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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

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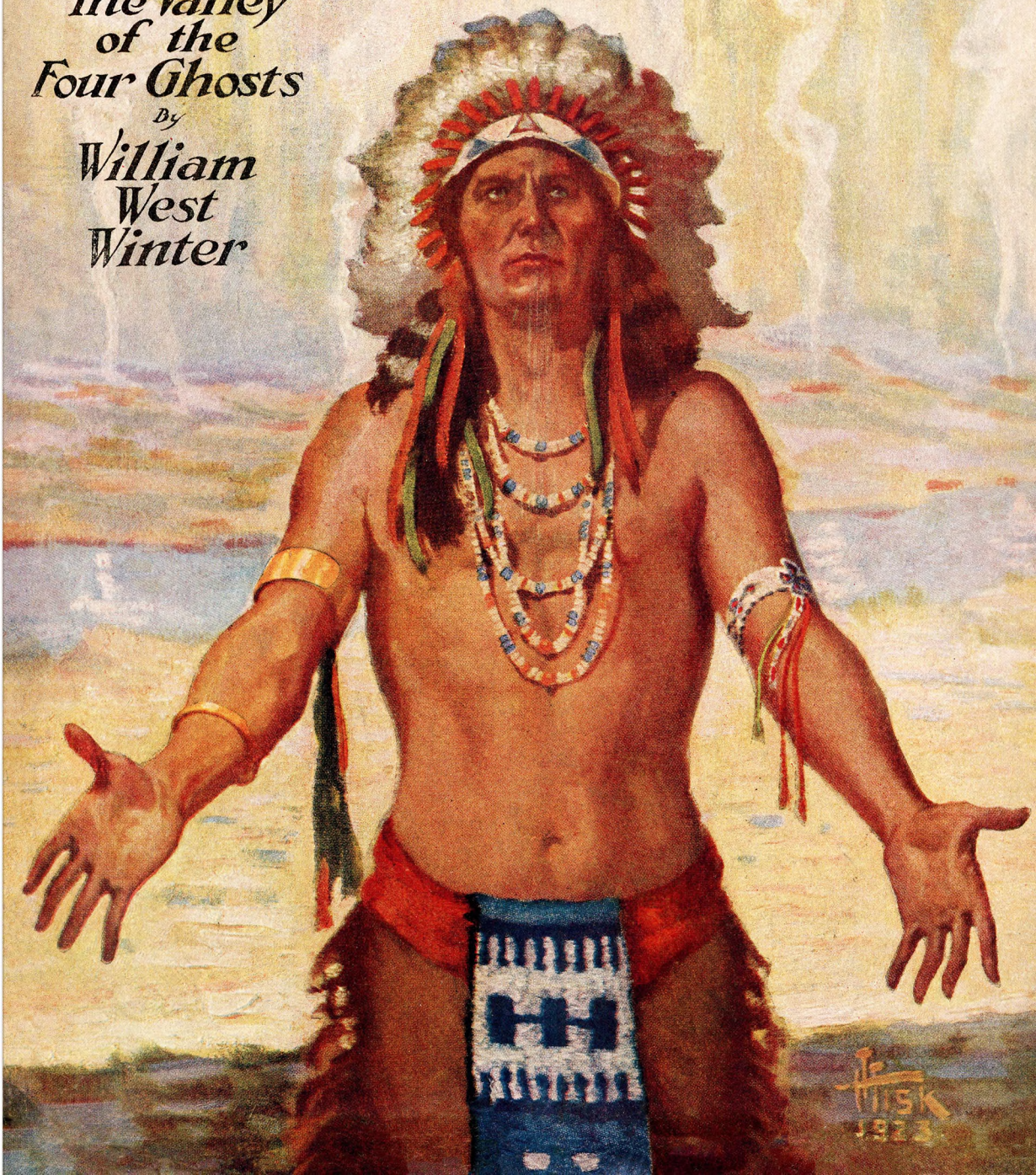
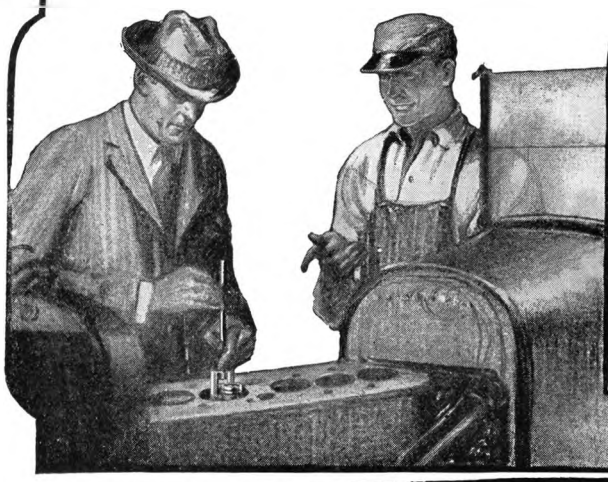
By

William West Winter





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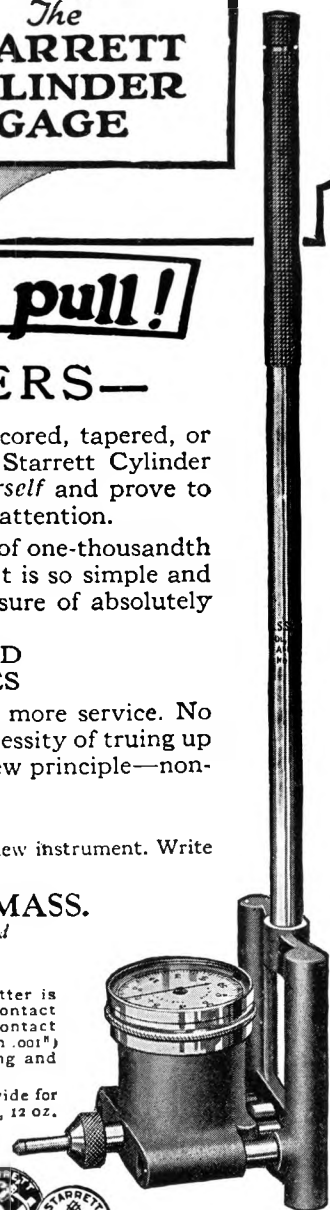

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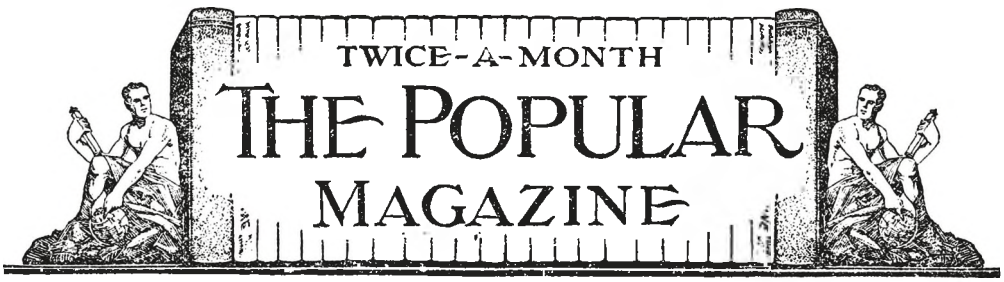

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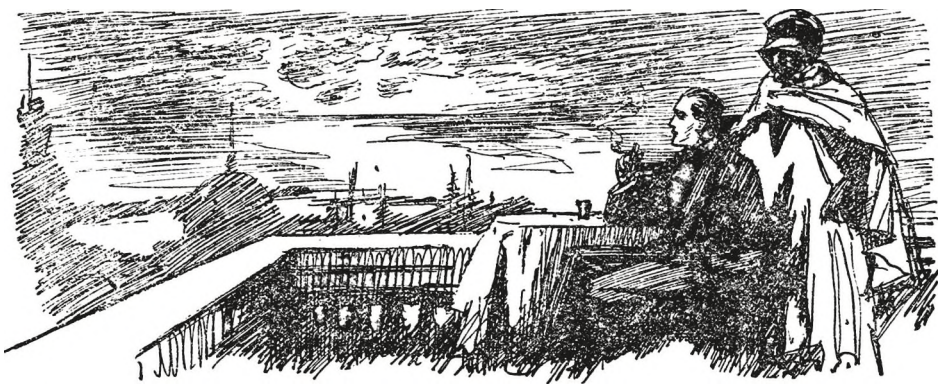


The Storm Center

By Burton E. Stevenson

Author of "The Buhl Cabinet," "The Fate of Mona Lisa," Etc

Here is the opening installment of a rarely fine adventure tale. In "The Storm Center" Mr. Stevenson has surpassed the best of his earlier work. It is a story that will catch your interest at the first paragraph and never relax its grip until the end. It will take you to France and to Africa and show you those countries more vividly, perhaps, than if you were to see them with your own eyes. You will find atmosphere on every page, atmosphere that will haunt you for hours after you have laid the magazine aside and gone about the routine of your daily business. It will make the real world you dwell in seem unreal, and the only reality the world in which the author has laid his tale of adventure, heroism, and love. A story that can do this is a great story.—THE EDITOR.

(A Five-Part Story—Part I.)

CHAPTER I.

THE MARSEILLES EXPRESS.

O'NEILL had counted upon arriving at the station with at least twenty minutes to spare, but his taxi driver, in clipping a corner after the light-hearted Paris fashion, had not taken sufficiently into account the slippery condition of the asphalt, the car had skidded violently, and the right rear wheel had crashed to pieces against the curb. By the time another taxi had been secured, his luggage transferred, and his erstwhile driver solaced to some extent he was uncomfortably conscious that he would be lucky to catch his train at all.

However, the shouted promise of a five-franc tip caused his new driver to open his throttle wide and to careen like a Juggernaut along the quays, escaping a dozen smashes by an unbelievable series of miracles and whirling up the long approach to the Gare de Lyon four minutes

ahead of train time. One of these was consumed in paying the driver and getting a porter, two at the ticket window where the slowest wits in France seem always to be stationed, and a few seconds more in getting past the gate and vaulting down the stairs to the platform.

There he found his porter awaiting him and staring gloomily at the long train.

"There are no places, monsieur," said the porter, with a shrug of helplessness.

Indeed that was evident at a glance. Not only were the seats occupied but the corridors were crowded with angry people glowering out at the platform.

"But I can't stand all the way to Marseilles," O'Neill protested.

"Pardon, monsieur," said a voice at his elbow. "Monsieur is going to Marseilles?"

O'Neill turned to find himself looking into a vivid Gallic face, outlined by a crisp black beard—a face with that strong suggestion of Jewish or of Oriental blood which so many French faces have and which sometimes makes them curiously attractive.

"Yes, monsieur," O'Neill answered.

"Then I can perhaps be of some service," said the stranger. "I had expected to take this train but at the last moment have had to change my plans. I have a place, if monsieur cares for it," and he held up a little reservation ticket.

"Care for it!" cried O'Neill. "I should say I do!"

"Take it, then," said the other and thrust it into his hand. "Only do not let the conductor suspect you are not the original purchaser, or he will not honor it. No, no—it is nothing!" he added as O'Neill thrust his hand into his pocket. "Hasten or you will miss the train!" and he raised his hat and turned away.

Already the guards were hurrying along slamming shut the doors of the carriages.

"Hasten, monsieur," said the porter, who had listened to all this. "There is the conductor," and he nodded toward a little fat man in uniform standing at the door of the nearest carriage.

O'Neill was at his side in two steps.

"Where is my place, monsieur?" he asked and held out the check.

The conductor seized it, looked at it, then glanced at O'Neill sharply.

"You are Monsieur Delage?" he demanded in a voice which seemed to O'Neill unnecessarily loud.

"But certainly!" O'Neill assured him. He had the impression that some one behind him had drawn nearer but he did not look around.

However, the conductor made no difficulties.

"The place is in this carriage, monsieur," he said quite amiably and checked off the number on the diagram he held in his hand. "Thirteen!" he added to the porter.

O'Neill sank into his place with a sigh of relief. This was better fortune than he had any right to expect. It was the window seat facing forward, the best in the compartment, and he reflected that once again he had been right to trust to his luck. The luck of the Irish! How weary the journey would have seemed had he been forced to stand with those others out there in the corridor. They had resigned themselves to fate, those unfortunates, leaning against the windows and staring moodily out at the the racing landscape; no doubt most of them had had the same experience many times, and O'Neill marveled anew at the invincible patience of the French traveling public, which, however it may grumble, never really expects that there will be seats enough for every one. Seats are for those who have the time and forethought to make a reservation.

And at this reflection O'Neill turned and took a look at the name written across the reservation ticket on the partition behind him. Delage—yes, that was it—he must not forget it; and he wondered for a moment about the real Monsieur Delage. A handsome man—a face interesting and forceful—a man of the world—all that had been evident at a glance. It was astonishing how that glance had registered the face in one's memory. Delage—that was the name of a famous make of automobile; but a man as rich as that would have taken a compartment in the *wagon-lit*. Outrageous, the price they charged for a bed on these trains——

And with his thoughts rambling idly on in this fashion O'Neill looked about at the other occupants of the compartment. There were five of them, three on the seat facing him, two on the seat beside him. In the places next the corridor were an Englishman and his wife, middle-aged, in the traditional tourist panoply. In the middle seat opposite was a dumpy Frenchman, a

traveling man perhaps, already nodding under the soothing motion of the train. Next to the window facing O'Neill was a lean individual with a swarthy face masked by a carefully trimmed beard, who might be of any of the nationalities bordering the Mediterranean. His eyes too were closed, though O'Neill somehow had the impression that it was in meditation rather than drowsiness. His hands were clasped loosely in his lap—powerful lean hands with dark hair growing thickly across the back and down the first phalanges of the fingers.

In the seat immediately at his left, O'Neill was conscious there was a woman. He had caught the faint aroma of her presence as soon as he sat down—an aroma provocative and unusual, which a connoisseur of perfumes would have recognized as that of amber; and a hasty glance had shown him that she was veiled. He noted too that she was dressed in black—a war widow perhaps. Well, there were plenty of them in France!

He got out the copy of the *Temps* he had bought as he left his hotel, shook out its gigantic page, and devoted the last of the afternoon sunlight to glancing over its columns. Wonderful paper, the *Temps*—always referred to in the dispatches as "the semiofficial *Temps*"—serious as a British quarterly, yet with an immense and devoted circle of readers whose opinions it molded day after day. O'Neill regarded it with admiration and respect. There was nothing like it in America, where there were only newspapers. The *Temps* regarded mere news almost with contempt—crowded it into a corner of the third page, condensed it into three-line paragraphs, in order that there might be plenty of space for the long editorial articles.

O'Neill started violently, for a hand had touched him gently on the sleeve.

"Pardon, monsieur," said a low voice beside him; "but you have been so absorbed. Would it be possible to have the window open a little—a very little?"

"But certainly!" O'Neill agreed, and then he glanced at the other passengers, remembering that there is an etiquette about opening a window in a French railway carriage.

"Of course, open it!" said the Englishman explosively. "Air's positively damnable."

O'Neill looked at his swarthy vis-à-vis, but his eyes were still closed; then at the little Frenchman, who shrugged his shoulders helplessly, as one hopelessly outnumbered, and turned the collar of his overcoat up around his neck. So O'Neill rose and pulled the window down from the top four or five inches. An invigorating current of cool air swept into the compartment.

He went back to his paper, but darkness had come outside and the single little electric lamp in the ceiling of the compartment cast but an uncertain and flickering light. He gave it up at last, crushed the paper into the seat beside him, and surrendered himself to his thoughts—not pleasant ones, for what he had regarded as his career had been suddenly broken off, and this trip to Africa, hastily decided upon, was more to get away and to think things out than for any other purpose.

"Monsieur Delage?" asked a voice at the door.

For a moment the name did not penetrate to O'Neill's consciousness; then he looked up with a start to see one of the guards standing there and looking at him inquiringly.

"Monsieur Delage?" the guard repeated.

O'Neill nodded mechanically.

"A message for monsieur," said the guard, who stepped into the compartment, handed O'Neill a little envelope, touched his cap and withdrew.

O'Neill examined the envelope uncertainly. It was addressed simply, "Monsieur Delage," and in one corner was the word "Urgent," heavily underscored. He turned it over and found it sealed. For an instant he hesitated; then, conscious that the eyes of his companions were upon him, he ripped the envelope open, drew out a folded sheet of paper, and looked at it.

Yes, something was written there, but in a handwriting so minute that his eyes could not at first decipher it in the uncertain light; then he made out two short sentences, of which this is the English:

Monsieur Delage is warned to leave the train at Dijon. To persist is to die.

CHAPTER II.

"TO PERSIST IS TO DIE."

A white-jacketed steward from the dining car forced his way through the crowd in the corridor, paused at the door, and stuck in his head.

"First service!" he bawled—the call to dinner.

O'Neill, who had been staring at the note in a stupor of amazement, woke up with a start.

"One place!" he called.

"There are no more, monsieur," the steward informed him composedly, and passed on.

The woman beside him laughed softly.

"Do not alarm yourself, monsieur," she said, also in English and speaking with an accent all but imperceptible. "By good fortune I have two tickets," and she got them from her purse. "I pray that you accept one of them."

"You are very kind, madame," O'Neill answered, twisting in his seat to face her and noting that the veil, although it completely concealed her countenance, could not conceal the brightness of her eyes. "If you are sure——"

"But of course!" she protested. "I have need of only one. It is entirely by accident that I have two," she went on quickly, as though feeling that an explanation was necessary. "The steward passed through before the train started and when I asked for a place for the second service he tore off two by mistake and gave them to me. So, if the second service is not too late——"

"No," said O'Neill; "it is the best service. Nevertheless, madame, I refuse to accept one of the tickets."

She turned quickly toward him, startled at his tone.

"But why?" she asked. "I assure you that I——"

"However, I will accept them both," O'Neill continued, plucked them coolly from her fingers, and tucked them into his pocket.

For an instant her surprised gaze questioned his, then she understood.

"Very well, monsieur," she agreed, her eyes shining with amusement. "Since I do not wish you to starve."

"It astonishes me that you speak English so well," he went on.

"Why should I not?" she queried. "You speak French—and also very well."

"Now you are being polite!" he protested. "But a European needs no other language. Whereas my French—such as it is—well, I would never have learned it if I hadn't had to. You see, I needed it in my business."

"Your business?"

"Yes—the diplomatic service," O'Neill answered with dignity.

"Oh, so you are a diplomat!" commented his companion in a most respectful tone. Then she drew away in amazement, for O'Neill had thrown back his head and burst into a peal of laughter. "Why do you laugh?" she demanded.

"If you knew the diplomatic service as I do," he began, "you would laugh too!"

"I do know it a little," she said; "and I suspected that it was your profession."

"You did?" O'Neill queried in amazement. "And here I have always congratulated myself that I did not look in the least like a diplomat!"

"Nor do you," she conceded. "But only diplomats receive such urgent messages," and she made a little gesture toward the sheet of paper he still held between his fingers.

"Oh, yes," he agreed, recalled to it with a start. "It is rather urgent—and decidedly peculiar," and he opened his lips to read it to her when he felt her knee touch his for the briefest instant.

No warning could have been more plain.

"You see I am not really a diplomat," said O'Neill quietly, replaced the letter in its envelope and slipped it into his pocket. As he did so he cast a rapid glance around the compartment. There could be no doubt that the eyes of his swarthy vis-à-vis were partly open, and the gaze of the Englishman was unashamedly intent. O'Neill had a queer feeling that both of them knew more about the letter than he did.

As a matter of fact, he knew absolutely nothing. "To persist is to die"—that was explicit enough. Persist in what? Of course it was not he who was being warned—it was Delage. And for the first time the thought flitted through his head that perhaps Delage had had some other motive besides philanthropy in giving him his seat; it was just possible that he had suddenly become aware of danger and was seeking to divert it. Then O'Neill shook his head impatiently—he was taking the note altogether too seriously. Besides, if anything happened, he had only to explain that he was not Delage.

He rose abruptly to his feet.

"Pardon me," he said and made his way over the outstretched legs of his companions to the door and out into the corridor.

With considerable difficulty he unearthed the conductor, who was dozing comfortably in the little box set apart for his use, and whose greeting was anything but amiable.

"Monsieur will excuse me for disturbing him," O'Neill began; "but one of the guards brought me a note a few moments ago. I should like to find this guard."

"For what purpose, monsieur?" asked the conductor.

"In the first place to reward him. In the second place that he may introduce me to the sender of the note. There are certain explanations——"

"He will doubtless welcome the reward, monsieur; but he can tell monsieur nothing about the note."

"Why not?"

"Because it was I who gave it to him to deliver to monsieur."

"Then you can tell me——"

"I can tell monsieur nothing," said the conductor, with finality, "except that it was handed to me as the train was leaving with the request that it be delivered to monsieur."

"You did not know the man?"

"But no—he was perhaps a commissionaire."

"And he did not get on the train?"

"Certainly not, or he could have delivered it himself."

"It has been some time since we left Paris," O'Neill pointed out. There was something in the conductor's manner which left him unconvinced.

"I understood that it was not pressing," said the man negligently; "and since Dijon is our first stop there seemed to be no need of haste."

"But I am not——" O'Neill began—and then he stopped. Why should he involve himself in endless and useless explanations? However much the conductor knew, it was evident that no information could be obtained from him.

"Monsieur was saying?"

"Nothing," said O'Neill. "Thank you.' And he turned back toward his compartment.

And then he realized that the second service must have been announced without his hearing it, for he found himself caught in a stream of people headed for the diner. There was no making way against it, so he stepped into a doorway and waited for it to pass.

At last the procession ended and a moment later O'Neill reached the door of his compartment. It was empty except for the woman in black.

"I was wondering if you had forgotten me!" she laughed, rising to her feet.

"Oh, no, madame," O'Neill protested; "but I was caught in that mob and could not get back."

He was still standing in the doorway, waiting for her.

"Come in," she said in a low voice, "and close the door."

Wondering a little O'Neill stepped inside and pulled the door shut. The passers-by along the corridor could see but they could not hear.

"Now," she went on, "let me see the note."

There was a strange urgency in her manner, and the hand which took the note that O'Neill silently gave her was trembling visibly.

She drew the sheet of paper from its envelope, opened it, and read its contents at a glance. Then she looked at him.

"Your name is not Delage," she said.

"How do you know?"

"You are not a Frenchman.'

"No, I am an American; but there are Americans of that name."

"Come," she said impatiently; "do not play with me. We have not the time. Your name is not Delage.'

"No; my name is O'Neill."

"How did it happen that you had M. Delage's seat?"

"He gave it to me as I was getting on the train. He was very polite—but perhaps he scented trouble and was looking for a substitute."

She nodded.

"And this note?"

"Was handed to the conductor by some unknown as the train was starting—at least that is his story. He didn't impress me as being absolutely frank—but no doubt the note was accompanied by a handsome tip."

She read the note again, then returned it to its envelope and handed it back to him. "What are you going to do?" she asked.

"Going to do?"

"We shall reach Dijon in half an hour. Will you get out there?"

"Get out there?" cried O'Neill. "But of course not! I have an engagement—a most important one."

"An engagement?" she repeated. "What engagement?"

"An engagement to take a charming lady to dinner," O'Neill explained gravely. "Even an American would not be rude enough to break it. Come, or we shall miss the first course."

She looked at him a moment longer.

"It may be more dangerous than you imagine," she warned him.

"Oh, I know it will be dangerous," O'Neill laughed. "Dangerous to my peace of mind, dangerous to my heart—but the Irishman never lived who fled from danger of that sort!"

"It is not the sort I was thinking of," she protested, but he could see that she was smiling too.

"There isn't any other," he said. "We are on the Marseilles express, not in a lonesome forest or a dark alley; this is the twentieth century, not the Middle Ages. Besides, why should anybody wish to harm me? Heaven knows *I* never harmed anybody. If I see any one approaching, deadly weapon in hand, I shall merely say, 'Monsieur, you have made a mistake—my name is O'Neill.'"

"Ah—yes," said his companion, "if you have time."

"Oh, I shall have time," O'Neill assured her. "I can speak very rapidly, if necessary. You will see. Come along!" and he opened the door. "I am starving."

"As you will," she said, and passed before him into the corridor. "But do not forget the words of the note—'to persist is to die!'"

CHAPTER III.

A THREAT FULFILLED.

In appearance the French dining car does not differ in any essential way from its American prototype, but its internal economy is entirely its own. The menu for each meal is irrevocably fixed—months or perhaps even years in advance!—and follows an invariable routine. Dinner consists always of a soup, a fish—or perhaps eggs—a meat, two vegetables, cheese and fruit, with coffee afterward—extra! It is run on an iron-clad schedule, as immutable as the laws of the Medes and the Persians: it starts at a predetermined minute and if one arrives late one misses what has gone before, for there is no turning back.

The stewards pass rapidly from table to table serving the diners from great steaming platters, and a certain number of minutes are allowed for each course. One must finish within the allotted time or throw the whole schedule out of gear; and there is perhaps no more embarrassing experience in the world than to realize suddenly that a whole car full of people are waiting for one to finish one's fish. Conversely, extraordinarily rapid eaters are sometimes rewarded with the offer of a second helping.

A railroad train is the only place in France where a Frenchman eats in a hurry. There is an atmosphere of rush and confusion very different to the leisurely, solemn, almost consecrated air of most French restaurants. To an American it is familiar enough; but to a Frenchman, with his high sense of the sacredness of the dinner hour, it must be devastating. However, as with all things connected with their railroads, they do not protest.

When O'Neill and his companion reached the door of the diner the soup had been served and the patrons were hastily falling to. The chief steward met them with a shrug of helplessness.

"All the places are taken, monsieur," he said.

"I have reservations for two places," said O'Neill, and produced his tickets.

The steward waved them aside.

"But monsieur is late; one must be on time, otherwise the places are not kept."

"Nevertheless," said O'Neill slowly and clearly, "I am sure you can find two places for us—perhaps even a little table," and he gave the steward a long look full of promise.

The steward's face softened. This prodigal American must be obliged.

"I will see what can be done, monsieur," he said and hurried away.

To most people nothing is more unbecoming than the act of eating. It is the supreme test of breeding. It is at the dinner table, more certainly than anywhere else, that one's true nature is revealed. And as O'Neill glanced along the tables he had a revelation concerning his fellow travelers which gave him a little shock of surprise. He could see the Englishman calmly dipping his mustaches in his consommé; he could hear the fat Frenchman sucking his lustily from the end of his spoon; both of them had protected themselves from the possible perils of the meal by tucking one corner of their napkins inside their collars

and carefully spreading the napkins across their bosoms. But his swarthy vis-à-vis did not seem to feel the need of such measures. His napkin was presumably in his lap—at least it was not to be seen; he was eating slowly, calmly and with entire dignity, and his shirt front remained spotless. The thought flashed through O'Neill's head that perhaps the man was an Arab; O'Neill knew nothing about Arabs, but he had heard somewhere that of all the swarthy races, the Arabs alone——

At this instant the steward came hurrying back.

"This way, monsieur, madame," he said, and led the way to the farther end of the car, where a little table which was used for serving had been hastily cleared and set with two places.

"Excellent!" O'Neill commented, and slipped a twenty-franc note into the expectant hand.

"Thank you, monsieur," said the steward, and with the most fleeting of glances at madame's veil and a tact and quickness of comprehension characteristically French, drew out for her the chair facing forward, so that she would have her back to the other diners.

She sank into it with a little murmur of thanks.

"You need not hurry, monsieur, madame," said the steward amiably, and turned away to his other duties.

A waiter whisked two cups of consommé in front of them—a reversal of the wheel of time which was a real miracle—and then stood expectant.

"What shall we drink?" O'Neill asked. "Champagne?"

"Oh, no," protested his companion quickly; "that is, unless you wish it very much. For myself, I prefer a Burgundy."

"As a matter of fact, so do I," O'Neill agreed, and ordered Pommard.

Then he waited, for the moment of revelation was at hand. His companion drew off her gloves. Then she lifted her veil and folded it back about the brim of her hat. And their eyes met in a long glance.

It left O'Neill a little breathless. For he had never before seen a woman like this one. Impossible to describe; one might catalogue the features in minutest detail—the ivory-tinted skin, so wonderfully smooth and fine, the eyes black or almost so under well-marked level brows, the nostrils delicately arched and sensitive as a thoroughbred's, the scarlet, mobile lips, not too full and yet full enough to tell of a generous nature—one might go on like this forever without giving the slightest idea of a face curiously arresting and wholly satisfying. It was a face which bespoke some unusual but singularly fortunate mixture of blood, the merging of two contrasting but congenial strains, making for depth and richness; it had in it a strange quality of mystery.

Somehow it made him think of Cleopatra. And catching a glimpse of his own honest, downright countenance in a mirror he could not but smile at the contrast—a smile tinged with chagrin. The Old World and the New!

He was conscious that she was speaking.

"First," she said, "you are going to tell me about yourself, are you not?"

"You are of course aware, madame," O'Neill pointed out with a smile, "that that is the most insidious form of flattery."

"Of course," she assented calmly, tasting her consommé.

"And you must also be aware from looking at me," he added, "that my past contains nothing of interest."

"I am not so sure," she said, with a swift glance. "At any rate, I wish to hear about it. You are a diplomat, then?"

"*Was,* madame," O'Neill corrected. "I was fired a week ago."

"Fired?" she repeated, her brows puckered.

"Given my congé—my walking papers."

"Ah!" she nodded. "You had committed an error."

"Yes," said O'Neill; "but not the sort you have in mind. I committed no diplomatic blunder—in our service diplomatic blunders make no difference. The particular error which caused my dismissal was committed eleven years ago, when I was twenty-one."

"Eleven years ago? But surely, after so long——"

"At that time," O'Neill explained, "I cast my first vote. I made the mistake of casting it for the Democratic party, and since with us politics is just a sort of habit, I repeated the offense a number of times afterward. The basic principle of our foreign policy is that all our diplomats shall be of the same political persuasion as the party in power. Unfortunately for me the Republican party came into power in the

United States two years ago. I was so unimportant that I finally made up my mind I had been overlooked; but the administration got around to me at last, gave my job to a good Republican—and here I am!"

"I am not sure that I understand—except that you have lost your position. But please continue."

O'Neill paused until the waiter removed the cups and served each of them with a delicately browned sole.

"I had been silly enough," he went on, to fancy myself cut out for a diplomatic career. So when I found myself suddenly separated from it, it was something of a shock. When one is thirty-two and still at loose ends one begins to have the horrible feeling that one is a failure."

"Nonsense!" she protested. "You are very young. A man is not really a man until he is thirty—sometimes forty. Before that he is just a child. Are you married?"

"No."

"That is fortunate."

"*I* think so; but my people have blamed me severely. Out in the section of the United States where I live it is considered hardly respectable for a man of thirty to be unmarried. He is regarded with suspicion."

"How stupid! No man should marry until he has assured his career."

"In that case," said O'Neill with a smile, "I fear I am condemned to perpetual celibacy."

"Oh, you will find your career," she assured him. "It is in your favor that you have not been easily satisfied. For the ordinary man any career suffices that gains a livelihood; for the unusual one——"

"I am not in the least unusual," O'Neill protested.

"One can tell by looking at you that you are intelligent. That is unusual. Most men are stupid."

"Thank you," said O'Neill.

"So," she went on, "after you lost your position, what did you decide to do?"

"I decided to think things over and get my bearings—also to take a rest; and it seemed to me that the best place in the world for meditation and repose was Africa?"

"Ah!" she said with a quick glance. "You go to Africa?"

"Yes—to Algiers—by to-morrow's boat."

"It is curious," she said reflectively, "but I also go to Algiers—and by to-morrow's boat."

O'Neill's pulse quickened its beat.

"I am very happy to hear it!" was all he permitted himself to say—but his glance said much more.

"You will find Africa very interesting," she assured him.

"You have been there?"

"Oh, yes!"

A sudden thought struck him as he looked into those brooding eyes—a possible explanation of their mystery.

"It is your home, perhaps?" he suggested.

"No," she answered with a little smile, as though fathoming his thought. "I am of Paris. And yet Africa is not like a foreign land to me, for my grandmother was Mauresque, so I have a strain of that blood, as you have guessed. I have a brother," she went on, "who is much more of Africa than am I. He has spent much of his life there. Perhaps some day you will meet him."

"I hope so," agreed O'Neill.

The train creaked to a stop beside a long platform with many lights. One of them was just opposite their window and across the top of the glass O'Neill saw the word "Dijon."

His companion saw it too and she looked at him gravely.

"Yes it is Dijon," she said. "You are quite sure you will go on? It is not too late— -"

"Oh yes, it is," interrupted O'Neill. "Why, if I got off I should miss to-morrow's boat."

"There will be another two days later."

"Yes—but you will not be on it."

"True—and you may not be on any boat if you persist——"

She stopped on the word, with a little shiver.

" 'To persist is to die,' he quoted, smiling. "But you do not believe it?"

"I do not know," she said uncertainly, and then she raised her glass and drained it. He could see that her hand was trembling.

"Nonsense!" he protested. "For this mysterious Delage, perhaps, there might have been some danger. But as for me—I wrap myself in the American flag."

"A dagger has been known to penetrate even a flag!" she pointed out. "Tell me

again how it happened that you were given that place."

So he told her of his encounter with the courteous M. Delage, describing him as well as he could. In the midst of this narrative there came a sharp whistle from the platform and the train crawled slowly out of the station.

They had come to the fruit and O'Neill's companion quartered her orange abstractedly.

"You must remember," she said at last, "that this is not America. Strange and mysterious things come out of Africa."

"But what has Africa to do with it?" he asked in surprise.

She hesitated, as though searching for an answer.

"I do not know, but I have a feeling that it has much to do with it. The fact that you are going to Algiers——"

"But Delage could not possibly have known that."

"Most of the passengers on this train are for Africa—it is this train which runs in connection with the boat. That is well known. Have you noticed the dark man who sits opposite you in the compartment?"

"Yes."

"I am sure he is an Arab—or at least of Arab blood."

"I think so myself," agreed O'Neill, and glanced back along the car. The man in question was sipping a leisurely cup of coffee and smoking a long Egyptian cigarette, gazing abstractedly into the air, his thoughts apparently afar in the desert. Beyond him the Englishman and his wife were just rising to their feet. Their eyes met O'Neill's in chill disapproval.

"Why do you smile?" his companion asked.

"The two Britons do not approve of me," O'Neill chuckled. "I am not living up to their idea of Anglo-Saxon aloofness. But then you see I am Irish—the Irish, you know, have always had an affinity for the French."

"Yes, I know."

She answered his smile but she had become distraught and ill at ease. And O'Neill, who had intended to enlarge upon the historical parallel, decided that he would better wait till next day.

"Will you have a liqueur?" he asked.

"No, thank you." Then she leaned suddenly forward across the table. "Mr. O'Neill," she said, "there is one thing I would urge upon you. It is that you do not return to your seat—that you find some other place."

"But there is no other place." He was tempted to add that he did not like to be banished—that his present seat suited him very well.

"Many people left the train at Dijon," she pointed out. "In any event, the conductor can always find a seat if the tip is large enough. I am very, very much in earnest."

"I see you are," he said, and indeed all trace of lightness had gone out of her face. "I will see what I can do."

She nodded with quick relief.

"That is sensible," she said, and let her veil fall.

O'Neill paid the check and they went out together, passing the Arab, still absorbed in his cigarette and his reflections.

The corridors were not so crowded as they had been but there were still some people standing and another seat might not be so easy to procure after all. At the door of their compartment O'Neill paused.

"I will smoke a cigarette out here in the corridor," he said, "and hunt up the conductor."

She held out her hand.

"I have to thank you, Monsieur O'Neill, for a most pleasant dinner," she said.

"But it is I——" O'Neill began, and then stopped with an exclamation of surprise.

"What is it?" she asked.

"There is some one in my seat."

She turned swiftly. There was, indeed, a man seated in the corner place, leaning back against the cushions with closed eyes.

"Some poor fellow who has stood all the way from Paris, I suppose," said O'Neill lightly. "I'll not disturb him for a few moments."

"Do not disturb him at all!" she said earnestly, under her breath, and with a friendly little nod stepped over the legs of the English couple, who were also in their places, and sank into her seat. O'Neill, who had paused to watch her, saw her look up and make a little motion to him.

He was at her side in an instant.

"The window," she said. "It is wide open—I am afraid it is too much."

"Of course," O'Neill agreed, and started to raise it.

As he did so the train lurched violently around a curve and the man in the corner seat fell heavily forward against him.

"Pardon, monsieur," said O'Neill, catching him. "You were asleep——"

But something in the pallid face, something in the limp weight of the body, gave his heart a sudden shock.

"Why, the fellow is dead!" he cried.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HAND OF FATIMA.

The man was indeed dead. That was confirmed when a physician, who had been discovered among the passengers by the excited conductor, came in and made a brief examination.

"But what killed him?" O'Neill demanded.

"Ah, that," the physician replied, with a shrug of the shoulders, "is not my affair—that is for the police," and he propped the body back in its corner. "He is dead—there is nothing I can do for him. That is all you wish of me, is it not, monsieur?" he added to the conductor.

"Yes," the latter responded, and the doctor bowed and took his departure, evidently determined not to become involved in the affair in any way.

"It will be necessary to close the compartment, messieurs, mesdames," the conductor went on. "At Lyon the police will be informed and the body removed. Until then the compartment must be closed and nothing disturbed. The luggage must be left in the racks exactly as it is."

"I'll be damned if I'll stand out there in the corridor," protested the Englishman, "or permit my wife to."

"It will not be necessary, monsieur," the conductor assured him. "You will all take seats in the *wagon-restaurant,* if you please. We shall reach Lyon in an hour."

So they filed out into the corridor, while the conductor pulled down the curtains of the compartment and double-locked the door. Then he took an inventory of the evicted ones.

"There are but five of you," he said. "Where is the other one?"

And when they looked at each other they saw that they were indeed only five—the Englishman and his wife, the Frenchman, the woman in black, and O'Neill.

"There was another man," said O'Neill, "a dark fellow with a beard. He had the seat facing mine."

"Yes, I remember," nodded the conductor; "but where is he?"

"He was in the diner when I left—but that was twenty minutes ago. Here he comes now!" And indeed the individual of the swarthy countenance was making his way toward them along the corridor in the most leisurely fashion.

He was quite near before he became conscious of their eyes upon him; he glanced blandly from one to another—but when his eyes met O'Neill's there came a quick flash of horror in them, and his right hand flew up involuntarily, with fingers outstretched and pointing rigidly at the astonished American. It was over in an instant—so quickly indeed that O'Neill was uncertain what had really happened; and the dark man came on toward them, his face expressionless and composed as ever.

"Monsieur has a seat in this compartment?" the conductor asked.

"Yes, monsieur."

"I shall have to ask monsieur to take a seat for the present in the *wagon-restaurant.* This compartment has been closed."

"But why?" asked the other.

His voice had a curious huskiness but he spoke French with a perfect accent.

"A man has died in there," explained the conductor curtly. He was enraged that this affair, which would assuredly cause much trouble, should have happened on his train. "This way, mesdames, messieurs," and he led the way back to the diner. "You will wait here," he added, and closed the door and disappeared.

O'Neill conducted his companion to the little table where they had dined together and they sat down wearily.

"We must have something to drink," he said.

"Yes—a brandy," she assented.

He ordered two and they sat silent and depressed until the little glasses of potent brandy were set before them. O'Neill felt the first sip warm his blood and revive his drooping spirits.

"After all," he said, "it probably had nothing whatever to do with the note. That fellow just wandered in there, feeling faint, opened the window to get some fresh air, and died quietly of heart disease, or something of that sort."

As his companion raised her veil he saw

that her face was livid. She too took a long sip of the fiery liqueur and then leaned forward toward him.

"No," she said, in a low voice; "the man was killed—you will see. And furthermore the man who killed him thought he was killing you."

"Oh, come!" O'Neill protested.

"Listen!" she commanded fiercely, leaning still closer. "Did you see that Arab point his fingers at you?"

"Yes—but——"

"Do you know the meaning of that gesture?"

"Has it a meaning?"

"It is the charm against the evil eye—the 'fives'—the 'Hand of Fatima.' You will see it everywhere when you get to Africa. That one had supposed that if any one was killed it would be you, and when he saw you suddenly instinct was too much for him.

"You will, of course, say not a word of all this to the police," she went on rapidly. "But it is well to know one's enemies; so if you can get a look at his papers, or listen to his interrogation——"

"My dear lady," O'Neill protested, "there is no reason on earth why any Arab alive—or anybody else for that matter—should want to kill me. I have led a quiet and blameless life—so far! I have stolen nobody's money, run away with nobody's wife, injured nobody's reputation. In fact I am quite distressingly respectable."

He stopped, for he was suddenly conscious that the Englishman, having consumed a stiff whisky and soda, had caught his eye, arisen from his seat, and was advancing gravely and purposefully toward him.

"Some one is coming?" asked the woman.

O'Neill nodded, and she let her veil drop with a quick movement.

The Englishman stopped beside the table. "I'd like a word with you, sir," he said. "Here is my card."

O'Neill took it and glanced at it. It bore the name of "James Gossage, Manchester."

"All right, Mr. Gossage," he said. "My name is O'Neill."

"O'Neill?" repeated the Englishman, in surprise. "But I thought——"

"No matter what you thought," interrupted the American coldly, "I tell you that my name is O'Neill."

"Oh, very well," stammered Gossage, wiping a moist brow. "There is a lot about this affair that I don't understand. May I sit down?"

"Certainly."

Gossage drew up a chair and cleared his throat, evidently uncertain how to begin.

"Of course in a railway carriage," he said at last, "it is impossible not to overhear what other people are saying, however much one may wish——"

"Quite so," nodded O'Neill.

"I understood you to say to this lady that you were in the American diplomatic service."

"'Were' is right," commented O'Neill cheerfully. "I mean that I am so no longer," he explained as the Englishman stared.

"Oh!" exclaimed the latter, obviously disappointed. "That is too bad."

"Why so?"

"Have you ever had an encounter with the French police? Well, I have, and it is unbelievable how much trouble they can cause. That one is entirely innocent makes no difference. They have an insatiable curiosity about a man's private affairs. The police are to be called in this case, I understand, and it occurred to me that we, as the only two English-speaking men in the compartment, might get together—an Anglo-American alliance, as it were."

He stopped and laughed a little foolishly, but his eyes were undeniably anxious.

"I don't see why there should be any trouble," said O'Neill. "I never saw the fellow until after he was dead."

"Neither did I," said Gossage hastily, "but my wife and I were alone with him there for quite a while."

"Oh, I see," commented O'Neill. "I don't think there is anything I can do," he added after a moment.

Gossage started to say something more but there was a certain stoniness in the glint of O'Neill's eyes which stopped him, and he arose and went slowly back to his wife.

O'Neill looked after him reflectively.

"Now I wonder what is the matter with that fellow?" he said. "Surely he couldn't have had anything to do with it!"

"Oh, no," agreed his companion, putting up her veil again. "It is something else—His papers are not in order perhaps. You were right to decline the alliance."

"If there is any alliance," said O'Neill, looking at her, "it will be a Franco-American one."

"Thank you," she smiled. "I shall remember."

And then she fell silent, plunged in thought—harassing and anxious thought to judge from the pucker of the brow, the tightening of the lips. Who was she, O'Neill wondered. Beyond the fact that her grandmother was Mauresque and that she had a brother she had told him nothing about herself—had, indeed, avoided personal references in a way which had warned O'Neill to ask no questions. And yet most evidently she was a woman of culture and experience in the world, and not in a small provincial world, but in a cosmopolitan world.

Perhaps to-morrow on the boat——

The lights of a great city began to flash past the window.

"Lyon, I suppose," O'Neill observed.

His companion nodded and a moment later the train came to a stop in a lofty station.

"We would better remain here," she said as O'Neill started to rise. "When the police want us they will send for us. It is useless to try to hurry them."

So they waited through interminable minutes, watching the crowd gradually thin away until only a few officials were left, walking solemnly up and down, their hands behind them, or shaking their heads gravely together. And then the door of the diner was thrown open and a fat man in the garb of a lieutenant of police appeared there, with the conductor obsequiously at his elbow. He paused for a moment to look at the six people sitting, with all the appearance of criminals, about the tables, then he advanced into the car and closed the door.

"Your papers, if you please, mesdames, messieurs," he said.

The French commercial traveler was nearest the door, and produced an identification card. The police agent opened it, glanced at the photograph it contained, nodded and passed on. O'Neill's swarthy vis-à-vis was next and produced a paper with a great red seal which the lieutenant evidently regarded with respect, for he saluted when he saw it. The Englishman and his wife were next and produced well-worn British passports.

"But you have more recent ones, have you not, monsieur?" asked the lieutenant, after glancing at them.

"No," the Englishman answered; "we were assured that these were all right."

"Monsieur can explain to my superior," said the lieutenant with a shrug, and passed on to O'Neill and his companion.

The latter produced from a small hand bag an identification card which the police agent accepted without comment, and O'Neill gave up his passport. The agent departed with this collection in his hand.

"That Arab seems to be somebody," O'Neill observed in a low voice, and described the paper which he had given the lieutenant. "What could it have been?"

"It was a large white paper with a red seal, you say? I do not know. The government of Algeria sometimes issues a format of that style to special persons—but surely," and she shook her head thoughtfully, "he could not be of sufficient importance——"

"I have an idea that he may be of considerable importance," said O'Neill.

"Perhaps you are right. We shall see. Get a better look at the paper if you can."

More weary minutes passed and then the agent returned and summoned Monsieur O'Neill. He found that the compartment had been converted into a court of inquiry, presided over by a gray-haired, good-natured police officer, with a secretary who made notes of the questions and answers. The dead man was still propped up in his corner and O'Neill understood that this was to be one of those confrontations which the French love so much.

"Please look well at the dead man, Monsieur O'Neill," said the police officer, and watched O'Neill closely as he did so. "Do you know him?"

The man was tall and thin, almost consumptive in appearance, with a pale, smooth-shaven face and a shock of dark hair which looked thick and oily. Something about the hair and the flowing tie gave O'Neill the impression that he might have been an artist.

"Do you know him?" the agent repeated.

"No, monsieur," said O'Neill. "I never saw him before."

"It is your place in which he is sitting, is it not?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"How did he come there?"

"I do not know; I found him there when I came back from dinner."

"Did you speak to him?"

"No—the lady I was with——"

"Ah, you were with a lady?"

"Yes—the lady who has the seat next to mine."

"Who is she?"

"You have her identification card, have you not?"

"True," the agent assented; "nevertheless I should like you to tell me who she is."

"I do not know who she is, monsieur."

"Ah," said the agent again. "Please continue, monsieur."

"I had stopped in the corridor to smoke a cigarette, but the lady complained of the draft from the open window. As I raised it the man fell forward against me and I saw that he was dead."

"The window was open then, when you came back?"

"Yes, wide open."

"Had you left it so?"

"No; I had left it three or four inches down from the top."

"Was any one in the compartment when you left it?"

"No; every one else had already started for the diner."

The agent pondered this for a moment.

"I supposed," O'Neill ventured, "that he was one of those who had been unable to obtain a seat, and, finding himself growing faint, he had come in here and opened the window to get some fresh air——"

"And then?" the agent encouraged him, as he paused.

"And then he just died there," O'Neill concluded.

"It is not a bad theory," commented the agent; "but it is weak at one point. He did not die there—he was killed."

CHAPTER V.

A BRITON IN THE TOILS.

"Sit down, please," proceeded the agent rapidly. "You have, it appears, a diplomatic passport," and he opened it and looked it over.

"Yes; I was the American consul at Rouen until quite recently."

"You are no longer in the diplomatic service, then?"

"No; I am taking my vacation, after which I shall return to America."

"Where have you planned to spend your vacation?"

"In Africa; I am sailing for Algiers by tomorrow's boat."

During the briefest instant O'Neill was conscious of a renewed scrutiny.

"Have you ever been to Africa?" the agent asked.

"No, monsieur. This is my first visit."

"How does it happen that you occupy the seat reserved by a Monsieur Delage?"

And again O'Neill recounted the incident at the Gare de Lyon. At the agent's request he described Delage as well as he was able.

"The conductor tells me that you were given a note addressed to this Monsieur Delage."

"Yes, monsieur."

"May I see it?"

O'Neill passed it over and watched the agent's face while he read it. But that worthy was no doubt accustomed to astonishments of this sort and made no sign. He read the note through twice, held it for an instant against the light, then tossed it to his secretary.

"We shall have to keep it," he said. "You understand, of course, that it is a most important piece of evidence."

"Of course."

"You have no idea where it came from?"

"Not the slightest. I tried to get some information from the conductor but failed, though I believe that he knows more than he told me."

The agent nodded in a way to indicate that the conductor would most assuredly tell the police all he knew.

"You did not take the note very seriously, Monsieur O'Neill," he commented, with a smile. "At least you did not get off at Dijon."

