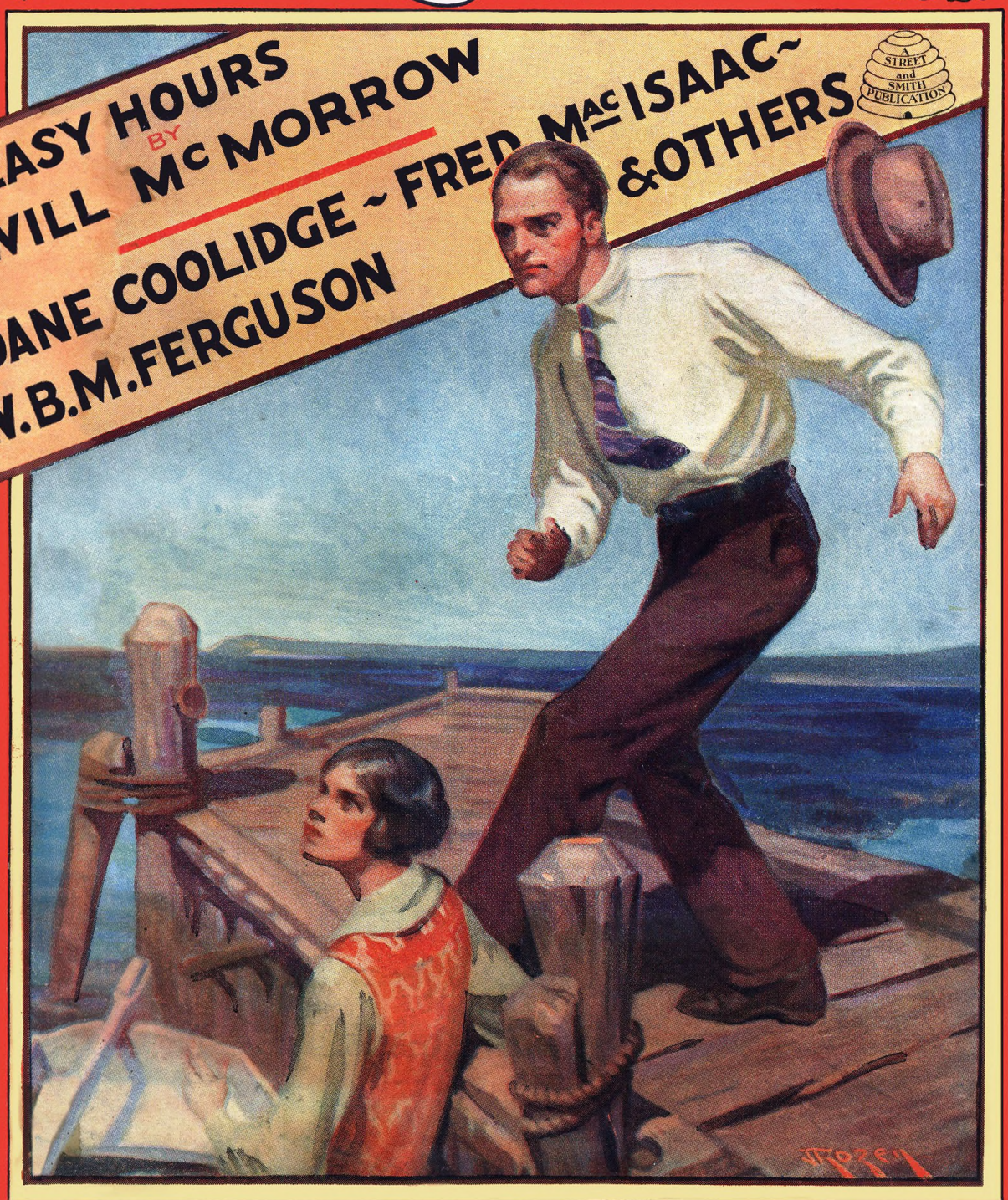
FIRST CHOICE OF A MILLION READERS

WEEKLY

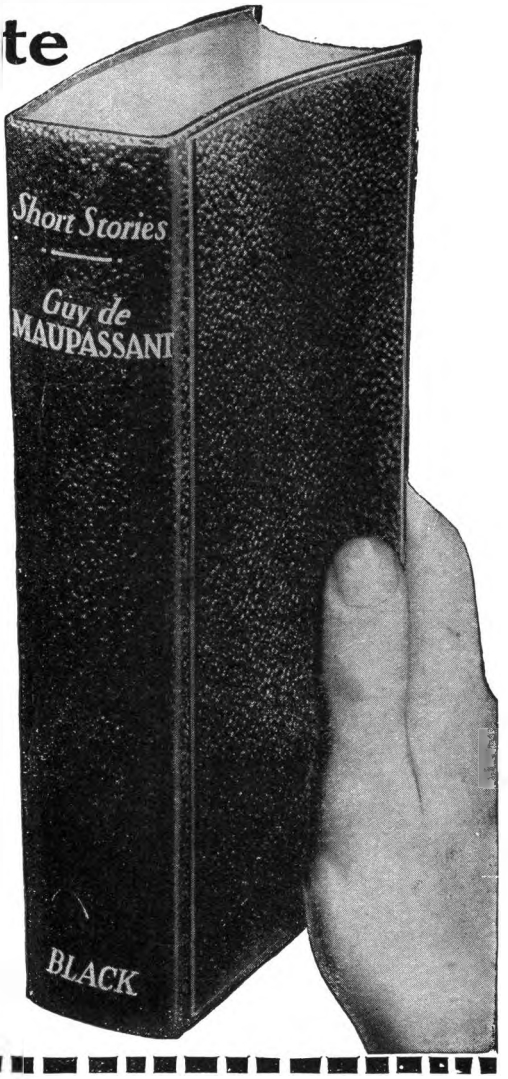
OCT. 15, 1927

# The Popular Stories

15 cts.



# Every Short Story
# MAUPASSANT
# Ever Wrote
# All in ONE Volume




| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Virtue | Boule de Suif | The New Sensation |
| A Piece of String | The Diamond Necklace | The Thief |
| In the Moonlight | The Story of a Farm Girl | The Diary of a Madman |
| Mlle. Fifi | Love | In His Sweetheart's Livery |
| The Inn | Ugly | Lost |
| The Devil | The Hole | Margot's Tapers |
| The Venus of Braniza | A Family | Waiter, a Bock! |
| The Sequel of Divorce | Bertha | The Mad Woman |
| Mademoiselle | A Mesalliance | Virtue in the Ballet |
| Graveyard Sirens | The Carter's Wench | Fecundity |
| Am I Insane? | The Bed | Words of Love |
| The Charm Dispelled | A Way to Wealth | The Impolite Sex |
| A Little Walk | Forbidden Fruit | The Farmer's Wife |
| A Dead Woman's Secret | Madame Parisse | On Perfumes |
| Ced No. 29 | A Wife's Confession | An Unfortunate Likeness |
| Doubtful Happiness | Love's Awakening | A Rupture |
| After Death | Woman's Wiles | The Lost Step |
| Room No. 11 | The Wedding Night | The Artist's Wife |
| The Tobacco Shop | On Cats | The Rendezvous |
| A Passion | One Phase of Love | A Fashionable Woman |
| Regret | A Poor Girl | An Old Maid |
| The False Gems | Caught | The Love of Long Ago |
| A Useful House | Magnetism | A Queer Night in Paris |
| Was It a Dream? | Countess Satan | Ghosts |

***And 150 more vivid tales—all in this wonderful book***

NO other writer, living or dead, has ever pictured life with the fearless audacity and daring devotion to truth of Guy de Maupassant. In stories that may be read in *ten minutes*. Maupassant, with his characteristic pagan frankness, embodies the entire gamut of human passions, the full breadth and depth of French life and love.

Now for the first time you can know and enjoy all the superb short stories of Maupassant, all within the covers of a single beautiful volume. Every translation absolutely complete, authentic and unabridged.

## *Read It FREE!*

You must see this amazing book to appreciate it fully. Fine quality India paper, large, readable type; the beautiful "Lifetime" Fabricoid, richly grained binding stamped with 22 kt. gold. Clip and mail the coupon now, keep and read the book a week, then decide if you want it. You risk nothing; you alone are the judge of the book's merit. Send no money now—just the coupon.

**WALTER J. BLACK CO. (Dept.724)**
**171 Madison Avenue, New York, N. Y.**

*Gentlemen:* Send me for free examination, your new one-volume edition of Guy de Maupassant's Complete Short Stories, printed in large, clear type, on fine India paper; limp, maroon Fabricoid binding, stamped in 22 kt. gold. I will either return the book at your expense or send you $5.45 in full payment within one week.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... State .....

Mark X here if you prefer your copy bound in Persian Morocco.
Add $1.50 to the price. Same approval privilege.

WALTER J. BLACK CO
171 Madison Avenue
NEW YORK CITY, N.Y.

**"Gulls' Island," by R. W. Alexander, the opening novel in the next issue of THE POPULAR STORIES, will get and hold your attention so that you won't want to leave it for anything. It is a modern pirate yarn, and has the tang and flavor that have made pirate yarns rank high among the favorite types of stories. Watch for it next week—October 22nd.**

Volume LXXXVI Number 2

# The Weekly Popular Stories

*Title Registered U. S. Patent Office.*



## CONTENTS FOR OCTOBER 15, 1927



Weekly publication issued by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York. Ormond G. Smith, President; George C. Smith, Vice President and Treasurer; George C. Smith, Jr., Vice President; Ormond V. Gould, Secretary.

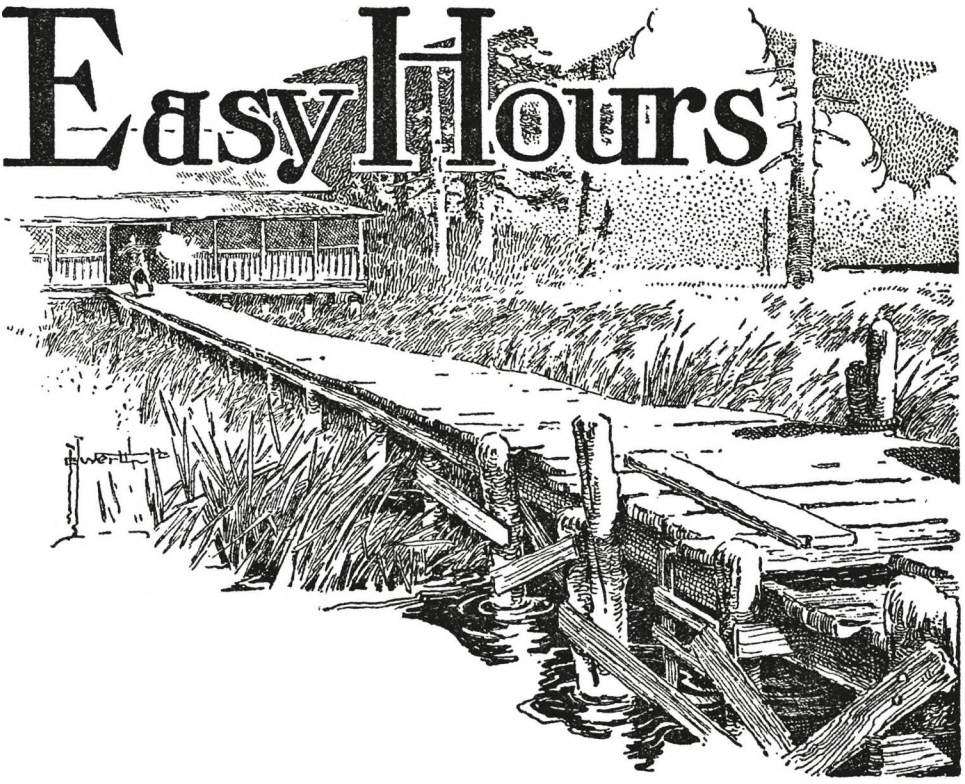
Entered as Second-class Matter, September 20, 1909, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, $7.50. Foreign, $8.50.

We do not hold ourselves responsible for the return of unsolicited manuscripts.

All manuscripts must be addressed to the Editors.

YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION, $6.00 SINGLE COPY, 15 CENTS

# Easy Hours



*Author of "The Honor of the*

**Throughout this story the reader will be saying to himself: self a job as a kind of keeper for a "nut." And what a nut! they all cuckoo, but that he himself was about to join their**

## CHAPTER I.

### FIRED!

HA! You scoundrel!" a voice exclaimed. The thin neck of Mr. Gandry, the office manager, turned a delicate shade of pink, and he turned sharply around to look over his glasses.

"Eh? What's that? What's that?"

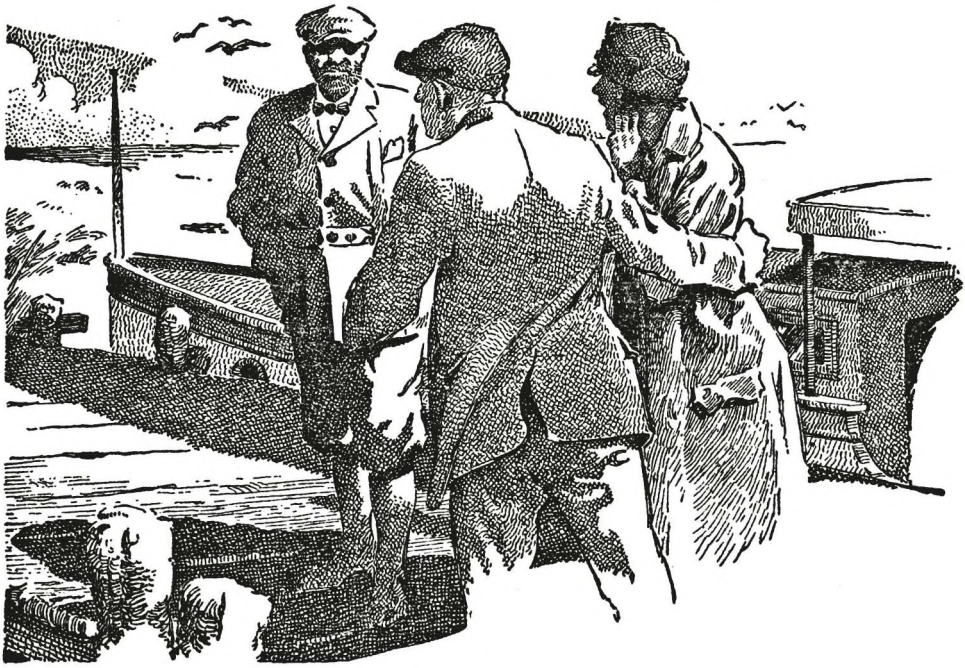
But Leonard's neatly combed blond head was bent studiously over the broad sheets of the ledger. He had not meant to speak so loudly. As a matter of fact, he had intended to hiss the words in a tone of concentrated contempt, as befitted a stalwart, two-gun Texan who had just broken through a cordon of enemies to discover the heroine in the grasp of a scowling Mexican—unwillingly represented by Mr. Gandry. All the world is a stage, and Mr. Gandry had been cast for many parts, most of them despicable, and on warm spring days like this he was usually a Mexican.

Leonard dropped the penholder he had leveled at Mr. Gandry's helpless back and looked out the window, moving his lips and blinking his eyes like a young man in the throes of mental arithmetic.

He jotted down a couple of random figures on the margin of the ledger and looked questioningly at the office manager.

"Yes, sir?"

# By Will McMorrow



*Regiment,*" "*Black Marsh,*" *Etc.*

**"Who's loony now?" It's all about a chap who got him-For a time, on that lonely island, he thought that not only were ranks, and that the only sane person was pretty little Aileen.**

"I asked you," Gandry snapped, "what that insulting remark was!"

Leonard's freckled face flushed guiltily.

"Why—er—nothing, Mr. Gandry. I was just thinking"—he made a lame explanation, feeling the uselessness of more definite explanation to this mundane and sarcastic taskmaster—"I was —er—thinking of a movie show I saw last night."

"You might try some of that thinking on that last balance sheet," said Mr. Gandry inappreciatively. "Judging by what the boss said yesterday, it needs it. You had your figures all wrong and showed a net loss of fifty-thousand dollars for the month, and he was just calling a meeting of the board of directors when I showed him your mistake. You ought to have some one examine your head——"

"Look here!" Leonard exclaimed. "You lay off those remarks, Gandry, or you and I will have a real argument. You can take your darned bookkeeping job——"

The peremptory sound of a buzzer on the wall, a menacing sound not unlike the warning of a rattler about to strike, sent Gandry scuttling in the direction of the private office. Leonard dropped the pen as if it had suddenly grown red-hot and reached into the pocket of his neatly pressed, thirty-dollar serge coat.

He read the advertisement for the tenth time in the Help Wanted columns:

Young man, well-bred, single, under thirty, cool headed and athletic, for confidential position requiring brains and exceptional ability. The man we want is preferably an ex-service man. Good pay and easy hours. Apply between 1 and 2 p. m., Leadcastor & Leadcastor, third floor, Doncherry Building.

The door opened slowly and Mr. Gandry appeared, frowning heavily. Timidly, as one might approach a lion with a peanut—which lions do not care for as a rule—Mr. Gandry handed an envelope to Leonard, and walked away.

Leonard opened it and read the message. It was brief:

MR. LEONARD NORRIS.

DEAR SIR: Owing to changes in our personnel, after next Saturday your services will be no longer required——

He tossed the note on the desk and stood up, reaching for his hat.

"Your work, I suppose, Gandry," he said, nodding. "What are the changes in the personnel? Making room for that nephew of yours in my job?"

"Why—why I suppose it means your position," Gandry snapped. "I've always thought you wouldn't last here, Norris. I hope next time you find a good job you'll appreciate it—respecting your—er—superiors."

"My superiors!" Leonard scoffed. "A fine world, where birds like you are my superiors! Well, I haven't been keen on pushing a pen, anyway. I can land a better job any day. I'd rather drive a taxi than work for you when it comes to that! I'll quit now, and your nephew can start to-day!"

"There's no day like the present for trying to get that other job," the office manager returned, smiling evenly. "Go to it, my young friend. Try the taxi first, I'd suggest," he called out after Leonard's vanishing back. "You're cut out for rougher work than bookkeeping——"

He jumped at the vigorous slam that Leonard gave the door, almost dropping his eyeglasses into the inkwell.

Leonard descended the creaking stairs of the warehouse to the street and stood on the sidewalk, frowning at the wholesale fruit and poultry sign across the way. In spite of his confident manner of carrying the thing off with his late office manager, he wasn't quite sure about that better job. Working as a bookkeeper under Gandry was not the height of Leonard's ambition, but it paid room rent, bought three fair-sized meals a day—and Leonard hadn't reached the dyspeptic age yet—and paid for that law course at night that promised a brighter future in another few months.

He had no relatives to depend upon—none that he would call on for assistance, at any rate—but he had fifteen dollars left from last week's pay, and his board was paid. Also he had his health, which was more than the narrow-shouldered Gandry had, and the advertisement he had marked in the Help Wanted column that morning, foreseeing the advent of Gandry's nephew, promised something worth trying for.

Fired at fifty, a man has need of some courage and more philosophy, but fired at twenty-five, youth supplies the philosophy, courage flows in the blood, and romance beckons to unexplored fields.

He turned into the lunch-hour stream of tired business men golfward bound, and made his way determinedly toward the Doncherry Building, ignoring the flirtatious glances of sauntering stenographers, released from their machines. Leonard was not a particularly arresting figure, but he had a pair of shoulders that filled out a thirty-dollar suit and made it look like seventy-five.

The Doncherry Building, built by Cyrus Doncherry of the Doncherry Woolen Mills and the Doncherry Stores, Inc., and several other million-dollar concerns, loomed up like a thirty-story mountain of limestone on lower Broad-

way. A hundred families might have camped in the shadow of the Doncherry Building—just as some hundred thousand families were dependent on the genius for organization and masterful ability of Cyrus Doncherry, in stores and mills and mines throughout the land.

No king ever ruled with the power of, or as unobtrusively as, the multimillionaire, Doncherry. It was a name whispered where men gathered to conjure money out of the murky air of Wall Street; it was a name shouted by electric signs and street-car ads throughout a continent. Leonard had paid tribute to Cyrus Doncherry in the purchase of that very thirty-dollar suit he wore.

He stepped inside the vast marble lobby, found Leadcastor & Leadcastor on the wall directory, and then entered one of a dozen silent elevators that slid up and down the three-hundred-foot shafts.

It deposited him high and dry above the turmoil of Broadway, in a spacious anteroom that had the atmosphere of an Old World church and was presided over by an elderly reception clerk, who had the appearance and manner of an ambassador to the Court of St. James. He bowed urbanely from behind his desk and motioned Leonard to a seat in front of a wall of brown, leather law books.

Leonard gripped his newspaper more firmly. This would indeed be a job worth having, if it meant working in this office, for Leadcastor & Leadcastor meant as much in law as Doncherry meant in finance.

The door nearest him opened abruptly and a scowling young man hurried out, jamming his hat on his head.

"Not me," he exclaimed triumphantly, like one who had unmasked a clever trick. "A nut! Call him by any other name, he's still a nut! Not for your Uncle Dudley! I want my sleep nights!"

With which cryptic declaration, he disappeared forever into the maw of the waiting elevator.

The reception clerk disappeared through the door near Leonard, and reappeared in the opening, with a pleasant nod toward Leonard.

"Step this way, please. Mr. Leadcastor, Jr., will see you."

## CHAPTER II.

### HIRED.

MR. LEADCASTOR, JR., was a man of Leonard's age, with a frank smile and an observant pair of eyes. He pointed to a chair beside his flat-topped desk and studied the tip of a pencil.

"How badly do you need a job?" he asked finally, tossing the pencil into a tray, and taking another appraising look at the applicant. "It will save our time to get to that first. We've had all sorts of men here to-day, and most of them want something for nothing."

Leonard grinned.

"Not to make a short story long, I've been fired from my job. I need a new one right away."

"Good! Service man?"

"Not anything extraordinary," Leonard confessed. "I managed to get into the infantry late in the war by forgetting my age, but I was only a month in France. Why, is there any fighting in this job?"

Leadcastor shook his head.

"Not in that sense. But the type of man who went to war is the type for a job like this. Not afraid of a rough-and-tumble and used to handling men. I think you'll do. There are certain other essentials such as breeding, education, an even temper and a good, sound set of nerves. I can see you have those without questioning you. We'd like to know something more about you, of course, Mr.——"

"Norris. Leonard Norris."

Leadcastor pulled a pad from a drawer.

"Single?" he asked.

Leonard nodded.

"No bad habits, I see," Leadcastor observed, smiling. "Not with that healthy color. Ready to tackle anything that's honest and a day's work?"

"Yes. My work as a clerk didn't agree with me much. I—er—have ambitions to be a lawyer. I'm studying at night."

"Really?" Leadcastor leaned back in his chair, tapping his lips thoughtfully. "We can help you in that, I think—later. This job comes first. It won't last more than a few months. After that—you see how important we consider getting the right man—we can start you in here at this office. Meanwhile, the position I have in mind will pay one hundred dollars a week and all expenses."

Leonard's eyes opened wide.

"One hundred a week——"

"But it will be like being in jail meanwhile," Leadcastor warned. "No amusements and a solitary life, and some danger involved to your peace of mind and perhaps your life."

"Say," Leonard said, with a laugh, "it's going to be hard to scare me off from a round hundred a week. Suppose you tell me exactly what this job is."

"I'll have to ask you to respect our confidence in this, Mr. Norris. I haven't mentioned any names so far in my interviews with applicants. Fortunately, I didn't take that fool who rushed out just now into my confidence. I think I can trust you."

"If you have any doubt on that score," Leonard replied, reddening, "perhaps we'd better call this conference off right now."

"I beg your pardon. That isn't exactly what I meant. Just sit tight now and I'll go into it from the beginning. You doubtless know that we are attorneys for Cyrus Doncherry—*the* Cyrus Doncherry. We attend to all his affairs, both of an intimate and public nature. But what you don't know, and what is generally not known by the public that knows Mr. Doncherry's family history very well, is that he has a cousin whom he supports—in strictest seclusion on a place on Long Island."

"In strict seclusion—you mean locked up somewhere?"

"Exactly. This cousin, Percival Doncherry, is not quite—well, to put it mildly, is a little off in his mind."

"How far off?" Leonard questioned soberly. "Violent?"

"Sometimes. I don't know the various grades of insanity, but I suppose you'd call him insane with occasional homicidal tendencies. He has been kept on an island in Great South Bay—formerly a duck-shooting lodge of Cyrus Doncherry—for several years, under care of a keeper, an old and trusted employee of Cyrus Doncherry. They have lived there quietly, rather cut off from the world, with a kind of handy man around to cook and shop for them.

"Once a month a specialist is sent by Cyrus to look over his relative and report on him. The last report stated that Percival is suffering from a pernicious heart affection that will probably kill him within a few months. He was reported quiet then and had not had an outbreak for some time; but Manley, the keeper, has been expecting one at any time. Percival had got hold of a revolver, and Manley managed to get it away from him. But you see the way the unfortunate man's mind works."

"And this job," Leonard prompted, "is to take Manley's place?"

"No. He has written asking for an assistant, some one to take the burden of watching his charge off his shoulders part of the time. You see, Percival Doncherry was at one time a man of some means, has traveled and is educated. Manley, himself, is a man of some superior abilities. The job of assistant to Manley requires more than the ordinary type of keeper.

"Percival must be entertained, made a companion of by a man of his own social caliber. That is why we have been so particular in choosing just the right man—a young man, preferably, who can join Doncherry in outdoor sports, for the patient has been quite athletic in his time and is allowed light exercise."

"It seems strange that, with all his money, Cyrus Doncherry hasn't been able to cure his cousin. Wouldn't he be better off in a sanitarium?"

"He's incurable; and Cyrus Doncherry, aside from the question of revealing a family skeleton, considers his cousin better off where he is than in a public or semipublic institution."

He lighted a cigarette and offered one to Leonard, who declined in favor of his own cheaper brand.

"Well," asked Leadcastor, "what do you think? Want to take hold?"

Leonard frowned at the oriental rug on the floor. A hundred dollars a week beckoned, but the thought of living with a maniac repelled.

"You say the place is cut off entirely?" he asked.

"Oh, no. Mr. Doncherry had a special telephone wire laid to the mainland from the island. You will be in communication with us whenever you wish. The letter from Manley, in which he asked for a second man, mentioned some trouble with the telephone line on account of the patient trying to destroy it; but that will be put right shortly."

"And this handy man—is he helpful?"

"I'm afraid not. Benjamin is a rather harmless fellow—half-witted type—that Manley picked up somewhere. You realize, naturally, it isn't every one who will work under those conditions."

"I believe you." Leonard smiled ruefully. "Alone with a crazy man and a half-wit on a desert island and liable to be killed in your sleep."

"Oh, not as bad as that, Mr. Norris. Manley will be there, and he knows the ropes. What do you say? You're our man, and I don't mind telling you if you'll stand the gaff for a few months our firm will make good with Cyrus Doncherry. That's worth a lot to us and will be worth something to you."

Leonard shoved out his hand.

"All right. I'm hired. I need the money. Now, when do I start—also, when does the pay start?"

"Right away," Leadcastor assured him, grinning, "as far as the pay. There will be some legal papers to sign—Mr. Doncherry doesn't wish a lawsuit on his hands if anything should go wrong with you there—and you can catch the two-fifteen train to-morrow."

Fifteen minutes later he walked with Leonard to the door and shook hands.

"One thing more, Mr. Norris," he said. "I know when I am dealing with a certain kind of man. I think your word is as good as the best contract we can draw up here. It would cause endless inconvenience to us and trouble if you should change your mind after reaching Goose Island. Will you give me your word to go through with this?"

Leonard squared his shoulders.

"I'll see it through, Leadcastor. Don't worry on that score!"

## CHAPTER III.

### GEOLOGY—AND EVERYTHING.

LEONARD, his slim baggage in an old suit case, stepped off the Long Island Railroad train at Clam Shores and looked around.

There wasn't much to look at—an empty railroad station, with the ticket window closed, a summer hotel boarded up, a real-estate office not yet opened for the season, a small amount of town to the left and quite a lot of Great South Bay to the right. Clam Shores was just beginning to stir from its winter sleep, and was comfortably outside the hectic zone of the suburban developer.

Leonard turned toward the bay, along a winding path between heaps of oyster shells, and found a man, by the water's edge, mending a dory.

"Goose Island?" The oysterman straightened up with a wad of oakum in his horny hand, and pointed vaguely southeast. "Out there—'bout a half dozen mile or so. You thinkin' of goin' there?"

Leonard opined he was thinking of some such thing.

"Real estater?"

"No. Just on a visit, you might say. How much to take me there?"

"A visit, hey?" The oysterman shook his head, and, with his free hand, produced a package of unpleasant-looking chewing tobacco from his pocket. "It ain't much of a place to visit, young fellow. They ain't no one goes there. Old Doncherry, the millionaire, owns that place, an' he don't let no one on it but his gamekeepers."

Still eying Leonard, he took a good mouthful of the oakum by mistake and immediately removed it, and tried the tobacco instead.

"You might try along the shore," he suggested. "My boat ain't fixed yet. There's old Captain Jim up beyond's got a boat, an' either him or his darter, that's home now, could take you out, maybe. It's around the next bend an' it's got a radio aërial on the ruff."

Captain Jim's house was there, all right, and the radio aërial on the roof, but no Captain Jim. Leonard shouted from the white picket gate that guarded the path to the little, weather-beaten house, and was about to give it up and plod back along the shore to the village when a girl appeared in the doorway.

"You're making an awful lot of noise," she pointed out coldly. "Please don't bother coming in. We have everything we need in the line of laces and embroideries——"

She started to shut the door.

"We also have plenty of books, we have no knives to sharpen, and the radio works perfectly," she added, seeing him still undaunted.

"How about a line of sofa covers or gas ranges," suggested Leonard, with a friendly grin. "Wait a minute. I was only kidding. What I wanted was transportation to Goose Island. I understand your father has a boat available."

"Father's not at home to-day." She pursed her lips speculatively. "I suppose I could take you out there, though I believe it is uninhabited. I remember before I went away to school it used to be the Doncherry place. Do you really want to go there badly, or is this some more joking?"

"I want to go badly—ten dollars' worth, if necessary," Leonard assured her; "and I can help you run the launch, if necessary."

She motioned him to come inside the gate.

"I don't know what father charges for the trip usually. Ten dollars seems more than it's worth. It's about six miles. I'll get ready and leave a note for him."

Leonard swung the gate open and walked toward the porch. She had evidently been engaged in housework, had her sleeves rolled back from sun-tanned arms, and wore an apron and an old pair of men's gloves.

Leonard, who had thought her a rather plain person from a distance, looked up into the brown eyes that were studying him doubtfully, and decided she was pretty. Then she sensed the ugliness of the shapeless apron and flushed as she tugged at the strings, and Leonard decided she was quite beautiful. These quick reversals of opinion are not unknown in young men of twenty-five, under certain circumstances.

"I suppose father will be furious. He has such queer notions about girls' places being in the home. But this is business and we really need the money. Besides, you don't look like an outlaw or any-

thing. Excuse me for a minute while I find my hat and coat. Please sit down."

Leonard sat down on the well-worn rocker and waited. It speaks volumes for his inexperience with the hand that wields the lipstick, and in its spare time rules the world, that he really expected her to appear within that minute.

When she did appear in the doorway, eleven minutes and some unimportant seconds later—a longer time, probably, than would have been necessary if her passenger had been middle-aged and bald—she wore a little, red-felt hat that was marvelously becoming, and an almost transparent rose-colored slicker that came to her slim ankles.

She smiled up at him, quite appreciative of his awkward admiration.

"Was I long?" she asked.

"Not a bit," he lied readily, and picked up his suit case. She led the way toward the shore, where a dingy-looking launch bobbed against the weather-beaten piles of a little pier.

"I suppose you should know what to call me," she threw back over her shoulder. "My name is Aileen Landon, and I'm on what you might call a vacation from work. That explains me."

Leonard would have enjoyed further explanations, but the hint was obvious. He tried to explain himself and still conceal Doncherry's family skeleton, by mentioning his name, general position in the world and the fact that he studied law at night.

He added that his mission to Goose Island concerned Cyrus Doncherry, and let her assume anything she wished from that. Aside from Leadcastor's request for secrecy, Leonard felt peculiarly diffident about admitting to this particular girl that he was about to become a keeper to a crazy man.

"Cyrus Doncherry!" she repeated admiringly. "How wonderful to be connected with some one like that! Men can do much bigger things in the business world than women. Here you are, not much older than I am, I'll bet, and you're deep in the affairs of multimillionaires, while poor me will be lucky to get a twenty-dollar-a-week job."

"Oh, not as bad as that." He laughed uneasily, and stooped to the rope that tied the bow of the launch to the pier. "I'm not really so important." But he had a sneaking hope she wouldn't believe him in that.

She seated herself calmly in the stern and supervised operations.

"There's plenty of gas. Father filled it this morning. That's right, push the nose away from the pier. It will need priming, maybe. I see you know something about these things, Mr. Norris."

"I used to have a motor boat when I was in high school," Leonard's voice came muffled from up for'ard as he worked over the gas line. "I was in the Broadway Boat Club, too, before I had to go to——"

"Really? Why, father raced from there years ago——"

"Is that Jim Landon? Good Lord! I remember meeting him when I was a kid. He was the big noise in yachting circles. Won the Lord de Ferris Cup and all. He kind of dropped out of sight, I guess. They said he'd retired."

She reddened quickly and looked out across the bay. Leonard bent over the flywheel of the engine and heartily kicked himself mentally. Too late he remembered the whispers and nods that had heralded the passing of Jim Landon. Old Father Booze, the jovial and treacherous playmate of sportsmen, had got Jim Landon in the end. And here was his daughter having to go to work.

The engine kicked into life and Leonard jumped to the stern for the old-fashioned tiller. Cautiously he swung the nose of the boat past the menacing piles, half submerged, and headed out into the choppy waters of the bay.

"What kind of work do you figure on doing, Miss Landon?" Leonard ques-

tioned, as the boat splashed through the glinting waters.

"Prepare for a shock," she said, her chin cupped in her hands and her patent-leather pumps drawn away from the bilge water. "My specialty is historical geology, with particular reference to the Neopaleozoic section—the Upper Silurian era, to be more exact."

Leonard threw up his hands helplessly.

"I'm licked without being more exact. What does it all mean and why is it?"

"It's mostly the story of the changes in the earth's crust," she told him, laughing. "Dry as dust, and I'd rather be a well-paid hat model——"

"You would be well paid, too, I'll bet," he agreed heartily.

"And as for my reason for picking out such a hard-sounding, rocky job, I took a course in it when I was wasting poor father's money at Vassar—before he had his—reverses—and I hope to get a teaching job where I can make it pay my board. It's a career of some kind, after all."

He looked doubtful.

"Maybe your father is right, though. A woman's place is—well, you know—home and all that—kind of a career for——"

"Marriage?" She threw her dimpled chin up and spoke with all the conviction and confidence of twenty-one years of youth: "Nonsense! That's old-fashioned. I don't need any man's protecting arm."

"Oh, I didn't mean that!" Leonard protested, though that was just what he had meant, strangely enough. "Is that the island?"

She looked in the direction indicated, and nodded.

"Looks lonesome enough," Leonard remarked.

And it didn't look any better during the succeeding half hour while they chugged through the narrow channel that skirted the shore. Goose Island might have made a wonderful winter duck-shooting preserve, but Leonard doubted that anything else would want to live there but ducks—unless it might be the goose it was named after.

There were a few discouraged-looking pine trees bent away from the wind, lots of stiff-grassed salt meadow and some patches of sand. A long, low house, big enough to house a fair-sized club, stood close by the water and connected with it by a narrow board walk above the swamp, running to a jetty.

As they pulled up alongside it, a man stepped down from the porch that fronted on all sides of the structure, and walked toward them.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE KEEPER OF GOOSE ISLAND.

HE was as tall as Leonard, strongly built and about fifty years of age. His eyes were shaded behind smoked glasses, his bulky figure attired in a golf suit quite the worse for wear, and his rather prominent chin was accentuated by a stubby, short beard shot with gray. The beard would have identified him immediately to Leonard, from Leadcastor's description, as Manley, the keeper.

Manley frowned slightly at sight of the girl.

"You're Mr. Norris, I take it?" he said, looking at Leonard. "I have Leadcastor's letter—he said nothing about your wife."

Leonard laughed, careful not to look at the embarrassed Aileen.

"No such lu—I mean, you've got it wrong, Mr. Manley. This young lady has been kind enough to ferry me over here."

Manley looked searchingly—or seemed to behind his dark glasses—and smiled, showing an even and perfect set of teeth between his bearded lips.

"Very sorry," he murmured apologetically to Aileen.

He reached out to help Leonard ashore and shook hands, vigorously.

"She knows nothing of your reason for coming?" he muttered.

Leonard shook his head, reaching for his wallet.

"I'm ever so much obliged, Miss Landon. Now, about the fare——"

He was interrupted by a shrill screaming from the house. Manley spun around, with a sharp exclamation of annoyance.

A thin, scarecrow of a man stood on the porch at the house and seemed to be gesturing violently to them with both arms, shouting out some inconceivable jargon. As they watched, this apparition lifted a shotgun in his hands and fired it off in their direction.

"It's Benjamin," Manley snapped. "He found that old gun again. They are only blank cartridges, but he's liable to hurt himself."

He started on a trot toward the house and the figure disappeared. Leonard started to follow, and had reached the entrance when he found the girl close behind him.

"What on earth is going on, Mr. Norris?" she asked breathlessly.

"You mustn't come in here," he warned seriously. "It is—it's kind of dangerous. You see—er——"

"I see nothing exactly," she retorted, "except that it's all your own secret affair. But I also see that I'm safer under cover than having that queer person blazing away at me with a shotgun."

"I'll take you back to the boat." Leonard volunteered.

"No, thank you," she smiled. "I'm not running a gantlet back again. I'll just park myself here until your friend takes the gun away from him."

They waited, peering through the open door. Leonard was pleasantly surprised to find the interior of the place quite lavishly furnished in the style customary in the shooting lodges of the multirich.

On either side of the great open fireplace fishing rods and stuffed specimens of weakfish graced the wall. The shining floor was covered with excellent Persian rugs, comfortable chairs were scattered here and there and clustered about the fire, and a reproducing grand piano stood by the draped windows on the seaward side.

"Not bad," Leonard commented, stepping inside to examine a wall of shining bookcases. "Some good ones here—Wells, Chesterton, George Moore, Conrad, Sinclair Lewis, Freud—our friend Manley for a keeper seems to be quite a superior person in many——"

The superior person appeared at that moment, rushing through a door at the end of the room, just as the decidedly inferior person they had seen on the balcony came prancing through another door.

At close quarters he looked more of a scarecrow than ever. He wore, over a stained pair of overalls, a cutaway frock coat of ancient design and several sizes too large. His thin face was topped with a fur cap with ear flaps.

"Grab him!" shouted Manley.

Leonard made a grab and missed by inches, and the tails of the frock coat danced merrily around the table. Its wearer circled around quickly, keeping the table between himself and his pursuers like a small boy playing tag.

"Now, gentlemen," he squeaked, with a decided English accent, in a falsetto voice, "gentlemen be seated! All will be explained, gentlemen! My object in discharging the gun was to find out once and for all whether it was loaded. My deductions, I am glad to say, proved to be correct in every in——"

Manley made a rush—a rapid rush for so big a man—and fell over a morris chair. Thereupon the frock-coated one shoved the table on top of Manley, waved his hand gallantly to Aileen and sped lightly out the front door leading to the water.

"What in the world——" Aileen gasped.

"I see I shall have a busy time here," Leonard remarked, helping Manley to his feet. As the big man rolled over, his coat swung open to show a revolver butt peeping from his hip pocket. Leonard whistled softly. Taking care of Percival Doncherry seemed to be a job requiring personal protection of a drastic sort.

"I don't know," Manley snarled, brushing himself off, "which is the worse—that half-wit or the other one. You can readily appreciate, Mr. Norris, how much I have needed an assistant."

"But where is Doncherry?" Leonard asked.

"Tied up," snapped Manley shortly. "I had to do it. My life wasn't safe any longer, and as much as I am attached to the family, I can't sacrifice myself altogether. He has been growing worse steadily. Cut the telephone line last week, ruined our motor boat so that we have been cut off absolutely from the mainland since yesterday—otherwise, I would have arranged to meet you after getting Mr. Leadcastor's message. But the limit was reached last night, when he awakened me in the middle of a sound sleep.

"I have always kept a strait-jacket—barbaric thing, I admit—in case of emergencies. He had the thing in his hands and sat there calmly telling me that there had been some mistake all along, that he was, after all, the keeper, and I was the maniac, and he thought I should be restrained. Laughable? Yes. But he looked dangerous, just the same, and I did not waste time in overpowering him. I'll let you see him later."

"But what is this all about?" Aileen broke in. "What kind of a place is this, Mr. Norris?"

Both men looked a trifle sheepish, and Manley rubbed his beard.

"Well," he said slowly, "it's impossible to expect that we can keep this hidden from you now. You'll have to be taken into our confidence. I hope you will promise me to say nothing about it on shore. As a matter of fact, this place is in the nature of a—er—private sanitarium for a wealthy patient. This gentleman and I are the—well, the guardians, you might say."

She looked at Leonard, frightened and reproachful.

"You didn't tell me I would be coming among dangerous lunatics——"

"Only one of 'em is," Leonard apologized feebly. "The other fellow——"

"By Jove!" Manley exploded. "I had forgotten him. Wait a minute!"

He hurried out the door. They heard his heavy feet on the board walk.

"I must go," she said, her chin held high. "I should only be in the way here, Mr. Norris. I presume it must have amused you to bring me here among these horrible people with that tale about big business. You're welcome to the transportation I furnished. Now, if you'll let me by, you may attend to your strait-jacketing and all the rest."

"Oh, say—Aileen! I mean Miss Landon!"

Benjamin's furry cap peeped over the edge of the window frame. He slid the window up softly.

"I say, old thing," he called. "If you will let me explain that little matter of the gun before that chap returns. It was really a distress signal, you know. You see, one would think it was a bit of a lark I was having, but it was quite distinctly otherwise. I've been jolly well marooned here, and that blighter that was chasing me——"

A bellow sounded from the water's edge and the furry cap dropped out of sight. Leonard ran to the window to see Benjamin crawl hastily out of sight under the board walk. The fur cap showed up on the other side as the Englishman, his forefinger on his lips, craned his neck to look up at Leonard.

"S-sh! Not a word, old object! See you later! Lots to tell you!"

Manley puffed heavily into the living room. He stopped and threw out his big hands in a gesture of despairing resignation.

"He's gone and fixed it now, Norris! Used the hammer from the tool chest and made a quick job of it, too. These half-witted gentry show——"

"What do you mean, half-witted?" Leonard scoffed. "What makes you credit him with half? If you ask me, it would take eight Benjamins to make up enough sense to equip a good-sized katydid!"

Manley smiled sourly.

"Well, that is as may be. But he had enough brains to know how to wreck most thoroughly that engine in the launch you came in! I'm afraid we must arrange to have this young lady as a house guest until we fix our own boat or her friends come out from the mainland!"

"You mean," Aileen asked, shuddering, "I must stay in this—this place overnight?"

"Exactly! Or perhaps a couple of nights. I'm sorry, miss, but there is no help for it. I wouldn't worry too much, though. Norris and I can protect you."

Her brown eyes widened, her lips quivered, and it was plain, even to Leonard Norris, that the expert on the Neopaleozoic section of historical geology was about to burst into unscientific and utterly feminine tears. He patted her shoulder awkwardly.

"Look here," he said soothingly. "No one is goin' to bother you while I'm around. I ought to be kicked for getting you into this scrape, but I'll knock any nut cold that troubles you. It's only for to-night, and your father will get your note and come right——"

She blinked back the tears and smiled ruefully up at him.

"But don't you understand? I—I didn't leave the note! I started to and got to thinking about what dress I'd wear in the boat—and all that—and forgot to write it!"

## CHAPTER V.

### MANLEY ENTERTAINS.

"THEN no one knows where you are?" Leonard questioned. "Won't any one at least have an idea that you're over here, and come after you?"

She shook her head.

"Not a soul. I know father will be worried stiff about me. Is there no way to get word to him or reach him?"

Leonard passed the question on to Manley, who was sitting in a comfortable chair of leather upholstery, his face expressionless behind the dark glasses.

"There was a rowboat," he explained, "but that rotted away since we stopped using it for the launch and it's a regular sieve. And as for the phone, Mr. Cyrus has promised to have it fixed by his own private mechanics some time within a week or so. If our Anglo-maniac friend hadn't messed up the works, we would be able to use our own boat. We have little communication at the best with the shore. You see, Mr. Cyrus has an arrangement for sending out supplies at the same time the alienist visits us here to look over our patient—that is once a month—and I make only one trip a week to pick up mail and fresh fruit."

"But Miss Landon can't wait a week here," protested Leonard.

"I hope it won't be necessary to," Manley assured them. "I'll do all I can to help out. There is a possibility they might miss her within a day or two and send a searching party out into the bay. The unfortunate thing is that this place is not known in Clam Shores, at all. Following Mr. Cyrus Doncherry's request for secrecy, I receive my mail at Roon Harbor, instead. You and I can get to work on the launch to-morrow, Norris, and see what we can make out of the wreck."

"Well," Aileen said, slipping into a deep chair, with a sigh, "I'm marooned, I guess, and we'll all have to make the best of it, for the night, at least. It's too late to work on the engine now, I guess."

"Quite true," agreed Manley, looking toward the darkening windows. "Which reminds me that I should see my patient again. Benjamin!"

After a pause, the fur cap appeared through a farther doorway.

"You've been very badly behaved today," scolded Manley, as if he were speaking to a child. "You know what that means, I hope! No, don't give me any excuses! Get back into the kitchen and serve dinner here at six o'clock for three. And get Mr. Doncherry's dinner ready to take up to him! Go ahead, now!"

"He's over it now," he said, as the fur cap vanished. "Probably he will be good for another week. To lock him up would be useless and also inconvenient, as he is the only cook and butler we have. In fact, he was once—before his mind went—a butler in the home of a friend of Mr. Cyrus. That's how we got him. He seems genuinely attached to our own Doncherry."

He stood up, nodding to Leonard.

"If you will step upstairs with me, I'll show you your room and also instruct you in your work, such as it is. You'll not find it arduous."

"'Easy hours,'" Leonard quoted from the advertisement, "'and good pay.'"

"You'll have some uneasy hours, too," corrected Manley grimly, "but not just yet. Not until I release him from the strait-jacket. This way."

He picked up a lamp from the table and turned to the door. Aileen stepped calmly beside Leonard.

"If you don't mind, I think I'll stick close to normalcy," she said.

Manley turned, the light of the kerosene lamp reflected in the dark glasses, and hesitated only for an instant before he shrugged his massive shoulders.

"As you wish," he conceded. "Though it's not pleasant sight-seeing for a lady."

The door they passed through opened into a hallway softly carpeted with rugs and papered in a pleasing pattern, rather faded. Two doors swung open on the right side of the hall and one on the left. At the end was a heavy, oaken door, barred at top and bottom with iron bolts and having an opening a few inches wide cut in the upper panel, at the height of a man's eyes.

"That," Manley pointed, "is where I am compelled to keep him during his violent periods. Let me see. I think you had better take this room, Norris, next to mine."

He shed the light into a large bedroom, comfortably, if not luxuriously, furnished with a big bed, Spanish-leather chairs, bookcase and hunting prints on the walls—a better room than Leonard had been used to in his rooming house in New York. Leonard slid his suit case inside and followed Manley, and Aileen, as she was assigned the room opposite.

"I think you will feel perfectly safe here," Manley said to her. "There's a bolt on the inside. But really there's no need for worry."

"I'll try not to," she assured him, but with a fearful glance toward the bolted door. "He can't break out?"

"Impossible to," Manley snorted. "Here, look for yourself."

With Leonard and Aileen peeping over his shoulder, he slid back the panel covering the opening in the door, and shot the rays of a flash light into the gloomy interior of the room.

It held only an iron bed, a chair and a table, all screwed to the plain, boarded floor, and the walls were covered up to the height of six feet with padded canvas. Heavy mesh wire covered the window at the end.

A man lay on the cot—a heavily built man of forty-odd, with tousled hair and glaring eyes, and he was bound and gagged; bound with a white-canvas jacket that inclosed his arms and laced down the front, and gagged with a surgical bandage fastened securely over his mouth.

Leonard had never seen a padded cell nor a strait-jacket before and it gave him rather a shock. He wondered what Cyrus Doncherry would have thought of this old-fashioned method of handling his unfortunate cousin.

"Oh," Aileen choked, "the poor man! It must be torture for him!"

"And yet," Manley pointed out coolly, "you, yourself, would hesitate to go to sleep if you thought he was at liberty. I know it's distressing and looks heartless, but what can I do? The man is violently insane—homicidal—and would murder us all in our sleep without a thought!"

"But the gag! Is that necessary?" She turned away from the door.

Manley nodded.

"My dear Miss Landon. I put that on since you arrived. His language at these times is not—well, you can understand——"

They followed him back to the living room. A subdued Benjamin had laid places for three at a small table, pulled near the pleasant fire. A glance at the snow-white linen and silverware, gleaming in the light of the center pink-shaded lamp, assured Leonard that, whatever the mental rating of Benjamin might be, his ability as a first-rate houseman was unquestioned.

Manley bowed them to their places, pulled out a chair for Aileen and unlocked a drawer in a bookcase. He returned to the table, carrying a carving knife, as Benjamin carried in soup and an uncut loaf of bread.

"For obvious reasons," Manley said, "I keep the sharper implements locked up out of Benjamin's way. It aids digestion when Benjamin is hovering behind me with a salad or a roast."

"Pleasant thought," Leonard muttered.

Nevertheless, he ate heartily, as much on account of the appeal of an excellent dinner to a youthful appetite, as on account of his wish to encourage Aileen. Manley, behind his dark glasses, seemed to observe Aileen closely and took every occasion to reassure her as to her safety —took a little too much care, Leonard thought, feeling faint twinges of jealousy at the older man's ease of manner and ability to entertain.

Manley seemed to be a man rather better educated than the average; he could talk intelligently on any subject that came up, holding his own deftly even when discussing historical geology with Aileen, and when Manley discoursed on "the molluscoid brachiopods of the early Devonian period," while Aileen nodded approval, Leonard felt hopelessly outclassed and illiterate.

He changed the subject to one nearer to home—the laws governing the status of the insane—but, even there, he found Manley knew more than he did about it.

"Have you ever studied the subject of insanity, Mr. Norris?" Manley asked.

"No," Leonard grumbled, and attacked his frozen pudding savagely.

"You should. I presume, then, that you consider manias, hallucinations, eccentricities and plain feeble-mindedness as most laymen do—as all under the one head," Manley pursued smilingly.

"Right," Leonard answered readily, glad of the opportunity to express himself. "They're all plain nuts to me."

"So wrong," Manley reproved, shaking his head, and turning again to Aileen for encouragement. "I find it the most intriguing of studies. The dark and poorly defined no man's land that divides the sane of the earth from the disordered ranks of unfortunates is a field of exploration I never tire of. My main object in being here is, through the

study of that pitiful case of poor Doncherry and the no less pathetic condition of our friend Benjamin here, to aid me in writing a book that I have long contemplated—a work that, I hope, will revolutionize the present methods of treatment of mental, or rather psychic, disorders."

"You can have it all," Leonard conceded, reaching for his cigarette case. "It just means a hundred a week to me—and I'm beginning to think it's worth it."

They sat around the fire while Benjamin quietly cleared the table, and for another couple of hours Manley's smooth voice rumbled on above the murmur of the waves on the beach.

Leonard yawned finally and strolled to the window, trying to see through the black wall of darkness.

"Wind kicking up a little," he remarked, and yawned again. "Must be pretty cloudy over the bay. I hope it will be clear to-morrow so we can work on the boat. I'm going to say good night."

Aileen rose promptly and held out her hand to Manley.

"I must, too. I'm awfully tired. I've enjoyed listening so much."

