AN UNUSUALLY STRONG NUMBER

No. 5, Vol. 24 TWICE-A-MONTH 15 CENTS

The Popular Magazine

JUNE
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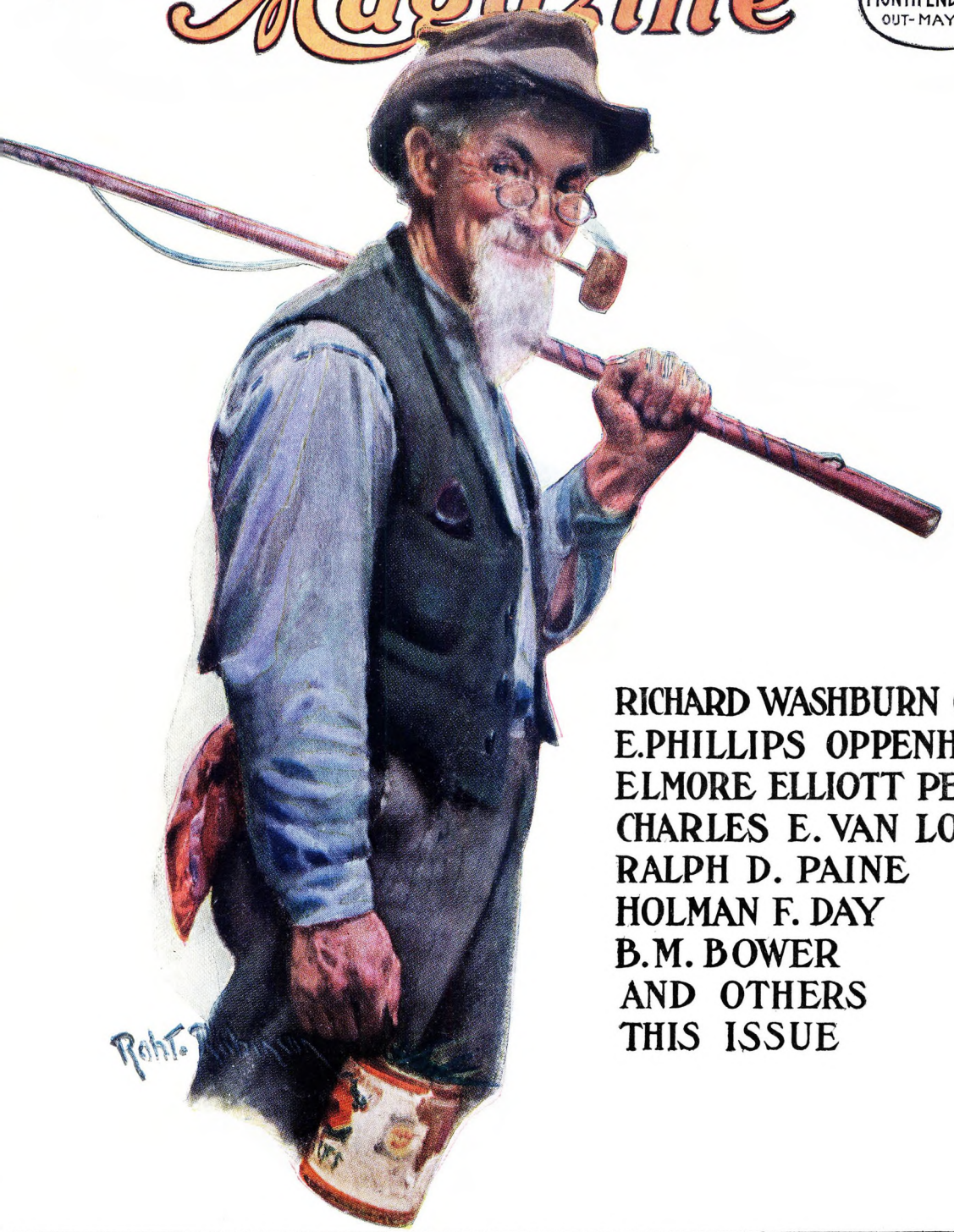
OUT- MAY 23, 1912



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THIS ISSUE

Twice-A-Month Publication issued by
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Thirst Content

Every day—many times a day, it just seems as if nothing would satisfy

Drink Coca-Cola

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What the Women Think!

Our correspondence is not entirely from the men who read THE POPULAR. For while THE POPULAR is essentially a "man's" magazine, it has a great many enthusiastic women readers. And some of them are kind enough to write and tell us what they think of THE POPULAR. Here are a few of their letters:

A RECIPE FOR KEEPING A HUSBAND HOME.

DEAR MR. EDITOR: As a means of keeping one's husband at home nights, THE POPULAR takes the prize. I usually read it aloud, and I can't drive my husband out when we have a POPULAR unread. Thanking you for the many pleasant hours we have spent with your magazine, and wishing you continued success and prosperity, I remain,

Very sincerely yours,
(MRS.) G. P. HENDERSON.

Mayer, Ariz.

PRAISE FOR "THE MAINSPRING."

MY DEAR SIR: I have just finished the story, "The Mainspring," appearing in the March month-end edition of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, and pronounce it one of the best I have ever had the pleasure of reading.

Now I would like to know what became of this Mr. Ashmore.

I would suggest that you write a sequel using as a plot Mr. Ashmore's adventures in the street-railway business and the winning of Miss Edith Cravens, also how Shackleton further interferes with Mr. Ashmore's plans.

Very respectfully,
(MRS.) OLIVER M. FERGUSON.

Muskogee, Okla.

THE CLASSICS *vs.* THE POPULAR.

GENTLEMEN: I had not thought that I should ever set the seal of approval on popular literature, having been reared in the good old days of classics, but I have "fallen from grace."

My husband is a busy surgeon, and I find THE POPULAR in his overcoat pocket semi-monthly.

The titles tempted me, and I did read. To read THE POPULAR *once* is to be its slave forever. "The Under Trail" is my favorite, and "The Tempting of Tavernake" is unique and original. Farewell, George Elliott, Thackeray, and ye old friends, and enter THE POPULAR! Seriously, the stories are *very* entertaining, and life is so very real and earnest that we need relaxation. Success and best wishes. Very truly,

MAUDE R. HAPPEL.

Cleburne, Tex.

A HELP IN ADVERSITY.

SIR: My husband took in THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, and all I know of it was that he and four others (to whom he lent it) were very keen to get it each month. Now and again, when I was putting one away, I would just read a bit. We had four frozen crops out of six, so sold out and came here. When we landed here, we rented a two-roomed shack, and so had to keep our trunks packed till our home was built, consequently of an evening I had very little needlework and no books. Then I took to reading THE POPULAR (generally aloud to my husband), and I am as ardent an admirer as you can possibly wish to have. I have never come across a magazine to equal it, and it is so refreshing to read the Alaskan and Northwest stories, after reading other books. I am so sick of love tales in the usual way. Your chacacters are so much more really human. We are even now looking forward to the next issue. Please accept our united thanks for many pleasant evenings, and best wishes for future success. Yours respectfully,

AGNES GOODMAN.

Maywood, Victoria, B. C.

THE BIGGEST THING IN THE WORLD.

DEAR SIR: People say that yours is a man's magazine, and does not appeal to a woman. What bosh! Could any woman fail to catch the spirit of the big world of adventure that is THE POPULAR spirit?

Sincerely, JANE BOGGS.

New Brighton, S. I.

LOYALTY.

DEAR SIRS: I've simply got to tell you how good we think your magazine. It can't be beat.

We have sworn allegiance to it, and may THE POPULAR always be as popular as it is now. Sincerely yours,

(MRS.) BESS HICKMAN.

Fond du Lac, Wis.

The Society Reminiscences of MR. FREDERICK TOWNSEND MARTIN

¶ Much has been written of Society.

¶ Many in Society have written.

¶ But very few in Society have written of Society.

¶ Mr. Frederick Townsend Martin's reminiscences, which begin in the June number of Ainslee's form an informal but authoritative history of American society from the simpler days of our fathers, down to the Bradley Martin ball.

¶ The fiction feature of this same number will be

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a brilliant, sparkling novel, by

MARION HILL

¶ Margaretta Tuttle contributes the opening story of a new "Nadine Carson" series. Other entertaining short stories of distinction are by Andrew Soutar, Parker H. Fillmore, Anna Alice Chapin, Edgar Saltus, Herman Whitaker, Thomas P. Byron, William Slavens McNutt, Virginia Kline, Nalbro Bartley and F. Berkeley Smith.

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MONTH-END EDITION

VOLUME XXIV NUMBER 5

TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

CONTENTS

JUNE 15, 1912

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. XXIV. JUNE 15, 1912. No. 5.

The Uphill Climb

By B. M. Bower

Author of "Lonesome Land," "The Happy Family Stories," Etc.

An intense and inspiring story of a cowboy's fight with himself; an uphill climb that was aided by one or two sincere friends and sadly hindered by others. B. M. Bower has written no more appealing story since "Chip of the Flying U." It is admirable in its realism, and, one feels, true in observation and in fact. Above all, it is a "man's story."

CHAPTER I.

FORD lifted his arms above his head to yawn as does a man who has slept too heavily, found his biceps stiffened and sore, and felt them gingerly with his finger tips. His eyes took on the tense vacancy of memory straining against the leash of forgetfulness. He sighed largely, swung his head slowly from left to right in mute admission of failure to grasp what lay just behind his slumber, and thereby discovered other muscles that protested against movement. He felt his neck with a careful, rubbing gesture. One hand strayed to his left cheek bone, hovered there tentatively, wandered to the bridge of his nose, and from there dropped inertly to the bed.

"Lordy me! I musta been drunk last night," he said aloud, mechanically taking the straight line of logic from effect to cause, as much experience had taught him to do.

"You was—and then some," replied an unemotional voice from somewhere behind him.

"Oh! That you, Sandy?" Ford lay quiet, trying to remember. His finger tips explored the right side of his face; now and then he winced under their touch, light as it was.

"I musta carried an awful load," he decided, again taking the straight trail from effect to cause. Later, the process of deduction carried him farther. "Who'd I lick, Sandy?"

"Several." The unseen Sandy gave one the impression of a man smoking and speaking between puffs. "Can't say just who you did start in on. You wound up on the preacher."

"Preacher?" Ford's tone matched the flicker of interest in his eyes.

"Uhn-hunh."

Ford meditated a moment. "I don't call to mind ever licking a preacher before," he observed curiously.

Life, stale and drab since his eyes opened, gathered to itself the pale light of possible interest. Ford rose painfully, inch by inch, until he was sitting upon the side of the bed, got from there to his feet, looked down, and saw that he was clothed to his boots, and crossed

slowly to where a cheap, fly-specked looking-glass hung awry upon the wall. His self-inspection was grave and minute. His eyes held the philosophic calm of accustomedness.

"Who put this head on me, Sandy?" he inquired apathetically. "The preacher?"

"I d' know. You had it when yuh come up outa the heap. You licked the preacher—afterward." Sandy was reading a ragged-backed novel while he smoked; his interest in Ford and Ford's battered countenance was plainly perfunctory.

Outside, the rain fell aslant in the wind and drummed dismally upon the little window beside Sandy. It beat upon the door, and trickled underneath in a thin rivulet to where it formed a shallow puddle where the floor was sunken. A dank warmth and the smell of wet wood heating to the blazing point pervaded the room, and mingled with the coarse aroma of cheap, warmed-over coffee.

"Sandy!"

"Hunh?"

"Did anybody get married last night?" The leash of forgetfulness was snapping, strand by strand. Troubled remembrance peered out from behind the philosophic calm in Ford's eyes.

"Unh-hunh." Sandy turned a leaf, and at the same time flicked the ashes from his cigarette with a mechanical finger movement. "You did." He looked briefly up from the page. "That's why you licked the preacher," he assisted, and went back to his reading.

A subdued rumble of mid-autumn thunder jarred sullenly overhead. Ford ceased caressing the purple half moon which inclosed his left eye, and began moodily straightening his tie.

"Now, what'd I do that for?" he inquired complainingly.

"Search *me,*" mumbled Sandy over his book. He read half a page farther. "Do what for?" he asked, with belated attention.

Ford swore, and went over and lifted the coffeepot from the stove, shook it, looked in, and made a grimace of disgust as the steam smote him in the face. "Paugh!" He set down the pot and turned upon Sandy.

"Get your nose out of that book a minute and *talk!*" he commanded, in a tone of beseeching for all its surly growl. "You say I got married. I kinda recollect something of the kind. What I want to know is, who's the lady? And what did I do it for?" He sat down, leaned his bruised head upon his palms, and spat morosely into the stove hearth. "Lordy me," he grumbled. "I don't know any lady well enough to marry her—and I sure can't think of any female lady that would marry *me!*"

Sandy closed the book upon a forefinger, and regarded Ford with that blend of pity, amusement, and tolerance which is so absolutely unbearable. Ford would not have borne the look if he had seen it; but he was caressing a bruise on the point of his jaw, and staring dejectedly into the meager blaze which rimmed the lower edge of the stove's front door.

"Who was the lady, Sandy?" he begged dispiritedly.

"Search *me,*" Sandy replied succinctly. "Some stranger that blew in here with a license, and the preacher, and said you was her fee-ancy." Sandy read romances mostly, and permitted his vocabularly to profit thereby. "You never denied it; and you let her marry yuh, all right."

"Is that right?" Ford looked up from under his lowering eyebrows.

"Unh-hunh—that's what you done, all right." Sandy's voice was dishearteningly positive.

"Lordy me!" gasped Ford under his breath.

There was a silence which slid Sandy's interest back into his book. He turned a leaf, and was halfway down the page before he was interrupted.

"Say! Where's she at now?" Ford spoke with a certain furtiveness.

"I d' know." Sandy read a line with greedy interest. "She took the 'leventwenty," he added then. Another mental lapse. "You seen her to the train yourself."

"Eh? What!" Ford's good eye glared incredulity, but Sandy was

again following hungrily the love tangle of an unpronounceable count in the depths of the Black Forest; and he remained perfectly unconscious of the look, and the distress which caused it.

Ford went back to studying the meager blaze and trying to remember. He might be able to extract the whole truth from Sandy, but that would involve taking his novel away from him—by force, probably; and the loss of the book would be very likely to turn Sandy sullen so that he would refuse to answer, or to tell the truth, at any rate; and Ford's muscles were very, very sore. He did not feel equal to a scuffle with Sandy just then. He repeated something which sounded like an impromptu litany.

"Hunh?" asked Sandy, and remonstrated cheerfully: "Yuh don't want to take it to heart like that."

Ford, by way of reply, painstakingly analyzed the shortcomings of Sandy's immediate relatives, and was beginning upon his grandparents when Sandy reached barren ground in the shape of three long paragraphs of snow, cold, and sunrise artistically blended with prismatic adjectives. He waded through the first paragraph and well into the second before he mired in a hopeless jumble of unfamiliar polysyllables. Sandy was not the skipping kind. He threw the book upon a bench and gave his attention wholly to his companion in time to save his great-grandfather from complete condemnation.

"What's eating yuh, Ford?" he began. "You might be a lot worse off. You're married, all right enough—but she's left town. It ain't as if you had to live with her."

Ford looked at him a minute, and groaned.

"Oh, I ain't meaning anything against the lady herself," Sandy hastened to assure him. "Far as I know, she's all right——"

"What I want to know," Ford broke in, impatient of condolence when he needed facts, "is, who *is* she? And what'd I marry her for?"

"Well, you'll have to ask somebody that knows. I never seen her close to, and you and her talked it over private like—the way I heard it. I was gitting a hair cut and shampoo at the time. First I heard, you was married. I should think you'd remember it yourself." Sandy looked at Ford curiously.

"I kinda remember standing up and holding hands with a woman, and somebody saying, 'I pronounce you man and wife,'" Ford confessed miserably, his face in his hands again. "I guess I must have done it, all right."

Sandy was kind enough when not otherwise engaged. He got up and put a basin of water on the stove to warm that Ford might bathe his hurts; and he mixed him a very creditable toddy to steady his nerves.

"The way I heard it," he explained further; "this lady come to town looking for Frank Cameron, and seen you, and said you was him. So——"

"I ain't," Ford interrupted indignantly. "My name's Ford Campbell, and I'll lick any darned son of a gun——"

"Likely she made a mistake," Sandy soothed. "Frank Cameron she had yuh down for, and you went ahead and married her willing enough. Seems like there was some hurry-up reason that she explained to you private. She had the license all made out, and brought a preacher down from Garbin. Bill Wright said he overheard you tellin' her you'd do anything to oblige a lady——"

"That's the worst of it. I'm always too darned polite when I'm drunk!" grumbled Ford.

Sandy, looking upon his distorted countenance, and recalling, perhaps, the process by which Ford had reached that condition, made a sound like a laugh diplomatically disguised as a cough. "Not always," he qualified mildly.

"Anyway," he went on, "you sure married her. Bill Wright and Rock was the witnesses. And if you don't know why yuh done it——" Sandy waved his hands to indicate his inability to enlighten Ford. "Right afterward you went out to the bar and had another drink—all this takin' place in the

hotel dining room, and Mother McGrew down with neuralagy and not bein' present—and one drink leads to another, yuh know. I come in then, and the bunch was drinkin' luck to yuh fast as Sam could pour it out. Then you went back to the lady—and if you don't know what took place, you can search *me*—and pretty soon Bill said you'd took her and her grip to the depot. Anyway, when you come back you wasn't troubled with no attack uh *politeness*.

"You went in the air, with Bill first," continued Sandy testing with his finger the temperature of the water in the basin; "and bawled him out for standing by and seeing you make a break like that without doing something. You licked *him*—and then Rock bought in, because some of your remarks hit him, too. I d'know," said Sandy, scratching his unshaven jaw reflectively, "just how the fight did go between you 'n' Rock. You was using the whole room, I know. Near as I could make out, you—or maybe it was Rock—tromped on big Jim's bunion. This weather's hard on bunions, and big Jim went after yuh both with blood in his eye.

"After that"—Sandy spread his arms largely—"it was go as yuh please. Sam and me was the only ones that kept out, near as I can recollect; and when it thinned up a bit, you had Aleck down and was pounding the liver outa him, and big Jim was whanging away at you, and Rock was clawin' Jim in the back of the neck, and you was all kickin' like bay steers in brandin' time. I reached in under the pile and dragged you out by one leg, and left the rest of 'em fighting. They never seemed to miss yuh none." He grinned. "Jim begun to bump Aleck's head up and down on the floor—and I *know* he didn't have nothing against Aleck."

"Bill——"

"Bill, he'd quit right in the start." Sandy's grin became wider. "You wasn't through, though, seems like. You was going to start in at the beginning and *en*-core the whole performance, and you started out after Bill. But you run into that preacher. And you licked him to a fare you well, and had him crying real tears before I or anybody else could stop you."

"What'd I lick *him* for?" Ford inquired, in a tone of deep discouragement.

Sandy's indeterminate blue-gray eyes rounded with puzzlement.

"Search *me*," he repeated automatically. But later he inadvertently shed enlightenment. He laughed, bending double and slapping his thigh at the irresistible urge of a mental picture.

"Thought I'd die!" he gasped. "Me and Sam was watching from the door. You had him by the collar, shakin' him, and once in a while liftin' him clean off the ground on the toe of your boot; and you kept saying: 'A sober man, and a *preacher*—and you'd marry that girl to a fellow like me!' And then *biff!* And he'd let out a squawk. 'A drinkin', fightin', gamblin', no-account cuss like me, you swine!' you'd tell him. And when we pulled you loose, he picked up his hat and made a run for it."

Ford meditated gloomily. "I'll lick him again, and lick him when I'm sober, by thunder!" he promised grimly. "Who was he, do you know?"

"No, I don't. Little, dried-up geezer, with a nose like a kit fox's and a whine to his voice. He won't come around *here* no more."

The door opened gustily, and a big fellow, with a skinned nose and a pair of eyes set too close together, looked in, hesitated while he stared hard at Ford, and then entered, and shut the door by the simple method of throwing his shoulders back against it.

"Hello, old sport!—how yuh comin'?" he cried cheerfully. "Kinda wet for makin' calls; but when a man's loaded down with a guilty conscience——" He sighed somewhat ostentatiously, and pulled forward a chair rejuvenated with baling-wire braces between the legs, and a cowhide seat. "What's that cookin'—coffee, or sheep dip?" he inquired facetiously of Sandy, though his eyes dwelt upon Ford's bowed head solicitously. He leaned and slapped Ford in friendly fashion upon the shoulder.

"Buck up—'the worst is yet to come,'" he said, and laughed with an

exaggeration of cheerfulness. "You can't ever tell when death or matrimony's goin' to get a man. By hokey, there's no dodgin' either one!"

Ford lifted a bloodshot eye. "And I always counted you for a friend, Bill," he reproached heavily. "Sandy says I licked you. Well, looks to me like you had it coming, all right."

"Well—I *got* it, didn't I?" snorted Bill, his hand rising involuntarily to his nose. "And I ain't bellering, am I?" His mouth took an abused, downward droop. "I ain't holdin' any grudge, am I? Why, Sandy here can tell yuh that I held one side of yuh up whilst he was leadin' the other side of yuh home. And I *am* sorry I stood there and seen you get married off and never lifted a finger. I'm *darned* sorry. I should 'a' hollered, 'Misdeal,' all right. I know it now." He pulled remorsefully at his wet mustache, which very much resembled a worn-out shaving brush.

Ford straightened up, dropped a hand upon his thigh, and thereby discovered another sore spot, which he caressed gently with his palm. "Say, Bill, you were there, and you saw her. On the square, now—what's she like?"

Bill pulled so hard upon his mustache that his teeth showed; his breath became unpleasantly audible with the stress of emotion. "So help me, I can't tell yuh that, Ford," he confessed. "I don't remember nothing about her looks, except she looked good to *me,* and I never seen her before, and her hair wasn't red—I always remember red hair when I see it, drunk or sober. You see," he added, as an extenuation, "I was pretty well jagged myself. I musta been. I recollect I was real put out because my name wasn't Frank—— By hokey!" He laid an impressive forefinger upon Ford's knee, and tapped several times. "I never knew you was rightly Frank Cameron. I always——"

"I ain't." Ford winced, and drew away from the tapping process, as if his knee also was sensitive that morning.

"You told *her* it was. I mind that perfectly, because I was so su'prised, I swore right out loud, and was so damned ashamed I couldn't apologize. And say! She musta been a real lady, or I wouldn't uh felt that way about it!" Bill glanced triumphantly from one to the other. "Take it from me, you married a lady, Ford. Drunk or sober, I always make it a point to speak proper before the ladies—t'other kind don't count—and when I make a break, you betcher life I remember it. She's a real lady—I'd swear to that on a stack uh Bibles ten feet high!" He settled back and unbuttoned his steaming coat with the air of a man who has established beyond question the vital point of an argument.

"Did I tell her so myself, or did I just let it go that way?" Ford, as his brain cleared, stuck close to his groping for the essential facts.

"Well, now—I ain't dead sure as to that. Maybe Rock'll remember. Kinda seems to me now that she asked you if you was Frank Cameron, and you said: 'I sure am'—or something like that. The preacher'd know, maybe. He musta been the only sober one in the bunch—except the girl. But you done chased him off, so——"

"Sandy, I wish you'd go hunt Rock up, and tell him I want to see him bad." Ford spoke with more of his natural spirit than he had shown since waking.

"Rock's gone on out to Riley's camp," volunteered Bill. "Left this morning, before the rain started in."

"What was her name—do you know?" Ford went back to the mystery.

"Ida—or was it Jenny?—*some* darned name—I heard it when the preacher was marrying yuh." Bill was floundering hopelessly in mental fog, but he persisted in believing that he knew a good deal about it. "And I seen it wrote in the paper I signed my name to. I mind she rolled up the paper afterward, and put it—well, I dunno *where;* but she took it away with her, and says to you: 'That's safe now'—or 'You're safe,' or 'I'm safe.' Anyway, *some* darned thing was safe. And I was goin' to kiss the bride—mebby I *did* kiss her—only I'd likely remember it if I had, drunk or sober. And—oh, now I got it!" Bill's voice was full of elation. "*You* was

goin' to kiss her—that was it—it was *you* goin' to kiss her, and she slap—no, by hokey, she didn't slap yuh, she just—or was it Rock, now?" He tugged hard at his scrubby mustache, and doubt filled his eyes distressfully. "Darn my everlastin' hide," he finished lamely, "there was some kissin' *somewhere* in the deal, and I mind her cryin' afterward; but whether it was about that, or—— Say, Sandy, what was it Ford was lickin' the preacher for? Wasn't it for kissin' the bride?"

"It was for marrying him to her," Sandy informed him sententiously.

Ford got up and walked to the little window and looked out. He walked back to the stove, and stood staring disgustedly down upon the effusively friendly Bill.

"If I didn't feel so rotten," he said glumly, "I'd give you another licking right now, Bill, you boozing old devil. I'd like to lick every darned galoot that stood back and let me in for this. You'd oughta stopped me. You'd oughta pounded the face off me before you let me do such a fool thing. That," he said bitterly, "shows how much a man can bank on his *friends!*"

"It shows," amended Bill indignantly, "how much he can bank on himself."

"On whisky, to let him in for all kinds uh trouble," revised Sandy virtuously. Sandy had a stomach which invariably rebelled at the second glass, and therefore, remaining always sober perforce, he took to himself great credit for his morality.

"Married—and I don't so much as know her name!" gritted Ford, and went over and laid himself down upon the bed, and sulked for the rest of that day of rain and gloom.

CHAPTER II.

Sulking never yet solved a mystery, nor will it accomplish much toward bettering an unpleasant situation. After a day of unmitigated gloom and a night of uneasy dreams, Ford awoke to a white, shifting world of Montana's first-of-October blizzard, and to something like his normal outlook upon life.

That outlook had ever been cheerful, with the cheerfulness which comes of taking life in twenty-four-hour doses only, and of looking not too far ahead, and backward not at all. Plenty of persons live after that fashion, and so attain middle life with smooth foreheads and cheeks unlined by thought; and Ford was not so much different from his fellows. Never before had he found himself with anything worse than body bruises to sour life for him after a tumultuous night or two in town; and the sensation of discomfort which had not sprung from some well-defined physical sense was, therefore, sufficiently novel to claim all his attention.

It was not the first time he had fought and forgotten it afterward; and it was no new thing for him to seek information from his friends after a night full of incident. Sandy he had always found tolerably reliable, because he made it a point to see everything there was to be seen; and his peculiar digestive organs might be counted upon to keep him sober. It was a real grievance to Ford that Sandy should have chosen the hour he did for indulging in such trivialities as hair cuts and shampoos, while events of real importance were permitted to transpire unseen and unrecorded. Ford, when the grievance forced itself keenly upon him, roused the sleeping Sandy by pitilessly thrusting an elbow against his diaphragm.

Sandy grunted at the impact, and sat bolt upright in bed before he was fairly awake. He glanced down at Ford, who scowled back at him from a badly crumpled pillow.

"Get up," growled Ford, "and start a fire going. You kept me awake half the night, snoring. I want a beefsteak with mushrooms, deviled kidneys, waffles with honey, and four banana fritters for breakfast. I'll take 'em in bed; and, while I'm waiting, you can bring me the morning paper and a package of Egyptian Houris."

Sandy grunted again, slid reluctantly out into the cold room, and crept, shivering, into his clothes. He never quite understood Ford's sense of humor at such times; but he had learned that it is

more comfortable to crawl out of bed than to be kicked out, and that vituperation is a mere waste of time when matched against sheer heartlessness and a superior muscular development.

"Y'ought to make your wife build the fires," he taunted, when he was clothed and at a safe distance from the bed. He ducked instinctively afterward; but Ford was merely placing a match by itself on the bench close by, and drew his arm under the blankets again.

"That's one," Ford remarked calmly. "I'm going to thrash every misguided humorist that mentions that subject to me in anything but a helpful spirit of pure friendship. I'm going to give him a separate licking for every alleged joke he perpetrates. I'll want *two* steaks, Sandy. I'll likely have to give you about seven distinct wallopings for a starter. Hand me some more matches to keep tally with. I don't want to cheat you out of your just dues."

Sandy eyed him doubtfully while he scraped the ashes from the grate.

"You may want a dozen steaks, but that ain't saying you're going to git 'em," he retorted, with a feeble show of aggression. "And 's far as licking *me* goes——" He stopped to blow warmth upon his fingers, which were numbed with their grasp of the poker. "As for licking *me,* I guess you'll have to do that on the strength uh bacon and sourdough biscuits, if you do it at all, which I claim the privilege uh doubting a whole lot."

Ford laughed a little, pulled the blankets up to his eyes, and dozed off luxuriously—and, although it is extremely tiresome to be told just what a man dreams, he did dream, and it was something about being married. At any rate, when the sizzling of bacon frying invaded even his slumber, and woke him, he felt a distinct pang of disappointment that it was Sandy's carroty head bent over the frying pan, instead of a wife with blond hair that waved becomingly upon her temples.

"Wonder what color her hair is, anyway," he said inadvertently, before he was wide enough awake to put the seal of silence on his musings.

"Hunh?"

"I asked when those banana fritters are coming up," lied Ford, getting out of bed and yawning so that his swollen jaw hurt him.

He ate his breakfast almost in silence, astonishing Sandy somewhat by not complaining of the excess of soda in the biscuits. Ford was inclined toward fastidiousness when he was sober—a trait which caused men to suspect him of descending from an upper strata of society, though just when, or just where, or how great that descent had been they had no means of finding out. Ford, so far as his speech upon the subject was concerned, had no existence previous to his appearance in Montana with ten thousand dollars and a talent for spending; but he bore the earmarks of a higher civilization, which, in Sandy's opinion, rather concentrated upon a querulous distaste for soda-yellowed bread, warmed-over coffee, and scorched bacon. That he swallowed all these things and seemed not to notice them, struck Sandy as being almost as remarkable as his matrimonial adventure.

When he had eaten, Ford buttoned himself into his overcoat, pulled his moleskin cap well down, and went out into the storm without a word to Sandy, which was also unusual. It was Ford's custom to wash the dishes, because he objected to Sandy's economy of clean, hot water. Sandy flattened his nose against the frosting window, saw that Ford, leaning well forward against the drive of the wind, was battling his way toward the hotel, and guessed shrewdly that he would see him no more that day.

"He better keep sober till his knuckles git well, anyway," he mumbled disapprovingly. "If he goes to fighting, the shape he's in now——"

Ford had no intention of fighting. He went straight up to the bar, it is true; but that was because he saw that Sam was unoccupied save with a large lump of gum. Being at the bar, he drank a glass of whisky—not of deliberate intent, but merely from force of habit. Once down, however, he realized that it was going to make him

feel better, and took another for good measure.

"H'lo, Ford!" Sam bethought him to say, after he had gravely taken note of each separate scar of battle, and had shifted his cud to the other side of his mouth and squeezed it meditatively between his teeth. "Feel as rocky as you look?"

"Possibly." Ford's eyes forbade further personalities. "I'm out after information, Sam; and, if you've got any you aren't using, I'd advise you to pass it over without any frills. Were you sober night before last?"

Sam chewed solemnly while he considered. "Tolerable sober, yes," he decided. "Sober enough to 'tend to business. Why?"

With his empty glass, Ford wrote invisible scrolls upon the bar. "I—did you happen to see—my—the lady I married?" He had been embarrassed at first; but when he finished, he was glaring a challenge which shifted the disquiet to Sam's manner.

"No. I was 'tendin' bar—and she didn't come in here."

Ford glanced behind him at the sound of the door opening, saw that it was only Bill, leaned over the bar for greater secrecy, and lowered his voice as well.

"Did you happen to hear who she was?"

Sam stared, and shook his head.

"Don't you know anything about her at all—where she came from—and why, and where she went?"

Sam backed involuntarily. Ford's tone either made it a crime to know these things, or to be guilty of ignorance—which, Sam could not determine. Sam was of the sleek, oily-haired type of young men, with pimples and pale eyes, and a predilection for gum. He was afraid of Ford, and showed it.

"That's just what—no offense, Ford; I ain't responsible—that's what everybody's wondering. Nobody seems to know. They kinda hoped you'd explain——"

"Sure!" Ford's tone was growing extremely ominous. "I'll explain a lot of things—if I hear any gabbling going on about this." He had an uncomfortable feeling that the words were mere puerile blustering, and turned away from the bar in disgust.

In disgust he pulled open the door, flinched before the blast of wind and snow which smote him full in the face and blinded him, and went out again into the storm. The hotel porch was a bleak place, with snow six inches deep, covering icy boards upon which a man might easily slip and break a bone or two, and a whine overhead as the wind sucked under the roof. Ford stood there so long that his feet began to tingle. He was not thinking; he was merely feeling the feeble struggles of a newborn desire to be something, and do something worth while—a desire which manifested itself chiefly in bitterness against himself as he was, and against the life he had been content to live.

The mystery of his marriage was growing from a mere untoward incident of a night's carouse into a baffling thing which hung over him like an impending doom. He was not the sort of man who marries easily. It seemed incredible that he could really have done it, and then have wiped the slate of his memory clean. More incredible still, that a strange young woman could come into town, marry him, and afterward depart, and no man know who she was, whence she had come, or where she had gone. Ford stepped suddenly off the porch and bored his way through the blizzard toward the depot. The agent would be able to answer the last question, at any rate.

The agent, however, proved disappointingly ignorant of the matter. He reminded Ford that there had not been time to buy a ticket, and that the girl had been compelled to run down the platform to reach the train before it started, and that the wheels began to turn before she was up the steps of the day coach.

"And don't you remember turning around and saying to me: 'I'm a poor, married man, but you couldn't notice it,' or something like that?" The agent was plainly interested and desirous of rendering any assistance possible; but

was also rather diffident about discussing so delicate a matter.

Ford drummed his fingers impatiently upon the shelf outside the ticket window. "I don't remember a darned thing about it," he said glumly. "I can't say I enjoy running all around town trying to find out who it was I married, and why I married her, and where she went afterward; but that's just the kinda fix I'm in, Lew. I don't suppose she came here and did it just for fun—do you? And I can't figure out any other reason, unless she was plumb *loco*. From all I can gather, she was a nice girl; and it seems she thought I was Frank Cameron—which I am *not!*" He laughed, as a man will laugh sometimes when he is neither pleased nor amused.

"I might ask McCreery—he's conductor on Fourteen. He might remember where she wanted to go," the agent suggested hesitatingly. "And say! What's the matter with going up to Garbin and looking up the record? She had to get the license there; and they'd have her name, age, place of residence, and—and whether she's white or black." The agent smiled uncertainly over his feeble attempt at a joke. "I got a license for a friend once," he explained hastily when he saw that Ford's face did not relax a muscle. "There's a train up in forty minutes——"

"Sure, I'll do that." Ford brightened. "That must be what I've been trying to think of, and couldn't. I knew there was some way of finding out. Throw me a round-trip ticket, Lew. Lordy me! I can't afford to let a real, live wife slip the halter like this and leave me stranded, and not knowing a thing about her. How much is it?"

The agent slid a dark-red ticket form into the mouth of his office stamp, and jerked down the lever, while he swung his head quickly toward the sounder chattering hysterically behind him. His jaw slackened as he listened, and he turned his eyes vacantly upon Ford for a moment before he looked back at the instrument.

"Well, what do yuh know about *that?*" he queried under his breath. He released the ticket from the grip of the stamp, and flipped it into the drawer beneath the shelf, as if it were so much waste paper.

"That's my ticket," Ford reminded him levelly.

"You don't want it *now*, do you?" The agent grinned at him. "Oh, I forgot you couldn't read——" He tilted his head back toward the instrument. "A wire just went through—the courthouse at Garbin caught fire in the basement—something about the furnace, they think—and she's going up in smoke. Hydrants are froze up so they can't get water on it. That fixes your looking up the record, Ford."

Ford stared hard at him. "Well, I might hunt up the preacher and ask him," he said, his tone dropping again to dull discouragement.

The agent chuckled. "From all I hear, you've made that same preacher mighty hard to catch."

Ford drummed upon the shelf and scowled at the smoke-blackened window, beyond which the snow was sweeping aslant. Upon his own side of the ticket window, the agent pared his nails with his pocketknife, and watched Ford furtively.

"Oh, heliotrope! What do *I* care, anyway?" Revulsion seized Ford harshly. "I guess I can stand it if she can. She came here and married me—it isn't my funeral any more than it is hers. If she wants to be so darned mysterious about it, she can go plumb—to—New York!" There were several decent traits in Ford Campbell; one was his respect for women, which would not permit him to swear about this wife of his, however exasperating her behavior.

"That's the sensible way to look at it, of course," assented the agent, who made it a point to agree always with a man of Ford's size and caliber, in the belief that placation is better than plasters. "You sure ought to let her do the hunting—and the worrying, too. You aren't to blame if she married you unawares. She did it all herself—and she sure knew what she was up against."

"No, she didn't," flared Ford unexpectedly. "She made a mistake, and I wanted to point it out to her, and help her out of it if I could. She took me for some one else; and I was just drunk enough to think it was a joke, I suppose, and let it go that way. I don't believe she found out she tied up to the wrong man. It's my fault for being drunk."

"Well, putting it that way, you're right about it," agreed the adaptable agent. "Of course, if you hadn't been——"

"If whisky's going to let a fellow in for things like this, it's time to cut it out altogether." Ford was looking at the agent attentively.

"That's right. Whisky is sure giving you the worst of it all around. You ought to climb on the water wagon, Ford. Whisky's the worst enemy you've got."

"Sure. And I'm going to punish all of it I can get my hands on." He turned toward the door. "And when I'm good and full," he added, as an afterthought, "I'm liable to come over here and lick you, Lew, for being such an agreeable cuss. You better write to your mother to-day." He laughed a little to himself as he pulled the door shut behind him. "I bet he'll keep the frost thawed off the window to-day, just to see who comes up the platform," he chuckled.

He would have been more amused if he had seen how the agent ducked anxiously forward to peer through the ticket window whenever the door of the waiting room opened, and how he started whenever the snow outside creaked under the tread of a heavy step; and he would have been convulsed with mirth if he had caught sight of the formidable billet of wood which Lew kept beside his chair all that day, and had guessed its purpose, and that it was a mute witness to the reputation which Ford Campbell bore among his fellows. Lew knew better than to consider for a moment the revolver meant to protect the contents of the safe. Even the unintelligent instinctively avoid throwing a lighted match into a keg of gunpowder.

Ford leaned backward against the push of the storm, and was swept back to the hotel. He could not remember when he had felt so completely baffled; the incident of the girl and the ceremony was growing to something very like a calamity; and the curtain of mystery which surrounded it began to fret him intolerably; the very unusualness of a trouble he could not settle with his fists whipped his temper to the point of explosion. He caught himself wavering, nevertheless, before the wind-swept porch of the hotel "office." That, too, was strange. Ford was not wont to hesitate before entering a saloon; more often he hesitated about leaving.

"What's the matter with me, anyway?" he questioned himself impatiently. "I'm acting like I hadn't a right to go in and take a drink when I feel like it. If just a slight touch of matrimony acts like that with a man, what can the real thing be like? I always heard it made a fool of a fellow." To prove to himself that he was still untrammeled and at liberty to follow his own desire, he stamped across the porch, threw open the door, and entered with a certain defiance of manner.

Behind the bar, Sam was laughing with his mouth wide open so that his gum showed shamelessly. Bill and Aleck and big Jim were leaning heavily upon the bar, laughing also.

"I'll bet she's a Heart-and-Hander, tryin' a new scheme to git hold of a man." Sam brought his lips close enough together to declare, and chewed vigorously upon the idea—until he glanced up and saw Ford standing by the door. He turned abruptly, caught up a towel, and began polishing the bar with the frenzy of industry which never imposes upon one in the slightest degree.

Bill glanced behind him, and nudged Alek into caution; and in the silence which followed, the popping of a piece of slate-veined coal in the stove sounded like a volley of small-caliber pistol shots.

CHAPTER III.

Ford walked up to the bar with a smile upon his face which Sam misunderstood, and so met with a conciliatory grin, and a hand extended toward a certain round-ribbed bottle with a blue-and-silver label. But Ford leaned not on the bar, but across it; and, clutching Sam by the necktie, slapped him first upon one ear and next upon the other, until he was forced by the tingling of his own fingers to desist. By that time, Sam's green necktie was pulled tight just under his nose, and he had swallowed his gum—which, considering the size of the lump, was like to be the death of him.

Ford did not say a word. He permitted Sam to pull away and back into a corner; and he watched the swift crimsoning of his ears with a keen interest. Sam's face had the pasty pallor of the badly scared, so that the ears appeared much redder by contrast than they really were. When he saw that they could grow no nearer purple, Ford turned his attention to the man beside him, who happened to be Bill. For one long minute, the grim spirit of war hovered just over the two.

"Aw, forgit it, Ford!" Bill urged mildly at last. "You don't want to lick old Bill. Look at them knuckles! You couldn't thump a feather bed. Anyway, you got the guilty party when you done slapped Sam up to a peak, and then knocked the peak off. Made him swaller his cud, too, by hokey! Say, Sam, my old dad used to fed a cow on bacon rinds when she done lost her cud. You try it, Sam. Mebby it might help them ears. Shove that there trouble-killer over this way, Sammy, and don't look so fierce at your Uncle Bill. He's liable to turn you across his knee and dust your pants *proper.*" He turned again to Ford, scowling at life in general, while the snow melted upon his broad shoulders and trickled in little, hurrying drops down to the nearest jumping-off place. "Come, drownd your sorrer," he advised amiably. "Nobody said nothing but Sammy; and I'll gamble he wishes he hadn't now." If his counsel was vicious, his smile was engaging—which does not, in this instance, mean that it was beautiful.

Ford, with reprehensible thoroughness, proceeded to drown what sorrows he then possessed. Unfortunately he straightway produced a fresh supply of trouble, after his usual method. In two hours he was flushed and argumentative. In three, he had whipped Bill—cause unknown to the chronicler; and to Ford, also, after it was all over. By mid-afternoon he had Sammy intrenched in the tiny stronghold where barreled liquors were kept, and scared to the babbling stage. Aleck had been put to bed with a nasty gash over his right eye, where Ford had pointed his argument with a beer glass; and big Jim had succumbed to a billiard cue directed first at his most sensitive bunion, and later at his head. Ford was not using his fists that day, because even in his whisky-brewed rage he remembered, oddly enough, his skinned knuckles.

Others had come—in fact, the entire male population of Sunset was hovering in the immediate vicinity of the hotel—but none had conquered. There had been considerable ducking to avoid painful contact with flying glasses from the bar, and a few had retreated in search of bandages and liniment; the luckier ones remained as near as was safe, and expostulated. To those Ford had but one reply, which developed into a sort of war chant, discouraging to the listeners.

"I'm a rooting, tooting, shooting, fighting son of a gun—*and a good one!*" he would declaim, and with deadly intent aim a lump of coal, billiard ball, or glass at some unfortunate individual in his audience. "Hit the nigger and get a cigar! You're just hanging around out there till I drink myself to sleep—but I'm fooling you a few! I'm watching the clock with one eye, and I take my dose regular, and not too frequent. I'm going to kill off a few of these smart boys that have been talking about me and my wife. She's a lady, my wife is, and I'll kill the first man who says she isn't. For I'm a rooting, tooting,

shooting, et cetera." One cannot, you will understand, be too explicit in a case like this; not one thousandth part as explicit as Ford was.

"I'm going to begin on Sam pretty quick," he called through the open door. "I've got him right where I want him." And he stated, with terrible exactness, his intentions toward the bartender.

Behind his barricade of barrels, Sam heard and shivered like a gun-shy collie at a turkey shoot; shivered until human nerves could bear no more; and, like the collie, he fled with a yelp of sheer terror. Ford turned just as Sam shot through the doorway into the dining room, and splintered a beer bottle against the casing; glanced solemnly up at the barroom clock, and, retreating to the nearly denuded bar, gravely poured himself another drink; held up the glass to the dusk-filmed window, squinted through it, decided that he needed a little more than that, and added another teaspoonful. Then he poured the contents of the glass down his throat as if it were so much water, wiped his lips upon a bar towel, picked a handful of coal from the depleted coal hod, and went to the door, and shouted to those outside to produce Sam immediately, that he might be killed in an extremely unpleasant manner.

The group outside withdrew across the street to grapple with the problem before them. It was obviously impossible for civilized men to sacrifice Sam, even if they could catch him—which they could not. Sam had bolted through the dining room, upset the Chinaman in the kitchen, and fallen over a bucket of ashes in the coal shed in his flight for freedom. He had not stopped at that, but had scurried off up the railroad track. The general opinion among the spectators was that he had, by this time, reached the next station, and was hiding in a cellar there.

Bill Wright insisted that it was up to Tom Aldershot, who was the town marshal. Tom, however, was working on the house he hoped to have ready for his prospective bride by Thanksgiving, and hated to be interrupted for the sake of a few broken heads only.

"He ain't shooting up nobody," he argued from the platform where he was doing "inside work" on his dining room while the storm lasted. "He never does cut loose with his gun when he's drunk. If I arrested him, I'd have to take him clear up to Garbin—and I ain't got time. Y' oughta have a jail, like I've been telling yuh right along. Can't expect a man to stop his work to take a man eighty or a hundred miles to jail—not for anything less than murder, anyhow."

Some member of the deputation hinted a doubt of his courage, and Tom flushed.

"I ain't scared of him," he snorted indignantly. "I should say not! I'll go over and make him behave—as a man and a citizen. But I ain't going to arrest him in my official capacity when there ain't no place to put him."

So Tom reluctantly threw down his hammer, grumbling because they would not wait till it was too dark to drive nails, but must cut short his working day, and went over to the hotel to quell Ford. Ingress by way of the front door was obviously impracticable. The marshal ducked around the corner just in time to avoid a painful meeting with a billiard ball.

Mother McGrew had piled two tables against the dining-room door, and braced them with the mop, and stubbornly refused to let Tom touch the barricade either as a man and citizen or officer of the law.

"Well, if I can't get in, I can't do nothing," stated Tom, with philosophical calm, and a swift, mental vision of completed wainscoting.

"He's tearing up the whole place; and he musta found all them extra billiard balls Mike had under the bar and is throwin' 'em away," wailed Mrs. McGrew. "And he's drinkin' and not payin'. The damage that man is doin', it would take a year's profits to make up. You gotta do something, Tom Aldershot—you that calls yourself a marshal, swore to pertect the citizens uh Sunset! No, sir—I ain't a-goin' to open this door, neither. I'm tryin' to save the dishes, if you want to know. I ain't

goin' to let my cups and plates foller the glasses in there. A town full uh men—and you stand back and let one crazy——"

Tom had heard Mrs. McGrew voice her opinion of the male population of Sunset on certain previous occasions. He left, at that point, and went back to the group across the street.

At length Sandy, whose imagination had been developed somewhat beyond the elementary stage by his reading, suggested luring Ford into the liquor room by the simple method of pretending an assault upon him by way of the storeroom window, which could be barred from without by heavy planks. Secure in his belief in Ford's friendship for him, Sandy even volunteered to slam the door shut upon Ford, and lock it with the padlock which guarded the room from robbery.

Tom thought that might work, and donated the planks for the window. It did work, up to a certain point. Ford heard a noise in the storeroom, and went to investigate; caught a glimpse of Tom Aldershot apparently about to climb through the little window, and hurled a hammer and considerable vituperation at the opening. Sandy scuttled in and slammed the door, according to his own plan, and locked it. There was a season of frenzied hammering outside; and after that Sunset breathed freer, and discussed the evils of strong drink, and washed down their arguments by copious drafts of the stuff they maligned.

I am not going into further disagreeable details about that night, because Ford was at heart a good fellow, and it does not seem fair to put all his defections down in black and white, especially as it was whisky, and not his sane self, that was responsible for his bad behavior.

Briefly, they had to take him out of the storeroom, because he insisted upon knocking the bungs out of all the barrels and letting the liquor flood the floor; and Mike McGrew's wife objected to that, on the ground that whisky costs money. They bundled him up and took him over and shut him in the ice house; and he kicked three boards off one side, and emerged, breathing fire and brimstone, like the dragons of old. He had forgotten about wanting to kill Sam by that time. He was willing—nay, anxious—to murder every male human in Sunset.

They did not know what to do with him after that. They liked Ford when he was sober, and so they hated to shoot him; though that seemed the only way in which they might dampen his enthusiasm for blood. Tom said that, if he failed to improve in temper by the next day, he would try and land him in jail, though it did seem rigorous treatment for so common a fault as getting drunk. Meanwhile they kept out of his way as well as they could, and dodged missiles and swore. Even that was becoming more and more difficult—except the swearing—because Ford developed a perfectly diabolic tendency to empty every saloon that contained a man, so that it became no uncommon sight to see a back door belching forth hurrying figures at the most unseasonable times. No man could lift a full glass, that night, and feel sure of drinking the contents undisturbed; whereat Sunset grumbled while it dodged.

It may have been nine o'clock before the sporadic talk of a jail crystallized into a definite project which, it was agreed, could not too soon be made a reality.

They built the jail that night by the light of bonfires which the slightly wounded kept blazing in the intervals of standing guard over the workers, ready to give warning in case Ford appeared as a war cloud on their horizon. There were fifteen able-bodied men, and they worked fast. They erected it close to Tom Aldershot's house, because the town borrowed lumber from him, and they wanted to save carrying, and because it was Tom's duty to look after the prisoner; and he wanted the jail handy, so that he need not lose time from his house building.

They built it strong, and they built it tight, without any window save a narrow slit near the ceiling. They heated it by setting a stove outside under a

shelter, where Tom could keep up the fire without the risk of going inside, and ran pipe and a borrowed "drum" through the jail high enough so that Ford could not kick it. And to discourage any thought of suicide by hanging, they ceiled the place tightly with Tom's matched flooring of Oregon pine. Tom did not approve of that, and said so; but the citizens of Sunset nailed it on, and turned a deaf ear to his complaints.

Chill dawn spread over the town and dulled the light of the fires. It brought into relief the sodden tramplings in the snow around the jail, and sharply defined the paths leading to Tom Aldershot's lumber pile. The watchers had sneaked off to their beds, for not a sign of Ford had they seen since midnight. The storm had ceased early in the evening, and all the sky was glowing crimson with the coming glory of the sun.

The jail was almost finished. Up on the roof, three crouching figures were nailing down strips of brick-red building paper as a fair substitute for shingles; and, on the side nearest town, the marshal and another were holding a yard-wide piece of paper flat against the wall with fingers that tingled in the cold; while Bill Wright fastened it into place with shingle nails driven through tin disks the size of a half dollar.

Ford, sober after a sleep on the billiard table in the hotel barroom, heard the hammering, wondered what industrious soul was up and doing carpenter work at that unseemly hour; and, after helping himself to a generous "eye opener" at the deserted bar, found his cap and went over to investigate. He was much surprised to see Bill Wright working; and smiled to himself as he walked quietly up to him through the soft, step-muffling snow.

"What y'doing, Bill—building a chicken house?" he asked, a quirk at the corner of his lips.

Bill jumped, and came near swallowing a nail; so near that his eyes bulged at the feel of it next his windpipe—or perhaps it was the memory of Ford's late belligerence.

Tom Aldershot dropped his end of the strip of paper, which tore with a dull sound of ripping, and remarked that he would be damned. Necks craned, up on the roof, and startled eyes peered down like chipmunks from a tree. Some one up there dropped a hammer and hit Bill on the head; but no one said a word.

"You act like you were nervous this morning," Ford observed, in the tone which indicates a conscious effort at good humor. "Working on a bet, or what?"

"*What!*" snarled Bill. "I wisht, Ford, next time you bowl up, you'd pick on somebody that ain't too good a friend to fight back. I'm gittin' tired, by hokey——"

"What!—did I lick you again, Bill?" Ford's smile was sympathetic to a degree. "That's too bad now. Next time, you want to hunt a hole and crawl into it, Bill. I don't want to hurt you—but seems like I've kinda got the habit. You'll have to excuse me." He hunched his shoulders at the chill of the morning and walked around the jail, inspecting it with half-hearted interest.

"What *is* this, anyway?" he inquired of Tom. "Smoke house?"

"It's a jug!" snapped Tom. "To put you into if you don't watch your dodgers. What'n thunder you want to carry on like you did last night for—and then go and sober up just when we've got a jail built to put you into? That ain't no way for a man to act—I'll leave it to Bill if it is. I've a darned good mind to swear out a warrant, anyway, Ford, and pinch you for disturbin' the peace. That's what I ought to do, all right." Tom beat his hands about his body, and glared at Ford with his ultra-official scowl.

"All right, if you want to do it." Ford's tone embellished the reply with a you-take-the-consequences sort of indifference. "Only, I'd advise you never to turn me loose again if you *do* lock me up in this coop once."

"I know I wouldn't uh worked all night on the thing if I'd knowed you was goin' to sleep it off," Bill complained, with deep reproach in his watery eyes. "I made sure you was due to keep things agitated around here for

a couple uh days, at the very least, or I never woulda drove a nail, by hokey!"

"It *is* a darned shame to have a nice, new jail and nobody to use it on," sympathized Ford, his eyes half closed and steely. "I'd like to help you out, all right. Maybe I'd better kill Bill. You *might* stretch a point, and call it manslaughter—and I could use the bounty to help pay a lawyer if it ever come to a head as a trial."

Whereat Bill almost wept.

Ford pushed his hands deep into his pockets and walked away, sneering openly at Bill, the marshal, the jail, and the town which owned it; and at wives and matrimony, and the world which held all these vexations.

He went straight to the shack, drank a cup of coffee, and packed everything he could find that belonged to him and was not too large for easy carrying on horseback; and when Sandy, hovering uneasily around him, asked questions, he told him briefly to go off in a corner and lie down; which advice Sandy understood as an invitation to mind his own affairs.

Like Bill, Sandy could have wept at the ingratitude of this man. But he asked no more questions, and he made no more objections. He picked up the story of the unpronounceable count who owned the castle in the Black Forest, and had much tribulation and no joy until the last chapter; and, when Ford went out with his battered, sole-leather suit case and his rifle in its pigskin case, he kept his pale eyes upon his book, and refused even a grunt in response to Ford's grudging "So long, Sandy."

CHAPTER IV.

Ford's range-trained vision told him while yet afar that the lone horse feeding upon a sidehill was saddled and bridled, with reins dragging. The telltale, upward toss of its head when it started on to find a sweeter morsel was evidence enough of the impeding bridle reins, even before he was near enough to distinguish the saddle.

Your true range man owns blood relationship with the original good Samaritan. Ford swung out of the trail as a matter of course. The master of the animal might have turned him loose to feed; but if that was the case, he had strayed farther than was ever intended. The chances, since no human being was in sight, were all against design and in favor of accident. At any rate, Ford did not hesitate. It is not good to let a horse run loose upon the range with a saddle cinched upon its back, as every one knows.

Ford was riding along the sheer edge of a water-worn gully, seeking a place where he might safely jump it—or better, a spot where the banks sloped so that he might ride down into it and climb the bank beyond, when he saw a head and pair of shoulders moving slowly along, just over the brow of the hill where fed the stray. He watched, and, when the figure topped the ridge and started down the other side, his eyes widened a trifle.

Skirts to the tops of her shoes betrayed her a woman. She limped painfully, so that Ford immediately pictured to himself puckered eyebrows, and lips pressed tightly together. "And I'll bet she's crying, too," he summed up aloud. While he was speaking, she stumbled, and fell headlong.

When he saw that she made no attempt to rise, but lay still, just as she had fallen, Ford looked no longer for an easy crossing. He glanced up and down the washout, saw no more promising point than where he was, wheeled, and rode back twenty yards or so, turned, and drove deep his spurs.

It was a nasty jump, and he knew it all along. When Rambler rose gamely to it, with tensed muscles and forefeet flung forward to catch the bank beyond, he knew it better. And when, after a sickening minute of frenzied scrambling at the crumbling edge, they slid helplessly to the bottom, he cursed his idiocy for ever attempting it.

Rambler got up with a pronounced limp; but Ford had thrown himself from the saddle, and escaped with nothing worse than a skinned elbow. They were penned, however, in a boxlike gully ten feet deep, and there was noth-

ing to do but follow it to where they might climb out. Ford was worried about the girl, and made a futile attempt to stand in the saddle, and from there climb up to the level. But Rambler, lame as he was, plunged so that Ford gave it up and started down the gulch, leading Rambler by the reins.

There were many sharp turns and temper-trying windings; and, though it narrowed in many places so that there was barely room for them to pass, it never grew shallower; and then, without any warning, it stopped abruptly upon a coulee's rim, with jumbled rocks, and a sheer descent to the slope below. Ford guessed then that he was boxed up in one of the main waterways of the foothills he had been skirting for the past hour or so, and that he should have ridden up the gulch instead of down it.

He turned, though the place was so narrow that Rambler's four feet almost touched one another, and his rump scraped the bank as Ford pulled him round and retraced his steps. It was too rough for riding, even if he had not wanted to save the horse; and he had no idea how far he must go before he could get out. Ford, at that time, was not particularly cheerful.

He must have gone a mile and more before he reached a point where, by hard scrambling, he attained level ground upon the same side as the girl. Ten minutes he spent in urging Rambler up the bank; and when the horse stood breathing heavily beside him, Ford knew that, for all the good there was in him at present, he might almost as well have left him at the bottom. He walked around him, rubbing leg and shoulder muscles until he located the hurt, and shook his head when all was done. Then he started on slowly, with Rambler hobbling stiffly after him. Ford knew that every rod would aggravate that strained shoulder, and that a prolonged stop might make it impossible for the horse to go on.

Worse, he was not quite sure, after all those windings where he could not see, just where it was he had seen the girl. But he recognized at last the undulating outline of the ridge over which she had appeared, and made what haste he could up the slope. The grazing horse was no longer in sight, though he knew it might be feeding in a hollow.

He had almost given up hope of finding her, when he turned his head and saw her off to one side, lying half concealed by a clump of low rosebushes. She was not unconscious, as he had thought, but was crying silently, with her face upon her folded arms and her hat askew over one ear. He stooped, and touched her upon the shoulder.

She lifted her head and looked at him, and shrank from him with that faint, withdrawing gesture which may be very slight in itself, but none the less eloquent and unmistakable. Ford backed a step when he saw it, and closed his lips without speaking the words he had meant to say.

"I wish you'd go away," the girl said, after a minute spent in fumbling unseen hairpins and in straightening her hat. "I don't know what you're here for, anyway. *I* don't need any help—from you."

"Appearances are deceitful, then," Ford retorted. "I saw you limping over the hill after your horse; and I saw you fall down, and stay down. I had an idea that a little help would be acceptable; about catching your horse, for instance."

"That was an hour ago," she stated, with a measuring glance at the sun, which was settling toward the sky line.

"I had trouble getting across that washout down there. I don't know this part of the country, and I went down it instead of up. What are you crying about—if you don't need any help?"

She eyed him askance, and chewed upon a corner of her lip, and flipped the upturned hem of her riding skirt down over one spurred foot with a truly feminine instinct before she answered him. She seemed to be thinking hard and fast, and she hesitated even while she spoke. Ford wondered at the latent antagonism in her manner.

"I was crying because my foot hurts so, and because I don't see how I'm going to get back to the ranch. They'll hunt me up if I stay away long enough

—but it's getting toward night, and—I'm scared to death of coyotes, if you must know."

Ford laughed—at her defiance of his amusement more than at what she said. "And you tell me you don't need any help?" he bantered.

"I might borrow your horse," she suggested coldly, as if she grudged yielding even that much to circumstance.

"You needn't hate *me* because you're in trouble," he hinted irrelevantly. "I'm not to blame, you know."

"I—I hate to ask help from—a stranger," she said, feeling her way and watching him from under her lashes the while. "And I suppose I can't help showing what I feel. I hate to feel under an obligation——"

"If that's all, forget it," he assured her calmly. "It's a law of the open—to help a fellow out in a pinch. When I headed for here, I thought it was a man had been set afoot."

She eyed him curiously. "Then you didn't know——"

"I thought you were a man," he repeated. "I didn't come just because I saw it was a girl. You needn't feel under any obligation whatever. I'm a stranger in the country, and a stranger to you. I can stay that way, if you prefer. I'm not trying to scrape acquaintance on the strength of your being in trouble; but you surely don't expect me to ride on and leave you out here on the bald prairie—do you?"

She was staring at him while he spoke, and she continued to stare after he had finished; the introspective look which sees without seeing it became at last; and Ford gave a shrug at her apparent obstinacy, and turned away to where Rambler stood with his head drooped and his eyes half closed. He picked up the reins and chirped to him, and the horse hesitated, swung his left foot forward, hobbled a step, and looked at Ford reproachfully.

"Your horse is crippled as badly as I am, it would seem," the girl observed from where she sat watching them.

"I strained his shoulder trying to make him jump that washout. That was when I first got sight of you over here. We went to the bottom, and it took me quite a while to find a way out. That's why I was so long getting here." Ford explained with his back to her while he rubbed commiseratingly the swelling shoulder.

"Oh!" The girl waited. "It seems to me you need help yourself. I don't see how you are going to help any one else with your horse in that condition." And when he still did not speak: "Do you know how far it is to the nearest ranch?"

"No. I told you I'm a stranger in this country. I was heading for the Double Cross; but I don't know just where——"

"We're eight miles, straight across, from there; ten, the way we would have to go to get there. There are other washouts in this country—which it is unwise to attempt jumping, Mr.——"

"Campbell," Ford supplied shortly.

"I beg pardon?"

"*Campbell.*" Ford was tempted to shout it, but contented himself with a tart distinctness. A late, untoward incident had made him somewhat touchy over his name.

"Oh! Did you skin your face, Mr. Campbell, when you tried to jump the washout?"

"No." Ford did not offer any explanation. He remembered the scars of battle which were still plainly visible upon his countenance, and he turned red while he bent over the fore ankles of Rambler, trying to discover other sprains. He felt that he was going to dislike this girl very much before he succeeded in getting her anywhere. He could not remember ever meeting before a woman under forty with so unpleasant a manner, and such a talent for disagreeable utterances.

"Then you must have been fighting a whole family of wild cats."

"Pardon me. Is this a Methodist 'experience' meeting?" he retorted, looking full at her with lowering brows. "It seems to me, the only subject which concerns us mutually is the problem of getting to a ranch before dark."

"You'll have to solve it yourself,

then. I never attempt puzzles." The girl, somewhat to his surprise, showed no resentment at his rebuff. Indeed, he suspected her of being secretly amused. He began also to suspect that she was not too badly hurt to walk if she wanted to. Indeed, his skepticism went so far as to accuse her mentally of deliberately baiting him—though why, he did not try to conjecture. Women were queer. Witness his own late experience with one.

Being thus in a finely soured mood, Ford suggested that, as she no doubt knew the shortest way to the nearest ranch, they, at least, make a start in that direction.

"How?" asked the girl, staring up at him from where she sat beside the rose-bushes.

"By walking, I suppose—unless you expect me to carry you." Ford's tone was not in any degree affable.

"I fancy it would be asking too great a favor to suggest that you catch my horse for me?"

Ford dropped Rambler's reins and turned to her, irritated to the point where he felt a distinct desire to shake her.

"I'd far rather catch your horse, even if I had to haze him all over the country, than carry you," he stated bluntly.

"Yes. I suspected that much." She had plucked a red seed ball off the bush nearest her, and was nibbling daintily the sweet pulp off the outside.

"Where is the horse?" Ford was holding himself rigidly back from an emotional outburst of any sort.

"Oh, I don't know, I'm sure." She picked another seed ball, and began upon it. "He should be somewhere around, unless he has taken a notion to go home."

Ford said something under his breath, and untied his rope from the saddle. He knew about where the horse had been feeding when he saw him, and he judged that it would naturally graze in the direction of home—which would probably be somewhere off to the southeast, since the trail ran more or less in that direction. Without a word to the girl, or a glance toward her, he started up the hill, meaning to get his bearings, and a sight of the horse, perhaps, from the top. He could not remember when he had been so angry with a woman.

"If she was a man," he gritted as he climbed, "I'd leave her out there, just as she deserves. That's the worst of dealing with a woman—she can always hand it to you, and you've got to give her a grin and thank-you, because she ain't a man."

He glanced back then, and saw her sitting with her head dropped forward upon her hands. There was something infinitely pitiful and lonely in her attitude; and he knitted his brows over the contrast between it and her manner when he left her.

"I don't suppose a woman knows herself what she means half the time," he hazarded impatiently. "She certainly didn't have any excuse for throwing it into me the way she did. Maybe she's sorry for it now."

After that his anger cooled imperceptibly, and he hurried a little faster, because the day was waning with the chill haste of mid-autumn, and he recalled what she had said at first about being afraid of coyotes. And, although the storm of four days ago had been swept into mere memory by one of those sudden chinook winds, and the days were once more invitingly warm and hazily tranquil, night came shiveringly upon the land, and the unhoused thought longingly of hot suppers and the glow of a fire.

The girl's horse was, he believed, just disappearing into a depression half a mile farther on; but when he reached the place where he thought he had seen it, there was nothing in sight save a few head of cattle, and a coyote trotting leisurely up the farther slope. He went farther down the shallow coulee, then up to the high level beyond, his rope coiled loosely over one arm, with the end dragging a foot behind him. There was nothing to be seen up there, either, except that the sun was just a red disk upon the far-off hills, and that the night was going to be uncomfortably cool if that wind kept blowing from the northwest.

He began to feel slightly uneasy about the girl, and to regret wasting any time over her horse. He might not be able to get close enough to rope the beast, even if he did see him.

He turned back, and walked swiftly through the dusk toward the ridge beyond which she and Rambler were waiting. But it was a long way—much farther than he had realized until he came to retrace his steps—and the wind blew up a thin rift of clouds which made the darkness come quickly. He found it difficult to tell exactly at which point he had crossed the ridge coming over; and, although experience in the open develops in a man a certain animal instinct for directions handed down by our primitive ancestry, Ford went wide in his anxiety to take the shortest way back to his unwilling protégée. The westering slope was lighter, however; and five minutes of wandering along the ridge showed him a dim bulk which he knew was Rambler. He hurried to the place, and the horse whinnied shrilly as he approached.

"I looked as long as I could see, almost, but I couldn't locate your horse," Ford remarked to the dark shadow of the rosebushes. "I'll put you on mine. It will be slow going, of course—lame as he is—but I guess we can manage to get somewhere."

He waited for the chill, impersonal voice to answer. When she did not speak, he leaned and peered at the spot where he knew she must be. "If you want to try it, we'd better be starting," he urged sharply. "It's going to be pretty cold here on this sidehill."

When there was silence still—and he gave her plenty of time for reply—Ford stooped, and felt gropingly for her. He thought she must be asleep. He glanced back at Rambler. Unless the horse had moved, she should have been —but she might have moved to some other spot, and be waiting in the dark to see what he would do. His palms touched the pressed grasses where she had been; but he did not say a word. He would not, he thought, give her that satisfaction; and he told himself grimly that he had his opinion of a girl who would waste time in foolery out here in the cold—with a sprained ankle to boot.

He pulled a handful of the long grass which grows best among bushes. It was dead now, and dry. He twisted it into a makeshift torch, lighted and held it high, so that its blaze made a great disk of brightness all around him. While it burned he looked; and, when it grew to black cinders and was near to scorching his hand, he made another, and looked farther. He laid aside his dignity, and called; and, while his voice went booming, full-lunged, through the whispering silence of that empty land, he twisted the third torch, and stamped the embers of the second into the earth that it might not fire the prairie.

There was no dodging the fact; the girl was gone. When Ford was perfectly sure of it, he stamped the third torch to death with vicious heels, went back to the horse, and urged him to limp up the hill. He did not say anything then, or think anything much; at least, he did not think coherently. He was full of a wordless rage against that girl; and he did not at first feel the need of expression. She had deliberately tricked him.

He remembered once shooting a big, beautiful, blacktail doe. She had dropped limply in her tracks, and lain there; and he had sauntered up, and stood looking at her stretched there before him. He was out of meat, and the doe meant what hot venison steaks and rich, brown gravy can mean to a man meat hungry. While he unsheathed his hunting knife, he gloated over the feast he would have that night. And just when he had laid his rifle against a rock and knelt to bleed her, the deer leaped from under his hand and bounced away over the hill. He had not said a word on that occasion, either.

This night, although the case was altogether different, and the disappearance of the girl was in no sense a disaster—rather a relief, if anything—he felt that same wordless rage, the same sense of utter chagrin. She had made a fool of him. After a while he felt his jaws aching with the viselike pressure of his teeth together.

They topped the ridge, Rambler hobbling stiffly. Ford had in mind a sheltering rim of sandstone at the nearest point of the coulee he had crossed, and was making for it. He had noticed a spring there; and, while the water might not be good, the shelter would be welcome, at any rate.

He had the saddle off Rambler, his shoulder bathed with cold water from the spring, and was warming his wet hands over a little fire when the first gleam of humor struck through his anger and lighted for a moment the situation.

"Lordy me! I must be hoodooed where women are concerned," he said, kicking the smoking stub of a bush into the blaze. "Soon as one crosses my trail, she goes and disappears off the face of the earth." He fumbled for his tobacco and papers. It was a "dry camp" he was making that night, and a smoke would have to serve for a supper. He held his book of papers absently while he stared hard at the fire.

"It ain't such a bad hoodoo," he mused. "I can spare this particular girl just as easy as not; and the other one, too." After a minute spent in blowing apart the thin leaves and selecting a paper:

"Queer where she got to—and it's a darned mean trick to play on a man that was just trying to help her out of a fix. Why, I wouldn't treat a stray dog that way! *Darn* these women!" And when he had the cigarette going, he voiced his most pressing need. "I'd give ten dollars for a pint of whisky—twenty-five for a quart!"

CHAPTER V.

Dawn came tardily after a long, cheerless night, when the wind whined over the prairie and the stars showed dimly through a shifting veil of low-sweeping clouds. Ford had not slept much, for hunger and cold make poor bedfellows; and all the brush he could glean on that barren hillside, with the added warmth of his saddle blanket wrapped about him, could no more make him comfortable than could cigarettes still the gnawing of his hunger.

When he could see across the coulee, he rose from where he had been sitting, with his back to the ledge and his feet to the meager fire, brooding over all the unpleasant elements in his life thus far, particularly the feminine element. Folding the saddle blanket along its original creases, he went over to where Rambler stood dispiritedly with his back humped to the cold, creeping wind, and his tail whipping between his legs, when a sudden gust played with it.

Ford shivered, and beat his gloved hands about his body, and looked up at the sky to see whether the sun would presently shine and send a little warmth to this bleak land where he wandered. He blamed the girl for all of this discomfort; and he told himself that the next time a woman appeared within his range of vision, he would ride away around her. They invariably brought trouble—of various sorts and degrees, it is true, but trouble always. It was perfectly safe, he decided, to bank on that. And he wished, more than ever, that he had not improvidently lavished his last gill of whisky on that disconsolate-looking sheep-herder whom he had met the day before on his way out from town; or that he had put two flasks in his pocket, instead of one. In his opinion, a good, big jolt right now would make a new man of him.

Rambler, as he had half expected, was obliged to do his walking with three legs only; which is awkward for a horse accustomed to four exceedingly limber ones, and does not make for speed, however great one's hurry. Ford walked around him twice, scooped water in his hands, and once more bathed the shoulder—not that he had any great faith in cold water as a liniment, but because there was nothing else that he could do, and his anxiety and his pity impelled service of some sort.

He rubbed until his fingers were numb and his arm aching; tried him again, and gave up all hope of leading the horse to a ranch. A mile he might manage, if he had to; but ten! He rubbed Rambler's nose commiseratingly, straightened his forelock, told him over and over that it was a darned shame,

anyway, and finally turned to pick up his saddle. He could not leave that lying on the prairie for inquisitive kit foxes to chew into shoe strings, however much he might dread the forty-pound burden of it on his shoulders. He was stooping to pick it up, when he saw a bit of paper twisted and tied to the saddle horn with a red ribbon.

"Lordy me!" he ejaculated ironically. "The lady must have left a note on my pillow—and I never received it in time! Now, ain't that a darned shame?" He plucked the knot loose and held up the ribbon and the note, and laughed.

"'When this reaches you, I shall be far away, though it breaks my heart to go, and this missive is mussed up scandalous with my bitter tears. Forgive me if you can, and forget me if you have to. It is better thus, for it couldn't otherwise was,'" he improvised mockingly, while his chilled fingers fumbled to release the paper, which was evidently a leaf torn from a man's memorandum book. "Lordy me, a letter from a lady! Ain't that sweet!"

When he read it, however, the smile vanished with a click of the teeth, which betrayed his returning anger. One cold, curt sentence—or so it seemed to him. His eye measured accusingly the wide strip of paper left blank under the words. She had not omitted an apology or explanation for want of room, at any rate.

"Oh, cer-tainly! I'd roost on that sidehill for a month if you said so." He glanced just once from ribbon to note; stuck the paper in his pocket, because he never left letters lying around for inquisitive persons to read, and dropped the ribbon upon the ground as if it had been a piece of string, and, with a curl of his lip, picked up the saddle and flung it upon his shoulder.

"I can't seem to recollect ever *asking* her to help me out, anyway," he snorted, while he looped the bridle reins over his arm. He turned, and looked pityingly at Rambler watching him with ears perked forward inquiringly, and started off briskly in the direction of the trail.

He was lucky that morning. He had not gone much farther than a mile when he was overtaken by a pleasant-eyed young fellow rushing a small band of horses across a little flat beyond the mouth of the coulee. He swerved and galloped toward Ford when he caught sight of him, and his grin was a direct invitation to the camaraderie of the plains; not at all like the antagonism of the girl, for instance. Ford's brow cleared, and his eyes. He grinned back whimsically.

"Hello! Looks like you're kinda up against it, stranger," greeted the galloping one, and pulled his horse to a stand.

"My looks aren't deceiving," said Ford. "Crippled my horse last night, so I'm trying to break myself to the saddle." Since the other had stopped, Ford stopped, also, and let the saddle slide to the ground, with a wriggle of the shoulders, afterward. "I'm glad I ain't a horse," he remarked dryly.

The other's eyes laughed. "How far did you pack that load—if it ain't against the rules to ask?"

"The country behind me says about a mile. My shoulders call it ten. I'd a heap rather take my shoulders' word for it; but you can believe the map if you'd rather."

The eyes of the stranger spilled the laugh to his lips, and the laugh drew funny, little creases about them. Ford liked him just for the spiritual uplift it gave one to look at him. He forgot even how hungry he was, which is saying a good deal.

"You've got the earmarks," said the young fellow, somewhat ambiguously—unless one knew the range well enough to know he meant the earmarks of a rider. "I'll rope you something out of the bunch to slap that riding gear onto. It'll beat walking; but it's liable to be rough going for a ways; every son of a gun has been running out since spring round-up; and there never was any lady's palfrey in that bunch."

"Man, I'm willing to ride a horse if he walks on his left ear exclusively—only so he can move!" Ford looked as if some one had just handed him a certified check for a million, except that he was not dazed with his good fortune.

"Oh—he'll likely *move,* all right." A quirk of the lips lent much meaning to the words.

This is not by way of introducing a rough-riding chapter. The important point for Ford was to get to his destination without being compelled to walk there. Inquiry developed the statement that the Double Cross was, as the girl had told him, ten miles away. Ford was not particularly famous as a "twister"; probably he never will be. But he saddled the fighting brute which the fellow managed to rope out of the bunch, and which he helped hold until it was bridled and the saddle cinched.

"I guess I coulda picked a gentler one —I ain't sure," he had half apologized during the saddling process. "Anyway, Toad pitches straight ahead, which is more than some of them freaks do. And he ain't tricky. You can bank on his being mean as thunder all the time. The whole bunch is pretty sassy. It was the rough string; and the tamer we had riding 'em tried to gentle 'em down by riding 'em to death. We turned 'em out after spring round-up; and there isn't one has had a saddle on him since. But I guess you can make out to ride him. As I say, he pitches straight and clean —and high."

"I'll ride him," promised Ford. "It looks to me like a case of have to. I sure ain't stuck on walking."

So he got on, after some maneuvering; and, though the young fellow had spoken truth, and it was rough going, he managed to stick. Visions of a ten-mile tramp, with the saddle on his own aching shoulders, may have helped to glue him in the saddle.

"He'll quit after a while, maybe," yelled the young fellow, by way of encouragement, after a tumultuous half mile or so.

"I doubt it some," Ford retorted in staccato.

That was the extent of their conversation for some time. When, from sheer inability to make another jump, the horse did settle down to mere snorting and headshakes, the dozen horses they were driving showed a persistent desire to separate, and run up divers, little gullies which they should have crossed, so that they were kept busy trying to keep the bunch together, and headed for the ranch—which, though Ford gathered that it was not the Double Cross, remained nameless to him.

"You can turn the horse out again when you get to the Double Cross," called the stranger when their trails parted, "and some of our boys will pick him up. Or you can throw him in the field till some one comes after him, just as you like." He paid the penalty of a hot chase after a pinto that bolted back for even that short speech. Ford did not learn who he was; but he watched him scurrying off after the pinto, and thanked him in his heart for the friendliness he had shown.

"H'lo, Ford! Where did you blow from?" a welcoming voice yelled when he rode up to the corral. The last ounce of trouble slid from Ford's shoulders when he heard it. He was among his kind once more, and he slid to the ground and gripped gladly the hand thrust at him. This was the man he had come from Sunset to see; the man who owned the Double Cross jointly with his wife, and who had stuck to a resilient sort of faith in Ford in the face of much condemnatory evidence.

"You look like you've been having a fine, large time, old man," he added, when Ford was standing before him. "Gosh! You'll want to stay in the bunk house, I reckon, till you grow some new hide—what? The wife's got lady company."

"No lady can get within gunshot of me, Ches—not if I see her coming in time." Though Ford smiled when he said it, there was meaning back of the smile. "I'd be willing to confront a large-sized breakfast, though."

Mason was rubbing his jaw reflectively, and staring at Ford. "Kate will go straight in the air if she knows you're here, and won't come to the house and stay," he observed uneasily. "She's had a big package of gratitude tucked away with your name on it ever since we made that prospecting trip together. And, lemme tell you, when a

woman goes and gets grateful to a man —gosh! Well, come on and get fed up, anyway. Mose—you remember Mose? I've got him cooking here. Hired him the day after the Fourth. The Mitten outfit fired him for getting soused, and I snapped him up before they had a chance to forgive him. Going to keep him, too. A better cook never threw dishwater over a guy rope than ole Mose. But—say!" He looked hesitantly at Ford. "I hate to tie a string on you—but if you've got any painkiller along, don't spring it on Mose, will yuh?"

"I haven't got a drop." Ford's tone was reprehensibly regretful.

"You do look as if you'd put it all under your belt," Mason retorted dryly. "Leave anything behind you?"

"A lot of sore heads, and a brand-new jail that was built especially for me," Ford admitted cheerfully. "Sunset was getting all fussed up over me. I thought I'd let their nerves settle a while. I was going to answer your letter, Ches, and tell you there was nothing doing in the foreman line—and then I took a notion to come and tell you myself. I was getting pretty well pickled in town, and that's a fact."

"Sure. Glad you came. I wish you hadn't brought that face, though—on account of Kate. She don't know—*all* about you; and she's got ideals. And," he added lugubriously, "she's so darned grateful to you for pulling me out of that Wolf Creek trip——"

"Well, call me Jack Jones, and let me stay down with the boys," Ford suggested carelessly, because he was close enough to the long, two-roomed bunk house to smell coffee and beefsteak. Mason's uneasiness seemed to him too trivial for words. "You can square it afterward, somehow," he added inattentively. "Lordy me, that coffee does smell good!"

You can't successfully whip up the conscience of a hungry man, and Ches Mason was wise enough to wait. Ford's face was, indeed, a glaring advertisement of some, at least, of his sins; but Ford himself did not worry much about it, now that the first soreness had abated. Perhaps he would have felt more sympathy for Mason's anxiety over Kate's opinion if he had come in contact with a mirror oftener; but even that is doubtful.

Mose asked him, first thing—and bent low over his shoulder while he handed him his coffee that Mason might not hear—if he had anything to drink. Ford shook his head, and Mose stifled a sigh, and went back to his dishwashing, and left Mason to gossip, undisturbed, while Ford ate.

It was not until Ford mentioned an inclination for sleep that Mason led the way into the other room, and they could speak in confidence without fear of Mose's loose tongue. Ford pulled off his boots, laid himself down upon the least-rumpled bunk, lighted a cigarette, and then eyed Mason quizzically.

"Do you know, Ches, I've been wondering for the last month what kind of a chump you are, anyway," he observed.

Ches grinned understandingly by way of reply.

"I was going to write and tell you what I think of a man that will lay himself wide open the way you did. And then I took a notion to come and tell you myself."

"You've got the floor," hinted Ches, still smiling.

"Well, you *are* a fool, Ches. Lordy me! Any man that will offer the place of foreman to a——"

"A rooting, tooting, shooting——" assisted Ches, chuckling over certain memories.

"Well, yes." Ford looked sheepish for a minute. "That's when I'm on a good one. But the point is this, Ches: You can't depend on me. You know you can't depend on me. I'll be all right for a month, maybe, and then—— I can't, for the life of me, see what made you make that offer. There are other good men. The foremen haven't all died off, just because old Slow cashed in—and that was too bad, too. I always kinda liked old Slow. But you back up, Ches. You ought to be sent to Sulphur Springs just for offering me the job."

"You're here," Ches stated blandly. "This is—the fifth, is it, or the sixth?

Well, we'll date you from the first, anyway. I can't bother with odd numbers. And soon as you look a little more human, you'll stop with us, of course. Kate wouldn't hear to anything else."

"Yes, and first thing you know, I'll get roaring, fighting drunk, and most likely try to lick everybody on the ranch —you included. For a man that's permitted to run loose and is supposed to be sane, you certainly are the——"

"There's quite a lot of riding left," Mason interrupted, his eyes twinkling. "Right around close, though. It won't be necessary to take out the wagons, except for a week or so. There's some stuff over on Bent Willow I want gathered in; but not much. This storm we had——"

"I never said I'd go to work for you, you weak-minded, old reprobate. I just came over to——"

"Oh, but you will," Ches contradicted. "You're on the job, old man."

Ford sat up and scowled. "Don't you know I'm a—a drunkard, practically?" he demanded sharply. "Why, I've got a rep from Glasgow to Butte as a booze fighter, and you know it. And a mean son of a gun, too. Why, I blew in ten thousand dollars in two months—and you know that, too, darn yuh! I'd like to know what man in his senses would trust me with his outfit. You don't count. You're a gibbering idiot, only you don't know it. Why, I'm liable to hit town with your darned old wagons, and—oh, heliotrope!" He dropped back upon the bunk, and said a good deal—which was not the language of flowers, by the way.

Mason smoked and smiled, and heard him through. When Ford had been silent for twenty seconds—staring up at the rough-board ceiling the while—Mason put his pipe in his pocket.

"You may have been all you claim," he admitted mildly, "as a pastime. I've hired you for what you really are, down underneath all that. *I* don't give a darn how mean you are when you're jagged. I don't expect to bump into you in that condition. You're foreman of the Double Cross now, old man; and the foreman of the Double Cross is all right. He's going to make good to the last white chip. I ain't a bit scared about that." He got up and stretched his arms, and yawned. "I've got to jog over to the river field," he volunteered. "The boys started over there to work a little bunch we threw in yesterday. You go ahead and take a snooze, Ford; and this afternoon, if you feel like it, we'll ride around and kinda size up the layout. I'm mighty glad you made up your mind to come. I've been wanting to take a trip to Oregon, and I hated to take some stranger and put him on the job and then leave him; and I couldn't leave the outfit to run itself, either. Good boys I've got here now, but rattle-headed, kinda. I did think, if you didn't show up pretty soon, I'd just make a flying trip of it. But the folks live out there, and they'd make a big howl if I didn't make 'em a visit, so——

"Well, you go bye-low, old man. We can talk any time." He took himself and his cheerfulness away, then.

He left behind him a mental battleground. Ford did not go "bye-low." Instead, he rolled over, and lay with his face upon his folded arms, alive to his finger tips; alive and fighting. There are times when the soul of a man awakes and reviews the past and faces the future with the veil of illusion torn away—and does it whether the man will or no.

CHAPTER VI.

Ford raised his head from his arms and listened, his heavy-lidded eyes staring blankly at the wall opposite. Then he sprang off the bunk and rushed from the room, slamming the door behind him so that the house shook. Outside, he hesitated long enough to see just where he must go to reach the woman who was screaming some inarticulate word over and over, and ran toward the voice, which seemed to issue from the little brown cottage that was trying modestly to hide behind a dispirited row of trees across a narrow gully. He took the plank footbridge in a couple of long leaps, vaulted over the gate when it showed a disposition to stick, and so reached the house.

A woman—instinctively he knew it must be "Kate"—jerked open the door, and screamed "Chester!" almost in his face. Behind her rolled a puff of slaty-blue smoke. Ford pushed past her without speaking. The smoke told, more clearly than she could have done, the tale of her need for help. She turned and followed him, choking.

"Oh, where's Chester?" she wailed. "The garret's on fire—and it's right over Phenie's room, and she can't take a step to save her life! Carry her out—*quick!* Nothing else matters——"

She rushed across that room and another, Ford at her heels. "There!" she cried, and pointed to a door. "Save her life—and I'll get Chester." She was off again; and Ford laughed in spite of himself at her panicky desire for her husband, and none other.

When he stopped with his hand upon the knob of the closed door, it turned fumblingly under his fingers. Again a woman confronted him—the girl he had met on the range. She had just struggled out of bed, it would seem, and into a flimsy, blue kimono, which she was holding together with one hand, while with the other she steadied herself against the wall. Her face was very white, and her eyes very big and dark; and her hair was tumbled into a brown mass which went away below her waist. Ford saw all that in one glance.

It was not done according to the best rules of romance. Ford said: "Come on;" and gathered her up in his arms, and carried her out with as much sentiment as he would have bestowed upon a sack of grain. His eyes smarted with smoke, so that he bumped into things once or twice. And when he reached the porch outside, he stood and wondered where he should put her, now that he had—theoretically, at least—saved her life. Kate had told him she could not take a step to save her life, so it scarcely seemed fair to deposit her upon the ground and leave her to her own devices.

He looked down at the girl; but there was no help to be gained there. She had closed her eyes, and was looking very much like a corpse. And there was an ominous crackling overhead. Then he glimpsed Mose running, limpingly, from the stables, and went down to meet him.

"Here, you take her and put her on a bunk, Mose," he entreated when Mose confronted him, panting a good deal because of his two hundred pounds of flesh and a pair of down-at-the-heel slippers, and a stiff knee that made haste laborious in the extreme.

Mose looked at the girl, and then at his two hands. "*I* can't take her—with both hands full of aigs," he objected. "Carry her down there yourself."

"Oh, put the eggs on the ground!" bawled Ford. "Lordy me, the house is on fire, and I've got to put it out!"

So Mose took the girl to the bunk house, after he had placed the eggs in a safe place, and Ford went back to put out the fire; which was a sinful waste of opportunity, I grant, but perhaps more practical. Once Kate had given up all hope of bringing Chester to the spot, she made a valiant assistant, handing up buckets of water to Ford on the ladder which led to the loft; and, since she had been washing clothes and had two tubs of water in the kitchen, the house was saved from destruction; because, after all, the fire had caught in a barrel of stuff which stood too close to the stovepipe, and was only just beginning to crackle along the rafters next the eaves when Ford was summoned. He was coming down with an empty bucket, and the atmosphere of a ticklish business carried to a successful end, when Mose puffed in, blatantly excited and eager to help save something.

"I don't know how to thank you," said Kate, with wet lashes and a trembling around the lips. "There was Josephine in there with a terribly sprained ankle, and couldn't walk, and—I was just *wild* with fear. I don't know what ever I should have done. And I'm so thankful and—and——"

"That's all right, without the thanks." Ford was backing toward the door. "I guess there's nothing more that I can do——"

"Oh, but you'll have to bring Josephine back!" Kate's eyes twinkled

damply. "I'm awfully sorry, but I'm afraid she won't want to stay in the bunk house; and she *can't* walk, you know. Poor Phenie—I don't know what she thought—and she's such a strange girl. I didn't tell her the house was on fire," she finished naïvely. "She may have imagined she was being kidnaped. I'll go and let the smoke out of the rooms, if you'll please bring her back. And—really, I'm so grateful that——"

Ford did not linger at that. He almost ran to the bunk house; and it occurred to him on the way that it might be difficult now for Mason to conceal his identity, and the fact that he was human, and therefore much inclined toward erring. She had had plenty of opportunity, he remembered, to see the condition his face was in. She was a nice woman, he fancied; but her gratitude he did not desire.

He found the girl, Josephine, lying upon a bunk just inside the door, still with her eyes closed and that corpse-like look on her face; and he was guilty of hoping that she would remain in that state for a few minutes longer. But when he lifted her in his arms, her eyes flew wide open, and stared up at him intently. She did not speak, however; so Ford shut his lips tightly together and carried her out without a word, and across the bridge and up to the house, where Kate received her with tearful sympathy.

Ford drew a long breath of relief when he closed the door upon the incident and went back to the bunk house. One tribute he paid her, and that was the decision to leave the ranch just as soon as he could after seeing Mason. He did not trouble himself over any explanation, further than conceding to woman the power of making things disagreeable for a man. Besides, it was not altogether upon her account that he was going. He had done some hard thinking, and had decided within himself that he was not to be trusted too far, and that Mason might mean well, but that he needed some one to do his thinking for him.

Mason, however, speedily demonstrated that he was not yet to be placed among the mentally incompetent. He heard Ford through—and it did not take long, because Ford was brief in his statement—and he did not laugh, as he had done before. They were standing down by the corral, where Ford had gone to meet him; and he put both hands upon Ford's shoulders, and looked him straight in the eye.