"It seemed to me too absurd to take seriously. Besides the warning was obviously not for me."

"You see now that that made no difference. You were saved by the merest chance. If you had gone to the first service instead of the second, or if you had not gone at all —in a word, if you had been in your place as the train pulled out of Dijon—you would not be alive at this moment. If your place had been empty the assassin would have waited till you returned to it; and perhaps at Lyon, perhaps at Avignon—certainly somewhere—would have carried out his mission. I will say to you frankly that if your papers were not absolutely in order and if you were not so evidently exactly what you say you are I should have to detain you. As it is, I ask merely that you leave me your address."

"I shall be traveling, but my address can

always be obtained either from the American consulate in Algiers or the American embassy at Paris."

"Do you assure me that you know absolutely nothing more about this affair?"

"Yes, monsieur; I know absolutely nothing more."

There could be no doubting the honesty and sincerity of the gray Irish eyes. The agent folded up his passport and handed it back to him.

"Then I will not disturb you further," he said.

"May I ask a question, monsieur?"

"But certainly," replied the agent in a tone which indicated that he did not bind himself to answer it.

"I should like to ask how the man was killed. I saw no wound of any kind."

"Some one reached through the open window, probably as the train was starting, and struck him on the head with a sharp instrument of some sort which penetrated the brain. There was no outcry, death was instantaneous; and there was very little blood —the heavy hair absorbed it."

"Do you know who he is?"

"Not for the moment. All his papers—if he had any—have disappeared. But we shall soon find out. He undoubtedly had some luggage somewhere on the train. The pieces in the rack above him are yours, are they not?"

O'Neill looked them over.

"Yes," he said, "they are mine." Then he looked at them again. "But I am pretty sure that when I left them the larger bag was on the bottom and the lighter one on top."

"Were they locked?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Will you see if they are still locked?"

O'Neill took them down and tried them. They were locked.

"I will not ask you to open them now," said the agent. "But when you do open them please observe very carefully if they have been disturbed or if anything is missing. If so, I would ask you to inform me by telegraph—Chef du Service de la Sûreté, Lyon."

"Certainly, monsieur," O'Neill agreed.

"One thing more. When you returned from dinner, who was in the compartment?"

"No one except the dead man and the two people who have the seats by the door —an Englishman and his wife."

"Thank you, Monsieur O'Neill," said the agent. "I think that is all."

A police agent accompanied him back to the diner and called for Monsieur Durand, who proved to be the little Frenchman. Oblivious of the Englishman's effort to catch his eye O'Neill walked on to the end of the car and resumed his place at the little table. He noticed that his companion had lowered her veil, but she put it up again as he sat down.

"Well?" she asked in a low voice.

"Well," he laughed as he lighted a cigarette, "I would probably be in jail but for my honest Irish face."

"Do not speak so loudly," she warned him. "There has been a crime then?"

"Yes," he nodded, "just as you supposed."

Monsieur Durand returned at that moment—evidently it had been necessary merely to hand him back his papers—and O'Neill waited for the police agent to call the next name. But instead of doing so he approached the swarthy unknown, touched his cap and spoke to him in a low tone and with the utmost deference. The unknown nodded, rose and walked to the door, the agent following at a respectful distance.

"Well," commented O'Neill as the door closed, "that dark fellow is certainly some one of importance from the way the police kotow to him. Which would indicate, of course, that he couldn't have had anything to do with it, either."

"Perhaps," she assented, but she did not look convinced.

"But surely if the police know him——"

"Yes, it is improbable, I know—and yet something tells me that he knew that the man in seat thirteen was going to be killed. It has been discovered, then, that he *was* killed?"

"Yes; the police agent says somebody tapped him on the head through the open window as the train was pulling out of Dijon. He added that undoubtedly the unknown assassin thought he was tapping me. So it was you who saved my life."

"In what way?"

"By giving me that ticket for the second service; otherwise——"

She waved him to silence.

"Please be serious. What do you mean when you say this man was tapped on the head?"

"I mean just that. Somebody reached in

through the window and struck him on the head."

"With a sharp instrument that penetrated the brain?"

O'Neill sat up with a start.

"How on earth did you know that?" he demanded.

Before she could reply the door opened. O'Neill looked up, expecting to see the swarthy unknown reappear. But it was only the police agent. He advanced straight upon them.

"If you please, madame," he said respectfully, and touched his cap.

And O'Neill, as he watched them disappear into the other car, realized that here too was some one whom the police treated with deference. The gendarme had called her "madame." She was married then, he reflected, with a little sinking of the heart. But he had of course known that already—had known, at least, that no respectable single woman would have entered so readily into conversation with a stranger; though even that might not be true in his case, since with Americans most women thought it safe to permit themselves a certain freedom. And then his spirits rose again as he remembered her black garments; undoubtedly she was a widow. His first impression of her had been the right one.

She was back again in a few minutes, and it was the turn of Gossage and his wife.

"I wonder why they look so guilty?" O'Neill remarked as he watched them leave. "You had no difficulty, madame?"

"Oh, no," she said; "my papers were in order."

"Pardon, madame, monsieur," said the conductor at their elbow; "but the *wagon-restaurant* is to be left here. If you would kindly take seats in the next carriage."

"Shall we take a turn on the platform?" O'Neill suggested. "I feel the need of some fresh air."

"I also," she agreed, and he helped her down the steps.

The platform was deserted except for a few officials and the guards of the train, looking very gloomy at the long delay and shaking their heads moodily together. And then, as two men passed bearing a stretcher with the body of the dead man vaguely outlined beneath its black covering, they stood to attention for in France death is always treated with respect.

O'Neill and his companion watched the

tragic procession until it disappeared into the station building.

"You haven't told me yet," he pointed out, "how you knew exactly how he had been killed."

"It was just a guess."

"It was a singularly good one," commented O'Neill a little dryly.

"Yes." She hesitated. "Yes—I will tell you. It is another link with Africa."

"With Africa?"

"It is in that way that a Berber sect known as the Hamadsha always kills its enemies."

O'Neill stared.

"A sect something like the Thugs?"

"Yes."

"Just what are Berbers?" O'Neill asked. "I want to get this thing straight."

"The Berbers are the native inhabitants of North Africa. They were there long before the Arabs came—before the Romans, even."

"And it is your idea that one of them killed this man?"

"Yes. Can you doubt it?"

"Then somebody is trying to prevent this Delage from reaching Africa."

"Yes—trying very hard."

"I should say so, since he doesn't hesitate at murder. But he might at least have made sure that he was killing the right man."

"The actual murderer was probably only an instrument. He had instructions to kill the man in seat thirteen if he did not leave the train at Dijon—and he carried out his instructions."

"Cold-blooded, I call it!"

"The Hamadsha care nothing for human life."

"So that was the reason you didn't want me to go back to that seat," said O'Neill suddenly.

"Yes; I had the feeling that there might be an accident—a mistake."

O'Neill looked at her, but her veil concealed her face. He too had a feeling—a feeling that she knew much more about this affair than she was telling him; a feeling that she might even in some way be involved in it—though that seemed absurd.

"I do not think I can go back to that compartment," she said after a moment. "It would be too much. Perhaps I can get a couchette—I am feeling very tired, very worn out. You will excuse me," and she left

his side and stopped the conductor, who was stamping impatiently up and down. There was a moment's low-toned conversation; the official at first shook his head, then he listened; and finally he nodded and called one of the guards. Madame opened her purse and gave him a note. Then she came back to O'Neill. "I am very fortunate," she said. "There is by chance a couchette free. Au revoir, my friend; I shall see you in the morning," and she held out her hand.

O'Neill had an absurd feeling that he was being deserted.

"We are to make the voyage together," he reminded her.

"True," she said. "Good night."

"Good night."

He watched her climb aboard the train under guidance of the guard. As he turned away there was a sudden sound of violent altercation from the carriage in front of him.

"It is an outrage!" cried a high excited voice, and then O'Neill saw Gossage, the Englishman, being hustled off the train by two impassive gendarmes. "I will inform my government—I will——"

But what else he would do was lost in the distance as the gendarmes led him away. His wife followed him. A guard brought his luggage from the train and set it on the platform. The officer of police stopped for a word with the conductor, caught O'Neill's eye, bowed politely and hurried away.

The conductor placed his whistle to his lips and blew a shrill blast.

O'Neill climbed aboard and the train started. He found the little Frenchman and the swarthy unknown already in their places. He looked for a moment at the corner seat; he was not superstitious and his nerves never bothered him, but to spend the night in a seat in which a man had just been killed—it was a little too much. So he quietly transferred his luggage to the end of the rack next the door, above the place which Mrs. Gossage had occupied, sat down and looked enviously at his two companions.

They too, apparently, were also untroubled by nerves. The swarthy one was sitting as usual with his eyes closed, sunk in oblivion; the little Frenchman was also drowsing.

And the train hurtled on southward through the night.

CHAPTER VI.

A DISTURBING VISION.

O'Neill was awakened from a most uneasy sleep—a sleep disturbed by nightmares of crawling hands and dark sinister faces—by a clamor of strident voices. He opened his eyes to find the train gliding slowly to a stop under the great shed at Marseilles. The voices were those of the Marseilles porters clamoring for a customer—though they looked more like pirates than porters, with their red sashes and wide corduroy pantaloons; and he realized that he was in the Midi, the rough, exuberant Midi, where even the language has a bur all its own.

His two fellow travelers already had their luggage out of the racks. The little Frenchman had only a bag, which he evidently intended to handle himself, for he carried it quickly out into the corridor, touching his hat in farewell to O'Neill as he passed, and disappeared from view. But the swarthy unknown had a variety of bundles, some of them very queerly shaped, which he passed out through the window and which required the services of two porters. Then he too squeezed by O'Neill, with a muttered word of apology, and passed from sight.

There were plenty of porters left and O'Neill picked out one of them with a nod of the head, passed out his bags, joined him on the platform and commanded him to lead the way to the Grand Hotel, which he knew was only a block or so distant. He had hesitated for a moment, uncertain whether or not to look for his dinner companion of the night before, but concluded that the early morning after a tiring railway journey was not a fitting time to intrude upon any woman; and he saw no sign of her as he traversed the long platform in the wake of his guide. Arrived at the hotel he plunged with great thankfulness into a hot bath and then went to bed and slept like a log for five hours.

He awoke a new man; shaved, dressed, descended to the office, confirmed his impression that his boat sailed at four o'clock, and then sallied forth to see something of the town and to fulfill two of the minor ambitions of his life: to stroll along the Cannebière and to eat a bowl of bouillabaisse at Bosso's. Every book he had ever read about Marseilles, from Dumas to Ibañez, every traveler returned from that exuberant city had impressed upon him the supreme

importance of accomplishing these two feats. Not to accomplish them would be like climbing the tower of Blarney Castle without kissing the stone, or journeying through Holland without tasting the cheese!

To find the Cannebiére he had only to follow the crowd, for the good citizens of Marseilles, whenever they have an hour's leisure, spend it walking up and down the broad avenue of which they are so proud; and O'Neill soon found himself smiling in sympathy with the good humor all about him. Here at least life was held to be a joyous affair and to be alive and in Marseilles the summation of good fortune. His ears were ravished with the rich accent of the Midi, here in its finest flower; his nostrils assailed with the odor of garlic, without which no Marseilles meal is complete; and the bright eyes, so eager, so friendly, so inquisitive, which constantly met his own gave him a new and altogether gratifying sense of unity with the human race.

The Cannebiére is lined on one side with shops and on the other with restaurants and cafés which encroach shamelessly upon the pavement; and the great Bosso's is at the very end of the street overlooking the harbor, as O'Neill discovered when he asked the way of a black-mustachioed policeman who beamed upon him approvingly.

"If monsieur goes to Bosso's," he added after he had given the direction, "permit me to advise that monsieur try the bouillabaisse."

"Such is my intention," O'Neill assured him.

"Good!" said the officer and smacked his lips. "Au revoir, monsieur, and good appetite!"

Thus heartened O'Neill proceeded on his way and found Bosso's without difficulty. It was crowded with a happy throng; but the head waiter, feeling a special responsibility to please this new customer, found him a seat under the awning on the terrace and handed him the bill of fare.

"No, no," O'Neill protested, waving it away. "Bouillabaisse, of course."

"Yes, certainly; and to drink, permit me to recommend, monsieur, a sauterne."

"Sauterne, by all means."

"A half bottle, monsieur?"

"No—a bottle!"

The waiter smiled a comprehending smile and hurried away, and presently a great steaming bowl of bouillabaisse was on the table, flanked by a bottle of golden sauterne—bottled sunshine.

Thackeray has sung the praises of bouillabaisse in an immortal ballad—it will be remembered he preferred Chambertin with his! But Terré's tavern was in Paris; his ingredients were limited by the market and were two or three days from salt water. Whereas Bosso's is at the very border of the sea and all the strange spoils of the Mediterranean are brought fresh to his door. The result is of an incomparable richness; and it is a pity that Thackeray was never privileged to partake of this succulent dish as it is prepared there.

True, the first taste is a shock to the unaccustomed palate; but how the surprised and ravished system hastens to adjust itself to this new delight!

And how the place fits in with this mighty dish! Before O'Neill's eyes along the quay there passed one of the most interesting panoramas in the world—a crowd composed of every race, every color, every condition, a mixture of every seaboard strain of Orient and Occident, of every sort of miscegenation in all the ports of the earth. The tongues which smote upon his ears spoke a hundred dialects, but not one language purely; the odors which assailed his nostrils were no longer the clean, simple odors indigenous to a land or to a people, but complex, hybrid—hot, indescribable odors of organic matter in decay, of spices, of strange perfumes, of potent drugs—the inimitable odor of the East.

Replete and happy as he had seldom been, O'Neill watched this panorama for a time over coffee and cigar, undisturbed by the importunities of beggars, bootblacks, guides, newsboys——

But yes, he would have a paper, and he called the boy back, bought one and shook it out. Perhaps there would be something about the tragedy on the train. He found the item finally, tucked away on the last page. It was dated from Lyon:

An unknown man was found dead last night on the express from Paris, shortly after it had passed Dijon. The police here were notified and held an investigation, but have no information as yet to give to the public.

Among the passengers interrogated was an Englishman whose papers were not in order. He was taken from the train and an examination of his baggage disclosed that he is the absconder Bradbury, for whom the English police have been searching. He had procured an old passport from an employee named Gos-

sage, and but for the accident of having occupied the compartment in which the tragedy occurred would doubtless have escaped.

O'Neill folded up the paper with a smile. So that was Bradbury, who had robbed thousands of needy people with a fake insurance scheme! No wonder he had been worried! Well, that much good would come out of the tragedy, anyway! Strange how an unforeseen circumstance sometimes tripped a man up!

"Does monsieur desire a liqueur?" asked the waiter.

"No, thank you," O'Neill answered, paid his bill, and joining the throng outside, drifted with it along the quay, past little cafés and dingy eating places, where sailors from east and west, white, yellow, brown and black were spending their money.

The principal industry of the Marseilles water front is the ferrying of strangers out to Château d'If, Monte Cristo's fabled prison, and the proprietors of the little boats engaged in this traffic hesitate at no violence to secure a customer. To escape them O'Neill turned to the right, up one of the narrow, dirty streets of the old town, with little shops on either side, their wares occupying the entire pavement, unkempt women turning them over with grimy hands and critical eyes, intent on making every sou count. O'Neill was picking his way carefully along, marveling that human beings could live and apparently thrive amid such surroundings, when he noticed just ahead of him a woman who was having similar difficulties in navigating the street. It was her delicate shoes which first caught his eye—assuredly this was no place for such shoes!—and as his gaze traveled upward he saw that she was clad in black and wore a veil.

With a sudden leap of the heart he recognized her. Yes, it was she, and his first impulse was to hurry forward to her side. But what was she doing here in this slum? Sight-seeing like himself, perhaps, though it seemed unlikely that she would venture alone here; and then he saw that she was hurrying on without looking to the right or left, as though to keep an appointment. She seemed thoroughly at home and turned up a side street without hesitation.

What should he do? Accost her? But would she care to see him? Follow her? He could scarcely do that!

And then she herself solved the problem by turning sharply and disappearing into one of the houses. O'Neill came up a moment later and paused to look it over. He had never seen a more disreputable-looking house. A fish store occupied the room on the lower floor and the whole place was saturated with its offensive stench. Beside it a narrow doorway gave entrance to a dark and dingy corridor, at the end of which he could dimly see the beginning of a flight of rickety stairs, the treads of which were worn almost through. The house itself seemed falling to decay, sagging forward over the street as though ready to collapse at any moment, indescribably repulsive.

He went on after a moment, for the burly fishwife, recognizing him as a stranger and therefore to be distrusted, was eying him with evident hostility. But his mind was troubled. What possible business could that lovely woman have in such a place? And again there blew through his brain that shiver of suspicion, that chill of the unknown, that feeling that she was somehow involved in a mystery past his understanding, an affair threatening and sinister from which all his instincts recoiled.

He loitered up through the smelly cheese market trying desperately to decide what to do; really there was nothing he could do, and he smiled at his own perturbation, for at bottom he was sure that that woman could take care of herself anywhere. If he could only find out what she was doing there! So he strolled down past the house again—and as his eyes ran upward over its grim façade he fancied that he caught a glimpse at an upper window of a face strangely familiar—a dark, bearded face—instantly withdrawn.

But this was foolish, he told himself as he went on; he was becoming obsessed with this affair. He was seeing visions! And he tried resolutely to convince himself that his eyes had deceived him. Perhaps there was a face there; but what of it? In Marseilles there were thousands of dark faces, framed in closely trimmed black beards.

He would have liked to turn back once more but he dared not. He lingered at the corner, hoping that he might see her coming out; but there was no sign of her.

And suddenly he remembered that he had a boat to catch and that it must be growing late.

He snatched out his watch—three-twenty! And the boat sailed at four! He

cast a last look up along the filthy street —she also was taking the boat.

An hour later, the *Lamoricière,* named after the conqueror of Algeria, drew in her gangplank, cast loose her moorings and backed slowly out into the harbor. And O'Neill, who had come aboard fifteen minutes earlier and who had remained glued to the rail watching every arrival, turned away with downcast face.

For his dinner companion of the night before had not appeared.

CHAPTER VII.

A NEW ACQUAINTANCE.

Considerably to his surprise O'Neill found that he had a two-berth cabin to himself. A passenger had been transferred to the next boat at the last moment, his steward informed him, and congratulated him upon his good fortune. It was somewhat unusual for the boat was almost always crowded at this season of the year, with every berth taken.

"Perhaps monsieur has a friend in the office of the company," the steward suggested; but O'Neill confessed that he possessed no such influence.

He opened his bags with the admonition of the police agent in mind and looked carefully over their contents but so far as he could see they had not been disturbed, nor was anything missing. It had been silly to suppose that any one would dare to open them in full view of the people passing along the corridor of the train—and yet a man had been killed there and the assassin had managed to get away unseen. He had taken the dead man's papers, too—a curious thing! A baffling affair altogether!

What had the woman in black to do with it? Was it really an accident that she had had those two dinner reservations? Or had she taken the additional one for some person who had not appeared? For Delage, perhaps? The thought made him start. Could it be possible that she was an accomplice of Delage in whatever he was doing? Was it the face of Delage which had looked out for an instant from the window of that dirty house in the slums of Marseilles? But how could it be?

O'Neill realized that he was wandering in a circle. He closed his bags, locked them and took a turn upon deck to clear his head. He found the little boat steaming valiantly southward through a choppy sea, pitching heavily and thrusting her nose from moment to moment deep into the waves. The pale sun was just dropping out of sight, and the moment it disappeared a damp chill crept into the air, presaging dirty weather.

There was scarcely any one upon deck but when O'Neill went down to dinner he found almost every seat taken, and he paused for a moment in the doorway to take an inventory of his fellow passengers. At the bottom of his heart was the hope that even yet he might discover among them the woman he sought.

It was a motley crowd—officers of the Foreign Legion going back to join their commands after a taste, all too brief, of the delights of Paris; civil servants of various degrees returning from their vacations or proceeding for the first time, with no little apprehension, to the distant posts allotted them by the government; a few presumably wealthy Arabs, dark and impassive under their fat turbans and with their long burnooses wrapped carefully about them; a sprinkling of Turks and Levantines, with tall red fez and oily countenance; and tourists, tourists everywhere, most of them English.

Within the range of O'Neill's vision as he took the seat to which the steward escorted him there were only two who seemed indubitably American. These were a man, with thin, smooth-shaven, scholarly face, and iron-gray hair, and a slender, wholesome-looking girl in her early twenties—presumably his daughter, for there was an obvious resemblance between them. They were sitting facing O'Neill at an adjoining table and he was interested to note what good comrades they seemed. They were laughing and talking together in the gayest spirits, almost as though they were starting on some delicious adventure.

The French people present also, of course, found plenty to talk about; O'Neill never ceased to admire the light-heartedness with which their minds ranged over any topic and their good-humored readiness to utter and to listen to any idea, however trivial. The three or four men at his table, who seemed to know each other, had started a conversation which began with the high cost of living, the exactions of the profiteers which the government did too little to curb, the meager rewards of gov-

ernment employees, thick-headedness in high places, the difficulty of getting a living price for one's product—one of them was a wine grower from Tlemcen—the impossibility of balancing the budget without additional taxation, and so on to the inevitable question of the war and reparations. O'Neill kept discreetly silent and even pretended not to be listening. He had been involved in such discussions so many times and had found that they never led anywhere or solved anything.

The talk became more and more lively, for the affairs of France had reached a critical stage. England, with her own unemployment problem on her hands, anxious for the opening of a continental market, had been unable to agree with France, Belgium and Italy on the question of sanctions, and had washed her hands of the whole business and withdrawn to her island. It was felt that at last France must take decisive action, that the occupation of the Ruhr was inevitable within a week or two, since the language of the mailed fist was the only one Germany understood—in a word that the hour had struck.

"She will howl, of course," said the man at O'Neill's right. "She will claim she is being bled to death—that France is trying to dismember her. She will appeal to America——"

He stopped suddenly and glanced at O'Neill.

"Ah, yes—America!" murmured another.

The man at O'Neill's right turned to him with a little gesture.

"You are an American, are you not, monsieur?" he asked.

"Yes, monsieur."

"And you speak French?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Then, monsieur, as a great favor, will you not tell us why it is that America seems to distrust us—even to dislike us? We cannot understand it. I beg of you to speak with frankness."

The others about the board nodded their approval as O'Neill looked around at their friendly and interested faces.

"I shall be glad to," he said quietly; "in so far as I can. The principal reason, I think, is that your statesmen, your diplomats, either do not understand us or are indifferent to and contemptuous of American public opinion. They do not take the trouble to try to conciliate it, to explain the French point of view; while German propaganda is going on all the time to France's disadvantage."

The man across the table nodded.

"Something of the sort had occurred to me, after our failure at Washington. That was a failure, was it not?"

"A stupendous failure."

"Yes," said another, "and our journalists are also to blame."

"Undoubtedly—but your government most of all. America is at heart very fond of France—we have an affinity for her, a great tenderness; but you allow yourselves to be misunderstood; you allow clouds to rise and make no effort to brush them away. Even lovers sometimes have need of explanations! You do not realize how widespread and insidious the German propaganda is; you do not understand how many millions of Americans have German blood in their veins, which inclines some of them toward the German side. I do not believe in propaganda—no American does—it often does more harm than good; but there is nothing to prevent France from making sure that America understands her purposes and ideals and struggles—there is no reason why she should not contradict the lies that are told about her."

Again his hearers nodded.

"You, Henriot," said one of them, "can do something. Monsieur Henriot is a member of the Chamber of Deputies," he added to O'Neill.

"At least I can thank monsieur for speaking so frankly," agreed Henriot. "And it is good to know that at heart America is still the friend of France—we have doubted it sometimes."

"As always, it is the friends of Germany who make the most noise," said O'Neill with a smile.

Afterward, in the smoking room, the thin American came and sat down beside him.

"I heard something of what you were saying at dinner," the newcomer began, "and I thoroughly agree. I wish I could speak French as well as you do—I'd go around doing some preaching, too! My name is Landon."

"And mine O'Neill," said the latter, and the two shook hands.

"It's good to find a fellow American to talk to," went on Landon, getting out a very black pipe and stuffing it with tobacco. "How long shall you be in Africa?"

"Till I get tired of it; I'm going for a rest."

Landon looked his companion over with a quizzical eye.

"You haven't the appearance of an invalid," he remarked.

"Mental rest," O'Neill explained. "I've got to readjust my views of life."

"Africa is a good place for that," Landon agreed. "After one lives there for a while one realizes that nothing matters much in this world except peace of mind."

"You have been there before, then?"

"Oh, yes. You see I am one of those queer birds called archæologists. North Africa is full of Roman ruins and I have poked around in them quite a good deal. That is what I am going back for now."

O'Neill looked at the keen, good-humored face with a distinct feeling of liking. The well-defined cheek bones and deeply indented chin bespoke a high temper, but the eyes were kindly and quizzical, with a network of little wrinkles about them. At first glance it had seemed to O'Neill that one was black and one gray, then he saw that this appearance was due to the odd circumstance that one pupil was considerably larger than the other.

"I have seen the ruins at Nîmes and Arles," he said, "and those scattered along the Riviera and of course down through Italy. Wonderful people, those old Romans."

"All those ruins are nowhere beside the ones in North Africa," said Landon. "Astonishing—that's the only word for them; and intensely interesting because they are full of inscriptions telling about the daily life of the men who lived there."

"Haven't they been explored?"

"No; they've only been scratched."

It occurred to O'Neill that here might be a means of forgetting his troubles for a time; at least it sounded interesting.

"You're not looking for an assistant, are you?" he asked.

"An assistant?" Landon repeated, drawing gently on his pipe.

"Oh, I don't know anything about archæology," O'Neill hastened to inform him. "But you have got to have somebody to help carry stones around, haven't you, and copy inscriptions and things? I ought to have sense enough to do that. I'm not asking for a job—I would pay my own expense, of course."

Landon looked him over again in a noncommittal way.

"Suppose you tell me something about yourself," he suggested.

And so O'Neill, wondering why Landon should be so curious, sketched briefly the principal incidents of his life up to the present moment; and his companion sat and blew smoke rings into the air.

"As a matter of fact I *am* looking for an assistant," he said when O'Neill had finished, "and furthermore I am perfectly able to pay his expenses. I might as well be frank and tell you that when I saw you and heard you talk it occurred to me that you might do."

"All right, then——" O'Neill began, but Landon stopped him.

"Not so fast," he said. "Please don't get peeved if I don't say yes right away. Perhaps it is of more importance than you imagine. Have you ever been in Russia?"

"No," O'Neill answered, looking at him in surprise.

"What do you know about Karl Marx?"

"Nothing."

"What are your politics?"

"I thought I told you—I'm a Democrat."

"Any Socialist leanings?"

"None whatever. Are they necessary to an archæologist?"

"In this case they would be fatal!" replied Landon, with a smile.

"I didn't know archæology was so complicated!"

"It's immensely complicated," assented Landon cheerfully. "I confess I like you but before I say anything definite I shall have to submit you for Pat's approval."

"Who is Pat?" O'Neill demanded.

"My daughter Patricia," Landon explained. "Perhaps you noticed her at dinner. She is going along and naturally has to be consulted. I will get her opinion in the morning. She has turned in and I think I'll do the same," and he rose and knocked out his pipe. "Getting rough, isn't it?"

It was indeed getting rough and the *Lamoricière* was having heavy going. Every moment a great wave would crash over her bow and she would shiver and roll, pause for an instant as though to recover breath and then go plunging on again. Her antics had already proved too much for the other occupants of the smoking room, as O'Neill realized when he looked around, for he and Landon had it to themselves.

"Good night," the latter said, and disappeared down the companionway.

The smoking-room steward approached deferentially.

"If monsieur wishes anything to drink ——" he began.

"No, I guess not," said O'Neill, rising and stretching. "I am going to bed," and he sought his stateroom.

It was an outside room, but the heavy sea had compelled the closing of the porthole, and the room was rather stuffy as he stepped into it and switched on the light. Lucky that he was going to have it to himself—that would be bad enough, with the window closed! The French never did go in for ventilation like the English and the Americans. He sniffed. It was not exactly a stuffy odor, either; it was a strange penetrating smell and O'Neill concluded that it must come from some sort of disinfectant. He had not noticed it on his previous visit. No doubt a lot of disinfecting was necessary on these boats—all sorts of people of course traveled by them. But it wouldn't disturb him, for he was suddenly aware that he was unaccountably sleepy.

He could scarcely keep his eyes open long enough to undress and he rolled into the berth with a sigh of content. He had not realized how tired he was—that night on the train had certainly taken it out of him. Yes, they had been disinfecting the berth—the odor was stronger than ever; well, no matter, so long as they did a good job! Then his eyes closed and he slept.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SECOND WARNING.

It seemed to O'Neill that he was in some old town of the East, with narrow twisty streets, foul and menacing, where he was striving desperately to escape from a pursuer who followed him relentlessly, carrying in one hand an implement like a hammer. The streets were in utter darkness except that here and there a shaft of yellow light struck into them through a window or open door, and in one of these he caught a glimpse of his pursuer's face—a thin, ferocious face, framed in a dark beard—the face of the man who had sat across from him in the Marseilles express. And at the same instant he perceived that the thing the man carried was not a hammer; its head, instead of being blunt, was drawn to a sharp point; and instinctively he knew that it was the chosen weapon of the Hamadsha.

A chill of fear struck through him; in all that town he knew that there were only enemies; he felt himself circled round, and always that sinister shape was drawing nearer and nearer, deliberately, without haste, waiting a favorable moment to strike; then, suddenly, with a spring, the pursuer was upon him, grasped him by the shoulder, shook him violently.

"Wake up, monsieur; wake up!" cried a voice and O'Neill opened his eyes to find that it was his steward shaking him. The porthole was open, a flood of sunlight poured into the cabin and a soft breeze played about him. "Monsieur will pardon me," the steward went on, releasing his shoulder and stepping back, "but monsieur has already missed the breakfast hour and I was sure he would not wish to miss luncheon also."

"Why, what time is it?" asked O'Neill in astonishment, rubbing the last vestiges of sleep out of his eyes.

"It is almost midday, monsieur," the steward informed him, "and luncheon is at one o'clock."

"Whew!" whistled O'Neill and sat upright and stretched. "That was some sleep. No," he added, seeing the expression on the steward's face, "I was not drunk—I hadn't even been drinking. Let me have some hot water and I'll shave."

"Very good, monsieur," said the steward, but he still hesitated.

"Well, what is it?" O'Neill demanded.

"Monsieur will pardon me," said the steward, "but he did not lock his door, or even close it."

"Yes, I remember—I tumbled right into bed."

"It is not the custom," the steward explained; "not on these boats. I should be glad if monsieur would make sure that nothing is missing."

"Missing?" echoed O'Neill. "You mean stolen?" and he was out of his berth in an instant, but stopped, grasping at the berth for support, conscious of a sudden dizziness.

"What is it, monsieur?" asked the steward solicitously. "Monsieur is ill?"

"Nothing—just a little giddiness," said O'Neill, and in a moment it had passed. "Ate too much dinner last night, I suppose. Now let us see," and he thrust his hand

into the inside pocket of his coat, which was hanging against the partition at the head of the berth. His pocketbook was there where he had left it, and he opened it and glanced through the contents—a fold of bank notes—letter of credit—passport—they were all there. "Seems to be all right," he said.

"Monsieur is fortunate," commented the steward and hastened away after the hot water.

But as he shaved O'Neill's mind ran back over the events of the night before. It certainly was queer the way sleep had overcome him. That odor, now—it was no longer perceptible—had it really been from some disinfectant? Why was it that he had slept without waking for more than twelve hours? He shrugged the thought away. It was too absurd!

"You're getting wheely, old chap," he said, and opened his suit case to get out a clean shirt.

Then he stopped again. There was something vaguely unfamiliar about the way his things were arranged, he could not say exactly what. Yes—those ties had been on this side, not on that, and those socks were——

He sat down on the berth and looked at them again. Perhaps he was mistaken—but he couldn't be mistaken——

He unpacked the bag and took a quick inventory of the contents. Nothing was missing.

Then he rang for the steward.

"When I came in here last night," he said to that worthy, "I noticed a peculiar odor. Had you been using disinfectant?"

"No, monsieur; we use disinfectant only once a week. I noticed no odor when I made up the berth."

"What time was that?"

"About nine o'clock, monsieur."

"Did you notice any odor this morning when you came in?"

"I thought the place smelled rather close, monsieur, so I opened the porthole."

"Have any of those Arabs got a cabin near here?"

"No, monsieur; they are all on the other side of the ship. Monsieur has not missed anything?"

"No," said O'Neill, "that is all." And he finished dressing slowly, trying to figure it out. Why should any one want to drug him and search his things? What could they be looking for? His mind went back to the incidents on the train. Was it possible that there was some connection between——

But he had to give it up.

"I should worry!" he commented philosophically, locked his bag carefully and mounted to the deck.

The storm of the night before had passed and the gallant little boat was steaming gayly along over the bluest of blue seas, beneath the bluest of blue skies. The air was soft and warm, with a strange aroma in it. The deck was crowded with happy, chattering people, leaning over the rail or walking up and down.

As O'Neill started to join the promenaders a detaining hand was placed upon his arm.

"I have been looking for you all morning," said a voice, and O'Neill saw it was Landon. "I want to introduce you to my daughter, Patricia. Pat, this is Mr. O'Neill."

The slim young girl, whose arm was through her father's, held out a cordial hand.

"I am glad to meet you, Mr. O'Neill," she said, and looked at him with steady gray eyes. O'Neill understood that she was appraising him.

"Yes," he laughed; "your father warned me that I should have to pass your inspection."

She flushed a little but her eyes did not waver.

"Dad has great confidence in my intuition," she said, laughing too.

"Well," observed O'Neill, "I hope I pass. Is there a mental test, or anything of that sort?"

"Yes; and I'll put you through it. Run along, dad, and write your letters, while I catechise Mr. O'Neill. Let us walk a little," she added as her father saluted and obeyed.

"Really," said O'Neill, "I didn't know archæology was such an exacting and serious occupation. When your father happened to remark last night that he was going to explore some Roman ruins it occurred to me that it might be good fun to go along, and I suggested it—but I don't want to intrude."

"You are not intruding," she assured him earnestly. "In fact, finding you may be the biggest kind of good luck for us—for me

especially. Didn't dad tell you he was looking for an assistant?"

"Yes."

"Well, it is not as simple as it may appear. Of course he could get some one to go along and carry out his orders—but I have been hoping that we might do better than that—that we might find some one we could trust. That is the reason we have to be so careful—and dad is such a child," she added indulgently. "He believes everything anybody tells him. Would you object to a little—a little excitement?"

"Excitement?" and he looked at her in surprise. "Is exploring Roman ruins exciting?"

"It may even be a little dangerous," she said, with a quick glance into his face.

"But I understood that you were going along?"

"I am."

"Then it can't be so very dangerous."

"It will probably not be dangerous at all," she said; "but there is just a chance that it will be. That is one reason I'm going. You see, dad is all I've got and I'm all he's got—and if there is any danger, why, we must face it together."

He looked at her again with quick sympathy.

"That is rather fine," he said. "But I don't understand—do the natives object to having their ruins disturbed?"

"Oh, no; they care nothing about them. In fact we shall have a gang of natives to help us." And then she fell silent, walking there beside him, her brows drawn together in earnest thought. A brave and determined little face he found it; and suddenly the wish to go along on this mysterious expedition, which had been nothing but a wish hitherto, became a violent desire, a determination.

"Look here," he said. "I am exactly what I represent myself to be. See, here is my passport." He paused beside the rail, took it from his pocket and opened it. "Yes—look at it. I want you to."

She bent above it and read it carefully.

"That photograph was taken three years ago," he said, "but you can see it was intended for me."

"Yes," she nodded. "Thank you."

He put the passport back in his pocket and stood waiting for the verdict. She looked up at him again with her steady eyes.

"I think I shall recommend you," she said and held out her hand with sudden friendliness.

He shook it with enthusiasm.

"Good! I feel very proud!"

"Of course, dad will explain everything to you as soon as he can—but there is one thing he may not mention and which I think you ought to know," and her face became suddenly grave, with little shadows under the eyes. "He is not well—he may have no trouble for years and years—and then again he may."

She stopped, her lips trembling.

"I understand," said O'Neill gently, remembering the disproportion he had noted in Landon's eyes. "You may count upon me."

"There is one piece of work he wants to finish," she added; "and it will do him good to be happily engaged. But of course I must be along."

"Yes," said O'Neill; "and so must I."

"I am sure we are going to be friends," she said, and they shook hands again. "Oh, there's the gong for lunch. Perhaps we can have another talk afterward."

"I am entirely at your disposal," he assured her, and watched her as she hurried away along the deck with a stride almost boylike. Indeed she was like a boy in many ways—an extraordinarily nice boy—and O'Neill decided that she had been raised by her father and had been his companion, no doubt, on many expeditions—as she was determined to be to the end. Just the same, he could not believe that her father, however eccentric he might be, would take her into any very serious danger. Besides, what could the danger be?

He fell in with the crowd and descended slowly to the saloon, where his table companions of the night before greeted him with friendly nods. The bright weather had restored every one's good humor and given every one an appetite. All the tables were full and a new thought caused O'Neill to look them up and down more carefully than he had done at dinner. Who was it had drenched his pillow with some eastern drug and searched his clothes and his belongings? He remembered his dream—could it be that it held a hidden significance? And his thoughts flew back to the swarthy man who had sat opposite him in the train; but, look as he might, he saw no one who resembled him.

Miss Landon, sitting down beside her father, nodded to him brightly. The Frenchman next to him noticed the friendliness of the salutation and clucked softly.

"Do you know the thing about America which I admire most, monsieur?" he said. "It is your young girls. They are so frank, so fearless, so sure of themselves."

"Yes; they are very fine," O'Neill agreed.

"A French girl, now, never forgets that she is of the feminine sex. We encourage it, I admit—and we like it, this consciousness of sex; but sometimes it grows a little tiresome. I wish—but no; they will never change."

"Perhaps all these outdoor sports——" O'Neill suggested.

"No; a Frenchwoman will be first of all a woman. We would not really have it otherwise. But in a way it is a pity," and he sipped his wine pensively.

"Yes, it is," O'Neill agreed, and let the subject drop. But as he glanced across at Miss Landon he felt again that thrill of pride he had so often felt in his young compatriots.

And then it occurred to O'Neill that here was a chance to get some firsthand information about the perils of Africa.

"You are stationed in Algeria, are you not, monsieur?" he inquired of his neighbor.

"Yes, monsieur; since ten years."

"Is the country safe for tourists—for women? There have been some horrific romances published recently," he added, with a smile, "about the perils which women run among the Arabs."

"But that is all nonsense, I assure you!" protested the other earnestly. "There is less crime in Algeria than in France."

"Even in out-of-the-way places?"

"Yes. In the Aurès Mountains there were, for a time, certain groups of bandits, but they have all been hunted down. The natives still have some feuds among themselves, but they never molest a white man—or a white woman."

"Don't they resent the fact that they have been conquered?"

"Some of the old ones, perhaps; but even the old ones realize that they are better off under French rule. The young generation is entirely loyal. You will see. For one thing, we do not interfere with their customs nor with their religion."

"So there is no danger of a holy war?"

"Absolutely not—there never was. The Mohammedans are divided into sects, just as the Christians are, except that they are more hostile to each other. If they could find a leader—a leader great enough to unite them—yes, perhaps. But that has never happened and it grows less and less possible with each year. Monsieur may penetrate into the farthest corners of the country without the slightest hesitation."

"Thank you," said O'Neill. "I don't suppose I shall really penetrate very far; but it is always well to be sure."

It was the last meal that would be served on shipboard and as he rose to leave O'Neill got out his pocketbook, opened his fold of bills, and handed the expectant steward a ten-franc note. As he did so a slip of paper which had been folded in with the money, fluttered to the floor.

"Pardon, monsieur," said the steward, and picked it up and handed it to him. "Thank you, monsieur."

O'Neill nodded and turned toward the door, glancing at the slip of paper the steward had restored to him. There was a penciled line across it, in a handwriting so minute that he could scarcely read it. Then his face became suddenly intent, for he knew that he had seen that handwriting once before. This time there were three words only:

Persister c'est mourir!

"To persist is to die!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE UNKNOWN.

It was an exceedingly thoughtful O'Neill who stowed this second scrap of paper carefully away in his pocketbook and mounted slowly to the deck. So there *was* a connection between the incidents of the last two nights—between the Marseilles express and the *Lamoricière*. The same hand had written both notes—the same brain had conceived them. "To persist is to die!" Perhaps it was a watchword or formula of some sort. And then he smiled grimly to himself: at least he had not been murdered like that poor fellow in the train! His pursuer, evidently, had grown more careful. He could only hope that presently the unknown, whoever he was, would realize that he was making a mistake in continuing on O'Neill's trail and would leave him in peace!

Indeed, he had probably already done so. The unknown must have discovered that he was on the wrong track when he had gone through O'Neill's bags so carefully and found—nothing. What could it be that he was searching for? Some document, some letter? Something important, certainly; and then O'Neill shrugged his shoulders and gave it up—put the matter definitely out of his mind, indeed, as he saw Landon and his daughter emerge from the companion-way and come toward him. He met them halfway.

"Well, O'Neill," said Landon, with a smile, "it seems that you are elected. Pat made the nomination, I seconded it, and it carried unanimously. Wait," he added in another tone as O'Neill started to speak; "don't accept it yet—wait till you know what it lets you in for."

"I know all I need to know," O'Neill broke in, "which is that it lets me in for a mighty interesting time. Miss Landon has intimated that there may be some excitement. All the better. Remember I have had a desk job for three years!"

"All right," Landon agreed; "we will consider it settled, then, with the understanding that you can withdraw whenever you want to. I will tell you more about it later on—it's only right you should know. But not here; there are too many people about. Let us go forward. We ought to be sighting Africa pretty soon, and it always gives me a thrill. Where are you going to stay at Algiers?"

"I don't know—wherever you are."

"We are going to the Oasis. It is right on the water front, convenient to the station. But it's not fashionable."

"Neither am I," protested O'Neill. "The Oasis it is."

And presently as they stood there by the rail looking out across the blue water clear-eyed Pat raised her hand with a little gesture of excitement.

"Look!" she cried. "There it is!"

And sure enough, low along the horizon appeared first a dark cloud, then a range of barren rugged hills, and finally on the bluffs along the coast little white villages strung together like a rope of pearls.

It was Africa.

O'Neill felt a thrill of excitement at his first glimpse of this silent and mysterious land; he pictured it stretching uncounted leagues to the south, with mountain and desert and jungle, peopled with strange tribes and stranger beasts; sinister and brooding, impenetrable to Western understanding, a challenge to Europe and all that Europe stood for of progress and civilization.

As the boat drew in toward the shore they could see the white, pointed domes of the mosques, the slender minarets, stately villas nestling like gleaming jewels in the midst of green gardens, and then away to the left a great clutter of ivory-tinted buildings climbing a steep hillside—Algiers.

It grew and grew as they approached—the mass of shipping in the harbor, the tall, colonnaded buildings along the water front, and still farther on the great hotels crowning the slopes of Mustapha-Supérieur. And finally the boat swept past the sea wall into the port and with much shouting and gesticulation was finally moored beside the quay.

A few minutes later O'Neill and his two companions descended the gangplank into the human maelstrom which is called Algiers, passed the customs, secured a cab, piled their luggage upon it, and rattled up the long incline to the Boulevard de la République, and on to the Hotel de l'Oasis, a great square building overlooking the harbor, where they were given rooms on the top floor. O'Neill's room opened upon a little terrace, and he spent a happy and restful hour there watching the sunset and drinking in the delicious balmy air. Just below him was the busy port, crowded with ships of all sizes, from the great liner pausing a day on her way to the Orient to the tiny boats of the piratical-looking porters, bobbing up and down like corks; while beyond the breakwater lay the blue sea, bounded on the right by a curving shore, but stretching to north and west straight away to the blue sky. There was something about it infinitely restful, a sense of peace.

Yes, he was glad he had come to Africa.

Then, quite suddenly as it seemed, the sun's red ball slid down behind the horizon, a chill crept into the air. The balmy day was ended.

They had dinner together at a very popular and delightful restaurant a few doors away under the Arcade, and then Landon proposed that they go around to one of the cafés in the Place de la République for coffee.

"You might as well see something of Algiers," he said, "and that is the center of the life here."

So to the Place they went and got a little table at the edge of the pavement and had coffee and liqueurs. It was a queer hodge-podge of humanity which drifted past, filling the entire street—French government employees and their wives, soldiers of the Legion, ragged goatherds, veiled women in their baggy white robes, stately Arabs in turban and burnoose, black Tuaregs in picturesque rags, blond Berbers, Jews, Levantines, Italians, Turks in tapering fez but otherwise from the best Parisian tailors—looking at them, O'Neill conceived a new respect for the Turk—native troops in their great brown-and-white turbans and brown cloaks, beggars of every age and infirmity, boy acrobats, sweetmeat venders, wandering musicians, stringy, emaciated Kabyles——

"The whole of Algiers—one might almost say the whole of French north Africa —passes here sooner or later," observed Landon. "One has only to sit and wait. There are tales of native feudists who sat here quietly day after day in the certainty that the men they had marked down as their victims would come by—as they always did."

"That reminds me," said O'Neill; "is there really a sect or tribe out here which kills its enemies by striking them on the head with a sharp instrument of some sort?"

"Yes; the Hamadsha. It is a sect with headquarters at a little town in the Aurès. Their weapon looks like a small hammer sharpened at one end. The adepts grow very expert in its use. They do not always kill—sometimes they prefer to maim; and they can maim in any way they choose, so I have heard—paralyze a man's arm or all one side of him; rob him of his sight or hearing or power of speech, make a hopeless idiot of him even. These stories may be exaggerated—doctors at home have laughed at them—but I don't know. Strange things come out of Africa."

"Pleasant sort of sect," O'Neill observed. "Why doesn't the government suppress it?"

"It does all it can; but the Hamadsha very rarely use their weapon against a white man—it is almost always in their own feuds; and they are bound together by an oath of secrecy and are very difficult to run down. Where did you hear about them?"

"There was a man killed in that way on our train just as it was pulling out of Dijon."

"A white man?" questioned Landon, suddenly intent. Then he glanced quickly about him. The café was filling up but the adjacent table was still empty and the noise of the orchestra and clatter of talk drowned their voices. "Tell me about it," he added, "but speak low."

So O'Neill told the whole story, from the moment Delage had accosted him on the platform of the Gare de Lyon—only one thing he did not mention—the lady of the veil. He decided it was unnecessary, since she had nothing to do with the story. Landon listened with a curious intentness.

"Delage," he repeated thoughtfully, when O'Neill finished. "I do not know any one of that name. Describe him again."

Which O'Neill did, as well as he was able.

"There was a swarthy fellow sitting across from me in the train," he added, "who looked like an Arab and who I fancied might be mixed up in it, but the police treated him with so much deference that I decided I was mistaken."

Landon smoked his pipe thoughtfully for some moments.

"What do you make of it?" O'Neill asked at last.

"It is evident enough that somebody doesn't want this Delage to reach Africa and employed one of the Hamadsha to put him out of the way if he didn't leave the train at Dijon. It must have been some one with considerable power, for the Hamadsha are most reluctant to operate outside of Africa—and especially against a white man. It is too dangerous."

"But the man they killed wasn't Delage."

"No—but I suspect he was just an object lesson."

"An object lesson?"

"Yes—to Delage or his confederates—to give them a taste of what they might expect. Since you are not one of them I don't suppose you will be troubled any further."

"That is what I thought," agreed O'Neill; "but somebody went through my luggage on the boat last night——" And he went ahead and told that story too. "They surely ought to be convinced by now," he added, "that I am not in any plot."

"May I see the note?" Landon asked, and O'Neill passed it over to him.

He examined it carefully, even got a lit-

tle magnifying glass from his pocket and scrutinized the writing. He handed it back at last without comment but his face was very grave.

"See here, O'Neill," he said, "I shall have to reconsider taking you along. You understand I can't complicate my affairs by having an assistant whom the Hamadsha are after."

"But they are not after me," O'Neill protested. "They are after some other man. They looked through my luggage last night just to make sure."

"To make sure of what?"

"I don't know—that I haven't any incriminating documents. Now that they are sure they'll drop me."

"Pray that they do!" Landon warned him. "Here in Africa you would have no chance at all—a tap on the head so quick that nobody sees it——"

"I think that Mr. O'Neill is right, dad," broke in Pat, speaking for the first time. "They have discovered by now that he is not the one they are after."