He bowed over her hand with what Leonard thought an elaborate politeness, and murmured a bland apology for having bored her.

"Oh, not at all, Mr. Manley! I don't know when I've had such an interesting talk."

She paused to say good night to Leonard, outside the door of her room.

"I'll bet you didn't find me too interesting," he said dolefully. "When it comes to metaphysics and molluscoids you've both got me——"

"Don't be stupid," she laughed, her brown eyes mischievously alight. "I like you lots better the way you are."

He heard the bolt shoot into place behind her door, and turned into his own room.

He listened for a moment at the doorway, standing in his pajamas, before climbing into bed. No sounds came from the padded room at the end of the hall, nor from Manley's room alongside. Only the ticking of a grandfather's clock in the living room and the soft lapping of the waves on the beach broke the absolute stillness.

"A quiet life," he muttered drowsily, as he pulled the comforter about his chin and blew out the lamp. "Monotonous—ought to be good for the nerves—talkative guy that Manley, but seems to know his business—Aileen—Aileen Landon—historic geology—well——"

And he was sound asleep in two minutes.

He awoke, in the pitch darkness of the room, to feel a hand groping along the edge of the bed, and creeping toward his throat.

## CHAPTER VI.

### WHISPERS IN THE NIGHT.

THERE are times when it is useful to be of a quick, nervous temperament, ready to go into action at the sound of the gong without wondering too long whether the referee really means "action front"—and one of those times is when you lie in bed in a strange and hag-ridden house in the middle of the night and you find a skinny hand moving quietly upward toward your unprotected throat.

Leonard grabbed that hand and landed both feet on the floor in one movement. His next movement was just as sudden. He wrapped his strong right arm about the waist of the groping person so quickly that the latter had no chance to do more than utter a thin squeak before he was thrown over on top of the bed.

He wriggled in Leonard's grasp like an eel.

"I say," he gasped, "a bit of all right, this—leggo a chap's neck, old chap, and let a chap get a bit of a breather——"

"Benjamin?" Leonard growled. "What's the idea—sneaking in on me

this way? Here, take a match from the table and light the lamp. No funny business, mind!"

He kept a firm grip on the back of the frock coat until the wick caught hold and the room sprang into light. Benjamin rubbed his neck where strong fingers had pressed.

"Funny business?" he repeated. "Nothing amusing, you know, about squeezing a chap's jolly old neck that way. I was feeling my way toward your nose—the old beak, you know—with the idea of pressing so firmly that the air would be shut off and you would be awakened quietly. It's an idea of my own."

"I congratulate you, Benjamin. It wasn't much, but still—an idea. I'm not the man to deprive you of your only idea. Now that I'm awake, what's next? If your idea also includes hitting me on the conk with an Indian club to lull me to sleep again, I warn you in time I'm not playing. Try it on Manley——"

"S-sh!" Benjamin warned, jerking his thumb toward Manley's room. "We can't talk here. Come to my room, old chap."

"Why?" Leonard hesitated, frowning. "Go to bed, Benjamin, and forget it. I'm too tired for nonsense——"

"Nonsense?" the little man whispered. "Oh, you mean my larking about this afternoon! That was a bit of camouflage, old fellow. I fancy you thought I was a bit off my perch, eh?"

"A long way off, Ben," Leonard yawned. "Let's call it——"

"You think I'm crazy, eh?" This was said very calmly. "Well, I'm not—which I'll jolly well prove to you presently. There's a madman here, but it is not me. I'm here to warn you. If you'll step away from this place to my room where we can talk, it might save your life. Right now I would not give a ha'penny for it nor the life of that young lady in there——"

"The young lady! What do you mean?"

The other shook his head, standing in the open doorway. Leonard reached for his slippers and bath robe, feeling decidedly foolish. The man might be half-witted, full-witted or witless altogether, but if he knew of anything that threatened the safety of Aileen, he was worth listening to.

Leonard trailed behind him through the hall and living room to a cubby-hole next to the pantry. The place smelled strongly of disinfectant. In the dim light burning there Benjamin, his ridiculous frock coat wrapped around him like a toga perched himself on a chair and motioned Leonard to another.

"Well, what's it all about, Benjamin?"

"First of all," the little man answered, "let's get the bally old facts straight. I gather that young Leadcastor, the lawyer chap, sent you down here to help a chap named Manley take care of an insane patient—or rather two. I should say, I fancy Leadcastor told you I was a bit balmy myself."

"Well," Leonard murmured, "there was—er—something like that in his mind."

"There was a jolly lot more than that in his mind." Benjamin's eyes glowed in the lamplight. "Suppose I were to tell you that Leadcastor lied to you—that I'm no more crazy than you are—and that Doncherry is as sane as any man on earth!"

Leonard shook his head.

"I'd say, Benjamin, that you were wrong. Why should Leadcastor lie to me and send me off on a wild-goose chase this way—and why are you folks marooned here on a lonely neck of the woods if everything's right with you?"

Benjamin's skinny hand waved for silence.

"Take your time, old man. One question at a time. Leadcastor lied to you because if he told the truth you'd rather commit suicide than come within a mile

of this place. He lied to you to get you to join us in taking care of Doncherry's cousin, who hasn't long to live now, they say."

"Sure. Heart trouble——"

Benjamin tucked his feet farther underneath him, tailor fashion, and grinned toothlessly.

"Not heart trouble, old chap. Nor insanity. As for your second question, we're stuck out here on this lonely place because there's something decidedly wrong with us. I, for instance, am here because I signed another chap's name to a check, and Cyrus Doncherry got me clear on the condition that I would help take care of his jolly old Cousin Percival. Manley is here under similar circumstances—murder, I think. You see, old bean, money can do a lot toward keeping a chap from jail, but Cyrus Doncherry doesn't do things for nothing."

He blinked solemnly at the lamp.

"Personally," he continued, "if I'd known what I was coming into, I'd have picked the jail. But it's too late now. We're here and you're here and that poor young lady with us—and here we stay! It's a life sentence for all of us, old chap!"

"You mean we can't get away if we want to?" Leonard exclaimed. "What's the idea?"

Benjamin shook his head.

"Not while Manley carries that gun on his hip. I'm afraid Leadcastor let you down badly. Oh, you'll get your twenty pounds a week safe enough! But you'll never get the chance to spend it. Leadcastor was doing the job he was paid for—finding a chap to help Manley take care of Doncherry. The insanity idea was just a neat trick to get you here. I was to play the balmy act to help out. I fancy I did it rather well, too."

"Say," Leonard blurted impatiently, "come clean! What's all this rigmarole about? You talk like a——"

"Not like a maniac," Benjamin suggested.

"No," Leonard admitted, "you don't. Now, what's all this mystery about? Conceding your sanity, there's a lot to be explained."

"I'll explain, then. I wasn't going to before, but the girl makes a difference. I can't stand by and see that beastly chap Manley—I've been watching him and——"

Leonard's face tightened quickly. "You think he will——"

"Why do you suppose," Benjamin retorted, "he ruined her launch?"

The younger man's eyes opened at that—and his fists closed.

"Then you didn't do it—but he said you——"

"I know," Benjamin agreed, nodding. "I had to keep mum, too. He'd 'a' done me in quickly enough if I gave the show away. If you'll think, you can see I couldn't have done it myself. I couldn't have reached the boat except by the board walk, and that was in plain sight. When Manley pretended to look for me out there, he smashed the boat."

"That's right." Leonard nodded savagely. "I see it now. You were on the other side of the house all the time." He stood up. "I'll have a talk with friend Manley right now and have this thing out."

"Easy," cautioned Benjamin. "You can't do anything now. He has his revolver. We'll try to get that to-morrow—as soon as we can before it's too late and you're doomed like the rest of us here——"

The light of the lamp flickered with a passing draft, and Benjamin cowered suddenly, his thin, cadaverous face the picture of terror.

"Lord!" he whispered. "I thought it was him for a moment. He mustn't catch us together this way. Look what he did yesterday!"

He stripped the frock coat and ragged shirt from his left shoulder. Across his

bony chest a blue-black bruise extended. Leonard shuddered.

"He caught me trying to fix the telephone line," Benjamin muttered. "He's cut it himself. I think he intended to leave this place when you came, but, seeing the girl, changed his plans."

"I'll change his map for him," Leonard threatened, "if he troubles her. But why shouldn't he leave here? Why shouldn't any of you quit the place if you wanted to?"

Benjamin grinned—a ghastly grin that danced in the uneven light of the lamp.

"Where would we go?" he whispered. "A worse place, my friend, for such as we are—an island worse than this—cut off from home and friends forever—a living death!"

In spite of himself, Leonard's face paled slightly. Benjamin raised his black-clad arms and the coat flapped like the wings of some evil bird of darkness.

"You stupid man!" His whisper was a strangled scream. "Don't you understand now? Insanity isn't the Doncherry family skeleton! It's leprosy! Percival Doncherry is a leper! Manley is a leper now, and so am I! And presently you will be with us—and that girl! Now, do you see?"

"Good Lord!"

## CHAPTER VII.

### EXIT BENJAMIN.

LEONARD was on his feet and as far away as the small room would allow from the loathsome, smirking face in the lamplight.

Leprosy! He had read of occasional cases—rare cases—of this terrible scourge appearing at intervals of years in America. He knew as little about it as the average man, from his biblical reading and a magazine article he once ran across telling about the leper colony on the island of Molokai. He knew only that it was infectious, that it was liable to appear anywhere, though seldom in northern latitudes, and that the victim, repulsive to his friends and abhorrent to himself, decayed slowly, a living corpse. And Aileen exposed to that!

He stepped forward, regardless of danger, and gripped Benjamin by the skinny arm, shaking him.

"Are you lying? Is this some crazy hallucination?"

Benjamin shrugged his shoulders calmly.

"My dear fellow, you can shake me to pieces if you wish, kill me if you like. I'm not afraid to die—since I'm on my way, anyway. I've got it, too, you know. But don't awaken Manley. If he thinks I've been talking to you——" He made a gesture of pulling a trigger. "Of course it's the truth," he whispered. "Why do you suppose Manley tied up Doncherry that way? Hey? Bandage around his jaws and a strait-jacket and all that? Because the poor wretch has no lower jaw left. Here, take a look at this!"

He held out his hand. In the center of the palm was a malignant-looking spot about the size of a quarter. Leonard shuddered and stepped back.

"Oh, it's not as contagious as that," Benjamin said easily. "Highly infectious, of course. You two newcomers will have to walk carefully. In the end it will get you. Then you might as well do as I'm doing. Stay on here comfortably, rather than be shipped off to the Pacific somewhere to a leper colony. This only showed up since the doctor's last visit, so he might treat it with some stuff he used on Doncherry—chalmoogra oil, I think it was. Doncherry is too far gone now for that."

Leonard shook his head slowly.

"The whole thing is unbelievable," he muttered.

"Is it? All right. Try it out to-morrow morning. Suggest to Manley that you carry up breakfast to Doncherry.

You'll find he won't let ony one near him but himself."

"But why does a man like Cyrus Doncherry stoop to a crime like this—exposing an innocent person to the disease? And it's so foolish to expect to hide it from me indefinitely."

"Cyrus Doncherry," Benjamin pointed out, "knows nothing of the methods his attorney is using. Manley and Leadcastor are in this thing together. All old Cyrus does is pay the bills to keep his cousin alive and prevent him from being sent away. And it won't be indefinitely for you. I don't know what their scheme is, but another man was necessary here for a while."

He leaned forward, his eyes narrowed.

"Maybe they've decided to do away with Doncherry altogether—Manley is capable of that—and use you as the goat, as you Americans say. Perhaps Manley hopes to be relieved here of his job and let you become accidentally infected with the disease, and then you'd have to stay. There would be no place else for you to go. Whatever their plans are——"

A board creaked in the floor outside the room.

Leonard's head swung around in that direction, and they both listened, with open mouths and speculative eyes staring into the dark oblong of the doorway.

Benjamin's voice breathed almost inaudibly in Leonard's ear:

"Pretend you know nothing if it's Manley. Lord help us if he should suspect we know!"

Leonard waited, watching the doorway, for what seemed a long time. He could hear in the utter silence the slow ticking of the clock in the hall and the slow throbbing of his own heart.

A face appeared around the edge of the door—the bearded, black-spectacled face of Manley. The lips were fixed in a set smile, showing strong, yellow teeth clamped shut. Leonard was reminded of those papier-mâché false faces children wear. With the smoked glasses hiding the eyes, it was impossible to say whether Manley was looking at Benjamin or Leonard, or, in fact, whether he was awake at all and not walking in his sleep.

He was clad in a brilliant red dressing gown of silk, and kept his hands in the pockets as he walked softly into the room—still with that expressionless, wooden grin.

"Benjamin," he said, "I'm afraid you've been talking nonsense again and keeping this gentleman from his sleep. Hasn't he?"

"I'm not sleepy," Leonard said cautiously. "We were just discussing the job here. Did we awaken you?"

Manley was still turned toward Benjamin, and did not bother to look at Leonard as he answered.

"I seldom sleep—and am very easily awakened when I do. It's almost daylight, Benjamin, and I think you had better start the fire in the kitchen, as long as you are such a night owl."

Benjamin slunk toward the door.

"What has he been telling you, Mr. Norris? The usual foolishness, I suppose?"

"I haven't told him everything," Benjamin's falsetto voice piped up defiantly from the hall. "There's a lot more he doesn't know—who you are, for instance."

"Excuse me." Manley bobbed his head quickly to Leonard and darted out the door. There was a sound of scuffling in the hallway and running footsteps toward the kitchen.

Leonard, reaching the door, found the hall empty, and waited, utterly at a loss what to do. Benjamin had certainly felt that his life would be forfeited for any indiscretion on his part. If there was truth in the weird story related by the little man, instant action was necessary if his life and Leonard's and

Aileen's, too, were to be guarded. And still, to interfere between the keeper and his subordinate on the strength of a half-witted person's imaginings would make Leonard ridiculous.

Leonard decided to take that chance and have an understanding with Manley, right away, no matter that developed. Striding to the kitchen door, he flung it open and walked in.

In the faint light that was beginning to come through the windows, the place showed absolutely empty. Leonard looked out the open door leading to the outside of the house, and could see no one.

Another door led down to the dark cellar and a door opened onto a narrow stairs leading to the upper rooms. Leonard called Manley's name at both and received no answer. The house was as silent as if he alone inhabited it.

"Darned funny," he muttered, and went off to his room to dress.

It was broad daylight when he came out into the hallway again, after a shower bath and a shave. Aileen was just emerging from her room, looking extraordinary nice and spring-morninglike.

"Sleep well, Miss Landon?" he asked.

"Like a top. Do you prefer calling me Miss Landon to Aileen?"

"No." He murmured something about being presumptuous.

"I think," she teased, "you will never be accused of being too forward, even by a formidable geological person like myself. By the way, does one breakfast here, ordinarily? I have been waiting patiently——"

"Aileen," he whispered tensely, "I don't want to alarm you needlessly, but we must get away from this place as fast as we can. Benjamin, the man who fired the gun yesterday, has been telling me a few things. I hope he's wrong, but in case he told the truth, I think you ought to know what he said."

She looked frightened.

"What was it?"

"This fellow Manley has been fooling us. Leadcastor, the lawyer, is in on it, too, Benjamin says. They've tricked me into this on the pretense that Doncherry is insane. It's worse than that."

"Ah! Up bright and early, I see! Our Goose Island air brought pleasant dreams, I trust."

Leonard jumped and turned to find Manley at his elbow. The keeper was smiling blandly as usual, but Leonard sensed that, behind the masking spectacles, keen eyes were observing him.

"Some very strange dreams, Mr. Manley," Leonard answered steadily. "Nightmares, I'd call them. One dream I had—ridiculous, I admit—was about being in a pest house—a kind of a place where they treated horrible diseases."

The smile on the bearded face froze a little in place, but thawed immediately. Manley laughed heartily—a ringing laugh, that yet seemed to have a false note in its joviality to Leonard.

"Well, well." Manley waved his large hands toward the living room. "It's odd what weird thoughts are conjured up in our subconscious minds. But, meanwhile, breakfast is ready and on the table. I'm sorry to say our good Benjamin is indisposed to-day and I had to prepare it myself. I'm sure you will overlook its deficiencies."

"Perhaps," suggested Leonard, "I had better help out, in that case. I should earn my salary somehow. Shall I carry up the patient's breakfast to him?"

Manley stepped quickly aside, blocking the hallway and waving them toward the table.

"Oh, no. Not a bit of trouble for me. Your job will be to help get the launch in trim. Mr. Doncherry—er—gets rather excited when he sees strangers. I'll attend to him myself."

He urged them to eat and not wait for him, and disappeared in the direction of the kitchen. Leonard had little

appetite for the cereal and eggs, but tossed off a cup of coffee and rose from his chair.

"Why the frown?" Aileen questioned lightly.

"I've got something on my mind, Aileen, and I'm going to get it off right now. I won't frighten you with ghost stories. I'll be right back."

Manley was starting toward the patient's room with a tray of dishes, when Leonard overtook him.

"Wait a minute," Leonard snapped. "There's a lot of mystery about this place, and I want a show-down, Manley, before we go any further. What's the matter with that man in the locked room there, and what kind of a scheme have you and Leadcastor hatched up?"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### PAGING MR. DONCHERRY!

MYSTERY? I don't know what you're talking about, Mr. Norris. I doubt if you do, either, for that matter!"

Leonard frowned up at the hovering, bearded figure above him.

"I know what I'm after, Manley, but I don't know what you're after. That man Benjamin told me some startling things last night. For one thing, Doncherry isn't crazy at all. He's a leper! And so are you! I've been tricked into coming here——"

"Don't be an ass, Norris." Manley's tones were smooth but held a note of warning. "I'll begin to think we'll need a strait-jacket for you, too. I see Benjamin has been talking again. What nonsense! You're a little unstrung, that's all, on account of the strangeness of this place and your adventures last night."

Leonard shook his head stubbornly.

"No, I'm not. How about that spot on his hand? That seems to bear out his story of this being a private leper colony——"

Manley's throaty chuckle interrupted him.

"Well, well! So it's leprosy now! The other day he insisted we were all members of a criminal band hiding out here to escape the police. He's mad as a hatter, Norris, and if you'd looked closely at his hand, you would have seen immediately that the spot was unmistakably a burn he got from hot grease in cooking last week. Believe me, my friend, this is no place for a person of a credulous disposition. You must learn to discount what these unfortunates tell you."

"But that busting up the launch!" Leonard insisted, weakening a trifle in the face of the other's smiling denial. "He says you did that!"

"Now, listen, Norris, I have no time to spend figuring out that fellows ravings. Leprosy! That's good! If you believe him, you'll have an exciting time here on Goose Island. He suffers from hallucinations and that's one of them. I didn't wish to alarm Miss Landon needlessly, but the fact is our crazy friend escaped me this morning and is wandering around loose now. Be prepared for anything!"

"Is he dangerous?" Leonard asked. "I thought he was a half-witted fool of some kind. I understand they don't have manias, and Leadcastor, himself, told me the man was a harmless sort of idiot."

Manley leaned toward him.

"You mean Benjamin, eh?" he whispered.

"Of course—the handy-man."

"Keep this under your hat, Norris. I didn't want to scare our young friend, but you can realize that it would be more than my job is worth to keep Cyrus Doncherry's cousin tied up the way you saw. The thing is, it isn't Doncherry at all. The man in the cell wasn't Doncherry at all. That was Benjamin!"

Leonard shook his head.

"This is getting too deep for me,

Manley. Who is the fellow we call Benjamin, then?"

"That's Percival Doncherry—a rather dangerous lunatic! He thinks he is Benjamin, the butler——"

"And Benjamin thinks he is some one else, I suppose."

Manley nodded and grinned understandingly.

"Rather complicated. Benjamin sometimes deludes himself into thinking he is Percival Doncherry. It was to prevent his acting on that odd assumption and burning down the place that I tied him up. That's what he is to-day. Tomorrow, as likely as not, he will claim he is some one else—Manley the keeper, for instance, or, very likely, yourself. But Doncherry is the one to watch. You were fortunate last night that I came in when I did. Wait here a moment for me and I'll show you."

The door at the head of the stairs slammed behind him. Leonard frowned at the floor. He didn't relish the idea of letting Doncherry wander around loose with Aileen unprotected. More than ever it would be necessary to get the launch fixed up and send her back to her father. Manley was evidently telling the truth and it sounded plausible.

Manley appeared again with the empty tray and led the way to the little room off the pantry where Leonard had interviewed the erstwhile Benjamin. Manley tossed back the coverlet of the bed.

"I found this all set this morning," he said. "You were sitting over it while he told you his tale about the leper colony. Recognize it?"

Leonard did recognize it. He had sufficient experience with bombs to know that the homemade affair, in spite of its crudity, would have given him an unpleasant moment if it had exploded while he was sitting alongside it last night. It was a coffeepot, bound with copped wire to give greater explosive power, and had a long fuse attached.

Manley hefted it in his hand.

"Good and heavy, too," he commented. "Filled with earth and, no doubt, some powder from the blank cartridges he amuses himself with. You can see how careful a person must be in letting him have even the obviously harmless things. They're cunning, too, a kind of animal cunning."

"Do you mean to say," Leonard blurted, "that nutty bird was about to blow me up with that?"

Manley chuckled and slapped Leonard on the back.

"Of course he was. It's his hobby just now. He meant no harm, but he would have exploded that thing under you very cheerfully, with the best spirit in the world."

"I'm glad of that. It's the spirit of the thing that counts. At the same time, there is such a thing as carrying a joke too far."

"Not getting cold feet, are you?" Manley questioned softly.

Leonard flushed hotly.

"It isn't that, Manley, and you know it. I go through with a job I start on. I'm thinking of Ail—Miss Landon. We should get her clear of this madhouse."

"Right! Let's look the damage over on the launch. You go ahead and I'll get some tools I have in the attic."

Leonard caught sight of Aileen's trim back disappearing around a turn of the board walk toward the little pier. He hurried after her.

He had gone perhaps ten paces from the house when there came a sharp crack behind him, and his soft, gray hat seemed to be plucked from his head by an invisible hand and tossed into a clump of bushes beside the walk.

"What the——" He wheeled around, fists clenched. A thin, gray thread of smoke drifted up from a shuttered window on the second floor of the house. Otherwise, there was no sign of life on its bleak front.

Leonard gave one look at his hat and

the tiny, round bullet hole in the crown, and raced back to the porch, taking the steps in one jump. He almost ran into Manley.

"Where did it come from?" the keeper shouted. "Upstairs or down?"

Leonard pointed to the ceiling and ran for the stairway, Manley panting along behind.

"I suspected he was up there, Norris. Be careful, now. He has a revolver."

"Where did he get it?" Leonard snapped impatiently. "It seems to me, Manley, for a maniac, he gets some odd playthings."

Manley, pushing by to the head of the stairs, flapped back his coat to show an empty holster in his hip pocket.

"It's mine," he explained. "I was careless enough to leave my trousers over a chair last night. Doncherry must have had it all the time, and I was too busy this morning to look for it."

"That's cheerful," grunted Leonard.

"There he goes! Head him off this way!"

Manley rushed toward the rear stairs, while Leonard scurried down into the living room again and along the hall to the kitchen. He met Manley coming out.

"Got clean away." The keeper shrugged his broad shoulders.

"How about the cellar?"

Manley nodded and shot the bolt home, locking the cellar entrance.

"If he's there, we'll keep him there out of mischief for a while. I, for one, am not going to venture down there in the dark. He's safe. Let's get to work on the boat."

Leonard listened at the door.

"He seems quiet enough. I might take a chance and rush him."

"My dear fellow," Manley protested, "I can't let you risk your life that way. No, let him cool off."

"But we're not even sure he's there. Can't we call to him?"

Manley smoothed his brown beard and indulged in the gurgling chuckle that Leonard was beginning to detest heartily.

"He's there all right, I can assure you —and he won't answer you now if you were to shout yourself hoarse. Let's forget about him for a while and get our young friend off."

Getting the young friend off was not going to be an easy matter, as Leonard discovered when he examined the engine of the launch. Blows from a machinist's heavy hammer, now lying beside the engine, had smashed every spark plug, and the magneto was broken into a hundred pieces.

They surveyed the wreck, Aileen tearful, Leonard wrathful and Manley sympathetic.

"How about taking the magneto and spark plugs off the other wreck?" Leonard suggested. "By the way, where is your launch?"

Manley pointed out into the choppy waters of the bay, which was devoid of any signs of life and unbroken except for the purple, hazy line of the mainland to the north and the barren, sandy, outer beach to the south.

"Out there in ten feet of water. Doncherry made a good job of that one, all right."

"I'd make a good job of that cuckoo," Leonard threatened, "if I could lay my hands on him right now."

Aileen, seated in the cockpit, clasped her slim hands about her knees and looked mournfully out over the water.

"Isn't there some way of communicating with the shore? It's so ridiculous to be stuck this way on Great South Bay, just as if we were in the middle of the Pacific somewhere."

Leonard patted her shoulder, and reddened when she smiled appreciatively upward.

"I know you can think up some way," she said.

"Sure can. How about putting that phone in order? Let's look at that."

They trooped back to the house, and Manley showed them the place where the telephone had been. The instrument had been yanked from the wall, leaving dangling wires and broken plaster.

"Doncherry," explained Manley, "dislikes telephones, you see."

"Say!" Leonard grumbled. "Why the deuce don't you fit that guy into one of those sleeveless coats like Benjamin is wearing? Looks to me he needs it."

"Mercy, no! He's our—er—meal ticket. Besides, the other fellow is worse when he gets started right."

"He must be a rip-snorter, I'll say," was Leonard's comment, as he stooped to examine the wires. "Where's the instrument and the box?"

Manley smiled pleasantly.

"Now I'll ask one. The last I saw of the instrument, Doncherry was disappearing around the corner of the house with it under his arm. He had some sort of theory of communicating with the planet Mars, which he refused to divulge to me. I'm of the opinion he dropped the whole thing overboard from the end of the pier in disgust. He is that kind of a chap."

"Well, let's go ask him what he did with it. Perhaps if we approach the matter tactfully—pleaded with him, as it were, to let us have our telephone back, he might condescend——"

"My dear fellow, be advised and stay away from him. He is safely locked up now——"

"But, look here! We can't let Miss Landon stay here another night. I'll *row* her across the bay first!"

Manley shook his massive head sadly.

"With what? There are no oars. Our good Doncherry decided——"

"Damn Doncherry!" Leonard exploded heartily. "Let's go and build a fire on the beach. Maybe some boatman will see the smoke and come to our rescue. Believe me, if I ever take a job like this again, you can put me in a padded cell, too!"

"Perhaps," Manley observed smoothly, "you might find yourself there some day. The border line between sanity and insanity is vague. Without meaning to be offensive, take that wild tale you came to me with this morning. Now, some people would say——"

"What do you mean? What are you driving at, Manley?"

The keeper spread his arms apologetically and clapped Leonard smartly on the back.

"You must let me have my little joke once in a while, old fellow. That's a good thought about a bonfire. We'll do it."

There was plenty of driftwood on the shore. They went to work collecting it together, ranging along the strip of beach for half-buried barrel staves and weathered logs. Leonard, his forehead puckered in a speculative frown, watched the keeper as the latter, the picture of bearded joviality, stacked the wood in a heap.

Leonard waited until Manley was some distance up the beach, then called Aileen quietly.

"How does our friend, the keeper, strike you, Aileen?"

"Mr. Manley? I don't like him, at all. I'm—I'm afraid of him. He—oh, I don't know—he is part of this whole horrible place! That madman in the locked room and that one they call Benjamin! I didn't tell the truth this morning. I didn't sleep like a top, at all. I heard some one trying the doorknob during the night and stealing away and coming back to try it again, and it kept up it seemed for hours—like some wild beast prowling outside. I couldn't sleep. You don't think we'll have to stay here another night?"

Leonard shook his head.

"I will, because it's my job. I'll try to get you clear somehow. I don't trust Manley, either."

He told her of the events of the night and Manley's explanations. She lis-

tened, with widened eyes, her becoming tan a shade paler than usual.

"Now," he concluded, "I don't care for Manley's explanations about this place, and I'm going to investigate for myself—more especially as he evidently wants me to stay out of two places, the cellar and the padded cell. I'm going to find out the real dope here."

"Now?"

Leonard nodded.

"This minute. If he asks where I've gone, you can say I stepped around the side of the house for more wood."

The dark eyes pleaded with him

"Do be careful—Leonard!"

"You bet. I'll watch my step. I'll be back before he knows it."

Crouching down when the keeper's back was turned, Leonard made quickly for the house, avoiding the exposed board walk and splashing through the soft mud underneath. He waited for a moment beside the porch and listened for sounds of feet on the board walk. None came, and he darted inside, closing the door.

The kitchen door, leading to the cellar, was still bolted. Leonard slid the bolt back quietly and looked down. Even at that time of day, in the early afternoon, the place was dark and forbidding enough, with the damp smell of mold coming up the shaky steps. He saw no one.

"Doncherry! Benjamin!" he called. There was no answer from the grave-like interior. He stepped cautiously downward one step, waited, then another, and tried to look around the curve of the steps.

A low laugh sounded behind him and something heavy struck him full in the center of his back, sending him headlong across the handrail. It gave to his weight with a snap of breaking wood and he landed on his side with a breath-taking thud on the wet cellar floor.

He heard the bolt slide into its grooves as the door slammed shut.

## CHAPTER IX.

### ALL ALONE.

AN eight-foot drop, when a man is taken unawares, gives him quite a bump, and it was a full minute before Leonard got his wind back and staggered to his feet, wondering how many bones were broken.

He felt himself gingerly and decided he was still intact. The only damage he could note, in the faint light that came from a cobwebbed cellar window, was to the thirty-dollar suit, which had received its share of green slime and black mud from the cellar floor.

There was also a certain amount of damage to his feelings. Leonard was mad, clear through. He climbed up the shaky stairs again and pounded on the door, shouted Manley's name half a dozen times and threw his weight against the solid oak.

The door held firmly. He waited a few minutes and called again, pounding against the wood with his foot to add to the racket. Even if Manley and Aileen were as far off as the beach, Leonard figured he could be heard and action taken to release him.

Some action was taken—but it wasn't of a friendly sort. It consisted of the sharp blast of a pistol two feet from his head on the other side of the door. A splinter of wood stung his cheek as the bullet plowed through within a foot of Leonard's right ear and splashed in a gray stain on the white wall.

Leonard didn't wait for the bullet that followed immediately, but made a quick descent of the stairs, out of range.

What was the next move to be?

Some one had tried to hurl him into the cellar—successfully—and was now taking pot shots at him through the door. Leaving out the possibility that the man in the strait-jacket had escaped, either Benjamin, alias Doncherry, or Manley, the keeper, was the guilty party. If it was Manley, then the half-wit's

story of the leper colony was true, and Leonard and Aileen were both in grave danger. In either case, some other way of escaping besides the door must be found.

Leonard groped his way around the cellar. One end of it was drier than the rest and held the steam-heating plant, now disused, a few pieces of log and a bin of coal. Leonard noted the heavy, iron furnace tools for future reference, and looked to the solitary window. It was about eight feet from the floor, with room for a man's body to crawl through; but an examination showed it securely fastened from the outside with a wire, besides the customary inner hooks.

He stepped back to the furnace and picked up the shaker bar to break the window with. He turned suddenly at a scraping sound from the window. Some one was unlatching the wire fastening from the outside.

It swung open, and a thin, familiar face and a familiar cockney accent greeted him, with polite solicitude:

"I say, old creature, are you quite all right?"

"All right?" Leonard replied, frowning. "If I am, I'm about the only bird around here that is. What the heck is the idea of shoving me in here and sniping through the door?"

"Sniping? Mercy, no! I was jolly well hiding out in the cellar when you came rushing down so precipitously, and I fled through the window. I fancy it was Manley. Odd sort of chap, Manley."

"I see," said Leonard, humoring him. "Now, if you'll stand clear of the window, I'll climb through. None of your playful tricks, Mr. Doncherry-Benjamin. Maybe you'd better go farther away just now."

"Quite so," the frock-coated one agreed readily. "You're a suspicious chap, Norris; but every one has his little oddities that way."

"I've got darned good reason to be suspicious," Leonard grumbled, and pushed a log in place to step on. "One of my oddities is that I hate to be smacked on the bean with a sand bag when I'm crawling through cellar windows. Suppose you take a stroll along the beach or go out on the pier and watch the tide come in for a while."

"I would," murmured Doncherry-Benjamin, moving off reluctantly, "but the bally tide advances so imperceptibly, one is never quite sure what one is gazing at, and there is so little excitement involved——"

"I've had plenty, myself," Leonard said. "Now, let's see how fast you can make the dash to the shore. I'll give the word—don't keep going after you reach the water. Ready? One—two—three—go!"

The tails of the frock coat disappeared around the corner of the house, and Leonard wriggled through the window. It was a tight fit and it took him several minutes to tear loose from a nail on the frame, with great detriment to the thirty-dollar suit.

He proceeded cautiously toward the board walk.

The front door was open, swinging lightly in the breeze that blew more strongly now from the darkening bay. Leonard stood on the threshold and looked around.

The living room was empty and the house silent. The door leading to the kitchen was ajar, and the door into the hall wide open, and neither place showed signs of life. Leonard stepped down from the porch and walked toward the place where they had piled the wood.

It was there—untouched by flame—and it was the only object that showed on the wide expanse of sand and marsh. Aileen's launch creaked against the sides of the jetty with the motion of the water, just as they had left it before.

But of Aileen or Manley or Benjamin there was not a trace.

Leonard cupped his hands to his lips.

"Ail-een!" he called. "Hello-o Aileen!"

Was it an echo or his imagination that seemed to answer faintly from the blank front of the house?

Panicky at the thought of what might have happened during his absence in the cellar, he hurried back along the narrow walk to the porch. A search of the three bedrooms and the single big room upstairs proved futile. He tried the pantry, Benjamin's room, and the vast attic storeroom under the eaves, and was greeted with silence and dust for his pains.

To all appearances, he was alone in the house—alone on the island, and the rest had vanished as completely as if they had stepped off into space.

He circled the house, came back to the porch and puffed at a cigarette, while he tried to figure out the answer. He refused to contemplate one possibility —that the mad Doncherry had succeeded in making away with every one including himself. It was impossible to conceive that Doncherry could have killed Manley. No shots had been fired while Leonard was climbing through the cellar window, and Doncherry was no match for the keeper physically.

As for Aileen—Leonard shook his stubborn, blond head. He wasn't going to lose her so tragically after waiting five years or more to meet just such a girl. There must be another explanation.

And that explanation pointed to Manley. Either the keeper had kept a boat in hiding and had bodily kidnaped Aileen and Doncherry—a far-fetched supposition—or he was lurking somewhere under cover. What kind of a weird game of hide-and-seek was going on here on this lonely island? Was the mad Doncherry telling the truth about Manley and Leadcastor? Which was Doncherry—Benjamin or the man in the padded——

Struck by a sudden thought, Leonard went inside the house, walked to the end of the hallway and opened the slide that looked into the gloomy interior of the padded room.

The cot was empty.

## CHAPTER X.

### NIGHTFALL.

LEONARD examined the locks of the door, and walked soberly back to the front porch, on the alert, while crossing the deserted living room, for any sound that might indicate danger threatening. Things were getting more involved. There were, evidently, two madmen at large on the island—two madmen and one criminal with a murderous record, according to the latest returns.

How the man had escaped was not clear, nor why he should have so carefully barred the door again after leaving.

Leonard's nerves were steady enough, even if he was romantically imaginative, and he did not jump when the grandfather's clock in the corner of the room boomed out the hour of six. But it reminded him of the fact that darkness was coming along from the east across the rolling Atlantic, and it behooved the man who was to spend another night on Goose Island to be on his guard and be ready for emergencies.

He shook the kerosene lamps, one by one. There was enough oil in each to give the necessary light, and he was relieved on that score. Even the steadiest of nerves would hardly stand a dark vigil in that place.

He needed no clock to tell him it was time to eat again. He had not eaten anything since breakfast. The kitchen was well stocked. Leonard pushed aside the unwashed breakfast dishes and laid out bread, the cold roast of the night before, and a cake that was stale but satisfying.

Before starting to still the cravings of hunger, he blocked the door leading to the upper floor with a chair and faced

his table so that he could command the other two entrances to the kitchen. He did not relish the idea of being a target for the eccentric Percival Doncherry, or, perhaps, the cold and smiling keeper of Goose Island.

It is remarkable what a difference food makes to hungry twenty-five. By the time Leonard had finished that semi-stale but palatable chocolate layer cake, he felt equal to almost anything—not only spending the night on the island but the solving of the several conflicting mysteries that cloaked it.

He leaned back comfortably and lighted a cigarette—the last of the pack that had been crushed when he hit the cellar floor.

He would find Manley and Aileen—prisoners, no doubt, of the escaped Benjamin and Doncherry—before dawn, he was quite sure. After that, with their aid, it would be easy enough to put the "nuts" in confinement again. Only, this time, he would insist that the gentleman in the shapeless frock coat go into quod, too.

Then he would send Aileen back to the mainland, to a grateful father and friends, and some day soon, without wishing any bad luck to Percival Doncherry, the unfortunate patient would leave this witless world and Leonard would receive the gratitude—including both money and a job in law—from the rich Cyrus Doncherry. Tears would stand in the old millionaire's eyes as he would stammer forth his thanks for taking care of one so dear to him. There would be a reward.

"Leonard, my boy," the millionaire would say—it would be "Leonard" and "Cy" at that point—"I am getting on in years. Some one must take care of my millions, my great interests. I have no heirs-at-law, now that dear Percival has departed."

"Good old Percival," Leonard would answer, puffing at a sixty-center. "Nice fellow, Percival. Pleasant chap—good-natured to a fault. I miss having him around now."

Then would come the day when he would lead Aileen proudly out the church door to Cyrus Doncherry's Rolls-Royce, while the organ played a bridal march softly——

*Crash!*

Leonard jumped out of his daydream and to his feet, with a suddenness that sent the kitchen table teetering on two legs, spilling the dishes to the floor. He looked at the object that had smashed through the pane of glass in the window beside his unsuspecting head.

It was an ordinary iron garden rake, the handle jammed in the broken glass. Jutting two feet into the kitchen on the rusty teeth of the rake was a square of dirty notepaper, inscribed with a pencil message in sprawling capitals.

Leonard did not wait to read it. He was more interested in the person who had shoved it through the window. He was outside in two bounds and turning the corner of the house.

No one was in sight. The rear of the house opened on an expanse of marsh grass and white sand, with only the low outline of the well house between him and the slowly darkening waters of the bay. He peered around the farther corner of the house. There were no signs of any one on the porch or as much of the board walk as he could see.

A glance into the smooth cylinder of the well, and he returned to the kitchen, feeling uneasily certain that the parties responsible for this latest manifestation were hiding in the house itself—were even then, perhaps, watching his movements.

Keeping his eyes on the open door leading into the living room, he plucked the paper from the rake and gave it a hasty glance. Even in the poor light he could read the printing:

We got the big feller and the dame and the little nut safe. We want Doncherry. Old C. D. will pay big dough for ransom. You

got the nut hid. Come clean with him and we will lay off. Otherwise, your whole gang and you goes in the bay and we beat it in an hour. If you think we don't mean this, watch what happens to the limey in ten minutes. Trot out Doncherry, leave him on the beach, and go back to the house.

There was no signature.

Leonard rubbed his square chin, speculatively. So that was what it was all about—a gang preparing to kidnap the insane man and hold him until they could extract a ransom from Cyrus Doncherry. The latter was doubtless meant by the initials C. D. "The big fellow" was Manley—unless Manley was implicated himself, which, to Leonard seemed quite probable.

It was evident, if the note was authentic and not a madman's merry jest, that there were new arrivals on the island, and that Doncherry had escaped.

"If they can find him they can have him," muttered Leonard. "He's no man's bargain. But where the heck are they all hiding out?"

His imagination soared into visions of secret passages and underground caverns. It was getting darker now, and he set to work lighting the lamps—with his head over his shoulder on the watch for the slightest movement—humming, "It Ain't Gonna Rain No More," to show himself conclusively that he wasn't a bit afraid.

Once there was a movement, he thought, of the curtains guarding the seaward windows, and he grabbed up the brass-handled poker from the dead fireplace and investigated. But the window was securely locked. He kept the poker in his hand as he made the rounds of the room. His plan of campaign was simple enough—to hit the first head he saw and ask questions afterward. He was getting sorer on Goose Island and its mysterious inhabitants every minute.

Leonard had no intention of spending the night inside the house. He figured that the safest place for him was the pier, where he could not be approached from behind. Meanwhile, with the living room and kitchen well lighted, he could keep a close watch on what went on inside.

With the place well illuminated, he picked up a folded newspaper and stepped on tiptoe out on the porch, holding the poker in readiness to repel attack. None came and he reached the unlighted bonfire on the beach.

The wind blew rather smartly from across the bay, and he had difficulty, crouching over the flame of a match, getting the newspaper to take hold. Eventually it did, and he shoved it underneath the tinder-dry pile.

The flame flickered, seemed about to go out, then leaped across a tarred barrel stave and flared up redly. He stepped back, watching the blaze creep upward along the driftwood, crackling sharply and sending a shower of sparks up into the black sky. If there was any human curiosity on the mainland there would be some one starting out presently to see if Goose Island was burning up. It was with that idea in mind that Leonard had decided to wait developments on the pier.

The blaze lighted up the whole place with a dancing, red light. It threw into sharp relief the lines of the house and was reflected from the blank windows of the upper story.

There was only one thing unusual brought out by the glare—but that was sufficient to send a chill up Leonard's spine.

It was the sight of a familiar, baggy frock coat, with a white face above it, dangling and twisting at the end of a rope from the high-peaked roof.

## CHAPTER XI.

### DONCHERRY AT LAST.

THE first thought that flashed through Leonard's horrified mind was that the gang had carried out the first part of their threat. The next thought was that

the unfortunate victim might not be dead. While he watched, the limp figure seemed to jerk at the end of the rope.

There was no thought of his own safety in Leonard's mind as he ran along the board walk toward the house. There was no time for consideration of consequences, with a man's life at stake.

The feet of the figure swaying overhead just cleared the edge of the porch roof. Leonard had a glimpse, as he passed, of a white placard pinned to the breast of the frock coat. Reaching for the penknife in his pocket, Leonard raced for the stairs and up into the big, bare room and slammed the window open.

He crawled out onto the sloping roof of the porch, greasy with the moss covering the shingles, reached the drooping form and sawed at the taut rope frantically. It gave way with a suddenness that made Leonard's feet slip on the shingles and sent him sprawling to the ground below.

Picking up the limp figure in his arms he dashed into the lighted living room again—and as he reached the couch the head of the victim dropped off.

Leonard looked at it—obviously a china sugar bowl—and at the pillow-stuffed frock coat he held in his arms.

"Well, I'll be jiggered! Of all the darn fool——"

He caught sight of the placard, pinned neatly to the ragged silk lapels of the coat. It read plainly:

THE GLASS OF FASHION

Being worn extensively at the bathing beaches at Biarritz——

And, lower down:

A gentleman's frock coat should never fit him!

"I'll fit some bird to a bump on his dome," Leonard growled, rubbing a bruise on his left elbow. "I've been the goat long enough!"

He was standing in front of one of the tall bookcases—open, glassless shelves that reached from the floor almost to the ceiling—on the side of the living room nearest the hall.

There was a muffled shout and a sound of shuffling behind him. As he turned to locate it, a book from the topmost shelf struck him on the shoulder and he looked up to see a row of calf-bound volumes leaning over dangerously. Then the whole thing rocked forward and, before he could jump clear, he found himself flat on his back, buried beneath a torrent of books, with two of the oak shelves lying across his legs.

He started wriggling clear of the mountain of literature, more surprised than hurt by the unexpected landslide. He thanked his stars that the heavier volumes had not been on the upper shelves.

A black space gaped where the books had been. Leonard took the nearest lamp from its stand and investigated the cavity. Apparently, the bookcases did not quite touch the wall, leaving a space fifteen or eighteen inches deep between the backs of the shelves and the plastered wall. Holes in the plaster showed where the shelves had been once nailed but pulled out again to make this narrow passage.

Leonard toppled another row of classics to the floor to enlarge the space and let the light of the lamp shine inside as far as he could, but he hesitated to trust himself to further exploration. Some one had been in there and, purposely or accidentally, had pushed a fair-sized library over on him; but that some one could stay there until daylight, as far as Leonard was concerned. He had no intention of groping around there in the dark.

A low laugh, startlingly distinct in the utter silence, came from the direction of the bedrooms, and Leonard spun around, almost upsetting the oil lamp.

He listened—to nothing but the snapping of the wood blazing on the beach, and the ticking of the grandfather's clock—and, for the first time since he had landed on Goose Island, he felt a furry tickling of the short hair on the back of his neck.

"Hell!" he assured himself. "Some more of that joker Doncherry."

Setting the lamp back on the table, he edged toward the doorway leading to the dark passage between the bedrooms. Where, five minutes before, the hall had been a well of blackness, light now showed at the chinks and through the peep hole in the door to the padded cell.

Leonard cleared his throat forcibly.

"Come on out, Doncherry!" he called. "Cut out the comedy! You there, Manley?"

Whoever was there made no reply to the call.

Leonard still clutched the fireplace poker. Keeping close to the wall, he advanced slowly along the passage toward the padded room, stopping at Manley's bedroom and his own to survey their interiors. The flickering, red light of the fire on the beach, coming through the windows, showed those rooms to be empty. He made sure that the one Aileen had occupied concealed no one.

The door to the padded cell was still barred, as he had seen it during the afternoon, and the slide still open. He looked inside.

On the plain table by the cot, stood a green-shaded lamp, and the light Leonard had seen reflected through the chinks of the door shone down on the narrow, iron bedstead, and on the figure of a man, tied securely, lying face to the wall.

Leonard blinked his eyes and looked again. The man wore the self-same rig Leonard had seen the first day—a canvas strait-jacket pinioning his arms and a surgical bandage wound across his mouth.

Two days on Goose Island had almost cured Leonard Norris of any disposition to be surprised at anything. Here, at last, was a chance to get to the bottom of things, and, if he was sometimes imaginative, he was not timid. He jerked the bars from the door and pushed it open.

"Benjamin," he called quietly.

The man on the bed did not move. Leonard walked up to him and looked more closely at the face half hidden in the bedclothes. It was not the same man Leonard had seen in the padded room the first day, at all. It was the frock-coated individual Leonard had known as Benjamin and now knew as Doncherry.

Leonard laid his hand on the skinny shoulder and shook it; then pulled his hand away hastily and stepped back. It needed no more than the sight of those fixed and glassy eyes and the wound that showed on the disordered hair, to make Leonard aware that no amount of shaking or calling could rouse that darkened mind again to the things of earth.

Leonard stood by the smoking lamp and stared down at the still form on the cot, and swallowed several times in quick succession. To be alone in a house of lurking shadows and whispers in the stillness of a black night, looking at the dead face of a murdered man, by the light of a smoky lamp—well, it does make a man's throat feel strangely dry, and it does make a man's head twist over his shoulder from time to time, fearful of the invisible hands that might be clutching from the dark; even a young man with quite a sufficient amount of courage.

He wished he were somewhere else. In fact, he started to go somewhere else—he didn't care where, but preferably the open beach—when his anxious eye caught the movement of the cell door, swinging slowly open.

Leonard clutched his iron poker and waited.

It seemed to him ages that he stood there, crushing the poker handle into the

palm of his hand and watching the opening, slowly, inch by inch, of the quilted door.

Manley's expressionless face, goggling, black spectacles and square, brown beard, showed up in the light from the lamp. He was smiling.

Leonard broke the silence finally. He had a feeling that he would go mad himself in that maniac's padded cell if he had to stand there much longer, watching that grinning mask.

"Well," he grated, "what's it all about, Manley? What does this mean? Fellow's been murdered, somehow. Where have you been?"

Manley did not answer, nor did he leave the doorway.

"Speak up, man!" Leonard exclaimed desperately. "You know something about all this! Where have you been hiding out, and what have you done with that girl?"

Manley's stiff smile remained fixed in place.

"Easy, now, Mr.—er—Norris. Let us not become excited. Your charming friend is perfectly safe. I, myself, have been—er—detained——"

"I know what detained you!" Leonard cried out. "It's your little kidnaping plot—incidentally a murder—and I'm going to see that you get what is coming to——"

"My dear fellow," Manley protested, in his colorless, even voice, "please don't shout. Kidnaping plot? It was a leprosy story this morning. You will recollect, my friend, I warned you that you might end in a padded cell. I am glad to see you have saved me the trouble of putting you here. Your stories are very plainly hallucinations!"

"What do you mean, Manley? Is this dead man—killed by you, no doubt, or by your crooked friends—is he an hallucination? You'll tell that tale to the district attorney!"

Manley shook his head reprovingly.

"No, my dear fellow, I'll tell it to you. The man was killed by Doncherry."

"Doncherry! First Benjamin is Doncherry; then this guy is Doncherry. Who is next in line?"

"Do you want me to tell you?" Manley asked evenly. "You are Doncherry, of course. I shall tell that young lady the sad truth that she brought our patient here. Already she must be convinced that your tales show an unbalanced mind. You are Doncherry—Percival Doncherry, our violent patient, and here you stay!"

"What the——"

"Don't swear, Doncherry, or I shall have to gag you as I used to gag our unfortunate friend—who became too obstreperous in the end. Don't move a foot! Stop!"

The blue steel of his revolver gleamed menacingly. Leonard stopped his quick rush suddenly.

"Here you are and here you stay," Manley went on smoothly. "That's better. Sit right there in the chair."

"I'm damned if I do!" Leonard exploded violently. "What's your game, Manley?"

The keeper kept the weapon in plain sight.

"I don't mind explaining. There must be a Doncherry, so you are *it*. I am tired of this place and am going away. You won't have to play the part of Doncherry long, however. As a matter of fact—the information wont do you any good, for you will shortly be dead as our friend there, but I rather enjoy the little joke—you are not Doncherry; neither is that half-witted creature there Doncherry."

"Say! What are you talking about?"

Manley chuckled good-humoredly, but his voice was a snarl as he plucked off the dark glasses, and hurled them to the floor.

"You fool! Can't you guess? Wasn't I clever to fool you all?"

Leonard looked at the burning eyes

of the maniac, now revealed to him, and his face whitened slowly.

"Doncherry!" the madman screamed. "Growing Manley's beard and wearing Manley's eyeglasses and clothes! Am I Doncherry, you stupid lout?"

## CHAPTER XII.

### IN THE PADDED CELL.

LEONARD nodded. The situation, alone with this murderous and armed maniac on Goose Island, was serious enough, without arousing the insane rage that smoldered in Doncherry's eyes. A lot of things that had mystified him, were revealed to Leonard right then—too late—and he wondered why he had not suspected the truth before.

It had been a mixed-up business, this job that young Leadcastor had got him into. Between the man bound in the padded cell and the lunatic in the fur cap with his ravings about leprosy, Leonard had been groping in circles. He knew now that neither the man they called Benjamin nor the prisoner in the cell had been responsible for the weird and tragic events of the past couple of days—the fantastic and cunning devices of a distorted brain. Here was the answer in the murderous glare of the crazy eyes probing into his.

Leonard realized, with a quickening of his pulses, that at last he was face to face with the real Doncherry, the madman, armed and ready to kill—as he had killed the unfortunate Benjamin.

But losing his head in an emergency was not one of Leonard's faults. He sat down in the chair beside the cot, placing the poker unobtrusively close to his right hand.

"I'll hand it to you, Doncherry, you sure were clever."

The erstwhile keeper nursed the pistol speculatively.

"I don't know whether to kill you right now or not, Norris."

"Just as you like," the young man murmured, with an assurance he by no means felt. "But, tell me, what happened to the real Manley?"

"That was Manley tied up there the first day you came," Doncherry boasted. "Pretty clever, what? I have him safe now, and I'll finish him after I'm through with you. There's plenty of time. So you think I'm a pretty good actor, eh?"

His brows twitched threateningly.

"I am a great actor! I'm the greatest that ever lived! Deny it and I'll send a bullet crashing through your skull! They've tried to deny my rights. They've kept me from my career."