"You can make good," he said calmly. "I know it. All you want is a chance, and, seeing you won't give yourself one, I'll give it to you. If there's a yellow streak in you, I've never got a glimpse of it. Now, here's this foreman job. You can hold it down, all right—you know enough about stock. You'll do for me what you won't do for yourself, I believe. Anyway, I'm taking a chance. You can make good—and, damn it, you will!"

"I wish I was as sure of that as you seem to be," Ford muttered, and turned away. Mason's easy chuckle followed him, and Ford turned and went back.

"I haven't made any cast-iron promise——"

"Did I ask you for one?" Mason's voice sharpened.

"But—Lordy me, man! How do you know I'll——"

"You will. That's enough."

"But maybe I don't want the job. You can't shanghai me, you know."

Mason studied him. "I didn't think you'd dodge, Ford," he drawled, and the blood surged to the other's cheeks. "If you hadn't wanted the place, you'd have answered my letter and told me so."

"If I should happen to get jagged up in good shape, the first thing I'll want to do will be to lick the stuffing out of you for this," Ford prophesied, as one who knows whereof he speaks.

"You won't, though."

"Oh, Lord! I wish you'd quit believing in me," Ford grumbled. "It only goes to show you're plumb foolish." But he reached out and clenched his fingers upon Mason's arm, and looked at him long, as if there was much he would like to say, if only he could find the words.

"You're white clear down to your toes, Ches," he said finally, and went away with his hat jerked low down upon his forehead.

Mason looked after him as long as he was in sight, then took off his own hat, and wiped beads of perspiration from his face. "Gosh!" he whispered fervently. "That was nip and tuck—but I got him." Whereupon he replaced his hat, blew his nose violently, and went to his dinner, with his hands in his pockets and his humorous lips pursed into a whistle.

Before long he was back, chuckling to himself as he bore down upon Ford. "The wife says you've got to come up to the house," he announced, pulling Ford out of hearing of the others. "You've gone and done the heroic again, and you can't beg off."

"You go back and tell your wife I'm a bold, bad man, and that I won't go." Ford, to prove his sincerity, sat down on the saw-horse and crossed his legs. "Tell her—well, darn it all, tell her the truth. And there ain't anything heroic in packing a few buckets of water and sloshing them on a few blazing boards."

"How about rescuing a lady?" twitted Mason. "You come along. I want you up there myself. Gosh! I've got to have somebody I can talk to about something besides the proper treatment for sprained ankles, and dresses, and whether the grocer sent out the right brand of canned peaches. You ain't *married!*"

"Oh! Ain't I?" Ford snorted. "And what's that got to do with it?"

"Say, there's a mighty nice girl visiting Kate. The one you rescued. Had an accident yesterday, so she's crippled up some for the present, but—say, she's a peach! You better——"

"I met the lady," Ford stated dryly. "We didn't fall in love at first sight. She commenced hating me soon as I came within a mile of her. And she sent me to catch her horse, and then ran off before I got back."

"Oh! *You're* the fellow." Mason regarded him attentively. "I don't believe she told Kate that. I wonder why she didn't. You see, I went out to hunt her up—Kate got kinda worried—and she spoke about you, and we waited a while. But I knew how Kate would feel if we didn't get back, so we came on home, and I sent a man back with a horse for you. She left a note tied on your saddle; but the fellow came back and said he couldn't find you." He stopped, and looked quizzically at Ford. "I didn't know *you* were the man," he said. "Gosh! This is getting romantic."

"Not enough to hurt," Ford disclaimed.

"Well, dinner's waiting, and you've got to come. You won't," he added shrewdly, "meet Joe, anyway. She's in bed. And Kate you can't dodge, so there's no use hanging back. She'll come after you herself if I go back without you—and she'll give me the devil into the bargain."

"Well—all right, then; but, Lordy me, I do hate to, Ches! Women I'm plumb scared of. I never met one in my life that didn't hand me a package of trouble with both fists. Why——" He shut his teeth on the impulse to confide his matrimonial mischance, and followed Mason in silence, though Mason laughed all the way, and made facetious remarks upon the subject.

CHAPTER VII.

"And you needn't accuse me of being disappointed, either." Mrs. Kate finished a spirited monologue with unabashed enthusiasm. "I think he's perfectly splendid; and I like him all the better because he does try to stay in the background, and refuses to make any declaration of good intentions. You needn't worry the least bit about the ranch, or me, or Ford, or anything else. If Phenie wasn't so—so——" Like many women, Mrs. Kate found it easier to divine a peculiar mental state in another than to find expression for all she felt upon the subject. "Well, you know yourself how she treats Ford," she asserted. "As if—well, just the way I *feel* when I start across the pasture afoot, and you have cattle in there. Maybe it's a mercy he doesn't care enough to notice it, but——"

"But you wish he would, eh?"

"No-o, I don't. I didn't mean that at all. But, coming back to the point, I do think you showed good judgment, for once in your life, when you brought Ford here. He'll never touch liquor again—I'm perfectly certain of that."

He had been at the Double Cross just six weeks. Women seem rather precipitate always, both in building up a perfectly blind belief in a man, and in condemning him utterly.

Ford did not consider that the fight was fairly on yet. He was, so to speak, still gathering his forces together and studying the map of the battleground. He had never mentioned the subject to Ches Mason until the morning when Mason was preparing to start on the long-planned trip to Oregon. Then Mason himself spoke of it indirectly, because he wanted Ford to understand that he felt no uneasiness about going.

"I know you don't, Ches," Ford replied. "I think myself you're more sure than sensible about it; but I hope you won't feel like kicking yourself all over the ranch for going off like this. You aren't a fool. You know what I'm up against. It's going to be an uphill climb, old-timer, and a blamed long hill at that, I'm afraid. And it's liable to be pretty darned slippery in places."

"I *sabe* that, all right," grinned Mason. "But I know, too, that you'll dig in your toes, and hang on by your eye-winkers if you have to. Keep an eye on Mose, will you? I wouldn't trust that old devil as far as I can throw him. He come pretty near sousing himself good just before you came; had a gallon jug of whisky sent out—and claimed it was vinegar. He won't quit pouring it down till he gets full, if he gets hold of it; and the boys all know better than to pass any on to him; but you'd better watch him yourself. Then I'll know everything's all right. But if he does make connections with anything, Ford, don't can him. Just shut him up somewhere till he gets over it. Good cooks are scarcer than—good foremen, for instance."

A heartening smile went with that last sentence, which was the closest Mason had come to praising Ford—unless one recognized the tribute he paid him by going off with a mind at ease and leaving Ford master of the ranch and guardian of his wife, to say nothing of "Buddy," who was six, and who had a burning desire to be a real twister.

Buddy would, by the way, have forced a recognition of his existence sooner if he had been on the ranch when Ford arrived. He had gone with the very first bunch of riders to the lower field, however, determined to help hold the "cut," which he did to the complete satisfaction of himself, if not of the men.

Buddy was rather terrible sometimes. He had a way of standing back unnoticed, and of listening when he was believed to be engrossed in his play. Afterward he was apt to say the things which should not be said. In other words, he was the average child of six, living without playmates, and so forced by his environment to interest himself in the endless drama played by the grown-ups around him. Buddy, therefore, was not unusually startling, that day at dinner, when he looked up from spatting his potato into a flat cake on his plate.

"What hill you going to climb, Ford?" was his manner of exploding his bomb. "Bald Pinnacle? I can climb that hill myself."

"I don't know as I'm going to climb any hills at all," Ford said indulgently, accepting another helping of potato salad from Mrs. Kate.

"You told dadykins you was going to climb a big, long hill; and he was more sure than sensible." He giggled, and showed where the first baby tooth was missing from among its fellows. "Daddy," he observed to his mother, "told him he'd make it; but he'd have to dig in his toes and hang on by his eye-winkers. Gee! I'd like to see Ford hang onto a hill by his eye-winkers. Joe could do it—she's got winkers six feet long."

Miss Josephine had been looking at Ford's face going red as understanding came to him; but when she caught a quick glance leveled at her lashes, she

drooped them immediately so that they almost touched her cheeks. Buddy gave a squeal, and pointed to her with his fork.

"Joe's blushing! I guess she's ashamed because she's got such long winkers, and Ford keeps looking at 'em all the time. Why don't you shave 'em off with dad's razor? Then Ford would like you, maybe. He don't now. He told dad——"

"Robert Chester Mason, do you want me to get the *hairbrush?*" This, it need not be explained, from Mrs. Kate, in a voice portending disaster.

"I guess we can get along without it, mamma," Buddy answered her, with an ingratiating smile. Even in the first six years of one's life, one learns the elementary principles of diplomacy. He did not retire from the conversation; but he prudently changed the subject to what he considered a more pleasant channel.

"Dick likes you, anyway, Joe," he informed her soothingly. "He likes you, winkers and all. I can tell, all right. When you go out for a ride, he gives me nickels if I tell him where——"

"Robert Ches——"

"Oh, all right." Buddy's tone was wearily tolerant. "A man never knows what to talk about to women, anyway. I'd hate to be married to 'em—wouldn't you, Ford?"

"A little boy like you," began his mother, somewhat pinker of cheeks than usual.

"I guess I'm pretty near a man now." He turned his eyes to Ford, consciously ignoring the feminine members of his family. "If I had a wife," he stated calmly, "I'd snub her up to a post, and talk to her about anything I damn' pleased!"

Mrs. Kate rose up then in all the terrifying dignity of outraged motherhood, grasped Buddy by the wrist and led him away—in the direction of the hairbrush, one would judge by Buddy's reluctance to go.

"So you are going to climb the—Big Hill, are you?" Miss Josephine observed when the two were quite alone. "It is to be hoped, Mr. Campbell, that it isn't so steep as it looks—from the bottom."

Ford was not an adept at reading what lies underneath the speech of a woman. To himself he accented the last three words, so that they overshadowed all the rest and made her appear to remind him where he stood—at the bottom.

"I suppose a hollow looks pretty high to a man down a well," he retorted, looking into the teacup because he felt an impulse to stare at her.

"One can always keep climbing," she murmured, "and never give up——" Miss Josephine, also, was tilting her teacup, and looking studiously into it as if she would read her fortune in the specks of tea leaves there. "And the reward for reaching the top——"

"Is there supposed to be a reward?" Ford could not tell why he asked her that, nor why he glanced stealthily at her from under his eyebrows.

"There—might—there usually is a reward for any great achievement—and——" Miss Josephine was plainly floundering where she had hoped to float airily upon the surface.

"What's the reward for climbing hills?" He looked at her full now, and his lips were ready to smile.

Miss Josephine looked uneasily at the door. "I—really, I never—investigated the matter at all." She gave a twitch of shoulders, and met his eyes steadily. "The inner satisfaction of having climbed the hill, I suppose," she said, in the tone of one who has at last reached firm ground. "Will you have more tea, Mr. Campbell?"

Her final words were chilly and impersonal, but Ford left the table smiling to himself. At the door he met Dick, whom Buddy had mentioned with disaster to himself. Dick saw the smile, and within the room he saw Miss Josephine sitting alone, with her chin resting in her two palms and her eyes fixed upon vacancy.

"Hello!" Ford greeted. "Do you want me for anything, Dick?"

"Can't say I do," drawled Dick, brushing past Ford in the doorway.

Ford hesitated long enough to give him a second glance—an attentive enough glance this time—and went his way; without the smile, however.

"Lordy me!" he said to himself when his foot touched the bridge; but he did not add anything to the exclamation. He was wondering when it was that he had begun to dislike Dick Thomas; a long while, it seemed to him, though he had never till just now quite realized it. Dick and he had been friendly enough, too, though he had once or twice suspected Dick of a certain disappointment that he himself was not foreman of the Double Cross; and once he had asked Mason why he hadn't given the place to Dick.

"Didn't want to," Mason had replied succinctly, and let it go at that.

If Dick cherished any animosity, however, he had never made it manifest. Indeed, he had shown a distinct inclination to be friendly; a friendliness which led the two to pair off frequently when they were riding, and to talk over past range experiences more or less intimately. Looking back over the six weeks just behind him, Ford could not remember a single incident—a sentence, even—that had been unpleasant; and yet here he was disliking the fellow.

"He's got bad eyes," he concluded. "That's what it is. I never did like eyes the color of polished steel; nickel-plated eyes, I call 'em; all shine and no color. Still, a man ain't to blame for his eyes."

Then Dick overtook him, with Buddy trailing, red-eyed, at his heels; and Ford forgot, in the work to be done that day, all about his speculations. He involved himself in a fruitless argument with Buddy upon the subject of what a six-year-old can stand in the way of riding, and yielded finally before the quiver of Buddy's lips. They were only going over on Long Ridge, anyway, to take a look at Rambler; and the day was fine, and Buddy had frequently ridden as far, according to Dick. Indeed, it was Dick's easy-natured, "Ah, let the kid go, why don't you?" which gave Ford an excuse for reconsidering.

And Buddy repaid him after his usual fashion. At the supper table he looked up, round-eyed, from his plate.

"Gee, but I'm hungry!" he sighed. "I eat and eat, just like a horse eating hay; and I just *can't* fill up the hole in me."

"There, never mind, honey," Mrs. Kate interposed hastily, fearing worse. "Do you want more bread and butter?"

"Yes—you always use bread for stuffing, don't you? I want to be stuffed. All the way home my b—my *stomerch* was a-flopping against my backbone, just like Dick's. Only Dick said——"

"Never mind what Dick said." Mrs. Kate thrust the bread toward him half buttered.

"Dick's mad, anyway. He's mad at Ford." Buddy regarded his mother gravely over the slice of bread.

"First I've heard of it," Ford remarked lightly. "I think you must be mistaken, old-timer."

But Buddy never considered himself mistaken about anything; and he did not like being told that he was. He rolled his eyes at Ford resentfully.

"Dick *is* mad. He got mad when you galloped over where Joe's red ribbon was hanging onto a bush. I saw him a-scowling when you rolled it up and put it in your shirt pocket. Dick wanted that ribbon for his bridle; and you better give it to him. Joe ain't your girl. She's Dick's girl. And you have to tie the ribbon of your bestest girl on your bridle. That's why," he added, with belated gallantry, "I tie my own mamma's ribbons on mine. And"—he returned with terrible directness to the real issue—"Joe's Dick's girl, 'cause he said so. I heard him tell Jim Felton—and you *are* his girl; ain't you, Joe?"

His mother had tried at first to stop him, had given up in despair, and was now sitting in a rather tragic calm, waiting for what might come of it.

Josephine caught Ford's eyes fixed rather intently upon her, and sensed the expectancy in them. She bit her lip, and then she laughed.

"A man shouldn't make an assertion of that sort," she said quizzically, in the direction of Buddy—though her meaning went straight across the table to an-

other—"unless he has some reason for feeling very sure."

Buddy tried to appear quite clear as to her meaning. "Well, if you *are* Dick's girl, then you better make Ford give that ribbon——"

"I have plenty of ribbons, Buddy," Josephine interrupted, smiling at him still. "Don't you want one?"

"I tie my own mamma's ribbons on my bridle," Buddy rebuffed. "My mamma is my girl—you ain't. You can give your ribbons to Dick."

"Mamma won't be your girl if you don't stop talking so much at the table," Mrs. Kate informed him sternly, with a glance of trepidation at the others. "A little boy mustn't talk about grown-ups, and what they do or say."

"What *can* I talk about, then? The boys talk about their girls all the time when they——"

"I wish to goodness I had let you go with your dad. I shall not let you eat with us, anyway, if you don't stop talking so much. You're getting perfectly awful." Which even Buddy understood as a protest which was not to be taken seriously.

Ford stayed long enough to finish drinking his tea, and then he left the house with what he privately considered a perfectly casual manner. As a matter of fact, he was extremely self-conscious about it, so that Mrs. Kate felt justified in mentioning it, and in asking Josephine a question or two—when she had prudently made an errand elsewhere for Buddy.

Josephine having promptly disclaimed all knowledge or interest pertaining to the affair, Mrs Kate spoke her mind plainly.

"If Ford's going to fall in love with you, Phenie," she said, "I think you're foolish to encourage Dick. I believe Ford *is* falling in love with you. I never thought so till to-night; but what Buddy said——"

"I don't suppose Bud knows what he's talking about—any more than you do," snapped Josephine. "If you're determined that I shall have a love affair on this ranch, I'm going home." She planted her chin in her two palms, just as she had done at dinner, and stared into vacancy.

"Where?" asked Mrs. Kate politely, and then atoned for it whole-heartedly. "There, I didn't mean that—only—*this* is your home. It's got to be. I won't let it be anywhere else. And you needn't have any love affair, Phene—you know that. Only you shan't badger Ford. I think he's perfectly splendid! What he did for Chester—I—I can't think of that without getting a lump in my throat, Phene. Think of it! Going without food himself, because there wasn't enough for two, and—and—well, he just simply threw away his own chance of getting through to give Chester a better one. It's the bravest thing I ever heard of! And the way he has conquered——"

"How do you know he has conquered? And lots of men save other men's lives. It's being done every day, and no one hears much about it. You think it was something extraordinary just because it happened to be Chester that was saved. Anybody will do all he can for a sick partner when they're away out in the wilds. I haven't a doubt Dick would have done the very same thing when it comes to that." Josephine got up from the table then and went into her own room.

Mrs. Kate went into the kitchen; and there was a distinct coolness between them for the rest of that day, and a part of the next. The chill of it affected Ford sufficiently to keep him away from the house as much as possible, and unusually silent when he was away; but he did not know that his disagreeable mental state was directly traceable to the two women; more exactly, to the younger woman.

Ford, if he had tried to put his gloomy unrest into words, would probably have said that he wanted whisky, and wanted it badly.

CHAPTER VIII.

Mose was mad. He was flinging tinware about the kitchen with a fine disregard of the din or the dents; and whenever the blue cat ventured out

from under the stove he kicked at it viciously. He was mad at Ford; and when a man gets mad at his foreman—without knowing that the foreman has been instructed to bear with his faults and keep him on the pay roll at any price—he must, if he be the cook, have recourse to kicking cats and banging dishes about, since he dare not kick the foreman. In late November "jobs" are not at all plentiful in the range land; and even an angry cook must keep his job or face the world-old economic problem of food, clothing, and shelter.

But if he dared not speak his mind plainly to Ford, he was not averse to pouring his woes into the first sympathetic ear that came his way. It happened that upon this occasion the ear arrived speedily upon the head of Dick Thomas.

"Matter, Mose?" he queried, sidestepping the cat, which gave a long leap straight for the door when it opened. "Cat been licking the butter again?"

Mose grunted, and slammed three pie tins into a cupboard with such force that two of them bounced out and rolled across the floor. One came within reach of his foot, and he kicked it into the woodbox, and swore at it while it was on the way. "And I wisht it was Ford Campbell himself, the snoopin', stingy, kitchen-grannying, booze-fightin' son-of-a-sour-dough bannock!" he finished prayerfully.

"He surely hasn't tried to mix in *here* and meddle with *you?*" Dick asked, helping himself to a piece of pie. You know the tone. It had just that inflection of surprised sympathy which makes you tell your troubles without that reservation which a more neutral listener would unconsciously impel.

I am not going to give Mose's version, because he warped the story to make it fit his own indignation, and did not do Ford justice. This, then, is the truth:

Ford chanced to be walking up along the edge of the gully which ran past the bunk house, and into which empty cans and other garbage were thrown. Sometimes a can fell short, so that all the gully edge was liberally decorated with a gay assortment of canners' labels. Just as he came up, Mose opened the kitchen door and threw out a cream can, which fell in front of Ford and trickled a white stream upon the frozen ground. Ford stooped and picked up the can, shook it, and heard the slosh which told of waste. He investigated further, and decided that throwing out a cream can before it was quite empty was not an accident with Mose, but might be termed a habit. He took Exhibit A to the kitchen; but he laughed while he spoke of it. And these were his exact words:

"Lordy me, Mose, somebody's liable to come here and get rich off us if we don't look out! He'll gather up the cream cans you throw into the discard and start a dairy on the leavings." He set the can down on the water bench beside the door and went away.

"I've been cookin' for cow camps ever since I got my knee stiffened up so's't I couldn't ride—and that's sixteen year ago last Fourth—and it's the first time I ever had any darned foreman go snoopin' around my back door to see if I scrape out the cans clean." Mose seated himself upon a corner of the table, with the stiff leg for a brace and the good one swinging free, and folded his bare arms upon his heaving chest.

"And that ain't all, Dick," he went on aggrievedly. "He went and cut down the order I give him for grub. That's something Ches never done—not with me, anyway. Asked me—*asked* me what I wanted with so much choc'let. And I wanted boiled cider for m' mincemeat, and never got it. And brandy, too—only I didn't put that down on the list. I knowed better than to write it out. But I give Jim money—out uh my *own pocket!*—to git some with, and he never done it. Said Ford told him p'tic'ler not to bring out nothin' any near drinkable than lemon extract! I've got a darned good mind," he added somberly, "to fire the hull works into the gully. *He* don't belong on no cow ranch. Where he'd oughta be is runnin' the W. C. T. U. So darned afraid of a pint uh brandy——"

"If I was dead sure your brains

wouldn't get to leaking out your mouth," Dick began guardedly, "I might put you wise to something." He took a drink of water, opened the door that he might throw out what remained in the dipper, and made sure that no one was near the bunk house before he closed the door again.

Mose watched him interestedly.

"You know me—I never do tell all I know," he hinted eagerly.

"Well"—Dick stood with his hand upon the doorknob and a sly grin upon his face—"I ain't saying a word about anything. Only—if you might happen to want some—*eggs*—for your mince pies, you might look good under the southeast corner of the third haystack, counting from the big corral. I believe there's a—*nest*—there."

"The deuce!" Mose brightened understandingly, and drummed with his fingers upon his bare, dough-caked forearm. "Do yuh know who—er—what hen laid there?"

"I do," said Dick, with a rising inflection. "The head hen uh the flock. But if I was going to hunt eggs, I'd take down a chiny egg and leave it in the nest, Mose."

"But I ain't got——" Mose caught Dick's pale glance resting, with what might be considered some significance, upon the vinegar jug, and he stopped short. "That wouldn't work," he commented vaguely.

"Well, I've got to be going. Boss might can me if he caught me loafing around here, eating pie when I ought to be working. Ford's a fine fellow, don't you think?" He grinned and went out, and then came back, and said he never could stand socks with a hole in the toe, and he guessed he'd have to hunt through his war bag for a good pair.

Mose, as need scarcely be explained, went immediately to the stable to hunt eggs; and Dick, in the next room, smiled to himself when he heard the door slam behind him. Dick did not change his socks just then; he went first into the kitchen and busied himself there, and he continued to smile to himself. Later, he went out and met Ford, who was riding moodily up from the river field.

"Say, I'm going to be an interfering kind of a cuss, and put you next to something," he began, with just the right degree of hesitation in his manner. "It ain't any of my business, but——" He stopped and lighted a cigarette. "If you'll come up to the bunk house, I'll show you something funny."

Ford dismounted in silence, led his horse into the stable, and, without waiting to unsaddle, followed Dick.

"We've got to hurry before Mose gets back from hunting eggs." Dick explained the long strides he took. "And, of course, I'm taking it for granted, Ford, that you won't say anything. I kinda thought you ought to know, maybe—but I'd never say a word if I didn't feel pretty sure you'd keep it behind your teeth."

"Well—I'm waiting to see what it is," Ford replied noncommittally.

Dick opened the kitchen door, and led Ford through that into the bunk room. "You wait here—I'm afraid Mose might come back," he said, and went back to the kitchen. When he returned, he had a gallon jug in his hand. He was still smiling.

"I went to mix me up some soda water for heartburn," he said, "and when I picked up this jug, Mose took it out of my hand, and said it was boiled cider that he'd got for mincemeat. So when he went out I took a taste. Here. You sample it yourself, Ford. If that's boiled cider, I wouldn't mind having a barrel."

Ford took the jug, pulled the cork, and sniffed at the opening. He did not say anything, but he looked up at Dick significantly.

"Taste it once!" urged Dick innocently. "I'd just like to have you see the brand of slow poison a fool like Mose will pour down him."

Ford hesitated, sniffed, started to set down the jug, then lifted it, and took a swallow.

"That isn't as bad as some I've seen," he pronounced evenly, shoving in the cork. "Nor as good," he added con-

servatively. "I wonder where he got it."

"Search me. Oh, by Jiminy, here he comes! I'm going to take a scoot, Ford. Don't give me away, will you? And if I was you, I wouldn't say anything to Mose—I know that old devil pretty well. He'll keep mighty quiet about it himself—unless you jump him about it. Then he'll roar around to everybody he sees, and claim it was a plant." He slid stealthily through the outer door; and Ford saw him run down into the gully and disappear while Mose was yet halfway from the stable.

Ford sat on the edge of a bunk and looked at the jug beside him. If Dick had deliberately planned to tempt him, he had cunningly chosen the time well; and, if he had not done it deliberately, there must have been a malignant spirit abroad that day.

For a week Ford had been restless and moody. Even Buddy had noticed that, and complained that Ford was cross and wouldn't talk to him; and Mrs. Kate had scolded Josephine, and accused her of being responsible for his gloom and silence. Since Josephine's conscience sustained the charge, she resented the accusation, and proceeded deliberately to add to its justice; which did not make Ford any the happier, you may be sure. For when a man reaches that mental state which causes him to carry a girl's ribbon folded carefully into the most secret compartment of his pocketbook, and to avoid the girl herself, and yet feel like committing assault and battery with intent to kill, because some other man occasionally rides with her for an hour or two, he is extremely sensitive to averted glances and chilly tones and monosyllabic conversation.

Since the day before, when she had ridden over to the stage road with Dick, Ford had been fighting the desire to saddle a horse and ride to town; and the thing that lured him townward confronted him now in that gray stone jug with the brown neck and handle.

He lifted the jug, shook it tentatively, pulled out the cork with a jerk that was savage, and looked around the room for some place where he might empty out the contents and have done with temptation; but there was nothing but the stove, so he started to the door with it, meaning to pour it on the ground. Mose just then shambled past the window, so Ford sat down to wait until he was safe in the kitchen. And all the while the cork was out of that jug, so that the fumes of the whisky rose maddeningly to his nostrils; and the little that he had swallowed whipped the thirst devil to a fury of desire.

In the kitchen, Mose rattled pans and hummed a raucous tune under his breath. In a few minutes he started again for the stable. Dick, desultorily bracing a leaning post of one of the corrals, saw him coming, and grinned. He glanced toward the bunk house, where Ford still lingered, and the grin grew broader. After that he went all around the corral with his hammer and bucket of nails, tightening poles and braces, and incidentally keeping an eye upon the bunk house; and, while he worked, he whistled and smiled by turns. Dick was in an unusually cheerful mood.

Mose came up behind him, and stood with his stiff leg thrust forward and his hands rolled up in his apron—with something clasped tightly under the wrappings, Dick could see.

"Say, that he-hen—she laid twice in the same place," Mose announced confidentially. "Got 'em both—for m' mince pies." He waggled his head, winked twice with his left eye, and went back to the bunk house.

Still Ford did not appear. Josephine came, however, in riding skirt and gray hat and gauntlets, treading lightly down the path, which lay all in a yellow glow which was not sunlight, but that mellow haze which we call Indian summer. She looked in at the stable, and then came straight over to Dick. There was, when Josephine was her natural self, something very direct and honest about her movements, as if she disdained all those little, feminine subterfuges, but took always the straight, open trail to her object.

"Do you know where Mr. Campbell is, Dick?" she asked him, and added no explanation of her desire to know.

"I do," said Dick, with the rising inflection which was his habit when the words were used for a bait to catch another question.

"Well, where is he, then?"

Dick straightened up, and smiled down upon her queerly. "Count ten before you ask me that again," he parried, "because maybe you'd better not know."

Josephine lifted her chin, and gave him that straight, measuring stare which had so annoyed Ford the first time he had seen her. "I have counted," she said calmly, after a pause. "Where is Mr. Campbell, please?"—and the "please" pushed Dick to the very edge of her favor, it was so coldly formal.

"Well, if you're sure you counted straight—the last time I saw him he was in the bunk house."

"Well?" The tone of her demanded more.

"He was in the bunk house—cuddled close up to a gallon jug of whisky." His eyelids flickered. "He's there yet—but I wouldn't swear that there's still a gallon——"

"Thank you very much." This time her tone pushed him over the edge and into the depths of her disapproval. "I thought I could depend upon you—to *tell!*"

"What else could I do when you asked?"

But she had her back to him, and was walking away up the path; and if she heard, she did not trouble to answer. Still Dick smiled, and brought the hammer down against a post with such force that he splintered the handle.

"Something's going to drop on this ranch pretty quick," he prophesied, looking down at the useless tool in his hand. "And if I wanted to name it, I'd call it Ford." He glanced up the path to where Josephine was walking straight to the west door of the bunk house, and laughed sourly. "Well, she needn't take my word for it if she don't want to, I guess," he muttered. "Nothing like heading off a critter—or a woman—in time."

Josephine did not hesitate upon the doorstep. She went in, and shut the door behind her before the echo of her step had died. Ford was lying, as he had lain once before, upon a bunk, with his face hidden in his folded arms. He did not hear her—at any rate, he did not know who it was, for he did not lift his head or stir.

Josephine looked at the jug upon the floor beside him, bent, and lifted it very gently from the floor; tilted it to the window so that she could look into it; tilted her nose at the odor, and very, very gently put it back where she had found it. Then she stood and looked down at Ford.

She did not move, and she certainly did not speak; but her presence, for all that, penetrated his abstraction. He lifted his head and stared at her over an elbow; and his eyes were heavy with trouble, and his mouth was set in lines of bitterness.

"Did you want me for something?" he asked, when he knew that she was not going to speak.

She shook her head. "Is it—pretty steep?" she ventured, and glanced down at the jug.

He looked puzzled at first; but when his own glance followed hers, he understood. He stared up at her somberly before he let his head drop back upon his arms so that his face was hidden.

"You've never been in hell, I suppose," he told her, and his voice was tired. After a minute, he looked up at her again. "Is it fun to stand and watch a man—— What do you want, anyway? It doesn't matter—to *you.*"

"Are you sure?" she retorted sharply. "And—suppose it doesn't. I have Kate to think of, at least."

He gave a little laugh that came nearer being a snort. "Oh, if that's all, you needn't worry. I'm not quite that far gone, thank you."

"I was thinking of the ranch, and of her ideals, and of the effect on the men," she explained impatiently.

He was silent a moment. "I'm thinking of myself," he told her grimly then.

"And—don't you ever—think of me?" She set her teeth sharply together after the words were out; but she did not seem to repent having

spoken them. She watched him, and she was breathing quickly.

Ford got up from the bunk and faced her with stern questioning in his eyes; but she only flushed a little under his scrutiny. Her eyes, he noticed, were clear and steady, and they had in them something of that courage which fears but will not flinch.

"I don't want to think of you," he said, lowering his voice unconsciously. "For the last month I've tried hard not to think of you."

She leaned back against the door and stared up at him with widening pupils. Ford looked down, and struck the jug with his toe. "That thing," he said slowly, "I've got to fight alone. I don't know yet which is going to come out winner, me or the booze. I—don't—know." He lifted his head and looked at her. "What did you come in here for?" he asked bluntly.

She caught her breath. "Dick told me—and I was—I wanted to—well, help. I thought I might—sometimes when the climb is too steep, a hand will keep one from—slipping."

"What made you want to help? You don't like me." His tone was flat and unemotional; but she did not seem able to meet his eyes. So she looked down at the jug.

"Dick said—but the jug is full practically. I don't understand how——"

"It isn't as full as it ought to be; it lacks one swallow." He eyed it queerly. "I wish I knew how much it would lack by dark," he said.

She threw out an impulsive hand. "Oh, but you must make up your mind. You mustn't temporize, or——"

"This," he interrupted rather flippantly, "is something little girls can't understand. They'd better not try. This isn't a woman's problem, to be solved by argument. It's a man's fight."

"But if you just made up your mind, you could win."

"Could I?" His tone was amusedly skeptical, but his eyes were still somber.

"Even a woman," she said impatiently, "knows *that* is not the way to win a fight—to send for the enemy and give him all your weapons and a plan of the fortifications and the password; when you *know* there's no mercy to be hoped for!"

He smiled at her simile, and at her earnestness also, perhaps; but that black gloom stayed in his eyes.

"What made you send for it? A whole gallon!"

"I didn't. That jug belongs to Mose," he told her simply. "Dick told me Mose had it; rather, Dick went into the kitchen and got it, and turned it over to me." In spite of the words, he did not give one the impression that he was defending himself; he was merely offering an explanation.

"Dick got it and turned it over to you!" Her forehead wrinkled into vertical lines. She studied him frowningly. "Will you give it to me?" she asked directly.

Ford folded his arms and scowled down at the jug. "No," he decided at last, "I won't. If booze is going to get the best of me, I want to know it—and I can't know it too quick."

"But you're only human, Ford!"

"Sure. But I'm kinda hoping I'm a *man*, too." His eyes lightened a little while they rested upon her.

"But you've got the poison of it—it's like a traitor in your fort, ready to open the door. You can't do it! I—oh, you'll never understand why, but I can't *let* you risk it. You've got to let me help. Give it to me, Ford."

"No. You go on to the house, and don't bother about me. You can't help—nobody can. It's up to me."

She struck her hands together in a nervous rage. "You want to keep it because you want to *drink* it! If you didn't want it, you'd hate to be near it. You'd *want* some one to take it away. You just want to get drunk, and be a beast. You—you—oh—you don't know what you're doing, or how much it means. You don't know!" Her hands went up suddenly, and covered her face.

Ford walked the length of the room away from her, turned, and came back until he faced her, where she stood leaning against the door with her face still hidden behind her palms. He reached

out his arms to her, hesitated, and drew them back.

"I wish you'd go," he said hoarsely. "I believe there are some things harder to fight than whisky. You only make it worse."

"I'll go when you give me that."

"You'll go anyway." He took her by the arm, quietly pulled her away from the door, opened it, and then closed it while, for just a breath or two, he held her tightly in his arms. Very gently, after that, he pushed her out upon the doorstep, and shut the door behind her. The lock clicked a hint which she could not fail to hear and understand. He waited until he heard her walk away, then sat down with the air of a man who is very, very weary, rested his elbows upon his knees, and, with his hands clasped loosely together, he glowered at the jug on the floor; and once more the soul of Ford went deep down into the pit where all the devils dwell.

CHAPTER IX.

It was Mose crashing headlong into the old mess box where he kept rattly basins, empty lard pails, and such that roused him. He got up and went into the kitchen; and, when he saw what was the matter, he extricated Mose by the simple method of grabbing his legs and pulling hard; set him upon his feet, and got full in his face the unmistakable fumes of whisky.

"What? You got another jug of stuff?" he asked, with some disgust, steadying Mose against the wall.

"Ah—I ain't got any jug uh nothin'," Mose protested rather thickly. "And I never took them bottles outa the stack; that musta been Dick done that. Get after *him* about it. He's the one told me where yuh hid 'em—but I never touched 'em, *honest*, I never. If they're gone, you get after Dick. Don't yuh go 'n' lay it on *me* now." He was whimpering with maudlin pathos before he finished. Ford scowled at him thoughtfully.

"Dick told you about the bottles in the haystack, did he?" he asked. "Which stack was it? And how many bottles?"

Mose gave him a bleary stare. "Aw, *you* know! You hid 'em there yourself. Dick said so. I ain't goin' to say which stack, or how many bottles—or—any other—darn thing about it." He punctuated his phrases by prodding a finger against Ford's chest; and he wagged his head with all the self-consciousness of spurious virtue. "Promised Dick I wouldn't, and I *won't*. Not a—darn—word about it. Wanted some—for m' mincemeat; but I never took any outa the haystack."

He began to show a pronounced limpness in his good leg, and a tendency to slide down upon the floor, so Ford piloted him to a chair, eased him into it, and stood over him in frowning meditation. Mose was drunk; absolutely, undeniably drunk. It could not have been the jug, for the jug was full. Till then, the oddity of a full jug of whisky in Mose's kitchen, after at least twenty-four hours must have passed since its arrival, had not occurred to him. He had been too preoccupied with his own fight to think much about Mose.

"Shay, I never took them bottles outa the stack." Mose looked up to protest solemnly. "Dick never told me about 'em, neither. Dick tol' *me*"—tapping Ford's arm with his finger for every word—" 'at there was *aigs* down there for m' mincemeat." He stopped suddenly, and goggled up at Ford. "Shay, yuh don't put aigs in—mincemeat,' he informed him earnestly. "Not a darn aig! Anyway, that's what Dick tol' *me*—aigs for m' mincemeat. Oh, I knowed right off what he *meant*, all right," he explained proudly. "He didn't wanta come right out 'n' *shay* what it was—an' I—got—the—*aigs!*"

"Yes—how many—eggs?" Ford held himself rigidly quiet.

"Two quart—*aigs!*" Mose laughed at the joke. "I wisht," he added pensively, "the hens'd *all* lay them kinda aigs. I'd buy up all the shickens in—the whole *world.*" He gazed raptly upon the vision the words conjured. "Gee! Quart aigs—'n' all the shickens in the world layin' reg'ler!"

"Have you got any left?"

"No—honest. Used 'em all up—for mincemeat."

Ford knew he was lying. His eyes searched the untidy tables and the corners filled with bags and boxes. Mose was a good cook, but his ideas of order were vague, and his system of housekeeping was the simple one of leaving everything where he had last been using it, so that it might be handy when he wanted it again. A dozen bottles might be concealed there, like the faces in a picture puzzle, and it would take a housecleaning to discover them all. But Ford, when he saw that no bottle stood in plain sight, began turning over bags and looking behind boxes.

He must have been "growing warm" when he stood uncertain whether to look into the flour bin, for Mose gave a snarl, and pounced on him from behind. The weight of him sent Ford down on all fours, and kept him there for a space; and, even after he was up, he found himself quite busy. Mose was a husky individual, with no infirmity of the arms and fists, even if he did have a stiff leg; and drunkenness frequently flares and fades in a man like a candle guttering in the wind. And Mose was fighting to save his whisky.

Still, Ford had not sent all of Sunset into its cellars, figuratively speaking, for nothing; and, while a man may feel more enthusiasm for fighting when under the influence of the stuff that cheers sometimes and never fails to inebriate, the added incentive does not necessarily mean also superior muscular development, or more weight behind the punch. Ford came speedily to the point where he could inspect a skinned knuckle, and afterward gaze in peace upon his fallen antagonist.

He was occupied with both diversions when the door was pushed open as by a man in great haste; and he looked up from the knuckle into the expectant face of Jim Felton; and over the shoulder of Jim he saw a gloating certainty writ large in the pale eyes of Dick Thomas. They had been running. He could tell that by their uneven breathing; and it occurred to him that they must have heard the clamor when he pitched Mose into the dish cupboard. There *had* been considerable noise about that time, he remembered. They must have heard the howl Mose gave at the instant of contact.

Ford glanced involuntarily at that side of the room where stood the cupboard, and mentally admitted that it looked like there had been a slight disagreement, or else a severe seismic disturbance; and Montana is not what one calls an earthquake country. His eyes left the generous sprinkle of broken dishes on the floor, with Mose sprawled inertly in their midst, looking not unlike a broken platter himself—or, at least, one badly nicked—and rested again upon the grinning face behind the shoulder of Jim Felton.

Ford was ever a man of not many words. He made straight for Dick; and, when he had pushed Jim out of the way, he reached him violently. Dick tottered upon the steps, and went off backward; and Ford landed upon him fairly, and with full knowledge and intent.

Jim Felton was a wise young man. He stood back and let them fight it out; and when it was over, he never said a word until Dick had picked himself up and walked off, holding to his nose a handkerchief that reddened rapidly.

"Say, you *are* a son of a gun to fight," he observed admiringly then to Ford. "Don't you know Dick's supposed to be ab-solute-ly unlickable?"

"May be so—but he sure shows all the symptoms of being licked, right at present." Ford moved a thumb joint gently to see whether it was dislocated or merely felt that way.

"He's going up to the house now to tell the missus," remarked Jim, craning his neck from the doorway.

"If he does that," Ford replied easily, "I'll half kill him next time. What I gave him just now is only a sample package, left on the doorstep, to try free of charge." He sat down upon a corner of the table and began to make himself a smoke. "Is he going up to the house—honest?" He would not yield to the impulse to look and see for himself.

"We-ell, the trail he's taking has no other logical destination," drawled Jim. "He's across the bridge." When Ford showed no disposition to say anything to that, Jim came in and closed the door. "Say, what laid old Mose out so nice?" he asked, with an indolent sort of curiosity. "Booze, or just bumps?"

"A little of both," said Ford indifferently between puffs. He was thinking of the tale Dick would tell at the house, and he was thinking of the probable effect upon one listener; the other didn't matter, though he liked Mrs. Kate very much.

Jim went over and investigated. Discovering that Mose was close to snoring, he sat upon a corner of the other table, swung a spurred boot, and regarded Ford interestedly over his own cigarette building. "Say, for a man that's supposed to be soused," he began, after a silence, "you act and talk remarkably lucid. I wish I could carry booze like that," he added regretfully. "But I can't; my tongue and my legs always betray the guilty secret. Have you got any particular system, or is it just a gift?"

"No." Ford shook his head. "Nothing like that. I just don't happen to be drunk, is all." He eyed Jim sharply while he considered within himself. "It looks to me," he began, after a moment, "as if our friend Dick had framed up a nice, little plant. One way and another, I got wise to the whole thing—but for the life of me, I can't see what made him do it. Lordy me! I never kicked *him* on any bunion!' He grinned as memory flashed a brief, mental picture of Sunset and certain incidents which occurred there. But memory never lets well enough alone; and one is lucky to escape without seeing a picture that leaves a sting. Ford's smile ended in a scowl.

"Jealousy, old man," Jim pronounced without hesitation. "Of course, I don't know the details, but—details be darned. If he has tried to hand you a package, take it from me, jealousy's the string he tied it with. I don't mind saying that Dick told me when I first rode up to the corral that you and Mose were both boozing up some; and right after that we heard a deuce of a racket up here, and it did look——" He waved an apologetic hand at Mose, and the fragments of pottery which framed like a "still-life" picture on the floor, and let it go at that. "I'm strong for *you,* Ford," he added; and his smile was frank and friendly. "Double Cross is the name of this outfit; but I'm all in favor of running that brand on the cow critters and keeping it out of the bunk house. If you should happen to feel like elucidating——" he hinted delicately.

Ford had always liked Jim Felton in an impersonal way. Now he warmed to him as a friend, and certain things he told him—as much about the jug with the brown neck and handle as concerned Dick, and all he knew of the bottles in the haystack—while Jim smoked and swung the foot which did not rest upon the floor, and listened.

"Sounds like Dick, all right," he passed judgment when Ford had finished. "He counted on your falling for the jug—and oh, my! It was a beautiful plant. I'd sure hate to have anybody sing 'Yield not to temptation' at *me* if a gallon jug of the real stuff just fell into my arms and nobody was looking." He eyed Ford queerly. "You've got quite a reputation——" he ventured.

"Well, I earned it," Ford observed laconically.

"Dick banked on that rep—I'd stake my whole stack of blues on that. And, after you'd torn up the ranch and pitched the fragments into the gulch, he'd hold the last trump, with all high cards to keep the lead. Whee!" He meditated admiringly upon the strategy. "But what I can't seem to understand," he said frankly, "is why the deuce it didn't work. Is your swallower out of kilter? If you don't mind my asking."

"I never noticed that it was paralyzed," Ford answered grimly.

He got up, lifted a lid of the stove, and threw in the cigarette stub mechanically. Then he bethought him of his interrupted search, and prodded a long-handled spoon into the flour bin, struck

something smooth and hard, and drew out a befloured, quart bottle half full of whisky. He wiped the bottle carefully, inspected it briefly, and slid it into his coat pocket. Jim, watching him, knew that he was thinking all the while of something else. When Ford spoke, he proved it.

"Are you any good at all in the kitchen, Jim?" he asked, turning to him as if he had decided just how he would meet the situation.

"Well, I hate to brag; but I've known of men eating my grub and going right on living as if nothing had happened," Jim admitted modestly.

"Well, you turn yourself loose in here, will you? The boys will be good and empty when they come—it's dinner time right now. I'll help you carry Mose out of the way before I go."

Jim looked as if he would like to ask what Ford meant to do, but he refrained. There was something besides preoccupation in Ford's face, and it did not make for easy questioning. Jim did yield to his curiosity to the extent of watching through a window, when Ford went out, to see where he was going; and when he saw that Ford had the jug, and that he took the path which led across the little bridge and so to the house, Jim drew back, and said "Whee-e-e!" under his breath.

Then he remarked to the recumbent Mose, who was not in a condition either to hear or understand: "I'll bet you Dick's got all he wants, right now, without any postscript."

After which Jim hunted up a clean apron and proceeded, with his spurs on his heels, his hat on the back of his head, and a smile upon his lips, to sweep out the broken dishes so that he might walk without hearing them crunch unpleasantly under his boots.

"I'll take wild cats in mine, please," he remarked once, irrelevantly, aloud, and smiled again.

CHAPTER X.

When Ford stepped upon the porch with the jug in his hand, he gave every indication of having made up his mind definitely. When he glimpsed Josephine's worried face behind the lace curtain in the window, he dropped the jug lower, and held it against his leg in such a way as to indicate a hope that she could not see it; but otherwise he gave no sign of perturbation. He went along the porch to the door of his own room, went in, locked the door after him, and put the jug down on a table.

He could hear faint sounds of dishes being placed upon the table in the dining room, which was next to his own; and he knew that dinner was half an hour late, which was unusual in Mrs. Kate's orderly domain. Mrs. Kate was one of those excellent women whose houses are always immaculate, whose meals are ever placed before one when the clock points to a certain hour, and whose tables never lack a salad and a dessert—though how those feats are accomplished upon a cattle ranch must ever remain a mystery.

Ford was, therefore, justified in taking the second look at his watch, and in holding it up to his ear, and also in lifting his eyebrows when all was done. Fifteen minutes by the watch it was before he heard the silvery tinkle of the tea bell, which was one of the ties which bound Mrs. Kate to civilization, and which announced that he might enter the dining room.

He went in as clean and fresh and straight-backed and quiet as ever he had done; and when he saw that the room was empty save for Buddy perched upon his long-legged chair, with his heels hooked over the top round and a napkin tucked expectantly inside the collar of his blue blouse, he took in the situation, and sat down without waiting for the women. The very first glance told him that Mrs. Kate had never prepared that meal. It was, putting it bluntly, a scrappy affair, hastily gathered from various shelves in the pantry and hurriedly arranged upon the table.

Buddy gazed upon the sprinkle of dishes with undisguised dissatisfaction. "There ain't any potatoes," he announced gloomily. "My own mamma always cooks potatoes. Josephine's the limit! I been *working* to-day. I almost dug out a badger over by the bluff. I

got where I could hear him scratching to get away; and then it was all rocks so I couldn't dig any more. Gee, it was hard digging! And I'm just about starved, if you want to know. And there ain't any potatoes."

"Bread and butter is fine when you're hungry," Ford suggested, and spread a slice for Buddy somewhat inattentively because he was keeping an eye upon the kitchen door, where he had caught a fleeting glimpse of some one looking in at him.

"You're putting the butter all in one place," Buddy criticized, with his usual frankness. "I guess you're drunk, all right. If you're too drunk to spread butter, let me do it."

"What makes you think I'm drunk?" Ford questioned, lowering his voice because of the person he suspected was in the kitchen.

"Mamma and Joe was quarreling about it. That's why. And my own mamma cried, and shut the door, and wouldn't let me go in. And Joe pretty near cried, all right. I guess she did, only not when any one was looking. Her eyes are awful red, anyway." Buddy took great, ravenous bites of the bread and butter, and eyed Ford unwinkingly.

"What's disslepointed?" he demanded abruptly, after he had given himself a white mustache with his glass of milk.

"Why do you want to know?"

"That's what my own mamma is, and that's what Joe is. Only my own mamma is it about you, and Joe's it about mamma. Say, did you lick Dick? Joe told my own mamma she wisht you'd killed him. Joe's awful mad today. I guess she's mad at Dick, because he ain't much of a fighter. Did you lick him easy? Did you paste him one in the jaw?"

Josephine entered then with Ford's belated tea. Her eyelids were pink, as Buddy had told him; and she did not look at him while she poured the tea.

"Kate has a sick headache," she explained primly, "and I did the best I could with lunch. I hope it's——"

"It is," Ford interrupted reassuringly. "Everything is fine and dandy."

"You didn't cook any potatoes!" Buddy charged mercilessly. "And Ford's too drunk to put the butter on right. I'm going to tell my dad 'at next time he goes to Oregon I'm going along. This outfit will just go to the devil if he stays a month!"

"Where did you hear that, Bud?" Josephine asked, carefully avoiding a glance at Ford.

"Well, Dick said it would go to the devil. I guess," he added on his own account, with a meaning glance at the table, "it's on the trail right now."

Ford looked at Josephine, opened his lips to say that it might still be headed off, and decided not to speak. There was a stubborn streak in Ford Campbell. She had said some bitter things in her anger; perhaps she had not entirely believed them herself, and perhaps Mrs. Kate had not been accurately quoted by her precocious young son. She may not have said that she was disappointed in Ford. They might not have believed whatever it was Dick told them, and they might still have full confidence in him, Ford Campbell. Still, there was the stubborn streak which would not explain, or defend. So he left the table, and went into his own room without any word save a muttered excuse; and that in spite of the fact that Josephine looked full at him at last, and with a wistfulness that moved him almost to the point of taking her in his arms and kissing away the worry—if he could.

He went up to the table where stood the jug, looked at it, lifted it, and set it down again. Then he lifted it again, and pulled the cork out with a jerk, and wondered if the sound of it had reached through the wall to the ears of Josephine. He was guilty of hoping so. He put back the cork—this time carefully—walked to the outer door, turned the key, opened the door, and closed it again with a slam. Then, with a grim set of the lips, he walked softly into the closet and pulled the door nearly shut.

He knew there was every chance that Josephine, if she were interested in his movements, would go immediately into the sitting room, where she could see the

path and make sure that he had really left the house. But she did not. She sat long enough in the dining room for Ford to call himself a name or two, and to feel exceedingly foolish over the trick, and to decide that it was too childish for a grown man. Then she pushed back her chair, came straight toward his room, opened the door, and looked in. Ford knew, for he saw her through the crack he had left in the closet doorway. She stood there looking at the jug on the table, then went up and lifted it, much as Ford had done, and pulled the cork with a certain angry defiance. Perhaps, he guessed shrewdly, Josephine also felt rather foolish at what she was doing!

Josephine turned the jug to the light, shut one eye into an adorable squint, and peered in. Then she set the jug down and pushed the cork slowly into place; and her face was puzzled. Ford could have laughed aloud when he saw it; but, instead, he held his breath for fear she should discover him. She stood very still for a minute or two, staring at nothing at all; moved the jug into the exact place where it had stood before, and went out of the room on her toes.

So did Ford, for that matter; and he was in a cold terror lest she should look out and see him walking down the path where he should logically have walked more than five minutes before. He did not dare to turn and look—until he was without the gate. Then inspiration came to aid him, and he went back boldly, stepped upon the porch with no effort at silence, opened his door, and went in as one who has a right there.

He heard the click of dishes, which told she was clearing the table, and he breathed freer. He walked across the room, took the jug, and hid it in the closet, and then went out with his heart in its proper position in his chest. Ford, as a man, was unused to feeling his heart rise to his palate, and the sensation was more novel than agreeable. When he went again down the path, there was a certain exhilaration in his step. He thought in clear-cut sentences, as if he were speaking, instead of those vague, almost wordless impressions which fill the brain ordinarily.

"She's keeping cases—she must care a little, or she wouldn't do that. She's worried a whole lot. I could see that all along. Down at the bunk house she called me Ford twice; and she said it meant a lot to her, whether I make good or not. I wonder—— Lordy me! A man could make good, all right, and do it easy, if she *cared*. She don't know what to think—that jug staying right up to high-water mark like that!" He laughed then silently, and dwelt upon the picture she had made while she was standing before the table.

"Lord, she'd want to kill me if she knew I was cached in that closet; but I just had a hunch—that is, if she cared anything about it. I wonder if she *did* really say she wished I'd killed Dick.

"Anyway, I can fight it now—with her keeping cases on the quiet. I know I can fight it—— Lordy me, I've *got* to fight it! I've got to make good; that's all there is about it. Wonder what she'll think when she sees that jug don't go down any! Wonder—oh, heliotrope! She'd never care anything about *me*. And if she did——" His thoughts went hazy with vague speculation, then clarified suddenly into one hard fact, like a rock thrusting up through the lazy sweep of a windless tide. "If she *did* care, I couldn't do anything. I'm *married*." His step lost a little of its spring then, and he went into the bunk house with much the same expression on his face as when he had left it an hour or so before.

He did not see Dick. The other boys watched him covertly, it seemed to him, and showed a disposition to talk among themselves. Jim was whistling cheerfully in the kitchen. He turned his head and laughed when Ford went in.

"I found a dead soldier behind the sack of spuds," he announced, and produced an empty bottle, mate to the one Ford had put in his pocket. "And Dick didn't seem to have any appetite at all, and Mose is still in Sleepytown. I guess that's all the news at this end of the line. Er—hope everything is all right at the house?"

"Far as I could see it was," Ford replied, with an inner sense of evasion.

"I guess we'll just let her go as she looks, Jim. Did you say anything to the boys?"

Jim reddened under his tan, but he laughed again disarmingly. "I cannot tell a lie," he confessed honestly. "It was too good to keep all to myself. I'm the most generous fellow you ever saw when it comes to passing along a good story that won't hurt anybody's digestion. You don't care, do you? The joke ain't on *you*."

"If you'd asked me about it, I'd have said keep it under your hat. But——"

"And that would have been a sin and a shame," argued Jim, licking a finger he had just scorched on a hot kettle handle. "The boys aren't lacking in any sense of humor that I ever noticed. And they can appreciate a joke—on Dick. They know him pretty well. Still, if I'd known you didn't want——"

"Lordy me, Jim, you needn't worry about it. Say, you'll have to stay here till to-morrow from the looks. The lower fence I'll ride myself this afternoon. Did you get clear around the Pinnacle field?"

"I sure did—and she's tight as a drum."

So life, which had loomed big and bitter before the soul of Ford, slipped back into the groove of daily routine.

CHAPTER XI.

Into its groove of routine slipped life at the Double Cross; but it did not move quite as smoothly as before. It was as if the "hill" which Ford was climbing suffered small landslides here and there which threatened to block the trail below. Sometimes—still keeping to the simile—it was but a pebble or two kicked loose by Ford's heel; sometimes what came near being a bowlder which one must dodge.

Dick, for instance, no doubt likened Mose to a real landslide when he came at him the next day with a roar of rage and the rolling-pin. Mose had sobered to the point where he wondered how it had all happened, and greatly desired to get his hands in the wool of the "nigger" said to lurk in woodpiles. He asked Jim, with various embellishments of speech, what it was all about, and Jim told him, and told him truly.

"He was trying to queer you with the outfit, Mose; and that's a fact," he finished; and that was the only exaggeration Jim was guilty of. Dick had probably thought very little of Mose and his ultimate standing with the Double Cross. "And he was trying to queer Ford—but you can search me for the reason why he didn't make good there."

Mose was a self-centered individual, like many of us. He wasted a minute, perhaps, thinking of the trick upon Ford; but he spent all of that forenoon, and well into the afternoon, in deep meditation upon the affair as it concerned himself. And the first time Dick showed up he got the result of Mose's reasoning.

"Tried to git me in bad, did yuh? Thought you'd git me fired, hey?" he shouted, as a sort of punctuation to the belaboring. A rolling-pin is considered a more or less fearsome weapon in the hands of a woman, I believe. When wielded by an incensed man who stands close to six feet and weighs a solid two hundred pounds, and who has the headache which follows inevitably in the wake of three pints of whisky administered internally in three hours or so, a rolling-pin should justly be classed as a deadly weapon.

Jim said afterward that he never had believed it possible to act out the rough stuff of the silly supplements in the Sunday papers; but, after seeing Mose perform with that rolling-pin, he was willing to call every edition of the funny papers true to life. It was Jim who helped pull Mose off, so that he felt qualified to judge. It was Jim also who told Ford about the affair, with sober face and eyes that laughed.

"And where's Dick?" Ford asked him, without committing himself upon the justice of the chastisement.

"In the bunk house, lying down," said Jim dryly. "In the words of the immortal Happy Hooligan, his 'noives hoits.' He hasn't got anything worse than bumps, I guess—but what I saw

of them are sure peaches; or maybe Italian prunes would hit them off closer. They're a fine purple shade. I put Three H all over him."

"I thought Dick was a fighter from Fighterville," grinned Ford, trying hard to remain noncommittal and making a poor job of it.

"Well, he is when he can stand up and box according to rule, or hit a man when he isn't looking. But my, oh! This wasn't a fight, Ford. This was like an old woman lambasting her son-in-law with an umbrella. Dick never got a chance to begin. Whee-ee! Mose sure can handle a rolling-pin some!"

Ford went up to the house to his supper, and to the constrained atmosphere which was telling on his nerves more severely than did the gallon jug in his closet and the moral effort it cost to keep that jug full to the neck.

He went in quietly, threw his hat on the bed, and sat down with an air of discouragement. It was not yet six o'clock, and he knew that Mrs. Kate would not have supper ready; but he wanted a quiet place to think—and he was closer to Josephine, though he would never have admitted to himself that her nearness was any comfort to him. He did admit, however, that the jug with the brown handle and neck pulled him to the room sometimes in spite of himself. He would often take it from the corner of the closet and let his fingers close over the cork; but so far he had never yielded beyond that point. Always he had been able to set the jug back unopened.

He was getting circles under his eyes, and two new creases had formed on each side of his whimsical lips, and a line was coming between his eyebrows; but he had not opened the jug, and it had been in his possession thirty-six hours. Thirty-six hours is not long, to be sure—when life runs smoothly, with slight incidents to emphasize the figures on the watch; but it may seem eternity to the poor devil on the rack.

Just now Ford was trying to forget that a gallon of whisky stood in the right-hand corner of his closet, behind a pair of half-worn riding boots that pinched his instep so that he seldom wore them; and that he had only to take the jug out from behind the boots, pull the cork, and lift the jug to his lips——

He caught himself leaning forward and staring at the closet door until his eyes ached with the strain. He drew back, and passed his hand over his forehead. It ached, and he wanted to think about what he ought to do with Dick. He did not like to discharge him without first consulting Mrs. Kate, for Ches Mason was in the habit of talking things over with her, he knew. But he felt too far away from Mrs. Kate for any discussion whatever.

Besides, he knew he could prove absolutely nothing against Dick, if Dick were disposed toward flat denial. He might suspect—but the facts showed Ford the aggressor, and Mose also. What if Mrs. Kate declined to believe that Dick had put that jug of whisky in the kitchen, and had afterward given it to Ford? Ford had no means of knowing just what tale Dick had told her; but he did know that Mrs. Kate eyed him doubtfully, and that her conversation was forced and her manner constrained.

And Josephine was worse. Josephine had not spoken to him all that day. At breakfast she had not been present, and at dinner she had kept her eyes upon her plate, and said nothing to any one.

He wished Mason was home so that he could leave. It wouldn't matter then, he tried to believe, what he did. He even dwelt upon the desire of Mason's return to the extent of calculating, with his eyes upon the fancy calendar on the wall opposite, the exact time of his absence. Ten days—there was no hope of release for another week, at least; and Ford sighed unconsciously when he thought of it; for, although a week is not long, there was Josephine refusing to look at him, and there was Dick—and there was the jug in the closet.

As to Josephine, there was no help for it. He could not avoid her without making the avoidance plain to all observers, and Ford was proud. As to Dick, he would not send him off with-

out some proof that he had broken an unwritten law of the Double Cross and brought whisky to the ranch. He had no proof of that; and as to his suspicions—well, he considered that Dick had almost paid the penalty for having roused them, and the matter would have to rest where it was; for Ford was just. As to the jug, he could empty it upon the ground and be done with that particular form of temptation; but he felt sure that Josephine was secretly "keeping cases" on the jug; and Ford was stubborn.

That night Ford did not respond to the tinkle of the tea bell. His head ached abominably, and he did not want to see Josephine's averted face opposite to him at the table, so he lay still upon the bed, where he had finally thrown himself, and let the bell tinkle until it was tired.

They sent Buddy in to see why he did not come. Buddy looked at him with the round, curious eyes of precocious childhood, and went back and reported that Ford wasn't asleep, but was just lying there mad. Ford heard the shrill, little voice innocently maligning him, and swore to himself; but he did not move, for all that. He lay thinking, and fighting discouragement and thirst, while little table sounds came through the partition and made a clicking accompaniment to his thoughts.

If he were free, he was wondering between spells of temptation, would it do any good? Would Josephine care? There was no answer to that, or, if there was, he did not know it.

After a while the two women began talking. He judged that Buddy had left them, because it was madness to speak freely before him. At first he paid no attention to what they were saying, beyond a grudging joy in just hearing Josephine's voice. It had come to that with Ford. But when he heard his name spoken, and by her, he lifted shamelessly to an elbow, and listened, glad that the walls were so thin, and that those who dwell in thin-partitioned houses are prone to forget that the other rooms may not be quite empty. They two spent most of their waking hours alone together, and habit breeds carelessness always.

"Do you suppose he's drinking?" Mrs. Kate asked, and her voice was full of uneasiness. "Chester says he's terrible when he gets started. I was *sure* he was perfectly safe, and I just can't stand it to have him like this. Dick told me he's drinking a little all the time, and there's no telling when he'll break out and—— Oh, I think it's perfectly terrible."

"Hsh-sh!" warned Josephine.

"He went out quite a while ago. I heard him," said Mrs. Kate, with rash certainty. "He hasn't been himself since that day he fought Dick. He *must* be——"

"But how *could* he?" Josephine's voice interrupted sharply. "That jug he's got is full yet."

Ford could imagine Mrs. Kate shaking her head with the wisdom born of matrimony. "Don't you suppose he could keep putting in *water?*" she asked pityingly. Ford almost choked when he heard that.

"I don't believe he would." Josephine's tone was dubious. "It doesn't seem to me that a man would do that. He'd think he was just spoiling what was left. That," she declared, with a flash of inspiration, "is what a *woman* would do. And a man always does something different." There was a pathetic note in the last sentence which struck Ford oddly.

"Don't think you know men, my dear, until you've been married to one for eight years or so," said Mrs. Kate patronizingly. "When you've been tied up——"

"Oh, for mercy's sake, do you think they're all alike?" Josephine's voice was tart and impatient. "I know enough about men to know they're all different. You can't judge one by another. And I don't believe Ford is drinking at all. He's just——"

"Just what?—since you know so well!" Mrs. Kate was growing ironical.

"He's trying not to—and worrying." Her voice lowered until it took love to hear it. Ford did hear, and his breath came fast. He did not hear Mrs.

Kate's reply. He was not in love with Mrs. Kate, and he was busily engaged in letting the words of Josephine soak into his very soul, and in telling himself over and over that she understood. It seemed to him a miracle of intuition that she should sense the fight he was making; and, since he felt that way about it, it was just as well he did not know that Jim Felton sensed it quite as keenly—and with a man's greater understanding of how bitter a fight it was, and for that reason a deeper sympathy.

"I wish Chester was here!" wailed Mrs. Kate across the glow of his exultant thoughts. "I'm afraid to say anything to him myself, he's so queer. It's a shame, because he's so splendid when he's—himself."

"He's as much himself now as ever he was," Josephine defended hotly. "When he's drinking, he's altogether another——"

"You never saw him drunk." Mrs. Kate pointed to the weak spot in Josephine's defense of him. "Dick says that——"

"Oh, do you believe everything Dick says? A week ago you were against Dick and all enthusiasm for Ford."

"You were flirting with Dick then, and you'd hardly treat Ford decently. And Ford hadn't gone to drink——"

"*Will you hush?*" There were tears of anger in Josephine's voice. "He isn't, I tell you."

"What does he keep that jug in the closet for? And every few hours he comes up to the house and goes into his room—and he never did that before. And have you noticed his eyes? He'll scarcely talk any more, and he just *pretends to eat.* At dinner to-day he scarcely touched a thing. It's a sure sign, my dear."

Ford was growing tired of that sort of thing. It dimmed the radiance of Josephine's belief in him to have Mrs. Kate so sure of his weakness. He got up from the bed as quietly as he could and left the house. He was even more thoughtful after that, but not quite so gloomy—if one cared enough for his moods to make a fine distinction.

Have you ever observed the fact that many of life's grimmest battles and deepest tragedies scarce ripple the surface of trivial things? We are always rubbing elbows with the big issues and never knowing anything about it. Certainly no one at the Double Cross guessed what was always in the mind of the foreman. Jim thought he was "sore" because of Dick. Dick thought Ford was jealous of him, and trying to think of some scheme to "play even" without coming to open war. Mrs. Kate was positive, in her purely feminine mind—which was a very good mind, understand, but somewhat inadequate when brought to bear upon the big problems of life, and upon human nature—that he was half intoxicated most of the time. Josephine thought—just what she said, probably, upon the chill day when she calmly asked Ford at the breakfast table if he would let her go with him to Long Ridge.

Ford had casually remarked, in answer to a different question from Mrs. Kate, that he was going to ride out and bring in Rambler. He was afraid of a storm, he said. It looked like snow, and Rambler could make the trip all right, much better than he could rustle on the range. He had meant to bring him in before, but had put it off from day to day.

"Can I go?" teased Buddy from sheer force of habit. No one ever mentioned going anywhere, but Buddy shot that question into the conversation.

"No, you can't. You can't go anywhere with that cold," his mother vetoed promptly; and Buddy, whimpering over his hot cakes, knew well the futility of argument when Mrs. Kate used that tone of finality.

"Will you let me go?" Josephine asked unexpectedly, and looked straight at Ford. But, though her glance was direct, it was unreadable; and Ford mentally threw up his hands after one good look at her.

"Sure, you can go," he said, with cautious brevity.

Ford made no attempt to understand her any more. He was carefully giving her the lead, as he would have explained it, and was merely following suit until

he got a chance to trump; but he was beginning to have a discouraged feeling that the game was hers, and that he might as well lay down his hand and be done with it. Which, when he brought the simile back to practical affairs, meant that he was thinking seriously of leaving the ranch and the country just as soon as Mason returned. He was thinking of trying the Argentine Republic for a while, if he could sell the section of wild land which he had bought rashly a few years before while he was getting rid of his inheritance.

She did not offer any excuse for the rather startling request, as most women would have done. Neither did she thank him, with lips or with eyes, for his quick consent. She seemed distrait —preoccupied, as if she, also, were considering some weighty question.

Ford pushed back his chair, watching her furtively. She rose with Kate, and glanced toward the window.

"I suppose I shall need my heaviest sweater," she remarked practically, and as if the whole affair were too commonplace for discussion. "It does look threatening enough. How soon will you want to start?" This without looking toward Ford at all.

"Right away, if that suits you." Ford was still watchful, as if he had not quite given up hope of reading her meaning.

She told him she would be ready by the time he had saddled; and she came and stood in the stable door while he was cinching the saddle on the horse he meant to ride.

"I hope you haven't given me Dude," she said unemotionally. "He's supposed to be gentle—but he bucked me off that day I sprained my ankle, and all the excuse he had was that a rabbit jumped out from a bush almost under his nose. I've lost faith in him since. Oh—it's Shorty, is it? I'm glad of that. Shorty's a dear—and he has the easiest gallop of any horse on the ranch. Have you tried him yet, Ford?"

The heart of Ford lifted in his chest at her tone and her words along toward the last. He forgot the chill of her voice in the beginning, and he dwelt greedily upon the fact that once more she had called him Ford. But his joy died suddenly when he led his horse out and discovered that Dick and Jim Felton were coming down the path, within easy hearing of her. Ford did not know women very well; but most men are born with a rudimentary understanding of them. He suspected that her intimacy of tone was meant for Dick's benefit; and when they had ridden three or four miles, and her share of the conversation during that time consisted of "Yes" twice, "No" three times, and one "Indeed!" he was sure of it.

So Ford began to wonder why she came at all—unless that, also, was meant to discipline Dick—and his own mood turned a silent one. He did not, he told himself indignantly, much relish being used as a club to beat some other man into good behavior.

They rode almost to Long Ridge before Ford discovered that Josephine was stealing glances at his face whenever she thought he was not looking, and that the glances were questioning, and might almost be called timid. He waited until he was sure he was not mistaken, and then turned his head unexpectedly, and smiled into her startled eyes.

"What is it?" he asked, still smiling at her. "I won't bite. Say it, why don't you?"

She bit her lips and looked away.

"I wanted to ask something—ask you to do something," she said, after a minute. And then hurriedly, as if she feared her courage might ebb and leave her stranded. "I wish you'd give me that—*jug!*"

Sheer surprise held Ford silent, staring at her.

"I don't ask many favors—I wish you'd grant just that one. I wouldn't ask another."

"What do you want of it?"

"Oh——" She stopped, then plunged on recklessly: "It's getting on my nerves so! And if you gave it to me, you wouldn't have to fight the temptation——"

"There's plenty more where that came from," he reminded her.

"But it wouldn't be right where you could get it any time the craving came. Won't you let me take it?" He had never heard that tone from her; but he fought down the thrill of it, and held himself rigidly calm.

"Oh, I don't know—the jug's doing all right where it is," he evaded. What he wanted most was to get at her real object, and, manlike, to know beyond doubt whether she really cared whether he "made good," and why.

"But you don't—you never touch it," she argued. "I know, because—well, because every day I look into it. I suppose you'll say I have no right, that it's spying, or something. But I don't care for that. And I can see that it's worrying you dreadfully. And if you don't drink any of it, why won't you let me have it?"

"If I don't drink it, what difference does it make who has it?" he countered.

"I'm afraid there'll be a time when you'll yield, just because you are blue and discouraged—or something; whatever mood it is that makes the temptation harder to resist. I know myself that things are harder to fight some days than they are others." She stopped and looked at him in that enigmatical way she had. "You may not know it—but I've been staying here just to see whether you fail or succeed. I thought I understood a little of why you came, and I—I stayed." She leaned and twisted a wisp of Shorty's mane nervously, and Ford noticed how the color came and went in the cheek nearest him.

"I—oh, it's awfully hard to say what I want to say and not have it sound different," she began again, without looking at him. "But if you don't understand what I mean——" Her teeth clicked suggestively.

Ford leaned to her. "Say it, anyway, and take a chance," he urged; and his voice was like a kiss, whether he knew it or not. He did know that she caught her breath at the words or the tone, and that the color flamed a deeper tint in her cheek, and then faded to a faint glow.

"What I mean is that I appreciate the way you have acted all along. I—it wasn't an easy situation to meet, and you have met it like a man—and a gentleman. I hated you at first, and I misunderstood you completely. I'm ashamed to confess it, but it's true. And I want to see you make good in this other thing you have attempted; and, if there's anything on earth that I can do to help you, I want you to let me do it. You will, won't you?" She looked at him then with clear, honest eyes. "It's my way of wanting to thank you for—for not taking any advantage, or trying to, of your position that night."

Ford's own cheeks went hot. "I thought you knew all along that I wasn't a cur, at least," he said harshly. "I never knew before that you were afraid of me that night. If I'd known that—but I thought you just didn't like me, and let it go at that. And what I said I meant. You needn't feel that you have anything to thank me for. I haven't done a thing that deserves thanks—or fear, either."

"I thought you understood when I left——"

"I didn't worry much about it, one way or the other," he cut in. "I hunted around for you, of course; and, when I saw you'd pulled out for good, I went over the hill and camped. I didn't get the note till next morning; and I don't know," he added, with a brief smile, "as that did much toward making me understand. You just said to wait till some one came after me. Well, I didn't wait." He laughed, and leaned toward her again. "Now there seems a chance of our being—pretty good friends," he said, in the caressing tone he had used before, and of which he was utterly unconscious. "We won't quarrel about that night, will we? You got home all right, and so did I. And when we get poor old Rambler where he can bury his nose in a pile of good bluejoint, there won't be a thing to worry about. We'll forget all about it. Won't we?" He laid a hand on the horn of her saddle, so that they rode close together, and tried futilely to read what was in her face, since she did not speak.

Josephine stared blankly at the brown slope before them. Her lips were set firmly together, and her brows were contracted; and her gloved fingers gripped the reins tightly. She paid not the slightest attention to Ford's hand upon her saddle horn, nor to the steady gaze of his eyes. Later, when Ford observed the rigidity of her whole pose, and sensed that mental withdrawing which needs no speech to push one off from the more intimate ground of companionship, he wondered a little. Without in the least knowing why he felt rebuffed, he took away his hand, and swung his horse slightly away from her; his own back stiffened a little in response to the chilled atmosphere.

"Yes," she said at last, "we'll forget all about it, Mr. Campbell."

"You called me Ford a while ago," he hinted.

"Did I? One forms the habit of picking up a man's given name, here in the West, I find. I'm sorry——"

"I don't want you to be sorry. I want you to do it again; all the time," he added boldly.

He caught the gleam of her eyes under her heavy lashes as she glanced at him sidelong.

"If you go looking at me out of the corner of your eyes," he threatened recklessly, kicking his horse closer, "I'm liable to kiss you!"

And he did, before she could draw away.

"I've been kinda thinking, maybe, I'm in love with you, Josephine," he murmured, holding her close. "And now I'm dead sure of it. And if you won't love me back, why—there'll be something doing, that's all."

"Yes? And what would you do, please?" Her tone was icy, but he somehow felt that the ice was very, very thin, and that her heart beat warm beneath. She drew herself free, and he let her go.

"I dunno," he confessed whimsically. "But, Lordy me, I'd sure do something!"

"You'd get drunk, I suppose you mean?"

"No, I don't mean that." He stopped and considered, his forehead creased, as if he were half angry at the imputation. "I'm pretty sure where I stand on that subject. I've done a lot of thinking since I hit the Double Cross—and I've cut out the whisky for good.

"I know what you thought, and what Mrs. Kate thinks yet; and I'll admit it was mighty tough scratching for a couple of days after I got hold of that jug. But I found out which was master—and it wasn't the booze." He looked at her with eyes that shone. "Josie, girl, I took a long chance—but I put it to myself this way, when the jug seemed to be on top: I told myself it was whisky or you. Not that exactly, either. It's hard to say just what I do mean. Not you, maybe—but what you stand for. What I could get out of life if I was straight and lived clean, and had a little woman like you. It may not be you at all. That's as you——"

He stopped, as if some one had laid a hand over his mouth. It was not as she said. It might have been, only for that drunken marriage of his. And never before had he hated whisky as bitterly as he did then, when he remembered what it had done for him that night in Sunset, and what it was doing now. It closed his lips upon what he would have given much to be able to say; for he was a man with all the instincts of chivalry and honor—and he loved the girl. It was, he realized bitterly, just because he did love her so well that he could not say more. He had said too much already; but her nearness had gone to his head, and he had forgotten that he was not free to say what he felt.

Perhaps Josephine mistook his sudden silence for trepidation, or humility. At any rate, she reined impulsively close, and reached out and caught the hand hanging idly at his side.

"Ford, I'm no coquette," she said straightforwardly, with a blush for maiden modesty's sake. "I believe you; absolutely and utterly I believe you. If you had been different at first—if you had made any overtures whatever toward—toward love-making, I should have despised you. I never would have

loved you in this world. But you didn't. You kept at such a distance that I—I couldn't help thinking about you and studying you. And lately—when I knew you were fighting the—the habit —I loved you for the way you did fight. I was afraid, too. I used to slip into your room every time you left it, and look; and I just *ached* to help you! But I knew I couldn't do a thing; and that was the hardest part. All I could do was stand back—clear back out of sight, and hope. And—and love you, too, Ford. I'm proud of you. I'm proud to think that I—I love a man that *is* a man; that doesn't sit down and whine because a fight is hard, or give up and say it's no use. I do despise a moral weakling, Ford. I don't mind what you have been; it's what you *are* that counts with me. And you're a man, every inch of you. I'm not a bit afraid you'll weaken. Only," she added, half apologetically, "I did want you to give me the—the jug, because I couldn't bear to see you look so worried." She gave his fingers an adorable little squeeze, and flung his hand away from her, and laughed in a way to set his heart pounding heavily in his chest. "Now you know where *I* stand, Mr. Man," she cried lightly; "so let's say no more about it. I bet I can beat you across this flat." She laughed again, wrinkled her nose at him impertinently, and was off in a run.

If she had waited, Ford would have told her. If she had given him a chance, he would have told her afterward; but she did not. She was extremely careful not to let their talk become intimate after that. She laughed. She raced Shorty almost to the point of abuse. She chattered about everything under the sun that came into her mind, except their own personal affairs, or anything that could possibly lead up to the subject.

Ford, for a time, watched for an opening honestly; saw at last the impossibility of telling her—unless, indeed, he shouted, "Say, I'm a married man!" to her without preface or extenuating explanation, and yielded finally to the reprieve the Fates sent him.

CHAPTER XII.

He spent the rest of that day, and all of the night that followed, in thinking what would be the best and easiest method of gaining the point he wished to reach. All along he had been uncomfortably aware of his matrimonial entanglement, and had meant, as soon as he conveniently could, to try and discover who was his wife, and how best to free himself and her. He had half expected that she herself would do something to clear the mystery. She had precipitated the marriage, he constantly reminded himself, and it was reasonable to expect that she would do something—what, Ford could only conjecture.

When he faced Josephine across the breakfast table the next morning, and caught the shy glance she gave him when Mrs. Kate was not looking, a plan he had half formed crystallized into a determination. He would not tell her anything about it until he knew just what he was up against, and how long it was going to take him to free himself. And, since he could not do anything about it while he rode and planned and gave orders at the Double Cross, he swallowed his breakfast rather hurriedly and went out to find Jim Felton.

"Say, Jim," he began, when he ran that individual to earth in the stable where, with a pair of sheep shears, he was roaching the mane of a shaggy, old cow pony to please Buddy, who wanted to make him look like a circus horse even if there was no hope of his ever acting like one. "I'm going to hand you the lines and let you drive for a few days. I've got to scout around on business of my own, and I don't know just how long it's going to take me. I'm going right away—to-day."

"Yeah?" Jim poised the shears in air and regarded him quizzically over the pony's neck. "Going to pass me foreman's privilege—to hire and fire?" he grinned. "Because I may as well tell you that if you do, Dick won't be far behind you on the trail."

"Oh, darn Dick! I'll fire him myself before I leave. Yes," he added, think-

ing swiftly of Josephine as the object of Dick's desires, "that's what I'll do. Maybe it'll save a lot of trouble while I'm gone. He's a tricky son of a gun."

"You're dead right. He is," Jim agreed. And then dryly: "Grandmother just died?"

"Oh, shut up! This ain't an excuse—it's *business*. I've just got to go, and that's all there is to it. I'll fix things with the missus, and tell her you're in charge. Anyway, I won't be gone any longer than I can help."

"I believe that, too," said Jim softly, and busied himself with the shears.

Ford looked at him sharply, in doubt as to just how much or how little Jim meant by that. He shrugged his shoulders finally, and went away to tell Mrs. Kate, and found that a matter which required more diplomacy than he ever suspected he possessed. But he did tell her, and he hoped that she believed the reason he gave for going, and also had some faith in his assurance that he would be back, probably, in a couple of days—or as soon afterward as might be.

"There's nothing but chores around the ranch, and Jack will ride fence," he explained unnecessarily to cover his discomfort at her coldness. "Jim can look after things just as well as I can. There won't be any need to start feeding the calves unless it storms; and if it does, Jim and Jack will go ahead, all right. I'm going to let Dick and Curly go. We don't need more than two men from now on. If Ches comes before I get back——"

"I wish Chester was here now," said Mrs. Kate ambiguously.

Ford did not ask her why she wished that. He told her good-by as hastily as if he had to run to catch a train, and left her. He hoped he would be lucky enough to see Josephine—and then he hoped he would not see her, after all. It would be easier to go without her clear eyes asking him why.

What he meant to do first was to find Rock, and see if he had been sober enough that night to remember what happened, and could give him some clew as to the woman's identity and whereabouts. If he failed there, he intended to hunt up the preacher. That, also, presented certain difficulties; but Ford was in the mood to overcome obstacles. Once he discovered who the woman was, it seemed to him that there should be no great amount of trouble in getting free. As he understood it, he was not the man she had intended to marry; and not being the man she wanted, she certainly could not be overanxious to cling to him.

While he galloped down the trail to town, he went over the whole thing again in his mind, to see if there might be some simpler plan than the one he had formed in the night.

"No, sir, it's Rock I've got to see first," he concluded. "But Lord only knows where I'll find him—Rock never does camp twice in the same place. Never knew him to stay more than a month with one outfit. But I'll *find* him, all right."

And, by one of those odd twists of circumstances which sets men to wondering if there is such a thing as telepathy and a specifically guiding hand, and the like, it was Rock, and none other, whom he met fairly in the trail before he had gone another mile.

"Well, I'll be gol-darned!" Ford whispered incredulously to himself, and pulled up short in the trail to wait for him.

Rock came loping up with elbows flapping loosely, as was his ungainly habit. His grin was wide and golden as of yore, his hat at the same angle over his right eyebrow.

"Gawd bless you, brother, and may peace ride behind your cantle!" he declaimed unctuously—for Rock was a character, in his way. "Whither wendest thou?"

"My wending is all over for the present," said Ford, wheeling his horse short around that he might ride alongside the other. "I started out to hunt you up, you old devil. How are you, anyway?"

"It is well with me, and well with my soul—what little I've got—but it ain't so well with my winter grubstake. I'm just as tickled to see you as you ever dare to be to meet up with me, and that's no lie. I heard you've got a

stand-in with the Double Cross, and, seeing they ain't onto my little peculiarities, I thought I'd ride out and see if I couldn't work you for a soft snap. Got any ducks out there you want led to water?"

"Maybe—I dunno. I just canned two men this morning before I left." Ford was debating with himself how best to approach the subject to him most important.

"Good ee-nough! I can take the place of those two men; eat their share of grub, do their share of snoring, and shirk their share of work, drink their share of booze—oh, lovely! But, in the words of the dead, immortal Shakespeare, 'What's eating you?' You look to me as if you hadn't enjoyed the delights of a good, stiff jag since——" He waved a hand vaguely. "Ain't a scar on you, so help me!" He regarded Ford with frank curiosity.

"Oh, yes, there is. I've got the hide peeled off two knuckles, and one of my thumbs is just getting so it will move without being greased," Ford assured him, and then went straight at what was on his mind.

"Say, Rock, I was told that you had a hand in my getting married back in Sunset that night."

Rock made his horse back until it nearly fell over a rock. His face showed every exaggerated symptom of terror.

"I couldn't help it," he wailed. "Spare muh—for my mother's sake; oh, spare muh life!" Whereat Ford laughed, just as Rock meant that he should do. "You licked Bill for that twice, they tell me," Rock went on, quitting his foolery and coming up again. "And you licked the preacher that night, and—so the tale runneth—like to have put the whole town on the jinks. Is there anything in particular you'd like to do to me?"

"I just want you to tell me who I married—if you can." Ford reddened as the other stared, but he did not stop. "I was so darned full, I let the whole business ooze out of my memory, and I haven't been able to——"

Rock was leaning over the saddle horn, howling and watery-eyed. Ford looked at him with a dawning suspicion.

"It did strike me, once or twice," he said grimly, "that the whole thing was a put-up job. If you fellows ribbed up a josh like that, and let it go as far as this, the Lord have mercy on your souls—I won't!"

But Rock only waved him off weakly, so Ford waited until he had recovered. Even then it took some talking to convince Rock that the thing was serious, and not to be treated any longer as a joke.

"Why, damn it, man, I'm in love with a girl, and I want to marry her if I can get rid of this other darned, mysterious, tomfool of a woman," Ford gritted at last, in sheer desperation. "Or, if it's just a josh, by this and by that I mean to find it out."

Rock sobered then. "It ain't any josh," he said, with convincing earnestness. "You got married, all right enough. And if it's as you say, Ford, I sure am sorry for it. I don't know the girl's name. I'd know her quick enough if I should see her, but I can't tell you who she was."

Ford swore, of course. And Rock listened sympathetically until he was done.

"That's the stuff—get it out of your system, Ford, and then you'll feel better; and we can put our heads together and see if there isn't some way to beat this combination."

"Could you spot the preacher, do you reckon?" asked Ford more calmly.

"I could—if he didn't get a sight of us first," Rock admitted guardedly. "Name of Sanderson, I believe. I've seen him around Garbin. He could tell—he must have some record of it; but would he?"

"Don't you know, even, why she came and glommed onto me like that?" Ford's face was as anxious as his tone.

"Only what you told me, confidentially, in a corner afterward," said Rock regretfully. "Maybe you told it straight, and maybe you didn't; there's no banking on a man's imagination when he's full. But the way you told it to me was this:

"You said the girl told you that she was working for some queer old party—an old lady with lots of dough, and she made her will and give her money all to some institution—hospital, or some darned thing, I forget just what, or else you didn't say. *Only,* if this girl would marry her son within a certain time, he could have the wad. Seems the son was something of a high roller, and she knew he'd blow it in if it was turned over to him without any ballast like; and the girl was supposed to be the ballast, to hold him steady. So the old lady—or else it was the girl—writes to this fellow, and he agrees to hook up with the lady, and take the money and behave himself. Near as I could make it out, the time was just about up before the girl took matters into her own hand and come out on a hunt for this Frank Cameron. How she happened to sink her rope on you instead, and take her turns before she found out her mistake, you'll have to ask her—if you ever see her again.

"But this much you told me—and I think you got it straight: The girl was willing to marry you—or Frank Cameron—so he could get what belonged to him. She wasn't going to do any more, though; and you told me"—Rock's manner became very impressive here—"that you promised her, as a man and a gentleman, that you wouldn't ever bother her, and that she was to travel her own trail and didn't want the money. She just wanted to dodge that fool will, seems like. Strikes me I'd 'a' let the fellow go plumb to Guinea if I was in her place—but women get queer notions of duty, and the like of that, sometimes. Looks to me like a fool thing for a woman to do, anyway."

Though they talked a good while about it, that was all the real information which Ford could gain. He would have to find the minister, and persuade him to show the record of the marriage; and, after that, he would have to find the girl.

Before they reached that definite conclusion, the storm which had been brewing for several days swooped down upon them, and drove Ford to the alternative of riding in the teeth of it to town, which was not only unpleasant, but dangerous if it grew any worse, or retracing his steps to the Double Cross and waiting there until it was over. So that is what he did, with Rock to bear him willing company.

They met Dick and Curly on the way; and, though Ford stopped them and suggested that they turn back also, neither would do it. Curly intimated plainly that the joys of town were calling to him from afar, and that facing a Thanksgiving storm was merely calculated to make his destination more alluring by contrast. "Turn back with two months' wages heating up my inside pocket? Oh, no!" he laughed, and rode on. Dick did not say why, but he rode on also. Ford turned in the saddle, and looked after them as they disappeared in a swirl of fine snow.

"That's what I ought to do, all right," he said; "but I'm not going to do it, all the same."

"Which only goes to prove," bantered Rock, "that the Double Cross pulls harder than all the preacher could tell you. I wonder if there isn't a girl at the Double Cross now."

"There is," Ford confessed, with a grin of embarrassment. "And you shut up, Rock!"

"I just had a hunch there was," Rock permitted himself to say meekly before he dropped the subject.

It was ten minutes before Ford spoke again.

"I'll take you up to the house and introduce you to her, Rock, if you'll behave yourself," he offered then, with a shyness in his manner that nearly set Rock off in one of his convulsions of mirth. "But the missus isn't wise—so watch out. And if you don't behave yourself," he added darkly, "I'll knock your block off."

"Sure. But my block is going to remain right where it's at," Rock assured him, which was a tacit promise of as perfect behavior as he could attain.

They looked like snow men when they unsaddled, with the powdery snow beaten into the very fabric of their clothing; and Ford suggested that they

go first to the bunk house and "thaw out." "I'd sure hate to pack all this snow into Mrs. Kate's parlor," he added whimsically. "She's the kind of housekeeper that grabs the broom the minute you're gone, to sweep your tracks off the carpet. Awful nice, little woman, but——"

"But not The One," chuckled Rock, treading close upon Ford's heels. "And I'll bet fifteen cents," he offered rashly, looking up, "that the lady person hitting the high places for the bunk house *is* The One."

"How do you know?" Ford demanded, while his eyes gladdened at sight of Josephine with a Navaho blanket flung over her head, running down the path through the blizzard to the bunk-house kitchen.

"Saw her shy when she saw you coming. Came pretty near breaking back on you, too," Rock explained shrewdly.

They reached the kitchen door together, and Ford threw open the door, and held it for her to pass.

"I came after some of Mose's mincemeat," she explained hastily. "It's a terrible storm, isn't it? I'm glad it didn't strike yesterday. I thought you were going to be gone for several days."

Ford presented Rock in the same breath with wishing that Rock was somewhere else; for Mose was not in the kitchen, and he had not had her to himself for twenty-four hours. He was perilously close to forgetting his legal halter when he looked at her.

She was, he thought, about as sweet a picture of a woman as a man need ever look upon, as she stood there with the red Navaho blanket falling back from her dark hair and her wide, honest eyes fixed upon Rock. She was blushing—perhaps she, too, wished Rock was somewhere else. She turned impulsively, set down the basin she had been holding under her arm, and pulled the blanket up so that it framed her face bewitchingly.

"Mose can bring up the mincemeat when he comes—since he isn't here," she said hurriedly. "We weren't looking for you back—but dinner will be ready in half an hour or so, I think." She pulled open the door and went out into the storm.

Rock stared at the door, still quivering with the slam she had given it. Then he looked at Ford, and afterward sat down weakly upon a stool, and began dazedly pulling the icicles from his mustache.