"Which reminds me," said O'Neill, "of another circumstance. The police told me that all the papers belonging to that fellow who was killed had disappeared, so somebody must have gone through his pockets."

"That couldn't have been done through an open window," Landon pointed out.

"You mean it was somebody in the train?"

"Must have been."

"I never thought of that," said O'Neill.

And he sat silent for a moment, turning this new development over in his mind.

"Well, it is none of our affair," said Landon finally; "and a rule which is especially good for Africa is to mind your own business. Do you give me your word of honor, O'Neill, that you have told me everything?"

"Yes, I do," answered O'Neill, and looked his questioner straight in the eye.

"And that you are not involved in an intrigue of any sort? Think now—of *any* sort?"

"I am not involved in any intrigue," O'Neill assured him. "On my word of honor."

"All right," said Landon. "In that case you may still consider yourself a member of the expedition."

There was a scraping of chairs at the table next to theirs and O'Neill, glancing up, saw three men taking their seats there. Two of them were French officers, the elder one with the gold leaves of a general around his cap, the younger with a captain's bars on his sleeve. The third man, who sat between them, was an Arab clad in a handsome scarlet burnoose. As he threw it back over one shoulder to release his arms O'Neill could see the beautifully embroidered tunic underneath. His face was turned away for the moment as he conversed earnestly with the elder officer. From the polite interest with which the occupants of the neighboring tables regarded the two it was evident that they were well known.

"We seem to be in distinguished company," O'Neill remarked, and Landon, glancing over his shoulder, sprang instantly to his feet, and, hat in hand, took a step or two toward the neighboring table.

As he did so the man in the burnoose turned and saw him. His face lit up with a welcoming smile and he touched his right hand to forehead, lips and heart, with that significant and touching gesture with which an Arab greets a friend.

But O'Neill scarcely saw it. He was staring at the man's face—for it was the face of his vis-à-vis of the Marseilles express.

CHAPTER X.

RIDDLES.

"It is Ali Bey ben Chenouf," said Pat, who had watched the meeting with smiling face; "he is a great friend of dad's. He showed us a perfectly gorgeous time, last year, when we were at Mechounech." And then she laughed outright, for her father had turned and nodded to her. "I shall have to go," she said, and crossed to the other table.

The three men sitting there arose as she approached and the Arab took her hand and raised it to his lips as gracefully as any Frenchman could have done. As his burnoose fell away from his tunic O'Neill saw gleaming on his right breast the cross of the Legion of Honor. It was wonderful how the native costume added to his dignity; one would never have suspected that the rather ordinary-looking man of the Marseilles express was in reality so distinguished. It was almost unbelievable—yet O'Neill could not doubt the clear evidence of his eyes. But it left him confused and uncer-

tain. For why should a man like this stoop to such a disguise?

There were introductions and a moment's animated talk. O'Neill could see Landon shaking his head in response to some question and then the Arab glanced in his direction. O'Neill knew, from the motion of his lips, the inclination of his head, that he was asking who he was. But evidently he did not suggest an introduction, for Landon made no sign, and presently he and Pat came back to O'Neill's side.

"Suppose we get back to the hotel," the former suggested.

As O'Neill rose he felt the Arab's eyes upon him, but he did not again glance in his direction—he was conscious that, in his astonishment, he had already stared rather too much.

"That is the most distinguished Arab I have seen yet," he remarked as carelessly as he could as they crossed the square together. "Who is he?"

"You will never see a more distinguished one anywhere," said Landon. "Ben Chenouf belongs to one of the oldest families in Algeria, and one of the most powerful. He is Kaïd of the whole district from Mechounech up across the Aurès. I met him last year. He was very much interested in my work and helped me a great deal. He wanted us to visit him again but I had to tell him it was impossible."

"He almost has the manners of a Frenchman," O'Neill observed.

"He was educated in France—at St. Cyr. He fought all through the war at the head of a regiment of his tribesmen. It is a part of French policy," Landon went on, "to give the eldest sons of the great native families a French military education and to show them every possible consideration. You noticed perhaps that he has the Legion? Not that he didn't earn it—but it is little things of that sort which confirm the loyalty of the colony."

O'Neill turned this information over in his mind. Now that Ben Chenouf was no longer before his eyes he doubted more and more whether he had been right in fancying he had recognized him. It seemed absurd to suppose that a man so distinguished, so powerful, so remarkable in every way, could possibly have been his vis-à-vis of two nights before.

And yet——

There was the deference the police had shown him. There was the paper with the red seal which they had regarded with such respect.

O'Neill admitted himself shaken. As they crossed the little park to the water front and turned to the left toward the hotel he tried to make up his mind what to do. Should he mention his suspicion? But why run the risk of making a fool of himself? Besides, what did it matter? The affair of the Marseilles express was closed so far as he was concerned. Better to let it stay closed. So he decided that for the present at least he would say nothing.

"Come in and sit down a while," said Landon when they reached the door of his room. "It is early yet—and I think I ought to tell you something about what you have let yourself in for."

So O'Neill went in and when they had got their pipes to going Landon sketched rapidly the marvelous story of the Roman occupation of north Africa—of the conquest of Carthage a hundred and fifty years before the Christian era; of the powerful native tribes converted into allies or driven deeper and deeper into the Sahara; of great fortresses built to guard the passes over the mountains; of countless leagues of roads constructed that the legions might move rapidly to any threatened point, and so well constructed that most of them were still in use; of grim deserts reclaimed by a vast scheme of irrigation and converted into fertile and smiling fields, which in time became the principal granary of Rome itself; of mighty cities rising all across the land, rivaling even the imperial city in the beauty of their buildings, with theaters and baths and temples of Numidian marble, embellished with statues, worthy of the Via Sacra; of the estates of the great nobles, set in the midst of lovely gardens, each a little empire in itself.

And then Landon pictured the gradual decay of this mighty organism, the drying up of its sources of power; the incursion of the Vandals, who overran Africa as well as Italy and who, in their turn, fell before the great Arab invasion of the eighth century, which swept Christianity from Africa and established in its stead the religion of Mahomet; of the destruction of all this wealth and beauty, which the Moslems hated because of its Christian origin; and of the final victory of the desert which year by year had piled its sands deeper over

field and villa and road and town, until it had engulfed them all—until the clock of time had been turned back and Africa lay sterile and dead again as it had been two thousand years before.

It is a tale fascinating beyond belief, and O'Neill, to whom it was all new, listened with rapt astonishment.

"There is no portion of the earth's surface," Landon concluded, "not Italy itself, which is as rich in the remains of that old civilization as these provinces of Algeria and Tunis. One could spend a lifetime here without more than scratching the surface. This is my fourth visit and I know very clearly now just what I want to do. We are going first to Lambèse, which was for generations the headquarters of the Third Augustan Legion; then on through Timgad to Tebessa, and finally I hope to Gafsa, an oasis where Jugurtha had his treasury. Nobody has ever discovered what happened to the contents of that treasury," he added. "Perhaps we shall find a clew!"

"It sounds like the 'Arabian Nights,'" commented O'Neill.

"It is the 'Arabian Nights,'" smiled Landon. "All along the route there will be astonishing things to study—I have been over it rather hastily, and have marked down one spot especially, where I think we shall be able to solve certain problems——"

His voice trailed away, and he sat silent for a moment, lost in thought.

"How long will it take?" O'Neill asked.

"That is impossible to say—some months at least. Of course you will be free to leave whenever you have had enough of it."

"That will not be for a long time, I promise you," said O'Neill, his eyes shining. "I never dreamed of anything so fascinating."

Landon smoked on thoughtfully. Then he glanced at Pat.

"Yes, dad," she said. "I think you ought to tell him."

"All right, I will," agreed Landon. "You understand of course that what I am about to tell you is told in absolute confidence."

"Of course," O'Neill nodded.

"The route I have just outlined," went on Landon in a lowered tone, "is our official one—the one for which I have the consent of the French government. But I am going to try, if I can, to make a side trip up into the Aurès Mountains, into the country of the Ouled-Abdi—the country of the Hamadsha," he added. "You understand now why I was so interested in your story of the tragedy of the Marseilles express."

"Yes," agreed O'Neill. He did not understand—not in the very slightest degree—but perhaps he would later on. "I suppose that is where the danger comes in."

"There will be no danger—absolutely none—so long as we can maintain the disguise of archæologists——"

"Disguise?" echoed O'Neill.

"Just that," said Landon, looking at him squarely, and O'Neill noted again the disproportion in his eyes. It was very marked. One pupil was distended until there was scarcely any iris; the other was contracted almost to a pin point. "When we go into the Aurès, it will not really be as archæologists, but as crusaders—crusaders in the cause of civilization. We shall be fighting against the Moslem, as crusaders have always done. What we shall accomplish there, I hope, is something far more vital than the deciphering of inscriptions and delving into the past—we shall take the first real step toward saving Europe and perhaps America from another Moslem conquest."

O'Neill was staring at him fascinated—at his extraordinary eyes, shining with excitement, at his quivering face.

Landon saw the stare and stopped abruptly. Then with a little laugh of apology, almost of embarrassment, he passed his hand across his face as though to wipe away the traces of his emotion.

"I suppose you think I am mad," he said. "It certainly sounds mad, doesn't it?" and he peered at O'Neill in a queer deprecating way.

"No," faltered O'Neill, and rubbed his head bewilderedly. "But I don't understand—I am afraid it's too big for me. You mean a holy war?"

"Oh, something much more subtle than that—much more dangerous. There will never be a holy war."

"Why not?"

"For the same reason that there will never be a Christian war. Moslems are divided into sects just as Christians are, and they hate each other much worse. Here in this country, if French control was removed, they would start to fighting not the Christians but each other, just as they have always done. Each marabout—and there are a lot of them—has his following, and they are jealous of all the others. Even if there

was a holy war, we should win it. But this time our civilization is to be betrayed into destroying itself."

He stopped again and again passed a trembling hand across his face. Glancing at Pat, O'Neill was startled by the intensity with which she watched her father and the thought passed through his head that perhaps all this was just a form of mania, not to be taken seriously.

"You will understand everything in time," went on Landon in another tone, "and then I think you will agree with me that it is not I who am mad, but the world—our world—to go on dancing blindly on the edge of the abyss."

He stopped, listened a moment, then rose, walked quickly to the door, pulled it open and looked out into the hall. The hall was empty.

"I thought I heard some one," he said. "Some one unlocked a door out there. I can't tell you any more, O'Neill—not here. It isn't safe. Wait till we are out in the desert."

"You don't need to tell me any more," O'Neill broke in.

"I will tell you this, though: if we win we shall put an end to the greatest conspiracy in history. If we lose—well, it will be in a cause worth dying for! What do you say? It isn't too late——"

"Yes, it is," interrupted O'Neill.

Landon smiled.

"Irishmen have been fighting in strange causes all over the world since history began," he said. "You are just one more—it is in the blood. I think we were mighty lucky to find him, don't you, Pat?"

The girl nodded emphatically.

"But see here," said O'Neill, "don't think I want to meddle in something I don't understand—but—but it seems to me——"

"Go on," encouraged Landon as he hesitated.

"Well, it seems to me that if there is really going to be any fighting it is no place for a girl."

"But I have already told you," broke in Pat impatiently, "that dad and I stick together in everything!"

Landon looked at her with a slow smile.

"Yes," he agreed; "and not only that—if certain things come to pass it is only through Pat that we can succeed. I do not think there will be any danger—real danger; but even if there were it would make no difference—she would have to face it. For I have dedicated her to this cause, as I dedicate myself!"

His eyes were shining again with that curious light—the light of fanaticism, and when O'Neill looked at the girl he saw that her eyes were shining too.

"Oh, all right," he said; "of course you know best," and he rubbed his head again, for there was queer buzzing going on inside.

"And now," Landon added, passing his hand across his eyes with a gesture of sudden weariness, "I am going to tell you good night. I have to get an early start to-morrow—I have a lot of work to do."

Pat took O'Neill to the door.

"I am so glad you are going!" she whispered. "And you will be glad, too! It is true what dad said—you will see. It's the biggest thing in the world! Good night."

"Good night," answered O'Neill mechanically, and sought his room.

He still felt a little giddy.

"Drunk with the wine of new ideas!" he told himself, and walked out upon the terrace in a sort of trance.

There was no use going to bed with his brain in such a turmoil, and he sat down on the bench back of the balustrade and filled his pipe again and stared out across the harbor. Perhaps they were both mad. "The greatest conspiracy in history!" "The first step toward saving Europe!" "The biggest thing in the world!"

What could be madder than that!

And then he started violently, for a hand had been laid lightly on his shoulder.

"I have come, as you suggested, Monsieur O'Neill," said a harsh voice in French, "to talk over our affair."

And, looking up, O'Neill saw standing beside him a tall figure wrapped in a great burnoose—a dark face framed in a close-clipped beard—the face of the unknown of the Marseilles express.

To be continued in the next issue, September 7th.

William West Winter's complete novel, "The Valley of the Four Ghosts," begins on page 51 of this issue.

Smoky Steps Out

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

Author of "The Snowbird and the Bull," "Wild Horses," Etc.

A man who will poison horses deserves what the agent of the T. J. got.

JUST a little town, south of Prescott, which the boys with sweet perversity call "Eagle." But as a town it is a decidedly dejected and unpatriotic Eagle. It never screams on the glorious Fourth, but sits molting, its sheathed talons in the sand and its beak on its chest —if an eagle may be said to have a chest. Possibly the temperature has something to do with Eagle's invariable dejection. In summer it ranges—the temperature, not the town—from one hundred to one hundred and ten in the shade, if you can find any. In winter the temperature doesn't range at all; just stays there. It is hot, and dry, geographically speaking. Ornithologically speaking, it is wet in spots, if you know where to look for the spots. "Smoky" says that the liquor surreptitiously sold in Eagle is a most peculiar beverage, and cites the instance of Sed Ambrose who under its influence miscalculated the logical date of his funeral by several years. It seems that the late demented Sed Ambrose, endeavoring to see into the future, mistook his six-shooter for an opera glass. Placing the open end at his eye he attempted to focus the blamed thing. The result of this scientific experiment was duly recorded in the obituaries of the Tonto *Herald,* with an accompanying editorial controverting the coroner's finding which intimated that illicit liquor was the cause of said Ambrose's decease. The *Herald* called attention to the fact that Mr. Ambrose did not pass into the Great Beyond until the seventh day after the accident—in other words, not until he had become entirely sober. Smoky, in recounting this little incident of mistaken identity, offered the immoral suggestion, "Why become sober when you can get liquor like that?"

Any one who has ever smelled a horse blanket would recognize Smoky as a rider, and a horseman. He is of that trim and economic mold which conceals real strength while revealing potential litheness and activity. And he doesn't slouch around town wearing high-heeled boots and a hat as wide as a desert homestead just because he has earned the right to wear them. Like all true sons of adventure he has journeyed far and survived many hazards. "What I mean, a fellow naturally has to go see what it looks like," is his inevitable excuse for wandering. Possibly that is why he drifted down to Prescott and eventually met up with "Bud" Ming of the O-Bar-O, who hailed from Eagle. Bud Ming, without advertising the fact, was looking for a man of Smoky's type. He casually mentioned Eagle and the wages he was willing to pay. "I don't know anybody around Prescott except Doc and Clay," said Smoky, "and they're both out of town. Eagle sounds kind of interesting. Mebby I'll run down and take a slant at her, later."

Bud Ming departed. A few days later Smoky was wafted into Eagle on the invisible wings of Chance, and there he heard something about Bud Ming and the O-Bar-O. Ming's saddle horses were dying from a cause suspected but not proven. It seems that a rival outfit, the T. J., after placing a lily—so to speak—in the unreceptive hands of one of their defunct cowpunchers, had buried him with a vow that they would set Bud Ming afoot to the last hoof. It might be well to mention, softly, and by way of explanation, that several months before Smoky arrived in Eagle one of Bud Ming's riders, led into an altercation with a T. J. man—the two of them meeting at an isolated and mutually coveted water tank—was forced to resort to that eloquent but not loquacious arbiter, the six-shooter. Hence, without further and unnecessary details, the grudge. Bud's man left there by pony express and eventually arrived in Juarez, C. O. D., and uncalled for. And the town of Eagle, still molting, never so much as ruffled a feather.

Smoky did not allow Bud Ming to think that he either wanted or needed work. He said he was in Eagle to find out what made it go.

"But she don't go; she just sets," declared the taciturn Bud.

"Then," suggested Smoky, "let's make her go."

Smoky's theory, which he still holds to in spite of the twenty-eighth commandment or amendment or whatever it is, is that you may camp, eat, drink, and travel with a man but that you never really know him until he is "lit up." In fact, the condition implied is often illuminating. But try as he might he could not ignite the lean and hawk-faced Bud, who while never declining a drink absolutely refused to let his light shine. Rather, he clamped down so hard on the English language as interpreted in southern Arizona that when Smoky asked him how far it was to his ranch, it was not until ten o'clock the following morning, when they were halfway there, that Bud turned to him and said, "Twenty-three miles."

"Why didn't you wait until we got there, and then you wouldn't had to told me at all?" complained Smoky, who was not feeling especially well. "I only asked you last night, in the pool room."

"Pool room," murmured Bud.

A mile farther Smoky turned to his silent partner. "What I mean, I feel more lonesome out here riding this dry country with you than I would if I was alone."

Bud Ming didn't smile; that is, on the outside. He raised his hand to his hat, took the old, black, floppy Stetson by its peak and gave it a twirl, so that the back was now in front. His jet-black eyes were expressionless; his lean, somber face untouched by any hint that he was interested in anything nearer than the dim, low ranges far to the south. Under his knee was a Winchester. In his holster was a six-shooter, in a country where these significant embellishments were not ordinarily in sight. Bud smoked a corncob pipe. A few ends of black hair stuck through a hole in his sombrero. The two top buttons were missing from his faded shirt. His chest was tanned as brown as his face. "He would do to put in a cornfield," thought Smoky. And then, upon further consideration Smoky decided that he would not care to undertake the job of putting him there. It was evident that Bud Ming was "on the prod." And Smoky wondered if he had not been just a bit hasty in accepting Bud's offer of seventy-five dollars a month and found. Exceedingly high pay for punching cattle, but not a whole lot too much for puncturing cattlemen. Yet Smoky, a much younger man, was intrigued by Bud Ming's personality. As Smoky says: "I could see what he was like on the outside, and his furniture was sure peculiar and interesting, from his old black lid to the ragged edge of his wrinkled chaps, which he wore low-down, like they would fall off any minute, but never did. What I mean, I was curious to find out what he was like, inside."

Some of the T. J. riders were even more curious as to Bud Ming's internal mechanism, and would have been highly pleased to have seen it marked "Exhibit A" at a coroner's inquest. Smoky had learned, in Eagle, that such was the case. He decided that Bud Ming had hired him because he was a stranger to the community, with no friendships to divert his vision, or influence his decisions—and Smoky began to suspect that there would be decisions to make single-handed and with no time for the dot-and-carry-one method. Ming's horses were dying off rapidly; in the home pasture, in the corrals, out on the flats of the river bottom and at isolated line shacks. At first it was

thought they had been eating poisonous shrubs or weeds. But that was soon abandoned as a theory. Then the water came in for an inspection and was found to be all right. No cattle died—a significant circumstance. Some one was poisoning the horses. So it was whispered in Eagle. Yet Bud had not said a word about dead horses or the T. J. feud.

The farther they rode the more Smoky yearned to find out what would be required of him. But he couldn't ask and he wouldn't turn back. He dropped a few delicate hints as to enlightenment but they fell without a ripple in the somber pool of Bud Ming's contemplations. Finally, as the sun rounded toward noon, Smoky put his hand to his head. His hand was moist but his head was dry and hot. "Eagle!" he murmured. Bud Ming jogging along, his black eyes fixed on the distant hills, actually spoke. Smoky almost fell out of the saddle.

"Don't believe in packin' liquor from town," declared Bud. "So I reckon we better get rid of this." He produced a small flask, proffered it to Smoky, who took it, held it out at arm's length, and blinked. "Looks like a good antidote for the poison we took last night. Well, if I never see you again——"

Bud Ming never asked a man to do what he would not do himself. Then he tossed the flask aside.

Another long mile and the sweat started on Smoky's forehead. He felt better. Then five more miles across the glaring sand with never a word from Bud Ming until they arrived at a fork in the trail. Bud drew rein. He raised his hand and twirled his hat. "Make for that notch over yonder. Nesters on the far side—Sparks, Dewey and Johnson. Follow Johnson's north-line fence to the corner and then head straight west. Tell Boomer I sent you."

Smoky nodded. His pride forbade asking any questions. Again Bud Ming raised his hand, twirled his hat, and gazed at Smoky with eyes that seemed to bore clear through him. "Got a gun on you?"

"You bet I got one!"

Bud reined his horse round and rode away at a lope. Smoky watched him for a few seconds, then reined his own mount toward the Notch. He rode briskly, hoping to make the home ranch before nightfall. His horse had traveled well enough at a trot or a walk. When loping he stumbled frequently. About the fourth stumble, and Smoky pulled him up. "Three-gaited horse, ain't you? Start, stumble and fall. Now suppose you just forget you're sire was Crutches and your dam Kentucky Blunder, and just travel!"

After Smoky had rubbed a little rust off his spurs the horse did better. The hot miles of sand and rock and cactus plants dwindled into space behind them and presently Smoky was in the Notch, where he watered his horse, and set out again as the long, afternoon shadows flattened to the earth. Working down the western slope of the hills he passed a meager homestead in the dusk—a house unlighted and an empty corral. Farther along the dim road he passed another homestead. A lone dog raced up and down inside the yard fence and barked.

"Folks must be seeing the 'Follies' at Eagle, or mebby taking in the 'Passing Show.' Me, I'm to tell Boomer who sent me. Now who the hell is Boomer? Sounds like he might be a depth bomb or something. What I mean, this here country looks snaky to me. Bud Ming and Boomer and dead horses." Smoky addressed his own mount: "Got a gun on you, Calculator? Huh! I guess *you* learned how to talk from Bud Ming." Smoky, since crossing the hills, had designated the horse as Calculator because of its habit of putting down three and carrying one. But it was a borrowed horse and there was no animus in Smoky's heart. To the contrary he was considerate of the animal, knowing that it was possibly the best that Bud could procure on short notice since his own remuda had been depleted. Finally Smoky passed another homestead. A light shone in the cottage window. A dog barked. Then a voice hailed him:

"That you, Bud?"

"Nope. When it's daytime my name is Smoky Saunders. If you're Mr. Johnson, I was to follow your north fence——"

"O-Bar-O? New hand?"

"That's me!"

"You better light down and eat. You ain't a stranger if you're one of Bud Ming's boys."

"I'm coming—with my ears laid back," said Smoky.

Ordinarily, Smoky despised nesters because of their well-known propensity for mussing up perfectly good range land with

barbed-wire fences and sheds for tame cows, and leaving harrows and plows scattered around the scenery; and fencing water holes, and committing all sorts of rural misdemeanors—a list of which may be found in that pathetic ballad entitled "The Cowboy's Complaint." However, the boiled beef and potatoes, the canned tomatoes and peaches and the dried-apple pie were good. Two large cups of hot coffee were even better. Molly Johnson and her mother were uneffusively hospitable. Johnson smoked his pipe, sitting back in the corner of the dining room, which, with the swift disappearance of the supper dishes became a living room, neatly kept and fragrant with the smell of new lumber. Smoky declined an invitation to stop for the night, and thanking his hosts for their hospitality, departed, promising to ride over some day—as he said, "With the bridle reins in one hand and an insurance policy in the other, unless Bud Ming furnishes me with a better mount."

Mrs. Johnson had smiled, and then she had glanced swiftly at her husband, who stepped out to the gateway with Smoky and after bidding him farewell, added: "I'd kind of hang onto that insurance policy, no matter what string of hosses you ride for Bud."

Smoky rode down to the northeast corner of the homestead and turned, keeping along the north fence. A low moon made it just light enough to tease Smoky's imagination, and convert clumps of cacti and brush into blurred images of grotesque animals and crouching men and all sorts of nightmarish possibilities. Even Calculator seemed unduly impressed by these familiar shapes. It seemed as though Calculator had suddenly been surcharged with fresh vigor and alertness. The horse did not change its gait, or show excitement, but stepped with more spring. Smoky caught the feel of it and smiled. "What I mean," he told Calculator, "you ain't forgot what Mr. Johnson said about that insurance policy. Same here. I reckon her eyes are blue, in the daytime. And her mother is just real folks! Too bad they're nesters."

Smoky passed the last dim post of the north fence and kept on toward the west. The going became rougher, yet the horse seemed to know where the trail led. He stepped briskly, putting down four with considerable regularity. Presently they were in a shallow cañon whose low walls echoed the faint, reiterated *plup* of Calculator's hoofs. Smoky pulled up, rolled a cigarette and lighted it. He twirled the match in his fingers and as it went out Calculator shied.

"Why, you dam' fool!" Smoky, blinded for a moment by the flare of the match, tried to peer into the darkness. Instantly he heard a faint *click* which sounded altogether too familiar. He drove both spurs into the horse's ribs. Calculator lifted, and then stumbled and went down. As the horse fell a shot crashed and rumbled in the narrow cañon. Smoky was on his feet and in the saddle before the horse had struggled up. Calculator, without any further inducement, lurched down the cañon on the run, leaping occasional rocks and dim, gray patches of sand with surprising agility. Smoky laid close to him and gave him his head. Finally horse and rider burst from the mouth of the cañon and pattered across a moonlit stretch of gravel, splashed across a stream, and sped, a flickering shadow, down the flat stretch along the river bottom. Smoky was never strong for barbed-wire fences, but he was glad to see that one, and the looped gate, which he lost no time in opening, and closing. He crossed what he surmised was a pasture, opened another gate and rode down a long lane toward the low buildings bulked against the starlit sky.

A voice came from the dooryard; a stentorian voice, a voice like the roll of drums: "Git out of that potato patch! Where do you think you are, anyhow!"

"If that ain't Boomer," thought Smoky, "it ought to be."

And a few minutes later, in the ranch-house kitchen, Smoky saw Boomer in the flesh—a little, dried-up, bow-legged old-timer, with "cook" written all over him, and a chest like a frog. In fact Boomer was all chest; his arms, legs and the rest of him being merely attached, like the white "strings" on a cellar potato.

Boomer's little, watery eyes blinked as he gazed at Smoky.

"So Bud sent, you, eh? Another snappin' turtle for me to feed! And Bud must 'a' give you a right good start, by the way you lit in here. Do you travel without a hat, regular?"

Smoky's hand went to his uncovered head. "It's cooler, without a hat. What I mean, I left mine on Johnson's northwest-corner fence post, so I could ride back tomorrow and see how far I came before I

got here. I had supper at Johnson's. Say, is it open season on cow hands around here?"

"You better ask Bud—and he won't tell you. But about three is the limit for one day's huntin'. You figure to stretch any hides, young fella?" boomed Boomer.

"I ain't exactly hard of hearing, Mr. Boomer. No, I don't calculate to stretch any hides, except my own, which is some shrunk from the sun. Kind of keeping house by yourself, ain't you?"

"You better ask Bud. Where'd you say you left him, down at Johnson's?"

Smoky's dark eyes were lighted with the faintest hint of a smile as he gazed at the little man with the big voice. "Me, I ain't seen so much of this here country as you, so I'm free to take advice from an old-timer. If you want to know where I left him—you better ask Bud."

For an instant Boomer looked as though he were going to smile; but smiling is mighty serious business for any man who has cooked long for cow-punchers. And as Boomer had other serious business on his mind he forbore to do more than pass the back of his hand across his mouth, as though brushing away any inclination toward levity. "I see you're travelin' light ——" he began.

"And fast," interrupted Smoky.

"So you sure must be a hand," roared Boomer, the veins in his wrinkled neck swelling as though he were trying to grow as big as his voice. "No bed roll, no slicker, no hoss, no——" Boomer was out of breath.

"No hat?" suggested Smoky with a slow smile.

"No nothin'!" continued Boomer. "Never saw a cow hand that did!"

"Did what, Mr. Boomer?"

Boomer stopped swinging his arm and his face went blank. Heretofore his natural vehemence and his majestic, if somewhat foggy, voice had always impressed strangers, especially young strangers. Yet this slow-smiling, dark-eyed, trim-built young fellow seemed decidedly cool and too darned polite altogether. He turned his back on Smoky, walked across the kitchen, and sat down. "What do you call yourself, anyhow?" he queried, still keeping up his bluff but finding it hard work to do so.

"Me? Why, I'm a pearl diver. What I mean, just lead me to a bed and watch me go to the bottom, and stay."

Boomer said nothing. He lighted a lantern and showed Smoky the way to the bunk house. It was evident that Boomer was the only other man about the place. Smoky chose a bunk. "I'm all set," he told Boomer. "I don't need no light."

Boomer picked up the lantern and stepped close to Smoky. "Got a gun on you?" he queried in a hoarse whisper.

"You bet I got one!"

Boomer stepped through the doorway. One of Smoky's boots dropped to the floor. "Hey, Boomer!" he called softly, "just whisper when you call me for breakfast. If I'm waked up sudden I'm like to go wild and mebby hurt somebody."

"You figure you're some hard, don't you?" said Boomer from the outer darkness.

"You said it! Honest, every time I go out I take a club along, fearing I'll get wild and bite myself. Good night, old-timer."

Boomer, back in the ranch-house kitchen, extinguished the lantern and sat down near the table. He tilted his chair back and curled his lean, little bow legs round the legs of the chair. He was getting ready to enjoy himself, a serious matter with him. His weathered, lined and hard face relaxed. He actually smiled. Then as though he had caught himself doing something which indicated that at heart he was altogether human and fond of a joke, he coughed. The dish pan fell from its nail above the sink.

Over in the bunk house Smoky was snoring peacefully.

Boomer's tremendous voice, and the fact that he always seemed occupied in handling it, and in nothing else, had bluffed many a man into believing that Boomer was nothing more nor less than an animated megaphone. But Boomer's voice was the bulwark of his craft—and not the kind of bull work so frequently associated with garrulous individuals. From behind the noise he made the little and ancient cook studied folk. In reality he was Bud Ming's right hand, adviser and loyal friend. Too old to work as foreman, he cooked, and boomed and fussed and scolded—yet there was never a kinder man wore jeans or a flour-sack apron with four X's branded on it. Occasionally, when some of the younger hands took to parading their verbal knowledge of cattle or horses, Boomer, for the sake of self-respect and old times, was obliged to express himself.

"You limbernecks!" he was wont to say. "Why, I was born just one day ahead of Adam. And speakin' of short ribs, I done forgot more about cattle and hosses then you'll ever live to see."

Naturally Boomer was an early riser, but unlike the bread he made when at the home ranch, his rising was unaffected by temperature. A range cook usually gets up about three or three-thirty, and Boomer had the habit. This morning was no exception, aside from the fact that he saddled a horse, instead of lighting the fire, and drifted out of the yard and across the creek before the dawn had gilded the eastern hills. He knew the trail Smoky had taken to reach the ranch and he followed it down through Coyote Cañon. And as the sun came up Boomer cast a speculative eye on the tracks of Smoky's horse. It was not customary for a man, especially one unfamiliar with the country, to ride through the cañon, at night, at a full gallop. Boomer was looking for the reason. He found it, a gray sombrero with a double hole through the crown. Boomer also found other tracks and an empty thirty-thirty shell. He tucked the shell in his pocket, and with the hat tied to the saddle he rode briskly back to the ranch house. He saw the smoke before he arrived and found Smoky bending over a skillet. "Heard you ride out," said Smoky. "Thought you'd be hungry when you got back."

Boomer stared at Smoky, at the stove, at the eggs in the skillet. "Hey? I'm never hungry! I just eat."

"I just eat—and I'm always hungry," declared Smoky.

Boomer held out the hat with the holes in it. Smoky's glance was swift, his decision even swifter. "Thanks," he said and turned an egg in the sizzling skillet.

"Me and you is goin' to get along," boomed Boomer.

"What I mean, we will—but how far?" And Smoky's eloquent, dark eyes were turned toward the sombrero—with the two holes in its crown.

Boomer shook his head. "Another hoss died last night—over on the flat by the creek. Saw him as I rode back this mornin'."

Smoky turned another egg. Boomer decided that he liked this trim-built young hand who had ridden full tilt into his potato patch, and had offered no explanation of his now thoroughly understandable haste. Yes, liked him a whole lot. Especially since he had found the bullet-punctured sombrero. Bud had made no mistake in hiring him, even if he did look young and frisky.

Boomer thought Smoky entitled to a line on the conditions prevailing in the spacious neighborhood, which, as a neighborhood, included the O-Bar-O, the T. J. and the T. Q. T., Thomas Quilnan Thompson, called frequently by the facetious "The Tom Tom," and by others, equally facetious but less friendly, "The Q. T." Yet as Boomer did not know just how much or how little Bud Ming had enlightened the new hand he was a trifle cautious, and generalized. They squatted just outside the kitchen doorway. As Boomer talked he used a stick to outline the main trails and water holes, and through habit scratched the brands in the dirt. "The O-Bar-O looks just like a dumb-bell, when you draw it," asserted Smoky unsmilingly.

"But Bud ain't," roared Boomer.

"More like an Indian club," suggested Smoky innocently.

Boomer dwelt long and eloquently upon the loss of their saddle stock, going into all the unlovely details with the enthusiasm of a veterinary student. Convinced that neither water nor poison weed were the causes, he suggested by inference that a recent difference of opinion was—yet he mentioned no brands, no names, or no logical finding to substantiate his theory. Bud Ming's horses were dying, here, there and everywhere. There were hardly enough horses left to furnish each rider with a string of three, which meant further elimination of saddle stock through overwork. Smoky listened, naturally interested in the mystery. Finally he stood up, stretched, and tilted his hat over his eyes. "What I mean, suppose we take a look at that horse you was telling me about—down by the creek."

"What's the good? He's dead, like the rest."

"Well," said Smoky, "I would kind of hate to ride over there alone. I only got one hat."

Boomer looked hard at Smoky, then by what appeared to be a tremendous effort of will lowered his voice to a pitch resembling that of a mere steamboat whistle in a fog. "You must of caught it from Bud"

"The habit of twirling my hat? No, you're wrong. It wasn't me twirled her."

"You know what I mean, you innocent-lookin' young reptile!" thundered Boomer. "Now you just take a short holt on yourself and wait till I get—till I get dressed. Then we'll go look at that hoss."

Boomer's ideas as to getting dressed were simple. He reappeared with a six-shooter belted about his waist and a shiny octagon-barreled Winchester in his hand. They strode across to the corral. "On the level—I thought you went to get your apron," declared Smoky as they saddled up.

Boomer examined his Winchester before he slipped it into the scabbard.

"Is it as bad as all that?" queried Smoky.

Boomer made no reply. Smoky tugged at Calculator's cinch.

After they had crossed the creek and were riding slowly along the flats, Boomer, gazing straight ahead, made a statement. "Whenever I get caught out at night, and have to ride, I never strike a match. When I want to smoke, I chew."

"Thanks," said Smoky.

Down along the flats a buzzard rose heavily and flew to the top of a distant cottonwood. The early-morning sunlight slanted across the sluggish stream, disclosing tortuous masses of naked roots on which a thin scum of mud had caked and dried. Patches of shade were vivid with sprouts of lush, coarse grass. Beyond a ridge of gravel they found the horse. Smoky dismounted, walked round the animal, stooped and examined its mouth. "Wish I could have got here sooner," he said as he rose.

"What killed him?" queried Boomer as they returned to the ranch house.

"Oh, paraphernalia, or ancestors, or something," said Smoky casually. "I'd hate to say what I thought."

"I reckon you would. But between you and me and the—the buzzard, yonder——"

"He was poisoned," declared Smoky.

"Which ain't news to me," growled Boomer.

"His mouth and his tongue was burned," said Smoky.

"What of that?"

"Oh, nothing. Only, did you ever know poison weed of any kind, or poison water, to burn a horse's mouth and tongue?"

Boomer reflected for a while. "Can't say that I did."

"I don't set up to be an expert, Mr. Boomer. I put in three years with one of the best veterinaries in the United States. I was a year in the remount service. Then I went across, and took to farming cooties. That's all."

"You mean you was in France, in that there fight?"

"Yes. That's why I'm here, I guess."

Boomer reflected again. Presently he spoke. "Say, just what is them cooties they talk about?"

"Oh, they're what made me wild, like I was telling you last night."

Smoky and Boomer had just reached the ford when they heard the patter of a horse's hoofs behind them. Boomer reined round, his hand on the butt of his Winchester. Smoky came round a second later. "Oh, howdy-do, Miss Johnson," boomed Boomer.

Flushed by her fast ride, Molly Johnson drew up and patted the neck of her sweating horse. She nodded and smiled as Smoky raised his hat. Then, "Boomer, somebody cut our west-line fence, and the O-Bar-O cattle got in the alfalfa. Mother and I ran them out. Dad's gone to Eagle. We mended the fence. It was cut. The marks showed. But what I really wanted to tell you was that Mr. Ming sent word to dad by Mr. Holder that he had gone on over to the Tom Tom, unexpectedly, and wouldn't be back for several days. And that the outfit ought to be in to-morrow and when they came in they were to stay until he showed up. Oh, yes, he said Mr. Saunders could ride over to Eagle and get all the .44 cartridges Simpson had."

"Thanks, Miss Molly. If you'll stay for dinner I'll kill a hen."

Molly Johnson shook her head.

"I'll kill a chicken," bribed Boomer.

"But mother is alone."

"And I can't lift my right hand as high as the stove lid," thundered Boomer, trying to make his voice sound weak and woeful. "Smoky, here, had to cook breakfast, and I like to starved to death. Rheumatiz—bad."

"Can't Mr. Saunders cook?" queried Molly.

"I couldn't cook a chicken if it flew into the oven and laid on its back and begged me to, honest!" declared Smoky hurriedly. "My long suit is building fire and setting table and washing and wiping the dishes and cleaning the sink, and hanging up the

dish pan, and hanging the dishcloth on the fence to dry, and——"

"And I'll ride back with you, as far as the cañon, this afternoon," volunteered Boomer.

"Well, I might stay—for dinner."

Boomer waved his erstwhile rheumatic right arm vigorously. "We win!" he said, which was as good as a shout.

The three horses spattered across the ford and climbed the slight rise to the yard level. Smoky put up the horses, while Boomer lured the chickens up to a pan of grain, and caught one. Habit was strong in him—Boomer. He dressed the chicken and mixed a pan of biscuits before he remembered that he had the rheumatism. Smoky and Molly Johnson found the ranch-house veranda a convenient place in which to get acquainted. And there was no reason for their not getting acquainted. Molly Johnson was young, blue-eyed, with the clear color of youth that lives in the open. She liked dogs and chickens and horses, especially horses. Moreover, Molly was practical and without any of the many affectations observable when young women visit with young men—especially strange young men. And this strange young man with the dark hair and the sincere dark eyes did not have to talk to make himself interesting. Yet his reserve puzzled her, while she was accustomed to meeting men who talked little. And Molly finally decided, as they came to the mutual conclusion that a fine horse was about the noblest animal in creation, that Smoky's reserve was founded upon experience and was in no way attributable to embarrassment. Molly was gazing at Smoky's hat which lay on the veranda floor.

"Were you in France—in the war?" she asked, turning to him.

"Yes, ma'am. But I didn't know I showed it."

"I thought you were, because you are so—so quiet."

"I wish some of the boys that were with me weren't just so quiet as they are, Miss Johnson." Smoky's dark eyes were grave with deep memories. "But I'd just as soon not talk about it. I got all the war I want."

"But," said Molly, "then why did you come down here?"

"I'm beginning to wonder myself. But I kind of like Bud Ming, and Boomer."

"Oh, Mr. Ming is a real friend when you get to know him. He's been a real friend to us. It's just a shame the way they have—the way his horses have died. Wat Holder stopped at our place last night, after you left. He told us that another horse had died; said he saw it on the flats as he rode over. You didn't meet him?"

"Wat Holder? No. You see it was pretty dark when I struck the cañon. Is Wat Holder a T. J. rider?"

"Oh, no! He's one of Mr. Ming's men. He's a good hand and a wonderful rider, but he's awfully cruel to horses."

"I'd like to meet him, in daytime," said Smoky, smiling.

"He comes to our house quite often. Father doesn't like him."

"You say he came last night, after I left?"

"Yes. He stayed for a few minutes. He said he was going over to Eagle."

Smoky gazed at his hat on the veranda floor. "You think this Wat Holder rode through Coyote Cañon coming to your place?"

"He must have. There is no other way through, from here."

"Well, if he did his headlights were out," said Smoky.

Boomer waddled round the corner of the house. "Come and get it!" he boomed, then his wizened face took on a startled expression as he realized that he was not out at the tail of a chuck wagon calling up the hands. His amendment was in a lower tone. "We're all set!"

"How many plates you got laid out?" queried Smoky as he rose and picked up his hat.

"Plates? Why, three! Cain't you count?"

"Sometimes. But judging from the dust they make I should say they are five or six—and they got an hour yet before they'll hit here."

Boomer followed the line of Smoky's gesture. Far out on the southern desert a thin cloud of dust rose, faded, was renewed.

"That's them," said Boomer.

Molly Johnson had enjoyed the chicken dinner and had departed before the outfit arrived. Meanwhile Boomer, growling and shaking his head, cooked a meal for seven hungry men. He had eliminated all traces of the chicken dinner beforehand. Smoky helped, and later sat down to eat with the outfit that he might place each one and himself as future coworkers and companions.

He was introduced in a general way, and not being hungry he managed to fix the personalities in his mind. Lee Byles, a long-geared and saturnine puncher, looked, so Smoky says, just like his name. Fay Carruthers was young, boisterous, red-faced, with hair bleached to straw color by the sun. Harley Miller was a quiet, stocky, middle-aged man who talked not at all. George Manley, Lane Gibson, and Henry Ritters were not unusual in any way—simply hands. Smithy Paige awakened Smoky's curiosity somewhat because Smithy's neck was smooth and his cheeks blooming and his manner not of the range, yet Smoky surmised that he must be worth his salt or Bud Ming would not have hired him. Bud himself was not with the outfit —and no one undertook to explain his absence.

After the men had eaten they filed out and distributed themselves about the yard, smoking and talking, or sitting silent with hat brims drawn down against the hot light. Smoky and Boomer happened to be together on the kitchen steps. "Who is that fellow in the gray shirt that ate with a fork?" queried Smoky. "Didn't get his name."

"You mean Smithy Paige. Used to be a bank clerk. He never did git over the habit of eatin' with a fork—and he's been with Bud for three years now."

"Too bad!" said Smoky, smiling.

Boomer's little, watery eyes sought Smoky's face but he read nothing there that would explain the remark. Boomer had noticed that Smoky used his fork instead of his knife. Was it "too bad" that young Smithy Paige had been with the outfit three years? The more Boomer tried to understand Smoky the farther Boomer got from any definite conclusion, save one: that the new hand was not an accidental acquisition but the deliberate outcome of Bud Ming's silent planning. And Smoky, himself, had noticed one peculiarity about the men. Each carried both rifle and six-shooter, save Lee Byles, who went apparently unarmed. And while Smoky did not doubt Bud Ming's judgment in hiring men he decided to keep an eye on two men—Lee Byles and the absent Wat Holder. New to the place and the outfit Smoky's intuitions were not blunted by association. His curiosity as to Wat Holder was assuaged within the hour, for that gentleman of the range rode in on a tired horse, stating that he had been to Eagle to buy some ammunition but that there was none of the desired caliber to be had.

"That saves me a ride," stated Smoky, who was sitting on the low step of the bunk house.

"How's that?" queried Holder. Smoky smiled to himself. "Bud Ming sent word I was to ride over to Eagle and get all the .44's in stock. No use going if there ain't any."

Boomer scowled heavily at nothing in particular. This Smoky person wasn't so keen, after all.

Yet Boomer had occasion to change his mind an hour or two later. Smoky had noticed a sleek, well-muscled pony corralled in a sort of ready-made box stall back of the barn. He had also noticed that Boomer fed and watered the animal. The pony had a blaze-face, and four white feet, and looked as though it were both fast and quick to rein. And Smoky was going to Eagle in spite of his remark to Wat Holder. Finding Boomer in the kitchen, his glasses on the end of his nose, reading a week-old Phoenix paper one of the boys had fetched in, Smoky asked him who owned the pony.

Boomer looked as though he had been deliberately insulted. "You mean Chilly? He's my hoss. Does he look like he belonged to some sore-footed cow hand around here?"

"Not exactly, Mr. Boomer. That's why I asked."

"Well, that hoss belongs to me—and I wouldn't let the best rider in Arizona throw a saddle on him."

"Well, I ain't the best rider in Arizona, Mr. Boomer. I'm going to Eagle, like Bud said."

Boomer's watery eyes blinked above his glasses. "Change your mind?"

"Not in private. I figure Bud Ming is the boss."

"You ain't such a fool as you look," observed Boomer.

"Which ain't my fault, being born good looking. Now you ain't so long on looks, but as for brains——"

Boomer's wizened face grew redder than usual. He wanted to get mad but he couldn't. "If you lame that hoss, or fetch him back wore down, I'll make you so hard to find you'll never locate yourself again," thundered Boomer. "Get out of this! Can't you see I'm readin' the paper?"

"I'll take your word for it—but honest, I never brag that I know how to read. Say, I'll just take along them saddle pockets of yours. They ain't working."

Boomer's jaw moved as though he were rapidly chewing gum but he refrained from further speech. In reality he was enjoying himself. Any man that had wit and impudence enough to silence him, especially when such impudence had behind it a serious and worth-while purpose, was welcome to anything that Boomer possessed. Old Boomer of the trail-herd days was a bigger man than his inches would indicate. He had trusted this Smoky person with the dearest possession he had in the world, the blaze-faced pony, Chilly, the little quarter horse that could outrun anything in the county and could outturn the quickest cow horse in Arizona. Boomer kept the pony through pride in old times, kept him and cared for him as though he were a thoroughbred.

Smoky lugged his saddle round to the back of the barn and introduced himself to Chilly. Chilly, who was grain fed and needed exercise, pretended that he just couldn't stand still for a thousand dollars a minute. Smoky paid no attention to this, but saddled and bridled the pony as though he enjoyed two stepping as much as the horse. It was Lee Byles, loafing in the shade, who rose and sauntered round to the back of the barn, incited by a covert gesture from Wat Holder. "Makin' a little ride?" queried Byles.

"Me? Well, mebby a ride—or mebby a walk. Depends on if I can stick. I ain't used to sitting down on bronchos."

"That thing ain't broncho. Any fool kin ride *him,*" declared the genial Mr. Byles.

"Ever try?" queried Smoky innocently.

Mr. Byles' artificial geniality evaporated. "Goin' to Eagle?" he asked

"Sure!" replied Smoky promptly.

"You might fetch back a pint. I been feelin' kind of low, recent."

"Sure! I ain't feeling too good myself. This here water is off. No wonder the stock is dying. The creek ain't so bad—but that tank, over there—why it's just plumb rimmed with alkali."

Lee Byles grinned. This new hand was evidently green. Alkali never killed stock. They were used to it. And as Smoky mounted he took pains to do so awkwardly for Mr. Byles' especial benefit. The result of this was that when Smoky had departed Mr. Byles and Mr. Holder held a brief conversation in which Smoky figured as a fresh kid who used both hands on the saddle to mount a horse and who didn't know enough about range and stock to be taken seriously. And that is just what Smoky wanted Mr. Byles and the rest of the outfit to believe—at least for a short time. Meanwhile, if Lee Byles or Wat Holder had seen Smoky jogging along up Coyote Cañon, the reins easy in his left hand and sitting the pony Chilly as though the two were united in movement and companionship, the aforementioned gentlemen might have thrown out the clutch and reserved their opinion. And as Smoky rode he noted down the landmarks and especially the spot where some one had surprised him and all but finished his career. Also, as he rode he hummed a little tune of his own which was a sort of accompaniment to his serious thought:

"I've heard 'em say, 'Pikes Peak or bust.'
And I've heard 'em sing, 'In cows we trust.'
Oh, the good old days and the good old dust,
Many, many miles from Main Street.

"Which," soliloquized Smoky, "is in Eagle—and not Main Street in Los Angeles. Now I was to get a pint for Mr. Lee Byles, the bilious-lookin' broncho buster. Pint of what? Leave that to me, Chilly."

Smoky passed the corner post of Johnson's north fence along toward dusk; and as he drew round toward the front of the house he observed several buckboards, ranch wagons and saddle horses in the yard. The near-by ranchers were giving a surprise party to Molly Johnson to celebrate her eighteenth birthday. Smoky learned of this later. He would have ridden past had not Molly herself seen him and invited him in. Smoky tried to excuse himself on the grounds of inappropriate raiment, his mission in Eagle, and because he was a stranger to the neighboring ranchers, but Molly would have none of it.