He struck himself on the breast.

"I've known how great an actor I was for a long time. Others knew it. They had me sent here through professional jealousy. I waited my time and last week I got clear of my bonds and broke a way through the wall there behind the pads. That hole leads outside. Later, when I'd tied my jailor up, I moved the bookcases out for a passageway to and from here, and waited for you to show up. Manley thought he was smart, sending for another man. He played right into my hands."

"How?" Leonard murmured. He was only mildly interested in this crazy man's past performances. It was the future that bothered him—and Aileen's safety—and it seemed best to spar for time.

"Why, you numskull, I needed another body. You walked right in and brought with you the star of my life, but that will wait. I wanted to get away. There were three men, Benjamin, Manley and myself. I shall leave three dead men behind to satisfy Cyrus Doncherry, my mortal enemy, that Goose Island was wiped out. Then they will never look for me."

He frowned thoughtfully at Leonard.

"You see," he went on calmly, "I am burning down the house to-night."

"You're what! Now, look here, Doncherry, be reasonable——"

"Silence!" Then, more quietly: "You don't suppose, my dear assistant keeper, that I shall leave evidence that will start them searching for me. They would search, too—on the plea that I am insane and must be found. No. I am leaving Benjamin, well charred, you may be sure, by the time the fire burns out, in the kitchen; Manley, in his own bedroom; and you, who are about my size, right here to represent me to posterity. Clever, eh?"

"Better not, Doncherry. You can't explain where the assistant keeper disappeared to. They know I came here, too."

Doncherry waved the objection aside.

"I'll think of that later. Perhaps I'll send a telegram in your name to Leadcastor, resigning the job. I can think of things like that readily. I have a wonderful brain—not like poor Benjamin here, with his foolish ideas about leprosy. I had all my plans made, and Manley's letter in my hand, when you arrived, but it amused me to play you along—you and our lovely little friend who——"

"What"—Leonard's voice was a trifle hoarse for the first time—"what do you intend to do with her?"

The madman's even teeth showed between his bearded lips.

"I am taking her with me to-night! I am the greatest actor the world has ever seen, and she shall share my honors with me. The launch is waiting for my bride and me for our cruise——"

"What launch? Man—Doncherry! You can't fix that."

Doncherry chuckled and wagged his head.

"What fools you all are, Norris! You really believed that story about the Goose Island launch being sunk. It's out there at the end of the island now, covered with grass in a creek. You'll forgive me, my dear fellow, if I laugh now. I've had a time trying to keep from laughing the last couple of days.

"That bomb I made myself and planted underneath Benjamin's bed. I was going to send you up like a rocket then—I thought you began to suspect that I wasn't Manley the keeper—but I changed my mind. I could not resist showing it to you. And I almost died that time I assured you that Doncherry, or, rather, Benjamin, would not answer your foolish shouts at the cellar door. I could have killed you then or even later when I followed you from the beach and pushed you into the cellar. But I had to get rid of Benjamin first. I think it's your turn now, my friend."

He fingered the revolver, his eyes glaring. Leonard felt for the poker handle carefully beside his chair, and drew his feet together for a desperate spring. He knew now that the crisis was close at hand. Meanwhile, the fire blazed on the water front and might bring help from the mainland at any moment.

Delay meant everything. If he could only keep this twisted, murderous brain diverted! Keep him talking and keep that twitching forefinger from the trigger!

He laughed forcedly.

"You're not so clever, Doncherry!"

The pistol hand was lowered slightly. Doncherry frowned.

"Why?"

"First of all, you can't persuade Miss Landon to marry you offhand."

"Can't I? She'll get her choice right now. If she refuses, I'll kill her, too. I have her safe, tied up in the bottom of Manley's launch, waiting until I finish you. And that means right now! Get ready!"

"Wait a second, Doncherry! You haven't heard the rest. I'm surprised such an intelligent man as you are should overlook one point. If you shoot me and Manley, our bodies will be found with bullet holes through the skulls. Even a fire won't hide that. How will that be explained, I wonder, and still look like an accidental fire?"

"Very easily," Doncherry nodded. "I shall not shoot you through the head. Furthermore, I shall not even bother to shoot Manley. He's wrapped up like a mummy in clothesline behind the farther bookcase. Incidentally that way out of here is blocked up now. That finishes you. Later I'll fix Cyrus Doncherry, the amiable cousin who has persecuted me in the pay of the theatrical interests."

He jerked the revolver into position.

"It'll be light soon," he snarled. "I can't wait any longer—not even to enjoy watching you die."

He stepped partly out the door, pointing the weapon at Leonard's chest. In the light of the lamp, Leonard could see that creeping forefinger tightening on the trigger, could see the cylinder gradually turning into position, could see the gleaming eyes of the maniac staring along the barrel. He leaped forward with all the strength in his body, the iron poker whirling over his head.

Almost touching the lapel of his coat, the revolver went off with a deafening roar.

Doncherry slammed the heavy door. For a full minute he peered at the crumpled form on the floor, watching the thin spiral of smoke rise from the scorched wool of the coat front. Then he dropped the bars in place and raced for the living room.

A vigorous kick sent the table lamp crashing to the rug, the oil spreading quickly in a blue flame. Doncherry rubbed his hands gleefully and sent another ornamental glass lamp after the first, piling a wicker chair and an armful of books on the growing blaze.

He danced through the flaming room, his powerful arms hurling furniture right and left and tearing down curtains to add to the fire. It flared redly, crackling as it caught hold of walls and floor and sending out yellow clouds of dense smoke.

For a moment, he stood on the porch and threw a stage kiss toward the house; then his running feet pattered along the board walk toward the beach.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### TWO COME ABOARD.

CYRUS DONCHERRY was not traveling on his own yacht. Cyrus Doncherry's *Buccaneer*—two hundred and twenty-five feet of gray-funneled floating palace—was as well known as the *Berengaria* to the Atlantic seaboard. The sight of Cyrus Doncherry's blood-red house flag on Great South Bay would have caused as much disquiet in the minds of newspaper reporters as the sight of a real buccaneer's black flag in the minds of old-time, peaceful merchantmen.

For reasons of his own, the multi-millionaire was not granting nor inviting interviews concerning his personal family affairs and reasons for visiting Goose Island—a privacy to which even a rich man is entitled but seldom receives—and was, therefore, traveling on the *Annabelle,* a mere fifty-thousand-dollar cruiser, the property of Doctor Midas Maggaro, the famous alienist.

Doctor Maggaro was still asleep in his cabin at dawn; but Cyrus Doncherry, who had received an early training in a harder school, was up and about the deck, dragging young Leadcastor behind him, as if young Leadcastor were being led by an invisible leash.

Doncherry filled his lungs with the clean sea air, and nodded.

"Wonderfully bracing, this air, Leadcastor. Healthful life—yachting and all that. Wish I had more time to devote to it."

He was a small man, thin, with a white and closely cropped mustache. He looked like a harassed law clerk supporting a huge family. Leadcastor, on the contrary, had the general look one associates with the young millionaire in the movies.

"It's—er—rather a shame, Mr. Don-

cherry, you had to come down here, at all. We realize how busy you are——"

"Can't be helped," the older man snapped, resting his hands on the rail. "The man is a relative of mine, as you know—cousin of my mother's. Blood's thicker than water. Got to do the best for him, poor devil. But I can't risk other people's lives on my account. From what you told me the other day, he's getting altogether out of hand. Seen him lately?"

"Not personally. This Manley seems to be a capable fellow and he reports regularly. I sent him an assistant the other day—a rather likely young chap. Your—er—cousin, if I may call him so, has been raising Old Nick around the place. Smashed the telephone line, tried to kill Manley——"

"You should have told me about that sooner, Leadcastor. Can't have anything happen to those men that are taking care of him. Let the papers make the best of it. We'll have to lock him up for good this time. Got a place picked out? You and Maggaro can arrange the details."

Leadcastor nodded obediently.

"Maggaro says Mr. Percival Doncherry hasn't long to live now—some cardiac disturbance."

Old Cyrus Doncherry's leathery face softened. He looked out over the calm water.

"I know. My mother's family had that trouble. She died of it. I don't know Percival Doncherry hardly from Adam. Saw him a few times before he —got sick—and never had much use for him, either. But my brother thought a lot of his people one time. What's that out there—smoke?"

Leadcastor followed the pointing finger, shading his eyes against the brilliant reflection of the dawn dancing on the water.

"Looks like it, doesn't it? They must be burning the marshes in shore somewhere. We ought to catch sight of Goose Island around the next bend in the channel."

Doncherry snapped out his watch.

"Be there in fifteen minutes. That'll give us time to finish our business and maybe get back to work before the Exchange closes."

"If you'll excuse me, Mr. Doncherry," Leadcastor interposed, "I'll get a bite to eat now. That is, if you don't care to join——"

"All right. Go ahead, Leadcastor. Had mine already."

Leadcastor hastened away, and Doncherry seated himself under the awning in the cockpit. He was deep in the financial columns of a newspaper of the evening before, when he was interrupted by one of the crew of three that the cruiser carried.

"Beg your pardon, sir"—the man's forefinger touched his cap—"but a party just came aboard who wants to see you. He signaled to us from a launch and we stopped to pick him up."

The millionaire looked peevishly over the side.

"I see you stopped," he snorted. "Who is the man and what does he want? I'm not receiving visitors on Great South Bay."

"Well, you see, sir," the man apologized, "he asked for Doctor Maggaro, but he was asleep, and we told him you were aboard, and he said he'd talk to you, instead. He seems kind of a clam-diggin' fellow, sir."

"Tell him I don't want any clams." And Doncherry lifted the newspaper again, settling the old-fashioned eyeglasses on his thin nose.

"He says, Mr. Doncherry, that Goose Island has burned down——"

"Burned down!" The newspaper was dropped quickly.

"Yes. And all the people burned up. There's a lot of smoke there now. We'll be there in a few minutes, sir; so, if you'd rather not bother with this——"

"Send him along! Burned up, indeed!

Some intoxicated clam-digger. Is he drunk?"

The sailor shook his head decidedly. "He seems burned, himself."

The man who slouched aft to the cockpit a moment later did seem to have been through a fire. His hands were black with soot, his overalls and shirt in charred rags and his head bound around with a dirty handkerchief. With his massive, unshaven jaw jutting out beneath the bandage, he was not a presentable picture.

"Well?" the old man questioned sharply. "What's this tale about Goose Island being burned down?"

"Last night," the man grunted. "Everybody dead there, chief."

"Impossible! Why, we're almost within sight of the place!"

"You'll never see it again. Ashes to ashes, my boy. It's gone from the map. Just as you and the rest of us will be some day."

"No time now for your clam-digging philosophy, my man," the financier broke in testily. "Come to the point. How did the place burn down?"

The *Annabelle* slowed down. Shouts came from up forward; but, from his position in the cockpit, old Doncherry could not see what was going on.

He started forward and a large hand stopped him.

"How dare you put your dirty hand on——"

A snarling laugh interrupted him abruptly.

"You want to know how it happened?" the man barked. "I did it! I burned it down—with Manley and the rest of the pack inside! Don't you know me, Cyrus Doncherry? I'm your cousin you've kept caged up like a wild beast for five years!"

The madman's hand darted inside his shirt front and something glistened evilly. Cyrus Doncherry was not a man easily cowed, but he retreated to the other side of the cockpit, and if he was outwardly calm, he was inwardly sure that he stood close to death.

"Drop it, Percival!" he commanded. "Put that gun aside!"

The other shook his head, grinning menacingly.

"Now your turn comes, my dear cousin. I've already killed two of my persecutors last night. I almost missed you. But I recognized that cursed doctor's boat and I stopped. I had no idea you were aboard, too. This is too good. The millions you made by keeping my wonderful genius hidden won't do you any good now. The theatrical magnates paid you well to keep me off the stage, but they can't help you now!"

"This—this is nonsense, man!" The other still grinned.

The millionaire looked helplessly over his shoulder. Escape was cut off by the closed door leading from the cockpit. Diving overboard over the rail would require more time than that creeping revolver would grant. The maniac shuffled closer, swaying like a drugged man and shoving the shining weapon to close range.

"Get ready, Cyrus Doncherry!"

The multimillionaire opened his parched lips to shout for help—help that he knew would come too late. Then his eyes widened—not in terror this time, but in frantic hope.

Over the rail behind the madman crawled a dripping, haggard young man—a young man with blond hair, rather the worse for singeing and a thirty-dollar suit rather the worse for wetting, with a hole scorched in the left lapel of the coat. But a young man, with a square, fighting jaw that was very consoling to Cyrus Doncherry right at that moment.

The newcomer slid off that rail with a sideways fling of his long legs, and, in one leap, was wrapped around Percival Doncherry, arms and knees wrestling for a fall.

The revolver blazed toward the

striped awning, the two men spun around and toppled heavily to the deck, at exactly the same moment that the strange young man's fist swung upward to an unshaven jaw.

It was not until then that Cyrus Doncherry found his voice.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### ——AND GOOD PAY!"

HE found it again, later in the morning, to better effect. It was when the *Annabelle*—outward bound, with Percival Doncherry in Doctor Maggaro's cabin, safely consigned to an asylum for the criminal insane—pulled away from the little pier and the blackened embers of what had been the lodge on Goose Island.

Manley was below, recovering from his disagreeable experience as a padded-call dweller, Aileen stood in the bows watching anxiously for sight of her father's house, and Cyrus Doncherry listened to Leonard and glared at Leadcastor.

"You owe this young man an apology, Leadcastor," the financier snapped. "The least you could have done would have been to give him a photograph of Manley. Then all this might have been avoided."

Leadcastor nodded contritely and looked at his buckskin shoes.

"Mistaken—er—identity. I had no idea the patient and the keeper had changed places. Poor Manley must have had a time of it—tied up that way and then suddenly dragged behind a bookcase. It's lucky Miss Landon got to him before the fire reached him. Clever girl, to escape from Percival's launch. Smart girl, that! Got there in the nick of time——"

"I'm glad," Cyrus Doncherry pointed out, "that some one showed a little intelligence in this business. Next time you send a man—well, there'll be no need for that now. Poor Benjamin suffered the most at the hands of my cousin. Too late to help Benjamin now; but there's still Mr. Norris here. I owe him more than an apology—even if it was only for preventing a panic on the Street by keeping me alive—and I pay all debts promptly, as much as I can. Good business policy. Did you say you were studying law, Mr. Norris?"

Leonard bobbed his head.

"Fine place you took to get rest and quiet for study," the millionaire grunted. "Eh, Leadcastor?"

"Good pay and easy hours," Leonard grinned. "He said so."

Cyrus Doncherry smiled grimly.

"Young man, you'll not find good pay and easy hours anywhere. They don't go together—that's my experience. Put him to work, Leadcastor, in your office. And when you're satisfied and he's a worth-while lawyer, just turn him over to me."

He looked shrewdly at Leonard.

"I'll give you the hardest working hours you've ever had—darned hard—but you'll find the pay damned good! Want to try?"

Leonard swallowed.

"You bet—I mean, I certainly do!" he stammered.

"There's only one qualification I insist on," old Doncherry continued, with a sidelong look at Leadcastor.

"What's that, Mr. Doncherry?" asked Leonard eagerly.

The old man pointed toward the bows—toward the slim outlines of a rose-colored slicker and a little red hat.

"She saved your life, young man, by getting you out of the padded cell last night. She'll save you a lot more knocks in this world. The job I'm offering you is for married men only. Get engaged to that girl right away!"

"How? She doesn't even——" Leonard reddened.

Doncherry snorted disgustedly.

"How! Leadcastor, he asks how he should do it. I give him up! Let's get

back to the cabin and look over those commitment papers."

Over his shoulder, Leadcastor winked heavily in Leonard's direction.

"Say, Aileen," Leonard began. "Er —you know, old Doncherry has a job for me. It depends——"

She turned toward him joyfully.

"Oh, isn't that fine, Leonard! For saving his life, of course! He should give you a job—and a good one."

"Well," Leonard hesitated, "between you and me, our friend Percy might have killed Cyrus, but it wouldn't have been by a bullet. You know, there weren't any bullets in that gun——"

"No bullets! But he shot at you yesterday from the house!"

"There were bullets in it then. Manley—it was his gun originally—must have used some blanks and some real bullets. Kind of used the blanks to scare the nut when he got too dangerous. You see, I discovered that when Percival pointed the gun at me last night. I saw a blank cartridge in the cylinder ready to fire. When he shot me he only burned my coat with a blank. I flopped down, thinking he'd run, and I'd follow him. I wasn't so sure about there being another bullet in the revolver. But he fooled me by slamming the door shut. If you'll look you'll see there's no bullet hole in the awning over the cockpit where Percival shot the gun off when we were battling. But don't tell Mr. Doncherry that."

"All the same," her face glowed proudly, "you didn't know *that* one was a blank, too. You were brave to swim out from the beach and fight that crazy man. Mr. Manley and I were watching you. It seemed ages before we saw you climbing over the side—and, oh, how worried I—we were——"

"That was nothing," Leonard protested. "I was sore at that bird for the tricks he played on me here, and I was out to crown him, anyway. Besides, I gave Leadcastor my word I'd see the job through. But—Aileen—old Doncherry's got some funny ideas about this job he's offering me. Funny old cuss! You'd sure laugh to hear what he says now."

He laughed himself—a trifle uncertainly, as if he considered old Cyrus Doncherry the most comical of men, with the weirdest notions, such as no precious and lovable girl in a rose-colored slicker would agree with.

"You know, Aileen—he gets ideas—I've had the same idea of course, but I wouldn't have the nerve to ask you—point-blank—he insists that we should—I mean, he thinks I ought to—he believes both of us ought to—you know, I mean, I think so, too—we ought to—that is, you and I ought to——"

She looked up at him and smiled in complete understanding.

"Why, Leonard, I think—I think we ought to, too—dear!"

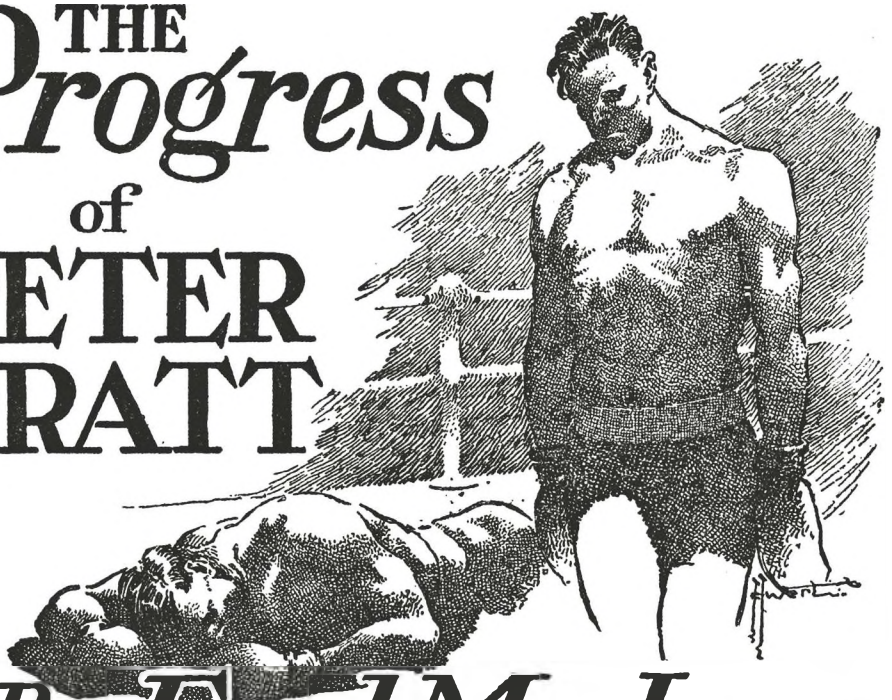
Fifteen minutes later the famous Doctor Maggaro stuck his famous long nose out of the companionway for a breath of air, after a long session of trying to persuade Percival Doncherry that his head was not a rubber ball to be butted roughly against the wall of the cabin.

Doctor Maggaro caught sight of the backs of the rose-colored slicker and the thirty-dollar suit quite close together.

"Young idiots!" he muttered, grinning.

Which was the shortest and cheapest and most erroneous diagnosis the famous mind specialist had ever made.

# THE Progress of PETER PRATT



## By Fred MacIsaac

*Author of "The Dog Star," "The Man-eater," Etc.*

### EPISODE IV—THE CLAUSE IN THE CONTRACT

**Peter Pratt is considered the worst prize fighter in the world. He thinks so himself, and that is why he left the ring to try his luck in the film business, spurred on, of course, by the lovely Annabel Green. In this episode, Peter is matched in a comeback with Mickey Murphy, who once knocked Pratt out three times in one round! Has Peter a chance? Probably not. These episodes are all separate stories, but are connected by the general thread of Peter Pratt's upward climb.**

ABE GOOLTZ, president of the Epitomy Film Company, elbows on his desk, chin buried in the palms of his hands, gazed across the room at Peter Pratt, and his look was the rueful one of a man who has purchased a gold brick and had just discovered that it is made out of lead.

Peter Pratt was a speculation that he had made, a speculation which was costing him forty dollars per week, and which, so far, had returned him little or nothing. Three weeks ago he had sublet him to Ludwig Lewis, who had promised to use him for seven days at twenty-five dollars per day. But at the end of two days Lewis had kicked Peter off the lot upon discovering that Peter was the person who had knocked him down for discourtesy to a young lady some time before when Mr. Lewis was very drunk.

Since that time Abe Gooltz had been unable to unload Peter Pratt upon anybody else and had had to pay the forty-dollar salary out of his own pocket. To be sure, the youth tried very hard to make himself generally useful; he

ran errands, drove Abe's car, and put in eight hours a day at the beck and call of the Poverty Row producer. But Abe was short of money, and he had put Peter Pratt under contract because he had anticipated cashing in upon latent screen possibilities possessed by the young man.

Now he was wondering if he had not better break the contract and turn the fellow loose again, and save the money.

Peter was seated in a straight-back chair which he had tilted to rest against the wall, and he was reading a book, the title of which Abe Gooltz could read across the room: "Principles of English Grammar."

"You got a gall, educating yourself on my time," he growled.

Peter Pratt closed the book.

"I was only waiting for you to give me something to do, Mr. Gooltz," he protested. "I might as well be reading as twiddling my thumbs."

"Is that so? While you're twiddling your thumbs you might think of an idea for a story or somethin'. English grammar ain't no use in the fillum business. I got a good mind to give you the gate."

Peter Pratt got up and reached for his cap.

"I don't hold you to my contract," he said. "So long."

"What's the matter with you? I said I had a mind to. I didn't say I gave you the gate. Can't a man think in his own office?"

"I know I'm a bill of expense to you, Abe," Pete declared. "I know you're sore because Ludwig Lewis fired me, and I know you're broke."

The little producer bristled.

"Who says I'm broke?" he demanded. "Don't you make remarks like that. Some creditor might hear you. I'm not broke. I'm kind o' financially embarrassed till I get some sales from that dog fillum, 'Almost Human.' But I got lots of assets. Ain't I paid you reg'lar?"

"Sure, Abe."

"Well, sit down, then. Study your grammar if you want to. Any ideas about a story that you'd have wouldn't be any good, nohow. You have to get in wrong with Ludwig Lewis, and he puts it around that you're a bad character, very unreliable, and a trouble maker, so nobody wants to take you on a set. I'm stuck with you. Why wouldn't I be sore?"

"But I offer to let you off."

"You're too willing. How do I know you ain't got something up your sleeve? Say, why don't you go out with that Catherine Borodin? She likes you, gosh knows why, and she's got big influence in this business."

"I may be a bum, but I'm not making use of women to help me up in the world," retorted Peter Pratt.

"Why not? Don't women make use of men? If she was stuck on me, wouldn't I get this Catherine Borodin to find me some capital? Don't be a fool, Peter. In this business men and women are just the same, only the women get the best end of it. You go out and call on this vampire, see, and ask her to speak to Moe Leventhal, over at Mammoth, about you."

"No," responded Peter. "I promised Annabel I would never have any more to do with her."

Abe snorted.

"Annabel Green! A nice kid, but no brains."

"Don't you knock Annabel," threatened the ex-pugilist.

"Didn't I say she was a nice kid, but if she had brains would she waste her time on you? Not that she wastes much of it," he added, with a grin. "I heard she's going around with Edgar de Longue, the Celebrated Players star."

"Annabel has to be nice to well-known actors and directors because it

helps her career," Peter replied. "Besides, she has only had dinner with him two or three times."

"Then why can't you help your career and make some money for me by eating with Catherine Borodin? She'd maybe pay the check."

"It's not the same thing, and I won't do it."

Abe sighed heavily.

"You're noble, and it costs me money," he groaned. "I don't know what I'm going to do with you. Forty dollars every week for three years. Oi, what a fool!"

"Break the contract," said Peter.

Abe shook his head.

"I got a hunch," he said. "If only I got some capital I would make a picture with you myself. You don't cost me any more than the dog, Napoleon."

"Don't you know any bankers?" asked the prospective successor to the dog star.

"Sure, I know them. That's why I can't borrow any money. With ten thousand dollars, Pete, I could make you famous. What a fillum I could produce for ten thousand dollars, or five! For five thousand dollars I could make what a pitcher!"

"Well, what are you looking at me for?"

"Peter," said Abe, "I got an idea. Never mind what it is. You keep the office while I go out."

The journey of Abe Gooltz was not a long one. It led to the office of Dave Prother, manager and booker for the Hollywood Stadium, the same man who had expelled Peter Pratt from the prize ring for being knocked out in the first round three times in succession, in Peter's last fight.

Later, during the making of Abe's picture, "Almost Human," Peter had appeared in the same ring in a scene with Arthur Rex, the film star, in which Rex, as the hero of the picture, was supposed to knock out the "villainous" Peter. But Rex, carrying a grudge, had knocked out Peter in reality with a loaded glove. Peter had regained his feet, and had beaten Rex to a pulp, to get even.

After this amazing exhibition, Prother had offered to take him in hand and make a real fighter out of him. But Peter Pratt had promised Annabel that he would leave the ring, and had kept his word.

"Listen, Mr. Prother," Abe Gooltz began. "This feller Pratt is a great fighter; you said so yourself."

"With training, perhaps," countered Prother. "At present he is a mark for a good professional."

"The kid had stage fright in the old days, but he's all over it now. He told me all about it. I betcher you he could give the chempion a belting."

"In an alley fight, perhaps; not in a ring."

"You put up a ten-thousand-dollar purse and see him go," urged Abe.

Prother laughed long and loud.

"People don't pay money to see setups; at least, they don't do it with their eyes open. I couldn't get five hundred dollars in the house for a fight between Pratt and a good man. The people of this town have seen him flattened by pork-and-beaners. If I took him I wouldn't let him in a ring for six months, and then I'd work him up through preliminary bouts and make a reputation for him. In a couple of years, if he knocked out a dozen good men, I might stage a championship fight."

"I can't wait," replied Abe. "Listen. Will you stick him on in a prelim with a pretty-good man some night when you got a good pair of main-bout fighters?"

"Well, I don't know. He's been knocked out here pretty often. I might give him another chance—put him up against another hunk of cheese."

"No. Pick that Mickey Murphy that

licked him last time." Mickey was really of Abe's race. "Mickey Murphy" was more suitable for the ring than his real, lengthy name.

"Mickey is coming along fast. He'd slaughter Pratt the way he did before."

"What odds'll yer give me?" insinuated Abe.

Prother laughed.

"A hundred to one on Mickey, only I don't make bets like that."

"Will you give me five to one?"

"Yes," said Prother. "Murphy is a cinch against Pratt, though with six months' training it might be different."

"When will you put them on?"

"In two weeks. A hundred-dollar purse to the winner; nothing to the loser."

Abe drew a thin roll from his pocket and peeled off a hundred-dollar bill.

"Cover it," he suggested.

Prother drew a very fat roll and laid five one-hundred-dollar bills upon Abe's mite. "You're on," he said.

They agreed upon a stakeholder, after which Abe returned to the office of Epitomy Films. Peter Pratt was still reading his English grammar, repeating sample sentences aloud.

"Pete," asked Abe, when he had resumed his seat at his big desk, "do you think you could lick that Mickey Murphy that knocked you out five or six weeks ago?"

"Yes," replied Pratt. "I could beat any of those hams that sent me down in the first round. The trouble with me was that I wasn't used to a ring, and the lights bothered me; but all that wouldn't bother me any more after that bout with Arthur Rex. I found myself that day, Abe."

"Sure," replied the producer. "That's what I think. Well, I just matched you for two weeks from to-night against Mickey Murphy." He waited to see the effect of his bombshell.

"The devil you did!" shouted Peter Pratt. "What right had you to match me with anybody? I've left the ring, see? I'm not going back. I promised I wouldn't."

Abe did not quail before his indignation.

"You got to," he retorted. "You got a contract with me. You hev to do what I tell you."

Peter was standing over the little man, glowering at him, but Abe refused to flinch.

"Your contract was to make me a film actor. It says nothing about boxing."

"There was a lot of clauses in it, Pete. You got to make yourself generally useful."

"In the film business, not in the ring. What has fighting to do with moving pictures?"

"So excited he gets," reproved Abe. "You got to fight Mickey Murphy in the interests of Epitomy Fillums. I need ten thousand dollars, or five thousand anyway, for my next picture, and you get it for me by licking Mickey Murphy."

"I don't see how. They wouldn't give you fifty dollars for a fight by me."

"I'm a good matchmaker. I got a hundred. Winners takes all."

Peter Pratt sat down and began to laugh.

"Business troubles are turning your brain, Abe. What good is a hundred when you need five thousand?"

"Out of this fight I make five, maybe ten, thousand. You leave it to me."

"Nothing doing."

"Your contract——"

"I break my contract. Sue me."

"Listen, Pete. With the five thousand I make a super fillum, and you play a great big rôle in it. I got a wonderful story——"

"What is it?"

"I ain't got it yet, but I will hev it. And I give the lead to Annabel Green. No, I star her. Now will you do it?"

"Annabel doesn't want me to fight any more."

"She don't want you to fight because you get licked. But if you win, she's crazy about you. Look at the way she carried on when you beat up Arthur Rex. You tell her you're doing it for her, to get her starred. I'll put her name on the fillum bigger than the title of the picture. You get featured; she gets starred."

"She might agree to that," considered Peter. "But what do I get out of it aside from the part in the picture?"

"Mercenary, he is," moaned Abe. "I give you the whole purse, a hundred dollars, and you get your forty a week while you train and right along afterward, even if you get licked. And I make you famous. He esks what he gets out of it!"

"I don't see how you can make thousands out of a hundred-dollar fight."

With a grin, Abe reached up and patted the big fellow on the shoulder.

"If you could see things like that, you'd be paying me a salary, 'stead of me paying you. Listen. You use my garage to train in. You put up a punching bag and you work there for the next two weeks. Don't come near the office. Get out now!"

After Peter had departed, still reluctant, Abe did some figuring, and finally put on his hat and went out. He entered his automobile and drove it into Los Angeles, finally arriving at an institution peculiar to that peculiar city, an automobile hock shop. It was located upon a vacant lot, upon which stood a small, one-room shack which was staggering under a sign saying: "Phœnix Auto Finance Corporation."

There were many machines, some of them of expensive makes, parked upon the lot. In that happy land it never rains from May to November, and the finance company did not need a roof to shelter its pledges. After a half an hour of haggling with another Russian in the little house, Abe emerged with twelve hundred dollars, cash, and the right to operate a cheap geared car for two weeks. He had often been in low water, and it was not the first time that his ancient car had been in what the Hollywood folks call "the repair shop."

While it was very difficult for actors to find Abe when he did not wish them to, he knew where to locate them when he desired to see them. So, happening with apparent casualness into a certain Italian restaurant on Wilcox Avenue which rejoiced under the name "Paris-Rome," but suggested neither city, he saw Arthur Rex, wearing a cotton-wool pad on his nose, eating a solitary dinner.

Abe greeted him with a hearty hand, but the leading man of "Almost Human" ignored the hand and scowled at him. It was Abe who had insisted upon Arthur Rex continuing the fight with Peter Pratt, a few weeks ago, although the picture was finished, because Arthur had meanly struck his opponent with a glove containing a hunk of lead. As the result was a broken nose for Arthur, it was natural that he did not rejoice to see Abe.

"No hard feelings," said the producer, as he seated himself uninvited. "You had it coming to you, Artie, but I'm sorry he busted your nose. How's it coming along?"

"I shall have to have an operation to straighten it," said the other sullenly. "It's all your fault."

"No, it was Peter Pratt's fault. He done it with his little fist. Oi, what a fighter that boy is!" Abe was chuckling.

"Fighter, nothing! Just a chopping block. He outweighed me twenty pounds, and I'm not a professional. Any cheap pug can murder him."

"Of course, he used to be rotten, but after the way he come back and laid you out, I think he's good. He's going back into the ring, Arthur."

"That's good news," the actor observed, with a nasty grin. "I'll have a ringside seat and see him slaughtered. Who's he going to fight?"

"Mickey Murphy."

Rex laughed loudly.

"That's the guy who knocked him out with the first punch. What chance has he got?"

"After what he done to you, I think he has a good chance," said Abe.

"It's a million to one on Mickey."

"You think so? What odds will you give?"

"Anything. A hundred to one."

"For how much?" demanded Abe Gooltz.

"You actually want to bet on that tramp?"

"You name the odds.

"Well, I might bet ten to one that Mickey wins the bout."

"You're on," snapped Abe, drawing two hundred dollars from his pocket. "Put up or shut up."

"I haven't got so much money, and I won't give ten to one on anything."

"Then you think Pete has got a chance."

"No, but I can't make a big bet. I haven't much money."

"That ring you got on. It's a nice diamond. Worth, maybe, five hundred dollars."

"I paid fifteen hundred for it when I was flush. Four carats."

"Full of flaws. I put up two hundred, cash, against the ring; that's only seven and a half to one."

"You're on!" exclaimed Arthur Rex.

The proprietor of the café took the stakes and deposited them in his safe. When the gamblers departed, Arthur Rex was in a kidding mood.

"I've just found two hundred dollars," he declared. "Abe, you're going to pay me for having the time of my life. I hope Mickey doesn't knock him out quick, but cuts him to pieces."

"For that ring I can get a thousand dollars, at least," Abe Gooltz was saying to himself. "People oughtn't to let their feelings run away with them."

His second prospective victim was Ludwig Lewis, and he made a special trip in the hired car to Mammoth to catch that important director in his office about five the next afternoon.

"Well, Ludwig," he began, "you chased Peter Pratt out of the fillum business. He's gone back into the fight game."

"He's the bozo who got knocked out three times in the first round by prelim fighters," said Lewis. "I hope they murder him this time."

"He ain't so bad," Abe retorted. "I understand he floored you with one wallop, and you're thirty pounds heavier, at that."

Lewis scowled.

"I was drunk," he replied. "And I'm not a prize fighter. Who's Pratt going up against?"

"Mickey Murphy."

"I saw that baby last week in a semi-final. He knocked his man cold in the third. Did he ever fight Pratt?"

Abe grinned.

"Knocked him out in the first round about six weeks ago."

"There you are. Nothing to it."

"I like Peter Pratt," Abe Gooltz replied. "He's a nice boy, and I'm going to bet on him if I can get good odds."

"Kiss your money good-by. I'm going to the fight. When is it?"

"A week from Friday."

"I'll be at the ringside with a roll. Though nobody will bet on Pratt."

"I bet on him if I get good odds."

"What do you call good odds?" asked Lewis warily.

"Oh, maybe ten to one."

"Nix. Murphy might drop dead or something. Give you six to one, Abe, and cover whatever you want to put up."

"Five hundred dollars," retorted Abe promptly, and produced the long green.

"My check good?"

"Sure, Ludwig."

The picture director immediately produced his check book and wrote a check for three thousand dollars."

"Got any more money?" he demanded.

"Sure, but I want better odds."

"On your way," laughed Ludwig Lewis. "You're a small sport. Didn't think I'd cover your five hundred?"

"You must hate the guy," grinned Abe.

"I don't like him," snapped Lewis.

Abe Gooltz departed, wearing a broad smile. He had been confident that these two bitter enemies of Peter Pratt could be jockeyed into wagering large sums at absurd odds against him when they learned that he was to fight a man who had disposed of Peter in a previous bout with one punch. He had eight hundred dollars wagered against forty-five hundred, assuming he could get no more than a thousand dollars for Arthur Rex's diamond ring, and he still had four hundred dollars to put up at the ringside. Abe figured that he could get even money upon the night of the bout that Pete would go out in the first round, and then take his bets and his winnings and pick off big odds that Peter would lose the bout.

Of course, Abe Gooltz was perfectly well aware that he was taking a tremendous risk in wagering heavily upon Peter Pratt, and that the chances were in favor of that worthy young man succumbing to a punch, as usual.

Abe was a born gambler, and he would grab the short end of any proposition which offered a chance. He was aware that Peter Pratt was a much better fighter than anybody had given him credit for. Besides, a thousand dollars was of little use to him in making a picture, but with five thousand he could produce one which he could sell for fifteen or twenty thousand. Thus upon Peter Pratt's prowess depended a possible profit of ten or fifteen thousand dollars. Abe Gooltz was just taking a chance.

Peter had not been able to break the news to Annabel Green that he had reverted to the prize ring, because, upon calling her house the previous day, her mother had informed him that Annabel had joined a bathing party at the Casa Del Mar Club at Santa Monica and would dine in the clubhouse. When he had a feeling that Annabel was not treating him just right, he always stifled it because he considered he ought to be grateful that she had dealings with him at all, since she was a rising young film actress and he a crude, untutored young man whose prospects were nothing beyond the contract which he had signed with Abe Gooltz. And Abe, in the film business, had little standing, and what he had was bad.

Annabel he knew to be a sensible girl who had a mother to support and who tolerated him because she was good natured. When a spasm of jealousy had caused her to write to Ludwig Lewis, identifying Peter as the person who had beaten him up on a certain occasion and causing him to discharge the young man from a company where he had a chance to show something, he had rejoiced instead of being angry, because it was the first real sign on her part that she liked him very much.

But Annabel had succeeded in replacing him upon the old footing. She told him frankly that she liked him, but that he had to show her achievements before she could really respect him, and she had frowned upon the fighting business.

Annabel would be furious with him for going back into the ring; but if one ring battle landed him in a real part in a real picture and got her starred for the first time in her life, he thought she would forgive him.

The day after his wager with Ludwig Lewis, Abe Gooltz went out to the garage before starting for his office and found Peter already up and punching the bag. Abe regarded his bulging muscles, his broad shoulders, his slim waist, and his powerful legs with admiration, and then proceeded to impress upon him the necessity of beating Mickey Murphy.

"Listen, Pete," he began. "For you I hocked my automobile."

"Gee, Abe, you hadn't ought to have done that," Peter said, distressed. "This feller is liable to take me, just as he did before."

"With the money I got I joshed Arthur Rex to put up a diamond ring worth fifteen hundred against two hundred, cash. That's how bad he wants to see you licked. He's going to have a ringside seat."

"The little hound!" growled Peter Pratt. "Well, he won't get the chance."

"You bet he won't. Then I went to Ludwig Lewis, and he bet three thousand against five hundred, cash, that Mickey would murder you. He's going to be there."

"I'll show that big stiff!" roared Peter, delivering a terrific thump upon the bag.

"All that money I bet on you, Pete," continued Abe. "Now, listen. I think, maybe, I hire a guy to box with you. That Izzy Block stood up against Mickey for three rounds. I can get him cheap."

"I never had any training for any of my fights," Peter said. "If I had a sparring partner, it would help a lot."

"And sirloin steaks I order for your dinner every night, no matter what my wife says. You get strong."

"I'll take Mickey Murphy for you, Abe!" cried Peter Pratt. "I went up against him last time with nothing to eat all day and only a couple of crullers the night before. But"—he grinned—"you ought to be plugging for him. He's a good Irishman—like you, Abe!"

Abe grinned back.

"Other times I would, but this is business. You murder him."

Unfortunately, Peter Pratt acquired a black eye during his first day's session with Izzy Block, his sparring partner who came for fifty dollars a week with a very poor opinion of the man with whom he was to train, but who changed his views after a few rounds

This made it unwise for Peter to make his explanation in person to Annabel Green, and over the telephone he met with misfortune.

"I am afraid you are perfectly hopeless," Annabel said sharply. "After all my efforts to induce you to improve yourself, you flop right back into that disgusting business. I'm off you, Peter Pratt."

"But, Annabel," he pleaded, "I'm doing it for you. Abe promises to star you in his next picture."

Her scornful laugh rang over the phone.

"You don't suppose I would go back to work for Abe Gooltz?" she retorted. "What good would being a Gooltz star do me? Nobody ever sees his pictures, and he won't pay enough to keep a kitten in milk. If you're doing this for me, I thank you very much, and oblige me by telling him what I said."

"Can't I come up and talk to you about it?"

"You can if you like, but I'm very busy. I have a very excellent prospect with Mammoth, and I'm seeing some people to-night about it. You can run in about five this afternoon for a few minutes, if you like."

Pete hesitated.

"It's like this," he said. "I got a sparring partner and—er—I thought I ought to come after dark. I got a black eye."

"Then keep away from my house. Don't you dare to appear looking like

a bruiser. I give you up, Peter Pratt." *Bing!* That was the receiver being slammed upon the hook by the indignant Annabel.

Mr. Prother, at the stadium, did not broadcast the news that he had matched Mickey Murphy with Peter Pratt. On the contrary. He had a good main bout and did not trouble to announce his two preliminary bouts. Thus the audience which assembled upon the eventful night was not aware of the treat in store for it.

When the announcer bellowed from the ring that the first bout would be between Mickey Murphy and Peter Pratt, a roar of protest and indignation went up that penetrated to Peter's remote dressing room. He understood its meaning, but he grinned his slow and captivating smile, the same which had attracted Catherine Borodin, most famous of vampires, and caused Abe Gooltz to put him under a three-year contract for forty dollars a week.

In the second row, ringside, sat Arthur Rex. On the other side of the ring, in the first row, squatted Ludwig Lewis. Abe Gooltz had a chair in the third row, and in the fifth row sat Catherine Borodin, the blond Russian whose dawning interest in Peter had awakened a flash of jealousy in Annabel Green.

Annabel had informed Peter in a subsequent telephone conversation that she would not dream of attending the battle; nevertheless, she was present, seated halfway back. In an audience of three thousand there were six or seven hundred women, most of them young and pretty.

Catherine Borodin did not know that Peter Pratt was performing this evening; she had been attracted by the main bout between the two well-known lightweights, and she was escorted by no less a personality than Moe Leventhal, boss of the Mammoth Studios.

Annabel, at the last moment, had purchased two tickets and invited an extra boy to escort her. She didn't know why she was present, but she could not keep away. And Abe Gooltz had raised the wind and had six hundred dollars to place at neat odds if the opportunity offered.

Mickey Murphy climbed into the ring first. He had weighed in at a hundred and fifty pounds—a dark, glowering, savage youth with a very low forehead, a wide, flat nose, and a perpetual scowl. He was welcomed noisily and grinned at his friends, displaying several glittering gold teeth. His grin was almost as terrifying as his frown.

When Peter Pratt entered the ring there was a burst of hearty laughter and jeers and catcalls from the rear benches which were not calculated to encourage a young man trying to get along. The crowd had seen him knocked out three times in succession a few seconds after the bell had rung for the first round, and, having paid good money to see fighting, the regulars were angry; they considered that the management was imposing on them.

"Look at the deep-sea diver!" shouted a ruffian beside Abe Gooltz.

"This is Mickey's meat!" cried somebody halfway back.

"The man with the glass jaw!"

"Peter Pratt, the plum pudding!" yelled some alliterative genius.

"It's Peter Pratt!" exclaimed Catherine Borodin to her escort. "He's a nice boy, Moe. I hope he wins."

"That guy won't last a round," commented Moe Leventhal. His heavy voice reached the ears of Abe Gooltz, two rows in front.

"Bet you a hundred, even, he does," cried Abe.

"You're on," agreed Moe.

"Got any more soft money?" demanded the man next to Abe "I'll take fifty."

In a couple of minutes Gooltz had placed six hundred dollars on Peter

Pratt's surviving the first three minutes, all at even money, which showed the contempt with which his protégé was regarded by the fight fans.

"Two to one, Mickey knocks him out," cried a man in the fourth row.

"I'll take that bet," cried Catherine Borodin. "One hundred against two."

Abe Gooltz scowled at her. What business had she butting in and betting on Peter? She was going to ruin his odds. However, he had too much respect for Moe Leventhal to chide the lady whom he was escorting, and, anyway, he had done pretty well in placing his bets.

*Clang!* went the bell, and the two men were moving to the center of the ring. Peter Pratt had a healthy respect for his opponent; Mickey Murphy had none for Peter. Hadn't he disposed of him with one blow a few weeks ago? He led with his left carelessly, and then a stinging right on the side of the head caused him to give ground and blink out of piggy eyes in astonishment.

Peter Pratt had been in the prize ring three times before his experience in the motion-picture fight scenes of "Almost Human." On each of these occasions he had been out of the ring in a few seconds. Thanks to Abe Gooltz's film enterprise, he had had a chance to get used to the feel of the ring and the glare of the lights. He was well fed and strong, and had been mixing it for two weeks with Izzy Block, so that he was in condition for the first time in his life.

While waiting for the bell to inaugurate the festivities, he had picked out Arthur Rex and Ludwig Lewis, his two bitter enemies, in the front rows, waiting to gloat over his downfall. He saw Abe laying bets right and left, and he heard Catherine Borodin when she accepted a bet of two to one against his winning. Annabel Green he had not discovered, and the idea that she was not present to watch him was a distinct relief.

In fiction the appearance at the ringside of the fighter's sweetheart always encourages him to go in and win, but in real life it is much more apt to contribute to his defeat. To-night he was sure the lights would not bother him, and he was not disturbed by the jeers of the crowd, because he had anticipated that they would be bellowing for Mickey Murphy.

He knew that he outweighed Mickey by a couple of pounds; he was just as big and strong and more intelligent. So he had no fear of him, and, besides, he could not let Abe Gooltz, who had staked everything upon him, in for a heavy loss. Accordingly, he boxed cautiously, found that Mickey telegraphed his blows to an opponent who watched his eyes, and saw with satisfaction that his failure to walk into the first wallop had confused his sturdy but stupid opponent.

His caution was misinterpreted by the crowd, which belabored him with verbal blows, called him "quitter," "faker," and "fourflusher." A small, thin, but lion-souled person halfway back demanded that he stand up and take it. A multitude bellowed to Mickey to step in and finish him, which was just what Mickey was trying to do without success.

Many a pugilist who has started a battle with a plan of campaign has been driven by the roar of the mob into dropping his plan and stepping into a knock-out blow; but Peter Pratt was not listening to the congregation; he was blocking wild swings, ducking jabs, and evading uppercuts.

Aside from one right to the head at the opening of the round, he did not land a hard blow upon Mickey Murphy during the first session. Nor had Mickey delivered a single telling smash. When the bell rang he walked back to his corner, jubilant; while Mickey

slouched into his and shook his head sullenly when his seconds upbraided him for not finishing the big set-up.

Abe Gooltz made use of the intermission to collect six hundred dollars from reluctant losers, and then offered any part of a thousand at proper odds on Pratt to win the bout. The audience was still almost unanimous for Mickey Murphy, who had done all the leading in the first round, and was quite convinced that Peter had survived because he was afraid to take a chance. Nevertheless, the best Abe could do was to get his money down at two to one. Catherine Borodin had ruined the odds.

Mickey opened the second round by a bull rush, which Peter side-stepped. As his opponent passed, Peter drove a hard right to his ear—which was already of cauliflower formation. Murphy continued on to the ropes, turned, and found Peter rushing in; but Peter slipped, fell to his knees, and saved himself by grasping Mickey about the thighs and pulling himself up.

As he lifted, his jaw was exposed, and, like lightning, came a terrific right smash to the chin. All Peter could do was pull back his head, but the blow landed with most of its force, and he flopped over on the canvas.

He was not out, but he was groggy. He heard the shrill whoop of the vindictive Arthur Rex and a howl like that of a wounded animal from Abe Gooltz. The blow had hurt Abe more than it had Peter Pratt.

He lay on the canvas while the referee began his count, and the unsympathetic crowd began to count with him. He longed to jump to his feet and confound them, but he had sense enough to stay on the canvas until the count of seven. Then he rose slowly, and at nine was on his feet, trying to meet a furious rush. Both Mickey's fists were flying like flails, and, despite Peter's efforts, half the blows landed upon the body and face, some of them hurting badly. But none touched a vital spot. He went into a clinch and held on until the referee tore the men apart. A second later he clinched again. The rest of the round was the effort of Mickey Murphy to knock down a man who was apparently out on his feet, but the bell saved him. However, the first two rounds belonged to Mickey Murphy by a mile. Any one could see that.

Abe Gooltz now could have got odds of four or five to one, but he had no more money, and, if he had, he had lost the heart to bet. As Peter sat upon his stool, submitting to the rude and not-too-friendly ministrations of the seconds furnished him by the management, he was able to smile at remarks from the crowd.

He was far from through, and had deliberately stalled through the second round, while Mickey had exhausted himself trying to break out of clinches and to apply the finishing touch.

Mickey had had every chance in the world to send him to slumberland as a result of his unfortunate fall, and he had delivered a blow to the chin which would have ended the evening for the old Peter Pratt. Peter now felt that he could take Mickey; he had no fear of him, and the bloodthirsty throng simply amused him. The shrill screeches of women fans no longer affected him, the lights did not bother him, and he felt he was a better man than his opponent.

Then the bell rang.

He moved forward slowly, and Mickey dashed in, full of enthusiasm and murderous intentions. Murphy started a right swing and left an opening as wide as a house.

*Crash!*

Peter's right glove had only moved forward six or eight inches, but every ounce of his hundred and fifty pounds was behind it, and it struck like a pile driver a few inches above the heart of

Mickey Murphy. With an expression of utter astonishment upon his ugly face, the swarthy youth began to sink, dropped on his knees, and fell forward upon his face. You could have heard a pin drop in the auditorium for a second, and then there came a roar that seemed to lift the roof.

Drama is the art of the unexpected. Nobody in the building, with the exception of Abe Gooltz, had supposed that Peter Pratt had a chance against Mickey Murphy. Catherine Borodin had bet on him to win, but she had never seen him in the ring before. It was like a battle between a bulldog and a rabbit, in which the rabbit bested the bulldog. Even those who had bet on Murphy could not restrain their astonished delight. The solemn count of the referee could not be heard in the din except right in the ring. One—two—three—four—five — six -- seven —eight——"

Mickey Murphy stirred. At nine he was up. On his feet after a blow like that which had given the world's championship to Bob Fitzsimmons in the good old days.

Again the welkin rang, but this time the cheers were for game Mickey Murphy. Peter Pratt, puzzled, closed in. Murphy ought to have been out for ten minutes, but he was up and ready to do battle.

The immigrants of the past generation have produced some extremely hardy children under the kindly climate and friendly skies of the U. S. A., and Mickey Murphy was a tough boy. Peter Pratt now had his turn of smashing away at a groggy man who clung to him like a brother, and Mickey, despite savage punishment, remained until the bell.

The crowd, no longer hostile, applauded both Peter and his opponent impartially. Abe Gooltz was grinning from ear to ear. Peter had won that round and there were three more. As sure as fate, he would dispose of Mickey, and the bets were safe.

The fourth round was even. Peter tried hard, but Mickey was wary now, and toward the end he evened up a row of left jabs by a heavy right to the stomach and a left swing which caught Peter above the ear and sent him against the ropes with a bad headache.

During the intermission a youth brought down a note to Peter Pratt, but one of his seconds intercepted it and thrust it into his trousers pocket.

"No notes till the scrap is over," he objected. Peter was not tired, but he had a few aches and pains. Mickey's condition was only to be surmised. He always looked like a killer.

Round five was again a boxing match, with Peter doing most of the leading and Mickey occasionally planting a damaging punch to the body. Abe looked over the shoulder of one of the judges in the front row and saw that the man had given Mickey Murphy three rounds, Peter one, and called the fifth even. Unless Peter knocked out his man in the sixth session, Mickey would win the match.