"Well—I'll—be—cremated!" he said, in a whisper.

"And what's eating *you*, Rock?" Ford quizzed gayly. He had seen something in the eyes of Josephine when he met her that had set his blood jumping again. "Did Miss Warden——"

"Miss Warden my granny!" grunted Rock, in a tone of unfathomable disgust. "That there is your wife!"

And Ford just backed up against the wall and stared at him.

CHAPTER XIII.

Ford was essentially a man of action. Once Rock had convinced him that the unbelievable was true, he did not waste one minute in trying to deduce the whys and the hows of the case; they could come afterward, and he would have a whole lifetime to figure them out in. What he did first of all was to slap his hat back on his head and start for the house—and the tracks he made in the snow were considerably more than a yard apart. He even forgot to stamp off the snow and scour his boot soles on the rug placed suggestively upon the porch.

He went in, pushed the door nearly shut, and went on, leaving it swinging in the wind until Mrs. Kate, with a shocked "My goodness!" came and shut out the snow and wind, which were despoiling her immaculate parlor.

He went into the dining room, crossed it in three strides, and found Josephine in the kitchen just setting out biscuit materials. He started toward her; but Buddy was following him up, so he stopped first and led Buddy from the room and to his mother.

"I wish you'd kinda close-herd this kid for a while," he told Mrs. Kate bluntly, and left her looking scared, with an arm around Buddy's neck. When he

reached the kitchen again, Josephine was not there; but he found her in the pantry, fumbling nervously for something on a shelf higher than her head; and so he put his arms around her where she was. Pantry or parlor, it made absolutely no difference to Ford just then.

"Say, are you my wife?" is the startling way in which he began, and kissed her hair many times while he waited.

"Why, yes. I thought you knew—why, of course you must have known!" Josephine twisted in his arms so that she could look at him. "What a funny question to ask!" She did not laugh, however, but stared up at him with that keen, measuring look he had hated so at first. "I don't understand you at all, Ford," she told him, with a puzzled frown. "I haven't all along. I'd think I did, and then you would say something that put me all at sea. What do you mean, anyway? You aren't troubled with any dual consciousness, are you?"

Ford told her then what he meant—and it speaks well, I think, for the good sense of Josephine that she heard him through with neither tears nor anger.

"Of course I knew you had been drinking that night," she said when he was through. "I saw it after it was too late to—to 'back up,' as you men say. But you talked straight enough; and I never knew I had made a mistake, and you weren't Frank Cameron, till you came here. Then I knew you couldn't be. Chester had known you, you see, when Frank was East, so——"

"What about Frank Cameron, anyway?" Ford demanded jealously. "What made you come out and marry a man you didn't know, and——"

"Oh——" Josephine gave a little, impatient turn of the head. "You couldn't understand—unless you knew his mother. I was sort of related to her, and stayed with her. She was the dearest thing, but—well, queer. I can't say crazy, for she wasn't. She worshiped Frank, and he was wild and wouldn't stay at home. And she felt sure that the right wife would keep him steady—and then she got the notion that I would be the right wife. And after that," she sighed, "I couldn't wean her from the notion. It grew on her, and she made the will that way, and gave me just six months to find him and marry him. She didn't even know where he was, you see. And she begged—and *begged!*" Her voice there was rather tragic.

"She wanted Frank to have her money; and she wouldn't give it to him unless I would marry him. And she was sick—and so finally I did promise. I counted," she confessed naïvely, "on the divorce laws to help me out. Of course, I wouldn't marry a man I didn't know, and—— But it seemed as if I might please her, even if I did hate it terribly. It was worth while, just to see how happy she was after that. So she died, and, of course, I had to keep my promise, if I could."

"Of course," Ford murmured against her hair.

"Well, I advertised, and followed every clew I could get; and the time slipped away until it did seem as if I'd have to give it up, as if I never could find him. And then a newspaper clipping sounded as if he might be in this part of the country, and I went to Garbin. Some one told me a man named Cameron was in Sunset. So I got the license—that was the last day, you know; and I hadn't much time—and persuaded Mr. Sanderson to go with me; and I went to Sunset and—and ——" She began to laugh nervously.

"Oh, poor, inoffensive you!" she gasped. "I went to the hotel and asked if Mr. Cameron was in town, and they brought *you* in. I asked you if your name was Frank Cameron, and you said it was. Oh, you——" She gave him an ineffectual shake. "Anyway, it was your own fault, you see, that I married you. So I explained everything, and you agreed to everything—and were perfectly good about it. I told you that I meant to go away again, and that the marriage was to be only a legal form, and you agreed to that also; and you thanked me beautifully for taking so much trouble to save your legacy for you. I can see now, of course, that you weren't a bit like yourself. But I didn't

know you then, you see. It was only when you turned to me after the ceremony, and were going to k-kiss me, that I got a whiff of liquor, and knew you had been drinking. I was afraid, then; but when I wouldn't let you kiss me you were nice again.

"And that's all, I think," she said, with a little sigh. "I came here to Kate. She had been writing to me to come ever since Aunt Jessie—only she was really a second cousin—died, and I never told her about my—my matrimonial difficulties. I had seen a lawyer in Garbin that day about divorces, and I had made up my mind to just wait a year, and then apply for one on the grounds of non-support, or something. You," she reminded him demurely, "agreed to that, you know."

"I wasn't in my right mind, so it's no good," he stated decisively.

"Well—and then in a few days you popped up before me, out there on Long Ridge—and I was scared stiff! I thought you had followed me and weren't going to keep your agreement."

"Lordy me!" breathed Ford out of the fullness of his emotions.

"Say," he queried, after an appreciable lapse of time, "what about that Cameron man? He's kinda left out, ain't he?"

"Well, I did all I could. I mailed the marriage certificate to Aunt Jessie's lawyer, and told him where Frank was —or where I thought he was, at least; and then I just dropped out of it. I don't care much," she said, with a woman's peculiar idea of justice, "if he does lose his mother's money. It's his own fault. He ought to have been the man."

"Ought he?"

Conversation, from there on, was what lawyers sometimes describe as irrelevant and beside the point; not, however, unimportant—to those two. One other sentence, spoken later, may be said to bear upon the subject.

"Well, but Ford, I married *Frank Cameron*. And, anyway, I'd like a *real* wedding."

What happened after that was just what one might logically expect to happen. There was a real wedding in Mrs. Kate's parlor, and Mrs. Kate was floury and flustered over the dinner she gave them, and profusely friendly with Ford, and anxious to prove her rejuvenated faith in him. (This to satisfy any chance feminine reader.)

What really counted was not so much the wedding, or the supper, or the approbation of Ches Mason and his wife, however. What really does count is the fact that Ford "made good." With Josephine to make the climb worth while, he did not find it so very hard to reach the top and walk with head erect upon the level above.

THE COMPANY SHE KEPT

A BOSTON couple, of middle age and kind hearts, spent their vacation near Augusta, Georgia, and during their visit took a great fancy to an old colored woman. When they left Augusta, they invited her to pay them a visit, which she accepted with the understanding that they were to pay her expenses.

Having arrived in Boston, she was given a room in the house of the white folks, and was invited to have her meals at the same table with her host and hostess.

"Mrs. Jones," said the hostess, "you were a slave, weren't you?"

Mrs. Jones replied that such had been her condition of servitude.

"I suppose your master never invited you to eat at his table," hazarded the Boston woman.

"No, honey, dat he didn't," replied Mrs. Jones. "My marster was a gentleman. He ain't never let no nigger set at the table 'longside of him."

The Peculiar Gifts of Mr. John T. Laxworthy

AND THE ADVENTURES AT THE PARADISE HOTEL IN WHICH HE BECAME ENGAGED

By E. Phillips Oppenheim

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PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THE SERIES.

MR. JOHN T. LAXWORTHY: Chief of the trio of investigators. In appearance he is both unremarkable and undistinguished; he is of somewhat less than medium height, of unathletic, almost frail physique; his head is thrust a little forward, as though he were afflicted with a chronic stoop; he wears steel-rimmed spectacles; his hair and mustache are iron-gray. "My chief aim," he tells his two associates, "is to make life tolerable for ourselves, to escape the dull monotony of idleness, and incidentally to embrace any opportunity which may present itself to enrich our exchequer."

MR. W. FORREST ANDERSON: Assistant to Mr. Laxworthy. A thoroughly British, self-satisfied gentleman; his figure is distinctly corpulent; he wears scarcely noticeable side whiskers, and his chin and upper lip are clean-shaven.

MR. SYDNEY WING: Assistant to Mr. Laxworthy. From the tips of his shiny tan shoes to his smoothly brushed hair he is unmistakable; he is young, he is English, he is well-bred, he is an athlete. His face is pleasant, unintelligent.

III.—RACHAEL, THE WOMAN OF DEATH

MR. LAXWORTHY sat on the porch of the Paradise Hotel, with his gray shawl arranged, as usual, about his shoulders, a volume of philosophy upon his knee, a pencil in his hand, and a notebook on the small, round table by his side. It was barely half past nine o'clock, but the sun was already high in the clear blue sky, and only the faintest of breezes was rustling in the leaves of the olive and cypress trees. A little stream of people was all the time passing from the hotel, out onto the terrace, and down the steps to the golf links; but of these Mr. Laxworthy took no notice whatever. His attention appeared to be entirely absorbed by the volume which lay open upon his knee. There was something almost sphinxlike about his studied isolation.

Radiant in her white linen gown and white tam-o'-shanter, the American girl came out of the hotel on her way to the golf links. She alone remained unimpressed by Mr. Laxworthy's obvious desire for solitude. Directly she saw him, she made her way to his side.

"Good morning, Mr. Laxworthy," she said amiably.

Mr. Laxworthy slowly turned his head. His reply was perfectly polite, but his tone certainly did not invite overtures. The young lady, however, remained absolutely unconscious of his lack of cordiality. She was much too spoiled to believe that any one of the opposite sex could possibly exist to whom her companionship was not agreeable. Besides, she rather prided herself upon being on specially intimate terms with Mr. Laxworthy, whom she claimed to have discovered.

"I was hoping that I should see you

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this morning," she remarked, drawing up a chair to his side. "There is something I wanted to ask you."

Mr. Laxworthy gave no evidence of any curiosity. His pencil had paused. He seemed, indeed, in the act of making a note in his book. There was nothing about his manner to even indicate that he was conscious of what she was saying.

"It is about Mr. Lenfield," she went on confidentially. "You admitted the other night, in those few, wonderful words of yours, that the poor man who was killed had probably come down here on business connected with Mr. Lenfield."

"Did I?" he murmured absently. "I really forget."

She frowned.

"I do not think that you can possibly have forgotten," she declared. "It was very clever, indeed, of you to find out all those things without trying in the least; and it proves that you must have great powers of observation. It is for that reason that I have come to ask you a question. Have you any idea as to the nature of the business which the murdered man might have had with Mr. Lenfield?"

Mr. Laxworthy sighed.

"My dear young lady," he protested, "I know nothing about the matter at all. Chance brought a few of those little happenings before my notice, and I felt bound to point them out. For the rest, the whole affair is not one that interests me. So far as I am concerned, it is finished and done with. I am entirely absorbed in my work."

"I know that," she replied calmly; "but I happen to be a little interested in Mr. Lenfield, and I should like to know whether he has ever done anything likely to put him in the power of such men as the person who was killed. That sounds rather involved, but I am sure that you know what I mean."

Mr. Laxworthy kept his place with his forefinger, and turned his head toward the girl.

"What is your interest in Mr. Lenfield?" he asked.

She leaned forward, tapping the tips of her shoes with the golf club which she carried in her hand.

"Not what you think," she replied. "I was sorry for Mr. Lenfield. I found him very agreeable to talk to, and we are very good friends——"

"Then why not ask him himself?" Mr. Laxworthy broke in ruthlessly.

"I had intended to," she admitted; "but, as a matter of fact, I have to play golf this morning at ten o'clock, and I believe that Mr. Lenfield is leaving for a few days this morning."

Mr. Laxworthy sat quite still for several moments.

"Did he tell you that he was going away?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"I happened to find out quite by accident," she said confidentially; "and, to tell you the truth, I thought it a little strange that he had said nothing to me about it. You know, I have seen a great deal of him since he has been here, and when he was quite ill I used to go and sit with him."

"Indeed!" Mr. Laxworthy remarked gravely. "Under those circumstances, I think his unannounced departure a most ungraceful act."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"You can't tell me anything about him, then?" she asked bluntly.

Mr. Laxworthy considered for a moment.

"No," he said slowly, "I can tell you nothing about him. At the same time, if you had come to me and told me that your friendship with him was likely to increase rather than diminish, I might have said——"

"Said what?" the girl interrupted eagerly.

"That it was a pity," Mr. Laxworthy replied, turning back to his book.

"Then you do know something," she persisted. "And what is that you have there underneath that ugly volume of yours? A time-table, I declare! You don't mean to say that you are going off, too?"

"By no means," Mr. Laxworthy assured her. "The time-table I was glancing at merely as a matter of curiosity. I thought it would be interesting to

know how long it took to get to Monte Carlo."

"Mr. Lenfield is going to Monte Carlo," she remarked.

Mr. Laxworthy nodded. The affair seemed to be devoid of interest to him.

"You don't want to tell me anything about him, I suppose—is that it?" she asked.

"I really know nothing," Mr. Laxworthy assured her. "You give me credit for both interest and perceptions which I do not possess. My studies, I suppose, have quickened my powers of observation a little, and the facts that helped to solve the mystery of the flower farm were easy enough to put together. So far as regards Mr. Lenfield personally, I do not think that one need be a close student of human nature to decide that he is not a person worthy of an unqualified amount of trust."

"This is only your opinion?" she persisted.

"Only my opinion," Mr. Laxworthy admitted. "And, my dear young lady, if you will allow me to call you so, permit me to point out that, while I find your society at all times a most charming distraction, you are just now interrupting what I look upon as my most valuable two hours' work of the day."

She rose at once.

"You certainly are the most ungallant person," she declared. "You are exactly what I read all Englishmen were like before I came over."

She moved away, and Mr. Laxworthy returned with a little sigh of relief to his labors. Presently the *concièrge* crossed the threshold of the hotel and came out into the sunshine. Mr. Laxworthy, without appearing to glance up or to interrupt his labors, beckoned him to approach.

'Fritz," he said, "the automobile which Mr. Wing ordered is in waiting?"

"But certainly, sir. It has been here for at least an hour."

"Any one going away by the omnibus this morning?" Mr. Laxworthy asked carelessly.

'Mr. Lenfield and Mr. Hamar, sir," Fritz replied. "They are going on to Monte Carlo for a few days."

Mr. Laxworthy went back to his work.

About fifty yards away, Mr. Lenfield, looking very ghastly and worn, was leaning back in an invalid chair with his friend by his side. Over his shoulder he had glanced more than once at Mr. Laxworthy, reading and writing in his corner.

"I can't stand that man," he muttered hoarsely. "There's something about him that paralyzes me. He sits and watches and waits like a spider. He scarcely moves an eyelash, and yet one feels that he sees all the time." The young man shivered.

His companion laughed. "That's all rubbish, Philip," he declared. "He did you a good turn the other night, anyway."

The young man turned his head slowly. So far, the Southern air seemed to have done little toward restoring his health. His cheeks were still hollow and his color ghastly. In his deep-set eyes there lurked still, too, the light of an unquenchable fear.

"A good turn," he muttered. "How do I know that? The end was very near—the end of the journey, Hamar. Why not? One wearies these days."

His friend looked at him reproachfully.

"Philip," he protested, "this isn't like you. Brace up! Remember there is work before us. If you can sit here before we start and feel your heart wax faint, what will it be when the time comes?"

The young man shrugged his shoulders.

"For a person in my condition," he said, "there is nothing so stimulating as action. It is when we sit here that I grow weak. I have come to hate the place. That man's eyes follow us everywhere."

Mr. Hamar laughed contemptuously.

"A queer, old-fashioned, bent, little misanthrope, with spectacles, and a gray shawl around his shoulders, and rubbers if there's a cloud in the sky!" he exclaimed. "You are full of fancies, Philip. Listen! There is the omnibus

coming up from the garage. Let us walk back to the hotel."

The large, white motor omnibus came puffing up to the front, and was soon crowded with little groups of the guests on their way down to the town. Mr. Hamar and his companion were the only two who had any luggage. The proprietor of the hotel came out to wish them good morning.

"It is only for two or three days," Mr. Hamar declared, shaking hands. "You will see that our rooms are undisturbed? I thought that a flutter at the tables might brighten up our young friend."

The proprietor of the hotel, who was aware of certain gossip concerning the events of a few nights ago, bowed gravely. To tell the truth, he had no particular desire for the return of these two guests. On the other hand, they had taken their rooms for a month, and he was powerless.

"I wish you both good fortune, gentlemen," he said. "One hears that the tables are doing badly just now."

The omnibus started off, commencing its circling detour down into the valley. From behind the glass-inclosed space where Mr. Laxworthy sat taking his sun bath, he watched until it became a speck in the distance. Then he carefully closed his volume, put his notebook into his pocket, and rose to his feet. As though his doing so were some sort of a signal, his two friends suddenly appeared upon the scene. Sydney Wing came strolling up the steps from the golf club, smoking a cigarette and swinging a new mashie which he had just bought. Forrest Anderson, with a big cigar in his mouth, came walking briskly down the broad terrace. The three met on the flagged space in front of the porch.

"So our friends have gone to Monte Carlo to try the tables," Forrest Anderson said thoughtfully.

Mr. Laxworthy looked at the little cloud of dust, now faint in the distance.

"They are gone, I think," he murmured, "to play for larger stakes than Monte Carlo knows of. Is everything ready?"

Anderson nodded.

"The car is round at the back."

"A jolly good one, too," Sydney interposed. "A six-cylinder Rochet. I can get sixty miles an hour out of her any time."

"I sincerely trust," Mr. Laxworthy remarked, "that it will not be necessary for you to attempt any such folly. You can fetch it."

Sydney nodded, and passed through the swing doors on his way to the back of the hotel. A few moments later he reappeared in the avenue, driving a large and handsome touring car, which he piloted to the front of the hotel.

Mr. Laxworthy permitted himself to be wrapped in a fur coat, although he still insisted upon the shawl around his shoulders. Just as he was stepping in, the American girl came strolling up the steps from the golf course. Mr. Laxworthy hesitated for a moment. The incident perplexed him.

"You have not been disappointed in your match, I trust?" he inquired, with his foot upon the step.

The girl nodded.

"Mrs. Morson doesn't feel like playing this morning," she remarked. "Don't you want to take me for a ride in that beautiful car instead?"

"With pleasure," Mr. Laxworthy replied politely. "Will you come as you are?"

She looked down at her white linen gown, white shoes and stockings, and the tam-o'-shanter which she was carrying. Her hands touched for a moment her bare head.

"How far are you going?" she asked.

"It is one of my peculiarities," Mr. Laxworthy explained, "that when I start for a little expedition of this sort I never know. If I enjoy it, I shall go on. If I dislike it, I shall come back."

"If I join you," the girl remarked, "I shall claim the privileges of my sex and decide when we are to return."

"On the contrary," Mr. Laxworthy retorted, "the privileges of my infirmities and years will survive. You will come back when I choose."

"I was certainly right when I told

you that you were not gallant," she remarked, smiling at him.

"My dear young lady," Mr. Laxworthy answered, "I never laid claim to such a quality."

"I can see," she declared, "that I am going to be deserted. Did Mr. Lenfield go on the omnibus, do you know?"

"I believe so," Mr. Laxworthy replied. "Mr. Hamar and he left together."

She smiled.

"The poor fellow ought to have some luck at Monte Carlo. He suffers enough in other ways."

Mr. Laxworthy took his place in the car.

"Since you will not accompany us," he said, "we will wish you good morning."

"I don't consider that I was pressed to come, you know," she remarked, watching them settle down.

"Young lady," Mr. Laxworthy returned grimly, "it is very certain that if you had desired to accompany us, you would be occupying at the present moment the seat by my side."

"I am not sure," she laughed, "that I like the reputation you give me."

"It leads," Mr. Laxworthy replied, as the car rolled off, "to success in most of the small crossways in life."

She waved her hand and watched them disappear. Mr. Laxworthy was busy arranging his spectacles and cap to keep off the glare of the sun.

"What do you think of that young lady?" Anderson asked him curiously.

Mr. Laxworthy touched his spectacles with his fingers to feel that they were perfectly safe, and leaned back.

"A few minutes ago," he declared, "I was inclined to fear that she might have more intelligence than she cared to display. I was even inclined to fear that she might mar to a certain extent the success of our little expedition to-day."

"And now?" Anderson asked quickly.

"On the whole," Mr. Laxworthy pronounced, "I am reassured. I believe that her interest in our doings merely results from the natural inquisitiveness of her race."

Monsieur Rénaultin, real-estate agent, lessor of villas—furnished or unfurnished—auctioneer and valuer, closed his ledger that morning with a little sigh. For some reason or other things were decidedly flat. The weather was surely all that could be desired. His dusty, little office, situated in the main street of Tropez, was flooded with February sunshine. But the visitors came not, or, if they came, they stayed at hotels, or took villas from their friends without employing the services of an agent. No stranger had passed his threshold for three days. No coroneted or crested letter, demanding an exact list of his desirable Mediterranean residences, had reached him for more than a week.

It grew near to midday. One might as well breakfast. So Monsieur Rénaultin closed his ledger, took down a white felt hat from its peg, arranged his necktie, and permitted his mind to dwell upon the occupation which appealed to him more dearly than any other during the day save his dinner. It should be breakfast, by all means. He must endeavor to forget that he had done nothing to earn it. He had carefully closed the door, and was standing upon the step leading into his office, when the great touring car came haltingly along the street, the driver looking from left to right.

Monsieur Rénaultin was immediately upon the alert. A direction was almost equivalent to an introduction; an introduction might lead to business. He composed his features into a state of amiable interest. He flattered himself as he stood there swinging his cane and regarding these three perplexed travelers, that if, indeed, they were in need of directions, they would certainly apply to one who seemed so willing and so able to give them. Apparently he was not mistaken. The car came to a standstill before the door of his office. He stepped forward with a little bow.

"The gentlemen desire?"

"This is Monsieur Rénaultin?" Sydney inquired, raising his cap.

Monsieur Rénaultin swept the pavement with his own hat. This was more than he had dared to hope.

"But certainly!"

"We wish to inquire about a villa," Sydney announced.

Monsieur Rénaultin was instantly at his best. The three Englishmen were ushered into his office and comfortably seated in the only three safe chairs. Photographs, drawn eagerly from a large portfolio, were passed from hand to hand. Prices, accommodation, location were described with picturesque and ample detail, with eloquence impossible to reproduce. They were palaces, these villas which Monsieur Rénaultin had to let, or ideal, little dwellings, whose lawns were embowered with roses, with their strip of sand lapped by the Mediterranean; or ensconced in pine woods, whose fragrance was the most delicious, with an air, an atmosphere, sufficient almost to bring the dead to life. The three men listened, appreciative but silent. One photograph which Monsieur Rénaultin had been on the point of handing out he retained in his hand. Mr. Laxworthy, who had said little, leaned over and looked at it.

"It is strange, this location," he remarked. "It looks as though it were built into the sea."

"It is the Villa De Cap Frinet," Monsieur Rénaultin explained. "It is reached only from the mainland by a narrow strip of sand; at high tide no more than a passage; beautiful, as monsieur sees; unfortunately not to let at present."

"I like the appearance of the place," Mr. Laxworthy said. "Do I understand that it is let for the whole season?"

Monsieur Rénaultin was disconsolate.

"A month ago, monsieur," he declared, "I let it for three months. Curiously enough, although I have received the rent, the tenants have not yet, to the best of my belief, taken possession. They are expected now, I hear, every day."

"It is let to some English people, perhaps?" Mr. Laxworthy inquired.

"Who can tell?" Monsieur Rénaultin replied enigmatically. "You English, nowadays, speak all languages so perfectly. The lady who took it spoke French. There was a trifle of accent, perhaps, but not sufficient to determine her nationality."

"Is the name a secret?" Anderson asked. "The villa rather takes my fancy, too."

"By no means, gentlemen," Monsieur Rénaultin assured them. "The name of the lady was Madame Laichenon. If monsieur is curious, there is this to be told: She was, I should say, a Jewess. However, the villa is let. Monsieur permits me to draw his attention to the most charming and desirable residence upon the whole Riviera, one mile from San Raphael; a perfect gem."

They listened, but it was obvious, however, that the three men were no longer deeply interested. Mr. Laxworthy, upon some excuse or another, pressed a fee into the hand of the reluctant agent, and took particulars of two of the most desirable villas.

"In a day or two," he declared, "we shall return. In the meantime, we will glance at these places on our way to Monte Carlo. You might also give me a card to view the Villa De Cap Frinet. It is possible that the tenants may not stay longer than the three months. I myself am likely to remain here until June."

Monsieur Rénaultin acquiesced promptly, and made out the cards. The business of leave-taking followed; a little elaborate from the fact of that unexpected fee, the hope of letting a villa as well, and the faint smell of omelet wafted up the street from the café. However, it was over at last. Monsieur Rénaultin, with a cigarette in his mouth, went gayly down the street, humming to himself. The touring car shot forward, already in its fourth speed. The three men were a little silent.

"If it should be the woman, Rachael!" Anderson murmured.

Mr. Laxworthy looked steadily in front of him.

"Who can tell?"

In less than an hour they were compelled to slacken their pace. They were on a road now of wonderful curves, and every few moments brought them to the

very edge of the Mediterranean. They skirted little, sandy bays, where brown-faced fishermen gazed at them with the stolid wonder of their class. They encircled high walls, which seemed built to jealously preserve the privacy of some dainty villa almost hidden from the outside world. It was like a miniature toyland, where people might dwell whose souls were in fairyland. One saw no village. All the pressure and commonplace details of actual life were absent. Then the car came to a standstill. Before them was a little avenue with a locked, iron gate, and painted upon the wall:

VILLA DE CAP FRINET.

"It is here," Mr. Laxworthy announced.

"It is here," the others echoed.

They did not at once descend. Mr. Laxworthy seemed to be making observations of the locality. Presently he pointed to a hill a short distance ahead.

"We will ascend," he said. "There we can judge."

The car shot forward. In a few minutes they gained the summit of a steep ascent. From there, looking downward, they could see the villa itself—a strange, little, white building, which seemed, indeed, as though it had risen like a shell from the sea, with a green veranda which almost encircled it. The gardens were on the mainland, and a little walk, with a handrail of about fifteen or twenty yards long, led to this curious abode. There was a landing stage, but, so far as they could see, no boat. No smoke issued from the chimneys of the villa. It had, indeed, all the appearance of being, as the agent had assured them, as yet unoccupied. Nevertheless, the three men sat in the car on the brow of the hill, and were for a time undecided.

"Let us consider," Mr. Laxworthy said softly. "We are moving a little in the clouds. A false step just now might result in serious inconvenience to all of us."

Anderson, who had been gazing at the villa through a pair of small field glasses, laid them down.

"I am convinced," he declared, "that at present, at any rate, the place is empty."

"It has that appearance," Mr. Laxworthy admitted; "and yet to-day is the twelfth of February. To-night should be the night of the great appointment. We know well that yesterday afternoon Madame Laichenon played baccarat in the sporting club at Monte Carlo. We also know that our friends left Hyères this morning, so the meeting place cannot be far distant. To reach here, they would have to go to Cannes and return. My idea is that Cannes was the meeting place; that from there they would motor here. On that assumption they cannot arrive for two hours and a half. One would imagine that the others would come from Marseilles."

Sydney was listening with knitted brows.

"It is all rather guesswork, isn't it?" he remarked. "It seems as though we were stepping into a big thing blindfolded."

"It is my principle," Mr. Laxworthy continued, "to proceed always upon assumptions, provided those assumptions are logical and carefully thought out. I propose, therefore, that, having this card to view the villa, which we procured from Monsieur Rénaultin, we forthwith make an inspection of the place. There can be no harm in that, nor very much risk."

"It is agreed," the others murmured.

Sydney backed the car, and they glided down the hill to the iron gate. The padlock resisted their efforts to enter; but Mr. Laxworthy, with a curious, little instrument which he took from his pocket, carefully picked the lock. He examined the ground closely.

"At any rate," he said, "no one has passed in by this entrance for several days."

The descent was almost perpendicular, down a narrow and curving driveway, on either side of which were thickly growing shrubs and trees, which formed almost an arch over their heads.

"At night this will be as black as the Styx," Sydney murmured.

"So much the better," Mr. Laxworthy assented. "It is a veritable tunnel."

They came suddenly out into the sunshine. The garden was a tangled wilderness of beauty. Mimosa and climbing roses had run riot about the place. There was a whole shrubbery of flaming rhododendrons, a tool house smothered with clematis. The oleander trees were in blossom. From the midst of a great cactus, one blood-red flower gave out a strange perfume. Nowhere was there a sign of any human being. They moved on across the overgrown lawn until they reached the water's edge. They were separated now from the villa only by that little strip of passageway. Mr. Laxworthy held up his hand.

"Be silent!" he ordered.

There was something a little ominous in his tone. They remained perfectly motionless, still partially obscured beneath the grove of oleanders which fringed the bay. Through the leaves Mr. Laxworthy stood like a figure of stone, with his eyes upon the villa.

"There is some one there," he said at last softly.

"There is no other entrance," Sydney whispered.

Mr. Laxworthy inclined his head a little on one side. They saw then the stern of a small, petrol-driven launch, anchored on the other side of the villa, so close under the walls that it had been invisible from the hill.

"It is not only that," Mr. Laxworthy murmured. "Listen!"

They all listened intently. The air seemed full of the repose of afternoon. Little waves, which were scarcely more than a tremor, broke upon the thin line of shingle. A few bees were humming, but the place was empty of birds. The background of silence was almost unnatural. And then they all heard the sound which had first been heard only by Mr. Laxworthy—the faint, low moaning of a human being in pain or terror.

"We are too late!" Anderson muttered.

Mr. Laxworthy shook his head.

"It is never too late. Come!"

He straightened himself, and brushed away the protecting branches of the oleanders. Then he drew his gray shawl closely around his shoulders, and stepped casually along toward that narrow footpath. With his hand upon the rail, he stopped, and turned to his companions.

"Everything about this place," he declared enthusiastically, "favors one's desire for seclusion. Think how one could work among such surroundings! Who could there be to disturb one! What unwelcome visitors, indeed, could find one out in such a paradise!"

They took his cue, and chattered lightly; but Anderson was a little pale beneath his healthy tan; and the fingers which held the match to Sydney's cigarette distinctly shook. Mr. Laxworthy stepped leisurely along the narrow path. If he saw the white face suddenly flash behind the windowpane, he took no notice.

"Have you said your prayers?" Sydney murmured to Anderson.

Anderson shrugged his shoulders.

"I expect to hear the bullets whiz at any moment," he replied. "But what can one do? The chief knows."

At the end of the narrow walk they stood literally upon the rock. Here and there were little clefts filled up with green and planted with scarlet geraniums. Immediately in front of them was a broad veranda which encircled the whole of the villa. There were indications that the formal entrance was on the other side. Mr. Laxworthy paused to look around him.

"This," he declared, "is perfectly delightful. I wonder if, by any chance, it would be possible to get inside. Try that window, Sydney."

The young man's hand was already outstretched toward the fastening. Suddenly he stood as though transfixed. No one moved. Distinctly from the other side of the house came the unmistakable sound of a petrol engine.

"They are off, by Heaven!" Anderson muttered.

Mr. Laxworthy led the way around the veranda to the front. A dozen yards already from the landing stage, a man was bending over the wheel of a low, petrol-driven launch. He turned his head to look at them; and even Mr.

Laxworthy gave a little cry. The man's face was obscured by a black mask; he was wrapped from head to foot in a white linen duster. It was impossible even to guess what manner of a person he might be. Already the foam was flying into the air as he gathered speed. He turned round, and, holding the wheel still in his left hand, raised his right hand to the skies. He ignored altogether the three men who stood watching him. His eyes sought an open window.

"My word!" he cried. "I have kept my word! You hear, Rachael?"

There was no sound save the beating of the engine of his boat. The three men stood gazing at him from the balcony. And then they heard suddenly the crash of breaking glass above them. Splinters of it fell all around. They looked upward. Through a great jagged space in the window of the room above, a woman seemed to have dragged herself upon her side. She lay there, raised a little on her left hand, while with her right she lifted a long, strange-looking pistol to a resting place on the fancy ironwork of the balcony.

"And what about mine, Henri?" she cried.

There was a blinding flash, a sharp, metallic report, and the dull spit of a bullet in the waves. The man gave a cry and crouched over his wheel. Again and again came the report and the flash.

"A repeating Savage!" Sydney whispered hoarsely. "By Heaven, she's hit him!"

The man gave suddenly a hideous start. Quivering all over, he fell back from his wheel. The boat swung round before he could grip it again. The woman's teeth were parted; her face was set in awful lines; her eyes looked steadily from the end of the barrel of her pistol toward the man at whom she fired.

"Twelve more!" she cried. "Good-by, Henri. This is the end. I kiss the bullet."

The man in the boat half jumped up, and again he was hit. He staggered, lost his balance, and fell over with a cry. Sydney tore off his coat and waistcoat.

The woman looked down, and seemed as though she had seen them for the first time. She was laughing. She leaned over the balcony, and her voice was soft.

"Do not be foolish, young English gentleman," she called out. "He is dead—dead in many places. Would you dive fifty feet for a corpse? Come up here and I will show you something."

"It is Rachael," Mr. Laxworthy whispered. "She is right, Sydney. The man is scarcely worth saving. Let him alone. Come!"

They found the door of the villa open. The little hall inside was all confusion, as though some sort of struggle had taken place there. They mounted the stairs. On the threshold of the front room, Sydney, who was leading, hesitated.

"It is Rachael herself," he muttered. "The woman of death!"

Mr. Laxworthy pushed by.

"She will not hurt us," he said.

He threw the door open. The woman was still half crouching upon the floor. Her legs were tied together with rope, the end of which was attached to the bedpost. One arm was bleeding with the effort she had made to disengage herself. Nothing remained of that terrible expression with which she had gazed across the bay. She welcomed them with a soft, almost an inviting, smile. The pistol lay smoking upon the carpet by her side.

"My friends," she said, "your arrival is opportune. I am very glad to see you. You wish to take a villa, perhaps? I see the card in your hand. It is an admirable residence, this—a tranquil, idyllic spot, where nothing happens, where one may rest—as he will rest."

She pointed toward the sea. Mr. Laxworthy came over and cut the cords from about her feet. He looked around the room.

"Madame," he remarked, with a shrug of the shoulders, "you pay your debts in full."

"Monsieur," she answered, "it is the custom of my race. If you are among those in whose blood is the love of adventure, although, indeed, you do not

seem of that kind, stay with me here for a little while, and you shall see other things."

"Thank you," Mr. Laxworthy replied, "we are peaceful Englishmen looking for a villa."

"You lie," she answered. "You are Mr. John T. Laxworthy, the man of peculiar gifts."

"Dear me!" Mr. Laxworthy exclaimed. "You seem to me to be a remarkably well-informed young woman."

She laughed softly. She was standing up now, but she was pale. Anderson was binding her arm with his own handkerchief.

"Listen," she said. "You have seen the beginning of a tragedy. I owe you something, perhaps, for your timely appearance. You are a man, and one can trust men. Stay here, then, with me and watch for the second part."

"Madame," Mr. Laxworthy replied, "I do not doubt your hospitable instincts; but your method of ridding yourself of undesirable guests appears to me a little arbitrary. I am not sure whether from your point of view, or from the point of view of those whom we meet here to-night, that we ourselves might not be considered a little *de trop*."

She held out her hand.

"Monsieur," she announced, "I am Rachael. I am not like that man who lies at the bottom of the sea. I have my friends and my enemies, and they know it. I offer you the chance of your lifetime. To-night there will meet the man whose deeds, less than a year ago, set all London in a panic, and the bloodhounds who have never been wholly off his track. They meet here, and in this spot. It should be worth seeing. Stay, then, with me. From now until night there is truce between us, if you accept it. After that, who shall say?"

Mr. Laxworthy removed his shawl.

"Madame," he replied, "it will give my friends and myself much pleasure to accept the hospitality of your villa for a short time. We have a motor car outside. Might I suggest that we spend some of the time before evening in taking you with us to San Raphael? There is an agreeable hotel there, and madame must dine."

She swept him a little curtsy.

"Monsieur," she said, "in the heart of every Englishman, even an Englishman of such accomplishments as Mr. Laxworthy undoubtedly possesses, there dwells a foolish and unnatural prejudice in favor of justice. I fear very much that if you and I were to pass a police station, the memory of that man who was, without doubt, my victim might render my position a little precarious. I can assure you that there are other things I can do besides revenge my wrongs. I can make an *omelette aux tomates*. I can roast a chicken as few others. I can mix a salad dressing which is immortal; and you will find from my sideboard that my taste in champagne is unexceptionable."

Mr. Laxworthy permitted himself a smile.

"Madame," he declared, "your invitation is too piquant. I speak for myself and my friends. We accept with pleasure your charming invitation. And in the meantime——"

He stooped and picked up the pistol. With deft fingers he withdrew the cartridges. She smiled at him.

"Monsieur," she said, "until to-night it is yours."

The fourth story in this series will be published, two weeks hence, in the first July POPULAR, on sale June 7th.

THE GREAT AMERICAN GAME

"Judging from what's going on," remarked the man with the gray hair and the hard heart, "American politics is a nice combination of the best skill of the knife thrower, the ventriloquist, and the mud lark."

The Red Lane

By Holman F. Day

Author of "The Gashing Fiddlers," "The Captain Sproul Stories," Etc.

Holman Day has told many inimitably funny stories; here is a serious one, so dramatic that one of our readers confessed that it "literally took him off his feet;" he had to get up and walk around the office. The Red Lane is neither road nor route. It is an institution; it is smuggling. Its thousand avenues are now here, now there; but along it come the oats, the potatoes, the sheep, the cattle, the boxes of this and the barrels of that which the smugglers have hidden at points of vantage for weeks. There is no question about this being a "big" story—perhaps the biggest of its kind ever written.

CHAPTER I.

WHEN EVANGELINE CAME HOME.

THE Red Lane crossed the border at Beaulieu's Place that night.

The lane was blatantly open. They who came along it were unabashed, unafraid.

Great wains rumbled and creaked on the hard clay road which led through Monarda Clearing. Teamsters shouted at straining horses, and bellowed their songs. From east to west the procession moved—from Canada into the States.

The plot had been ripened carefully, the word had gone out to the smugglers, the season's "killing" was on in earnest.

There were potatoes, there were oats and general produce of farms—commodities cheap on one side of the line, but made valuable by the magic of passing an iron monument set in a granite block at the side of a woodland highway. The iron post marked where free trade ended and the tariff began. It was a monument set above the corpse of Reciprocity. It was the boundary post.

Droves of cattle shuffled along the clay road in the gloom. Sheep and horses came, too.

Given five hundred miles of frontier in a customs district—woods and water at the edge of things—and deputies cannot frustrate all the tricks of the smugglers!

Deputies are few and scattered. The smugglers are many and persistent. And their stratagems are many, too. About once in so often the great coup is executed—the Red Lane is thrown wide. No lawbreaker is furtive and fearful that night.

The Red Lane is neither road nor route. It is an institution—it is smuggling. Its thousand avenues are now here, now there.

This night it monopolized the highway through Monarda Clearing past Beaulieu's Place.

The deputies had herded and run north, chasing rumor. They had been carefully fooled. The smugglers are good for at least two new ruses in a season. And when it was certain that the deputies were chasing the false scent in the north, then promptly along the clay road of Monarda was the Red Lane opened—and the oats, the potatoes, the sheep, the cattle, the boxes of this and the barrels of that which the smugglers had been hiding at points of vantage for weeks—all came across in gay and noisy procession.

Beaulieu's Place is an institution on

the border as well as the Red Lane—for the Monarda Road is a thoroughfare which unites populous sections.

One of the popular "Come-all-ye" songs of the border celebrates Beaulieu's Place. Men who ride high on the joggling seats of the great wains bawl it lustily and with a zest of declaration which indicates that its sentiments are approved.

Come, all ye teamster lads so bold, oh, come along with me!
We'll whoa the nags at Beaulieu's Place, where the morson flows so free.
Give us a drink of good, white rum and we do not care a d——n
For all of the Yankee customs sneaks who work for Uncle Sam.
Red Lane—
Red Lane,
That's the road for me.
And not one cent of duty
For the country of the free.

Beaulieu's broad door of planks was wide open. The light of smoky lamps smeared the gloom at door and dingy windows.

Teams halted in the broad yard, and, while the sweating horses puffed, the drivers flocked in noisy comradeship in the big, low room where Vetal Beaulieu sold to all who were thirsty.

Men who were not teamsters were there. There were woodsmen who were spending their money in prolonged debauch. Little knots of them clung together, wavering on unsteady feet, wailing hoarse choruses.

One group was persecuting a "jumper"—a French Canadian, who leaped and screamed and flailed his arm about him whenever a tormentor yelled sharp command to "Strike!" When the "jumper" drove his fist against some unwary man's face great laughter convulsed the bystanders.

Tobacco smoke in whorls and strata drifted above the heads of the men.

Only one man in the room was silent, sober, saturnine. This was Vetal Beaulieu, sturdy little publican, with bowed legs, a crisp, grizzled beard masking all his lower face. His hard eyes took all in. His hand, dripping with liquors, stuffed bills and coins into his trousers pockets.

There were crackers in plates upon a huge truck, or table on wheels. This was in the center of the big room. There was cheese in plates. There were many bottles and a few jugs on the wheeled table. Whisky in queerly blown glass bottles which resembled dumb-bells, gin in high-shouldered bottles, rum in tall, goose-necked bottles which were labeled "Vieux Rhum." There were decanters, glasses, and the impedimenta of a bar, all disposed on the wheeled table, or truck.

The truck was astride a line done in white paint. The big room was bisected by that line.

One end of the room was decorated with English flags, which surrounded a chromo of the ruling British sovereign.

The other end of the room displayed a picture of the president of the United States, draped liberally with dingy specimens of the Stars and Stripes.

Such was Beaulieu's Place, most widely celebrated of all the border resorts! Its habitués knew that the line of paint marked the boundary between two countries. The broad, low building squatted squarely on the line. It was not mere whim on Beaulieu's part which located it thus impartially. That wheeled truck, with its load of liquors, suggested a reason.

Prohibition held sway on one side of the line.

There were the king's excise tolls on the other side.

Only once in the history of Beaulieu's Place had the officers of both nations been able to agree, and descend simultaneously. Then, after dividing startled gaze between them, Vetal had centered his truck on the median line of the room, straddled that line himself, folded his arms, and waited. He reckoned safely on the jealousy of nations. The officers had fallen into such prompt dispute over honors and spoils of war that they finally departed their several ways, leaving Vetal astride his paint streak, his stock of liquors unmolested.

"Balance" Beaulieu, so some of the folks nicknamed him!

They did not apply that epithet in his

hearing. Men bespoke him softly, as one having wealth and one who pressed the heavy thumb of a mortgage on many scores of little farms up and down the broad valley of the St. John.

The Monarda stage was late that night. Its route was from the east toward the west, from the province into the States. Here and there its grumbling driver took advantage of a broad place, and lashed his horses around a heavy wagon, or bumped past through the gutter, risking axles and wheels. Droves of animals blocked the road, bewildered in the night, stupidly crowding together in the middle of the highway.

The old stage driver, wizened French Canadian, frequently shuttled his chin over his shoulder, and apologized to his one passenger.

"I forget and talk some bad talk, mam'selle. But it's very much trouble on the Monarda road this night. Those who are breaking the law, they don't care if the mails do not get through on time."

The passenger did not reply. From the moment the driver had told her that these men, whose cattle and teams filled the road, were smugglers, she had cowered in the shadow of one of the coach's old curtains. She could not see their faces in the June night. But they were lawbreakers. They inspired fear. The drovers yelled oaths at their charges. The teamsters beat their horses and cursed delays.

"We shall do much better after we get past Beaulieu's Place, mam'selle. They do not keep to the highroad when they get past there, and are in the Yankee country. Ah, then they hide in the woods, and follow the narrow lanes. We shall hurry and make up the time we have lost," he chattered consolingly.

"I have told you that I am to stop at Monsieur Beaulieu's."

"Ah, but that is not at Beaulieu's Place. No, that cannot be, mam'selle. No, you are to stop at Beaulieu's of the Mill—Felix Beaulieu's, eh?"

"I do not know Felix Beaulieu. It is at Vetal Beaulieu's where I shall get down from the stage."

They were climbing a hill, and the horses were walking. He had taken this opportunity to talk to her, for the road was clear for a space.

He turned squarely around and stared, trying to see her face.

"It's the queer mistake you have made, I think," he assured her. "There is only one Vetal Beaulieu on the Monarda road, and you would not be going there."

"But Vetal Beaulieu is my father—and I *am* going there."

He snapped his gaze away, and was silent for a time, wrinkling his brow with the air of one who is trying to remember just what he had been saying.

At last, without turning his head, he asked meekly: "You have been away from home, eh, some time, mam'selle? I have drive past Beaulieu's many times, and I have never seen you."

"I have been at the convent school of St. Basil for many years—ever since my mother died—and I was a very little girl when she died. I have never been home since. My father said it was better for me at the school. He is a very good father—he has been to visit me many times."

"So he has now sent for you to come home, eh?" he inquired.

She smiled and indulged his curiosity, understanding her people:

"My father did not send for me. But I have learned all the lessons the good sisters can teach me. It is the duty of a daughter to come home, and make that home more happy for a father who has been alone all the years. I have not said that I was coming. It is to be a surprise."

He nodded, gazing straight ahead.

"Yes, it is to be a surprise, mam'selle."

"I have offered to come home before this. I have wanted to be of some help to my father. But he has said I must not sacrifice for his sake. Yet it is no sacrifice for a daughter to make home happier for her father."

"It is a quiet place, that St. Basil convent—a quiet place, and far from here, eh, mam'selle?"

"Yes."

The horses had topped the hill, and were trotting down the other side.

There were more teams ahead, more troubles, and he did not speak until the road was clear once again.

"They are not very interest, eh, in the news, those good sisters and the girls at the convent of St. Basil? They do not talk about what goes on outside?"

"There is no gossip there, monsieur."

"But I think they must say something to you about your father—how Vetal Beaulieu has made the very much money—how he is the rich man?" he floundered.

"No; I only know he is a good man, who has given me education, and has made my life happy. Now I am going home to help him."

The old driver's narrow limits of tactful inquiry had been reached. He flicked his horses, and they hurried on. He muttered constantly, but the rattling of the wheels did not let her hear.

"I think the good sisters of St. Basil have not teach her something she ought to know," was the burden of his soliloquy. "For if she thinks that Vetal Beaulieu is the fine man, she will have the heartbreak before this night is over."

When the stage reached Monarda Clearing, he steered his horses through the tangle of heavy wagons, and halted near the door. Inside, voices babbled, men howled choruses, laughter and oaths and obscenity were mingled.

"I am very sorry, mam'selle," said the old driver. He had climbed down, and was offering her his hand. "I have try to think something which I could say. But I am only a poor man—and Vetal Beaulieu is rich, and has a mortgage on my little house. So I have thought it best to say short words to his daughter about him. I am sorry, mam'selle! I have brought you to Vetal Beaulieu's house."

She stared at the dingy windows, where the yellow light splashed the night. Dismay, astonishment, incertitude, even frank disbelief struggled together in her countenance.

"I tell you the truth. I have brought you to your home. You will find your father inside."

She came down slowly, clinging to his hand. He placed on the ground the little bag which contained the scanty possessions of a convent girl.

"I have my mails, and I am late, mam'selle. Your father is within. I must hurry."

He leaped back upon his seat, and drove away with the haste of a man who fears what may happen. He had no wish to appear before Beaulieu as the charioteer who had whisked that daughter home without warning.

She stood outside, hesitating.

A flicker of light from the door shone on her face. A man who came out singing, beating his whip handle across his palm, stopped and swore amazedly.

"Thousand thunders!" he panted, speaking in Acadian patois. "If you are not a June fairy, fresh lighted here, then you are the handsomest mademoiselle on the border."

He put out his hand, but she avoided his grasp, and hurried into the big room. Better inside where the tumult was and where her father must be, than the outside in the dark, where men leered, and said the first words of passion of a man for maid she had ever listened to!

The swinging smoke of the room clouded the vision of the startled eyes with which she searched their faces when they all turned to goggle at her.

Suddenly there was a cry, a man's yelp of astonishment. Silver coins rattled and rolled on the floor. Vetal Beaulieu, his hard eyes popping, had dropped a handful of money he had been conveying to his pocket. He stood transfixed, his wet fingers outspread, his jaw sagging.

"I am Evangeline Beaulieu," she quavered. Her smarting eyes could not distinguish him in the smoke. "I am looking for my father."

A young man leaped forward, seized her hand, and led her toward Vetal, who stood without motion, and without words.

When she came to him the father put out to her his hand, odorous with liquor.

"Is this—is this our—home, father?" she cried.

He led her to a door, which opened into another part of the house.

"I shall talk with you soon, Evangeline," he said. His shaking voice marked the tumult of his spirit.

When she was gone and the door was closed behind her, he faced them, leaning against the door.

"I have had the surprise," he told them brokenly, his face white, his eyes avoiding theirs. "My girl has come home from St. Basil. The place is closed for this night."

They protested noisily, but he went among them, insisting with dogged determination. The drunken ones he pushed out of doors. He buffeted those who tried to fight him off. The soberer teamsters went away after a time. But for an hour the talk was loud, the uproar was brutal, and afterward men lingered outside, and bawled coarse insults at Vetal Beaulieu, barricaded in his house.

For the first time in the memory of those men of the border, the door of Beaulieu's Place was closed against a man who had money in his fist and wanted to buy liquor.

But Vetal Beaulieu was now face to face with a girl who had become a woman after those few moments of shame and agony. His money had educated her, had given her breadth of intellect, love of honor, deep religious feeling, poise, and character. He was a Frankenstein, looking on a creation raised up by his dollars. Before her his spirit and his money greed took fright.

His own excuse which had served his conscience through the years—that he had taken his toll from those who fared along the Monarda highway for her sake, to provide for her future, seemed weak excuse now when he stammered it—her eyes searching his soul.

Men who battered at the plank door and were not answered, listened at the cracks, heard voices of appeal, rebuke, and protestation, and went away, not understanding.

At last the voices ceased.

One who arrived singing, "We'll whoa our nags at Beaulieu's Place, where the morson flows so free," swung his cart so that he could peer from his high seat through one of the windows. He saw Vetal Beaulieu seated beside his truck, alone.

Beaulieu would not open his door.

CHAPTER II.

THE COURIER OF THREE THOUSAND SHEEP.

Vetal Beaulieu was still wide awake when the first sleepy cheeping of birds hinted that dawn was at hand.

He sat in his hard chair, his elbows on his knees. He lifted his head, and, with red-lidded eyes, saw the gray light of earliest morning smear the sky between the crowding spruces which grid-ironed his eastern windows.

Solitary, in the dim spaciousness of the big general room of Beaulieu's Place, he had cursed, he had stamped about in the night's silences, he had wept; then he had cursed again, only to melt into noisy tears once more. He had inherited the mercurial temperament of his Acadian forebears. From extreme to extreme of emotion his tumultuous feelings carried him.

Now and then in the night the smoky oil lamp had given signal to those who traveled along the Monarda highway that some one was awake within Beaulieu's house.

They had beaten upon the door, and shouted impatiently when Vetal did not lift the bar. Beaulieu growled oaths, and sat with fingers thrust into his gray hair, his palms against his ears.

When the rattle of the carts was dulled by distance, and died, the hush of a forest night settled on the house in Monarda Clearing. The shrilling of June frogs in Hagas Swamp was stilled. The lamp's flame burned redly within its smoky chimney. Mice came out of the walls, and nosed warily at cigar butts and litter on the unswept floor. When Vetal wiped his eyes, and found voice and cursed and stamped about, they scurried away into their cracks. When he was still again, sitting with elbows on his knees, they came out and nibbled at cracker crumbs here and there.

Alone in the night he thought upon his mortgages and his estates, but such thoughts did not cheer him.

Men had heard Vetal Beaulieu curse, as he had cursed this night in the solemnity of the silences before the dawn. But no man had ever seen him weep.

He clutched his fingers in his hair and pondered!

He had pride of race, Beaulieu had! His forebears were of the Grand Pré of the Acadians, of the Basin of Minas.

Beaulieu's folks had not been transported to the south by the hated English. Only the sheep of the Grand Pré flock had given themselves into the hands of the oppressors, he was accustomed to boast. Vetal Beaulieu's great-grandfather had been a lion, and had resisted—had escaped. With his family and his stock, by trail and by raft, he had ascended the broad St. John into the fastnesses of the wilderness, and, with others as bold as he, had founded a New Acadia. In his barn stood horses whose ancestors had cropped the close grass of France—he had cows whose strain had been preserved in straight descent from dams brought off the Isle of Jersey.

He paid his debts promptly—he had saved his money, he reflected with pride.

He had met all comers without regret, without shame, in his business. Beaulieus had kept the village wine shops in ancient Normandy.

But he forgot his property and his pride as he sat there in the hush of midnight, and later, in the dim, early hours. Then the fresh new day began to stir the leaves with first sighs of breezes, though the east was not yet gray. But he did not heed the world out of doors. The windows were close shut. The stale odors of liquors and the scent of dead tobacco mingled. The sweet dews of morning trickled on the panes outside, and the cool scents of Monarda Forest were all about—but he did not open to let them in.

The staleness within doors seemed to suit his mood; the foul air, confined there, was as bitter as his thoughts.

The lamp's flame had been dying. Now it winked out, leaving stench of charred wick to mingle with the malodorous atmosphere.

To one keeping vigil, absorbed in troubled thoughts, it is night so long as the light of the evening before stays burning. The lapse of time is not noted.

Vetal lifted his head. The windows showed him that the first gray of dawn was in the skies. He heard now and then the drowsy chirp of birds.

He rose and staggered about a bit. Fumbling in the dim light, he poured a dram for himself. It was white rum, and fiery. But it seemed to him that its fires suited his hot resolution. For he had resolved!

He muttered, moving about the room, making sure that the windows' catches were fastened, yawning even as he cursed, continuing his sullen monologue.

Then, as faint, almost, as the ticking of the old clock on the shelf above the truck, he heard the dull clip-clop of a horse's hoofs.

The rider was hurrying his animal, for the sound grew louder with each second, and its staccato showed that the horse was galloping wildly.

Before Beaulieu had finished his round of the big room the horse had stopped at the broad door.

The master of Beaulieu's Place paid no attention to the first knocking, though it was sharp and insistent, the beating of a whip handle on the oak planks of the door. It continued.

The horse had raced up from the Province side of the boundary. Vetal growling, his forehead wrinkling with apprehension, pushed his truck along the floor to the American side of the painted line.

Evidently the man outside heard the rumble of the iron wheels.

"Open up, Vetal! It's Dave Roi! I hear you. Open up!"

Beaulieu threw the wooden bar out of its slot, and the door swung wide.

The cool breath of the dawn was waiting there at the threshold, and rushed in upon the tainted atmosphere of the big room.

The man who had knocked came, too, with the impatience of one to whom minutes are precious.

"It takes you a long time to wake up."

"No, by gar, it takes me a long time to go to sleep," retorted Vetal sourly. "I have not closed my eyes this night."

"Neither have I; but there are many better things in this life than sleeping." He laughed with the boisterous zest of one who comes in from the flush of the morning, full of the joy of living. "Sleep winters, Vetal! Sleep while the good priest preaches. Sleep when there's nothing else to do. But when there's fun or business on, don't waste your time snuffing feathers."

He smacked gloved palm against Beaulieu's shrinking shoulder, and strode to the truck. He poured liquor for himself with the freedom of one sure of his ground in Beaulieu's Place. He drank and tossed the last drops from the glass upon the floor—an instinctive libation according to the old Acadian habit.

Vetal watched his guest intently. He puckered his eyes and looked Roi up and down. He acted like one who has felt called on to make a new appraisal of a friend. He seemed to be satisfying his doubts, assuring himself that certain things were so.

He saw a young man who was brusquely alert, full of the arrogance of strength, telling the world by the upcock of his black mustache, the tilt of his cap, the trim neatness of his corduroy riding dress, that Dave Roi had full belief in himself. One subtler in analysis than Vetal Beaulieu might have disregarded the externals, and seen something more than mere confident youth in the air of this rider of the night. The stare he now turned on Vetal was hard and suddenly suspicious. His black eyes glittered.

There were telltale lines about those eyes.

"What is it? Say it!"

"I say nothing, but I only think that you are a mighty fine-looking young man," stated Vetal promptly and somberly, as though replying to some doubts he had been entertaining. "And I think that something must be the matter with that girl what throw you away—if there is some girl that throw you over."

"Look here, what kind of lies have you been hearing about me?" Just then the subtle analyst would have been still less impressed by Dave Roi's externals.

"I hear no lies. I say that you look very good, and that some fine girl—any girl would say so," insisted Vetal, continuing his inspection of the young man in question in a way which made the subject uneasy.

"I know what you mean, Vetal. But, look here, you can't afford to believe everything you hear about a fellow along this border. Man to man, now, what's a chap going to do when the girl herself puts up her finger? Ah, Vetal, when your Evangeline comes home to us, when the priest says the fine words, then you'll see how I can straighten out. Now, man to man, don't blame me for all you hear."

"What I hear I forget. I was not talking to you about what I hear," muttered Vetal. When the young man had spoken the girl's name Vetal's countenance twisted with a grimace in which anger and sorrow mingled.

"I'm glad you haven't been sitting up all night worrying about *me*," remarked Roi, recovering his self-possession.

At the first words of Vetal he had shown the quick alarm of one expecting an accusation of serious portent. His uneasiness had been increasing ever since his arrival. He had found Beaulieu red-eyed and sullen after a night's vigil. The man had been staring him out of countenance. Vetal had begun upon a peculiar subject for discourse at that time in the morning.

"A fellow has to flit about a bit while he's waiting for the real girl," protested Roi. He was taking courage from Vetal's assurances. "Have all your foolishness over before marriage—that's what I believe in. I ride here and I ride there, Vetal. You know what the border is! I kiss and gallop away—and nobody is harmed. If anybody comes to you with any other kind of a story it will be a lie. I've been waiting all these years for your girl, Vetal. She's the one for me. Oh, yes! No one else counts. And it can't be much longer that she'll keep me waiting, eh?

The sisters at St. Basil must have told her all there is to know!" He was chattering eagerly, as one anxious to justify himself.

"They tell a girl a great deal at St. Basil," muttered Beaulieu, walking to the door, his stubby fingers clutched into his grizzled beard, tears starting to his eyes. But anger succeeded grief, as wrath had followed tears while he was alone in the watches of the night. He came back into the room. He stamped about his truck.

"Maybe, eh, they teach girls to be ashamed of good fathers who work hard all the days to lay up money that makes all the girl's life easy for her." He shook his finger at the liquors as he marched about them. "My great-grandfather kept his wine shop, Dave Roi, and he never lost the respect. Our people have the respect for the wine shop. It is good for the people."

Roi was staring at Beaulieu. He did not understand this outburst.

"And I am not a bad man because I sell what the people want to buy."

"What's the matter with you, Vetal? You can't afford to pay any attention to what those infernal Yankees say about rum selling. They're only hypocrites. They like to come here and buy. Let 'em talk. What if you don't pay Yankee duties? And what if you do dodge the excise over here?" Roi had passed across the painted line, crossing the border into the Province. "That's why you can give the good people the better liquors. You and I can grin and let all of 'em talk. We stand together, you and I do, Vetal! I pay no attention if they lie about you. Pay no attention if they lie about me."

"And I give my good money all to her some day!" wailed Vetal, with what seemed irrelevance to Roi. "She shall have it, and you shall have it."

"It will come in handy, of course, but I shall have plenty of my own," stated the young man airily. He marched to and fro. He shook his fist at the Stars and Stripes draped on the wall of the room. "I cleaned up ten thousand dollars last year, Vetal, right under their peaked Yankee noses. I've got three thousand sheep back there on the road right now. I'm riding in ahead of them. Here, you and I have been wasting time! We've been talking about nothing for ten minutes. Let's get down to business. I say I've got three thousand bleaters back there on the road. You don't know anything, do you? No tips, eh?"

Beaulieu glanced at the dirty window in the east end of the room. The morning light was flushing it.

"You'd better not run 'em across in daylight—that's my tip," said Vetal.

"Oh, I've got all the Yankee hound dogs of deputies running north of here, chasing a shadow," retorted Roi, with a toss of his hand. "I was the one who opened the lane here to-night—it was my scheme! They run in a pack, and a snap of the finger starts 'em, when you know how to do it. I'm only afraid of some straggling idiot. You haven't seen any signs, eh?"

Beaulieu shook his head.

Roi rattled on, still marching to and fro:

"I'll let the sheep come on. I ought to have been here at midnight, Vetal. I planned it that way, of course. But the devil's in that flock back there, and some sneak poisoned my two best dogs last week. We have come slow. But across they must come, Vetal! They ought to be here in ten minutes."

He went out of doors and listened. The sky was red in deep hues near the horizon, but the sun was still below the hills, and the highway under the trees stretched dimly in its vistas east and west.

The horse which had brought the chief of the Monarda smugglers was hitched to the iron post that marked the line between the countries. Roi went to the animal, and was about to mount.

Beaulieu called to him.

Vetal stood in the broad door. The anxiety in his tones and the expression on his face indicated that he had something especial to say.

"I haven't any time now, Vetal! Save your gossip."

Beaulieu stepped out of the door, and gazed furtively at a window in the far

end of his house. The curtain was drawn tightly.

He turned to Roi, his finger on his lips. Then he pointed to the open door.

"You'd better step in, Dave," he advised, and led the way.

Roi followed, for there was a warning significance in the man's words and acts.

"A spy in there, eh?" he demanded, when they were back in the big room. "Why in the devil's name didn't you say so the start-off?"

"I'd know what to say about a spy—I'd know what to tell you, and tell you quick. But it's worse than a spy—worse than a hound deputy, Dave!" His voice broke in sudden emotion, and he began to plod around his truck. "It's Evangeline—my girl, Evangeline! She is home from St. Basil. She is there in the room." Tears were on his cheeks.

There was a flash of sudden astonishment in Roi's eyes. "Evangeline home!" Then he recovered his self-possession. "I must say, Vetal, you don't act like a proud father getting back his daughter after all these years."

"She was not to come now. I did not tell her to come now. She came without the warning." Vetal beat his hand upon his breast. His voice was hoarse with grief and anger. "She stand and tell me that I shame her—I disgrace the good name of the Beaulieus. She talk like that to her own father, who have been so good to her! I have work hard all the years. I have pile up the money!" In his distress his Acadian tongue became careless of its English. "I do not sleep all the night. I sit here and sorrow, for my own girl have come back home to tell her poor father that he have disgrace her. Dave, I have not sleep. I think I never sleep some more!"

"Do you mean to say, Vetal, that a girl eighteen years old hasn't found out till now that you have made all your money peddling rum off that truck—hadn't ever heard of Beaulieu's Place on this border?"

"She go on the convent of St. Basil when her mother die, when she was a baby of four years, you know that yourself," bleated Vetal. "But I am not ashame because I have sold my rum. My great-grandfather have keep his wine shop."

"Well, selling wine in old Normandy and selling rum off a truck, where you beat the customs and the excise both, may strike some fussy folks as different propositions," drawled Roi, with a flash of sardonic humor. "I don't lay it up against you, Vetal. Understand that. I believe that every cent we knock out of the Yankee customs is honest money for us. But a girl right out of a convent isn't able to understand the business side of things. You simply have got to put it up to her straight and right. She's an Acadian girl. She'll understand."

"She say I must smash my bottles, close my doors, clean out my place, make the pilgrimage to the shrine, do the novena for every year I have been in the wickedness, and give my money to the poor as she shall tell me to give it," wailed the publican.

"Oh, see here! That's all nonsense. That's only a silly convent notion. She'll wake up. If she doesn't wake up, well, you know how to bring your own daughter into line, don't you? If you don't, then you'll be the first Acadian who didn't understand how to handle his womenfolk."

Vetal drove his hand across his face. He swept away the tears. "I say 'Go!' to my wife, and she go—and she come when I say 'Come!' That's my wife." He vibrated his clenched fist over his head.

"Run your own house—that's right!" commended Roi. "Of course, I don't believe in being a brute where women are concerned, Vetal, but you can't afford to let a girl be foolish. Rise up and be boss, and the thing will straighten out all right." He whirled on his heel. "Say, this gab isn't going to do for me, Vetal. I've got three thousand sheep piling along back here. I can't waste any more time talking about a girl's whim. She had no business running home from the convent till you had it understood with her. But now that she's here, make her toe the crack. A

woman never has any use for a man who doesn't twitch her into line."

He started for the door. But Vetal rushed after him. He seized Roi's arm, and dragged him back.

"But I've got to get out of here, I say," insisted the young man. "This job of mine can't wait even for a sweetheart. I'll be back later in the day, Vetal. I'll have a good talk with her. Both of us will talk to her."

"She tell me last night that if you are a smuggler, as she has heard, she will not marry you—she will not speak to you again."

Roi swung about, and scowled on Vetal. "She has been hearing something, eh?"

"And she said more than that," the father went on. "She said you are not the young man for her to marry, anyway. I don't understand, Dave. I look at you. You are a fine young man. You have make money. That girl what throw you away don't know what she do."

Roi's face flushed, and his eyes narrowed. He did not require the restraining clutch of Vetal Beaulieu now. He strode back into the room.

"You don't mean to say she said that in earnest!"

"Listen, Dave Roi! I look at her when she talk to me last night. I say to myself, over and over: This is only my girl Evangeline. Bah, I shall not allow her to talk to me like that. But, Roi, when I look at her standing there she is not my young girl any more. She is —she is—I can't tell you what it is she is—but I am frightened when she look at me." He began to weep again. "I am frightened, for she is not my girl —my Acadian girl, like the other girls who obey and do not ask questions."

Dave Roi did not understand what this halting speech tried to explain. That this father, accustomed to the ancient obedience of children, unquestioning subservience to the will of the elders, had all at once been faced by something which had upset all his aims and hopes and dreams was not grasped in its full extent by the cynical young man. Roi simply understood that Evangeline Beaulieu had come home, and had dragged her father over the coals on account of the traffic by which he earned his money. It seemed to him that a little discipline might easily remedy the matter.

That reference to himself Roi thought he understood better. His face grew hard.

"I'm going to stop long enough to tell you one thing, Vetal. I keep my eyes and ears open on this border. That's a part of my business. I didn't think this amounted to much when I first heard it. But if Evangeline is talking about me as you tell me she is, then it's time to speak out. They say she has been having a beau on the sly at the convent."

"I believe no such thing," raged Vetal. "It is too strict at St. Basil. There can no young man come courting there. Even you—you, who shall marry her, and so the sisters know—even you can see her only in the big room, with the sisters sitting by. She can have no beau."

"It is strict there—but thoughts can go out over the walls, even when a girl cannot," growled Roi. "A girl can fall in love with a fellow even if she has never touched his hand."

"She shall marry you," blustered Vetal.

"I don't need to force any girl to marry me, but I'll tell you this: There's no Yankee customs spy who can carry off the girl who has been promised to me. I've heard a story I'm going to look into."

"She is yours, and you shall have her," insisted the father. "But she has come home with the strange ways—with the queer ideas. So I warn you, Dave. She will look at you like she looked at me. She will say to you: 'I will not be marry to the man what breaks the country's law!' I wish you don't drive your sheep across the line to-day."

"But I'm not going to hang up a drove of three thousand sheep to please a girl," declared Roi, with an oath. "I say they've got to be kept moving."

"But I have lie to her. If she was ashame of her old father, I say to my-

self she must not be ashame of the man I have pick out for her to marry," cried Vetal. "So I tell her you don't smuggle. I have lie to her. You shall marry her so that some sneak shall not steal her away. Turn back your sheep, Dave. If she know I have lie to her it will be very bad for a poor old father."

There was almost frenzy of appeal in Beaulieu's voice. The picture of his daughter rose before him as she had stood there in the room the night before, cowing him by her woman's poise, shaming him by her sorrowful accusations, wringing his simple heart by her grief that her father should be such as she had found him.

But even while Beaulieu pleaded, there came a strange sound from the woods to the east. The pur of innumerable little feet on the hard clay road —that was the sound. There were broken, dust-choked quaverings of the complaints of weary sheep; there were tremulous wailings of lambs. Above all there was one insistent sound—the queer, rustling shuffle of many moving bodies.

Roi swung away from the coaxing, patting hands of Vetal. He hurried to the door.

"She may as well drop fool notions, and get used to her husband's business!" the smuggler called over his shoulder. "It's too late to call off this deal now, Beaulieu. Here comes a clean profit of a thousand dollars—wool, hides, and chops—all under their own steam. And as for me, I'm not ashamed of having any girl see me turn this trick."

He marched out into the roadway, and watched the approaeh of the flock, casting side glances at the curtained window.

And Vetal Beaulieu slunk out and stood beside his son-in-law-elect.

CHAPTER III.

BY THE HANDS OF BEAULIEU'S GIRL.

The sheep came on, crowding, bleating, thrusting woolly bodies together, their trotting hoofs purring on the hard roadway. The undulating press of shaggy backs filled the Monarda thoroughfare. Two collie dogs, with lolling tongues, scurried here and there on the outskirts, menacing stragglers with sharp barks, nipping at vagrant hocks. Now and then the dogs crossed the field of moving wool, springing from back to back. Far behind, hardly more than shadows in the haze of fine dust from the clay road, were men with long staves.

The men were shouting commands to the eager dogs, and yelped angrily at the laggards or truants among the sheep.

"You take the big chance this day—you take the big chance," complained Beaulieu. He scowled apprehensively when the clamor swelled—he peered under his hand to the west, searching with squinting eyes among the scattered trees of the Yankee border.

"Oh, the good old Red Lane is open for me here all right!' said Roi, boasting carelessly. "They're looking for me twenty miles north of here. The good old Red Lane is easily shifted to-night." He laughed loudly, and looked at the window in the far end of Beaulieu's house.

"But when you shift three thousand sheep, and drive 'em across in daylight you shall find much trouble some of these days," warned Vetal. "That Red Lane ain't made to be use after sun-up."

Roi did not reply. His eyes were fixed on the curtained window, but the curtain continued to guard it jealously.

A man, dust-streaked and panting, came running up on the outside of the drove, leaping over the gutter bowlders.

"What say, boss? All right, ahead?"

"Let 'em go, Nappy! Divide 'em as I told you. Same pastures as on the last trip. When you come across Jefreys tell him I'll meet him later in the day. I'm going to hang up here a while."

He was staring again at the curtained window. He turned from the drover and walked past the window, flicking his riding whip at the hurrying sheep, in his bravado exhibiting the airs of the commander. He shouted orders.

"It is bad for you and bad for me,

and now you go to make it much worse," complained Vetal, at his heels. "She hears—she sees. She has come back to hate us for what we do on the border."

"If she has got whims that a good Acadian girl shouldn't have, then it's time to have an understanding. If she doesn't hate Yankee sneaks the way she ought to hate 'em we'll find out what the reason is," declared Roi doggedly. "It looks to me, Vetal, as though you need help in handling your own daughter."

He kicked viciously at bewildered sheep who ventured into the broad yard of Beaulieu's Place. He cursed the dogs who were slow in turning the flanks of the drove.

"If she is ashamed of me because I've made my good money on the Red Lane, as my father and lots of other good men did before me, it's because she has been getting Yankee ideas that an Acadian girl shouldn't have, Vetal. It's right to cheat a Yankee. It's a part of the game on this border. They have always cheated *us*."

But Vetal Beaulieu did not seem to find consolation in Roi's opinions. He plodded to and fro in the yard, his somber gaze on the sheep.

"My girl has come home, and she is ashame of her poor father," he muttered. "I have work and save for her, and she is ashame. I think it is the very bad time for poor Vetal Beaulieu, who have work so hard all his life for his girl."

The laggard file closers of the weary sheep were scuffling past.

Behind them came the men with the long staves, bawling to their charges.

"Bring out half a dozen bottles of the white rum, Vetal," directed Roi.

But the master of Beaulieu's Place gave a furtive glance at the curtained window, growled, and kept on walking.

Roi hurried into the big room, and came out with his hands full of bottles.

"Open them later, boys, when the pasture bars are up behind the bleaters," directed the chief. "Keep 'em moving. There's no customs sneak ahead of us on the Red Lane this morning."

The drovers grinned, divided the bottles among themselves, and hurried on.

Suddenly Vetal, who had peered under his palm each time he turned to the west, threw up his arms, and gave a shrill cry.

"What have I tell you—what have I tell you, Dave Roi? You have took the chance. You have fooled with the daytime. You have gone against the bad thing this time."

There was no mistaking the identity of the person who appeared suddenly on the brow of a hillock just ahead of the drove. The first shaft of the rising sun touched the insignia on the man's cap. A spot of reflected light sparkled ominously in the eyes of the smugglers. This man was clearly an officer of the United States customs.

He was alone. Roi leaped upon the granite base which supported the boundary's iron post. No other officers were visible.

"The sneak!" he blustered. "There's only one of him. He's tumbling into this thing by accident."

He leaped down, tugging at his hip pocket, and ran toward his men, who had halted in the highway. He thrust his revolver into the hands of one of the drovers.

"Duck around through the edge of the woods and give him a lead hint to move. Get behind him. You can do it easy."

The man pushed the weapon away. "I'm hired to drive sheep, not to shoot officers, Mr. Roi."

"You don't propose to let one man hold us up with three thousand here on the hoof, do you? What kind of cowards are you?" Roi shook the revolver above his head, and turned from one to the other. "Where's your nerve, boys? Get after him."

"What's the matter with your doing that kind of a job yourself, Mr. Roi?" inquired the big fellow who had thrust back the weapon. "I'm no coward, but murdering a customhouse man isn't in my line. I don't own these sheep."

"Well, I do! And I don't propose to have a lone-handed sneak steal 'em. And who said anything about murder?

Gad, they don't make the right kind of men these days. Give you fellows wool and a bleat, and you'd fit into this drove here." He stamped about, cursing them. "It's your fault! You ought to have been here before daylight, you loafers. And now that you're here you're no good."

He whirled, and shook the revolver under the nose of a stocky youth.

"If old Blaze Condon was here—if your father was alive he wouldn't be standing here shivering on one foot. He'd know how to open the Red Lane if only one man was blocking it—yes, if a dozen Yankee hounds were over there!"

The youth knocked the neck of his bottle against his staff, broke the glass, and drank from the ragged opening.

"Make it worth while, Mr. Roi?" he suggested insolently.

"A hundred if you drive him!"

"Good pay for driving sheep, but a devilish small price for driving a customs man."

Roi looked down the line of his woolly property. The man on the hillock stood like a statue, waiting. The leaders of the flock had passed him. The sheep could not be turned and herded back across the line. The officer was posted in a way to prevent that.

"Five hundred to you, Condon, if you do something so that we can get those sheep out of this scrape—and I don't care what you do."

"That sounds different!" The youth turned up the broken bottle and drank again. The liquor ran down over his breast, for he could not set his lips on the jagged glass.

He threw the bottle at the iron post, and reached for the revolver.

"Go on with the drove, boys," he said. "I'll cut around behind."

Roi strode into the big room on the heels of Beaulieu. There was fright on the publican's seamed face. He trudged about his truck, muttering his fears, looking from the corners of his eyes at Roi, who came to the truck and poured liquor for himself.

"Dirty work, eh?" he sneered, catching some of Vetal's words. "Well, you didn't think I was going to do it myself, did you, when there's a drunken fool handy?"

"Your father would not have hire a man for murder."

"My father operated on this border when officers would handle a piece of money, or stay out of the way where they belonged. If Yankee sneaks are bound to get in the way in these days they've got to take the consequences."

"Your father was not so reckless like you. He would not have come across here in the broad day," stuttered Vetal.

As he hurried to and fro in the room he kept cocking his head, listening, fear in his eyes.

In a few moments that fear became the ugliness of a man whose nerves are overstrained. He turned on Roi who was lurking within doors.

"You hire a man to go off to murder, and you hide your head. Dave, I think you been the coward."

"I'll run my business without taking any advice from you, Beaulieu." Roi poured another drink for himself. His hand was shaking. He was pale. "There isn't any murder in this. I didn't tell Condon to murder any one. What he does he does on his own responsibility."

"Ba gar, you are the coward!" insisted Vetal angrily. "You lie to yourself because you are the coward."

The agony of that waiting in the silence was too much for his Gallic nerves. He stormed at Roi. Anger relieved his stress of emotion somewhat.

His own fury met ready response from the smuggler. Roi retorted savagely, and the two cursed each other, hiding their deeper emotion under incoherent speech and nasty oaths.

"You have sent a drunken man to go and do something," shrilled Vetal. "And a drunken man he has no brain, no care of what he do. You go and make my place the headquarter for this thing. You make me either the liar or the man who get mix in, and he cannot help himself. You do that, and my Evangeline here to see, to hear it all!"

"According to what you've been tell-

ing me your case can't be much worse with her than it is now," said Roi, with a brutal sneer. "It's a case of stand together, Vetal. You can't afford to throw me down. And if Evangeline is going to run your business and mine, too, it's about time to find out about it."

Then they heard that which both had been listening for with cowardly dread. There was the sudden popping of shots; men outside yelped at each other like angry dogs.

"Look and see who gets the best of that," gasped Beaulieu.

But the smuggler turned his back on the door, shook his head, and poured another drink for himself.

"What you don't see you won't know about," he muttered.

The two in the big room stood and looked at each other. Silence had fallen without. They mutely confessed by the glances they exchanged that neither dared to step into the sunshine and confirm what they feared. Thrushes lilted in the edge of the forest, and they heard the plaintive lowing of cattle in Beaulieu's barn, coaxing for the open.

Then there came the hurrying footsteps of a man on the hard clay of the highway.

Beaulieu leaped to the door, slammed it shut, and dropped the bar across it.

A moment later some one kicked upon the planks.

"Open this door. Quick! Open this door. I'm hurt. I need help."

It was not the voice of one of Roi's men.

The two inside stared at each other, and did not stir.

"I'm bleeding. I need help, quick!" appealed the voice without.

But they did not open the door.

On their tiptoes they slunk back against the wall, so that they might not be seen through the windows.

There was the silence of the June morning for a little while.

"Ho, inside, there! Haven't you got common decency?"

The door shook under blows dealt by a boot heel.

"I command you to open. In the name of the United States, open this door!"

Suddenly Beaulieu saw his daughter. She had come into the big room noiselessly, from the inner recesses of the house. Over her night gear was a wrapper of bright colors. Such a robe might have seemed gaudy on another. But the garment appeared to belong to her brilliancy. Against the soft duskiness of her Acadian pallor her cheeks glowed with vivid hues. In the liquid depths of her big black eyes strange fires sparkled. There was appeal there, too. But resolve dominated her excitement. Both of the men who sneaked back in the shadows by the wall felt the influence of that resolve, and blinked uneasily when she stared at them. The father felt it most. He had tried to explain to Dave Roi that morning. But his halting tongue had not found words to describe an emotion which had been new to him. This grave, beautiful girl had faced him with her reproaches the evening before. She was centered in a mental and spiritual poise that had left him abashed and grieved—yet angered in a sullen, secret way.

She came straight to her father, pushing back the tumbling masses of her dark hair.

"Why do you not open that door, father?"

"Are you going to let a man die here on your doorstep, you thief of a Canuck?" demanded the man outside. His voice broke in pain and passion.

The girl gathered the folds of her bright robe close to her neck, and hurried to the door.

Vetal ran from the wall. He screamed at her. He spoke in the patois of their race:

"Do not open that door!"

The man without was beating at the planks still.

"You are my girl. I command you! You are to obey!"

With her hands on the bar, she turned on him. For a tense instant she looked at him.

"No; the good mother commands—and this is the door of an Acadian home."

She threw the bar out of the slot.

"Stop her!" yelped Roi. "Man, can't you handle your own daughter?"

No, Beaulieu could not. This rebellion of his womankind cowed him. The traditions of Acadia had been overthrown. Here was a girl back from St. Basil with something new, compelling, dominating in her soul. He stood before her, his jaw drooping, his hairy fists closing and unclosing—and she swung the door wide.

A young man stood there. His cap bore the eagle of the United States customs service. His bronzed face was gray under the tan, the sweat of agony dripped from his forehead. His sleeve was stripped up over a brawny forearm, a handkerchief was knotted around the elbow. Blood was dripping from his finger tips.

"I am hurt!" he gasped. "I am——" Then he stopped.

Even Beaulieu, in the tumult of his own emotions, could see that utter, paralyzing astonishment had overwhelmed this visitor. He who had been pale, flushed. He stepped back. He stammered broken words of apology.

Her cheeks were flaming. Her voice trembled when she spoke to him, but the poise of this girl who had just conquered her own father supported her spirit.

"Come in! Acadians do not turn folks in trouble away from the door."

He came in, bending his head under the lintel, for he was tall above the average of men.

Beaulieu backed away from the door, snapping gaze from one to the other with squirrellike jerks of his head. He saw, but he did not understand. His keen gaze detected what he could not fathom.

Roi's clutch closed about Vetal's arm.

"That's the fellow—that's the dog, Beaulieu. It's that Aldrich! He's her beau! Look at the two of 'em!"

The man and the girl in the middle of the room did not turn from each other—did not hear the hoarse whisper.

"I hadn't believed all I've heard," hissed Roi. "But they're giving it away by their actions. There's only one reason why a girl looks at a fellow that way."

He choked, angry jealousy in his lowering eyes. Beaulieu flamed with sudden passion at this prompting.

"You come away!" he raged, advancing on the couple. "Back into your room, you girl!"

She lifted her head, her eyes still held by those of the young officer. The hues on her cheeks had deepened. Scarlet flamed there.

"This is my home, sir," she told him bravely.

"I didn't know—I didn't dream," he stammered.

"This is my father. My name is Evangeline Beaulieu." Her voice trembled, but her head was raised proudly. "Father, you must help this man. He is hurt."

"You have come in my place, and I have not ask you!" screamed Beaulieu. He stood on his tiptoes and shook his fist.

"*I* have asked him. I am mistress of this house so long as I remain in it. Will you bind up his wound, father?"

"No; I do nothing for a Yankee hound," he shouted, adding a wicked oath.

"I ask your pardon, sir." Her lips were white and quivering. "Sit there, and I will do what poor service I can."

She pointed to a long bench at one side of the room. He staggered to it. Weakness was overcoming him. She ran to help him when she noted his plight. He fell upon the bench and leaned his head against the wall.

"I am sorry," he murmured. "I would go away if I could. But I am suffering."

She hurried to another part of the room, where water trickled from a tap into a barrel. She dipped a basin in the water, and came to the officer, with a towel snatched from a hook.

Vetal was striding to and fro beside his truck. He raised his hands as she passed him, threatening her, but she did not hesitate. She did not even glance at him. Her obliviousness, her disregard of his presence and profane commands intimidated him more effectually than

retort. More than ever he realized that he was in the presence of a species of woman he could not understand—and he feared her.

"You're a coward!" said Roi, coming to the truck. "The girl is bossing you, and the Yankee sneak is laughing at you."

"I am not the coward who hire another man to shoot," raged Beaulieu, welcoming an adversary, and forgetting prudence.

Roi, startled, caught the flash from the officer's eyes, and went back to the wall.

"Mother Mary guide my hands!" breathed the girl. She kneeled before the wounded man, and, with gentle fingers, began her offices. He set his teeth, and leaned his head against the wall. There was silence in the room. Beaulieu stood over against his truck, glowering on the girl and her work, but he no longer threatened. Roi stepped across the painted line, and stood under the picture of the king.

"It will do now; I have troubled you long enough," said the young man at last. "I am grateful more than I can tell you."

"But I could do so little," said the girl wistfully. "It is bad. I am afraid!"

"I will hurry to a surgeon. You have mended my hurt so tenderly that I'll have strength to get there."

She looked up to meet a smile.

"You have make love to my girl, eh?" blustered Vetal, starting toward them. "I have hear about you. And you sit there and make love to her some more, eh? You make love when I look on, eh?"

Evangeline cried out, shame and grief in her flushed face.

The officer rose from the bench. His face hardened with sudden passion.

"I do not care to hear a father insult his daughter, sir. I have not made love to her. I didn't know her name, sir, until a few moments ago. She does not know my name." He turned to her. "I am Norman Aldrich. And I hope I shall live long enough, Mademoiselle Beaulieu, to prove my gratitude for what you have done to-day."

"You lie to me," insisted Vetal, wrathful suspicion in his snapping eyes. "You have seen my girl before. I have been told you have seen her at St. Basil."

"I have seen her there, sir." He straightened, towering above the frantic little French Canadian.

"You own up to me you have seen her! Then I think——"

Aldrich's right arm was in the sling which the girl had improvised hastily. He dropped his left hand heavily on Beaulieu's shoulder. He leaned down with an air of sudden menace, and checked the little man's threatened explosion with a sharp command.

"Let me say in the presence of your daughter that I never have spoken to her until this day, nor has she ever spoken to me till now." He thrust Beaulieu back, and turned to the girl.

"It is shameful that I have to say this before you. I do it to save you from further insult, mademoiselle. If I find the one who has lied to your father I'll see that this thing is made right."

It was a piteous look of shame she gave him from her tear-filled eyes. He thrilled under that glance.

The attack on him, his sufferings, his amazement at finding there at Beaulieu's notorious resort this maiden of St. Basil, had benumbed his sensibilities as a blow might momentarily paralyze an arm. He was awaking to what this meeting meant.

He realized suddenly that this girl whom he had seen with her companions on the streets of the convent village had been in his thoughts from the first meeting. A flash from her dark eyes when she had passed him, a jump of his heart when he had met her gaze—such had been the sum of their meager love-making. And on her part it was not love-making—it was spiritual knowledge that she had seen one who swayed her and drew her thoughts outside the narrow environment of convent walls.

The shock of meeting her here, the knowledge that she was Beaulieu's daughter—all that was of small account

to him in that tense moment when she looked up at him with tears in her eyes. The beauty of Evangeline Beaulieu had dwelt in his soul ever since he had seen her at St. Basil. But admiration is not love. Suddenly he saw this girl of the border in new light. She had shown him woman's tenderness—defying her father to minister to him in his agony. She had been brave for his sake in a moment of trial. Now she gazed at him, shrinking, sorrowing, ashamed. His heart went out to her. Love does not reason. Love does not count and calculate. He choked. He felt an overmastering impulse to take her to himself—to put his arm about her—to protect her, dry her tears, and comfort her distress. In the tumult of those emotions he was conscious that Beaulieu was shouting, but the purport of the frenzied man's words did not reach him till the girl began to cower like a victim under the lash.

"You know it, Dave Roi! You have told me. Now tell it to him. Tell it to her. You say they have make love past that convent wall. You have heard it all. Now you shall stand up and tell it to him. He say I have insult my girl. You tell him I have good reason to talk to her."

"I know you for a smuggler and a border renegade, Roi," cried the officer, striding to the painted line. "A few minutes ago I heard something about your hiring a man to shoot me. I believe that much about you. But what is this I hear? Are you the cur who has made up this lie about a girl you are not fit to look at?"

Roi scowled at his accuser. He did not advance from his post under the picture.

"You ain't afraid of a Yankee sneak of a customs man—eh, Dave? You tell him what you have told me," adjured Vetal. "I don't propose to have my girl think I talk to her and make up the lie by myself."

"You have been courting her!" declared Roi sullenly.

"Oh, for two arms just now!" gasped Aldrich.

"If you had four arms," said Roi, swaggering forward a few steps, "I'd still serve notice on you that you can't steal away a girl who has been promised to me for my wife."

"Yes, she has been promised for his wife," screamed Vetal. "She's my girl. She's going to marry him." His anger overmastered his fear of her. He seized the girl, and pulled her across the painted line with him. "You stay on your own side, you Yankee sneak!" The epithet which he had employed so many times served him in lieu of further threats; he kept repeating the words, clinging to the struggling girl.

Aldrich made two steps forward. Prudence was not with him at that moment. Wild desire to protect her, to take her from them took possession of him. He forgot his wound and his weakness. But the smuggler was quick to remind him of something which halted him at the strip of paint.

Roi leaped to the truck, and seized one of the heavy jugs. He shook it above his head.

"There's the line of your country right under your feet. By the gods, you come across here, and try to arrest me on my own side, and I'll brain you." Roi had mistaken the officer's sudden advance.

Those words checked Aldrich more effectually than any other threat could have done. He was reminded that, though he might cross that line to the girl, he might not cross it as an officer in quest of a smuggler.

The border code is not to be broken lightly. The governments of great countries guard the acts of uniformed officers jealously. While he hesitated, men came in through the big door. They were early wayfarers seeking the wares of Beaulieu's Place. They grinned, understanding only one phase of the scene. Vetal and his loaded truck and Smuggler Dave Roi were safe in sanctuary, holding at bay one of the hated customs spies of the border. They were witnesses whom even a crazed lover could not disregard.

Aldrich exchanged a despairing look with the grief-stricken girl, and turned away with a groan.

The full folly of his insane resolution was revealed to him as the mists of passion cleared from his brain. Evangeline Beaulieu was with her father, and what right had Norman Aldrich to interfere between father and daughter?

"That's right, you Yankee sneak, pass on about your business," blustered Roi, brandishing the jug. "You've got your hint to keep out of my business."

Aldrich was at the door. He whirled on his heel.

"I'll have my settlement with you later, Roi," he cried hotly.

"My business is a bad business for you to mix into."

"It's a business where you're too much of a coward to cross the line and attend to it yourself. You hire men to do your dirty work."