So Smoky watered Chilly, tied him to a fence post and threw him an armful of alfalfa. Then he went round to the kitchen to wash and brush the dust from his garments. Pies, cakes, pots of beans, fresh-baked bread, roasted meats were being carried from wagons to the house. Fathers, mothers, daughters and sons and babies in clothes baskets were in evidence, along with Sunday raiment—and, as Smoky says, the neckties alone would have made the party

a brilliant success. Of course a dance was to follow the supper, and the local fiddler was there, and for once in history painfully sober. After every one had eaten all that he or she could, and the "Its" had been nourished and put back in their baskets, the fiddler took charge.

Young men knew the young ladies present and promptly chose partners for the first dance. Smoky watched, choosing the doorway from which to view the festivities. The older folk forgathered in front of the house and discussed crops and stock and weather. The first dance over, some one suggested a waltz. The fiddler struck up "The Blue Danube." It was evident to Smoky that the fiddler's explorations of that sensuous stream of melody were limited, for he only managed to get about halfway upstream when he was obliged to return and repeat. But it was a first-rate waltz tune as far as it went.

Smoky noticed that Molly Johnson was not dancing. He thought he would ask her to waltz. He knew that he could waltz fairly well—at least that is what a little Red Cross nurse had told him, over in France. And if any one believes that the nurses didn't waltz with the real boys over there, any one hasn't been honestly informed. Yet Smoky hesitated. Bashful? Not a bit. Ashamed of his clothing? Never a minute. The reason for his hesitation sat in one corner of the room—of course she couldn't sit in two—and gazed longingly at the dancers. And this young person did not seem to evoke any enthusiasm among the masculine element. It is significant of Smoky's real quality and courage that he felt sorry enough for her to ask her to waltz. "And," says Smoky, recounting the incident later, "I knew I made a mistake before I made it. What I mean, she wasn't built right to waltz, although she looked like she might win in a wild-cow milking contest. She was thin, and she had on a pair of them canary-leg, high, button shoes as yellow as poison, and long feet with pointed toes, and her ears wiggled when she laughed. What I mean, she laughed when I asked her to waltz, and I saw 'em wiggle. She had her hair fixed plain and tight, with one of them buns at the back—and it was drawed up so snug it made her eyes look like a scared Chinaman's. I don't just recollect what kind of clothes she wore, for first thing I knew I had holt of her and was trying to keep her gentled down so she wouldn't romp all over my feet. What I mean, did you ever get your rope on a tame heifer that wasn't exactly mean, but kind of wild? Well, you know how it handles its feet. I never noticed she was cross-eyed until I got holt of her, and it sure bothered me. What I mean, when I wasn't looking at the mole on her neck I was trying to kind of be polite and look at her eyes, and honest, you would think she was dancing with some fella behind me, instead of me. What I mean, it got me all off my lead and when we wasn't stepping on each other's feet we was figuring to keep from stepping on somebody else's.

"'That *is* a kind of a good-looking fella that keeps passing us,' I says to her. And I liked to laugh, but didn't, when she says, awful soft and sentimental, 'Why, Mr. Saunders, I been looking right at *yew,* all the time.' What I mean I felt sorry for her, first off, and then I got to feeling sorry for both of us."

Smoky was glad when the fiddler stopped fiddling. He did not undertake the next dance, or the next, but forgathered with the ranchers and smoked a cigarette. He had done his duty and expected no reward. But he was rewarded, just before he left. Molly Johnson told him that she thought it was nice of him to ask Lola Swinkey to dance. Smoky smiled. "I was going to ask you," he said, "but nobody seemed to take a shine to that Miss Swinkey, and she sure looked lonesome."

"You're a nice boy—and I like you," said Molly, possibly because they were alone out near the fence where Smoky was untying the pony; possibly because she was not afraid to be frank.

"That's worth missing a dance with you," said Smoky.

He would have stopped at Johnson's that night had it not been that about all of the available sleeping space had been preempted by ranchers who had come too far to think of returning immediately after the festivities. And Smoky was not averse to riding the desert at night, when it was pleasantly cool. He planned to stop over in Eagle the following day and returned to the O-Bar-O via the starlight route. The pony, Chilly, stepped briskly, boring along at a fox trot that wore down the long, blank desert miles; and shortly after daybreak the cluster of adobes and metal-roofed build-

ings called Eagle loomed against the red rim of the ascending sun.

Smoky was eating breakfast in The Surprise Café—which lived up to its name, in that every dish served had to be taken for granted. "What I mean," said Smoky, "a fella was surprised at how real food could be cooked so that it tasted like something else." And while Smoky held his knife and fork over a tired-looking steak and was trying to surprise it in a tender spot, without success, Bud Ming entered with a square package under his arm. Without any sign of greeting Bud took a seat opposite Smoky, placed the square package on the floor and rested one foot on it, and sat straight and stiff as though waiting for some one to feed him. Bud's advent was still another surprise.

Smoky nodded casually and again attacked his steak.

"What you eatin'?" asked Ming.

"I ain't. I'm just carving my initials."

The waitress minced up to the table.

"Eggs," said Ming.

"And?"

"Coffee."

"And?"

"Fried potatoes."

"And?"

"Nothin'," concluded Bud.

The waitress passed on to the nether regions and nought but the buzzing of early flies disturbed the silence. But Ming sat gazing at the wall. Finally Smoky realized that Bud was gazing at the row of hat hooks—at a dusty gray sombrero with two holes in its crown. Smoky gave up attacking the steak and skirmished with the bread, potatoes and coffee. "Lost another horse, day before yesterday, at the ranch," said Smoky.

"Which way you headed?" queried Ming, his black eyes catching Smoky's gaze suddenly.

Smoky's face was tinged with sudden red. "Why, to get those cartridges you wanted —the .44's."

"Who said to get 'em?"

"Why, Miss Johnson rode over to the ranch and said you sent word for me to ride over to Eagle and get all the .44's I could find."

Bud Ming reached up as though to twirl his hat and then evidently remembered that it was not on his head. "She said you was to go?" he queried.

"Sure! She said that you said Saunders was to go."

The waitress came with Bud Ming's order. He ate wolfishly, his gaze on his plate. Wat Holder was the only person to whom he had mentioned Smoky's name. And Wat Holder had not been told to send any one for ammunition. For the first time since the horses had begun to die Bud Ming suspected an enemy in his own camp. But he said nothing. His gaze traveled back to Smoky's hat. He finished his breakfast, rose and waddled over to the cashier's desk, the square package under his arm. Outside the café he handed the package to Smoky. "Forty-fours," he said. "Take 'em back to the ranch. Give 'em to Boomer."

Smoky nodded.

"Tell Boomer I said to send you and Holder over to the east-line shack, but don't ride that hoss Chilly. Take the zebra dun. Take along grub for six days. Never mind what Holder does—just watch the hosses."

"I got you!" declared Smoky. "And I'll sure play my hand."

"If another hoss dies while you're over there, hang your saddle blanket on the third post from the gate, south."

"I got you," said Smoky quietly. "But I only got one blanket and a sweat pad."

"One will be enough," declared Bud Ming.

Smoky concluded that he was not to spend the day in Eagle, after all. Bud Ming's orders had been explicit and implied an immediate return to the ranch. Two hours' rest for the pony Chilly, and he would be good for the return journey. Smoky asked Ming to accompany him to the drug store, where a pint of the beverage that made Eagle infamous was procured, and also a white powder known to veterinary surgeons. The powder which Mr. Byles had *not* ordered, was dissolved in the liquor. "Mr. Byles asked me to get him a pint," explained Smoky. "The powder is for his liver."

Bud Ming reached up and twirled his hat.

An hour before noon Smoky and Bud Ming again left the town of Eagle, riding together, neither doing any talking, both pondering a subject serious enough to keep even talkative men silent. It occurred to Smoky that Bud's plan of sending him to the line shack with Wat Holder was the outcome of a swift decision in which the foreman would figure one way or another.

Smoky did not pretend to know how or when. They pushed their horses a little faster than on the previous journey and arrived at the fork in the trail considerably before sunset. Smoky half expected that Ming would ride with him to the ranch, but Ming had other plans.

At the fork Bud Ming reined in. Smoky was not altogether surprised when the foreman reached up and twirled his hat. Nor was Smoky altogether surprised when Ming pointed toward the notch in the western hills. "Stop at Johnson's to-night. Don't ride Coyote Cañon till after daybreak." The surprise came, however, when Bud Ming actually proffered his hand. Without a word the two shook hands, swung their horses apart and each rode away, Ming toward the south, and Smoky into the golden path of the low sun. Smoky said later that he felt sorry for that lone, lean, saturnine figure which would have been ridiculous had it not fostered a spirit that held it so straight and stern and silent. And before he had reached the notch in the hills Smoky made a weighty decision. He knew that if Bud Ming discovered one of his own men poisoning the horses he would kill him without a word, a question, or the slightest warning. And one killing would lead to another. Bud Ming would become outlaw, with every man against him. No, not every man, either. Boomer would never turn against him, nor would Smoky himself. Because he liked Ming, Smoky decided that he would avert any chance of a gun battle by running Wat Holder off the ranch himself, provided he could prove that the latter was implicated in poisoning Ming's stock. And Smoky imagined he had a good excuse with which to open negotiations with Holder; at least he had a hat with two holes in it that would figure in the try-out. It further occurred to Smoky that at night, riding an O-Bar-O horse, and with the light of a cupped match shining on his face, he might be mistaken for Ming. They were both dark, and of about the same height.

"What I mean," soliloquized Smoky as he rode through the Notch, "Bud Ming ain't running a cattle outfit. He's out gunning for horse poisoners. Up to to-day he's been scouting for T. J. riders, or the Tom Tom boys. But now he's going to work a little charity and begin at home."

Beyond the Notch and down on the level land Smoky rode past Sparks' place, then Dewey's, and finally reined up at Johnson's. He felt a bit diffident about asking for a night's lodging, but that need not have bothered him. Johnson insisted on his stopping and Molly Johnson's eyes told him that he would be welcome. So, after supper, Smoky and Molly Johnson sat out on the porch steps and became further acquainted. The starlit hours passed swiftly. Finally Johnson came out with some blankets and a tarp. Molly Johnson shook hands with Smoky in bidding him good night. He fancied that she returned the pressure of his fingers. He was not sure but he was willing to believe it. Smoky made his bed in a wagon box, his preference for this elevation due to the fact that he had noticed a collection of rattlesnake rattles in Mrs. Johnson's sewing basket.

After breakfast next morning Molly Johnson saddled her horse and rode with him as far as the mouth of Coyote Cañon. "Come over and see us," she said at parting.

"I sure will!" declared Smoky.

"And—Mr. Saunders, father noticed those holes in your hat. He said they weren't there when you left our place the first night."

"Oh, that's all right, Miss Johnson. I understand what you mean."

"You *will* be careful, won't you? Father says there's going to be trouble at the O-Bar-O. I hadn't ought to talk about it, but——"

"Your saddle is loose," said Smoky, dismounting.

Molly Johnson dismounted and examined the cinch.

"Let me fix it," said Smoky. He stepped close and as she raised her head he kissed her. "That's for taking an interest in a fella that ain't worth worrying about."

Quick as a flash Molly Johnson boxed his ears. Smoky grinned.

"That's for taking too much interest in some one you don't know," said Molly.

"Sort of compound interest," declared Smoky. "But if I have done something I ought to be sorry for, I'm glad of it."

Molly mounted her horse, reined him toward home and set off at a lope. But she did not ride far. Smoky's voice checked her. "Oh, Miss Johnson!" he called.

She turned. "Well?"

"Can't I even ride past your place, next time I go to Eagle?"

Molly shook her head.

"Why?"

"Because I don't want you to."

"Then I'll stop."

"If you do—I'll box your ears again," called Molly.

"Great!" And Smoky swung up to the saddle and waved a farewell. Molly Johnson replied with a gesture which told Smoky that he was not altogether outlaw in her regard.

A little later, as he rode through the cañon, Smoky held brief converse with the pony Chilly. "What I mean," he said, "long range ain't so accurate as point-blank, but she sure scored a bull's-eye with me."

Upon his return to the ranch Smoky delivered Bud Ming's message to Boomer, along with the package of cartridges. Old Boomer didn't say much but he immediately set aside the necessary provisions for the stay at the line shack, and told Wat Holder of the chief's orders. Holder exchanged glances with Lee Byles, while Boomer, to cover his interest in their attitude, growled and boomed and relegated cow-punchers as a tribe to that torrid range where the cloven hoof is supposed to predominate. It was Smoky, looking for Byles that he might deliver the pint which the latter had asked him to get, who came upon Holder and Byles suddenly, out back of the corral. "And I fixed another one, last night," Holder was saying.

Smoky appeared to have heard nothing as he presented the bottle briskly, and to make his attitude appear disinterested in their talk, hesitated as though expecting Byles to offer him a drink. But Byles made no such sociable advance. He paid Smoky for the liquor and pocketed it.

About three that afternoon, with a pack horse—Holder riding one of his string and Smoky the zebra dun—they set out for the east line. "And nothin' to do but rest," declared Holder as they moved along.

"Great!" said Smoky.

And during their ride to the east line Smoky laid himself out to be agreeable to Wat Holder, and in doing this Smoky set aside a precedent—he talked of the war and his experiences on the front. He was relating an incident having to do with a gruesome hand-to-hand struggle in the trenches, when Holder interrupted. "Got a gun on you?" he asked casually.

"Only an old army automatic in my bed roll. Kind of a keepsake. I ain't much on this gun stuff."

"How was Bud feelin' when you met him in Eagle?"

"Well, he didn't say. What I mean, he looked about the same, except that he got a shave and bought a clean shirt before he set out for Phoenix." Smoky's imagination seldom failed him in a crisis.

"Phoenix, eh?"

"I don't know," said Smoky casually. "He put his horse in the livery and took the stage for Phoenix. Mebby he changed his mind and went to Niagara Falls. He's the queerest foreman I ever saw. He seems to work harder at keeping away from the ranch than anything else. He's sure queer."

Holder glanced sidewise at Smoky. "Some. And he's goin' to lose all the hands he's got if he don't pay more money. Thirty a month won't keep a man in tobacco, and a little liquor once in a while."

Smoky took the bait, because he knew that Holder wanted him to. "I should think he'd pay old hands like you and Smithy Paige and Lane Gibson more than that. Why, I ain't much of a hand, and he pays me forty a month." Ming had hired Smoky at seventy-five.

Holder smiled to himself, satisfied of two things: that this "Smoky" Saunders didn't know a real hand or he would not have included Smithy Paige, the ex-bank clerk—and also that Smoky was a kid in the game and willing to answer any questions asked. As for Smoky himself, he was playing the game for all it was worth. Against his natural pride as a good rider he had shortened his stirrups and rode awkwardly. He had set his saddle too far back and had cinched it loose; already the saddle blanket was working back. But he was careful not to overplay his part.

Just beyond the east line the country was rough and dotted with brush, rising from the arroyo that paralleled the fence to the foothills of the Tecolote range. The shack itself was on a little rise, circled by level ground dotted with rusty tin cans and camp litter. Smoky, after hobbling the horses, rustled some wood and cooked supper. Holder took all this as a tribute to his seniority—but it wasn't. And the biscuits that Smoky manufactured were not, either. They were so hard that

they rattled in the pan when Smoky passed them. And Smoky could make biscuits as light as a débutante's whim, when he chose.

In the morning Smoky found what he had expected to find, the zebra dun down and dying and the pack horse standing with head lowered and mouth open. He examined the dead horse's mouth, which was burned by some chemical poison. Wat Holder was still asleep, or pretending to sleep. Smoky turned from the horses. His face was white with rage. He strode back toward the shack, hesitated, recalled Ming's orders, and walking slowly to the camp, picked up his saddle blanket. He had purposely left it on the ground. He hung the blanket on the third post south of the gate. Then he entered the shack. "Holder!" he called.

"Now what?"

"The zebra dun has cashed in. Must have got some of that bad water, last night. And the pack horse is sure sick. Say, we're in a hell of a fix! How am I going to get back to the ranch?"

"Well, there's no hurry about that. Somebody'll ride over before we're ready to pull our freight. You needn't to git excited. Guess you've seen a dead hoss before."

"It ain't the horses," declared Smoky. "It puts me afoot."

"That's O. K. You can do the cookin' and I'll do the ridin'."

"What I mean—mebby we'll get poisoned ourselves, drinking that water over yonder."

"Well, I ain't scared of it," said Holder. "Anyhow, we drink coffee, mostly."

"That's right!" exclaimed Smoky as though relieved. "Boiling that water may make a difference."

And Smoky set about getting breakfast while Holder dressed and strolled out, as he said, to see if he could tell what had poisoned the two horses. Strangely enough, his own mount was apparently in good condition. While Holder was absent Smoky took his automatic from his bed and slipped it in the shoulder holster. Glancing through the doorway he saw Holder in the distance stooping over the zebra dun. Smoky went through Holder's effects swiftly and cautiously, replacing everything as he had found it. He discovered nothing unusual. "Shucks!' He's got it on him somewhere," said Smoky, turning back to the stove. The color had returned to Smoky's face and his dark eyes were brighter than usual.

After breakfast Smoky washed the dishes, tidied up the shack, rustled some wood for the noon fire, fetched in some water and then, squatting outside the shack, smoked a cigarette. Meanwhile he gazed at the saddle blanket on the third post south of the gate. Finally he got up and entered the shack. Holder, stretched in the shade of the west wall, rose on his elbow as Smoky came out with an old pack of cards in his hand. "Let's play a few," he suggested. "Nothing else to do, right now."

"Just as soon. But what you got to put up?"

"A couple of dollars," said Smoky.

"That ain't worth shuffling the cards for."

"Well, I guess we don't play, then. I was only figuring to pass the time."

"Tell you what, I'll put up ten bucks against that gun you was talkin' about," suggested Holder.

Smoky hesitated. "I'd hate to lose that gun. It's kind of a keepsake."

"Come on—be a sport!" said Holder.

"Oh, I'm game! I'll get the gun."

Smoky stepped into the shack, took the gun from under his arm and came out. He showed the automatic to Holder, drew the clip and explained the working of the weapon. Holder pretended an interest he did not feel. He thought he had gauged Smoky pretty well, but there was no use taking a chance. Lee Byles was scheduled to arrive at the shack the following day, when he and Holder planned to take what provisions they needed and make a quick ride for the border. They had been hired by the T. J. to poison Ming's horses and had succeeded only too well. They had practically "put Bud Ming afoot." And it was high time to decamp, for Holder suspected that Ming had sent him to the line camp for some special reason of his own.

"All right," said Holder, sitting down and crossing his legs. "Get that saddle blanket of yours to play on."

"She's wet yet. I forgot to hang her up last night. I'll get yours."

Holder produced two five-dollar bills and laid them on the blanket. Smoky placed the automatic on the bills, shuffled the cards. They cut for deal, and Holder dealt.

"You're in ten dollars' worth," said Holder. "Want to make it a two-bit ante and dollar limit—or the whole works at one flop?"

"I ain't no millionaire," declared Smoky. "Anyhow, we can kill more time playing a dollar a throw."

"Kid's game!" sneered Holder. "How many do you want?"

"Kid's game!" said Smoky. His hand swept down; the automatic leaped up to the level of Holder's stomach. "I want *one*," and Smoky's voice was burdened with all the hatred he felt for a man who would poison a horse. "And the one is *you*. Kid's game—and I'm the kid called Smoky. Move a finger and you'll see smoke! Now keep your hands where they are, stand up and turn around." Smoky rose, jerked Holder's gun from the holster and tossed it back of him. "And now, Mr. Holder, you can let go your hold and dig up that stuff on you that you been fixing Bud Ming's horses with. And dig fast. I'm nervous!"

"You're crazy, kid!" bluffed Holder.

"What I mean—I am crazy to kill you!"

Holder reached inside his shirt and dropped a square, small, pasteboard box on the ground.

"See the two holes in my hat?" queried Smoky. "Well, the front of your shirt will look like that only there'll be about six more holes in it if you just even look like you want to make a break. Do you know who made those two holes in that hat? I could tell you. And you working for Bud Ming, taking pay from him! If he'd caught you, like I did, you wouldn't had time to breathe twice."

Holder's gaze left Smoky's hand and wandered toward the rough country east of the line fence. He saw a horse dip into the arroyo far down the line. Byles must have had reason to appear a day earlier than planned. Perhaps he had got wind of Ming's intent to call for a show-down. Holder shifted his gaze back to the muzzle of the automatic. "What'll you take to turn me loose, kid?"

"About half a second and I'll turn you so loose that a coyote would spend all night searching for the pieces. Hold 'em right where they are."

The oncoming horseman was out of sight in the arroyo. Old Lee Byles was foxy, not taking any chances, as usual. Holder again glanced toward the edge of the arroyo.

Smoky's eyes changed expression. Holder thought he was going to shoot him—but Smoky had heard the faint sound of a horse's hoofs, behind him.

"We'll change places," he said. "Step around to the north of me, and turn slow." Holder did as directed. His back was now toward the rim of the arroyo. He watched Smoky's eyes. The sound of hoofs became clearer. Presently Smoky thrust the automatic in his shoulder holster. Smoky's face was a puzzle. Holder, so certain in his own mind that the rider could be no other than Byles, crouched to spring at Smoky, who now seemed entirely off his guard. The approaching horseman was standing in his stirrups, his carbine at his shoulder. He fired as Holder sprang forward. Holder stopped with hands in mid-air, whirled as though some one had jerked him round by the shoulder, and crumpled down.

Bud Ming stepped off his horse and with carbine held at his hip walked over to where Holder lay. "I had him figured out for the man, but I wa'n't sure," said Ming.

"Well, I am," declared Smoky. "What I mean—there's the stuff, in that little box there, that's been killing your horses. He took it out of his shirt by special request. The zebra dun has cashed in, and the gray pack horse is about all in, by the way he is acting. But I didn't figure on any shooting. What I mean, I thought he knew it was you riding up. That's where I made a mistake."

Holder lay on his face near the saddle blanket, the scattered and trampled cards, and two soiled and crumpled bills.

Bud Ming, with a pair of high-power glasses had watched the two all that morning, had witnessed the card game and had seen Smoky holding his man with the automatic. That had decided him to take a hand. He turned to Smoky. "Take Holder's horse. Tell Boomer. Then you better drift. Here's your check. I had it all figured."

"But, hell, Mr. Ming, I ain't quittin' just because you bumped off this poison tarantula."

"This is only the beginnin'," stated Ming, reaching up and twirling his old black Stetson. "Tell Boomer, El Paso."

"Oh, I get you! All right. Then I'm done as soon as I tell Boomer. Those .44's are there, in the shack."

"Thanks," said Ming, and it was the last word Smoky ever heard him say.

Boomer received Smoky's news in silence. Boomer's little, wizened face was twisted up into a knot of wrinkles. His watery eyes blinked hard. "Just step out and saddle up Chilly for me, will you?" he said as Smoky concluded.

"I'm for Eagle, and north," said Smoky.

"I'll side you as far as Prescott," growled Boomer.

Before he left Boomer filled in the blank checks Bud Ming had left with him, to pay off the hands. He placed the checks in an envelope and entrusted them to George Manley, asking him confidentially to hold them until the following morning.

Boomer and Smoky drifted out of the O-Bar-O headquarters toward evening, leaving the boys wondering what could have called them away at that hour. Yet the boys were accustomed to all sorts of peculiar and peremptory orders from Ming and paid no special attention to the going of the cook and the new hand. Meanwhile the cook and the new hand rode briskly, and again it was Smoky's fortune to stop at Johnson's after dark, although this time his eyes were somber and he did not smile. Boomer refused to stop, but rode on in the darkness.

"Could I speak to Miss Johnson a minute?" asked Smoky at the ranch-house door.

"Why certainly!" said Mrs. Johnson. "Won't you come in?"

"I wish I could—but I got to get to Eagle in a hurry."

Molly Johnson came from the kitchen, saw Smoky standing in the doorway and knew intuitively that something grave had happened. She walked with him to the yard fence. "Well, it happened," said Smoky.

"Not you?"

Smoky shook his head. "But I'm leaving the country. I saw all the killing I want to see for the rest of my life, over in France. I came down here to punch cows. I made a mistake for myself. What I mean, I don't want to make another one, which might be worse. So I'm saying good-by—and I sure wish it was 'hello.'"

"I know it isn't because you are afraid ——" began Molly.

Smoky interrupted promptly, and she didn't box his ears. "No, I ain't afraid—except of myself," said Smoky. "What I mean, I like to ramble and I guess it's come time for me to be on my way again. And say, you can tell that Miss Swinkey for me that I said she was the best dancer I ever had a holt of. Mebby she'll believe it, and that won't do her no harm."

Molly Johnson bit her lip, but not because she wanted to laugh. She turned and walked slowly toward the house, the lighted doorway, and the blurred images of her father and mother sitting by the table.

Smoky saw her turn toward the road as she stood on the doorstep. "What I mean—good-by!" he called.

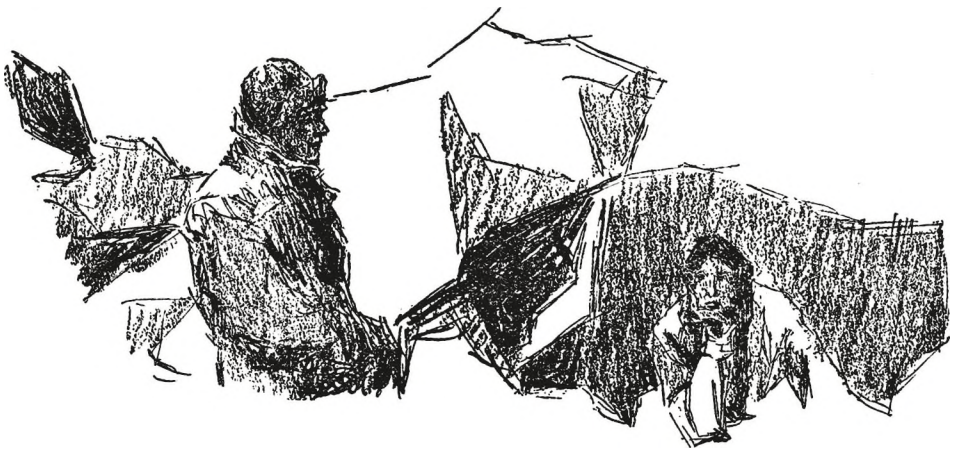
Then he drifted away into the night, pushing his horse that he might overtake Boomer. He imagined Boomer was going to El Paso. If so, Boomer would hardly take the pony, Chilly, with him. Smoky had an idea that he would like to own the little horse.

Another Western story by Mr. Knibbs in the next number.

AN ARMY THAT IS FADING AWAY

THAT army of white-haired men who were the "boys" who fought at Lookout Mountain, Gettysburg and Shiloh is slowly—yet far too quickly—being defeated by an enemy more implacable than the men in gray against whom they fought sixty years ago. Last year the G. A. R. dwindled from 85,000 to 71,000 members. During the year more than five hundred active posts went out of existence. This fall not more than twenty thousand of these Civil War veterans are expected to attend the national encampment in Milwaukee.

We hate to think of so many of these old "boys" answering their last roll call. We admire them for what they did, and love them for themselves. May it be many years before we hear of some claimant of the honor of being the last survivor of the Civil War.



The Valley of the Four Ghosts

By William West Winter

Author of "The Valley of Power," "Millions in Motors," Etc.

In this latest story, "The Valley of the Four Ghosts," Mr. Winter takes his readers out to the frontiers of the fading West as it used to be. It is an arresting tale of adventure, oil, Indians, and conflict, in which an effete son of the East rediscovers his manhood, and a girl of the West finds herself, in more ways than one.

(A Complete Novel)

CHAPTER I.

ONE would have supposed that the rather elegant young man who walked into the law offices of Lamont, Cartwright & Davis, presented a card bearing the name "Mr. Morton W. Sturgis" and asked for Mr. Cartwright was a decidedly affluent dilettante. Mr. Sturgis, in fact, was dilettante enough, but he was not affluent. The summons he had received from his friend Mr. Cartwright had been accompanied by an intimation that he might hear of something to his advantage and as he was—as he described it feelingly—"busted so bad he could live on his debts" he lost no time in answering the call.

Young Mr. Sturgis was decidedly in need of hearing of something advantageous to himself, for as he had no real profession and a pronounced disinclination to indulge in productive labor of any kind it seemed that unless "something turned up," if he were to continue to live, he would have to do it on either his debts or his friends.

He did have friends. In fact he was a rather likable fellow, tall, good looking, well dispositioned in some respects, although boasting a rather cynical view of life and ethics. Cartwright was one of his friends and thought enough of him to go to some trouble to help him, in the hope that in some way Morton might brace up and amount to something.

He now welcomed Sturgis with some cordiality and waved him to a seat while he finished a call on the telephone.

"You'll be over then in half an hour or less?" he said to the person at the other end of the wire. "Good! I've got the man you want, I think, and he'll be here. You can talk to him right here and size him up. I'll be waiting for you."

He twirled around in his chair; a man ap-

proaching middle age, several years older than Morton, who was about thirty, brisk and able. He plunged at once into his subject.

"Last night," he said, "you proposed to Myrtle and she turned you down. She isn't so very rich, you know, so I judge that conditions must have been bad—knowing you as I do. I'm right, am I not?"

"I'm very fond of Myrtle," said Morton in rather an aggrieved tone.

"I don't doubt it. You have an affectionate disposition, Mort, and we like you for it. Heaven only knows why, otherwise, we do like you. But I gathered from yourself, while making sundry engaging confidences; from Myrtle, who was much amused at your suit, and from other sources, that having spent every cent you have or can hope to get, having no profession of any commercial value and, above all, having very little disposition to work, you have taken the last desperate resource and are now trying, but with very poor success, to get married to a wife who can support you in the style you are accustomed to. Myrtle couldn't do it, having no such wealth as that, so I assume that you've about exhausted all the possibilities in that line before trying her."

"Your sister," said Morton stiffly, "is a young woman for whom I have a sincere affection—even if she doesn't realize it."

"Oh, I know it," said Cartwright with good-humored impatience. "She has the same for you, I may add. She likes you. If she hadn't I wouldn't have stood for it at all. But she said I really ought to do something for you, Mort, to break the sad blow resulting from her turning you down with mirth and laughter. Well, I know it's no use to talk to you about the error of your ways so I'm just going to throw a chance to you and see how you react to it. If you've got any nerve at all and the brains of a baby you ought to get something out of it anyhow. Whether you get enough to make it worth my trouble is up to you. There's money in it, that's all I can say."

"Lead me to it," said Morton fervently. "If there is money in it I'll show you every virtue of an acquisitive nature that there is in the dictionary."

"Know anything about Indians—or the Far West?"

"I've seen Buffalo Bill and his justly famous show," said Morton.

"That ought to qualify you as an expert," retorted Cartwright sarcastically. "Well, can you still manipulate a flying machine?"

"I was up with Billy Dawson a week ago," said Sturgis. "I had the stick and flew her from here to Montauk and back. If there was any money in it I could qualify for the postal service, I guess."

"I'm glad you got that much out of your war service anyway. It would have been better, of course, if you'd gotten across and been downed by some Hun after showing yourself a man; then we wouldn't have been put to all this trouble with you. Next: how much of your college education do you retain?"

"I've improved on it a great deal," said Morton complacently. "In dancing, drinking, playing poker and general all-round accomplishments like that I'm several grades ahead of my college days. But if it's math, physics, chemistry and English lit. you're talking about—forget 'em. I have."

"How about surveying?"

"Well, there I have been remiss. I got some fun out of fooling with a transit and have sometimes done a little of it since then. Last summer, for instance, Charlie Sackville had a new camp up in the Catskills he'd bought. Was going to have it all mapped and diagrammed when I heard of it. I was in need of a little cash then and didn't mind doing a little thing like that for a friend, so I made him a proposition and did the job. I had to bone up some on it but I got through with it all right and as well as any one could have done it. It wasn't bad sport either."

"He'd recommend you, would he?"

"If he's got a mite of gratitude in his carcass. That job would have cost him twice what I charged if he'd hired a regular man. But what's the big idea? I'm not taking up surveying as a profession. It doesn't pay enough."

"Just hold your conclusions within bounds. I'm coming to it. You can qualify then in two rather unrelated respects—as an aviator and as a surveyor. Well, I've got a job that needs just those specifications. That's why I asked you if you knew Indians and the West."

"Am I going to survey the West or ride Injuns around in a ship? Doesn't sound promising in either event."

Cartwright rose and got a map which he

brought back with a bundle of typewritten matter. These things he spread out on his table and bent over with a pencil, to indicate his various points.

"This, as you see, is a map of a State in the northwest Rocky Mountain region. You can see that the boundary on the east and north is formed by the backbone or divide of the main range of the mountains lying between it and the States to the north and east. That's according to an act of Congress creating the State, passed in the late 'sixties, I think. That act provides that the main crest of the range shall form the boundary between these two States. Have you got that?"

"My intellect can assimilate it without undue strain," said Morton.

"Very well. Now, I have here the notes of the survey that was made in the 'seventies, pursuant to act of Congress, to determine the exact boundary. It was made along the divide, under great difficulties, and interrupted at one time by the Sioux wars and at another by the Nez Percé rising and retreat across this territory. But it was finally finished, or was supposed to be finished. The appropriation was exhausted and the results accepted to all intents and purposes.

"Up to the early 'eighties most of this territory around here was in possession of Indians, chiefly Snakes and Bannocks and Shoshones, with some Cheyennes, Arapahoes, Nez Percés and Kootenais. They had treaty rights of one kind and another which it isn't necessary to go into. But at that time the government negotiated another treaty with several tribes, setting aside a reservation at Fort McGruder, named after a trapper out there who was connected with the Indians—married one of them, I think. This reservation is marked on the maps and is defined as occupying about three thousand square miles of territory in a rough rectangle stretching east of the fort to the divide between the two States. In other words, the boundary of the States forms the eastern boundary of the reservation. Got that?"

"Again, O sapient friend, my intellect embraces the substance. Proceed!"

"All right. At the present time that reservation is occupied by a bunch of Snakes and Bannocks, several hundred of them, of whom a number of families have taken allotments and settled down as citizens, under the law of 1887. Now, at the east of this reservation, right up against the apparent boundary, which is precipitous mountains, is a basin or valley between the divide on the east and a high ridge on the west. It is called the Deerlodge Basin. A good part of it is occupied by a woman who has taken up land under allotment herself but who also owns a great deal more through inheritance from her husband, who was a white man and settled there with the consent of the Indians, before the reservation was created. He got a good deal of land together. His wife, who was the daughter of an Indian and a white man—a half-breed, in other words—inherited more land from her father. So, altogether, she has a great deal of land. Her name is Mrs. Stewart, although she has an Indian name, which is unimportant."

"Probably some enlightening cognomen like 'The Lily Who Washes Dishes' or something of the sort," said Morton agreeably.

"She is an old woman now and she has only one heir—or heiress—a granddaughter who, by the way, is also the daughter of McGruder, or McGregor, the man whom the fort was named after. So you see, she is also a mixed breed. More white than Indian, I think."

"Hold on a minute! Grandmother was part white, married a white, has a granddaughter who is the daughter of a white. That makes her about an eighth Indian, or something like that. Fairly well diluted if you ask me."

"That isn't the point. She's a member of the tribe anyway and will share somewhat in the assets of the tribe if they are ever distributed. And it is those assets that we are concerned with. You see, they've struck oil in Deerlodge Basin."

"Oil! Oh, Lord! Millions and millions all going to a lot of unwashed savages! Ain't that the luck of it!"

"Don't get mournful. There is where you come in, son. A great part of the Deerlodge is owned by Mrs. Stewart and should go to the granddaughter in time—a short time too, for the old lady is over eighty. These Indians have a matriarchal system by which descent is traced through the mother and not through the father. Consequently the girl is regarded as an Indian and gets the whole shooting match by Indian law. I suppose she'd get it by white man's law too, although there are complications there. Seems Stewart didn't leave a will and one

of his brothers had a son. This son has horned in with a lawsuit in the Federal district court at Fairview. Whereby hangs another tale."

"I'm getting a lot of history without much point to it, it seems to me, unless you are hinting that I go out there and marry the girl. And where do the ship and the transit come in it?"

"Shut up, will you? As I say, they have discovered oil in big quantities there. An Indian had a hundred-and-sixty-acre allotment in the basin and the Northwestern Oil Company got a lease for oil prospecting from him. They brought in a ten-thousand-barrel well. They also dug around in the archives and discovered something that had been unaccountably overlooked all this time. It seems that the boundary survey was defective and that the eastern line of that reservation has never been legally determined.

"In running the survey as I said, all sorts of difficulties were encountered and at this point the party ran into cliffs which could not be scaled. They explored around them and ran a tentative line westward of them along the Deerlodge ridge, which was connected to the main divide. They erected some sort of monuments, intended to be temporary, but after spending a great deal of time in proving that a tract of land about twenty-five miles long by fifteen wide could not be reached at all they left the job and when it was taken up again the lines were continued with this tract remaining unknown and unexplored.

"The Indians call it the Valley of Four Ghosts, and say it is a valley surrounded on all sides by insurmountable cliffs, where four ghosts in the form of columns of smoke live. They are supposed to be very important ghosts. Sort of a sacred place, you know. The surveying party, as a matter of fact, as told in these notes, climbed a mountain about thirty miles away, called Thunder Mountain, and got a look into the place. There seems to have been a valley there with some columns of smoke to be seen from the distant mountain. But the Indians declare that no one has ever been in it except some mythical ancestral chiefs back in the dark ages.

"Now comes in a serious complication. This valley, which was unsurveyed by the original party acting under the law establishing the boundary between the two States, presumably is at the crest of the divide, and should form the boundary, thus leaving the Deerlodge Basin in the reservation, which, as I told you, has the boundary between the two States as its eastern limit. But the only survey actually made, since the valley itself was inaccessible, was the temporary or tentative line run *west* of the Deerlodge Basin and leaving it outside the reservation. This was never considered in making the maps nor did it ever rouse the interest of the authorities of the two States concerned, probably because there was nothing in that section of any apparent value except to the Indians. The boundary was *assumed* to run across these inaccessible cliffs and through the hidden valley. But the Northwestern Oil Company recently dug up the fact that the survey had never been run across the assumed true divide and that there was a strong legal presumption, to say the least, that, under these circumstances the legal boundary between the States and, by consequence, the eastern boundary of the reservation, lay to the west of the Deerlodge Basin, leaving that territory outside the reservation and open to lease and exploration under the oil-leasing act recently passed. This would follow because the law says that the actual survey, once accepted, even if incorrect, is incontestable. Now, the only *actual* survey ever made of that particular part of the line would place it west of the basin.

"Following this discovery the Northwestern Oil Company got busy under the oil-lands leasing act recently passed and filed on all the unoccupied land in the basin. The department of the interior promptly enjoined them. They also went to work and dug up this Stewart heir and had him bring suit for two thirds of the Stewart property, as heir of Stewart, claiming that he died intestate and that his widow had only her dower right in his property. Of course they have a working agreement with him to give them leases for nothing.

"Now, that is the situation briefly. The title to the land is in litigation and it looks as though the Indians would lose, as there is no proof that the divide actually runs over this hidden valley and not over Deerlodge ridge. There are remains of monuments on the ridge though they were put there merely as temporary offset indicators. As you know, the law says that monuments, whether correct or not, determine the limits of a survey. One of the western meri-

dians, which is scientifically an exact segment of a great circle and is meaningless unless it is actually correct, has a senseless jog of several miles in it owing to the fact that when the surveyors established a monument at one terminal of their line determined up to that time they left it for the winter, enjoining an old Mormon to watch it as the apple of his eye and see that it was not disturbed. During the winter an Indian uprising occurred and the Mormon had to skip north for safety. He remembered his undertaking, went out and got the precious monument, loaded it into his wagon and took it with him. When the uprising was over he returned to his home and conscientiously brought the rock back and stuck it up. Unfortunately he could not recall the exact place it had occupied and put it up some distance away from the true site. The surveyors returned, ran from the monument, and the courts have held that, ridiculous as it is scientifically, the monument establishes the line and therefore we have a meridian which is not a meridian at all, but leaps nonchalantly away off the meridian line and then goes on as if that were the habit of meridians."*

Morton chuckled. "I seem to see difficulties ahead for these simple aborigines," he remarked. "What chance have they got against a law like that?"

"Very little except that the act describes the divide as being determined by the slopes and the watersheds. If it could be shown that water flowed down the eastern side of the valley and to the west, flowed down as divided by that crest, it would go far, with the statement in the notes that the line was merely a temporary offset, to render the question debatable. There are no streams running down the western face of the cliff, though there is a stream in the Deerlodge Basin. It runs, as you see, down the basin, draining from the Deerlodge ridge, but it flows into a lake at the southern end of the basin and there is no outlet to that lake. So that gets us nowhere. A stream also flows out of the hidden valley, through the cliff and to the east, but where it comes from is not known. It seems to originate as a sort of spring, but many come from the valley."

*NOTE: This is a fact. The Salt Lake meridian in southern Utah does just this, and the explanation generally accepted is as I have given it. THE AUTHOR.

Morton crossed his legs comfortably. "I begin to get your point," he remarked. "I'm supposed to fly into that valley and complete the survey if possible. Sounds like a sporting proposition. Then there's the girl. Even if she only gets a third, added to her grandmother's allotment, and there is oil on it, she ought to be wealthy. A squaw isn't just what I was looking for but if she isn't too dark I might chance it. And I ought to be able to impress the untutored daughter of the boundless prairie, accustomed as she is to the simple habits of the tepee and boiled dog. On the whole I am inclined to take you up if there is any immediate cash to be gotten out of it."

Cartwright looked at him with amused contempt. "I believe that you are capable of doing just that," he said. "However—if that is what you have in mind, go to it." There was something like malice in his smile. "You'll be up against a crowd who are fighting for a good deal of money. If the Indian bureau wins out and gets the land they'll stick the oil people for a million dollars cash for leases or maybe more than that. If they lose, the oil people get leases on most of it for nothing but the royalty payments and the fees to the government. The girl, of course, will be rich in any event, I suppose. Personally I don't take much stock in this Stewart fellow's claim and think that can be beaten no matter how the rest of it goes. Still, he has an obvious course to take if he is at all presentable—to Indian maidens' taste, that is," he added with that same malicious smile. "He'd do what you are planning to do; marry the girl and so consolidate his claims with hers."

"More and more sporting," said Morton, grinning. "Not only the heiress but a designing rival to make things interesting. Lead me to it, old man."

"I'm leading you. A delegation from that reservation is on its way here accompanied by a lawyer from Fairview who has their case in hand. I was talking to him when you came in." He looked at his watch. "They are probably outside by now."

The door to the outer office opened and his clerk came in.

"Mr. Baxter, of Fairview, and a bunch of scalp dancers are out here, Mr. Cartwright," he said.

"Show them in," said Cartwright.

CHAPTER II.

A slender, shrewd-looking, sun-tanned man of past middle age, dressed in loose-fitting but good clothes, entered. Behind him came a towering figure whose garments were as good as those Sturgis wore and who was as handsome a man as Morton himself. This in spite of the fact that his skin was brown with a reddish tinge on the cheek bones and his smooth hair as black as a crow's wing. This man was six feet tall and beautifully proportioned.

Three others followed. They were dressed in plain dark suits that did not fit them any too well, carried black felt hats with broad brims and two of them wore their hair long and braided while the third had his banged in front and tucked into his collar behind. They also wore moccasins instead of shoes. They were big men, elderly in appearance and rather fat. Their faces were broad and dark, their noses prominent and hawklike, their eyes beady and black. Their mouths were thin-lipped and now wore ingratiating smiles that showed white teeth. One of them had several gashes across his cheeks in a regular pattern.

Cartwright rose and welcomed them, indicating chairs as he shook hands solemnly with all of them.

"Mr. Baxter," he declaimed, with a motion toward Morton. "Mr. Sturgis. Mr. Flying Cloud"—indicating the tall man in tweeds. "Chief Running Wolf; Chief Socomish; Chief Bad Baby! This is Mr. Sturgis, gentlemen."

The three older Indians looked solemnly at Morton. Each of them said "How!" in sepulchral tones and held out a hand. Morton accepted each.

"My holy aunt!" he said to himself. "Bad Baby! Would you believe it!"

Both Baxter and Flying Cloud shook hands and answered his greeting conventionally in English. The tall Indian spoke it without the trace of an accent except that of Harvard.

Somewhat bewildered and intrigued Morton listened while Cartwright and Baxter went over the matter. The lawyer from the West asked a number of questions which Cartwright answered with satisfactory results. The man called Flying Cloud interpreted to the Indians, who spoke very little English.

"I believe we have the matter pretty well understood, then," said Baxter at last. "We intend to finance your attempt to fly into the valley and determine the true conditions, Mr. Sturgis. To that end we have contracted for a D. H. 4 airplane, bought from the army, which will be delivered at Fairview, within a hundred and fifty miles of the basin, in two weeks' time. There is a narrow-gauge railroad running from there to Fort McGruder. Whatever supplies you will need can be gathered there and shipped in to the fort. We will assume that the entire job will take not to exceed three months and for that we will pay you at the rate of one thousand dollars a month. You will get three thousand dollars whether it takes three months, three years or three weeks and you will hold yourself in readiness to appear as a witness for us if we so decide after getting your report."

"If you get it at all," said Morton casually.

"What do you mean?" asked the lawyer sharply.

"You seem to take it for granted that getting in is all there is to it, Mr. Baxter. But I'm rather more interested in the prospects of getting out again. I've no doubt there will be landing places within flying distance of the place all right, but I'm not so sure that there will be any in the valley itself. If there isn't—well, good night! Pay my salary to my heirs—or creditors."

"I see!" said Baxter, looking at him curiously. "You look forward to difficulties then?"

"I don't look forward to anything," said Morton coolly. "It doesn't pay. If my life is to be cut off in its prime I don't want to harass the remaining days of it by dwelling on the horrors of my fate. Eat, drink and be merry, says I, for to-morrow we may die! If I've got to do the Robinson Crusoe act in some inaccessible hole in a mountain don't expect me to anticipate it. I'd rather think of last year's flowers, any day, than of next year's snows. Get me?"

"I reckon I do," said Baxter with some admiration. "You'll do to tie to, I think."

"Let us hope so," said Morton dryly.

The tall Flying Cloud turned and said a word or two to the other Indians and they looked at Morton and grunted. Their faces were expressionless but he somehow got the idea that they approved of him. The one called Bad Baby looked especially friendly. But Flying Cloud, although he was gravely suave, vaguely disturbed Morton. There

was something about his face that, handsome as it was, roused antagonism. And Morton felt mysteriously that the educated redskin was not friendly either to him or to this expedition. He gave no sign of this, no tangible indication at any rate, but his black eyes were wary and glowed with some inner fire that hinted at secret antagonism.

But he gave little heed to this phase of the matter while Cartwright and Baxter went on to discuss details of the forthcoming attempt to enter the hidden valley. He bent his attention to following their explanations and details and forgot the silent and stolid Indians who listened to the occasional low-voiced interpretations of Flying Cloud and grunted assent to what was being planned.

"The tribes and Mrs. Stewart are financing the affair," Baxter informed him. "Mrs. Stewart is interested not only as a member of the tribe but as a landholder whose interests are jeopardized. As you have heard, a man named Stewart has appeared and brought suit to acquire title to almost two thirds of her land. But we can deal with him. Mrs. Stewart naturally takes an interest in the welfare of her kinsmen and she has also an interest in the Indian funds, as has her granddaughter."

"Who is this granddaughter?" asked Morton, as though he had not previously heard of her. He thought that Flying Cloud pricked up his ears at his question.

"Miss McGregor? She's a young woman who lives with Mrs. Stewart, her own father and mother being dead. McGregor used to act as agent for the old lady. He didn't have anything of his own but was a decent-enough fellow, I've always understood. The girl inherits from her grandmother and will be pretty well fixed. There are twenty thousand acres of land that is worth something even if there wasn't oil. They've quite a bunch of stock on it, too."

"Indian, isn't she?"

"A member of the tribe, yes. Mixed blood, you know. But a very estimable young lady, nevertheless."

"I haven't a doubt of it," said Morton.

Arrangements and agreements were finally made, the entire matter being thrashed out while the three Indians got their version of it through Flying Cloud's interpretation. At last they arose and prepared to go, but old Bad Baby, as he shook hands solemnly with Morton, allowed a fleeting and ingratiating smile to wrinkle his aged face even more than nature had already done.

"How!" he said. "You pretty good, maybe! Maybe you come see me? Plenty smoke; plenty hunt; plenty squaw. Pretty good, maybe?"

Morton did not crack a smile. He looked solemnly at Bad Baby and dropped one eyelid slowly.