"Pete!" he shouted. Peter turned his tired eyes toward him.

"You got to kill him," advised Abe. "These robbers are cheating you."

Abe was on his feet. Somebody grabbed him and slammed him into his chair; but Peter had received the warning. So far, he had fought a heady fight, had refrained from chances, and had not been willing to take a blow to land one. But there was only another round, and if he was voted a beaten man, he might as well risk a knockout.

*Clang!* went the final gong.

"Go to it, now. It's yer last chance," his seconds warned him.

The Hollywood Stadium is noted for slugging matches, for the youths who battle there are strong on heart and

short on science, as a general thing; but never before had it witnessed what transpired in that frame.

Peter Pratt went in to win or lose, and Mickey had to meet him or be buried under an avalanche. Forgotten was Peter's careful guard. He made no effort to block blows, but opened up with everything he had in the way of an offense. There is no blow as effective as a swing, but a straight-arm punch will beat it to the mark, and all through the fight he had avoided swinging. Now he cut loose both with right and left, and only artful dodging by Mickey Murphy prevented his extermination.

Mickey, on his side, had no such incentive for battle. He had the fight tucked away on points, and all he had to do was to play safe until the bell rang. However, he was a first-rate fighting man and he liked slugging. Furthermore, he was landing, while Peter was missing. Three times he doubled Peter up with rights to the stomach, and each time Peter came back strong.

It seemed to Peter that he had been fighting for ages, and he knew he was losing, when he saw in Mickey's eyes that the fellow was waiting to plant a right on his jaw. He thrust it out invitingly and the blow started, but Peter had also begun a left swing. *Crash!* came the right to the jaw—which he had not tried to block—and *crash!* landed his left upon the right temple of Mr. Mickey Murphy. A perfect exchange.

Peter felt himself falling, grasped and caught the rope. Everything was black and he could not see his opponent. He heard the referee counting slowly and he tried desperately to rise, but somehow—something—— Then the thundercloud lifted and he saw that it was Mickey Murphy who lay prone, while he, Peter, was on his feet, clinging to the rope. He had been knocked out, but he had not gone down. Mickey had fallen.

"Ten," said the referee, then grasped Peter's right glove and lifted it high.

Pandemonium! Hats were thrown into the air; girls were shrieking; men were bellowing. Abe Gooltz was busy collecting. Peter's eyes closed and he would have fallen if his seconds had not been on hand to support him to his corner. Mickey Murphy lay there, while his seconds poured the contents of a pail of water over him.

After a minute or two Mickey sat up, and Peter, by that time in full possession of his senses, went over and helped him to his feet.

"Well," said the defeated gladiator, grinning, "I done it to you oncest. No hard feelin's."

"You are a great scrapper, Mickey."

"You ain't so bad," replied Mickey, grinning.

The referee forced them both out of the ring, for this was only a preliminary bout. However, anything after what they had witnessed would have been an anticlimax, and already some of the most blasé patrons were departing. Peter was led to his dressing room, where he examined his face anxiously in the mirror. He had his original black eye renewed, there was a cut on his right cheek, and his jaw ached like a dozen bad teeth; but there were no marks that a few days would not remove. His body was sore, but no ribs were broken. On the whole, he had escaped with little punishment, considering the furious character of the bout. A few minutes later Abe Gooltz burst into the room, delirious with joy.

"Six thousand dollars you won for me, Pete!" he proclaimed. "Oi! but I would have sold out cheap in the second round. I promised you a hundred, but I'm a sport. I give you two hundred, and to-morrow we get busy on our picture."

Peter frowned at him.

"I take a beating for two hundred dollars. You sit by the ringside and get hoarse and you make six thousand. It ain't fair, Abe."

"And why ain't it?" demanded the film man. "I hock my car and take my last dollar and put it up on you to win. If you lose, all you get is a headache, but I lose my home, for Mrs. Gooltz would put me out. It's capital that gets the money, Pete. Labor ain't nothin'."

"Then I'm going to be a capitalist," retorted Peter Pratt.

"Sure you are. You stick to me and I make you lots of money. Now we put on another fight, see——"

"We do not," retorted Peter Pratt. "This one ruined me with Annabel Green. She won't have anything to do with me. She wouldn't even come to the fight."

"Is that so? I seen her yelling her head off for you to win."

"She was there?" exclaimed Peter.

"Sure, she was. Girls do a lot of talking, but all you got to do to get them is to win."

"If she kept away from me until I won, I'm through with her," said Peter. "I never heard a word from her all the time I was training, and when I asked her to come yesterday she hung up on me."

"Come in, Miss Borodin!" exclaimed Abe cordially. "Come right in. How do you do, Mr. Leventhal? What do you think of my fighter-ector?"

The blond Catherine had crowded into the little dressing room, followed by the portly film producer, who acknowledged Abe's exuberance with a cool nod.

"If he acts as well as he fights," said Leventhal, "he ought to be a find. Catherine was telling me he has possibilities."

"Look at the money you won for me, Peter Pratt," said Catherine.

Peter grinned, and Moe Leventhal suddenly eyed him closely.

"Guess you and Abe won all the money that was bet on that bout," Peter said. "I'm glad I came through for you."

"Send this fellow over to see me some day, Gooltz," said the business-like Moe Leventhal "Something might be done with him."

Catherine whispered to Peter.

"I saw little Miss Green while we were on our way out here and asked her to come along. Do you know what she said?"

"Said she was off me," replied Peter dispiritedly.

"She said you didn't want to see her, and she didn't blame you."

"What?" he cried. "Is she still there?"

"No. She left immediately."

"Oh!"

The visitors departed, and Peter dressed slowly. Abe thrust his wealth into his pocket and departed, also. A burst of cheering announced the finish of the semifinals, and he heard the victorious and defeated warriors pass his door. Presently one of his former seconds thrust his head in the door.

"Here's a note that came for you early in the fight," he said. "I stuck it in my pocket and forgot it."

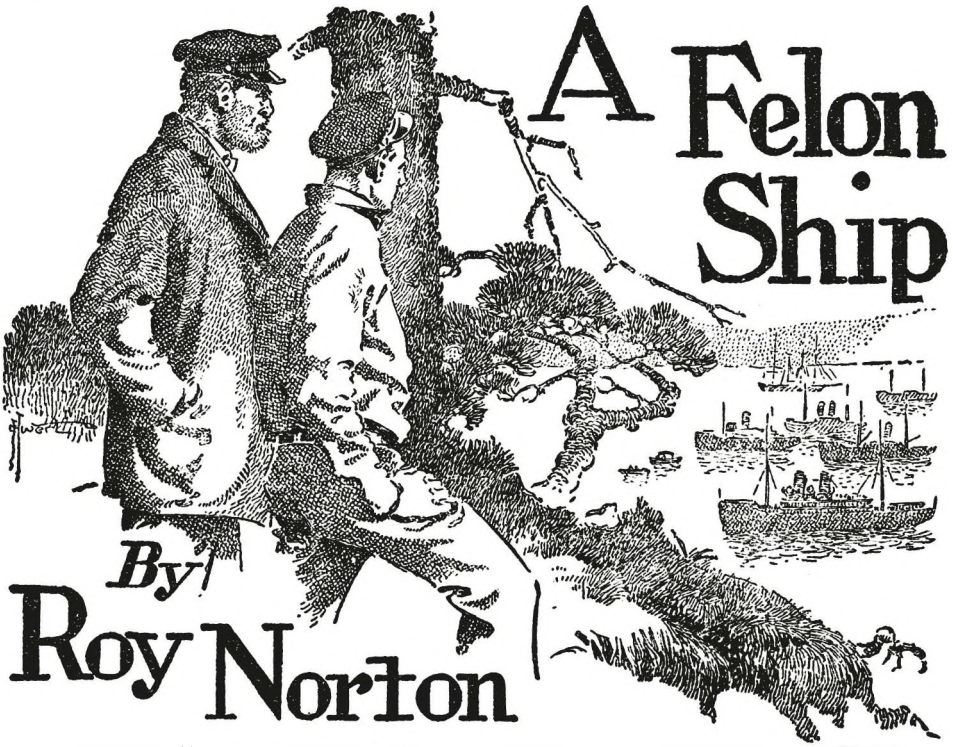
Peter opened the folded slip of paper, and his heart thumped when he recognized Annabel's handwriting.

DEAR PETER: Forget all the mean things I said. I'm here and I want you to beat that nasty creature. ANNABEL GREEN

The potential million-dollar smile lightened the room.

"I guess things ain't so bad, after all," observed Peter Pratt.

*Follow Peter Pratt's progress in the next issue of* THE POPULAR STORIES—*October 22nd.*



# A Felon Ship

By Roy Norton

*Author of "The Strongest Man On Earth," "The Opportunist," Etc.*

**Another tale of Captain Drake, the Opportunist, in which he goes to considerable trouble to break a couple of vicious crooks and make the *Malabart* an honest ship again.**

CAPTAIN ELI DRAKE, who was known over many seas as "The Old Hyena," had quelled a mutiny single-handed, been the victor in a hundred free-for-all fights, was picked up by a constable on the water front of Plymouth. He was picked up from a gutter, doused under a hydrant, and with eyes so swollen that he could barely see through them recognized an arc lamp as something familiar, the Bobby's uniform as something seen before, and appraised his own condition.

"I thought when I first saw you you was plain drunk; but now I sees you are plain beaten to a pulp," the constable commented. "The 'orspital for you, my lad. Who done all that to you?"

Captain Eli did not answer, but regaining still more strength, felt his battered nose, his loosened teeth, his cut ears and then probed his ribs with his fingers.

"Humph! Put the boots to me after I was out," he growled between his puffed lips. Then he rested against the water tap and replied to his good Samaritan: "No, I don't want any hospital. No, I don't know who handed it to me, so there's no one you can pinch." He paused, felt in his pockets and found his watch undisturbed. "All you can do is to get me a cab to take me to my rooms at the Widow Catlin's, up near Davenport. After that I can take care of myself."

Once in the cab, he muttered:

"I've seen a few men licked, and licked a few myself, now and then, but, by the ghost of Davy Jones!—never have I known a man to get it as good as I have, unless they were out to kill him.

And that bunch got paid to come as near as they could doing me in without finishing the job. And, by thunder! I'll get to the bottom of this before I leave Plymouth, or may Cape Cod never see me again, may my bones be buried in dirt instead of blue water, and may my ghost wander forever on the docks of Port Aden, which is the nearest thing to hell I know of!"

When the cab driver helped him up the front stoop of the house in Davenport, the door was opened by Bill Catlin, Drake's chief mate for many years, stanch follower and friend, who exclaimed:

"Good Lord! What's happened to you, skipper?"

"Pay this cabman his fare and a drink or two. Then go to the nearest first-aid station and get some one to patch me up," the captain mumbled, crowding past Catlin in the narrow hallway. And Catlin, not unused to the sight of red, but alarmed to see the redoubtable Drake in such gory plight, made for the nearest night dispensary where he routed out a man who knew his business, having had much experience in that neighborhood.

A half hour later, after applying leeches to the puffed eyes, stitches to the worst cuts, and much court plaster otherwise, the chemist remarked cheerfully:

"He'll be all right after that jolt of brandy I gave him gets to work. Pretty hard to kill a tough customer like him. Six shillings. G'night."

Catlin stood in front of the patient, filled his pipe and, looking down upon the victim, said:

"Well, skipper, maybe you can find time now to tell me whether it was a railway wreck, a cyclone, or a second battle of Mons. How'd you collect all that?"

Captain Eli sat up on the creaking sofa, seemed to be gathering his senses and blurted:

"Bill, I'll be blowed if I know. Been thinking it over for the last half hour and all I can remember is this: I'd been yarning with your Cousin Jim, the bar manager down at the Cosmos Hotel. Saw no one worth noticing when I came out and started to give my legs a stretch by walking home. Got down near the timber docks, and heard a noise behind me. Turned just as a big walloper took a swing at me with something, maybe a sandbag, maybe a billet. Got it on the forearm and closed in. Then it looked to me like about a dozen others piled on and things got lively. I broke the first feller's arm with a trick I learned in Singapore—heard the bone snap. Got a good look at his face as he swung toward an arc light, but I'm sure I never saw him before. Got a good look at the others, too, and found out there were really five—all strangers. You know I don't forget faces. I was getting along nicely—sort of enjoying myself—when some swab caught me a bash from behind and—out! That's all I know about it!"

"Humph! Get your wallet?"

"No, that's the funny part of it. They took nothing; not even my watch."

For some moments Catlin sat scowling at an enlarged, air-brush portrait of his deceased brother and meditated. He did not put his thoughts into words. They might not have pleased the battered Captain Eli. It was not an attempt at robbery, apparently, so, according to Catlin's reasoning, the Old Hyena might have been recognized by some gang of sailors who had come afoul of him in his windjamming days and wanted to pay him out—something they hadn't been able to do when Drake strode his own decks, with belaying pins handy. But, hold on! Maybe it had been an attempt at robbery and the footpads were frightened away before they could search their victim. Now, if they had tried a few days before, when Drake had more than twelve thousand pounds

in his pocket, the day when he sold the steam schooner *Malabart* to those two crooked swine, Robinson and Smythe——

Catlin shifted, suddenly wondering if that pair of discomfited swindlers could be connected with this job of slugging. He found himself feeling a protuberance in his hip pocket as if it had become a habit to reassure himself of its safety, for therein reposed three hundred pounds presented to him by Captain Eli. And when that gentleman displayed signs of liberality on such scale it recalled the days of miracles.

Catlin's new trend of thought was interrupted by Drake who got up and began to move stiffly about the room, rubbing his injuries and growling.

"Skipper," Catlin asked, "has it struck you that Robinson and Smythe, that pair of swabs, wouldn't forgive you too dad-blamed easy for making them dig up the money they robbed poor old Captain Cardin of? Also that not havin' guts enough to tackle it themselves, they're just the sort as would hire somebody else to lay you out?"

Captain Eli stopped like a restless horse jerked to its haunches, swung round and stared at him.

"Well, I'll be blowed! I never thought of that," he exclaimed. "If I thought that—— If I could make sure of that beyond any chance of mistake, the truce that was sort of made between us when I sold them the *Malabart* would be off! I'd go after that pair and beat the everlasting—— No, hold on. I can think of something better than that!"

He took another turn backward and forward, the length of the room, and to Catlin's surprise halted in front of him with a grin distorting his bruised lips.

"Bill," he said, "to-morrow we've got to find a man with a broken arm, one tin ear and perhaps a busted nose, who weighs about a hundred and ninety pounds, and limps a little as if he had a game foot. You know this town and I want you to think of the best way to go about it."

"Seein' as I was born and brought up here, I reckon if any one could find your man, I ought to," Catlin replied, and as Drake started toward the door as if satisfied, added, "Yes, to-morrow we'll go after him."

In the morning Drake most certainly had the appearance of a man who had got much the worst of a night out, and Catlin, after eying him, made a suggestion.

"I think, captain," he said, "that I might attract a little less attention if I took this job on alone. All I want to know is exactly where they jumped you. Then if I can find that cove, I'll come back here and get you. What do you say to that?"

The captain, after consulting a looking glass, grouchily agreed, and Catlin left. He strolled to the place of the assault, and then, as if he had a well-defined plan of campaign, strode off into the nearest street and called at every dispensary on the way. At each he made inquiries to learn if a man with a broken arm had presented himself there for attention on the previous night. When he started his quest he was confident of success; but when, with dogged patience he had exhausted street after street, and learned nothing, he was pretty well discouraged. But he did not abandon that line until nearly four o'clock in the afternoon, and then resolved to try to learn if a man answering such description was known to the police. But how to reach the police confidentially was another matter. He had never had to avoid a man in uniform, but on the other hand, he had a vast respect for the English constabulary. The idea finally came that he would consult his cousin, Jim Catlin, the manager of the bar in the Cosmos Hotel, and get his advice. He had a vague idea that the manager of a first-class bar should be on friendly terms with the constables,

if any one was. So he wended his way to the Cosmos.

"Know any of the constables? Of course I do," said Cousin Jim. "I know 'em from the chief inspector down. But look here, Bill, if you've got crosswise with the police, don't lean on me too heavy. You may as well come across and tell me what's up."

"Nothin' up with me, Jim," the mate said, "but I want to find a man who got one of his wings busted about ten o'clock last night, and the police——"

He stopped, for a look of knowledge had come over his cousin's face.

"Maybe I could help you without calling the constables in at all," the bar manager said and then added, in a voice scarcely above a whisper, and after a glance to assure himself that no barmaid was within hearing, "but get this: You must keep your mouth shut about me. I don't want to be dragged into anything. Just about half past ten last night I answered my telephone. A man wanted to talk to either Smythe or Robinson. I said I'd look 'em up and tell 'em to call, and asked what number. It was 2015. Then I found Robinson, and he had just enough cargo aboard to be a trifle loud when he came behind the end of the bar here to use my phone. I'd have sent him out to the public phone in the office if he wasn't such a good spender. He seemed mighty pleased over what he heard and I wondered why, because I could hear him saying: 'Tige's got an arm broken, eh? Who is Tige? And you think I ought to pay the doctor's bill? Well, have another think. They got paid for the job and took their own chances. From this minute on I know nothing at all about it.' Then he hung up, and by and by he found Smythe, and the pair of them got in the corner and laughed and chuckled, and ordered a bottle of fizz as if celebrating something. Now tell me why you want to find a man with a broken arm."

The mate hastily muttered the story, and the manager expressed indignation, but shook his head and said:

"Afraid what I told you is no good I don't suppose Robinson or Smythe could possibly have anything to do with it, or at least, anything that could be proven. I think Drake ought to go to the police if he wants satisfaction."

"All of which shows you don't know the skipper. He's his own judge, jury, police force and executioner."

"Well, suit yourselves, but keep me and this place out of it," the manager warned, as he moved away in response to a call.

Catlin went to a public phone and learned that phone 2015 was in a public house called the Butcher's Inn, in a not too savory part of the city. He went thither and inspected the place from the opposite side of the street, eying the low, old-fashioned building and the grimy curtains in the narrow windows of the upper floor. He went farther up the street, crossed over and returned, but through the windows filled with dusty bottles, some of which were empty, could see nothing of the interior. He hesitated, then went inside to the bar and ordered a glass of ale from a blowsy-looking ruffian with shirt open at the neck and sleeves rolled up above fat, hairy forearms. Instantly the sailor decided that to ask any questions might defeat his purpose. However, he tried to open a conversation, but getting only surly or morose replies, desisted.

Catlin was anything but slow-witted, but he left the place in a quandary. He feared that if he returned and told Captain Eli what he had learned, that bellicose mariner would charge into the Butcher's Inn, at least wreck the place when he failed to elicit information, and in any event get much the worst of it. Moreover he felt that the advent of the battered captain would put on guard any and all of the gang, including Robinson and Smythe. If he could but

learn where the man with the broken arm could be found, matters would be simplified. Then he had a brain wave. If a doctor had been employed he would probably be called from that tough resort, the Butcher's Inn, the proprietor would be the man to call him, and would select a doctor whom he knew, or in whom he reposed confidence. With a grin Catlin stepped into a narrow, untenanted alleyway, took one arm from its sleeve, rolled up his shirt, bound his handkerchief around his wrist, replaced the coat with the empty sleeve over his shoulder and returned to the Butcher's Inn. It was still without clients, still smelled of stale, bitter beer and stale smoke, and the same blowsy, surly man looked up when the mate entered.

"Blast them automobiles!" he roared as he entered. "An' if I could get my hands on the scruff of the neck of the blighter that was runnin' it! Gimme a brandy, quick. I feel faintlike."

" 'Smatter with ye?" the man demanded as he measured out a tot of brandy.

"Just after I blew out of here a few minutes ago and was startin' to tack across the street, one of them blighted cars nigh rammed me. I jumped back to get out of the way as he come a-tootin', my heels struck the curb, and down I went. And it feels to me as if I've smashed my forearm. Know any good doctor near here?"

"Sure," said the saloon man. "Doc Baynes. Hell on bone settin', he is. Reckon you can make it to his surgery? It's not far. Go down the street, first turn to the left and you'll see a brass plate after you've come into the second square. Right hand side—second square."

"Thanks," Catlin growled as he threw down a shilling and walked out.

For fear that the saloon keeper might have watched him from the doorway he did not resume his coat until he had turned the corner. He found the surgery and entered, observing from the plate, as he did so, that within five minutes he would have been too late. The doctor, an irascible old fellow, was just in the act of leaving.

"Well, well. What is it?" he asked impatiently.

"I heard that you set the broken arm of a friend of mine last night," Catlin said, and the doctor scowled at him.

"Wouldn't have taken you to be the friend of any cattle like that," he remarked. "But what do you wish to know about this fellow who calls himself Tige Williams. When he was in the hospital with a bad foot his name was Hardy."

"Want to know where to find him," Catlin growled, not liking the aspersion, but fearing to tell the truth.

"How does it happen you don't know he's upstairs over the Butcher's Inn, if he's a friend of yours?" the doctor demanded. "And a nice place that is, too. If that's all you want, it's time I was out on my rounds."

Catlin muttered his thanks and was aware of the doctor's condemnatory looks as he departed. But now the grin on his face was pronounced. He felt as if he had accomplished a skillful piece of detective work, such as he had read of in various yellow-backed books at sea. He felt that Captain Eli had not depended upon him in vain, hence rolled homeward with an air of triumph.

After hearing what his friend had to say, the Old Hyena growled his approval, and, to the mate's alarm, reached for his hat.

"Come on," he said. "And by the way, if you've got a pair of brass knuckles better bring 'em. Might come in handy, from what you say."

"But, see here, skipper. Do you think it's wise for us to tackle a place like that, where there may be twenty thugs stowed in corners, and——"

"All right, I'll go alone if you've got any doubts about——"

"Ever know me to hold back without a reason? I'm tellin' you right now I don't like it; but if you're bound to go, I'm in with you to a finish."

"Good lad. Reckoned you would be," the master growled. "And as far as kicking up a rough-house goes, there won't be one, unless somebody starts something. All I want is a little sweet conversation with this feller Williams, or Hardy, or whatever his real name is. And that I'll have, too."

Mightily perturbed, but glum with silence, Catlin led the way back to the Butcher's Inn, and followed the big captain through the door. At sight of him the ruffianly proprietor scowled more than usual, and got well behind his bar, resting both paws beneath it.

"I got a friend stopping here, and I've come to see him," the mariner said.

"Oh, you have, eh? You look to me as if the last man you met wasn't exactly a friend," the proprietor growled. "Who do you think's stoppin' here that you know?"

"Tige Williams, sometimes calls himself Hardy. He's the man I come to see."

"Well, you can't see him, and that's that," the man rumbled in a bullying voice.

"I can and will," Captain Eli asserted, moving toward the bar with a threat in his blazing eyes and bent shoulders.

"Stop!"

The man behind the bar suddenly lifted a hand that clutched a short pistol of the bulldog type which carried a slug of lead the size of a small marble. Captain Eli stopped, then suddenly turned toward Catlin and said:

"Would you take a look at that, Bill! Funny cuss, isn't he?"

He gave a chuckle of contempt, fixed his eyes on those of the barman, and walked steadily toward him.

"Gimme that gun! Quick!" he snapped, and before the owner could summon either resolution or protest, a hand lashed forward, seized the hand holding the gun and gave it a sharp twist. Another hand the size of a small ham came around with a swinging smack that caught the saloon man alongside the head and dropped him like a ninepin. With amazing agility Catlin jumped to the entrance behind the bar, jerked the dazed and floundering proprietor to his feet, and dragged him out into the barroom. The man rocked on his feet, rubbed his head and seemed incapable of any further defense.

"It don't pay to pull a gun until you're ready to use it, and sometimes it doesn't pay then—not with a man like me," the captain growled, thrusting his chin forward almost against the proprietor's face and glaring at him. "For two cents I'd crack your empty skull in with your own gun. Now wake up and take us to Tige Williams." His hand shot out and closed on the back of the man's thick neck, shoving him toward an inner door. "And if you know when you're well off, you'll not try any funny business on the way. Bill, get that stove poker and bring up the rear. We may have to make a slaughter house out of this dump yet, so there's no use in taking chances."

But all fight was gone from the proprietor of the Butcher's Inn. His neck was held as in a grip of a crane clutch and he began to whine for mercy.

"Shut up, or I'll twist it for you, you fathead," was all the reply he got, and hastily he half walked and was half impelled up a flight of unclean stairs and forward until he halted in front of a cracked door. Catlin tried to open it, found that it was bolted inside, and smashed it inward with a kick. A muchly bandaged and splintered man sat up in a frowsy bed. At sight of Captain Eli, he let out a howl of terror.

"Here, Bill. Take this gun and stand there by the door. If any of their gang butts in, kill 'em first and ask questions afterward," Captain Eli ordered.

Williams' eyes stuck out with terror.

Drake regarded him malevolently for a moment, and then flung the inn proprietor into a corner.

"You stay there and don't move till I get through with this swab," he said, and at this further display of strength the saloon man was afraid to make even a protest. Captain Eli walked across until he stood, with huge hands on his hips, above the bed.

"You've got just one chance with me," he said, "and that's to come across to every question I ask you. By rights I ought to put one hand under your chin, the other at the back of your neck, and snap your head off; but if you answer up I'll rob myself of that much fun. Now who hired you and that gang to do me in last night? I've got pretty good proof who it was, but I want to make sure."

Williams wriggled and showed signs of evasion until a pair of huge hands with fingers like marlinspikes began to move slowly and clutchingly toward him. Then he cried:

"Don't! Don't! I'll come across, straight, I will. It was—it was two swells called Robinson and Smythe. But if they ever found out that I squealed on——"

"Bah! They'll not find out unless you tell 'em. I won't," the captain promised.

And then to the surprise of all others in the room, Catlin included, said:

"Come on Bill. That's all I wanted to get." And he stalked toward the door, through it, down the stairs, and outside without uttering another word.

"What are we goin' to do now, captain?" the mate asked, after they had walked some distance in silence.

Captain Eli turned and Catlin was astonished by the look of satisfaction on his face.

"Never you mind what I'm going to do," he said. "Everything's clear now. That Williams will say nothing, and I don't want you to tell any one—not even Jim Catlin—what we found out. I think I see an opportunity to get more than square with that pair of scorpions."

And Catlin, who knew him too well to ask questions, wondered what infliction was in store for Robinson and Smythe, and was glad he was not in their shoes.

He wondered still more when on the following day Drake said:

"Bill, you're signed on with me as first mate of no ship, but you'll get the regular screw. So pack your dunnage. We leave to-day for Dartmouth."

Again he asked no questions and bided his time to learn his employer's intentions. When the train dropped them off at Kingswear, the village across the mouth of the Dart River from Dartmouth, Drake said:

"We'll stop on this side. Won't do for me to cross on the ferry and stop in the Queen's Arms, where I'm known. I don't want any one to know I'm here."

They trudged through the narrow, winding, cobbled streets of the old town until they found a house bearing a sign "Lodgings." Here they hired two small rooms and unpacked their meager luggage.

"Now we'll take a little cruise on foot up this side of the river," Drake said; and Catlin, big, faithful, obedient and taciturn, trudged beside the captain until they stood on the hillside, high above the estuary. They looked down upon scores of ships, many of which were hulks, some of which had been merely laid up, and one or two of which were taking on cargo. Drake seemed to have no eye for the beauties of the quaint old port, but stared downward.

"See anything familiar down there?" he asked, with a sweeping gesture of his arm.

"See enough to make me homesick," Catlin rumbled as his eyes found the rugged little steamship which had been his and the captain's home for years, until bankruptcy had caused a change of

owners. "She—she don't look like she ought to—not shipshape—kind of as if she had been deserted by us and was brokenhearted—as if she'd lost all her spirit," he went on brokenly. Drake's face was grim as if he, too, suffered from a similar emotion of regret for vanished days.

"Aye," he said gravely, "she suffers. She knows that she's going to be a criminal ship—a thing that sneaks across clean seas ashamed of her business and her owners. Ships have something about them, not a soul perhaps, but something like it. Bill, we are sailors. Both of us—since we were boys—the only difference being that I went to blue water not long after you were born. So we know that ships have personalities. A criminal ship knows she's criminal as well as the men that own her, man her, degrade her. She carries that about her which warns honest ships." He laid his big hand on the mate's shoulder, and added:

"Our *Malabart's* too good for that. We kept her skirts clean. And that's one reason why I brought you here to help me, because I'm going to try to make her clean again."

Catlin looked at Drake and saw that the hard, fearless eyes were softened, as if something within him stubbornly repressed had broken forth unawares, in a wave of earnestness. He went on, as if apologizing to both his friend and the ship, for his actions.

"Think what has happened within a month. Seems impossible! We bring poor old Captain Cardin's ship in to find he is bankrupt because he has been swindled by Robinson and Smythe. I learn enough to suspect they are going to smuggle a cargo of bootleg stuff to America and want the *Malabart*. I make a first payment of all I had on her, then hold them up. Blackmail, they called it! I made them fork over not only the price of the ship, but Captain Cardin's money, and all too late because Cardin dies of a broken heart. I couldn't do both, get Cardin's money back and keep the ship clean; so I played with pitch. Filthy business! And I'd have had nothing more to do with that pair of swine, if they hadn't hired thugs to do me in. They wanted to get even and were afraid to try it themselves. I don't know just what I'm going to do now, but I hope I can do two things: make it hot for them and keep the *Malabart* clean, even if we two never set foot on her decks again."

He stopped, walked restlessly to and fro, staring now at the ship, and then off at the promontories forming huge gates to the sea. He became the hard, harsh master-mariner once more.

"The first thing we will do is to watch the *Malabart* take her cargo aboard. It will, I am almost certain, be done here in this little harbor where things are slack, not too well watched, and will be reported as routine and buried in the small official way. What I want to make positive of is that she is laden with stuff that would be contraband in America. So, from now on, night and day, turn about, one of us is to watch her without letting any one suspect what we're up to. Those are my orders, the same as if we were on a ship. You understand?"

Catlin said: "Yes, sir. I understand," almost like a man on a bridge, and added, "Lucky I brought binoculars. We can keep day watch from here on the hillside."

"Nights will prove the most difficult," Drake said. "We may have to buy a small boat for that job. Might as well do that now, I think." And he led the way back toward the town.

For five days and nights there was never an hour when the *Malabart* was not under scrutiny. On the fourth day a sluggish wisp of smoke above her stubby funnel betrayed the fact that some of her engine crew had come

aboard, and that night a barge was pushed alongside by a tug from Plymouth, and the winches were worked. A rowboat slid out of the darkness, drifted for a while alongside the barge unobserved. Then Catlin cautiously climbed up and lifted the corner of a tarpaulin, made a minute's inspection, quietly dropped back into the boat and pulled easily away. He hung under the side of an old hulk and through night glasses tallied the slings as they came aboard, making rough computation. On the fifth day men with ditty bags detrained in Kingswear, and Drake saw them board the ship. Another barge came in on the evening tide, and this night both Drake and Catlin cautiously assured themselves of the character of the cargo, smelled barrels, peeped at case goods of whiskies, and tallied the hoists. The blackness of the night, the confusion of loading, and their boldness enabled them to do all this unobserved. On the sixth day the longshoremen finished their work and toward dusk the smoke above the *Malabart's* stack was a rolling cloud of black. In the murk of the night she brought in her hook, drifted slowly with the river tide for a few moments, whirled a slow and cautious screw and then, thrusting steadily downward, disappeared between the great headlands that were silhouetted against the stars. She was off.

And Captain Eli, in the small boat, put down his night glasses, shook his fist after her and muttered:

"Aye! I know, my girl! I know, but I couldn't help you. It had to be."

While Catlin slept, the following morning, Drake was afoot. He made certain inquiries at the port offices, and returning to his lodging in Kingswear, he called:

"Bill, we leave for Plymouth on the one-twenty train."

Throughout the railway journey in that land of summer glory they rode with little speech, Captain Eli brooding and Catlin wondering what their next strange action might be. Sometimes the mate furtively studied the rugged, scarred, weather-beaten face of the man he admired, and questioned vaguely whether that terrible mauling, that brutal mistreatment, had not inflicted also some mental injury. Sitting there with his huge body huddled listlessly and his eyes glazed with thought, the Old Hyena seemed anything but formidable, appeared to have lost virility, lacked that suggestion of power that was habitually his when walking upon a sea-cradled deck. It was not until the train was entering Plymouth that he roused himself, sighed wearily like one resuming a burden, and leaned across and addressed Catlin.

"Bill, I wish you'd find out for me if Robinson and Smythe got away on the *Malabart,* or are still stopping at the Cosmos Hotel. Do it quietly. To-morrow will do."

"I'll do my best, sir," Catlin answered. A day later he made his report.

"They're both in the hotel and show no signs of leaving. In fact, it looks as if they intended to stay forever, because that swab, Smythe, is having his rooms fixed up with some stuff he had shipped down from London."

Drake scowled, started to speak, devoted a minute to pondering and then, muttering something that sounded like, "Might have expected that," he pulled from his pocket a worn red memorandum book and a stub of pencil. Slowly, as if still absorbed in thought, he tore a leaf from the book, wet the pencil with his tongue and scrawled on the paper. He handed it to Catlin, saying:

"That's the address that will reach me. Now get this carefully. You're to stay right here in Plymouth and keep track of those two men. If they pull out, cable me and follow them. Your pay goes on the same as if aboard ship and——"

"But this address is in care of a New York ship chandler! I'd like to go with you, sir. We've been together so long and——"

"I know how it is, Bill, believe me I do! But you're the only man I can depend on to do what I want done. And I ask you to stay here and do as I say. I don't want to lose track of that pair of——" He exploded with words that would have sent a recalcitrant crew into flight.

Interminable weeks dragged themselves along after Drake's departure into the unknown, or at least they measured as such to Catlin, who felt marooned and hungered for activity, and for the sea. He heard nothing whatever from Drake, but at the end of each month he received a check for his wages, sometimes mailed from one place, sometimes from another, as if the captain were traveling from port to port in America. Each time when he acknowledged his check he made a report. The first read:

That pair still here, cheerful as clams at high tide.

Then he sent one, reading:

Still here, but look to Cousin Jim as if worried about something, and don't seem so flush with cash.

Finally he wrote an extra report, in the middle of a month:

Looks to me as if those birds are getting restless, and they may be getting ready to move on somewhere. They now owe the hotel nearly a month's bills. I'm afraid I can't stick this much longer. I have hung on here only to please you. I wouldn't have stayed here loafing this long for any other man on earth, and we are good enough friends so I can write you that I think it foolish of you to pay me for watching a pair of low-lived swabs. I wouldn't give as much as you've already paid me to save them from hell fire and brimstone. Please get me out of this or let me get out.

When he had posted the letter he soliloquized:

"That settles that! If he asks me to hang on, I'll know that beating made him crazy, and that he's just found an excuse to pay me for doing nothing."

He walked away shaking a sorrowful head, for there was no man on earth for whom he sustained such admiration and affection, a feeling such as he could have bestowed only upon an older and infinitely kind brother. And from that day on he began to quietly inquire for possible berths, displaying his master's ticket, but ready to accept even a second mate's billet. Then one day, when he was more than usually dejected, he received an astonishing cable message, which read:

Remain there. Sailing from Newport News to-day. See you in Plymouth in two weeks. Hope that pair still there.

It confirmed his apprehensions that Drake was no longer the man he had known, although the dominant characteristic of never letting go of an enemy was still showing itself. Failing to accomplish all else, even to finding employment in command of another ship, he was crossing the Atlantic ocean for his last effort, a final reckoning with the men who had robbed poor old Cardin and employed thugs to nearly murder Drake, himself. The concluding sentence of his cablegram made all this plain. Catlin pondered the advisability of warning Robinson and Smythe of their danger. He had seen Drake in that temper which had earned for him the sobriquet of the Old Hyena, and he did not wish to see his friend in a dock charged with a dual murder. But he could come to no decision, and thus passed thirteen days of perturbation. Worried and despondent, and thinking of the fact, gleaned that day, that no American liner could reach Plymouth for two more days, Catlin trudged toward the Cosmos Hotel on what had become to him a nightly and habitual round of duty. He was later than usual.

A boisterous autumn wind off the channel was blowing clouds of dust from the streets, and also wafted an occasional cloud of silver across the face of a full moon. It had driven the people indoors and the pavements to emptiness. It whipped and lashed the triangular corner of the hotel, perched overlooking the cliffs, the breakwater, and, far outward, the tortured channel.

"The sea's makin' out there," he thought, with a sailor's habitude, as he pushed open the doors of the barroom and went inside.

The great gilded barroom of the Cosmos, blazing with lights, the glitter of glasses and mirrors, seemed peculiarly still after the outward whistle and turmoil of wind and sea. Almost indifferently he observed that there were but two men in the place, Robinson and Smythe, seated in the corner which they had adopted as their own. For so many weeks he had always seen them there that their very absence might have shocked him. His cousin, the manager, sat in his little private office immersed in a pile of invoices. A single barmaid, yawning, was behind the battery of plated pumps, keeping an eye on the clock. A window not far from Robinson, on the leeward side of the building, was half-raised for additional ventilation. Catlin ordered his glass of Devonshire Rough cider and absentmindedly stared at its small square of blackness. No one paid the slightest attention to him, or to the open window. Then sharply, like the intrusion of a ray of light across a black space, there appeared something that caused him to drop his glass to the polished surface of the bar, bend forward and stare.

Into the open window a face had been thrust, a square-jawed, clean-lined face, with searching eyes that flashed under the light's reflections as they rove to and fro, raking the interior. They stopped when they discerned and centered upon the two men by the corner table. Then the face disappeared and the square of blackness was again unbroken.

Catlin blinked, brushed a hand across his brows and again looked. A black square, unbroken.

"I'm seein' things!" he muttered. "Goin' mad, I am. Thought I saw the skipper's face there in that spot. It was like marble—the way he looked when things went bad. And always, when he looked that way——"

He never finished that thought. The entrance doors swung hurriedly, thrust open by a kick or blow, and through them came Drake with a smile so grim that it pulled the corners of his firm lips downward above his resolute chin.

"Skipper—skipper!" Catlin cried spontaneously, filled with a great joy of greeting. Drake turned and made a gesture, comprehensive, apologetic and restraining; but for a flashing second his face softened to the warmth of gladness and affection before it resumed hardness as he strode toward the men in the corner. They were unaware of his entrance until he loomed over them, bending his great bulk above the table, resting arms and knuckles upon its marble top. His head was lowered between his bent shoulders, like that of a falcon prepared to strike. His lips were curled back, exposing bared teeth. He stood, a silent figure of menace and retribution.

Disturbed, startled, they leaned back, recognized him, and stared. Their consternation was evident. It rendered them, for dragging moments, incapable of speech. Their very silence exasperated him to words.

"May Justice damn you," he said hoarsely. "Yes, I'm back! Back from across a sea to find you, to tell you that you are beaten, and why you have lost all you had and all that your friends gave you. It was I who informed the United States coast guards of the cargo of the *Malabart* which you sent out falsely as merchandise bound for Ha-

vana. It was I who told them how to seize her."

Their anger overcame fear. Both jumped erect, voluble with oaths. He drew away from the table as if to enjoy their wrath and discomfiture. Robinson, always the quickest of speech, shouted the first coherent question:

"So, after holding us up, and giving us to understand that the scores were even, you——"

"Listen," Drake interrupted. "It was no longer even after you hired Tige Williams and his pals to half kill me. And as far as holding you up went, I did that only to get back the money of which you swindled my best friend, Captain Cardin."

"Damn Cardin! I'm sick of hearing of that old——" Smythe cried, purple with anger and ending his sentence with the vilest of epithets.

It was as if that single word had unleashed a tempest. In its onslaught were combined Drake's angry roar, and the crashing of the table he overturned as he sprang toward Smythe. At the same time Robinson hurled a half-emptied bottle at Drake's head. It glanced off but diverted his attention. In a single bound he caught Robinson, lifted him high above his head and hurled him into the corner, where he fell, huddled, unconscious and still. The barmaid repeatedly screamed, and the manager ran toward the door to be barred at the threshold by Catlin who jerked the police whistle from an extended hand and shouted:

"Hold on! Hold, Jim! This is where kinship don't count. You keep out of this, or, by heavens! I'll have to down you."

The bar manager drew back, protesting loudly, asserting that he couldn't permit this sort of thing in a respectable house, and appealing alternately to the mate and to Drake. For all the attention they gave him he might have been voiceless.

Drake, crouched, was moving with the deliberation of a tiger upon Smythe, who had seized a chair for a weapon. The captain sprang and the chair came swinging downward, was wrenched from its holder's hands, thrown aside in the same swift movement, and Smythe felt a hand clutching his throat and another his wrist, slowly bending it backward. He was no weakling, but struggled without avail. There was a spell of horrified stillness like the unearthly lull in the center of a cyclone. It was ended by Drake's voice, no longer raised, but low, steady, chill, and conveying inflexible determination.

"You'll get down on your knees here on this barroom floor and apologize for that name—the name you called my dead friend, or as sure as there is a Lord in heaven, I'll kill you here and now with my bare hands, you dirty, contemptible blackleg!"

He gave to Smythe's tortured arm a malevolently slow twist that bent its owner over with agony and bedewed his forehead with moisture. Smythe was speechless with pain and terror. His lips writhed in his effort to speak, when Drake freed his throat and waited, still bent above him, slowly twisting his arm to the breaking point. He fell to one knee, curiously distorted in his attitude, then to the other, with his body arched backward until his head was but a few inches above his heels.

"I will! I will! Give me a chance! You're killing me now," he cried, and instantly the mariner released him and stepped back, waiting, oblivious of the wreckage, the broken man in the corner, and what was going on behind him. The barmaid, now silent but wide-eyed, leaned far over the polished bar. The manager, equally spell-bound, stood bent forward and speechless, while his sailor cousin maintained guard in front of the door, palpably resolved to prevent outside interference, though Drake inflicted death.

The words of retraction and apology uttered by Smythe, low spoken and stammered though they were, sounded loudly in the weird stillness which seemed to have invaded the room. They were sufficiently abject and inclusive to have satisfied even the dead man, had he been within hearing. Bill Catlin had the uncanny feeling that somewhere, invisible to their eyes, the spirit of Captain Cardin took heed.

"You will now get up and sit quietly over there while I take a look at your crooked pal," Captain Eli said, in that same quiet voice.

He turned and glanced at the others in the room, as if for the first time recalling their presence. His eyes took in the entire situation, and he nodded to the mate, saying:

"That's right, Bill. All of you stay just as you are. I can make this inspection alone."

He strode over and picked the inert Robinson up, laid him on the lounge that bordered the room, and felt him over. They waited anxiously, apprehensive lest Robinson was dead, but were reassured when Drake turned, gave a slight shrug, and said:

"He's all right, except for a broken rib or two. I'm sorry that he's in such bad shape that I can't bring him to and add his apology. But one will have to do. He's had enough."

Indifferent now to his victims, he walked across, paused in front of the bar manager, and said:

"Sorry to have had to do this in your house, Jim. Be in to-morrow to pay the damage. Nobody knows, so there's no harm done to the place's reputation. Good night. Come on, Bill. We'll go now."

Then, with a stride or two, and without looking back, he flung the door open and, followed by his faithful friend, trudged out into the windy, fitfully moonlit night. The gale caught the door behind them and it closed with a bang, as if relieved by their departure.

Outside the winds roared around them, welcoming them, as they fought their way the short distance to the historic spot, the Hoe, where, on a momentous day, another Drake had played bowls when the Spanish Armada hove in sight. They gained the lee of the ancient lighthouse.

"Bill, look down there," Captain Eli said, with a wave of his hand to where, far below, the riding lights of ships rocked gently in the harbor. The moon was kindly, and for a few moments shone brilliantly between silver-edged clouds. Suddenly Catlin started, and glared as if transfixed.

"Skipper—sir——" he said with a queer pathos, "the *Malabart*—our old ship—down there!"

"Aye! When she was confiscated by the American government and sold, I bought her. She's a clean ship now, and an honest one. If Captain Cardin knows he will——" He did a strange thing, for him—stopped as if a heart full of memories were choking him, cleared his throat and in his old firm sea voice said, almost brusquely:

"Get your sea chest aboard to-morrow and into your old cabin not later than eight bells of the morning watch."

But the rough change of tone did not deceive Catlin, for the hand of the Old Hyena had reached out and come to rest upon his shoulder with that gentle, kindly pressure which only an enduring friendship knows.

# Gun Smoke

BY

## Dane Coolidge

*Author of "The Gateway of the Sun," "Money-getter Number .45," Etc.*

Passing through Portales, Gun Smoke won a horse race with Quick Murrah, foreman for crooked Zim Plunkett. When they tried to hold out on him, Gun Smoke grabbed his winnings of money and Murrah's favorite pistol and galloped away, with Quick and his gunmen in pursuit. Shot from ambush by Cutthroat Charley, and weakened from loss of blood, Gun Smoke took refuge at the cabin of Colonel Blood, who had been swindled out of his cattle by Plunkett. Gun Smoke was attracted to Johnsie Blood, but thought her engaged to Dandy McAllister, gay young owner of a great rancho at Barcee.

Gun Smoke rode on to Barcee, where Dandy told him that Johnsie had turned him down. After winning his crack-shot host's much-prized target pistol in a shooting contest, Gun Smoke gave it back.

IN SIX PARTS—PART III

**When Quick comes after his gun, bringing his brothers along, Gun Smoke takes care of the situation very handily. But then they get the whole gang after him again.**

### CHAPTER VIII.

THE DAUGHTER OF THE STONE-EATER.

WITHIN the thick adobe walls which had once served for a fort the light was already dim. Barred windows let in long shafts ot twilight, a fire flickered fitfully, illuminating the rack of guns against the wall. Gun Smoke looked them over curiously, and every weapon that he praised McAllister instantly offered as a gift. His rash bet and the loss and recovery of his most cherished pistol had stirred him to a more than common gratitude; but Gun Smoke thought he saw something more.

Spending his life among the Mexi-

cans, he had become almost one of them —their customs and manners were his. And it is the pleasure of Spanish grandees to offer their house to every guest, although of course with no expectation of acceptance. It is merely a polite form, calling in return for a graceful declination; and in like spirit Gun Smoke declined the guns. Yet there was a long-barreled buffalo gun, shooting a .45-90 cartridge, which he hefted more than once. But he was traveling light, with nothing but a slicker and the two pistols that he wore in his belt, and he put it back with a sigh.

"Might borrow that some time," he said, and "Dandy" pressed it upon him again.

Then as evening came on the Mexican servants came in softly, bearing white linen and solid silver for the table, and in the mellow light of candles they brought in a dozen courses, each served with a different wine. There was no end to the dainties which followed the soup and fish, the salad, the beef, the beans; and as the wine loosened his tongue Dandy McAllister became more communicative, more intimate in the confidences he bestowed. But as the liqueurs were brought in and they sat chatting over their coffee, from outside the huge barred window there came the strumming of a guitar, the sweet consonance of flute, violin and harp.

"*A Sus Ojos Negros*—To Your Black Eyes!" whispered Dandy; and as the musicians continued their serenade he lay back and smiled at the ceiling. Then, rising, he invited the invisible orchestra inside, and the entertainment of the evening went on.

"Now the dancers!" demanded McAllister and, dressed in their best, bold caballeros and shy maidens filed in. They paced gravely through formal measures, flying swiftly into whirling waltzes which stirred even Gun Smoke's blood; but deep in his heart he had the Texan's scorn for Mexicans, a feeling which his host did not share. For Dandy more than once had bounded from his chair to join impulsively in the dance, and Gun Smoke noted shrewdly that it was always the same maiden that he summoned to be his partner. It was Lola, the stone-eater's daughter, who thought the *patron* could do no wrong.

She was small and endowed with the warm beauty which goes so often with Latin blood; but, despite the coquettish glances which she cast in his direction, Gun Smoke saw he could never cut out McAllister. To please him she might smile on the yellow-haired Texano who had shot down the swallow in full flight, but her heart belonged already to the man who shot pebbles from the spoon that her father held. And not for nothing was she the stone-eater's daughter, for she had his same resolute air. Gun Smoke smiled back boldly, the better to please his host, but he wondered how Johnsie Blood took this affair with the dark Lolita, and whether it had made her refuse him.

"And now a little pantomime!" announced McAllister to his guest. "Lolita's lover is in prison. This walled window is the door. She has come to save him from death."

He bowed to Lolita, whose eyes glowed as she met his smile. Then he turned down the lights for the play.

She came tripping in the doorway, bringing a platter of cooked squashes—to be given which, among the Mexicans, is the symbol of dismissal, like the old-time "giving the mitten."

"My Juan is a bold bandit," she sang, "but to-morrow at sunrise he must die."

Then, at the entrance to the prison, she ceased to sing his praises, for she was confronted by the stern alcalde.

"I come but to see my Juan," she sang; and in artful pantomime, still singing the ancient verses, she led on the imaginary alcalde until he was so fascinated and distracted that she was able, while giving poor Juan the dish, to

slyly open the door. Juan escaped unseen while the alcalde was stealing a kiss. But when her lover had safely fled the fair deceiver discovered that he had left one piece of squash in the dish. With this she brought the lovemaking of the alcalde to an end, by dashing it into his face, and fled to join her Juan.

The pantomime was primitive, but so was Lolita, and her dark eyes were big with emotion as she bowed to the gringos' applause. And when McAllister, after dismissing the musicians, took her hand and requested her to stay, her face lit up with a smile.

"This is my friend, Mr. Gun Smoke," said Dandy as he led her to Gun Smoke's chair. "I want you to sit right down here and talk your best English. He's a long way from home, and he's lonely."

He grinned and winked mischievously, but Gun Smoke only smiled.

"That was sure a pretty dance you put on," he said. "But I'm jealous of this bandit, Juan."

"Nope, I'm jealous of the alcalde." put in McAllister. "He's the hombre that gets the kiss."

"No, you're wrong," answered Gun Smoke, as she glanced at them shyly. "She just kissed him to save her Juan. If that sheriff that's after me should throw me into jail, do you reckon she'd get me out? Or don't she like these Texanos?"

"Oh, yes," she declared airily. "Some of them."

"Do you like them with yellow hair and blue eyes?" inquired Dandy; and Lolita looked at Gun Smoke again.

"And why not?" she responded evasively. "But some Texanos are very rough!"

"You mean, like Quick Murrah," said Gun Smoke; and suddenly Lolita went white.

"She's had a little trouble with Quick," spoke up Dandy apologetically. "He gets pretty rank when he's drunk. I expect if you'd stay over and run him out of town she'd give you a kiss, and a good one."

He grinned at her teasingly, but Lolita did not smile.

"Yes," she stated. "I would."

"You hear that?" laughed Dandy. "There's your chance now, Gun Smoke—you spoke about cutting out my girl. I'll just make you town marshal, and next time he comes down——"

"Nope—she's your girl," answered Gun Smoke bluffly; and McAllister gazed down at her admiringly.

"That's right," he said. "Prettiest girl in the whole country. Isn't that right, now, Mister—er—Gun Smoke?"

"Prettiest girl but one," stated Gun Smoke judicially, as she waited, half smiling, for his answer. "But I saw another one, up a canyon back here——"

He paused abruptly, for her eyes had suddenly changed, and Dandy was flagging him to stop.

"Ha!" she exclaimed, rising up from her chair and glaring from him to McAllister. "You mean Johnsie Blood?"

She spat out the name so vindictively that Gun Smoke no longer had his doubts—she knew Johnsie, and Johnsie knew her, but it was time to cover his hand.

"Hell, no!" he laughed. "What gave you that idea? You think she's prettier than you are?"

"That's what Dandy says—sometimes," she answered reproachfully.

McAllister leaped up like a shot.

"Hey!" he yelled, "who started this, anyway? Come on, Lola! Let's dance *La Botella!*"

He snatched off his coat, turning it inside out to give him a vagabond air; then, turning his trousers pockets inside out, he reached over and grabbed up a bottle.

*"La Botella!"* he cried again, thrusting it into his hip pocket and striking a rakish pose.

Lola's anger melted away like summer's snow.

*"Andele!"* she answered, snatching up another bottle, and began the first couplet of the song:

*"Andele, compadre, baila La Botella*
*Y si no lo bailas, yo te doy con ella!"*

(Come on, *compadre,* dance the Bottle Dance.
And if you don't dance it I'll give you one with this!)