Framed in the sunshine at the door he took off his cap. He paid no more heed to the oaths and insults of the smuggler.

"Good morning, Mam'selle Beaulieu," he said, with deep feeling; "I shall never forget your hospitality and your kindness."

Jeering laughter of men followed him when he went out into the morning. But he did not mind. He carried with him the memory of that last look from her eyes.

The sheep were gone. He saw no sign of them to the west along the broad road. He knew the habits of smugglers. He understood that the great flock had been hurried on into the States. The sheep would be divided promptly in pastures here and there, and their identity as smuggled property lost as soon as pasture bars were up behind them and they had mingled with the flocks of the smuggler's agents.

"It was no sort of a game for a lone hand," he muttered, as he plodded down the road, hugging his aching arm to his breast. "I reckon I'd better be getting to a doctor. I'm going to need two good arms right away."

The birds serenaded him, their songs lilting in the forest aisles to right and left; the fresh morning tried to comfort him.

But his teeth were set hard, and his face was grim.

At the turn of the road he paused and looked back. No person was visible outside of Beaulieu's Place. But in the morning silence he heard loud laughter still.

"Oh, my God!" he mourned. "To have to come away and leave her there! And yet——"

He drove his hale arm into the air with a gesture of passionate despair, and hurried on along the Monarda Turnpike.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SPIRIT OF OLD ACADIA.

The new arrivals at Beaulieu's Place considered they had good excuse for hilarity. They had seen a customs deputy routed—maimed and helpless. Empty carts crowded the yard, and the drivers were within, herded around the truck. They boasted of what the wains had borne across the line the night before. The Red Lane—smugglers' nickname for whatever route served for their contraband—had been open for glorious traffic.

Roi boasted loudest of all. He was flushed with liquor and with victory. Three thousand sheep had been run across under the very nose of an officer, he told his listeners. He thrust crumpled money into the hands of Vetal, and insisted on paying the score for all. He told them what his profits were on that night's work, and what his loss would have been had luck gone against him. He bragged of young Condon's prowess, and vaunted his own liberality in paying when a man of his gang could deliver the goods.

But Vetal Beaulieu did not laugh with the rest. He poured liquors, growled curt replies to sallies from his guests, and cast anxious glances at the door through which Evangeline had fled.

His eyes were red, he staggered with weariness, exhausted with spent passion. But there were those there who wanted to spend money, and he poured liquors and stuffed the coins and bills into his deep pockets.

The drivers of the wains went away at last. They climbed to the high seats and cracked their whips, bawling to each other. The broad wheels rumbled on the hard road. One man sang the burden of the old Canadian lilt:

"En roulant ma boule le roulant,
En roulant ma boule.
Derrière chez nous y'a-t-un-e-tang
En roulant ma boule.
Trois beaux canards s'en vont baignant."

Then from all along the line of carts roared the chorus:

"Rouli, roulant, ma boule roulant,
En roulant ma boule roulant,
En roulant ma boule."

Roi sat on one of the hard chairs, his legs astride the back. He listened to the rude song as it died in the distance, and watched Beaulieu rinsing the glasses.

"One of our busy mornings, eh, Vetal?"

The publican tossed his shaggy head with an angry jerk.

"Hardly the sort of a happy home a convent girl would take to?"

Beaulieu shot a blazing glance over his shoulder, and did not reply.

"Evangeline has come spying—probably was put up to it by some Yankee sneak," pursued Roi. "But you can't afford to let a girl run your business for you, Vetal. She's coming to herself, all right. I was glad to see you pull her into line at last. She needed it. It's misery in a house when a woman is boss. You never knew it to be different."

"My wife was not the boss in my house. She did not try to be any boss," cried the father. "And I do not like this new time if it make a girl come home and talk hard to the poor old father who have work so hard for her."

"No sense in any of it," agreed Roi. "And it's too bad to have a girl like that spoiled, Vetal. Now, I'm going to talk straight to you. We struck hands on this match a good many years ago. My father agreed with you about it in the good old Acadian way." His potations had made him garrulous. "I really have never been very keen about your girl, Vetal. I might as well tell it as it is. It was probably all right in old Normandy to pick out a girl for a fellow about the time the two of 'em were born. Usually it doesn't work very well in these days. I've seen Evangeline a few times up at the convent—and honestly a girl doesn't show up very well in those black dresses. I've seen a lot of girls along the border that I've taken to a sight better. But I tell you, Vetal, it's all off with the other girls from now on. I'll cut loose from 'em."

He kicked the chair away from him, and strode about the room.

"I didn't know she was so handsome till I saw her this morning. Vetal, she is a raving beauty," he said thickly. "Those cheeks, those eyes, and her red lips! I never saw a girl with that look in her face. Hell fire has been inside me ever since I saw it. It wasn't for me—that look wasn't. Her eyes were on that fellow she was pawing over."

"Then you better court her yourself," affirmed Vetal sourly. "You say you run here and there with other girls, and don't know how handsome my girl is! And you stand here to-day and have been the coward—and a girl don't like that."

Roi's face was livid with rage and jealousy.

"I was taken by surprise. I was in wrong all through it. I would have done different if I had known. Curse me for a fool, I never saw the real Evangeline Beaulieu till half an hour ago!"

"If you have wake up I'm glad."

"I'm wide awake enough so that no one will ever get that girl away from me. I'll fight the whole border first. You say yourself, Vetal, this is no place for her here in this joint! She has finished at the convent school. You can't send her back to St. Basil. You told me this morning you wanted her to marry me."

"And then you go to work and smuggle sheep under her window, and make it hard for me, who have told her you don't smuggle."

"But I didn't know what kind of a girl was hid behind that curtain. I'll give up smuggling rather than lose a

girl like that. I've got money enough. Here's my talk, Vetal! I want her. I want her now. I'll show 'em something in the way of a handsome wife along this border when I buy new dresses for her. Get the priest to cry the banns."

He beat the flat of his hand excitedly upon Beaulieu's shoulder.

"I'd like to have my girl settled," Vetal owned up. The little spirit he had shown once that morning was gone now. He tugged at his gray hair. He kicked aimlessly at cigar butts on the littered floor. "But she say she don't want to marry you," he burst out.

"A whim, man. She's promised to me. I've got fifty thousand dollars tucked away. I'll talk to her. I know how to talk to a girl. And now is the time to talk." He poured liquor into two glasses. He thrust one glass into Beaulieu's hand. "Here's sealing the old bargain, Vetal. Here's to the handsomest girl on the border, and here's to a wedding."

He was in the mood to hasten matters. He was eager for another sight of her. He went and beat upon the inner door.

"Evangeline," he called. "My little sweetheart Evangeline! Your father wants you. I want you. There are things to talk about. Come out!"

She came, after a time, for he was loud and insistent.

She was garbed in black—the dress of the convent school. The broad, stiff collar, turned low on her shoulders, was not much whiter than her face.

"You should have kept the bright dress on, little sweetheart," said Roi, walking toward her, leering at her in his new passion, his burning eyes caressing her fresh, young contour. "In that bright dress you are the handsomest girl I ever saw."

She avoided him, and went to her father.

"There's no need of being touchy, little one," mumbled Roi, at her heels. Drink made him carelessly bold. "There's an understanding already. We'll soon have a better one. If any one has told you I am bad they have lied. I have been waiting for you. Ever since you were a little girl I have waited for you."

She turned on him, for his breath was fanning her neck. She had that in her eyes and mien which had quelled her father the night before. Those big, unwavering eyes, grave and placid now, calm with the spiritual poise and candor of maidenhood, were not the eyes of the border maids with whom he had fooled and philandered. There was somethting he had not seen in girls' eyes before. He stammered and stepped back.

"Father, I know what you have planned in regard to me with David Roi," she said. "But we shall not be married as you have planned."

"I have promise, my girl!" wailed Beaulieu, fearing her gaze of reproach, and trying supplication.

"But *I* have not promised."

"It was done by the old Acadian custom—by the custom of the Beaulieus when they live in old Normandy," he pleaded. "And the children are expect to help the fathers keep the pledged word."

"But not a word that delivers them into shame and bondage," she declared firmly.

"Do they teach you that at your school, or did you learn it from some Yankee sneak?" blazed Roi, stung by this reference to himself. "You can't fool me! There are plenty of folks along this border who are trying to make good Acadians over into low-lived Yankees."

"I have been taught to obey my father in all good and true things," she said. "In other things my immortal soul shall tell me what is right. Father, I have not promised to marry this man. Do not tell me to marry him, for I want to obey you in what is good and right."

It was utter and settled rebellion, and Beaulieu understood that no appeal could change the determination of that girl who stared at him from her black eyes with such direct gaze that his own eyes fell.

"Let me talk," blurted Roi eagerly.

"I heard you talk outside my window.

I heard you breaking the laws, and glory in doing so."

"Oh, I say, it has always been done on the border. My grandfather, your grandfather, my father, your father, have not been thought any less of because they have shown that they are not afraid of the stingy Yankees."

She stared at him with such cold disdain, such provoking contempt, that he lost control of himself. He remembered the look she had given another in that room a little while before.

He caught her savagely by the hands, and held her. He put his face close to hers.

"Don't you suppose I know? Don't you suppose I know? A nice excuse you are giving me! A girl who has lived all her life on the kind of money that Vetal Beaulieu makes!"

She struggled, but he would not let her go.

Vetal moved as though to assist her.

"I have been ashamed of my father's money since I have found out!" she cried.

Vetal stepped back, his face hardening.

"Tell that to a fool—not to me!" stormed Roi. "It's that Yankee—that's what ails you! You got your eyes on him when he was sneaking and spying around St. Basil. You've been thinking of him while I've been waiting for you—waiting for you—waiting for you to come and keep the promise that our families struck hands on. I've waited like an honest man. I could have had the best between the Temiscouata and the St. Croix. And you're loving some one else. I tell you I can talk to you, even if your father doesn't know how to do it."

He should have taken warning from her face. It was not the face of one who would deign to appeal or deny. She was now another being. She had come from her door pale, grave, wistfully grieving. Now she was suddenly on fire—lithe, tense, cheeks flaming, eyes blazing. She bent and twisted her arms from his rude clutch with a movement so sudden that she freed herself before his fingers could take fresh hold on her. She struck him once across the face with all her strength. She did not retreat. She stood before him so fearlessly furious, so desperate in her rage that he quailed.

The coward in him recognized something that thrust him back. He might have fought mere brute strength; drink had made him dizzy and reckless. But the soul of this slight girl mastered him.

The bold spirit of the Acadian pioneers glowed in her. Even Vetal sullenly admired her fiery courage, though rancor because of her contemptuous obstinacy swelled within his breast, and revealed itself through his mutterings.

There was no misunderstanding the girl's mood at that moment. She proposed to dictate her terms.

"I will never marry this man, father."

"You have make this trouble yourself," insisted Vetal. "If you have act better toward him, he would have take you and love you very much and make the nice home for you."

"Make a home for me because I have no home of my own, you mean! Where is my home, father?"

"This where I live," he said doggedly.

"Have you thought over what I said last night?"

"I sat here all the night, and do not sleep because I think of it—and I tell you what I think," he shouted, pricked by the presence of Roi at this scene of rebellion to authority, stung by thoughts of what the gossip of the border countryside would be if his own daughter were to rule his affairs. "I think I keep on and run my business like I have run it when I have work hard to make it easy for you."

"I'll take not another cent of this sort of money." She flung a gesture which embraced the loaded truck. "I begged of you on my knees last night, father. I tried to talk to you as a loving daughter should talk. I want you to be a good man."

"Meaning that priests and customs hounds are the only decent people in the world, I suppose," sneered Roi. But

she kept her face turned resolutely from the man.

"I will be your obedient and true daughter—I will work, father, so that you and I may eat honest bread. But this home—this cheating of the laws—this business which takes money for poison—I'll not endure. I will not stay here."

"You say, then, like you say last night, that I must break my bottles, throw away my good business, and give my dollars to loafers of priests?"

"I say you must be an honest man."

"You have your chance to marry and have a nice home; you have your chance to be the rich daughter of Vetal Beaulieu. You must take one or the other. I don't let my girl make the fool of me among all the people," he declared.

"No, I have one more chance, father."

He scowled at her.

"I shall go away and earn my own living—and wait until you become what a good Acadian ought to be."

He did not rave at her any more. His passion had exhausted itself. His mood was that of stubborn anger now. That secret fear of her made him reject the idea of holding her against her will.

"I am going away, father."

He tossed his hand at the door. She gazed at him a few moments, but his hard eyes did not soften under their tufted brows. She went away into her room.

"Let her strike out," advised Roi. "She won't get very far or stay very long. And when she has had her lesson she'll come home and be sensible."

Evangeline, in her room, gathered the few belongings she had brought from St. Basil, tied her hat over her dark curls, and came back into the big room, where her father and Roi still waited in surly silence.

"Good-by, father," she said, with dignity. "I shall pray to the good mother for you."

"You have in your pocket, mebbe, some of that black and dirty money I have made here, working hard for you in this room," he suggested. "Perhaps you better not take that away from here. It's the very bad money."

She flushed. In her distress that seemed a cruel and a childish revenge. But the shrewd old Acadian had a reason outside of the desire to humiliate her. It had suddenly occurred to him that a penniless girl would not be ablo to go far in the world. The suggestion of Roi was bearing fruit. After her lesson she would be an Acadian daughter, meek and obedient.

She produced a few coins from a purse, and, turning modestly from the men, drew a tiny chamois bag from its hiding place in her breast.

"It's what I have saved from my allowance," she explained, her voice steady. "I changed the money into gold pieces, and saved them." She laid them and the silver coins in his outstretched hands.

"It's the wicked money—I suppose your fine, high friends tell you about the wicked money of your poor old father," he sneered.

"I want to remember that I said goodby to you in sorrow, not anger," she replied. "It is right I should not carry away your money if I am going in disobedience, as you think."

She went out of the big door, and walked away down the Monarda road, and did not turn her head to look back at Beaulieu's Place.

"Give a filly her head if you want to know where her hankerings will take her," said Roi, coming back from the door. He watched the girl out of sight. "She has headed straight into Yankeeland." His face worked with his jealous passion. "I'm not so sure that we ought to let her go, Vetal."

"It's not much of a wife she make for you the way she feel now—not much of a daughter she make for me," returned the stubborn master of Beaulieu's Place. "If the woman stand and rule, then the man must lie and roll. That has for long time been the wise say in Acadia. She will come back pretty soon—mebbe this night she will come back, for she's only a girl." Thus out of his ignorance of woman's deep nature did he fatuously comfort his misgivings. "You might go along far behind and watch her," he suggested to Roi.

"I'm taking no chances across that line just yet a while—not even to follow Evangeline Beaulieu," snapped the smuggler promptly. "When the boys drift back this way tell 'em to meet me over east—I'll feel safer with ten miles between me and the boundary."

He hurried out, mounted his horse, and clattered away.

"If my girl would only think so good of him as he think of himself," said Vetal Beaulieu aloud, listening to the flying hoofs, "it would make a fine marriage. But she don't pat his face like she think much good of Dave Roi."

It was very still. The sun was hot and high. Sleepy drone of insects had replaced the songs of the birds. The stupor of somnolence descended on Vetal.

He stretched himself across his broad door in the sunshine, and snored, his head on his breast. He did not want to lose a customer. He knew that no one could enter without waking him.

Faring along the Monarda turnpike, now in the flare of the high sun, now treading the checkerings of shade and light under the wayside trees, trudged the Evangeline of a newer Acadia, self-expatriated.

Vetal Beaulieu would not have slept as soundly if he had understood women better—and the resoluteness of one woman in particular.

CHAPTER V.

DOWN THE WORLD WITH BILLEDEAU.

Anaxagoras Billedeau came fiddling through the drowsy noon.

His pudgy little horse slouched along sleepily. The dished wheels of the dusty buckboard wabbled and revolved at about the rate of speed observed by the second hand of a respectable clock.

Anaxagoras Billedeau sat on the buckboard's seat, his short legs crossed, his body doubled forward—and he was fiddling industriously.

The reins were loose on the dashboard. The horse plodded with wagging ears, needing no driver. It was the fond belief of old "Rosum-the-bow"—such was Billedeau's nickname along the border—that his horse so loved the fiddle's strains that the music made roads smooth and hills easy.

So now, when the sun beat upon the white clay stretches, Anaxagoras fiddled for the wagging ears of the patient beast—the shaggy little horse who drew this fiddling rover up and down the broad valley of the St. John.

No one along the border thereabouts but that knew Billedeau! He was very much of a public character in the Acadian country—the wandering minstrel of the plain folks of the sloping valley fields and the hedging forest's clearings.

There is a song of many stanzas extant along the border, and it celebrates the fame of Fiddler Billedeau. The first verse goes:

If you've been on Madawaska, I guess perhaps you know
Old Rosum-the-bow—that's Billedeau.
He's a short, fat, wide man—'way out—so!
Oh, yes, that's him—that's Billedeau.
He fiddles for his living, and he plays so very nice,
He plays so long's you like him for a very little price—
For a supper and a bottle of that white morson
He plays for kitchen dances on the North St. John.
Ho, hi, ho!
Rosum on the bow,
We like a lot of music, oh, M'ser Billedeau!
Ho, hi, ho!
Caper heel and toe—
You shall fiddle for my wedding, good M'ser Billedeau!

This was the Anaxagoras Billedeau who came fiddling through the drowsy noon. His eyes were closed and haste mattered not to him. For, wherever there was a roof on the border, he knew that shelter waited for him—shelter, food, and a bed, and baiting for his little horse.

The horse stopped, and Billedeau did not open his eyes. There was no hurry.

But the horse had seen a girl, who rose from beneath a roadside tree, and came so close to the side of the highway that even a sleepy horse could understand that she had business to transact with the fiddler. So the horse halted. And when the girl spoke Anaxagoras opened his eyes.

He did not know the girl. But as one who had viewed all the border beauties over the bridge of his fiddle for many a year, and therefore possessed judgment in the matter of charms, he realized in his heart that this girl was entitled to reign queen over the fairest of the others.

Her dress was black, her hair was dark, and between glowed a face whose eyes were anxiously, eagerly alight, whose lips were red and parted appealingly, whose eyes were twin prayers to which a saint would incline.

"*Bo' jour,* mam'selle," cried Anaxagoras, dragging off his rusty hat.

She answered him in the patois of the border—the archaic dialect of old Normandy; its forms of speech have persisted from the times of the forefathers, even as the strains of Jersey cows and Norman horses have persisted in Acadia.

"I am Evangeline Beaulieu, M'ser Billedeau. I have seen you in the north country at St. Basil."

"Ah, I am the very well-known man, mam'selle." He patted his fiddle, and tucked it under the buckboard's seat. "Those who have the jolly feet remember me. You have danced, eh, when my fiddle played the good plon-plon?"

"I have not danced, m'ser, for I have been in the convent school ever since I was a very little girl."

"Then the young men have been very sad all these years," he declared, with a flourish of old-time gallantry. "You are a Beaulieu, eh? A Beaulieu of Ste. Agathe? A Beaulieu of the Coté Portage, or——"

"I am Vetal Beaulieu's girl," she confessed bravely, though her lips quivered. "Vetal Beaulieu, of the border store."

He opened round eyes. He clucked softly. He jerked his head with sideways gesture.

"You are the girl of Vetal of the Monarda pike?"

"Yes, M'ser Billedeau. I must tell you a sorrowful truth, for I have a great favor to ask of you. I am going away from home. I am going to earn my own living. I could not stay with my father. There has been sad trouble between us."

He looked into her brimming eyes, and then turned away to stare over the tops of the distant trees which hedged Monarda Clearing.

"I came home last night. I did not know before. We do not hear of many things at the convent school. I thought my father was in honest trade. I cannot stay there."

"But it is a very bad idea for the young girl to leave her father—to go off here and there, where she don't know!" He wrinkled his brow, and surveyed her with compassion. "Ah, it is not a good home for a young girl in Monarda Clearing. That is right. But it may not be a good place for a young girl if she goes away to some other home. I am an old man, mam'selle. I have been about much. I have seen. I know."

"I cannot go back there. I have been taught to know what are the wicked ways, m'ser. All my life I have been taught. All the truth is deep in here!" She patted her breast with trembling hand. "My father should have understood that when a girl has been brought up in the good way she will hate wickedness. He will not change from his wicked ways."

"They have taught you the sober minuet, and now he expects you to come and dance the lively jig all at once," remarked the old Canadian fiddler sagely. "You have been made the very good girl—he made you that by sending you to the convent school. Ah, no! He cannot expect that you will stay in that home if he does not make it better. He has some other home, then?" he asked shrewdly.

"He says that I must marry the man to whom he has promised me—a man whom I saw breaking the laws this morning!" The flush deepened in her cheeks. The indignation of outraged modesty flamed in her eyes. "That man held me and threatened me, and breathed his liquor fumes in my face, and insulted me, and my father did not protect me. So I will not go back to that house!"

"Perhaps I know that bad man?" he suggested, with rising inflection.

"David Roi, who smuggles!" she said.

He darted at her such a sudden, strange look that she started back. His eyes narrowed. He opened his mouth to speak, and then snapped his jaws together. She waited, curiosity sparkling in her eyes. But Anaxagoras Billedeau, after once again threatening with open mouth to speak, decided to hold his peace.

"What do they teach young girls at the convent school of St. Basil?" he asked, changing the subject so suddenly that the girl blinked at him in bewilderment.

"All the things a girl ought to know, m'ser."

"I think that is not so," he cried. "No, it is not so! For if a girl has a husband promised to her, and she has not found out that he——"

He checked himself again.

"I will listen and be thankful for what you tell me," she entreated.

"We'll go on to that business you spoke to me about—that favor," he said. "That will be my own business."

"Where are you going, M'ser Billedeau?"

"Ah, here and there, where they may want the fiddle to play." He had recovered his smile and his gallantry. "It makes no difference to my old horse and me, so long as we do not hurry. For a door is always open, whether it's there or here."

She came close to the dusty wheel, nerving herself to make her appeal.

"I do not know any one. I have no money. I shall have to tell you that part first, m'ser. I gave my little stock of money back to my father. I want to go north, to the big school in Père Leclair's parish—to the Yankee school. Do you know it? It is the new school, and I have been told they need teachers there—teachers who can speak the Acadian tongue."

"I have heard about that new school. It is said that the Yankees have built it there so that all the boys and girls of the border may be trained to be Star-spangled Yankees." He grinned shrewdly at her.

"I want to go there, m'ser. Can you take me there? I will pay you out of my first earnings. I will pay well—all you may tell me to pay—for I know no one else to ask for such a great favor."

"It is many miles, mam'selle. My little horse is old. He cannot travel very fast—and here and there I must stop to fiddle—for they will not let me pass."

"I will not be impatient—I will not trouble you. I do not know how to get there unless I may go with you."

He fingered his nose, pondering.

"Yes, it is a crooked way by the stage coaches," he admitted; "a long journey, and a stop here and there for the night. I think it would be bad for a young girl who did not know. And I have no money to lend you for that journey, mam'selle. I do not need money for myself where all the folks of the countryside are so generous and kind to me. They take me in, and they are very glad to see Anaxagoras Billedeau and his fiddle," he said, boasting as a child would boast.

"I fear I have asked for too great a favor," she faltered. "They would not be pleased to see me coming, for I have no money for my food and shelter. I will not urge you further."

She turned away, but he stopped her with a cry.

"It is not that—it is not as you think, mam'selle. I have talked too much. It is my fault—I gossip and I talk. Oh, they will be glad to see you come with me—the poor people will be glad to see you come. For the poor people are not like the rich people. The doors are open, and they do not make excuses. So *I* have been wrong in making excuses to you." He climbed down from his buckboard's seat. He stood before her, old hat in his hand.

"I forgot politeness in making my excuses, mam'selle. I have talked too much about my poor wagon, my slow horse, and the long road to the north. I think I must have talked that way be-

cause you deserve the very grand chariot of a queen."

He bowed and, though her face was suffused with blushes, she understood the old-fashioned Acadian stock too well to take umbrage at this extravagant compliment.

"To you I offer it all—and to you I offer the hospitality of the homes of my friends—for they would be very angry with me if I did not speak now in their names to a girl who needs the handclasp and the kind words. You shall have those words from my friends—the poor people—as we travel on. I will take you to the big school. I shall thank you for your company on the way. Your hand, mam'selle!"

She extended her trembling little hand, and he helped her to the seat of the buckboard.

"If we go slow you will be patient, eh?" he asked, smiling at her.

She answered him incoherently, for tears were streaming down her cheeks, and she was sobbing.

"We shall not worry any more," he said soothingly. "If we go slow we shall not worry. No harm will come to us, for all the poor folks are friends of Anaxagoras Billedeau, and you shall find that they will be friends to you. And we shall come safely to the big school at last."

After a time her tears ceased—they had been tears of gratitude—tears of relief rather than of sorrow. She listened gratefully to the old man's chattering.

Their way took them through a forest, where cool vistas of beech and maple stretched away to right and left, and where white birches lurked in the green coverts like snowy-garbed dryads peeping timidly.

Farther on, at a wayside spring, he stopped, and lifted up to her a draft of sweet water in a bark cup, and when he shared his food with her from his little, round, wooden bucket she ate with the appetite of youth. There was chicken laid between thick slices of cool, moist bread—breast of chicken as white as the bread. There were nut cakes, there were crinkled cookies with caraway seed sprinkled among flakes of sugar on their tops.

"Ah, I have the good friends here and there who pack my little bucket when I ride away in the morning," he said. "It is good to live in the world with many friends. Perhaps I do very little to earn the good things they give me, but they are poor folks, and they have not many things to be gay about—and the music makes them gay. So I play plenty of music for them—night or day."

"To make folks happy—to make folks forget their troubles, that is worth while, and you deserve the good things they give you," she said. She was thinking bitterly of the traffic of Beaulieu's Place.

"Many think no good at all of a man unless he does something to make much money, mam'selle."

"I know a man who boasts about how much money he has, but it is money that would burn the hands of an honest man." She was thinking then of David Roi.

"Ah, so I go on through the good country, from St. Croix to the north, and I hope I do right if I keep the poor people happy," he told her. "Maybe old Billedeau is needed for something."

He leaned back and sang, beating time with his palm upon his dusty knee:

"Quand on est si bien ensemble,
Bon soir, mes amis, bonsoir.
Devrait on jamais se laisser,
Bon soir, mes amis, bonsoir,
Bon—soir!"

The old horse plodded with swaying head and flapping ears. Through checkerings and patches of light—under the shade of the big trees—they went on. They seemed to have the woods to themselves that afternoon. Their progress was slow, but mile after mile was notched off behind them by the windings of the road.

The girl, looking behind now and then, felt comforted by the trees; they seemed to march into the way by which the wagon had come—closing ranks after her like sentinels who guarded her flight. It was not leaving home—Beaulieu's Place had never been her home.

Every now and then she felt the yearning of a girl who was homeless, and she was frightened. But Vetal Beaulieu, in all the years of her girlhood, had left her in the hands of others —and love for a parent does not wax and grow great without association and affection on which to feed. When she thought of Vetal Beaulieu's traffic, and his determination to persist in it, when she remembered the insolence of Dave Roi and his leering love-making, the tears left her eyes, and she turned her face to the front. And when she gazed that way, though she strove with maidenly modesty to put it from her thoughts, she saw the face of the young officer to whom her hands had ministered that morning.

So fared Evangeline Beaulieu, homeless and penniless, into the north country, her squire an old fiddler as homeless as she—but a smile lighted his face; he lilted gay songs, and the cheer of his companionship soothed her fears.

They jogged out of the forest at last. There were fields, and a few little houses were dotted along the road.

Children came running to meet them when they were near the first house. They leaped and shouted, did these couriers, pointing behind them toward their elders, who stood waiting in the road.

"Come to our house, M'ser Billedeau!" screamed the children. They cried their fathers' names. They came crowding around the slow-moving buckboard. "It is to our house you must come with your fiddle. Père, mère—they say so."

"Ah, the good friends," said the old man, smiling on his wistful charge at his side. "You see, mam'selle, I have told you the truth about my good friends."

Men who were garbed in fuzzy gray, women whose black eyes beamed greeting, met them at the roadside.

The old fiddler pulled his horse to a halt, and stood up and shouted his salutations:

"We shall divide! You, Felix Bourdoin, you shall have my old horse for your barn. I will stay with the good Cotés. For there is the fine floor for the dance."

He came down from the buckboard.

"But there," he said, indicating the blushing girl, "is the guest who will make the house bright wherever she may go."

Half a dozen gayly shouted invitations. Grizzled farmers smiled on her, and took off their hats. Youths grinned shyly at her. Girls came pressing forward.

"She shall go with Elisiane Beaupré," announced Billedeau, and they accepted his dictum with good humor. Their smiles showed that they enjoyed his jovial tyranny. "You shall take her home, Elisiane. She is Evangeline Beaulieu, who is going for to be a teacher in the big school in the north—and she travels with Anaxagoras Billedeau, for he can show her, along the way, so many fine scholars who will follow her to that good school."

It was introduction—explanation—all in one. It was tactful—it was comprehensive. They took her to themselves. A pretty girl slid her arm about Evangeline's waist, and drew her away. There were no questions—no suspicious oglings.

"You shall all come with gay ribbons to the dance to-night," the old fiddler called after them. "I shall make the grand music."

There were many children in the Beaupré family. The little cottage was full of laughter. They crowded about the table when the supper was set forth. But though the laughter was loud and the jests frequent, the lonely girl received the constant courtesy due to the honored guest. The buoyancy of the Acadian nature was in her soul. She revived as a flower revives when kissed by the sun and bathed with dew; the jollity was the sunshine, the simple-hearted hospitality the dew.

The trammels of a convent school did not brood over that board. The woes that beset her could not live in that atmosphere. Sometimes the tears were very close to the smiling eyes—for this was a real home, and she, poor waif, had none then.

In the dusk she went gayly with them to the Coté house. Billedeau, tuning his old fiddle, smiled at her. She tried to tell the youth, who came to her bashfully when the fiddler nudged him, that she could not dance.

"Ho, every girl can dance," shouted Billedeau. "Every girl can dance when my fiddle sings to 'em. You are the honored guest of the Beaupré Clearing to-night. You shall lead the march with that fine boy—and then you shall learn the figures of the dances, because all the hands will be out to help you."

And all the hands *were* out!

When the round, June moon rose redly over the spruces in the east, and flushed the clearing with ruddy hues, they all left the Coté kitchen and danced on the greensward before the open door.

The old man played, his wrinkled face pressed close to his fiddle, smiling, crying his jokes to them as they danced —singing now and then.

The pallet in the Beaupré attic, where the children slept, was narrow, and the niche behind the curtain was small. But the stars of the wide heavens twinkled serenely in Evangeline's eyes before she closed them, and her soul drank in that serenity, and she slept—and in her dreams she danced with one who was tall and bronzed and tender and loving —and who bent his crisp curls to her dark hair, and whispered something which made her blush there in the night, where only the round moon could see.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ANCIENT PROBLEM OF THE CROWDED LAND.

The rising sun quivered hotly behind its gridiron of trees, and the day promised warm.

The little horse was put early to the buckboard, so that they who were journeying to the north might make the best of their way in the cool of the morning.

The good folks waved their farewells behind—the children ran beside the buckboard as far as the turn of the road.

"Good-by, M'ser Billedeau! Come to make us gay again!" was the cry which followed the old fiddler and his passenger until they were deep in the forest.

It was cool there. The beeches shook drops of dew upon those who passed beneath. The fresh fragrance of the morning woods came to their nostrils—moist waftings from clumps of witch hobble where the damp soil was odorous, balmy whiffs from fresh verdure, aromatic savors from lowly patches of pennyroyal where cobwebs spread their dew-spangled fabrics—fairy handkerchiefs dropped in revels overnight.

That was Billedeau's suggestion—that last.

"Those little folks—those merry elves —they forget when the fairy fiddles play—they dance very wild, and they have lost their lace *mouchoirs.*"

Evangeline smiled at the conceit.

It seemed a long way behind her—that desolate yesterday.

The woods, the fields, the companionship of poor people of simple faith and kindly joys comforted her more surely, more sweetly than words of sympathy.

Nature, on her screen of wood and sky, slipped pictures in such deft and quick succession that there was no time for mournful introspection. A deer was silhouetted on a distant slope, rabbits cocked inquiring ears, and peered through tangle of brakes. Birds caroled in the mad joy of June.

When at last they came out of the forest into the fields again, she looked up at the snow-puffs of clouds in the lazy sky, and inhaled the scents of ripening strawberries in the wayside grasses.

One more turn of the road, and Evangeline gasped when the scene opened. They had come upon the mighty valley of the St. John. They were on the hills. Far below them the azure river mocked the sky. The little waves twinkled where the breeze brushed whorls upon the water. A bateau crept along the farther bank, its oars flashing with silvery light. Cows strolled on pasture swards, sheep trickled in Indian file among the rocks. Sounds of farm and field rose to their ears—restful sounds

made faint by distance. The girl forgot the dusty buckboard, the hard seat, the dished wheels rattling against the hillside rocks and ledges. It seemed to her that she was floating over this panorama on a magic carpet.

"I have thought sometimes, mam'selle," said the old man, speaking softly in the mellow Acadian patois, "that I would like to go, after death, and fiddle merry music for the fairy dances. But when I see the valley of the good St. John I think I would like another work for all the days of eternity."

He swept his hand with a broad gesture. The imagination of his race lighted his face.

"I would like to have God give me the new mind, and put me among the artist angels, who keep so very busy and happy, copying out new plans for the other worlds the good God is building."

Her heart swelled. This imagery was fantastic, but she understood him. This wrinkled and rusty old man had the soul of a poet, but his poor gifts gave him only one avenue of expression—his fiddle.

"A wise man has written—and I have read it—that the soul is made up by good wishes—that good wishes make the soul what it will be—what it will accomplish in paradise," she told him. "You are a good man, M'ser Billedeau. I have heard of you many times. And perhaps to good men comes that which they wish for when they wish very much. The wish may be whispered to you as a hint that it will come to you."

The road led them down the hill by winding ways, until they were close upon the water by the river bank. There were houses in plenty now. They were set closely along the main road which followed the river. All were little houses. Rarely was there seen one which boasted of a brick chimney. Sheet-iron funnels served. Most of the houses were unpainted, were weather-stained. About all of them many children played.

The children cried shrill greetings. Women flourished salutes from doorways, smiling.

"We hope you have the time to come and stay with us pretty soon, M'ser Billedeau!" was a frequent hail.

It was plain from their eagerness that only the presence of his passenger prevented them from being more insistent then and there.

"They are the poor people—they have many mouths to feed," confided the fiddler. "But they are the very jolly people, for they work hard, and they save, and so they have the good things to eat, and a ribbon or two for the feast days and the Sundays—a tithe for the priest and a spare crust for the fiddler when he comes."

He pointed to the windows of the little houses, where a bit of lace in the fore rooms fluttered at the pane—pathetic hint of housewifely longing for grace and beauty.

"Ah, that is what I would do if I had the much money as some men have it," said Billedeau. "I would bring each mother new curtains for the front windows—I would bring each little girl a new ribbon for her hair. Phut! There are so many folks with money who think the poor people need only corn meal and pork."

Now the highway skirted the river closely. Sometimes the road dipped so that the splash of the twinkling waves was very near; then the way mounted to the hillside.

The hills on either side were high and domed. The slopes were set thickly with fences. The farms were hardly more than narrow lanes. These strips ran back a mile—two miles—to the fringe of woods on the polls of the hills.

At the foot of each narrow wedge of a farm, on the highway, was the little cottage of the owner.

"Once they were the big farms—the broad farms," explained Anaxagoras. "They were the big farms when our grandfathers came up here from Grand Pré, mam'selle. There was plenty of room up here for the poor refugees. But in these days—you see!" he said sadly. "And yet, who can blame them because they want to stay—the simple folks who love this valley of the great St. John?"

The thrill of the beauty of it was in her soul, and the pathetic story those narrow farms told of attachment to the soil touched her deeply, because she understood so well.

"Perhaps they have not told you at the convent—but our Acadian folks are not like the other French people in Canada, mam'selle. They do not want to run away from their homes to the big cities to stifle themselves in the mills, where the cotton dust flies instead of the thistledown, and the sky is only an iron roof. Our Acadian children want to stay on the good St. John, where their fathers and their mothers live so happy. Look at the sky—the river—and you will understand! So, when the boys grow up and marry, then the good father takes a slice off his farm—and the slice must be made long, so that the boy may have his little house on the long pike—the slice must be made narrow, for there are other boys to grow up—there are girls to marry and bring their husbands to the home where their old folks live. Ah, the Acadians get no joy out of life when they are taken away to the big city—when they cannot live on the St. John, where their fathers and mothers have been so happy all the years. But, mam'selle, the farms of the old *habitants* have all been sliced up. You may see for yourself when you look up at the hills. I do not know what must become of the little children who are playing here to-day—who will grow up and want to live here and make good citizens."

She pointed far ahead into the hazy, blue distance, where dark forest growth notched the horizon line—where the hills were thatched with woods unbroken.

"They must buy new land and cut down the trees, and make farms, as the fathers did so many years ago," she said, out of her innocence.

He shook his head sorrowfully, his elbows on his knees.

"It should be so, mam'selle. For they are good people, and they work hard, and they make honest folks for a country to have. But I am very sad. I have watched this thing grow bad through all the years. There are some Yankees who are good. They want the Acadians to live on this border, and make the border seem good to those who look across from the Province. But there are other Yankees who are not good. They think of the money first. They do not care if the Acadians go away from the border. They have bought up the lands where the big trees are. They will not sell. I know many good Acadians who go to them with money—plenty of money in their hands, and try to buy the lands for the sons or the daughters. But no—they will not sell. They say: 'Boh! We do not want Canucks near our timberlands, chopping down trees, setting fires. There is much money in our trees. We want the money. We do not care about the farmer. Go away to some other place!'"

"And so they must go?" asked the girl wistfully.

"Ah, they do not go away—many of them do not go away!" cried the old man. "And I am afraid—I am afraid! I see some very bad things for this border! I see hatred, and I see men fighting, and I'm afraid that there will be bitter killing and great sorrow."

She stared at him with frightened eyes.

"Perhaps I should not say such things to you, mam'selle. But you tell me you hope to teach in the big Yankee school, eh? Then perhaps you will remember some things I tell you, and you can tell them to others who will be willing to help the poor Acadians. There are Yankees who are good. Perhaps they will help if you talk to them."

She looked up at the peaceful hills swelling against the sky—at the patient men who were bowed over their tasks in the sloping fields—at the trailing flocks and the grazing herds.

"I do not understand," she gasped.

"They do not understand—the others do not understand—they who see only the outside of things," he declared, with much bitterness. "The stingy—the money-loving Yankees who have bought all the woods do not understand—and they do not want to understand. They sneer at the 'Canucks,' so they call them.

They do not understand what love of home and the river and the soil is—what home means to these poor people who have so little. 'Go away,' they say to the poor people who have worked so hard and have saved the little money, and beg to buy the land. 'Go away. We can make more money from the trees. We do not want you for citizens. Leave your wife and your children, and come to work in our woods if you like—but we don't care about homes and farms.'

"But, ah, mam'selle," he cried, with passion, "those poor Acadian peasant people remember when their fathers came up this river, struggling with their rafts, fighting their way past the falls and over the shallows—for to make their home. And they were here before those Yankees ever heard of this valley. The farmers say that they have the right to own land now on which to set their feet and build their little homes. They say the Yankees shall not tell them to go away, after their fathers have discovered this for the homes of Acadians. They ask to be allowed to buy—and when the Yankees say 'No'—then, mam'selle, I am afraid! For the Acadians are taking—here and there they are taking. And they say: 'Our money is ready. We will give our money. We will not give up our homes.'"

She was silent. The landscape had lost its brightness suddenly, she felt.

"This is not the fine talk for a young girl to listen to," said Billedeau, breaking the silence. "I had forgot myself, mam'selle. I always forget myself when I talk about the sad thing that has come up along the border. I'll talk no more. You know now how bad it is. Perhaps you can talk some time to some one wise and strong among the Yankees. For it is very bad. Our poor people are settled on fifty thousand acres of land where they have no title that the law makes good. Some have been put off. Others have been threatened. I have heard rumors. It is said that the Yankees who own—or who have bought titles from those who say they do own—are angry now, and will come to take what they say is theirs. But on some lands Acadians have lived for many years. I do not know how it will all fall out, mam'selle, but I am frightened by my thoughts. The Yankees are stern and greedy—but the Acadians are dangerous when they are stirred, mam'selle. You and I can realize it better than the Yankees. I feel the old blood stirring me once in a while, and I am reminded that the patient folks have hot fires that they must keep smothered."

Only once in her placid life till then had unbridled passion overmastered Evangeline. She had not fathomed the depths of her Acadian temperament until her soul had rebelled at the insults of David Roi.

"I understand, M'ser Billedeau," she said quietly—but she remembered the fury which Roi had evoked—and she was frightened by that memory.

They rode along, busy with their own thoughts for a long time.

It is a well-worn saying in New Acadia that tongues distance the telegraph.

Start a bit of news at St. Francis on the north, and it is south at the Mellicite Portage as though it were really the winged word.

Therefore, the information that Fiddler Billedeau was on the St. John Highway distanced the fiddler in his slow progress.

A man who came galloping bareback on a fuzzy horse, emerged from a branch road, and stopped Billedeau with joyous shouts.

"St. Xavier has sent you to us, good Fiddler Billedeau! To-night the son of Supple Jack Hebert is to marry the pretty Joe Rancourt girl. We have tried to get word to you. But we have not been worried—we knew that the good saint would send you, because Marie Rancourt, she have pray very hard. So come along behind me to the Bois-De-Rancourt Clearing."

He whirled his horse, flourishing his hand delightedly. There was no doubt in the mien of that messenger. It was understanding, complete; the word to Billedeau—that was all!

The old man turned hesitating gaze on the girl at his side before he lifted the reins.

"It is not midday, mam'selle, and we have come slow—and the big school is far ahead. They take much for granted on the border, when it is a word to the old fiddler."

"You warned me we should come slowly," she said, with a smile. "And it would make me very sad to think of the wedding without the music."

"Ah, you make the fine companion for the fiddler who plays for the poor people. I shall tell them what you said—and you shall see!"

He turned his old horse into the side road, which wound sinuously up the hillside, away from the river. When they topped the slope they were again in the forest. The man on horseback summoned them on excitedly with tossing hand. He was bringing the crowning joy of the wedding. He was eager to show his prize, to receive plaudits from a chattering throng, and drink his portion of the white rum.

It was a crooked way and a rough road, but Evangeline rode joyously. The spirit of youth was in her, and she had already sipped of the simple cup which exhilarated that Acadian countryside. She fared on to the Rancourt wedding with thirst for more of the gayety of the poor people.

If Vetal Beaulieu could have seen that look on his daughter's face at that moment he would have been less remorseful for his stubborn anger when he turned her forth into the world alone.

Vetal Beaulieu came near to beholding that look. For he passed the mouth of that side road only a little while after Evangeline had gone over the brow of the hill into the forest. He was alone. He was clattering along in a buckboard, his elbows akimbo, his lips pursed with clucks to his horse. He did not look to right or left. He had been told on the St. John road that Fiddler Billedeau was far ahead, and that with him in his buckboard was a pretty girl; with that clew Vetal was pursuing. Shame and his haste prevented him from asking more questions as he passed along the road to the north.

Otherwise, he would have surely learned that there was to be a wedding that night in the Rancourt Clearing, and he would have been saved a long chase past that side road which led over the brow of the hill. For, where a wedding was, he would have understood that there would Anaxagoras Billedeau be also!

Past the narrow farms and the little houses, on toward the north country, hurried Vetal.

He had shuttered the windows and barred the big door of Beaulieu's Place when remorse and sudden panic of fear for his daughter had sent him forth on his quest. But now that his chase was taking him far afield, when turn after turn of the road failed to disclose the fugitive, his covetous thoughts ran backward though his eyes peered ahead. He knew that many fists had beaten upon the door that day—that much money had gone on in pockets of disappointed wayfarers. He remembered that he had turned away customers when he had stormed and wept all the long night. In all the many years, Beaulieu's Place had never turned away customers till then.

"It shall be how I say after this," he muttered irefully. "She shall come home, and be Beaulieu's girl. I will take her home. She shall not shame me by running about this border. I shall beat the ears of Fiddler Billedeau, and take her home, and she shall marry Dave Roi."

He wondered why he had allowed himself to be dominated by her even for a little while. In his wrath he planned retaliation. There were ways of breaking a woman's spirit—it had been done before by Acadian fathers.

The houses thinned out. The forest was ahead. Vetal's horse slowed his gait to a walk. The afternoon was wearing on, and the publican squinted doubtfully at the big trees.

He had passed his days at the loaded truck, selling drams and bottles; he did not know the country of the border. The long road led to the north—he had followed it. But those woods might infold him when night fell!

"Ba gar!" snarled Vetal. "That fiddler must have wheels on that old horse,

and push him along very fast with saplings for reins!"

He was cheered by the sudden appearance of a horseman. Here was one who could give him information. The man came cantering from the forest. But when Vetal noted the cap of a Yankee customs officer his face fell. And when the man was close up, and Vetal saw a bandaged arm, and recognized the officer as Norman Aldrich, his face became a study as a mask for emotions.

The young officer hurried past with loose rein, flinging only a glance at Vetal, who bent his head, and did not look up. That attitude was suspicious in a land where it is the custom to raise the hat to all strangers who may pass. Aldrich checked his horse, and looked back. Vetal, in desperate need of information, had stopped, and was just nerving himself to ask questions.

The two looked at each other, and it was plain that both lacked words to fit the case.

Vetal noted one fact which interested him. Aldrich carried a rifle—an unusual weapon for a customs officer on the border.

"Well, you seem to have something on your mind," said Aldrich, first to recover himself. "Is there anything I can do for you, sir?"

The officer's tone hinted very plainly that Vetal Beaulieu did not occupy a very exalted position in his regard.

"You might let me know," said Vetal, stung by this frank contempt, "how you and some other folks I can tell you about get so far in one day or two day. I would like to get there, too."

"I don't understand," returned Aldrich stiffly. "When a man has a bad wound he naturally gets where he can have it cared for. I don't lose any time in getting back to where I have business."

Beaulieu's eyes fell under the indignant stare.

"While you have fly about so fast have you seen my girl, Evangeline?" he asked. If he had calculated on immediately shifting the talk from a topic he feared he had succeeded admirably.

"Has she gone away from home?" Aldrich gasped.

Vetal shrewdly decided that this astonishment was real.

"Then you don't meet her with Fiddler Billedeau on this road, eh?" he pointed his whip at the woods.

"I have not seen her. Why should she be with Billedeau?" He slapped his horse, and hastened to the side of the buckboard. He leaned over the father, who blinked up at him, alarmed by this sudden fire of eagerness. "Are you searching for her on this road? Hurry up! Why do you think she is with Fiddler Billedeau?"

All of Beaulieu's suspicions were aroused—it was plain to him that Roi's hint had foundation. His sullen grudge was stirred to the depths.

"Has she gone away from your place? Is she with Billedeau? Why is she with the fiddler?" demanded Aldrich excitedly.

"I think perhaps she go to pick up the pennies the folks throw to him when he fiddles," growled Vetal. He jerked the reins, and started his horse. He kept on toward the forest, too angry to care which way he traveled. He cursed, beating his horse along. He growled his convictions aloud. Roi was right—there was something between his girl and this hated Yankee. Here, then, was where she had got her foolish notions about what had always been done by shrewd folks on the border—what always would be done! And if she could not have her own way about the business of her poor old father and the man who wanted to marry her and give her all the good things—then she would run away and hunt up the Yankees? Well, he would see about that thing! He lashed the horse on. When he got his hands on her he would show the gossips that he was boss in his own house, and that his girl could not disgrace him by running around the countryside with fiddlers and customs sneaks.

Aldrich stared after Vetal until the buckboard had rattled out of sight among the trees.

He had ridden long miles from the north down the river road that day.

There was no Fiddler Billedeau in that direction. He was sure of it.

South? He was hastening south. He had swung to his saddle from the surgeon's door, though the man of needles and gauzes had warned him impatiently. He had ridden with an arm that throbbed and a head that ached, and every now and then dizziness filmed his eyes. But the Monarda turnpike summoned him south. There was business there in his line, he told himself. His rifle nudged his ribs as he cantered. They needed a lesson on the Monarda turnpike! It should be given promptly, or half the effect of it would be lost.

He rode on after Vetal had disappeared.

However, when the officer came to the first of the narrow farms he began to make inquiries regarding Fiddler Billedeau.

Aldrich was a young man who was fairly candid with himself—a trait which is rarer than one might suppose. He owned up to his own soul that, when he had decided that duty called him south, the picture of a girl was before him—a girl whose cheeks were on fire, whose eyes prayed to him—a girl who had been dragged by her father across a painted line which marked the bounds of Aldrich's duty as an officer, but across which his love had rushed while his feet retreated.

So he rode slowly when he came to the little houses; half-shamefacedly he asked for information about a fiddler—and information merely dribbled—for the folks of the border do not talk freely about friends when the questioner is a man who wears the badged cap of the United States customs service.

But after a long time Aldrich happened to find out that a wedding party was on in the Rancourt Clearing.

A customs officer must be able to put two and two together in his business.

TO BE CONTINUED IN NEXT ISSUE, OUT JUNE 7TH.

THE STATESMAN AND THE WISE REPORTER

CHARLES NAGEL, secretary of commerce and labor, has under his department the revenue-cutter service and the lighthouse boats, which make up a tremendous fleet. The last time the president reviewed the United States navy, in New York Harbor, Mr. Nagel was on one of the boats as a sight-seer. Tall and silent, he had been watching the naval fighters without making any comment. Finally he was approached by a New York newspaper reporter, who was clad in the latest fashions and a consciousness of great wisdom.

"That's a pretty big fleet, don't you think?" the news gatherer asked of the tall man, and pointed to the two hundred ships which were under inspection.

"Oh, I don't know," replied Nagel. "I've got a bigger one."

The reporter's jaw dropped, and he rejoined his companions with the pitying remark: "That old fellow is plumb nuts."

His curiosity got the better of him, however, and he went up to Nagel again with the question: "What is your name?"

"My name is Nagel," replied the member of the cabinet.

"Where are you from?"

"My home is in St. Louis."

"Is that so?" commented the reporter vaguely. "And you have a bigger fleet than this?"

"Oh, yes," reaffirmed Nagel carelessly.

That was too much for the reporter. He went back to his companions, made a gesture signifying wheels in the head, and said, with an air of great conviction:

"Fellows, he's a raving maniac."

For Revenue Only

By Charles E. Van Loan

Author of "A Pennant and a Penance," "The Crab," Etc.

Some men are born handsome, others are born rich and foolish, while once in a long while one is born with the native ability to smite a baseball to extraordinary distances. It is the latter who is sure of fame—and revenue.

IT wasn't "Truck" Boyle's fault that he couldn't see a joke with the naked eye. He was born that way, just as some are born tone deaf or color blind. Truck was born joke blind; and, but for his appearance of ruddy and almost obtrusive health, he would have made an ideal undertaker's assistant.

Admitting that Truck was blind to humor of every sort, there were other things which he could see quite clearly, including the break on a fast ball; and, as Truck could hit a fast ball over most of the right-field fences in the league, his lack of humor was not regarded as fatal. That is to say, not at first.

Neither was it his fault that when Old Man Opportunity made a long arm and snatched him half across the continent into Fast Company, he should have batted his way into a big-league club which boasted more brilliant humorists than were ever gathered together on one bench since the dawn of creation. (If you call a practical joker a humorist. By some experts they are not so classified.)

One eminent baseball authority once went to the great length of signing his name to a statement to the effect that if the Crickets would pay more attention to the national pastime and less to the amiable art of "kidding" themselves and the public, the Crickets would adorn a higher place in the percentage table at the end of the season. But of that you must judge for yourself.

Dovetailing two proverbs, we stumble upon a mighty truth, as follows, to wit: "A little humor now and then—is a dangerous thing." Particularly, I should say, if practiced upon a man who would not recognize a joke if he saw it naked in the street. Think of this as we go along, for it has a bearing upon the story, and, in a way, explains what happened to Truck and to the rest of the Crickets, the comedians of the big league.

Some men are born handsome, others are born rich and foolish, while once in a long while one is born with the native ability to smite a baseball to extraordinary distances. It is the last who is sure of fame. Truck Boyle was a striking example of the young man who skyrockets athwart the firmament of public esteem by reason of this rare birthright.

It has been said time and time again —and none has risen to disprove it— that Truck Boyle could hit a ball farther away from the diamond than any man of his weight and inches in any league. If his fielding and base running had been on a par with his hitting —but pshaw! There is only one ball player who has no weakness; only one perfect athlete, and you know *his* name. Comes from Georgia, I believe. *I'm* talking about Truck Boyle.

Truck could not "hold down" an infield position because he could neither move nor think fast enough to keep from gumming up the cogs of that light-

ning machine, beside which, he was weak on ground balls. Neither was he a star as an outfielder—as outfield stars go, and they go *some* in the big league, if you should happen to be questioned about it—but he was earnest and methodical, he obeyed every signal given him by the other outfielders, and, when he got the ball into his hands, he could usually guess what to do with it.

But speaking of hitting, now. When Truck Boyle got his old black bat in his hands and a worried pitcher in front of him, *he was working at his trade.* Hitting was his long suit.

It was because he had a habit of breaking up two or three games a week that he held his place, drew his money, and got his name into all the papers. It was because of this trick that the big-league scouts went scurrying to the coast to examine into this home-run machine, and some of them found fault with Truck's position at the plate, and some of them did not like his fielding, and some of them said that the big-league pitchers would have the fence-busting fishmonger accepting nourishment from the palm of the hand inside of three weeks—and all the gentlemen just mentioned have been looking for alibis ever since.

The astounding thing about Truck Boyle was that he really didn't seem to be able to distinguish between ten-thousand-dollar-a-year pitching and the ordinary morning-batting-practice variety. It all looked the same to him—sort of soft like.

When you get down to it, it is the batting which makes baseball worth going to see, and a screaming home run, with the bases densely populated, will draw more applause than a brilliant fielding feat in which three or four men handle the ball never so skillfully. It's the crack of the big stick that gets you up on your feet to watch the flight of the ball—yes, sir, and you yell like an Indian. You know you do.

Truck started out to be a semiprofessional at three dollars per game, or thereabouts, for, when a fellow is working in a fish market at ten a week, three dollars is—well, it's *three dollars,* and you can buy a lot of things with three dollars. Truck's hitting attracted immediate attention, and the minor-league scouts came after him with conversation and coin, but mostly conversation. Truck accepted both at face value; and the Grogan boys, who lived on the same block and had often thrashed him after school, were quick to prophesy that Boyle would be scaling fish again inside of a month.

"They'll get onto that old, round-house wallop of his," said the Grogan boys hopefully.

But if a man is a born dynamiter with a bat, it doesn't make a great deal of difference who does the pitching. The difference is in the hitter. If he is born with the eye, he will find the seam of the ball, and it will not matter to him from whose hand it comes. The main thing, then, is where it goes on the return trip.

Truck's first year—and his only one—in the minor league was a continuous hurrah. He hit balls over fences and into corners, where, said the oldest inhabitants, baseballs were never hit before.

"Now, what d'ye think of that guy?" asked the Grogan boys. "Awful lucky, eh?"

It was the fashion in that league for merchants to advertise their wares on the outfield fences, with premiums to the players. A cautious tradesman would blaze forth thus:

"Hit the ball over this sign and get a silk umbrella."

And the chances are that the sign would be about four feet wide, and so far away from the plate that the average hitter could not reach it with a rifle.

Other merchants, less cautious or overstocked on some particular commodity, did not insist upon accurate marksmanship, but offered boxes of cigars—some of them real two-fors—candy, hats, shoes, shirts, neckties, smoking tobacco, articles of furniture, and even cooking utensils, for any home run scored in the game.

Truck came close to putting these philanthopists out of business; and, when he returned from his first trip on

the road with a real league team, he was bowed and staggering under the weight of his spoils, and the manager had threatened to charge him excess baggage. He had six boxes of cigars, seven pairs of shoes, twenty pounds of smoking tobacco, ten pounds of assorted chocolate creams, three traveling bags, four canes and umbrellas, three bats, and one silk shirt-waist pattern; and the students of the box score were learning to look first at the summary for the familiar words:

Home run—Boyle.

Having discovered that personal property accrued to the man who smacked out home runs, Truck applied himself to that specialty with all the earnestness of a serious nature. Unless actually ordered to dump a ball for a sacrifice—and how the fans howled when they saw Boyle preparing to bunt!—he swung from the spikes upward, lashing out nobly for the cigars, the shoes, the smoking tobacco, the chocolate creams, the hats, or anything else with which the generous merchants seemed to be overstocked.

One consequence of this lust for goods and chattels was that Truck Boyle speedily ran his string of home runs into double figures; and there is no place in the United States of Yankee Doodle—Georgie Cohan, stand up!—where a young man addicted to the home-run habit may conceal himself from the scouts of the big league.

Mulready, of the Crickets, saw him first, last, oftenest, and for the money; and to the Crickets came this serious-minded young fishmonger with his big stick, little recking that he was stepping into the home nest of the most celebrated athletic humorists in captivity. Was he recking of Fame, perhaps? Not any. The serious mind of Truck Boyle was wrapped and bent upon the pillage of the merchants of the effete East; his heart was set upon home runs for revenue only.

A spring training camp is not the most humorous place in the world; even the Crickets recognized this fact. In the spring, the old ball player worries about holding his job, the star worries about what sort of a season he is going to have, and the recruit worries about unseating some veteran and making a place for himself.

When our friend Truck arrived, the Crickets were really busy, for it had been rumored that there was to be a shake-up on the team, and even a humorist works hard under such painful circumstances. The Crickets had no time for practical jokes; but they looked Truck over, felt him out tentatively, and reserved judgment.

Barney Spillman, the center fielder, was not particularly cordial, because if Truck made good, there would be a strange face in center and a familiar one on the bench. Barney was about through with fast company. Billy Lee, the right fielder, and Timmy Joyce, the left fielder, were reasonably certain that their jobs were safe, so they sympathized with Barney Spillman.

This sympathy became more pronounced when the team started on its annual trip through the "bushes," and Truck began to give exhibitions of fancy fence breaking. Not many high-and-far-away floaters for Truck. He hit the ball where it was biggest, and it fled, whimpering, taking the shortest line between points.

"Doc" Cassidy, who had once been a great ball player, but who had eaten himself out of the league by virtue of a fatal appetite for pound cake—think of it, *pound cake!*—and now was nothing but a bench manager at ten thousand a year, saw Truck sting a few selections, and was not long in making up his mind. It was Barney to the bench and Truck to center field; and, when the regulars and the squab squad separated, Mr. Boyle was with the former aggregation of talent.

With the strain of the training season drawing to a close and the comedians sure of their jobs once more, the Crickets began to sit up and chirp a bit, and the innocent and guileless Boyle listened to many fearful and wonderful tales about the customs of the country to which he was going. (Did I mention

that Truck's education was limited to two years in a grammar school? He could read plain print if no one hurried him, and he could write his name so that almost any handwriting expert could tell what he meant by it.) The Crickets set themselves to the task of storing Truck's mental warehouse with the various inventions of their fancy, marveling at the amount of floor space displayed.

"Hey!" said Doc Cassidy to Billy Lee, one of the most versatile and engaging liars on the team, "you'd better cut that out. You ain't fooling that fellow. He's a better kidder than you are, because he's kidding *you* into thinking you're kidding *him.*"

"Listen!" said Billy Lee. "All this guy knows is fish; see? Fish, and to stand up there and ding that ball a mile. He'll believe anything you tell him; and he doesn't think often enough in the same day to 'kid' anybody."

"Solid ivory?" asked Cassidy.

"Not a crack in it anywhere," said Lee.

While the Crickets were regaling Truck with various truthful anecdotes, Barney Spillman, the deposed center fielder, hung about the outskirts of the nightly gathering in the smoking compartment of the Pullman and worried about his future. Barney did not wish to go back to the minors any more than a Broadway star likes to take a trip through the kerosene belt; nor did he feel friendly toward the youth who had ousted him from his old berth.

"I could stand it," said Barney to Billy Lee, who was his chum, "to be nosed out by a smart guy; but to have a bonehead like this Boyle take my cue away and set me out of the game is tough; that's what it is, *tough.* He don't know a thing in the world but to hit, and that lets him out!"

That same night, in the Pullman, Truck complained rather bitterly about the sporting spirit of the merchants of a Southern city where the Crickets had completed a three days' engagement. He had made two home runs in that town, and had spent the rest of his time scrutinizing the signs on the fences.

"A fine town!" said Truck savagely. "They don't give a man nothin' for making a home run in this country."

"Eh?" asked Jimmy Fellows, the second baseman, pricking up his ears. "How's that? Don't give you what?"

"Out on the coast," said Truck, "they give you a lot of stuff for getting a home run—cigars and hats and shoes and candy. When I got to going good, I made some of 'em take their signs off the fence. *Cheap skates!*" He spoke bitterly. "This must be a jay town we've just left. After I got them home runs, of course I expected *something;* but I couldn't find a single sign on the fence to say what they give you for one. But I guess it's better up in the big league, ain't it? They got some sports up there, hey?"

Barney Spillman raised his head suddenly, as if he had heard his name called, meditated a moment, and then craftily steered the conversation into other channels. Later he sat on the edge of Billy Lee's berth and shook the wrinkles out of a gorgeous scheme.

"Tip it off to all the fellows," said Barney, "so that they won't horn in and spoil it. If they work it up careful, we'll slip one over on this busher that he'll remember as long as he lives!"

The teamwork of the Crickets was remarkable—humoristically speaking. When they went out to "kid" a man, they might be trusted to attend to all the preliminaries in a masterly manner.

Billy Lee fired the first gun of the campaign at the breakfast table in the morning.

"I suppose the same old premium stuff goes this season out at our ball yard?" He addressed the remark to no one in particular; but Jimmy Fellows played the next card to that lead without looking up from his ham and eggs, and all the other players went on eating in silence.

"Why, sure!" said Jimmy. "Only another tailor has come in this year, so there'll be some competition. They tell me he's going to put silk lining in the suits he gives away."

"Well," said Timmy Joyce, "all *I* want is one of those gold watches. I

hope that jeweler ain't got cold feet this year."

"That's all right," said Jimmy Fellows. "He's going to give 'em away the first half of the season."

Truck Boyle had been listening with his mouth open.

"Givin' away gold watches?" he said. "What for?"

"Why, *home runs,*" said Bobby Lewis. "Didn't you know that before? Gee! But it's a long way out to California, ain't it?"

"Quite some distance," said Billy Lee. "I was out there one winter, and——"

But Truck would not permit a change of subject.

"Are they any good?" he asked anxiously.

"Are *what* any good?" asked Jimmy Fellows.

"The watches," said Truck. "Is there any class to 'em?"

"Show him yours, Billy," said Fellows; and Lee at once produced a gold watch, which he passed to Truck for inspection.

"Some kettle!" said Truck, with deep emphasis. "And a split-second attachment, too!"

"You bet!" said Lee. "Full jeweled, solid gold case, works adjusted to heat, cold, and all oscillations of the body. You bet it's some kettle!"

"How can they do it?" gasped Truck.

"Look at the advertisement they get!" said Lee. "I suppose by me having this watch and showing it to people, they've sold as many as fifty like it. It's a good 'ad' to give a ball player a watch."

"Sure is!" said Truck. "What else do they give?"

"All sorts of things," said Timmy Joyce. "There's another jeweler that gives away diamond stickpins."

"How big?" asked Truck.

Joyce glanced about the table.

"You got one of them pins, ain't you, Charlie?" he asked. "Show it to Boyle here."

Charlie Morrissey took a gorgeous diamond horseshoe from his cravat and passed it across the table.

"They give you one of these when you get three home runs," he said.

Truck's eyes glistened.

"Anything else?" he asked greedily.

"Silver chafing dishes," said Pete Bronson.

"What's a chafing dish?" asked Truck curiously.

"Sort of a funny pan arrangement," said Lee. "You soak your feet in it if they get chafed."

"My feet never get chafed," said Truck. "I guess I could trade it for something else."

And so it went on. Timmy Joyce mentioned silk stockings; and Frank Foster, the big, good-looking pitcher and the Berry Wall of baseball, pushed his chair back from the table in order that Truck might inspect his silk-sheathed ankles.

Pete Bronson mentioned gold match boxes; and Freddy Dixon immediately handed a gold match box to Truck for inspection. It had a two-karat diamond set in the side.

"No wonder they call this the big league!" said Truck. *"How long has this been going on?"*

"Just started toward the end of last season," said Joe Mack; "and, of course, all these store guys are seeing which one can make the biggest splash. Competition, you know. The clerks are getting terrible fresh, though. You'll have to look out for 'em or they'll do you. Did you have any trouble getting that watch, Billy?"

"You bet I did!" said Lee. "I showed the box score to the clerk, and let him see my Elk's card for identification; and dog-gone if he didn't try to hold out on me! I had to go right after the manager of the joint, the big, old he-boss himself; and I guess if I hadn't hollered like a wolf, I wouldn't have got the watch at all. I fixed him, though. I said if he didn't come through, I'd send for the police and have him pinched for obtaining home runs under false pretenses. That caved in his slats."

It was really too easy, and almost a shame to do it. Before the Crickets were through with the subject, Truck floated dizzily in the midst of visions of

gold watches, diamond horseshoes, silk underwear, fifty-dollar suits of clothes, gold-headed canes and umbrellas, silver toilet sets, and other portable property. The list was limited only by the mendacity and invention of the players, and these were limitless.

The home park was packed black for the opening game of the season, and Truck Boyle, hurrying into a spick-and-span white uniform, was the second man out of the clubhouse.

"He's like all those bushers!" growled Barney Spillman, climbing into his regimentals. "Just crazy to get out where somebody can see him."

But it was not to be seen that Truck had made haste. It was to see for himself; and when Billy Lee loped out onto the field there was the fence-breaking fishmonger rooted near second base, his eyes on the distant fences.

"What's the matter, kid?" asked Billy. "You look worried."

"I don't see none of them things on the signs," said Boyle. "Them gold watches and diamonds."

"O-o-h!" said Billy Lee. "Didn't we *tell* you how we made 'em take those signs off the fences?"

"No," said Truck. "Did you?"

"You bet!" said Billy Lee.

"What for?"

Lee placed his hand on Truck's shoulder.

"You see, kid," he said, "it's like this in the big league—most of the players are high-class fellows, college men, and that sort of thing, and proud. Now you can see how a fellow of that kind wouldn't want to be going around town if every roughneck could tell that he got his socks and his underclothes for making a home run. Sort of a bawl-out, it would be."

"Sure," said Truck. "I never thought of that; but you know I never went to no college, or——"

"But you can see how it would make a fellow feel to have everybody pointing at him, and saying that he got his clothes for nothing," said Billy Lee. "We talked it over, and then we got up a committee and went and waited on these merchants. We told 'em they'd have to take those signs off the fence or we wouldn't hit any home runs at all. That fetched 'em, you bet, because they were all baseball bugs and fans, sitting in the grand stand at every game. They took down the signs rather than hurt our feelings."

"And they *ought* to done it," said Truck. "But—how do you get the stuff?"

"Oh!" said Billy Lee. "They write you a letter and tell you to call, and they ask you, as a favor, to advertise 'em all you can."

"Fine!" said Truck. "I'll advertise 'em like a circus!"

Fired thus with the flames of zeal and cupidity, and burning to begin the sack of the merchantmen, Truck Boyle stepped into his first game. The first time he came to bat, he topped a mighty wallop, and was thrown out at first base; but the second time, he flattened the trade-mark on the ball with the drive that still lives in history as the longest one ever seen in that park. It sailed over the fence between center and right, and so far away from the grand stand that only the sharpest eyes traced the flight of the tiny white speck.

Twenty-five thousand wildly excited men stood up and howled like Comanches as Truck jogged around the grand circuit, carefully kicking the dust from every cushion as he passed over it. Even the players on the bench were shouting, for they knew they had seen history in the making; but Truck Boyle, the fishmonger and the dynamiter with the bat, felt nothing, heard nothing, saw nothing but gold watches, diamond scarfpins, jeweled match boxes, and other auriferous loot. Prosperity, eighteen-carat fine, lay just beyond the home plate.

"Well," he remarked, as he dropped into his place on the bench, wafted thence by the thunders of public approval, "I guess these store guys ought to know what hotel I'm stopping at."

"Did you get all that paper and stuff?" whispered Billy Lee of Barney Spillman.

"I got it," said Barney thoughtfully;

"but it wouldn't surprise me none if this should turn out to be a double-ended joke, after all. Look what that ribbing-up did! If he ever hits another ball like that in *this* park, I see where I pack my trunk."

"He won't," said Billy Lee confidently. "Now all we need is a forger with about seventeen kinds of handwriting. *Zam!* . What a wallop that was!"

Truck passed a restless night. Once he woke his roommate, Pete Bronson, to ask how long it ought to take to get a letter that should have been mailed the night before. Pete cursed him luridly, and buried his head in the pillows.

The players were eating breakfast when Phil Patigan, who was only a club secretary and not in on the joke, presented Truck with an imposing stack of envelopes.

"Gee!" said he. "I guess you made good yesterday, all right, all right. Pipe the mash notes!"

Barney Spillman was thorough in his method, if nothing more. No two of those envelopes were alike; but Mr. Sherlock Holmes might have remarked an absence of engraved stationery and a similar flourish to the signatures. Most of the letters were typewritten, for Robby Rinehart, the newspaper man, had been let in on the joke. Sherlock might also have found food for thought in the fact that all the letters were mailed at the same substation, and postmarked with the same hour; but the unsuspecting Truck was far too busy—and happy, too—to take notice of minor matters. He was out at the end of the pier of hope, waving his dream ship into the harbor of disenchantment.

"They all say for me to come and get the stuff," said he, "and to identify myself. How can I do that?"

Robby Rinehart kindly volunteered to attend to that important matter, and constructed a marvelous document, beginning with, *"To Whom It May Concern, Greetings and Salutations,"* and closing with, *"Given under my hand and seal, this —— of April, in the year of grace, One Thousand Nine Hundred and——"*

"That ought to knock 'em kicking!" said Truck, as he struggled through the legal verbiage. "Ain't some of you fellows going along to help me carry this stuff?"

But, like the gentlemen in the parable, the Crickets straightway began to offer excuses. It cut them to the hearts to miss the fun; but none was hardy enough to wish himself at Truck's side when the awakening came.

"And if we went," said Billy Lee, "he'd try to make affidavit men of us, and that wouldn't do. No, it's a lone hand, and he'll play it harder without company."

"Now remember this," said Frank Foster, the pitcher, "they'll try to hold out on you if they can. Go right after the main guy himself. He's the man to see."

"Sure thing!" said Truck.

"Show 'em the box score," said Charlie Morrissey, "and flash that letter. Then there ain't no way for 'em to crawfish."

"I will," said Truck.

"Better go at 'em strong," said Jimmy Fellows. "If you go in with your hat in your hand, sayin' 'Sir' to everybody, they'll think you're a mark, and hand you cheap stuff."

"That's right," came in a murmured chorus from the conspirators.

"They won't put nothing over on me!" said Truck. "Lemme look at that watch again so they can't ring in a phony!"

Mr. T. Augustus Hopp, president of the jewelry house of Hopp, Hopp & Howell, was a very busy little man; but there were times when he was visible to the naked eye, and fate decreed that this should be one of the times.

"Er—you say he will not state the precise nature of his—er—errand? Very well. Show him in."

Enter one Martin (Truck) Boyle, fumbling in an inside pocket.

"Good morning, sir," said Mr. Hopp. "And what can I do for you?"

"Put her there!" said Truck. "My

name's Boyle, center fielder for the Crickets. I got a home run yesterday, and I've come for that watch."

"Watch? Watch?" repeated Mr. Hopp. "I fear I do not understand. *What* watch?"

Mr. Hopp was one American citizen to whom the names of Mathewson, Wagner, or Cobb would have meant nothing. In a dim and shadowy way he knew that there were such things as baseball players; but it was his opinion that they were a low, rowdy, nasty lot, and beneath contempt. So Truck's opening sentence passed blankly over his small, bald head.

"What watch?" he repeated.

"Cheese! Cheese!" said Truck gruffly. "Wait till I show you the official papers. Here's the letter. Here's the box score. Look for yourself. 'Home run, Boyle.' That's me, and now kick in with the red kettle! They put me onto you before I started this morning, and they said you'd try to run out. I don't want no more than is coming to me, and I'm a-going to get it or call in the bulls!"

Mr. Hopp stared over his spectacles before he sought temporary refuge in the letter of identification. The man had been talking about a watch, but what was this jargon about a red kettle? And the reference to bulls? Mr. Hopp was at sea; but he understood from Truck's tone that he was being threatened, and he laid his hand upon a push button.

"My good man," he said conciliatingly, "why should you think that something is—er—'coming to you,' as you say?"

"You're *good*, all right!" said Truck, with grim admiration. "You ought to have been an actor. Didn't I get a home run yesterday?"

"A home run?" said Mr. Hopp, puzzled. "Bless me! How should I know what you got yesterday?"

Truck was staggered for an instant, but he recovered almost immediately.

"Look at the box score!" he roared. "Read it! Ask anybody if it ain't so! Now you get a wiggle on you and trot out that split-second watch, or I'll come back here with a bull and make you!"

Once more Mr. Hopp shook his head vaguely. Sanskrit, all Sanskrit.

"I fear," he said, "I greatly fear you are—er—laboring under a misapprehension."

"Huh?" said Truck, startled. "Break that up in little ones."

"You are mistaken," said Mr. T. Augustus Hopp.

"See here!" demanded Truck savagely. "I got the letter right here in my pocket that you wrote me saying to come in and get that watch. Quit your stalling, because I won't stand for no more of it."

Then Mr. Hopp grew almost bold, for he had pressed the button.

"My dear sir," said he, "it is not of the slightest consequence to me what you say you have in your pockets. That is a matter which does not—er—interest me in the smallest degree. I assure you, sir, that no man in the employ of this firm ever wrote such a letter."

Truck placed both hands on the office table and leaned forward.

"They told me you'd do it," he said. "Dig up that kettle now, or me and you on the floor together. You ain't going to job me out of what's coming to me. I may be just from the coast, but there ain't no four-eyed, pot-bellied, bald-headed, little wart that can keep me from getting what's coming to me when it's *coming!* Come across with the kettle, or—hello, who's this guy?"

A large, calm, horse-faced man in a gray uniform came in on rubber heels and hesitated at Truck's right elbow. Mr. Hopp made a slight motion with one hand.

"A strange case, Hoskyns," said he. "Dementia of some sort, I believe. Take him outside, Hoskyns, and call an officer."

"So that's it, is it?" bellowed Truck. "You're going to rat out on me, are you? You dirty, little, petty-larceny shrimp! 'Take him outside, Hoskyns, and call an officer!' Well, what d'ye think of that for fine treatment?"

The large, calm, horse-faced man stepped closer and took a firm grip upon

Truck's arm. Humiliation, disappointment, a strong sense of crying injustice had been welling up in Truck's soul; but when personal affront was added, rage—red-eyed, berserk rage—was born of the coalition.

"Who you grabbin' at, you big stiff?" he demanded. "Leggo my arm!"

And down went the large, calm, horse-faced man, with his horse-faced head in a waste-paper basket. The position was undignified in the extreme sense of the word, but the man in gray entered no protest. Truck had rendered him totally oblivious with a single, terrific swing upon the angle of the jaw—the place where the beard begins to turn the other way.

"Help! Help! Murder! Po-lice!" squeaked Mr. T. Augustus Hopp, diving, headfirst, under the table like a terrified rabbit, just in time to save himself from total annihilation.

Above the crashing of glass, the splintering of woodwork, and the demolition of things fragile—Mr. Hopp was a man of excellent taste in the matter of costly kickshaws and gimcracks of pottery, and the like—there rose at intervals a bellowing blast:

"All I want is what's coming to me!"

He got it, though not precisely what he had expected.

Doc Cassidy, the manager of the Crickets, did not live at the hotel. He was sleeping late that morning, late and deep, but not so deep that a telephone bell failed to bring him to the surface. And this is what the wires whispered in his ear:

" 'Lo! Is this Cassidy, the manager o' the ball club? This is Flynn, Lootenant Flynn, Central Police Station. Say, Doc, we got a man here charged with assault and bat'ry, and mayhem, and arson, and God knows what all, includin' licking a wagon load of policemen, an' he says he's Truck Boyle, the new guy that got that home run yesterday. Yes, that's what I thought, too; but this fellow has got a bunch of letters all addressed to Boyle at the Argyll Hotel. That looks queer, eh? How would he get that mail? What does he look like? Terrible tough mug. Weighs about one-seventy, not very tall, black hair, scar on one cheek. *Sweet, suffering Moses! You don't say so!* And we all thought he was some crazy guy! Yes, better get a taxi and beat it right over here. This ain't no ordinary case of a player gettin' soused and raising Cain.

"What did he *do?* What *didn't* he do! He busted up about a million dollars' worth of junk and moved a whole jewelry store out into the street. No, no. Seems perfectly sober. Huh? That's what I can't find out. He says they was a watch or something in this joint that belonged to him, and, when he went after it, they tried to give him the worst of it, so he put the whole place on the bum. The jewelry-store people say he's insane; and he sure give us a battle; whole hospital full of cops. Yes, the sooner the better. Good-by, Doc."

The manager of the big-league team is not without standing in the police department and the lesser courts of the law, and money is a powerful lever; but, despite these circumstances, Cassidy enjoyed a full day. Lieutenant Flynn had not misrepresented matters when he said that the case was no ordinary one.

It required the services of two lawyers, three bondsmen, and one gilt-edged diplomatist to restore to the sobered bosom of his club the person of M. Boyle, and charges black as night were hanging low over his head.

"Now, then," said Cassidy, when they breathed free air once more, "tell me about this thing from the beginning. Are you—subject to spells of this kind?"

Truck produced a pile of letters; the first exhibit for the defense.

"H-m-m-m," said the manager. "And you *fell* for this?"

"The boys told me I'd have some trouble getting the stuff," said Truck heavily; "but I never looked for anything like this."

Then the light broke in upon Cassidy's understanding.

"The boys!" he said. "Billy Lee and that bunch?"

"Sure," said Truck.

"I thought so!" said Cassidy grimly. "I'll show 'em another joke that'll make this one look sick."

But it was Truck who looked sick.

"A joke?" he faltered. "What——"

"Wake up!" said Cassidy. "Get onto yourself! Those fellows put up a job on you, and you fell for it, hook, line, and sinker. These letters ain't on the square. Any fool could have seen that. The chances are that Lee wrote every one of 'em himself."

Truck came to a halt, gasping, amid the shattered fragments of a golden dream.

"But I saw the stuff!" he repeated over and over. "They showed me the stuff!"

"Sure they did," said Cassidy. "Those fellows are likely to show you anything."

Truck pondered while the truth was taking hold upon him. Cassidy expected a wrathful outburst and promises of retribution; but this is what he heard, spoken in broken accents:

"And they—they don't give a man *anything* for making a home run in this league?"

Cassidy whistled.

"So *that's* what was eating you?" he said. "Let me tell you something, son; and don't forget it as long as you live. You're out of the bushes now, and here in the big league. A man plays for the team, *for the team*, understand? When you go up there to hit, you ain't hitting for yourself. Do you get me? Now look what this crazy-horse business has got you into! You've set yourself back half a year's salary for the vases and things you smashed, and, unless the lawyers can square the assault charges, you've got a swell chance to go over the road."

"I guess I'll go back to the coast," said Truck sorrowfully.

"I guess you *won't!*" said Cassidy sternly. "Not while you're out on bail, anyway."

The Crickets are still famous for their humor, which, however, is now of a more subtle and refined variety, and Truck Boyle is immune. They do not even tell him funny stories. Perhaps one reason that the Crickets have cut out the slapstick comedy is because the premier in that art is now with another club. Cassidy hated to do it; but he was forced to trade Billy Lee to the Reds. That was the only way to prevent Truck Boyle from becoming a murderer.

The fence-breaking fishmonger is still unable to see a joke; but he has his eye on the ball, and he still raps out those tremendous long-distance hits. But he hits for the club, and not for Boyle; and in his heart he yearns for the boxes of cigars, the hats, shoes, silk umbrellas, and smoking tobacco of happier days.

He is, as V. Hugo once remarked about another celebrated clean-up hitter, "the mighty somnambulist of a vanished dream."

ONE OF THE KNOX KNOCKS

PHILANDER C. KNOX, the secretary of state, received one day in his office a bunch of high-browed Washington newspaper correspondents. In the number was William Hoster, who stepped to the front with a copy of his paper in which was one of his dispatches under big, black headlines. The dispatch dealt with the affairs of the department of state and ran along glibly as if the writer had enjoyed the confidence of Mr. Knox regarding the whole matter.

"What do you think of this article?" asked Hoster, exhibiting no modesty as he handed the paper to the secretary of state.

"After looking this over," said Mr. Knox graciously, "I must say, Mr. Hoster, you are the nestor of Washington correspondents."

At this, Hoster took on the aspect of a balloon and looked exceedingly pleased until Knox added softly:

"Mare's-nester."

The "Bad Man"

By Daniel Steele

Author of "The Twist of a Screw," "The Adventure of Prince Pozzanceit and the Pearl Necklace," Etc.

A modern drama enacted on the centuries-old trails over the barren Sierra Madre Mountains. A study of an outlaw who had many likable traits, and who had been successively a sailor, a clerk in a drug store, a cowboy, and a "bad man."

IT was on a summer afternoon that Nan told me this story. We were on the hotel piazza. We sat there together, looking out over the valley below, sunk deep in a section of the Catskill Mountains that, round-backed and gigantic, resembled a herd of elephants crowding one another. A curious sense of aloofness from the littleness of our own living seemed to belong to the mere fact of beholding so much reality in one glance.

The hotel and its surroundings, so inartistic generally, here aloft in this big place, lost all offense, and became an insignificant, little, human joke—a trifle clinging to the edge of the cliff. In the foreground just below us, the tiny dirt oblongs of tennis courts, with the players sending the balls hopping back and forth on futile journeys, seemed negligible in presence of the happy solemnity of grandeur that enveloped us. And yet it was of trifles we spoke at first, though all the while our under thoughts followed our eyes past the tennis courts and out over the mountains.

"Robert plays well," said Nan. Robert was her brother—big, tanned, young, a mining engineer several years out of college. She said it with that touch of maternal defensiveness with which a sister often speaks. I answered that Robert apparently did most things well. There he was in evidence before us, defying the heat and the well-placed drives of his adversary with the cocksure bearing of a Parsifal overcoming evil.

"Oh, he *does*," she said. "I wish you could know him. He is so—brave and erect." I listened with the interest of one who has not seen his old playmate and first cousin for some years, and whose accidental reunion with her is colored with a certain delight in fitting the more recent unknown with the known of long ago. "Dear Robert," she went on, smiling, "what would the world be without men like him? He could no more do wrong than he could pardon it in others. His world is a beautifully clear child's world, where good is good and wrong needs no sympathy."

As she spoke of the brother, whom I remembered only as a negligible, small boy, her serious eyes rested on the distant mountains. It was almost as if they had drawn from her this intimate half confidence so unlikely to be spoken in any lower place. And yet it was like Nan, too; vitally like the Nan of old to thus strike all at once, and without formal conversational transition, a note of reality. "It reminds me here," she went on, irrelevantly it seemed, "of Aguas Calientes."

"What!" I cried. "Do you mean that little pueblo in northern Mexico?"

It was then that we discovered that we had both, though in different years,

been to the same place—traveled those same centuries-old trails over the barren Sierra Madre Mountains. And the discovery bringing with it a flood of vivid interchange, led finally to the telling of the story—to the painting upon that background of smooth-topped, Eastern mountains, as we sat there together, looking out over them, a picture of those wilder, sterner, more elemental hills of the great Southwest.

"But it needs higher mountains to make it Aguas Calientes here," I said, reverting to her first comparison. "For instance"—I waved my hand in an inclusive sweep—"if we could imagine around this rolling chain of Catskills an outer barrier of rock-ribbed, red-cliffed giants, which should dwarf all this into foothills, then that little, green place, with its thread of a river away down there in the center of the valley, shining in the sunlight like a piece of sardonyx, would be Aguas Calientes."

She flashed on me a look of appreciative assent. "Weren't they grand, those Sierra Madres, with their heavenly sense of space!" Her face lit up. "Oh," she cried, "I must tell you! I never dared tell Robert." She laughed a rollicking disregard of the implication. "He wouldn't understand. Besides, it was pretty awful—what I did! Maybe even you won't approve."

I turned to her with a smile, but she was apparently serious, as though for the moment she were above caring for the petty implication of a remark. I looked at her, and waited. The warm August wind blew her hair across her face. A little eddy whirled a newspaper off a near-by porch chair, and whisked it against the piazza railing, where, as though unwilling to go farther, it managed to wedge itself for a while under the lower rail. The little, fluttering thing seemed to suggest to me the truism that if one only reached a high enough altitude, all the trifling intricacies of life could be blown away. I mentioned it to Nan.

"Perhaps not all of them," she said. "Something ought to be left. Even in the newspaper there ought to be something worth while for us. It's funny, isn't it, how little some things are, and how big others are; and the little seem big and the big little, and you never can really tell." She mused a moment in silence, and I waited for her story.

"I've often thought I'd like to write this all down, and see if it wouldn't make a story. But it's different from stories you read—it's, somehow, incomplete. And the hero is named Sammie. I don't think that's a good name for a hero, do you? It spoils it at the start. But, then, he wasn't what you'd call a good hero, either. And, in the second place, the story happened down over the border in old Mexico; but I saw Sammie first up at Robert's ranch in New Mexico, which is a senseless and unnecessary violation of the unity of place that no well-trained story writer ever allows——" She smiled at me. "But, never mind, I'll tell you.

"It was six years ago, that time I went West with Robert. You know how it is out there about hospitality. People just come and go ad libitum. I never yet have gotten over the delight of it. Being an American in that land of greasers and Indians is like belonging to some fraternal organization. We had a lot of men on the ranch looking after Robert's cattle. Some permanent and some transient. Sammie was transient. He came down over the trail one day, crossed the arroyo, and up to the ranch house. No one asked him any questions, and he got down off his horse and stayed a month.

"Robert had a classmate out there visiting us. Ricks Warren. Perhaps you know him? He hasn't much to do with this story except at first. Out there he was a 'tenderfoot.' So far as I can see, that means a man who can't ride or cook. That seems to be their measure of life—to seize your living first hand from the plains, and sometimes their conceit over it gets tedious. But I suppose men are conceited everywhere."

I hastened to register my unqualified assent.

"I hadn't seen Sammie ride much; but he *could* cook, and so, pretty soon, that job fell to him. Have you ever eaten

jerked beef pounded into soup and boiled after you have been in the saddle all day long? Well, if you have, don't talk to me about the cuisine of this hotel.

"One day Ricks tried to ride a horse. It wasn't much of a horse; but it threw the poor man headfirst down into a pile of loose rocks. They all sat around and roared with laughter—without waiting, mind you, to see even if he was killed. Robert laughed, too. I didn't see anything so awfully funny in it; and Sammie only smiled.

" 'That sure was a tumble,' he said, rather sympathetically. It was the first time I had ever heard him speak more than a monosyllable. All the men were shy with me; but Sammie was positively abashed into absolute silence, and only cleared his throat when I was present. I thought for a long time he was a sort of tenderfoot, too; he was such a quiet, little fellow—so young, and evidently not used to a rough life. At Sammie's remark, the others sniffed. And Sammie, despised thus of the majority, retreated into the house to cook dinner.

"We used to have men out there just to break horses. You must know all about them. I think Robert paid them five dollars for riding a horse once. When a horse was ridden five separate times, he was broken so that an ordinary cow-puncher could use him. But the casual observer from the East, like me, couldn't see much difference. The time for a round-up was approaching. There was one particularly wild horse. Two or three men tried to get a saddle on him, and failed. Robert said he would give a hundred dollars to have that horse ridden.

"Sammie cleared his throat three or four times. Then he said: 'I'd sure like to have that money myself, Mr. Roberto.'

"No one said anything until Ricks Warren broke into a laugh.

" 'Perhaps you mean to try and ride the animal. Do you, cookie?'

" 'Yes,' said Sammie quietly, standing with a steaming frying pan in one hand. 'Have some more frijoles, Mr. Roberto?'

"The next morning he rode the horse. We all perched on the fence around the corral. And it was the most awful thing I ever saw. The vicious creature came at him screaming—imagine a *horse* screaming—and clawing at the air. He tossed a rope around the horse's forefeet, and in the same instant jumped aside. You know the way the banderillero waits while the bull is charging him—it was just like that. Sammie jerked the rope, and the horse turned over in the air, and landed with a thud on his head. Well, I won't describe the rest. You've seen it yourself. By and by Sammie and the horse, like two wild cats, one on the back of the other, were flying around that corral, Sammie swinging his quirt overhand, and the animal bucking and changing ends.

"Well, Robert gave him the hundred dollars; and after that the men couldn't do enough for him. But, for all his sudden popularity, Sammie seemed worried. I used to catch him looking furtively over his shoulder; and once I spoke to him, and he jumped. He didn't stay long, either, to enjoy his popularity. Only two days after he rode that horse, he went away without a word. He just disappeared, and the horse he had broken with him; and Robert when he found it out was pretty mad.