"Son of the sun-kissed hills and the fragrant forests," he declaimed gravely, "my heart listens and is glad at my brother's words! I will be there at my brother's tepee when the robin sings in the wildwood. Yea! I will be there all lit up and with bells on."

There were sounds all about him. Baxter cackled shrilly; Cartwright made a sound as of annoyance. Flying Cloud grunted surlily. But Bad Baby allowed his face to crack into a thousand pieces and said:

"You betcha! Me an' you both!"

"Bad Baby," said Morton fervently, "you're there with the goods. They misnamed you. *Some* Baby is what they should have called you."

They departed, Bad Baby evidently much pleased with himself. When they had gone Cartwright spoke.

"You take a chance with those people, Mort," he said irritably. "They aren't educated up to your light badinage the way we are. You'd better watch your step and not try to make fools of them that way."

"Me!" said Morton indignantly. "Get off your foot! Why, that Bad Baby is all to the good. I like him. He's completely civilized. He's got a sense of humor and a friendly disposition. He and I will be so thick within a week or two that Damon and Pythias will have to back up and start all over to preserve their reputations. You watch me."

"I hope I don't watch you getting your scalp lifted," said Cartwright sourly. "That old savage was on the warpath not more than thirty years ago or thereabouts. Well, that's that. I'm not going to worry over you."

Morton opened the door. "Until we meet!" he remarked. "I am going out to hunt a restaurant where I can begin cultivating a taste for boiled dog. I'll start with frankfurters first and gradually work up to it. See you to-night!"

True to his promise he called on Myrtle Cartwright that night and in spite of his recently broken heart intrigued her with a light and vivid account of his afternoon's adventure. She was flatteringly interested, especially in his extravagant account of the heiress.

"I'm sure that's your chance, Morton," she said when he had finished a flowery description of an imaginary Indian princess as his ideal of the girl. "Of course a squaw won't be just the kind of wife you'd want to appear with at first, but she must be mostly white and a little polish will make her presentable. She has money and, after all, that is the main thing. With money one can do anything."

"You've said it, Myrtle," he agreed. "Money is the only thing worth considering. With it one can buy respectability, beauty, culture, all the things that are essential. Give me this unreclaimed maiden of the forest, even if she grunts like a wild boar and wears unfinished rawhides for clothes and I'll guarantee to turn her into a drawing-room ornament inside a year if the cash is sufficient."

"But you'll not take advantage of her unsophistication, Morton? You mustn't deliberately break her heart with your callous disregard for sentiment. She may be a very sweet girl, you know, untutored and crude as she is."

"Why, I'm no brute," said Morton indignantly. "I'm quite capable of falling in love with her if she looks like anything human. You may be sure that I'll be good to her."

"I was just wondering if you'd have things all your own way," said Miss Cartwright with something of the same malicious smile that her brother had used. "A girl who is rich like that must have a lot of suitors among her own people and others. You may have trouble with her."

"Shucks!" said Morton scornfully. "When I get my dulcet wooing to going right she'll have to back up and listen. There'll be absolutely nothing to it but the wedding."

"It all sounds so romantic and splendid," said Myrtle enthusiastically. Morton looked at her with suspicion and became a little bit serious.

"That's all right," he said sullenly. "It does sound like a rotten mixture of farce and villainy but just the same I'm going through with it. I've nothing against the girl and I don't wish her any bad luck but I need the money and I'm going to get it. I don't care if she's as dark as a mahogany bureau, I'm going to try for her. And I don't care what any of you think."

"Oh," said Myrtle sweetly, "we don't think the worse of you. We know you too well, Morton. Go ahead and good luck to you. Bring her to see me when you come home, won't you?"

"You'll call on her first," said Morton savagely.

After he had gone Myrtle went in and talked to her brother. She was much amused and a little indignant but Cartwright was plainly disgusted.

"He has the making of a pretty thorough scoundrel, that boy," he said. "I hope he gets taught a good lesson."

"He will be," said Myrtle sagely. "I'll see to that. I'm going to enlighten Day McGregor as to his designs and if I know Day he will be in for something he doesn't expect. I'd give anything to be there to see it."

CHAPTER III.

Morton Sturgis set out for the West with a blithe ignorance of what he was to meet founded on occasional reading and attendance at a wild-West show supplemented by moving-picture renditions of frontier life. Not that he believed the West to be like those things. Indeed he utterly distrusted them as trustworthy guides. In this view he was more or less confirmed by his progress across country. He found civilization at his elbow all the way although it could not entirely discount the vast changes in the scenery that occurred as he went west.

It had been arranged that he should meet Flying Cloud at Fairview and complete all necessary arrangements from that place. Fairview he found to be a place of about eight thousand inhabitants, new and neat and busy, with up-to-date stores, a good hotel, paved streets and people who, at this time of year, walked the streets in straw hats and clothes that would have passed muster on Broadway. Here and there, to be sure, he saw men in rougher garments and horses which were caparisoned in big roping saddles with high horn and cantle, with single bridle reins and cruel curb bits. But they were not as much in evidence as were automobiles.

He found Flying Cloud awaiting him at

the hotel and was a little curious as to how the Indian's presence would be received. But there were no other signs of race prejudice to be observed than could be accounted for by casual curiosity at seeing a cultured and civilized Indian. Morton himself was probably more ill at ease in this company than the natives would have been. The red man was, he understood, to assist him in all ways and to accompany him as an assistant on his flight.

There were a good many affairs to arrange preliminary to the actual arrival of the airplane and the assembling and tuning up preliminary to the flight. As to these things, Flying Cloud had some suggestions to make which were sensible enough. He proposed that they fly, not from the fort but from Fairview, Morton taking the plane in to Deerlodge Basin, with a mechanic to assist him, and landing near the Stewart ranch. There Flying Cloud would meet him with supplies of gas and oil and such food and other additions to the outfit as were required. He said that the Indians were given to regarding the valley as a sort of holy place and that, if they shipped the plane to the fort, their intentions were bound to get out and might cause trouble among the more superstitious of them. To all this Morton agreed, more especially as in Fairview he could get competent help while at the fort it was unlikely that any assistants could be found.

But this decision necessitated his going on to the reservation and exploring the basin around the Stewart ranch for landing fields. He had plenty of time for this, of course, and Flying Cloud offered to accompany him to the Indian-agency office where arrangements for the trip to the basin could be readily made.

Yet he gathered a dim idea that the Indian was by no means enthusiastic about the trip although it was hard to read any expression in his stolid face. He impressed Morton rather unfavorably but he gave the man little heed in the press of other matters.

The journey on the narrow-gauge road running to the fort was made without incident and Morton found himself in due time interviewing the agent, with whom Flying Cloud, after presenting him and explaining his errand, had left him. He found the agent a big, capable Westerner, who, while having few illusions about his charges, was yet earnest in his efforts for their benefit. But he was pessimistic about Morton's plans.

"Seems to me to be throwing good money after bad," he said. "I wonder that Baxter fell for such a scheme. Must be pretty desperate to rely on it. The department is bound, of course, to look after the Indians' interests in all ways, but I'm plumb convinced that this oil business isn't going to do any good no matter how it turns out. It isn't money these bucks want. It only spoils 'em and pauperizes 'em. What they need is work. They want to be turned loose to work their lands and sink or swim by their own efforts. It will be hard but there's good stuff in 'em and they'll pull through."

"I don't doubt it," said Morton, who had no interest in this point. "But, in the meantime I'll do my best for 'em. Now, what I want to know, is there any danger of any of them cutting up rough about my desecrating this valley? The superstitious ones, I mean."

The agent looked puzzled. "Why, I don't see how they can. The old-timers had some sort of legend about the place as a residence of ghosts but even they don't take any serious stock in it. Of course—there's peyote. You can't tell what that will do."

"Peyote?" asked Morton.

"It's a cult—religion, founded on some sort of dope these Indians make from a cactus flower they bring from the south. No harm in it that any one can see. The Indian preacher, Parson Running Horse, who's a good and simple old soul, says it is a blessing. It puts 'em in a sweet and reasonable mood where they feel almost like Christians, as near as I can make out. But you can't never tell about Indians—nor about dope, I reckon, and when you get the combination you got to expect most anything."

"But do they regard the valley as sacred?"

"Well, I don't rightly know. Peyote is a sort of sun worship, I think, and it has a holy number in it, which is four. Now, there's supposed to be four ghosts in this here valley, though how any one knows how many there is is beyond me. Likewise it lies east of the reservation, which is toward the sun. I've heard some hints that they look on it as a sort of holy place but I don't reckon they'll kick up any row about it anyhow. They are all peaceable and law-abiding Injuns nowadays, though they weren't

always that a way, and the older chiefs don't take any stock in this new religion either. It's the chiefs and Mrs. Stewart that are backing this play anyhow."

"And what about Mrs. Stewart?" asked Morton.

"Mrs. Stewart stands high in the tribe although she's part white. Fine old lady, she is, and right superior, as you'll find. She's the daughter of an old-time chief and married twice. The first husband was an Injun, but the second was white. She had a daughter by the first husband, who was married to McGregor, a white man and once agent here. McGregor's daughter lives with the old lady, both her parents bein' dead. Stewart was the old lady's second husband and they had no children.

"The way it goes, I reckon, is that if the Stewart land is on the reservation the Injun laws of inheritance will have a good deal to do with who's the old woman's heir. If it ain't, the State laws govern. Which is why she is interested beyond her natural interest as a member of the tribe. Of course, the chiefs, both Bannock and Snake, are considerable agitated because it means a lot of money to them and their people one way or the other and they've teamed up with Mrs. Stewart to pull this thing off."

Morton had one more question to ask. "What about this oil johnny of the same name as Mrs. Stewart?" he asked. "Any trouble to be expected from him? The way I get it, he's suing as the rightful heir of this lady's second husband. As you put it, he'd be interested in stopping any survey that might strengthen the government-and-Indian claim that the original survey was never completed and that the legal boundary is yet to be determined, which is why I'm here. What kind of man is he?"

The agent frowned and went to a window, looking out of it and to right and left as though seeking something. As he did this he spoke as though half to himself.

"Now that's a question," said he. "Ordinarily speakin', I'd say you needn't worry none. I'd put him down as a four-flusher. But then you never can tell what that kind will do when they see money ahead of them. Personally he ain't dangerous—except to women—but he's got a band of roughnecks out on their lease and although we hold 'em pretty close to it they might get away from us for a while and do some damage. And then Stewart, who ain't any call to be loafin' around here, has been hangin' round for a day or two and I'd say he was waitin' for your friend Flying Cloud. Leastways—he's been holdin' some sort of powwow out there with him for the last half hour, ever sence the Injun left you here. You can see for yourself."

Morton looked out the window and observed Flying Cloud over in front of a small house which belonged to the storekeeper at the agency, and when necessary served as a substitute for a hotel. The Indian was talking with, or rather listening to, a white man who at that distance appeared as a rather handsome man with no particularly outstanding characteristics except that he was young.

The agent went on, thoughtfully: "I'd better send you up with Joe Jump High," he said. "A trustworthy member of our police. I don't like that play between that educated Injun and Stewart. Joe'll take care of you, Mr. Sturgis. You'll go by way of old Bad Baby's camp on Elk Creek, which ain't far from the basin. You'll likely run into Miss McGregor there as she rides over right frequent to see the chief's daughter. Good luck to you—and watch your step."

Morton thanked him, rather skeptical of the warning, and left. When he got outside he saw no sign of either Flying Cloud or Stewart and he soon dismissed thought of them from his mind.

The next morning Morton started with a swarthy and capable-looking Indian for guide, who had everything ready for him. Unused to riding, the first day's trip was a hardship which got worse and worse as he pushed on in the wake of the guide. The horses seemed to have only one gait, a sort of jiggling, shuffling trot that, easy enough at first, within a few hours grew to be a jolting torture as Morton's muscles stiffened up and the inside of his legs grew tender with chafing. The animals, though small and scrawny, were as tough as steel and the Indian seemed utterly unspairing of them. He jogged along, Morton envying him his easy seat, for hour after hour without looking around or giving sign that he remembered his companion at all.

They pushed steadily in a generally eastern direction, climbing higher and higher into the hills and reaching with each step a wilder and more beautiful country. Ahead the mountain peaks reared up to the sky

snow-capped and gaunt, but all around were tall, straight trees and underfoot was soft, cool verdure. Over it all was silence; not the faintest sound of bird or beast or anything that moved except the faint crunching of the horses' hoofs.

Stiff, aching, with a stitch in his side that was torture and with thighs rubbed raw, Mort welcomed the stop that the indefatigable Indian made in the afternoon. They had ridden without pause for lunch until five in the evening and then with no preliminary warning Joe called a halt. Half dead from fatigue Mort helped inadequately and listlessly with the meager supper and then lay, half somnolent, nursing his misery, before the tiny and futile fire that, Indian fashion, Joe had made with little sticks arranged with butts to the center like the spokes of a wheel and burning only in the middle.

Mort could not sleep and reclined, wrapped like an Indian in his blankets, half stupid with pain. Joe had little to say but he too made no move to roll up in his coverings and sleep. Instead, although he smoked imperturbably before the fire, he seemed to be alert for something, his bright, beady eyes flitting from side to side.

Morton did not notice, being too far gone for attention. Thus he did not hear a sound until it broke upon him from near at hand when two tall and moccasined men strode out of the trees and walked to the fire. Morton thought them Indians and they were—at least to some extent. They were lighter in color than Joe, however, and on the unprepossessing countenance of one of them were a number of large, dark freckles which would have marked the man to any experienced eye as a "breed." Aside from their footgear they were clad much as white men of the region, though they wore beaded belts and sheaths which held knives.

They spoke to Joe in his native tongue and he answered in a grunted monosyllable and went on smoking. But his eye was wary and alert with suspicion. One of the two nodded toward Morton and asked a question. The other stared insolently at him and when Joe replied to his companion uttered a sneering laugh.

Now, Morton was totally indifferent to all things material except himself and his pains. But those pains had frayed his temper which was occasionally short. And now, especially, he was easily irritated. He readily took that sneer to be directed at himself.

"Say, my aboriginal Adonis," he said truculently, "are you by any chance making a face at me? Because, if you are, you'd better stop it. Otherwise I'll take a poke at you!"

"Argh!" snarled the man contemptuously. "You be damn'!"

Mort was ready to mix it with any one who offered by this time and he began to twist out of the enveloping folds of his blanket. The half-breed laid a threatening hand on the hilt of his knife and grinned invitingly. Joe Jump High suddenly sat up and uttered a sharp command. His hand was dropping to his side when the second half-breed, with a swiftness that was disconcerting, suddenly threw himself forward and pinioned Joe's hand, rocking him backward at the same time. He also called a sharp command to his companion.

The ill-favored breed responded with a leap at Morton, his knife flashing as he drew it. If Morton had attempted to disengage himself from his wrappings the delay would have been fatal—but he did not. In his own way he was a most competent young man and now he proved it. Forgetting his stiffness for the moment he threw himself backward as the breed rushed him, lifted his feet with a quick jerk and planted them both in the man's stomach. The breed caved in like a shut jackknife, grunted loudly and distressfully and dropped his knife. Raging and swearing, Morton threw him off with a thrust of his feet and left him to roll in his agony while he twisted swiftly out of his blanket.

The other breed looked up from the struggling Joe to see Mort reaching for him with a long, sinewy arm and he too uttered a startled ejaculation and let go of Joe long enough to grasp for his knife. He got hold of it just as Morton struck savagely. The blow got home on the fellow's ear and knocked him free of Joe and the Indian was on his feet in the next instant, his own knife flashing in his hand.

Joe leaped, snarling, and Morton had barely time to catch him by the arm before he flung himself on the breed.

"Here!" he cried. "Hold on a minute! You don't want to kill that guy!"

"You bet," spat Joe viciously. "I'll cut the heart out of him."

The breed was scrambling to his feet and the one that Morton had deprived of wind was crawling painfully toward the trees.

Joe struggled to get at them but Morton held him fast.

"Let 'em go," he advised. "Don't use a knife on the scum. No use making trouble."

The breed suddenly took advantage of the deadlock to turn and run and his companion also leaped to his feet and took after him. Joe suddenly laughed and dropped his arm.

"Pretty big fool," he commented tolerantly. "Better let me kill 'em. No good! They'd have cut you up."

Morton recalled his bruises and aches suddenly. He turned back to his blanket.

"Well, I guess they were only chucking a bluff," he said. "Wild West bad-man stuff, you know. They were only trying to scare me."

Joe looked at him and grunted contemptuously. "You don't scare?" he said half sneeringly. "Well, maybe you'll learn. What do you think those fellows picked on you for?"

"Just a mean disposition, I guess," said Morton easily. "Saw a chance to run something on a tenderfoot and took it. I guess, though, that they'll hesitate a moment before they do it again."

Joe looked at him curiously. "No good," he said. "They were after you."

"After me?" said Morton derisively. "And why?"

Joe shrugged his shoulders. "Don't know," he said. "You better ask Mr. Stewart, maybe."

Morton stared at him and then whistled slowly.

"Is that so!" he said thoughtfully. "Mr. Stewart, eh? Well, if you're right that's one I owe that fellow."

"You better pay him then," said Joe.

"I generally pay my debts—of that kind," grinned Morton and then made his way painfully to his blankets to roll up and seek sleep. But Joe stayed awake and alert until far into the night.

CHAPTER IV.

In the morning Morton awoke to find the Indian preparing breakfast. There was frost on his canvas "tarp" and the air had a bite like steel but he had to haul on his outer clothes while he shivered and the cold bit into his stiff and numbed muscles, accentuating all his soreness. When they at last got off again on their journey they went at that inevitable trot which had seemed such a slow shuffle that it could not jolt. Yet Morton found himself bouncing and lurching distressfully except when they chanced to go uphill. Downhill it was doubled and redoubled agony. But up or downhill the Indian sat imperturbable, as though glued to his seat.

Late in the afternoon Joe turned in his seat and indicated a coulee running off to one side.

"Want to go there?" he asked. "Tepees down there."

Morton groaned inwardly. "I don't give a continental where we go!" he said. Joe's wooden face did not relax at all but he turned his horse down the slope and jolted on downward along a meandering creek.

Every step of the horse sent a shooting pain through Morton's back and ribs where cramps were seizing him. He jolted blindly along in the policeman's wake until they came out into a flat glade, grassy and pleasant. Back from the stream that ran through it were several ledges, made of poles in pyramidal arrangement over which was thrown canvas painted in dull colors with rude pictures.

"Tepees belong to——" There followed a string of syllables, some Indian name which sounded barbarous to Sturgis. He looked blank.

"You call him Chief Bad Baby, maybe," said Joe blandly. Morton's interest was roused even in spite of his aches and pains. He eyed the tepees intently and was aware of a feminine figure or two which peeped from one of them. In front of another a blanketed figure squatted on the ground. It was the same old man who had invited him to visit, although much changed. Instead of the store clothes and the black hat the old chief sat stolidly wrapped in a blanket, his head bare, with the long hair neatly parted and braided to fall over his shoulders and down his breast. From under the blanket projected legs and feet clad in blue-cloth trousers decorated with beads, and moccasins.

Joe rode up to him and dismounted.

"How!" he said. The ancient image looked indifferently at him and uttered a reply.

"How!"

Joe spoke in syllables intelligible to a Snake and utterly otherwise to Morton. But

he surmised that his own presence formed the subject, for old Bad Baby's eyes swung to him, staring like those of a basilisk, or of a snake. Then slowly a grin cracked his venerable features wide open.

"How!" he said. "Plenty good you come!"

Morton tried to summon up his usual air of light carelessness and answer as he thought the occasion required but he could not do it. He only wanted to groan and lie down flat somewhere.

Nevertheless he did his best, feeble as it was.

"How! Son of the boundless forest and the tree-clad hills!" he said unconvincingly. Somehow the burlesque did not seem to go as well in these solemn and silent fastnesses, with the bright hills and the somber forests all about him, as it had in a New York office. Yet he forced it through. "From the roaring cities of the paleface I have found my way to my brother's lodge, to the simple hospitality of the noble red man, to sit down before the pot of boiled dog and eat with the kindred of nature. How! Bad Baby!"

He made a motion of salute while he was conscious that Joe was eying him with inscrutable features. Bad Baby grinned cheerfully.

"You ride plenty hard," he said. "You pretty sore maybe?"

Morton was sure he caught humor in Joe's eye but his answer anticipated the knowledge. It came explosively.

"Chief, you've said a mouthful," he said convincingly. "Let me climb down and die if you have any pity!"

He did climb down and stood awkwardly, his legs aching and raw. Every movement gave him pain and evidently the Indians found his pain enjoyable. From the other tepee came muffled sounds which he interpreted as laughter, feminine laughter in the nature of titters, that annoyed him. It was all very well to try and make a fool of an Indian outside his natural environment but it was not so well that savages should enjoy a joke on himself.

And Joe looked solemnly at him and spoke.

"You ought to have a name, an Indian name," he said solicitously. "Suppose the chief gives you one?"

"Call me anything," said Morton. "Only don't ask me to move."

Joe spoke to the chief, who grunted assent. He then rose from the ground and stalked into the tepee with great dignity. Joe motioned to Morton, who followed, all the time conscious that from the adjoining lodge and from two or three others set back from the chief's, he was watched by invisible Indians. Also from bushes near by he felt beady eyes in small, round red faces set intently upon him. A couple of bucks, in answer to a short ejaculation from Joe, emerged from the other tents and walked over to them. Morton heard them talking in short, choppy syllables with the policeman and they soon came in with the latter. They were solemn-faced, tall men, dressed in black sateen shirts decorated with beadwork, fringed and beaded trousers and moccasins. Like Bad Baby's, their hair was braided and one of them wore a single feather sticking up picturesquely from the back of his head. Both had necklaces of animals' teeth hung on their breasts. They wore broad beaded belts from which hung knives in beaded sheaths. As they stood statuesque in the dim light of the tepee the West and Indians did not seem to be so remote and ancient and past and gone as Morton had been inclined to regard it all.

There was a little fire, built with those small sticks arranged like the spokes of a wheel, in the center of the tepee. The smoke ascended straight to a hole in the top at the junction of the poles. Around it was a clutter of blankets and various paraphernalia of Indian manufacture. A big bearskin lay to one side and on it was a saddle, a very curious saddle even to Morton's unaccustomed eyes.

He followed the chief in squatting down, with many suppressed groans for his agonized tissues, facing Bad Baby across the little fire. Joe and the other Indians took places between the two, forming a circle around the fire. Morton wanted to look at that saddle again but his attention was distracted for the time by another entrance or invasion of the tent. There did not seem to be room for many more but the flap lifted and three women sidled bashfully in. One was an elderly female, about the shape of a very large barrel, clad in gingham skirt, a rough woolen tunic striped with beadwork and fringed with woolen strings on sleeves and selvage, and what appeared to be buckskin trousers peeping from under the skirt above her moccasins.

With her were two younger women. The first was a plump, dark young woman, with hair that shone sleekly above her forehead. She wore a black alpaca blouse, of "store" manufacture, a buckskin skirt and moccasins. Her round features and soft eyes were rather attractive and pleasant.

The second was a still younger woman, not plump but slender. She seemed very shy and kept in the background. But Morton could see even in the dim light of the tepee that she was much lighter in color than the others. She seemed to have an oval, symmetrical face, with very good features, straight and cleanly cut. But her hair was also sleekly parted and braided and shone with some sort of grease. She wore a buckskin, beaded tunic, buckskin skirt fringed and banded with beads, daintily worked moccasins and some sort of wraps on her limbs, all of buckskin. In one other particular she seemed nearer the savage than the others. About her waist was a belt of beadwork and on it hung holster and revolver.

Morton was curious about this girl but he did not have any opportunity of noting more than this. He also was curious about that saddle, which, in the glances he cast at it, seemed to be a rather clumsy affair, with thick horn and solid tree of wood, covered with an extraordinary kind of leather. It was a dull white in color—or rather might once have been white; now it was a dull gray. It was smooth leather, much like unglazed kid in texture. So much he could see and also that the leather was stretched on with lacings of thongs, beaten flat along the seams.

But some sort of ceremony was claiming him. The old chief, in the circle of solemn bucks and the outer circle of shy, silent women, had produced a long pipe with a stone bowl which he filled with tobacco. He reached to the fire, picked up a blazing twig, touched it to the pipe and drew in a long mouthful of smoke. He then raised his face toward the orifice, blew the smoke in a long trailing feather and uttered several declamatory syllables in a dramatic manner. Morton was impressed. But he heard a suppressed snort behind him as though some one had stifled a laugh with difficulty. He turned and saw the old Indian woman and the plump one regarding the third with severity. But she had recovered. She stood with hanging head, silent and submissive.

Each of the Indians took the pipe in turn and did what Bad Baby had done until it came to Morton. He took it also and looked at Joe for information.

"Smoke!" said Joe. "They've named you. You say something after you smoke."

"What the devil have they called me?" asked Morton. Joe repeated some sonorous syllables which sounded something like "hooly-hooly-tlatchka-mucklush" to Morton though it might have been entirely different. He shook his head dubiously but took the pipe somewhat gingerly and drew in his prescribed mouthful of smoke, blowing it to the roof. Then he waved it solemnly and spoke.

"Friends, I thank you for this signal honor you have done me. It is with emotion that I can hardly suppress that I reflect upon the distinguished title and cognomen which you have bestowed upon the paleface that comes to you in amity and friendship, offering the hand of fellowship to his brethren of the wilderness. That name, you may be sure, I shall bear always with pride and joy even superior to that with which I carry my ancestral designation. I thank you!"

Four stolid Indians uttered grunts in approval. From the rear came another snort, followed by suppressed cries that might have been agony. Morton turned to behold the slender maiden stuffing into her mouth an undoubted handkerchief. The plump woman was grinning like a Cheshire cat and the old fat one was rumbling and shaking with inward mirth.

He sprang to his feet and turned on them but the slender one suddenly fled to the outside where she let her emotions get the best of her. The circle of bucks stared at this breach of etiquette but Morton was angry and sprang past them and out the door where he came upon the slender Indian girl shaken with her laughter.

"Say!" he demanded belligerently. "What the deuce are you laughing at?"

"S-n-p-f!" snorted the young woman. "You were so funny!"

"I was, was I? Well, if that stuff affects you so sharply I guess you ought to stay away from comedies. You'd die of hysterics. I appreciate the reaction to my wit but darned if I see where it deserves it."

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" said the girl. "It wasn't that. It was your name!"

"My name?" repeated Morton. "What's

my name got to do with it? It's a perfectly good name, isn't it? Sounds like a whole flock of names, in fact."

The girl straightened up and wiped her eyes. She became demure and shy as became a daughter of the untamed aborigine. Her brown eyes were veiled under modest lashes of a singular length and luxuriance.

"I beg your pardon," said she. "I shouldn't have laughed, of course. But the name—you don't know what it means of course?"

"No I don't," said Morton warily. He began to comprehend, though dimly. "What the devil does it mean?"

The girl blushed and looked slightly shocked.

"I really couldn't—translate it—literally. It's too—too *broad,* you know. But it might be rendered as—as 'Plenty Boils,' I guess. It is longer and more descriptive than that but that is the best I can do for you."

"So! So!" said he thoughtfully. "These untutored primitives are little John K. Jokers, are they? Well, well! Score one for them. But I'll see how far they can beat a white man with that sort of stuff. Old Bad Baby had better be stepping high and wide after this because——"

But the girl became suddenly approximately serious and grasped his arm.

"Mr.—Mr.——"

"Sturgis," said that worthy promptly. "Morton W. Sturgis, of New York and way stations. My friends call me Mort."

"And the Indians——" But she stopped shortly instead of saying it, though the laughter had leaped straight into her eyes. "Never mind. Mr. Sturgis, you mustn't be too careless with these Indians. They are all right and quite peaceable and friendly. But you don't know them. You might offend them seriously."

"I care a whole lot if I do," said Morton angrily. "Plenty Boils! Say, after that I feel——"

"But listen! They merely played back at you. You were trying to get funny at their expense. You've no—no kick coming. And don't you be reckless in retaliating. Better drop it where it lies."

"Let a scalp dancer get the best of me! I see myself doing it. If I can't——"

"Yes, you think you can get even, but you'd better not. You don't know them. There's the chief, for instance. He's just a jolly old fellow who seems to like you. He *does* like you. But he's a chief and he has his pride. You saw that saddle lying there?"

"Yes, I did. What about it?"

"Nothing. Only it is his proudest possession. They claim—and I suppose it is true—that he killed a white man in single combat once upon a time, skinned him and put his tanned hide on that saddle. Is that the kind of man you wish to play practical jokes upon?"

Morton stared at her incredulously. "Say, Miss——" He paused for a name.

"I am Day McGregor," she replied readily. It did not entirely surprise him. But it caused him to look at her with something of intent satisfaction. Untutored, perhaps, but not so bad if she were dressed right, he was commenting to himself. But all he said was:

"You can't string me like that."

"I'm not stringing you. You need not believe it if you don't wish to. It's nothing to me, of course. But look at it when you go in. They are waiting for you and you'd better go back. The rest of the welcome is to come, you know."

"Oh, it is? And it will be about as funny as the first part, I suppose."

"Oh, I hope so," said Day McGregor and burst into further smothered laughter.

Morton was angry but game. He had almost forgotten his aches for the moment but as he turned back to the tepee they recurred to him with force. He came in to meet cheerful and unabashed grins from the circle of Indians and he sat down with a good attempt to answer them in kind.

"That girl said it meant Plenty Boils," he confided to Joe. "Is that right?" Joe chuckled openly.

"That's pretty good," he answered. "Best she could do, maybe."

"Well," said Morton, "I judge a further translation won't add to its euphony so we'll let it go at that. Good for you, chief!" he said magnanimously to the old idol who faced him. Bad Baby grinned enjoyably.

"Fine name," he said complacently. "You like him? You like Injuns? Maybe you like squaw, no?"

"Depends a good deal on the squaw," said Morton.

Bad Baby waved his pipe at the two women who still stood in the background. "Maybe you like 'em?" he said. "My squaw. You want buy 'em?"

"Rather bid for the one that went out," said Morton cheerfully. "How much for her?"

The chief laughed and shook his head. "No good!" he said. "No belong to me. You go ask her maybe."

"I will," said Morton.

A little later they prepared food over the little fire in a pot hung from a stick. Morton was too tired and half sick to eat much and besides was half suspicious of the provender provided. He soon rose and went out to his blankets, stooping painfully over them in the effort to arrange them to some degree of comfort, aided by the rising moon which gave him light. And then the girl came out of one of the other tents and walked over to stand beside him.

"I suppose you were too tired to eat," she said sympathetically.

"I was," he replied. "And, besides, I didn't half know what I was eating. They are such jolly little jokers that I wouldn't put it past 'em to work in some actual boiled dog on me."

"Did you think it was that?" said the girl. "That is too bad! Really it was beef. They do eat dog when they have it, you know."

"And do you, also?"

"Well, no. I've had some advantages they haven't, you know. My grandmother has seen to that. Even if we are only Indians we try to improve ourselves as much as we can."

Morton felt an unwonted stirring about his heart as the girl went on wistfully:

"I've been to school some. I wish it had been more. We Indians must try to be like the white people now and we find it hard sometimes. It's even hard for me, and I am almost white, you know. I want to be white. It is true that there are pleasant things here in the wilderness but it must be so much more interesting among civilized people. There must be so much to see; so much more to learn!"

There was something wistful, Morton thought, in her voice, something that appealed to him for sympathy. He felt it, too. It was a soft and sweet voice and her dark beauty, in spite of her straight and shiny black hair, was making an impression on his sophisticated and cynical mind. She undoubtedly deserved better things. And she had the money to get them, while he could certainly show her what they were.

"See here, Miss McGregor," he said, "why don't you get out of here and go where people really live? You could do it, I think."

"Why, how could I do it?" she asked, wide eyed.

Morton had spread his bedding and now lowered himself to it.

"Pardon me," he said. "I really have to sit down. I can't stand any longer even if it does seem rude. Won't you have a seat?"

She looked shy but she sank hesitantly down beside him, drawing her crossed feet under her rather short skirt. She folded her hands on her lap and gazed trustfully into his face. She had really wonderful eyes, large and of great depth and sparkling in the moonlight with little points of light.

"Why, your grandmother is rich, I've heard. Why can't you go east and live among white people? Surely she'd let you."

But Day shook her head and sighed.

"I'm afraid not," she said. "Grandmother is old and she gets more Indian every day as she gets older. She wants me here. She wouldn't give me money to go away."

There was something in her tone when she said this that impressed Morton with an idea, vague enough but disturbing. It was as though for an instant she had dropped a mask, a mask so cunningly fashioned that he had not even recognized it as a mask, and had spoken for once sincerely and from the heart. There was real feeling and something more; something like uneasiness and terror in the depths of it.

"D'you mean to say that she wants to make an Indian out of you?" he asked harshly.

"I *am* Indian; part Indian at any rate. I'd like to be something else—but I can't be."

He blurted out his thought rudely.

"Why don't you marry a white man and get out of here?"

He thought she stiffened but almost immediately she relaxed dejectedly.

"White men—nice white men—seldom marry Indian girls, do they? And it is hard to know, even if they did, which are nice and which aren't. There's very little choice when one lives on a reservation. I don't see many white men."

Morton had planned things very differently. He had counted on meeting some crude, unsophisticated, half-savage damsel, too awkward and shy to feel anything but

awe at his magnificent superiority, ready to fall down and worship him at a word. Well, this girl was unsophisticated, no doubt, maybe she was crude, though she didn't seem so, but she was also strangely appealing. If she didn't have such glorious eyes! he told himself. And he didn't want to have his hand forced. It would seem raw. Yet he couldn't control what leaped to his lips even if he had had time to realize and make the effort.

"You've seen me," he said. "I'm not a crowd—but I'm decent, after a fashion, and I'm well connected and—and I'd treat you well. Yes, and by the Nine Little Fishes, I'd *love* you! There!"

He finished on a breathless note, staring at her, half frightened, half astonished at himself for, while he looked into those eyes he *did* love her, crazy as it seemed. And then a wave of shame struck him. Shame at himself, at his philosophy in life, shame at what he had done. He felt as nauseated as when he had thought he was devouring canine flesh. Yet behind the shame one fact shone forth. For that instant when he made that declaration he had completely forgotten that she had money or that such a thing as money existed. It relieved him somewhat.

Then he was aware that she was looking at him searchingly. Her face, pretty and earnest, was not far from him, her lips, which were sweetly curved were half parted above white teeth, her eyes, which had such power over him were burning into his.

It was strange but through all his shame he knew that money or no money he meant what he had said and would stick to it to the end.

"You—would marry—me?" she asked in a half whisper.

Instead of answering in words he bent forward to the face that didn't move away and kissed her on the lips. She sat still for an instant and then leaped to her feet. But instead of anger or confusion, she betrayed only implied mirth, with low, triumphant laughter.

"You want to marry—me?" she asked again. He could only look at her, fascinated and wondering, and nod his answer voicelessly.

She laughed again.

"Well, come to the ranch, then, Mr. Sturgis—and I'll give you the answer. Good night!"

CHAPTER V.

In the morning Sturgis and the Indian parted company. Joe's duties lay in the lower part of the valley among the oil wells while Sturgis' took him first to the Stewart ranch and then on a scout to locate one or more suitable landing places. As to the last there did not seem to be much difficulty, as the valley was fairly level and there were meadows and flats which would serve his purpose well enough.

Joe pointed out the road up the valley as the path he was to take and, with one of the pack horses, Morton set out to follow it. He encountered no obstacles nor anything to delay him and about noon came in sight of fenced fields and pastures which bespoke the vicinity of a dwelling.

A quarter of an hour later he rode up to the house itself, to find it a comfortable frame dwelling, painted, with a railed porch and a well-kept lawn in front of it. Back of it were farm buildings, corrals and a bunk house. It was just such a house as might have been the domicile of any well-to-do rancher, the only point in which it differed from the expected being the character of the two or three men who were to be seen about the place. These were all Indians, though they were dressed much as the ordinary ranch hands of the region and only their dark skins and braided hair served to differentiate them from white cow hands. An Indian came around the house and stared at him without speaking as he dismounted.

"Can I see Mrs. Stewart?" said Morton, doubtful that he could make himself understood by the aborigine. But the man nodded and picked up the rein that he had dropped to the ground, motioning toward the front door of the house. He then turned and led the horses away to a corral.

Sturgis stepped up on the porch and rang a bell. It seemed strange to find a bell in this remote region, even though it was an old-fashioned one with a wire pull. Its cheerful jangle came faintly through the door and then the latter swung open to show a neatly dressed, sleek-haired Indian woman standing stolidly before him.

"Can I see Mrs. Stewart?" he asked again. The woman said nothing but stood aside to let him in. She then padded on moccasined, noiseless feet through a wide, neatly furnished hallway from which rooms opened on either side. Sturgis followed her

to one of those doors and stepped into a comfortable, bright, almost luxurious living room with hardwood floor, soft rugs and handsome furniture. His notions about "squaws" were receiving a rude jolt.

He saw a little old woman sitting in a huge easy-chair drawn up before a wood fire in a large fireplace which even on a warm day seemed cheerful and appropriate. Her face was wrinkled and was the color of old ivory, but preserved traces of a once considerable beauty. She was dressed plainly but well and was just such an old lady as one would have selected for a grandparent, though Morton judged from a certain wandering of the eye and looseness of the mouth that she was approaching senility. Certainly she must have all of the eighty or more years with which she was credited.

"You are welcome, sir," said the old lady as Morton bowed to her. "I hope you'll make yourself at home and enjoy your stay with us. I am afraid I did not catch your name!"

"Sturgis," said Morton. "I understand that I was to meet a Mr. Flying Cloud here."

The old eyes grew eager and avid in a strange way.

"Flying Cloud? Yes? And he is coming soon?"

"I thought he'd be here as soon as I," said Morton.

Undeniable satisfaction, greedy satisfaction, he thought, showed on the old woman's features. She trembled slightly and leaned toward him.

"Good! Good! I'm glad to hear it, sir. And you? I'm sorry that I can't help entertain you, but you see I'm too old for much. Day will look after you. Day! Where is that girl?"

He became suddenly aware that the doorway from the hall had become occupied and swung about to see a demure, shy Indian maiden standing there, a shawl about her head above the sleek hair, her olive skin flushed slightly, her great, deerlike eyes cast down and her hands folded in front of her doeskin skirt. She was even more the savage than she had appeared last night, with her fringed and beaded skirt and her tiny moccasins peeping from beneath the bandaged ankles. She was actually darker of skin than Sturgis had thought her, too; much darker than her grandmother. Since she was proportionately more white than the latter this was unexpected, but Morton supposed that it must be due to some reversion to type.

The girl ducked her head in a quaint acknowledgment of his presence and her great eyes appealed to him in a way that made his heart ache. That madness of last night was gone. He couldn't really have fallen in love with this half-breed girl—and yet—when her great limpid eyes rose to his and sank again he forgot color and dress and felt his head swimming and his heart beating.

"Grandmother?" she said, in the sweet voice he recalled. The old woman did not look around nor did the girl come into the room.

"You look after Mr. Sturgis, Day," she said. "Show him a room and entertain him. He's expecting Flying Cloud."

"Yes, grandmother," said the girl submissively. Her eyes rose again to Morton's and then sank bashfully. But on her lips—they were very pretty lips, too—he caught the curve of a mocking smile almost instantly suppressed. She backed through the door and he followed her hesitantly into the hall.

The girl stood in the hall awaiting him but he paused at the table to unbuckle his revolver belt and lay the whole harness on the table.

"May I show you your room, Mr. Sturgis?" asked Day softly.

"Please don't trouble," he said. "I don't know whether I shall stay. In any event I'd be perfectly all right in the bunk house with the men. Don't put yourself out at all."

"The men are Indians—all of them," said the girl. But she turned back from the stairway and came nearer to him.

"Flying Cloud is coming, you say?" she asked and he thought there was a guarded, troubled note to her utterance. "What is he coming for?"

"Why—I suppose you know what I'm here for?"

Again that fleeting, mocking smile flitted over her face.

"Oh, yes. I know very well. But Flying Cloud?"

"Why, he's acting with the chiefs and they've employed me. He's in charge of arrangements for the flight and he's going with me."

"For the flight? Flying Cloud?"

"Yes, the flight into this valley over here. Of course he thinks your grandmother need not know what we're up to, so perhaps you'd better not say anything to her. Thinks she may say something to rouse superstition in the more backward Indians, you know."

"Oh!" said the girl. "That's it, is it?"

Morton did not know why she should be puzzled and grave about it but he made up his mind that she was. But he wasted little thought on such matters. He was embarrassed for once in his life; he felt awkward, constrained and shamefaced. He had to face it out with the girl sooner or later and he did not know how to begin.

Then Day was speaking again, just as he thought that he must break the uncomfortable silence that had fallen upon them.

"Do you know anything about Flying Cloud, Mr. Sturgis?"

This was a reprieve at least, though he was roused from his own thoughts so suddenly as to startle him.

"No, I don't," he said. "Seems to be a very superior sort of Indian, though."

"He is!" It sounded sarcastic from her. "Very superior. He graduated from Carlisle and from Harvard, I think. Would you like to see the orchard?"

Evidently she was through with that subject for the time being. He assented to her proposal and followed her through a rear door into the space back of the house, where orderly rows of apple trees stood between shallow ditches. The sun beat through in a mosaic of brilliant light as they walked.

"It's—it's a fine orchard!" said Morton awkwardly as she paced noiselessly and sedately beside him. He had to say something. "It's almost like it is back East."

"I suppose so," said the girl. She stopped at one tree which had branched close to the ground in a thick fork. It formed a natural seat and she settled herself into it, drawing up her feet beneath her skirt and planting them against the sloping trunk. She folded her hands over her knees, with the ends of the shawl clasped in her arms and drawn about her face.

"You sit down there—on the ground," she said, indicating the brown, wiry grass at her feet. She was a trifle imperious but Morton dropped to the spot indicated and looked up at her. She had straight, finely penciled eyebrows, extraordinarily long lashes and features as clearly cut as a cameo. If she hadn't been brown——

But when she opened her eyes and looked at him calmly and expectantly Morton forgot that she was brown. In any case he couldn't observe her color when she was looking at him like that. Then she smiled and the little mouth, curving over the gleaming teeth, drew him sharply into an impulse to repeat that astounding folly of last night.

"I'm ready—to hear what you have to say, now," she said timidly. Morton groaned and tore his eyes from hers. They fell on her hands, little, tinted hands with delicate fingers and nails carefully manicured. Why was that? It wasn't exactly what one would have expected.

Wondering, he raised his eyes imprudently and again hers caught and held him. He could not understand the surge of tenderness that welled up in his callous, cynical heart and caused him to writhe in mingled shame and longing for her.

"I—what can I say?" he muttered. She looked hurt and her hurt caused him pain. "I meant it all—more than that!" he added hastily.

"You meant it? That you'd marry me?" The question was timid, pleading, as though she asked for assurance. She was a little thing, helpless, lovely and as wild and shy as a fawn. What a brute he was!

"Yes, I did," he blurted. "I—I meant more than that. I don't know how it could have happened like this. I never believed in such things as love at sight. But I've got it—bad. I—I'm a rotten sort of scoundrel, Day, but I sometimes mean well. I shouldn't have done it, I know, but I couldn't help it."

"Shouldn't have done what?" she asked, puzzled.

"I shouldn't have kissed you that way. I—I don't know why, but it wasn't right. I didn't think it would be like this. I thought it was just like kissing any girl at all, but it wasn't. I'm sorry."

"Sorry that you kissed me?"

He squirmed because he was giving her pain but he plunged ahead doggedly.

"Yes, I am. If I hadn't felt this way I wouldn't have cared. But it wasn't fair to you I—you see, I didn't know it, but I fell in love with you then—or about then, at any rate."

Her smooth forehead wrinkled in her effort to comprehend and her eyes showed hurt.

"But—but if you kissed me of course you

must have loved me. Isn't that why one kisses a girl? Then why should you be sorry?"

"Oh, hang it, it is all mixed. I can't make you see it. But I'd kiss a girl, any girl, Indian or white, like nothing at all, if I didn't love her. I never did love one before, I guess. At least I never felt like this about it. But when I kissed you I felt ashamed of myself. You see, I'm no good at all and I ought to feel ashamed of myself."

"But you said—that you were all right and that you'd love me!"

Again she was puzzled, pained and hurt, not comprehending him at all. He didn't comprehend himself.

"I know. I *do* love you—at least I think I do. I'm *sure* I do. And I'm a scoundrel and you ought to hate me. I—I, you see, I came out here with the intention of marrying you."

"But I don't understand. How could you when you didn't even know me? You'd never seen me."

"I knew something about you, though," said Morton grimly. "I'll not be the last one that does it either. You'll have to take my word for it. I came out here intending to marry you though I'd never seen you before and I—I fell into something I wasn't looking for and now I'd be the rottenest kind of scoundrel if I tried to do what I intended."

"You mean you won't marry me?" The softly plaintive voice was mournful, heartbreaking.

"My dear, I couldn't, for your own sake. You'd be unhappy with me. You'd find out what kind of scoundrel I am and it would break your heart! I—I can't go through with it."

"Because I'm an Indian?"

"No—or rather, yes! Not because I wouldn't love you, Indian or not, but because—because you couldn't ever believe that I married you except for one thing after you'd—discovered—found out what sort of people men like me are."

"Oh!" said Day and was silent for a moment of thought. Then she spoke quite clearly and calmly.

"Maybe I understand. You came out to marry me when you didn't care what I was or what happened to me and now you—care—a little, perhaps, and are sorry for me, and you won't marry me because maybe I would be unhappy and you don't want me to be unhappy. Is that it?"

"Yes, that's something like it."

"But suppose—I would be unhappy, if you didn't—now?"

"You mean you like—love me?"

Day nodded shyly. There were traces of tears in her eyes.

"Even if I'm a scoundrel?" Again she nodded.

Morton drew a long breath while discretion and resolutions and good intentions and renunciations all jumbled in a whirl of confusing and senseless desires centering around those eyes that held him with their pleading beauty.

"I am a scoundrel!" he declared. "But—Day, will you marry me?"

She rose and looked off through the trees, speaking solemnly and slowly.

"I don't know," was her troubled answer. "I can't tell after what you've told me. Are you sure—sure that you love me?"

She turned and gazed at him again and again he was hypnotized.

"I'm as sure as that there's a sky above us!" he declared.

Day nodded her head. "I believe that," she said, and if he had been in possession of his right mind he would have caught the faint tinge of irony. "But—I don't want to decide at once. Suppose we wait—until——"

"Until when?"

"Until supper time," said Day sedately. "We'd better go in now."

CHAPTER VI.

Morton spent the rest of the afternoon in a dazed wandering about the slopes and benches some distance from the ranch, ostensibly in looking for a landing field that would be suitable. He found one, or at least he thought he had found one. He even mechanically noted its landmarks that could be seen from the air so that he could identify it. But in reality all that he did was merely reflex action. He was so upset and confused, so stricken with remorse and doubt, so fearfully and senselessly happy at one moment while at the same moment he was terrified and ashamed that he did not know what he was doing. He had dazzled and captured that wild, shy thing, and he had to hurt her, to break her heart, as it would assuredly break when she discovered

what he was and why he had sought her out! It was too much! It was more than even the old Morton Sturgis could have stood for before he really had fallen in love with the girl. And now that he *had* fallen in love with her it was worse because, even though he wanted to do the right thing, he couldn't. He couldn't give her up! He didn't care if she ate dog, if she scalped people, if she was as savage as any Apache that ever was hanged at the end of a lariat. He wanted her.

He dreaded meeting her again, dreaded the answer he was going to read in her shy eyes at the supper table. She had admitted that she loved him—at least she had nodded her head when he asked her, so there could be no doubt of what her answer would be. She was far too unsophisticated and ignorant to fathom all the cynic selfishness of men like himself. The love of a man from the outer world, such a man as himself, could not but flatter her, overwhelm her, dazzle her. She would doubt a little, maybe, wonder at his mysterious hints, but she would not understand them and they would not affect her decision. She would only believe trustfully in his love and surrender to it.

But time passed inevitably and he had to go into the ranch at last. He went in through the rear door, stopping in the kitchen to wash, much to the surprise of the Indian servant, who wondered why the white man didn't go up to the bathroom like other white people did. Then he fairly sneaked into the front of the house and paced up and down the deserted living room across from the room in which Mrs. Stewart sat. He didn't even wish to see her. He felt guilty in deceiving the old lady's granddaughter. She was white enough, at least. She would understand him, no doubt, or at least would have her doubts about this amazing stranger who came in and carried her granddaughter away after a twenty-four-hour acquaintance. He was inclined to believe that Mrs. Stewart was going to have a very severe shock when she heard the news.