She drew back the empty bottle as if to strike him, and Dandy, playing drunk, responded happily:

*"Qui estar su compadre, bailando La Botella*
*Y te vas a darle un besito, que sea."*

(Here is your *compadre,* dancing the Bottle Dance
And you are going to give him a kiss, at least.)

Lolita drew back with an expression of scorn and sang on, offering the bottle:

*"Besitos no tengo, hay está la botella*
*Tomas untraigo, contentas con ella."*

(Kisses have I none—there is the bottle.
Take a drink from it, and be content.)

Dandy drew himself up and reached for the bottle, and as he finished he reached for her hand:

*"Pues tomo un traigo, de sus manos, Bonita,*
*Y vayas conmigo a mi casa, hijo!"*

(All right! I'll take a drink, from your hands, Bonita,
And then you will come with me, little sister!)

He caught her in his arms, and Lolita yielded the kiss.

Then, as they stood laughing and panting, a harsh voice outside the window made them start and glance toward the door.

"Hey!" came a rasping Texas twang, "Quick Murrah sent me down fur his gun!"

"Who the hell is that?" burst out Gun Smoke, rising up; while Lolita shrank back with a cry.

"It's one of Quick's night riders," whispered Dandy across the room.

Gun Smoke stepped closer to the wall.

"Hey! You hear me?" repeated the voice. "I want thet gun, right now. The one you stole, young feller!"

"You mean me?" spoke up Gun Smoke boldly. "Why don't he come down and get it?"

"Never mind," snarled the voice. "He'll be down hyer, damn quick, if you try any funny business with *me.* So throw out thet pistol, right now!"

Gun Smoke drew out the gun and glanced back at McAllister, who motioned him to give it up. But Lolita, standing behind him, shook her head. Touching her lips, she threw Gun Smoke a quick kiss and shook her head more vigorously.

"What's the matter?" he inquired, with a good-natured smile. "You want me to stay and fight?"

"Lord—no!" burst out Dandy. But behind him, smiling radiantly, Lolita nodded her head.

"All right," he agreed. "Hey, you tell Quick Murrah to come down, himself, and get his gun!"

"He'll come!" yelled the raucous voice from the night. "He'll come and he'll come a-shootin'. We'll break you of suckin' aigs."

"Yes, you'll play hell!" jeered Gun Smoke.

He turned to Dandy McAllister.

"All right, pardner," he said. "You've got a new town marshal. I'll step in behind that badge—for one day."

## CHAPTER IX.

### BEHIND THE BADGE.

MEXICAN town was deserted when the new marshal rode forth to take up the duties of the day. For one day—and perhaps a brief one—he was to be the embodiment of the law; and he set out to make the most of it. On the breast of his shirt there gleamed the ornate silver star which had been presented to his predecessor for valor. Gun

Smoke rolled in the saddle as he trotted up the street on the back of the vigilant Watch-eye.

In a holster beneath his knee he bore the heavy buffalo gun which McAllister had had on his wall; and ready to his hands hung his old, wooden-handled pistol and the gun he had won from Quick Murrah.

For no reason at all he had stayed over at Barcee, and Quick had sent for his gun. But how could Gun Smoke look Johnsie Blood in the eye if he weakened and gave it up? What else was there for a high-spirited young Texan but to wait and let him claim his revenge? For the gun was undoubtedly Gun Smoke's, won fair and square in a horse race; and if McAllister and the Mexicans chose to bow down before this bad man, that was no reason why a stranger should quit.

"Watch-eye," spoke up Gun Smoke as they ambled up the street and looked out over the long, empty road, "these folks will date time from this day. Either we go down shooting or we put the fear into the hearts of Quick Murrah and his gang. Are you afraid, Old Socks? What say?"

Watch-eye shook his head vigorously and Gun Smoke chuckled as he turned and rode back through town. From behind every barred window and from the depths of darkened doorways the Mexicans stared out like caged animals. They were afraid—afraid of the Texans, afraid of him. He went into a saloon for a drink—seeing them hiding almost made him a little afraid.

As he rode back to the bridge that separated the two towns he met Juan Brabon and Lolita.

*"Kai!"* he greeted Old Juan, as that one took off his hat. "How's the stone-eating business this morning?"

"He don' speek English," responded Lolita, smiling admiringly, "but the stone-eating business is good."

"Fine! Fine!" he grinned. "Did you come out to see the shooting—watch me tame down these ba-a-d Texanos?"

"I hope you keel that Quick!" she answered grimly.

"Sure! Sure!" he laughed. "Anything to please the ladies. Got to kill him to git that kiss?"

"No, you ron him out of town," answered Lolita, her eyes burning. "I don' care—you ron him out of town."

"All right," he agreed, "I'll make him hard to ketch. What's the old man trying to say?"

"He says," she interpreted, "you look out for those Texanos. Maybeso they shoot you from behind."

"Ask him how he'd take 'em on," he suggested.

"He says," she replied, "he will go ahead and watch. And when he sees them coming, he will yell. Then, you can come and fight them, maybe."

*"Muy bien,"* nodded Gun Smoke and as the stone-eater hurried away he dismounted and sat down by the bridge.

"How do you mean, 'maybe?' " he asked Lolita.

"Maybe they *all* will come!" she hinted.

"Say, you'd better go home," he decided. "I need all the nerve I've got. You go on back and hold hands with Dandy—I don't want to have you around."

"You think I'm afraid?" she asked.

"Why, sure!" he laughed. "The whole danged town is afraid. Never seen such a low-spirited crowd. What has Quick Murrah ever done to you?"

"He steals women," she answered.

Gun Smoke nodded wisely.

"I see," he said. "He tried to steal *you*. He's a bad one with women, eh?"

"I don' like him," she returned, her eyes shining with hatred.

Gun Smoke shrugged and looked up the road. There was dust rising, far to the north.

"Well, you go on back," he directed,

"and I'll take care of Mr. Murrah. I reckon that's him, coming."

She gazed down the street and out on the prairie beyond, and as three horsemen appeared over a swell of ground, she started up to stare.

"Those others are his brothers," she stated. "See—there is my *papá*. He is watching."

Old Juan had taken his place in the middle of the street and Gun Smoke rose and tightened his cinch. Then he took down the heavy buffalo gun and led Watch-eye out of sight behind the approach to the bridge. When he came back Lolita looked at him intently.

"Roll your hoop, now," he said bluffly, "this is no place for little girls. And Lolita, I was just fooling about that kiss."

"How you mean?" she asked.

"Never mind," he answered. "You go back to the house. And don't you come out when I shoot."

He stretched out behind a timber and laid his cartridges in front of him.

"Doggone it," he complained, looking up and seeing the girl still there, "I thought I told you to git."

"I am waiting for my *papá*," she responded tremulously. "I sure hope you don' get killed."

"Same to you," he grunted. "By grab, they're sure coming!"

And as the three horsemen galloped up, a shrill yell rent the air and the stone-eater waved his hat. With a rapid popping of pistols the riders dashed into town and reined in before the Big Cantina. In the clear morning light Gun Smoke could see their dark, gaunt faces as they searched the empty street for possible enemies. Quick Murrah and his brothers had come to get back his pistol, perhaps to snuff out a life.

Gun Smoke glanced down the sights of the close-shooting buffalo gun, but something stayed his hand. They had come to kill him—he was justified in shooting them—but he waited, and suddenly they whirled. Three hands shot into the air, three pistols went off together. Then, with a wild Texas yell, the brothers charged through the swinging doors.

Gun Smoke leaped to his feet. The time had come to strike. As well as he knew anything he knew what they were doing now—they were lined up, still on horseback, for the drinks.

With a bound he ran down the bank to where Watch-eye stood waiting. Thrusting the gun into its holster as he mounted, he plunged in a swift, reckless gallop up the street, while the village dogs fled yelping before him. At the door of the saloon he dropped off on his good leg, his pistols gleaming as he drew. The next moment he bulged through the door, ducked quickly to the left, and thrust them both out at once.

At the bar, with glasses poised, the three Texans sat their horses, looking back over their shoulders in surprise. They had been drinking from the stirrup, after the border cowboy fashion, and Gun Smoke had them covered.

"Hands up, you cowardly whelps!" he commanded.

They sat frozen, too startled to obey.

"Here's my badge," went on Gun Smoke, more quietly. "And the first man that makes a break, I'll kill. Glad to do it—just waiting for a chance."

Ed Murrah put up his hands; John, the younger brother, followed; then Quick, muttering an oath.

"Now git," ordered Gun Smoke peremptorily. "Out of town—and don't come back."

He followed them through the doors, and as they lined up in the street, he looked them over appraisingly. Quick Murrah had gone pale beneath the dusky tan of his Indian skin, but death was lurking in his eyes. The others were afraid—cowed.

"Well, reach for it," taunted Gun Smoke, as Quick's hand began to twitch.

"Go ahead, if you're so quick on the draw. I'll just put these guns up and give you a better break." And he thrust them back into his belt.

Murrah gazed at him, keen and watchful, his little eyes moving restlessly; but he did not go for his guns.

"I was figuring," observed Gun Smoke, "on doing this country a favor by wiping you boys off the map. And now I've got you where I want you it would be a big mistake to let ary one of you go. But I'm not a killer—not yet."

He paused, looking them over quietly. John pushed his hands up higher. But Gun Smoke shook his head.

"Nope," he said, "the wolf was plumb left out of me. But don't gamble on my good nature too far. Now you ride out of town and don't you look back—I'm not taking any chances, at all."

He jerked his head up the road, and the Murrahs swayed their bodies, turning their cow ponies away from his guns. Then, still holding up their hands, they rode out of town, while the Mexicans stared in silence from their doorways. Gun Smoke reached up quietly and plucked the rifle from its holster, the better to keep them in range. For a hundred yards, for four hundred yards, they trotted away, hands extended; and the Mexicans crowded into the street. Then, with a shrill, defiant yell Quick snatched out his pistol and fired it into the air with lightning quickness, as he turned.

But Gun Smoke had been waiting, his buffalo gun poised, and as Quick Murrah whirled to shoot, the heavy rifle leaped up and its roar woke the echoes of the town. The left side of Murrah's coat was ripped off and hurled away. His hand jumped and he let his pistol fall. But the bullet had missed his heart, grazing the ribs as it passed, even burning the inside of his arm.

Gun Smoke jacked up another cartridge, then turned to the stone-eater, who had suddenly stepped out of a doorway.

"How's that for close shooting?" he inquired.

Old Juan racked his brain for enough English to express his thoughts; then, doffing his hat, he picked up a small pebble and held it aloft between two fingers.

"You shoot!" he invited as the Mexicans, observing his pantomime, burst into roars of laughter.

Down the road, in a cloud of dust, the three Texans were in full flight. The marshal's duties were done. He could go about his own business.

As he limped over to Watch-eye, who was snorting to go, Lolita came running up the street. Her face was alight, there was a world of gladness in her smile, and as he stood there, dumfounded, she threw her arms about his neck and kissed him again and again.

"That's enough now," he laughed, as he pulled her hands away. "I was just fooling about that kiss."

But as he met her eyes his face became suddenly grave. For Lolita was not fooling.

"Hell!" he muttered, as he swung up on his horse. "I've gone and done it again."

He spoke aloud: "All quiet in town, eh? Give that to McAllister!" And he threw his marshal's badge into the street.

Then, with a bow to the startled Mexicans and a last glance at Lolita, he galloped away to the south.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE WHITE WOLF.

DAGGONE it," grumbled Gun Smoke, looking back at Barcee, "there's another burg I can't go back to. What's the matter with these womenfolks, anyway?" He chuckled at his egotism.

Watch-eye swiveled one ear back to

catch the words of his master, then pointed them both to the front.

"Who'd 'a' thought," complained Gun Smoke, "that a Mexican girl like her would kiss a cussed Texano! And McAllister's girl, at that! Well, down the road, Watch-eye! Down the road toward the setting sun! Danged lucky to git off alive."

Watch-eye arched his proud neck and after making a balk to bite his master's leg, he settled down to his steady road gait.

Gun Smoke heaved a sigh. Some strange fatality seemed to dog his steps, making fighting men his enemies and women his friends. But before him lay the open trail. He was free, all the world was before him—new faces, new adventures, new friends. And all his enemies were left behind—all his quarrels and mistakes and budding love affairs. It was better so.

Yet, as he rode on, he pondered on the stone-eater's daughter, and her giving him a kiss. Only the evening before, he had read her secret in her eyes—she was in love with McAllister, her *patron*. It was to tease him that, in jest, Gun Smoke had made the pretended bargain, to drive Murrah out of town for a kiss. But his honor as a fighting man had made him meet the Texans, and refuse to give up his gun. If it was kisses that he sought he had no need to roam so far. But women could never understand.

He sighed and threw the spurs into the dawdling Watch-eye, who was making furtive grabs at bunches of grass, but as the miles fell behind him his mind went back up the trail to the cabin hidden away in the hills. When Johnsie heard of his close shooting and his encounter with Quick Murrah, perhaps she would forget how he had dropped out of sight, without a word, like a thief in the night. He had had no thought, with her, of asking for a kiss; yet he wondered, since women are human, what her answer might have been if he had said what was in his heart.

It was just for that reason, that women are so human, that he had left without saying good-by; for, though she took him for a horse thief, Johnsie was lonely up her canyon, and he might say something he would regret. And she, being lonely and at outs with Dandy, might forget and answer, "Yes." And then what?

Ah, there was the rub. For Gun Smoke did not want to settle down. Not even for Johnsie would he live in one walled canyon—or in one spot on the boundless plains. There was that in his blood which urged him on and on, whether they treated him well or ill. He was a rambling, gambling cowboy, and the open trail was his home.

The Las Vegas trail skirted the base of the towering Rockies, leading up over long ridges and down across wide swales which opened into the plains. Cattle grazed along the hillsides or were scattered out in tiny dots over the sea of grass below.

As he dismounted to rest his leg, which was beginning to throb and ache, Gun Smoke saw a solitary horseman, far behind. He was following him down the trail. Gun Smoke watched him idly as Watch-eye cropped the grama grass. Then, coming over the next little rise, in back, he saw two more. They rode on down the trail, and behind them came still two more, riding fast to catch up with the first.

"What the devil!" grumbled Gun Smoke.

Remembering certain hard faces, he mounted and spurred on to the south. But now he thought no more of the fair ones left behind. In their place there flashed up visions of Zim Plunkett and "Cutthroat" Charley, of Quick Murrah and his galloping horsemen. He had beaten them and escaped; but were they following now to kill him, to ride him down on the plains? He halted behind

the summit of a ridge and crept back cautiously to look.

Where two men had ridden before, with two following behind, he saw four now, with two more behind. Nor did they turn out to ride through the cattle which grazed on both sides of the road. These were men with some purpose besides that of reading brands—they were following on his trail. Gun Smoke glanced up at the sun, which was swinging down toward the west, and rode steadily on as before. But behind the next ridge he stopped and looked back again. There were more riders now—there were ten!

"Old Scorp!" he said to himself, limping back to mount and ride. He had not yet escaped the night riders. He thought it best to keep his even gait until dusk cast a haze over the hills.

Then he swung out over the rocks, to leave no tracks for the trailers, and rode for the open plains. He hit a high lope as he broke out of the foothills; and as the night came on he circled and rode due north, in the direction from which he had come. So foxes, when hard pressed, double back on the hounds, he thought. And he laughed as he rode through the dark.

On the trail far behind him a signal fire blazed up, winking the message of his escape. And soon, on the ridge just south of Barcee, an answering fire blinked and beckoned. The hunt was on, with many riders scouring the prairie or riding pell-mell toward Las Vegas. But beneath the quiet stars Gun Smoke rode back softly, keeping well down in the shelter of the draws. Watch-eye fell into a cow trail that led on across a stream. The lights of Barcee twinkled behind. At last, far out on the grassy plain, Gun Smoke reined in and stepped wearily down.

For a long time he stood listening to the sounds of the summer night—the lonely hooting of ground owls, the roar of swooping nighthawks, the far-away howl of a wolf. As he listened, the vigilant Watch-eye raised his nose to the wind and sniffed it with reassuring snorts.

"All right, eh?" muttered Gun Smoke. "My leg hurts like hell."

Stripping off his saddle and bridle, he turned his trusty mount loose. Not even a hackamore dragged after Watch-eye as he walked—he was free as the prairie wind. But as Gun Smoke made his bed in a buffalo wallow, the pony came and stood above him. Gun Smoke rubbed his soft nose, brushed the hair out of his eyes and caressed his sensitive ears; then he pulled off his boots and settled back with a sigh.

Midnight came, and a taint on the wind wakened Watch-eye as he stood drowsing by the wallow. He raised his head and listened, softly inhaling the burdened air and blowing it out with low snorts. Gun Smoke stirred, snuggling closer beneath his sweaty saddle blanket. But Watch-eye breathed warningly in his ear.

"What's the matter?" grumbled Gun Smoke as Watch-eye gave a huge snort and jumped back, as if to run.

Peering over the edge of his hiding place, Gun Smoke stared out into the night. A ghostly form appeared in the darkness, but Gun Smoke settled back, with a grunt. It was a wolf, probably attracted by the tallow on his throw-rope, or creeping up to steal his boots. He dropped back, but as he slept Watch-eye jumped even more violently and whistled forth a challenge of fear.

The wolf was closer now and Gun Smoke reached for his gun. But to shoot would summon his enemies—he would have to saddle and ride. He picked up a clod of dirt from the side of the hole and hurled it, with a curse, muttering as the brute made off. Soon sleep was heavy upon him again, and when Watch-eye, snorting anxiously, reached down and nudged him awake he slapped him away. But when, with a

fierce whistle, the horse snorted danger into his ear, Gun Smoke reached for his pistol and looked out.

Almost at the brink of his hiding place the gray wolf stood swaying its head. Gun Smoke stared at it intently, for its actions were strange, and Watch-eye was exploding with angry snorts. Whether he fired or not, there was no more sleep for Gun Smoke, with this creature prowling about. So at last, with a vengeful curse, he thrust out his pistol and shot.

"Take that, you danged whelp," he muttered as the wolf fell kicking, then lay still.

Heaving up impatiently, Gun Smoke pulled on his tight boots and stumbled out of the hole.

"Come up here, you crazy fool!" he burst out petulantly, as Watch-eye stood snorting at the wolf. But for once the pinto refused to obey. Every breath was an explosion, and Gun Smoke laid down his bridle while his hand crept back to his gun. Swiftly he glided over and touched the muzzle to the wolf, which lay dead in a pool of blood. Something dark appeared behind it; something white reached out in front. He jumped—it was a human hand.

"My Lord!" breathed Gun Smoke as he stood staring at the body. In the grass, before the outstretched hand, he beheld a long pistol, cocked. The wolf skin had cloaked a man—a murderer, creeping up to kill him—but the first shot had laid him low. Gun Smoke snatched away the hide and leaned down to scan the face. He had guessed right—it was Cutthroat Charley.

In some mysterious way he had traced Gun Smoke to his hiding place, but his wolf skin had not deceived the faithful Watch-eye, and his criminal career had been brought to a close. Gun Smoke stood over the horse thief, the first man he had ever killed, gazing with awe at the outstretched hand which had been thrust out to shoot him, noting the white line across his throat. There the hangman's noose had cut before they lowered Charley to the ground and ordered him to steal no more. But Gun Smoke's beautiful pinto had tempted him beyond his strength, and now he had paid the price.

Gun Smoke reached for his saddle, to mount and ride away from this grisly, sinister form; but as he was tightening up the cinches, Watch-eye snorted and wheeled, and a voice came out of the night.

"Did you kill him, Charley?"

Gun Smoke turned, with an oath.

"No," he growled, and crouched closer to the ground.

There was a thud of horses' feet, an impatient jerk, and, looming against the sky, Gun Smoke saw a tall rider, dragging Charley's reluctant mount behind.

"Did you kill the danged whelp?" he cried out again exultantly.

Gun Smoke felt the lust to slay.

"No!" he snarled, "but I will!"

His gun leaped up of itself. There was a flare of light, the deep-mouthed *bang* of the six-shooter, and the tall man went over backward.

Gun Smoke did not wait to investigate. As the two horses broke and fled he swung up on Watch-eye and galloped off into the night. His blood was pounding now; he felt a fever in his brain. Watch-eye spurned the ground as he ran.

Then, in front of them, to the south, two shots stabbed the darkness, and Gun Smoke pulled up short. Two shots from behind, where Cutthroat Charley had met his death, spat out their sinister answer; then two more, far off to the east. Gun Smoke reined toward the west and rode at a gallop, dimly conscious of an outdistanced pursuit. But day would soon come, and with the night riders on his trail, he felt the hunted man's instinct to hide.

The huge bulk of the mountains rose before him as he rode, and he turned up

a wide, grassy swale. But when he slowed to a walk he heard drumming hoof-beats behind him; then two shots and a long, shrill whistle. He was just starting up the wash when two more shots flashed in front of him—he was surrounded—caught in a great circle.

"To hell with 'em!" Gun Smoke shouted recklessly and charged forward to break through the line.

What was one man to him—he had shot two already! And if he tarried the big circle would close in and net him. He swung low and rode for the hills. It was dark, but in the gloom a broad line appeared before him, a white trail leading to the south. Then Watch-eye shied violently, and as Gun Smoke hooked the horn he heard the *bang* of a pistol shot.

Watch-eye had turned and swung north at a gallop, taking the curves at lightning speed. Gun Smoke felt a hard blow, as if something had struck his crazy-bone; then a six-shooter spat out at him, close behind. He turned in the saddle and emptied his own in five swift shots, straight into the answering blaze. They whirled around a point, the horseman close upon him, and their pistols exchanged fire again. But at the next dip into a canyon the man was not there—only his mount, running wild down the trail. Gun Smoke swerved to the left and hid up a little wash as the riderless horse clattered by. But on its heels came another horse, and another behind that, and he reined behind a bush and sat still, while up the trail at a furious gallop the pursuing horsemen spurred on and on.

As their clatter died out Gun Smoke headed for the hills. Suddenly he felt sick and weak—the black night went blacker—he pitched off his horse into the sand.

He roused from his faint to find Watch-eye sniffing him curiously. His sleeve was wet with blood. With a curse he stumbled to his feet. He had been hit; he was wounded again. If the night riders found him, there would be no escape this time from death.

Groaning and groping for the horn, he hauled himself laboriously into the saddle. With numb fingers he loosened his rope. Then, wrapping it around him, he made the ends fast and touched the anxious Watch-eye with his spurs. The night closed in again like the shadow of approaching death, as Watch-eye plodded away into the darkness.

## CHAPTER XI.

### TWO LUMPS OF SUGAR.

GUN SMOKE had ridden fast and far before the bullet of the night rider had caused him to seek the hills. But when he roused up, still tied to the saddle, and gazed about with bloodshot eyes, he wondered which was the dream. Had he dreamed that Cutthroat Charley had crept up to his bed disguised as a prairie wolf? Had he dreamed that in hot anger he had shot another rider and engaged in battle with a third? Or was he dreaming now that he was back in Blood's Canyon and Watch-eye was nosing at the bars?

The pinto set his strong teeth into the topmost pole and rattled it back and forth. With a quick flip to the right, he jerked it loose and it fell with a clatter to the ground. He pushed out another bar and stepped gingerly over the rest as he plodded on up toward the house. Good old Watch-eye—he had brought his master through.

At the clatter of falling bars, a hound pealed out his challenge, and others rushed from their beds under the house. As Gun Smoke's brain cleared, he saw the door jerked violently open. The colonel stepped forth with a gun.

"Heah!" he called, "what the devil are you doing? Now you git, and nevah come back! You're no gentleman, suh—sneaking off in the night like the low-down hawse thief you are!"

"Wha's that?" inquired Gun Smoke groggily. "Say, gimme a drink, will you, colonel?"

"A drink!" repeated the colonel, with biting scorn, "you've had too many already. And after a night in the barroom—and a fight, too, if I'm any judge—you come back to the man you've insulted."

"Gimme a drink!" repeated Gun Smoke insistently.

From the open door Johnsie Blood came running out.

"Oh, he's hurt!" she cried reproachfully. "Why, I do believe he's shot. He's killed!" she screamed. "He's tied into the saddle and the blood has run down everywhere!"

"Got shot—by the night riders," responded Gun Smoke thickly. "Up here." He touched his shoulder, rather gingerly.

"Oh, mercy!" exclaimed Mrs. Blood, running out to join her husband, who was lifting Gun Smoke out of his saddle. "I knew he'd never escape alive! They're determined to kill us all, it's just a matter of time! Oh, Henry, let's give up—let's go!"

"Stop your chatter!" scolded the colonel. "Mistuh Gun Smoke is badly hurt. And if the night riders did this he's welcome to my home, no matter how many hawses he's stole."

"He never stole any horses," wailed Johnsie. "Oh, where did they shoot him, now?"

"Through the back!" replied the colonel; "the way they always shoot, the cowardly passel of assassins. He's shot high, through the shoulder. We'll put him in our bed!"

Gun Smoke awoke to find the colonel standing over him, with Mrs. Blood and Johnsie behind.

"Don't move, now," he said. "You've been shot through the shoulder and you've hurt your leg, to boot. Are the night riders on your trail?"

Gun Smoke rolled his eyes, as he tried to collect his thoughts.

"Say, where's my horse?" he demanded.

"He's heah," answered Colonel Blood grimly. "Do you want him inside, as usual?"

"I'll take care of him," volunteered Johnsie eagerly.

But Gun Smoke shook his head.

"You look out," he warned, "he's liable to paw you down. Open the door while I talk to him first."

He thrust a finger into his mouth and gave a shrill whistle, and Watch-eye came trotting to the house.

"I'll speak to him," he said, "and tell him not to bite you."

But Johnsie only laughed.

"Oh, Watch-eye won't hurt me," she scoffed, and strode out the open door.

"You—Watch-eye!" called Gun Smoke. "Don't you kick her, or I'll kill you!"

"Now you hush up!" she called back. "He's perfectly gentle, and I know it. Whoa, boy!"

She loosened the cinch; then, while Gun Smoke shouted orders, she stripped off saddle and bridle and hit Watch-eye with the reins over the rump.

"Go on, horse," she said. "And don't mind him—he's crazy!"

But Gun Smoke did not answer her smile.

"Don't you spoil my horse," he croaked. "Don't you feed him now, while I'm sick. He's a one-man horse—understand?"

"All right," she answered lightly; and at a glance from her father, she turned and went away.

"Now, young man," began the colonel, "if you can get your mind off that hawse for a minute, I'd like to have a little information. Wheah were you when you got this wound?"

"Down on the road," replied Gun Smoke; and as briefly as possible he outlined his running fight.

"Good! Good!" pronounced the colonel. "So you killed Cutthroat Charley! He was the worst villain unhung in these parts—except Zim Plunkett and Quick Murrah, of co'se. Now, what was all this fighting down in Barcee yesterday? I heard you had a run-in with Quick!"

"Yes, and a run-out!" boasted Gun Smoke. "I ran him plumb out of town. They made me town marshal—for one day."

"Didn't he fight?" inquired Colonel Blood dubiously.

"Hell, no!" scoffed Gun Smoke. "He was afraid to. His two brothers were there, too, and I run them out with him. You should of heard them Mexicans laugh!"

"Now, don't get excited," soothed the colonel, feeling his brow. "You've got a big hole in your back—just grazed your collar bone, passing out. But I can hardly believe that last."

"You can't hardly believe anything!" retorted Gun Smoke heatedly. "But I did it, all the same. You just ask Dandy McAllister—he knows."

"Ah, was Dandy theah?" asked the colonel with sudden interest. "So that was why Quick left town!"

"No!" shouted Gun Smoke. "He was back in his house. But his Mexican, that stone-eater, was there."

"What? Dandy not present?" exclaimed Colonel Blood.

"Well, it wasn't his funeral!" defended Gun Smoke. "I didn't need any help, with those yaps."

"Well, well!" frowned the colonel. "This is very unusual. I understand you were Dandy's guest."

"What difference does that make?" demanded Gun Smoke.

Colonel Blood threw his head up arrogantly.

"It makes this difference, suh," he stated. "You were his guest and theahfore his friend. And it is the custom, among gentlemen——"

"Oh, now, Henry!" protested Mrs. Blood anxiously, "please don't get Mistuh—er—Gun Smoke excited."

"He's all right—perfectly calm," answered the colonel shortly. "But, very well—some other time." And he strode out in a huff.

Mrs. Blood bustled about, cleaning Gun Smoke up, and bringing his breakfast. But it was easy to see she was worried. Her kind, motherly eyes glanced often at the door, and when at last they were alone, she hurried in with a pillow slip, which she passed over furtively to her guest.

"I knew you'd remember it," she explained. "I suppose you came back after this."

"After what?" inquired Gun Smoke blankly.

"Why, your money!" she exclaimed. "You went off and left it. And, oh, I was so worried for fear Henry might find it and not understand, you know. He might think you were trying to pay us and——"

Gun Smoke caught it like a flash—the insult to their pride which such a payment would convey—and he passed it off with a laugh.

"My Lord!" he cried, "did I go off and leave my roll? So that's where I put it—in that pillow case."

He chuckled to himself as he fetched out the wadded bills, and Mrs. Blood beamed triumphantly.

"I told her!" she said. "I told her you were just young and careless; and forgot, the way boys often do."

"Forgot several things," admitted Gun Smoke, tucking the bills under his pillow. "But I was leaving kinder early and—well, I didn't stop to thank you for your kindness. You certainly entertained me with true Southern hospitality, and I hoped to thank you later."

"You were welcome, of co'se," she smiled, "and we were sorry to have you go, but—— Now! you're doing the same thing right over again!"

She snatched the bills out from under his pillow, and laughed, as Johnsie glanced in through the doorway.

"See what this foolish boy was doing —again!" she cried. "He was putting his money inside the pillow slip!"

"Well, you've got my clothes!" complained Gun Smoke. "Where else could I cache it, anyway?"

"I'll take care of it for you!" she offered, and went out smiling happily.

Johnsie looked him straight in the eye.

"You can't fool me," she said, sitting down and surveying him accusingly. "You thought you'd play smart and leave that money, anyway—after I'd told you I couldn't receive it! And then you sneaked away, like some horse thief!"

"Well, that's what you thought I was," defended Gun Smoke weakly; but he dared not meet her eye.

"I'd think so yet," she stated, "only you haven't got sense enough—leaving your money around in pillow slips! Suppose some officer should come here and find all those bills! Do you think that's quite fair to your friends?"

"By grab," he grumbled, "you've got the worst case of suspiciousness that I've run across in years. Didn't I tell you I won that money on a horse race?"

"Yes, and you told me your name was Gun Smoke!" she flared back. "And that's one thing I just know is a lie."

"Well, call me Bad Medicine, or Bill Enright, or anything. As Shakespeare says, 'what's in a name?' "

"A real name shows you're honest, and on the square!" she replied. "But whoever heard of a family named Gun Smoke?"

"This is a case," he grinned, "where, as Shakespeare says again, a man's actions speak louder than words. Ain't I lived right up to that name?"

"Oh, what do you know about Shakespeare?" she flouted. "I declare, I believe you're bluffing. You haven't done anything but just to act tough."

"Say, kid," he nodded admiringly, "they can't fool you much, can they? You just keep right on thinking that way and it'll sure relieve my mind, because I've got to preserve my incognito."

"Your which?" inquired Johnsie. And she laughed heartily. "You've been reading some book," she said.

"Oh, well," he sighed, "I see you'll never take me seriously, so I might as well get well and go. You think much reading has made me mad, eh?"

"Maybe you had a good start," she jested, "before you ever got a-hold of Shakespeare."

"Nope, it wasn't that," he confided. "I was perfectly O. K. until I rode up this canyon and seen you. Since then I haven't been right."

"I believe it," she nodded with conviction. "But at the same time," she added bitterly, "I never thought you'd ride away without even saying good-by."

Her lips trembled a little now, and a new soberness came over Gun Smoke as he saw the hurt look in her eyes.

"I'll tell you, Johnsie," he said, "I didn't dast to do it. Because if I had I'd——"

He paused and sighed.

"You'd what?" she prompted.

"I'd said something I might be sorry for."

"Oh, I see," she nodded. "Well, don't worry. So you didn't intend to come back at all, then?"

"Nope," he confessed. "And I can't figure out yet how I got here. I was fifty miles away when this ruckus began, and seems like they chased me a good fifty more; but when I got this hit I just tied myself in the saddle and turned old Watch-eye loose. Next thing I knowed I was here."

"Well, that's too bad," she mocked. "And then the *next* thing you knowed, Johnsie Blood was back making eyes at you!"

"Hell, no!" he grinned, "I was biting my tongue to keep from saying how pretty she looked."

"Well, well," she smiled, "the boy is improving. Must have had some practice, some time. But go right on—we make it a principle in this country never to pry into anybody's past."

"Practice—nothing!" he scoffed. "It just comes to me natural, whenever I look up and see you. But your mother told me, Johnsie, not to get wrought up or excited, so I won't try to tell you the rest."

"No—don't," she said, laying a cool hand on his brow. "Just lie back and go to sleep and think how wonderful it is not to have to say anything at all. And when you wake up, I'll try to think of something pleasant, instead of all the spiteful things I've said. And don't worry, Mr. Gun Smoke, about anything you've said, because I know you're not responsible. A man with a horse that's smarter than he is has nothing to fear from me."

She rose and went out. While Gun Smoke was asleep she gave Watch-eye two lumps of sugar

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE SMARTEST COWMAN IN TEXAS.

WHEN his fever abated Gun Smoke noted a worried air on the part of Johnsie and her mother. And when the colonel did not respond to the baying of his hound pack, Gun Smoke knew that something was wrong. He noticed that the women kept the outer door closed, glancing often through the loophole at the trail, and he guessed what was on their minds. He had come back, bringing the anger of the night riders upon them, and every minute they expected the attack.

"Colonel," he began, when he had him alone, "as soon as I can ride I'll be leaving here. Is Zim Plunkett after me again?"

"Yes, he is," admitted the colonel, "and theah's no use denying it—he's watching our cabin, right now. But don't you worry, young man—you're more than welcome to stay heah, if you can put up with our humble fare."

"Colonel," protested Gun Smoke, "I feel like a dog, bringing the night riders on your neck again. And honestly, I didn't intend to do it. But when I got hit I just tied myself into the saddle and turned Watch-eye's head toward the hills."

"So my daughter informs me," returned Colonel Blood grimly. "But as I said befoah, if you can put up with our hard fare——"

"Why, colonel!" exclaimed Gun Smoke, "I'm living like a king. These big steaks are building me up better than anything in the world, and your wife is giving me everything!"

"Amy's a good cook," conceded the colonel. "We don't live so bad. But these rascals in the hills are watching me so closely I can't get away to kill a deer."

"Give me beef," pronounced Gun Smoke, "and you can have all the deer meat. But who do you reckon these hombres are that are watching the house so close?"

"Quick Murrah and his gang," answered Heck Blood ominously. "They've got you marked for death."

"Let 'em mark!" scoffed Gun Smoke, "I could've killed all three of them, only I can't shoot down a man in cold blood."

"They can—that's the difference," responded the colonel. "And you'll never leave this canyon alive, if Quick Murrah has his way. You humiliated him and his brothers before those Barcee Mexicans. And they're watching this house, day and night."

"You wait till my arm gets well," threatened Gun Smoke, "and I'll chase them like a goat. He don't look so bad to me—and next time we have a run-in I'll jump him out and *make* him fight."

"He'll fight," replied the colonel. "Have no doubts about that. He's a killer, through and through, and quick

as a rattlesnake. He'll pistol you before you know it."

"Think so?" smiled Gun Smoke. "I'm kinder quick, myself. Did they tell you about me winning Dandy McAllister's six-shooter, winging swallows at ninety yards?"

"They told me," admitted the colonel, "but a thing like that could happen only once in a lifetime. Quick Murrah has practiced the draw until the action can't be seen—it's too swift for the human eye. So my advice to you is to shoot it out in the open, with rifles. I see you've got a good one on your saddle."

"Oh, that one," nodded Gun Smoke. "Little present from Dandy. And believe me, it shoots to a hair. At four hundred yards I took Quick Murrah's shirt off, and I'll bet it broke his nerve, to boot."

"Mistuh Gun Smoke," spoke up the colonel, after a contemplative silence, "I don't know who you are, but somehow I like your style. You may be a trifle boastful, but I'll have to admit you have acquitted yourself very creditably. At the same time you've been shot twice in less than two weeks; and it's only a matter of time, if you remain in this country, until Quick and his killers will get you. I admire your courage, but my advice to you is to leave these renegades alone. Because, no matter how brave a man is, a bullet will kill him."

"There's something to that," responded Gun Smoke soberly.

The colonel laid a hand on his arm.

"You stay heah," he said, "until you get well. And then, some dark night, you take your hawse and ride—and don't stop until you're clear back in Texas. That's my advice, now, as a friend."

"Well—I'll do it," decided Gun Smoke. "That is," he added quickly, "if you don't need me here. But you've taken me in twice, colonel, when those hell-hounds were after me, and I never go back on a friend. Right or wrong, I'll fight for him. And after what you folks have done——"

"No, my boy," smiled the colonel. "I'm proud to hear you say it, but we don't need your help—not right now. Zim Plunkett has learned to let sleeping dogs lie, and I'm tired of this uphill fight. I'm whipped, only I won't admit it, so I've decided to wait for the railroad."

"Well, now, colonel," went on Gun Smoke, with a mysterious smile, "I've been studying over Zim Plunkett, and I don't know whether you're whipped or not. I believe there's a way of pulling his teeth. Have you got those notes he gave you?"

"I have," responded the colonel, "right over in that trunk. But they're not worth the paper they're written on, because Scorp Plunkett has been outlawed in the State of Texas, and he'll never set foot across the line."

"At the same time," suggested Gun Smoke, "he might be induced to do so. There are ways of doing everything and I'm willing to take a chance, if you'll give me a little help. All I want is the name of every man that's holding his notes. I believe I'll go back and buy 'em up."

"They're worthless," declared the colonel impatiently. "He'll never go back to Texas, and if he did he wouldn't pay a dollar."

"I'll tell you," spoke up Gun Smoke impulsively, "you may think I'm a horse thief, trying to outrun the sheriff; but I've got folks, my ownself—my dad is the smartest cowman in Texas!"

"This will be good news for Johnsie," beamed the colonel, "because she just naturally despises a hawse thief."

"Never mind about Johnsie," cut in Gun Smoke. "I'm telling you about my dad. He's the man to take Old Scorp and tie him up in a bow knot. He'll figure out some way of getting him over into Texas. And believe me, he'll col-

lect on those notes. No, I know *you* couldn't do it, and neither could I. But my old man is a wolf. Never did a crooked thing in his life; but he's just naturally smart in a trade, and that's the way to git Zim Plunkett. There's no use trying to fight him. But you touch his pocket and you touch his heart; and I'll bet my father can clean him!"

"Very praiseworthy opinion," commented the colonel dryly. "Glad to heah you speak so well of your father. But you'll pardon me for doubting if he or any other man can get the better of Scorp in a trade."

"No, go ahead and doubt!" flared back Gun Smoke. "You must think I'm crazy as hell! But I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll buy those notes of yours for ten cents on the dollar, right now!"

"And then what?" queried the colonel shrewdly.

"I'll go back to my old man," answered Gun Smoke confidently, "and he'll hang Plunkett's hide on the fence. Never mind how—he can do it. All I need right now is those notes."

"Very well, suh," spoke up the colonel, "I'll just turn them over to you. And I'm proud indeed to know you have such a father. You can pay me the ten per cent later."

"Nope—spot cash!" returned Gun Smoke, running his hand under his pillow. "Say, gimme my clothes, will you? Mrs. Blood done hid my roll for fear I'd lose it, or something."

For a moment Heck Blood stood eying him sternly, for he knew about the money in the pillow. But he restored the hidden pillow slip, and got his notes from the trunk while Gun Smoke counted his roll.

"There's some more in my clothes," he said at last. "How much do those notes of yours come to?"

"Well—twenty thousand dollars," stated the colonel. "I sold him two thousand head at ten—— But of co'se you wouldn't want them all."

"I'll go the limit," answered Gun Smoke, "as long as my money lasts. Just pass me over them pants, will you, colonel?"

He went through the various pockets, culling out more and more money until the colonel began to stare. Then, ripping open a seam, he reached down inside the waistband and fetched out eight hundred-dollar bills.

"There you are," he said. "Two thousand dollars even, and I'll ask you to sign over those notes."

"Who to?" inquired the colonel politely.

"Well—make it to Bill Enright," decided Gun Smoke at last. It had to come out some time.

Heck Blood grunted as he passed over the notes.

"Very well," he said. "Your name means nothing to me. But to my daughter, now——"

"Never mind," spoke up Gun Smoke in a huff. "I reckon my folks are just as good as any. And if your daughter don't like my name she'll have to think up another one, or just let it go for plain Smoke."

"That's agreeable to me," responded the colonel stiffly. "Only it's customary, among gentlemen——"

"Colonel Blood," broke in Gun Smoke, "a man can be a gentleman with any name, or no name at all. It's the man that counts and, just passing through the country, I prefer to be known as Gun Smoke."

"Gun Smoke it is!" replied the colonel with a bow. "But just the same, young man, you're throwing away your money. You'll never beat Old Scorp Plunkett."

"You don't know my dad," answered Gun Smoke. "He's the smartest danged cowman in Texas.

*To be continued in the next issue of* THE POPULAR STORIES, *October 22nd.*

# "THE Singing Charlotte"

By Idwal Jones

*Author of "Pascual Plays Trumps," Etc.*

**Swanwick, the dealer in nautical instruments, had lived many years of peaceful bachelorhood—before he engaged a housekeeper. Then she began to dictate his diet, his time, his appointments—and, worse than that, she brought mystery into the house and disturbed Swanwick's routine of life.**

IT was between night and morning, late in August, that Adrian Swanwick, dealer in nautical instruments, learned that there was mystery in the house.

Naturally he was greatly upset over the discovery. Yet, the more he considered the matter, the less surprised he was. It all came of having a woman on the place—and that woman a housekeeper.

He had got up, dressed, and shuffled down the corridor to his study which overlooked the bay of San Francisco. It was his custom to glance over the shipping by the clear light of dawn, amuse himself by making a guess how many sextants, compasses, logs and what-not he would sell that day, before beginning his daily work. It was just his professional eccentricity.

Here in the window he had his pet telescope set up—a brass tube fitted with a pair of lenses ground by the Stockholm opticians, Haglund & Groesbeck, thirty years ago. The firm is dead, and you might as well hunt for an auk's egg as for a pair of glasses to match these.

"Imagine the shock I got when I found the door open," Swanwick told me afterward. "There was the housekeeper, Mrs. Porson, looking through the tube. She was dressed in a corduroy bath robe, and her hair was done up in awful curl papers."

"Well, Swanwick," I said, "you can't

expect a lady to look her best so early in the morning."

"It was confoundedly cheeky of her, I thought, messing with my things like that. She had been running my house a week, and ordering me around, but this was exasperating. There she was, as comfortable as you please, sitting in a chair, and looking through my telescope as if she were a pilot. She looked for several minutes, with the pivot locked, then got up.

And after she was gone, I went back to see what she had been looking at through the lens.

"Framed in the lens was a boat, northeast of Alcatraz. I never saw an uglier boat in my life. A potato scow, that's what it was, one of those tubs that haul vegetables from the Jap farms in the San Joaquin delta. It had a two-story calaboose at the stern, and a rusty smokestack at the bow. Loops of rope, bedding and ragged hempen bumpers dangled over the side. It was a filthy and unseaworthy tub—a disgrace to the bay. And its name"—Swanwick guffawed here—"its name was *The Singing Charlotte!*"

This was the first time Swanwick had laughed in a month. He had been a sad dog lately, no longer the cheery, florid bachelor who used to invite us to his flat on Russian Hill and cook most delightful little dinners for us. He made magical dishes like *foies-aux-truffes* á la Coquelin, and *fritto misto,* and chicken Marengo. He was a good host and a genial creature until the devil put it into his head to advertise for a housekeeper.

A she-viking bore down upon him when he was alone and defenseless in his office, extracted the advertisement from a mesh bag, read it aloud, and coyly asked for the job. She had a lot of references that sounded all right. And she had been a ship's stewardess for years. That settled it. She got the job. Swanwick's troubles began immediately.

She sulked if he entered the kitchen, so he stayed away. She sulked if he gave a little party. She didn't believe in fancy cookery, and was a foe of liquor drinking. Friends who hopefully stayed for dinner got neck of mutton and spinach, and if they wanted a drink had to swig gin covertly in the study. They never came again.

She consulted with Swanwick's doctor on the state of his health. She packed him off to bed at ten o'clock, and administered his dietetic regimen as severely as it were the penal code and she the police judge. Swanwick was terribly afraid of her. And now, to cap it all, there was mystery in the house.

Swanwick peered through his telescope and contemplated the hideousness of that craft for a quarter of an hour. It had now dropped anchor. From the cabin there emerged a man so large that he had to stoop to avoid bumping his head. He was clad in overalls, a red singlet, and had enormous, black whiskers. He stretched his arms, yawned, and leaned over the rail. After a while he rubbed his hands and reëntered the cabin. Soon a thread of smoke arising lazily from the stovepipe proclaimed that the commander of *The Singing Charlotte* was cooking his breakfast.

Swanwick shuddered. What fantastic concern with such a creature could the excellent Mrs. Porson have? As if it were not bad enough to have her around, this seemed to hint of another alien, even coarser, intrusion into his life.

When he sat down to breakfast he was in bad humor. Poached eggs again, five mornings in succession, and a half cup of weak, synthetic coffee, that tasted like a decoction of sofa pillows. What he had been accustomed to was a grilled ham steak, fried potatoes, a tomato sauce, a saucer of cherries and a pot of Mocha thick enough to float a spoon.

Mrs. Porson, stately in a black dress

and with a frilled cap, walked majestically into the room, and he made a half-hearted complaint.

She set down a plate of dry toast.

"You may have two slices this morning," she said, disregarding his lament. "Doctor Henshaw tells me you have been off your diet much too long, Mr. Swanwick. It is very silly to pay a doctor a big fee for his advice, then disregard it."

Swanwick winced. Confound Henshaw! Those two must have been in cahoots. He was sure they had even conspired to make him quit tobacco. In fact, he hadn't enjoyed a cigar in weeks. He suspected her of putting some of that poisonous "antinicotine" stuff into his tea.

"Yes, yes, you are right, Mrs. Porson," he mumbled.

"There was heavy fog come down from the river last night, Mr. Swanwick," she said. "It's gone now, but the air is still damp, and you'd better put on that heavy Melton overcoat."

"Certainly, Mrs. Porson." Then, in a burst of cheery bravado, he added: "All kinds of strange things come down the river these mornings."

Perhaps she did not catch that. He got into his overcoat, a heavy garment that he loathed because of its age and greenness, and went down the steps. Then the housekeeper called out:

"Is there anything you'd particularly fancy for dessert?"

"Well, yes, a dessert, Mrs. Porson. A Charlotte—of some sort."

He chuckled over this riposte all the way to the office. He chuckled all day.

But that night, Mrs. Porson had her revenge on him. The dessert was stewed prunes, the same dish that had appeared unfailingly on the vesper board for a whole month, and toward which, since old Henshaw had prescribed it, he cherished the liveliest repugnance.

As the weeks, the months went on, the housekeeper tightened little by little the check rein. Swanwick grew fatter and pinker, but his temper grew worse. She would call up the club, when he was in the thick of a poker game, and order him to come home. Invariably he went. He was never out after nine o'clock, and was in bed by ten.

"Dammit, I've forgotten what a good meal tastes like," he would grumble. "I'd take to drink, if I only dared."

He caught a cold, a very mild one, the kind you can cure with an aspirin and a cup of eggnogg. Mrs. Porson hustled him off to bed and kept him there a whole week

After she had judged him convalescent, she permitted him to sit up in his study, a few hours at a time. And it was here, one clear evening, that I sat with him while he amused himself sweeping the bay with his telescope. Far down, in a semicircle, the covered docks fringed the water edge. They looked like recumbent elephants with gray howdahs on their backs. Alcatraz, purpling in the dusk, seemed theatrical. Its great light was beginning to twinkle. Swanwick kept peering through the lens. Then he gave a smothered cry, a cry that might have been prompted by surprise or acute annoyance.

"Have a look at this confounded thing, will you? There it is—*The Singing Charlotte.*"

I did have a look. Then I stepped to the telephone, called up the Marine Exchange, and inquired the name of the skipper of that craft.

Richard Porson, it turned out to be, and so I told Swanwick.

"Lord!" he said. "It must be the woman's husband. Why the devil doesn't he take her away?"

"That's a happy solution," I whispered. "Get acquainted with the fellow. The scow hooks up at Pier 24. Take a bottle down with you."

We whispered together, and guardedly, for the Porson was prowling in the hall. So the next morning, quite

early, the both of us were down at the dock. *The Singing Charlotte* was uglier than we had expected. It was a misshapen hulk, unkempt and tarred to the water line. The captain had just finished unloading his cargo, which consisted of some fifty crates of vegetables and a dozen coops of chickens that were poking their heads wretchedly between the slats.

He washed his hands in a bucket on the deck, then went aft, and reappeared, resplendent in a blue uniform glittering with brass buttons, and a cap adorned with gold filigree. *The Singing Charlotte* was a rotten command, but its master had his little vanities. With the dignity of an admiral, he crossed the street and entered a greasy lunch room. We followed and took chairs opposite him.

The navigator was a simple, unaffected creature, with nothing ferocious about him except his beard. He had the candid, violet-blue eyes of a child. Swanwick talked to him, and he became friendly.

"That's one of the stanchest little boats I've seen in a long time," said Swanwick, pouring him a drink.

"Had her for ten years," the captain volunteered. "Named her after my wife, who was always singing."

"I never heard anything so poetic."

"No more than she deserved," affirmed the captain, swallowing another drink. "But it turned out to be very small for her, tossed pretty heavy, which she objected to. Besides, slogging up the river and down, in all sorts of weather, and with a couple of tough hands on board, it was hard for a lady to put up with if she was brought up to gentle ways, like Charlotte was. Now, I couldn't afford a larger boat. I was too fond of the craft to give her up, so I stuck. She left me. A fine woman, if I say it myself, and I'm fond of her; but as you see, gentlemen, it isn't all my fault."

"I can very well believe it isn't," said Swanwick.

The navigator, with arms folded, leaned forward and turned upon us his candid eyes aglow with affection like a spaniel's, yet betraying a sad perplexity.

"It's too bad you can't take her back to sea with you," said my friend.

Porson shook his head sadly.

"It isn't decently big enough for her, and I haven't got the means to buy a larger one. And I haven't seen my wife for a year and a half. I did hear, though, that she is nursing some rich old geezer she has taken a sort of motherly fancy to, and I don't reckon she'll leave him until he's gone. Charlotte always sticks to the end—never leaves them until they're buried. She's that good hearted."

Swanwick gave a squirm at that. He banged the table once or twice, as if he were going to say something, but refrained. The sailor chatted on, guffawing behind his thick beard at times, and telling stories of his life on the river. My friend listened with the indulgent air of an adult humoring a child, but it was plain to see that his thoughts were elsewhere. Then he lifted a hand.

"Listen, Porson. No man can get ahead in the shipping business with such a small boat, dockage, fuel and wages being what they are. I can't see why a man of your ability doesn't try to get something bigger. Now, I'm in a side line of the business myself, and I might —I don't promise, mind you—but I might be able to put you in touch with somebody who'd back you in getting a heftier scow than that."

Swanwick gave him his card. They talked a little while longer, and we went back to the house. We had hardly entered when Mrs. Porson came in, bearing a tray with a steaming bowl upon it.

"You will get this down at once," she said. "It's just a little steeped saxifrage."

"Really, Mrs. Porson—heavens!—

that stuff, you know—I'm quite all right now——"

"Doctor Henshaw," she said, "told me it will do you no harm. Come, it's only half a pint."

That vision of him gulping down that stuff with many grimaces was the last I beheld of Swanwick for weeks. He had no will power left. He came no longer to the club. The belief at the club was that the woman was holding him incommunicado. There were other rumors, even more sinister.