"The next day after that a man rode up to Robert, and said: 'Howdo?' Then he got off his horse and ate dinner in silence; but all the time looking around queerly upon us. After dinner he took Robert aside, and explained that he was a sheriff on the trail of a 'bad man.' You know that's what they call an outlaw. It seems this 'bad man' was wanted for killing a man and for robbery, and had escaped from a posse who had him surrounded. He had jumped a corral fence and ridden away bareback, shooting and wounding two men. The sheriff's description of the man, as well as his undisguised admiration for the way he could ride, pointed unmistakably to Sammie. And, when he found that Sammie had gone two days before, he traded his horse with Robert for a fresher one, and rode away. That was

the last I saw or heard of Sammie in New Mexico."

Nan paused and looked at me with her serious smile. "I suppose I ought to have been terrified," she said, "living for a month in the same house with what you would call a murderer and a robber—having him cook for us. And in the East here, I guess I would have cried when I found out. But out there you know how it is. It seemed the most ordinary thing in the world to happen. After a day or two, the talk about our visitor died down into an occasional speculation as to whether or not the sheriff would get him, and a sigh of regret over the loss of his cooking.

"It was the following spring that Robert took me on a trip through the Sierra Madres."

As she came to the part of her story which dealt with the mountains of old Mexico, I followed her in imagination over the selfsame trails I had myself traveled, and with an interest quickened by my own vivid recollection.

"Robert went to examine some mines and prospects. We traveled with a pack train—the only way you can go over the old Spanish trails, you know, that take you down into that country. We slept at night on the ground, and lived mostly on beans and coffee—*frijoles y café, señor. Ah, qué bueno!* It was for me the experience nearest heaven I have ever had. Don't laugh. I mean it. If you've been there yourself——"

"I have, and I understand, *si, señorita,*" I answered. "Down there away from the tinsel of life, where you live in the elements of things; go to sleep in a dozen blankets and tarpaulin, while your face freezes as you look up at the stars, and the light of the camp fire reflected on the under sides of the leaves overhead; wake up as the first sun's ray skims the top of the *combre* in the east and strikes you hot in the face; and you spring up ready dressed, unlanguorous, eager for another day in the saddle."

"Oh, you *do* understand!" she cried. "It was just like that—real camping out; not the polite kind of Canada or the Adirondacks. Robert, and sometimes I, but mostly Robert cooked generally two meals a day. And our Indians looked after the pack animals. They used to start before dawn, and track the hobbled mules and horses for miles *in the dark;* and, just as the sun rose, you'd see them come, every one, hopping patiently down the mountainside. I used to wonder at those Indians, turning the animals loose at night to feed, and never once losing one of them. Then we'd put on the aparejos and the packs with a diamond hitch, and saddle up and ride all day.

"Of course, Robert initiated me by easy stages; but I had ridden upon his ranch cross saddle in men's corduroys, and four or five days inured me to that slow trot and walk, going up and down those steep, old trails. We had left the little, single-track railroad, the Chihuahua al Pacifico, and had struck off into the hills, crossed the Rio Verde, and so on south to Jésus Maria, and then south from there to those tiny, little pueblos and ranches scattered like specks of oases over that great, barren, uninhabited hill country. I love their funny, little names—Aguas Calientes, Batopilias, Tohiachic, Palo Amaria. You know them?

"Finally we found ourselves away down in the very heart of those wonderful, barren mountains, where no birds sing, no beasts roam; where you find, perhaps, a solitary Mexican family living in a cave, the only human beings within a radius of twenty miles. And there you can be absolutely alone with the kind of aloneness you would find, I suppose, on the moon. And somewhere under your feet lies nature's buried treasure of gold and silver that men spend their lives looking for.

"We spent about three months altogether on the trip, and lost completely all account of the days. By and by, as we turned northward again, our pack mules loaded with samples of ore, I remember we passed an Indian encampment. Robert told me they were not the wild Yaqui Indians with whom the Mexican government was at war. Then once, as we stopped for a noon meal,

an armed train passed us. I remember that first there came two short, thick-set Indians. Their arms and legs were bare, and they wore some kind of faded blue jeans. They carried rifles, and walked just like scouts in storybooks—carrying their heads forward, and with a set expression on their dark faces—they were really dramatic as they slouched along not on the trail, but through the woods, fifty yards to one side of it.

"A moment after they disappeared, several men on horseback rode by. Then came pack mules, and finally a rear guard. Robert spoke with one of the men. He was Smith, the bullion conductor of the Dolores Mine. He only exchanged a word, and hurried on. It all seemed to me then, ignorant as I was of what was to come, as though it were a Belasco show gotten up for my special benefit.

"We met another thing characteristic of the part of the country—an old prospector. It was about a week after the bullion train passed us, and we were now getting within a hundred miles of the railroad. We struck into a pine forest. The trail led along by a river. We had passed a dead mule some one had shot near a pile of rocks at a bend in the trail. And I remember wondering how it came there, and why the mule I was riding, and whom I had begun to regard as the most insensible of creatures, should have so suddenly and violently shied at it.

"That evening, about dusk, we were camping under the pines near the stream. The trail, like a path in the park of an English country house, ran along near by. Down it came a grizzled, bearded old man, riding a dirty white mule at a slow trot. Robert and I were lazily pushing a coffeepot up against the blaze. Our Indians were off to one side, rolling their tortillas of ground corn on the flat leather insides of the aparejos, preparatory to toasting them.

"As the old fellow came abreast of us, he suddenly roared at the top of his lungs: 'There are too many fool Americanos sitting around here under the trees.' And he rode on.

"Robert looked at him a minute. 'There are too many fool Americans riding around on mules, too,' he answered, without a smile. Then he shouted after him: 'Where are you going?'

"The bearded countenance turned full upon us. 'Straight to the Waldorf-Astoria as fast as this mule can carry me,' he yelled, as though defying us to contradict him.

"Robert laughed. 'Better stop and eat something here,' he said. 'It's a long trip.'

"He proved to be one of those old fellows who could talk about Nome and Madagascar, and almost every wild place under the sun where he had been looking to 'make his stake,' as he called it, and failing unaccountably hitherto, but this time sure of success. Coming more recently from civilization than Robert and myself, he brought us the news. We hadn't so much as spoken to a stray American for so long that we were overjoyed.

"It seemed quite exciting, as you may imagine, to hear that San Francisco had been destroyed by an earthquake six weeks before, and quite natural that we shouldn't have known it. Coming down to events of a more local interest, there had been a holdup in that part of the country, in which a bullion conductor, taking a seventy-five-thousand-dollar pay roll out to the Dolores Mine, had been shot—the very outfit, in fact, which had passed us farther south on the trail the week previous. The old prospector told us the details with great gusto.

"It seems that the bandits, a gang of four 'bad men' from the States, had waited behind a pile of rocks at a turn in the trail, the very place where we had passed the dead mule, and, letting the advance guard go by them, had fired on the second division of the cavalcade without a word of warning, shooting two Mexicans and a mule, which carried a small box roped over its back. But they had picked out the wrong mule. The bullion conductor was shot, too, in the abdomen. Believing himself a dead man, he turned under fire, and rode back to another pack mule that car-

ried his rolled-up bed, slashed open the bed with his knife, and took out the money concealed there. Then he aimed a chance shot into the mesquite with his six-shooter, which, by pure accident, killed one of the attacking party, and galloped off, bleeding and hanging half dead over the horn of his saddle, eight miles to the nearest Mexican rancho, where they found that his cartridge belt had deflected the bullet, and that he would probably recover.

"The three remaining outlaws, having failed to get the money, were now supposed to be headed for the Texas border. A detachment of Mexican soldiers —I think part of a regiment which was on its way down to the Yaqui country to fight the Indians—had been told off to pursue the outlaws. Our visitor's narration concluded with warm praises of the courage of Smith; and then he and Robert fell to talking of mining matters.

"It seemed terribly exciting and real to me, for I had seen this man Smith with my own eyes speaking to Robert only a week before, and hurriedly riding on when it had seemed to me that all that display of guns and rifles was a sort of ornamental parade. Robert assured me we were not in any special danger, though I was too much of a tenderfoot to understand his reasons. But I felt a positive trust in Robert. That is one of the beautiful things about my brother; the sureness you feel with him. I am quite afraid to look at a gun here in the East; but out there I carried a thirty-eight all day, and slept with it under my head at night; all as a perfect matter of course.

"The old prospector left the next day, and we never saw him again. Thinking it over now, it seems weird how you meet and talk with people out there whom you never saw before, and never will again—people who seem to come from the ends of the earth just for that particular, accidental meeting.

"The next day I got lost. The trails, running over the tangled undergrowth of the forest, were hardly discernible. We were returning northward over the same ground we had gone south on three months before. And I suppose Robert, who formerly kept his eye on me, couldn't conceive the possibility of my failing to follow a trail we had been over once. And so, dropping gradually behind until I was out of sight, I finally turned off in a wrong direction.

"Just as I began to realize that I was lost, I came to the most wonderful place I ever saw in all my life. I had been riding through a flat mesa country. Strange flowers abounded. Immense plants, like century plants, took root on the sides of bare rocks. Everything was thorny, and with fierce-looking thorns like steel awls. Huge cucumber-shaped things raised themselves aloft, green and prickly, twenty and thirty feet in the air. I felt like Alice in Wonderland. And then the trail emerged suddenly upon the edge of a precipice, and I looked down, infinitely down, over a valley bathed in the shadows of dusk. It was not yet so dark but that I could see one of those wonderful panoramas where a day's journey occupies the foreground only, and the miles your eye travels back over run up into the decades as you see in that marvelously clear air the sandstone towers, fantastic, majestic, and beautiful, and the deep-wooded valleys through which no road has ever been. I felt as though I was on the top of a new-created world, clinging like an insect.

"A lone hemlock grew upon the edge from which I had drawn back my unfeeling mule. Its black limbs were outlined against a dull, blue-black, infinite sky. Over the outline of distant mountains was a tiny streak of flaring orange —the sun setting in a far-distant land, and yet visible to me. To the right, a great stone face, sculptured by nature in the side of a cliff, seemed to be looking with me out over the illimitable valleys. The dull, intricate tracery of the tree against the ocean of solid dark blue reminded me of a painting of Elihu Vedder's. A mournful vastness, like a New England November, brooded over the great canvas. The sunset was so far away it seemed like the dying of a melody played in a dark room. And the stone face, from its dizzy height, like

the face of a musician, seemed to look into infinity. A curious, impersonal sense came over me, as though I were part of the cliff on which I stood and were looking back over the days of my own life. And then night fell, as it always does there, with the suddenness of turning out the gas.

"I felt sure that our Indians would track me as soon as Robert realized I was on the wrong trail, and so I decided to wait. I waited a long time. I had no matches. I finally decided to unsaddle the mule and tie it to a tree, and lie down rolled up in my saddle blanket, for I was tired. Just as I began to feel around in the dark to unfasten the cinch, I heard a noise of some one clearing his throat, and there was Sammie.

"I think I felt the most complete sense of welcome I ever felt in my life for any human being. There I was, alone in this wilderness of mountains, suddenly confronted by an armed outlaw fleeing from justice. But what cared I for such trifling, personal defects! Here was another human being, and I had been alone long enough to make me welcome him even had there not been something in his attitude that reassured me. Perhaps it was a certain remembrance on his part of my brother's hospitality—a code of some kind that he lived up to. I know the first thing we did—and it seemed at the time the most natural thing in the world—was to devour all the tortillas which I had in my saddlebags. We gulped the cold, unsavory things down in silence, for it seemed both of us were mortally hungry. After that, Sammie found his voice, albeit he spoke with some embarrassment. 'I was shore hungry,' he said. 'I ain't et for three days.'

"He had taken off my saddle and blanket, and had spread the latter on the ground for me to sit on. He crouched down himself on his heels, cowboy fashion, and lit a pipe. 'I don't want to make no fire,' he remarked; 'but you stay here, and, if they don't come for you pronto, I'll take you to your camp.'

"He spoke with an assumption of solicitous care—as though he had met me downtown and was offering to see me home in a taxicab. And I doubt not the mountains seemed to him quite such a matter-of-fact place. I asked him if he had been one of the men who had held up the bullion train of the Dolores Mine.

"'Yes'm,' he answered simply. 'I shot that *mula* which she was the wrong one. You heard about it, did you?'

"There was no boastfulness in his tone; nor, on the other hand, was it colored with any sense of bitterness at failure. It was a simple statement of fact, just as he had remarked that he hadn't eaten for three days. 'No,' he added, 'we didn't have no luck. My pardner, José, got killed, and we had to *vamos*.'

"It was all quite the strangest conversation I ever had in my life; and yet it seemed at the time quite natural. Sammie explained, as though it were a detached fact of minor interest, that he couldn't get food anywhere unless he went to some rancho or pueblo, and that that would risk capture, especially as he was without money. Perhaps he would have to risk a holdup single-handed. I asked him, if he was caught, whether he would be taken to Chihuahua to be tried.

"'No,' he said quietly, 'they'd take me out and shove a gun into my back and shoot me, and make a report that I was shot attempting to escape.'

"I shuddered. For the first time, the awfulness of this wild life came over me all at once, just as I feel about it now looking back on it. I observed his thin, haggard, boyish face—for he was only a boy in years—lit up by the gleam from his pipe. It was such a narrow-cheeked, firm-jawed face, as little Fred used to wear when he was training for football at St. Mark's. It seemed so queer—so tragically unfair—the lot of these two boys. My youngest brother, safe and happy in the surroundings of that far-away East, that seemed to me, at that moment, like a dream; and this unkempt, starving, little brother of some one, reared and taught little better than a wild animal, and hunted like one.

"A lump came up in my throat.

'Sammie,' I said, 'suppose I get together a lot of tortillas and frijoles and give them to you.'

"'I don't want to come near your camp,' he answered. 'I ain't goin' to get into no trouble with Señor Roberto, nor make trouble for him, neither. It ain't his business to help me. I took a horse from him once.'

"'But suppose I don't tell him, and just leave it for you on the trail.'

"Sammie studied me for a moment. 'That shore is friendly of you,' he said. 'If I can once get to the *ferrocarril* I am all right, because I got a pal who is a conductor at that railroad, and he'd see me through. Yes, that shore is friendly of you.'

"And so, sitting there alone in the dark, we agreed upon our plan. I had simply to follow Sammie's directions as to just where, and in what way, I was to leave the food for him. And, having thus entered into a sort of partnership with one another, Sammie became more talkative, and told me a good deal about himself in that impersonal way he had of stating facts uncolored by feeling.

"He had in his few years been, among other things, a sailor on a Pacific coast vessel, a clerk in a drug store in La Junta, and a cow-puncher. In exchange, I told him of Robert's business and of our plans; that we intended to turn back again after we got up to Jésus Maria, and go southwest toward Sonora; that it was my first visit to the West. I asked him if he had ever been East. 'I ain't never been to New York,' he said; 'but I was to Denver twice.' That isn't as funny as it sounds, after you look it up on the map and find how far inland from the Pacific coast Denver actually is.

"Sammie confided in me that his real name was Henry Johnson. He started to tell me how he had gotten into trouble up in the States. It was vague to me, because I couldn't grasp his meanings always. His commonplaces of life were to me the unknown, with its spice of romance and adventure.

"'I could fix it,' he said, 'if I was to see a man I know. I could fix that trouble and square things; but I don't want to.' He laughed, and I lost track of his explanation. I didn't quite see how robbery and killing a man could be 'fixed,' unless, perhaps, he had acted in self-defense, and so I gave it up.

"'Sammie,' I blurted out suddenly, 'I shouldn't think all this would pay. Why *don't* you fix it up and be a good man? I should think you would make—well, an ideal sheriff—or maybe you could get——'

"'Oh, hell!' he interrupted, in his gentle, matter-of-fact voice.

"It was the first false note I had struck. Apparently Sammie could understand facts. He looked them all in the face without flinching. But anything in the way of comment bothered him. It was weakly superfluous. I could feel that he insensibly drew away from me—that I had somehow fallen a little in his estimation. He maintained a brief silence, smoking until his pipe went out. After that I suddenly became aware that I was alone. The landscape had long since faded from sight, even the nearby hemlock was invisible. I was alone in the pitch dark. And in that same instant I heard Robert's voice hallooing faintly below me on the trail.

"The next day Robert missed a lot of food—I am ashamed to say how much—from the grub box which he kept always locked. Also I had to inform him that I had lost the small sum in Mexican bills he had confided separately to me. But the loss of the food became quite a mystery for a while until it was forgotten.

"We arrived at Jésus Maria, spent a day there reading an accumulation of mail, and then turned southwest, as we had planned, toward Sonora. It was on this trip that we fell in with Señor Chavez, a Mexican *jefe politico,* who, with his detachment of soldiers, was out after the bandits who had held up the Dolores Mine bullion train.

"Those Mexican soldiers are recruited, you know, from the prisons, and they live on the bulls that are killed in the *plaza de toros,* so you can imagine how delighted Robert and I were to have them in the same neighborhood

even for a short time. But the *jefe* himself was a ceremonious, little man. He was most unusually polite to Robert, who looked like a worse ruffian than any of them. But Robert explained this by saying that it was the elegance of his saddle which proclaimed him a gentleman, and that when a man is possessed of an expensive saddle, he is to all intents and purposes well dressed.

"Robert invited him to lunch with us; and he told us that he had already caught two of the outlaws, and was after the third. When I discovered that he was completely off the track in his guess at Sammie's whereabouts, something inside me gave a leap of delight.

"He went on to tell us how the two had suddenly appeared at Aquas Calientes and had shot a storekeeper, and were making away with provisions; and how, after a brilliant engagement, in which he had lost six men, he finally became victorious. Had they captured the outlaws? Ah, no, *señorita, muchas gracias,* they had shot and killed them. The third man, *señorita,* was out in the mountains. He would starve. The *jefe* was reckoning on the very thing I had provided against. It was impossible, evidently, for one to travel far through that barren, lifeless stretch of mountains, unprovided. One was there as truly marooned as any pirate left on a desert island.

"I sat conversing with our visitor. Robert had gone off for something. The soldiers were camped some distance away. He and I were alone, and I felt a strange thrill of excitement, conversing diplomatically with him. A curious sense of immoral elation, as I wished him success in his pursuit of the outlaw, knowing all the time that my efforts had frustrated his plans, and that my poor Sammie was hundreds of miles away, safe by this time up in Texas. I smiled inwardly, as any De Medici woman might. And just then Sammie, like an apparition, came upon us.

"His eyes shot glances quickly around like the eyes of a man accustomed to seize his moment. A six-shooter in one hand covered steadily the little Mexican, who had given one choked cry of guttural surprise, and now sat frozen. I loved the way the cold, gray barrel of that six-shooter, without any apparent effort on Sammie's part, seemed to fasten itself hungrily on the Mexican, while with his free hand Sammie seized unceremoniously what remained of our meal, and stuffed it into the capacious pockets of his corduroy jacket. All the time he was doing this his eyes continued to travel swiftly over the scene, and he spoke in a low, even tone, without clearing his throat.

" 'The Yaquis are out,' he said, speaking to me, but not once risking a glance in my direction. 'They have got by the soldiers, and are over the Sonora border. They have already killed a prospector who was going through this country on a white mule, and they are headed up this way. Some *hombre* come down from Chihuahua two days ago with the news. It come around by way of Casas Grandes. I killed a horse getting here in time to head you off. Mind you tell Señor Roberto every word I've said, but don't say it was me said so. I'm going back afoot. *Adios.*'

"He backed off as he finished speaking. Suddenly he was gone in among the trees. I sat dazed; and then a vague, aching realization took possession of me that Sammie had come back ninety miles, straight into the embrace of danger, to warn us; that he had practically given his life for us, and I had sat speechless, and hadn't even thanked him.

"At that instant Robert came running up, his face white, followed by half a dozen soldiers. He had taken in the situation at a glance. He picked me up in his arms and swept me back into the trees. 'Keep out of this,' he whispered hoarsely. Meanwhile, the soldiers were running around their little commander, gesticulating, and all talking at once. The *jefe* waved them to one side, and pointed down across the arroyo, where, some distance off, the trail, after curving around under the trees, reappeared on a steep, rocky hillside. There was a space of about thirty yards where Sammie would have to cross in the open. The trail looked like a fine, white thread clinging athwart the gray rock.

"Suddenly a sick feeling came over me. In those few seconds I lived through what was to follow. There stood the little *jefe,* braced on both feet, rifle in hand, poised as gracefully and looking as cruelly horrible as one of those overdressed matadors in silk and slippers when he waits to kill the bull. I saw in my mind Sammie running for his life across that open, sunny stretch, heard the shot, and saw him pitch headlong down that rocky gorge. My knees sank under me. And then came an inspiration.

"I broke away from Robert's arms and gained the open space where stood the Mexican. He turned to see me at his side. His dark eyes flashed on me a look of appreciation. 'The *señorita* shall have see I am *bueno* to shoot,' he said. 'I shall kill heem.'

"Dimly, as from a great distance away—as though drowned by a rushing in my ears—I heard Robert's voice. 'Run away, Nan,' I heard him cry, and felt vaguely that he had seized me by the arm. 'Are you crazy? For God's sake don't look!'

"But I stood there and watched. I didn't feel exactly horror, only a strange kind of white excitement. I don't remember much after the report of the rifle. I was so near that the recoil of it bruised my cheek; and I remember the awful groan of chagrin that came from the little Mexican as I fell into his arms in an imitation faint that was almost real, and knew that I had spoiled his aim. The next thing I was aware of, I was sobbing hystericaly in Robert's arms; Robert, who was honestly sorry that the outlaw had escaped."

"You see," said Nan, after quite a pause, "it doesn't quite make a story, because I don't know what became of Sammie."

She gazed out wistfully over the mountains, and a sudden access of tears came into her eyes. I waited, and then finally I said:

"Don't you suppose he got to Texas all right?"

"Oh, I don't know," she answered gloomily. "I used to hope it. The Mexicans never caught him, and he never turned up at any of those little villages. That much I know. But Robert said he was sure to starve out there in the hills, unless he got around it by putting a bullet into himself. That was all six years ago. I haven't been West since then, and Robert's business has kept him in the East; but I have often thought it over, and wondered why my conscience has never troubled me about helping a 'bad man' to escape. Somehow I just had to help him. And then he asked me not to tell Robert, and so I suppose I have no right. But life is a curious thing, isn't it?—the good all mixed in with the bad. Oh, dear"—she clutched her hands together—"why is it so terribly real just to live!"

We were both silent for some time after that. The sunny afternoon had declined, and long shadows lay in the deep hollows far away beneath us. Near by, the laced shadows of the nets slanted across the tennis courts. The players had stopped. Bathed in perspiration, Nan's brother came up the piazza steps twirling his racket in his tired hand, and, seeing us, drew near.

"Hello!" he cried gayly. "You two still talking over old times? Say, Nan, did you know one of those little buttons is coming off your waist?"

Nan laughed, and gave me a sly glance of understanding. Then her eyes traveled back to the clear-cut, earnest face above her, a face in which an instinct for convention seemed to be a genuine part of a perfect health of mind and body. "You foolish boy," she said; and then added obediently: "I'll sew it on."

Robert, actuated by some further instinct of neatness, saw and picked up the newspaper that still clung, wedged, under the piazza rail. His eye traveled carelessly over the columns, and then lighted with a sudden interest.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "A holdup near that New Mexican ranch of mine last Friday. That's interesting." His eye ran rapidly down the printed item. "H'm—an outfit of bad men held up a mail train on the Santa Fe. H'm—h'm—they ran into a sheriff's posse which

happened to be on the train, and, after a running fusillade kept up for an hour, they were all shot and killed. H'm—that was a coincidence they didn't expect, wasn't it, to run into a sheriff's posse and get cleaned out like that? Pretty rough outfit out in those parts. H'm—this man Henry Johnson——"

"Henry Johnson!" Nan gasped faintly. "Was—was he killed?"

"He's a new one on me—since I was West," mused Nan's brother. "I never heard of him before. No"—looking up—"he wasn't shot. He's apparently the new sheriff they've got out there. Here, read it yourself."

THE GENEROUS EMPLOYER

JACK MARTIN, of New York, Paris, London, and other distributing centers, was in the French capital without a valet—a valet being a person who is expert in the folding, pressing, and draping of men's apparel. Mr. Martin employed the man who first applied for the position, but, after half an hour of close observation, went off like a geyser with this:

"What you don't know about valeting would break the heart of any real valet in Christendom! You don't know a sleeve button from a pressing iron. What on earth is your real vocation?"

Then the impostor confessed. He said he was not a valet, had never been trained as a valet, and hoped he would never be a valet. As a matter of fact, he explained, his real business was that of chauffeur.

"Good!" exclaimed Martin. "I fire you as valet and engage you as chauffeur. You can drive my machines for me."

After the first day of the new job, the chauffeur and Mr. Martin had narrowly escaped death sixteen times.

"See here!" exclaimed the employer. "You're not a chauffeur. You don't know how to drive a car. You're fired!"

"I know it, sir," sobbed the valet-chauffeur, "but I'm an American, and I was hungry when I applied to you for a job. I hope you'll forgive me. My real business is pugilism. I'm some pugilist. Believe me, I'm some fighter!"

At last the truth was out, and at last Martin was enthusiastic.

"Fine!" he cried. "You're not fired. You're reëngaged. I make you my valet again."

Then the man and the manservant sailed for the United States. On the dock in New York a customs official told Martin to open his trunks. The valet did it. Then the official insisted on Martin's opening all the trays in each trunk.

"I won't do it," said Martin, "and I won't allow my valet to do it."

Whereupon, the official converted the Martin trunks into a storm, and scattered rainbow pajamas and silk socks to the four winds—all of which greatly pained Mr. Martin, who turned to the valet and said, in a low but stern voice:

"Beat him up!"

As a beater-up that valet was a blue-ribbon performer, and he made the customs official's face look like scrambled eggs, cold. A few minutes later the police appeared, the valet was taken to the lockup, and Martin jumped into a taxicab and started for his club with a friend.

"I don't think this is fair," objected the friend. "Why should that valet go to jail for obeying your orders?"

"Oh, he's got no kick," said Martin lightly. "I always pay him twenty dollars a day extra when he's under arrest!"

Buccaneers

THE PIRATE OF 1612

OH, once again my merry men and I are on the water, with prospects fair, with hearts to dare, and souls athirst for slaughter! Before the breeze we scour the seas, our vessel low and raking, and men who find our ship behind in mortal fear are quaking. We love the fight and our delight grows as the strife increases; we slash and slay and hew our way to win the golden pieces. To hear, to feel the clang of steel! Ah, that, my men, is rapture! Our hearts are stern, we sink, we burn, we kill the men we capture! Why mercy show when well we know that when our course is ended, we all must die—they'll hang us high, unshriven, undefended! Ah, wolves are we that roam the sea, and rend with savage fury; as soft our mind, our hearts as kind as will be judge and jury! To rob and slay we go our way, our vessel low and raking; and men who hail our ebon sail may well be chilled and quaking!

THE PIRATE OF 1912

MY heart is light and glad to-night, and life seems good and merry; my coffer groans with golden bones I've pulled from the unwary. Ah, raiment fine and gems are mine, and costly bibs and tuckers; I got my rocks for mining stocks—I worked the jays and suckers. What though my game is going lame—a jolt the courts just gave me—my lawyers gay will find a way to beat the law and save me. I'll just lie low a year or so until the row blows over, then I'll come back to my old shack and be again in clover! I've fifty ways to work the jays, and there's a fortune in it! The sucker crop will never stop, for one is born each minute!

Walt Mason

The Quest of the Golden Table

By Ralph D. Paine

Author of "The Stroke Oar," "The Heart of Peter Burnham," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF OPENING CHAPTERS.

At the close of their college course Peter Burnham, Jim Stearns, and Hector McGrath start for the West Indies in quest of a reef on which a Spanish galleon containing vast treasure in gold and silver was wrecked. Burnham has learned of the whereabouts of the wrecked vessel from an ancient history which he has stumbled upon. Taking with them Julius Cæsar Jones, an elderly negro, as mascot, they ship aboard the *Esmeralda*, with Captain O'Shea, former filibuster, but now in the service of the Consolidated Fruit Company. The *Esmeralda* is bound for a port in the republic of Salgada, on the border of which is the Galleon Bank, where lies the treasure. On arrival at port they learn that the president of the neighboring republic of Oriente, Emilio Martinez, has been dangerously wounded by an assassin. Martinez' son, Bolivar, was once at Yale and a good friend of the three treasure seekers. They are greatly distressed by the news.

CHAPTER V.

THE three young men appeared to be convoying Julius Cæsar Jones, and for the moment he had ceased to be an humble satellite in their distinguished train. Schooled as they were in the extravagant humor of the campus, there was nothing particularly extraordinary in carrying a professional mascot as part of the equipment, and his tall hat and medals were no more than a diverting episode.

Although Port Catalina was on Spanish-American soil, the natives appeared to be in an inconsiderable minority. The wharves swarmed with laughing, chattering Jamaican negroes like flies around a sugar barrel. Here and there was a tanned, curt young Yankee in khaki or white linen who gave orders to the black laborers as the long trains of banana cars came clattering in from the plantations.

As the visitors turned into a well-paved street they were highly amused to note that groups of idling Jamaicans were gazing, open-mouthed, at the majestic figure of Julius Cæsar Jones, and presently as many as a score of them were trudging in his wake. This homage intoxicated him. He had come into his own kingdom. His head was thrown back, the tall hat was tilted at a rakish angle, and his rheumatic knees limbered themselves in a manner to suggest the winner of a cakewalk. Now and then he emitted an unctuous chuckle.

The procession passed the extensive buildings of the Consolidated Fruit Company occupying an entire block of offices, stores, and living quarters for the American employees. Soon they came to the German hotel recommended by Captain O'Shea. The ramshackle wooden structure faced a small park, which went far to redeem the commonplace aspect of the town. It was a rarely beautiful bit of tropical landscape, with neatly kept paths shaded by palms, breadfruit, and rubber trees, and spangled with brilliant patches of blossoming orchids amid the foliage.

The proprietor of the hotel, one of those cosmopolitan exiles from the Fatherland who are found at the helm of commercial enterprises from Mexico to the Argentine, greeted the party cordially, but his florid features betokened curiosity as he surveyed Julius Cæsar Jones and blandly interrogated:

"Are you mit him, or is he mit you? When I saw you paradin' up the street I t'ought maybe it vas some peoples of

the Spanish opera troupe what vas expected in the mail steamer from La Guayra."

"He belongs to our troupe," answered Hector McGrath. "Please give him a room, lock his medals in the safe to-night, and treat him kindly."

Julius had condescended to converse with two or three of the worshipful Jamaicans who were hovering in front of the long piazza. The young men left him there, and followed the landlord to the large and airy but none too clean rooms of the second story. It was obvious that he wished to know something about them, and, observing that he lingered, Hector kindly vouchsafed:

"We are three friends, who were together in Yale College, and we are traveling for pleasure. We are not salesmen for anything, nor do we sing in opera."

"So? From Yale, in the States?" said the landlord. "There is a man from Yale mit the fruit company. He is Mr. Blackburn, and he vas manager of a banana plantation. He will be in town to-night. He will have dinner in my hotel, because it vas the best hotel in Port Catalina."

"That's good news," said Jim Stearns. "Blackburn? Seems to me there was a Blackburn in the varsity crew years ago."

"He will dine with us," exclaimed the delighted Hector. "I begin to like this place."

Returning to the piazza, they could find no Julius Cæsar Jones. Surmising that he had found a room, and was doffing his war paint, they rambled through the park and down to the sea wall, upon which they perched themselves, and went into executive session. They felt adrift, and their plans were nebulous.

"Well, here we are; and what next?" grumbled Peter Burnham.

"The military band will play in the park to-night, and there is a moving-picture show around the corner from the hotel," hopefully exclaimed Hector McGrath.

"You are too blamed frivolous," chided Peter. "How does this situation size up to you, Jim?"

Stearns grinned, and answered:

"Perfectly absurd. We came down here to hunt for that golden table of yours, Peter. You discovered it, but Captain Mike O'Shea is really the responsible party. He made it sound plausible. He baited the hook, and we bit. Then he has an attack of mystery, and leaves us in the lurch. I say we get busy and find some kind of a craft and a few amphibious natives, and set sail for Cape Saint Mary and the Galleon Bank."

"If Captain O'Shea doesn't come ashore before night, I move we go to the ship and try to extract some information," said Hector. "As president of the Galleon Bank Exploration Company, Limited, I propose to have something doing."

This sounded sensible, and they strolled back to the hotel, where Julius Cæsar Jones was awaiting them. With him was a plump and pompous colored gentleman, shaded by a green umbrella, who bowed low, and permitted Julius to explain:

"My friend, Mistah Jason Wilberforce, is owner of th' foremos' grocery an' dry-goods emporium doin' business with the folks from Jamaica. His brother-in-law is th' preacher of th' 'stablished Episcalopian church roun' yonder. Mistah Jason Wilberforce has kindly invited me to share th' hospitality of his house, an' this evenin' I'se to be the guest of honor at th' church sociable."

Mr. Jason Wilberforce bowed again, and excused himself on the score of important business.

"How did you do it, Julius?" demanded Hector. "We have been wandering about, friendless and forlorn, and you have broken into society without losing a minute. Was it the tall hat and the medals?"

"Mebbe so," and Julius beamed benevolently. "But what fetched 'em was when I 'splained that you mos' important young gentlemen jes' had to tote me along to supply my special brand of good luck. These Jamaica folks is a

heap believin' that way, an' nothin' is too good for Julius Cæsar Jones."

"Save a little good luck for us. Don't let them take it all away from you at the church sociable," sighed Hector. "We begin to need it."

"Don't you worry. We'se bound to win," chirruped the old man.

The problems began to untangle themselves late in the afternoon when a lathy, black-haired man strode into the hotel, and the landlord indicated him as Mr. Blackburn. His riding breeches and leather puttees were streaked with red clay, and his face spattered with mud. As Jim Stearns hastened to introduce himself and his friends, Blackburn's tired eyes glowed with pleasure, and his sallow complexion showed a bit of color.

"Stearns, stroke of the crew?" he cried, as he shook their hands. "And Burnham, the baseball pitcher? Well, by gad! I'm glad I came in to-night, although I was near chucking it up. The roads are beastly. I get the *Alumni Weekly*, and keep in touch with the old place."

As he left them to seek soap and water, Peter Burnham said to the others:

"A good deal of a man, but he is trained too fine. He looks worn to the bone."

"Mr. Blackburn is mit the fever and the shakes sick pretty often," remarked the landlord. "But he will not be what you call a quitter, eh? He haf stayed in this country too long. Banana growing vas not good for white men."

The dinner party was a rare event for the plantation manager, and all the talk swung back to Yale, until they adjourned to the piazza to sip the black coffee of the country and listen to the music of the excellent band in the park. Port Catalina was at its best during these lustrous evening hours. It appeared less Americanized, not so much under the sway of the Consolidated Fruit Company, more as one might expect it to be. The native Salgadans of the better class strolled to and fro, or, with their vivacious señoritas and prim duennas, drove up and down in small victorias drawn by absurd little horses. The air, cooled by the afternoon showers, was fragrant and revivifying.

Hector McGrath sighed contentedly, and observed:

"This is more like it. Jim Stearns is liable to buy a guitar and serenade some fair lady on a balcony, with a red rose in her hair and a mantilla draped over her dear little head."

"I have cut out the girl proposition," sternly declared the impressionable Stearns. "Life is too complicated just at present to dally with them. I am an adventurer with his eye fixed on the main chance."

Blackburn smiled, and asked:

"By the way, how long do you tropical tramps expect to be in port? I should like to have you come out to my place."

The three young men comically regarded each other, and Peter Burnham volunteered, as spokesman:

"Our plans are a trifle uncertain. I think we may safely confide our secret to you. We are treasure seekers—Spanish galleon full of gold, and all that sort of thing. Just now we are trying to find a base of operations."

"Bully! I had almost forgotten that the world had any youth and foolishness left in it. I am in a rut. I think in terms of bananas. And how can I help you?"

They told him the tale in piecemeal, vehemently outlining the defection of Captain O'Shea. Blackburn nodded understandingly, as if the circumstances were not so very puzzling, after all. When the narrators paused for breath, he called a waiter, and had the table and chairs removed to a secluded nook of the piazza.

"We are four Yale men together," he said, with a deliberation that was rather impressive. "Whatever I may tell you will go no further. One learns to mind his own business in this country, but it would be poor friendship for me to leave you in the dark. When I rode into town this afternoon, I stopped at the customhouse to look up a consignment of machinery. A couple of the port officials were jabbering

about the friends of Captain O'Shea, who had just landed."

"But how did they know that we were friends of his?" demanded Jim Stearns.

"They made a point of finding out, I presume. They may have questioned the crew of the ship. You have heard, of course, that Emilio Martinez, president of Oriente, has been shot by an anarchist, or something of the sort."

"Why does that concern us?" asked Peter Burnham.

"Well, Captain Mike O'Shea is what you might call the unofficial admiral, and his ship the navy of Oriente. At least, that is the common impression. It was he who landed the guns and munitions which enabled Emilio Martinez to win the revolution that reinstated him as president. And Martinez showed his gratitude by giving the skipper a handsome present—a hundred thousand in cash, so I've heard said. Anyhow, it was enough to enable O'Shea to buy the *Esmeralda* for himself. And it goes without saying that in case of need he would place himself at the disposal of Emilio Martinez or his government."

"But Captain O'Shea told us there was no chance of a revolution in Oriente," said Stearns.

"He ought to be pretty well posted," replied Blackburn, glancing over his shoulder to assure himself that there were no eavesdroppers. "What it *does* mean is that if Emilio Martinez, the ablest man in this part of the world, is likely to die, Salgada may resort to war at any time."

"A war against Oriente? What for?" exclaimed the three in one breath. Peter Burnham whistled, Jim Stearns muttered: "By George!" and Hector McGrath jumped so suddenly that he upset a tray and wrecked two coffee cups.

"Ah, now we are getting at the nubbin of affairs," said Blackburn.

He told them of the long-standing dispute between the two republics concerning the boundary line which ran to the coast near Cape Saint Mary. Popular ill feeling in Salgada had been rather fostered than discouraged by the attitude and influence of the Consolidated Fruit Company. A few years more and the black, fertile soil of the banana belt along the coast of Salgada would be exhausted. The fruit company was always planning and looking ahead to open up new regions, just as it had invaded one Central American country after another, Honduras, Costa Rica, Panama, and was now reaching out along the Caribbean coast of South America.

"You might think that any one of these republics would be glad to welcome the company," said Blackburn, "but study conditions here in Salgada and perhaps you may comprehend why Emilio Martinez has fought the schemes of leasing and buying vast tracts of land in Oriente and developing a new shipping port. The natives will not work on the banana plantations. All the labor for this port is done by sixteen thousand negroes imported from Jamaica, and the management is in the hands of Americans. The independent native planter has been almost wiped out because the company controls the transportation and fixes the prices of bananas. With its tremendous organization the company dictates its own terms. As fast as the independent planter is forced to quit, the company takes over his land and places it under its own managers."

"But doesn't Salgada get any benefits from this huge business?" queried Peter Burnham.

"An export duty of two cents a bunch —something over two hundred thousand dollars a year revenue—in return for which the company plays politics under cover and virtually owns the government. Emilio Martinez does not want to make this kind of a bargain. He has brought prosperity to Oriente, and he fights shy of Yankee domination by means of Yankee dollars."

"He sounds to me like a wise person. No wonder young Bolivar was such a level-headed coxswain," observed Jim Stearns. "And now we are warm on the trail of Captain Michael O'Shea."

"Yes, I imagine the Salgadan government is watching him like a terrier at a rat hole. They have a notion that he could whip their whole navy, given a fair chance. It is said that the decks of the *Esmeralda* are braced for gun mounts. And she would run any blockade they could establish on the coast of Oriente."

"I begin to perceive why the skipper was not inclined to tell us all he knew," murmured Hector Alonzo McGrath.

"Mind you, I am merely putting two and two together," said Blackburn. "I am rather out of touch with what is going on. I stay in the jungle most of the time."

The band in the park was playing the national hymn of Salgada. The throng cheered with shrill *"Vivas,"* and the band repeated the martial strains, the trumpets soaring above the other brasses with thrilling cadences, and the drums rolling as if they were beating the call to arms. Several officers of the army, slender, dark-visaged little men conspicuous for gilt trimmings, waved their visored caps at the musicians.

"The pot is beginning to boil," said Blackburn. "As I was about to explain, the authorities here might find a pretext to hold the *Esmeralda* in port if Captain O'Shea should show the slightest indication of throwing up his fruit-company charter. They could refuse him clearance papers or put the ship in quarantine or trump up smuggling charges, for instance. And the fruit company is not at all anxious to give him a chance to help Oriente, and will hold him to his charter if possible."

"What do you think he will do?" put in Hector.

"Just now he has no choice. I noticed that the *Libertad* is anchored in a position to keep him under her guns. He must load bananas for New York. He dare not refuse."

"If war is declared, will it amount to anything?" demanded Peter Burnham.

"Don't let yourself be misled by all the comic-opera yarns about the ructions down this way," grimly affirmed Blackburn. "These little black-and-tan beggars will fight, and Salgada has no slouch of an army. What do you say to strolling down to the wharf and saying good night to Captain O'Shea? He may be ready to drop you a hint of some kind."

They were moving slowly through the crowded park, when Hector spied the immaculate figure of Weston Cady, the wireless operator, whose white clothes were too smartly cut to have been turned out by a native tailor. The crook of a bamboo cane hung over his arm, and his Panama hat was of that fine texture made in Ecuador. He was eying the pretty girls, and humming a Spanish love song.

"Shipmates ahoy!" cried he. "Dorflinger, the pirate who runs your hotel, mixes the best cocktail south of New Orleans. Will you join us?"

"Thanks, but no cocktails until we know whether we are coming or going," returned Jim Stearns. "We have some very earnest thinking to do."

"A foolish habit. When a man stops to think, he is apt to miss the show."

"What news from the ship, Mr. Cady? When do you expect to sail?"

"We shall go to sea at five o'clock tomorrow morning, full of loathsome bananas. The loading gangs have been busy since dark. The captain expects to run up and see you between now and midnight."

"Evidently the company is not anxious to have him linger in port," said Burnham. "Have you heard anything more from Oriente?"

"Only a bulletin or two which I picked up from the company's shore station. Emilio Martinez is no better. The odds are against him. How is Salgada taking it?"

"There are no signs of mourning," quoth Blackburn. "What do you think of the situation, Mr. Cady? Is there any serious prospect of war? You know what the talk of the port has been."

"I think it looks jolly well like it," and the wireless man jauntily twirled his bamboo stick. "Too bad the *Esmeralda* has reformed, isn't it?"

"My private opinion is that she may

suffer a relapse," was the opinion of Hector McGrath.

T. Weston Cady smiled sweetly, and murmured, his hand on Hector's sleeve:

"S-s-s-h, my boy! Don't megaphone it to the populace. The *Esmeralda* has cleared for New York, consigned to the Consolidated Fruit Company. Are you going back with us?"

"We don't know. If there is to be a shindy, we shall want to see it."

The wireless man sauntered toward the hotel, while the others continued to the wharf. The long shed was brilliant with electric lights. Locomotives were shunting loaded banana cars from landward or hauling them back empty. From the *Esmeralda* came the clatter of the mechanical loading machines and the clamorous voices of hundreds of laborers. It had seemed incredible that the ship should be filled with her perishable cargo overnight, but when one saw how the thing was done it ceased to be a miracle. Wide, endless belts driven by steam moved between the doors of the cars and the hatches of the ship. Upon these belts the deft, brawny Jamaicans laid the green bunches of bananas, and they were swiftly conveyed to the deck where gangs of men passed them down, from hand to hand, and others stowed them, tier and tier, in the holds. Torrents of fruit incessantly streamed into the ship.

Captain O'Shea took no part in this spectacular activity. He was comfortably seated in a deck chair outside the door of his room, surveying the scene with a contemplative air, and smoking a very long cigar. To the hail of the young men, he shouted back:

"Come aboard. I was resting a bit before I trotted uptown to find you."

Blackburn preferred to remain on the wharf, thinking the skipper might wish to talk confidentially. The others scrambled up the steep gangway, and felt at home in the familiar environment. Captain O'Shea bade them drag chairs nearer, and jovially exclaimed:

"Did you think I had deserted the Galleon Bank Exploration Company entirely? Dear me, it has been a busy day! And what news do you hear ashore?"

"Wars, and rumors of war, and never a bit of hunting for lost treasure," said Hector Alonzo. "Our proposition seems to have been laid on the golden table."

One eyelid fluttered on the skipper's cheek, and he whispered behind his hand, imitating the manner of a conspirator caught in the act:

"Whisht, my boy! Say it softly. Your ears must have deceived you. War, did you say? And with who, and for what?"

"With Oriente, for instance," blurted Jim Stearns. "Are you at all interested?"

"I am a man of peace, thinking of nothin' else than hustling bananas to market and keeping my holds at the proper temperature so the cursed fruit will not go ripe on me. 'Tis the refrigeratin' plant that has streaked my hair with gray, as you see."

"We understand that you must take your cargo to New York this voyage," boldly put in Peter Burnham, who had a heavy-handed way of charging straight at the facts. "You are between the devil and the deep sea. After that, what? Do you expect to come back to Port Catalina?"

"'Tis what my charter calls for. I have found out some things since I saw you this morning. Will you lads go back with me? To put it plain, if the Salgada government should find you hiring men and outfittin' a schooner, you might not be permitted to sail. They are a suspicious lot just now. And there is no coastwise steamer touching here to carry you to Oriente inside of the next two or three weeks."

"We are inclined to stay here. If we make a failure of it, we can go home with you next voyage," cried Jim Stearns.

Captain O'Shea smiled inscrutably as he rejoined:

"Then here's to my next voyage, and I want no better shipmates. Keep out of mischief, lads. If I was the daddy of the three of you, I'd take you by the slack of your trousers and hoist you into your staterooms and lock the doors.

But you are bound to stay in Salgada and see what happens. Did you see my wireless man ashore?"

"Yes, and a natty article he was," said Hector.

"He talks better Spanish than me, and he is picking up what news may be floating about. Well, boys, if there is anything in this gossip of war, I know you will be sympathizin' with Oriente, but you must express no such opinions in Port Catalina."

"We are strong for Oriente. This is a Yale affair," exclaimed Stearns. "Bolivar Martinez was a classmate of ours, and that means a lot to us. We hope his father will live to knock the stuffings out of Salgada and the Consolidated Fruit Company."

"Such sentiments may be popular aboard the *Esmeralda,*" said Captain O'Shea, his eyes sparkling with pleasure, "but you could not get them past the customhouse on the wharf, yonder."

It was evident that Captain O'Shea intended to divulge nothing more, and, after chatting at random, the visitors filed down the gangway.

"He wanted to loosen up and tell us all about it," said Peter to Jim.

"He can't. But, say, won't he feel easier when he gets to sea again?"

If one could have seen into the mind of Captain O'Shea, this was putting the case mildly. He was unable to persuade himself that war was actually imminent, that Salgada would be so base as to take advantage of the great misfortune which had befallen Oriente. He was too much a sailor, too straight-minded, to realize that Yankee dollars know no sentiment when dividends can be fattened. In coming into Port Catalina, he had put his head in a trap.

He could not fight his way out with an empty hold, and run for Oriente. His armament was ashore, stored in a warehouse of the Brooklyn waterside. This was unlucky, but it did not matter much. If there was to be war, he knew what Emilio Martinez would want him to do—fetch a cargo of munitions and supplies with all possible speed. It was, therefore, as well to load with bananas and make for New York, where there was a banker's credit for just such an emergency as this. Oriente might charter other ships, but only the *Esmeralda* could be relied on to smash her way through a blockade.

The hostile excitement might simmer down. Should Emilio Martinez rally, the Salgadans would shut up like a pack of frightened curs, thought Captain O'Shea. He would find cabled instructions in New York. And, meanwhile, the *Esmeralda* could earn the price of a banana voyage and be ready to return to her old trade of desperate hazards if the call should come. To make a false move in Port Catalina was to have the ship tied up.

When the three collegians rejoined Blackburn on the wharf, he said, with a laugh:

"The chief of police was taking a look at the *Esmeralda* just now. He asked me several questions about you fellows. I gathered that the estimable old colored person—what do you call him, Julius Cæsar Jones?—puzzles the officials. You are suspicious characters, you know, but the imposing darky is a riddle. They think he must be some kind of a very important personage."

"If they could see him on the Yale campus, they would be sure of it," said Stearns. "He is really a joke, but——"

"These people mistrust anything they can't understand," observed Blackburn. "Well, I shall be riding back to the jungle early in the morning. You must be sure to let me know what you decide to do."

Before the adventurers turned in, Hector Alonzo voiced the common sentiment by sleepily announcing:

"My poor, tired brain is completely addled. If any man says another word about war, politics, or treasure before to-morrow, I shall shoot him on the spot."

It was shortly after daylight when Jim Stearns awoke, clawed his way out of the folds of the mosquito netting, and pattered out upon the piazza in front of his door, drawn by the lilting song of army bugles. Reveille was sounding from somewhere beyond the

park. He sought a chair, and enjoyed the refreshing coolness of this early hour.

It was not long before he heard the shuffling noise of many feet. From behind the screening palms appeared a company of Salgada infantry moving rapidly past the hotel. Their uniforms of blue drilling were ill-fitting, but they were wiry little men, their magazine rifles were well kept, and the bayonets clean.

"They may be turning out to mount guard, but they are in a deuce of a hurry," soliloquized Jim. "And look at all that kit on their backs. It looks more like a practice march, or else the curtain is about to go up."

From the harbor came the prolonged, deep-throated notes of a steamer's whistle, blown three times, a signal of farewell. Jim Stearns recognized the voice of the *Esmeralda*. Captain O'Shea was bound to sea.

CHAPTER VI.

The comrades three had not realized how much they relied on Captain O'Shea to aid their quest of the golden table until that capable mariner was gone from Port Catalina. In his absence it was natural that Peter Burnham should assume the leadership by tacit agreement. He was a seasoned man, with his two feet under him, as the saying is, and he had been accustomed to work out his own salvation. His comrades were younger and more impulsive, and for all their professions of having outgrown the campus, they still regarded life as a holiday. Before he held further consultation with them, Peter analyzed the situation in his thoroughgoing manner, as if it were a problem in mathematics.

Blackburn had revealed certain facts which dovetailed as neatly as fragments of a picture puzzle. Captain O'Shea had been compelled to act with the nicest caution and shrewdness in order to extricate his ship. He had a far bigger game to play than fooling with a happy-go-lucky party of treasure seekers. But he had shown convincing faith in the plan of exploring the Galleon Bank, and his opinion was worth something.

Peter Burnham was not in the habit of chasing rainbows, and he had embarked with the sober intention of seeking that treasure with might and main. Nor did he propose to be diverted and thwarted by any tuppenny war between two hot-tempered Spanish-American republics. On the other hand, his leave of absence from the staff of the New York *Chronicle* had been granted by command of Hector McGrath's father, as chief stockholder of the property, and it was quite evidently the purpose of that solicitous parent that Peter should have an eye to the safe conduct of the irresponsible heir.

"I suppose I ought to have done as Captain O'Shea suggested last night," reflected Peter, "locked Hector in a stateroom of the *Esmeralda,* to be carried home. This talk of war will go to his head, and he will want to go messing around where he doesn't belong. Jim Stearns is reckless, but is wise, after his own fashion, and he is husky enough to take care of himself in almost any company. I can argue him into seeing things my way, but Hector is like a confounded flea—you put your finger on him and he isn't there."

It was seven o'clock in the morning when Peter cogitated in this wise, the hour of coffee and rolls, but his friends had not yet appeared below stairs, and Peter walked out to sniff the morning breeze.

The streets were unusually astir for this time of day. In addition to the groups of noisy negroes trudging toward the wharves and the market place, numerous Salgadans were standing at the corners, walking to and fro along the wide promenade which bordered the park, or congregating before the government building which housed the postal and telegraph departments. Their voices were high-pitched and vehement, their gesticulations fiery.

Presently several newsboys came running past the hotel. They shouted excited tidings. In a twinkling they were surrounded, almost mobbed, by

eager men who snatched the ill-printed sheets and began to read the contents aloud, hurling fragmentary sentences at one another like so many impassioned orators.

Peter Burnham shouldered a path to the nearest urchin and secured one of these agitating newspapers. The gentlemen of Salgada scowled and muttered as he thrust them aside. They bore the Yankees no love at any time, but inasmuch as this one appeared capable of handling at least half a dozen of them, they uttered their uncomplimentary remarks none too loudly.

Peter's rudeness was caused by what he overheard. He could also read Spanish, after a stumbling fashion, and his journalistic eye first sought the news dispatches and then the double-leaded column of editorial comment. The former included a telegram from San Pablo, the capital of Oriente, stating that President Martinez was still alive, but unconscious. While it was possible that he might live, his recovery would be exceedingly slow. The vice president of Oriente had assumed control of the government, and proposed to convene the congress immediately.

The leading editorial was a masterpiece of indirection, insincerity, and insolence. Salgada was inexpressibly grieved that so grave a blow should have been dealt the neighboring republic of Oriente through the attempted assassination of its able and beloved ruler. Emilio Martinez had been a benevolent dictator, and his country had made material progress under his sway, which had been won by force of arms.

The more enlightened people of Salgada, which was a republic in reality, could not comprehend a form of government in which the will of one man was supreme.

It was unfortunate that just at this time the boundary dispute between the two countries should have been in an acute stage. The Salgadan minister of foreign affairs had prepared his answer to the ultimatum of Oriente only a few days before the shooting of President Martinez, and had summarily rejected the terms thereof. As the bravest and most intelligent people of all the Spanish-American nations, the Salgadans everywhere indorsed the action of their minister of foreign affairs.

No doubt President Martinez had the governmental machinery of Oriente so well organized that it could cope with whatever results might arise from this issue. Diplomacy had failed. When the honor and prestige of so proud and cultured a nation as Salgada were at stake, not even the sympathy and sorrow inspired by the tragic event which had removed the president of Oriente from the head of affairs could justify a policy of wavering or delay.

In the light of what Blackburn had confided, Peter Burnham could read between the lines. Salgada was a mockery of "a republic in reality." The conjectures might be unfair, but it seemed as if behind the scenes, in the background, stood the dominating influence of the Consolidated Fruit Company, whose vast interests in the tropics employed a hundred ships and fifty thousand men. If not actively aiding this hot-headed quarrel, the corporation was willing to let Salgada pull its chestnuts out of the fire.

The destinies of the country were controlled in a tall office building in New York, where American business methods, as applied to politics, were patterned after the system well known in the legislative halls of the United States. Stripped of its tortuous verbiage, this newspaper editorial meant that now was the time to catch Oriente unprepared and bereft of its strong leader in war and peace.

In college athletics, Peter Burnham had been a zealot for "the square deal." He was a sportsman, through and through, grim and indomitable during the contest, fighting for every inch of advantage that could be fairly won, and ready to shake hands with his foemen after the smoke had cleared. He was slow to anger, but now his blood boiled.

This rag of a newspaper clinched all that had been hinted or revealed.

Peter Burnham vividly recalled the likeness of young Bolivar Martinez as he had flitted about the campus or gust-

ily bullied the crew from the coxswain's seat of the varsity shell. At the word that his father needed him, Bolivar had fled to play a man's part as an officer of the fighting army of Oriente.

"By Jove! if I linger long in Salgada, I'm liable to hurt somebody," Peter muttered between his teeth.

"Who has been treading on Peter's toes so early in the morning?" cried Hector Alonzo McGrath, who came tripping out of the hotel, all fresh and smiling. "Jim Stearns is fussed up, too. He toddled out at daylight, and saw soldiers doing stunts."

"Let's get our coffee, and I'll translate the news to you," said Peter.

Jim Stearns joined them, having enjoyed a belated nap, and Peter pounded the table while he expounded the latest developments. The others listened dutifully, for it was hazardous to interrupt Peter when he was very much in earnest. At length Stearns spoke up determinedly:

"Well, the hands are dealt. I am glad there is to be no more holding the cards under the table. This country is undoubtedly going to try to put it all over Oriente. Where do we come in? It looks as if the trouble might start a good deal sooner than Captain O'Shea reckoned."

"I am for going to Oriente and saluting Bolivar Martinez with a few Yale cheers," said Hector.

"What do you advise, Peter?" asked Jim. "You are the grand old man of the Galleon Bank Exploration Company."

"As I see it, the proposition frames up something like this: Cape Saint Mary and the Galleon Bank are on the coast of Oriente, or, at least, in the disputed boundary region, a couple of hundred miles south of here. That is our destination, and it is also a good deal nearer our friend, Bolivar Martinez. I say we try to get out of here in some kind of a sailing craft, and make for Cape Saint Mary."

"We are more likely to run across Captain Mike O'Shea in those waters than if we wait in Port Catalina," said Stearns.

"He will not come back here," positively declared Peter.

"What do you think of taking a run up to Valencia, the capital of this foolish republic?" suggested Hector. "It is a four-hour trip by train, and the city is charming, they tell me. We might be able to pick up some information. Everything we hear in this blighted banana port is apt to be secondhand information, and false alarms."

This was carried by unanimous vote, Stearns thoughtfully adding:

"How about Julius Cæsar Jones? Shall we leave him here?"

"Sure thing. He is the least of our worries," cried Hector. "If the Salgada police dare to molest him, there will be an uprising among the sixteen thousand Jamaica negroes. Julius has arrived. He is the star performer of the troupe."

An hour later they were in a train which moved leisurely along a narrow-gauge road that skirted the seacoast for several miles, and then turned to follow the valley of a brawling river into the mountainous hinterland. There were lovely glimpses of flashing surf and blue ocean beyond the tall, clustered palms, and of lush, interlaced jungle creeping to the boundaries of the vast clearings in which marched the stately files of banana trees—it was belittling to call them plants—whose great fronds towered twenty feet in air.

Soon the track began to climb above this steaming, tropical belt of coast. The banana plantations became less frequent. The landscape was bolder and more broken. The breeze was cooler and not so enervating. The black Jamaicans no longer thronged the stations and villages. Spanish was the language overheard. Along the muddy trails leading from the small coffee and cocoa farms on the hillsides rode the native Salgadans, small, sallow men, clad in dingy linen and cotton, their wide straw hats flapping, the indispensable machete hung from the belt, the horses stunted, but active and sure-footed.

The hills rose higher and more rugged, until the river valley was a

mountain gorge. The railroad track clung to steep, crumbling shelves of muddy earth and rock. Here and there gangs of laborers were clearing away small landslides which had tumbled down overnight.

The mountains billowed in the misty distance, and there seemed no end of them. Along its winding path to the temperate zone the train crept up one difficult grade after another, until, at length, it emerged from a tunnel, and the city of Valencia was visible, set upon a wide plateau and ringed about by the peaks of one of the lesser ranges of the Andes.

At the station were many carriages and several automobiles, at which Hector Alonzo McGrath, oblivious of the picturesque, was moved to exclaim:

"Man alive, what *do* you suppose they have to pay for gasoline in this neck of the woods?"

"Fifty-five cents, gold, a gallon, and there isn't a mile of decent road outside the city," promptly answered the voice of a stranger. "The young bloods of Valencia wish to cut a dash, so they go bumping over the cobblestones, around the block and back."

The speaker was a young man of the most affable demeanor. He used English with hardly a trace of foreign accent, yet his olive complexion, black eyes, and a certain vivacity of movement bespoke the Latin strain of blood.

"Thank you kindly," returned the collegian. "If you live here, do you mind telling us the name of the best hotel?"

"I live here? Not in a thousand years," and the cordial stranger whisked a card from his pocket and slid it swiftly into Hector's hand. It proclaimed in bold script:

MARCUS V. PAOLI,
Newark, New Jersey, U. S. A.
South American Agent,
The Matchless Safety Razor.

"Well, I will be darned!" drawled Peter Burnham, as if greatly impressed.

"Why, I use a Matchless Safety Razor myself."

"So do I," exclaimed Jim Stearns.

These announcements seemed to delight Marcus V. Paoli. It was as if letters of introduction had been exchanged. Grasping Hector by the arm, he effusively declared:

"Whichever hotel you choose, one is worse than the other. I am at the Dos Hermanos. The rooms are good, but the food is fierce."

"The Dos Hermanos for us," said Stearns. "We can buy provender between meals."

"Wait, I will get a carriage," cried Paoli, and he flew to the station platform and bullied a meek-looking *cochero* as if he were about to eat him alive.

Hector McGrath eyed him admiringly, and murmured to the others:

"He is from Newark, did you get that? And he is selling safety razors. He sharpens the blades on his cheek. He could sell anything."

Paoli came dashing back. One could hardly imagine him as moving slower than a trot. He led the young men to the carriage as if he had a personally conducted party in charge. Among the crowd on the station platform he seemed to have many acquaintances. To one he sang out a greeting in Spanish, to another he was no less voluble in German, a third he caused to smile with a jocular remark in facile French. He radiated friendliness, his exuberant spirits were irresistible. It was necessary for him to explain his gift of languages. Anything for an excuse to talk about himself. Halting his charges, he informed them:

"My father was Italian. My mother was Portuguese. I was born in France. I am cosmopolitan to beat the band. There are no flies on me, I tell you."

Into the carriage sprang Marcus V. Paoli, and, as it rattled through the narrow streets of stone-walled, tile-roofed houses, built no higher than one story for fear of earthquakes, he shoved his hat on the back of his head, showed his white teeth in a flashing smile, and ejaculated:

"It is no trouble to be of service to my countrymen. There is much excitement—many people in the city just now—but I will make the pig of a hotel keeper treat you right."

"It is most kind of you," politely returned Jim Stearns. "We feel a bit lost up here among the real natives. What is the local excitement?"

"The war against Oriente," answered the other, with a shrug and a gesture. "I wish very much to go there, but it is impossible. I went to the railroad station to get information. The German boat that is due to sail next has been chartered by the government of Salgada."

"We are thinking of going there ourselves," said Peter Burnham.

"Maybe we can make the trip together, somehow," enthusiastically affirmed the agent of the Matchless Safety Razor. He leaned forward, and added, in a confidential undertone: "I am up to snuff. I have good friends in this city. One of them is a general of the army. I am invited to dine at his house to-night. Perhaps I can find out some things."

"May I ask why you are in a hurry to sail for Oriente?" asked Peter Burnham.

"Because I sold a thousand dollars' worth of razors and blades to the biggest house in San Pablo on my last trip. I want to collect my money before the row begins, you understand. If I don't, I may not get it at all."

At the hotel, he hurried them into the patio, or open court, within the gloomy walls, and his energetic exhortations mustered all the staff within earshot, from the slipshod waiters to the manager himself. The three guests had no voice in the matter. Paoli made all arrangements, and danced about until the rooms had been inspected, after which he shot out of the place on some business of his own.

"There goes the original human comet," observed Hector. "It's a pity we didn't find him in Port Catalina. We might have been on our way to the Galleon Bank by now. Blackburn was all right, but he hadn't the speed of this one."

"Poor Blackburn is full of chills and fevers, and he is working for the Consolidated Fruit Company, remember that," said Peter Burnham. "He has to play a safe game. But with this Marcus V. Paoli person there will be something doing every minute."

"I hope he joins the troupe," exclaimed Stearns. "I'll bet he has left a trail of safety razors all the way to Cape Horn."

Soon the sounds of martial music drew them to the street. A regiment of Salgadan infantry was passing. From the balconies the women were pelting the soldiers with flowers. There were huzzas from every doorway. The populace was intoxicated with excitement. The three young man walked the streets until they came to an open space in front of the buildings of the University of Salgada. The students were drilling in awkward squads under the direction of uniformed officers. In another part of the grounds was a company of older men, more practiced in the manual of arms, who appeared to belong to a militia or volunteer force.

The spirit of war was rampant, volcanic. All disguise had been flung off. It was to be concluded that the army was mobilizing as rapidly as possible.

The fervid atmosphere of the city aroused in the three Americans a violent antagonism. They felt that they were in the enemy's country. When a group of young loafers paraded the most pretentious avenue, trampling the flag of Oriente in the mud of the gutter, his comrades had to lay hold of Jim Stearns to keep him from punching a few heads. His face was white as he cried:

"I can't stand much more of this. You fellows can do as you like, but as far as I am concerned, the lost galleon and the golden table can go plumb to Hades! I am going to get to Oriente somehow and help Bolivar Martinez."

"I am pretty sore on these swine myself," slowly spoke Peter Burnham.

It was late in the evening when Marcus V. Paoli, bright-eyed and breathless,

reappeared at the Hotel Dos Hermanos. Herding the trio into one of their rooms, he bolted the door, closed the transom, stripped off his coat, fanned himself with his hat, and announced:

"My friend the general gave me the laugh when I said we wanted to go to Oriente. We are bottled up, you understand. Nobody will be allowed to go to Oriente until after the Salgadan army has been landed there. Salgada will give no passports. There is to be no declaration of war."

"That sounds silly," was the comment. "They must know at San Pablo what is going on."

"How can they find out? Look at the map, and see it for yourself," rejoined Paoli. "There are no roads between the two countries. The jungles and mountains are awful. It takes two or three weeks to make the journey. The government controls the telegraph. By sea? There are only two ports on the coast of Salgada—Port Catalina and the little one of Bahia Honda. Launches will patrol them. Every boat will be watched. It is threatened that anybody going to sea without permission will be shot as a traitor."

"You mean to say that it is possible to land an army in Oriente and take the country by surprise? Why, this is not war. This is a raid," said Peter Burnham.

"Salgada has been getting ready for some time," resumed Paoli. "It has been kept pretty well under cover. Now the big chance has come to strike quick. They were afraid of Emilio Martinez. Four thousand men are ready for active service at once. There will be steamers enough. The government can seize ships of the Consolidated Fruit Company in Port Catalina. The company will protest. It will claim damages. Salgada will pay them. It is to laugh."

Peter Burnham was trying to appraise this intelligent young man. He seemed to be the soul of candor, but it was as well to be cautious.

"How anxious are you to get to Oriente?" Peter asked him.

"One thousand dollars' worth," promptly answered the salesman. "My house holds me responsible for that bill of goods. And for one thousand dollars I would try to go anywhere."

"I believe you," said the candid Peter. "I presume you are not taking sides in this shindy. You are a business man."

"You bet. I am in South America, not for my health, but to sell safety razors. There is no business here in Salgada. All the merchants are locking up their money."

"Then if we should happen to find a way of escaping from this country," deliberately declared Peter, "it would mean nothing to you if we chose to make use of this advance information."

"Mr. Burnham means that we shall put Oriente next to this raiding scheme if there is any way to do it," impetuously broke in Jim Stearns. "We should like to beat the Salgadans to it."

"Go as far as you like," the salesman smilingly returned. "I will not give you away. And if you want to make the break to leave Salgada, I will take chances and go with you. I am wide awake. I know the country, the people, the language. I can help you. Emilio Martinez is the finest man in all these republics. Last trip I gave his son a Matchless Safety Razor, gold-plated."

"Do you know Bolivar Martinez? He was in college with us," exclaimed Hector.

"Of course I know him. I know everybody. He is a good sport. He likes me because I used to sell goods in New Haven. He is now Major General Martinez, and, let me tell you, gentlemen, he is no tin soldier. He will perhaps command part of the army of Oriente if his father does not get well."

"The little rooster!" laughed Stearns. "And I used to take him by the neck and chuck him off the boathouse float."

Paoli was thoughtful for a moment. Then he said:

"I think the troops will begin to move from here to Port Catalina in two more days. Then the trains will be full of them. We had better go to the coast tomorrow afternoon. Good night. I will see you in the morning."

After his abrupt departure, the three young men gazed at each other seriously and in silence. The holiday aspect of life had utterly vanished. Little by little, a step at a time, they were being led to face a conclusion which appealed to them as in the line of duty, which held them in honor bound. What Paoli had told them was probably true.

"It seems to be up to us," said Jim Stearns. "It sounds wild to suppose that Oriente could be taken by surprise, but this safety-razor person knows these countries a lot better than we do. And his wits need no stropping."

"Oriente has no navy, barring the *Esmeralda*," observed Peter, "and this surprise party is to be pulled off in a hurry, before Captain O'Shea is in shape to interfere."

"Boliver Martinez would do as much for us," said Jim. "The treasure expedition is hereby shelved for the present. If any one can find a boat and sneak away from this coast, Paoli is the lad."

"Perhaps we had better ship Hector back to New York. This is a man's job," Peter gravely suggested.

"Not unless you chloroform me," doughtily retorted the youth in question. "When it comes to carrying a message to Garcia, alias Bolivar Martinez, you will have to count me in."

At nine o'clock next morning they happened to be passing the ancient Spanish cathedral of Valencia. Into the noble edifice streamed men and women of all classes, members of the most aristocratic families jostled by the barefooted peons from the thatched huts of the mountain valleys. The Americans found room to stand in the rear of the spacious interior. Between the soaring stone columns the aisles were filled with soldiers, while on the stone floor knelt hundreds of praying wives and mothers, their heads covered with *rebozos* of blue, white, and crimson silk.

The full strength of one of the finest military bands in South America was mustered near the altar. The solemn drone of the ornately garbed priests ceased, and the band filled the cathedral with the majestic strains of a Te Deum. The effect was thrilling beyond words.

"It is a military mass," whispered Peter Burnham. "By Jove, it makes a lump come in a fellow's throat."

The service ended, the soldiers shuffled out, and waited in rank for the band to lead them back to camp and barracks. Walking through the plaza, the three friends were overtaken by Paoli. A moment later a pair of young Salgada dandies passed them, and one, laughing nastily, said something to the other, in which the Americans caught the words "Oriente," and "Martinez." The remark was so obviously insulting that Hector demanded of Paoli:

"What did that saddle-colored sport have to say about Bolivar Martinez's father?"

The salesman hesitated and flushed before he answered:

"I would rather not translate it for you. These people are very much excited, you understand. Those young fellows know that Emilio Martinez has been very friendly to Americans. Maybe this is why they said what they did so you could hear it. It is possible to say very bad things in Spanish which a decent chap doesn't like to repeat in English."

"It must have been pretty bad," aggressively put in Jim Stearns. "I suppose I should be thrown in jail if I broke those rascals in two."

"Go easy, old man," said Peter. "To blow up now would spoil our strategy. If we succeed, the joke will be on Salgada, and all accounts will be squared."

CHAPTER VII.

Marcus V. Paoli, that cosmopolitan pilgrim from Newark, New Jersey, was not only a high-powered salesman of safety razors, but he was also a born conspirator. While his chief motive in risking a flight to Oriente was to safeguard that thousand-dollar "bill of goods," yet the prospect of outwitting the officials of Salgada was very much to his liking.

Moreover, he tremendously admired the sportsmanship of the three young men from Yale. They were willing to take chances with no other motive than friendship. Perceiving how intimate was his acquaintance with the country and its people, they were glad to listen to his opinions and follow his suggestions.

As the party journeyed coastward from Valencia, he submitted his plan of action. Twenty miles this side of Port Catalina was a junction of the main line and a branch railroad which ran in a southerly direction, linking the capital of the republic with the small seaport, Bahia Honda, which was situated at the mouth of a river bearing considerable inland traffic. At this place it might be possible to find some kind of a sailing craft, and slip away by night.

At least, this was more feasible than trying to do anything of the sort in Port Catalina, which swarmed with government officials, and in which the three Americans had already made themselves conspicuous.

"That sounds crafty," said Hector McGrath. "We can leave this train at the junction, and slip quietly into little old Bahia Honda to-night. We have enough hand luggage to do at a pinch, and we can send for our trunks when the skies clear. But what about Julius Cæsar Jones? We can't desert the old man, don't you know."

"Wouldn't it be saner to leave him behind?" suggested Peter Burnham. "We brought him along for a lark, but this expedition may be no picnic from now on."

"Somebody will have to see him and explain the situation," said Jim Stearns, "and arrange for his passage back to New York. I'm afraid he is not sprightly enough to keep the pace set for ourselves."

Hector was inclined to demur at this, explaining his point of view as follows:

"It will break his heart if we chuck him into the discard. He feels that we can't get along without him. Why can't I go on to Port Catalina in this train, while you fellows switch off at the junction, and take to cover at Bahia Honda? When could I make connections to join you, Paoli?"

"A mixed train leaves Port Catalina at five o'clock to-morrow morning, and meets another at the junction. This will put you in Bahia Honda at eight o'clock."

"Good enough!" exclaimed Hector. "You see, I shall not arrive in Port Catalina until after dark. Being alone, I am not likely to attract attention. Stearns and Burnham are such brawny, ferocious-looking brutes that they were the cynosures of all eyes. Little Hector, the lightweight, is of the brunette type of beauty, like most of the natives, and he will flit through the town like a shadow, do you see? I can round up Julius at the mansion of Mr. Jason Wilberforce. And if any inquisitive person is hanging around the station to-morrow morning, he will assume that I have come to fetch Julius back to the mountains. Of course, I shall try to convince him that he had better adorn the next steamer bound to New York, but the one best bet is that he will lay back his ears and balk in his tracks."

This argument contained a surprising amount of common sense for Hector Alonzo, and his comrades approved after thrashing it over. No harm could befall him in Port Catalina, and so long as it was assumed that he was returning to Valencia the officials were not likely to interfere with his movements.

Therefore, when the train halted at the junction which consisted of a box of a station and several huts in the heart of the jungle, Hector remained in the car while the others filed out and waved farewell from the side of the track.

Dusky nightfall was overtaking the brief tropical twilight as the asthmatic engine and one dilapidated passenger coach moved out on the divergent branch road which led to the seacoast at Bahia Honda. For some time Peter Burnham and Jim Stearns had little to say. They were steering away into the unknown, venturing blindfolded, each confessing to himself that this might turn out not so much a bold enterprise as a fool's errand. And their spirits drooped somewhat without the efferves-

cent companionship of Hector Alonzo McGrath, who had a knack of making the wildest dreams seem true.

The banner bearer of the Matchless Safety Razor was cheery and talkative, and had many a diverting yarn to spin of his commercial pilgrimages in regions extraordinary. He was a man to chase dull care away, a seasoned campaigner along unbeaten pathways.

"I have been in this wretched town of Bahia Honda only once," said he. "I must have been crazy, for a man could sooner sell safety razors in an old ladies' home, you understand. The people are too lazy to shave themselves if they had the price of a razor. I know a Frenchman there who has a little store. He came from the Isthmus many years ago, when the French were digging the canal. We will go to see the old man. He is a good sport."

At length the little locomotive wasted most of its remaining steam in a series of blasts from its shrill whistle, as if exulting in the feat of accomplishing the journey without breaking down. The few native passengers scuffled out of the car, and the Americans followed them into an unlighted street, where the mud was ankle-deep. The straggling town sloped toward the water, which mirrored the bright stars like jewels cast upon velvet. Paoli stumbled on ahead until he came to a two-story frame building perched upon pilings at the harbor's edge.

The lower room was lighted by several kerosene lamps, which disclosed the shelves of canned goods, rolls of cloth, and gaudily labeled ranks of gin, whisky, and cognac bottles comprising the stock of the small merchant in the American tropics. A wisp of a man, shriveled, brown, white-haired, bobbed from behind the counter, and cackled enjoyably at sight of Marcus V. Paoli. The twain embraced, both talking at once, and the pilgrim from Newark, chameleon of a fellow that he was, instantly became a Frenchman. Peter and Jim, who had been taught French in the wretched, piffling fashion of the American universities, could understand perhaps one word in four of the torrential dialogue, and dumbly waited for enlightenment.

"He will give us a place to sleep upstairs," cried Paoli, "and his cook will find plenty to eat. There are no boats in the harbor. All of them are up the river. I have promised to sit up with him, and sing him all the latest songs from Paris. If you are tired, you had better go to bed after supper. I will try to work the old codger so that maybe he will help us."

Peter and Jim wearily agreed that they were not inclined to make a night of it, and as soon as it was courteously possible they tramped to the second floor, where a servant had spread thin mattresses upon the matting. As Peter Burnham kicked off his shoes, he grumbled:

"I suppose I am old enough to know better. What worries me is having Hector McGrath in tow. That frolicsome kid is the apple of his daddy's eye."

"Oh, Hector is old enough to vote," yawned Jim. "And if you and I should withdraw from this locoed enterprise, ten to one Hector would strike out for Oriente by himself. He was awfully fond of Bolivar Martinez in college, you know. And Hector has a heart as big as a basket."

"No sense in borrowing trouble, I suppose," said Peter. "It looks as if there was a mighty slim chance of sneaking to sea from this God-forsaken port of Bahia Honda."

Paoli entertained the Frenchman to some purpose, for he came scampering in from a plunge in the surf next morning, and awoke his companions with this budget of news:

"A schooner is expected down the river to-day. She will load hides for Port Catalina. The old man says she can sail like the deuce. The owner is the brother of the chief officer of the customhouse of Bahia Honda, who is looking out that nobody goes to Oriente. Maybe we can fix him so he will shut one eye."

"Hector McGrath will bring plenty of money with him," said Jim Stearns.

"This sounds hopeful. We will try to charter the schooner."

This plan was knocked all askew when the morning train brought Julius Cæsar Jones, but no Hector Alonzo McGrath. Taking the Frenchman's advice, Jim and Peter had decided to remain in the seclusion of their quarters, as the sight of them in the street would cause curiosity. They were gazing impatiently from the windows when Paoli appeared, with Julius ambling soberly in his wake, the resplendent headgear and frock coat discarded in favor of a straw hat and linen clothes.

The two young men fell upon him and demanded with one voice:

"What has become of Hector McGrath?"

"I ain't done nothin' with him," quavered Julius, in troubled accents. "He done routed me out las' night, an' told me I must quit th' golden galleums expedition, an' tote myself back home. I jes' positively refused him up an' down an' crosswise. I come down yere to take keer of you all. I'd everlastin'ly disgrace myself on th' Yale campus if I lef' you in this heathen land. I don't know where I'se goin', but I'se on my way."

"All right! You were too much for McGrath," impatiently exclaimed Stearns. "But what about *him?*"

Julius mopped his anxious old face, and his agitation was painful as he stammered:

"He tol' me to go to th' depot an' insert myself in th' five-o'clock train. He would suttinly be there, says he, but I must flock by myself, an' not go pesterin' around to find him 'til th' train done started. He didn't aim for nobody to see us go ramblin' off together, 'cause I natchurally attracts such a heap of attention. I done as he tol' me, an' bought my ticket for this yere Bahia Honda town, an' come on through. Did I do wrong?"

"No, you obeyed orders," said Peter. "Hector must have missed the train. Where did he sleep last night?"

"He went to th' hotel, an' I ain't seen him since, please suh."

"Then he will come to-night, in the train which brought us," cut in Paoli. "He can get in no trouble in Port Catalina."

"He just carelessly failed to connect," said Peter.

"I was suttinly all tore up to come on by myself," wailed Julius, "but I done precisely jes' what he tol' me."

"We are not scolding you. Say, Julius, have you had a good time in Port Catalina?"

The cloud fled from the venerable visage as if by magic. With a chuckle the old man rolled his eyes, and murmured:

"Bless th' Lawd, I'se been swimmin' in good times. These folkses from Jamaica does surely know how to treat a 'stinguished colored pusson right."

Shortly before noon a white, two-masted schooner came reaching down the wide and sluggish river which met the sea in the harbor of Bahia Honda. From the Frenchman's building the Americans gazed at her wistfully as she hauled up to pick an anchorage no more than a hundred yards from where they were. She was smartly handled, and looked weatherly enough to undertake a coastwise voyage to Oriente.

"A lot of good it will do us to-day," mourned Jim Stearns, as he shook his fist at the schooner. "We can't open negotiations until Hector arrives with the funds. There isn't enough money in this crowd to turn the trick."

"I think the captain of the schooner will not risk it for less than a thousand dollars," said Paoli; "and there are the officials to be fixed up. I will pay my share, but most of my money is in a draft, which the Frenchman cannot cash unless he sends to the bank in Port Catalina."

"It means delay," growled Peter Burnham. "Confound Hector McGrath! If we really have a chance of carrying advance information to the government of Oriente, every second counts."

Their state of mind became even more distressing when, late in the afternoon, a large steam launch flying the flag of the Salgada coast-guard service ran in from seaward, and anchored

near the beach, perhaps a quarter of a mile from the schooner. The slim, black muzzle of a rapid-fire gun was visible upon her foredeck. It was apparent that the launch was patrolling this stretch of coast for the purpose of enforcing the embargo decreed to prevent communication with Oriente.

"It is just as well that we did not squander good money on the schooner and the customs officials," said the melancholy Peter. "The jig is up."

A small boat was shoved overside from the launch, and two of the crew scrambled in, followed by a spruce young man in white uniform, presumably the lieutenant in command. The boat made for the rickety wharf adjoining the Frenchman's building, and no sooner had the lieutenant disembarked than he vanished into the small room in the rear of the store, where there were chairs and a table and cognac by the glass for thirsty mariners.

Paoli went downstairs to reconnoiter, and returned an hour later, slightly pale, and holding his head in his hands.

"Ah, that lieutenant drinks like a fish," he sighed, "and it is abominable cognac. He insisted that I must pledge the cause of Salgada, and then there had to be encores. I have a pain in my head, and one in my stomach. He is a very brave man—so he was telling me—and he will whip Oriente all by himself."

"How long does he expect to lie at anchor in this harbor? As long as the cognac lasts?" demanded Stearns.

"He does not know—several days, perhaps. He is ordered to watch the sailing vessels that come down the river."

" 'Pears like it's up to me to do some rootin' an' mascotin'," plaintively murmured Julius Cæsar Jones, who had established headquarters in the Frenchman's kitchen. "I sort o' lost track of my job while I was mixin' with high society in Port Catalina."

"This game is too swift for you. Better take a siesta on the back porch," advised Peter.

When darkness came they ventured from their hiding place, and hovered in the neighborhood of the railroad station, anxiously awaiting the train which should bring Hector Alonzo McGrath. At length the superannuated locomotive whistled its war whoops to proclaim that it had again achieved the impossible, and Paoli rushed forward to greet the missing comrade. The sprightly figure of Hector McGrath was not among the passengers. His spirits drooping for once, Paoli returned to the others, who received his tidings in woebegone silence, which Peter Burnham was first to break.

"Well, if this isn't the limit! What could have happened to him?"

Paoli rallied, ashamed that he had shown dismay in the face of a crisis. "Let me go to the telegraph office," he cried. "Maybe there has come a message this afternoon."

He came cantering back, waving aloft a bit of paper, and very well pleased with himself. Matches were scratched, and by their flare the friends of Hector read this curiously worded telegram from Port Catalina:

PAOLI, Bahai Honda:
H. M. advises disregard him. Plans changed. Deposit left with me.
DORFLINGER.

"What does all that mean?" asked Peter.

"It is easy," airily exclaimed the quick-witted Paoli. "Dorflinger is the German who keeps the hotel where you stayed. Mr. McGrath asked him to send the message so the government officials would not smell a rat. They know me. I am selling safety razors. And they know Dorflinger. That is all they wish to know. They are too dumb-headed to translate the telegram. Mr. McGrath has changed his mind, and he has left money for you with Dorflinger."

Peter Burnham heaved a sigh of genuine relief as he said: "It must mean that his father has cabled him to come home, don't you think, Jim? I am glad he is off my hands."

"Sure! It could mean nothing else. His father may have got wind of the trouble brewing down here. He is probably close to some of the directors

of the Consolidated Fruit Company. They are all big men in Wall Street."

"Perhaps one of the company's steamers sailed for New York to-day, and the cablegram nabbed Hector just in time."

"And he knew we were under cover, so he said no more than he had to."

"I wonder how much money he left us? I suppose we will have to go back to Port Catalina to get it. That means another day or two lost. Confound it all!"

"Let's go back to our room and talk it over."

Now it was that Peter Burnham assumed his rightful place as a leader of men. Paoli had been well enough where audacity, adroitness, and a ready tongue were needed. He could dodge around obstacles, but Peter was the man to break through them. It seemed immensely absurd to him, it attacked his self-respect, that what he wished to do should be thwarted by the vain, childish little people of this Spanish-American caricature of a nation.

And because he was unable to take them seriously, because he had the calm self-conceit, the sense of superiority and of domination born in the blood of the Anglo-Saxon race, he was ready to undertake the improbable, the unexpected thing.

It was significant he should throw an arm across Jim Stearns' shoulder, and that these two should walk toward the harbor while Paoli followed in silence. He was, in truth, with them, but not of them. The clan spirit, the long and intimate associations of the campus world, set them apart from him. Its ties had been tightened by the stress of circumstances.

It was as if they were about to confer between the halves of a football game or the innings of a baseball contest when the tide of fortune had set strongly against them. It was mutually understood that they were going to Oriente without more fuss and delay, precisely as when a good Yale eleven hammers its way to a touchdown against a team which, by every reason under heaven, ought to prevent it.

Having come to the beach, the pair stood, each with his hands in his pockets, and gazed seaward. The night had suddenly become overcast. There was no more lavish glory of stars in the sky. The wind was driving down from the northward, gusty and damp. It brought flurries of rain. The song of the surf had a deeper note. The darkness was intense.

Peter Burnham grasped the arm of his chum, and said, as if thinking aloud:

"The captain of the schooner is in the Frenchman's place, drinking with the lieutenant of the launch."

"The same thing has just occurred to me," replied Jim. "There were four men on board the schooner. Where are the other three?"

"Let's stroll over to the Frenchman's and take a look. You know what I mean," and the voice of Peter was steady and matter-of-fact.

"Sure! I'll go you! It's a bully good game!"

They moved in the direction of the frame building. The safety-razor salesman trudged behind them, wondering, and a little abashed. He no longer held the center of the stage. His personally conducted party was quite evidently about to conduct itself. Nevertheless, he possessed an emotional kind of bravery, and had no thought of hanging back. These two young men, so stolidly resolute and taciturn, rather awed him.

Peter Burnham turned, and gave him an order:

"Go in and mix up with the crowd in the back room, Paoli. Find out how many of the schooner's crew are there, and what men from the launch. If the Frenchman is a friend of yours, and can be trusted, pass him the word to keep all hands busy with the cognac. Then come upstairs, and report to us."

Peter and Jim went quietly to their room, and found Julius Cæsar Jones spreading the mattresses on the floor in his puttering fashion. He straightened up to ask:

"Where you done left Mistah McGrath? I heard th' train come in a while ago."

"He telegraphed that he had decided

not to join us," answered Peter, and he cut short the old man's exposulations by adding curtly:

"I suppose we ought to leave you behind, but it won't do. These Salgada officials will make you the scapegoat if they catch you after we have gone."

"Where you gwine to?" was the startled query. The accents of Peter Burnham had sounded ominous.

"Never you mind, Julius. You are with us for better or worse. Pack up our stuff. Have everything ready. Hold on! There's a revolver and a box of cartridges in my bag. Hand 'em over, please."

The knees of Julius knocked together as he gingerly handled the weapon. His complexion assumed a grayish cast. Fear was in his beseeching old eyes, but the very simplicity of his words revealed that the heart of a hero dwelt within this shaky tenement:

"I reckon we Yale men stands together."

Examining the revolver, and carefully loading the chambers, Peter Burnham said to Jim Stearns:

"Can you sail a schooner?"

"I guess so. I did a lot of cruising with Hector McGrath in his yawl."

"Well, you will have to do some tall sailing to-night."

Paoli suddenly appeared in the room, after a catfooted ascent of the stairs. He had regained his self-esteem. He was playing the rôle of a conspirator. Alert and vivacious, he announced, in a stage whisper:

"There is only one man left on board of the schooner. On the launch? It would make you laugh to go into the back room downstairs. The lieutenant and the engineer are weeping in each other's arms, because they will soon go to war and be killed. They are so sorry for each other's sweethearts. That cognac is——"

Peter Burnham aimed a finger at the informant, and addressed him with an air of parental authority:

"Good enough, my son! Now, listen! Go down again, and make sure the schooner's skiff is still tied to the wharf. Then float into the store, find a sack, and fill it with canned stuff, crackers, anything you can lay your hands on. If the Frenchman is there, pay him for it. If not, leave some money on the counter."

"He is all right. I will rustle the grub," said Paoli.

"Fine! As soon as you are ready, come back and let us know."

Paoli nodded. He was in the grip of a will stronger than his own. He vanished, instantaneously and without noise. Jim Stearns softly whistled a snatch of "Wake, Freshman, Wake," and observed:

"This isn't any worse than waiting in the dressing room just before a big football game, Peter."

Peter Burnham smiled. One might have said he was enjoying himself.

"I am sick of all this side-stepping and strategy," said he. "I hereby declare war!"

Julius Cæsar Jones was kneeling over one of the sole-leather bags, but his posture suggested that he might also be engaged in prayer.

The time seemed long, but no more than fifteen minutes had passed before Paoli returned, and excitedly informed them:

"All aboard! I have done everything. It is raining harder. Nobody at all is outside."

They slipped on their waterproof coats, and passed to the lower piazza. A few steps, and they were stealing along the narrow wharf. Paoli stumbled over the sack of provisions, and groped for the rope which tied the skiff to a piling.

"I have a lantern," he whispered, "but we must not light it now."

"Pass the stuff down to me," muttered Peter, as he lowered himself into the bobbing skiff.

"I guess I am elected to pull the oars," said Jim Stearns.

Without mishap they shoved clear of the wharf. The wind was still strong, and the harbor swell was crested with streaks of foam, which gleamed past the gunwales. A few minute's hard work with the oars, and the schooner was dimly discerned, her white hull like

a wan shadow against the curtain of night.

Peter Burnham, doubled in the stern sheets, wiped the spray from his eyes. The cabin windows were unlighted. Probably the one man on board was asleep below. Jim Stearns ceased rowing.

"We must pile on deck and find that chap, first thing," counseled Peter. "Let her drift, Jim. Put her alongside as easy as you can. That little deck house forward must be the galley. You hop in there, and light the lantern. Then wrap your raincoat around it, and come aft, and follow me while I dive below and grab the lone sailorman."