Then he heard the Indian announce that the meal was served. He went out and helped her wheel the old lady into the dining room. The table was set with white linen and silver and crystal. The china was good and the room itself was as nicely furnished as the rest of the house. A crop-haired young Indian in a white jacket acted as butler. He did pretty well at it, too.

"Sit down, Mr. Sturgis," said Mrs. Stewart, as he remained standing after assisting her to her seat. "Day will be down in a moment. We need not wait for her."

He sat down and the butler began to serve the meal. It was all very strange to find a household like this in the wilderness with its mistress presiding over it as if she were the descendant of a duke, while she at the same time muttered Indian sentences to herself and who had a granddaughter, more white than herself by blood, who dressed in skins and beads and was a mere shy, simple little half savage. It didn't fit together somehow.

"I'd hoped Flying Cloud would get here," the old woman said wistfully. "I hope he'll come soon."

"He'll undoubtedly be along to-morrow," said Morton reassuringly. He wondered why Flying Cloud was wanted so much. But it was merely a passing wonder. He had other things than Flying Cloud to think about.

"Here's Day, now," said Mrs. Stewart suddenly, looking up. Morton's back was to the door and he had not heard the light step on the stairs. He caught a look of surprise on his hostess' face and then she spoke again: "My heavens, Day! What is all this for?"

Morton had risen and turned and then he staggered and had to grasp the edge of the table while the world swam about him and his innermost ego was torn out of him and crushed and ripped and smashed into tatters. For Day came through the door, smiling, and the room was filled with her beauty and the air oppressed with her splendor.

She was not more than five feet two inches tall but she looked like an empress. Her hair was piled on her head and over her ears, in crow-black, gleaming, wavy magnificence. Her face was cream and white and ivory, her complexion as perfect and lovely as that of a baby. Her shoulders were glorious masterpieces as they rose out of her gown, a shimmering, gleaming thing of one of the newest and most marvelous silks. Her arms were marble dreams. She was dressed for conquest and she was armed for victory. It was hers!

"Why," said Day, with a malicious glance at poor Morton, "I thought Mr. Sturgis, on

his first visit to the untutored savage, ought to see me in all my war paint!"

She raised an arm slightly and slowly turned around on one tiny toe incased in a slipper that had high heels and glittered with satin and rhinestones. Over one exquisite shoulder she asked: "How do you like it?"

Morton said something, he hardly knew what. Day swept on past him and settled into her seat. He stared at her boorishly, half unconscious of aught but the fact that he had ruined himself irrevocably, but when she raised those great, demure eyes in which now lurked all the imps of the nether regions, his face burned red and he dropped his guilty and ashamed eyes. He was too crushed to even wonder where that brown complexion had gone, where were the sleek straight bands of hair. It was half an hour before he recollected that slight acrid taste that told him she had used some sort of stain to befool him and make him ridiculous.

"What is the joke, Day?" asked Mrs. Stewart, looking curiously and understandingly at the girl's sedate but impish eyes.

"Joke?" asked Day innocently. "Grandmother! Is it some joke Mr. Sturgis is playing? I understood from Bad Baby that he was quite a humorist. Won't you let me in on it?"

Once again all appetite fled from Morton. His sense of humor had entirely departed and it was doubtful if it would ever return. He had not been half so sore in body after that grueling ride with Joe Jump High as he now was in mind and spirit. There was no use in sticking it out. The debacle was far too complete to even admit of struggle.

He slowly rose from his seat and his own eyes now might have plead for him, because there was pain in them.

"I am sorry," he stammered. "You will excuse me, Mrs. Stewart, but I am—ill. Too ill, I think, to remain. It is nothing serious but—if you will pardon me I'll go outdoors."

"Why, what is it, Mr. Sturgis? Of course, if you're ill—but your room is ready if you'd care to lie down a while."

"Grandmother," said Day seriously, as she looked at poor Morton, "I'm sure it is his heart. Wait. I'll help you, Mr. Sturgis."

She rose and the helpless Morton had to allow her to take his arm and assist him to the hall. As soon as they had turned the corner he drew away, head hanging, and stepped toward his hat on the hall table.

"Just a moment, Mr. Sturgis," said Day sweetly. "I have something for you. It's a letter from a friend of yours—and mine."

Morton took it and let his hand drop. But she was not sparing him.

"I think you'd better read it," she said, "if you're not—too ill."

He had to read it. It was from Myrtle Cartwright and it was rather brief:

> I am inclosing this with a letter to Day McGregor, Morton, and have asked her to hand it to you whenever it seemed convenient. You have met her by this time, necessarily, and so I need make no comment on her. But I trust that you have realized by this time just what you let yourself in for when you formed that decision which you confided to us. Of course I don't know what Day has done to you, but I sincerely hope she has lived up to her reputation, and that your conceit has at last received what has been long coming to it.
>
> With best wishes and sincere commiseration.
>
> MYRTLE.

Morton looked up and squared his drooping shoulders. His eyes were blank but he set his mouth in straight lines and achieved some sort of bow aimed at that flashing glory in front of him.

"You win, Miss McGregor," he said. "I can't say anything more. I guess I've said considerably too much. If it'll add to your satisfaction I'll admit what you already know. I was telling the truth. You succeeded—all the way—and I know that you know it."

"Thank you, Mr. Sturgis," said Day sweetly. "I suspected it at any rate. It is good to know how beautifully everything went off. Isn't it?"

"It is—if it is good to know the depths of cruelty to which you can sink," said Morton with some dignity. "However, I'll not whine. If you please, I'll be going now."

Day stepped aside and he went out, picking up his belt absently, carrying it with heavy six-shooter dangling from his hand. He stumbled down the steps into the night and walked unseeing toward the corral. One or two dogs barked and came sniffing around but they recognized the guest and did not interfere with him as he laboriously caught his horses and managed to pile his pack on one of them after an awkward fashion. Then he threw on the saddle and climbed into it. He rode out at a walk and slouched away toward the lower end of the valley.

CHAPTER VII.

Crushed as he was there were still matters of everyday moment which had some claim on Morton and he did not continue his journey very far, no farther, in fact than that meadow surrounded by trees on a level bench about a mile from the ranch. It was this spot that he had picked as the most convenient landing place for his ship and it was to it that he headed half unconsciously. Arrived there he made some sort of camp, hobbled his horses and wrapped himself in his blankets to spend a night of numb misery.

It passed and day came at last. He had some food and made himself a fire, eating breakfast mechanically. His unskillful efforts at it were made worse by his utter indifference. Then he went through the grove of trees to an open slope from whence he could see the road through the valley. Flying Cloud would come this way, he supposed, and could be intercepted. He threw himself down on the ground and nursed his wounded ego through the dragging hours of the day.

But in his way Morton was a strong man, hard and ruthless. Self-pity, despair and sorrow were things he could not exactly dismiss offhand but underlying them was the fiber that was legitimately his. It was tough fiber. In the course of time his mind began to adjust itself to facts and as it did his grim humor came to the surface, his ability to face realities aided him. He looked at himself with sane, open eyes and laughed at what he saw. He did not laugh pleasantly but he did achieve a sardonic sort of mirth and the ability to estimate himself with jeering clarity. He was not one to whine or to pity himself for long.

He had won to outward self-control, to grim and set expressionlessness when the road below finally showed dust approaching and he made out a small car rolling over its rough surface. There were two men in it and he rose and walked down to intercept it. It came to a stop before he reached the road, awaiting him, and he perceived that it contained Flying Cloud and the lawyer, Baxter, the latter driving.

"What are you doing out here?" said Flying Cloud. "You were to meet me at the ranch."

"Was I?" asked Morton flippantly. "Well, this suits me as well as the ranch. I can meet you right here."

He told himself that he did not like Flying Cloud. For that matter he was inclined to dislike everybody just at present, but the Indian irritated him particularly. He asked nothing better than to have him resent his manner. But Flying Cloud merely stared at him inscrutably and grunted like any other Indian.

"All right," he said quietly. "Makes no difference to me. But if you've anything much to discuss you'd better come on to the ranch. I don't want to hang up here all day."

"What's there to discuss?" said Mr. Baxter sharply.

"Not a thing as far as I am concerned," said Morton, "except to tell this fellow that the place I've selected is right back there through those trees and that I'll be here in from two to three weeks. And I want him to have oil and gas laid down ready for me and be ready himself, if he expects to take this hop with me."

"All right," said Flying Cloud again. "I'll have the stuff hauled in and everything ready for you. You'll come alone, I suppose?"

"You suppose wrong—that is if I can get any one out in this section to take a chance on riding with me. I can't go fooling around the mountains without a mechanic."

Morton thought that the Indian seemed slightly annoyed at this but he said nothing, except to agree.

"I'll be here," he repeated. Baxter took up the conversation.

"Your plane will be in Fairview?" he asked.

"I'm going to fly it here and start from here," said Morton. The lawyer seemed somewhat surprised but made no objection.

"You're on your way to Fairview then?" he asked.

"Yes," said Morton. "I'm riding to the fort and take a train from there."

"You have horses here? Well, why not let Flying Cloud send them in and let me pick you up and take you back? I'm going out this afternoon and stop at the camp to-night."

"Suits me," said Morton indifferently. The lawyer motioned to the car. "Hop in."

Morton permitted himself a slow grin. "Not on your life," he declared. "I'm very comfortable here and I'll just wait until you come back. Don't hurry on my account, either."

Again Baxter said nothing though he must have wondered. With a promise to be along later in the day he started his car and rolled away, while Morton went slowly back to his makeshift camp and his reflections.

It was about four o'clock when the lawyer sounded his horn loudly on the road and Morton led his horses out and turned them toward the ranch, to be picked up and cared for until they could be sent back to their owner. He climbed in beside the lawyer, who was now alone, and they drove on. Nothing was said for some time and then it was Baxter who spoke.

"Whose idea was it to start from here?"

"Flying Cloud's," said Morton.

"Is Flying Cloud managing the enterprise?"

"Not so you would notice it. He had his reasons and it wasn't a bad idea, so I agreed. Have to start from somewhere and this is as good a place as any."

"What were his reasons?"

"The usual ones. It's near the objective, good landing place, saves freighting the ship to the fort, and so on. Start from the fort and you'd have all the superstitious bucks up in arms over a possible desecration of the sacred valley. Might give us trouble."

"Flying Cloud was afraid of superstition among the Indians?"

"That's what he said. Didn't even want the old lady taken into our confidence for fear she might talk carelessly and let it out. If you ask me, it's all bunk. I don't claim to know Indians but if I've sized up these natives correctly they are too lazy and shiftless to get excited about anything."

"Yes," said Baxter absently and drove in silence for a while. Then: "Have you heard anything about Indian superstitions since you've been here?"

"No," said Morton. "The agent was agitated about something or other—some sort of dancing and going on. But I didn't get just what it was."

Baxter again let some moments go by without a reply.

"Queer that Flying Cloud should talk about superstitions," he then said.

"Why?" asked Morton.

"Oh, because he's generally credited with being back of most of the superstition on the reservation at present. He isn't a chief, you know."

"I don't know anything about him," said Morton.

"But he represents something that the chiefs don't. Ever hear of peyote?"

"What is it?" asked Morton. "An animal?"

"It's several things. A religion for one thing. Queer sort of religion, too. I've known good Christians who indulged in it and said it supplemented their own religion although as near as I can make out it's some sort of heathen sun worship. Then it's also a drug. The drug in fact gives its name to the religion. You have to use the drug to get into the spirit of the thing, you know."

"Religions aren't in my line exactly," said Morton.

"No. Well, this peyote ritual, or whatever it is, seems peaceable enough but it sort of worries some people. You see the Indians are taking it up pretty promiscuously."

"I thought we were talking about Flying Cloud and his responsibility for superstitions," said Morton, who cared nothing about peyote or anything pertaining to it.

"Exactly," said Baxter. "You see, Flying Cloud is generally credited with being the big noise among these peyote devotees. And it is the peyote crowd who regard the valley as sacred. They don't ever speak of it except very vaguely among themselves but I've heard that they regard it as a sort of paradise or something to which they expect to go—or do go—when in their trances. If any one objected to its desecration it would be they."

"Doesn't quite fit into any conception I have of Flying Cloud," said Morton dryly. "If that bird ain't a skeptic, I miss my guess."

"Still—he may be and yet be using peyote for his own ends. Of course he may not want his followers to know he's going in with you. That is probably the explanation. He don't object to going but he wants to keep his crowd fooled, I suppose."

"Did he volunteer to go?" asked Morton after a moment's thought.

"Well, I don't know. I suppose so. I had heard that Mrs. Stewart was the one who proposed the thing and put up most of the money and that she told Flying Cloud to go along. She contributed to his education, you know. He's a sort of very distant relative of hers."

"Fond of him, isn't she?" said Morton.

"Seems to be. Sort of surprised me, too. Used to think more of Day McGregor than

of all the Indians and white men on earth. Spent money like water on her, polishing her all up and making her shine like a nickel-plated watch. Bound and determined she wasn't going to have a sign of Injun on or about her. Yet I noticed she fell all over herself giving the glad hand to Flying Cloud and she was talking Indian so much she couldn't hardly listen to what I had to say. Day, she noticed it too, and it struck me she was worried some about it. Might be that the old lady is reverting and turning from Day to this Flying Cloud."

"I noticed she was sort of anxious and eager in expecting him myself," said Morton. Mention of Day had started that dull ache of desire and pain again. He had momentarily lost it, or at least had forgotten it.

"I never saw the beat of it myself," muttered the lawyer, and fell silent.

An hour or so later they came into the oil field. The three towering derricks loomed up idly, one of them capped and piped, the others not yet drilled in, awaiting the provision of storage facilities for the oil. A great rectangular basin, formed of banks of earth thrown up, already held thousands of gallons of oil and other streams of it were flowing away across the blackened and greasy benches toward the lake in the distance over which a thick scum was beginning to form. Men were swarming in a field, toiling with pick and shovel and horse-drawn scrapers at digging another reservoir to impound the precious stuff. There was bustle and shouting, hurry and noise as trucks rumbled up and down, teamsters drove their sweating horses and perspiring Indians and white men swung their tools. In the midst of it all an Indian drove solemnly and proudly from the log house that stood alone amid the tents and shacks of the laborers. He drove in state as became a millionaire of a day or two. He drove in a magnificently plumed and polished hearse, to which were hitched two half-broken, scrawny and disreputable ponies that plunged and snorted in their ornate harness. Beside him on the box sat a very fat squaw, wearing an enormous plumed hat. The Indian wore a shiny "two gallon" affair with a feather stuck in the black band. Inside the hearse, peering round-eyed through the plate-glass sides, swarmed a half dozen urchins whose shiny brown faces bespoke ineffable bliss.

Morton looked at this spectacle morosely. He would have howled derisively at it three days ago. He saw nothing very funny in it now. Nor did Baxter.

"Poor devil," the latter muttered. "Guess money means his finish."

"Sure it does," said Morton scornfully. "But look at those little imps. They're sights for the gods right now—but let 'em alone a few years. They'll be growing up to go to college and be as good as any of the big-headed white scoundrels that are so busy sneering at 'em. Let me tell you, Baxter—I know. You needn't tell me Indians haven't got capacity. I've been here long enough to know different."

"Well, maybe you're right. But they look sort of pathetic and hopeless to me. Look! Look at that damned scoundrel!"

He pointed excitedly to a man who was walking along the roadside and had stopped as the equipage went sedately by, its proud driver sitting superciliously erect. The white man shouted and whooped derisively and when the stolid red man drove past without heeding him he stooped and picked up a handful of sticky clay, wet with black oil from the overflow, molded it in his hands and let it fly. It struck the ornate creation that the squaw wore, knocked it awry and splashed all over the woman's broad shoulders and back. The men engaged at work and loafing set up triumphant and exultant shouts. Imitations of war whoops rang in the air.

"Attaboy, Slazey! Strike one! You're signed for the league! Dead center!"

The woman had uttered a suppressed scream as her treasure was destroyed and she now sat, ignoring the slime and mud that dripped from her shawl, holding the ruin in her hands and eying it with despair and uncomprehending protest. The buck beside her rose in his seat, his plug hat jerking askew, its feather rakishly tilted. He held the reins of the plunging horses with one hand and faced the crowd as he stood up precariously. His eyes were blazing like the eyes of a snake and one hand was fumbling at his waist for a knife which was not there. Inside the hearse the little children cowered on the floor, peeping wide-eyed and frightened at the howling mob outside. Another lump of greasy clay splashed against the glass that sheltered them,

The Indian was about to leap down but at that moment two things happened. The

first was that the half-wild ponies bucked in frenzy into their collars, jerking the hearse violently and throwing the buck into his seat where he had all he could do to seize the reins and strive to control his hectic steeds. The second event was the arrival of Morton W. Sturgis on the ground in one flying leap from the seat of the automobile and his advent in front of the complacent Slazey.

"How I hate a joker," said Morton loudly, and struck straight and true from the shoulder. Slazey caught it full on the chin and went over backward into some of the greasy mud he had just used with such humorous effect. "How I despise a funny cuss like you!"

There was a startled pause on the part of the men who had gathered. From the area of the new reservoir men were dropping their tools and swarming forth. Indians and whites were coming fast. The pause was momentary, born of surprise. These were tough men, inured to such things, ready and quick to rise to emergencies of the sort.

"Pick and shovel!" yelled a voice. "Git this divil and git him right!"

"Right is right!" retorted Morton. "You first, my vociferous friend."

He went swiftly, glidingly, skillfully, as light as a dancer on his feet, and as he went he struck. When he struck something gave before him, for he was a jewel with his fists. He slid under an upheaved shovel, jolted the chin behind it with a paralyzing fist and swung as he struck to face another. Piston-like, his other hand shot out and drove an assailant backward, leaving him face to face with the man called Mike who had shouted that rallying cry. Mike was game and with shortened, murderous pick poised himself warily to meet and kill that flailing menace that rushed upon him.

The mob gathered itself and was about to recoil inward upon Morton. He had no chance. He might glide and dance within range of Mike but he would never live to strike more than once as that murderous ring closed in on him. Yet he was single-minded in his purpose. He gave no heed to those about him but went for Mike.

Then just behind him the elderly Mr. Baxter burst into the fray. He came swiftly but with dignity and in his hand was a long, blocky weapon of the variety dear to the old-timer of the West. It was a six-shooter, with a high curled hammer and solidly set cylinder, the famous "frontier model" of Colonel Colt. It twirled jauntily about the forefinger that pierced the trigger guard and at every other revolution its butt smacked solidly into the nervous palm that lay ready for it.

"I reckon," said Mr. Baxter loudly, "that this here is a limited hostility. If any hombre allows otherwise I sure welcomes his interference!"

The crowd fell back. The crowd was experienced and it recognized something about the elderly and sedate Mr. Baxter that had been rather uncommon in that section for the past fifteen or twenty years. It was not that obsolete dialect, nor was it the ancient and deadly artillery, though these gave point to the actuality. It was that calm and unexcited and yet happy air of competence that sat so well upon him as he twirled his gun and hummed an ancient ditty of the range that had gone.

"My foot's in the stirrup and my seat's in the saddle,
And I'm off to ride around with the gosh-darned cattle;
With a ki-yi-yippy-yippy-yee!"

There came a grunt from the scene of combat and the pick swung peckishly at Morton's head. The head swayed aside and Morton leaped to get inside the wicked points. Mike was an old-timer and experienced in battle. He held his weapon with both hands not more than six or eight inches from the head and swung it back as it missed. It came back at a lower level and struck Morton in the side below the arm. The next instant his fist smacked home on an unprotected face and the doughty Mike ceased to be a factor in the battle.

Morton staggered back, his shoulder drawn down with the spasm of pain that seized him. But he faced the ring of men with red, embattled eyes.

"Next!" he said hoarsely. "Who's the next humorist?"

No one volunteered in face of that twirling, ancient weapon that smacked voraciously into the waiting palm on every second revolution about Mr. Baxter's forefinger. Instead there was an uneasy shuffling among the dozen or so who formed the circle. Behind them came the sound of many feet running swiftly.

"I'd just suggest," said Mr. Baxter, who had dropped his vernacular as suddenly as he had assumed it, "that this spot promises

to be rather unhealthy when our friends get here. I'm not one to offer advice, nor do I claim more than twenty or thirty years' acquaintance with Indians, but if I was a white man of a certain sort such as I see around me I'd be vacating these premises some hurried before these hostiles get on the job."

The men looked hastily around. The reference was sufficiently obvious. True, there were ten or fifteen white men who were on the way to them but they loomed rather insignificant in contrast to something like fifty Indians who were coming much faster and with evidently warlike intentions. The Caucasian reënforcements evidently sensed this for they showed a disposition to lag and to turn off at a tangent and go somewhere else.

The belligerent ring melted away. Some had the nerve to walk with an approach to dignity but most of them went at a sturdy trot. Even the walkers gradually hastened their steps until they merged into smoothly running leaps. In about ten seconds there was no embattled Caucasian on the scene except Mr. Baxter and Morton, the latter still on his feet but painfully bent. On the ground, however, lay Slazey, still unconscious.

The Indians came crowding up, looking at the three with inquiring and determined eyes. Mr. Baxter still twirled his heavy gun but Morton felt sick and indifferent.

"Tell 'em," he muttered, "to go to the devil! Jokers! All of 'em jokers! Lick any joker—Injun or paleface!"

Then he sat slowly down on the unconscious Slazey and the earth rose up to meet him, whirling dizzily.

Mr. Baxter spoke quietly to the Indians. The resplendent buck who had been the innocent occasion of the whole affair now ran up, having got his horses safely tied, and added his explanations to those of the lawyer. One of the Indians gravely stepped forward and held out his hand to Baxter, who took it as gravely.

"How!" said each of them. Then the Indian spoke in his own language. In answer three powerful bucks stooped over Morton and picked him up. They carried him to Baxter's car and placed him comfortably on the seat. As for Slazey, one or two looked contemptuously down at him and kicked him with careless, moccasined feet.

Mr. Baxter observed that they turned away without further violence and, seeking their former place of employment, gathered up their belongings and trooped away.

"Son," said he to the recumbent figure on the ground, "if you ask me I'll say that you're lucky to have been born as late as you was. Otherwise you wouldn't have no more hair now than a buzzard. I've seen times, son, when you'd have been just so much raw meat after any such play as that."

Morton was beginning to come to as Baxter slowly and carefully started the car. He groaned and sat painfully erect and then gingerly felt his side.

"Take it easy, son," said Baxter. "You all have earned a rest. But, if it ain't getting too personal, why ever do you come among all them rioters with your hands when you packs a six-gun handy?"

"Huh?" said Morton dazedly. "Six-gun? What six-gun?"

"It ain't possible!" said Baxter admiringly. "But I allow you done forgot that you had a gun, didn't you?"

"Gun?" groaned Morton. "Why, yes. I didn't think of the gun."

"Well, with reasonable odds, I'll admit you didn't really need one," said Baxter. "Hurt much?"

Morton was feeling himself gingerly, with his lips set in gray thin lines. He spat over the side of the car, looking closely at the saliva.

"Not much," he said. "No internal injury and no ribs broken. Point cut me a little and bruised me a lot, I think."

CHAPTER VIII.

It was three weeks later when Morton Sturgis, with a mechanic riding in the back seat, banked his ship above the jagged ridge that cut off the Deerlodge valley from the main range and straightened it out over Mystery Lake, a body of blue and fathomless water about two miles long by a fourth as broad, lying calm and serene amid its border of rugged banks clothed with dark fir and spruce and larch. From this point, at an elevation of about three thousand feet, or nearly eleven thousand above sea level, he headed up the valley, keeping fairly close to the forbidding rim rock that cut off the Valley of Four Ghosts from the rest of the world. At this height he was above the rim and was even able to swing over it to

get a view of the mysterious region he was to explore.

He headed in with due regard for treacherous air currents which tossed the ship about like a cork at times, giving him some inkling of the difficulties he would meet later. His sweeping eyes swept the barren, rugged plateau below him, finding it seamed and rocky, with sparse alpine vegetation and no sign of water. Basaltic, he judged the rock to be, weatherworn, forbidding. At no spot did he observe any considerable level area on which he could land without a wreck.

He headed eastward for a mile or more, climbing high though the cold was biting and the rush from the propeller was numbing him. It was necessary, for the currents that swooped around the great block of stone were dangerous. Here he found it difficult to judge of conditions below but he made out what appeared to be a narrow valley steeply sided, running mainly parallel to the drift of the range. There was more vegetation down there and signs of water, perhaps even flat land where he could land if the currents would let him.

He could also see, looking like gently swaying and shifting puff balls of dark mist against the ground, what he took to be the smoke clouds which had given the valley its name. He looked keenly for all of these that were visible, counting them carefully and found that there were four of them which he could distinguish. That gave him occasion for thought and decided him upon a change in his plans, which had been to fly directly to the Deerlodge and land after sizing up the conditions above the rim rock.

He banked around and headed straight northeastward toward the towering spike of snow-clad rock that marked Mount Thunder, about thirty miles away. The fast-traveling De Haviland, an old army machine with a Liberty motor of four hundred horse power, swooped down on the cloud-capped peak, swung about at an altitude of fourteen thousand feet and came around no more than half a mile from its sides. From here, Morton judged, as good a view of the valley could be had as one could get from the peak itself.

He peered intently at the region he had left. His eyes were keen, used to judging appearances from this altitude, but he could see only one or two smoke pillars and very little of the valley, no more than to indicate that there actually was a valley of some kind.

Satisfied and deeply puzzled he headed the ship westward again and shot straight for his destination as nearly as he could guess it. In a few minutes he was banking downward toward the Deerlodge, and he soon picked out, in the checkerboard of timber patches, meadows and fields, what he thought was the house and the flat meadow he had selected as a landing place. He swooped down, banked parallel to the long way of the meadow and made his landing without incident. He stopped only long enough to look at his gauge, which indicated about fifteen gallons of gas remaining. The oil gauge was also perilously low.

"That was a little chancy with the Liberty," he said philosophically. "That motor is a regular hog for oil and gas. If I'd realized it first I guess I wouldn't have risked taking that swing out to the mountain, Ben."

The mechanic climbed stiffly from the cockpit and stretched himself. "I was wonderin' why you went joy ridin' out there," he said. "Flirtin' with mountains that way is some venturesome."

"I wanted to see what could be seen from there," said Mort thoughtfully. He climbed out and helped Ben to block the ship and stake the wings. The two of them, out of practice in flying, were a bit stiff in their oily overalls, and weary besides. They seemed quite isolated and as far as they could tell their advent had not even been noticed though the roar of the motor, despite the muffling of an alleged silencer, had been almost enough to deafen them.

In this they were mistaken, although no one came near them for more than an hour. At the end of that period they had unloaded everything they intended to take from the machine, which was mainly food and the rifle which Morton had strapped to the side of the fuselage just below his cockpit, together with blankets and tarpaulins.

Then a man rode into the meadow from the trees around it and Morton looked up to face Joe Jump High on his scrawny pony.

"Got a permit to fly on reservation?" asked the Indian. But Morton saw the faint show of white teeth and was not impressed. He smiled more openly than the Indian.

"Hello, Joe!" he said heartily. "Been arresting any bootleggers? I haven't got a

permit, no, but you might ask Flying Cloud for one if you're bound to have it."

"Flying Cloud! He got a permit?"

Joe had alighted and strolled up to where the mechanic, Stevens, was bending over a recently started fire. The mechanic looked up and grinned.

"How, Injun!" he said. "Don't you go shovin' any bluff here now about bein' a policeman or I'll take you apart and see what makes you go. You hear me?"

"Sure. You make plenty of noise!" said Joe calmly. He squatted down beside Stevens and watched him at his rather clumsy culinary attempts. But he spoke to Morton.

"What's Flying Cloud got to do with this?" A thumb indicated the airplane near by.

"It's his machine—or Mrs. Stewart's," said Morton.

"What for?"

Morton had already made up his mind that Joe's occasionally clipped utterance was merely a trick of speech and that he spoke English almost as well as Flying Cloud, who spoke it better than Morton did.

"Haven't you heard that the cattlemen use these things herding their beef around?" he asked innocently. "Great stunt to locate strays."

"Not as cheap as Indians," said Joe dryly. "Who bought it?"

"Flying Cloud did—for Mrs. Stewart."

"She know it?"

"I suppose so," said Morton idly, though he more than suspected that the old woman had no knowledge of how her money was being spent.

"Ugh!" said Joe expressively.

"You speaking to me, Injun?" asked Stevens.

"No," said Joe with contempt. He squatted silently for a time.

"Hour ago," he suddenly said, without feeling, "heard you go by. Other men heard you. Man named Stewart coming pretty soon. Flying Cloud's not here."

"He isn't? Know where he is?"

Joe shrugged his shoulders. "No," he said. "What you going to do?"

Morton also shrugged. "Wait for him. Otherwise—nothing."

"You going to marry Day McGregor?" asked Joe suddenly.

"Lord, no!" stuttered Morton. "What on earth——"

"Somebody better marry her—quick. Pete Little Dog works there"—he indicated the general vicinity of the ranch with a sweep of the hand. "He saw you talking to her. Pete thought you liked her."

"I *do* like her. I guess everybody does. But she wouldn't marry me, Joe. I hardly know her."

"Ugh!" said Joe again, a grunt that was expressive of much. "Maybe better that way. She knows Stewart. She knows Flying Cloud. They know her. I guess she better marry you."

Morton stared at the impassive face of the Indian in astonishment. "What the deuce do you mean?" he demanded. "What are you driving at?"

"Nothing," said Joe, rising. "You like Day? That's all. Flying Cloud's no good. Stewart's no good. You'll see."

Stevens looked up as the Indian stepped toward his horse. "Well, so long, Injun!" he said heartily. "Come around again. Any time you're lookin' for entertainment just start something."

Joe eyed him speculatively. "Plenty big mouth," he said meditatively. "Makes lots of noise." He shook his head sadly and mounted his horse. "So long!" he said to Morton. "You think it over."

Then he wheeled the animal, lashed it with his quirt and loped swiftly away.

Morton stood gazing after him, thinking hard. The Indian evidently was friendly to him for some reason, and, contrary to his original opinion, not because he was connected with Flying Cloud. But he could not guess why nor why he should offer such advice to him of all men.

"Stevens," he said as he turned to his assistant, "in the three weeks we have been together I've sized you up as a pretty good mechanic and a pretty tough and disreputable citizen. I don't know whether or not your opinion is worth anything but I'm going to ask it just the same. What do you think of Stewart?"

"The guy that monkeys around down at the wells?" asked Stevens.

"The same."

"I may be tough," said Stevens, "and according to some lights I may even be disreputable, though if you weren't payin' me well for it I'd maybe take a whirl at you for sayin' it. But tough or disreputable as I may be I sure claim one or two streaks of white blood. This here Stewart, now, he

may be white on the outside but if you skin him I'll betcha he'll shade that Injun for darkness four ways from the jack. I'll say no more without knowin' why you want to know, except to add that I wouldn't trust him around the other side of a fishin' pole with a German one-mark note of mine."

"Why?" asked Morton.

"You better tell *me* why," said Stevens.

"I believe he wants to marry a girl here —who has money. I don't think it would be well for her to let him do it."

"If I hated that girl worse'n I do poison, Chinamen and heathens in general," said the mechanic, "I'd disagree with you maybe. Still, I ain't certain I would at that. I'm a good hater but my disposition that way has its limits. I reckon I'd not go so far as to wish that much on even a rattlesnake."

"I gather you don't like him."

"Your gatherin' is about right then. I ain't got nothin' to go on, mind you, besides the general high-toned disdainfulness he uses toward roughnecks like me, and maybe a word here and a word there. Still, if the female you mentions was any relation to me and wanted to marry Stewart I reckon I'd just wring her neck and get it out of her system that way."

"I see," said Morton. "That is somewhat the way I feel about it."

Stevens grunted almost as though he were an Indian himself and set himself to his cooking. Morton lapsed into thought for some time. Finally he spoke again.

"Ben," he said, "that place we flew over back there is what I brought this ship out here to explore. Did you notice it?"

"I noticed it looked bad if you have to land," said Ben.

"There is a valley there," said Morton, "that has never been entered. It is supposed to be inaccessible except with a ship like this. A lot of people off and on have tried to get into it, yet there is no known way of getting there. The Indians regard it as the home of some sort of spirits or other. They call it the Valley of the Four Ghosts. Four, mind you!"

"I'm minding it," said Ben. "But what of it?"

"I was wondering how, if no one has ever been in it nor even seen it except from Mount Thunder, which is the only place they *could* see it from, the Indians come to call it the Valley of the *Four* Ghosts!"

"I'll bite," said Ben. "Why?"

"There *are* just four ghosts, or smokes in it," said Morton impressively. "I counted them as we flew over it. Now, how did they come to know the name was correct?"

Ben stared at him blankly for a while while the implication penetrated his understanding, then he answered.

"My opinion of Injuns is that you can't take no stock in nothing they say," he pronounced. "If they call it that, and yet they *say* no one was ever in it, I'd allow they were lying about it."

Morton looked at the frowning rim that showed above the trees and shook his head.

"But how?" he asked. "No one has ever been able to find a place to climb those cliffs, although a surveyor and his party went over every inch of them a good many years ago."

"Shucks!" said Ben easily. "We got an edge on them guys. You wait until we land in there and I'll bet you we can find a way out if we can't find none *in*. They ain't going to hide both ends of the hole, I reckon."

"I hope not," said Morton.

CHAPTER IX.

It was still early in the afternoon and although Sturgis had been informed that Flying Cloud was not there, which he also deduced from the fact that his supplies were not there either as yet, he had the impulse to go over to the ranch and see Day McGregor if possible. His uneasiness had grown on him with his absence from her and he had more than once lost sleep in imagining that she might be in some danger or other with him too far away to help her. Yet apparently nothing had happened as yet or Joe would have said something to him about it.

He half hesitantly obeyed the impulse and walked through the grove until he came out on the road about half a mile away and turned toward the ranch. As he approached it, however, his courage failed him as he contemplated the reception he was likely to meet. The prospect of facing the girl's scorn was painful to think of.

Still he kept on, though going ever slower and slower. He passed the corner of the fence inclosing the field about the house and glanced at the pleasant, cheerful building, for all the world like the modern farmhouse of a prosperous Middle Western coun-

tryman. It was hard to believe that he was far removed from what he knew as civilization as the orderly fields, the green orchard and the flower beds appeared to his vision. Yet all around him was the wilderness inhabited by none but scattered Indians, with the nearest center of white man's activities, aside from the oil-drilling operations at least fifty miles distant.

The road which he was following swung down at this point almost to the sandy bank of the little river which furnished water to the valley for irrigation. There were willows growing thickly along the edge of stream on the side of the road opposite the line fence, furnishing good cover if one had need of it. This had not occurred to Morton as he paused in sight of the house but it did a moment later when he heard the unmistakable noise of an automobile and saw it swinging out of the roadway of the ranch, a small two-seater holding a man and a woman. He had good eyesight and even at the distance he was sure that the woman was Day McGregor. The last thing on earth he wished at the present time was to meet that young lady, although he had set out with the hope of getting sight of her.

Without a moment's thought or hesitation he dove into the brush along the creek bank and crouched there well hidden from any one passing on the road.

In a minute or two the automobile ran rather slowly past his hiding place, around the corner of the fence and stopped where the road turned up on the bench. From the house this was hidden by the growth along the line fence but there was a free sweep of vision out over the foothills of the valley. It was not more than twenty feet from where Morton lay and while he could not see them clearly he could hear what was said.

It was no part of his purpose to play eavesdropper, but he at first supposed that they would be going on immediately and lay quiet without thinking. They did not however and he heard Miss McGregor speak.

"It apparently came down somewhere out there, perhaps behind that slight rise. I am not sure, though—it might have been farther down."

Another voice, carefully modulated, answered.

"I think perhaps I had better run up to the top of the hill and see before going on. It may be in there and I can't drive over this greasewood."

The engine stopped and the door opened. But before dismounting the man said, half to himself apparently:

"Funny thing for an airplane to be out here. I wonder what brought it. Maybe a forest-service ship, though there is no forest very near here."

"Why, no, I think not," said Miss McGregor. "I am sure it is the machine that the Indians and grandmother bought to settle this dispute about the boundary of the reservation. There was a man named Sturgis here two or three weeks ago, who was to fly it. He came to select a starting point, I believe, and went back the same day."

"A man named Sturgis? An airship to settle the boundary? What are you talking about, Miss McGregor?"

"Just that, Mr. Stewart. They are going to fly into the valley over there and see where the divide really goes."

"Oh!" said the man named Stewart, and paused for a moment. Then, thoughtfully: "So! That's it, is it? And who's idea was this?"

"I'm sure I don't know. I rather think it was suggested by the office of Indian affairs but it may have been Flying Cloud's brilliant idea. He is going with the flyer, I understand."

"Flying Cloud is going? Why——" Again he paused as though thinking better of what he had to say.

"This may make a difference then," he finally said, with a laugh. "But I am not sure that it isn't money wasted. As I understand the law there isn't much chance for the Indians in any case. It might help you but I hardly think so. It's too bad, for of course if it did carry enough weight with the courts it would make a difference in my own claim. For your sake, Miss Day, I sincerely hope it does."

"Thank you, Mr. Stewart," said Day. "But we are not going to quarrel about that. If you win, you win, and I shan't hold it against you."

"If I had known you before it started," said Stewart regretfully, "I should never have dreamed of making the claim. I would withdraw it now but unfortunately I am under serious obligations to others in the matter, whom I cannot desert. I was not a rich man when I found out about the rights which had come down to me and

others have assisted me in prosecuting them. If I had the money I would reimburse them gladly and dismiss the suit. They, however, went into it from more or less mercenary motives, since the issue was quite clear to them and to me and I would be deserting them if, on the very eve of the decision in our favor, I should withdraw."

"Are you so sure of the decision, then?"

"If you could have heard what the judge had to say in comment to the lawyers the other day I think you'd have no doubt, too. It is a shame, Miss Day, and I bitterly regret ever having ventured into the matter, since it is going to hurt you."

Miss McGregor laughed but Morton thought that some anxiety lay behind her assumed mirth.

"But it is nothing to get serious about, Mr. Stewart. If the land is rightfully yours, you should have it. In any event I believe that some, at least, is not involved and that we shall be left with enough to struggle along on."

"That's true," said Stewart. "You'll have nearly a third of the total about which there is no dispute. Still, it means a lot of money."

Now, Morton, who had been on the verge of letting them know he was within hearing, had changed his mind abruptly when he heard what Stewart had to say. He marked that gentleman's assumed confidence and his reference to favorable comments of the Federal judge who was presiding in Fairview and hearing the suit, it being a matter involving a government reservation and therefore within his jurisdiction. Morton had been in Fairview for the past three weeks and while he awaited the completion of assembling and rigging his ship had several times dropped into the Federal Building to hear the suit, and also that involving the application for an injunction brought by the government and Baxter as the representative of the Indians, restraining the Northwestern Oil Company from further exploitation of Deerlodge Basin under their leases.

Stewart of course knew how his own suit was going and had probably been present among his lawyers at the very time Morton had listened to the taking of testimony. That testimony and the judge's remarks concerning it had not been exactly as he sought to represent. In fact the astute Baxter had sprung a surprise on the complainant, who claimed to be the lawful heir of Mrs. Stewart's husband, who had died intestate, as the only legitimate son of the said Mr. Stewart's brother. Stewart, it seemed, was the old woman's second husband, Day's mother having been the issue of her first marriage, and the present claim involved her right to anything beyond her dower of all the property Stewart had possessed at the time of his death.

The surprise Baxter had sprung was in the nature of a crushing blow, no less, in fact, than direct testimony casting more than serious doubt on the legitimacy of the claimant. Stewart, it seemed, could produce no real proof that his mother had ever married his father while there was considerable proof to the contrary. So much so, in fact, that the learned judge's comments on the evidence had been exceedingly caustic nor had they been as Stewart represented, at all in his favor. Quite the reverse. He had even talked of throwing the case out of court.

As for the injunction suit, that was another matter. There, it was true, things were not going well for the Indians or the government. But Stewart to all intents and purposes was no longer a factor to be considered seriously.

When Morton heard the brazen lie on his lips he changed his mind about coming out. He wanted to hear more but in this he was disappointed for the time being. Stewart left the machine with Day sitting in it and walked toward the rise to see if the airplane had landed in that direction. Morton decided to wait until he came back, thinking they would drive on so that he could get away without discovery.

Stewart came back in a few minutes, having found nothing. But he did not climb into the car at once. Instead he put one foot on the running board.

"I've been thinking about matters, Miss Day," he said earnestly. "Believe me, the situation as it regards you pains me exceedingly. I cannot go on with this affair which must result in depriving you of the inheritance you have been brought up to expect. I have made up my mind that, irrespective of everything, I must withdraw from the case. It is true that in doing so I will be betraying people who have trusted me but maybe I can work to repay them in time. There is only one alternative by which I could preserve my self-respect and that seems almost unthinkable."

"Why!" exclaimed Day. "I certainly don't wish you to drop your claim. It would be preposterous. And I shan't hold any hard feeling about it, I can assure you."

But Stewart shook his head sorrowfully. "I cannot do it," he said. "You see, Miss Day, when you and your grandmother welcomed me to your house it was as an open adversary to whom you rendered hospitality and as a relative of a sort, who, though opposed to you, was still friendly. It was generous and fine of you not to hold animosity against me. But you won a victory then which you did not intend."

"Certainly we didn't wish to take advantage of you or to make any claim for a return for common hospitality," said Day. "You can't think that of us."

"I am miles from thinking it of you. Nevertheless, I have been in your company several times. Once would have been enough. I think you will understand me when I say that I could not be in your company for five minutes without succumbing to your charm, Miss Day. Others must have done the same before me but none could have yielded so completely as I. I love you, Day, and that is the reason I cannot rob you of your heritage."

He said it rather well and even Morton was in doubt whether there was not real passion behind the man's stilted declaration. Day seemed to know nothing of the real facts regarding the lawsuit and she therefore could not know that there was another motive, a desperate last essay for fortune in the background. He seemed disinterested and sincere.

"Why!" she exclaimed startled, "we've hardly known each other long enough——"

"It has been quite long enough to bring about my downfall," said Stewart sadly. "I know it is hopeless and I do not ask you for an answer. But, Miss McGregor, I have noticed lately that you seemed sad and worried, as though there were something on your mind. Believe me, I have your interest nearest to my heart and I want to help you in any trouble that may be yours."

"It is only my grandmother," said Day hastily. "She is—is failing. That is all, I assure you."

"I hope it is," said Stewart. "But if it should be anything else, if there is anything in which you wish help, remember that I would give my life for you."

"Thank you," said Day, somewhat at a loss. "But I don't know——"

"In one way," went on Stewart, "I can serve you. You may depend upon it that I shall instruct my lawyers to dismiss my suit at once."

"No, no!" cried Day, "you must not do that. I could not accept that from you!"

"But you cannot help yourself, Miss Day. It is done or will be as soon as I can reach them. It is the only way since the alternative I mentioned——"

"But what is the alternative? You must not do this. I cannot—don't you see that it places me under obligation to you?"

Stewart seemed to realize this for the first time.

"That is so," he said thoughtfully. "I don't wish you to feel under an obligation. You must not be bound in any way, of course. Yet the other course is too much to hope for. I love you as man never loved woman yet but I would be a fool to expect you to reciprocate my feeling. If you only could, though——"

"What are you saying?" cried Day.

"I am not saying it. It is only a thought, sufficiently obvious. I love you, Day, and if you could only give yourself to me there would be no further question of mine or thine between us. This wretched suit would then make no difference. But I do not dare to ask it."

"I never dreamed of this," said Day in a worried tone. "I—I don't know what to say. I don't care about the money but—but——"

"You mean that you can——" Stewart's cry was triumphant. But she stopped it as it rose to his lips.

"No, no! I don't know. I think you are fine and generous and chivalrous, Mr. Stewart, but I cannot say that—only, I need a friend, and I had hoped that you would be one."

"I will serve you to the last drop of my blood!" Stewart declared.

"By the Lord Harry!" muttered Morton to himself in disgust, "she is beginning to fall for that stuff. And mine—well she recognized it but she didn't fall. Can you beat it?"

But Day was speaking excitedly.

"I've got to trust some one and look for help somewhere. I don't know what it is, Mr. Stewart, but something threatens and terrifies me. My grandmother is becoming

strange and terrifying. She seems to have trances in which she becomes altogether Indian—and she threatens and commands me, then, to do things which are—terrible. She seems to think I am Indian too, or should be. And I am so little Indian! I do not know what it is, but something is being planned and I am afraid."

"Why, what is it?" demanded Stewart.

"I tell you I don't know. It is Flying Cloud. He is a very distant connection of grandmother's and mine and he has somehow achieved almost complete control over her lately. They have been talking together many times and I am sure that sometimes they have talked of me. And lately grandmother talked about—my being an Indian and what my duty as an Indian was. I am sure she was not herself at all. But the thing she hinted at was horrible. Yet when she got a message from Flying Cloud yesterday that he was coming to-morrow she ordered me to be ready—to make my choice."

"But what choice? What is she threatening?" And Morton also was listening now with deadly intensity.

"I am not sure. But Flying Cloud is—is a sort of high priest of some new religion among the Indians and he—he has converted grandmother, I am sure. She seems dazed, to have lost her mind, almost, and she talks so vaguely. I am afraid to guess what they intend."

"But you spoke of a choice?"

"If there is a choice I shall be glad. There must be, of course. But I am afraid of Flying Cloud. He is not what he seems. I don't mean that he isn't cultured. He is. But he's hypocritical for his own purposes and he is greedy. He will stop at nothing, I think. I am afraid of him."

"You need not be," said Stewart loftily. "I will attend to him."

"But there is nothing to go upon. He has never said anything to me which I could resent. He has looked sometimes when—but I know nothing, there is so little to go upon. Yet I am afraid to be here to-morrow when he comes."

"There is no need for you to be here then," said Stewart cheerfully. "You shall go away before he gets here."

"But how?"

"Leave it to me, Day. I'll be here with the machine to-morrow at any time you say. You just walk out, get in and I'll run you to the fort or Fairview within five hours. Nobody will stop you and if they attempt it I'll settle that little detail."

"If you only could, Mr. Stewart. It is so good of you—and I wish, really, that I could feel differently—about the other matter. You are generous and kind and knightly."

"I am nothing of the kind. I only desire to serve you. And when shall I be here?"

"Flying Cloud is coming in the morning. They always talk and palaver a lot before luncheon. If you could come about noon I'll be ready."

CHAPTER X.

The automobile went on out of sight and Morton came out of his hiding place to follow it slowly. The situation thus disclosed to him was something which depressed him and yet he did not see that there was at present anything he could do. He had a fierce desire to interfere in some way, but all ways seemed closed to him. His feelings were a compound of resentment against the girl and of yearning desire to watch over her and protect her. He wished to appear as a rescuer, to heap coals of fire on her head, snatch her from impending disaster and then magnanimously bow himself out of the picture and leave her to her remorse. That was a part of it. The other part and perhaps the greater was simply an overmastering solicitude for her, born of a sudden and surprising love that he had never thought himself capable of feeling for any woman.

The situation, as he saw it, was simple enough. Flying Cloud, the Indian, was working on her grandmother for purposes of his own, compounded probably of covetousness and superstition, if indeed his superstitions were not simply a pose. Knowing nothing about them Morton could not say how that matter rested but he was inclined to think that the Indian was, like many another primitive who has been educated beyond his capacity, simply a cynical skeptic, cast adrift from his own primeval code and yet not anchored to any substitute. Just what the Indian might be driving at he could not know but he guessed that it was Mrs. Stewart's wealth, or prospective wealth. He also suspected, with something like disgust and contempt, that he might be raising his eyes to Day herself, counting on

the grandmother's influence. But of course it was ridiculous to think that he could possibly accomplish anything in that direction.

As for the Indian's attitude to himself he had formed no definite opinion. But there lurked in his mind a doubt that Flying Cloud favored the expedition at all. It was vague doubt, for the Indian was not given to betraying his feelings, but Morton had sensed that there was no enthusiasm on Flying Cloud's part. When this factor was linked with the Indian's apparent knowledge of one of the features of a valley into which no man had ever penetrated it was puzzling. Yet Flying Cloud had made no demur about accompanying him on the flight. Indeed when they had discussed the matter Morton had thought Flying Cloud quite reconciled to going, even to the point of demurring against his engaging any one else.

In any event the valley did not seem to be connected with Day's problems in any direct way beyond its possible bearing on her inheritance and even there it was not likely to make much difference. There remained Stewart.