One day my telephone bell rang. It was Swanwick, with his voice low-pitched. He wanted to know what I was doing the following Saturday.

"Nothing? Well, then, come for a bit of a cruise up the river. Porson has a new boat—twice as big as the old one. I bought—that is, I helped him finance it. He ran across it in the Oakland estuary. A bargain. Only six thousand dollars all complete, down to the spoons in the cabin."

"I'll come."

"All right. Get to Meiggs' wharf at seven o'clock. Any fisherman will row you out to *The Singing Charlotte*. We'll have a pleasant little voyage up the San Joaquin, as far as Stockton. Back Sunday night."

It was comical, the idea of Swanwick turning sailor. A trip across the bay on the ferry boat, and he would be ill for a week. Three days went by.

Saturday evening came, and wrapped in a mackinaw jacket, I got to the wharf and was rowed to the craft. *The Singing Charlotte* was riding high, and I boarded her through an open porthole, and Swanwick helped pull me into the cabin. Darkness fell. The river fog, chill and damp, interposed like a curtain between the vessel and the shore, almost blotting out all the lights of the city.

It was a fine night for collisions. The bay was rough. Sirens bawled throatily. A trans-Pacific liner moved by, with a prolonged, brassy snarl that penetrated to the marrow of one's bones. Patrol boats put-put-putted frantically, like a flock of half-witted hens.

We were on deck, and Swanwick, with an ill-fitting yachting cap, was talking to Porson, who seemed to be paying no attention to him.

The deck trembled, and, with a prolonged blast, *The Singing Charlotte* moved out into the channel and headed for the open water. Swanwick leaned against the cabin and put both hands across his stomach.

"What's going on up the river?" I asked.

"I don't know. Ask him." He jerked his head in the direction of the steering wheel. "He's got a commission job up there, he says, and he was bent on my coming along. He was dead set on paying up to the last penny this week-end. I told him I could wai—wait a whole year. And that his credit was good. Why, he paid three thousand dollars, cash, when the title was drawn up. Good checks on the Hongkong-London Bank. He was richer than I thought."

The boat began to rock infernally in the cross tides. Swanwick put his hand to his mouth.

"Never wanted to set foot aboard the craft," he groaned. "And there'll be the devil to pay when I get home."

"How's that?"

"Mrs. Porson——"

"Oh, I forgot about her."

"I wish that I could."

The boat throbbed onward for half an hour. On we went past the estuaries, and the dark towering ramparts of the Golden Gate loomed up on either hand.

"Did you say we were going up the river?" I shouted.

"Why, where are we?"

"Heading straight for the Pacific Ocean, if you want to know."

"Don't tell me that!" he wailed. "I'm seasick already."

Soon we were out in the fog-wrapped world beyond the heads. The sea was

as ribbed as corduroy. Waves from the north made flank attacks on the entering tide, and the boat bumped in the swirl as if it were riding over a shoal of porpoises. The wind screamed, with a violence that confounded our senses. It mounted to a gale, and *The Singing Charlotte* soared, dropped and joggled from stern to bow as the engines pounded and the screws raced in mid-air.

Swanwick threw his arms about a stanchion under the pilot house, and hung on like a rider on a fractious beast. His complexion was pea-green; he was drenched with spray, and gasped like a fish in the teeth of the suffocating wind.

"What would Mrs. Porson say if she saw you in this condition?" I shouted into his ear. "Are you feeling so very ill?"

His eyes went glazed, and he would have sunk to the deck if I hadn't seized him, and then dragged him over the boards, yeasty with foam, to the cabin, where I laid him on the bunk. He lay there only half conscious. I went aft to where Captain Porson was twirling the spokes.

"Have the goodness," he snarled, "to stand away from the binnacle light!"

I did so. His manner was very unpleasant. Sparks and heavy jets of smoke came from the cigar that emerged through the mosaic spread of his black whiskers. Every now and then he gave me a dubious, sidewise glance that most palpably indicated distrust. Eventually he spat out his cigar stump.

"What did the guv'nor tell you?"

"Nothing. He's too sick to raise his head."

"Huh! He's no salt-horse eater. Now, I said, 'What's the use to part own a boat, guv'nor, if you haven't the gumption to go for a little ride?' So I coaxed him to come along. I sort of let on, just to encourage him, that it would be just a little run up to Stockton."

"Where the devil are you headed for? On to China?"

He gave a loose smile, but looked straight ahead.

"Out to where the small *Charlotte* has been many times. Just three miles beyond the Farallones. Is that information enough?"

"Queer place to take on freight," I remarked. And his answering smile was enigmatic.

The sky cleared. We bowled west for the space of an hour. The sea became more and more calm, and, having left the scuffling shore currents far behind, we reached water that heaved smoothly under the moon like vast planes of polished lead. The engines stopped. The engineer came up to lean against the rail and smoke. The captain sat on the hatch.

After some time, the two began to deliberate, and the engineer went below, and the boat was again in motion. I strained my eyes, and managed to discern after a few minutes a pinpoint of light on the horizon. Thither we were headed.

We were approaching a liner. When we were but a hundred yards away, *The Singing Charlotte* began to move almost parallel, then neared in a diagonal line, until we were a biscuit's throw apart. The phosphorescence in the wake of the ship began to diminish. She was visibly checking her headway, and soon kept up but a fiction of progress. In large, black letters on her hull were painted the words *City of Soochow.*

In twenty minutes we were alongside, then hull to hull, with hempen buffers between, and the engineer made our boat fast with a painter.

Then men appeared on our deck. Two had sprung up at the bow. Two more were in the waist. They must have all been secreted in the engine room. Heavy-built fellows, they were; roughly clad and frowzy, the kind that loaf around the docks, handy for any sort of a job.

An iron door, hinged above, swung back in the side of the liner. A corpulent, white-coated Chinaman appeared. He gestured with a finger, and two of our deck hands began warping until *The Singing Charlotte* was drawn ahead a few yards farther, and her midships was in line with the door.

"How many piecey you got, Number One?"

Number One Chinaman held up both hands and made signs that there were thirty. Porson appraised the space on our deck, and the crew, moving with liveliness, pushed up a plank, scrambled into the liner and began to send down large, oblong boxes. They were spread out, and handled with a minimum of rough tackling.

The job was over in ten minutes, which was good time, considering that lights were out and both boats still in motion. Number One slid down to us.

"Thirty piecey—you count 'em," he announced.

"I'll take your word for it," grumbled Porson. "But last time I found two in each box."

Number One's plump and ingenuous face broke into a seraphic smile, and his fat body shook all over with mirth, like a jelly.

"This time all right, cap'n. Here's the paper, all first-chop. Two t'ousand apiecey, on Hongkong-London Bank, Mon'gomery Street, San Flancisco."

"I don't have to be told where it is," Porson mumbled, counting the bank notes. "All right this time, Number One."

The Oriental agent went up the plank on hands and knees, and the door closed on him at once. The painter was cast off, and we were divorced from the *City of Soochow*. A gulf was between us, then a plain of water, and we passed through the Golden Gate hours ahead of the liner.

Meantime the deck hands were prying off the lids of the crates—a simple job, for they were just covered with a strip of loose bamboo matting and a couple of slats. From each crate a Chinaman extricated himself. The process of resurrection got itself done with lamentation and groans. Chinese may be stoics, but these had been cooped up for days. A scraggy and evil-favored crew they were, pale and cramped in their limbs. They sat about, rubbing their legs, or, with arms about each other's necks, hobbling about like paralytics.

"They do look a bit sickly," said Porson to me. "But inside of an hour they'll be as right as trivets. Here comes the guv'nor. Hullo, guv'nor! How are you feeling now?"

Swanwick stood by the hatchway. He looked not much better, and his hair was tumbled over his face, giving him the aspect of a man who had just awakened from a nightmare, only to perceive that the images that had horrified him before were indeed real and menacing.

"What's this, Porson?" he gasped. "What are all these—these things—doing here, eh? What did you do, pick them up?"

"That's what I call a good guess," said the skipper. "But you've got no call to worry. We'll soon be home, and the sooner, and the quieter, the better for both of us."

"'Us,' you say? I have no hand in the matter, I'll have you know!"

Porson contrived to look very much surprised.

"Beg pardon, guv'nor, but we are still partners in *The Singing Charlotte*. She has made a good haul to-night, and we've still got to be careful. Smuggling is a Federal offense. And if there's ship's papers, like we have, to prove joint ownership, we have to be careful about your getting pinched for complicity."

Swanwick looked aggrieved. Then he flushed, and, though a sick man, he made threateningly for his partner. He pushed aside a Chinaman, who uttered

at once loud, falsetto shouts. That startled him, and he wavered, to gaze in dismay at the Cantonese who began to wail in a high, rusty voice, then suddenly bent over and snatched off his slipper. He struck Swanwick in the face with it. The report was like a slap at a wineskin. And before we knew what had happened, five of the smuggled coolies were on top of the merchant. I had barely turned before Porson charged at them, kicked with his iron-shod boots. The coolies kept up a cat's concert while Porson lustily pounded their flesh. Then the deck hands came running up, and we rescued Swanwick and dragged him once more to his bunk.

He wasn't hurt in the least. Sulking, fretful and profane, he was propped up with pillows, and Porson made him swallow some gin.

"Don't let that worry you, guv'nor," the skipper soothed. "That's how they go sometimes. Just plumb flooey—what with no air, and nailed up in the dark for hours and hours, like they was dead men. It's awful, and just imagine how you'd feel if you was in that same situation."

Swanwick, with a dirty blanket drawn up to his chin, glared at him, and was too furious to find words. The hands were seeing to the navigation. It was clear running into the bay. The lights of Fort Point became visible, then came the luminous streak that was the line of street lamps along the Marina. Soon the beam atop the naval prison on Alcatraz shot its intermittent glow into the cabin, and full on Swanwick's face.

"Getting pretty close to home, now, guv'nor," announced Porson. He extracted a thick wallet, took out some notes and laid them on Swanwick's chest.

"That'll square us," he said cheerily. "It's the first time I ever owed any man a nickel. I've always played square with every man, and no man," he whispered, "ever had a chance to double cross me." He thrust out a rocklike fist. Then, as if fearing he had made his words too personal, he bent his frank, blue eyes upon Swanwick. They beamed with a wistful and forgiving light. "It sounds like I was a hard man," he said gently.

"You're a damned scoundrel!" shouted Swanwick. "You ought to be hanged for this."

"Sounds like I was a hard man," Porson continued; "but I've always played straight, if I do say it myself, and there's very few on this bay that has risen to the command of so fine and big a craft as this in so short a while—and owned it, besides."

It was rather ungracious of Swanwick, considering that the skipper had just saved his life, but his remarks on Porson's honor were frank in the extreme. The skipper shook his head regretfully.

"It's too bad, guv'nor. Here we are—we tried to have things nice and smooth for your little voyage, and something like this happens."

Then he left, very much like a nurse turning her back on an infant in quite unreasonable tantrums. In fifteen minutes or so the boat nosed into some wharf pilings, and going out, I observed that we had put in, of all places, into the government-transport dock. The plank was pushed over. One by one, the Chinamen, parchment-gray under the lantern, disembarked.

They stood grouped on the wharf, and, after a consultation in which Porson took part in pantomime, they set off down the Marina, and over the hill to the devious alleys of Chinatown. Swanwick emerged from his cabin, bleary-eyed and tousled, and I helped him to the gangplank.

"Sorry it was so unpleasant, guv'nor," murmured Porson. But at the expression on Swanwick's face, his extended hand dropped at once.

The first rosy tendrils of dawn were

creeping over the Berkeley hills when we reached the house, but all the windows were lighted. Swanwick plucked nervously at his chin, and his hand so trembled that I took his key away from him and opened the door. No sooner was it opened than the housekeeper, leaning over the railing, broke into a tirade. She rocked, with hands clasped, and her words gave way to sobs and hysterical laughter. Swanwick's knees all but collapsed, as I helped him up the stairs. The man who had defied Captain Porson quailed at the prospect of explaining things to his outraged guardian. On the landing she faced us.

"Five o'clock!" she whimpered accusingly.. "And I've had the police looking for you since midnight. They've looked in the morgue, in the club, in the city jail, looked everywhere. I've had Doctor Henshaw call up every club member he could think of—got them all out of bed to answer the phone. Is this the way you treat me, Mr. Swanwick? What will Doctor Henshaw say about this? Where have you been?"

Swanwick blanched. He moved with apologetic tread, though with his face set as hard as flint, toward the study. He picked up the telephone.

"It's past five o'clock, Mr. Swanwick," Mrs. Porson enunciated in her whining singsong. "If you have any phoning to do, think of your delicate health first, and put it off until you have had your sleep."

"Can't postpone it, ma'am. It is my duty as a citizen to hand a criminal over to the police. I have been kidnaped, shanghaied, slugged most brutally, and barely managed to escape with my life."

"A likely tale, sir," sniffed Mrs. Porson. "I heard there was an all-night stag party down to the club, and I called the president——"

Swanwick winced. He clapped down the telephone, strode to the window and opened it. He pointed to where the boats lay clustered against a wharf.

"That's the ship, ma'am. The owner is a scoundrel. He is also a criminal who has broken the laws of our Commonwealth, and who, half an hour after I have telephoned for the police, will be on his way to the Federal penitentiary. Can you read the name?"

Swanwick shouted it aloud:

*"The Singing Charlotte!* Have you heard that name before? The captain is one Porson—your husband, I believe?"

Mrs. Porson whitened. Her hand strayed up to still the beating of the pulse at her throat.

"He—he has been at it again?"

"Smuggling Chinese? Yes. It is my duty to deliver him to justice."

She stared at her master, and there was fear in her eyes, a sudden flaring up to tenderness, and then defiance.

"I believe you had better be going, Mrs. Porson," he said quietly. "You can warn him, if you like. It is a new and very much larger boat. If you don't——"

She left the room. Ten minutes later the click of the door announced that she was gone.

Swanwick paced up and down the room, mopping his brow.

"Nice fix I'd have been in, if the police had got hold of those partnership papers, wouldn't I?"

"It must be fine to feel you are the Great Reconciler," I said. "She was infatuated, I believe, and now Captain Porson has caught her on, what we call, the rebound."

"Shut up! How about some breakfast? Plenty of coffee, a grilled ham steak, a dozen eggs fried hard, and some sliced cucumbers and mustard sauce—how does that sound?"

For the last year or so, that has been Adrian Swanwick's usual breakfast. When a man has no woman in the house, and won't permit one on the place, he can do pretty much as he pleases, even to coming home from the club regularly at midnight.

# The Battalion's Shrine

By Frank E. Evans

*Author of "The Old Breed," "When the Squadron Dropped Anchor," Etc.*

**During a Haitian campaign two happy-go-lucky marines get hold of some voodoo rum, which first gets them into trouble and then leads to a couple of D. S. C.'s.**

THE days of the Cacos were running out fast in their last stronghold in Central Haiti. Only Renoit's band was at large, for that wary Caco chief was as elusive as the morning mists on the hills. From the Caco tunnels on the hill crests his outposts could scout for miles in search of the marine patrols that were tightening the web about him. Signals by smoke, by conch horns, and by the roll of his voodoo drums warded off surprise attacks. Attrition by dengue and malaria, campaigning far from base in the impoverished country, and unreliable native guides were the allies of Renoit that further hampered the drive of the pursuing marines.

A score of times the patrols, by forced marches at night, had struck at dawn, only to see the Cacos flee at the first volley and melt away into the labyrinth of jungle-clad hills. A week later and the scattered elements had made their way by secret trails to reform and recruit in a hidden stronghold. That was their specialty.

Of all the columns, D Company of the First Regiment had harried him the most doggedly. Twice its patrols had made contact, and each time Renoit's fighting strength had suffered heavily. Spurred on by its grim slogan, "Get Renoit!" D Company laughed at short rations and empty canteens, and forgot the blazing noons and freezing nights. Captain Rivers had burned that slogan into his men. There was not a man in the outfit who did not top him by a full two inches. There was not one who did

not accept his leadership with a flaming loyalty to his harshest demands.

A bundle of rawhide and steel clothed in a battered campaign hat, faded O. D. shirt and ragged riding breeches—that was Captain Kenneth Rivers. "One Shot" Rivers he was to his marines, for it was traditional that he always got his man at the first shot. "Capitaine Rouge" he was to Renoit's men, for his thatch of flaming red hair in the van of a patrol of ragged marines was an ill omen.

To the camp at Binche came conflicting reports after a distant patrol had struck at dawn. From the north came the message that Renoit had been reported as dead, his band hopelessly broken. From headquarters at Mirabelais, two days later, came the news that Renoit in person had struck the gendarme post near there, and wiped it out. From Port-au-Prince, the capital, Binche heard that Renoit had retired to some secret camp fifty miles back in the hills.

The word of a native agent that the redoubtable Renoit had been seen in the wild valley of Riviere Rouge, a dozen kilometers away, had caused Rivers to raid a voodoo temple. The raid, though it gave no verification of Renoit's presence, had netted to Private Jerry Miles a unique trophy, which he had hidden jealously from his mates, to parade vainglorioously on their return before the astonished eyes of his buddy, Steve Campbell.

"A full quart of native rum that tastes like the honey of logwood blossoms," he boasted. "Steve, I'll bet that rum was run through the still before you ever knew there was a leatherneck or a kitchen police! Break out your canteen cup, and I'll prove it to you. It's the real thing."

"Sure it's not spiked with some snappy voodoo poison?" asked Steve, with the cup tantalizingly near his lips, its pungent aroma melting the doubt from his eyes as he waited for the answer.

"Didn't I see it fall out of that gook's shirt when I drilled him at sixty yards? You poor fish! A fat chance he had of slipping voodoo poison into it, with me covering the rest of that sixty yards like a mountain goat."

There was tribute in Steve's eyes as he finished and passed the cup. The back of his hand passed lovingly over his smiling mouth.

"Just this one shot, and the bar closes," was Jerry's chilling edict. "We'll save this baby for emergencies."

He was adamant against Steve's pleadings, but when they crawled beneath their combined blankets for refuge against the cold winds of the hills, the delectable flavor of the rum lingered. It invaded his dreams and he woke to the thrill of an inspiration. Steve Campbell, as the plan was unfolded, sealed it with joyous approval. Drinking in camp was sternly banned, and Jerry's solution promised sanctuary.

Rivers had declared a holiday routine. Morning mess had come and gone. Mess kits had been sanded and cleaned. The camp had gone quiet in its morning siesta when Jerry Miles and Steve Campbell sauntered down the deserted company street. Each had his rifle and belt of ammunition. Over Jerry's shoulder two canteens were slung. Steve carried an extra canteen, his haversack and an ax.

They had passed the limits of the camp unquestioned until, at the first turn of the road, Corporal Lindstrom hailed them. Lindstrom was one of a type fast dying out in the Corps. He was a hard-headed, morose Swede, cast by nature for duty with the military police. Lindstrom was none too popular with the high-spirited lads who had been stranded in Haiti since the Armistice.

"Oh, the blundering squarehead," Jerry mourned. "We've got to think fast, Steve, or it's about face."

"Hello, Lindstrom," he called cordially. His face was wreathed in its most disarming smile.

"What's the big idea of the ax?" retorted Lindstrom.

Jerry Miles had won his spurs as the most inveterate practical joker in the outfit. Jerry was a confirmed non-com baiter, the corporal's suspicious scowl fired him to a spirited show of indignation.

"If it's anything to your exalted rank we're steaming out of camp on orders from 'Top Kick' Rafferty," he shot back.

"What for?" countered Lindstrom, and there was wavering decision in the mild blue eyes, as Jerry noted.

"The skipper's decided that the runty, misbegotten flagpole in front of his château was a disgrace to any outfit, outside of a Swedish home guard," came the diplomatic explanation. "Rafferty sent us out to get a new pole in that patch of pines where the Pignon Trail crosses this road. We're going out to mark one, and then come back for a detail of three squads to haul it in."

"Back in the old country"—Lindstrom's voice softened—"there wasn't a lad of my age who could swing a smarter ax. I know pines the way the skipper knows the I. D. R. I can pick you a pine that is a pine."

It was clear to Jerry that the mild blue eyes were shining now with unforgetable memories of some old village back in Sweden; that the lanky corporal's nostrils were breathing the odorous perfumes of the pines. There was no way out of it, and this new side of the morose Swede quickened his sympathies.

"You're on," he said.

"You've got more than your share of the load," said Lindstrom. "Let me have them canteens."

"Here, you take the ax," Jerry compromised swiftly. There were urgent reasons why he and Steve should carry those canteens.

Just short of the junction of the Pignon Trail with the road the three halted. The shade of the Haitian pines was heavy on the soft carpet of moss and ferns but they fanned lustily with their battered campaign hats, for the sun was boring down, and the air was breathless. Lindstrom, without a moment's inaction, disappeared into the thick of the grove.

"Easy on the water, Steve," counseled Jerry. "The big Swede will be back with a thirst you could hang your rifle on."

"You don't have to drive me to drinking it neat," crooned Steve. "If it was some of this rotten rum that the gooks ordinarily drink it would knock us for a touchdown and goal in the first quarter. This rum goes down like honey."

The sounds of Lindstrom's ax biting into a tree came dim and muffled as the contents of the first canteen, sparingly diluted with water, dwindled under their combined attack. The thunderous crash of the tree was silently accepted as the signal to "cease drinking!" Dripping with perspiration, but with a beatific light in his eyes, Lindstrom found them reclining on their backs. To their enthusiastic welcome he sniffed suspiciously. The pungency of the pines could not altogether drown the aroma that hung about them.

Steve Campbell nudged his mate, and Jerry Miles smiled benignly at the suspicious Swede.

"Say, Lindstrom, did you ever hear the old-timers say that anything was possible in Haiti? Stands to reason, doesn't it? Rainbows before a storm, and never after—voodoo poison that looks and smells like water, and either kills a man by inches or takes him off as though he'd been sitting on an ammunition dump."

His eyes were dreamy as he pursued his line of impromptu thought.

"Who'd ever believe, for instance, that the juice of a pine would be fit to drink?

They tell me the gooks make a sort of liquor out of pine trees, just the way they make rum out of sugar cane. Me, I don't take any stock in such fairy tales, but ever since you've been hacking at that tree, Lindstrom, I could swear I smelled something faint, like rum, in the air."

"There never was a pine I've ever seen," said the mystified Swede, "that had liquor in it. Still, this is one queer island, with its devil doctors and voodoo witches. You may be right."

"Sheems t' me a guy could ship foresh pine trees t' States an'——" Steve broke in thickly.

Jerry Miles turned a withering eye on him, and Steve mercifully subsided.

"Say, Lindstrom," Jerry began spiritedly, "lead me to your pine. I'll bet you spotted a beauty that'll make the skipper's eyes shine with pride. Steve, you stay here and take it easy. Sun's been too much for you. Ever since that touch of malaria you've got a trick of mixing your words. Ought to see the medico about it."

Lindstrom nodded sagely.

"A kid like you, Steve, ought to go easy on hiking. You haven't got your full growth. These tropical fevers are no joke."

He proudly led Jerry Miles to the far edge of the grove, where the pines towered above the rest. The head of a giant pine lay across the Pignon Trail. Its decapitated base rested a full fifty feet away, in a bed of crushed fern. Jerry was seized with a paroxysm of coughing.

"You sure nicked the king of the pines," he gasped. Lindstrom beamed with gratification.

"How in thunder are we ever going to get that bird into camp, though?" Jerry demanded speculatively, as his second paroxysm of coughing ended in a feeble wheeze.

"Leave that to me," said Lindstrom proudly. "I'll hike back to camp and break out a detail with a rope. You and Steve get busy with this ax and trim it."

He strode off down the trail, and Jerry went to wake the slumbering Steve.

"Snap into it!" he clamored. "If you don't work some of that rum out of your system you'll be holding down a cot in the brig. Ain't you ever going to learn to drink like an officer and a gentleman? Grab that ax and get busy."

Steve was swaying a bit unsteadily alongside the fallen giant when Lindstrom, at the head of three squads of indignant marines, tramped through the underbrush. He dropped the ax and sank to his haunches, wiping the streaming sweat from his face.

"Say, what's the big idea?" an irate buck private stormed. "Flagpole? Flagpole my eye!"

"The biggest flag in the island would look like a canceled postage stamp at the top of that baby!"

"You could bridge the Hudson at Peekskill with that little piece of timber!"

"Oh, wait! Just wait till little One Shot lays his sights along it!"

The outraged Lindstrom scowled blackly at the insurgent chorus, which proceeded to direct its batteries on Jerry and Steve.

"We might have known it," groaned the ringleader. "Smells like a distillery every time one of you guys opens his face."

Lindstrom rushed to their defense.

"Have you ignorant birds been in Haiti all this time," he demanded hotly, "and don't know yet that the gooks make liquor out of pine sap?"

Jerry smiled blandly at the scoffing circle. Corporal Willoughby, after one wrathful explosion, twirled his forefinger in derisive circles behind Lindstrom's back.

"Some guys," he remarked casually, "have been down here too long for their

own good. Tell us another good one, Lindstrom."

It was a hot and mutinous detail that finally made the rope fast about the butt of the monster pine.

"Now, all together!" Lindstrom yelled.

The long line stiffened and heaved manfully. At the end of five minutes the pine had moved as many inches.

Thirty minutes later they entered camp with a frayed rope. Lindstrom stood his ground manfully under the scathing fire of Top Sergeant Rafferty's examination. In the refuge of their tent Jerry and Steve dolefully waited. They could hear the crisp voice of Captain Rivers, searing and blasting, and the chuckles of their mates.

Rafferty's choleric face peered through the tent flap.

"The Old Man wants you. On the double there, you hell pups!"

Rivers' gray eyes were hard and cold as ice. At the end of their story, deleted of certain pregnant details, the stern mouth relaxed.

"It's amazing," he said dryly, "how you two men have read my innermost thoughts. This camp is going to be battalion headquarters as soon as we get old Renoit. And that," he added casually, "won't be long. For a fortnight I've been planning a flagpole that would be a credit to the battalion. You've beaten me to it."

A smile flitted over Jerry Miles' face. Steve Campbell stiffened to renewed attention and forgot his raging headache.

"You made two mistakes, however," Rivers went coolly on. "In the first place your spirit of self-sacrifice in letting Lindstrom do all the work, and your oversight of spurring him on to take three full squads out into the woods, is liable to misconstruction. In the second place you allowed delusions of grandeur and beauty to blind you to the merits of a serviceable flagpole."

The smile erased itself from Jerry's face. Steve groaned inwardly.

"At three bells sharp you will leave camp with a sharp ax. You'll stay out until you have located and cut down a pine that will fill the bill. Sergeant Rafferty will hand you a memorandum covering the length of the tree and the diameter of the butt and top. If you can't find a pine answering close to those measurements you can work that giant tree of Lindstrom's into sizes laid down by the company cook."

"Can we take our canteens, sir?" asked Jerry with resignation.

"Don't ask damfool questions," Rivers snapped. "I'd make you take blankets, but it would never do to let two babes in the woods stay out all night. Mr. Renoit might pick you up as souvenirs."

"Aye, aye, sir!" came the respectful chorus.

Three bells came none too soon for their peace of mind. The company street was alive with its flights of merry persiflage and weighty advice. They were especially cautioned not to pick out a pine with an overload of sap; and to keep one man in the tree as a lookout against a marauding Renoit.

As they finally started for the sanctuary of the pine grove each carried a canteen, one filled with water, the other with the remaining measure of the voodoo temple's rum. A sharp-edged ax, a bulging haversack and their rifles completed their equipment. To the mocking tune of "The Trail of the Lonesome Pine," they were whistled out of camp until the bend in the road gave them surcease. Philosophers to the last, they consoled themselves with the conviction that when they returned both canteens would be empty.

On the far edge of the grove, but a few yards from the fallen monarch, they came to the end of their dispirited quest. Jerry seized the ax and began the attack. From his haversack Steve

dug out a hollowed gourd with two-quart capacity, a sack of sugar, and a dozen limes. When the time for relief came he handed the half-filled gourd to Jerry.

"Oh, boy!" Jerry crooned. "If Rafferty could see us now he'd be fighting for a turn with the ax. Wait till you feel this crinkling up your toes, Steve. You'll go through that pine as if it was commissary butter."

With alternating attacks on the pine, and drafts from the gourd, their sentence passed agreeably. The tape encircled the pine's butt to the very inch laid down in Rafferty's memorandum. Straight to its tip it soared, straight as a rifle's cleaning rod. Coincident with the draining of the gourd the resounding crash of the pine signaled the end of their labor. Jerry looked at the fallen giant near by and kicked it triumphantly. The company cook would never gloat over its dismemberment.

It was the biting of a swarm of tiny ants, biting that stung like corroding acid, that woke them from the nap into which they had sunk. As Jerry brushed them from his neck and arms a sound, sinister and unmistakable, whipped him into keen alertness.

"Steve," he whispered tensely, "listen!"

Somewhere from the brown, mysterious hills came the faint roll of a voodoo drum. In its low, insistent call, they knew, lay some weird, hypnotic power over the blacks who heard and rallied to it. The muffled roll sank into silence. An instant later it seemed that it was being beaten by the bare palm of a voodoo priest less than a half mile distant. With faces immobile, and hands clenched they listened. Again it throbbed, thin in the distance.

"They say those birds can play it close aboard and you can't hear it," said Steve solemnly. "Then again they can throw it so that gooks ten miles away can hear it and spot just where it is."

The mournful hoot of a conch horn broke in, short and long, repeated at regular intervals.

"Caco signals!" Jerry whispered.

His head was clear as a bell when he climbed to the top of a tall pine on the crest of the ridge. The significance of those sinister sounds had killed the lingering potency of the rum. No longer was he a rollicking, carefree jester, but a marine on outpost duty! For a scant mile the Pignon Trail, white as bone in the hot sun, stretched away before it was lost in the jungle. A quarter of an hour passed before his vigilance was rewarded.

"Cacos moving on the trail, Steve," he called down sharply. "Fording a stream now. Two scouts in the lead and two mounted birds in the middle of the outfit. About seven or eight squads in all. If that's all Renoit has left, he's in a bad way. I'm sure it's his bunch, and they're heading this way!"

As he slipped down the tree, the roll of the drum could no longer be heard. Now and then a conch horn sounded its soft signal. Their mission was clear. If they could catch the head of the column with surprise fire, and bar its way, the sounds of the fight would filter into the camp. At the first of them their mates would be tumbling joyously out of their tents, forming on the run, and sallying forth with little One Shot at their head.

For a moment Jerry thought of sending Steve back to camp with a warning message. He dismissed the idea quickly —he had need of two rifles. A swift reconnaissance of their position brought a grim smile of pleasure to his face. One flank was covered wide by a hedge of wild pineapple. Even a sharp-snouted Haitian pig could not penetrate that. On the other flank rose the stony slopes of Morne Rouge. Strewn with boulders and almost impassable jungle, it was a formidable rock barrier that carried clear to the Santo Domingo bor-

der. It flashed on him that this was Renoit's goal—the sheltering border of Santo Domingo. And only the Pignon Trail led there for the hardy remnant of the Caco band.

A full two thirds of the gap between those sturdy flanks was covered by the two fallen pines. From behind the giant pine, as they fell instinctively into the prone position, they saw an unbroken field of fire, save for scattered rocks and stunted bush, to a depth of four hundred yards or more.

With their bayonets and the ax they feverishly dug a shallow trench behind each tree. Their positions gave them a cross fire. The Cacos were notoriously poor marksmen. Except for the necessity of exposing their heads as they fired across the prostrate pines there was little danger of any but a stray shot. That, and the danger of a rush in overwhelming numbers.

They waited the coming band in serene content. They knew their primitive tactics, and they held all Cacos in a searing contempt. The scouts at the van came into view, slouching along with no signs of alertness. Fifty yards behind, the main column broke into view. Jerry waited until a bare three hundred yards measured the distance.

His rifle barked viciously and a scout doubled up grotesquely in the middle of the bone-white Pignon Trail. Steve Campbell's Springfield cracked out like an echo, and the second scout crumpled up. Caught in utter surprise the Cacos behind the scouts broke right and left into the shelter of the jungle. The conch horns sounded their gage of battle. To the dull roar of their old Gras rifles, and the sharper song of carbines, bullets sought out the entrenched defenders of the Pignon Trail. They buried themselves with sullen impact in the standing pines. They creased furrows in the carpet of moss and ferns. They whipped dirt and stones against the bulwark of the two fallen pines. Jerry rejoiced that there was scant likelihood of infiltration around his flanks.

As the Cacos rallied to the fray he and Steve kept the bolts of their rifles working like shuttles. On came the band to within three hundred yards, flitting in and out of the trail, before they broke again before the accurate fire. As the trail emptied, and shots tore harmlessly overhead, the two marines cast regretful eyes at the emptied canteens and the gourd. Their barrels were sizzling with heat. The quart of rum would have wasted its aroma on the blue-black barrels, if it had not been drunk.

Jerry slipped a fresh clip into the magazine, and hastily spread a half dozen close at hand.

"Steve," he called, "did you pipe that gook with an old French forage cap waltzing about in the rear on a brown pony?"

"The bird who was waving a sword around his head?"

"That's Renoit himself, or I'm a bad guesser," Jerry said with conviction. "He'll keep under cover himself as long as he can. He'll be busy trying to work his gang up for a rush. You leave him to me, Steve. If I can get him the whole works will blow. Lord, but I hope little One Shot is on his way!"

Then, out into the open the Cacos raced, maddened by their losses, spurred on by the hypnotic roll of a drum and the wail of conch horns. A giant black was in the van—a black with a pointed beard, clad in a jumper of faded blue denim, ragged white trousers, and a crimson sash about his waist. He sprang upon a fallen tree trunk and swung a machete about his head.

"Come on, you white pigs," he challenged in high-pitched Creole, "and we will slit your throats!"

"This is not my calling day, old top," Jerry muttered, as he aligned his sights full on the giant black. "Here's where one voodoo priest is expended."

His rifle cracked. Its blast flattened

the ferns below it. The priest spun about like a top and then pitched forward.

"I'll bet that holds them for a while," he cried exultantly to Steve. "And I'll bet a month's pay we'll find a necklace of dried chicken claws, and a quart of funny little 'thunder stones' about his dirty neck. Fat chance for those voodoo charms when a Springfield drills them."

Threading in and out of the trail, firing wildly, the Cacos closed the distance doggedly. Then, on their right flank, the hedge of wild pineapples stopped them, and forced them out into the open.

Jerry looked anxiously at his dwindling clips.

"How're you fixed for ammunition, Steve?" he yelled.

"Five clips to the good," came the answer.

"Make them good, old boy," he counseled savagely.

The loss of their priest had chilled the ardor of the ragged Cacos, but they could hear Renoit yelling shrilly. Once Jerry caught a sight of him, now dismounted, and marked him by his sword and the strip of red flannel about his straw sombrero. His rifle barked, but Renoit had slipped back under cover. Almost at the same instant Jerry's arm, as he exposed his left shoulder and head, was seared as if with a white-hot iron.

A savage yell arose. Straight down the field of fire came the pack, and Renoit was at its head. Some were waving their machetes, others firing on the run, and a storm of high-pitched taunts broke from them. Renoit, it was clear, had estimated the paucity of the little force that barred the trail, and the way to Santo Domingo. A frontal attack, through sheer weight of numbers, was all that was left to him.

Jerry took meticulous aim, but, as he pressed the trigger, he knew that the muzzle was waving in unsteady circles. The taut strain of the rifle sling on his wounded left arm was too much for straight shooting. He groaned. He had scored a clean miss at the tempting target. His head was swimming with vertigo, and he heard Steve Campbell cursing viciously.

"Missed him, too, Jerry," Steve shouted. "That last shot was a 'stripper.' Only carried halfway!"

Again Jerry held his sights on the onrushing bulk of the Caco chief. The muzzle spun in crazy circles. Intuitively he reached for his bayonet and slipped it on.

"Leave that bird to me, Steve," his voice rose shrill above the din. "Keep your rifle working like hell!"

On came Renoit, straight for him. The curved blade of his Dominican sword was flashing above his shoulder. Like a panther Jerry sprang to his feet. His rifle was drawn back to the full length of his right arm. His right hand was frozen to the stock. With his crippled left arm holding grimly to the balance, he timed his lunge to perfection. The point of the bayonet caught Renoit full and hard in the stomach. As he pitched over the fallen pine the curved blade was buried in its length. And a cry of rage broke from the following Cacos.

Suddenly, the sharp *tat! tat!—tat! tat!* of a machine gun opened up on the left flank. A squad of riflemen flung themselves between the two spent men who had barred the trail to Renoit's band. Over the fallen pine on Jerry's right raced another squad, led by Lindstrom. A sharp volley, and the riflemen between Jerry and Steve leaped clear, rushing on with fixed bayonets.

Caught between the bursts of machine guns on their flank, and with a line of riflemen surging down on them, the Cacos fought with the desperation of trapped wolves. With both leaders gone, their ranks thinning rapidly, they rallied to stave off the inevitable thud of steel driving home. Jerry staggered to his feet to be in at the death. The

high notes of a bugle, blaring out its insistent summons to cease firing, sounded thin and distant in his ears. He pitched headlong over the prostrate pine.

When Jerry regained consciousness some one was holding a canteen to his lips. It was Lindstrom, the mild blue eyes worried; the grim, dour face heavy with solicitude. All about him lay the salvaged spoils of the fight in which overwhelming odds had been followed by overwhelming odds. Only the insistent sounding of "cease firing!" had saved Renoit's redoubtable band from complete annihilation.

There were Gras rifles and belts filled with cartridges of a dozen makes, wrapped in strips of goatskin to take the caliber of the Gras. There were Krags and Enfields, with rope slings and broken sights, and straw haversacks with assorted cartridges and native rations. There was a gaudy medley of epaulets and gold-braided caps, once worn by generals and colonels of the revolutionary armies that had laid Haiti waste for scores of years. Thrown across the curved Dominican sword of Renoit were a half dozen strings of voodoo charms that had been stripped from the necks of the dead chief and his giant voodoo priest.

Jerry's face twisted in a happy smile. He looked up and saw Captain Rivers, face inscrutable, running his hands up and down the scarred and gashed pine behind which he had fought.

"I—we owe you an apology, sir," Jerry began. "It was sure one handsome pole before that Caco outfit came charging down the trail. It was the pick of them all before that."

"I wouldn't trade that pole for one of solid mahogany, Miles." Rivers' eyes were kindling with pride. "You've given the old company a chance to clean up on old Renoit, and you didn't leave us so much to do, at that." His hand shot out and gripped Jerry's. "You and Campbell take it easy, son. The rest of the show is ours."

A month later a battalion in khaki stood rigid at "present arms" as the flag crept slowly, impressively, to the top of the slim white pole.

The formation broke and scattered to its tents. In front of the battalion commander's hospital tent Jerry Miles and Steve Campbell stood stiffly at attention.

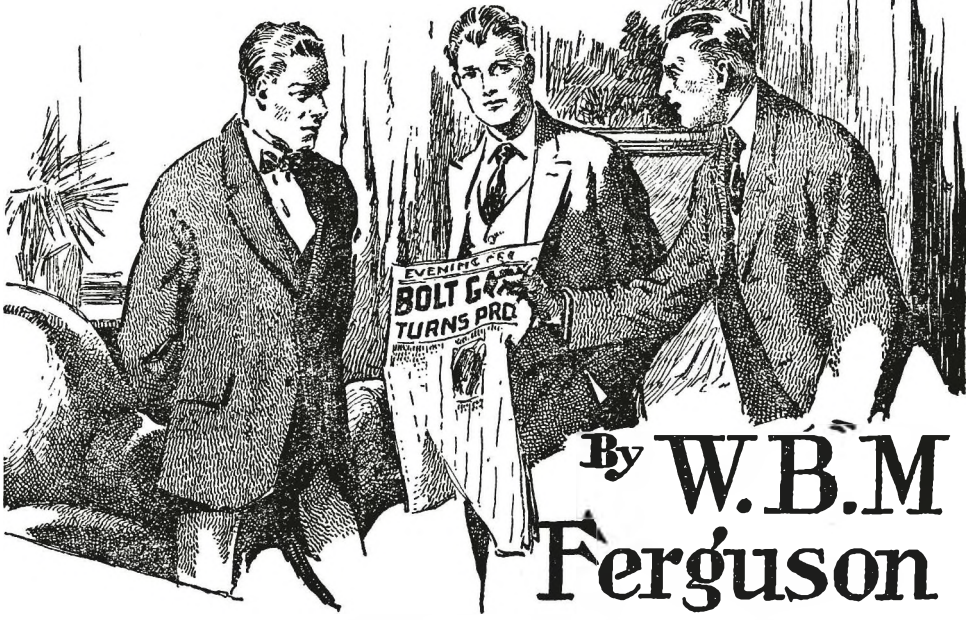
"Men, I have little to say to you," the major began. "I have little to add to what Captain Rivers told the battalion. The brigade commander will have a chance at you when you report to him next week. You're going north on the *Henderson* from there, in charge of a detail of short-timers and sick men, and when she lands them at the Washington Navy Yard you're to report to the major general commandant. There's just one thing I want you to do for me while you're up there."

He coughed, and they saw that his eyes were strangely soft with feeling.

"I want you to ask the general to show you the two battle flags of the old Fifth and Sixth that we brought back from France. I want you to look at the silver battle rings on their staffs, and the Croix de Guerres and the war ribbons at their peaks. Then I want you to tell the Old Man of the shrine you gave this battalion." And the major's hand waved slowly to where the white pole, with its rippling flag, towered above them.

They kept their promise on a day when the cherry blossoms in Potomac Park were in all their glory. There were certain details that they either glossed over, or ignored entirely, as the grizzled old soldier listened. There was enough, however, in that simple, embarrassed recital, to hold the Old Man of the Corps in rapt attention. There was more than enough to justify the two Distinguished Service Crosses that lay in the wire basket on his desk.

# The Dollar God




By W.B.M Ferguson

*Author of "Lightnin' Calvert," "Deep Water," Etc.*

The old football spirit of Bolton College had gone from all but a few scions of the old families. Judith Dearing, one of these, discovered a great player in Bolt Gary, a mechanic, and was instrumental in getting him to join the college and make the team. Gary was highly successful in rebuilding the team; but there were evil forces at work against his good name, in the persons of Ad Steen, a rival for Judith's regard, and Ransom, Gary's weak-kneed roommate. At the height of his college popularity, he found himself caught in a compromising incident concerned with one Flossie Bing, a waitress. To save his roommate's name, Gary took the blame upon his own shoulders.

IN SIX PARTS—PART IV.

**Bolt Gary had rebuilt the college gridiron reputation. He had put Bolton back on the map. Now, because of a cruel slander, his sycophantic friends were deserting him, accusing him. He was only human; why, then, should he not snatch the great opportunity that came his way, and turn professional?**

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE SPREADING OF THE LIE.

ALMOST six months had passed, and Gary was nearing the end of his sophomore year. They had been momentous months, for others as well as himself. The college had begun to prosper, had started to reclimb the long hill of success, and it was a foregone conclusion that the next freshman class would prove a record breaker. Bolton had been advertised all over the country, was still being advertised, and old grads were suddenly remembering their old Alma Mater with pride.

All this free publicity was due entirely to the big team, which outranked

in glory even the historic one of '96. It had gone on from strength to strength and closed a wonderful season by winning the district championship. And Bolt Gary was the team, the real source of all the publicity and success. His playing had become more brilliant, if possible, and the public interest in him was continuing to wax instead of wane. All the critics were unanimous, not only in conceding him first choice as all-American right half, but in agreeing that he was the greatest all-round player the game had ever known. And when all critics agree, that is something to talk about.

As a matter of course, he had been elected captain of the team, an honor he had tried vainly to decline; and one would have said that no man could have asked more from the gods. For his work in the classroom had kept step with his play on the gridiron.

Professor Amery, and even Doctor Sturges himself, were enthusiastic over his attainments, predicting that he was destined to become one of the great engineers of the century, doing for Bolton in the realms of science what he was achieving for her in the world of sport. Extravagant praise, perhaps, but it was difficult to speak of him without indulging in hyperbole. He had become a social lion, a public pet, and the best people in the State vied with one another in doing him honor. What man could desire more of happiness?

Yet Gary was not happy. It was not the mere fact that his temperament was such that he found no pleasure in public posturing, the beat of the big drum, but that he was finding anew the price demanded of success. It was being shown to him on a little larger scale than that displayed in Mercersville.

There were covert sneers mixed with the cheering. Ransom, his room and team mate, had confesssed to envy and jealousy; but there were others who never would- -these, seemingly, his most ardent admirers. Ransom had confessed, and thereby purged himself; but there were others who had not. Success, such as had come to him, is not easily forgiven, and Gary knew that even some men who had played shoulder to shoulder with him, who professed to be his greatest friends, had fallen victims to jealousy. That was one reason he had tried to decline the captaincy.

But there was more than this. He had detected a subtle change in his three closest friends apart from Ransom—Dearing, Blackstock, Huneker—so subtle was it that it defied analysis; yet it existed. He knew it was there, and the knowledge hurt. He acquitted them of any feeling of envy; they were not of such clay, and they were heart and soul for Bolton and all that made for its advancement and glory. Their praise was unstinted for all he had done. No, it was not that; but it was something. And Gary, intelligent, if not suspicious, knew that it was Flossie.

The superintendent had said nothing, but Gary felt sure that the episode had gone around in the mysterious but efficacious manner common to gossip and slander. He had no means of knowing that his erstwhile pursuer, Miss Burdet, was one of the earliest and most industrious helpers in its circulation. She confided it to Judy Dearing with great secrecy and lively, if veiled, satisfaction.

"Oh, but it's true," she persisted, when Judy declined to listen. "It seems that this girl, Lizzie——"

"Who?" Judy had suddenly decided to hear more.

"Lizzie or Flossie Bing. She works in that cabaret, Mike's, and she knew Gary in Mercersville. Everybody knows about them. He bribed the superintendent to say nothing, but several boys saw him leave his place with her. And plenty of others saw him leave the hop that night."

Judy flushed. She did not say that he had canceled the dance with her, but perhaps Marie knew it. There was little she did not know. Judy had not given Gary the last dance through inadvertence or necessity; she had reserved it for him, looked forward to sitting it out. She had even picked the spot where they would sit, secure against interruption. She had hoped for an intimate talk, had meant to do her share, and more than her share, in healing this insupportable breach that had widened mysteriously between them.

She was hurt and angry when Tony informed her that Gary had left, and now she was being told that he had gone to keep a clandestine appointment with this intolerable girl, Lizzie. That was adding insult to injury with a vengeance. It corroborated, and more, all that Steen had said.

"You must believe it, dear," said Marie. "It is dreadful, of course; but, after all, what can one expect from a person of such ancestry? Of course, I can't have anything further to do with him. I thought him really worthy of all I was doing for him, but he's not. Of course, I don't mean to tell a soul but you, and you won't say anything."

"Oh, no," said Judy—and told her brother first thing. She had come to understand something, if not everything, of her dear friend's character.

But, instead of the hot denial she expected to receive from Tony, there came at last further corroboration. Tony did his best to evade the issue; but, when he found that she knew chapter and verse, grudgingly capitulated. He was obviously troubled.

"There's no blinking the facts," he said. "I didn't know this Bing girl's other name was Lizzie—I've only heard her called Flossie—or I'd have told you so at the time. I've given Gary every chance of explaining; but he hasn't, and, of course, I can't ask him. I thought it was only Ransom who used to go around with this girl, but maybe I've been blaming him wrongly."

Judy clutched desperately at this straw.

"But couldn't she have been there to see Ransom?"

"She could, but she wasn't. He didn't come home until long after she'd gone—and he was in no condition to make an appointment with anybody. Besides, that wouldn't explain why Gary canceled his dance with you. He went straight to his rooms. And he never gave any explanation why he had to leave like that.

"You don't want to make too much of this, sis," continued Tony, having no desire, among other things, to play the Pharisee. "Most everybody was on the loose that night, and it was enough to turn even Gary's head. I'll admit that I didn't think he was that sort, but—well, he isn't the first one it has happened to. And we've got to remember his upbringing and all that. I guess it was just what you might call a temporary reversion to type."

"You mean chronic, don't you?" retorted Judy. "It has been going on ever since he came here, and before that. You know it has."

Tony shrugged.

"I guess we expected too much of him. We all have our failings."

"I can forgive most anything but odious hypocrisy and deceit," said Judy, with flashing eyes. "It's not merely what he has done, but the way he has done it. You needn't try to gloss it over; the whole thing's abominable, inexcusable, and you know it."

"I'm not trying to gloss anything over," retorted her brother. "I'm blamed cut up over it, and so are Joe and Rex. But there's no sense in exaggerating it, either. We thought Gary was one of us, and he's not; that's all there's to it. But that doesn't wipe out all his other fine qualities, all he has done and will do for Bolton."

"As long as he's a great football star and plays for Bolton, nothing else matters?"

"Not to us, personally, if you insist on putting it that way," retorted Tony. "Why should it? Gary's still my friend, of course; but he's not the kind I'd like you to be close friends with. It won't make any difference in my general attitude toward him. And you don't want to let him see that you've heard anything. It means simply that he can't be the sort of family friend he was. Maybe he doesn't want to be. He seems to have sheered off a bit lately."

"He can do without us, now that even the governor of the State is anxious to entertain him. We have served our turn. We were setpping stones, but he has climbed to something higher. He has graduated from our class."

"What's the matter with you?" demanded her brother. "You needn't be so bitter and sarcastic. It's not like you, sis. Give Gary his due. Success hasn't spoiled him, and he isn't a climber; otherwise, he'd have left Bolton before this. He could market his popularity at a big figure if he wanted to—and a whole lot of other fellows would have. They're making him all sorts of offers. But he can't be bought. He deserves a thundering lot of credit for that alone, a man who has really no affiliations with the college. If he was really mercenary, as some say, he'd have sold out long ago. He is as loyal to Bolton as if he'd been born and brought up here."

"Bolton, always Bolton," murmured Judy, with compressed lips, and stared out the window at the old clock tower on the hill. It was possible for stone and mortar to become a god. Its influence permeated her brother's being, tinged all his thoughts, regulated his conduct. So even with the severely moral Blackstock. And so it had been with her until a sensate god dethroned it. A god; yes, she had secretly worshiped Gary as such.

And now Tony was doing his best to condone and excuse the suddenly revealed hideous feet of clay, simply because the idol was throned in Bolton. He would have cut dead, found no extenuating circumstance, for any other guilty of such conduct as Gary's. He had censured Steen and Ransom for infinitely less, condemned them on really no evidence at all.

"It may make little difference to you," she said, "but it makes a very big difference to me. It makes all the difference in the world. I don't care what he has done, or will do, for Bolton; the thing that really matters is what he has done to himself. I don't wish to have anything to do with Mr. Gary."

"I'm not asking you to, am I?" demanded Tony irritably. "But you needn't tell the whole town about it. I won't ask him here any more than I can help, but when he does come you've got to be decently polite. Hang it all, he's the captain of the team, the *whole* team, and he must be treated as such. I'm not going to have him offended. This business has nothing to do with you, anyway. His private life is his own. Of course, you're only a girl and can't understand."

"I understand quite enough, thank you," said Judy, with quivering lip. "You needn't be alarmed for my manners. But I—I will certainly see no more of Mr. Gary than I can help. I understand at least when I've been insulted, if you don't."

"Good Lord!" said Tony, as she hurried from the room. "Why, you'd almost think she was in love with him! A kid of seventeen!"

When Gary sought her out with an apology for the canceled dance, there was no fault to be found with Miss Dearing's manners. She was extremely polite, embarrassingly so.

"Oh, it doesn't matter in the least," she assured him, and left no doubt of the truth of this. Nor was Gary's embarrassment lessened by the fact that he could offer no detailed explanation, nothing better, in fact, than a suddenly remembered important engagement.

"Yes, so I understand," Judy had been unable to refrain from saying.

They had judged and condemned him unheard, these great friends of whose intimate knowledge of him he had boasted. He could offer no explanation without exposing Ransom, nor would he if he could. If he was not embittered, he was hurt, and he made it unnecessary for Tony Dearing and the others to show him delicately that he was no longer a member of the inner circle.