The skiff drifted closer, until strong hands caught hold of the schooner's low rail. It was ticklish work to keep the small boat from grinding and bumping in the uneasy seas; but, watching his chance, Peter Burnham made a risky leap for the deck, and Stearns scrambled after him, leaving the others to make the best of it.

The brace of tall athletes parted company, Stearns to light the lantern, Burnham to stand poised for action at the companionway of the trunk cabin. The man below had been awakened, for Peter heard him moving about, and a drowsy voice sang out something in Spanish.

Peter shoved the hatch back, and listened, holding his breath. The man in the dark collided with something, and swore fervently, mentioning the names of several saints. Then he found his bearings, and moved toward the companion hatch. His bare feet made little, scraping sounds as he felt for the stairs which led to the deck. He paused a moment, yawning and grumbling, perhaps puzzled to know why his hail had been unanswered.

Above him, in the thick gloom, Peter Burnham waited like six feet three inches of inexorable fate. Jim Stearns was having trouble with the lantern, and had not yet emerged from the galley. The unwitting sailor resumed his lazy ascent. Another step brought his head level with the open hatch. A long arm shot out, and sinewy fingers twisted themselves in his shock of hair, fingers which years of baseball pitching had given the strength of steel hooks. A mighty heave, and the man was plucked from the hatchway as one might pull a turnip in a garden. Consternation made him dumb. His breath came with a whistling sound.

The gigantic captor deftly tucked him under one arm, and covered his mouth with an immense, hard hand. His bare feet wiggled piteously, like signals of distress. Peter Burnham glanced forward, and cautiously sang out:

"Come along with that lantern, Jim. I want to tuck this chap away in a safe place."

"What? Have you bagged him already?" incredulously exclaimed Stearns as he ran aft.

"Sure thing! Duck into the cabin, will you, so I can see what I'm doing?"

Nonchalantly descending, Peter sat his prisoner upon the table, and flourished the revolver to emphasize his brief remarks:

"Hi, you hombre! Savvey this? You *habla* one word above a whisper, and I'll blow your *cabeza* off. *Vamos* into that stateroom, pronto. Lock the door on him, Jim. He is scared green. He won't peep."

Grasping the panic-smitten wretch by the slack of the trousers, Stearns obediently heaved him into the cubby-hole of a room, and luckily found a key in the door. The two young men leaped for the deck, and found that Paoli and Julius Cæsar Jones had come aboard from the skiff.

"You are the skipper, Jim," said Peter. "What are the orders? How shall we get this packet under way in a hurry?"

"All hands turn to on the mainsail halyards when I say the word," was the prompt reply. "We ought to reef it, but we'll have to take a chance. I suppose the blocks will creak like the very dickens."

He felt his way out along the main boom, and swiftly cast loose the stops that bound the sail. Then, fumbling for the pin rail, he found the coils of halyards, and the quartet tailed on for

dear life. The flapping canvas rose very slowly. There were telltale sounds, which must have carried ashore to the roisterers in the Frenchman's back room if they themselves had not been making so much noise.

"They will be sure to hear us in the launch," panted Stearns. "Pull! For Heaven's sake, pull yourselves in two."

The mainsail was no more than half-mast high when a light moved on the deck of the armed launch. A moment later her steam whistle began to blow frantic, spluttering blasts. Jim Stearns stumbled forward, and groped for the heel of the bowsprit. As he loosed the jib, he barked his shins against the small hand windlass, and was delighted to discover that the cable was not of chain, but of hemp. With his pocketknife he sawed through all the strands but one. Then, scrambling aft, he swayed with Paoli on the peak halyard of the mainsail. The schooner was lightly sparred, and the sail was climbing without a hitch. The four of them sweated and hauled with the strength of ten.

A stream of light shot athwart the landward end of the wharf as the door of the Frenchman's store was flung open, and the men from the schooner and from the launch came tumbling out. They raised a tumultuous outcry. The whistle of the launch was calling them with hysterical clamor. At least one person of ready resource had been left on board, for presently the gun on the bow winked a red spark, barked sharply, and spat a shell, which flew over the schooner with a hiss like a rocket.

"Looks as if they jumped to the conclusion that something is wrong out here," drawled Peter Burnham.

"This sail is hoisted home," shouted Stearns. "Take the wheel, Peter, and hold her steady while I cast off."

Racing for the bow, and tumbling head over heels against the water cask, he picked himself up, and hoisted the jib. Then, after cutting the last strand of cable, he flattened the headsail to windward with all his strength. The sensitive schooner began to pay off, and he shouted a reckless, defiant hurrah.

The gun on the launch was fired again, but the aim of the man behind it was wholly at random. He was shooting at the wide, wide world. The lantern in the schooner's cabin had been doused. She was an indistinguishable mark, a phantom shape blending into the murky obscuration of the rain-swept, starless night.

Jim Stearns, so agile for his strapping proportions that he seemed to be in several places at once, shouldered Burnham away from the steering wheel, gripped the spokes, and roared, all caution thrown aside in the thrilling excitement of the moment:

"The mainsheet bitts are just behind you, Peter. Here, you, Paoli, jump and help him! Slacken out the sheet—not too much. Belay when I tell you. It's all clear water ahead. We've got to make a run for it."

"Aye, aye, sir," replied the obedient Peter. "The launch will be putting after us as soon as she can get her people aboard."

The schooner staggered, and buried her lee rail as the weight of the wind smote her soaring mainsail. Then she nimbly picked up headway, and fled for the open sea.

"By Jove, she *is* fast," exultantly cried Jim Stearns, as he fought the kicking wheel. "If we could only hoist the foresail!"

"Can she stand it?" asked Peter.

"I'll take a chance, old man. If we can once get out of range of that peevish little cannon, we'll heave her to and try it."

The schooner soon passed clear of the point of land which sheltered the harbor to the northward, and crashed through the long seas, which had battering force in the lift and send of them. Jim Stearns had no intention of squaring away down the coast. For one thing, it would be dangerous to run with a free wind and give this yawing, unreefed mainsail a chance to trip or gybe, and, besides, he wanted open water, and plenty of it.

Glancing over his shoulder, he fancied he heard the faint beat of the launch's engine. He was undismayed by this, but as he peered ahead he was shocked to

discern two or three stars mistily glimmering high above the horizon. The dark canopy of rain clouds had rifted. The whole heaven was likely to clear suddenly, after the capricious manner of tropical weather in the summer season.

"Now, what do you think of that, Peter?" he exclaimed. "If it is going to be one of those blazing starlight nights, those lobsters in the launch can see us as far as they can shoot."

"I say we get up that foresail before the weather clears," unhesitatingly growled Peter. "We are a crippled duck without it if this is going to be a chase."

"Right-o!" cheerily returned the acting skipper. "Take your crew, and get busy the minute I let her come into the wind. You know where to find the ropes."

It was an immensely audacious thing to attempt. The launch could be no more than a couple of miles astern. Peter Burnham dived below, and instantly returned with the captive sailor, hustling him on ahead like a football. He was driven forward, cowed and eagerly obedient, and a skilled pair of arms was added to the crew at the foresail.

The plunging schooner hung in the wind while Jim Stearns stared over her quarter, and heard, like the echo of his loudly beating heart, the pulsations of the launch's engine. He hoped the pursuit might blunder past, but, alas, the schooner was by no means silent. The pulley blocks whined dolefully, and the wooden hoops of the foresail squeaked loudly as they went jerking and scraping up the mast, while the mainsail slatted with a noise like distant thunder.

The launch was coming up rapidly. To Jim Stearns it seemed as if she was following the wake of the schooner like a hound on a hot scent. By now the clouds were breaking almost overhead. Presently the practiced eyes of a seafarer would be able to descry the schooner at a considerable distance, when her tall canvas should blot out the stars, many and bright in this tropical latitude. The wind was no longer rough and gusty. It blew a joyous whole-sail breeze that sang steadily in the schooner's rigging.

Jim Stearns licked the salt from his lips, and muttered, in the form of a prayer:

"Give us ten minutes more! Oh, Lord, give us ten minutes more. We'll show them a race. They will have a run for their money."

The sound from the launch became a hard-driven, metallic throb. Jim was sure he could make her out as a dim black blotch. He rubbed his eyes. The black smear startlingly defined itself by spurting a thin ribbon of flame, and a shell plopped short of the schooner, and tossed spray on deck.

From the foremast came the unterrified accents of Julius Cæsar Jones, to remind Jim Stearns of the recent Yale-Harvard boat race.

"Lay into it, my Yale tarrapins. There ain't no poor white trash from Salgada gwine ketch *us*. Only a few mo' strokes. Swing, swing together with your bodies between your knees."

Proverbially poor Spanish gunnery, together with Yale luck and the efficacious presence of Julius Cæsar Jones to enforce the same, saved the schooner from being riddled like a sieve. As Peter Burnham yelled, "Play ball, Jim! We've finished our job!" the launch was pumping shells at point-blank range, and the company of the schooner automatically ducked at the flashes and reports, like so many marionettes.

Marcus V. Paoli was playing a man's part, but he was heard to ejaculate, with mournful intonation:

"I would give that thousand-dollar bill of goods, so help me, to be on shore somewheres!"

Then the schooner filled away, no longer handicapped by lack of sail, but eager and responsive, like a sentient thing which had taken fright. She rushed buoyantly seaward, the low deck awash, and Jim Stearns held her to it, determined to drive her under rather than heave to again.

The Salgada launch was no lubberly craft, and she was not to be outfooted

in a hurry. The gunner was shooting closer to his target, and a shell ripped through the box of a galley lashed to the schooner's deck. There was a tremendous clatter of crockery and tinware.

"Hit square in the appetite," regretfully exclaimed Peter Burnham. "This is getting darned serious."

This calamitous shot was the best the gunner could do, however, and, smoking along at a good ten-knot gait, the schooner began to draw away, little by little, until the launch was no longer visible. Holding to his course for some time longer, Stearns then tacked and stretched away into the northward, in the hope of deceiving the pursuers. The ruse was successful. The launch was shaken off, and it is to be presumed that the thirsty lieutenant jogged back to the port of Bahia Honda to console himself with another bottle of the Frenchman's potent cognac.

The piratical crew of the schooner gathered aft, and ceremoniously shook hands all round. It was Peter Burnham who sagaciously inquirtd:

"Well, Jim, old sport, how do you expect to navigate this packet, now that the excitement is over?"

The young man at the wheel airily waved an arm to the southward, and answered:

"Oriente is down there somewhere. We shall come about presently, and hit the trail. There is a compass in the binnacle, and there may be some charts below. Lead the kidnaped sailor into the cabin, and make him rummage around."

"Come on, Calamity Bill," said Peter, as he grasped the person in question by the ear. "You and I will exchange a few thoughts in Spanish. I am sorry I had to be rough with you. This is your unlucky day."

"I sell safety razors, and I am used to close shaves, but——" piped up Paoli.

"That will do for you," chided Stearns. "Don't get frivolous. I never stole a schooner before, and I am full of serious meditations. Here, you Julius Cæsar Jones! Curl up somewhere and go to sleep!"

"I suttinly is weary in my bones," drowsily murmured the old man. "I reckon I ain't young enough to 'preciate th' enjoyments of this yere performance. When them big bullets was sayin', 'Whee-ee, whoo-o-o, where's that ol' nigger?' I was powerful sorry you ever tol' me 'bout the golden galleums."

TO BE CONTINUED IN THE NEXT ISSUE, ON SALE JUNE 7TH.

THE CALL OF CHANTICLEER

BARNEY WELLER was about the funniest fellow you ever saw. He was always making people laugh by playing jokes on somebody, and he put up a game on a victim every day in the week. He was in Chicago at a big hotel on one occasion when the butt of one of his jokes sought revenge by securing a live rooster and tying it under Barney's bed at night.

At three o'clock in the morning the rooster turned up for his first vocal selection and let out a long, shrill crow. The second performance of this kind was too much for the humorist. He dressed himself hastily and rushed down to the night clerk.

"Give me my bill!" he said fiercely. "I'm going to get out of this place."

"But please tell me what the trouble is," suggested the night clerk.

"That don't matter," said Weller angrily. "I'm going to get out of here and get out quick!"

"At least," begged the clerk, "let us know what is the matter with the hotel before you go."

"Well," exploded Weller, "there's a crazy fool next door to me who thinks this place is a hen house. He's spent the last two hours trying to imitate a rooster."

In the Sawdust

By Robert V. Carr

Author of "Power of the Press," "Clipping the Wolf's Claws," Etc.

Men handling cattle are no "pink-haired Willies." They work rough, and play rough. And no man looking for their business can make good by being afraid to get down in the sawdust with them

DID you ever have some fellow who could handle you easily take you by the neck and slam you up against the wall and hold you there? If you hain't, you've never known the feelin' of bein' totally out of conceit. I'm strong for brains and ideas, but just the same I know there are times they don't count. And one of them times is when some big husky has you grabbed and shows you that he's got you, and there's no use to think he hain't, or try the mental-suggestion stunt on him Believe me, a slam in the jaw is a hard-boiled fact that no amount of mind work can argue away. If you've ever known the feel of a fist on your face, you'll know what I mean.

I was raised to never take a beatin'. "Back into a corner, and go to shootin', but never let no man maul you under any conditions," was a cow-land motto dented deep in my mind. But when I began hustlin' live-stock shipments for Billy Dayton I quit packin' a gun. Thinks I: "Johnny Reeves, your cow-punchin' days are behind you. Don't be foolish and carry a gun. Times are changed. You're married now, and are out for business instead of trouble." Thusly and so figgerin', I puts the old forty-five in my grip instead of slingin' it handy in my waistband. In that way I puts it up to myself to side-step trouble as much as possible. It's a true sayin' that a gunless man talks soft.

Of course, you can come up with the argument that a man on the road for a live-stock commission firm could avoid the bad actors and the rough-house boys. The answer to that is this: Men handlin' cattle are no pink-haired Willies. They work rough and play rough. And no man lookin' for their business can make good by bein' afraid to get down in the sawdust with 'em. Drunk or sober, the real go-getter mixes with the shippers, or he don't land their business.

Cowmen won't stand for any uppishness. If you expect to do business with them, you've got to be one of them. Otherwise they'll run the hoodoo brand on you, and it's good night to your little job.

But this is no business-college course, and so I'll lope back to where one Pete Snider has me against the wall of the Tiptop Saloon, and I'm a-thinkin' the bell has done rung for my finish.

Pete was a round-up cook. His outfit had come in to change the color of the burg to a bright red, and they had plenty of paint and were all free-hand artists. Naturally, bein' an old cow-puncher, and with an eye to business, I romps into the bunch as they are millin' round in the sawdust on the floor of the Tiptop. They all greets me friendly enough, except Pete, the cook, who has a half-drunken grouch on. I'm takin' my tea with the bunch when Pete throws the spotlight on himself and me.

"Hey, you," he yells, plowin' through the crowd to get to me, "take off that collar!"

Before I could guard, he'd reached

out, hooked two fingers in my collar, and jerked it off my neck. "We don't 'low no high-collared dudes in this dump," he bawls, plenty mean.

Now, in my cow-punchin' days there would have been a dead cook. But with Johnny Reeves out for business, and the old forty-five sleepin' in his grip over at the hotel, it was different. I held my temper and grinned.

"That's all right, old sport," I says, pleasant. "Collars are cheap." Then, thinkin' to side-step further trouble, I calls up the house.

But Pete wasn't satisfied. He wants to muss me up more; and, take it from me, he wasn't backward about doin' it. He weighed near two-twenty, and was built like a grizzly bear. I stood no show with him a-tall. First thing I knew, he has me grabbed and is woolin' me around, pawin' my hair, and such-like pleasant stunts. Still I holds my temper, pertendin' like I think it's just good-natured hossplay. But in my heart I knows the cook means to hurt me, and I'm longin', in spite of my good resolutions, for my old six gun, the great equalizer, that, like the grave, makes all men the same.

The cook keeps gettin' rougher and rougher, and finally—*blim!* goes my temper, and I'm killin' mad.

"Let go, you greasy pot rasler!" I says, quiet and desperate, "or I'll tear your front out!" I tried to jerk away from him, but no use.

My gettin' mad just suited Pete. It give him some excuse to beat me up. So he gets a better holt on me, and slams me up against the wall of the saloon. His left hand holds my right, and his right paw has a clutch on my neck. He's too close to kick or use my knee. I can't get any swing on him with my left hand, and he's got me, and that's all there is to it.

"Aw, cut that out, Pete!" butts in one of the boys. "Leave him be."

But Pete don't pay no attention. His big, hairy hand has a grip on my neck, and he's grinnin' in my face like one of them gorillas. At that time, had I had my gun and a free hand, I would have beefed him too dead to skin. I was crazy mad, but he was so much stronger than me that I was practically helpless. Yet I manages to gurgle to Pete Snider: "Better kill me now, you big stiff, or I will you if you let me live!"

Pete grins his yellow-toothed grin two inches from my face, growlin': "The time to kill is *now!*"

He was drunk, but, don't you know, there was a heap of wisdom in his words. The time to do anything is *now*. And if you can't do it now, keep your fly trap shut.

Still I kept on repeatin' that I'd surely kill him, until finally he shut off my wind, and my face began to feel big and things got hazy.

Thinks I: "Johnny, this dirty cook is a-goin' to choke you to death. You're a gone goslin' unless something happens." Then, just about the time I could feel my knees weakenin', something did happen. That *Something* was my friend, Nicodemus Tree. He come in just as I thought my name was Mud, instead of Reeves, and you can gamble all the money in the world he was as welcome as the flowers in May.

Let me give you a line on Nicodemus Tree: He was the biggest man west of the Missouri River. He stood six feet seven inches in his socks, weighed three hundred pounds, and all of it hard meat and bone. When Nick come to town they had to take the covers off of two beds in the hotel and make him a shake-down on the floor. No ordinary bunk would hold him, and everything that he used nearly was made to order. He chewed a half pound of plug tobacco a day, and it was only a stranger that stood to windward of him. His idea of a light lunch was a porterhouse barely seared, a loaf of bread, three pounds of potatoes, a soup bowl full of gravy, one pie, and a half dozen cups of coffee. That's what I've seen him eat when he was just mincin'. What he'd do when real hungry I hain't enough imagination to say. Believe me, there was nothin' about Nicodemus Tree that would remind you of an invalid.

Nick never smiled except with his

eyes. His face was smooth-shaven, and there was more waste acreage on it than a farm in the bad lands. His eyes set 'way back under big, gray brushes of brows, and his head was a grand old dome, topped with a tumbled thicket of iron-gray hair.

I always liked Nick, though I'd never been able to get his cattle. He was wedded to the river markets on account of old-time associations, and bein' in the habit of goin' there. But there were conditions under which he would ship to Chicago. No, I won't name 'em now. I'll just repeat that I liked Nick and he liked me. To me there was something soothin' and restful about the grand old boy. To be near him was like settin' in the shadow of a mountain—big, calm, and quiet.

"What's up, Johnny?" he booms out, recognizin' me.

For the reason that Pete has me by the neck, I can't answer to do any good.

In one way, old man Tree was like an elephant. He didn't appear to move quick, but he always caught what he went after. Really he was as quick as a scairt wolf, but so bulky you didn't notice how sudden he was. He's up to Pete in a breath.

"Let go of that boy, *you!*" he bellers, as gentle as a foghorn.

But Pete has a good opinion of himself. He don't propose to let go. Bein' drunk, he don't notice how quiet everything has got all of a sudden, and don't look around to see who's speakin'. He sets his claws in a little deeper, figgerin', I guess, to not be robbed of his prey.

Though he was chokin' the life out of me, I kind of felt sorry for that cook. Had he looked around and seen who was talkin', he would have dropped me like he would a live rattlesnake, and tore the end of the saloon out to get away. But the poor fool didn't look around, and the next second the cyclone—with a cloudburst throwed in—arrived, and that greasy cook was in the middle of it. In his ignorance, that there Pete had sassed Nicodemus Tree, and, as the Good Book says, "he reaped the whirlwind."

The first thing I know is that the fingers let go my neck, and I'm alone, leanin' against the wall, a little faint and sick, but enjoyin' the sight. Old man Tree has a great hand clenched on Pete's arm, and is slowly drawin' the cook toward him. If I was as helpless as a child in Pete's hands, the cook was a rag baby to Nick. He handled the dough mixer without effort.

"What for you be a-woolin' a friend of mine?" asks Nick, kind and calm. "Come here! I want to visit with you."

He twists Pete's arm, and the cook moans as the bones threaten to leave the sockets. No one said a word, and most of the bunch, though reckless with licker, scarcely breathed. Drunk or sober, they all knew old man Tree.

"Come to pappy," says Nick, like he's talkin' to a baby. Slow and easy, and with one hand, he twists the arm of that cook, until, down on his knees, the pot rasler, now sobered by pain, begs for a let-up. But Nick hain't through with the lesson yet. When he gets Pete where he wants him, he suddenly lams him on the side of the head with his open palm. Say! Talk about your smacks! It sounded like hittin' a steer with a scoop shovel. When Pete gets that clip on the ear, he groans 'way down deep where he lives.

"That will remind you," Nick tells the groanin' cook, "never to talk back to pappy."

Then old man Tree, probably thinkin' of school days, grips the shoulders of the cook, lifts him to his feet with scarcely the sign of an effort, and then the main show opened up.

Did you ever see a dog shake a rat? Yes? Well, then you can understand, in a way, what Nick done to that cook. Actually he shook the shudderin', shiverin' daylights out of that chef. The boys said he shook something loose in Pete's noddle, for they claimed the cook was always a little off his mental range after that.

Followin' the ginnin' up, Nick throws Pete from him like he's a wormy apple, and *slam!* goes the cook ten feet away and against the stove, which luckily is cold. Down comes the pipe.

and then, to wind up the job, Nick goes over and picks the pot rasler out of the wreck, carries him by the slack of the clothes to the back door, and throws him out, same as you would a cat. Pete don't come back.

Durin' the whole deal, no one so much as cheeped. If there was any one who had any fault to find with Nick, he kept it to himself. No man gets so drunk but what he knows the uselessness of findin' fault with sudden death.

Nick comes back from throwin' out the cook, holdin' his hands away from him, like he'd been handlin' something sticky and was afraid he'd soil his clothes. He wiped his mauls on a big, red bandanna, and says, quiet like: "Everybody take a drink on me. I'm celebratin' my sixtieth birthday."

Then, kind of rememberin' something, Nick asks the bunch: "What for did you boys stand around and let a cook paw over an old cow-puncher?" He said it kind of nice, but there was danger in his voice.

One long cow-puncher hurried to explain: "We thought Pete was just a-foolin', dad. No harm meant, you know. It was all a josh. We didn't calculate to let it go much farther, and then you come in——"

Nick interrupts him: "That'll do—that'll do. I hain't sayin' that cook had you boys buffaloed, but it looked a lot like it. You sure forgot your manners to strangers."

No one made any reply, and so I cut in: "Let's forget it. I guess the boys, at first glance, thought I was a tenderfoot. Let it pass, and bygones be bygones." Then, to old man Tree special, as I pours out a reviver: "Here's hopin' you live forever!"

Things were kind of squared around now, and the cow-punchers followed suit in wishin' Nick many happy returns of the day. Really them punchers didn't sympathize with the cook. I could see they felt ashamed of themselves for the way they'd let Pete paw me over. Nick's talk had kind of showed them where they were, and they felt cheap. Some of them even come up and half apologized to me. But to all I said "Forget it."

Funny about cow-punchers and cooks. To a cook's face, a puncher will be as nice as pie, when really the rider hates the pot rasler's innards. But a round-up cook is no soft proposition. There's somethin' about cookin' that makes men cranky and desperate. No cow-puncher in his right mind will lip a cook unless he's prepared to run a foot race with a locoed pie artist directly back of him, wavin' one of them long butcher knives. So you can see that when a sure-'nough cow-puncher speaks to a cook, he says pretty, "Please."

After things had sort of got bedded down, I says to Nick: "I sure appreciate what you've done for me. I thought I was a gone goslin' till you came."

"Don't mention it," says Nick, wavin' his hand. "The exercise done me good." He lays a nine-pound mitt on my shoulder and laughs with his eyes. "How's business with you?" he asks, friendly and nice.

"Couldn't be any better," I tells him, "unless I should hear *you* were goin' to ship to Billy Dayton, at Chicago." I grins at him, and ties my handkerchief around my neck to replace the collar Pete had tore off of me.

Old man Tree's eyes twinkle like he's thinkin' of something pleasant. Asks he, leanin' down to me: "Do you know the proposition I made the Chicago yards' representative last year?"

"Yes," I replies, "I've heard something about it. But he didn't get your cattle."

Nick goes on to explain: "No, he couldn't make good. It was a fair proposition, too. But he weakened just the same. Says I to him: 'I'm fifty-nine years old to-day.' And that was just a year ago to-night. 'And I'm goin' to celebrate the fact. Come with me, boy, and I will show you how a man enjoys himself.' But he kind of hung back. I sort of liked the young scoundrel, same as I do you, and so I says to him: 'Put in the night at Nick Tree's side, drink for drink, eight p. m.

to eight a. m., and his cattle go to Chicago.' He was a good, game boy, but along about two o'clock he petered out. I've always shipped to Omaha, know all the boys down there, but now I'm gradin' up my stuff, and they're big and fat as butter. If that Chicago stockyards man had stayed with me on the night of my fifty-ninth birthday he would have got my cattle. They ought to go to a heavy cattle market, anyway."

I'd heard of Nick's proposition to the Chicago market booster, but I thought it mostly talk. I knew that puttin' in a night with old man Tree was like goin' to a tea party with a bolt of lightnin', or waltzin' with a cyclone. It took a good man, I knew, to drink with Nick and stay by his side for one night. "Still," thinks I, "if the price of landin' Nick's cattle is to stick with him on the night he's celebratin' his sixtieth birthday, it'll do me no harm to take him on, especially after the way he rescued me from the claws of that cook."

I turns to Nick for more information. "Do I understand that if I stay with you, drink for drink, from eight o'clock to-night to the same time to-morrow mornin', that you will give Billy Dayton your business?"

"You are certainly correctly informed," replies the cook destroyer. "If you honor me with your company from now on until eight in the mornin', I'll ship every hoof I've got or ever expect to have to your outfit as long as you're with them. Under them conditions, whenever you leave your firm, my business goes with you."

"That," says I, "is good enough for a setter dog. Consider me your huckleberry from now on, with kindest regards. I will follow your smoke, regardless of what happens."

"Enough said," he comes back, shakin' my hand on it. Then he turns and yells to the bunch: "Fill 'em up again! We've only one life to live, and let's be a-livin' it! Them's my sentiments."

Then he begins kind of chantin': "Sixty years old, and never an ache nor a pain. Sixty years old, and never been whipped. Sixty years old, and owe no man a cent."

He brung his hand down on the bar, and the glasses jumped two inches high. "I've found a good little pard," he informs everybody within the town limits, layin' an arm across my shoulder, "and we're a-goin' to celebrate my sixtieth birthday. Drink hearty, boys, for there's more where that come from."

Nick was just beginnin' to feel his oats; and some of the boys, gettin' cold-footed, began edgin' for the door. But they don't get far away. The old man catches them and snakes 'em back.

"Don't try to run away from pappy," he tells 'em, playful like. "The fun's just started."

We has a few more rounds, and then Nick concludes he hain't gettin' quick enough action. "Put out everything!" he bawls; and the bartender, knowin' his man, begins settin' out a forest of bottles. My sixty-year-old friend then gives a yell that almost raises the roof, and, with swipes of his great arms, sweeps bottles, glasses, and men in a wreck to the floor. Old man Tree was gettin' down to business.

As for me, I stayed back of him, with my mind made up to stick or die in the ditch. Believe me, I was the original sand-bur kid.

Why didn't some one interfere? Why didn't the marshal show up and take Nick in tow? The reasons were simple: The only way to take Nick Tree in tow would be to drop him with a buffalo gun at a thousand yards, then rope and tie him, and drag him away. No one wanted to go to all that trouble, so they left him be. Besides, he paid for everything he ordered or broke. The saloon keepers just give him the figgers after it was all over, and Nick wrote them checks without a kick. Of course, if he hurt any men, that was their personal lookout. It was a cow town and not particular.

By the time Nick got fairly started the whole bunch was some illuminated. I felt kind of lit up myself, though I'm determined to hold my mind on the main issue—stickin' with Nick until eight a. m.

All of a sudden Nicodemus concludes he's done enough damage in one place. So he spreads out his arms and starts for the door, with a scufflin', howlin' mob of men. I've got a holt of his coat tail, and wild hosses couldn't have drug me loose. Nothin' but death can part me from old man Tree.

Out we pours on the street and into the next saloon. Nick busts in like the end of the world.

"Everybody take a drink on me!" he bellers, grabbin' and slammin' men up against the bar like they was sacks of straw. Some of them didn't come quick enough, and the old mountain of bone and muscle just plowed into them, gathered his arms full, and placed 'em where he wanted 'em. No use to even think of resistin' him. No use a-tall to get mad. Only thing to do was to do what he wanted, and do it quick.

All the time I'm stickin' close to Nick and crookin' my elbow whenever he does his. I don't propose to give him a chance to kick out of his promise. But my head is beginnin' to pound, and things gettin' queer slants to them. Still I stays, a-hangin' onto old man Tree like a trick monkey to a circus mule.

Once durin' that horrible night Nick turns and comforts me. Says he: "Johnny, you're a game little boy! Stay with it, and I'll pay your funeral expenses myself."

Then he gets his eye on a feller poundin' a piano in the back of the saloon, and starts for the musician, and the playin' dies out quick. That piano player is a fawn-faced gobbler, and the sight of Nick bearin' down on him chills him to the hocks. He's like one of them birds charmed by a snake, only a little flutter left. He just cheeps once as Nick's awful hand circles his goose neck.

"Can you run?" asks my gentle friend, about as soft as a clap of thunder.

"Yes," cheeped birdie on the piano stool.

"Let's see you, then," requests old man Tree, lettin' go of fawn face, who went him one better than demanded. He didn't run. He just gathered himself and flew.

Nick sets down gently on the piano stool. For a wonder, it stood the strain.

"Boys," he says, in a sociable voice, "I'd 'a' been a musician if I'd 'a' had a show. If I do says it myself, there hain't no one that can beat me chordin' right now. Listen to this."

He pulls that piano up to him, raises his mauls, and say, believe me, he showed that old music box no mercy. *Bling, blung, blung! Bling, blung, blung! Bling, blung, blung!* And then, to show that there was class to his playin', and that he knew more than one piece: *Blang, bling, bling! Blang, bling, bling! Blang, bling, bling!* In a minute he got kind of sore at it, and fell on it like he wanted its life. I didn't think he was goin' to do that—he was goin' along so smooth. But just the samee, he hit it one last fearful lick, and it went *ker-rak* on its insides. and we knew something had done busted.

Nick lifts up the cover and looks down the piano's throat. "I know what's the matter with her," he says, lookin' wise as a tree full of owls. "She's dry and wants a drink. Fetch her a bottle."

The bartender can hear Nick whisper a mile away, and he comes a-runnin'. Nick takes the bottle of joy juice from him and pours it into the piano. That done, he sets down and gives her two or three slams for luck. Believe me or not, that *ker-rax* sound is out of that piano, and she rings as clear as a bell. Nick gives it a farewell lam on the jaw, and leaves it lay. He gets up, and we go on to greener fields.

As I look back on that night, I don't believe there is enough licker in the world to get Nick Tree really and truly stewed. He might get joyful and playful as a runaway battleship, but drunk? Never—never in the world.

In my experience, I have never seen the like of Nick's birthday celebration. He would jump into a crowd of men, grab three or four, and wool them like they were kittens. Sometimes he'd nail some one feller, toss him up in the air,

and catch him, same as you would a baby. Then, to sort of give interest to his program, he'd do a kind of elephant dance while he bawled: "Boys, boys, give me the pat!"

The crowd, mighty willin', would stomp the floor and pat their hands while old man Tree, now sixty years of age, did a breakdown and kicked sawdust to the ceilin'.

I was sore all over. I'd been pulled and hauled around so much that I hadn't a button left on my clothes. My hat was gone, and the front of my shirt in rags. But I was still on my feet and a-stickin'—a-stickin' for business. Things were a-gettin' cloudy, but I hung onto old man Tree like a wild cat to a shepherd dog. And, let me whisper, it took backbone. I was pretty near all in, but I hung to rushin', roarin' Nick like a man hangin' on a cliff by his teeth. There was nothin' I wanted so much in the world as a bed—unless it was Nick's cattle. And as I thought of that bed, I says to myself: "Make it nine feet wide and stationary."

Along about two o'clock the crowds began to thin out. But that didn't stop Nick. It was an all-night town, anyway. From saloon to saloon I tagged him. There was nothin' he would not do, and few things he did not think of doin'. And all the time, desperate and half blind, I was hangin' to his coat like a bulldog tailin' a steer.

Three o'clock, four, and the old man was still howlin' and war dancin'. Five, six, and I've just enough eyesight left to see the clock over the safe in the last saloon. Seven o'clock, and the crowds began to thicken up for their mornin's mornin'. Old Nick is still a-foggin' and chargin' around. I'm now almost blind—plum' dead on my feet, and seein' things on the inside of my head. I leaned at a long, wide-legged slant, and hung onto Nicodemus Tree as he opened the introduction to his last speech.

"I am sixty years old," I hear him say, and his voice sounds a mile away, "and never been whipped. There hain't a man in the world who can put Nicodemus Tree on his back."

He threw his old lion's head up, and began rumblin' that war song old, old-timers sometimes cut loose with for fun:

"I can tear a grizzly bear's heart out and eat it raw!

"I can lick a mess of wild cats, or rip a mountain lion lim' from lim'!

"I'm the original he wolf of the plains, and it's my night to howl! Who-o-o-e-e-e! Who-o-o-e-e-e!

"Is there any man who wants to try me? Come one, come all!

"Tie my hands, and I'll bunt heads! Tie my hands and feet, and I'll bite you and drink your blood! Come one, come all!"

He looks around invitin'ly, but no one seems to want to have his blood drunk. Old Nick reaches back a hand and steadies me, and, deep in my heart, I thank him for bein' so thoughtful, for, believe me, my nose wasn't a foot from the floor. Then he goes on with stronger talk, thinkin', I suppose, to get action.

"Am I to blame?" he asks, sorrowful like, of no one in particular, "'cause in these mush-and-milk days there hain't no fightin' men? Be it my fault they don't raise nothin' but angleworm-backed scrubs? Hain't there no one in the world who'll give a poor old man a little excitement?"

Nothin' stirrin'. Absolutely nothin' stirrin'. And, in his disappointment, Nick throws his hat on the floor and jumps up and down on it.

"Wow-wow-wow!" he bellers. "Not a man in the world as good as me! Sixty years old, and never been cowed! Sixty years old, and——"

About that time there came a sweet, gentle voice from the saloon door, and I pried open one eye with my finger far enough to see a little, old woman in a shawl and black bonnet standin' there.

"Nickie," says she to the original wolf of the plains, "you've talked enough for this time. Come with me."

Say! but old man Tree just faded out. He seemed to shrink down until he was only ordinary size, and his clothes looked two numbers too big for

him. He picks up his hat, looks around kind of silly, grins, and then asks:

"What time is it, Johnny?"

I concentrates my mind on the clock. "Just a shade before eight," I manages to whisper, grabbin' the bar.

"Then," says he, "you win. My cattle go to Billy Dayton. I didn't have no idea *she'd* come to town." Then, to his wife, in the doorway: "I'm comin', mother," as gentle and soft as the cooin' of doves.

I staggers to the door to get a breath of fresh air and see the finish of Nicodemus Tree. There they go down the street—the tamer of grizzly bears and tearer of mountain lions as meek as a pet lamb, and she holdin' his arm, her little, black bonnet a-bobbin' a foot below his shoulder.

I laughs an all-gone laugh as I hangs onto the door and watches 'em headin' into the livery stable where Nick keeps his team. Thinks I: "Mother is seein' that 'Nickie' goes home."

Then I weaves into the hotel, somehow finds my room, falls across the bed, and sleeps a million years.

"Something New in Neckwear" is the title of the next story in this series. In the first July POPULAR, on sale June 7th.

A FEMININE MISUNDERSTANDING

UPTON SINCLAIR, who is an advocate of divorce when married people are unhappy, tells this story:

A woman in one of the large cities of this country was one day persuaded to go to a spiritualistic séance in order to hold converse with her dead husband.

"My dear George," said the widow, in tears, "are you happy where you are?"

"Happier than I was on earth with you," George answered, with alacrity.

This was something of a poser, and the widow paused to decide what she should ask next.

"What is it like in heaven, dear George?" she finally asked.

"Heaven!" exclaimed George. "I'm not in heaven."

THE HEIGHT OF DIPLOMACY

IT was at the British embassy at Washington. A distinguished Englishman was delivering a lecture, and in his audience were many big diplomats and high-society people and two newspaper reporters. The two reporters, being only dumb, driven cattle, who worked for a living among all those people whose business was inheriting gold spoons, stood in the rear of the room.

Just as the lecturer spread on the ambient atmosphere his most gorgeous verbal picture, a large German tried to sit down quietly in a chair in front of the reporters. He did sit down, achieving a transfer from the chair to the floor with a great clatter, which peeved the lecturer and annoyed the guests, who were all anxious to get the talk over and organize a stampede for the punch bowl. Everybody in the room turned around and glared in the direction from which the noise had come. But that German was too smart for them. Having hurled himself against the floor, he stayed there, breathing in a fine mixture of wax and meal which had been rubbed in preparatory to the dancing that was to come later on. And everybody glowered at the poor, downtrodden reporters, clearly indicating that such unspeakable persons should never have been let into the place.

After the lecture was over, Mr. Bryce, the British embassador, found and shook hands with the astute German, remarking:

"Your fall and subsequent recumbent position were the most exquisite piece of diplomacy I ever saw in Washington."

The Law of the Lightning

By Damon Runyon

Author of "A Marathon of Mercy," Etc.

Mr. "Laughing Lou" Bray, promoter of foot races, mostly of the "fake" variety, discovers a way to disprove the old saying that lightning never strikes twice in the same place

GREAT oaks of effort from little acorns of argument grow.

This cabalistic comment is inspired by the results of a small difference of opinion among a party of dishonest gentlemen, gathered for shelter beneath the portico of the Green Palace Hotel, in the city of Denver, one rainy afternoon.

It was a rain with pyrotechnical attachments.

Lightning laced the gloomy sky with brilliant fabric; sharp volleys of thunder came banging out of the black canopy of clouds at frequent intervals.

Mr. "Laughing Lou" Bray, well luncheoned and unperturbed, beamed good-naturedly at the dripping world; Mr. Lathrop Golding, immaculate in tweeds, and talking volubly, found interest in occasional flashes of feminine hosiery at the near-by street crossing; Captain Eben S. Light solemn and silent, listened as austerely as a tomb.

Behind them, close to the revolving doors, cowered the slight figure of Mr. Malcolm Cornet, known to his intimates as "The Cuckoo," for Mr. Cornet feared the lightning as befitted one who felt, inwardly, just cause for a visitation of Providential wrath.

Besides that, Mr. Cornet was "in bad" with his chief, Laughing Lou Bray. The Cuckoo had been behaving, or, rather, misbehaving, with great indiscretion since he had received his share of a "fake" foot race at Excelsior Springs—a race promoted by Mr. Bray; and he had recently come in for a scathing admonition from Laughing Lou. When needs be, the tongue of Mr. Bray could sting like the tip of a quirt, and the Cuckoo feared it almost as much as he did the lightning.

Removed from what he considered the range of both, Cornet eyed the splashing rain distrustfully, shrinking farther back into his corner at every fiery stroke of electricity across the somber canvas of sky. Occasionally he shot a glance of vindictiveness at the portly form of the contented Bray, who stood smoothing a particularly well-filled waistcoat of virulent pattern with one chubby, beringed hand.

"That's quite a storm," remarked Mr. Bray, breaking in upon a steady stream of irrelevancy which flowed from the lips of Mr. Golding. "The lightning is playing down close."

"It struck this building a couple of years back, and caused a fire," replied Golding, glancing upward, with assumed apprehension, and then slanting an amused look at the quivering Cornet.

"In that case, we're safe," came the voice of the foot racer in relieved accents. "Lightning don't strike twice in the same place."

The fat hand of Laughing Lou, slipping up and down and across his abdominal expanse, paused at the middle button of the garish waistcoat. He appeared to be weighing Cornet's observation.

"It don't, eh?" he remarked slowly. "It don't strike twice in the same place?"

A new channel of thought seemed to have opened in the mind of the man

who was credited with being the leader of the greatest organization of "sure-thing" operators that ever attracted the attention of the Western police. The fat, smiling face became mobile with seriousness. Captain Light eyed him with profound solemnity.

"Cap, do you know who was the toughest bird we ever picked on a foot race?" inquired Bray, lowering his voice.

The captain considered. "They was all tough," he finally answered succinctly.

"The name was Deetz," said Mr. Bray impressively, his voice still lowered. "John R. Deetz, a loan shark, right here in this State. He was the toughest of them all, bar none. You wasn't here then; neither was Golding—all the better. The Cuckoo, there, was. Still better. John R. Deetz, of Vanceburg—one tough fellow to take money away from."

"Well?" demanded the captain.

"Jack Wolf is in Portland, isn't he?" asked Bray. "Come here, Cuckoo. You've got nerve, if you haven't got any sense."

Two successive impulses tugged nervously at the mind of Mr. John R. Deetz, of Vanceburg, when there suddenly appeared in the doorway of the office of the Moon Salary Loan Company—which was Mr. John R. Deetz—the sharp-cut features of Malcolm Cornet.

The first impulse was to lock the safe; the second to seize a chair and brain the Cuckoo with blows therefrom. Mr. Deetz was not given to extemporaneous violence, however, and the Cuckoo seemed of peaceful intent. We find them closeted later in Mr. Deetz's private room, the searching eyes of the money lender staring at the runner, and endeavoring to probe the inmost soul of that young man.

The Cuckoo was slight of frame, as stated, but built compactly, and close to the ground. His eyes were a shallow blue, set against a narrow nose. His head carried a shock of wiry white hair, which he brushed straight back from the roots so that he looked as if he wore a cotton turban. The Cuckoo's voice was soft, emphatic, and convincing.

"Here's the proposition," said Cornet: "Bray, the leader of the bunch that trimmed you at Colorado City four years ago"—Mr. Deetz winced—"is down East. I'm the only one of the crowd that was in on your trimming"—Mr. Deetz winced again—"that's left in this part of the country. A fellow named Golding is running things out here for Bray; and he's the chestiest guy you ever saw in your life. He never heard of you, see? He doesn't know I'm sore on him and this game, and that I want to break away and try something honest. Neither does any of the rest of the mob. They think I'm still with them body and soul. Supposing I go to Golding, and tell him I've got a soft old bird—which will be you"—Mr. Deetz winced some more—"hooked to back me in a foot race. Naturally, I'll plan with him to throw you; but I don't do anything of the kind. I'll go on and win, and you split the money with me."

Again Mr. Deetz repressed a desire to lay that cotton turban flat with a chair.

The mind of the president of the Moon Salary Loan Company—branches throughout Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming—drifted back to that frosty morning of four years ago at Colorado City, and to an event which he esteemed the only error of a long money-collecting career. Regarded as infallible in all his financial undertakings by those who knew him, Mr. Deetz had to admit to himself that the foot race was a mistake.

Mr. Deetz was spending the heated months of 1908, and some of the interest on salary loans, at a fashionable hotel in Colorado Springs. His physician had recommended rest. While there, Mr. Deetz became acquainted with a number of well-dressed, prosperous gentlemen, who came from Pittsburg, according to the hotel register, and who were out West, according to themselves, for the purpose of looking after their mining investments.

Such a crowd of immaculate, cultured, and refined gentlemen Mr. Deetz

never hoped to see again. They took him to their bosoms, figuratively speaking, and made so much of him that Mr. Deetz, remembering the cold nods of his fellow townsmen of Vanceburg, where he was the most unpopular man in the community—and knew, and resented it—was convinced more than ever of the prophet being without honor on his local preserves.

The Pittsburgers spent money like water. Occasionally Mr. Deetz attempted to reciprocate—or, at least, to judiciously expend some of the interest on salary loans like spray, if not exactly like water—but his overtures were rejected with a scorn that abased even his conservative soul.

One day Mr. Deetz overheard the Pittsburg millionaires—they couldn't have been anything else—laughingly discussing a plot to have some fun with a crowd of Colorado City gamblers—in those days the Goddess of Chance still had a more or less uncertain throne in the little neighbor to Colorado Springs.

It seemed that the gamblers had a foot racer whose prowess they esteemed. They had been winning barrels of money on him during the summer. The Pittsburgers had quietly sent East and secured a college sprinter, who, they said, held the record for one hundred yards, or close to it. They had matched this man against the gamblers' favorite for thirty thousand dollars' real money. To make their victory over the gamblers a sure thing, they had, moreover, bought off the gamblers' foot racer; and that unworthy athlete had agreed to "throw" the race to the collegian.

So it was a "cinch," anyway you looked at it.

The freedom with which Mr. Deetz's friends discussed the matter before him, gave that gentleman to understand that he had their complete confidence. Never had he felt so intimate with men before. They were making up the thirty thousand dollars. They were laughing and joking over the coming discomfiture of the gamblers; and Mr. Deetz laughed, too, because he did not approve of gamblers or gambling. Many a man to whom he had loaned good money at ten per cent had caused him much delay and court costs by gambling.

"We've got twenty thousand dollars now," said Mr. Soandso—names make no difference now. "Come on in with that ten thou, Carnegie"—or Frick, or Schwab, or whatever it was. They had the money, too; big bunches of green paper in a derby hat; they counted it right before the interested eyes of Mr. Deetz.

"I'll give you my check," said the gentleman addressed, pulling out a book for that purpose. "I haven't got that much cash with me, or in the bank here, either."

"No checks," was the ultimatum. "Those gamblers want to see the color of the dough."

"Well, I haven't got it, and I surely want in," remonstrated the unfortunate—but why continue?

Mr. Deetz *had* the cash, or, at least, could get it in a hurry. His friends said "No, no," of course; they didn't want him to risk *his* money. Still, they didn't want him to think they were arbitrarily shoving him away from a good thing. Whereupon, Mr. Deetz, with the idea of the "cinch" in his mind, begged them to accept his money. The gambling element must surely be taught a lesson.

So they let him in.

As he sat contemplating the Cuckoo, there arose in the mind's eye of Mr. Deetz the picture of that young man shivering, bare-legged, beneath a black blanket on that crisp morning at Colorado City—a picture particularly impressed upon Mr. Deetz because the Cuckoo was carrying ten thousand dollars of his money. Vividly he recalled the strangely subdued group of gamblers, contrasting with the lively, chattering party of which he was a member. So, too, he remembered the hand satchel crammed with money—and then the race—ah, yes, the race! The race that the Cuckoo did not win!

Likewise there came to Mr. Deetz the memory of those years of apprehension that his fellow townspeople might find out how he had been victimized by that trained organization of "sure-thing" men known as the "Big Store." Again

he repressed, with difficulty, an impulse of extreme violence.

"You can beat their man, of course?" he finally suggested. "I mean you can beat him if you should both run to win?"

"I can beat almost any hundred-yard man in the United States, unless he can do better than nine and three-fifths seconds," said Cornet loftily—and that was a fact, by the way. "It's a cinch I can beat any man they'll dig up, because no runner as good as I am is mixed up in crooked races in this country. Another thing, they won't try to get a fast man, thinking I'm going to lay down, anyway, will they? A dub will do them."

Mr. Deetz had to admit that this was a reasonable supposition.

"How do I know you aren't as crooked now as you were before?" he asked, looking Cornet over with great care. "I really ought to hand you over to the chief of police for coming to me with such a proposition."

Cornet did not appear vastly alarmed. He was a keen student of human nature in his way.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," he said patiently. "I'll put in five hundred dollars of my own money. That means a lot to me, too, because it's all I've got; but I'll put it in to show you that I'm on the square with you. I'm sick of that whole gang, and I'd like to take enough money away from them to give me a start at something honest."

The Cuckoo tried to muster a tear as further evidence of sincerity; but lachrymose efforts were not in his line. Mr. Deetz seemed half convinced.

"Come to-morrow," he whispered. "Come and see me to-morrow."

Long after the departure of the runner, the money lender sat pondering, a crafty smile playing over his lean features. Then he arose, put on his hat, and joined the crowd in the main street of Vanceburg. He carried himself with the confident step of one who appreciated that every fourth or fifth man who passed owed him money, did John R. Deetz; but there was no cordiality in his nods, or the returns thereto. John R. Deetz was a cold, hard man. Vanceburg knew it, and John R. Deetz knew that Vanceburg knew it.

There had been no ostentation in the movements of the Cuckoo after leaving Mr. Deetz. He had repaired by a devious route to the single telegraph office. Of course, he could not have known that the telegraph operator owed Mr. Deetz money—that Mr. Deetz at that moment held an assignment of wages from Henderson, the key pounder, which would have cost Henderson his situation had it been presented to the main office of the company. Mr. Deetz's course to the office was direct.

"A young fellow with bushy white hair may have sent a telegram from here this afternoon," he suggested mildly to Henderson. "A glance at that now——"

Henderson understood. He had given Mr. Deetz other "glances" in times gone by. He fished around in a wadding of yellow "flimsy" on his file hook, and extracted a copy of a message addressed to "L. J. Bray, Green Palace Hotel, Denver," and reading laconically: "Looks good—Cornet."

Back to his office went John R. Deetz, dropping chilly greetings right and left. He entered his private room, closed the door carefully, and then stepped in front of a wall mirror. Long he inspected the reflection of his features.

"I guess I *do* look green," he finally muttered. "And I guess I *am*. Almost I bit again."

He moved to the window whence he could survey the street, and the crowd. Something in the very appearance of the people seemed to arouse the ire of the money lender. He gazed at the moving scene with a scowl, and then gradually a mammoth scheme evolved itself in his mind. He lifted a clenched fist and shook it at the crowd.

"You don't like me," he hissed, after the fashion of the stage villain, "and you never have. I'll sting you all, and get my revenge at the same time."

After which surprising performance, Mr. Deetz sat down and indited a long

letter, which he addressed to Provo, Utah.

"He'll only bet three thousand dollars," said the Cuckoo. "He says that's all the ready cash he's got on hand right now. But he says he wants to do the people of the town a favor, and that he don't mind having it get rumored around that he's backing me—without it coming direct from him, see? He don't want to figure in anything that looks like gambling. But he says that the people there think his judgment of anything involving money is a cinch, and that they're always trying to nose into his deals to sort o' follow his play, so they'll take all the money you can lug down there. I don't get his slant——"

"I do," replied Laughing Lou quickly. "He wants to make himself out a philanthropist without it costing him anything. He's the softest thing I ever heard of, because he'll get all the blame for losing his friends' dough, don't you see? He'll be the goat. We'll nail him, and we'll nail them, too. Their money's as good as anybody else's. It lets us out of any trouble, seems to me."

Despite this optimistic view, Bray called Captain Light aside after the departure of the Cuckoo.

"You're going to do the betting down there," he said. "If they are a lot of boobs, go ahead and take all they offer; but you'd better hold back to the last minute and feel 'em out. If you think they'll cause trouble, we'll just take old Deetz's three thousand dollars, and let it go at that, without monkeying with outsiders. We don't want to get any one shot, or strung up."

The announcement in Vanceburg that there was to be a foot race caused some excitement. The rumor, coming from no one knew where, that John R. Deetz was backing one of the runners, created commotion. The people refused to believe it at first. They asked John R. Deetz outright, but he only smiled, and warily shook his head. The idea of John R. Deetz risking his money on a foot race seemed preposterous. Then some one whispered that possibly Deetz had it fixed for his man to win. The whisper arose to the voice of belief.

The local paper confirmed the rumor of the race, at all events, announcing that it was to be between Malcolm Cornet, a well-known Eastern athlete, and Jack Wolf, a runner from the Northwest; the place, Cyril's Grove, the distance, one hundred yards, and the consideration, a thirty-five-hundred-dollar side bet. Further than that, the paper said nothing, because the editor knew nothing further.

Any morning the Cuckoo might have been seen dashing wildly over the roads around the town in such scant attire as to bring protests from maidenly residents of the outskirts. Wise ones consulted the sporting manuals; and found Malcom Cornet's name therein with excellent marks of deportment upon athletic fields entered against it. How could they know the care and perseverance with which Laughing Lou Bray worked his ends? How could they know that he had maintained the Cuckoo, at much expense, in New York for two years, during which time the runner was attached, as a Simon-pure amateur, to a famous athletic club, gaining experience and training and those very marks, against just some such contingency as this?

Of Jack Wolf there was no book record whatsoever.

It became known that Henry Jordan, proprietor of the Tivoli gambling house, and the local sporting oracle, had been made the stakeholder of seven thousand dollars cash, which was the side bet on the race; and it was whispered that he understood thirty-five hundred dollars belonged to Mr. Deetz. The astute Jordan remained silent to all approaches, however. As a matter of fact, he did, somehow, understand that part of the money belonged to Deetz; but it had been placed in his hands by the Cuckoo, and a beautifully immaculate young man who gave his name as Golding, so Henry Jordan could not have made oath that Deetz was interested in any portion of the stake.

Mr. Lathrop Golding arrived in

Vanceburg unattended, and was headquartered at the Commercial Hotel. Incidentally, he was bored beyond measure by the unattractiveness of his surroundings. On business bent, Mr. Golding had to content himself with standing posed, and poised, in the lobby of the Commercial, or adjacent thereto, saying nothing. The hardship of his part was mostly the silence. Mr. Golding had nothing to do with the Cuckoo, of course; and that was eminently satisfactory on both sides. The Cuckoo did not like Mr. Golding, and Mr. Golding returned the runner's regard in full measure.

Vanceburg found the Cuckoo a most diverting young man. It liked him, and told him so. The runner made friends rapidly; that was part of his business. He rarely retained them, for obvious reasons. He saw little of John R. Deetz.

Coincident with the arrival in the town of Captain Light, with Jack Wolf, the runner—and that was a couple of days before the race—there came to Vanceburg, and registered at the Commercial Hotel, a wise-looking little man of around sixty; a man with an unusually large, silvered head, and a disproportionately small body; a man who kept his coat buttoned around his meager frame, and who appeared to view the world, from a pair of keen gray eyes, with the most profound wisdom; who, in addition to these things, scrawled his name across the Commercial book as Jabez True, of some town not determinable from any analysis of the True penmanship. He appeared to have no definite business of the moment; but he was always around gazing upon men and affairs with the same expression of inordinate wisdom, which became rather disconcerting.

When Vanceburg got a look at Jack Wolf, a clamor for Wolf money arose. He was a frail, emaciated lad, with a pigeon breast, who could really cover a hundred yards with considerable dispatch, if necessary. His appearance was one of his assets. There was no Wolf money. Captain Light held the Bray roll; and he was not betting any part of it, despite the earnest entreaties of Mr. Lathrop Golding.

"These boobs around here are crazy about the Cuckoo," argued Golding. "He's got them hypnotized. I don't believe they're going to care much even when he loses. You'd better take their money while the taking's good."

But the captain stuck to the Bray instructions, and kept "looking around."

"We've got Deetz's three thousand dollars cinched, and the rest won't run away," he replied. "I'll wait until the race."

John R. Deetz had held himself sternly aloof from any discussion of the event which was exciting all Vanceburg. His acquaintances gathered the impression that the subject of the race was distasteful to him because of the insistent, persistent, rumor of his connection therewith. And yet his failure to openly deny that connection caused many a heated debate in speculative centers.

His early appearance at Cyril's Grove on the morning of the race, however, was considered a public admission of his interest. It also occasioned some public resentment.

"He knows something," summed up Chief of Police Tom Holliday briefly. "Pretty lucky old bird getting *his* money down, and leaving nothing for the rest of us. He knows something; and any proposition John Deetz thinks worth a three-thousand-dollar bet is good enough for Thomas P. Holliday, if I can get on."

Mr. Deetz came in a buggy.

"Just out of curiosity," he remonstrated, when some one, who did not owe him money, passed a jocular remark on his presence. "The town's so worked up over this thing, I thought I'd see what was going on."

While flouting this statement, the people collected in Cyril's Grove expressed the fervent hope that the backers of Jack Wolf would bring some more money with them. Most of the crowd had reached the grove on foot, but some had come in wagons, and a few on horseback. It was a dull, drab morning. Occasional murmurings of thunder

arose from the far horizon, and intermittent gusts of wind rode noisily across the sky. Rain threatened.

A course had been laid out and hastily cindered in the heart of the grove; and this was soon a lane of humanity. One of the late comers to the track was Jabez True, who arrived looking wiser than ever, his coat still buttoned tightly around his thin body. He attracted no attention.

The Cuckoo came alone. He was chewing gum, and trying to appear nonchalant. He nodded briefly to various acquaintances, shot a brief glance at John R. Deetz, sitting in his buggy, and quickly stripped off a few outer garments, showing himself in a set of flashy running trunks. Mr. Deetz found himself wondering, as he looked the runner over, if the Cuckoo had that little bladder filled with beef blood; and, if so, where he had it concealed. A shadow of pain darkened the face of the money lender as he again recalled that morning at Colorado City, when the Cuckoo, leading his opponent by a yard, suddenly reeled, and fell, with a scarlet stream trickling from his mouth.

At the instant of Mr. Deetz's mental speculation, the Cuckoo had that essential to the Bray mode of "faking" a foot race in the pocket of the overcoat. The bladder was to be placed between the teeth at the start of the race, and bitten into whenever necessary.

Mingling with the chattering crowd, surrounded by admiring, friendly faces, hearing friendly words, and feeling the grasp of warm hands, a weird thought crossed the mind of the Cuckoo.

"Why shouldn't all that bunk I told Deetz be true?" he mused hazily. "Why shouldn't I cross Bray, and win the race? These are good people, and they can't stand to lose what they're going to get down on me. The best Lou'll give me will be a couple of hundred bucks after what I did with the Excelsior Springs dough—Deetz is bound to cut that thirty-five hundred dollars with me; and that gives me a decent stake. I've got to get honest pretty soon if I'm ever going to, and this looks like a chance. Lou's always right at my hip with a bawl-out. He's always giving that guy Golding the best of everything."

For a moment, the Cuckoo's bosom swelled with a feeling of righteousness; then his spirits as quickly drooped again.

"Lou'd hunt me up and shoot me sure," he argued sadly. "I ain't afraid of that fresh Golding, or old Light; but Lou'd pot me some time. Still"—elation again came foremost—"still, he ain't here, and I could stick in the town until it's all blowed over. Deetz'd see that I wasn't bothered—and so would these people."

Strangely enough, no fear of consequences at the hands of "these people," should be lose the race, came to the Cuckoo. He had nerve, as Bray said. A struggle was going on in his mind when Mr. Lathrop Golding and Jack Wolf arrived. Immediately the crowd surged about them making eager inquiries; but Golding only shook his head. During the confusion, Captain Light came almost unnoticed. In the captain's pockets was money—much money; and he looked about him reflectively, as if deliberating just where to begin. Mr. Golding and Wolf retired behind a tree, and the thin runner peeled his clothing.

Officer Mulrooney, of the local police force, had been selected as starter of the race, chiefly because he had his big, blue-nosed revolver with him. The Cuckoo tossed his overcoat aside and followed him to the starting point—slim, sinewy, girl-waisted; a much finer figure of an athlete stripped than when he had on his street attire.

Then came Wolf, with a light coat still tossed over his shoulders, and followed by Lathrop Golding, who little relished his task of caretaker of the skinny athlete. Wolf's legs were pitifully frail. His kneecaps were as large as saucers. His face was white and drawn, and he seemed quite nervous. The crowd tittered audibly, and passed jocular remarks. Some looked at John R. Deetz, who sat hunched up in the seat of his buggy, his eyes following the runners with a curious glint in their depths.

Cries arose from the crowd. Men with money in their wildly waving hands pushed hither and thither through the jam shrieking: "A hundred on Cornet!" "Two hundred on Cornet!" Their voices were appealing, beseeching.

Meantime, the murmurings of thunder had gradually moved in from the horizon until they were just overhead; little spats of lightning went twitching across the sky, and the Cuckoo stepped about uneasily, like a fretted colt, glancing upward with nervous apprehension.

Captain Eben S. Light thrust a hand into his pocket and hauled forth a tremendous bundle of bills. He stepped forward and opened his mouth, as if about to utter words; but no words issued forth, for Captain Light suddenly saw, through a break in the trees, a portly man approaching in the distance; a man who moved with laborious speed. Almost at the same moment, Captain Light became cognizant of a voice; a high, thin, whiny voice; and he was aware that Jabez True was speaking. Meantime, there bore down upon the scene, unnoticed by all save Captain Light, Laughing Lou Bray.

"Gentlemen," shrilled Jabez True, "I have been in your city but a short time, and I have not the pleasure of acquaintance with any of you; but I have here with me what speaks for me. Gentlemen, I have become interested in this foot race, and I believe the runner, Wolf, will win. I have here twenty thousand dollars in greenbacks, which I am willing to wager in greater or less amounts at even money. Let Mr. Henry Jordan be the stakeholder."

He began reaching both hands into his pockets. The man fairly leaked money. He had it in every crevice and corner of his garments. The crowd did not realize the purport of his speech immediately. It hung silent and suspended for a full moment. Then the rush closed in, just as Captain Light, standing with his fists swelled large by the bills beneath his fingers, caught another glimpse of Laughing Lou signaling him frantically from the near background.

Headed by Chief of Police Tom Holliday in person, his gold star gleaming from his bosom, the betting public of Vanceburg moved against the little, old man, who seemed to suddenly melt away in size, and grow more shrunken than ever as he divested himself of bills, while Henry Jordan, standing at his right, grew visibly larger, and visibly more embarrassed, as he endeavored to keep mental tally on wagers.

While this was going on, Captain Light sidled silently over to the excited and perspiring Bray, attracting only the attention of John R. Deetz, who, from the vantage point of his buggy, trailed the captain with his eyes until some trees shut off his gaze. Deetz could not see Laughing Lou; and, of course, could not hear what he said.

"Couldn't keep away from the excitement, cap," panted Bray. "Am I in time? How much you got down, and do you need any more money?"

The captain solemnly raised his two money-stuffed hands.

"Somebody's beat us to it," he said dismally. "There's a man over here named Jabez True, betting all the money in the world on Wolf to win——"

"True?" roared Bray. "Lemme see him! Bettin' on Wolf, hey?"

He crowded past the captain to a point where he could see the group surrounding Jabez True. A rift in the mass of humanity gave him a fleeting glance at the little man.

"Git over there, cap!" bawled Laughing Lou. "Git over, quick, and bet him all the money you've got on Cornet—then git word to the Cuckoo to win—understand—*to win!*"

The runners had paused at the head of the cinder pathway, where there was also quite a crowd; and Mr. Lathrop Golding removed the coat from the shoulders of Jack Wolf. He was cognizant of considerable excitement down near the finish line, but could not tell the nature, or the cause of it. Officer Mulrooney was taking his place behind the runners as they stepped to the starting point, when suddenly a little boy dashed up to Golding with a note, hasti-

ly scribbled on the torn margin of a newspaper. Golding read:

Scheme switched. Tell Cuckoo to win.
LIGHT.

Golding was not vastly surprised. Sudden changes in plans were frequently necessary in their business. He was a trifle puzzled, and he turned to the Cuckoo just as the stentorian voice of Officer Mulrooney shook the very leaves in the trees.

"On yer marks!"

The runners moved forward.

"Git set!"

The white-skinned lads postured simultaneously, and in the same fashion; their bodies bent forward until their finger tips scratched the ground ahead of them. Mulrooney raised the blue nose of his revolver upward.

An instant later it spouted a thin flame, and the dull report of the exploding shell reached the crowd. Forward leaped the runners with the same motion. The people craned their necks out over the course.

John R. Deetz was standing up on the seat of his buggy. Vaguely he remembered seeing Captain Light rush up to Jabez True and thrust a handful of bills at him; vaguely he recalled seeing a stout man, whose face and form seemed strangely familiar, in the captain's wake; but these things did not strike him as significant at the moment.

A thin rain was now falling, and the lightning tipped the treetops. There was a wild hum of voices as the two runners legged it down the path, cinders flying beneath their feet. The hum paused a brief instant as they neared the finish. Then came a yell of joy. Elbow to elbow the sprinters moved to within fifty feet of the line; then one man inched ahead. One stride—two strides—three strides—he gained, although the other was slashing distance like a shadow—three strides represented the relative difference in their positions as they whirled across the tape; and at that same instant came a mighty smash of thunder as a blade of lightning sabered through the grove.

Standing on the seat of his buggy, John R. Deetz watched that struggle. His eyes could not separate the twain as they neared the end. The stretch of crowd shuttered the runners from his view for the last few yards of the race, despite his elevated position. There was a momentary hush as the race ended—a brief lull before the storm of enthusiasm, as well as one contributed by nature. A man standing by the buggy claims he heard John R. Deetz cry:

"Did he fall? Did he have the hemorrhage?"

An instant later, as the crowd roared the victor's name, which was the name of Malcolm Cornet, John R. Deetz shrieked wildly, and then fell from his buggy to the ground, crying: "The wrong man! The wrong man!"

At least, that same man by the buggy claimed afterward he heard these words; but most people put it down to imagination, because, they point out, John R. Deetz won thirty-five hundred dollars on the race.

In any event, it is true, he fell to the ground; but he lay unnoticed for the moment, while the crowd stood watching in deep amazement the figure of the Cuckoo flying on, and on, past the finish line, on through the grove of trees, and on out toward the open ground. They could not understand that Malcolm Cornet had caught a brief glimpse of Laughing Lou Bray, as he sped past, winner of the race.

Nobody paid any attention whatever to a smaller figure that went tearing in wild terror through the leafy vales in an opposite direction—on through the city streets—on down to the railroad station. Later, the station master mentioned the departure in much apparent excitement of one Jabez True; but the people of Vanceburg held that he had just cause for agitation.

In deep bewilderment, Mr. Lathrop Golding and Jack Wolf sought out Captain Light and Laughing Lou.

"Cap got down seven thousand dollars with that bird True, and so we win just about three thousand dollars," remarked Bray contentedly. "It's mighty

lucky I got here when I did. That flash o' lightning must have scart Cuckoo into the next county. I can't find him nowhere."

"Win?" said Mr. Golding wonderingly. "Win? How win?"

"Offen Deetz," explained Laughing Lou. "He's the goat. He loses everything that was lost. He wins thirty-five hundred dollars offen us on Cornet, of course—or four thousand dollars, to be exact, considering that five hundred dollars of his stakes was our own money; but we win seven thousand dollars right back, which leaves us the shade, don't it? But he nearly grabbed all his fellow citizens of Vanceburg, son—he nearly did. I'd tell 'em so, too, if I didn't think he was punished enough. We win better than expenses; but we'd have taken some real money away with us if old True'd had more'n seven thousand dollars when cap got to him. We're philanthropists, son. We've plucked old Deetz for the benefit of Vanceburg, and I reckon the town's got it coming from him, too."

Golding mopped his brow.

"I don't get you," he said wearily.

"Why," said Bray, "Deetz evidently had our number from the start. He wasn't no sucker. He never believed the Cuckoo was to win for him at all. He bet us three thousand dollars of his own money on the Cuckoo—then he had a young fortune at the track to bet on Wolf, figuring to get it placed at the last minute, when we wouldn't have time to switch. In other words, he was willing to lose his three thousand dollars, but figured to win about ten times that much at the same minute—mostly off his Vanceburg friends, see? He figured they'd follow the hint that he was backing the Cuckoo, and he wanted to stick 'em."

He grinned widely.

"Say," he continued. "Supposin' I hadn't got here. Supposin' the Cuckoo had gone ahead and done his funny fall; you'd have won Deetz's three thousand dollars, all right, while he was taking about twenty thousand dollars from his Vanceburg friends—what would have happened to you fellows? Zam! I've been around here about four hours, and I've got a better line on Vanceburg than you did in a week. These folks are loaded."

"Old True looked funny when you poked that dough at him, cap," laughed Bray. "He couldn't think fast enough to hesitate."

"True?" queried Golding. "Then he——"

"Was betting Deetz's money," said Laughing Lou. "I recognized him as the manager of Deetz's Provo office, see? And that's when I had Cap Light get you word to have the Cuckoo go on and win, and we hedged off our bet."

The most popular resort, by all odds, in Vanceburg is The Cuckoo's Nest, a rather pretentious pool and billiard parlor at the corner of Main and Hector Streets, and the most popular citizen in the town is a young business man named Malcolm Cornet. He is spoken of, and to, by many of the women, most of the children, and every man in Vanceburg, save and excepting one. The people marvel at this exception, because it is common knowledge that a check done in the hand of John R. Deetz, the exception noted, set Mr. Cornet up in business. They do not know, of course, how unwillingly that check was promulgated.

Mr. Cornet esteems himself an honest man, who expiated any small indiscretions of youth by a single burst of speed. He is thinking of getting married and raising children. He is still afraid of lightning, and he is inordinately fond of Vanceburg. He has made it a point never to leave the limits of that city since his arrival there.

He believes that certain pretensions to friendship, conveyed in occasional letters from one L. J. Bray, are nothing less than sly ruses to get him within convenient shooting distance of the writer. As a matter of fact, the Cuckoo is still held in kindly regard back in his old world, for just one man knows that he did not get the message to go on and win that foot race—and Mr. Lathrop Golding is hereby nominated for membership in the Humane Society.

The Blue Wall

By Richard Washburn Child

Author of "Jim Hands," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Among the cases coming to the doctor upon the sudden death of his colleague, Doctor MacMechem, is that of little Virginia Marbury. She is dangerously ill with meningitis. As she lies semiconscious in a darkened room the progress of her disease seems to be affected for good or bad by something which is happening in the adjoining house beyond the blue wall back of her bed. Attempting to fathom the cause of this phenomenon, the doctor learns that the adjoining house is occupied by a Jermyn Estabrook and his wife, a daughter of Judge Colfax, an apparently happily married couple. Spurred on by the critical condition of his patient, the doctor calls at the Estabrook house. He is refused admittance by the old servant who slams the door in his face. As he comes down the steps and walks across the park he is followed and attacked by a man who has been watching him from the shadows. The doctor overpowers him and discovers him to be Estabrook himself. He takes the man to his office and learns his story. Estabrook has fallen in love with Julianna Colfax, some seven years before this time. She is the daughter of Judge Colfax, whose skill at chess is unusual. Walking home one evening the judge gets Estabrook to play chess with the Sheik of Baalbec, a famous automaton. The machine beats the young man at the game, and he rises from the table feeling that there is something almost uncanny about the automaton. Estabrook asks Julianna to marry him. She refuses and tells him that she does not love him. When Estabrook leaves the Colfaxes' he yields to a sudden impulse and goes to the Sheik. Putting a coin in the machine and a pencil and paper in its hands he waits for a message. To his amazement the automaton writes that Estabrook is in danger, and that he must never see the old man and his daughter again! The writing seems familiar, and when Estabrook compares it with a letter he has received from Julianna he finds that "the message from the Sheik was written as she would write!" An expert in handwriting assures the young man that the two specimens were not written by the same person, and he returns home to find Julianna waiting for him. She has come to confess her love for him. When Estabrook broaches the matter to the judge the latter shows him a packet of papers which he says contain a vital secret concerning Julianna. But with terrible earnestness the old man impresses upon him that it would be better for both the young people if they married without the secret being disclosed to either. As Estabrook assents to this decision the judge catches sight of a face at the window and falls back dead. Later Julianna finds the packet of papers and reads them, but refuses to tell Estabrook the nature of the menace that threatens. Some time after her marriage to Estabrook she asks him to leave her alone with her nurse, Margaret Murchie, in the old house for three weeks. Only a week of this time has gone when one night he returns and finds an apelike man watching the house. He pursues him into the nearby park where the creature escapes. As he returns to the house another man comes down the steps and Estabrook attacks him and discovers that he is the doctor.

PART III.

The Doctor's Limousine

THE DOCTOR RESUMES HIS NARRATIVE.

SUCH was Jermyn Estabrook's story. I have tried, in reproducing it, not only to include all the details given by this desperate young man, but to suggest also the coldness and accuracy of his speech. Why? Because the very manner of narration is indicative of the man's character. He belonged to the dry, desiccated, and abominably respectable class of our society. Pah! I have no patience with them. They live apart, believing themselves rarities; the world is content to let them do it, because theirs is a segregation of stupidity. And Estabrook, though he had fine qualities, belonged to them.

Nothing could have indicated this more clearly than the emphasis he put on his fear of scandal, the smug way he spoke of his word of honor, and the self-conscious blush that came into his

handsome face when he mentioned the name of Estabrook. Why, even the menace to his beautiful Julianna was not quite sufficient to cause this egotist to forget his duties toward himself! So, if he had not acted with such nobility of spirit during the remainder of our adventures begun that night, I could not tell you that I learned to be very fond of him.

I will go on. Estabrook asked me what I knew, and I told him all that I have told you—about Virginia, that she seemed to feel the existence of something the other side of her bedroom wall, about MacMechem's notes on the case, the game of life and death I was playing, my conversation with the old servant; and, for full measure, I told him where I had learned to place a blow behind a gentleman's ear. It is necessary to deal with men as excited as Estabrook without showing the nervousness that one may feel oneself.

When I had finished, he jumped up from his chair, and, clasping his hands behind his back, in the manner of lawyers, he walked twice across this room.

"Why, don't you see?" he cried. "All that you have told me simply adds mystery to mystery, apprehension to apprehension, fear to fear. And it strikes me that, though my own experience has been bizarre enough, your observations and that of this other doctor, who is dead, are even more fantastic. What do you hope to accomplish by telling me this gruesome state of affairs?"

"I hope to make you act," I said, putting a chair in his path. "We are sensible men. There are no doubt explanations for all occurrences. Our limited mental equipment may not find them at once. But the first thing to recognize is the one important fact—neither of us doubts that your wife is in some grave danger. Personally I believe that if you are not mentally deranged she is! In any case, it's your duty to go to your house. Force an entrance, if necessary. It cannot be done too soon!"

Estabrook clenched his hands as he heard me, but after a moment he began to shake his head doggedly.

"Can't you see that it would mean publicity?" he asked.

"Better that than losing her," I argued, feeling certain that he would yield.

He did, in fact, cry aloud, but nevertheless he shook his head.

"Impossible!" he groaned. "I've given her my solemn promise!"

I suppose I've a reputation for being short of speech, often frank, and sometimes profane. I then allowed myself in my rage to be all three. It was to no purpose. Estabrook would not consent to tearing the cover from his affairs in any way which would cost him the breach of his confounded words of honor.

"You are a madman," I exclaimed, in my vexation. "The death of your wife may be entered against you. What folly!"

"Doctor," he answered quietly, "I want your help, and not abuse. Your storming will not accomplish anything. You are the only living soul to whom I have confessed the presence of a skeleton in my married life, and I want you to help me. I have been told repeatedly that you are a man of courage, steadiness of nerve, scientific eminence, and high ability."

I could not disagree with him.

"The next thing, then, is Margaret Murchie, the servant," I said.

"What of her?"

"She knows something," I said. "You have heard how she talked to me, how she tried to conceal her excitement, how she treated me as a spy, how guilty she seemed. And you have indicated that you, as well as I, believe that she knows what is at the bottom of this."

"Yes, yes," cried Estabrook. "I am sure that she knows. But what then—what then? What can we do?"

"My dear fellow," I said, "why 'we'?"

He threw up his hands, and sprang out of his chair again.

"I beg your pardon," he answered, with a look of chagrin. "I've been under a strain, I suppose, and I forgot that you have nothing at stake."

"Not so fast, Estabrook," I said.

"Take another nip of the brandy. I prescribe it for you. And not so fast. I have a good deal at stake."

"What?"

"My case," I said.

He looked at me with admiration.

"Furthermore," I went on. "I feel a certain brotherhood with you, young man. You are the first person with whom I've rolled on the sod for many years. I have punched you in the neck. You are now my patient and my guest. You have confided in me. You have made an unconscious appeal to me for help. Above all, I am one of those old fogies you have mentioned, who secretly mourn the dying out of romance. Here —a glass—to adventure!"

Estabrook smiled sourly, but he drank.

"Thank you," he said. "I appreciate your spirit, and, permit me to say, also, your attempt to make me treat this terrible affair in a spirit of sport. But old Margaret is the superlative of stubborness. We cannot expect to go to her to obtain information. I have lived in a house with her for more than six years. Can I say whether she is a saint or a crafty villainess? No! I know no more now than when I shook her in my anger on the evening the judge died. She has never addressed me of her own will since. She will give up nothing to me. You have tried her already."

"I am less conservative in my ideas," I answered. "Since we are in this field of turbulence and mystery, let us be turbulent and mysterious. All that you say is true. Therefore, we must force the truth from Margaret Murchie."

"You mean to induce her——" he began.

"Stuff!" said I. "The thing I mean is assault and battery. The thing I mean is kidnaping. You may believe in clapping your hand over her mouth and struggling with her, while we take her out. Personally, I prefer a cone containing the fumes of a liquid called Cataleptol, fortunately well known in my profession, while still a stranger to criminals."

But the careful Estabrook shook his head.

"You are not serious?" said he doubtfully. "Do you plan for me to take part in this?"

"There must be two," I said. "And, once we have the lady in this room, I will be willing to guarantee that she will tell all she knows. I cannot ask my chauffeur to go with me, for I trust him about as implicitly as I trust a rattlesnake. Which makes me think. Can you run a car?"

Estabrook was weakening. He nodded. I looked at my watch, and found that it was after eleven. I drew that curtain there, and saw that sheets of rain were still being blown slantwise across the foggy radiance of the arc lights. There is a trace of the criminal in me. Perhaps you—perhaps all men feel it at times. Just then, observing the wildness of the storm, I felt the joy of a midnight misdoing, even more than my desire to find the answer to MacMechem's question.

"I shall be glad to know how you propose to gain a second admittance," said Estabrook, when, after tripping over the wet cobblestones, and bending our shoulders to the drive of the cold rain, we had groped through the black alley to the dimly lit garage. "I'll also be glad to know why you suppose you can draw a statement from the old woman."

"My dear fellow," said I, "there is the cause of many of your troubles! You are always wanting to see your way to the end. And the way there often must be cut through a trackless waste of events that haven't happened."

"In light of my experience it seems to me that your statement is unreasonable," he muttered peevishly; "but, since you are satisfied, I will be, too. If I understand your plan, however, while you sit dry and comfortable within this machine, I am to ride outside, wet to the marrow."

At this remark, the sleepy garage attendant rubbed his eyes, filling them with the sting of gasoline, swore, and forgot to submit my new chauffeur to the inspection of his first surprise. He

drew back the door, and we trundled out into the water-swept thoroughfare.

The rain, which had begun with a thin drive, had now settled into one of those sod-soaking autumn downpours, commonly called an equinoctial storm. Estabrook was showing the effect of his nervous strain, by driving the machine through it with a recklessness of which I disapproved, not only because we had twice skidded like a curling stone from one side of the asphalt to the other, but also because I did not wish undue attention attracted to our course. The windows in front of me and to the right and left were covered with streaks of water, and fogged with the smoke of my cigarettes which in my pleasurable excitement I smoked one after the other; therefore everything outside—the spots of light which lengthened into streaks, the shadows, the other vehicles, the glaring fronts of theaters in Federal Circle, formed a ribbon of smutched panorama, the running of which obliterated vertical lines, and made all the world horizontal. At each crossing we jumped, landing again to scoot forward to the next, where, through the openings of side streets, came the faint sound of whistles in the harbor; and still Estabrook—confound him!—to my cautions, bellowed through the speaking tube, paid no attention.

With shocking suddenness it occurred to me for the first time seriously that I had no assurance that this man who drove me was not a maniac!

I reviewed the meeting with him, the tale he had unfolded, his distraught actions. I am fairly familiar with psycopathic symptoms, and my summary of all that I had observed in him indicated clearly that he was sane enough. But for the first time in my life I realized the feeling of uncertainty about a physician's diagnosis which a patient must endure. A doctor delivers his opinion as a matter of self-assertion; the layman receives it as a matter of self-preservation. Riding in that flying car, I found myself in both positions. As a physician I was wholly satisfied with my conclusion; as a man I found myself still in doubt, and picturing to myself a wild ten-minute ride, which I had no power to prevent, ending in a chaos of broken glass, twisted metal, clothing, blood, and flaming gasoline.

"MacMechem met violent death the moment he became curious as to the other side of the blue wall," I thought, with a twinge of the superstitious fear which touches prowlers as well as presidents, professors as well as paupers.

We were whirling around a corner, then, and through the glass and over Estabrook's broad shoulders I believed I saw again the treetops of the park.

"At least he knows where he lives," said I to myself, as we drew up to the curb.

"Good!" I whispered to him, when I had stepped out into the swash of the rain. "Frankly, I hardly enjoyed it. You drive like a demonstrator."

"I'm a ruin of nerves," he answered, shivering. "I'm afraid I'm a poor assistant for you, anyway. What do you want me to do?"

"Just climb inside there, where it is warmer," I said, clapping him on the shoulder. "I'll be back in a minute."

"Back in a minute?" he repeated, as if dazed.

"From the Marburys', if you don't mind?" I explained.

He leaned back against the cushions, disregarding the fact that, with every nervous movement, water ran from him as from a squeezed sponge. "Oh, I forgot your patient," said he, with a twitching mouth. "But, for God's sake, don't keep me waiting long!"

I shook my head in answer; then ran, rather than walked, up the Marburys' steps; indeed, that night taught me how active a corpulent old codger can be if the need comes.

Miss Peters evidently had been at the window in her night vigil, watching the storm; she opened the door.

"Well?" said I.

"The tide has turned."

Under the hall light I looked up at her stony, expressionless face. The

sphinx itself was never more noncommittal.

"What do you mean?"

"I supposed you knew," she whispered. "I supposed that was why you came back to-night so late."

I exclaimed in a hoarse and savage whisper. I was furious. This time I had fought with disease not only as in a common struggle with carnivorous death, but as a hardened sinner, whose heart has suddenly opened to a child.

"Virginia is dead!" I said, glaring at her.

She never changed the coldness of her tone.

"No," she said. "She is going to get well."

"Confound it!" I roared, under my breath. "How do you know?"

"The blue wall," she answered, with a sneer.

"Bah!" said I, starting up the stairs. "We will see."

As I pushed open the door, I observed that the nurse had procured a red-silk shade to screen the single electric lamp on the table. The yellow rays were changed to a pink, reflected on the wall, sending their rosy lights into the depths of that bottomless blue; the breaking of a clear day after a spring rain has no softer mingling of colors. For a moment I looked at the chart, then with new hope turned toward Virginia herself.

Either the new tints diffused by the lamp deceived the eye, or the little girl's pale skin had, in fact, been warmed by a new response from the springs of life. She was sleeping quietly, her innocent face turned a little toward me; and in the faint, illusive smile at her mouth, and in the relaxation of her beautiful hands, I read the confirmation of Miss Peters' prophecy. I, too, believed just then that Virginia would not die, and that, as so rarely happens in this disease, her recovery would be complete.

"It is a wild night," said the bony nurse, when I had tiptoed out of the room.

She seemed to be wishing to draw from me an opinion on the extraordinary rally the child had made. That was her way; she always invited discussion of a subject by comments about something wholly irrelevant.

"We will see," I answered again. "A relapse might be fatal. To-morrow—we will see."

"It is raining hard," she said, as she turned the latch for me.

"Yes," said I, "and the treatment till then must be the same. Who knows what——"

"Who knows?" she repeated.

A blast of wind and water, and the closing of the door seemed to deny an answer. I found myself on the steps again, looking into the staring eyes of my car, and, with a sharp jump of my thoughts, wondering how we were to accomplish the work we had come to do. I descended, however, and when I had reached the door of my limousine I saw Estabrook's drawn face pressed close to the glass. It was the sight of him that gave me an idea; it was his first words that, for a moment, drove it from my mind.

"Look! Look!" he said to me. "Look at her window!"

I had merely noticed that a new, bright light shone there; now, in a quick glance over my shoulder, I saw a shadow on the curtain—the shadow of a figure standing with its arms extended above a head, thrown back as if in agony.

"Is it your wife?" I asked, in a hoarse whisper.

He took my wrist in the grip of his cold hand. "I don't know, doctor, I don't know," he said. "It looks—its motions, its attitudes, its posture—it looks like the thing I saw outside the judge's window!"

Well, now—his words made me shudder! I confess it with some reluctance. Of course, a doctor comes in contact with enough real horrors. They become ordinary. It is those undefined, doubtful things which run fear through the veins like a drug. Nevertheless I caught myself in time to conceal my nervousness.

"Here, here, Estabrook!" I said, in a sharp, businesslike tone. "We didn't

come to watch drawn curtains. The question is, did you bring your keys?"

Without asking me questions, he handed them over.

"Now, understand me," I said, for I could see that in truth he was in no condition to offer much assistance. "My advice is for you to take these keys and walk into your own house."

"I can't do that," he said irritably. "I've told you I can't do it—and why I can't."

"Then understand me further," I said, when a shriek of wind had gone off down the avenue. "I have debated this question, and decided that we must not disturb your wife. She has warned against that, and perhaps it is better to assume she is not insane, and take her warning."

"Yes, yes!" he cried. "That is right."

"I shall not parley with Margaret Murchie," I went on. "Move a little! I have something I want to reach under the seat. There! I shall not ask her to come. She will have no choice. It will all be over before she has time to cry out. And you must be ready to help me carry her into this car."

"The law——" he began.

"Oh, I know that," said I. "But it is a choice of doing this, or nothing. Any other course either makes you break your confounded, nonsensical word of honor, or else raises a noise that will bring the reporters around like so many vultures. It is your affair, after all. Shall I stop here?"

Again, as I spoke, I felt the pleasurable thrill of adventure which I had supposed had gone with my youth.

"You want me to wait here till you signal?" he asked.

"Yes."

"As you say!" he agreed. "The old servant knows. She must tell. I can't stand it any longer. She must be made to tell."

I nodded. He indicated the proper key with a touch of his forefinger.

Whereupon, crossing the sidewalk again, and ascending the Estabrooks' steps with as much unconcern as if they had been my own, I fitted the key softly and turned the lock.

The very instant that I tried to open the heavy door, however, I knew that a watcher who had been observing our movements through the silk curtains was behind it. I felt a resisting pressure. I heard a stifled scream.

It was no moment for indecision. With an unbelievable rapidity of thought, I estimated the chances of the unseen person being armed, the hazard of their giving vent to an uproar which would bring the neighborhood about our ears. Then I threw my body against the door.

It yielded suddenly; with a crash it flew back against the tiled wall. I was precipitated forward, and a second later found myself in the ridiculous performance of rolling around on the floor with what felt to me like a fat wash, consigned to a laundry. It was, however, a bundle from which choking imprecations and grunts exploded, and which for a turn or two was enlivened with upheavals of some strength. Well enough to laugh now, but at that moment you may be sure I was searching with my free hand for the person's mouth.

I had meant to be gentle; if I clapped my hand over the source of the little cries and protests with something more than decision, you must blame the circumstances. I had expected to surprise old Margaret from behind, and give her such a whiff of Cataleptol that she would have suffered no inconvenience. Unfortunately I had not at first known that it was she whom I had encountered, and now there were obvious difficulties in the way of my applying my saturated gauze to her nose.

"Be still!" I commanded, trying to uncork my vial, with a single hand. "Be still! No harm will come to you."

Her reply was a well-placed thrust of her two old knees, which nearly sent me through the glass. It placed me in a position, however, where I could, with a push of my foot, close the door and shut us into the vestibule, so that her clamor, which had broken forth again, might be muffled.

Furthermore, I now had my chance to unloose my anæsthetic. I can hear the squeak of that fat cork now; I can recall the pleasure of smelling those dizzy fumes as I thrust the gauze into her face. Time after time she succeeded in thrusting it aside with her clawing hands; time after time I succeeded in jamming it back again against her nose. The scene is not one I recall with pride, but my brief excuse must be that I do not like to have my undertakings fail. The delicacies of the best of us, moreover, depart at critical junctures.

However that may be, the important point is that finally I felt her struggles subside. Her hands no longer acted with intelligence; they moved about wildly in front of her face, as if to push away a tangle of cobwebs. Her head rolled to and fro; the gurglings, sputters, half-uttered cries of rage ceased.

"Breathe again!" said I, with the habitual phrase of the surgeon administering an anæsthetic. "Breathe away—breathe away! Ah, now—breathe—breathe—breathe!"

And at last she was still.

I threw the gauze into the corner. I got up panting, for, as you observe, I am not built for exercise, and, panting still, I peeped out through the silk curtains to be sure that in our little adventure we had attracted no attention.

The wind-driven rain still swept down the streets under the iridescent glows of the arc lights, my car still stood like a forlorn, forgotten thing in the gutter. In one direction the wet perspective of the avenue appeared as empty as a street scene on a drop curtain. But when I turned my eyes the other way, my heart gave quick response. Just beyond the iron fence stood a patrolman.

He had stopped, and seemed to be looking directly at the door behind which I stood. I could see his two bare hands on the iron railing. They were very conspicuous against the rubber coat, wet, black, and shiny, which covered his burly figure, and he used them to sway himself softly backward and forward. It seemed to me that he was debating how to act, and I believe that I learned then, peeping through the glass, to what extent guilt and the desire for secrecy will sharpen the imagination.

I say this, because almost at the moment that I felt sure he had taken a step forward toward me, I saw that not his face, but his back was turned toward me, that his hands were behind him, and that he had leaned for a moment on the rail, perhaps to look at the physician's green cross on my lights. A second later he ducked his helmet into the driving rain and, walking on, turned into the shadows of the cross street.