Again Morton considered that phase of the matter with disgust. Stewart was negligible and contemptible. He knew him as a good-looking, weak-mouthed satellite of the oil crowd, and his maneuver to win Day and Day's property with her was ingenious to an extent but hardly worthy of serious consideration. Even if the girl, in ignorance of the true status of affairs, should be impressed by his apparent generosity and disinterestedness and yield to them, Morton did not think that Stewart would be able to maintain the deception. The news of the real status of the lawsuit would undoubtedly reach the girl in a few days.

The only way, then, that Stewart could hope to carry through this attempt was to win the girl to an immediate marriage, which did not seem possible.

And then a suspicion struck Morton, with sudden conviction. An immediate marriage! What if the man did plan for that consummation? If that was the plot, then he had dismissed Stewart too lightly. The man might be capable of that and he undoubtedly had played to win the girl's confidence with some success.

Morton whistled and then grinned. It seemed too melodramatic for serious consideration and yet he hoped there might be something in it. To save Day from herself, without her consent! That would be something worth doing. This exultation gave way almost instantly to a mounting rage against Stewart and, singularly enough, the rage spread to embrace Flying Cloud, the oil magnates who plotted behind one or both of these men and every one who in any way dared to lift a hand or harbor a thought inimical to the girl he adored with such poignant worship.

Now he was hastening onward toward his rude camp, striding with swinging steps and set jaw. He paid no heed to the murmur of an engine on the road ahead of him and when the automobile containing Stewart and Day passed him he stared straight at it with eyes that saw nothing but the sweet face of the girl. Though the face was not exactly sweet at that moment, but rather frozen into a look of blank ignorance of his existence as the machine swept past. That look cut and Morton paused to swing about and watch the machine out of sight. Then he went on.

When he came through the grove into his camp the mechanic looked up and greeted him.

"Just had a visitor," he announced. "Guy was in here not ten minutes ago asking about us."

"Yes," said Morton absently. "I know. Stewart, wasn't it?"

"Yeah. Seemed right curious about it all. Looked the ship over as if he'd never seen one before."

"He did?" said Morton and got up to examine the ship himself. He went over it carefully, testing struts and guys and controls to see that nothing had been tampered with. The mechanic laughed.

"He didn't put it on the bum," he said. "I ain't letting any one get away with that."

"How much gas have we?" asked Morton, and looked at the gauge. It was very low. The motor was not an economical one and he had taken no more gas with him than would bring him to the basin with a margin for safety. He relied on Flying Cloud for a further supply. But Flying Cloud so far had failed him. He might make twenty or thirty miles, or possibly as much as fifty, with what he had.

Well, he would have that out with the Indian in the morning. In the meantime there was nothing more to do except to kill time as best he might. He pottered about the machine the rest of the day helping the me-

chanic. During this time he was often interrupted. More Indians than he had ever seen constantly drifted through the grove or over the hills back of the field, solemnly pulled up their scrawny ponies and as solemnly stared at the strange artificial bird that the two palefaces tinkered with. Morton supposed that they had seen him in flight and had traced him down to his landing place out of curiosity. They gave not the slightest hint of hostility and he smiled as he thought of Flying Cloud's warning against their superstitious resentment. They were just as he had noted in his short stay on the reservation: lazy, indifferent, dull, and inveterate beggars. They might be superstitious but they were too lazy even to conjecture what he was doing there with his strange machine.

They were mostly youngish men or middle aged, and he saw no women among them. Several grinned at him and said: "How!" And one or two seemed to regard him with conspicuous friendliness. These, although he did not know it, were men who had worked at the oil camp and had seen his championing of their kinsman. He asked one who spoke some English what they were doing there and he replied rather vaguely that there was "heap powwow" at the ranch and that they were all attending it.

Night finally put an end to this and the last Indian departed about his business. Morton turned in to sleep but found it difficult. He found himself thinking of Day McGregor, with a dull ache of the heart which was despairing. He was seeing himself as he was for the first time in his life, reviewing his own worthlessness and lamenting his wasted opportunities. Even if he won her forgiveness it would do him no good. A penniless fortune hunter he had come out here and a penniless fortune hunter he remained except for the little pittance he would receive for this work he was doing. It was beyond the possibilities that he could hope to become anything else and, in his position, with his original motives exposed, it was impossible to hope that he could win the girl. Indeed, he could not even try, for to do so would expose him to suspicion—even in his own mind—of reversion to this former attitude.

He passed a miserable night which went far to burn from him most of the callous selfishness and cynicism which had hitherto characterized him. And as he writhed in the fire of his self-revelation he gradually won to a new manhood. He was not altogether regenerate but the worst of his failings were put aside for good and all.

When the new day dawned he was up. Somewhat red eyed and gray of face from his self-communings but with a manner compounded of grim reticence and hard determination. He did not know what he had to do but he intended to do it. As a starter he was going to watch Stewart. After he had foiled whatever scheme that gentleman had up his sleeve he would go about his business with a watchful eye out for any other plots that might be brewing. Then, when his work was done, he would get a job. The oil company probably would hire him. If not there were other openings for a man who could manipulate an airplane. Sheep and cattle men were using them, he had heard. Oil prospectors were employing them and lumber companies with great timber tracts were finding them useful. One thing was certain; he would not go back to the old shame and futility.

It was a cloudy day and before they had finished breakfast it began to rain, with mutterings of distant thunder over the basalt cliffs of the forbidden valley. The mechanic crawled under the tarpaulin that covered the machine and went to sleep again. But Morton put on his leather coat and overalls of waterproof canvas, pulled his helmet on his head and set out for the road from the lower end of the valley.

He hunted out a position which commanded a view of the road for some distance in each direction, although the ranch was out of sight, and sat down beneath a clump of scrub oak that sheltered him somewhat from the intermittent gusts of rain. After a while these died away and the sun beat through the scattering clouds though the lightning still played on the frowning cliffs across the basin.

It was getting along toward noon when he was rewarded for his vigil. For several hours nothing had passed except an occasional Indian riding toward the ranch but now he heard the faint humming of a motor and in a moment Stewart's small car came in sight, running slowly. Behind it were a party of Indians, three or four in number.

The car drew up at the side of the road and stopped and the Indians paused beside it to converse for a moment or two. Morton had no plan in view but he decided that

if he was going to watch Stewart he had better watch him unseen, so he lay flat on the ground and blended the grease-stained drab of his overalls and the buff of his coat and helmet with the brown undertone of the vegetation.

Just below him was an outcrop of rock with other boulders scattered about in a heaped-up confusion. The Indians went on and Stewart waited. They passed out of sight finally and then he started his car, driving it slowly along the road until he came opposite the rocks. Here he stopped again, looking cautiously all around him. Morton waited expectantly. He was beginning to understand a little better.

Stewart got down with a can in his hand. It was a ten-gallon gasoline container and it was light and empty. Another look up and down the road and then Stewart passed to the rear of the car and began to drain gas from his tank into the can.

Morton swiftly made up his mind and acted. He crept like a snake from his place beneath the oak and wriggled to the next clump of greasewood. From there he slid downward toward the rocks, rivaling an Indian in his caution. His dull monotone of clothing aided him in the bright sun, blending into the dun of the hillside as the coat of a lizard does. But even so he was not in much danger of discovery. Stewart was too intent on funneling his gas into the can to pay heed to the hill above him, his attention being concentrated on what he was doing and on watching the deserted road.

Morton gained the rocks and crept to their summit, where he was fairly over the man. He was in time to see him straighten up, screw the top on the can and then walk around to the front of the car to look at the instrument board.

He uttered a grunt of satisfaction.

"That ought to do," he said out loud, the solitude and silence of the vast landscape tempting him to vocal soliloquy as it has a habit of doing. One speaks his thoughts to hear the sound of his own voice and rid oneself of the feeling that he is disembodied. "Three gallons left. A little better than fifty miles. That ought to bring us about halfway—and there isn't any habitation that I know of around that point. Now I think we can go on and stage our little plan."

He chuckled to himself and Morton, who had a pretty good idea what the plan was. had a hard time to resist the impulse to spring from his hiding place and make an assault on the man. He held himself in, however, assisted by the fact that Stewart left the car and walked right toward the pile of rocks, carrying the can of gas.

Morton gathered himself to face the encounter he thought was due but Stewart did not ascend the pile of rocks. Instead he found a crevice down near the bottom where he placed the can, covering it with other stones so that it was completely hidden. Then he again chuckled and turned back to the car.

"I am economical," he said again. "There is really no use to save it, is there? But it's no use to pour it out here where some one might see it."

Then he was gone.

Morton drew himself up on the rock. It was a good place for what he planned as it was close to the road and commanded it for half a mile. There he sat, grim and patient and the look on his face boded no good to Mr. Stewart when he returned that way.

CHAPTER XI.

When Day McGregor came home from her expedition with Stewart, which had been staged simply for the purpose of finding out where the mysterious airplane had landed, she went in to her grandmother to find her sitting as usual in front of the fire of ironwood in her pleasant sitting room. The old woman seemed restless, her eyes darting to the girl and then beyond her as though she expected some one else.

"Where have you been?" she asked in the Shoshone dialect which for these past months she had been affecting more and more. Day replied in English. She did not speak the Indian tongue as well as her grandmother, though she understood it well enough. In any case, as her grandmother showed signs of reverting to aboriginal traits the girl felt more and more disinclination to encourage it.

"Mr. Stewart from the oil camp came looking for that flying machine which landed near here and I went out with him to help locate it."

"Flying machine? What flying machine?"

"The one they have engaged to settle the boundary dispute. You remember that Mr. Sturgis who was here?"

"Yes. I remember. He went away very discourteously." The Indian vocabulary was found difficult for expression of such ideas as these and Mrs. Stewart lapsed into English perforce. "What was the matter with that young man? I rather liked him. He had a strong face."

"No stronger than his impudence," said Day resentfully. "He was simply a scoundrelly adventurer. He is the man who is going to fly into the Valley of the Four Ghosts."

"What?" demanded Mrs. Stewart. "Why, I thought Flying Cloud was going to do that."

"Flying Cloud? Why, he isn't an aviator, grandmother."

"But he told me—I don't understand. No doubt it is all right, though. And why was Mr. Stewart so interested in this airship?"

"He is with the oil company and they are concerned with any one flying around here I suppose."

"Yes. But I don't like his curiosity. I don't care much for him. He claims to be Frank Stewart's son, doesn't he?"

"Why, of course. You know that. He hasn't made any concealment of the fact."

"I remember. But that's queer, too. I remember Frank Stewart. My husband brought him here once. He died before Tom did. But I never heard that he had a wife—or a son. Tom didn't think much of him. I wonder why he never told me."

"Maybe he didn't know himself. If he had he would probably have made a will, grandmother, and saved this trouble. Now we are likely to lose most of what we have."

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Stewart with spirit. "Baxter says there is nothing to it at all. I don't take any stock in this Stewart, Day. If he's Frank Stewart's son he's the son of a worthless stick. I don't care to see you running around with him."

"There isn't any one else to run around with, grandmother," said Day rather forlornly. "Only Indians."

The old woman pressed a bell and an Indian woman entered. "Tea," she ordered and the servitor went out on soundless, padding feet. "And what's the matter with Indians?" she asked aggressively. "I'm Indian. So are you. You can't get away from Indian blood. It's more persistent than the white strain, I can tell you. It's blood to be proud of, too. I'm proud of mine, though it cost me grief enough when I was a girl."

"I'm not ashamed of mine," said Day, "though there is little enough of it."

"That little is strong, though. Don't make any mistake about that. I'm more white than Indian myself but when I was a girl and my father sent me to school in St. Louis you wouldn't have thought it. To the other girls I was an Indian and they made fun of me. I wasn't white and they never let me forget it for a moment. I wanted to be white in those days and it was a bitter time. That's why I married Stewart and saw that your mother married a white man. I wanted to be white, wanted my children and their children to be white. But it was folly. I've learned that. Better far to have been content with my Indian heritage and remained Indian. For you can't get away from it. And you shouldn't want to get away from it. It's old blood; ancient blood; proud blood. It's better blood than the dirty white blood that an Indian woman has the chance to marry into."

"My father's blood was good," said Day resentfully.

"Maybe. He was not bad. Nor was Stewart nor your grandfather. But they were all ignorant men, traders and trappers, half wild. And I was the descendant of a great chief, who should have been too proud to seek the scourings of the white man's race. Folly! Folly! Indians were better men than they, had I but known it."

"I have no prejudice against Indians, grandmother. But I am white, and you were white. It was natural for you to marry a white man. And Indians nowadays are hardly like they were when you were a girl."

"Aye! That is true. The white man has debauched and ruined my people. They have sunk into worthlessness and despair. But there is a day coming when the sun will shine again for them. They shall sit in the light and lift up their voices and the trails that they follow shall be bright with flowers and soft with green grass. The night passes and the day comes. They are turning their faces to the east to greet the Great Spirit that warms the earth."

She was speaking Shoshone again, chanting it rather, and her eyes had taken on a fixed bright stare. The Indian woman padded in and placed a tray on the table. There were tea things on it, incongruous things in contrast to that barbarous tongue

and the half-inspired chant of the old woman. Day stared at her uneasily.

"I am sure I hope there are better days for them," she said awkwardly. "But money doesn't do them much good."

"Money! Money! What is money? The white man's invention. But it has its uses for the time being. There are Indians who can use it. I am not speaking of money."

She leaned over and with trembling hands poured tea from the caddy—or what Day thought was tea, though it was not green tea. The hot water steamed over the dry petals and browned into the cups. Mrs. Stewart was not content, but steeped it again.

She pushed a cup to Day and the girl took it idly, though it did not look much like ordinary tea nor smell like it.

"It is better than Chinese tea," chuckled Mrs. Stewart. "Drink it! It is Indian tea." And she laughed silently.

Day drank incautiously. The stuff was aromatic and pungent, not unpleasant to the taste nor yet very palatable. But Mrs. Stewart was looking at her as though challenging her to cavil at it. So rather than offend her Day drank it slowly.

A pleasant warmth began to steal through her body and her mind grew drowsy and contented with a great content. Her eyes were open but she saw things differently. Everything looked brighter and more colorful, the texture of the rugs, the firelight, the wall paper, all took on an iridescence that was infinitely beautiful. Dreamily she looked at her grandmother and when that old lady poured another cup of the tea she took it rather eagerly and drank it down.

She seemed to float on soft and rosy clouds, the room fading away into nothingness and the sky looming above her in soft, cerulean blue. The air was perfumed and warm, a sun that was all gold brilliance shone upon her but did not burn her. Beside her floated her grandmother, a look of ineffable peace and happiness upon her rapt features which had softened and grown youthful once again.

Her grandmother was speaking, in Shoshonean, the sonorous syllables shaping themselves into flowery and dignified metaphor. She was speaking of beautiful things, of beautiful living, of the wonders of a day that was to come. She was describing a paradise of Indians, where the red men roamed supreme, living happy and peacefully in the ever-shining sun. And as Day listened she seemed to see these things; saw the Amerinds uplifted and glorified, living full lives, without sin or evil. Faith and love and charity abode among them, making their existence lovely. The grass was green, the cool waters were sweet, the trees were stately. Above a green earth shone a golden sun, lighting up the universe with a stupendous glory. And her grandmother chanted a hymn of worship to that sun.

What else passed before her vision? She did not know. There were Indians she knew, but greatly changed for the better both in looks and manner and disposition. There was Bad Baby, but she knew him by another name than that ridiculous appellation given him by his scolding mother in infancy. She knew him by a sonorous name of many syllables which stood for bravery and gentleness and humor. He rode a horse but it was a naked horse without that terrible and sinister saddle which was his pride. There was no room for terrible and sinister things in this new world. There was Flying Cloud, stately and wise and great, with all the wisdom of the white man, all the fine qualities of the red one blended together to make a perfect whole, and he ruled these people with a gentle and merciful rule. They bowed down to it and loved the ruler. The ruler however, loved in a different way and it was Day whom he loved, Day made even more beautiful but Day made an Indian maiden in fact, living and loving as an Indian. And Day was awed by that love, finding it beautiful and blinding.

Then the voice of her grandmother died away and she floated away into visions that grew ever more beautiful and thoughts took possession of her that were ever more glorious and sweet and good. She was swooning in a very orgy of benevolence and love and kindliness, her charity and pity and love embraced the whole of a glorious world that swam about her in beauty. And then the world and all passed away. It passed gently and mercifully, merging gradually into bright blankness which slowly faded out into nothing at all.

When Day awoke she lay for some time in her bed while vague fragments of her vision floated uncertainly in her mind. Her mouth was slightly dry and feathery, her skin was hot and her eyes heavy but otherwise she

felt no ill effects until she opened her eyes and looked about her. Even then it was only that she had a little difficulty in focusing them on the familiar and pretty furnishings of her room, which now seemed drab and unbeautiful. She arose with some hesitation and found herself able to walk, though her limbs were a little uncertain. This soon passed away and she slipped into a dressing gown and threw up the shade. She looked out on a drab, misty, dripping world, covered with dark clouds in which thunder rumbled and lightning darted. She shuddered with disgust and disappointment as the details of her trance came back to her. How hideous everything was. She could see several tepees of Indians pitched in the fields about the house and again she shuddered. These were degraded beings indeed, living squalid, degraded lives in contrast to what she had seen.

Yet she was frightened too. She knew that she had been drugged, though she did not know what the drug was. It scared her and she fought against the longing that was on her to again see the things she had seen and to think the thoughts that had possessed her. The dismalness of the outlook, the tame and stuffy and inane quality of ordinary existence was forcibly before her and she could not help wishing to lose it all and get back her vision of yesterday. The desire was not desire for the drug but for the things the drug had shown her. She had no craving for stimulant, no perceptible reaction of nerves. She only wanted that beauty and peace and goodness.

But her sane white heritage fought for her, driving her into unreasoning terror. She had the inherited pride of brain and character, the white man's character, that held its self-command as the greatest achievement of all its æons of evolution from savagery. Her brain was her own and to take it away was to steal away her very soul. And so she fought for that soul and won her fight for the time being. She whipped herself into anger and disgust and dressed herself and marched down to have it out with her grandmother.

But her grandmother was sitting in her room with Indians. One of the Indians was Flying Cloud, dressed like a white man and the other was Parson Running Horse, the Indian preacher, who wore a queer mixture of clerical and Indian attire. She knew him for a devout, kindly and rather simple Indian who had been converted to Christianity and ordained to minister to his tribal brothers sunken in their savagery. But she knew that, not so many ages ago, this gentle priest had taken scalps himself.

Day had no wish to have a scene before these natives and she withdrew. But the sight of Flying Cloud recalled that detail of her visions in which he had taken such a prominent part and again she was filled with fear. Had she actually seen love in that Indian's face and manner and had she reacted to it and answered to it? She could not believe it and yet the memory was vivid. And, as she had stood before her grandmother's door a moment ago, Flying Cloud had looked up and at her. She had seen the swift change of his features, seen the black eyes light up with covetousness in a singular travesty of the same look the vision had lent him. But there was nothing beautiful nor attractive about Flying Cloud's expression now.

She had seen that there were papers on the table before her grandmother and that Flying Cloud had been reading them to her. Mrs. Stewart seemed to be dreamy and listless and indifferent but as Day drew away from the door she heard a question and the old woman answered it readily and assentingly. The last Day observed was that she bent forward and took a pen that Parson Running Horse handed her and stooped over the document before her. But Day had no idea what it was.

It was evident now that her grandmother was in the grip of that drug which had stolen away her own senses and she suspected that Flying Cloud had something to do with this. She recalled how eager the old woman had been of late to have the Indian come to see her and she could guess why. She wanted the drug.

Day was terrified. Her only protector was helpless and in league with and controlled by that handsome, sinister renegade. All around her were Indians, with not a white man within reach. The Indians were peaceful and orderly enough but she suspected that gathering, remembering the occasional references to a new religion that had sprung up among them. Was this drug addiction the religion? And Flying Cloud—was he the high priest of that cult? She did not know, but she feared so.

What was she to do? That there was something afoot she felt certain and she

suspected that that something had to do with her. The look she had surprised on Flying Cloud's face was confirmation enough. She believed the crafty renegade would do anything and stop at nothing though that he should covet her and seek to win her was almost unthinkable. Still, there was the preacher, an Indian like himself, who, unlike any Caucasian priest, would feel no horror at the idea of her mating with an Indian. What else was he there for except to further the plot? She was not sure but she seemed to recall that the vision of Flying Cloud rendered glorious and loving her gloriously had been suggested by her grandmother when she was under the influence of the drug.

She was fearful and wished to fly from the place at once but she could not go without running the risk of being stopped. There was no place to go except to take the road, trusting to meet Stewart. She recalled him with a start, wildly relieved to think that rescue was coming and yet somewhat puzzled that she had not thought of him before. Surely in this extremity he should have been first in her mind and yet he had not been. Singularly enough she had been thinking of Sturgis, with a bitter thought that if he had been any sort of decent man she could have appealed to him and been safe. He was near and he had an airplane. But Sturgis was a scoundrel. His rascality was all the more venomous because he might have been such a splendid man, with his strong, keen face and reckless humor. He would have been a man to lean upon if he could have been trusted. But that was out of the question.

She went out when the rain ceased and paced restlessly up and down the drive to the road going to the fence and back again in an endless pilgrimage of impatience. She had put on coat and hat and was ready to go. She even had a bag packed and ready. She did not know where she would go nor what she would do without money or friends but she was confident that Mr. Baxter, the lawyer, would look after her and she knew that she could get along some way. This was the West and Western white people would see that she was taken care of. Witness Stewart—though Stewart was not a Westerner, she recalled. Still, he had the ways of the West. He was chivalrous and unselfish and helpful. Would that Sturgis had been the same!

Joe Jump High came along and dismounted to lean against the fence by the road until she came there on her next round of the drive. His copper-colored face was inscrutable and he seemed to be merely idly watchful of the gathering of Indians who lolled listlessly around the tepees. There were no women among them; another cause for uneasiness.

"Good morning, Joe," she said as the Indian nodded to her. "Did you pass Mr. Stewart, by any chance, this morning?"

"No, haven't seen him," said Joe. "He coming?" He looked expressively and significantly at the huddle of tepees in the field. "Thought this was Indian party."

"Yes, I think so," she said. "Why shouldn't he?"

Joe grunted. "You want him here?" he asked. Day blushed and felt guilty for some reason she could not define.

"I'm going away with him," she said defiantly. Joe might be in league with the others, but she did not care.

"Better not," said Joe. "What you going for?"

"I don't care to stay—with these people here." She nodded toward the tepees. "You're watching them, aren't you?"

"Yes, I'm watching," said Joe. "They won't hurt you."

"Maybe not. Still I don't like it."

The Indian again nodded. "All right. You go if you want to. But better go with me."

She shook her head. He was an Indian and she distrusted all Indians at this moment. "No," she said.

"You know Sturgis—Plenty Boils?" and he smiled his shadowy smile. She simply answered that with a look.

"You go with him," said Joe.

"No!" and this time she was very emphatic.

"All right," said Joe. "But he's a good man. Better than Flying Cloud—or Stewart."

"Not in my opinion," Day said scornfully. And she sought to change the subject. "What is going on here?"

"Indians got religion," said Joe dryly. "Revival, parson calls it."

"Is that what you're here for?"

"Here to see they don't do anything foolish," he answered. "They won't hurt you, though."

"What would you do if they did?"

"They won't. It isn't that kind of religion. If they did I'd stop it."

Day turned away. The lone Indian did not reassure her in face of what she had seen. She wasn't afraid of violence, anyhow. She was in mortal terror of some trick that would steal her senses away and lead to almost anything. If there had been white men there to protest and to prevent any unfair practice she would have felt safer, but there was no white man. If they drugged her again, even though she could not guess how they would do so against her will, she could not answer for what might happen. And she was afraid that if her grandmother recalled those visions vividly to her she might even yield to the temptation to see them again and take the drug willingly. She could not answer for herself.

"All right," said Joe. "You listen. Don't go with Stewart. You go see Plenty Boils."

She did not answer and Joe mounted and rode to take up his patrol of the listless, lazy camp.

It drew on toward noon and as yet nothing had happened. Then she at last heard the sound of Stewart's running motor and a few seconds later the car rounded the corner of the line fence and turned boldly toward her. Her knight was coming and without any misgiving she turned and ran toward the house.

There was nobody in the rear hallway where she had left her bag. She heard her grandmother and Flying Cloud talking in Shoshone dialect but apparently they did not hear her. No one interfered with her and she was soon running with her bag toward the gate where Stewart awaited.

The escape, if such it may be called, was ridiculously easy. In fact she simply got in and drove away and nobody made any effort to stop her. If Flying Cloud had known of it he might have done something but he had no idea the girl suspected anything and so had not concerned himself with what she might be doing. As for the other Indians, they were simply peaceful devotees who had gathered to worship according to the rites of their faith.

The car rolled swiftly along the fast-drying road and shot up onto the bench. Then, as a loom of rock reared up ahead a drab and grease-stained figure dropped swiftly down from its summit and sprang to the middle of the road. There was an ugly revolver in his hand.

"Put 'em up!" said Morton incisively. "No tricks, now, or I'll wreck the machine!"

Stewart had stopped instinctively and before he could gather his wits together and run over the highwayman that gun was staring him in the face. He had no great amount of courage and he obeyed orders.

Day sat cold and white and scornful. Morton walked to the door.

"Get out," he said. "I've something to show you!"

She did not obey but simply looked at him as though he were something to be ignored.

"What are you up to?" cried Stewart. "We've not enough money to make a stick-up worth your while."

"Maybe not," said Morton. "Well, if you won't get out maybe I can show you without it. How much gas have you, Stewart?"

Stewart started and turned pale and Day saw it. He did not answer immediately. Morton indicated the gauge, which showed zero.

"It's out of order," said Stewart sullenly and desperately. "I've plenty of gas to get to camp."

"How much?" said Morton blandly but commandingly.

He reached into the car and fished out a measuring rod. Then ordering Stewart out at the muzzle of his gun he drove him to the tank and handed him the stick. "Measure it," he said. "And no tricks, mind you!"

Stewart tamely unscrewed the cap and plunged the stick in, while Morton watched closely to see that he did not splash it around and drive gasoline farther up on it than it should show. He then took the stick from him and swiftly handed it to Day before the gasoline on it could evaporate.

"How much?" he asked. Day, in some surprise, looked at the stick.

"About two and a half gallons," she said.

"Enough to drive forty or forty-five miles in this thing," said Morton dryly. "And did you have any intention of stopping at the camp?"

"Why, no, I didn't know we were going that way. I supposed we'd go straight through to Fairview."

"Exactly. And that would have left you stalled at least fifty miles from Fairview, with night coming on and no help to be had."

Day, astounded, looked at Stewart with

blank eyes. He looked guilty, there was no doubt about it, but he tried to retrieve the situation.

"That's a lie," he said. Morton whirled on him and he shrank. "I mean I had no such intention. I was going to detour to the camp and get more gas."

"Then why," asked Morton coldly, "did you so carefully empty your tank right in front of this place and hide ten gallons of gas in those rocks?"

Stewart wilted. He tried to protest that he hadn't done any such thing but his declarations were not convincing. If he had shown spirit and indignation, had declared that it was a plot, that Sturgis himself had planted the gas, Day would have believed him—but he had lost his nerve. He stuttered weak denials which Morton crushed by going to the rock and dragging out the can of gas.

"That's the kind of skunk you are, Stewart," he said as he lifted the heavy container and held it up for Day's identification. "You're so low I wouldn't even soil my hands on you by licking you. Get in your car and, Miss McGregor, you get out! There, that's better. Now, you start that machine and don't stop it until your sweet presence is clear out of the landscape. If you look around once I'll hurt you!"

Stewart sullenly started the car and obeyed. When he was a safe distance away he turned and hurled a vicious anathema at Morton. Then he put on speed and shot out of sight.

"Well," said Morton with satisfaction, "that's that! Now it's you for home and grandmother, Miss McGregor."

CHAPTER XII.

Day McGregor was staring at nothing and did not seem to know he had spoken. She was naturally upset, for the shock of Stewart's betrayal had almost stunned her. Still her emotion was even more of anger against Morton than against Stewart. Somehow the blow of the latter's perfidy had not hit her so very hard, not so hard, in fact, as that it should have been the contemptible Sturgis who had interfered to save her from what must have been, at the least, a very awkward situation, provided the accusation against the man were true.

She suddenly flamed into doubt and whirled on Morton.

"If you will be so kind as to explain! What right had you to interfere?"

"None," said Morton candidly, "except general interest and, perhaps, the feeling that white men can't afford to let another white man get away with stuff that would shame an Indian. But why discuss it? There is no more to fear from Stewart, I think."

"Was there anything to fear before? I rather doubt this tale of yours. Why should he leave himself stranded for lack of gasoline? How would he get back himself and what would be his motive?"

"I think his motive is obvious enough. All he hoped for was to compromise you and I think you can guess what he hoped to gain from that. He's down and out and ready to do almost anything. As for his plan, it was crude enough but probably would have been effective. He could easily have arranged for some one to come along within a day or two and pick you up. But since that is all over I think you had better return to your home."

Day looked at him with smoldering eyes. "My home!" she said bitterly. "I have no home. Do you know that that house is the house of an Indian? And that is the home you would send me back to."

"Nonsense!" said Sturgis. "It's your grandmother's home and she's no Indian. In any case you are safer there than with such cattle as Stewart. Even an Indian is preferable to him."

Day brooded a moment before replying. "Even an Indian!" she repeated. "I had hoped that white people were—better—but I must change my mind, I suppose. Even an Indian! After all, I am Indian, after a fashion. So—you send me back to my people?"

"Of course I'm sending you back to them," said Morton impatiently. "It's the proper place for you, isn't it? There is nothing to be afraid of from these Indians."

"No?" said Day with a note of question. Then she turned away and walked slowly down the road toward the ranch, Morton following rather diffidently. He was embarrassed, knowing that she resented his interference, and he had nothing more to say to her.

Nor had she much to say to him. She was reflecting on the perfidy she had encountered from these white men, overwhelmed with horror and disgust. It was

evident that she could trust them no farther than she could trust Indians, perhaps not as far. In any case she saw no refuge anywhere for herself. The men who should have been her support were all sordid and brutal fortune hunters without conscience or pity. Better the Indians than these!

She marched on slowly past the dingy tepees of the Indians pitched in the field around the house. Most of the stolid braves were lolling about, but several were at work about a spot not far from the veranda of the house. They were apparently making some kind of little platform or mound out of clay. It was crescent-shaped and about a foot high and the horns of the crescent faced the east and the frowning cliff of the mysterious region beyond.

"What are they doing?" asked Morton, forgetting in his interest that he was outlawed and despicable. Day laughed mockingly.

"What are they doing? I don't know. But I think we will both find out before very long. Just wait and probably you'll see."

A tall Indian rose from the little mound and the other men fell back. The tall Indian folded his blanket over his head and turned to the sun, which was now westering. He bowed toward it, remaining with head bent and covered for a moment while he uttered some invocation in words that were muffled by the cloth. Then he unbent and the group scattered, though two men remained, one at either side of the mound which now seemed to have taken on the significance of an altar.

Vaguely puzzled and uneasy Morton followed the girl to the porch where Flying Cloud and Parson Running Horse stood awaiting her. They stared stolidly at her hand bag, which Morton carried, and at her cloak and hat, and in Flying Cloud's face Day thought she detected a threat.

The parson was all smiles and benevolence. "Where you go?" he asked. "You not run away? You stay and see very beautiful thing, Mis' McGregor! Very beautiful!"

Day shot him a glance of scorn and walked into the house without an answer. Flying Cloud merely bowed and stood aside for her while Morton followed with the bag which he set down on the floor. He was about to turn and go away when Day suddenly seized his arm. Her eyes were burning into his face and her own features were white and desperate.

"You've brought me back here—forced me back," she said in a tense whisper which emphasized her emotion. "Now you shall not go away until you see what you have done. I want you to stay; I order you to stay. I don't know when it will commence—I think in the evening, but you shall stay and watch it. If you are not a coward you will do as I tell you."

"Well, I'm no Bayard but neither am I afraid of shadows," said Morton. "I don't see anything alarming here and I don't know what you are afraid of but if you insist I'll certainly stay if only to reassure you. If you need any help——"

Day looked him up and down and laughed so that it cut him.

"Help! From you? I think not. I insist on your staying just to show you what you have done. Now, go out there and stay around until the beautiful ceremony starts. You'll probably know more about Indians before it is over than you do now."

"But what are you going to do?" he asked, a little anxious, and yet sullen at her scorn. He was bitterly conscious that he deserved it.

"I! I don't know. Watch and see. That is what I ask of you."

She was gone then and Morton went out to the porch where Flying Cloud still stood. The Indian smiled slightly and Morton felt his dislike of the taciturn red man mount inside him. He sought for an excuse to vent his irritation.

"Say, Flying Cloud," he said belligerently, "where is my gas and oil and when are you going to be ready to start? I'm not going to wait around here indefinitely for you."

"I forgot the oil and gas," said Flying Cloud carelessly. "And I'm not ready yet to go with you."

"You forgot it and you're not ready! Say, what do you think I came here for—to loaf about and enjoy the scenery?"

"No," said Flying Cloud with his calm smile. "You came here because I wanted you here rather than in Fairview. Once here, you can't get away so readily."

"I don't quite get you, my ruddy friend," said Morton with narrowed eyes. "What are you putting over now?"

"It is very simple," said Flying Cloud easily. "If you had been at Fairview or the

fort you could have made your flight without interference from me, no doubt. Now, I have no desire that white people should violate the shrine of my people and there are a number of others who feel as I do. Unfortunately the chiefs and many of the others are still sunk in their slothfulness and materialism and do not admit the sacredness of the valley or allow it to stand in the way of their greed. I was unable to persuade them not to hire you but I think I am able to prevent your carrying out their plans. You are not going to fly into the valley. That is why I am not ready to go and also why you have no gas nor oil."

"Is that so?" said Morton dryly. "Well, I'm sure you're a crafty and cunning little plotter, my friend, but you make a mistake if you think you can run any of that on me. I'm hired to go into that valley and I am going."

Flying Cloud shrugged his shoulders. "Without me, then," he said. "I do not go into the valley where the four ghosts sit guarding the sacred flame—at least not that way. Go by all means if you care to, but remember that it may be easier to get in than to get out again." He grinned.

Morton nodded grimly. "You and I don't like each other, my bounding brave of the untrodden wilds," he said in something like his old manner. "You remember one thing I'm telling you. Don't you start anything with me you can't finish."

"I think I can finish it," said Flying Cloud. His black eyes gleamed cruelly. Morton shrugged his shoulders and stalked away.

So the Indian had intended to trick him by bringing him here where he could not replenish his supplies and then failing him! Well, that was serious, but it need not be fatal. He could get supplies finally though it meant a wait. And he had enough to get to Fairview or the fort thanks to Stewart's unintended generosity. Ten gallons would carry him some little distance with what he had left and he could do without extra oil at a pinch. Of course he would have to watch out that some one did not injure the ship. As he thought of that he had the impulse to hasten back to guard it and then hesitated recalling that Day had bade him stay and see what went on. But surely there was nothing going on except some sort of ceremony, perhaps a dance which these savages were about to perform.

He turned toward the road and started away but before he had left the house Joe Jump High came riding leisurely up and stopped beside him.

"Where you going?" he asked. Morton told him briefly that he was returning to his camp.

"Maybe you'd better stay here," said Joe. "You'll see something."

"I want to watch my ship," replied Morton.

"Nobody touch your ship yet. You'd better stay. Day maybe needs you."

"What for?"

"How do I know? But there's going to be something here. Big peyote spree. Parson Running Horse here. Looks pretty bad."

"Why, what will they do?"

"Don't know. Maybe nothing. Peyote don't make 'em bad so far as I know. Can't tell, though."

"But what's a Christian preacher doing in a heathen celebration of this sort?" asked Morton. "He *is* a Christian, isn't he?"

"Yes. Plenty Christian. But you better ask him."

Morton determined to do so. He was again hesitating with a sense that there might be some likelihood of trouble from drug-crazed savages. So he left Joe and went to where Parson Running Horse in his dingy, worn black coat stood talking to other Indians. The parson turned to smile upon him as he came up and the Indians stepped stolidly away.

"How!" said the parson. "Plenty glad to see you." And he held out his hand. The other Indians grunted in what was evidently good will. The story of his championship of their tribal brother had served Morton well with them.

"How!" said Morton in Indian fashion. "I was going to ask you, parson, how it came that you were present at this ceremony, you being a minister? It's none of my business, of course, but I'm a bit curious about it."

Instead of resenting the question the parson was quite voluble as far as his limited English would allow him to be. He eagerly explained.

"Good! You my Christian brother and you wonder why good Christian here? Yes? I tell you!

"Indian not good Christian yet. Plenty hard to make Indian worship God. He cling

to ghosts and spirits and devils like his fathers. Preach a heap but no good! Then come peyote to Indians and make Indians know beautiful thoughts and how beautiful to be good. They eat peyote and be all same like Christian, almost. They get better all time and pretty soon they listen when we preach Christianity. You see?"

"No," said Morton, "I don't. But then I'm not a very good Christian myself. I suppose it is all right if peyote does all of that. But it sounds queer to me to be smoking hop or whatever it is because it promotes Christian virtues. At that rate heaven ought to be full of drug addicts."

"You no understand," said the parson sadly. Morton nodded agreement and went away. But now he went no farther than the fence which he occupied as a seat while he watched the listless Indians as they pottered around or lolled before their tepees.

Sitting on the fence got him nowhere and he tired of it after an hour. Then he decided that he would go up to the house and try to see Day and ask her what she feared. He got down and walked that way but before he reached the porch he observed a number of Indians, among whom the parson was conspicuous in his seedy clerical vestments, crowding up on the porch and through the doors.

He did not care to go in with them and so he decided to seek the rear and ask for Day back there. He turned and skirted the house past the windows of Mrs. Stewart's living room and was surprised to see Joe Jump High crouched beneath one of them behind a rosebush.

"What the devil——" he began and the Indian raised a hand to beckon him. He crept wonderingly to his side, cautioned by Joe's manner to be silent.

"Police got to get wise to what's going on," said Joe shamelessly. "You listen."

There was talk going on but it did Morton no good to listen since he could make nothing out of it. But fortunately Joe could and he translated in a whisper.

"That's the old lady!" he said as a rather shrill voice broke on the murmur of tongues. "Listen!"

And then he rendered the substance of what she was saying.

"She says she has asked them to gather here for the ceremony of the Watching of the Fire. She says that for many years she has forgotten that she is an Indian while she has tried to be like the white people but that her heart has always been Indian at the bottom and now her heart has brought her back to her own people. She says that the white men want to rob the Indians and that they will do it, as they have always done, but that she still has wealth that the white men cannot take away. It is Indian wealth and she is Indian. It is wealth that might make the Indians rich and happy and that she is moved to return it to the Indians to whom it belongs. She has made a will and has left it all to the Indian who is doing most to bring the Indians into happiness and goodness and brightness where they will not need the white man and will know no more of the white man's ways that are evil but only the ways that are wise and good.

"She says that she has a granddaughter who is Indian like herself, although she has not yet realized it. She loves that granddaughter because of the Indian blood in her and she does not wish her to suffer. But she knows that Flying Cloud, the Indian who loves all of them and has taught them so much, will look after her and see that she does not want even if she remains white, while, if she becomes an Indian, he will make her the happiest of all of them. So she is reading her will to them."

"Reading her will? Leaving it to Flying Cloud! Is the old woman crazy?" demanded Morton fiercely. And yet he was exultant.

"Don't think so," grunted Joe. "Full of peyote, I reckon."

Then, as another, a sweet, sad, resigned voice, broke in:

"That's Day. She's answering. She says that she admits her grandmother can do as she pleases with her own and that she has no objection. She doesn't think wealth would add to any one's happiness and she doesn't want it. She says she doesn't know but that she would even like to be Indian since what she has seen of white men lately has not been good but that she cannot change her blood nor the color of her skin at will. She has so little Indian blood that she must remain white. Therefore she thanks her grandmother and all of them and says that they need not think of her convenience."

Flying Cloud followed and again Joe spat, this time with some venom.

"All crazy but him," he said. "He's crazy —like a fox! Pretty slick, Flying Cloud!"

The big, sonorous voice boomed out in oratorical declamation and Joe scornfully rendered snatches of the speech that seemed important. Morton listened to fragments promising glory and power and happiness to the Indians, claiming for himself all the wisdom of the white men and all the virtues of the red. He spoke of his readiness to hold their wealth as trustee even as he had worked for their happiness and uplift through the virtue of the magic flower of the holy cactus which had led them to know the glories that their father, the sun, had in store for them. He felt that the time was at hand for the blessed consummation that he had often promised them since others of the tribe, still sunk in their misguided ignorance, had sought to violate the secrets of the sacred Valley of the Four Ghosts who sat forever guarding the Holy Fire and, in spite of what he could do to prevent it, might soon succeed. He had blocked the present attempt, but who knew when they would make another? Thanks to Mrs. Stewart much of their wealth would be secured to the Indians and safe in his care but he had yet other glories to promise them and before it was too late and the Four Ghosts were perhaps driven by sacrilegious unbelievers into flight from the sacred valley, he would fulfill those promises. This was the night when the Indian, through the chosen few who were selected as most worthy, should at last know the full measure of what the sun had in store for them.

It was all a jumble of nonsense to Morton and Joe seemed to regard it as bosh, though he took it seriously enough in one respect.

"He's proposing that they drink something in honor of the old lady's generosity," said Joe. "She's sent for wine."

He raised himself to a level with the window sill and Morton also raised up behind him to look over his shoulder. A solemn group of Indians was gathered around the table, and some were squatting on the floor. Mrs. Stewart, with dreamy eyes and rapt expression, was gazing fervently at Flying Cloud, who stood with folded arms, a picture of dignity, before her. The parson sat on a chair with hands folded meekly in front of him, a benevolent smile wreathing his lips and making his features look rather silly.

Day shrank listlessly in a chair to one side, her chin on her hand and elbow supported by the arm of her chair. In spite of her black hair waving in great masses above her head she looked startlingly fair and white in that gathering of dark-skinned men and savages. That one could assume that she was Indian was simply preposterous.

An Indian woman brought in wine, padding slouchily in her soft moccasins. She slouched to Flying Cloud who waved her to Day. The glasses were empty and the bottle stood in the midst of them on the tray with the cork almost out and ready to be pulled free.

As the woman paused before Day the girl looked up and eyed the tray doubtfully. Then she drew the cork from the bottle and poured a little of the wine into a glass. This she lifted to her nostrils and smelled suspiciously. But she apparently noticed nothing about it to alarm her. She even sipped a little, tasting it carefully and looked her relief.

The others grunted their acknowledgment as the wine was passed to them and then Flying Cloud made another speech in which he said that the Indian race would remember their mother—meaning Mrs. Stewart—as long as their father, the sun, should shine upon them. He said a good deal more which appeared to disgust Joe to the extent that he did not take the trouble to translate it. The Indians all said "How!" in guttural approval and tossed off their wine. Mrs. Stewart drank hers slowly as did Flying Cloud. Day took nothing until she had watched each a moment and then, apparently assured that it was safe, drank her share of the toast. Nothing happened and the Indians began to rift slowly out.

Joe shook his head as though puzzled and crept away with Morton behind him. When they were well out from the house he stopped and spat.

"No good!" he said. "Can't make it out. But you'd better stay."

"The dirty hound!" said Morton. "He's robbing that girl."

"It's the old lady's ranch," said Joe. "She can do what she wants to with it."

"But she hinted at her turning Indian and marrying that educated savage!"

"Seems to be up to Day," said Joe doubtfully. "If she wants to be Indian it's none of our business."

"Well, what are you doing here then?"

"Don't know—yet," said Joe. "Maybe nothing."

CHAPTER XIII.

Morton had lost all desire to go now and he was determined to remain and see what happened, although so far it appeared that nothing was going to happen except the acknowledgment of this outrageous will which he had heard read in the old woman's thin voice. It was a brief and simple document, beautifully simple, from Flying Cloud's point of view. It simply left him everything that she possessed. Day however had seemed to acquiesce in it though Morton had an idea that she could successfully fight it if she chose to do so. He hoped she would not and while he was indignant he was glad at the same time. Now she might see how mercenary he was. Let her become even poorer than he was and he could go to her with a chance of redeeming himself.

He wandered restlessly about, wondering when the dance, or whatever it was, was going to start. Now and then he went to the window and looked cautiously into the room but all he saw was Mrs. Stewart and Flying Cloud and Day, with the parson and two of the older Indians, sitting gravely and rather silently around the room. Day seemed half asleep. Once Mrs. Stewart poured what looked like tea and Flying Cloud handed it to her. She took it listlessly and mechanically and drank it down without pause instead of sipping it. Mrs. Stewart also drank. The parson and the other Indians, except Flying Cloud, chewed on something. Flying Cloud neither drank nor chewed.

Yet Morton was alarmed. Something about all this was highly unnatural. There was a certain tension in the air as though a portentous hour were awaited. Joe slunk about trying to pick up information but came back still ignorant. He had heard a word here and there and he thought that Flying Cloud had made some sort of promise that, this night, he would magically convey several of the chief men among the devotees into the sacred valley where the Four Ghosts watched the sacred fire—whatever that was. But Joe had no idea how this was to be accomplished. The other Indians thought it would be by some supernatural power but Joe was a born skeptic and rationalist. He was a Bannock and Flying Cloud and his satellites were Snakes. While related, they did not like each other any too well.

Then as the sun was sinking toward the horizon there was a sudden stir among the Indians. They got up and strode toward that little mound in the yard before the house and began to group themselves in front of it, facing the east while the sun sank behind them. Opposite them two bucks busied themselves in laying sticks for a fire. When it was lit and burning just before the clay mound in the form of a crescent one of them straightened up and faced the sun. He raised his arms and uttered a wailing shout.

Almost immediately the door of the house opened and Flying Cloud strode out on the porch. It was a new Flying Cloud, a Flying Cloud whose Harvard attributes had fallen from him like a cloak. He was clad in buckskin tunic and leggings, wonderfully beaded and embroidered in quills and on his head reared a towering, gawdy war bonnet whose sweep of painted and stained eagle feathers swept the ground behind him. Silver armlets and wristlets gleamed on his limbs and his face was red with ocher while he carried three blue stripes on his forehead. He towered there in splendid and barbarous picturesqueness and held aloft a buckskin bag.

He too faced the dying sun and cried an invocation. Then he tossed the bag toward a waiting Indian and turned back to the house. Every brave around the fire bowed his head and drew his blanket over it. The Indian who had received the bag bowed his head toward the sun and then carried it reverently to the group around the fire. With every evidence of devotion he passed around the group distributing something which he took from the bag to each of the seated figures who received it, gestured toward the sun and then put whatever it was in their mouths. Then, like images, they sat with covered heads, motionless and quiescent, except that now and then one would drone out some sort of chant in a low voice to which the others paid no attention.

Again it was all puzzling and disappointing to Morton who had been looking forward to something exciting, perhaps a dance which would get wilder and wilder until it became a frenzy. Nothing of the kind. Instead the squatting group of blanketed braves seemed to be sleeping or in a trance.

Joe wandered softly and restlessly about, showing no great surprise at a ceremony with which he must have been more or less

familiar. He seemed to be most anxious about what was going on in the house and since there certainly was nothing going on outside which could cause alarm, Morton also felt the urge to observe what happened inside. So he and Joe again walked softly around to the side where they could see into the living room. They found the group still seated about the fireplace except Day who was not present. They too seemed to be somnolent, the parson and Mrs. Stewart siting listlessly with eyes closed, the other Indians squatting on the floor and Flying Cloud alone, sitting easily in his chair with open eyes and wide awake.

Suddenly he uttered a low exclamation and the group stirred, heavy eyes opening slowly. Flying Cloud spoke softly but he spoke in English.

"The Daughter of the Sun is here," he said. Day entered from the hall dressed as Morton had first seen her in her Indian costume but now her hair was not plastered down with any preparation to keep it straight, and it waved and tossed above her white brow in great masses which seemed almost too unruly to have been confined in braids. Her face was pale and her eyes heavy and listless while she walked slowly and as though she did not see clearly. Her expression was one of rapt intensity as though looking at and hearing things which were invisible and inaudible to others.

Flying Cloud arose and bowed to her, his magnificent and barbaric headdress rustling. He was a splendid figure as he stood there and Day seemed to feel it, for she smiled at him and held out her hand. He took it, bent over it and kissed it. Morton, wondering and puzzled, gritted his teeth with rage.

Then the parson stepped forward with a slow step much like Day's. The two Indians on the floor grunted and did not move. Mrs. Stewart smiled vaguely and also sat still. Then Mrs. Stewart spoke as Flying Cloud led the girl before her.

"It is the time," she said. "The day of the Indian has dawned when he shall live in the favor of the father of light. You have seen what we have all seen, Day McGregor, and now we ask you if you are willing to return to the blood from which you sprang and to unite yourself once for all with your mother's people?"