Meanwhile, Ransom had been urging him, as offers became more tempting, to turn all this public adulation into dollars and cents.

"You're a fool if you don't, Bolt. You'll never get a chance like this again." He kept at him day in and day out, urging this argument and that.

"You've got a right to go if you want to, Bolt. This college has done nothing for you; it's you who've done everything for it. In another two years you'll be through, anyway, and then what? You'll have to start in at some measly salary like thirty a week. Thirty a week! Why, man, you can earn that now in a few minutes if you want to! In the next two years you can pile up a fortune, if you go about it right. This offer of Wolverton's is only a feeler. They're all biting, but he can offer the biggest bait. And he will, if you hold off. He knows what you're worth as a drawing card, and so do I. Let me help you do the dickering for us, Bolt."

"Us?"

"Sure," said Ransom, "I'll go, too."

"The Harry you will!"

"The Harry I won't! You can't keep me here. You've got to take me with you, Bolt. You can make that part of the contract. You've *got* to make it."

Gary was sadly conscious of the fact that in a sense, and this a most important one, the thought of leaving Bolton was no longer so painful as formerly. In one way it would be an actual relief to leave the town he loved so well.

But to take Ransom? No, that had never entered his mind. It was impossible. But Ransom thought otherwise; the lure of big money had caught him, its virus was working in his blood, and he swept aside all Gary's arguments with more force than elegance.

"The hell with the team and my college career!" he exclaimed, after a long verbal exchange. "See here, Bolt, let's cut out the fake sentiment and look at this thing right. That's what's troubling you—fake sentiment. You've come to think you're a Boltonian, but you're only pretending to think it. What does Bolton really mean to us? Nothing. Why did I come here? Because it offered the best education for the least coin. Why did you come here? Because you got it for nothing. What are we? Roughnecks who don't really belong. Why do we want an education? So as to earn money. Well, here's a chance of earning more coin than we could in a lifetime. What I get will only be a fleabite to yours, but, all the same, it'll be ten times more than I could earn in any other way.

"I'm looking at this thing right," he continued. "I'm a dumb-bell at the book-learning game, and there's nothing in it, anyway. Why, Jack Dempsey earns more'n a night than a dozen professors earn in a lifetime! Look at the college men who've turned pros at all sorts of games. It's the thing nowadays. My mother should worry about my college career if I can send her a nice bunch of smackers every week. That's all she wants me to do, to be able to earn a good, honest living.

That's all a college education's for, isn't it? Well, that's what we've learned here—football, and now we can get big money for playing it."

"But you can't make football a life job, Jack."

"Who wants to?" demanded Ransom. "I can get enough out of it to set me up in another line, while you won't have to do another lick of work in your life. Why, if you're stuck on a degree, you can come back here as a millionaire student. What? Well, on the sunny side of Easy Street, anyway. There's a big bunch of coin crying out for you, and you're passing it up for what? For a college that's using us to make its own coin! That's all they want of us—to play football. By George! it's time we quit being exploited and did something for ourselves. Too much is enough."

And again:

"I'm going, anyway, Bolt, if you aren't. You won't be taking me away, because I've made up my mind to quit. I'm through here on Commencement Day. But I can get a far better price, of course, as your running mate. And you'd be far better with me. I'm not meaning to brag, but it would save you breaking in another man, even if you got one who dovetailed the way I do. Wolverton will give a good figure for us as a combination. But, anyway, I'm going. I'll get in somewhere."

"Well," said Gary finally and wearily, "if you've made up your mind to it, I suppose there's no stopping you. If we do go, we'd better go together."

"Now you're shouting!" cried Ransom. "Let's go!"

## CHAPTER XVII.

### LOST CASTE.

THE bombshell burst in Bolton shortly before Commencement Day, taking the form of staring headlines in the press: "Bolt Gary Turns Pro. Famous Right Half to Join Sam Wolverton's Wolves. His Running Mate Goes With Him. Rumored Price Sets New Record in Professional Football." And so on.

Dearing, Blackstock, and Huneker rushed from the frat house to Chatterton's Block. Of course, it could not be true; it was merely another false report. Hardly a day passed without it being alleged, more or less circumstantially, that Gary had signed a contract with this or that professional team.

Tony Dearing, if he had never exactly inspired such fictions, did nothing to impede their circulation. It was part of the publicity game, more free advertising for the college. By all means, let the dear public argue and speculate to its heart's content; the more the merrier. Every time Gary soared in print, Bolton followed inevitably, like the stick of a rocket.

Indeed, Gary had become a sort of national sporting bet; there were those who said his inclusion in the professional ranks was a foregone conclusion, others—these his greatest admirers—who said he was above the lure of the dollar, however big.

Tony and his cronies had smiled complacently at it all, having every reason to believe that they knew their man better than anybody. No, Gary would never sell out.

But now, even though disbelieving, they were shaken for the first time. This report was different from all that had gone before; the papers that carried it were no yellow sheets, and it contained an alleged corroborative statement from Sam Wolverton himself. And Wolverton never rushed into print without his facts.

It was the first time, for long enough, that these three friends had paid a visit to Gary's rooms. He received them with bare, if not open, arms. He was busy packing, and there was no sign of Ransom.

"Yes, that's substantially true," he said calmly, having read the paper handed to him. "They've got it right."

*"What!"* cried Dearing, while the other two gasped. "But it can't be! It's not. You're kidding, Bolt. Come out of it. You—you simply couldn't do a thing like this!"

"Like what?" he asked, with his unwinking stare.

"Selling us out!" shouted Dearing. "Why, apart from all else, leaving us to find it out like this! No, you couldn't do it. Nobody could."

"I'm not selling any one but myself," said Gary. "As for this"—tapping the paper—"somebody has jumped me. The deal isn't quite through yet, but it will be in a few more days. I meant to resign the captaincy to-night, to tell you that I won't be returning to Bolton in the fall."

There was a long, cold, clammy silence. Dearing grew violently red, then chalk white.

"Sold out!" he gasped. "Sold out in this hole-and-corner fashion, and you the captain of the team!"

"And you've got Ransom to sell out, too!" cried Huneker. "You've wrecked the team. You know that the three of us graduate this year and—and—good Lord! this is a fierce note. I never heard anything like it. I would never have believed it. You've dynamited the team!"

"I don't look at it that way," said Gary, who seemed the only one who was unperturbed. "There's plenty of good material left; it has been given a start, and all it needs is to keep on going. This isn't any snapshot decision of mine; I've been dickering with Wolverton a long time, and I did a lot of thinking before I finally made up my mind. A team has got to keep alive, to develop——"

"Bah!" cried Dearing. "You needn't make it worse by that kind of stuff. This is one rotten deal, Gary, and you know it. On your own admission you've been only waiting to get your price. You have, haven't you?"

"Certainly I wouldn't leave without it," replied Gary calmly. "I know what I'm worth, and now Wolverton has come across with an offer I really can't refuse. Money is money these days."

"And what about your promise?" cried Huneker. "What about that, if nothing else? You came here on the understanding that you were to play football——"

"And haven't I?" broke in Gary. "I said I'd put Bolton back on the map, and I've done it——"

*"You've* done it!" exclaimed Dearing. "You mean *we've* done it. Where would you ever have been without us?"

"I was going to say that I've done it with your help," replied Gary. "I agreed to play football; but there was no specified time limit, was there?"

"Oh, if you put it *that* way," said Huneker. "No, of course we didn't think it was necessary to sign you up with a four-year contract. We don't pretend to be Sam Wolverton."

"But there's such a thing as an honorable understanding, Gary," said Dearing. "There's such a thing as a gentlemen's agreement, even if you don't know it."

"I don't think that you two have any right to talk this way," said Gary. "As I look at it——"

"That's the whole point," broke in Dearing. "We don't see things the same way. That's our mistake. We thought your viewpoint was ours, but it's not. We belong to different schools. We discovered that some time ago."

"Yes?" said Gary. "In what way?"

"You know what way," retorted Dearing. "Or maybe you don't. But if you'd been any one else, the Flossie Bing matter wouldn't have been hushed up like it was."

"It doesn't seem to have been quite

hushed up enough," said Gary, after a moment's silence.

"What's the use of carrying on like this?" exclaimed Joe Blackstock, speaking for the first time. "Gary's right; there aren't any strings on him, and he can quit when he likes. Even scholarships aren't compulsory here. Shut up, Tony, you and Rex. You've blown up, as usual, and don't know half you're saying. You're forgetting all he has done for Bolton."

"I know this much, anyway," said Dearing, as he picked up his hat; "it's the first time Bolton has been sold, and it'll be the last."

It is quite probable that, but for the intervention of Blackstock, Dearing's and Huneker's remarks would have become more bitterly personal. Dearing, in particular, was like a doting parent that has seen his offspring foully maltreated.

"Cool off a bit. Cool off, you two," urged Blackstock, as they left Chatterton's Block. "After all, this was only to be expected, in a way, and there's a lot of truth in what Gary says."

"He's a damned mercenary, that's all he is!" exploded Dearing. "He has thrown us down cold, just the way he did the Comets of Mercersville. Yes, I believe now what they said about him at the time. He'll sell out Wolverton if somebody offers a bigger price and the contract isn't crook proof. And this is the fellow whose jersey was to be framed in the trophy hall with Humph Bolton's! This is the fellow who was supposed to be even greater than Humph! To the devil with his football genius! What's genius without principle and character? He hasn't as much loyalty, or even common decency, let along college spirit, as a sick pig! Yes, and I'll tell him so!"

"No, you won't," said Blackstock. "This kind of talk isn't much credit to yourself or Bolton, either, Tony."

"Tony's only telling the truth!" exclaimed Huneker. "We've been sold out—and for what? It isn't even as if he could make the excuse of having a dependent to support. He's got nobody but himself. It's just money greed."

"Well," said Blackstock, "you've got to make allowances for everybody. I'm as sore as you, as disappointed in Gary's character, but we've got to look at his side of it. It isn't his fault if we thought him what he isn't. We knew the very first time we met him that he was a mercenary, though we lost sight of the fact. Why, he has been a mercenary all through, really paid, in a way, for playing here. His whole life has been a struggle to make a living, and it's only natural he should think money everything. I guess we would, too, if we'd been born poor."

"Speak for yourself, Joe," snapped Dearing. "I've got my failings, like all of us, but at least I'd never bite the hand that fed me. That's what it comes to. He has simply exploited Bolton, used it to get the publicity he needed. He meant to, all along. And now he has thrown the scholarship in our teeth. And, not content with all that, he has demoralized Ransom, infected him with his own lack of principle, persuaded him to sell out, too."

"How do you know?" demanded Blackstock. "I'd say it was the other way round. No, I'm not defending Gary's action, but I say we've got to be fair. He's acting according to his lights, the way he was born and brought up. Why, in the name of goodness, should we expect him to sacrifice for Bolton? What are its traditions to him? And is he the first college man who has chucked the classroom for money? We don't know what Wolverton's offering, but it must be pretty big, the biggest that has ever been paid. How many fellows would pass it up if they got the chance?"

"Any decent fellow, any captain of a team, would."

"Well, I'm trying to look at this as Gary looks at it," said Blackstock. "He has fulfilled his part of the bargain, hasn't he? He has done far more in one season than any other fellow could do in four years. Who could have done half what he has done? Look where we are to-day and where we were a year ago! He has put us back on the map, and, as he says, it's up to the next team to keep us there."

"He has wrecked the team, that's what he has done," said Dearing.

"Not a bit of it," retorted Blackstock. "Of course, it can never be the same team without him, but he wasn't intending to spend the rest of his life here, anyway. He is leaving a great inspiration and example. He has brought football back to Bolton; started this wave of prosperity, too. His name will never die. Let us not forget all he has done, just because he isn't going to do more, because his ideas don't measure up to ours. Whatever else he may be, let us give him his due as the greatest player that ever came to Bolton, Humph Bolton not excepted. Let us be men and not churls."

"What book are you reading now?" asked Dearing darkly. "No 'Gettysburg Address' can ever make black white. Ransom and he are the first Boltonians who've ever sold out and turned——"

"They are the first we've had for thirty years whom anybody would want to buy," interrupted Blackstock. "You've said a whole lot, Tony, that you'll regret when you cool off. That remark about Flossie Bing was particularly unfortunate."

"The truth often is," retorted Dearing. "I didn't say half I meant to. He should have been expelled for that business—and he would have been, you bet, if we'd had any idea he meant to sell us out like this."

Ransom, who, all this time, had been busy packing in his bedroom, came out as the three visitors departed.

"Well, they certainly handed it to you, Bolt," he said, with a grimace. "What did I tell you? I guess you see now that we never really belonged, and what their friendship is really worth. I couldn't help listening in, of course. It was all I could do to keep from butting in and telling 'em a few home truths, especially about Flossie Bing."

"I'm glad you didn't, Jack. It would only have made things worse."

"I'll bet they wouldn't have believed me, either," said Ransom. "It's what I told you; you've been handed the blame for that business. I'd no idea, of course, it had got out. But now you've got to let me square it, Bolt. It can't do me any harm, either, because I'm leaving, anyway."

Gary smiled faintly. Ransom's egoism was so naïve at times. It was highly probable that he had known long ago of the talk that was going round.

"It matters whether you're expelled or leave of your own accord," he said. "It's not the sort of tale you want to go back to your mother. It's over and done with. This is nothing new. I guessed long ago that Dearing and the others knew about it. If you haven't seen the change in them, I have.

"I'm not sore about it," he continued. "On the facts of the case, I guess most anybody would have judged me guilty. But—well, I thought they knew me better than that. You shouldn't have to explain, sue for faith and understanding, in real friendship, and I'm not going to begin now. I'm not sore, just hurt."

"You should worry, Bolt. It's what I told you from the first. They gave you the glad hand, called you the white-haired boy, so long as you were the goose that laid the golden eggs. And now that you've got sense to start laying some for yourself, they could cut

your throat. It doesn't matter what you've done for Bolton; your fault is that you aren't going to do more. It's an unforgivable crime. You see now where you get off. You're only a big tramp, a villain who plotted to boost himself at the expense of this college. How dare you have the audacity to quit its sacred precincts before you'd broken your blooming neck on the grid-iron? I guess they'll try to get an injunction forbidding you to play anywhere else. You've got no right to break jail. Oh, this college game is a great joke!"

But Gary did not see it as such.

"There are two sides to every argument, Jack," he said soberly, "and I can see theirs, if they can't see mine. We've taken a big step, crossed the Rubicon, and I'm not sure even now that it's best or where it will lead to. And I wish I was taking it alone."

"That's a nice thing to say! It will lead to fortune, Bolt, and you're showing me the way."

"It will lead to more than that," said Gary. "It will lead to a whole lot of things we may be better without."

"Lead me to them," said Ransom. "You want to get rid of this old Father Time stuff. I'm no kid, Bolt, and you aren't responsible for me. It's the best and easiest step we ever took, and, as I told you at the start, I'd have taken it alone, anyway."

Gary turned and looked out of the window, at the glory of the old gray town as it stood bathed in the afterglow. And suddenly the chimes broke out, their silvery voices stealing into the shadowed room. His eyes traveled to every loved object—the row of elms, the Long Toms that had thundered on Lake Erie, the old sundial that Admiral Bolton had brought from an Elizabethan garden. Down in the quadrangle, as the chimes ceased, a quartet of strolling sophs began to hum the haunting hymn of "Bolton Bells." An easy step? No. For him, at least, it was not the easy step that Ransom pictured. He loved this place, if the other did not.

It had not been easy to make known his decision to Dearing, Blackstock, and Huneker, nor was it easy to say farewell to old Professor Amery and others, to feel, though it were admirably concealed, that he had fallen in their regard, lost caste. There was no tinge of bitterness, no hint of criticism, nothing but the best wishes for his future, the greatest praise for his past, the utmost regret at his going; but—but—well, it was there, impalpably but unmistakably. He had lost caste.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### EXIT OF A MERCENARY.

HARDEST of all was his interview with Doctor Sturges, who sent for him and received him in the study of his home. Sturges had long since earned the right to append LL. D. after his name, and his manner now was that of an old minister talking to one of his young flock about to embark on a hazardous enterprise.

Gary had the greatest respect for Sturges, but before the long and intimate talk was ended he had also great affection. He saw a side of the other that few were privileged to see; saw beneath the austerity to the warm humanity. And he was astonished, humbled, by "Prexy's" great and wholly disinterested thought for his future.

"Gary," said Sturges, and laid a hand on the other's shoulder, "I've heard the news and I don't like it. I don't like it, not simply for my sake or Bolton's sake, but your own sake. I have watched your career here with the utmost interest and admiration, and, wherever you go, whatever you do, I shall continue to take that interest. I ask you, in making this decision, if you have given it all the careful con-

sideration it demands? Sit down, my boy, and let us talk it over, not as your college president, but sincere friend and well-wisher."

"I've given it a great deal of thought, sir," said Gary, taking the proffered chair. "But money is money, sir."

"And always will be," agreed Sturges. "I'm not one who makes a point of sneering at it, or who pretends to ignore its necessity. We can do very little without it in this world, and it makes everything possible. That it is abused, like everything, is beside the question. But, as Franklin said, there is such a thing as paying too dearly for one's whistle. I understand that you've no relative dependent on you?"

"That is so, sir."

"Well, such being the case, there is all the more danger of paying too dearly for your whistle, seeing that no one is going to blow it but yourself. I don't wish to go into the question of professionalism in sport, more especially that phase of it concerning college men, for I'm against it on principle, and you might consider my views biased. Nor need I touch on the increasing tendency these days to worship the Golden Calf. But, as you may not have fully realized it, I wish to try and bring home to you what you are giving up or selling.

"It looks like the old story of, not Potash and Perlmutter, but potage and birthright, Gary. You are the most brilliant engineering student we have, or have had in my recollection, and you are abandoning a career of the utmost promise. I need not speak of its honor and usefulness, compare the building of bridges and harnessing of rivers to entertaining a crowd which should be indulging in some manly sport instead of watching it. That is becoming our weakness; we have too many lookers-on at games and too few players. We are in danger of degenerating into a nation of spectators like the decadent Romans. But there, I'm straying to one of my pet subjects.

"To return to yourself, and speaking purely in a mercenary sense, your earning capacity should be impressive in a few years. It should place you beyond all thought of want. Indeed, there is hardly a limit to it. I may tell you that only the other day I was discussing your gifts with one of the greatest engineers in the country, president of a great construction company, and he expressed the wish that, on your graduation, he might have the offer of your services. That was unprecedented. I want to bring home to you the fact that I think you are losing the substance and grasping at the shadow."

"Well, it's a very big shadow, sir," said Gary. "And a dollar down is worth five in the dim future. I dare say you'll hear a lot of stories about what I'm getting, but I'll tell you the truth. I held out for a percentage, and I expect to get an average of about fifteen thousand a game."

Prexy stared through his glasses. Fifteen thousand dollars for an hour's play, and he received about one fifth of that for a year's work!

"That's an enormous amount of money," he said slowly. "Prodigious!"

"That's only the estimated average," replied Gary. "I may get thirty or forty thousand, according to the gate. And I play at least twice a week."

"Stupendous!" murmured Sturges, wiping his glasses.

"And that's only part of it," pursued Gary. "If I turn pro I can take money for giving my name to help advertise everything from soup to suspenders. I've got a dozen offers in that line. And then there's the screen, the movies. They'll want to star me in some 'masterpiece.' At the very least, sir, I calculate on making perhaps two hundred thousand next season."

"Two hundred thousand!" echoed Sturges. "Colossal!"

"So you see, sir, it's a mighty substantial shadow, and I haven't taken the first offer. Money is money, and I held out for the best price I could get."

"It is a monstrous temptation," said Sturges "I had no idea such a sum was involved. It is really wicked to offer such huge sums for the mere playing of a game, to divert our young manhood from worthy channels of service, the professions and vocations for which they are best qualified. It sets a false standard, false ideals, false everything. This sum can be no indication of your true earning capacity. Your services cannot possibly be worth a fraction of it. Your character must suffer in consequence. No young man's services could be worth such a sum. Why, it is double the salary of the president of these United States! It's stupendous!"

"The National Football League isn't a philanthropic institution, sir," replied Gary. "If I wasn't worth it, I shouldn't get it. As I'm on a percentage contract, if I receive that amount, my employers will receive far more. I don't say 'earn.' I know my services aren't really worth that, but neither are a screen star's, a champion prize fighter's, or even a popular novelist's. It's not a question of intrinsic merit, but of drawing capacity. Everything goes by the 'gate' these days, and, as you know, sir, there's no telling what really makes popularity."

"Of course, as a rule," said Sturges, "the best writers have the least readers, for an entirely adequate reason that needs no stressing. But it is otherwise with you, Gary; you deserve this tremendous popularity."

"I do not, sir. What you said regarding money applies also to popularity. I haven't any delusions about it, sir. The public idol of to-day is the outcast of to-morrow. I've had some small experience of that already. But, while it lasts, I mean to capitalize it for all it's worth. That's why I say it's a chance I may never have again. If the public are willing to pay in such numbers to see me play, that is their lookout and not mine. They have set their own price on me, and, while I'll do my best to keep their favor, I quite realize that I mayn't be able to do so very long."

"In short," said Sturges, "it is a very rich gold mine that, in technical language, may pinch out at any time? Exactly. And for this pocket you're sacrificing the mother lode, your real profession. Now, Gary, you've shown yourself very level headed in many respects over this tremendous public adulation. I've admired your balance, your whole reception of it throughout. It is enough to turn a far older head, demoralize a far more experienced character. And, in the face of such a huge monetary temptation, it is only natural, only human, that you should lose your sense of proportion. It makes a tremendous problem, but there is really only the one answer. I want to point out to you several eternal truths, the first being that real greatness never comes from grasping, and that you are bartering infinitely more than you realize."

"I don't think so, sir."

"But I do, my boy. The real things of life, no money can buy. When all is said and done, gold is merely gold. The treasures of the spirit——" Sturges was now fully launched on one of his pet subjects; he talked long and earnestly; but, at the end of it all, Gary's decision remained unchanged. He could find no convincing answer to his argument that money was money.

Meanwhile, Tony had brought the news to his sister, and she heard it with astonishment, perturbation, and some quiet amusement. For her brother now denounced Gary all along the line, no

longer finding any excuse for his affair with Miss Bing.

"You were right, sis," he said magnanimously. "A man who could do that could do anything—and he has done it. He has sold us out cold. He's a mercenary. It's nothing to him what becomes of the college or team." Tony's bitterness and anger had not its root merely in his overweening love for Bolton; had he not cared personally a great deal for Gary, he should not have minded so much, nor felt the blow so acutely.

"Are you sure that's his only reason for leaving?" asked Judy slowly.

"Of course it is. Money—that's his middle name. What other reason could there be?"

"Well, I don't know. I thought there might be a contributing cause. I mean, supposing he has heard some of this talk about Miss Bing? And—and we haven't been particularly nice to him this term, have we?"

"As nice as he deserves. And *you're* the one who said you wanted nothing more to do with him."

"I know," she replied in a low voice. "And things have been so different, unpleasant, that it may have induced him to accept this offer. And—and I wonder, Tony, if half that has been said is really true."

"Of course it is! Aren't *you* the one who told me long ago that it was true? And now, when it has been proved, you turn round and say it mayn't be true. I can't understand you at all."

This was not to be wondered at, because Judy could not understand herself. She knew simply that the thought of Gary leaving Bolton tore a hole in her heart, through which all minor cares and worries were lost and forgotten. And deep down in her conscience was the question: had she quite played the game? Had she let pride and jealousy wreck her friendship with Gary? No matter what the circumstantial evidence of his guilt, should she have accepted it from any one but himself?

Tony seemed to sense the drift of her thoughts, for he said:

"We've nothing to blame ourselves for; not a thing. Our only mistake was in thinking Gary one of us. But you can't take a pig to market and bring it back a blood horse. That's the long and short of it. His idea of things aren't ours, and they never will be."

"But could our first opinion of him have been so wrong? And think of all he has done for Bolton! Tony, we —we *can't* let him go like this!"

"What's to stop him? Nothing but a moral obligation that he can't or won't recognize. You don't understand, sis; there's big money at stake, and nothing or nobody could stop him grabbing it. What he has done for Bolton he did, first of all, for himself. It was always himself, never the college. It was all part of a plan to get himself before the public, make his price."

"I don't believe it," said Judy. "And I don't believe, either, that he induced Ransom to leave. Let us be fair, Tony. He couldn't have known—nobody could —that he would become such a public idol. And he wouldn't be if he hadn't earned it. We can't deny him that. You talk about his influence on Jack Ransom, but what about Ransom's influence on him? From all I've seen of Mr. Ransom, he's far the more worldly and material of the two."

"I guess it's fifty-fifty, if it comes to that," said Dearing. "They both belong to the same school. There's no use trying to pretend that they're different from what they are. College, the privilege of coming to Bolton, never really meant anything to them. Money means more than loyalty or principle. Gary will get oodles of it, but it won't do him any good. You see if it does. He'll spend it as fast as he gets it, and that Bing girl will help him."

Judy winced and turned to the window.

"Meanwhile," continued her brother cynically, "we've got to give Gary a send-off worthy of Bolton, if not himself. Of course, we can't let the papers sniff our real feelings; they'd say we were sore because he's not playing for us. But there isn't a college man in the country, let alone Bolton, who doesn't share our feelings. Only a college man could understand."

"Will you have him here to dinner, Tony?"

"I will not! I told you long ago he wasn't the sort I wanted as a guest, and there's no necessity for us to have him privately. It will be a stag party, a presentation, and, of course, he isn't supposed to know about it. It's one of those things that have to be done, and done well. The papers will be full of our grief and admiration. Oh, we'll give him a proper send-off, all right."

But Gary and Ransom, on a summons from the manager of the Wolves, left for New York ere Bolton knew they had gone. And, on the whole, they considered it just as well. If they did not know of the honor in preparation for them, they knew much of what envy and malice, apart from the silent censure of the worthy, were saying of them.

For the mere fact that Gary was no longer a Boltonian seemed to release the brakes from many tongues, and the Flossie Bing matter was discussed with welcome abandon. The fact that Miss Bing herself saw fit to leave the town a few days later gave point to the story.

"Well, that's the end of that hick burg, thank Heaven," said Ransom, as the train departed. "We don't want any of their crocodile tears. Let this be a lesson to you, Bolt, on the folly of casting pearls before swine, wasting your time on small-town stuff. They're all alike, college or manufacturing; mean and petty and backbiting. You were a king so long as you served them, and now you're a clown. You aren't leaving one true friend, not one. The only friend you've got is sticking right here by your side. Well, we should worry. We're going where we'll be appreciated, do as we please. This college game has served its turn, and now we're really going to live. Hey, for the Big Town!"

Gary made no answer, seemed not to hear. He had turned for a last look at the old gray towers on the hill. Ransom's opinion was wrong, as it was wrong in other instances; for he, Gary, was leaving behind at least one true friend, one he had found where least expected. This was Doctor Sturges. He had revealed himself as a sympathetic and understanding friend, even though he did not approve of Gary's decision. That is the real test of friendship.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### ACROSS THE RUBICON.

ANOTHER of Ransom's false opinions was that concerning the calling or vocation he was about to embrace. His ideas of it were based on what he had read in certain papers, augmented by the confidences of a whilom friend who had played on a mediocre Middle-Western team. Professional football, he informed Gary, was "soft;" it was a game where nobody got hurt and the slogan was: "Live and let live." It was not like the intercollegiate article, where a fellow's feelings were involved and he went all out to win, regardless of the cost. In the professional game nobody really cared who won, not even the fans, so long as they got a run for their money. This was proved by the fact that the championship was always in dispute, because the teams comprising the league were so widely scattered that they could not possibly meet one another. Each club might have a more-or-less-loyal following, but there could

be no interest such as attaches to the national game and the fight for the pennant.

"All the public wants," said Ransom, "is a scrap to watch on Sundays, Saturdays, and holidays, when the baseball season is dead and box fighting hasn't started. All we have to do is put up a decent imitation. It'll be a lead-pipe cinch to what we've been through last season."

He believed that games were fixed and that players could do pretty much as they pleased, especially famous stars. One would not have to keep to the rigorous training table instituted by coaches like "Pug" Traynor. In short, he looked forward to a pleasant period of much travel, little work, and high pay.

Gary did not subscribe to this belief. He knew no more about the National Football League than Ransom, but, unlike the other, he knew the world and how hard it is to earn a living from it. Ransom had lived solely on his mother, and, though he talked largely, his actual knowledge of life was small.

Indeed, this was his first visit to New York, or any big city, though one might have thought him a globe trotter. His fictional experiences had even imposed on Gary to a large extent. For Ransom, out of ignorance or hearsay, always spoke with supreme authority; while Gary, out of experience, often hesitated and qualified. The more he learned, the less sure was he about anything in this world or the next.

"I wouldn't be too certain of that, Jack," he now said. "It's my experience that you get nothing for nothing in this world, and the New York Wolves aren't that Ohio team you speak about. We're getting big money, and you can bet your life we'll have to earn it, every penny. If you want my opinion, the professional game is just a bit better than the best college stuff. If you aren't playing for glory and Alma Mater, you're playing for your daily bread—which means just a little bit more. If you take my advice, you'll get ready for the hardest ten weeks you ever spent. You'd best keep in mind the fact that we're bucking an open market for the first time; and, if we don't make good, there are plenty of others who can and will. There's no shortage of material when money talks——"

"Rats! We're the best backfield combination in the country, and nobody could take our place. Wolverton knows that darn well."

"That's all right," said Gary, "but we've got to keep proving it. We aren't being paid for what we've done for Bolton, but what we'll do for the Wolves. And, if we don't do it—good night! Get that through your bean. There's nothing in our contract that calls for Wolverton to keep paying a loss. I get a percentage of what I can draw, you get a thousand a game; but if I only draw flies and you pan out a dud, one or two games will see our finish."

Ransom laughed.

"You want to forget this modesty complex, Bolt, before we hit the Big Town. It was all right in the college game, but it's bad business in the professional. You've got to put your own price on yourself, and on me, too, and it's time you realized our worth. It matters a v hole lot, matters everything, what we did at Bolton; if it didn't, we wouldn't have got this contract.

"We're the greatest scoring combination that ever happened, and, no matter what we do, the fans will break all records to see us play. Our drawing capacity is established and *that's* what we're being paid for! Once you've made your rep, the rest is pie. It's the same in every game, profession, or business. We can take the gate with us wherever we go, and Sam Wolverton knows it. You've got to act like a

champ and talk like a champ, Bolt, not a hick from the sticks. You've got to show this bunch where they get off. They'll try to run it over you, work you like a dray horse, if you don't know your own rights. Just watch me!"

It will be observed that Ransom now employed the pronoun "we" as a matter of course. No longer was Gary the supreme drawing card; it was Gary *and* Ransom. Already success was having its effect on his mercurial temperament, and he had never been lacking in self-appreciation.

Gary could have pointed out that the sum his running mate was to receive for every game was no real indication of his value, any more than Gary thought his own value to be worth fifteen times that sum. Ransom never could have got it in any other circumstances, if he had entered the market alone. There were plenty of half backs, as good or better, who were playing for far less, plenty who could have been secured.

Nor was Ransom such an essential part of the combination; he was neither indispensable nor irreplaceable. But Gary, out of friendship, had magnified his importance in the negotiations with Wolverton, got him the best price possible, made him part and parcel of the proceedings. So long as Ransom was determined in any case to enter the professional game, Gary meant to do his utmost for him, just as, in the first instance, he had brought him into prominence, made this ultimate step possible.

And now the result was that Ranson, with his naïve egoism, believed it a fitting tribute to his own native worth. And inwardly he argued that, if Wolverton was willing to offer him such a price, he must in reality be worth far more.

However, out of consideration for Gary's feelings, he refrained from mentioning this. At the same time, he meant to let the world see that he had no delusions about his own value.

Gary did not pursue the subject; he had said what he could, and, his advice being rejected, he played the part of wisdom by letting future events point or disprove his argument. He had no desire to be continually preaching, and he had learned that Ransom believed nothing until it was demonstrated by hard fact.

Hard fact was not long in coming. It arrived when Ransom appeared for the first practice try-out in palpably poor form, and Barney Milligan, Wolverton's right hand, reported the matter to his boss. Then Ransom heard things that have never been seen in print. Pug Traynor, at the top of his form, had never dared to be so impolite. Wolverton, whose red neck and ears matched his hair and language, let fly at him before the whole team, and right there the color and wind went out of some of Ransom's most cherished soap bubbles.

"I don't care a continental who or what you are!" said Wolverton, when Ransom protested. "And, if you don't like my line of talk, get your bonnet and check out. The sooner the better. There aren't any strings on you."

"Y-you guaranteed me my price for every game."

"And you'll get it, when and *if* you play," retorted Wolverton grimly. "But I never guaranteed to pay for slacking and loafing. You can bet your boots I'm playing no man who isn't in condition. What the devil do you think this outfit is—a dime museum? If you're aiming to crowd on fat and live soft, make a date with Huber. You're a professional now, not an amateur, and you'd better understand that first as last.

"That goes for all you new men," he continued, aiming his cigar at each in turn. "The rest of the boys know what's what. There ain't a man big

enough to break the rules and do as he likes here, and the next time one of you's reported out of condition, he's *through!* Understand? I don't care a rap what you did at college or anywhere else, but I'm gonna see what you do here. You're here to show me, and, if you don't show me, that's your funeral. If you've got any little idea you can get by with stuff you worked somewheres else, can it right now. This is a business organization, and we ain't carrying any watered stock. Every man among you, big or little, has got to be fit and ready to earn his dividend. If he ain't, he can take the air. That's all I've got to say, and I won't say it again!"

As proof of this, Madden, the big all-American full back, "took the air" the following week. Next to Gary, he was, perhaps, the most talked-of man of the year; but, when he persisted in reporting for practice with a breath, his exit was as swift as though he were the humblest member of the team.

"Let that be a lesson to you, Jack," said Gary. "But I guess you don't need any. You're doing fine."

"Lord!" said Ransom. "I never put in such a week. They work you like a dog. You'd think this club owned us."

"You'd think right," said Gary. "We're professionals, not amateurs, as Wolverton said. There's a difference."

"Well, our contract, Bolt, don't look so juicy on a close-up. We get nothing for nothing."

"Exactly. The contract hasn't changed, but maybe you have."

"But supposing Wolverton crawls out on me? I thought we were pretty slick, but you can't teach these New York sharks anything. It looked all right on paper—but what's to stop him not playing me in *any* game? Or giving me the gate, like Madden?"

"Yourself, Jack. Don't you worry about him playing you, if you keep on the way you're going. That little talk did you a world of good. Wolverton's not expecting any miracles, only a fair deal. And, naturally, he has insured himself against an unfair one. There are some fellows who think the right game is to do as little as they can for their money, instead of the most. They look on an employer as something to be milked. That's poor economics as well as ethics. A business can only pay what it earns, and football is no exception. The better we play, the more we draw; and the more we draw, the more we earn."

"*I* don't," said Ransom. "Nor any other player but you. You're the only one on a percentage."

"If I happen to draw nothing, you won't call it very lucky, Jack. No matter what I and the rest of the club get, you and the other players are sure of yours."

"Well, I'll swap you any day, Bolt. I only wish I was as sure of mine as you are of yours—and that it was half as big. They say the advance bookings for the Pounders are breaking all records. I bet you make more than you figured."

"I hope so," grinned Gary. "In this instance, too much isn't enough. But I'll believe all these tales of a record gate when I see it. This is New York, not home."

He was destined to see it, just as Ransom was destined to see his last cherished illusion vanish. There was nothing soft about that game with the Providence Pounders, none of the spirit of live and let live; it was as fierce and implacable as the memorable fight with State University, faster and more generally skillful. These men were playing for their daily bread, which, as Gary said, furnished enough incentive. They had to make good or go under, just as in the battle of life. For the most part, they were the hardy adventurer type, soldiers of fortune who were ready for any fight on any field.

They were a mixed lot—college men, sand-lotters, professionals, amateurs; but all were cast in the same mold. Most of them would drift ultimately to the waste places of the earth, to far horizons, wherever the red lamp of danger winked, the finger of adventure and profit beckoned. Mercenaries, if you will, but with something of the color of Cæsar's Tenth Legion. Fighting was a business, and they gave and took with equal phlegm.

Added to this was an ancient rivalry, for the Rhode Island team had disputed last season's championship with them. For that reason, apart from Gary's appearance, a record crowd was assured. Ransom learned that, whatever the feeling in other sections of the country, there was no lack of it here.

The Providence rooters came in their thousands, and the Wolves had as rabid a following as ever graced, or disgraced, the bleachers. He learned that it mattered who won, mattered far more, in a way, than any college game. It meant money to most of that crowd, money wagered.

Such a crowd! Used as he had become to the gradually growing gate drawn by Gary, the biggest Bolton game was small to this. It awed him as he trotted out on the field to run through the signals. Its composition, its manners! The college game imposed certain restrictions on the conduct of the most rabid adherent or critic; but here there was none. The bleachers said what they pleased. They had paid their price for admission, and it included the privilege of free speech. These guys, of which he was one, were playing for money, and, if they put up a bum show, they'd hear about it. They were no different from any other public performer.

Ransom heard about it, ere the game had well begun, when a fumble on his part was instantly converted into an adverse score. He was a victim of nerves and could hardly see, much less control his limbs. A howl rent the heavens:

"Yah, you Bolton bum! Get the hook! Take him out! He's rotten!"

"Don't listen," said Gary in his ear. "Get down to it, Jack."

Gary was inured to it all—the rivalry, "barracking," the professional give and take. It was simply the Comets over again on a larger scale. He was as much a soldier of fortune as the hardiest bravo on this field, harder and more experienced than most. He was back in his own class again, that was all, and he was able to lead it, as he always had done. They could teach him nothing.

There were those who had come to see his gorgeous bubble pricked, and the Pounders themselves meant to put this college star where they had put many another. This rah-rah boy would soon learn the difference between the amateur and professional game. They'd show him what he was really worth; he'd be able to draw nothing but arnica and splints when they got through with him.

Amiable delusion! Gary was there, every minute of the play, every foot of the way—there in defense as well as attack. And the crowd rose to him as every other crowd had done, as it crowns every two-handed fighter who is also the boxing artist and game to the core.

He was greater than all reports; in this brilliant field his light dimmed all. Never had he been more dazzling, more irresistible; his personality dominated the play. He started with running back the kick-off for a touchdown, and finished with another that put an unnecessary nail in the Pounders' coffin.

And never had Jack Ransom played better; never had the combination worked with such uncanny precision. But it was Gary who had inspired it. made it possible, Gary who bore the

brunt, covered up his running mate's mistakes, retrieved them, while Ransom was finding his true form. It is quite possible that, but for Gary, it would have been Ransom's first and last game with the Wolves. Indeed, it is almost certain.

The prestige that Gary gained from that opening game in mid-September was incalculable, but his reward in real money was double what he had first prognosticated to Doctor Sturges. It exceeded his wildest hopes.

"Gee, over thirty thousand dollars!" breathed Ransom, staring wide eyed at the check. "I never knew there was so much money in the world, even on paper." And then, in the next breath: "What did I tell you? We've crossed the Rubicon, all right, and are wading neck-deep in fields of the long green. I mean, *you* are. Over thirty thousand for one game! Take the thirty away and you've got my figure. What are you going to do with it, Bolt?"

"Put it in the bank."

"Tightwad," said Ransom. "Why don't you loosen up a bit, take the padlocks off your pockets, and buy yourself a good time? You'll never have it younger. I know how you feel, of course; you've been so darned poor all your life, like myself, that you're scared of poverty. That's it, eh? But there's such a thing as overdoing it. You're scared to death of poverty. It gets some people like that, though it never got me. I'm too wise."

Gary might have suggested that perhaps the real reason was that Ransom had never worked for even the little he got.

"You're scared of poverty, Bolt, and you aim to pile up what you think will keep you safe. Yes, I know it. But that's a mistake; if you ever start that, you'll never stop, never think you've got enough. Ever hear the story of the guy who was sent into a roomful of gold pieces and told he could take whatever he thought would keep him the rest of his days—just that and no more? Well, he died there before he got through counting. He couldn't stop soon enough."

"Most men stop too soon," said Gary, with his faint smile.

"Well, they live, have a good time. And that's all money's for. Come on. Bolt, let's go and celebrate. We deserve it. There's lots more dough where that came from. The boys expect it of you, too."

"Why?" asked Gary, with his unwinking stare. "I've got mine, they've got theirs, and that's all that's to it. Why should I buy them a good time any more than they me?"

"Oh, well, if you can't see it——" Ransom shrugged.

"No, I can't see it. Besides, I'm in training, and so are you and they. There won't be any more money where this came from if we don't keep fit. You know that."

"I'm not talking of hooch," said Ransom. "Nobody wants to get stewed. But there's no harm having a good time. And, hang it all, you're the biggest winner and it's up to you to show it to the bunch. It's only right."

"I don't see it that way," replied Gary calmly. "It cost me something to get this money, and, if the bunch thinks I'm going to blow it for their amusement, they've got another think coming. No, sir; I think more of money than that. Every person is entitled to have his own idea of what you call a good time, and I've got mine."

"Counting the feathers on a gold eagle?"

Gary laughed.

"Well, I advise you to do the same, Jack. This game isn't going to last forever, and, as I warned you, it opens up a lot of things we're better without. Our job is to keep fit, and I guess most of the fellows know that. But there are hangers-on, the vampires and

parasites of the sporting world, who'll be only too glad to bleed you white if you give them half a chance. That's all they want, your money, and you'll be a good fellow while it lasts. You can get in with a crowd, before you know it, that'll ruin you, Jack. And the thin end of the wedge, the password, is 'a good time.' You can have a good time without blowing your money. The best times are the ones that can't be bought. Save your money, Jack; it's your best friend."

"Huh!" said Ransom. "I've a fat lot to save, haven't I? Only a thousand smackers, a grand, and I've got to send some of it to my old woman. You don't have to send anything to anybody—and you've got over thirty grand. There's a hellova difference, Bolt—not that I'm sore at your cut. No, nothing like that."

## CHAPTER XX.

### PART OF THE PRICE.

IT was nearing the end of the season, one of unparalleled triumph for Gary and the team, and his fame had become international. All that had gone before, epic as it was in its swift and tremendous movement, had been but a prelude to this publicity and popularity.

Never had there been anything like it. He was the idol of the gutter gamin, as well as of those in the seats of the mighty; and high and low, rich and poor, vied with one another in bending the knee of homage. Last tribute of all, his name, which had been given—at a price—to multiform commodities, was bestowed on various defenseless infants.

The Gary garter, underwear, or shaving cream marched hand in hand with all the little Bolt Gary Rabinowitches and O'Reillys. He was the topical crack at revues, where a gag about his financial acumen always got a hearty and tolerant laugh, and he was scheduled to spend the end of the winter in Hollywood, where a feature film was being written for him.

He was mobbed wherever he showed his nose, and the Sunday supplements, though they had combed his whole life, were still clamoring for more, anything with his name attached. A syndicate had paid him fifteen thousand dollars for ten newspaper articles, and he had dined with the highest in the land.

Old man Gary's forge and his wife's alleged clothes basket had become as well known as the Statue of Liberty or the Woolworth Building, and, his brief sojourn in Flanders being properly investigated, he had been discovered as the real and only original man who had won the Great War. There was a salad named after him at the Ritz—a subtle joke this, because of his known affection for the long green—and it was said that his income-tax assessment would perturb even Morgan.

In short, he had arrived at the last station on the road to fame, or, in other words, these United States had made a thorough fool of itself over him, as it has a habit of doing.

He had arrived, reached the ultimate golden goal, but what had his ticket cost him? Few considered this, or, if at all, quite superficially. And few could have understood the more subtle part of the price paid, because few understood Gary's real character. Even Ransom, his close companion, did not fully understand it, though he thought otherwise. Doctor Sturges was the only one who had penetrated its complexity, though there had been a time when Judith Dearing stood on the brink of complete discovery.

Gary's was a hypersensitive character, a quivering soul that reacted violently to what the average ego would hardly sense. It had been his bane since childhood, and he had proceeded to combat it, as he had fought against other handicaps, material and otherwise.

This big fellow with the hard jaw and emotionless manner was in reality as sensitive as a photographic plate; he registered what others missed. But he had taught himself to grow a protective shell, like other members of the animal kingdom, because it was necessary for survival. He was acutely sensitive about his birth, the ugly poverty of his early days, and many things at which he had learned to smile and for which the public thought he cared nothing. The public verdict was that he had no nerves, no more than a jellyfish; his lack of sensitiveness, physical and otherwise, was proverbial, one of the many popular misconceptions.

In short, the public believed Gary to be a thing of stone and iron, the offspring of a blacksmith and washerwoman, with all that that implied to the superficial mind. Somehow, he had been given a brain far above his heritage, a brain that functioned brilliantly in football as it had in the classroom, but otherwise he was the legitimate product of his class and people, a crude, forceful, insensitive personality.

All this was wholly wrong; he was a bundle of nerves—the true psychologist would have known that this made his brilliant play possible—a mass of sensitiveness and acute perceptions. But he had learned mastery of self, the high art of camouflage. None knew what he really thought and felt.

Therefore, to him a part of the price that was being paid, the spiritual part, the hardest part, would have meant little or nothing to many, just as the public thought it meant nothing to him. His hatred of publicity, touched on already—his shyness was thought crudeness or a calculated part of the publicity game—need not be stressed, and we may begin with what the loss of his amateur standing meant to him.

Gary realized it to the uttermost, though it was thought he did not. He felt it far more keenly than Ransom, sensed subtleties and nuances lost on the other. He had said long ago that he should be selling more than his amateur status, and the truth of that was brought home in many ways. Often had he cause to think of his talk with Doctor Sturges and what the other had said about the things of the spirit.

Yes, he was a professional now, and there was a world of subtle difference. He was still a national idol, even greater than heretofore, but he was no longer the same idol. He was making a fortune, but he had lost an intangible something that no money can buy. He was now a paid idol, doing for gold what hitherto he had done for sport and Alma Mater. There was a difference and it was shown to him very clearly. He might dine with the greatest in the land, but so might any public exhibit. Oh, yes, there was a difference, subtle but unmistakable. He was a mercenary, a professional, and he had lost caste in the greater world, just as he had lost it at Bolton.

His audience, his admirers, were different, or he was being viewed from a different angle. Now he was admired for his physical prowess alone, not his character. He was admired like the Roman gladiator in the arena, and when that prowess failed, everything failed. Woe betide him when it should! He need expect neither mercy nor justice. As his rise had been swift, tremendous, so also would be his fall. It is the destiny of idols. He saw it clearly.

He was not held in true affection either by the public or his teammates; indeed, in a sense he was one of the most unpopular popular heroes that had ever lived. His self-confidence was misunderstood, and he had an irritating habit of doing even more than he said, of upsetting calculations and prophecies.

They said he could not last, that such speed and vitality was bound to burn itself up; but here he was at the end

of the season, going as strongly as ever, just as spectacular and efficient. They said he was bound to be knocked out, but game after game passed and it was others who were carried to the side lines or went on the sick list.

No, he was not popular; he did not scatter his money about, ape all the mannerisms of the average public idol. He lived very quietly and, it was said privately, in mean fashion. He had a reputation for parsimony, for exacting the utmost for his services. And it was not only college men who, as Dearing had said, resented the selling of his amateur standing; the vast body of public opinion was against it, however tolerant its criticism. It had evoked editorial comment in certain papers, marked him as another victim of the big-money lure and the commercialization of sport; an example to be avoided by the best youth of the land. They compared him to his detriment with Phil Jones, an equal prodigy in his own line, who, though in modest circumstances, had resisted such temptation, and, in consequence, stood for all that was best in sport and character, an American to be proud of.

The fact that Gary had no one to support but himself, that he had spurned the gift scholarship of Bolton, forfeited what had promised to be a brilliant career, deserted the college that had made him, served to make his surrender all the more culpable. There were no extenuating circumstances. The public idolized him as a football player, but as nothing else. A certain paper had baptized him good-humoredly "The Dollar God," and the name stuck, was used with increasing point by his enemies.

He had many enemies. Nothing is so universally popular as failure, and he had been too successful. Envy and jealousy and malice were abroad, and he sensed it even in the team; not as a whole, but among certain members. He was making far too much money; money that they were helping him earn. He was getting all the meat and gravy; they, the bone.

It was the old story of Bolton over again, on a larger scale, though Ransom had not suffered a relapse. Apart from the lesson he had learned in that respect, Ransom himself was earning enough glory these days, justifying his selection as Gary's running mate. His game had developed, become more brilliant, as it was bound to do in such company. He borrowed his light from Gary, though this he had ceased to admit; and, with his bonhomie, good looks, and social graces, he was far more popular in a sense than Gary himself.

Yet Ransom, thanks, perhaps, to this popularity, was troubling Gary. An element was entering their friendship, a possible source of friction, that had not been there before. Ransom gayly refused to be "preached" to any longer.

"I'm out of leading strings," he said, when Gary remarked on certain company he was keeping. "If you want to be a crab, a social frost, there's no reason why I should. As you said yourself, everybody's entitled to his own opinion of a good time."

"I'm responsible for you, Jack. I brought you here——"

"You didn't, and aren't. Get that out of your head for good, Bolt. I'd have brought myself, anyway. You'd nothing to do with it. And I'm making good off my own bat."

Gary let this pass.

"If Wolverton's got no kicking coming, you haven't," added Ransom. "And he's the one to kick."

This was true. Ransom's form of enjoyment appeared to have no ill effect on his playing ability. Whatever dissipation he might indulge in, it was offset by intensive training. Gary did not know what he did with his spare time, but he knew he kept late hours

and that they were costing a lot of money.

"Well, it's my own," said Ransom, when this subject was touched on. "If I want to spend it on a show or a pretty girl, what's the odds? I don't keep bumming at you, Bolt, because you prefer to pile it up. You can only be young once. That's my motto."

"What about this business you were going to buy?"

"Plenty of time," replied Ransom airily. "I'm as good as signed up for next season, ain't I? Yes, and at a bigger figure, too—if I should want to take it."

"Yes, and the next show may put you on the sick list or out of the game for good. You ought to be saving every penny, Jack."

"And be called 'The Dollar God?' No, thanks, Bolt; none of that for mine. One's enough in the family. Don't you worry about my small cut; it's no skin off you."

"It's skin off me," said Gary composedly, though hurt, "if you continue to borrow the way you've been doing. It's easy enough to be generous at some one else's expense. I'd rather be called a tightwad than a sponger."

Ransom flushed angrily.

"Are you calling me that?"

"No, I'm not, Jack. But the next step to borrowing is sponging. So long as you've opened the subject and taken this stand, I just want to remind you that you owe me five hundred dollars."

"I haven't forgotten it. I haven't had a chance."

"I've never mentioned it before, Jack."

"Oh, you might as well have. Don't you worry; I'll pay back every cent, and with interest, too, if you like. Gee, but you're tight, Bolt! It's getting to be a regular disease with you. I told you it would. What have you soaked away in the bank? Nobody knows but yourself. And yet you grudge an old pal a few kopecks! What's five hundred to you?"

"Money is money," said Gary equably. "Besides, there's the principle of the thing. I've money for any friend's necessity, to the extent of my means, but I'll be darned if I've any for extravagance. I've said that befor, and now I'm saying it again. If you can afford all you do for amusement, you can afford to pay your debts. And if you pay your gambling debts, you can pay me. One's just as honorable as the other, though some people don't seem to think so."

"Who says I've got any gambling debts?" demanded Ransom.

Gary shrugged. It was a shot in the dark which, judging by the other's expression, had gone home.

"Your money goes somewhere, doesn't it? How much do you give your mother?"

"That's my business. I give her enough—and that's enough."

"Well, there's no earthly reason why you should have to borrow, Jack. You know there isn't. You're earning big money——"

"A thousand a game! What's that?"

"It's twenty thousand a year, at least, not counting what we may make on a barnstorming trip. And that's twenty thousand more than you thought of earning a few months ago. It was a fabulous sum then."