I knew then I had no time to lose. I had been delayed; Margaret Murchie might regain her senses. And yet, when I had signaled to Estabrook, when he, without a word, had come, and when I felt the excitement most keenly, I found myself impressed not with the necessities of the moment, but rather with the extraordinary grotesqueness of the situation.

"Take her about the knees," said I, and then touched his elbow. "Estabrook," I added, "this—mind you—happens in a twentieth-century metropolis."

He did not answer, because the old servant, dashed in her upturned face by a stream of water running from the coping, moved her arms feebly, and uttered a groan.

"Quick!" said I. "Drop her, and crank up the car. I'll do the rest."

He obeyed.

I dragged the burdensome weight of my victim, if you will so call her, and thrust it into the interior of the vehicle. Estabrook was already on the chauffeur's seat; as quickly as I tell it, the car had begun to pick up speed over the wet and slippery street. We flashed by a light or two, and I saw that Margaret Murchie's eyes had lost their stare of unconsciousness.

"Margaret," said I, "you are all right. Be sensible. There is Mr. Estabrook in front."

She shook herself convulsively, as if to throw off the remnants of the anæsthetic. Then she caught my sleeve.

"Oh, it's terrible!" she cried. "Ye have taken me away from Julie! Bring me back to her, do you hear? You and Mr. Estabrook! What do ye want of me?"

"Quiet!" I said. "We want you to tell all you know."

"You want me to tell it? After all these years? And it's no fault of mine or hers!"

Suddenly she became excited again.

"Take me back!" she screamed. "You don't know what you do! Take me back to my Julie! She may need me sore enough!"

"Have sense," I said, close to her ear. "We are going to the bottom of this. You must tell everything—everything from beginning to end."

She was silent for several seconds, while we sped out toward the North Side.

"It's awful," she said finally. "And it has gone far enough. It's been more than I can bear. It's time for me to tell! If you, whoever you are, and Mr. Estabrook will hear, you shall have it all—the living truth of it—the bottom of what I know."

"Good!" said I. "And now we'll go to my house."

"No, no," she exclaimed. "There is no need for that. I would not be from the girl while these awful minutes is going by. Who can say what would happen? Oh, no, sir! Take your cab back to our door, and then—sitting on this seat—with my eye on that terrible house—and less need of any of us to worry—I can tell ye all from the first to the last."

In her voice was that sincerity of emotion which invites confidence.

"Very well," I said. "That is agreed." And then, picking up the speaking tube, I told the wretched man at the wheel. He swung us around; we turned back, and in five minutes more drew up again, according to my direction, not by the Estabrooks' door, but under the spreading limbs of the oak across from the Marburys' ornate residence.

"Take some of this, my boy," I said, as he crawled, wet and trembling, into the interior. "It will be good for you, and for you, Margaret, too!"

"Oh, Mr. Estabrook!" she exclaimed, when she had swallowed the stimulant, "I lied to you. I once lied to you very sore, as you shall see."

"Enough—enough!" he cried. "What of her—my wife? She is still alive?"

"Have no fear," replied the old woman. "It's not death that's with us, I'm believing."

The poor fellow wrung his hands.

"But, by the saints, what I'll tell you now is true," she said, putting her hands first on his knees, and then on mine. "Look! The light is shining on my face, and you can read it if you like. Sure, I'm praying that you may use the knowledge to save us all."

"Go on!" commanded the young man hoarsely.

And thereupon, in an awkward, jerking manner, which I can only hope to suggest in the repetition, she told a tale of strange mingling of good and evil. This was her story.

PART IV.

The Pupil of Madame Welstoke

MARGARET MURCHIE'S STORY.

I was born on the Isle of Wight. My father was a seafaring man. He owned his own vessel—a brigantine as sailed from the Thames to British South Africa, and sometimes around the Hope to Madagascar.

Where he met my mother I never knew. He was Scotch, and she was an Irish beauty, I can tell you. Looking back on it now I believe she was of rich and proud people, and that they had cast her off for her folly in marrying a man that was rough of cheek and speech, for all his ready good heart. She was as delicate and high-strung and timid as he was brown, big, and fearless as to anything, be it man or

typhoon. And yet it was her who could stick to one purpose, as if the character of a bulldog was behind the slender, girlish face of her, while he was always making for this and that end, charging at life with head down, like a bull.

I can see the two of them now, walking together arm in arm, when he'd come back out of the sea; I can see them strolling off down along the old hedges of the garden, or sitting beneath the thatched roof of our cottage, which had stood the wind sweeping off the Channel for more time than any one at Bolanbywick could remember. She looked like a child beside him, for his shoulders would measure three of the width of hers. It was from him I have my frame, that once called to the eye of men to see the figure that it held, though I say it myself. But from her I got many a trait that fitted me badly, because craftiness and stubbornness and a weakness for sentiment and the like of that had best be in a body small enough to tame them.

The two of them loved each other completely, each in their way, but it was well that they had no other children. It was well, perhaps, that when I was seventeen I had grown strong and quick as a hound. My mother went with him then for her first voyage since her honeymoon, and it was the last ever seen of her or him, or the only property we owned, which was the vessel and a cargo of cotton ducks and sheetings for speculation, bound to the Gold Coast. Sometimes the sea opens its mouth like that, and the jaws close again.

There was no more education for me! My father's sister was a boarding-house keeper in London. I was staying with her then, and when the lawyer found there was no insurance, life, ship, or cargo, she was for setting me to work the next morning. Poor woman, she had slaved her life against dust in halls, and cockroaches, and couples who wanted rooms without references, and the heart had gone from her, and when she died she left the best of two thousand pounds to a clairvoyant and card reader, who had robbed her week after week for ten years.

I took a place as companion to an old lady, going to Odymi in Hungary. It was there one of the doctors who had seen my two bare forearms, spoke of my strength, and told me that I could make good money as a rubber in the baths, and I was glad of the change from the old woman. I was proud, and short of tongue and patience with her, and we were always snarling at each other. But time wears those edges off people, I can tell you!

It was there, at the baths, I fell in with the woman who called herself Madame Welstoke.

She was an evil woman, and of the worst of such, because she was one who never seemed bad at first, and then, little by little, as she showed herself, you could get used to her deviltry, and for each step you could find an apology or excuse, until at last the thing she had done yesterday seemed all right to-day, and you were ready for some new invention of hers to-morrow.

Mainly she treated diseases by the laying on of hands, and the best that could be said of her as to that was she preyed on the rich, and would take no patients she thought were short of at least fifty pounds to spend for her mumbo-jumbo and gimcracks. She would talk in a very smooth voice to those she got in her web—about the flow of vital energy and the power of positive and negative currents over the valves of the heart and circulation of the blood. She would roll up her eyes, and complain of how the treatments, which consisted of laying her fingers on a person's temples and wrists, exhausted her, and at first I thought she really meant it; and when her good old motherly face was turned away, many was the time I laughed. And finally, when I began to see that most of her patients improved, and some were cured, I stopped laughing, for there was the evidence before my eyes, and no denying it.

Whether or no she had power to heal, I would have stayed with her. Her influence was like slow rot, and the germ of it was deep-seated before you could even see that it was time to resist it. I

was acting as her maid in private at first, and before other people wherever we went—Paris, Vienna, Berlin, Monte Carlo, and lots of places I have forgotten—I was supposed to be her daughter, who had joined her from New York. And it was all one to me, for I was drawing a fine pay, and living very rich, and I could see that the name and game of Mrs. Welstoke spelled prosperity.

All this, of course, was before I even saw the judge, but I was getting my training, and learning how easy money could be made to come through a little folderol here, and a bit of blackmail there, and introducing one class of society to another in the next place. It was easy to salve my conscience, because the old adventuress was curing many a poor sleepless or rheumatic creature who could spend money like dirt to get the result, and, besides, she took an interest in me enough to make me wonder why, and she was always keeping her eyes open like a pilot to see that I didn't meet any man who might be after me. To tell the truth, she talked so much of the villainy of males, and the horrors of marriage, that finally I believed what she said, and turned my young face away from all men.

We were in Paris when she showed her hand, and, strange enough, she chose to do it one afternoon when we were driving the Bois, with a thousand fine gowns and faces to distract the attention.

"The trouble, Margaret," says she, "is that our reputation runs on ahead of us. Here in Paris it is the same as at Vienna and Rome—we have much more than we can attend to. I can't put my hands on two fools at once, and I am always pained because I am an American by birth, as I never yet told you before, and I hate to see five dollars slip by, as we say over there."

"It's too bad," I answers, "for there is no way to help it."

"Indeed!" she says. "I'm not so sure. I haven't made you my daughter for nothing. And I'm thinking of having you treat those who I can't."

"Me!" I cries, very surprised. "You know well enough that I have no power."

At this she leaned back on the cushions, and nearly put her broadness on Midget, her toy lapdog, sitting beside her. But she threw her head back, and laughed her own natural laugh, as coarse as a fishmonger's, and different from the ripples she could give when anybody was around.

"Power?" says she. "Child alive! I have no power, you simple girl. When I put my fingers on their silly heads, my hands might as well be resting on a sawdust pincushion in the Sahara Desert."

"But the cures?" says I, looking to see if the *cocher* could overhear us.

That question brought the laugh away from her, and for a minute she looked serious.

"Many a time when I go to sleep of nights, I think of that myself," she says, patting my hand. "I actually know no more of the reason for those cures than you. Nevertheless, I know surely enough it's not me that cures them. No, I think it's their own wills. A bit of claptrap fools them into exerting their own minds on their bodies, and by the same token the fear of weakness will make the weakness itself. So the world rolls around, my dear."

It was those words of hers I have never forgotten.

I've never forgotten, for one reason, because when I began to play for patients, and worked over them with the talk and flapdash and monkeyshine, and got them to pay their money freely, then half the time they would improve, and say they felt the flow of vitality, and some of them went away well and sound as biscuits, when before they had come to us they had had doctors and drugs and baths and changes of climate for nothing.

I even knew some who would swear that Welstoke's daughter had more power of healing than the great Welstoke herself, and among them, too, was rich and terribly cultured people, who would come with veils in closed carriages, and would be afraid their hus-

bands would find out, and then if they didn't pay the bill rendered, all that was necessary was to threaten suit to have them go into a panic, and rush the money to us in a hurry.

It is wonderful how easy a person drops into new views of what is fair and right, when their surroundings change; and something else is wonderful—the fact that I, who sit here with the two of you now, a broken old housemaid, once had gowns as fashionable as any on the Continent, and that without a penny of inheritance or a single love affair.

"All is well with us," Welstoke used to say, "and all will be well if you have the sense to keep out of a match with some lying-tongued creature, who, on his side, will believe nothing you say, and will cast sheeps' eyes at every plump blonde from Benares to Buffalo. Besides which, my dear, there never was one of them that didn't snore. Remember that and you are safe."

Indeed, I thought I was safe, as she called it. I believed that the affectionate natures of my father and of my mother had offset each other in me, for three years went by, and never a thought did I give to love of man. And when it came, there was a flit of it like the shadow of a flying bird that comes and goes on the wall, and is none the less hard to forget. It is so with all, I'm thinking, high and low, rich and poor; we see these shadows of what be, and whist! they are gone again, as if to say we'd live again in another world, and there is plenty of time in other lives than ours—time for the right head to lean on the shoulder that was meant for it, and this hand to touch that!

Be that as it may, the thing happened the winter we were at Venice. Madame Welstoke was in her heyday then, with plenty of money to give dinners for the little crowd that was made up out of dark-brown society—the old men who'd tell of nearly reaching greatness and the like of that, with champagne running from the corners of their eyes, and their voices cracking with all the bad-spent years. And there were fat, jeweled women, too, hanging on alimony or adventure, and middle-aged men from this country, who had left New York or Philadelphia for one reason or another of their own, and talked about rates of interest, and whistled tunes that were popular in the United States in the seventies, and had a word or two for my shoulders.

"Be careful how you talk too much," old Welstoke would say. "It's a very fair presentment you make with a bit of rouge and a hairdresser, and keeping your big hands under the table as much as possible. Whatever you do, listen, and be on your guard, if the conversation runs to letters or music. One way to be educated is to be silent."

Perhaps she laid it on so heavy about my lack of "finish," as she called it, that when my one moment came to speak, and say in my plain way a word or two, it gagged me in my throat, and would not slide out.

In those days a French Jew, named Vorpin, had a place just off the Grand Canal, called "Folies Trois," and by waiting till mid-evening for dinner, we could find the café well-nigh empty. The truth was I went there often alone, when a fit of depression was on me, and it was no wonder these fits came. A week of idleness, taken by a person who comes from my class, and should be working eight and ten hours a day, is a misfortune often longed for, and seldom recognized when it has come.

Little did I think that evening, of which you will hear, that what happened there was to have its hold on Julianna Colfax, who had not then been thought of as coming into the terrible clutches of that which has followed us like a skulk o' night.

The café was long, and longer yet with its gilt mirrors on the white walls, and its row of empty, gilded chairs, and I found a table in the corner. Perhaps a man and woman or two was there, either too late or too early for the gayeties that went on. I have forgotten. I only know that the sound of lapping water came in through the lattice beside my table, and a breeze, too, that cooled my bare neck, and would not cool my head, which was full of thoughts of my

days in the old garden in the Isle of Wight, and my mother's song, and the colored crayon of my father, looking very stern, and hanging over the green old china vases on the mantel.

I believe the first thing that made me look up was a crash of glass, of crockery, the exclamation of the waiters, and running feet.

"So here is where they boast of excitement?" roared a thick voice. "And yet a man must make it himself."

The waiters had surrounded him, whoever he was, and I could not see him then.

"Bah!" he cried, beginning to laugh like a stevedore. "I'm an American. Monte Carlo and all that! I'll pay, you frog catchers! Take that! Ask the proprietor if that will cover the damage!"

A great explosion of squeaky French followed, a word or two of Italian. The waiters parted, and this American stepped out.

I had expected to see him taller, but his power was in the weight of his shoulders, the easy swing of his drunken progress down the aisle. The devil-may-care was in him—in his handsome, laughing, wild eyes—the look of a child mad with the promise of a world of pleasures.

"Pay?" he roared again. "I pay as I go! Live? I live as I like! Out of the way, dishes! You are here to-day, on the ash heap to-morrow! So with all of us."

With that he pulled off another tablecloth, sending the glassware rolling into splinters.

"Come! Collect!" he said, holding a fistful of notes in the air. "How much? How much? Quickly! I see mirrors down beyond! You lie, you mirrors! I'm walking straight! You lie!"

There was no stopping him. With a heavy, crooked cane in his strong hand, and the perspiration running from his handsome face, he staggered toward the spot where I was sitting. And yet, though he had raised his stick to strike the chandelier above the next table, and had let out a yelp of childish delight before he saw me, I had felt no fear of him.

I can tell you, the effect of the meeting of our eyes was astonishing. I'm thinking there wasn't a muscle in his body that did not pull at him to straighten him up, to take off his hat, to bend him a little backward, as if he had thrust his face among thistles.

As I sat there, looking at those brown eyes of his, and listening to his frightened, heavy breathing, I knew well enough I had come to a place where my road of life split, and ran in two directions. There are things we know, not by thought or reason or culture, but by the instincts, I'm thinking, that Heaven has put into us along with the rest of the animals. And he knew it, too, perhaps, for he saw me leaning forward on my elbows, and a little white and scared of something that can't be put into words at all, and it sobered him, I can tell you.

"What are *you* doing here?" he said, as though he had known me these six thousand years.

Silly fool that I was, the color came rushing up into my face, and I feared to speak. Believe it or not as you like, I could see Welstoke's thin lips saying: "Though your nose and your eyes is very refined, it's your manner of speech as discloses you, my poor dear," and I was silent as a stone, for I thought him a fine gentleman.

"Do *you* disapprove of me?" says he.

I smiled, I suppose, but my lips only moved. And a look of pain came into his face.

"Somewhere else—some other time," he rather whispered. "God knows how! But you will remember Monty Cranch. It's not soon you'll be forgetting him, girl."

With that he turned, and walked out of the place as straight as an arrow, and his words were true—as true as death. And though it was all many years ago, I can tell you, it seems to me now that I can hear the water lapping in the canal outside the lattice, and see the wind nodding the flowers on the table that were mocking me—a

nosegay one minute, and the next a bouquet for a tomb of something gone and buried. Nor from then to now have I opened these lips to tell living soul of that meeting.

Life kept on as it had been going, with many things sliding in and out, but they have nothing to do with what is hanging over us now. Welstoke and I finally came to America, however, and then luck began to turn. There is a great joke behind the scenes of the little dramas of each of us, and the old lady who had laid her hand on many a twisted wrist or swollen elbow began with a joint in her thumb, and in six months' time was a hundred shapes with the rheumatism. She was all out of scandals and blackmail then, and lay in bed with her own self coming out, in evil curses for pain and her losses on 'Change, and slow horses, and she, who had claptrapped thousands, was caught herself by a slick brown man, who called himself a Hindu Yogi, and treated her by burning cheap incense in a brass bowl, and a book of prayer that he called the "Word of Harmonious Equilibrium."

"You are all I have now," she would say to me, after the cupboard was bare. "Whatever you do, don't get married, my child. These men are all alike. Some of them begin to get knock-kneed as soon as you marry them, and others have great fat middles. You have your choice in these offenses to good taste."

The old fox was wasting breath, though, for I had less notions for men than ever before. I had only to shut my eyes to see one, and though time had slid by fast enough, I could only see him as he was, standing half frightened before me in the Folies Trois. He never seemed to change. I thought he'd always be the same.

Besides, I was loyal to old Welstoke, if I do say it. I tried hard at first to keep our patients coming, but it would not go when the madame herself was out of the business. I never understood how to hold the confidence of people, and then the only thing left to us was a complexion mask that the old lady had invented. It was a failure at first, but after I had walked my feet off introducing it we got a bare living from it, and I thought it would stand between me and starvation when Welstoke had gone.

Finally that day came, too, with the undertaker creeping around in his black, sneaking way, and I found, when it was all over, that she had secretly incorporated a face-bleach company, and sold all she owned to it, complexion mask and all, and lost the whole of what she got on that year's Derby. I've understood from the boarding-house keeper that the last words she said was: "Now I'm really plucked!" And that was the end of her.

There are times like that, when one's spirit is sick, sore, and lame, as if it was a body, and it goes looking for a place to lie down where nobody will disturb it, and it can feel its dizzy self going into a long sleep. I'll never forget how sick my soul was then—sick of all the false ways and selfishness and all the old scenes, and all big cities, and the flow of faces on the streets, and the memory of our elegant apartments in Paris, with their pale brocades at the windows and on the furniture, and sick of the sordid surroundings in the cheap New York boarding house, where the rheumatism had finally reached Welstoke's heart, and the paper was peeling off the walls.

I had always swallowed the airs and graces of society people very hard, and many was the time I'd wish to drop back among people like my father's family, who didn't mind the smell of cooking, and could get a night's sleep by laying a head on a pillow, and weren't bothered by frills. So, though it was plain enough that nothing was left for me but to come down in the world, I was not sorry, after all. I could see in the mirror that the easy life I had led at first, and the worry and labor of foot that had come suddenly on top of it, had made me fat of body, and yet drawn and old of face. My youth had gone, along with Madame Welstoke, and I had little regret for it or her.

Business was dreadfully poor then,

and for the life of me I could not get a hold on anything in the way of hotel housekeeper, or millinery, or doctor's office maid. For every position that offered, which was few, there was a mob of women, with their smirks and smiles and references in white envelopes that they were trying to keep clean as the days went by. Of course, I had no references at all, and small good would it do for me to tell of my past experience. Besides, as I've often thought since, the way I wore my hair and colored my cheeks, from the habits Welstoke had taught me, was overdone, as all women get to overdoing the thing sooner or later, and more particularly when they think their good looks is threatened by the bleaching and yellowing and drying up of the wrong side of thirty-five. It's not a thing to help much in applying for work. Anyway, the short of it was that after six weeks I had no job, for all my walks in the heat to save car fare.

You have never felt the panic that comes when it seems as if fate was chewing away the strands of the rope that holds you to self-preservation; it is a terrible thing, and soon takes out of you all fancy notions. It grabbed me by the neck, and bent my pride, and sent me off praying to find a place through an employment agency. Cooking, washing, and ironing was good enough for me the minute I found my last dollar staring up at me from the palm of this right hand. The fall had begun to come on, and, believe it or not, as you like, I dreamed and dreamed and dreamed of walking the streets at night, through the driving snow of winter, and down to the wharves and the river, with its cakes of ice and its welcome. And when the first day I had gone to sit in the intelligence rooms, and a lady—she seemed like a blurred picture to me, and her questions were far away, like the rumble of a train at night—had hired me, I took my alligator bag that was left out of the wreck of old elegance, and I stood up and tried to follow her like a dog till she stopped me.

It was only when I'd met her later, and was on the train bound for a little town up the State, that I turned my eyes, kind of cautious, to see who it was had hired me.

You could not call her pretty by any means. She was tall and thin, and there was a prominent bone sticking out at the back of her neck. Her shoulders sloped, too, and looked as if they had been bent forward on purpose to squeeze her lungs together. Her skin was a bit too yellow, and her teeth too large, and her lips too shapeless. But the steel of people has nothing to do with the scabbard, I'm thinking. Bodies are many a time disguises, and there was only one place where that woman's self peeped through like a flower through the dead coals on an ash heap. It was her eyes.

I never have seen the beat of her eyes for loveliness. No, I never have seen two of them—gray, they were—that could toss a God's blessing to you so easy. They gave the lie to her cold lips, and made you forget the looks of her, because you knew she'd been made to wear ugliness to test the sweetness of her soul.

I saw 'em when from all the falseness and worry, all the paint and powder and the mockery of big cities, and the jest of money, and all the worry and bitterness of the end of my adventures, I felt the relief of being nobody again, and going in a *home,* whosesoever it might be, and being where there was trees, and hard work, and fewer human faces streaming along and looking into yours, only to forget you forever. For the first time since the day I believed I'd never meet Monty Cranch again, my sight was all fogged with tears.

Probably she saw me. And if you'd know the kind of woman she was, I'll tell you that the first I knew, her thin fingers was on my big hands, and I looked up, and there were those two eyes. The train was thumping along through the meadows, but I heard her say, "There, there!" very soft, and she never asked me one word about my past either then or ever after. That was her kind of charity, and may God rest her soul!

Oh, when I look back on that day, I

wonder how evil thoughts ever came into my mind, and how I could ever wish harm to the white house under the big elms in the center of the town, where, among the business blocks, it stood very stubborn, and I wonder how I ever plotted wrong for her or him that was her husband, and met us that day at the iron gate.

We saw him reading a paper on the wide porch—a young man then, with a big frame, and a habit of looking out very solemn from under his eyebrows, and over big, tortoise-shell glasses. But he had boyish, joking ways of speech, as you know. He came down the walk between the plats of grass, that looked like two peaceful, green rugs spread in the midst of all the noise and bustle of the town, and his long hands pulled up the latch, and he smiled at the woman as if he loved her. And she said to me, in a very proud and dignified way: "Judge Colfax, my husband."

That was the first time I ever set eyes on him, and in a quarter of a century, beginning, as he was then, a judge of county court, and ending as well you know, I never could see a change in his way of looking at life. Civilization moves here and there and along with its ways and means and customs and fashions and the looks of the buildings and the furniture, but there is a saying of the judge that comes back to me now. "The way of vice, virtue, passions, and instincts of men is universal and everlasting," he'd say; and as for himself, his eyes were watching it all from too high a place for him to be jumping this way and that, like one of the sheep running with the flock.

It showed on the inside of the house then as it did the day he died in this city. The look of it was the same then, with 'most everything that was in it used for comfort and not for show, though in those first days there was no end of ornaments, that was kept for memory's sake—a piece of coral as big as your head brought back by Mrs. Colfax's father who had been a minister or something to Brazil, and spears from the South Sea Islands, and two big blue biscuitware jars from China that had been a wedding present to the judge's mother from an importer of tea, who had courted her and been rejected, and documents in frames which I can't remember, except a commission in the army, signed by a man named James Madison, and a college degree, and a letter written by Jonathan Edwards to a man dying of consumption. They were hard to keep clean, but I liked those things because they reminded a body of the fact that days had gone by when other people was living with their ambitions and loves, and snoring at night, and pain in their wisdom teeth, and all forgotten now!

Anyway, you'd never know they had wealth, they lived so simply, and Mrs. Colfax had even done much of her own housework. I was hired because a baby was coming, and you can believe it was a happy house in those days, with its peace and the sprinklers spraying water on the lawn in the last hot days of the autumn, and the leaves rustling outside the kitchen window, and the wife singing in her room upstairs, and the judge looking at her as she sat across the table at breakfast, with his eyes wide open, because, whatever anybody else might think, he believed her the most beautiful-looking woman in the world.

I was happy, too, speaking generally. The only trouble was the training that Madame Welstoke had given me. After a body has learned a little of being shrewd like a snake, a cat, or a weasel, and looking on anybody as fair game for blackmail or threats or health cures, it is very hard to shut the cover down on them, and never employ those methods any more. I liked the judge, and I might say I loved his wife, but there was still something in me that kept me watching for secrets or skeletons in the closet, and little did I know then how my chance would come.

The baby was born in January—a daughter, and as beautiful a little creature as you would want to see, with red-brown hair and a pink mouth hard to beat. Of course, I've seen parents fond enough of children, but never any so fond of one that their mouths were

hushed as they looked at her. The truth was that as for Mrs. Colfax, she was so bound up in the child that she suffered.

"Margaret," she said to me many a time, "a mother's heart has strange instincts, and I fear true ones. There is something that tells me that little Julianna will never live."

"Hush the nonsense!" I answered her, laughing at her white, frightened face. "Trouble enough you'll have with her teething, without borrowing more from such things as death! Look out the window, ma'am, at the snow that covers everything, and be thankful that we are not having a green winter."

"Something will happen," she said. And I believe it was her worry and nervousness that kept her from getting her strength back, and wore her thinner and thinner. She would sit in her window, that looked down the slope to the river, with Julianna in her lap, and gaze out at the melting snow, or, later, at the first peep of green in the meadows between the two factories up and down the valley, and at those times I would notice how tired and patient her face looked, though it would all spring up into smiles when she heard the voice of the judge, who had come in the front door.

Then finally there came a night I remember well.

It was about the full moon in the early days of April, but a wind had come up, with a lot of clouds blowing across the sky. Maybe it was at ten o'clock—just after I had gone to bed, anyway, and had got to sleep—when I heard the screams—terrible, terrible screams. And I thought they were the screams of a woman.

I jumped up, threw open my window, and tried to look through the night toward the river. I could hear something splash once or twice in the water, and then all was still—still as the grave.

You know how a body feels waked out of a sleep like that. Though it was a warm breeze that blew, and though I've never been timid, I was shaking like a sheet of paper. It was a minute or two before I could get it out of my mind that some one had been cut from ear to ear. Then I remembered that they had told me that rowdy parties were often boating on the water above the first dam, as the weather grew warmer, and when I listened, and heard no sound of any one else in the house stirring, I began to think that my half-sleepy ears had exaggerated the sounds. And then, just as I was about to close the window, a cloud rolled off the moon, and for a second or two there was a great path of light on the slope, and back of the stable, among the old, gnarled apple trees. There were a lot of queer-looking shadows among these trees, too, but none so queer as one.

This one shadow was different, for it was not still, like the others, but went stopping and starting and scuttling like a crab over the grass—sometimes upright like a man, and sometimes on all fours like a beast. At last it stood up and ran from tree to tree in a swaying, moving zigzag. I could see then that it was a man, but for the life of me I could not remember where I'd seen his like. Then another cloud slid over the moon, and the night was as dark as velvet again.

You may be sure I passed a restless night. Perhaps the judge saw it, for when he came in from his regular early-morning walk the next day, looking very grave and solemn and troubled, he stared at me a minute before he spoke.

"Margaret," said he. "You look overworked."

"Oh, no, sir," I said, half ashamed to tell of my fright.

"I'm glad to hear you say so," he answered. "I was about to ask you whether you could add to your duties by taking full charge of Julianna."

"The baby!" said I. "Has anything happened to Mrs. Colfax?"

"No," he said, a bit excited. "But I'm going to send her away to-day. I trust it will be soon enough. The doctor has been advising it this long time. Mrs. Colfax is on the edge of nervous prostration, and the baby should be taken from her now and put in your care while she is gone."

I think I must have shrunk back from

him. I remembered the screams. I could hear them again in my ears—terrible, terrible screams—at the river.

"While she is gone!" I whispered.

"Yes," said he. "What ails you? You have heard the plan before."

"But the haste, sir," I said. "What is this dreadful hurry about?"

"Not so loud," said he. "You will hear the news soon enough. I may as well tell you. But it must be kept from her at any cost until she is away. A dreadful thing has happened—happened in the night—not two hundred yards from this house. A woman has been murdered."

"A woman!" I said. "Who?"

"Her name was Mary Chalmers," he said. "She was an actress. She and her husband and their baby had come up from New York. She was found this daybreak at the dam by one of the factory watchmen. There was an overturned boat. The baby had been left asleep in the boarding house where they were staying, and the husband had been heard to say that he would take her rowing on the river. He had been drinking. He was caught trying to catch the early-morning train, and was still so befuddled that he could only say over and over again that he had no memory of where he had been. He says he is not guilty, and has sent for a lawyer. The coroner has gone to the dam. That is the story, and my wife must be prevented from suspecting any of it. The man will probably be held. It looks badly for him, and the case, if tried, will come before me. My wife must be kept away until it is all over; she must not suffer the morbid worry."

"Did any one hear screams on the river last night?" I asked, biting my finger.

"Several heard them," he said, nodding.

I felt a great relief from that answer, for I had a dread of being called as a witness, and then and there I made up my mind that, come what might, I would tell nothing. "What one sees tomorrow, and what one didn't see yesterday, makes the road easy," Madame Welstoke had been used to say, and I recalled her words, and thought highly of their wisdom. And yet I have many the time wondered whether, if I had told of the creature I had seen scuttling like a crab over the grass in the orchard, I might not have prevented the grisly prank that fate has played.

That afternoon my mistress, in spite of her gentle protests, was taken to the train by the judge and Doctor Turpin, who I've always remembered as an old fool, trying to wipe the prickly heat off his forehead with a red-bordered silk handkerchief. One of the neighbors, clinking with jet beads till she sounded like a pitcher of ice water coming down the hall, went on the journey to the mountain sanitarium with Mrs. Colfax, as a sort of companion, and when all the fuss of the departure and the slam of the old cab doors and the neighing of the livery-stable hearse horses was over, I was left alone with the baby Julianna and the judge.

The child was laying on its fat little naked back, kicking its feet at me, when the father came upstairs.

"Please, sir," said I, "what is the news?"

"The inquest says drowning or blows on the head administered by a party or parties unknown," he answered gravely. "John Chalmers, the husband, acts like a heeled snake—violent and sinuous by turns. His lawyer has waived all preliminary proceedings, and, as luck will have it, we have a clear docket to go to trial with a jury."

By afternoon the town was filled with reporters who had come up on the midday train. From the back windows you could see them walking along the banks of the river and talking with a man in a red shirt. And later I learned he was the one who had gone out in a rowboat and found the poor woman's silly hat, that, with its wet, yellow roses and lavender veil, had floated around amongst a clump of rushes. With night the city papers came, full of accounts of the actress, and how she had played in melodramas, until finally she had played her farewell in a tragedy of real life. One said her husband was going to prove an alibi. Another said he had no

memory whatever of where he had been or what he had done that evening; and still another paper said the woman had been seen to quarrel with him and join a mysterious stranger, who was described as being a hunchback of terrible ugliness. All three of those I saw said the mystery might never be solved, but that new developments were expected every minute by both the State police and the chief of the local department.

"Margaret," said the judge, that evening at supper, as I was waiting on him, "you must not be talking of this murder with any one. Remember that you are employed in my home. Furthermore, I have old-fashioned notions, and so, from now on, I have stopped the *Morning Chronicle* from coming to the house, and I don't want any newspapers brought in until the trial is over."

"And when will that be?" I asked.

"Soon, I hope," he answered. "The district attorney, I understand, has conferred with the police again this afternoon, and believes he has enough evidence to hang Chalmers, and that no more can be gathered. For some reason the defense is equally satisfied. Do you understand now?"

"Yes, sir," I said. "There won't be much delay."

"Not much delay," he repeated over after me, and his voice shook as I never heard it shake before that minute.

"The beast!" I said.

"Hush!" said he. "He must be found guilty first. But if he is——"

He stopped there, but I saw the light in his eyes, and his long, tight-clenched fingers turning white under the pressure, and I knew if he passed sentence on John Chalmers what it would be.

That was the last word I ever heard from him before the trial was over, and I had to be running over to the neighbors for all the news I got. A reporter came to ask me one day if I had seen a strange man loafing in the meadows the evening the thing happened. He was a red-haired, freckled young man, who kept pushing his hat first to one side of his head and then the other, and talking first to one side and then the other of a pencil held in his teeth, so I could hardly hear a word he said. But he told me that, following the case from the beginning, he had been the one who had discovered that, two weeks before the murder, the man had insured his wife's life in his own favor, and that before he had met and married her he had had a different name—Mortimer Cross—and been a runner for a hotel in Bermuda, and lost the place because, in a fit of anger, he had tried to knife a porter.

"The police haven't half covered this case," he said, with his green eyes snapping. "I've got more evidence for my paper than they can get for the State's case. I haven't slept four hours in forty-eight."

"Young man," said I, "how much do you get a week?"

He grinned.

"Twenty dollars," he said.

"You work like that for twenty dollars?" I asked.

"For twenty dollars!" said he. "What's the twenty dollars?"

"Well, then——" said I.

"It's the game," he said. "But you don't understand."

"Don't I, though!" said I. And for days the old desire for adventure, for all the crooked ways, came back to me, and made me "as restless as a volcanic island," as Madame Welstoke used to say.

It was then I used to begin to hate the baby at times. I could have loved one of my own, and the feeling that this one belonged to some one else, and that I probably never would have the touch of hands that belonged to me, haunted me like a gray worm crawling through my head. Many a time, as I would be dipping little Julianna into her bath, these thoughts would come to my wicked mind, and, drying her, I'd dust the powder over the pink body till the room looked like a flour mill. I wished the trial would hurry to come and go, so Mrs. Colfax, who was writing such pathetic, patient letters about her baby, could return, and I laid many a curse on the fat doctor for making so much

fuss about her nervous condition, and for sending her away.

I could not go to the court, and I had to pick up what I could of the trial, as it went on, from gossip and reading of papers in my own room after I had gone to bed. Sometimes I'd wheel Julianna down the street to the courthouse, and then I'd see men with fingers raised as if they were all barristers, or imitating barristers, standing on the courthouse steps, and whispering and talking and laughing, and the sheriff, with a blue coat and mixed trousers and gray side whiskers, sitting on a camp stool under the big elm tree, like a man at an old soldiers' home, and factory-girl witnesses, giggling as they went up and disappeared into the dark corridors, and the drone of voices coming out of the open windows, and perhaps the jury walking in pairs and acting very important, with a deputy sheriff taking them over to the Lenox Café for their lunch.

The murder mystery had brought up a lot of curious people from the city, and I remember one—a woman with folds of skin under her chin, and plenty of diamond rings, who wiped her eyes, pretending there were tears in them.

"Where is the courthouse?" she said to me, just as if she could not see it. "*I* was the *woman's* most *intimate* friend *once*."

That was the way with 'most everybody. They did not like the thought of the poor dead woman or the horror of it, but only the thought of being important, and knowing something about it that the next one did not know. One girl in the town—a daughter of the biggest grocer, and quite a belle—could imitate the screams she had heard, and did it over and over, because she was begged by her girl friends, and so she was something of a heroine, and thought for still another reason to be a good person to know.

The judge was made of different stuff, I can tell you. We did not have many criminal trials in our family, so to speak, and I think it must have eaten well into his heart, for he was very silent and grave at meals, and never laughed, except when he came up to play with the baby, and ride the little thing, with its lolling head, and big, blue eyes, on his knee.

It took over a week to finish the trial after they had begun it. They wanted to trace John Chalmers' history, but he would tell nothing of it himself, and his past was a mystery, and there was a feeling among those who discussed the case that this would be against him. In fact, every one said he was surely guilty. He had misused his wife's life; he was a drunkard, and subject to fits of violence; he had asked his wife to go rowing on the river at a season when it was still cold; she had screamed; he was a good swimmer; there were signs of blows on her head; he had rescued himself, but not her, and he had tried to run away from the town without reporting her death.

To be sure, he had been able to show that he had been drinking, and evidence was brought to prove that he had lost consciousness after getting out of the water, and that, when he had awakened, he had asked a sleepy milkman where the police station was, and had been directed to the depot by mistake.

According to his own story, the boat had tipped over when the moon was behind a cloud, and he had lost all trace of his wife after her first struggle in the water. But people laughed at this story, and, as for myself, I wondered who was the creature I had seen in the orchard, mixed up with the queer shadows, and running from tree to tree like a frightened ape. Little knowing what was to happen, I wondered whether I would ever see John Chalmers, the accused man, before the law made 'way with him.

I never doubted that the law would hesitate till the day the judge came home to dinner at six in the evening, and told me that the case had been in the jury's hands for three hours already. How well I remember the long rays of the sun slanting over the slope, the songs of the wild birds that had sneaked into the trees along the green back yards of our dusty street, and how it came to me then that the world was too beauti-

ful to be befouled by the hates of little men, whose appetites were no more important than the appetites of the caterpillars eating the green foliage. But I could see the hates of men reflected in the judge's face.

"Surely they would not let him go, sir?" said I.

He only shook his head, and later he went out without once asking for the baby, and I knew when I heard the gate slam that things had not gone well at the courthouse.

At eight o'clock that night I was on the porch when a man came tearing up to the fence, almost fell off a bicycle, vaulted the rail, and came running over the grass.

"Got a telephone?" he said.

"Yes," said I, with the answer frightened out of me.

"Gimme a match," said he. "I've gotter have a cigarette. Hold on, I got one."

He lit it. In the flare I saw it was the red-haired, freckled reporter, and his green eyes was all alive again.

Before I could stop him, he had pushed his way ahead of me into the judge's study, and was at the instrument.

"A line!" he gasped. "I want New York."

He was snapping at his cigarette like a wild thing, and, along with his perspiration, ashes and sparks were dropping on the rug.

"Excuse me," he said. "I lost my prey!"

"What!" said I.

"Acquittal," said he. "The judge was too conscientious in his charge to the jury. Come on there, New York! Confound you, come on! I've got to relay a message through to my paper."

"Acquittal?" I asked, trembling like a horse.

"Acquittal!" he roared into the instrument. "This is Roddy. Five hours out. Interview with Dugan, juryman, local plumber. Says strict charge of judge did it. Prisoner gone down to River Flats with counsel. Drinking with Fred Magurk in kitchen barroom. Refuses to talk. Rest of story already gone by telegraph."

He turned around then, and grinned as if it hurt him—as if he was trying to hide some pain. I had lit the lamp, and you cannot begin to know how funny his white face looked under his bright red hair.

"Can I get a drink of water?" he said, choking, and then over he went, face foremost, into the morris chair.

I ran into the kitchen, and, what with the water splashing in the sink, I did not hear the judge come in, and the first I knew about his being there was when I went back into the library. There he stood, with his tortoise-shell glasses in his long fingers, looking down at Mr. Roddy, sitting weak and blinking in his chair.

"Sorry, judge, to faint away like a queen dowager in your library," said the reporter, with his everlasting American good nature. "But I came in to use the first telephone I could find. I was a little tired. My name's Roddy."

"Mr. Roddy," said Judge Colfax, holding out his hand, "I know of you very well, and of your work on this case."

"Too bad!" said Roddy. "The outcome?"

"I express no opinion," the judge answered, in a weary voice.

"The prisoner lost no time in finding liquor again," said the other. "He went to a bar before he went to his baby."

This reached the judge. His eyes snapped. There was a low growling in his throat.

"Margaret," said he to me, "bring this gentleman some brandy. You will rest here a while, Mr. Roddy. I suppose you will not leave until the eleven-thirty train."

"Thank you. I'm played out," said the reporter. "I thank you."

And so it was that, with many a queer thought in my head, I sat in the kitchen rocker, listening to the mumble of their voices, and waiting up to see if they should want me for anything. And so it was, too, that at last I found myself nodding with sleep, and started to go upstairs to bed.

Call me superstitious if you like, but I know well enough that some of us humans can feel the whisper of evil and terror before it reaches us. It spoke to me on those dark back stairs, with the moonlight shining on the wall at the top, and I was brought up sharp and wide awake, when the air rang with it as if it was a bell.

"You're half asleep, you old fool!" I said, feeling the sweat start out on my forehead, and I repeated it to myself when I was in my room, and turning down the bedclothes.

A nice breeze was blowing in from the meadows, cooling off the hot night, and finally, when I was laughing at my nervousness, I went to the window and leaned on the sill.

It was a very peaceful scene, I can tell you, with that long stretch of grass and daisies, and the water, and the light carried through the factory yard up the river, bobbing along as the watchman passed one window after another. All but the apple trees! They seemed as horrible as ever, and a dozen times I thought I saw men without heads, or with long arms like apes, creeping and skulking from one shadow to another. At last I felt my eyes sore with staring at them, and I turned away.

Just then I heard the knocking at the back door. It was soft and careful at first, and then a little louder.

"Some one from up the street to ask me questions," said I, feeling my way down the stairs, but then I caught the sound of something that I thought was the mewing of a cat. If I had had any sense I would have called to the judge before I slid the bolt and opened the door.

The thing I saw was a little bundle of white clothing. At first it looked so white it seemed to give off a light, and I thought it was hanging in the air. Then I saw two hands were holding it, and that it was a child.

"I want to see the judge," said a thick, evil voice. "I've got a joke for him—the best joke he ever had played on him."

"And who are you?" I asked.

"Oh, he'll see me all well enough," said the man, with a heave of his shoulders. "I'm John Chalmers!"

I could not speak. I stepped back, and he came in. He must have heard the voices in the study. But I can hardly say what happened. I only know that I found myself standing behind him, and that I saw him put the baby into a chair, and heard him cough.

The two men—the judge and Mr. Roddy—looked up, and I never saw two such faces.

"Stare!" said the terrible creature. "Well you may! Go ahead and stare, for all the good it will do you. I know you both. Both of you wanted me hung, didn't you? You're clever men—you two. But I'm cleverer than you. The joke is on you."

"You came in?" asked the judge, in a whisper, as if he didn't believe his eyes.

"Yes, and I'd have come in the front door if the people, with their butter-plate eyes, weren't watching me wherever I go. Oh, don't think I'm crazy with drink! No! I'm clever."

The judge and Mr. Roddy had stood up, and the judge could not seem to find a word to say, but Mr. Roddy clenched his freckled fists.

"What yer want?" he said.

"I came to tell you," said Chalmers, "that the joke is on you. I didn't expect the pleasure of seeing you, Roddy, my fine penny-a-liner. But you're in this, too. The joke is on you. I've been acquitted."

"What of it?" the judge said.

"I can't be tried twice for the same crime, can I? Didn't my lawyer tell me? I guess I know my rights. Ho, ho, the joke is on you, judge. I saw your eyes looking at me for a week. I knew you would like to see me hung. And Roddy, there—he nearly got me. But I'm safe now—safe as you are."

The reporter laughed a little—a strange laugh.

"You killed her, after all?" he asked.

"Yes," answered the other, in a husky and cheerful voice. "I did. That's where the joke is on you. I did the trick! Me! And what have you two

got to say? Who takes the bacon—me or you?"

"You don't know what you say," the judge cried.

"Yes, I do," roared the man. "I tell you I did the trick, and got tried once, and I'm free forever. There isn't anybody can touch me. I tell you the joke is on you, because I did it."

I could see Mr. Roddy's green eyes grow narrow then. He turned to the judge.

"Is that so?" he asked. "He can't be arrested again?"

The judge shook his head. I can see this minute how his face looked.

"Well," said Mr. Roddy, with a long sigh, "I'm beat! I've seen a lot of criminals in my day. Some were very clever. The joke *is* on me, Chalmers, for I'm obliged to say that you are the cleverest, slickest person I've ever seen, and you beat me! I've a lot of respect for you, Chalmers. Here's my fist—shake!"

The other walked to meet him, and they clasped hands in the middle of the room. It was only for a second, for, as quick as a flash, Mr. Roddy seemed to stiffen every muscle in his body. He pulled the other man toward him with one arm, and shot out his other fist. It made a dull sound, like a blow struck on a pan of dough. And the wretched murderer slumped down onto the floor like a sack of bran, rolled over on his back, and was still.

"There!" said Mr. Roddy, with his cheerful smile.

The judge had jumped forward, too, with a shout.

"Just a minute, judge," said the reporter. "Let me explain. You remember that I found out that two years ago our clever friend was at Bridgeport. That summer a girl was found in the park there—murdered. I was on the case. They never found out who did it. Have we or have we not just heard the confession of the man who killed her?"

"You mean to testify that this brute confessed to that other murder?" asked the judge, choking out the words.

"You mean to hang this man for a crime he never committed?"

"Why not?" asked Mr. Roddy. "It's between us, and it can be done. It's justice, isn't it?"

"My God!" said the judge. He began to bite his knuckles, as if he was tempted sorely enough.

What made me step over to look at the unconscious man's face? I do not know, unless it was the design of fate.

White it was—white and terrible, and stamped with evil and dissipation and fearful dreams. But there was a smile on it, as if the blow had been a caress, and that smile was still the smile of a child who sees before it all the endless pleasures of self-indulgence.

I felt the years slide back, I saw the mask of evil and folly torn away. I was sitting again in a beautiful gown in the Folies Trois in Venice, the wind was blowing the flowers on my table, the water in the canal sounded through the lattice, a man was tearing tablecloths from their places, dishes crashed, and then I saw the fellow's smile fly, and his face turn sober, and I heard his voice say, "What are *you* doing here?" as if he had known me for centuries. Because I knew then, in one look, that John Chalmers and Monty Cranch were one. I had met him for the second time—a wreck of a man—a murderer. But the mystery of a woman's heart——

"Well," I heard Mr. Roddy say, "are we going to hang him?"

"No!" I cried, like a wild thing. "No, judge! No! No! No!"

"And why not?" he asked, glaring at me.

"It's against your oath, sir," I said, like one inspired. "And it's against honor to hang a creature with lies."

The judge thought a long time, struggling with himself, until his face was all drawn, but at last he touched the red-haired reporter on the elbow.

"She is right," said he. "The incident is closed."

Something in his low voice was so ringing that for a moment none of us spoke, and I could hear the drawn cur-

tains at the window going flap-flap-flap in the breeze.

At last the reporter looked at his watch.

"Well, judge," he said, with his freckled smile. "I'm sorry you can't see it my way."

"You want to catch your train," the master replied quietly. "It's all right. I have a revolver here in the drawer."

"Probably I'm the one he'll want to see, anyway," Mr. Roddy said, in his cool, joking way. "Quite a little drama? Good night, sir."

"Good night," said the judge, without taking his eyes from the man on the floor. "Good night, Mr. Roddy."

I can remember how the door closed, and how we heard the reporter's footsteps go down the walk. Then came the click of the gate, and after a minute the toot of the train coming from far away, and then the silence of the night. Then out of the silence came the sound of Monty Cranch's breathing, and then the curtains flapped again. But still the judge stood over the other man, thinking and thinking.

Finally I could not stand it any longer; I had to say something. Anything would do. I pointed to the baby, sound asleep as a little kitten in the chair.

"Have you seen her?" I asked.

"What!" he answered. "How did she come there? You brought her down?"

"That isn't Julianna," said I. "It's his!"

"His baby!" the judge cried. "That man's baby!"

I nodded without speaking, for then, just as if Monty had heard his name spoken, he rolled over onto his elbow, and sat up. First he looked at the judge, and then I saw that his eyes were turning toward me. I felt my spine alive with a thousand needle pricks.

"Will he know me?" thought I.

He looked at me with the same surprised look—the same old look, I thought, but he only rubbed his neck with one hand, and crept up and sat in the big chair, and tried to look up into the judge's face.

He tried to meet the eyes of the master. They were fixed on him. He could not seem to meet the gaze. And there were the two men—one a wreck and a murderer, the other made out of the finest steel. One bowed his head, with its mat of hair, the other looked down on him, pouring something on him out of his soul.

"Well, I'm sober now," said Cranch, after a long time. "I know what you're thinking. I know it all. I know it all."

"You are not human," whispered the judge.

Can you say that certain words call up magic? I do not know. But those words worked a miracle. In a second, like something bursting out of its shell, the Monty Cranch I had treasured in my heart tossed off the murderer, the drunkard, the worthless wretch who had been throttling him, and holding him locked up somewhere in that worn and tired body, and came up to the surface like a drowning man struggling for life.

"Human?" he said, in a clearing voice. "Human? Am I human? That is the curse of all of us—we're human. To be human is to be a man. To be human is to be born. To be human is to have the blood and bone and brain that you didn't make nor choose. To be human is to be the son of another without choice. To be human is to be the yesterday of your blood, and marked with a hundred yesterdays of others' evil."

He jumped up. The whites of his eyes were bloodshot.

"Am I responsible for what I am?" he roared. "Are any of us?"

The judge looked frightened, I thought.

"Blood is blood!" cried Monty, with the veins standing out on his forehead. "That's why I brought the baby here. I wanted to kill her. Blood is blood! There's mine in that chair—and it is me, and I am my father, and he was his father, and there's no escape, do you hear? I wanted to kill her because I loved her, loved her, loved her!"

He felt back in the chair, and covered his face with his hand, and wept like a child.

I looked at the judge, and I could have believed he was a bronze statue. He never moved an eyelash. I could not see him breathe. He seemed a metal figure, and he frightened me, and the child frightened me, because it slept through it all so calm, so innocent—a little, quiet thing.

"Well, Chalmers," said the judge at last. "What do you mean to do? You're going away. Are you going to leave your daughter here?"

Monty's head was bowed over, so his face did not show, but I saw him shiver, just as if the judge's words had blown across him with a draft as cold as ice.

"I'm going to Idaho," he said. "I'm going away to-night. I've got to leave the baby. You know that. Put it in an institution, and don't let the people know who its father was. Some day my blood will speak to it, judge, but half my trouble was knowing what I was."

"By inheritance," said the judge.

"By inheritance," said Monty.

"You love this little daughter?" the judge whispered.

Monty just shivered again, and bowed his head. It was hard to believe he was a murderer. Everything seemed like a dream, with Monty's chest heaving and falling like the pulse of a body's own heart.

"You never want her to know of you—anything about you?" asked the judge.

"No!" choked Monty. "Never!"

"Every man has good in him," said the judge slowly. "You had better go—now!"

Without a word, then, Monty got up and went. He did not rush off like the reporter. He stopped, and touched the baby's dirty little dress with the tips of his fingers. And then he went, and the front door closed slowly and creaked, and the screen door closed slowly and creaked, and his shoes came down slowly on the walk and creaked, and the iron gate latch creaked. I went to the window and looked out one side of the flapping curtain, and I saw Monty Cranch move along the fence and raise his arms and stop and move again. In the moonlight, with its queer shadows, he still looked like half man and half ape, scuttling away to some place where everything is lost in nothing.

"We can't do anything more to-night," said the judge, touching my shoulder. "Take the child upstairs."

"Yes, sir," said I.

"Stop!" he said huskily. "Let me look at her. What is in that body? What is in that soul? What is it marked with? What a mystery!"

"It is, indeed," I answered.

"They look so much alike when they come into the world," he said, talking to himself. "So much alike! I thought it was Julianna."

"And yet——" I said.

He wiped his tortoise-shell glasses as he looked at me and nodded.

"I shall not go to bed now," said he. "I shall stay down here. Give the child clean clothing. And then, to-morrow we can——"

I felt the warmth of the little body in the curve of my arm, and, whether for its own sake or its father's, I do not know, but my heart was big for it. In spite of my feeling and the water in my eyes, I shut my teeth.

"To-morrow," I said.

How little we knew!

How little I knew, for, after I had washed the child, laid it in the big vacant bed, and blown out the candle, I remember I stood there in the dark beside little Julianna's crib with my thoughts not on the child at all. It was the ghost of Monty Cranch that walked this way and that in front of me, sometimes looking into my eyes and saying, "What are *you* doing here?" and other times running up through the meadow away from his crime, and again standing before a great shining Person, and saying: "What I am, I was born; what I am, I must be."

I went downstairs once that night, and peeked in through the curtains. The judge was at his desk, with his hands folded in his lap, and his eyes looking out from under his heavy eyebrows, as if he had the puzzle of the world in front of him, and was almost afraid. I thought of how tired he must

be, and of what a day it had been for all of us.

At last a board squeaked on the stairs, reminding me of the late hour and my aching body and burning eyes. So I went up to bed and tossed about until I fell asleep.

I know I could not have slept very soundly. Little matters stick in the memory if they are connected with such affairs. And so I remember half waking to hear the slam of a blind and the howl of a wind that had sprung up. Things were rattling everywhere with every gust of it—the curtains, the papers on my bureau, the leaves on the trees outside, and I pulled the sheet over my head, and thought of how my father and mother had gone down at sea, and fell into dreams of oceans of melted lead, hissing and steaming and red.

I think it was the shout of some man that woke me, but that is neither here nor there.

The house was afire! Yellow, dancing light and smoke poured under the door like something turned out of a pail. With every puff of the wind, the trees in the orchard were all lit up, and the flames yelled as if they were a thousand men far away and shouting together. Between the gusts you could hear the gentle snap and crackle and the spitting of sap in wood, and a body's own coughing when it tried to breathe in the solid mass of smoke. There were shouts of people outside, too, and the squeaking and scampering of rats through the walls. Out of my window I could see one great cloud of red sparks. They had burst out after a heat explosion, and I heard the rattle and tinkle of a broken window above the roar of the fire.

Of this terrible element I always had an unreasoning terror. Many a sleepless night I spent when I was with Madame Welstoke, and all because our rooms might happen to be high up in the hotel where we had put up. You can believe that I forgot all and everything when I opened my door, and found that the little flames were already licking the wall on the front stairs, and smoke was rolling in great, biscuit-shaped clouds through the leaping pink light. I could not have told where I was, whether in our house or city or another. And I only knew that I could hear the voice of my old mistress saying: "Remember, if we do have trouble, to cover your face with a wet towel, and keep close to the floor." It was senseless advice, because the fire that must have started in the judge's study, kept blowing out into the hall through the doorway, and then disappearing again like a waving silk flag. I opened my mouth, and screamed.

I might have known that the judge, if he were still in the library, was not alive, and I might have noticed as I went through his sleeping room, to climb out on the roof of the front porch, that he had not been to bed at all. But it was all a blank to me. I did not remember that there was a judge. Fire and its licking tongue was after me, and I threw myself off the hot tin roof, and landed among the hydrangea bushes below. In a second more I felt the cool grass of the lawn under my running feet, and the first time that I felt my reasoning power come to me I found myself wondering how I had stopped to button a skirt and throw a shawl around my shoulders.

There were half a dozen men. Where they had come from I do not know. They were rushing here and there across the lawn, and vaulting the fence. They did not seem to notice me at all. I heard one of them shout: "The fire alarm won't work! You can't save the house!" Everything seemed confused. Other people were coming down the street, running and shouting; sparks burst out somewhere and whirled around and around in a cloud, as if they were going up into the black sky on a spiral staircase. The walls of the grocery and the Danforth residence across the street, were all lit up with the red light; and a dash of flames, coming out our library window, shriveled up a shrub that grew there, as if it was made of dry tissue paper.

"How did it start?" yelled a man, shaking me.

I only opened my mouth and looked at him. He was the grocer. I had ordered things from him every morning.

"Well, who was in the house?" he asked.

"The judge," I said.

"The judge is in the house!" he began to roar. "The judge is in the house!"

It sounded exactly like the telephone when it says, "The line is busy, please ring off," and it seemed to make the people run together in little clusters, and point and move across the lawn to where the sparks were showering down, and then back, like a dog that wants to get a chop bone out of a hot grate.

Suddenly every one seemed to turn toward me, and in a minute all those faces, pink and shiny, were around me.

"She got out!" they screamed and shouted. "Where's the judge? Any one else?"

"The judge and the baby!" I cried, and sat down on the grass.

"No!" shouted the depot master. "The judge is all right. I just met him walking over the bridge after the freight had gone through. It wasn't twenty minutes ago. But you can't save a thing—not a stick of furniture. The whole thing is gone from front to back on the ground floor already!"

"Here's the judge now! That's him running with the straw hat in his hand," a woman shrieked, and ran out toward him, with her hair flying behind. I could see his tall figure, with its long legs come hurdling across the street. I could see his white face, with the jaw square and the lips pressed tight together.

"You!" he said, bending down. "Yes! Where's Julianna. Where's my baby?"

My head seemed to twist around like the clouds of pink smoke, and the whirl of hot air that tossed the hanging boughs of the trees. The crackle and roar of the fire seemed to be going on in my skull. But I managed to throw my head back, and my hands out, to show they were empty.

He cried out something.

The world went all black for me then, but I heard voices.

"Stop, judge! Don't go! You'd never get out."

"Let go of me!"

"He's going into a furnace! Somebody stop him!"

"Look! Look! You'll never see *him* again."

I opened my eyes. Judge Colfax's long, lean body, with its sloping shoulders, was in the doorway, as black as a tree against the sunset. I saw him duck his head down, as if he meant to plow a path through the fire, and then a fat roll of smoke shut off all view of him.

"They're both gone—him and the baby!" roared the depot master. "Lost! Both lost!"

The woman with the flying hair heard this, and ran off again, screaming. I listened to the piercing voice of her, and the roar and the clanging of bells. Horses came running up behind me, with heavy thuds of hoofs, and voices in chorus went up with every leap of the fire. It was like a delirium with the fever, and the grass under my hands where I sat felt moist and cool.

Then all of a sudden the shouting and noise all seemed to stop at once, so there was nothing but the snapping and crackle and hiss of the flames, and a voice of a little boy cried out:

"The judge is climbing down the porch! He's got something in his arms!"

"It's the baby!" yelled the depot master, throwing his hat on the ground. "He's saved the baby!"

I began to cry again, and wondered why the people did not cheer. There was only a sort of mumble of little shouts and cries and oaths, and the people fell to one side and the other, as the judge came toward me.

"Come, Margaret!" he said.

I looked up, and saw he was all blackened with smoke and soot, except where the sweat had run down in white streaks. His face was close to mine.

"Come! Do you hear?" he said. "I don't believe she's hurt, but we must see. We'll go across to the Danforths. There is nothing to do here. I've got Julianna!"

Just as if the fire was answering him, there came a great ripping and roaring, as if something had given away and collapsed. A tower of flames shot up out of the roof—a sort of bud of flame that opened into a great flower with petals. It was horrible to see the shingles curl and fall in a blazing stream down onto the ground, as if they were drops of hot metal.

It stupefied me, perhaps; I cannot remember how we went to the neighbor's house, or who welcomed us, or how we got into the room on the second floor, with a candle burning on the bureau. I noticed how small and ridiculous the flame was, and laughed. Indeed, I think when I laughed I woke up—really woke from my sleep for the first time.

"I went for a walk," the judge was saying. "I had a headache. I couldn't sleep. I moved the lamp onto the card table. The curtain must have blown into it. We must thank God! We were lucky, very lucky!"

He was pacing up and down there like a caged animal.

"I'm thankful Eleanor, my wife, wasn't at home," he went on, talking very fast. "She has always been so delicate—had so much sorrow—so much trouble. A shock would kill her—a shock like that."

I got up, and pushed the tangled hair back from my face.

"It's all right," he went on, with a thick tongue. "Julianna is all right—the little rascal is smoky, but all right. Blow the candle out. It is getting light outside. It's dawn."

The child on the bed kicked its pink feet out from under its long dresses, and gave one of those gurgles to show it was awake.

The sound made me scream. I had just awakened from my stupidity.

"The other child!" I cried.

"The other!" he said. "What other?"

"The one he left," I whispered. "I had forgotten her."

"So had I. I had only one thought," he cried out. "Only one thought! And now Chalmers' wish has been granted. His—has—gone!"

He sat down in a wicker rocking-chair, and wiped his forehead with the back of his hand.

"I never thought," he said again. "I didn't see it anywhere. I didn't look for it. I found Julianna in the middle of the bed."

"Bed!"

That was the only word I had. The light of sunrise had come. The shouts in the street were far away.

"Why, yes," the judge said. "I—did—I found——"

He stopped, he walked over to the infant, and swept it into his arms. He took it to the window, and held it up to the light as a person looks at a piece of dress goods.

"Why, it must be Julianna," he whispered.

Then I heard noises in the back of his throat; he could not catch his breath at first, and when he did he gave a low groan that seemed to have no end. The baby stared up at him, and laughed. It was Monty Cranch's child.

It was I who took it out of his arms, and I who watched him go to the bed and fall across it face downward, and hide his eyes like a man who cannot stand to see the light of day. If fate ever played a fiendish trick, and punished a square and upright man, it had done it then! I did not dare to speak to him. I did not care to move. I laid the happy, gurgling baby in my lap, and sat there till I felt that every joint in my body had grown tight in its socket.

Once they rapped on the door. The judge did not move, so I opened it a crack, and motioned them away, and sat down again, watching the light turn from pink to the glare of full day, and then a path of warm summer sunlight stretch out across the rug, and climb down the wall till it fell onto a basin of water sitting on the floor, and the reflection jumped up to dance its jigs on the ceiling.

I heard the judge move often enough, but I did not know he was on his feet until I looked up at last, and there he was, standing in front of me, with his wild eyes staring down at the child.

He pointed at the little thing with his long forefinger.

"Julianna," said he.

"You are mad, sir!" I cried.

"No," said he. "My wife! It must be done to save her happiness. Yes, to save her life!"

"To save her?" I repeated, after him.

"Yes, a lie," he whispered bitterly. "She has not seen the baby for weeks and weeks."

"She could never know," I cried, understanding what he meant. "That is true, sir. No one could ever tell. The two of them were not different, anyway. But you! You could never forget."

"I know," said he. "Yet it is my happiness against hers, and I have made up my mind. No living soul can ever learn of this. I am safe there. Chalmers will never come back. Nor could he ever know if he did. And so——"

"But the blood!" I said, trembling with the thought. "What of that?"

"God help us!" he answered, beating his knuckles on his jaws. "How can I say? But, come what may, I have decided! That child is now Julianna! Give her to me!"

He took the infant in his arms again, pressing it close to him, as if it were a nettle which must be grasped with full courage to avoid the pricks of its thousand barbs.

"What are you?" he whispered to the new Julianna. "What will you be? What is your birthright?"

Well I remember his words, spoken in that half-broken voice; they asked questions which have not been answered yet, I tell you!

And yet little attention I paid to them at the moment, for the mischief Welstoke had taught me crept around me again. I could not look at the judge, with his youth dropped off him, his voice and face ten years older, and his eyes grown more tender by the grief and love and sacrifice of an hour, without turning away from him. Why? Because a voice from the grave was whispering to me, as cool as wet lettuce, to prove that the good or bad of a soul does not end with death.

"Didn't I tell you that skeletons hang in all closets?" it said. "Now, after this night, the judge, to use a good old phrase, is quite in your power. Bide your time, my dear. We women will come into our own again."

"Excuse me, sir," I said aloud. "There was a locket on the child's neck. Wouldn't it be well to remove it? It is marked with a name that must be forgotten."

He looked at me gratefully as he fumbled at the trinket with his long, smoke-blackened fingers, while I trembled with my desire to have it safe in my own hands. It was the one thing left to prove the truth.

I believe my arms were stretched out for it, when there came a knock on the door.

"You want some breakfast," said a voice. "You poor, tired people!"

The judge, jumping up, placed the little chain and locket on the window sill. I saw it slide down the incline; the screen was up far enough to let it through. It was gone! He gave an exclamation, but the next moment the door had opened, and the Danforth family were crowding in.

"Well, Colfax," said the old lawyer, "you're a lucky man. Everybody safe and sound, and a very ugly old colonial house burned flat to the ground, with plenty of insurance. Now that you have the new appointment, and are going to leave town, it makes a very convenient sale for you."

"Hush!" said his daughter. "The hot coffee is more important. You had better bring the baby down with you. We have sent for milk and nursing bottles. There, John, that is the baby. You've never seen it. Wasn't I right? Isn't it pretty?"

"My God!" cried the judge.

"What!" said they.

"I must be tired," he answered. "It has been a strain. It was nothing."

TO BE CONTINUED IN NEXT ISSUE, ON SALE JUNE 7TH.

Looking On from the Bleachers

BEING THE LETTERS OF FELIX McGEE, FORMER PITCHER FOR THE INVINCIBLES, TO HIS OLD-TIME CAPTAIN IN THE IRRIGATED LAND OF PROMISE AND BIG RED APPLES

By Frank X. Finnegan

IV.—SIGNING UP FOR A DOMESTIC BATTERY

DEAR BILL: I think I notice in your last letter a sort of regretful pang because you failed to sign up a partner and make it a domestic battery before you went out there—a sort of hint that you lack the refining touch of woman's hand in your lonely cabin, and the deft mitt of the fair sex in putting 'em over at the cook stove. That may all be, cap, but in my opinion you are a whole lot better off right now, at the start of the season in the Irrigation League, to be going it alone than you would be with a manager. Later on, when those skinny saplings can show an apple here and there, and you have something to make the festal board groan besides corn meal and potatoes and last year's salt pork, you might look around at the offerings of the bush leagues and grab off something worth while—at this stage of the game, I think it would be a mistake for you to sign a new contract.

In the first place, Bill, you've been used to having your own way so long, being captain of a ball club and running things to suit yourself before, during, and after the game, that it would be quite a wallop to you to find yourself outclassed at that stuff, as you would about a week after you got married. You know, many a man who put in years rubbering at the proposition, and thought he was finally marrying Docile Dorothy, has found out in a hurry that he had hooked up Conversational Carrie, with her foot on the loud pedal. I don't know whether you remember Charlie McGill or not—he played second for the Dreadnaughts when "Hank" Murray was managing them, some years ago. We never knew what made Mac such a solemn chap until after he was dead—then Murray found out.

It happened that the team was on the road when Mac was in his last illness, and none of the boys were able to show up for the funeral; but "Hank" drilled around to the house as soon as he got back to town, to find out about it and make the usual spiel about the boys missing Charlie, and all that. He found the twelve-year-old daughter at the house—the widow was away some place—and after he had asked about the funeral and so, for want of something better to say, Murray says to the kid: "And what were your father's last words, Mary?"

"Oh, he didn't have any," she says; "ma was with him to the end."

So you see, Bill, it's best to go a little bit slow on the marriage proposition, especially for a fellow like you that's all out of practice. If you should sign up a wife, the chances are you would have to take some one about your own age that everybody in Montana had been waiving on for the last ten or fifteen years, and it's a cinch that she would have stored up a lot of conversation that had never been used. She would sure unload this on you while you sat beside the cheerful evening fire trying to read a last month's paper from

This series began in the first May POPULAR.

Seattle, and she mended some section of your harness; and I'm afraid you'd find that trying after a few months' steady diet. You know, cap, you've got to take nearly everything for granted when you finally decide to leap off the dock into the sea of matrimony—you can hardly ask the woman for references and get away with it. And not having references sometimes means getting stung.

Billy Sullivan, of the White Sox, used to tell us about a countryman of his named Casey, who went down to the water front in New York one day looking for a job. He spotted a brig, or a barge, or some sort of a seagoing tub that was getting ready for a voyage, and he fluttered down on the captain, standing on the dock.

"Captain," he says, "do you need anny more min?"

"Have you got any references?" the cap says, looking him over.

"Well, I haven't any wid me," says Casey; "but I can bring you enough av thim to choke a horse."

"Go and get 'em," says the skipper; and Casey started. But before he got out of earshot, he heard a big German strike the captain for a job.

"Sure!" says the captain. "Go up forward and report to the second mate."

Casey was pretty sore at having to run around town and dig up references while the Dutchman went to work without batting an eye, but he went uptown and saw a bunch of the right people, and came back with a sheaf of official stationery that he dumped on the skipper.

"All right," the captain says, after taking a flash at some of the stuff; "go up forward and report to the second mate."

The first day at sea, they put Casey and the Dutchman to work washing off the deck—the Turk with a broom, and his pal hauling up the water in a pail at the end of a rope. After half an hour or so, a big wave caught the bucket when the German threw it over. He hung onto the rope, and away went pail, Dutchman, and all over the rail into the moist and moaning sea.

Casey stood and watched his shipmate floating away into the distance behind the ship for a few minutes, and then he hunted up the captain.

"Say, captain," he says, "whin you hired me you made me bring you riferinces, didn't you?"

"Yes," says the skipper. "What of it?"

"You didn't get any riferinces fr'm th' Dutchman, did you?" says Casey, with a grin.

"Well, that's my business," the skipper says. "What about it?"

"Oh, nothin'," says Casey, walking aft again. "I just thought I'd tell you —he's gone with yer bucket!"

Of course, I don't mean to say that it's all one-sided, at that, Bill. Believe me, the girl that hooks up with you will be taking as many chances as you are, and then some, like my old schoolmate, Anna, did with the Gould dust twins, Count Boni and Prince De Sagan. I don't know anybody that can be a bigger grouch than you if you don't get everything pitched to you just where you want it; and if you should ever try to put over some of the stuff you did down around the clubhouse in the old days, it would be just like several determined ladies I have met to bounce a chunk of the proud State of Montana off your knob, notwithstanding the implied promise to love, honor, and obey. As you have never been accustomed to this line of work on the part of the fair sex, I would earnestly advise you to postpone the teamwork until the last possible moment, and take four or five looks before you leap.

Everybody doesn't do that, you know, and sometimes the innocent bystander gets spiked accidentally. We used to have a silent sort of a gillie playing center for the Cardinals when I was with them—his name was King, and he always signed himself "N. King," without tipping off his first name. McCloskey got curious about that monaker, and after he and I had guessed a dozen names beginning with "N," he nailed this fellow to a pillar in the

Southern Hotel one morning, and made him admit that he had a first name.

"We've made a little bet about what that 'N' stands for," says the boss, "and you've got to settle it. Come on—dig up!'

The young fellow pretty nearly choked to death trying to swallow his Adam's apple that was chasing up and down his neck like the bobbin of a sewing machine; but finally he says:

"Well, if you'll keep it to yourselves, I'll tell you. My first name is Nosmo."

"It's what?" we both yelled.

"Nosmo," he says again; "but you notice I ain't making any big, loud holler about it. I ain't handing out any cards with my full name printed on 'em, and I'm generally satisfied to call it 'N. King,' and let it go at that."

"But leave us not in this painful suspense," suggests McCloskey, "when you know we're clamoring for the big info as to how they came to slip you a handle like that when you were an innocent and helpless kiddo. Tell us, Nosmo, prithee, tell us."

"Well," he finally says, "the way I get the dope on it is this: It seems there was a big factory of some kind near where my folks used to live, and it had two big swinging gates at the main entrance. My mother used to pass there pretty often, and she noticed that one of the gates was marked 'King,' and she made up her mind that must be the name of the rich guy that owned the factory, and thought he might be a relation. Coming from the other direction, she saw the other gate was marked 'Nosmo,' and it looked like it ought to be this big gun's front name; so when I was born she coaxed the old man to saddle me with the names off the gates, 'Nosmo King.' But the first time they passed when both gates were shut, and got a flash, they saw what the painter had been trying to say: 'No Smoking.' It was too late then to fix me up with a new name, and I've been stuck ever since."

Leave this be a lesson to you, Bill, not to jump at conclusions and take desperate chances, especially along the lines I have been discussing. When a fellow has been playing under the old rules as long as you have, it's likely to be quite a jolt to him to take on a new umpire that refuses to change any decisions, and may put him out of the game and off the lot if he opens his trap too often. These things have happened, Bill, and while I'm a family man myself, and have no hammer out for marriage as an institution, I merely intend to slip you this chunk of wisdom, which has come down through the ages: "Leave well enough alone."

You have another advantage in living out there on your little, old ten-acre orchard that I don't suppose you appreciate—you don't have to move when the first of May comes around, like us poor suckers back here in the busy metropolis. I don't know why I have to move, either, except that my sparring partner, Mrs. McGee, made up our mind a month ago that the present hut wouldn't do under any circumstances for another year. When we came into it last spring, she gave me to understand, in a general sort of way, that it was the grandest piece of work architecturally that had been turned out by the hand of man for several ages back.

Lately, however, I had begun to detect signs of unrest which my long experience had taught me were symptoms of springibus flittibus, and my guess came out all right. The lady who presides over my hearth, home, and bank roll has decided that the right field of our flat is too close to the grand stand, that the pitcher's slab isn't far enough from the plate by four or five feet, and that the fences ought to be moved back, the diamond resodded, and the base paths rolled before we sign a contract for the coming season.

She pulled all this chatter on the gentlemanly agent when he passed among us with the new leases a week or two ago, and he had such an acute attack of heart failure that I thought he was going to die right there in the flat and get us in bad with the coroner's jury. I crabbed that game, though, by getting him out into the hall, and he stood

there and barked like a sea lion until I had to throw him a fish to keep him quiet for a few minutes.

The upshot of it was that the game was called right then and there, and Mrs. McGee went forth with a glad smile and an air of expectant delight to hunt up a new shack in which to plant me and such chunks of our furniture as the movers think are worth while carrying in after they have broken them up into pieces easy to handle.

Do you know, Bill, there is something about women that seems to make 'em sort of hanker for this moving thing. I don't know whether they get a jinx on the neighbors, or whether they mix it up with all the grocerymen around, or get a grouch on the same old streets and buildings; but just as soon as the green begins to get back in the trees, and those old fossils out in the suburbs begin piping to the newspapers about the first robin, every woman in town wants to pack up her traps and move. I think it's a disease, Bill, on the square!

Now, you or I could settle down almost any old place, and, so long as the roof didn't leak, and somebody dished up our eats every so often, and there was a street car within a mile or so, fine for the lilies! It would be us for playing a season of one hundred and sixty-eight games right there, and signing a long-term lease for the old grounds. But it's some different with woman, lovely woman, and I suppose it's all right that it should be, too. If they weren't a lot different from us, we wouldn't all be chasing them so hard most of our lives, and we wouldn't all keep hustling while we're in the game, and living up to every old rule we can remember to keep from getting our releases some fine day when we're not looking for it.

You know, Bill, there's a favorite old gag on the vaudeville stage about the man that doesn't pay as much attention to his wife after marriage as he did before. When the charming soubrette in the side-splitting sketch pulls that on the near comedian, and asks him why it is, Rollicking Rollo asks her if she ever saw any one chasing a street car after he had caught it, which always brings a yelp of delight from the lowbrows who think marriage is a good deal of a joke from any standpoint. That's all well enough, cap, about chasing the street car after you've caught it, but, on the other hand, you've seen many a gazam put off a street car for not paying his fare.

That's what happens to a lot of these dubs who chase the matrimonial street car without stopping to frisk themselves and see if they've got the price of a ride, and while I don't want to insinuate anything at all, Bill, you'd better see how you stand after a good, careful search. If there is one lie that has caused more trouble in this world than any other, it is that ripe old nut: "Two can live cheaper than one," and that you may never fall for any such bum information is the sincere wish of Your old pal,

New York. FELIX MCGEE.

The next story in this series is called "Pitching on the Political Diamond." You will get it in a fortnight, first July POPULAR, on sale June 7th.

THE ORIGINAL SELF-MADE MAN

DOCTOR MARY WALKER, who wears trousers and a thoroughly masculine costume, including the coat and the derby hat, had just concluded before the Senate committee on pensions a few remarks regarding a bill in which she was interested.

As she went out of the committee room, Senator "Bob" Taylor, of Tennessee, slid far down in his chair and remarked:

"There goes the only self-made man in history."

The Lawbreakers of Petit Bois

By Elmore Elliott Peake

Author of "The Little King of Angel's Landing," "When Scholarship Came to Panther," Etc.

Elmore Elliott Peake has written one or two short stories for us, but this is his first long novel for the POPULAR, and we think you will agree that it is an exceptionally good one, a novel of most unusual quality. In it Mr. Peake tells about a problem which a United States revenue officer had to solve; but aside from the mystery you will be captivated by the delightful pictures which follow one another in the course of the narrative, pictures of the South so full of charm and color that you know they could only have come from a man who knows and loves the Southland. The scenes are in that quaint old section where the French strain is still to be met with. It is the kind of story that every reader—and we include the ladies—will thoroughly enjoy.

(*In Two Parts—Part I.*)

CHAPTER I.

"THERE'S your man," said Speight to me. Speight was my immediate superior in the secret-service division. We were standing on Canal Street, in New Orleans, at eight o'clock in the evening, in front of a café. "My man," just advancing to the cigar case, was a handsome young Creole of perhaps thirty, wearing a gray crush hat, with suit and gloves to match. A Cape jessamine was pinned to his lapel; he wore a lavender tie, and carried a flexible cane of a kind made in France, and which is in reality only a sheath for a stiletto.

"Follow him, regardless of expense—to the ends of the earth, if necessary," continued Speight hurriedly—for him. "Charter a ship as your private conveyance, if need be. Get your proof—don't fall down on that, as Mabrey did—and then net him. It will be a feather in your cap. In the last two years, as nearly as I can estimate, from all available data, that young fellow and his gang have smuggled not less than five million dollars worth of French and Belgian laces into this country. Where and how is for you to find out."

My man—Raoul Delarue was his name—had paused at the cigar stand to light a cigarette. As he again advanced toward the door, Speight pressed my hand, with a low "Good-by, and good luck!" and moved away. No one to look at him—he had an abstracted, scholarly air, wore glasses, and stooped slightly—would have guessed him to be one of the world's greatest detectives; yet such he certainly was—and is.

I moved off twenty feet, and stood under a lamp, apparently scanning an evening paper. Delarue paused on the threshold for a few moments, ogling the passers-by, especially those of the gentler sex, and exhaling cigarette smoke through his nostrils. Presently he strolled up Canal Street, turned into one of the narrow cross streets, and

almost at once was within the purlieus of a section which for romantic and historical interest has no equal in America—the French or Latin Quarter of New Orleans, the product of an Old World stock in a New World soil, embalming the story of its French and Spanish ancestry in the names of its streets and squares, its stuccoed walls, arches, gratings through which whispered words of love have passed, balconies from which more than one Juliet has leaned to her Romeo, jalousies, tiny courts crowded with parterres, urns and basins, statues and fountains, all half smothered in vines and roses.

Through one of the iron-latticed entrances Delarue let himself with a key, and disappeared from view, and a moment later a light gleamed from an upper embrasure. I took the number of the house, crossed the street, and walked slowly back and forth, the full length of the block, so as not to excite the suspicion of any mantilla-hooded maiden who might be sitting in one of the sequestered balconies.

If he did not reappear before twelve o'clock—it was now eight-twenty—I could safely assume that he would spend the night there. Or, if he eluded me, I felt certain of picking up his trail again as this point. However, he reappeared in about twenty minutes, minus his cane, carrying a traveling bag, and having exchanged his light clothes for dark ones. He walked back to Canal Street, and paused on the corner. As he was evidently waiting for a car, I slipped on a false mustache and closed in on him, so that I might be able to take the same car.

We rode west, or southwest, into a fashionable section of the American Quarter. He descended after about twenty minutes—I preceding him, having stood on the rear platform, smoking—walked a block or two, turning into an exceedingly handsome avenue called Coronado Court, and ascended the steps of a mansion which bore the number nine. After seeing him admitted by a maid, I retreated across the street.

It was a very retired quarter, and during the thirty minutes I stood at my post no one passed. Then the big front door of No. 9 was suddenly flung wide open, emitting a flood of light; I heard the sharp, staccato notes of anger, and a large, bald-headed man vigorously kicked Raoul down the marble steps, his bag bounding away from him like a football.

Raoul leaped lightly to his feet, drew a derringer, and leveled it at his assailant. But, instead of firing, he began a rapid harangue, in his excitement dropping into the Creole patois to such an extent that I could not follow him. Then something happened which could scarcely have happened between two members of the Teutonic or Anglo-Saxon family. The host came down the steps, smiling, with outstretched hand; Raoul pocketed his pistol, and offered his hand, also smiling. A guarded colloquy followed, of which I caught only the last words, uttered by Delarue: "To-morrow, for sure, eh!"

He bade the other good night, and ran gracefully down the terrace steps to the sidewalk. I added a set of whiskers to my mustache, knocked the crease out of my fedora, dented its four corners, and once more stepped up to Monsieur Delarue's side while he waited for a car, without exciting his slightest interest, much less suspicion. He scarcely glanced at me, but pulled on his cigarette until the tip glowed, and gazed at the ground with brilliant, reflective eyes.

Our ride ended this time at the levee, in sight of the twin stacks of one of the few survivors of that magnificent fleet of steamboats which once plied the muddy Father of Waters between the Crescent City and St. Louis. Delarue immediately went aboard, but I paused, checkmated. I could not take passage without luggage. Not that I haven't gone without a change of linen for a week, and wooed Morpheus in a union suit, but because a man without luggage, if traveling, is an object of suspicion anywhere and everywhere.

I glanced up at a sign which read: "*Stonewall Jackson*—Red River and

Bayou Dauphine." The last name looked familiar to me, and after a moment I recalled that Bayou Dauphine was one of the waters which the preliminary workers on this lace job had marked "suspicious." And on the map which had been furnished me, a little place called Petit Bois had been encircled with red ink, to invite my particular attention.

"What time does this boat leave?" I asked of a negro lolling on a bale of cotton.

"Boss, she suppose to leave at ten o'clock, but I ain't never seen her git away yit before harf past eleven. And she's loadin' a heap o' truck to-night."

I glanced at my watch. It was just two minutes of ten.

"Do you know whether she passes a place named Petit Bois?" I continued.

"Sholy, suh. That gemplum just ahead of you is a-goin' to Petit Bois."

"You know him, then?"

"Ah ought to. Ah rousted on that old tub till I got mah leg broke last March."

"Does the gentleman live at Petit Bois?" I ventured to ask.

"Ah reckon he do. He keeps a-comin' and a-goin'."

A near-by clock struck ten. Could I make it to my hotel and back before the boat left? I decided to take the hazard, and, if I lost, to go up on the next boat, whenever that might be.

I won. At eleven-fifty-three I walked up to the purser's window, followed by the cabin boy, carrying a bag, a suit case, and two gun cases. The later had been provided beforehand for just such an emergency as this. I was a Nimrod, a mighty hunter, but for a different kind of game than most people would suspect.

While I was paying for my ticket to Petit Bois, the bells in the engine room below jangled, I heard the mate's raucous voice, and the *Stonewall* emitted a hoarse cough from one of her exhaust pipes. At the same moment I was conscious of a soft, almost apologetic, voice at my elbow:

"Pardon, seh, but would you be please to join a few of us gentlemens in a little game of pokair, just to paz the time away?"

It was Raoul, twisting his little, dark, silken mustache between a delicate thumb and forefinger, and smiling upon me with eyes as beseeching as a girl's.

I should much have preferred my berth, but it was business to cultivate this man, and I nodded assent. I wore no make-up now, I may explain. Wigs and whiskers will not stand close inspection. Moreover, they are not necessary, as a general thing.

Seated at a round table in the forward end of the saloon, and evidently awaiting my arrival, were a tall, sallow man, with long hair and rapier mustachios—a planter, as I soon learned; a dapper cotton factor from New Orleans; a trapper from the backwaters, wearing boots and a broad-brimmed hat with a band of rattlesnake skin; and a Spanish sea captain, whose presence on a fresh-water craft was not explained to me.

At the end of an hour Delarue was ninety dollars ahead of the game. Little of it, though, came from my pocket, for I quickly recognized the man as a card sharp, and had played conservatively. He handled cards like a prestidigitator, shuffling and dealing with a speed which was fairly bewildering. Yet, in spite of his speed, I detected him in substituting five stacked decks, to say nothing of the stacking which took place before our eyes and the slipping of cards from the bottom of the deck. It required nerve; the men about the table were not tenderfeet at that game, or at the game of life, and had they detected him, I have no doubt he would have been roughly handled.

I retired at one o'clock, pleading fatigue. When I arose we were in the Bayou Dauphine. Twice have I circled the globe on the trail of a fugitive from justice; but a lonelier, weirder, more God-forsaken spot I have never seen than the one my eye rested on as I stepped to the cabin deck. The water was inky black. Cypress knees emerged like the snouts of saurian monsters. The trees were hung with funereal festoons of Spanish moss. Alligators sank

out of sight in the repulsive fluid at our approach. Startled white herons winged their way through the gloomy arcades of the forest like spirits of the dead. A blood-red flower—perhaps an orchid—glowed here and there in the sedgy margin like the widespread mouth of a serpent.

Now and then, however, along the bluffs, we passed a patch of cotton or sugar cane, usually ornamented with a negro leaning on his hoe and waving his wool hat. The passing of the steamboat was doubtless an event in those arid lives, and at the landings there was always a goodly crowd to greet us. Yet the *Stonewall Jackson* was not a vessel to inspire confidence in a passenger. Captain Slogger's breath was alcoholic, and he was always wiping his damp mustache as if he had just had another drink—which was doubtless the case. And as I stood in the pilot house and watched the negro pilot, whose hip pocket bulged with a flask, throw his wheel to port or starboard, in an effort to dodge a cypress knee or a sunken log, I wondered at the providence which still held the *Stonewall* upon the bosom of the waters.

Delarue did not appear until about ten o'clock, by which time he and I were the only passengers left, Petit Bois being near the head of navigation. He looked as fresh as if he had slept in a cradle rocked by his mother's foot, though at four o'clock I had heard the poker game still in progress. I wondered how much he had cleaned up.

"B'u'ful country, seh!" he observed to me, as he lit one of his endless, gold-tipped cigarettes. "Yes," exhaling a thick cloud, "a most b'u'ful country. If it could only be paint and put upon the canvas—eh! Lots of the bear and the deer, too," he added, at sight of my gun cases, lying near the companionway. "You will find many."

To my disappointment, he left the boat at Belle Vue Landing, a mere gap in the forest wall, into which the *Stonewall* stuck her stage plank long enough for him to skip along it with his catlike quickness and leap ashore. Petit Bois was a mile and a half farther on. The name means, I believe, "little wood," and in a space perhaps a mile square I saw no trees except two rows of Lombardy poplars along the single street of the village and groups of fruit trees.

It is an ancient Norman settlement, dating back to the first quarter of the eighteenth century; and, contemplating its vine-covered cottages, gardens, and orchards, brooded over by an Old World peace and leisureliness, one might easily have believed himself on the banks of the Orne. Here the appearance of a dragon would be scarcely more astonishing than that of an automobile.

There was no tavern or inn, I learned from an old peasant in a smock; but strangers always found entertainment, he added, with Mademoiselle Heloise, and offered to show me the way and to help with my luggage.

This pleasantly named lady proved to be equally pleasant to look at. Indeed, she proved nothing less than a beauty, and could not have been over twenty-five. At first, in her plain gray gown, I could have believed her a nun. But when she stepped out into the light the gray became a pale lavender, and I realized that its exquisite fit had never been attained in Petit Bois. And there was nothing nunlike in her dark, glowing eyes, with their challenge of mischief, as she said: "Ah, yes, most gladly shall I make for you such poor entertainment as I can. It iss not much; I live most simply. But if you hunt you will not care. Many gentlemens from the North come to hunt. And the deer and the bear they are many. Sometimes in our gardens—yes! But myself I could not shoot one!" She shivered in a cozy, snuggling way, and showed her perfect teeth in a merry laugh. "I could but drive it away with the stick. For you know, maybe—who could say?—it might have a li'l' fawn in the woods."

She and I sat down alone to the noonday meal. A maid in her teens, named Yvonne, waited on table, and a colored boy hacked listlessly at the woodpile. These seemed to constitute her household, but I asked no questions.

Neither did I ask her last name, which I felt certain could not be Heloise. But as "Mademoiselle Heloise" she had been introduced, and as Mademoiselle Heloise I addressed her, which she seemed to take as a matter of course.

After dinner I strolled up the village street. The men hoed in their rich, black gardens, or tied up vines, or smoked and chatted with one another over their division fences. The houses were all flush with the street, after the Old World style, and I glanced into one as I passed, curious to see its interior. The sight within made my heart miss a beat. A woman sat with a fat, round pillow in her lap, on which was pinned a parchment pattern. Larger pins, acting as guides, were stuck here and there, and from the top hung a number of little bobbins. She was making lace!

In the next house three women were engaged in the same occupation, two on pillow, one on needle-point, work. And so it went. In every house, so far as I could see, from one to four lace makers were at work.

For a moment a wave of chagrin immersed me. Was it the product of these bent peasant women, whose great-great-grandmothers had doubtless been lace makers in distant Alençon and Argentan, which had put Petit Bois on the list of suspected places? It was evident that Petit Bois, with its hundred or two habitants, could make but a fraction of the contraband goods which Speight had smelled out. But the local industry might prove a loophole of escape for Delarue if cornered. He could swear that he handled only domestic goods, and he could prove that these goods might easily have been mistaken by government officials for imported stuffs.

When I reached my lodgings again, a wizened, little, old man, clad in a cassock which touched his ankles, and wearing a flat hat, was seated on a bench with Heloise, under her rose arbor. I learned afterward that he was in his ninety-first year, but his cheeks were a cherry-red, he had the laugh of a boy, and an insatiable curiosity as to the doings of the great outside world. After he had taken his departure, I said to Heloise:

"I was quite surprised to find that the principal industry of your village is lace making. I did not suppose that a lace-making colony existed in America."

"Yes," said she, quaintly twisting the word with her tongue.

"And do you, too, make it?" I asked.

"Me?" She laughed gayly at my innocence. "Ah, no! I have not the skill. To sew a button on, that is my utmost. Oh, maybe darn a stockin', too. I buy the lace—my bruzzer—my brother—and I. And they bless us for it, for before we came, two, t'ree year ago—I forget which—they take it to the city and peddle it from door to door. But they would not get much, and have to pay for the ride on the boat, besides. And the Americains—pardon!—they make them pay the license, too. So they were happy when we came, for we pay them more. And Father Drouet is happy, too, for it was hard for him to live. The pipple could not pay much to the church. But now they pay much, and he has a chicken each Sunday. You must go to see him. I will take you. He is always delight to meet an Americain."

"And your brother—does he live here, too?"

"Oh, yes. Not far away. He iss a planter. We could not live by the lace alone, of course."

I did not fall asleep that night with my usual readiness. I fell to thinking of Father Drouet, as simple as a child, stranded here in an eddy of busy America, and quite evidently living only to provide spiritual food for his little flock. Nor will I deny that the beautiful Heloise, also so alien to America, occupied a part of my reflections. And underneath it all, like the undertow of surf, was my professional errand here.

It must have been after midnight when I heard a door softly close. Slipping from the bed and peering out of the low window into the moonlit night, I saw a woman, cloaked and hooded, in spite of the balmy air, passing down

the garden path. At a line of shrubbery she was joined by a black-haired, black-whiskered, piratical-looking fellow, and the pair disappeared in the shadows beyond.

Five minutes later I was a hundred feet behind them. They carried on no conversation, and he walked three or four feet from her. They crossed a cotton field, pushed through a patch of sugar cane—a stalk of which the man tore off and began to chew—and finally emerged into a lane with trees on either side. This they followed for perhaps a mile, until there loomed into view on a slight eminence one of those great plantation houses which mark a closed chapter in the history, not of Louisiana alone, but of the whole South.

No lights were visible, and they passed around to a door in the rear. The man drew a key from his pocket, but before inserting it said something to the girl. She shook her hooded head. And he spoke, earnestly but softly, and laid his hand upon her arm. She withdrew a step or two, he unlocked the door, and they entered.

CHAPTER II.

I heard the bolt shoot; then, realizing that for the moment I was at the end of my tether, I returned to the cottage. Professionally I was encouraged, for the situation looked promising. A clew seemed in sight. Law-abiding people do not, as a rule, go scurrying about after midnight.

But as a man, I felt depressed. One hates to have his faith in human nature jarred. He regrets to discover that a man or woman whom he thought good is bad; and I had a feeling that Heloise's arch, innocent face was but a mask. I suspected that this big house was the home of her brother, and that her brother was no other than Raoul Delarue.

On the other hand, it remained to be proved that he was a smuggler, though certainly Heloise's midnight call upon him lent color to that supposition. To approximate the truth as closely as possible, I determined to visit the cottages the next day, as Heloise had invited me to do, and see what grade of lace these people were making.

I lay awake fully half an hour the next morning, studying the quaint, antique furnishings of the room, before I heard a knock, followed by Yvonne's voice, to the effect that breakfast would be served in twenty minutes.

When I entered the little dining room Heloise was chirping at a German linnet. Then she turned and extended to me a soft, little hand, saying: "I hope our breakfas' is not too early for you? But we live in the country, you know, monsieur. We are—well, we are planters."

She laughed as if this were something of a joke, but no one could have looked into her beautiful face and doubted her sincerity.

About ten o'clock we made our round of the cottages. I found no crudities in the lace making. Needle-point, or "point," as it is commonly called, and bobbin, or pillow lace, were both made. The purity of the art had been preserved. I saw examples of the most exquisite point d'Alençon, point de gaze, duchesse, appliqué, Valenciennes. In one of the cottages was a lace machine, driven by a gasoline engine, but it was not at work, and Heloise informed me that it was not often used.

On our return we discovered Raoul Delarue seated in front of the cottage, clad in faultless saddle clothes. A fine chestnut mare was tied to the fence, pawing impatiently. Raoul advanced, with a winning smile.

"Mr. Chase," he exclaimed, "this iss a mos' pleasant surprise! I had not suppose that you were to make your headquarters at Petit Bois, and I have just learned you were stopping with my sister Heloise. You must come over to my house, where I can give you entertainment much better as my sister. She has such a li'l' place, you know. Besides, two other gentlemens who are also after the bear and the deer are already at my house. My sister, she stays here to look after the laces. The designs, it is important they be 'up to date,' as you Americans say. And

correct, too. But I—I myself look after the plantation—to the planting of the cotton and the cane. The lace brings us but a pittance. We have but a hundred workers or so. Indeed, it is not for the money my sister stays here. She is—what you call it?—a philanthropist. She loves to help these pipple," indicating the village with a sweep of his gauntleted hand. "She teaches them not only to make the lace, but also to make the prayer, to go to the church—to do all that Père Drouet tell them. Y'unnerstand?"

"His praise, it is too much!" protested Heloise, with a flash of her irresistible eyes. "I do but little."

Raoul laughed merrily. "To hear her, you would believe so. But take my word—I know better. It is I who do little."

Nothing could have pleased me better than Raoul's invitation. If there was one place the inside of which I was curious to see, it was that great house to which Heloise had made her midnight visit in company with a man whose very appearance was suggestive of secret, lawless deeds. Yet I could explain the invitation only on the grounds that Raoul—assuming he was engaged in a contraband trade—wished to keep me under his eye.

The other two guests at Belle Vue, as Delarue's country place was called, proved to be a Mr. Dassy and a Mr. Stringfellow. Dassy looked anything but a sportsman. From his pink cheeks and heavy build, he looked as if a hundred-yard brisk walk would prove the limit of his endurance. There was something familiar about his face, also, but I puzzled my brain for two hours before I connected him with the man at No. 9 Coronado Court, who had kicked Delarue down the steps and then so abruptly proffered the latter his hand. Stringfellow was a thin, saturnine man, who also apparently lacked every element of the sportsman. But appearances are too often deceptive, and I withheld snap judgment.

I was curious to see and learn something of the man who had accompanied Miss Heloise to Belle Vue the night before; but he did not appear at the midday meal or afterward, nor had I seen anything of him at the village. However, I was destined to see him soon enough.

After dinner Delarue showed me about his plantation. It struck me as being in a rather shabby condition, and the acreage in cotton and sugar cane was by no means great. Yet it was in keeping with what little I knew of the Creole, who is always going to do great things to-morrow which he has no time to do to-day.

After supper we four men sat and smoked in the great drawing-room, with its beautiful paneling in walnut, its blue Cupids and angels on the high ceiling, considerably the worse for wear, and its faded brocade hangings. It was not a lively company; to my surprise, Delarue did not propose cards, and by nine o'clock every one seemed ready for bed. During the whole evening, Stringfellow had not spoken twenty words, though the other two had made a perfunctory conversation.

I slept until one o'clock, when I was awakened by the alarm watch under my pillow, whose faint, musical jingle would not have disturbed any one in the same bed unless his faculties had been sharpened by training. It was my purpose to investigate the house, for as yet I had been working more or less in the dark, and I had to adopt sweep-net methods. I dressed fully, slipped my forty-five automatic pistol in a holster which rested inside the waistband of my trousers—a most convenient place for quick action—and lighted a small bull's-eye lantern.

My room was on the main floor—a rather peculiar situation for a bedroom, it struck me, and at the extreme end of one of the wings of the house. The hall led, after two or three turns, to a grand central staircase, which, I doubted not, in days long gone by, had rustled with many a silk petticoat as satin-slippered feet twinkled up and down the broad treads. To-night, though, there was no suggestion of beauty, warmth, and flowers. The reception

room, the staircase, and the broad landing above looked cold and desolate. The circular spot of light from my bull's-eye revealed the work of the subtropical rains of the country—brown streaks on the wall and blotches on the ceiling. Indeed, the whole house looked neglected and forlorn. Of rosewood mantelpieces and tiled fireplaces there was a plenty, as also of hand-painted borders of roses and vines. But scarcely a third of the rooms were furnished, broken windowpanes admitted the storms, and in one room I disturbed a little owl.

A very modest stairway led to the third floor, and I was about to pass it by—for the present, at least—when I remembered that I had not yet discovered the bedrooms of Delarue or his two guests. In fact, I had not yet found a locked door. So I ascended the stairs softly in my tennis shoes, and at once perceived a lighted transom at the far end of the hall. At the same time I heard the clink of glasses.

Now, there are several ways of peeping through a transom light, but I have never found a better or quicker way—provided one is rather muscular, and is shod with rubber soles—than to hook your fingers over the lintel and brace your feet against the casing on either side. It has the added advantage, if a hurried retreat is necessary, of leaving no betraying presence in the shape of a chair or other article of furniture.

I lifted myself noiselessly up, and all but lost my balance at the sight within.

CHAPTER III.

Around a poker table of generous dimensions, clad in evening clothes, with expansive, diamond-studded shirt fronts, sat Delarue, Dassy, Stringfellow, and the black-whiskered gentleman of the evening before. Between Dassy and Black Whiskers, and facing me, sat—I looked twice, to make sure—Heloise Delarue, her beautiful arms and neck emerging from a black velvet bodice trimmed with pearls. On her breast glittered a sunburst of many stones. Her cheeks rivaled the petals of a rose, her dark eyes glowed and scintillated phosphorescently, and behind her rich, red lips her teeth glistened like pearls in her almost continuous laughter. The company had been drinking apparently, for a tub of champagne sat on the floor, and a serving table was littered with bottles and glasses.

The walls were very thick, and I could not catch any connected sentences; but once, after pointing to a full-length portrait on the wall, in a huge gilt frame, of a fine-looking old gentleman—perhaps one of the former proprietors of Belle Vue in its palmy days—Heloise emitted a scream of laughter, and hurled a wineglass at the head. Against the heavy canvas the fragile glass was shattered to splinters. Dassy and Delarue roared with laughter, and the latter leaned over and patted her cheek.

It was an entertaining though not edifying spectacle, but my strained position was becoming irksome. Besides, there was danger of some one coming out. So I let myself down. Unless Delarue's hospitality was all a sham, why had I not been made a party of this revel? Was it because the all but saintly Heloise—as I knew her—objected to me, a stranger, witnessing her in this very different rôle? Or had Delarue and the rest of the party reason to fear me? Did they suspect my errand? If so, I felt certain that other lodgings than my present one would prove conducive to my health.

I determined, nevertheless, that if I retreated at all, it should be in good order, as the military strategist puts it. Also, I had another piece of business to attend to. Just back of the landing at the head of the grand staircase I had observed a magnificent pair of doors of deeply carved mahogany. From my knowledge of these architectural relics of the French and Spanish régimes in America, I felt certain that these doors opened into a ballroom. They were the only doors in the house which I had thus far found locked, and I was determined to have a look behind them. So I descended to the sec-

ond floor again, with a bunch of skeleton keys in my right hand and my lantern in my left. Reaching the recess, I threw the lantern slide wide open—and came to a sudden halt.

Framed in the circle of yellow light were the head and shoulders of a gigantic negro, seated in a chair. Evidently he was as startled as myself, for he acted as if he had been asleep, and blinked in the strong glare. Before he could move, I had dropped my keys and covered him with my automatic.

It was an embarrassing moment to me. I was fairly trapped. I could retreat ingloriously, and get off with a whole skin, or I could handcuff the negro. But either act would betray my hand and compel the abandonment of the Petit Bois job, to say nothing of bungling it irremediably for any one else in the secret-service division. But there was still another course open, and I adopted it, perforce.

"Don't move or make a sound, or you are a dead man!" I said softly, advancing my pistol until it was plainly visible to him, for of course he could see nothing behind the light. "What are you doing here?"

He did not answer, and I saw from his composed face that he was not frightened. Indeed, I half suspected that he was making ready to leap upon me; and, as those great hands of his would make short work of a man's neck, I slipped the safety of my weapon with my thumb, so that I could fire instantly.

"Answer or not, as you please," I continued. "But let me tell you something: I am an officer of the United States. I have reason to believe that this house is the scene of criminal operations. By resisting me you become a party to the crime. Remove me, by death or otherwise, and to-morrow there will be another man on the job—if necessary, two, three, a dozen, a regiment of cavalry. Remove me, and there will be no haven for you on the face of the earth. Uncle Sam does not forget. You will be a fugitive, not for a month, or a year, but for the rest of your life, provided you are not taken sooner. Now, choose between Uncle Sam and Raoul Delarue, or I'll slip the bracelets on you at once. And choose once for all, and remain faithful to your choice, or you might a thousand times better surrender now."

Still he did not speak, but I saw that he was considering my offer.

"Be quick!" I urged.

"How much will you pay me?" he asked.

"Ten dollars a day."

"Will I have to come out in the open?"

"No," I answered. "You can serve me better by remaining here."

"I take you," he answered, but not eagerly, and I saw that I had no ordinary negro to deal with.

"Now, tell me your name."

"Shadrach."

"Shadrach what?"

"Lamotte."

"Did a Lamotte once own this place?" I continued, knowing that if in antebellum days Shadrach's father or grandfather was known as Lamotte's Shadrach, or whatever his name might be, the descendant would be Shadrach Lamotte.

"Yes, sir—before the war. They all dead now except Charles. He lives in New Awlins."

"All right, then. Now, open those doors."

He drew a great, iron key from his pocket, which might have belonged to the Bastile, and opened one door. We passed in, after which he locked the door again. I let him retain the key, believing that if I were to expect him to trust me I must trust him.

I flashed my light over the ruined grandeur of the room– costly tapestries, pier glasses with gilt frames a foot wide, deeply carved casements. From an inscription over the fireplace downstairs, I knew the building dated back to 1759, when Louisiana was still a French province, but on the eve of being turned over to Spain, when American rule was not yet a dream of the wildest exponent of expansion on the far-away Atlantic coast. It was

of that period when the luxury-loving Creole grandees lifted their spacious mansions amid the gloomy cypress and long-leaved pine, and, close on the heels of the Indian, reared a unique, romantic civilization unparalleled in the annals of the world; when they jaunted about from home to home on their month-long visits with almost courtly splendor, their black slaves poling their pleasure craft along the somber bayous, while music and laughter startled strange and unnamed birds from their solitary haunts.

This ballroom had played its part, doubtless, in these revels. Yet if all the filmy, diaphanous vestures, from Paris and Seville, of all the women who had once woven the mazes of the waltz or the statelier minuet across this floor could be magically gathered together again, I doubt if the laces alone would have much exceeded in value the stock which was now stored in this room. I smiled at my former fear that Delarue might have dealt in the output of Petit Bois alone. Not in fifty, not in a hundred, years could Petit Bois have stitched and plaited the billowing, snow-white masses of delicate fabric which were collected here.

Using just one packing case as a basis of calculation, I inventoried the contents, and estimated that the value of the stock, at wholesale, could not have been less than five hundred thousand dollars. Yet do not picture the room as full, or a tenth full, for, indeed, the boxes made quite a modest show. But many of those flounces and robes, almost as ethereal as spider's web, were worth twice or thrice their weight in pure gold.

We passed out; Shadrach locked the doors, and again assumed his sentinel duties. It was not yet time for me to act, for while the cases bore no mark of any kind, and while I had no doubt that they had been smuggled to this point by way of the countless obscure bayous reaching to the coast, I had no evidence of the kind which would be required in court.

I squirmed, I will confess, over leaving the black rascal in my rear. But there was nothing else to do—man hunting is not a trade for the squeamish, anyhow; and, once more impressing upon him that he had everything to gain and nothing to lose by remaining faithful to me, I again ascended to the third floor. It had occurred to me that by taking a position on the iron balcony which clung to the front wall I might find a window open in the poker players' room, and thus be able to hear something of advantage. I felt sure that Dassy and Stringfellow were both colleagues of the young Creole in this lace business, perhaps jobbers or distributors.

I passed through a room adjoining that occupied by my suspects, opened a window, and cautiously stepped out on to the frail iron structure, with an inward prayer that the rusty brackets might not crumble to dust under my weight and precipitate me to the ground. The grating sagged ominously, with sundry creaks and groans. I paused a moment, still clinging to the casing; then, nothing further happening, I crept softly along, holding my breath almost, as one will, as if thereby I might make myself lighter.

To my disappointment, no windows were open, though the room on which my interest centered was bluish with smoke, part of which came from the pretty lips of Mademoiselle Heloise. I noted with pleasure, however, that cards had been laid aside in favor of some books bound like ledgers. Heloise, curled up in a leather chair, with her feet under her, was reading a paper-backed volume, doubtless a novel.

The men were in earnest discussion —at least, Delarue and Dassy. The former had risen to his feet in his excitement, gesticulating wildly, and shaking his finger under Dassy's nose. Dassy smiled calmly, and said something, whereupon the fiery Raoul seized a wine bottle—for the Latins are a fistless race—and smashed it upon his opponent's bald crown.

A quart bottle is a more formidable weapon than you might believe, unless you have had one cracked over your pate. Dassy collapsed like a pin-

pricked toy balloon, and slid to the floor. Delarue, with the neck of the bottle in his hand, still stood bent over the table. Black Whiskers reflectively burrowed into his beard, without rising. Stringfellow sat with no visible emotion upon his saturnine features, and then deliberately drained a glass of wine.

But my eyes were on the woman—that philanthropist, friend of the church and people. During the quarrel, she had not lifted the long, dark fringe of lashes which edged her lids. At the blow, she looked up quickly, but like one, it seemed to me, prepared beforehand for the event. Her face was grave, but not shocked, and her large eyes swept first from her brother to the fallen man, and then back again.

The next turn of the drama confirmed my suspicion that the squabble was a put-up game. Black Whiskers drew a piece of clothesline from an inside pocket, and proceeded to bind Dassy hand and foot, which made me hope that he was not dead. Delarue quickly ran around the table, tore open the senseless man's clothing at the waist, and arose with a money belt in his hands. Its compartments bulged; it looked heavy, and he handled it as if it were heavy. Loosing one of the buckles, he poured on the table a large handful of double eagles—shining, yellow stuff for which men and women have sold themselves body and soul since history began, and doubtless long before; and for which, mayhap, they will continue to sell themselves until history closes and writes "Finis" across the annals of humanity. Then, loosing the remaining buckles, one by one, he continued to pour out the coins until there was a respectable heap upon the table.

There is a kind of honor, no doubt, among thieves. Without it, coöperation would be impossible. Under ordinary circumstances, Delarue would without question have accepted Dassy's note or check. But in a hazardous business like selling contraband stuff, the merest tyro would be too clever to leave behind him a trail of commercial paper. Hence—so I figured it out—Dassy had brought the cash with him—hard cash, and yellow to boot—the kind that is as good in Yucatan or Egypt as in America, and worth as much in a shapeless lump as when crisp from the mint.

Yet I was loath to believe that robbery was the motive of the present crime. Fifty thousand dollars in gold coin weighs about twenty pounds. This is a greater weight than any man could conveniently carry in a belt for any length of time, and forms a greater bulk than can be readily concealed under conventional clothing. Yet, admitting that the pile on the table represented as much as fifty thousand, it was only a tithe of the value of the laces in the room below. Moreover, by this atrocious act Raoul had alienated, if, indeed, not killed, a man who was certainly a very good customer.

I recalled the scene at No. 9 Coronado Court. Was revenge the motive? Was his reconciliation with Dassy all a stratagem, and when he had said, in parting, "To-morrow, sure," had he these double eagles in mind?

Stringfellow and Black Whiskers gathered up the limp Dassy and carried him from the room. Raoul scooped up a double handful of the gold and let it run clinkingly back, like sand from an hourglass. Then he tossed one of the coins into Heloise's lap, and another, and another, until she had ten, which she surveyed with sparkling eyes.

At that instant Shadrach thrust his head into the door. "Treason!" I murmured to myself, with a quickened heart. Yet I instantly changed my mind, for his communication—inaudible to me—had no pronounced effect. Raoul merely nodded his head, and shifted a trifle, I thought, so as to keep his body between the heap of gold and Shadrach's eyes.

CHAPTER IV.

About eight o'clock the next morning a negro boy brought me a cup of black coffee, bitterly strong. The tray, though much battered, looked like solid silver; but the cloth and napkin were

the worse for wear. An hour later the boy appeared with my breakfast—more coffee, in a little pot, toast, a brace of quail, and hot cakes.

I was up and dressed by this time, but did not deem it the part of wisdom to appear too early; hence it was ten o'clock when I entered the drawing-room. Delarue and Stringfellow were present; the other three, of course, I had not expected to see. After inquiring as to my night's rest, and whether the breakfast had pleased, Delarue observed pleasantly:

"It is mos' unfortunate. Monsieur Dassy is indispose this mornin', and cannot go after the bear. We do not like to leave him out of the fun; on the other hand, we do not like to kip you from the fun."

"Don't worry about that," said I. "To-morrow will suit me just as well."

"Of course you would say that, my dear frien'. And it is good of you, too. But we have decided you mus' go. More than that, we will go with you. The bear is hard to find; also the deer. You must know where he likes to stay. Ha!" And he laughed gayly, apparently out of pure animal spirits, as you have seen a child do.

"They told me in the village yesterday that there was a good deal of water in the canebrakes," I demurred, but not too strongly, for I had the part of a hunter to play.

Raoul smiled benignly. "For the poor devils on foot, yes; but for horses and dogs, no. And we have the horses and dogs—eh! Also the mos' excellent guide—a man who knows the swamps and brakes and pine hills like you know your back yard. But maybe you have no back yard, eh? Maybe you live in the flat, eh?" He laughed as sweetly as a girl at his little joke, and even Stringfellow parted his severe lips far enough to show a row of long, tobacco-stained horse teeth.

My mind was bent on anything but "the bear and the deer," and still less so when I discovered that the famous guide was no other than Shadrach. What could be easier, provided the negro had turned traitor to me, than to lead me off into a lonely spot, let a thirty-thirty bullet through my back, and then carry me into the village across a saddle as the victim of a hunting accident? Or, easier still, dump my body into one of those black, motionless, moccasin-haunted pools, and say no more about it?

I could bunt the ball, of course, instead of trying for a clean three-bagger, by feigning sickness, a sudden headache, et cetera. But even that course had its difficulties, and I resolved to go. However, as a precaution against the unpleasant contingencies which I foresaw as possible, I determined on a campaign of publicity, for publicity of corporate doings no more safeguards the public than publicity of private doings sometimes safeguards the individual.

On the pretext, therefore, of mailing an important letter, I led our mounted party to the village; I chatted with the postmaster a moment, and with several other habitants, letting them all know, in a casual way, that Delarue and I were going on a hunt. And that letter *was* important, for it was to my colleague in New Orleans, apprising him of my hunt and my apprehensions, and stating that if he did not hear from me by the next mail it would be because I had met with foul play.

We had dismounted and tied our horses, for Delarue remembered a commission at Petit Bois' single store; and as I passed the little church on foot, returning from the post office, Heloise came out.

She was in her Quakerish garb of the day before, and it was hard to believe she had been in any other since I had last seen her, save, perhaps, the immaculate, lace-edged robe in which one would imagine her kneeling at her bedside prayers.

No trace of lost sleep or excitement dulled her eyes or paled the roses in her cheeks. As she came up to me, she murmured, in her pretty patois, at sight of my hunting garb: "Ah, monsieur is ready to hunt the bear! Be sure the bear do not hunt *you,* like li'l' Red Ridin' Hood!" Was it a subtle

warning? I could not say. I know that she was wonderfully attractive; she drew me both as girl and woman, innocence and art combined. Yet, thinking of the outrage of the night before, I was also repelled.

I glanced into the primitive place of worship, and in the dusky interior I glimpsed an altar.

"You have been to say your prayers?" I asked.

"Every morning I go to say my prayers—and sometimes to confess," she answered simply.

"Did you have anything to confess this morning? You do not look it."

She flushed, not guiltily, as if my arrow had struck home, but in pretty, girlish confusion, rather, over my compliment.

"Ah, well, monsieur mus' guess that. He is not a Catholic, or he would not ask." Her face grew soberer. "I have also been to the parsonage. One of my girls iss sick. I fear much she will make no more lace. She has work very hard, too hard. Her father and mother are very old; they can work no more; and her husban' got bite by the snake, and he died only last month; and she has a li'l' babe—oh, such a li'l' babe! It is mos' sad." Her lips quivered, and she smiled through a gauze of tears.

And those misty, blinking eyes were the same which had gazed, scarcely twelve hours before, at the slugged Dassy, as coldly and indifferently as an Agrippina at one of her poisoned victims! Was wine the author of the diabolical transformation from Jekyll to Hyde? Or was it gaming, or hate, or what not? Had Dassy, by a too familiar touch, or glance, or word, while inspired by wine, metamorphosed this gentle creature into a fury, so that she had goaded her brother to the assault? Or was the tigress I had seen the night before the real woman and this gray dove but her pale mask?

Delarue hailed me; I said good-by to the girl, and in a moment the village was lost behind us. Louisiana is a network of streams. All but four parishes, it is boasted, are served by navigable waters. In the Bayou Dauphine region, which is an alluvial deposit, there is little high ground. The waters gave, and the waters take away when the freshets come. Consequently our route was often along a causeway, with dark, sluggish, vegetation-choked canals on either side.

Now and then we passed a plume hunter's shack, and once we saw one of these human weasels tearing the plumes, with the adhering flesh, from the back of the still-quivering body of a snowy heron. I could have cheerfully scalped the fellow, but Delarue watched the process with that gleam of pleasure which you have perhaps seen in a boy's eyes as he impales flies upon a pin.

"What is more beautiful as an aigret on a lovely lady's hat!" he exclaimed.

Shadrach was a hunter, and no mistake. His soul was in the work, whether he regarded my carcass as a by-product of the hunt or not. A bear was what I wanted—or assumed to want—with a deer second. The waters, however, were high from recent rains; and in spite of Shadrach's prowess the dogs picked up no trail.

About two o'clock, after eating lunch, we decided to separate to distances of about two hundred yards, in the hopes of drawing a bear in a tangleberry swale. I occupied the extreme right, Delarue right center, Stringfellow next, and Shadrach extreme left. As the swale widened, we naturally drew farther apart, and finally I could neither see not hear any of the other members of the party.

I was pondering the situation, a little afraid of getting lost, when a bullet whistled by my ear, followed by the crack of a rifle on my rear left quarter. Now, if you have never had a high-velocity bullet meander past your head at a distance, say, of two feet, you have something to look forward to. Only you will not believe it a bullet. You will mistake it for a comet, with a pair of log chains tied to its tail, making a right-angle turn in your immediate vicinity.

Involuntarily—which saved me the trouble of doing it voluntarily later on—I ducked, throwing my breast upon my horse's neck. An instant later a volley of French oaths and imprecations smote my ears. It was Raoul's voice, calling down upon his curly head the wrath of all the saints in the calendar for his carelessness in letting off his rifle accidentally. Then he cried out:

"Monsieur! Monsieur Chase! My friend! Spik! Tell me, are you hurt?"

It was a pretty piece of acting, though it struck me as rather overdone. In the first place, not one right-handed man in a thousand—and Raoul was right-handed—would ride with the muzzle of his gun pointing to the right, for to shoot from that position would require a reversal of the arm. Secondly, if he were guilty of such a tenderfoot trick, the chances of hitting a man two to four hundred yards away by an accidental explosion, taking into consideration all the possible angles of windage and elevation, would be, I should say, about one in ten million—or less.

Adding to these facts my former suspicions, I very properly assumed that Raoul had meant to assassinate me, and I did not answer his plaintive appeals as to the state of my health. Instead, I rode into a clump of loblolly pine bordering the swale, where I would be out of his sight, and then turned sharply to the right. My destination was Petit Bois, from which point I intended to ride to the nearest telegraph office, wire for help, arrest Delarue, Stringfellow, and Black Whiskers—if he was still about—and find out what had become of Dassy. Meanwhile, in order to blind Raoul, I would inform him when we next met that I had heard his shot, but not his calls—being slightly deaf—and had afterward lost my way.

I had no notion of the way back, but after riding half an hour I struck a north-and-south road, and turned into it. Two hours later, having seen no human being or human habitation, I concluded that I was indeed lost. A little later, though, I approached one of the long, low ridges called by the natives a "pine hill," or "saddleback," and on the top of this ridge was a cabin, larger and more substantial than the general run of such structures.

In answer to my rap, a refined, pleasant voice called out "Enter, please!" A tall, dark-haired, slender young fellow, dressed in black, with a singularly kind, winning countenance, came forward to greet me.

The room matched the man. Two sides of it were lined with bookcases; a microscope stood on a low table beneath a window. Beside it lay an open herbarium, and a little farther along I noticed a power press. On the wall hung a vasculum or botanical collecting case, a prism binocular, a butterfly net, and a taxidermist's gun.

In answer to my question, he informed me, in perfect English, though I was certain of his French descent, that I was on the road to Petit Bois, which was, in fact, only two miles away—or only a little over a mile by a short cut through the unfenced wood. After an exchange of courtesies, he added:

"You are no doubt curious as to my presence here in this wilderness. I am here for my health. It may not strike you as a salubrious climate"—he seemed to detect my Northern origin—"but I was born and reared in it, and all I need is rest and quiet." He paused, and then, with that simplicity so characteristic of Latin peoples, he continued: "I broke my health in studying for the priesthood. Now I must turn my few talents to something else, for I have my own livelihood to make. What it will be I cannot say, but something that keeps me out of doors, my physician says."

"I should think you would find it a little less lonesome in the village," I observed.

"Yes," he assented. "But I am near, and I often walk over. Then, with my books, I am never lonesome. Besides, at present I am collecting flowers and insects for one of the universities of my church in New Orleans, and I can

work to a little better advantage out here."

I rode on, so profoundly impressed with the courage and optimism of the clean-looking young fellow, in spite of his great misfortune, that I received no warning of the proximity of another human presence in the solitude until a woman's clear, soprano laugh startled my ears. I reined in, and a moment later two people stepped into an open space on the side of the saddleback.

You may imagine my amazement when I recognized Heloise and Father Drouet. Nor was it tempered by their actions and appearance. The band of the father's little, flat hat was stuck full of yellow lady's-slippers. A stole of plaited, fringed orchids hung from his shoulders to his knees, and to each arm was attached a length of grape-vine, the loose ends of which were in Heloise's hands.

They were playing horse! She geed and hawed at him, turning him to right and left, and occasionally touching him up with a long willow wand. The old man was quite as diverted as she. He pranced quite coltishly under her whip, and once, when she went forward to mend the harness, he looped the vine over her neck and drew her nearer, nearer, with twinkling eyes, until at last he planted a tender, fatherly kiss upon her brow.

Oblivious as children at play, they passed on without descrying me. I watched them until they turned toward the cabin which I had just left; then, tying my horse a litle off the rude road, I ran back several hundred yards, screened by the roadside thicket. All three were sitting on a bench in front of the cabin, the priest in the center. I could hear nothing that was said, but presently Père Drouet drew forth his great, iron-rimmed spectacles and stepped inside, as if to refer to a book. Then the lovers—for lovers they were—instantly drew together, and she laid her head upon his shoulder.

Father Drouet—sly old fellow!—must have been struggling with a knotty point of theology, for the pair presently strolled down the slope. He held her hand, without speech, and presently I discovered that she was weeping. His face was so sad that I doubt not he, too, would have wept had he been a woman.

I slipped away, feeling that further eavesdropping was outside my professional jurisdiction. Dusk was falling when the old man and the girl returned to the village. I was standing at one of the cottage doors, watching the swift weaving motion of a woman's fingers as she utilized the last of the light on a piece of delicate fabric, destined, perhaps, to adorn the bosom of some reigning beauty, far, far away, who would little suspect the primitive conditions under which it had been made.

Father Drouet's floral decorations were gone, and Heloise's face was grave. As the sun sank behind the gloomy cypresses, turning the sky into a bed of molten glory, she paused in front of the little church while the father passed on. With her face to the west, she stood motionless—perhaps for only a minute or two, but it seemed longer—and in the faint, reflected light she also was transfigured.

I thought of him who had studied for the priesthood, who loved books and nature, whose face was touched with the beauty of consecration. Then I saw the fallen Dassy, saw this girl catching the double eagles one by one as her brother tossed them forward. The enigma of life, even in this placid little backwater of the world's flood, seemed greater than ever. What would be the outcome of that love, a phase of which I had glimpsed? When this beautiful woman stood behind the bars of a federal prison—and such, I felt, if I did my duty, was her inevitable end—would that fine soul out there in the cabin sink under this final blow? Yet I could imagine a crueler blow—the slow revelation that the wife of his bosom was but a whited sepulcher, full of corruption and abominations within.

At the clip-clop of hoofs in the stoneless soil, the girl broke the spell which seemed to hold her, and moved toward her cottage. My hunting partners of the day dashed up. At sight of me,

Raoul Delarue all but threw his horse on its haunches, then leaped to the ground, and sped toward me.

With an exclamation, he threw his arms around my neck and kissed me. "We thought you was dead, and you are alive! You have lift a load like a thousand kilogram of lead from my heart. We ride and shout and fire off the rifle, but we find you not. My gun, she go off by the accidental, and I fear I killed you. I call to my friends; I dare not go to look by myself alone. But we find you not in the spot. Then we ride and shout and fire off the rifle. And here you are! I am mos' happy!"

The party's bedraggled, mud-stained garments corroborated his protestations —at least, to the effect that they had searched for me long and far. As to Raoul's mental suffering, I was skeptical—naturally. I glanced at Shadrach. But his eyes were of that bluish-black hue which tell no more than a china marble, and whether he were true or false to me remained to be seen.

CHAPTER V.

It was a grand dinner to which we sat down that night at Belle Vue. In fact, it seemed to be a kind of celebration of my return from the dead, as Raoul insisted on putting it. Again and again he reverted to the anguish which he had suffered, until at last, in spite of all I knew, I was almost constrained to believe him sincere. The only thing which stood in my way was the acceptance of the theory that it was the ten-millionth chance which had brought the ball so close to my head. Had I drunk my share of the wine which he opened, doubtless I should not have balked at even that. I drank sparingly, however, for I was still wholesomely impressed with the idea that I was not yet out of the woods, and needed all my faculties.

After supper, Delarue, to my surprise, offered to show me about the interesting old mansion; and, with many apologies for its bareness and dinginess, which he had not yet had time to remedy, he escorted me from cellar to garret. Finally we paused at the head of the central staircase.

"That is the old ballroom, I suppose?" I ventured, as a feeler.

"Yes, but in a mos' pitiable condition. Still, it is no worse than the others, and I will show it to you if you wish. We use it only for the billiards and the pool—and a little roulette."

My pulse quickened as he turned the massive key. Knowing what I did of the contents of that room, I feared a coup of some kind. But when we entered, I saw only a great, dismantled room, the farthest recesses of which were filled with flickering shadows as he held the lamp over his head. Here and there a pool or billiard table loomed darkly, but not an ounce of lace was in sight, not so much as a splinter from the packing cases.

Once more he had overplayed his part—but this time intentionally, I have since come to believe. He had everything to lose and nothing to gain by thus revealing to me that the lace had been spirited away, for of course the exploration of the house was only a preliminary to this. Yet I have noticed that many men, especially those who live outside the pale of the law, love to play with the javelins of fate. It is a part of the madness which makes them criminals. Without the lace, he took it for granted that I would have no legal proof against him.

This was true. It explained his zeal for me to go after "the bear." While I hunted, the lace was vanishing. But it could not yet be very far away, and I intended to make it my business to find it. Which way should I look? One man possibly could tell me. That was Shadrach. Yet he was a broken reed to lean upon, for the chances were even that it was through his revelations that Delarue had taken alarm. Nevertheless, I resolved to see him at the earliest possible moment.

That was not soon, for my host and Stringfellow were by no means as anxious to get to bed as they were the night before. They proposed cards, opened wine, smoked, and by one means or another held me in the drawing-room un-

til eleven o'clock. I felt that I was under surveillance, yet immediately upon entering my room and locking the door, I stepped through a low French window onto a stone esplanade. I hoped to find my black ally in the servants' quarters, which were the same as those occupied by the slaves before the war, and lay to the rear. Though I had smoked several times since dinner, I lighted another cigar, in order to give my quest the appearance of a soporific stroll in case I should be detected by Delarue or his confrères.

I had not gone ten feet before Shadrach glided out of the shadows.

"The lace is gone," said I.

"Yes. I came to tell you. But we can do nothing. There are too many of them."

"Can you tell me where they've taken it?" I asked.

"To Bayou Chicot, to put it on the schooner."

"On what schooner?" I inquired.

"The schooner it came in."

"How far is it?" I asked, feeling that my quarry was slipping between my fingers.

"Fifteen miles, mebbe."

"When can we start?"

"As soon as Mr. Delarue leaves," said he. "If we left before, they would simply shoot us from behind. We can do nothing, anyhow. There are three men here and six on the boat."

"I'll see that plenty is done, Shad. Your pay goes on just the same."

Yet I was puzzled. The smuggler had taken alarm, but whether he would attempt to escape to the gulf, or merely hide in one of the thousand and one lakes and bayous, was a question. The best I could do was to get a description of the vessel and wire the facts to Speight. He could pass the facts on to the revenue cutters engaged in coast patrol, to put them on the alert. Then, if Delarue failed to poke his nose out, we could take up the search for him on the inside of the coast line. It would be a good deal like looking for a needle in a haystack, but it was the only course left.

I returned to my room, blew out the kerosene lamp, and lay down, fully dressed, with my hat near at hand. I considered the organization of a posse. Anywhere else in the United States it would have been easy. But these habitants scarcely acknowledged our government, felt no loyalty toward it; and I doubted if they could be made to act against the Delarues. I also thought of arresting Heloise. I had no doubt of her complicity; indeed, I fancied she furnished the brains for her brother in the enterprise; and while I had no evidence against her, there is always a chance to force a confession. On the other hand, I could pick her up at any time, for there was no reason, so far as she knew, for her leaving Petit Bois.

Another thing, I will confess, restrained my hand: In spite of all that I had seen, I had a suspicion that I might have misjudged her, and I shrank from laying violent hands upon her.

It seemed a long time before there came a gentle tap upon my window, though it was really only two o'clock. Shadrach waited with two saddle horses. I handed him one of my automatic pistols, and explained its operation, and told him that if it came to a fight he was to shoot to kill. "For you are in effect an officer now of the United States government," I added. Such a communication would have swollen most plantation darkies clear out of shape, but Shadrach was the least emotional member of his race I have ever seen. He merely nodded, and we mounted and rode away.

We selected a roundabout route, so as not to overhaul the fugitives prematurely. In the course of our conversation, Shad told me he had been to Tuskegee to school, which explained his good English. He also asked me a great many questions about the North, and what chance there would be for him up there. I suspected that in helping Delarue in his illicit business, he was scarcely conscious of criminality.

I had supposed that we could cover the fifteen miles in two hours. Perhaps the distance was greater than that. Moreover, the roads were abominable,

the horses being fetlock-deep in water half the time, which made the going slow. Hence the gray light of dawn was beginning to show when Shad said, in his cool way:

"We must dismount here. It would be dangerous to go farther on horseback."

We tied our horses in a secluded place, walked a mile or so along the margin of a wide bayou, and then ambushed ourselves in a thicket. In plain sight, not two hundred yards away, lay a dirty, unpainted schooner, not over fifty feet in length. Her patched sails hung idle in the dead calm, but a rusty smokestack from the center of her deck showed that she had steam power as well. Half a dozen sailors lay on the deck asleep, and she looked as little like a vessel fleeing from an officer of the United States as can be imagined.

Yet I had no doubt that the lace from Belle Vue lay in her stinking hold, along with rats and bilge water. Her crew were a long-haired, foreign-looking, villainous lot, and she had no name. A ship without a name is as suspicious a character as a man without a country.

"What is she waiting for?" I whispered.

"Light, I reckon," answered Shad. "The channel is full of logs and cypress knees."

That she was waiting for more than light, however, soon became evident, for presently we heard the splash of horses' feet in the oozy soil, and Delarue, Stringfellow, and Black Whiskers appeared. Then, to my amazement, Heloise rode into view, wearing a red knit cap and a long cloak. My bird had flown!

She was in a new mood—to me. She sat in her saddle with the haughtiness of a queen; her lips were set severely, her eyes glowed, and once she struck her horse savagely, for no apparent cause. Delarue, on the other hand, usually so sprightly, was pale and taciturn; the military bearing of his head and shoulders was relaxed. For a moment after reaching the bank, he sat and disconsolately surveyed the uninviting vessel upon which he was to take passage. As I watched them, I wondered if Dassy were in his mind, and I wondered if the young man in the woods were in hers. Was it because Raoul or circumstances was forcing her to leave her lover that she was sad?

Alas for my sentiment! At that instant she broke into a flood of French, clapped her jeweled hands to her eyes —she never wore jewels at the cottage —and wailed aloud.

"She has lost her pearl necklace somewhere along the road," whispered Shad, jarring me both with his information and his knowledge of French. "She wants Mr. Delarue to go back and look for it. That is why they are so late."

Raoul, oblivious of his sister's plaints, hallooed lustily to the sailors. These gentlemen, who would certainly have made the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus look like somnambulists, stretched leisurely. A second blast from Raoul, however, quickened their movements. They rolled over the taffrail like monkeys, and leaped into a dory which trailed at the stern; then, with much gibberish in a tongue which I afterward learned to be Portuguese, they pulled alongside the plank which served as a pier.

Raoul pushed Heloise forward. She resisted, and he gave her a more vigorous thrust, whereupon she turned with the quickness of a cat and struck him across the face with her riding whip. No sound escaped him, nor did he lay his hands upon her again, but his eyes blazed with a demoniacal fury. I was not surprised that she stepped into the dory without further resistance or protest. But when she stood upon the schooner's deck she turned an impassioned face shoreward, clasped her hands again, and mournfully cried, in English, as if having exhausted the other language:

"My perrils! Oh, my poor, beautiful perrils!"

Raoul surveyed her with disgust. "I wish to all the gods I had never give them to you! You would sooner be like a bird in a cage with those perrils

than free like the eagle without 'em —eh! Is it not so? Well, if you keep on making us delay perhaps you will neither have the perrils nor be free. We shall see." Swinging on his heel, he said to the grinning sailors: "Go ahead—quick—right away! If we are catched, you, too, go to the cage. Y'unnerstand?"

I suppose a hero of romance would have swum his horse to the vessel's side, warded off the sailors' cutlasses —if they had any—shot down half a dozen, and sailed in triumph for New Orleans—possibly winning the fair Heloise before that port was reached. I, however, lay ignominiously in cover until the vessel had rounded the first turn in the stream, writing a fifty-word telegram to Speight with the aid of my cipher code.

Raoul's departure was evidently no mere maneuver; it was flight, definite flight, for the abandoned horses had not even been tethered, as would have been the case had a confederate been expected to come after them. They were English hunters, worth not less than five hundred apiece. Shadrach agreed to lead them to Petit Bois. For the sake of greater privacy, I would have instructed him to take them to Belle Vue, but I was not quite certain that the last foul bird had flown from that nest, and I did not wish unnecessarily to jeopardize his life.

Before separating, he directed me to La Suze, the nearest telegraph station, eight or ten miles away.

My spirits were somewhat low. I had flushed my birds before I was ready to fire, and their bagging now depended on the accuracy of the other fellow's aim. But what cannot be cured must be endured. It was some satisfaction that in one hour I covered half the distance to La Suze without getting lost, as I knew by reaching a crossroads called Cuthbert's Corner.

Mr. Cuthbert was enjoying a snooze in a chair, tilted against the shady side of his store. I exchanged greetings with him, confirmed my whereabouts, refused first a dinner, then a drink, and finally a "chaw of twist," but handed him a cigar to show my good will, and cantered on more cheerfully.

I had advanced a quarter of a mile farther when two masked men quietly rode out of an unfenced field of sugar cane, leveled their pistols, and gave me the laconic but always disconcerting "Hands up!"

CHAPTER VI.

My hands went up. The muzzle of a forty-four six-shooter, even though it be a rusty brown, and of an obsolete model, grows on one as he gazes into the dusky hole of which it is largely composed. The effect is heightened if your eye, running along the rib, comes up against another eye gleaming through a slit in a mask.

One of the men dismounted, handed my bridle reins to his partner, and then deliberately searched me, with no trace of nervousness. He overlooked my money belt—purposely, I now believe—and took nothing except my automatic and the copy of my telegram to Speight, which he read and then tore into bits. By this token, I knew that he was no highwayman, but an agent of my good friend, Delarue, who had so ecstatically kissed me the afternoon before.

"Ride in front," he commanded, handing me back my reins, and himself remounting. "Don't look behind. We wish to remove our masks, so that it will be unnecessary to leave the road in case we meet any one. Remember that we could just as easily have blindfolded, bound, and gagged you, and carried you through the woods across a horse's back, like a sack of salt. Be guided accordingly."

Blackguard that he was, his voice unmistakably marked him as a man of education and intelligence—I might almost say culture. When such a man adopts crime as a livelihood, he is far more to be feared than the lowbrow, whose notions of right and wrong are hazy, to say the least. Therefore, should I attempt to escape, or appeal to any passer-by for help, I hadn't the slightest doubt that this man would end my mortal career then and there.

Hence, when we met a couple of planters, I nodded to them as pleasantly as if I were out for an airing with a couple of friends; and when my captors paused and asked certain questions about the road, I was careful not to look back. The unlucky beholder of Medusa's head was turned to stone, and I was quite sure that an equally unpleasant transformation would overtake me should I chance to glimpse my captors' unmasked faces, and thus obtain a clew which might lead to their identification.

Nevertheless, I had made up my mind to make a dash for liberty if opportunity offered, and presently I saw her approaching in the shape of a load of sugar cane drawn by a yoke of oxen.

"Hadn't we better turn out of the road?" I asked. "This horse of mine is almost unmanageable in the presence of oxen."

An incredulous laugh was the only answer I got from behind. But presently one of the pair said: "I think you can manage him."

Now, I really had not wanted to turn out of the road, for that would have been too obvious a ruse for making a dash into the thicket-grown forest. I merely wished to prepare the stage, as it were, for my intended act. So when within fifty yards of the approaching cart, I secretly gave my horse a dig with one spur. He threw up his head with a snort, reared a little, and landed athwart the road—under my manipulation of the bridle. My captors paused quietly for me to regain control of the beast, and again I was careful not to look at them.

I finally got the horse to moving forward again, with a fine, dancing, mincing step—the combined result of a gentle roweling and a tight rein on the cruel spade bit with which all of Delarue's bridles were fitted. But twenty yards farther on I again put him through his rearing stunt.

By the time we came abreast of the cart he was truly alarmed, and I had little difficulty in waltzing him in a wide circle clear around the oxen, whom the negro driver by this time had brought to a halt. By the time I reached my starting point in the circle my captors had passed around to the other side, perhaps thirty yards away, again waiting for me to gain control of my steed, with the pile of sugar cane between us—all of which I saw out of the tail of my eye.

Instantly I straightened the horse in the road, spurred him sharply, and away he went like an arrow, while I bent low over his neck to present as small a target as possible to the bullets I expected to hear whistling by. But no shots followed. Either the presence of the negro restrained them, or they thought I was really being run away with. Neither did they offer pursuit, and when I reached the crossroad leading toward La Suze, which I had carefully marked before, I turned into it.

Here my luck deserted me, however. I lost the way, and it was two hours before I cantered into the little hamlet. More than this, when I asked the operator at the telegraph station for a blank, he informed me that the wire was not working.

"How long since?" I asked.

"About twenty minutes, suh. Can't understand it, eithah, on a ca'm day like this, when there's no bresh fallin'."

My friends the enemy had beaten me to it and clipped the wire.

"How far is it to the next station?"

"In a bee line, twenty-five miles. By road, forty-five. But before you git there, suh, you'll think it's seventy-five. Water's pretty high."

I thought a moment. "Have you any idea how soon the line will be repaired?"

He spat in a bucket of sawdust. "When the wire gang fixes it ag'in. I'd hate to say how soon that would be, stranger, fer I might disapp'int you. Sometimes she's dead fer a couple of days. We don't do much business out thisaway."

TO BE CONTINUED IN NEXT ISSUE, ON SALE JUNE 7TH.

Sweeny and the Low-brow Lady

By Charles R. Barnes

Author of "Honking for Sweeny," "The Sweenys' Mysterious Guest," Etc.

It is perfectly easy to understand how so sympathetic a man as Dan Sweeny should promptly plan to improve the mind of the low-brow lady when he prefigured a romance in which the prospective bridegroom was a "classy Englishman who had one of them skyscraper educations, and talked like a dictionary with all the little words left out"

MY poor dead husban' didn't have no rah-rah education," said Mrs. Sweeny, "but that wasn't no reason w'y the Perfessor should rub it in."

The Boarder looked up.

"The Professor?" he questioned.

"Uh-huh," confirmed Mrs. Sweeny, "the Perfessor. He was a classy Englishman, about thirty years old, with a bunch of correct language, and a bank roll. Fellers like he was ain't the kind you'd think would fall for a note writ on a egg. But, my gee, you never can tell. Look at the millionaires' sons that can marry 'way up, and falls for the chorus! Sometimes, mister, I get to thinkin' that aristocracy is only a kind of paint, that gets soft, and runs w'en there's a pretty face 'round. Plenty of them carriage-trade parties had started out to pull some 'Home, James!' stuff, and has ended by hollerin': 'Oh, you kid!' M-m, I don't know."

She broke off abruptly, and wrinkled her brow, as if a weighty problem were perplexing her.

The Boarder urged her on.

"Who was this Professor?"

"His name," was the reply, "was Moggins—that is, his last name was. It ain't got no limousine sound, I admit, but it was better than w'at went b'fore. There was so many Clarences and Percys, and things like that in it, that w'en he told it, a pusson'd think he was callin' the roll of the Counter-jumpers' League. My husban' Danny and the rest of the race-track crowd wouldn't let it get by without a operation, though. They chopped out all the funny stuff, and called the guy 'Perfessor.'

"They painted that sign on him b'cause he had one of them skyscraper educations, and talked like a dictionary with all the little words left out of it, and only the big ones workin'. As I said, you'd never s'pose he'd give a tumble to a note that was wrote on a egg—a egg, mister, that come from the store of J. B. Fritts, our groceryman, and was just about to do a divin' act into a kettle of boilin' water, like many a egg has did b'fore, and nothin' got in the paper about it. No, mister, you wouldn't believe the Perfessor would kick into that kind of a cheap game. Heiresses and duchesses for his, was the way anybody'd figger him out. But you never can tell, can you?"

"No," agreed the Boarder, although he was not at all firmly grounded in the matter of what one never can tell.

Mrs. Sweeny, however, had made up her mind to explain it all, and soon was busily at it.

"The Perfessor was a fine-lookin' young feller," she said. "He'd come over from England to have a good time blowin' hisself, and it wasn't very long till he'd got mixed up with the racin' game. And my Danny, bein' a bookmaker, run into him so often that them two got to be fr'en's. That's how the Perfessor got to comin' out to our flat a lot; and I guess it was the intimate nature of the acquaintance that made the Englishman begin to bawl my Danny out about his shine education.

"Danny, you know, only had the grill-

room side of a college education, w'ile the Perfessor had been through a place called Oxford four times and back again. He had more polish than you could find in Tony the bootblack's little tin box, and he could talk Greek like a fruit-stand man. There sure was class to him, mister, and both of us was proud to have him round, even if he did try to make Danny's learnin' look like it had been picked up in a livery stable, and discarded by everybody till my husban' come along and took it home to raise. Me and Danny didn't like that side of the Perfessor, but we put up with it b'cause we liked his other sides; and, besides, he was somethin' real swell to trot out and show to our fr'en's.

"I guess he come round to our place so often just b'cause he was lonesome. He didn't know nobody but the folks in our set, and he was alwus sayin' that the men in it ought to of been pirates, and the ladies' talk was so slangy that w'enever one of 'em sneezed he thought she was sayin' somethin' that was gettin' past him.

"With me and Danny, though, he seemed to feel at home, as you might say—enough at home to talk cross to folks, w'ich is the true test of bein' at home, as far as I've been able to judge. So he come out a lot, and we was glad to have him, even if Danny did get fretful for a minute or so, every time the man come in the house. The Perfessor usta begin somethin' like this:

"'Sweeny,' he'd say, 'I never see you readin' no books.'

"'No,' Danny'd say. 'I don't get no time. I started one once, w'en I was a kid, and I got halfway through it. The thing was called "Uncle Tom's Cabin," and it was a peach——'

"The Perfessor never let Danny finish nothin' like that.

"'Sweeny,' he'd say, 'there's some rippin' books, old top, rippin' books that every man of culture should include in his readin'.'

"Then he'd go on, and tell about some wop author named L. A. Miserables, knowin' real well that Danny never got no farther than the things the sportin' editors sign, and makin' my husban' look like a damaged two spot. Danny alwus laughed about them things, but I knowed that they hurt him. No man likes to be showed up in front of his wife, and it was my guess that my husban' would of took to revenge like a kid to snowballin'. Then come the puffec'ly good egg with the writin' on it, and I seen that I wasn't the worst guesser in the world. Ladies sometimes knows things without bein' told, mister."

The Boarder nodded assent.

"I understand," he said. Thereupon Mrs. Sweeny continued:

"That there egg come buttin' into our fam'ly affairs one mornin' at breakfast. We had one of them fresh hired girls, then, that is so darn fr'en'ly with you that you think every minnit she's goin' to call you 'Dearie.' Me and Danny had set down to the table, and was waitin' for somethin' to happen in the eats line, w'en in come that girl, a egg in her mitt.

"'Mis' Sweeny,' she says, 'wouldn't this here jar you, though!' she says. She handed over the egg to me. 'Some lady,' she says, 'wants to quit work,' she says, 'or I don't know nothin',' she says.

"I took the egg from her, and looked it over. There was writin' on it that was kinda smeary from bein' handled, I guess, but I made out w'at it meant without much trouble. Danny seen me figgerin', and he says:

"'W'at does it say, Belle?' he says.

"'It's a note from a lady to the wide, wide world,' I says.

"'Read it,' he says. And so I done it. I read:

"Will some refined gentleman correspond with a lonely lady? Address Miss Pearl Somers, Railroad Street, Millville, N. J.

"I looked up at Danny. His mouth was open.

"'Now,' he says, 'w'at do you think of that?' he says.

"Our hired girl ain't at all shy about showin' how hep she is to the ways of lonely ladies.

"'That there girl, Mister Sweeny,' she says, 'is prob'ly workin' as a egg packer, and is tired of the job,' she says. 'So she's took to writin' her name on a lot

of eggs, and trustin' to Gawd that one of 'em will fall in the hands of some party that's romantic enough to write back,' she says. 'I bet she's fifty-six years old,' she says, 'and has got pop eyes,' she says. 'The kind that has to write on eggs to get men,' she says, 'ain't much,' she says.

"And with that I give her back the egg, and told her to dump it in the kettle, and for the love of Mike don't let it stay there no longer than three minutes, or you get a roar from Danny, bein' that he was out late last night, and is nervous this here mornin', I says to her.

"W'en I turned to talk to Danny again, I seen that he was scribblin' somethin' with a pencil on the back of a envelope.

" 'W'at you doin', Danny?' I says.

" 'Writin' down a reminder to look up Gold Dollar Cohen to-day,' he says. 'I got to see him about a little matter we got on in the third race to-morruh,' he says.

"And, mister, never havin' had no reason for to doubt my husban', I didn't make no more inquiries, but let it go at that. Oh, them men!

"That night the Perfessor come out, and we told him about the lonely lady. And, would you believe it, he got real sympathetic, all of a sudden.

" 'I can understand her feelings,' he says. 'She's lonesome, like almost any pusson that ain't married, is. I tell you, Sweeny,' he says to Danny, 'you married men don't know w'at a fine thing you got. Every time I come in your house,' he says, 'it almost makes me sick to look round and see all them comforts of home that I ain't got,' he says. 'And every time I go away,' he says, 'I put in the time wishin' I was hooked up, and had a lovin' wife and reg'lar meals and things kept shipshape and——'

" 'Bills to pay,' says Danny, 'and alwus bein' expected home to dinner, and where was you at w'en you was late last night——'

"But, mister, the Perfessor wouldn't hear nothin' like that. He goes on to tell how he'd fix up a happy home, with books, and fine pitchers, and lots of reg'lar highbrow stuff. He wouldn't have no autograph pitchers of Jim Corbett on the walls, and nothin' but dope sheets from racin' papers for a library, he wouldn't. No, sir. He'd have a refined home, with lit'ature and art doin' stunts, and a piano piled up with music that wasn't ragtime, but was wrote by a guy with a Heinie name. That was his idee of a home. Danny says:

" 'But w'ere you goin' to get a doll that will fall for all that stuff, Perfessor?' he says. 'The ladies that's in our set don't know nothin' but how to use a nutcracker on a lobster claw,' he says, 'and how to spend money,' he says.

"Right-o,' says the Perfessor, 'but there is others outside of your bunch,' he says, 'and some time I'm goin' to grab off one,' he says, 'and then you'll see my ideel home takin' form,' he says.

"And so the talk run along like that. The Perfessor had often spoke in that there way b'fore, and mebby it was the rememberin' of it that set Danny to writin' on the back of the envelope in the mornin'. Mebby it was w'at I've heard you call subconscious we go——"

"Ego," corrected the Boarder.

"All right," said Mrs. Sweeny. "Have it any way you want it. Danny said, after the Perfessor had went away, that he had a hunch that he was goin' to play.

" 'W'at's it like?' I says.

" 'I'll tell you later,' he says. 'I ain't quite sure you'll like the idee right now,' he says.

"I couldn't get him to say no more, so I give up tryin'. And I didn't get the answer till more'n a week later. Then, one evenin', Danny comes in, and picks up some mail that's been layin' on the sittin'-room table. There was a flat package, tied up in brown paper, in the pile. Danny opens it, and begins to laugh. Then he showed me w'at was in it—a photograph of one of the darndest prettiest girls I ever seen in my life.

" 'Who's that there?' I says, kinda sharp.

" 'Belle,' says Danny, 'don't start no battle. That pitcher is of Miss Pearl Somers, livin' at the present moment in

Millville, New Jersey. She packs eggs for a livin', and is tired of the job, so she tells me.'

"He b'gun to laugh again, and I just set there with my mouth open, wonderin' w'at in the name of Mike was comin' next.

" 'You been correspondin' with her?' I says.

" 'Yep,' he says, 'and she writes a worse letter than I do, and that's sayin' a whole lot. Her education wasn't w'at you could call neglected,' he says. 'It was abandoned on a doorstep w'ile it was real young,' he says. And then he begins to laugh again. 'Say, Belle,' he says, 'I was awful sure that our hired girl had the wrong dope on that lady,' he says. 'All the country dolls I ever seen was pretty and young, and had red cheeks,' he says. 'And just you watch and see w'at I'm goin' to hand the Perfessor,' he says. 'Take it from me, Belle,' he says, 'there's somethin' comin' to a man that keeps a-slurrin' me for things I can't help,' he says. 'You just sit up and watch it come to the Perfessor.'

"I didn't see w'at he was drivin' at, mister.

" 'Danny,' I says, 'w'at sort of a bug have you fetched in this house now?' I says. 'I don't quite get you,' I says.

" 'Well, Belle,' he says, 'I guess you'll admit that almost any man would stop on the street and turn round to look at a girl as pretty as the one that's pitchered in that photo,' he says.

" 'I guess they would,' I says, 'for she sure is a pretty kid. I guess she must be all of nineteen,' I says, 'and, with a little dressin' up, she'd be a sensation,' I says.

" 'You're on, Belle,' says Danny. 'Now, I'll tell you w'at I been doin',' he says. 'W'en our hired girl fetched that egg in, the other day, I got to reasonin' that whoever wrote the stuff on it must be romantic. And bein' romantic, there was about a fifty-to-one chance that they was young. Now, carryin' out the reasonin', young girls has more of a chance of bein' pretty than old ones. And this one, bein' from the country, wasn't apt to know about lobsters or talk slang. But she was real liable to be a awful lowbrow, takin' in consideration that she was packin' eggs for a livin',' he says.

"I tell you, mister, my Danny was the darndest man to study out a line of dope that you ever seen. I guess that was w'y he was so lucky as a bookmaker at the track. I never seen the like of him, I didn't. And you can sure understand, from w'at I've just told you, that he was the wise old thing. I know you can."

An affirmative nod from the Boarder encouraged the story-teller.

"Danny goes on to tell me," she continued, "that somethin' inside him had told him to copy the egg-packin' girl's address on the back of a envelope. And, later on, with the Perfessor in mind, he wrote to her. He sent her one of the Perfessor's photographs that we had, and now she'd sent him hers.

" 'Just you wait till the Perfessor sees this pitcher,' he says to me. 'If I don't get even with him, I'm goin' to know w'y. I'll bet you a dozen pairs of gloves, Belle, against bein' let out of the next call-down you figger to hand me, that the guy gets stuck on the pitcher, and goes clear nutty about our egg-packin' fr'en'. And then, if things ends up by him marryin' her, me and you can just set idly by and grin w'en he starts any talk about educations that was lost in the shufile,' he says. 'Take it from me, Belle, w'en a party by the name of Dan Sweeny goes to bat, he gives the bleachers somethin' to holler about.'

"I took up that pitcher, and looked at it real close, mister, and, be-lieve me, after I'd studied out w'at was in the face, I seen that Danny had aces. I told him so, and he says:

" 'Belle,' he says, 'I'm goin' over there to Jersey, to-morruh,' he says, 'and see that doll——'

" 'You mean,' I says, real hurried, 'that me and you—*we*—are goin' to Jersey and see that doll, Danny.'

"He kinda stared at me a minnit.

" 'W'y?' he says.

" 'B'cause,' I says, 'I think I'd better be along. Not that I don't trust you out of my sight,' I says, 'but that girl is too

whoopin' pretty, Danny, and it goes as I put it,' I says.

" 'All right,' he says, 'have it your way.'

"And that was how it worked out, mister. Me and Danny went over to that Jersey town, next day, and hunted up Miss Somers. We wanted to find out if she was really as swell a looker as the pitcher made her out to be. And she sure was. My gee, but she was a world beater! If you'd turned her loose in a Fifth Avenue party, every lady there would of throwed a grouch, and got jealous enough to bite theirselves. The girl was about in the pony class, so to speak. She had dark hair, and big, brown eyes, and a kinda confidin' way with her, that musta got the men where the doc puts the stethoscope.

"She was lavin' off, that day, and we found her at her home, which was a little two-by-twice house way at the end of the street. And she hadn't hardly opened her mouth, b'fore I seen that she never would do as the wife of a classy Englishman, w'at had ideas about music wrote by Dutch Heinie highbrows, and wanted his home all took up with books that had been got up for folks that lies w'en they say they can read 'em and have a good time at it.

"She let us in the house, and then both me and Danny got busy tryin' to think up a excuse for buttin' in there. It was my husban' that come across first, and even if I did think his talk wasn't the practicalest piece of work that could be studied out, I kept still, and let him go on, bein' that onct he got goin' there wasn't no stoppin' him.

" 'Miss Somers,' he says, 'a fr'en' of mine that's in the egg business was down this way a while ago,' he says. 'This here fr'en' seen you, and told my wife about you. My wife, you know, is lookin' for a companion,' he says, 'to help her put in the time w'en I'm away earnin' the money to keep the joint goin' with,' he says.

"The Somers girl looked kinda scared.

" 'Gosh!' she says.

" 'Be-lieve me,' says Danny, 'I'm tellin' the truth,' he says, 'and if you don't believe it, you can ast my wife here. Ain't I tellin' the truth, Belle?' he says.

"I nods my head 'Yes,' and set there, wonderin' w'at was goin' to happen next. Danny goes on:

" 'The wages ain't much to start with,' he says, 'but after you learn companionin', the pays' better. How'd twenty-five a week suit—twenty-five and board and room?' he says.

"Gee, mister, I wisht you could of saw that child's face! She wasn't no more'n eighteen years old—younger than her pitcher looked—and I bet anything you want to, that she hadn't never earned more'n four or five dollars a week in her life. She opened her mouth like a lady that's goin' to scream, and just stared. It was a minnit b'fore she could get a couple of words ready to work. Then she says:

" 'Twenty-five!' she says.

"Danny nods his head.

" 'Twenty-five,' he says, 'and if that ain't enough, we'll throw in the washin',' he says. 'Now, tell us, sister, w'at kind of a sound does that listen like to you?' he says.

"Well, mister, there wasn't only one answer to it. W'en me and Danny left that house, we'd hired a companion for me, and Danny had staked her to a bunch of money in advance, for expenses. We told her not to come till the end of the week, and then we hiked back to New York.

" 'Now,' says Danny, 'we'll pull that photograph on the Perfessor,' he says, 'and get a little action doin',' he says.

"That very night he called up the Englishman, ast him out to play cards, and showed the pitcher. That was all he had to do. The Perfessor done the rest. All evenin' he kept starin' at the pitcher, and, mister, bein' a woman, I could see that he was hard hit. Them things often happens, you know—men and ladies gettin' al fussed up over a photograph—but I hadn't never saw nothin' like it b'fore. And it got me to thinkin', be-lieve me, for I knowed that w'en the Perfessor seen the real girl, he'd go clear bugs. Who's loony now? The Perfessor. That would be the answer.

"I begun to think of the girl's talk, and the way she prob'ly et at the table, and them tall-timber clothes she wore; and I had it reasoned out in about a minnit that Danny was goin' to have a fine young revenge, even if it did cost him twenty-five a week. None of us knowed w'at companions brung in the market, and I wasn't worryin', for Danny had been havin' great luck at the track, and he didn't care if the lady cost twenty-five or a hunderd. It was all the same to him, just as long as he got results. And, mister, if you'd of saw the way the Perfessor took to that pitcher you'd of felt it in your bones that the results was on the way, with all the speed on, and the switches spiked down.

"We told the Perfessor that the pretty lady was a fr'en' of ourn, and was goin' to be one of the fam'ly for a w'ile. You'd ought of heard him ast questions, then! W'en was she comin? he says, and could he come out w'ile she was here? And a line of stuff like that.

"Danny b'gun his revenge right away by wonderin' out loud whether it was wise for to interduce a experienced man of the world, and a race-track follower, at that, to a simple-minded, convent-raised pony, from 'way down the track, where the rails seem to run together. He rubbed it in so hard that the Perfessor left our house vowin', by gosh, that he wouldn't so much as smoke a seegar b'fore 'comin' out, if he was allowed to say: 'Pleased to meet you!' to Miss Somers.

"And w'en he was gone, Danny laughed a collar loose, thinkin' of how that Perfessor was goin' to be jolted w'en he come to, and found that he'd been bunked by a pretty face, that didn't have as much culture b'hind it as you'd find in a barrel of sauerkraut.

"I ain't here to say how this whole business would of turned out, if the little lady hadn't of came to us with a cold, that, you might say, lived in the same street with pneumonia. Danny was to of met her at the train, but he got int'rested in a argument that was goin' on in some barroom, and forgot all about her. So she gets off the train, and wandered all over New York for almost a whole day, in a lot of slush and cold wind, b'fore she found our flat.

"She was just about all in w'en she hit the place, and there wasn't nothin' else for me to do but put her to bed, and holler for a doctor. The next night we had her on the lounge in our front room, all wrapped up in blankets, w'en the Perfessor rung our doorbell. He come stalkin' in the room; and I give one look at that pretty thing layin' there, and made up my mind, right off, that it would be a crime for to let her talk, and show her hand. So I says:

"'Dearie,' I says, 'this here party is Mr. Moggins,' I says. 'You mustn't talk none,' I says, 'for your poor pipes ain't fit for it yet,' I says. 'All you can do to-night is to say "Glad to know you," and let it go at that,' I says.

"And orders was orders with her. She done w'at I told her; but she kept follerin' that man round the room with her eyes, and seemin' as if she was tryin' to think. You see, she'd saw his pitcher, and she didn't hardly know w'at to make of everything.

"The Perfessor acted like he'd been hit in the nose with a pair of skates, or somethin'. He seemed kinda stunned, and couldn't look nowhere but at Miss Somers, layin' all cuddled up on the lounge. And I didn't blame him a bit, for that doll was sure somethin' to look at, with her thick hair tousled over the sofa pillow and her big, brown eyes starin' round in a droopy, quizzin' way.

"Me and Danny chased the Perfessor out after he'd been there ten minnits. We made my companion go back to bed, and a hour later we took in to her a double-portion order of big red roses that had came with the Perfessor's compliments. Them flowers was a reg'lar knock-out for that little girl. A half hour after she got 'em, I went in her room, and found her cryin'. Nobody hadn't ever sent her no flowers b'fore, she told me. And w'en I found out later that the poor child had had a rough life, and a awful hard one, back there in the country, I wasn't a bit surprised.

"She was pretty enough to of been carried round on a gold plate, but the

best she'd ever got was a good kickin' by her pa, every time she was docked at the egg-packin' works, and a pannin' out from her ma. This here sympathy from that fine-lookin' Perfessor went straight to her heart. I guess I'd of bawled, too, if I'd of been her.

"For three days, mister, me and Danny kept the good-lookin' party down and out, while the Perfessor stuck to our house like it was a piece of fly paper he'd sat on, and blowed money for flowers and stuff to eat and everything he could think of that Miss Somers might take to. And at the end of that time, there wasn't no guessin' contest on. W'y, even Danny seen how it was.

"The Perfessor was runnin' round in rings, so to speak, and the girl was dead sure that he was the original tin god that all the others was copied from. She hadn't been allowed to say anything but 'Yes,' and 'No,' owin' to her bum pipes, that wasn't so awful bum, no more, so our British fr'en' hadn't no idee w'at a awful lowbrow she was.

"The thing was gettin' on my nerves somethin' terrible. My gosh, mister, it seemed a reg'lar wicked thing to be puttin' up a cruel job like me and Danny was doin'. Two parties feelin's was goin' to be dreadful damaged w'en the blow-up happened. I wasn't for the way matters was goin', at all. But I let myself out by figgerin' that this was Danny's party, and it was all up to him. He'd been laughin' and chucklin' a lot, but I'd noticed that, as the days went by, he didn't do so much of it. So, one evenin', w'en we was alone, I wasn't much surprised w'en he up and says:

" 'Belle,' he says, 'somethin' seems to tell me somethin',' he says.

" 'W'at,' I says, 'does it say?' I says.

"Danny stared hard at the rug by the writin' desk, that had a big spot on it, where he'd spilled a bottle of ink, once.

" 'I wisht,' he says, 'that we hadn't of went into this revenge business,' he says. 'I'm gettin' it, all right,' he says, 'but it tastes like it had been hung too long, and ought to be sent back to the chef,' he says.

" 'Go on,' I says.

" 'Well,' he says, 'I ain't sentimental, Belle,' he says. 'I can take money from the boobs,' he says, 'and the come-ons that bets their last cent on a phony winner, and mortgages the household goods to get it,' he says. 'But this here proposition is different,' he says. 'I'm beginnin' to feel meaner than if I was coaxin' a baby to catch hold of a live 'lectric-light wire,' he says. 'S'pose,' he says, 'that after I'd married you, I'd found that you wasn't all there in your hurricane deck, for instance. W'at would I think, and how would I feel if I found that mebby you'd picked up a pocketbook in the street, once, with a thousand dollars in it, and really tried to find the owner,' he says. 'W'at if I'd discovered that there wasn't no class at all to you?' he says.

"I didn't have nothin' to say. I just let him worry along.

" 'Belle,' he says, 'things has sure got me feelin' awful bad,' he says. 'I'd ought to of punched the Perfessor in the eye for my revenge,' he says, 'and had it over with. I feel now as if I'm punchin' him w'ere he lives, and there's somethin' horrible about it, like I'd got him tied to a stake, and was just lightin' a fire under him. It don't look to me as if I was takin' a civilized revenge,' he says. 'I'm fixin' for to break that man's spirit,' he says, 'and the girl's,' he says, 'and their lives is goin' to be ruined,' he says, 'and there ain't no tellin' how things is goin' to end,' he say. 'Belle,' he says, 'get me out of this here deal,' he says.

" 'How?' I says.

" 'I don't know,' he says, 'but do it,' he says. 'And if you do,' he says, 'I know I can think out plenty of things I'd rather do, durin' the course of my natural life,' he says, 'than to get into the heart-bust business,' he says.

"Well, mister, me and Danny set up pretty near all night figgerin' the thing out. And the next day me and my companion lit out for Atlantic City. Danny told the Perfessor that we'd went somewheres else, so we'd be safe from him a-follerin' us. The first thing I done was to hunt up a lady there that could slap a little polish on that girl.

" 'Get some class in her,' I says, 'if

you have to use a hypodermic needle,' I says. 'We only got six weeks to have it did in,' I says, 'and I'm willin' to pay for a overdose,' I says, 'providin' it sticks. Train her to run good with a highbrow gent'm'n fr'en',' I says.

"And so I sicked her on Miss Somers for almost ten hours a day, tellin' the girl that she'd have to get more of the pink-tea stuff in her b'fore she could be looked on as a reg'lar in the companion business. She took it, all right, and was real willin' about doin' w'at the lady told her.

"I guess we'd been there at the seashore about five weeks, w'en, one mornin', I let out the usual roar for my companion, and there wasn't no answer. I went in her room, and there was a note stuck in the mirror, like is fash'n'ble in some circles. It says, as near as I can remember it:

"MRS. BELLE SWEENY.

"DEAR FR'EN': This is to let you know I have quit the swell job you give me as I run into Mr. Moggins on the board walk tonight and me and him is going to New York and get married. I hate to quit you this way, dear fr'en', but I ain't got any show against that man. He is awful bossful and I guess I kinda like it and want to go along. I hope I get forgive for this as you was a true fr'en' and I like you.

"Your companion,

"PEARL SOMERS.

"Gee, mister, w'en I read that, I almost done a flop. As soon as I come out of the daze, I got Danny on the long-distance, and told him w'at had come off. And he says for me to hike right home, and we'd see about it. It was night by the time I hit New York. Danny was waitin' for me, and we was drove right home. We hadn't been there more'n an hour, w'en our telephone bell rings, and it's the Pertessor on the wire. He says he and his wife is comin' out to be forgave, and Danny tells 'em they can't make too good time doin' it.

"Of course, there was a real sobby rumpus b'tween us ladies, right away, as soon as we seen each other, and them men stood there shakin' hands like a couple of mutts. By and by, though, Danny gets the Perfessor out in another room.

"'Say,' he says, 'I wasn't on the square with you, Perfessor. Sooner or later you're bound to find out that the little lady wasn't no fr'en' of ours, but my wife's companion,' he says, 'that we picked up in Jersey.'

"'Sweeny,' says the Perfessor, 'I know all about it. She may of been your wife's companion once,' he says, 'but she's holdin' down that job for me, now,' he says.

"'Yes,' says Danny. 'Me and Belle figgered it would come out that way, so we've had her down at Atlantic City gettin' fitted for a highbrow home,' he says. 'She knows all them Dutch Heinie music writers by their first names now, and can read ten lines in a book wrote by a party named Browning, without hollerin' for help,' he says. And right here, Danny says the Perfessor laughed real hard.

"'Sweeny,' he says, 'w'at kind of a feller do you think I am?' he says. 'W'y,' he says, 'I'd of married that little girl,' he says, 'if she hadn't of knowed but half of the A B C's, and got all twisted tryin' to recite that much,' he says. 'Them things is easy fixed,' he says, 'for the little lady is as bright as a cop's shield,' he says. 'I'm goin' to have a couple of classy teachers bat just enough higher education into her so she'll be human, and simple, and sweet, like she is, and not wantin' to vote,' he says.

"'But,' says Danny, 'how about them heavyweight-class books?' he says.

"'Well,' says the Perfessor, 'she'll know how to wear good clothes, and patter small talk with my fr'en's, and look pretty. And that's all a lady ought to know. If I catch her tryin' to read them books,' he says, 'I'll sue you, Sweeny, for peddlin' me a lemon,' he says.

"Then he begins to laugh, like he was the happiest man in the world, which was true, you can bet. And w'en Christmas come round, he sent us the most expensive phonograph he could find, mister, with two hunderd records to it, all ragtime songs, except the one you've heard so often—where the feller recites 'Casey at the Bat.'"

A Chat With You

IT is not our custom to announce a new series of stories in THE POPULAR until we have the manuscript in hand and know that we can give all we promise. Naturally, also, we say nothing about new stories from which we hoped much, but which, on reading, prove not good enough for a place in the magazine. It is not our custom to talk about our disappointments, but just at present we are going to make an exception. We had planned to start, some time this year, a new series of stories by Jacques Futrelle, whose stories, "The Quest of the Golden Plate," "The Thinking Machine," and others, have delighted thousands of readers all over the world. This new series was to be the best thing Futrelle had ever done. He had this high hope for the tales that were taking shape in his imagination and we shared that hope. There were to be ten stories in all, each complete in itself, each a mystery story in which Futrelle's already famous creation, "The Thinking Machine," was to be the central figure. THE POPULAR had secured the rights to all these stories, and four of them had been written and delivered when Futrelle took passage on the *Titanic* for New York. Of course, the terrible disaster is a twice-told tale now. You have known for weeks that Futrelle, with other brave and useful men, had given up his life that the women and children might find a place in the boats. Every one who has read Futrelle's stories feels a personal loss at his death. We have now four stories of "The Thinking Machine," the last tales Futrelle ever wrote, and, to our thinking, the best. They will appear in future issues of THE POPULAR.

SPEAKING of the wreck of the *Titanic*, we have been receiving telegrams and letters from newspapers and readers all over America commenting on the wonderful fidelity with which such a wreck was described in Mayn Clew Garnett's story, "The White Ghost of Disaster," which appeared in the issue of this magazine out on the stands a few days before the biggest of all ocean liners sank in the western ocean. The fact that the tale was published just a few days before the fact which it so well described is, of course, nothing but a remarkable coincidence. It is something more than coincidence, however, that made the story so accurate a description of the actual happening. It could not have been such had not the author known what he was writing about, had he not known ships, and those who sail them, and the sea itself. We have often said that in THE POPULAR we generally published stories by men who knew what they were writing about, and that the stories we publish are in many ways a reflection of various phases of life itself.

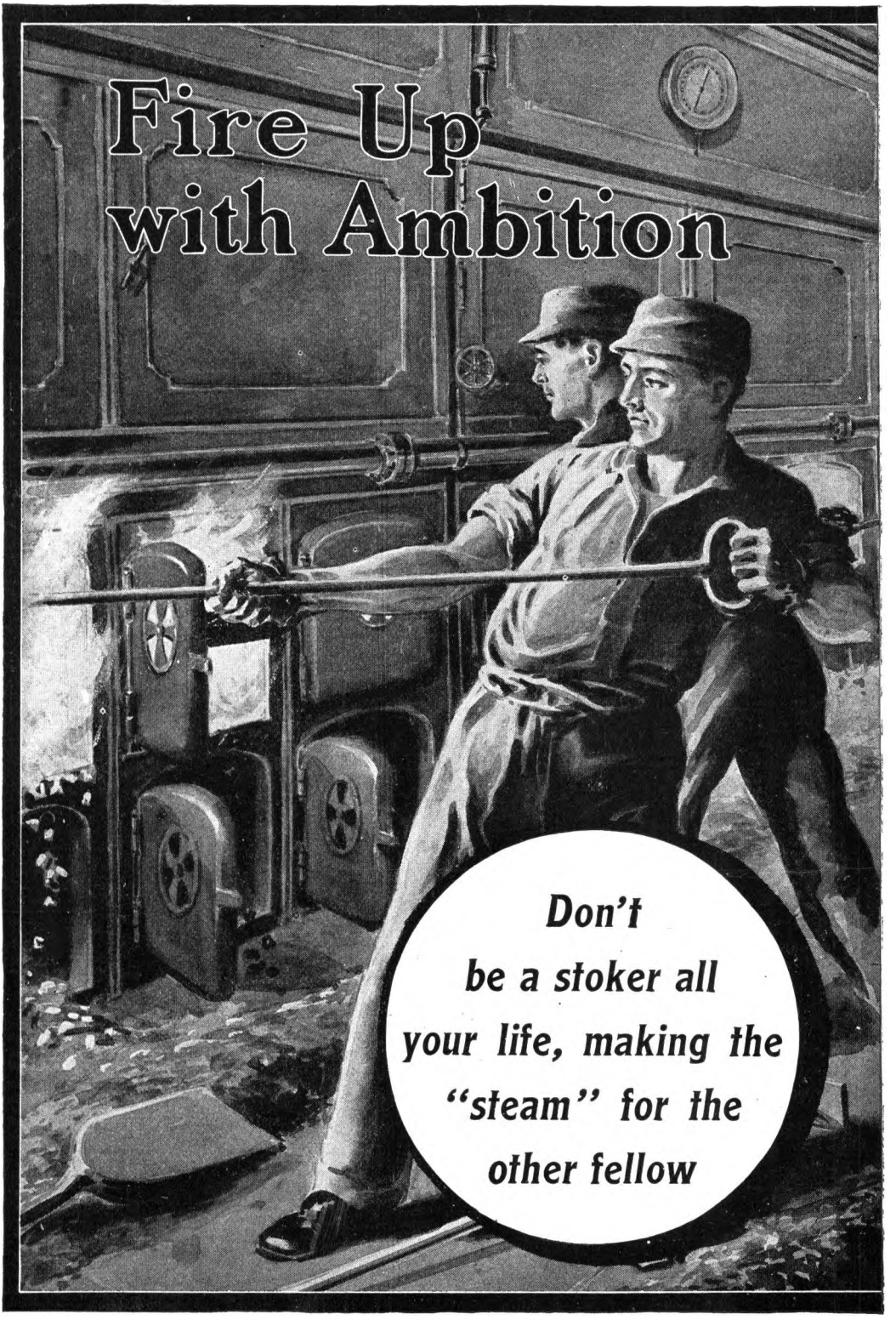
YOU remember Arthur B. Reeve's novel, "The Green-goods King," which appeared some issues ago in this magazine. The next issue, out in two weeks, opens with another complete novel by the same author, "The Treasure Vault." In this new story which, we are inclined to believe, is even better than the first, you will meet again with Craig Kennedy, that most modern and scientific of all detectives. Reeve has discovered a new sort of story which, for want of a better name, we will call the "scientific detective story." This new novel is a splendid example of the type.

IF you have not done so already, don't fail to read the first installment of Holman F. Day's serial, "The Red Lane," at once. It is undoubtedly the best story Day has ever written. It is so strong, so gripping, so vivid, the canvas is so broad and so crowded with interesting figures, that it stands out above the common run of books. It gets better with each successive installment, its interest is continuous and cumulative. It is sure to be talked about a great deal, and we want you to be the first to read it. There's a splendid baseball story by Van Loan, "The Good Old Wagon," in the next issue, two Western stories, by George Pattullo and Robert V. Carr, the first of a new series of short railroad stories by Francis Lynde, and a lot of other good fiction.

WE are going to close the "chat" this time with a letter. We get a great many like it, and it is the kind of letter we like best to receive. It comes from Emmet C. Dibble, whose work has taken him to Guamo, Cuba. It follows:

GENTLEMEN: Herewith I inclose P. O. money order for three dollars, for which you will please renew my subscription to THE POPULAR, from date of expiration of my subscription. I want to express my appreciation for your magazine. I rather think that in fine literary merit some stories in THE POPULAR leave something to be desired. But I am a strayed-off "Americano," buried in the heart of a Cuban jungle, where I pass weeks, and sometimes months, without hearing my native tongue, and strong, virile, clean stories, such as your magazine brings, come like a breath of clean, fresh air from God's country, twice a month. There is one great thing to be said for your magazine—it goes in largely for Western fiction, but in sentiment and ideal it is more purely American, more all-American, than any other publication I have ever seen. And it helps the man "on the edge of things," where there is no public opinion to help him, to keep straight and decent from whatsoever part of the U. S. A. he hails (I am from the South), to keep true to the ideals of manhood to which he was reared.

TO all American exiles, outposts of civilization, we extend greeting. To Mr. Dibble himself we send our thanks for the interest shown in the magazine and the kind feeling that prompted his letter. It makes getting out the magazine seem a little more worth while, and it is in the way of encouragement to make it better than ever.


Fire Up
with Ambition
Don't
be a stoker all
your life, making the
"steam" for the
other fellow

THROW AWAY YOUR GLASSES

How to Save the Eyes

Simple Home Treatment Works Wonders—No Drugs—Natural Method.

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At last the good news can be published. It is predicted that within a few years eyeglasses and spectacles will be so scarce that they will be regarded as curiosities.

Save Eyes, Get Rid of Glasses.

Dr. John L. Corish, an able New York physician of long experience, has come forward with the edict that eyeglasses must go. Intelligent people everywhere are indorsing him. The doctor says that the ancients never disfigured their facial beauty with goggles. They employed certain methods which have recently been brought to the light of modern science. Dr. Corish has written a marvellously interesting book which tells how strained and weak eyes may be benefited, in many cases instantly. There is an easy home treatment just as simple as it is effective, and it is fully explained in this wonderful book, which will be sent free to any one. A postal card will bring it to your very door. This book tells you why eyeglasses are needless and how they may be put aside forever. When you have taken advantage of this information obtained in this book you may be able to throw your glasses away, and should possess healthy, beautiful, soulfully expressive, magnetic eyes that indicate the true character and win confidence.

Bad Eyes Bring Bad Health

Dr. Corish goes further. He asserts that eyestrain is the main cause of headache, nervousness, irritability, neurasthenia, brain fag, sleeplessness, stomach disorders, despondency and many other disorders. Leading oculists of the world confirm this and say that a vast amount of physical and mental misery is due to the influence of eyestrain upon the nerves and brain cells. When eyestrain is overcome these ailments usually disappear as if by magic.

Book Free to You

The Okola Method, which is fully explained in Dr. Corish's marvellous book, is the method which is directed at making your eyes normal and saving them from the disfigurement of these needless, unpleasant glass windows. If you wear glasses or feel that you should be wearing them, or if you are troubled with headache in the forehead or nervousness when your eyes are tired, write to-day to Okola Laboratory, Dept. 139, Rochester, N. Y., and ask them to send you, postage prepaid, free of all charge, the book entitled "How to Save the Eyes," and you will never regret the step taken.

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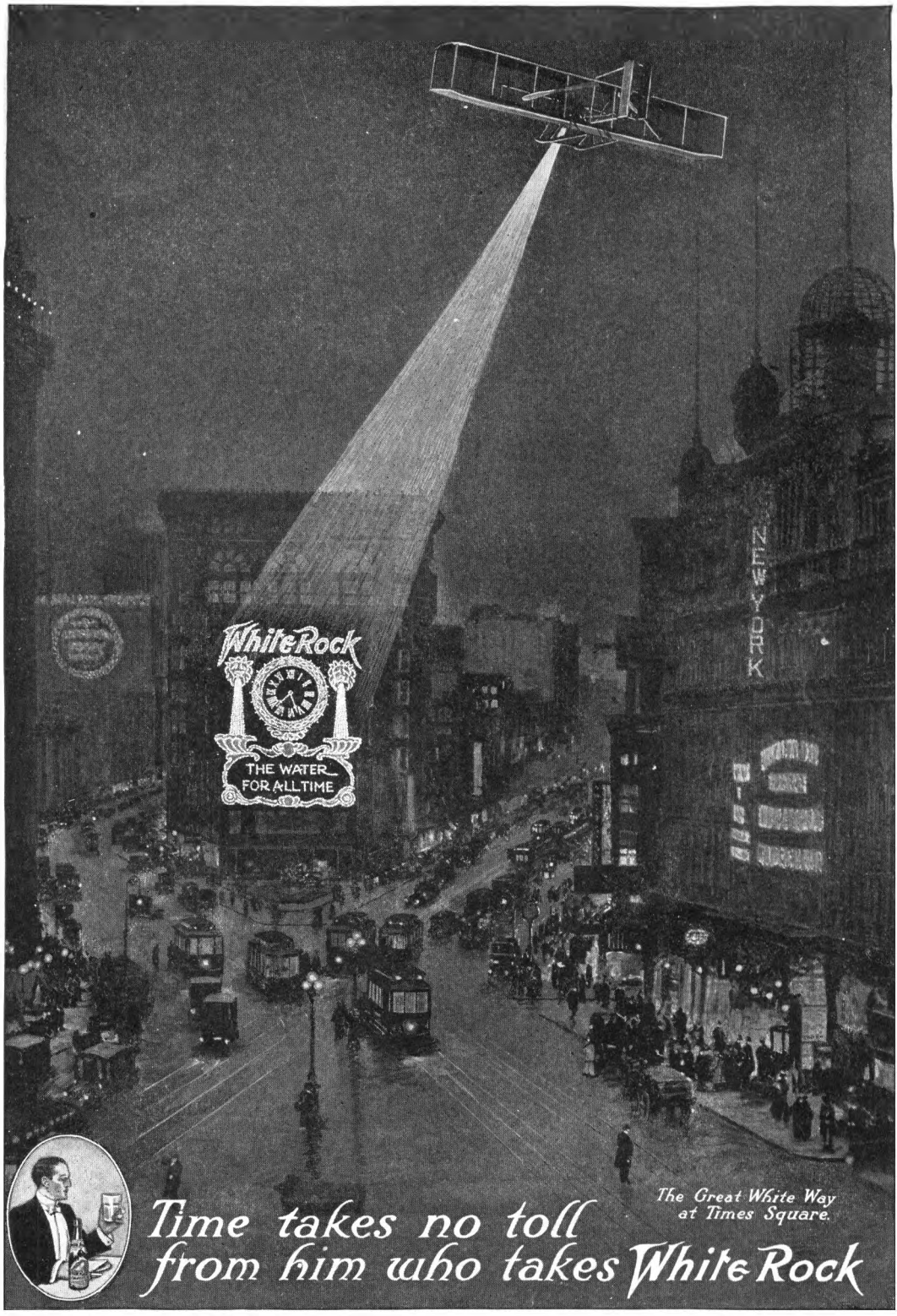

The Great White Way at Times Square.

Time takes no toll from him who takes White Rock

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