"Yes, and what about the fabulous sum you're making? You're getting about ten times that, or more. And with nobody to support. It's all right for you to talk——"

"Well, I'm talking," broke in Gary. "I've tried one way with you, and now I'll try another. It's nothing to you or anybody what I get; your business is to look after what *you* get. You seem to be losing all sense of proportion. The more money you have, the more you chuck away. Well, you're not going to chuck any more of mine.

I wouldn't be your friend if I let you get away with the idea that you can always come to me when you're broke, that that's all you've got to do. I tell you you'll have to check up on your outlay and take a tumble to yourself. My lending days are over, and I won't let you have another cent. That's straight."

Ransom laughed with genuine humor, all his former irritation and resentment gone. This was one of his most appealing traits; he seemed incapable of treasuring a grudge or staying angry for long.

"All right, Bolt, I'll take a tumble to myself. Why didn't you say you wanted your money back? Why didn't you say it at the start, you old *Shylock,* without all this lofty preaching? And, say, you'll get me that job in the movies, won't you? You'll let me play second to your lead?"

"I told you I'd do my best, Jack, but that it isn't up to me. The producers have the say."

"But ain't I the other half of the famous combination? Well, then? They can't do without me, and all you've got to do is tell 'em so if they don't seem to know it. We should get a whacking good price, eh? Yes, I'll take a tumble to myself, Bolt, and I'll pay you that five hundred, too. Oh, yes, I will!"

But days became weeks, weeks months, and Ransom did not pay, nor did his mode of life change perceptibly. And, though seemingly their friendship remained the same, there was a subtle change that Gary felt keenly. Perhaps it had always been there and he had not sensed it hitherto; but now he could not escape the thought at times that Ransom only cared for what he could get out of him. Would a true friend say the things that the other sometimes said? Perhaps it was merely that Ransom was insensitive; he, Gary, hypersensitive. But the things that Ransom said left wounds, and, however he might heal these by subsequent contrition and apology, the scars remained.

Gary also could not escape the feeling that, though Ransom protested to the contrary, he envied him the money he was making, thought that he, Ransom, should be getting more.

So much for part of the spiritual price. There still remained the physical.

*To be continued in next week's issue of* THE POPULAR STORIES, *October 22nd.*

## RE STEAK

THE man in Middletown, N. Y., who hit a policeman with a juicy steak during a quarrel in a restaurant, must wonder how they get away with it in the movie comedies. Superhuman people—movie characters. They fall into the water and come out dry; they are knocked out cold with large vases or bricks or clubs, and they come up groggily but ready for the chase again; they are hit with pies, large gobs of mud, plates of spaghetti or bowls of watery dough, and they never seem to lodge charges. There is a healthy optimism in this. The policeman in Middletown should have chased his assailant around the block a few times, with another steak, still more juicy with gravy, ready for reciprocative action.

# The Silver Sidewalk

BY

## Alan Sullivan

*Author of "The Eyes of Sebastien," "The Debt," Etc.*

**"Whispering" Joe, a shadowy sort of fellow who could only bask in the light of bigger men, finally ran onto The Silver Sidewalk—but he remained the same old Joe.**

ONE may write of heroes, demigods and herculean bravos, or, scanning humanity with a more intimate eye, discern in the ordinary, very ordinary, man the elements of romance. For beneath the most insignificant exteriors lurks all the interpreter may hope to find. As a case in point, take the individual known in the early Cobalt days as "Whispering" Joe. These were the times when the woods were full of men, any one of whom could have told you how Lawson made his strike, and how La Rose, the blacksmith, threw a pick at a fox and hit a million dollars instead.

Whispering Joe was small, especially in a country of big men; ineffective, where the day was to the strong; weak, where fortune waited only on the bold. He spent his life in the shadow of those who had arrived at fame, hanging on their talk like a fly on a sticky plate, and lapping up with curious avidity what morsels of conversation or drink they flung to him. He seemed contented to live thus, retailing to the few who would listen what he had heard the great men say from time to time, staring at them with large worshiping eyes, deifying them because they had done what he could never do.

Besides this homage for the big men, there was one other direction his adoration took. He had a certain choking love for Mary Geddes. It was love in secret and silence, for Mary was the aspiration of half the camp. If one had mentioned Joe to her, she would have died of laughter.

Can you see him—this slim-shouldered man with the ferretlike face, the cringing manner and the hidden passion. The world is full of such fellows.

I take it that Joe came to the turning point of life as the result of a conversation he overheard between Lawson and Hendrick, the big Swede, who made the strike on Loon Lake. Each had sold out for about the same amount, and they were therefore on terms of social equality. It did not matter that Lawson retained a one-fifth interest that brought him in twenty thousand a month. On the night in question he had drifted back from the gilded haunts of luxury to get, for a day or two, a whiff of the smell of a camp. And Joe was following him like a setter pup. He had even given Joe a cigar with a gold belt round its middle.

"Matter of fact," he argued, "the stuff is where you find it. In my case it was fool's luck. I sort of took a walk in the bush, and darned if I didn't sit on it for a smoke. Sort of scratched away the moss, and there it was, shouting at me. Call that prospecting?" he concluded cynically.

Hendrick had his doubts. He held that Lawson had walked that way because, being a good prospector, he "sort of heard the stuff calling to him." The ordinary man wouldn't have heard it. Sitting on the outcrop itself was another sign of the true woodsman, and as for scratching away the moss, that was nothing short of genius. There were, to common knowledge, a million other acres of moss where the scratching was just as good. Why choose that one?

"Well," grunted Lawson, "to my way of looking at it, that little runt over there who's pretending not to be listening might just as well have found it as me."

The little runt, being Joe, pricked up his ears. The admission was so extraordinary that it took his breath. Might have been him! He turned this over beneath his tongue, and forgot to listen any more. Long after the two great ones were out of sight, he was digesting a perfectly new and absorbing idea. Might have been him!

A week later Joe was in a canoe something more than a hundred miles away. His fact was still wistful, but his eyes held a new light. He had not the slightest idea where he was, but that did not matter. It was unprospected country. Also, it seemed very silent, save only for that reiterant whisper following through the wilderness: "It might have been him." Furthermore, he did not know where he was going, but that did not matter either. All he knew was that he listened with all his hesitating soul for the call which, perhaps, would lead him aright. Lawson didn't know why he sat down and scratched moss, but Joe would.

Now it is perfectly true that the wilderness chooses the time and place where it will speak. Also it uses voices that are multitudinous in quality and pitch. To those whose ears are closed by pride or greed it does not matter, for to such the real voice is never addressed; but to the others, who have interpreted something of the significance of what, for lack of a better word, we call silence, there is no moment of day or night which does not bear its own intimate interpretation. And Joe had achieved this to a certain extent, for now, and it was the very first time in his life, he had come into the woods with the lid taken off his soul—ready to be his own essential self, if only he got the chance to find out what he really was meant to be. And for one who had spent his life in the shadow of others, this was somewhat of an achievement.

It was midafternoon when he drew abreast of a low point, where the ground was flat and covered with pine needles. It did not look like good prospecting ground, and he doubted whether Lawson or Hendrick would have stopped here,

but that caused him no worry. This was Joe's concern. He made camp, still under the same mysterious influence, then went for a walk in the woods. In something less than an hour he had found what came to be known throughout the silver country as The Silver Sidewalk.

The thing was about thirty feet long, and four feet wide. Forgotten glaciers had polished it lovingly to a burnished smoothness, so that it lay like a gleaming, molten river, suddenly congealed. There was no moss to scratch here. A hundred wards before he reached it, he saw it glinting. Many a moose must have slithered over that glassy surface. One end dipped into a narrow bay, and he could follow the glint of metal as it swam down under the dark, brown water. How much more there might be, he could not tell, but he was dizzily aware that this was the most spectacular find so far made in the North. He had watched the silver bricks shipped from the refinery, but never had he seen in any one place so much silver as this. It was as though the earth had yawned, and the Almighty had plugged the hole with bullion.

Joe sat down on top of it, set his head on one side, and laid a dirty finger tip on the metal. He had no idea of how much it was worth, but reckoned dimly that it should fetch as much as the Lawson and Hendrick claims did together—and then some. That was really all he cared about. He put it at about six hundred and fifty thousand, and then, to be dead safe, made it the even seven. He cut and marked the discovery post, then made his bed of spruce brush right on top of the richest part. He finally got to sleep, but woke up every hour or so, put out a hand in the dark, scratched at the silver with a blunt nail to make sure it was still there, then dozed off with a grin. Next morning the price was still seven hundred thousand.

He stuck to that, stuck to it because he knew the Buffalo Claim was shipping stuff that ran a hundred thousand a carload, and their best ore was worth ten thousand a ton. So all through the rush that followed, when the woods around were alive with men, and strangers came to gaze with awe at The Silver Sidewalk, Joe linked his very spirit with that particular sum, and refused to be diverted. He did not touch it. Not a square inch of moss was moved by him or any one else. It lay there, seeming to be more prodigious day by day. It seemed to swell in the night. It may be that it promised so much more, that Joe perceived the promise was good enough, and let it go at that. Even when an engineer representing a noted firm offered him fifty thousand for the privilege of testing the lode, with the undertaking to buy at half a million if satisfied, Joe only shook his head and repeated the ritual of seven hundred thousand. And finally he got it.

Now it is written that fame is achieved in the silver country in two distinct ways. You may either make a big strike, or you may sell your strike for a good deal more than it is subsequently proved to be worth. In both cases your position is secure. And it happened that Joe pulled off the double trick.

Nature, being a tricky dame, takes a peculiar pleasure in doing the unexpected. She works in a secret fashion, which, as often as not, violates all the laws of geology, and confounds the predictions of mining experts. It was with some hazy consciousness of this that Lawson had stated that the stuff was where you found it. Anyway, the purchaser of The Silver Sidewalk blew the bottom out of that seductive looking mint in something less than a month. Then he drained off the lake only to find that the glimmering sheet of silver was a whited sepulcher, without depth or permanent value underneath.

It is time now to take another look at Whispering Joe. Men pointed to him as being the wisest of them all. The

fact that he had allowed no one to touch The Sidewalk till the sale was made, invested him with a profound wisdom, or shrewdness—it didn't matter which. He was followed by admiring glances, and a buzz of conversation——

"That's the feller, by heck, that found The Sidewalk, and I'm darned if he didn't sleep on it till he sold it. Used to push the brush away, and show up the real stuff. Guess he sort of felt there wasn't much underneath, for he left the stuff right there, and never put in a single shot. Then, when he sold her, the mining sharp from New York sort of lifted her right off the earth."

Joe overheard a good deal of this sort of thing, and it was unction to his soul.

Then he went down to the city, and appeared shortly, clad in fine raiment, at a hotel much frequented by the kings of the North. Those were the days when the change was left on the bar counter. Lawson was here, and Hendrick, and others of lesser fame. What brought Joe was a sudden resolve to take his place among the seats of the mighty. And it happened that he took the armchair. He got his audience, and Lawson and the others waited till he had finished.

Now if you are attired like Solomon's favorite wife, and keep your pockets stuffed with hundred-dollar bills, to the destination of which you are indifferent, you bear living evidence to the fact that it is collateral and not blue blood that makes the mare travel. When he went in to meals, there was an eloquent angle in the head waiter's neck. No one ever asked him for money. That is, no one except one person. And that was a woman.

She was at the next table for dinner, and he had been secretly admiring her dark hair and eyes. She glanced at Joe once or twice, then looked down with the faintest possible blush, whereat he lost all desire for food. The vision of Mary Geddes grew fainter. What was Mary against a vision like this. He ached to speak, but his collar felt suddenly tight. Then a fortunate thing happened. The lady discovered that she had lost her purse.

The waiter was standing beside her, and the color had rushed most gloriously to her cheeks, when Joe, with a certain choking haste, made a galvanic gesture, and the trouble ended. The waiter bowed, and disappeared. The lady, now a little pale, sent Joe a grateful glance, and motioned to the chair beside her. Joe's knees knocked together as he stepped across.

"How very, very kind of you—and how stupid of me," she said quickly. "I've never done such a thing before. What in the world must you think of me?"

Joe licked his dry lips. He wanted to say what he thought of her, but did not dare. The dark eyes rested on him for an ineffable moment.

"You must let me know your name so that I can send it to you."

"Send what?" he said thickly.

"Why, the money I owe you." This time she smiled.

"Oh, hell!" said Joe, then shrank back, appalled at his words.

She only smiled again.

"You're from the North, aren't you?"

He nodded convulsively, and glanced round to see if Lawson were anywhere near.

"I thought so. The men of the North are"—she hesitated a little—"are different."

Joe liked that.

"How are they different?" he asked.

"They are so strong and independent—not like the men in the city, who are all the same. Your kind look as though they always did just what they wanted to do."

He began to feel a little devilish.

"I guess I can afford my fancy," he hazarded. "At least, there's seven hundred thousand that says so."

The dark eyes rounded.

"What! Did you strike it as rich as that? Oh, do tell me about it. One reads these things, but it isn't the same as actually hearing them from the man himself."

Follow them to the lounge. Observe Joe lighting a dollar cigar, because, forsooth, there were none at a dollar fifty. Notice how the pair settle back into the soft cushions, remembering that this is the reward for braving the perils of the North. Do not overlook the fixed attention of that siren face. Listen to Joe as he ornaments the tale of the discovery of The Sidewalk. Catch the little gasp as that famous name comes from his lips, and the unconscious way in which her shoulder approached his own. Observe Lawson and Hendrick as, with lifted brows, they saunter past. And give due attention to the description of how the purchaser of The Sidewalk lifted her into the lake three weeks after he bought her. Then, wrap it all up in what is called "the human factor," and come to your own conclusions. Is it any wonder that the vision of Mary Geddes slid a little farther back?

"I think it's the most wonderful story I ever heard. What are you going to do now?"

He did not know how empty the question was. How could he? But she knew. If it had been whispered to Joe that he was about to make several kinds of a fool of himself, he would have flouted the thought. And it is to be remembered here, that this was the first woman who had ever paid him any attention whatever.

He swaggered back to Lawson a little later, his chest out, and a knowing expression in his narrow eyes. Lawson had been in the city for several months. That was one difference. Also, he was getting just a little tired of the story of the discovery of The Silver Sidewalk, and its subsequent evaporation. So when he saw Joe headed straight for an expensive experiment, he only grinned, and reflected that this was one of the ways in which the city broke even. Then Joe affably sank into a chair beside him.

"Women is the devil," he remarked doggishly.

"Seeing as how your acquaintance is some limited, I don't quite get you."

"Well, take that one I was talking to. She went and left all her money at home. Kind of fortunate I was sitting close by."

"It were," grunted Lawson. "What next?"

"Nothing much, but I guess I'll drop in and see her. She sort of asked me to."

"Reckon you're going to meet her husband?"

"He's dead."

"Where did you get that?"

"She told me so."

Lawson bit off the end of another cigar.

"Some folks has all the luck," he said.

The little man felt a secret glow.

"Meaning me?"

"Who else?" said the prospector. "My observations of women is like this: them as you don't want, wants you; and then as you do want, won't touch you. Think that over."

Joe made no comment. He was deep in the sudden reflection that the tide had turned—so far as concerned himself. There were days when he had done chores near Mary Geddes' cabin just for the chance of a glimpse at her white throat and smooth round arms. And Mary only put back her head and laughed at him. He had not seen her since he made the big strike, but always in the back of his head—that is up to an hour ago—he held the vision of himself laying his wealth at her feet. She could not turn that down. But now he perceived that it was only for the money that she would take him, and this stung like a wasp. Yes, women unquestion-

ably were the devil. But he was not quite ready to go to Mary yet.

"Damned if I do," he said, half aloud.

Lawson heaved himself up.

"Meaning you won't have a drink?" Joe grinned.

"No, I guess I'll go out and buy some more clothes. I want one of these here fishtail coats for after sundown. Like the one the head waiter sports."

There is a simple kind of rabbit snare, which is used very effectively, by those who know how. You take a small sapling beside a rabbit run, trim the top and bend it over, attach to it a running noose of fine copper wire, open the noose till it will just take head and shoulders, fasten it down with light stakes that just hold it, camouflage the wire with a little brush, and then go back to camp. An hour or so later, you will hear a sort of half-human scream, and, returning to your snare, will find the rabbit swaying above your head. He has pushed in his head and shoulders, dislodged the holding-down pins, and now awaits the pot.

It was something like this that happened to Whispering Joe. And it did not take much brush. The bill ran into five figures, but, as a matter of fact, made hardly a dent in seven hundred thousand dollars. The incidental return of a long dead husband, and the consequent situation, need not here be depicted. Their only importance is that they contributed definitely to what made up the little man's human factor, and he signed the check with the reflection that it meant only a fraction of an inch in the width of The Sidewalk. The thing to remember was that he had emerged from the chrysalis of the prospector, and become a man of the world. Then he bought more clothes, and made ready to go back to Mary Geddes.

The way of his going was in a special private car, usually reserved for Cobalt millionaires and the president of the line. Joe traveled alone, at the end of the train, watched over by a high-grade porter, and nourished by an expert colored cook. He lay awake at night, listening to the clicking rail joints, and picturing Mary's face when she saw him. At times he rolled over, and stared at the tangled forest. Those days were over now. When the train stopped for water, he gave a hundred-dollar bill to the section foreman's daughter. Mary would give her another when they came down the line. He had arranged to keep the private car till they had time to get married.

It was a little before noon when he was shunted on the siding, hard by the Geddes cabin. Then he saw her through the window and felt giddy.

It was several minutes before he climbed out, and walked across. Mary was mixing dough on a bench by the door, and stared hard before she recognized this affluent stranger. Joe went up, with his new worldly manner, and held out his hand.

"Here I am," he said briskly.

A sudden light gleamed in the blue eyes, then she extended a floury palm.

"Being as we're old friends, Joe, you won't mind this."

It was hardly what he had expected, but he was comforted to detect a quivering at the corners of the full, red lips. She *was* moved. He could see that. His eye dwelt on the slow curve of neck and shoulder, and the whiteness of her skin. She was looking at him curiously.

"It's the same Joe that found The Silver Sidewalk," she said slowly. "I haven't seen you since that. Is it your private car that stands beyond?"

"It is," he assured her.

"Faith, then this is the first time I've ever spoken to a man that got out of one of them things. What is it like to be traveling alone, as though you owned the road?"

"Rotten," he said hastily, "but it's great for two."

She sent him a swift glance.

"And how does it feel to be able to point to anything that meets your eye, and say, 'send that along to my place'—and know it will come?"

"Rotten," he replied, "when it's only one that's saying it."

"Then you're the same old Joe, and you haven't changed a bit." She shot this out with her eyes fixed on the mixing pan.

"Nary a bit."

Then a thought struck him, and he added:

"I've seen life, of course, since I was down in the city. Now I've come back for you."

She bent low, so that her face was hidden.

"You've come back, with that car over there, for me?"

His chest expanded visibly.

"Yes. Come along and get married, then buy anything you want. And the more you buy, the better I'll like it. There's nothing you can't have."

She seemed strangely unimpressed.

"Speaking of seeing life"—she said after a little pause, "what might you be meaning by that?"

Joe pushed out his lips.

"'Tis nothing at all, and you were in the back of my head all the time."

"Because, faith, there was no room in the front of it."

She paused again, and glanced down the construction road that led off through the bush.

"Were you after having a bit of trouble with the woman's husband?" she asked swiftly.

The little man swayed where he stood.

"Who—who has been talking to you?"

"Bill Lawson happened along this way last week, and dropped a word or two about the swath you were cutting down city way. And yet you say you're the same old Joe. 'Deed and I wonder you weren't half kilt."

He drew himself up.

"Bill Lawson is talking through his hat. 'Twas nothing but a bit of foolishness. And now I've come back for you."

She looked straight in his face.

"You're meaning that?"

"I always meant it."

Mary took a long breath.

"So you think," she said with a lift in her voice, "that I'm to be had like that. Well, it's myself that's telling you you're in for trouble with another woman's husband."

"Whose?"

"Mine. I married Jim Henessey a fortnight past—him that drives team for the Buffalo Mine, and it's him that will be coming down the road any minute, for 'tis past dinner time. And why a fistful of bills should make you think I'd marry you, beats me altogether. And even if I hadn't hitched up with Jim, I wouldn't touch you with a ten-foot pole, for you're the same old Joe, and it's a man I was after, and not a bunch of money in store clothes."

## AN ITEM THAT MAY HAVE SKIPPED YOUR NOTICE

DID you read that Lincoln's former office boy, Eppenetus W. McIntosh, recently died, at the age of eighty-three? When the Civil War president was a young lawyer in Springfield, Illinois, Eppenetus worked for him. When the boy was seven years old, Mr. Lincoln gave him a drum, which later accompanied Eppenetus through the war, when he served as a drummer boy. The drum is now in the National Museum, at Washington.

# A Litany of the Meridian

*By*

**Berton Braley**

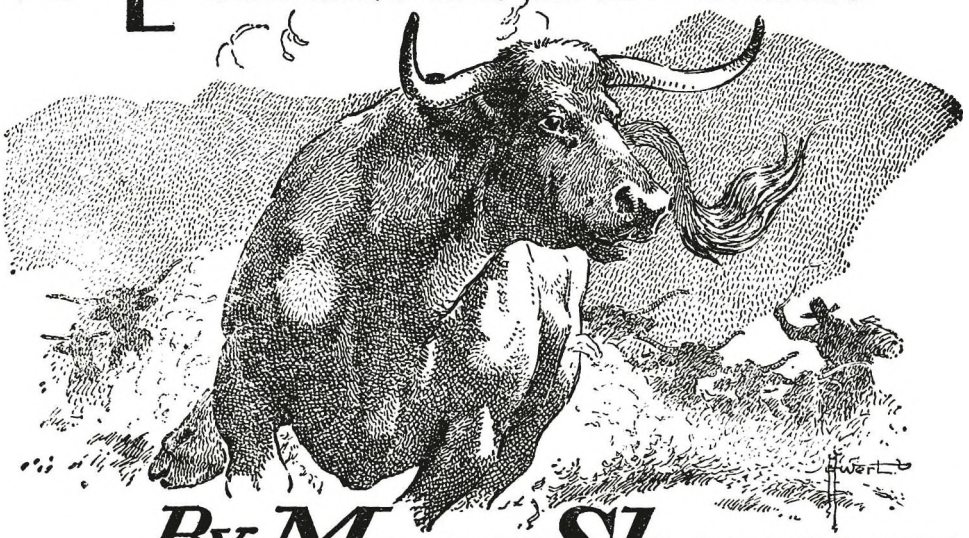
NOW that I'm forty-five,
I pray thee, Lord, to keep
Youth in my heart alive,
Though age upon me creep.
Let youth's illusions still
With rapture quiver me.
From losing every thrill,
Good Lord, deliver me!

From growing dull and fat,
And smug and satisfied,
From stiff convictions that
Cannot be turned aside,
From letting all things new
Scare, shock and shiver me,
From "sober points of view,"
Good Lord, deliver me!

From talk of "good old days;"
From looking all askance
At younger people's ways
Of folly and romance;
From letting Fortune's frown
Dismay or flivver me;
From *ever* "settling down,"
Good Lord, deliver me!

From quoting ancient saws,
With neither sense nor wit;
From holding Custom's laws
As more than holy writ;
Till I by death am paged,
And clods shall "kiver" me,
From *acting* middle-aged,
Good Lord, deliver me!

# Spanish Horns



## By Mary Shannon

*Author of "The Golden Badge of Chivalry," "Beak of Top Range," Etc.*

**Dominant majesty in every line of him, the great bull, stalking before the herd, perhaps reserved in his brute brain the idea of that splendid coup that was to restore him to the wild, free life he had been forced to leave.**

ALL night Sharkey and his men had circled the wild herd, singing in rude harmony as they rode. All night, from amidst the shadowy horns, deep rumblings had warned them that the bull still chafed against captivity. When far across the deep, velvet void a rosy flame blossomed out and settled into a glow, and the lines of the high range stood up in the bluish light of dawn, a stir of definite action passed among men and herd.

The east reddened, the swift fiery dawn of the north. It rayed across the lone grazing hills and flamed to a horned pageantry of color the uneasy milling cattle. The bull's black coat, with its tawny line of back and head and its ivory gleam of Spanish horns, was struck to darkling velvet.

Sharkey rode up so as to face the bull, which stood like a monarch in the center of his herd. Now, now would come the tug! In all his wild, free life the bull had never left these high ranges. Well, he would go this time, Sharkey swore, with set jaws. As though he divined the man's thought, the bull lowered his head and snorted defiance. The crew paused, staring, for an indescribable moment.

Perhaps it was the flare of crimson dawn that struck the bull's eyes like the challenge of a red flag. His nostrils spouted rage, his great horns charged through the herd toward Sharkey. It

was a magnificent dash. Only the agility of his horse saved the man. Even then the swift side leap caught the graze of a sharp horn on lean flanks. Before the prick of goad sticks, the sting of the lash, the bull drove back to the herd. He licked the cut on his nostrils and stood still, his eyes rolling redly for some way of escape. Always, always that man, just beyond the menace of his horns!

Sharkey wiped the perspiration from his thick, swarthy face and cursed the bull.

"I'd shoot the brute right now, if it wasn't for the big price they're offering for beef down in Circle Camp!" he avowed vindictively to one of his men.

"I wouldn't shoot anything down right now," advised the man. "Take sixty wild range cattle like these here, just ready to run at the drop o' the hat, an' a pistol shot'd start 'em so quick! We'd never get 'em together again. After the time we've had gettin' 'em too!"

Sharkey's hard, black eyes shot a glance toward the hills.

"No sign of Rowan and his herd," he announced triumphantly.

The other laughed.

"Guess you settled him, puttin' the boys up to stampede his cattle. Dandy lot he had, too! He's got a little to learn about this country, that kid! Well, we ought to hit Circle Camp first, if nothing happens."

"We sure will," returned Sharkey. "But we've got to start right away. I'm going to swing 'em right over the range and ford 'em across the Nechaco River by dusk."

"Nechaco's pretty rough just now, isn't it?" demurred the other.

"I know. But we've got to be in Circle Camp by to-morrow, anyhow, if we're to get the cream o' prices. Only that bull! He's apt to make no end of trouble!"

"Isn't he a devil! But say, isn't he a beauty? Rollin' fat. As a herd, they're the best I've ever seen come off the range."

Sharkey's eyes lingered on the shifting sleek backs. The days of hard riding that the herd had cost faded before pleasant visions of the gold they would bring down in Circle Camp.

"Rowan sure did have a dandy bunch, too," the man was saying. "And he'd have beat us to it, all right, if they hadn't bolted. Ought to've heard him tell how he was gonna spend the wad they'd fetch. Gonna build a house on his ranch, go down country an' marry the girl right away!"

"Wife, eh?" snorted Sharkey." Country's better without wimmen! Yes, he'd have beat us to it if we hadn't started his herd."

He rode about, giving orders:

"Take turns at breakfast. We'll start right away, over the range to the Nechaco ford. Watch that bull, every one of you!"

The last injunction was not needed. Not for a single moment did the shifty-eyed crew lose sight of the gleaming horns moving majestically among the milling cattle. Above the crowding heads Sharkey caught the glare of the bull's eyes upon him. If worst came to worst he would shoot the bull down. Not if he could help it, though, with Circle Camp in the flush of its first boom, and five thousand miners clamoring for beef, beef, beef!

He was wolfishly gulping down pancakes and beans, when, over a misty ridge, rode a horseman. He reigned in his horse and stared down at the milling herd. Sharkey sipped unconcernedly at his mug of hot tea, but from the tail of his eye he knew the slim young rider for Derk Rowan. Through the crew seemed to run a stiffening for hostilities.

But Rowan, as though unconscious of numbers against him, rode straight for the camp fire, though his eyes scarcely left the bull in the center of the herd.

"How's this, Sharkey?" he demanded, his tanned young face flushed and incredulous. "That bull——"

"Yes, and what about that bull?" retorted Sharkey defiantly.

"Just this——" began Rowan, then stopped. "I suppose," he went on heatedly, "none of us has any real right to say anything. That bull belonged to the range, just as much as the rest of the unbranded herd. But he's such a peach, and he's lorded it up there so long that —well, hasn't there been a sort of an— an agreement between us all to leave him there? Not that we ever talked about it, only—hang it all, Sharkey, you know what I mean! That bull's been— we all been so proud o' him. What you going to do with him, anyhow?"

"Just what you aimed to do with the herd you'd gathered up," sneered Sharkey. "Drive him down to Circle Camp and clean up a wad with the top prices they're offering for beef."

Derk Rowan's face whitened to the fringe of his rusty hair.

"Sharkey," he protested, in a tone of outrage, "you're not going to drive him down there to be killed for common beef!"

"Not common beef!" laughed Sharkey coarsely. "He's in great order. Look at him! A fine pile of dust he'll bring! Don't you wisht you'd rounded him up yourself, Rowan?"

Derk Rowan looked at the bull standing a little apart in the still dusk of dawn. The tawny head was lifted longingly toward the far reaches of the lonely range. The beast seemed a creature of the plain, wild and aggressive and unconquerable. Suddenly he flung his voice into the solitude, with all the longing and loneliness of his wild heart. Again and again it rolled and trembled among the hills. It seemed as though the very echoes were calling him back to the range.

The tightness in Rowan's throat sharpened to protesting pain. His eyes went from the bull to Sharkey in swift challenge.

"Don't you see? He—he sort of belongs to the hills—the country," he protesed, choked by his earnestness.

"Don't belong there any more'n the rest o' the unbranded bunch," retorted Sharkey brazenly.

Undaunted, Rowan met his eyes squarely. He leaned forward, flushed with the youthful ardor of his last appeal.

"Sharkey, I know it's a long time since that Englishman went away and left his blooded stock to run out on the range. There was a kind of an agreement among the ranchers to look after them till he'd get back. But when he didn't come and they got mixed with the wild cattle, you couldn't tell 'em then. But when this bull was only a calf, everybody picked him for a real shoot of the old stock. And especially, after the way he held his own through that winter when the wolves took so many of the young stock, we've—we've kinda agreed——"

"Just here let me tell you that I'm mindin' my own business an' other folks better do the same," interrupted Sharkey, an edge on his voice. "Where's your own herd?" he demanded tauntingly.

Rowan winced. His face seemed suddenly old, old with the bitterness of regret, of baffled dreams.

"Something started them. Most of them got away on me in the night," he returned heavily. "Well, I've got to go and look them up."

"You'd better," jeered Sharkey, "if you're to get down in time to pull in that wad."

The men gathered about laughed coarsely. Rowan rode away, his young shoulders defiantly set, yet with that air upon him of useless protest, of futility against overwhelming odds. Sharkey finished his meal, then rode about and spoke curtly to his men:

"Believe there's some one signaling to Rowan. Shouldn't wonder but they've got some o' the cattle again. Hustle round now! We've got to hit the trail!"

He rode ahead into the stretch of range that led west to the Nechaco ford. Behind, by concerted force of cattle calls and beating quirts, the drivers tried to urge the herd into the drive. But the bull gave no heed. With the fierceness of a barbarian king making his last stand, he lowered his horns and bellowed a challenge to his foes. Deep throated, it echoed and trembled among the hills. A rumbling of throats ran the length of the herd, an ominous threat of mutiny. The men closed in, yelling, cutting fiercely with their sharp quirts, until, like a thing of fury suddenly let loose, the drive started forward across the range. In the center of the herd the bull swung, the moving, the dominant force. Though driven, he took all with him. From him emanated the pace, the power that thrilled the seasoned drivers to alert fearfulness. His least caprice might scatter and ruin the drive.

Crest on crest of hill lowered and lifted and stretched into long slopes under trampling hoofs. There was a tense, almost ominous, quiet about the drive. Thought seemed to translate itself into action without sound. And that one thought was to keep the drive, the bull, moving toward the west, toward the Nechaco River and Circle Camp. The Nechaco! Every man's thought stumbled a little at memory of its angry current.

Riding in the lead, Sharkey was intensely conscious of that driving force behind him. Something like the brute warning of a pursuing enemy pricked between his shoulders, drew his backward glance again and again. Each time he turned back reassured, and swore exultantly, and rioted his senses in a dream of the days he would spend at Circle Camp. For in a sort of steady haste, as though he hoped each step would carry him beyond his captors, the bull was swinging ahead, carrying in his stride the uncertain rangy herd.

It was a day to make a man sing. Spring waved, full bloomed, over the land. The still air bathed them, pure as water and strong as wine. Lakes glistened, a wrinkle of flashing silver in the morning breeze, and overhead great clouds of wild fowls went winging into space.

From time to time Sharkey searched the range receding behind them, but he saw no signs of Rowan's herd. Luck! Luck was certainly with them to-day!

As the range narrowed between timbered hills, the bull's horns began to swing from side to side impatiently. The drive grew more difficult, the drivers redoubled their watchfulness. Sharkey felt the perspiration start out afresh on his face. If the cattle should stampede now, get away into the timber! He signaled directions to his men and kept the lead.

And again he exulted. The cattle steadied to the drive, the bull stalking along, his rolling eyes on the stretch of range ahead. Sixty head of cattle, and so far not one had been lost! They would bring—ah, who could tell just what they would bring, with the booming gold camp fairly desperate for beef? And they would be first on the ground if they kept up this pace. Capturing that bull was a winner of an idea. It was he who was pushing the drive along. Nothing like letting him think he was having his own way.

Sharkey's dream of gain was rudely broken. Without a hint of warning, the bull charged and broke for the hills. Instantly the drive was in confusion. The cattle dashed with the leader, crowded into a snorting wedge of clashing horns. Hot with rage, Sharkey spurred his horse to head off the stampede. The range rocked to the thud-

ding hoofs, and in the lead the great Spanish horns flashed in the sun. The thick, young spruce leaped nearer, and their damp pungency struck Sharkey's quivering nostrils like a wave.

He dug his spurs into his horse and dashed daringly around the front flank of the herd. His men crowded close behind him. The drive swerved in a ragged half circle and dashed back across the range. But faster dashed the panting horses. The hills rang with cowboy calls, the snapping of quirts, the snorts of cattle. And Sharkey, with eyes upon the Spanish horns, drove his horse in a spurt of speed that again swung the maddened herd from the timbered hills. The drive wavered, broke in threats of panic here and there. But the men closed in and again the jostling horns were turned to the west.

Once more in the lead, Sharkey wiped the perspiration from his face and swore at the loss of several head. Mostly he cursed the bull and the delay he had caused. If luck should change now—— He would be glad when the drive was over. At every step he felt that dominant force pitted against him.

Morning waned, and the noon sun slipped behind a cloud. Anxiously, Sharkey studied the sky. He dreaded any change. A storm of any kind would be an added difficulty. But the white clouds, ballooning above the horizon, did not seem to portend immediate change.

The narrow range went sidling along the flanks of a hill. The tension of the drive tightened. Again the ivory half circle of the bull's horns, reared above the others, held the watchful eyes of the men. Free, wild life, scurrying into the timber, sent the herd into spurts of panic. Once a band of caribou flashing past with a string of coyotes in full chase, threatened another break. But again the bull settled to his angry swinging gait, and Sharkey rode on reassured. If they could keep up this pace they would reach the river by dusk, and then the cattle would be tired enough to cause no trouble in crossing.

Luck! He marveled at his luck! Everything was turning out exactly as he had planned it—the capture of the bull and his herd, the stampeding of Derk Rowan's band, the swift leadership of the bull which he had turned to such good account. Even the occasional cloudiness of the sky was in his favor. They would be in Circle Camp to-night.

But an unseen obstacle seemed to bar his way with its threat of disaster. The river. The Nechaco River! It was high now, full and swift with the spring floods. There had been rumors of pack trains having been lost.

He flung off his momentary doubt and swung his hard-muscled arm defiantly. A cool head, steady nerves, and the cattle could be forded easily. The wave of success he was riding seemed big enough to carry him over all obstacles. If he could be in Circle Camp first! He must! He must! He turned instinctively and searched the back range. Those moving dots back there! They might be only a band of deer or caribou! But they might be Derk Rowan's herd!

The range widened to the crest of a hill. Far below, in the shadow of a curving valley, a trodden pack trail showed like a black thread. Sharkey's glance ran its visible length, even while he was acutely consicous of the very temper of the drive behind him. Those occasional black dots, or clusters of black dots, moving along! Miners, pack trains, headed for Circle Camp where things were on the boom! His sense of urgency quickened, his evil brain surged with schemes. He was an adept in all the crooked devices for wresting from miners their hard-earned gold. With the money he would get for the cattle he would start up in business.

Evening came on and the crew began to watch the sky uneasily. At times they drove a mile with the world all in safe shadow; again a flash of sunshine struck the range to dazzling gold. Suddenly, with an oath of dismay, Sharkey drew rein and signaled to the drivers. At the foot of the ridge they were rounding, through a break in the fringing pines, gleamed the turbulence of the wild Nechaco. It was high. It certainly was high! The first check to his triumphant drive!

"Think we kin make it?" asked one of the men, riding up.

Sharkey pointed across the river to the clouded western sky, where rifts of silver threatened a burst of sunshine.

"Swim 'em now, an' the sun apt to get in their eyes?" he demanded. "Sunset's the very worst time——"

"I know, but don't see how were going to hold 'em here. That bull——"

"Damned brute!" muttered Sharkey. "It's him that's pushed us on so fast. Didn't count on gettin' here till after sundown."

The driver wiped his face with the back of his hand.

"He sure kin travel! The rest might be all right. Still, that devil kin start 'em to do anything. Look out!" he yelled to one of the men.

The big bull had made a sudden dash that threatened the entire herd.

"Well, what are we going to do?" demanded the man as he rode back after the cattle had quieted. "They won't stand here long unless we get 'em started to feed."

"Look there!" broke in Sharkey, pointing to the river.

In tense silence they watched a pack train of horses cross the river that lay now in shadow softened to a faint, copper glow.

"Don't believe there'd be much trouble even of the sun did come out," argued Sharkey.

The man shook his head, then dashed away to round up a straying steer.

"Mebbe we'd best drive 'em back a little till after sundown," he suggested, as he again joined Sharkey.

"Drive 'em back!" scoffed Sharkey. "I'd as lief lose 'em in the river as let 'em go back to the range. And if I can't get 'em to Circle Camp right away, they're no good to me. Beef'll be rushin' in. The price'll be down tomorrow. Rowan's likely right behind us. It's now or never! Come on! We'll chance it!"

Again he rode ahead. The last ascent was made in silence. Only the hoofs beating upon the broken rock that led to the ford. But at the river's brink Sharkey wavered, appalled at the force of the current. Swift it was, overwhelming in its terrific beauty! A faint, copper glow glinted and danced on its yeasty surface. But behind him cattle snorted, horns clicked and clashed. That brute crowding, pushing! He seemed to feel the bull's hot breath against the back of his neck. With a surge of driving terror he plunged his horse into the river!

He could feel that the drive wavered, but the whistling quirts, the yelling, cursing men triumphed, and the herd crowded into the water. Borne along in the rush, the bull snorted and plunged as the icy waters rose about him. Then, suddenly and magnificently strong, he crashed into the current. It boiled whitely about him. The vigor of his infuriated strokes drove him steadily ahead until his great horns were leading the way for all the rest.

With beating temples and starting eyes, Sharkey turned his head cautiously. He could see only eyes, horns, distended nostrils, struggling in a trouble of foam. Water dashed, flung in starry showers about them. He heard distressed breathings, throat sounds, as the race of the current pulled and sucked at the struggling cattle,

bore them in a downward curve as they followed the leader across the river. But the bull was leading the way, steadily, triumphantly. A grudging admiration thrilled Sharkey, admiration that swelled to swaggering exultation. Great how everything was coming his way! Already they were almost halfway across. They would make it easily!

He stiffened, his muscles sprung to attention. Suddenly the river, the swimming cattle seemed to leap higher, to swell to blinding proportions, to be lost in a glare of fire. He knew! The rays of light flung straight from the setting sun, struck the water in a dazzling whirl of fire, seared the eyes like flames.

The bull stopped as though he had been struck. The drive wavered in a spurt of panic. Horned heads milled helplessly in a lake of fire that dazed and blinded their startled eyes. Already there was plunging and clashing and crowding!

Sharkey shouted into the bedlam.

"Keep 'em movin'! Keep 'em movin'! Can't you see?"

The drivers stiffened to instant attention. With one impulse they tried to keep the cattle moving across. They yelled, swung their quirts, tried to force forward the panic-stricken mass. Sharkey plunged about, every nerve strained to desperation. In a spasm of rage he struck at the bull. The tawny head shrank from the stinging blows, swung about. His huge horns clashed with the horns of a steer, drove a way into the swimming, struggling mass. Horned heads turned to follow him, clashed, crowded. There seemed to be a deadlock of horns!

Sharkey swore and shouted. But all were swimming in confusion. In helpless rage he saw the terrified cattle crowding one upon the others' backs, heard the bellows of throaty distress, the snorts of fear that sent showers of cold spray into the air. Here and there rose a choking death bawl where some hapless steer had gone down under the milling bodies.

The river frothed redly about the mighty struggle. And from afar off the sun poured its terror of death upon them, glinting and glancing upon the swiftly flowing river that flung and tossed like bits of driftwood the maddened, panting cattle.

A prick of warning pierced Sharkey's confusion. Surely, steadily the sweep of the current was bearing them down the river, a living, drifting island in distress. Was he to lose the whole herd? He knew he had already lost heavily. But he could see, below, a narrow bend of the river where the water rushed, a perfect mill race. His courage woke to a desperate hope, and he drove his horse toward the shore, hoping that the cattle might follow.

He turned, dread frozen to a terrible certainly. From the struggling mass horns drifted, swept down on the icy current. He had a maddening vision of the great bull floundering mightily, of the white curve of his horns against the far bank. He saw, too, that his men were making for shore. Even as he cursed their cowardliness, a sudden fear closed about his heart. The icy water was cramping his muscles!

He had a hideous, baffling, terror-stricken moment. Fear had him now, fear of the sucking current, of the merciless river, fear of the one enemy he bowed to—death! Death! He drove his horse toward the bank, a prayer in his throat, the ice of the water creeping, creeping. He heard the clash of stones beneath his horse's hoofs, the reins slipped from his nerveless hands, he flung himself upon the bank, numb with cold.

When he opened his eyes the river ran in streaks of flame, darkened by bobbing spots. In a sort of groping rage he saw the bull rising out of the flames, crashing through the shallows

to the opposite bank. He had a dim sense that the bull had risen from the dead. His vision cleared and a protest of rage gathered to blinding hate. The bull reared hugely, horns erect, and blew from his nostrils spurts of angry spume. The water sprayed from his black coat, glistened on his tawny head and ivory horns.

Sharkey struggled to his feet. Across the foaming river man and bull faced each other a long moment. Then the bull's head lowered, he snorted rage, he bellowed a thunderous challenge that rolled and echoed among the hills. The great horns swung, he went crashing into the spruce.

Rage foamed in Sharkey like unbridled waters. He cursed his crew, he cursed the river, he cursed the bull! He could see his men drawing together in shivering knots. He climbed upon his horse and took the trail to Circle Camp. There was still O'Hagan's Saloon and a glass of brandy to warm him.

The northern dawn silvered the hills next morning when Derk Rowan drove his sleek herd down over the trodden pass to the ford. The river flowed swiftly, steadily, as though no storm of death had furrowed and darkened its surface. The crossing was made almost in silence, and the cattle emerged dripping and panting on the bank. Derk relaxed in his saddle. It would take but a few minutes to rest both horses and herd.

He started suddenly out of his bitter dream. The still dawn trembled to a deep-throated challenge. The very echoes rolled and called to him! His glance leaped to the hills in startled searching. High up on a rounded knoll the mist lifted upon a great, dusky bull, behind him the lean remnant of his herd. Again his great voice flung itself into the solitude. He was calling—calling to his nomads of the range.

Rowan stared a bewildered moment, then he flung up his hat with a cheer that woke the far reaches like the ringing peal of bells. But high up on the lonely hill, black in the pearl-gray dawn, the bull stood, remote, magnificent, his great horns pointed against the world again. He was lord of the range once more.

## MORE LIKE THE REAL THING

DID you ever, at a play dealing with historical characters and scenes, get good and tired of the stilted, archaic language the actors used? We would be willing to bet good money that you have, and we *know* that we have.

Well, praise be to Allah, it looks as though that sort of thing were on the wane. Not that historical plays are no longer being written. They are, and we hope that they will continue to be. But they are being written in the living, vivid vernacular of to-day. The characters use the language of the twentieth century. They even use a little slang, when that is the appropriate thing. People used slang many hundreds of years ago, you may be sure. But the slang they used would not be recognizable as such to us. So the best of the modern playwrights let their characters use modern slang.

The first time you see such a play (or read such a book, for that matter) you are likely to think the effect rather ridiculous. But that very quickly wears off and the people are much more real to you than they could ever be "theeing" and "thouing" their way about the stage. They are much more likely to strike you as real human beings. You are much more likely to get a glimmer of understanding of their souls, to share their joys, their sorrows. And that is what plays are for.

# A Chat With You

IT is a saying that the luxuries of yesterday are the necessities of to-day. We may go further than this and say that a lot of things regarded as necessary and desirable to-day were rather feared by our forefathers.

It was a common reproach to the pioneers of aviation that the Deity did not intend men to fly, or He would have provided them with wings. Similarly, one might argue that man should go unclothed because he was born naked, or that he should eat with fingers because Nature had not provided him with forks.

King Canute was regarded as highly impious because he commanded the tide to go back. Some day the tides will be harnessed to work, not for kings, but to light and heat the houses of common people. Ajax defied the lightning and was punished for it. Doctor Franklin put the lightning to work and was rewarded.

* * * *

PERHAPS the most unreasonable of all prejudices was that felt against the use of anæsthesia—meaning the obliteration of pain—in surgical operations. The unreasoning opposition to the innovation came not only from untutored men. Physicians and surgeons, highly trained, educated members of a great profession with a great tradition, were just as loud in their declaration that God had intended men and women to suffer, and that it was impiety to ameliorate that suffering save in the actual cure of a disease.

Before the use of chloroform or ether, if a man were to have a leg cut off, he must stand it with all his senses alive, and nine times out of ten he must die, for the nervous shock from pain is more than half the danger from any major operation. If a man had peritonitis or appendicitis or gall stones, he must surely die, for without anæsthesia modern surgery would be inconceivable. And yet there were doctors of good repute who opposed it, just as there were those who opposed antisepsis just as intemperately.

* * * *

ANÆSTHETICS, things that put one to sleep so that the sudden shock of pain is mercifully withheld, cover a wider range than was once thought possible.

It seems that plants and trees have nervous systems. Every one who is at all fond of trees knows that young trees may be transplanted with comparative safety because they can be removed and replaced without bruising the roots.

The big tree, the fine old oak or beech, is much more closely anchored to his place in the soil. Break any of his roots when he is transplanted, and he will sicken and die. Up to lately the only way to transplant a big tree was to remove bodily a great ball of earth containing within its circumference all the wide-spreading roots. This was always risky and expensive and often impossible. The old theory was that breaking or injuring a root interfered with the nourishment of the tree, so that when it was transplanted, it starved to death.

Now we are told that this is not the case. The new idea is that the tree has a nervous system, that when its roots are attacked, it feels what corresponds to pain and the shock of pain in men and animals, and that is what kills it.

So they tried anæsthetizing the ground for a considerable distance around a tree, so that the tree went to sleep for a while. And then the tree doctors went to work and the operation was performed. And when the tree woke up afterward, in its new home, it ached a little in some of its roots, but its sap was running well, and so it escaped all the shock of the operation.

* * * *

THERE are other shocks and buffets in life that hurt the nerves just as much as physical pain.

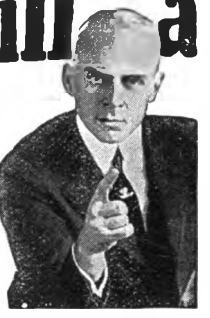
Over-hard work, worry, disappointment, the loss of friends, the thousand shocks and vicissitudes of life, hurt like physical pain and often sicken and incapacitate. Some escape from the pain in drink and dissipation. But here the remedy is worse than the disease, and sets up a vicious circle that is sometimes unbreakable save by violence. Crime and suicide are often the results of unwise efforts to escape from the hurts of life.

To get your mind off yourself is to stop worrying. Good fiction is a bracer and a tonic. It is also an anæsthetic to the mind, and the only safe one.

# Electrical Experts are in Big Demand!

—L. L. Cooke

# I Will Train You at Home to fill a Big-Pay Job!



**L. L. COOKE**
**Chief Engineer**

It's a shame for you to earn $15 or $20 or $30 a week, when in the same six days as an Electrical Expert you could make $70 to $200—and do it easier—not work half so hard. Why then remain in the small-pay game, in a line of work that offers no chance, no big promotion, no big income? Fit yourself for a real job in the great electrical industry. I'll show you how.

## Look What These Cooke Trained Men are Earning

**Makes $700 in 24 Days in Radio**

"Thanks to your interesting Course I made over $700 in 24 days in Radio. Of course, this is a little above the average but I run from $10 to $40 clear profit every day; you can see what your training has done for me."
FRED G. McNABB,
848 Spring St., Atlanta, Ga.

**$70 to $80 a Week for Jacquot**

"Now I am specializing in auto electricity and battery work and make from $70 to $80 a week and am just getting started. I don't believe there is another school in the world like yours. Your lessons are a real joy to study."
ROBERT JACQUOT,
2005 W. Colorado Ave.,
Colorado Springs, Colo.

**$20 a Day for Schreck**

"Use my name as a reference and depend on me as a booster. The biggest thing I ever did was answer your advertisement. I am averaging better than $500 a month from my own business now. I used to make $18 a week."
A. SCHRECK,
Phoenix, Ariz.

**Plant Engineer — Pay Raised 150%**

"I was a dumbbell in electricity until I got in touch with you Mr. Cooke, but now I have charge of a big plant including 600 motors and direct a force of 34 men—electricians, helpers, etc. My salary has gone up more than 150%."
GEORGE ILLINGWORTH,
63 Calumet Road,
Holyoke, Mass.

# Be an Electrical Expert

## Learn to Earn $3,500 to $10,000 a Year

Today even the ordinary Electrician—the "screw driver" kind—is making money—big money. But it's the trained man—the man who knows the whys and wherefores of Electricity—who is picked out to "boss" the ordinary Electricians to boss the Big Jobs—the jobs that pay $3,500 to $10,000 a Year. Get in line for one of these "Big Jobs." Start by enrolling now for my easily learned, quickly grasped, right-up-to-the-minute, Spare-Time Home-Study Course in Practical Electricity.

### Age or Lack of Experience No Drawback

You don't have to be a College Man; you don't have to be a High School Graduate. As Chief Engineer of the Chicago Engineering Works, I know exactly the kind of training you need and I will give you that training. My Course in Electricity is simple, thorough and complete and offers every man, regardless of age, education or previous experience, the chance to get in this work which pays thousands of other Cooke trained men $3,500 to $10,000 a year.

### No Extra Charge for Electrical Working Outfit

With me, you do practical work—at home. You start right in after your first few lessons to work at your profession in the regular way and make extra money in your spare time. For this you need tools, and I give them to you—5 big complete working outfits, with tools, measuring instruments and a real electric motor.

### Satisfaction or Money Back

So sure am I that after studying with me you, too, can get into the "big money" class in Electrical work, that I will agree in writing to return every single penny paid me in tuition, if, when you have finished my Course, you are not satisfied it was the best investment you ever made. And back of me stands the Chicago Engineering Works, Inc., a two million dollar institution.

### Get Started Now—Mail Coupon

I want to send you my Electrical Book and Proof, both Free. These cost you nothing and you'll enjoy them. Make the start today for a bright future in Electricity. Send in Coupon NOW.

**L. L. Cooke, Chief Engineer**

**L. L. Cooke School of Electricity**

owned and operated by

**Chicago Engineering Works**


L. L. COOKE,
Dept. 73
2150 Lawrence Ave.,
Chicago

Send me at once without obligation your big illustrated book and complete details of your Home Study Course in Electricity, including your outfit and employment service offers.

Name .....

Address .....

Occupation .....

MAIL COUPON FOR MY FREE BOOK

**5 big outfits given to you — no extra charge**


*The "Cooke" Trained Man is the Big Pay Man*