"I have seen, grandmother, and I am willing," said Day in a monotonous tone.

"I am glad," said the old woman. "Let us then get it over with and have done once for all with the white man and his ways. Parson Running Horse, though you are not an initiate and a believer, you are a priest of my granddaughter's faith, and in order that none may say that this ceremony is not lawful and binding, we have asked you to perform it. Will you proceed?"

The parson, who seemed as dazed as the others—except Flying Cloud, who was certainly wide awake and triumphant—stepped before the two and droned a question:

"You willing to marry this man, Mis' McGregor?" he asked. Day smiled and nodded, while Morton drew a great breath of enlightenment.

The parson drew forth a book and opened it while Day and Flying Cloud stood before him. Without any delay he began to read, making a fair attempt at the unfamiliar English which he read better than he spoke it.

"Dearly beloved, we are gathered——"

The familiar words in that unfamiliar voice broke on Morton like a thunderclap rousing him from his stupefaction. The stumbling parson got no further when the screen burst on the window and Morton was climbing over the sill.

"Day!" he said. "Not that! Not that!"

And Day turned slowly with her face as the face of one who hears sweet voices and looked toward him though it was not certain that she saw him.

"I hear you!" she called softly. "I hear you, dear!"

Flying Cloud stepped swiftly before her and wheeled to meet Morton. "Get out of here," he said in a hissing tone. "You're not wanted!"

"Morton!" called Day plaintively from behind Flying Cloud. It was as though she had lost him and sought for him.

"I'm here!" he called. "Not wanted"—to Flying Cloud. "Well, I'm here whether wanted or not. D'you think I'd let this go on?"

"What right have you to stop it?" asked Flying Cloud. The others gaped listlessly at the two, seeming to take singularly little interest in what was going on.

"By the Lord Harry!" said Morton loudly as the significance of it all came home tardily to him. "Doped! They're all doped! And Day! Day! What's the matter? What have they done to you?"

"Morton!" she called again softly from behind the Indian. "I am here. Why don't you come for me?"

"I'm coming," said Morton. "Get out of the way, Indian!"

He sprang like a panther, striking as he leaped. But the Indian was as quick as he and Morton leaped right into the knife that sprang to his hand. His fist got home with a ringing smack but so did the knife get home. The blow landed a fraction of a second before the blade, however, and threw Flying Cloud off his balance. In another moment Morton, seeing red, was on top of him, smashing away with either hand. The knife flew out of the Indian's hand, he leaped back to escape a blow, struck with his own fist, and then went down before a right-hand swing that landed exactly on the point of the jaw.

Morton swept Day into one arm and leaped for the window, half carrying and half dragging her. The Indians and Mrs. Stewart seemed too bewildered and dazed to do anything but sit and stare. Flying Cloud was picking himself dizzily to his feet. Day stumbled in Morton's grasp and put a hand to her forehead.

Joe Jump High pulled them through the window and prevented them from sprawling in a heap. He was also ready with advice.

"Better beat it," he said. "They aren't very far gone yet. I'll try to hold 'em."

Morton was inclined to argue this question but at this moment there rose on the still evening air a terrible screeching yell such as he had never heard in all his life. It quavered on the air and died away and rose again and before its echoes had dropped it was answered from the field where the sacred fire burned. There was the sound of running feet and again that splitting, bloodthirsty screech burst on his ears.

"Beat it!" said Joe tensely. "They're up and it'll be hell here in a minute." The sound of the door opening in front and a shout of guttural commands gave force to his words.

Excited voices called to each other and scurrying feet could be heard. Some one leaped down the steps from the porch and rushed toward the side of the house. Morton yielded to Joe's advice and seized Day. But she was holding her head and did not appear to be able to run.

"I'll have to carry you, then," he said and picked her up. She was solid and heavy but he managed to lift her and break into a heavy trot toward the main-line fence. The plowed field was heavy going and the lucerne tangled in his feet. He had gone no farther than halfway to the fence when he heard shots, and yells which answered them. Then pandemonium broke lose behind him and he ran as he never had run before.

Day stirred uncomfortably and complained.

"What is it? I heard something and it hurt my head. It sounded like a war whoop."

"I reckon it was something like that," panted Morton."

"What's the matter? Where are we?" she demanded. But Morton had no breath for explanations.

Another yell, different in timbre from those others, rang out distantly and Day shuddered. "What is it? That's the death cry!" she said. "Who is killed?"

But Morton did not answer. He had no breath to spare, for one thing, while, for another, he had an idea that it would not be comforting to know. Even his untrained ear could distinguish between the sound of rifles and revolvers. Those first shots had been from Joe's weapon, he had no doubt, but there had been others of sharper and higher note and they must have come from rifles in the hands of Flying Cloud's disciples. There had been no revolver firing for some minutes.

The fence was ahead and shouting braves were behind, gaining with every step. It looked like a hopeless attempt but Morton seized the top wire and managed somehow to heave Day over and follow her. Then he was about to pick her up again, though his strength was almost gone. She stepped away from him.

"I'm all right. I can run."

"Come on then, for Heaven's sake!" he gasped, and seized her hand. They made better time now, though Day seemed a little uncertain as to her footing. She ran as lightly and easily as Morton, however, and was in better shape after his efforts. And then he remembered his revolver, which for the second time of emergency he had forgotten he carried.

"I'll have a shot at 'em anyhow," he muttered and turned to fire back at figures which were dimly outlined as they scrambled over the fence. A startled whoop answered his unexpected offensive and they

did not come on as fast as they had. Then, too, there seemed to be some sort of dispute developing among the pursuers.

At any rate they gained for the time and soon were on the bench where the going was fairly level, running as hard as they could toward the level field where the airplane lay. Down on the road ahead of them Morton saw what looked like swinging lights and heard voices, but who it was and where they were going he had no time to investigate, with a dozen maddened braves hard on his heels.

Gasping and staggering Day and Morton gained the fringe of trees that hid the ship and were about to plunge into it when Morton heard the sound of running feet close behind and a yell of triumph. He whirled and fired at random but he hit some one by luck, as the shriek of the Indian testified. He had only time to glimpse other forms closing in on him before the trees inclosed him.

He dragged Day through the brush and smashed his way recklessly on until the level field showed ahead and he saw the ship lying there with tarpaulin spread. Had he time? And then he groaned. The gas! He had forgotten it. The ten-gallon can still lay among the rocks where he had left it intending to return and bring it to the ship. He had been too busy for that.

And then he saw other figures ahead of him with lights, who burst out of the trees and ran toward him. They were probably enemies and he shouted despairingly to his mechanic.

"Strip the ship and cut the ropes! Stand by the prop!"

He could hear Stevens uttering scared ejaculations as he ran with Day staggering and stumbling beside him. He hoped the man was not too dazed to act and he almost stopped to bless him as he saw the white tarpaulin flutter and drag aside. He staggered alongside a moment later as Stevens was slashing at the ropes. He heard a rifle shot and something *pinged* beside him.

Stevens was stuttering oaths. Ahead the lights grew nearer and shouts of men could be heard. They were white men's voices but the first words gave no comfort.

"There they are! Get 'em and get 'em good, boys! Kill the flyer!"

Another voice answered in startled tones:

"Holy mackerel! He's got a bunch of Injuns on the warpath! Look at 'em!"

"To hell with the Injuns!" shrieked another voice. "Kill him and the dirty hostiles with him!"

Again a rifle answered and a bullet must have come uncomfortably close to one of the men from the oil camp, for Morton heard him curse. Then Stewart shrieked out a command:

"Go in and get him, boys! Don't let the Injuns bluff you."

"So it's you!" said Morton to himself as he slashed the last guy and leaped for the cockpit. He seized Day and heaved her to the seat behind, scrambling over the wings recklessly to throw himself into his seat and pull the switch.

"Stevens! Stevens!" he yelled. "Contact!"

"Right!" cried Stevens and spun the propeller. The engine roared, sputtered, took hold and the song of the blades rose above the turmoil that seemed to be surging around them on all sides as the Indians and the whites joined battle. The ship stirred, rolled a little way and gathered speed. Then, with a rush, it tilted forward as the tail rose and ran a little distance, to sail gradually up and away. The roar of the engine and the propeller drowned any sounds from below.

Morton leaned over the side for a glimpse at the flashes of rifle fire down below. It was all he could see and the ship demanded his instant attention. He drove it up as fast as he could, fighting for altitude. The ground fell away below him and he ascended into regions of peace and silence.

Down there the Indians took cover and fought the white men—or at least some of them did. There had been confusion among them from the first. Several of them were men who knew what Morton had done at the oil camp and others were peaceful and simple souls who had no intention of seeking trouble with any one at Flying Cloud's behest. But there were a dozen or more fanatics among them who answered that war whoop when it first burst on peyote-dulled ears, and leaped for the rifles in the tepees without question. The effects of the drug, however, were not conducive to speed and agility and that was lucky for Morton. Otherwise he would have been caught almost at once.

Joe had met the first rush but his command to halt had been answered by a ferocious rush and he had then settled to his

business which did not last long. He accounted for one or two but a knife in the hand of a frenzied brave had opened the way for the others. Then, with Flying Cloud still in his finery, they had taken up the chase.

But when they burst through the trees in pursuit of Morton they encountered the gang of workers from the oil camp, who, summoned by the raging Stewart, had marched to take vengeance on the aviator who had created such havoc in their camp not so long ago. The roughnecks of the oil fields were not men to stop for Indians and they promptly joined battle. There were forty or more of them and not half that number of braves, while the white men were quite as well armed as Flying Cloud's followers.

So it came about that as the ship climbed out of sight and roared off down the valley the routed Indians scuttled for shelter, with the oil men in full and joyous pursuit. They chased the red men jubilantly and especially one who wore a flowing war bonnet and was otherwise conspicuous as a leader. He gave them a chase, too. He gained the corral near the house, leaped on a horse and drove it at a mad run down the road, flanking them and getting clear for the time as he headed in the direction whence they themselves had come.

Stewart's automobile and a truck were handy, however, and by now the badly wounded Joe was able to act. It soon developed that an oil man had been killed and that an Indian who had attempted to control his crazed colleagues had been stabbed to death. This was sufficient for the whites, who looked forward to nothing more enjoyable than the hazing of a bad Indian through the country. In an hour or less the chase was in full cry.

But Stewart did not join in it. He had seen that airplane as it cleared the field and zoomed upward on its first start. While the battle was on he had watched it as best he could from cover, had seen it climbing steadily, circling and banking until it faded into the darkness. Again and again he had looked upward to trace its route and once he had seen it as his men routed the Indians and gave chase. It was lighted up by the moonlight over the cliffs and seemed to be poised an instant over the mysterious hidden region and then, before he lost sight of it, to dive and flutter downward like a crippled bird until lost to sight behind the jagged edge of basalt that marked the forbidden limits.

CHAPTER XIV.

Old Mrs. Stewart rocked fretfully before the fireplace in her sitting room and contemplated a world which had fallen in pieces about her, or rather the ruins of a dream world which had never existed in reality. She was wracked by desire for the drug which had enslaved her, craving for its soothing stimulus and soporific effect, her whole feeble system shaken and aching for it. No longer did rosy dreams of grandeur and ineffable beauty hold her in their grasp. Instead she neither slept nor dreamed as the tremors of age and drug poisoning shook her.

In and out stalked silent, serious Indian policemen in nondescript blue uniforms, armed and threatening. In the yard outside her window she saw the cow hands gathered, Indians also, in makeshift garments of the white man, dark and stolid and helpless. They seemed resigned, unfeeling, stupid. There was in them nothing of all the capacity for glory and beauty and attainment which the drug had so long painted for her. These were simply sodden victims of the march of civilization, barbarians unable to hold their own in the economic strife of the age, poor children of a primeval day whose time had come to yield before the march of the white man. There was no glory and no glamour about them.

With the police had come Bad Baby and two or three other old chiefs, and while they might to a discriminating eye have retained something of the primitive virtues of their race, her eye was no longer discriminating. The elder warriors, who had fought the white man in the old days, had taken scalps and counted coups, did not fit in with her recent visions. Old Bad Baby, himself, went about scowling solemnly, orating about the treachery and evil of the renegade Flying Cloud who had brought on them the white man's wrath. He spoke at length and with scorn and bitterness of educated scoundrels who used their education to lead the simple Indians away from the ancient superstitions of their fathers, consisting of primitive belief in ghosts and spirits of the dead, to new and more elaborate heresies having to do with sun worship imported from Mexico.

Bad Baby and his kind had the simple virtues of half-suppressed savagery and peyote and its attendant delusions made no call upon them. If an Indian was good and obeyed the government he would have rations and care and in time would learn to work an allotment and become like the white men. If he was bad he would receive a lesson he would remember. Having previously received such lessons Bad Baby knew what he was talking about and his words carried force even among the peyote addicts who now hung about in fear and shame. They, with the Snakes and Bannocks who followed the elders, one and all sought to make up for their late outbreak by joining with the police in the hunt for Flying Cloud.

There were those who said Flying Cloud had gone into the valley but Bad Baby grunted his scorn for this view. No one had ever been in the valley which was known to be full of ghosts and Flying Cloud's claims to have magic powers of entry and egress were of a piece with his other fraudulent exhibitions. It was recalled that, though the Indian had initiated many into the delights of peyote, he had never been known to use it himself. Now there was no more Flying Cloud and no more peyote; only remorse and the unsatisfied craving for the drug.

Mrs. Stewart had heard some of this when she had submitted to the stern questioning of the agent who had come to take charge of the pursuit and punishment. She now heard for the first time what had become of her granddaughter, or rather what was surmised as to her fate. Nothing was actually known except that she had fled with the strange aviator and that nothing had been seen or heard of them since. It was known from a badly scared mechanic who had been found hiding in the brush, that the plane had only enough gasoline to carry it some thirty miles or perhaps a little more. Yet the country had been scoured in a circle for that distance except in the direction of the inaccessible cliffs and nothing found.

So Mrs. Stewart sat and contemplated the ruins of her dreams and ate her heart out with remorse. She was no longer an Indian, her white blood having asserted its control as the drug lost its influence and the subtle suggestions of Flying Cloud no longer worked upon her enfeebled mind. She was only a lonely, shattered and failing woman who longed for her ewe lamb. She had only a vague recollection of what she had done but she felt that her treatment had driven the girl away, to perish miserably among the basalt cliffs that lined the basin.

The Indians and white men drifted away and left her finally to her remorse and the insistent, dull craving for the sleep and dreams that were denied her. If there were any of the cactus buttons left the Indians were so thoroughly frightened that they took care they were not forthcoming. The days came and went, and the evenings were filled with waking nightmares in which she cried out for the company of the stolid Indian woman who served her and watched her with such dull and stupid curiosity. Her brain was cracking under the strain and the deprivation and her strength was rapidly going. It was her punishment to die alone and she told herself that she deserved it. She had no wish to live, for the last of her offspring was dead; dead by her hand as surely as if she had killed her.

Then Flying Cloud came. He came in the night, secretly and silently, creeping like a shadow into the house and to where she sat and moaned and shook before her fire that gave her no heat. She came out of one nightmare of remorse to look at what she thought was another. He had come so silently in his moccasins that she had not heard him and now she was so startled and frightened that she could only stare with mouth hanging and eyes glaring in fixed terror.

He was not the splendid figure he had presented when she had last seen him. His war bonnet was gone and his cropped black hair was incongruous with the rest of his costume, making it almost a caricature. His body was naked to the waist except for armlets and wristlets and he wore leggings of buckskin, tattered and worn, with beads and quills hanging to them in shreds. His face was drawn and fierce and there was nothing of the artificial culture of the white man left about him. He was dirty and starved and hard pressed, like any hunted wolf.

He spoke in the Snake dialect, croaking like a raven.

"I have come back! Where is the man who drove the sky bird?"

Mrs. Stewart could only stare with terror-stricken eyes.

"Where is he? I have come back for him. Answer!"

The old woman licked her parched lips

and tried to say something but she could only gasp.

"Tell me!" commanded Flying Cloud. "I want the man and the girl. See! If you show me where they are you shall have the magic cactus. If not, you must die without it."

Now the old woman uttered a moan of longing—of longing to sleep, to forget her remorse and her folly, to die with the blessed ease and peace of the drugged. She held out clawlike hands, her pinched, white features working eagerly.

"Give it!" she whispered. "Give it!"

The Indian laughed cruelly. "I will give it when you tell," he said.

But she could not tell. "Dead!" she tried to say but her words were unintelligible. Flying Cloud angrily shook her and she clawed at him in whining, incoherent appeal for the narcotic. He drew a knife and shook its blade before her terrified eyes.

"I have this for them," he said. "But it may do for you unless you tell."

But it was no use. She was crazed and dumb and he shook her hands brutally from his brown arms to stalk over to her desk and rummage in it. He was looking for the will that she had signed and he soon found it.

"I will take care of this," he said, in English now. He slipped it into his leggings and then went toward the rear where the old Indian woman slept peacefully, indifferent to her mistress' needs. Mrs. Stewart heard him rummaging out food and eating wolfishly. Then he came back into the room and stood there looking at her where she sagged in her chair, helpless and almost unconscious.

"I ought to cut your throat and make sure," he said, "but it would only anticipate nature by a few days. And you can't change the will now. It may not do me much good, but this may blow over after a while. If any one asks for me, tell them I have gone into the sacred valley to join the four ghosts."

He laughed harshly and contemptuously and, with another glance at the wreck he had made he crept from the door and slunk away into the night.

A somnolent policeman sleeping in the bunk house was aroused by the snorting of horses and crept out to investigate the corral. He was in time to see a shadowy figure lead a horse through the bars and mount, and called a sharp order to halt. Instead there came a defiant whoop in answer and the horse leaped into a run with a bunched figure at its neck. The policeman fired his revolver and then ran for his own horse while others came rushing out. In a few minutes the chase was on.

It led through a cloud-wrapped night with the mutterings of a storm overhead on the frowning basalt cliffs, down through the valley along the river bank, across the stream and skirting the eastern bank of the lake although there was no passage there, since the lake ran in to lap for a hundred feet or more the very walls of the cliff which rose out of it. They lashed the pursuit frantically but they could only keep the fleeing man in sight without gaining on him.

He rode recklessly over brush and rocks and through the greasewood and sage and willows that lined the lake and the bench above it, all the time drawing closer and closer to the cul-de-sac of narrowing beach that finally pinched out against the cliff and the waters of the lake. But Flying Cloud never attempted to turn or to halt. The chase continued fervidly until the riders saw him throw himself to the ground at the point where a strip of curving, level sand ended against the rough, seamed and overhanging masses of black, slippery, unscalable rock. Ahead of him the water flowed and rippled in greasy, long undulations, scummed for no one knew what depth by an accumulation of oil from the well across the basin.

For one moment he turned to face the pursuit, dim in the murky night against the yellow sand. They saw him throw up his hands over his head, heard the ear-splitting yell with which he defied them, and then, with a last gesture, he dove into the water and was gone.

They came up to the bank and dismounted beside his staggering horse, and one or two ran to the bank to peer across the water, watching for his head lest he should swim to the other side and climb ashore or perhaps cling to some projecting point of rock along the cliff. He might even creep up and climb into one of the gaunt and jagged crevices that seamed it for hundreds of feet up. But although eyes as keen as those of an eagle watched the water and the cliff, nothing appeared, not even a sluggish oily ripple. Men had gone around the

lake to come in from the other end, and in doing so had picked up men from the oil camp, but when they got to the farther side they could find no trace of any one having come out.

The clouds massed and banked above the cliffs and a wind began to blow. One or two superstitious souls among the Indians, who had eaten peyote with Flying Cloud, muttered that the ghosts were abroad and that Flying Cloud had gone to join them in the sacred valley. But most stolidly grunted, looked at the gathering storm and concluded that the renegade had simply taken this method to end his career as spectacularly as he could.

On the lower side of the cliff Stewart had come to join the men who stood about watching the water. He too noticed the accumulation of oil and he had the curiosity to throw a small stick into the water and watch it for an hour. Its movement was slow and uncertain but it traveled first in a wide circle and then began to drift sluggishly toward a point near the cliff and not far from the spot where Flying Cloud had dived. Stewart looked out over the lake, noting the greasy sheen of the water fanning out widely from that spot until it merged with clear water.

Then the lightning struck.

With crash and roar and blaze of light it played about the black rocks, lighting them up and showing the lake in fire beneath its light. Where it shone on oil the lake looked like polished ebony but a quarter mile out the sheet of oil gave way to clear water and there it shone red and flashing. Stewart realized the truth all at once.

"By the Lord Harry!" he shouted above the crash of thunder as the men began to drift away to seek shelter. "There's a passage here! See! The current has carried the oil down here and gathered it. That's where the Injun has gone!"

"We'll watch his hole to see he don't come out again, then," yelled another man.

But the storm god saved them the trouble of that. High up on the cliff a stunted cedar clung, seeking sustenance in some crevice of the rock and hanging precariously on the sheer wall. There came a ripping blaze of light, a tremendous crash, heralding the rain, and the cedar split and cracked under the bolt, bursting into flames as its resinous wood ignited. For five minutes the half of it sagged there, burning furiously, and then, with a faint crackling and tearing it broke loose from the stump and toppled down the cliff. The blazing torch struck the water, sank only a slight distance and then stood floating with branches out of the smothering fluid and blazing merrily against the black oil scum.

"Beat it!" yelled the men and scattered from the bank. The Indians caught the alarm and drew back. A flame ran from the limb and licked the oil and flared up a moment. Another followed, flashing out over the water. Another and another crept out and then dense black smoke began to curl upward. As if to give it the best chance, the rain ceased almost at once.

Then the holocaust spread and the smoke rolled up in giant clouds against a lightning-shot sky. Higher and higher that tremendous cloud mounted, rolling in balloonlike masses which were slashed with red underneath. The spectators stood well back from the lake, retreating up and down the valley and listened with awe to the strident roar of the burning oil as it gathered headway and leaped against the cliff.

Back at the ranch Mrs. Stewart sat in stupor for many hours. Then she saw men coming back and talking and she came out of her trance for a while.

"Have they found him?" she whispered to the Indian woman. The old woman grunted.

"No findum!" she said. "Lake heap fire —all burn—devil get him maybe!"

The morning came, with a sky overcast not by clouds but by dense, evil-smelling smoke that spread for miles. Later in the day came Baxter with a physician, driven hard over the rough roads from Fairview. The physician was needed, for Mrs. Stewart was in delirium in which she alternately fought off Flying Cloud and called for Day McGregor.

The lawyer's news had to wait though he told it to the agent who had come in again from searching the woods and hills for Flying Cloud, to hear where that fugitive had gone.

"That Stewart's suit has been thrown out of court," he said. "So that the Stewart property is more or less secure to her. But I can't say the same for the government. The court has held that the monuments placed by the original survey govern, even if only temporary, if they can be found, and that the survey notes govern if the

monuments are gone. That means that even if we could prove that the divide runs through the valley it would do us no good. The injunction has been dismissed and the roads are a howling mass of stampeding prospectors."

"But," said the agent, "what are they rushing for? The Northwestern Oil Company holds lease and exploration privileges on every foot except the Stewart property."

Baxter chuckled dryly. "That's where they got fooled. The basin has been surveyed by the land office and the survey accepted prior to alloting the Indians their claims. Now the land is declared United States public lands—and as it is surveyed the State has a claim to each alternate section as a school grant. On those lands, at least, the lease and exploration permits of the oil crowd aren't worth a cent."

He stroked his chin reflectively and shook his head.

"But some one was smart enough to see that," he muttered in conclusion. "Naturally there was a rush for the capital to apply for claims. But some guy or other got there two or three weeks ago and collared the best of it. You have to hand it to him for thinking a good bit ahead of any one else. *I* never thought of the State's claim to school sections."

"Who was it?" asked the agent enviously. It hurt to know that a simple act of foresight had given some one riches when he was left to watch on his inadequate salary the development of a new Golconda.

"You can search me," said Baxter. "I haven't heard."

The next day Mrs. Stewart regained her wits, although she was obviously dying. At her request Baxter was brought in to her where she lay amidst her civilized surroundings. In the white bed her gaunt and sharpened features had taken on an unmistakably Indian cast and her face had something fierce and hawklike about it.

She listened apathetically to the news the lawyer brought and then dismissed it with a contemptuous wave of her hand.

"It is as it has always been," she whispered. "They will rob my people once again. But they shall not rob them entirely. I am an Indian too, though for years I tried to forget the fact. Take your paper and write! I wish to make a will—a new will."

She was obviously sane and in possession of her faculties and the lawyer had heard something about the will which Flying Cloud had carried off. He was glad enough to comply in the hope of undoing some of that mischief. But when the old woman had dictated her desires for some time he raised his voice in remonstrance.

"All of your estate in trust to the tribe! But, Mrs. Stewart, what about your granddaughter?"

The old woman uttered a sneering laugh. "My granddaughter! She is no granddaughter of mine. She is white. God knows I tried to make an Indian of her at the last, but the blood was not in her. She has no claim on me."

"But she has. If the will is to stand without a contest——"

"She has no claim, I say! Bring me the papers from my desk. You shall see."

Baxter obeyed and brought to light several documents which had been discarded by Flying Cloud when he had seized the will. He perused these at the old woman's direction and finally nodded with an inscrutable air.

"All right," he said, but with a note of regret. "I don't know whether she stands to gain or lose, though I reckon most wouldn't have any doubts. Go ahead. The entire estate to the tribe, you said."

CHAPTER XV.

With a half-dazed girl in the cockpit behind him and a shooting pain in one shoulder which made him dizzy at times, Morton half instinctively manipulated the stick, climbing steadily into a fitful wind which necessitated his banking in great spirals. Something in the back of his mind kept repeating to him that twanging, singing noise he had heard before he leaped to his seat in the confusion of the joining battle. He heard it dully, half uncomprehending, but he felt that it was not the noise of a bullet singing past his ear. Deep in his subconscious mind was an anxiety that preyed upon him. Some control or other had been hit and he could only guess how great had been the damage.

Yet he must fight for his altitude, disregarding everything else. In the treacherous air currents of the basin, rimmed on one side by the perpendicular cliffs and on the other by the steep slopes of the Deerlodge ridge, his ship was tossing and lurching

alarmingly. The motor roared encouragingly and a glance at the gauge showed that he had enough gas for a flight that would take him out of reach of those below. What was happening to Day he could not tell. A look to the rear showed him her form seated there, with head bent, motionless, hair whipping in great undulating waves in the wind and lashing back and forth across her face in a manner that must have hurt her, yet of which she gave no sign of being conscious. Neither had goggles and her head was bare and unprotected, though he had his helmet. Nor was she clad for a sustained flight at a high altitude, though as yet the air was fairly warm. They were climbing steeply, however, and it was only a question of time before her frame would begin to feel the numbing bite of the altitude.

He peered outward from side to side and could see nothing to guide him in the gloom. To the left he knew loomed the steep escarpment of the Valley of the Four Ghosts but in just what direction he could not tell. He switched on a small searchlight and tried to penetrate the abyss around him, but the tiny ray could offer him nothing of certainty. His compass was wabbling drunkenly. There were many hours of darkness before him and a country underneath which was rough, broken, timbered and uninhabited except for an occasional Indian's shack or an isolated ranch house.

Then the expected happened. With another twang something parted and the stick gave in his hand as a control went out of commission. A wire had been chipped by a bullet and had parted. The plane swerved, fluttered and nosed steeply to one side. He banked feverishly in the direction which one control enabled him to take and immediately afterward some black, forbidding shadow seemed to loom imperceptibly and gently out of the air beneath him and ahead. What was it? He was not sure but he felt a danger and frantically tried to climb. By swinging in a great spiral he gained a slight amount of altitude but his control was precarious and uncertain. The black shadow passed underneath, drifting ominously backward.

He did not know where he was and all hope of striking a line southward and eastward along the mountains was gone. He had only gas for a short flight and he could not control his ship. The situation was apparently hopeless. He looked around at the apparently senseless girl and a great wave of pity for her and of self-reproach for himself swept him.

There was iron in the man, however, and he wasted little time in vain regrets as he bent again to his stick and fought his losing battle. His look at the altimeter showed that he was not climbing any more, but if anything sinking, though slowly, as he circled. He glanced overside and downward but he could see nothing of that threatening black shadow. Only a dense void rewarded his observation. His shoulder throbbed dully now and his head felt light, but he gave these things no heed. He was conscious of a burning thirst.

Then as the ship swept in its great orbit something seemed to creep out of the blackness, something that was even blacker than the night, something that he felt rather than saw. He swung the stick and felt it go limp and loose in his hand as the broken control mocked his effort. The ship fluttered and swayed around, yawing frightfully. The nose dipped and it began its steep rush downward.

He shut off his power and worked his elevators spasmodically, trying everything he knew to lessen that fatal dive. What evolutions his imperfect control sent them into he could not guess but the plane fell like a falling leaf, twisting and turning drunkenly until he wondered that neither he nor the girl fell out.

And then by some happy chance a tug at the elevator brought reaction, sending the ship upward on a steep zoom against which it almost immediately reacted by slowing up and then settling down and sidewise in a drunken, failing tremor. He braced himself for the succeeding rush and the final crash that should mean the end. Instead there was a terrific bump, a crash of rending struts, the ripping of fabric and the whirling chaos of disaster as they touched ground and smashed!

It was not such an all-embracing, cataclysmic crash as he had expected and had been braced for. Instead it was a slow, disintegrating, sickening performance that flung him violently half out of his seat, clutching a strut that broke under his hand. He was conscious of the tingling, numbing sensation of the splintering spruce in his grip and then he came to the dazed realization that the ship had landed, a wreck be-

yond all doubt but not the crushed and twisted ruin that had been promised. By some miracle such as the god of aviators reserves for his favorites that last momentary reaction to the elevators had slowed the ship up almost to a standstill and on a quartering level just above the ground and the succeeding crash had been comparatively gentle for that reason. She had come down almost on one side and fairly level. By another miracle the occupants of the machine apparently had suffered hardly at all.

At least Morton had not, as far as he could tell. And Day was struggling confusedly in her cockpit, trying to climb out against the slope of it, blocked by the piled mass of fabric and splintered struts and guy wires of the crushed wing that sloped up and over her. Morton jerked and twisted himself free, and he lost no time in wriggling to her side and assisting her to crawl out of the wreckage. In a few moments they were standing wearily and feebly holding to each other and gazing at the dim outlines of the ship as it lay—where?

Day swayed and put her hands to her head.

"It aches!" she said wanderingly. Morton hurriedly looked at it, running his hands over it gently, though each movement sent a pain through his left shoulder. He could find no sign of a wound under the tangled masses of burnished hair.

"We've got to have a light—and shelter," he muttered. "If there's anything left to help us to it."

He placed Day on a rock that loomed near them and she sat there with her head in her hands, without moving, seemingly little interested in what was going on. Then he made his way to the ship and began groping through the maze of twisted wire and splintered spruce to get to the storage compartment. He pried it open with a broken strut and rummaged among its chaotic contents. Matches he found in a pocket of the cockpit where they were handy in case of an emergency. He also had a box of them in his pocket. There were some cans of soup which seemed to be unbroken. He felt among broken instruments and grinned to recall his errand. There would be no survey made of the valley for yet a while.

His rifle was strapped to the fuselage and was intact except for broken straps and there were some boxes of ammunition. That promised well and cheered him. They were not entirely helpless, then. What food there was must be discovered when there was light enough to search. At best there would not be a great deal for the ship was not yet supplied for his trip and what had been shipped at Fairview was mostly in the camp back in the basin.

There was a little gasoline stove in a cardboard carton. He found this somewhat smashed up and dragged it out. The light of a match seemed to show that the tough and yielding corrugated wrappings had protected it except for a few dents. He then sought for the gasoline tank and found it dented but tight. In fact the fuselage had suffered comparatively little damage, though the underbody and landing gear, the propeller and the wings had been smashed to bits.

It was difficult to drain the tank, but he managed to get a quart of gasoline out of it and filled the stove, after putting the latter together. Then he soon had a meager light and considerable heat. The light showed them their surroundings for a few yards, dimly and eerily. They seemed to be on a more or less level plain, broken with small, rusty stones and without vegetation. Morton had an idea that they had fallen on the top of the plateau, but he was not certain. Those last minutes of fighting had been too confused for him to gauge altitudes or to guess directions.

He heated a can of soup and broke the top open with a knife. He had found a bent cup and he poured some of the food into it and fed Day. She drank the hot liquid eagerly. It revived her greatly and she sighed and looked around her, but she had nothing to say except: "Where are we?"

"Search me!" said Morton cheerfully, though his shoulder ached and throbbed and his throat was parched. She did not ask again but yawned wearily which he thought was queer. He stripped off his leather coat and wrapped her in it. The ground offered no comfortable resting place but he placed her against the rock in a reclining position and she sighed and went to sleep almost immediately. This made him anxious, seeming to point to some internal injury or blow on the head, perhaps, but there was nothing he could do and she seemed to be breathing regularly and evenly.

He drank some soup himself and was refreshed by it though he would have given

his hope of escape for water. There was no water, however, that he could find in the dark and so he was forced to wait until it was light. The moon did not help them, for it was under clouds.

But gradually the clouds passed and the night lightened until he could make out shadowy outlines. There was nothing definite to see. The view was blocked in all directions by blackness. Such moonbeams as fell did not lighten the spots near them and the moon itself remained hidden. All that could be determined was that in their immediate vicinity the ground was rather flat, though broken by small stones, and that there seemed to be very little sign of any plant growth or water.

Although warmed by the soup Morton was weary and chilled by the keen night air, and his aching shoulder was accompanied by a sort of lassitude which gradually overcame him. Wearied out and sick he dozed and finally went sound asleep.

When he awoke, with dry and cracked lips, it was light. He came awake dully and his first movement was rewarded by pains that shot through his arm. Trial showed him that the member was stiff as a board and quite painful and when he looked with twisted head he observed the sleeve of his shirt slashed and plastered to his skin by what was evidently dried blood. It had soaked his arm clear down to the wrist.

He looked then at Day and found her still sleeping soundly in spite of her awkward and uncomfortable position. Then a glance around him showed their surroundings. They were not on the plateau as he had supposed. Instead it was quite evident that they had fallen into the valley itself, as the jagged, rugged cliffs showed.

It was not an encouraging prospect. Here even more than from the outside the volcanic, igneous nature of the formation was most apparent. The entire block had quite evidently been thrust up through softer rocks and had split to form this hollow or valley in its center. The surrounding cliffs were of basalt or rough, reddish lava, with streaks of quartz or granite marbling them. An area of several acres about them was comparatively flat but roughened by small points of lava that looked like rusty iron ore. Farther away the ground roughened and was rocky and uninviting. There was a thin, reddish soil on most of it and in patches there were considerable growths of rough yellowish grasses. There was no sign of water.

Water was the crying necessity of the moment, especially for Morton, whose wound was demanding his attention. He got up painfully, went over to the girl and looked at her with mingled pity and awe. Even disheveled and clad in her crude Indian garments, supplemented by his stained and weatherbeaten leather jacket, she looked very beautiful and helpless as she slept so peacefully. He reached down and gently touched her on the shoulder and she stirred under his hand. A moment later her eyes opened and she sat up, murmuring something unintelligible. She yawned and hid the yawn with the back of one hand. Then she shivered and uttered a little protest of pain at the stiffness engendered by her night against a rock. Finally she looked at him.

Presumably he was not much to look at with his pale face and haggard eyes and the shirt clinging to his arm in a sodden, crusted mass. Day seemed startled at first and then her brows drew together in a frown. She seemed to be trying to remember something.

First a slow blush crept over her face and then it was followed by a swift sweep of horror. That was succeeded by indignation that was plainly directed at Morton.

"So!" she said enigmatically. "We seem to be here. But where is it?"

Morton's grim mood returned to him as he looked about them.

"Somewhere between the nether regions and the skies," he said, his voice rather throaty and husky. "I've never been here before so I can't exactly tell you where it is. At a guess I'd say we'd fallen right into the ghostly valley. Whether we can fall out again is another riddle. Your guess at it is as good as mine."

Day continued to frown, but once or twice she looked at him as though puzzled and doubtful. Once or twice, also, she blushed as she had first done.

"I suppose," she said slowly, "I am partly to blame, am I not? I'm trying to recall how much actually happened and how much I dreamed. I think—I am not sure—that I appealed to you, did I not?"

"No," said Morton shortly. "I didn't wait for any appeal."

"Oh! I thought——" She fell silent and looked sidewise at him. "Just what did happen, then?"

"You were doped, weren't you?" asked Morton instead of answering her directly. Day frowned again.

"I must have been," she said. "Certainly I was. But how? I was determined not to be trapped like that again. Once was enough. So I drank nothing but a little glass of wine and I made sure that it was not drugged. Yet shortly after that I grew—not dazed, but warm all over, rather drowsy and comfortable, and I know I took that awful stuff when they offered it to me. It never occurred to me to refuse it. Indeed, I could not have done so. Then I saw the same things again, all the beauty and the splendor of the other vision. I recall wanting to be an Indian—entirely Indian and going up to get into this costume. Then I came back and—that man came—and he looked, oh! so glorious and handsome and great, and I didn't want to resist or to do anything except what they told me to do. I was very happy and I didn't care."

"The wine must have been drugged, perhaps only slightly so that you wouldn't notice it," said Morton gruffly. He, too, was seeing vividly that scene when the resplendent Flying Cloud had assumed the rôle of bridegroom before the drugged Parson Running Horse.

"Then there was an interruption. I heard a commotion and I—I thought I heard you call. I answered. That drug seems to have the power to present everything in attractive aspects for it seems to me that I regarded you, even, as something to be welcomed. But maybe it was only some subconscious realization of my danger and the welcome my submerged self unconsciously gave to any promise of help. Don't you suppose that was it?"

"It must have been," said Morton dryly. "Even my help was acceptable. I gather that the stuff they tricked you into drinking is hypnotic in its effects. If that's right, it was all suggestion and doesn't count against you."

"I'm glad you agree with me," said Day. "After that I have some recollection—quite a good deal of recollection, I mean—of that flight and of war whoops and things like that. But it was all dull and meaningless and unreal. Then we were in the machine and going up. I don't believe I recall all of the rest except that my head was numb and I couldn't think or feel anything very vividly and didn't care. I know we had some sort of accident and fell."

"We did," said Morton, and looked at his ship with cynical eyes.

"Was that how you hurt yourself?"

Morton looked at his shoulder. "No," said he. "I think not. In fact, I believe that some one stuck a knife in me. However, it doesn't matter."

"Oh, but it does," she replied and got up to look at his arm. But the caked cloth was too much for her and Morton rather gruffly asked her to let it rest for the time.

"Water's what we need," he added, looking around. "We'll have to look for it. Or I'll look and you stay here until I come back. Here. Take this."

He unstrapped his belt and dropped it and the gun it held at her feet. He tried to make the action elaborately casual, as though it were a mere afterthought but the girl looked quickly at him and again frowned contemplatively.

"I'll wait, I think," she said.

"Rifle's strapped in the fuselage," he explained gruffly and turned away. But she halted him.

"You'd better take it, then," she said. "You can't tell what you may encounter."

"I don't want it," he answered shortly. "If you are able you might dig up another can of soup or whatever there is and heat it. I'll be back as soon as possible."

She said nothing to this but watched him as he made his way slowly and rather uncertainly across the level ground and toward a bend in the cliff. He stooped to pick up the empty soup can which had fed them already and with this in his hand he went out of sight without looking around.

When he had gone she first smiled slightly and then frowned again. Then she set to work to master the rather simple action of the gasoline stove. After that she busied herself in ferreting out the eatables in the fuselage.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Drugged!" said Morton dully to himself. He felt an impulse to argue insistently on that point. "She was doped, hypnotized, mesmerized and paralyzed. She didn't know what she was doing or saying. She was just as glad to see that circus-exhibition Indian with his feathers and his war paint. Doped—drugged—plumb off her chump!"

And just as insistently and not at all dully

something deep within him kept answering jubilantly and triumphantly: "But she *did* call you 'dear!' You heard it plainly!"

And again he told himself morosely: "Doped! Didn't mean a thing!"

He stumbled along half-heartedly and it was fortunate that his search for water was not long nor hard. He found it around a bend in the cliffs in a pool at the foot of an outcrop where the solid basalt held it instead of letting it soak in as the more porous lava would have done. With his pocket-knife he cut away the sleeve of his shirt and by soaking it with water managed with much pain to disengage it from the shallow flesh wound in his shoulder and wash the latter. It was slightly inflamed but did not look bad to him. He managed to bandage it after a fashion with a dampened handkerchief. Copious drafts of the cool though rather sulphurous water refreshed him enormously and he felt quite strong and capable as he filled the cleaned can and started back with it.

His examination of the surroundings had also reassured him to some extent. Though precipitous the cliffs in the inner valley were not insurmountable, great rifts and splits in them offering what seemed quite feasible ways to the top. The valley itself ran southeastward and widened out as it went. They had evidently fallen into the upper part of it. As it widened the vegetation was more apparent and its desolation was softened somewhat. Here and there on hills of lava were clumps of spruce and fir, youngish growth for the most part, of no great size. Farther downward he saw lanes of willows and brush which might even line a stream. There, too, though not certainly located, rose curling clouds of yellowish smoke, four columns of it, which were evidently the "ghosts" of the valley. But of life, animal or bird, he saw nothing, save high up in the blue the circling, floating shape of a buzzard on motionless wings and, on a steep pinnacle of the cliffs, the tiny, stately form of an eagle.

He brought the can of water back to the airplane and found Day composedly warming up some corn and soup. She was glad to drink, her mouth being parched from the effects of the drug she had taken and after she had emptied the can she seemed quite recovered from the effects of the adventure. She also adjusted the clumsy bandage on his shoulder for him.

"We can't stay here," said Morton after he had eaten. "We'd better get out whatever is useful and move to water. There seems to be a stream down farther."

Day sat still and looked at the little stove. "Having landed me here," she said, "I suppose it is up to you to make the next move. But I admit some slight curiosity as to what you plan now."

"I plan to get out as soon as we can," he answered.

"How?"

"Climb the cliffs and get on the plateau. Then rig ropes or something and get down that way."

Day shrugged her shoulders. "Where will we get ropes?"

This left Morton somewhat blank. True, he had provided plenty of rope for some such purpose in his outfitting but the coils of line were heavy and bulky and had been unloaded at his recent camp against the necessity of repacking them in the final disposition of loads. They were at this moment resting on the ground in the field in Deerlodge Basin and might as well have been ten thousand miles away for all the good they were. But he tried to make the best of it.

"We can splice the guy wires of the ship," he said. Day looked at the tangled mass of wreckage with skepticism which Morton more than shared. He knew they would never be able to splice a hundred feet of wire together, let alone the five hundred which they would need at the least.

"Oh, come along!" said Morton sullenly. "We'll find some way out."

He stalked to the ship and began to throw the contents of the storage compartment out on the ground. There were several blankets, spare ones which fortunately had been brought along. Morton's own blankets and sleeping bag were also at the starting point. There were a few odds and ends of cooking utensils which had not been in use at his camp. There were a few cans of soup, of corn and of beans and a small piece of bacon. There were several cans of prepared coffee, and salt and pepper. In addition to these there was rifle and revolver ammunition in plenty, but as far as Morton could judge nothing whatever to use it on; there were the bulky cases of transit, level, and the other surveying paraphernalia, which had suffered in the crash. They were totally useless for anything he could imagine

in their present difficulties. Then there was the little gasoline stove and there might be five gallons of gas left in the tank. It was not a very cheering inventory and the whole of it did not make a respectable load for one of them, barring the instruments, which were left there as being worthless to them.

"A couple of Robinson Crusoes without any ship to outfit us," he muttered ruefully as he swung the pack on his back and led the way down the valley. Day fell in behind him and followed silently, carrying the rifle and having the cartridge belt and revolver buckled around her slender waist.

"I don't know why we bring this ammunition," said Morton discontentedly. "It's as heavy as the rest of it altogether and there's nothing as big as a chipmunk to shoot in the whole place as far as I could make out."

"Never mind," said Day composedly. "We may find something to shoot before we're through."

She had the air of being distantly unconcerned, as though his presence was a thing to be recognized, indeed, but not encouraged. As far as she could do so she would ignore his existence. She was resigned but not at all cordial. Nor did the serious nature of their plight seem to strike home to her and cause her to relax toward him.

Morton strode along silently past the pool where he had obtained water and heading downward toward that line of willows and brush which seemed to mark a permanent stream. It was perhaps a mile and a half away and as they drew nearer to it the aspect of the valley grew more kindly and less rugged. The soil was thin and supported little vegetation but there were a few berry bushes and considerable grass and they passed several small groves of the small trees, spruce, cedar and fir, that he had seen previously. But not even a chipmunk sprang to life in front of their plodding feet.

They finally came to the willows and found them to line a tiny stream which meandered down the valley. They followed this for another mile while the valley widened out gradually and finally took on all the appearance of a meadow lined with high walls of basalt. These cliffs, while remaining rugged, no longer presented any great obstacles to climbing them. They were split with gorges and cañons and clefts at intervals and the rim of them did not seem to be much over two hundred feet above the valley in several spots. Out of them flowed small streams of hot water, sulphurous to smell and taste, and one or two colder springs. The stream they were following, fed by these accretions, grew larger as they progressed.

Finally they came out on a broad glade where the valley widened out to a round basin. From the cliffs it sloped down gently to the center and on one side there was a spreading grove of aspens, the golden leaves all quivering in the still air. Behind these were spruce trees of larger growth than they had previously seen. Off to the westward the basin retreated into the cliffs, where, evidently, a cañon of considerable size ran back toward the main wall of the place. Out of this cañon flowed a sluggish stream of considerably greater volume than the creek they were following. It was joined by their stream and seemed to wind across the basin and vanish in the cliffs on the opposite side. Ahead the valley narrowed rapidly and ended in frowning walls.

Morton threw his pack down at the junction of the two creeks and looked around him. Here the grove of aspens came down nearly to the edge of the larger stream and among the silvery trunks he thought he saw something that hinted of human occupancy. With a cautionary word to the girl he crept forward toward the trees, keeping them between him and the object. He made his way silently through the edge of the grove until he could see plainly, watching for a while and then returning to beckon to her.

She came to his side as cautiously as he had gone and placed a hand on his arm as though claiming his protection quite unconsciously. Then peering through the trees she gave a little gasp of surprise as she observed the thing he had discovered.

"Now," said Morton in a low voice, "how did that thing get here? Humph!"

The "thing" was an Indian tepee of new canvas, somewhat wrinkled, and painted with pictures of the coyote and the eagle in conventional design. At intervals, running round the wall in a circle, were representations of the sun.

"Why!" said Day, amazed, "this is extraordinary. How could it have gotten here?"

"You ask your friend Flying Cloud," said Morton. "Valley of the Four Ghosts, in-

deed! How did they know there were *four* ghosts? And there they are, all four of 'em!"

He pointed across the stream which was quite wide and placid here to a slope of ground stretching up to the wall of the basin. This was lava covered and barren, strewn with rocks that were encrusted with whitish deposits like lime. Here and there were bare spots of what looked like dried mud, clean of all vegetation. All of them were simply flat, level circles except four. Those four, larger than the others, dipped toward their centers like shallow bowls and from the middle of each curled out a dense, yellowish, grayish and blackish smoke or steam. The odor of sulphur came across the stream to them.

"Some sort of volcanic vents," said Morton. "Maybe this thing explains the oil across the wall. I guess it makes a kind of dike of hard rock which has impounded the stuff. The tepee looks right out on the ghostly headquarters."

There was no sign of life anywhere about and the tepee was obviously deserted. Morton bade the girl stay where she was and crept out to it. It was just on the edge of the wood and faced a stretch of level, grassy sward stretching down to the stream. It faced due south, as near as he could judge. On going around in front of it he found the ground leveled off and beaten flat. The flap of the tent was closed and he lifted it and looked in. Finding it empty as he expected he beckoned Day and lifted it aside for her to enter.

Except that it was new and clean it differed in no degree from other tepees which in these degenerate days are generally made of duck instead of the ancient skins of the bison or the elk. The floor was of beaten earth and there was a Navajo rug on it, also quite clean. The interior walls were pictured with figures of the sun and there were no animal totems shown.

But in the center under the smoke vent was the distinguishing feature. Here, made of clay moistened and molded and allowed to dry, was a little mound in the form of a crescent and in front of it a depression evidently designed to hold fire. In every respect it was a duplicate of the sacred crescent mound and fire that had engrossed the peyote devotees the night before.

"I judge," said Morton thoughtfully, "that this thing was prepared for visitors who haven't come. Maybe they are not due yet. My guess is that this is the place where Flying Cloud was going to bring his leading and most favored disciples for a final and glorious debauch on dope that would have cemented them to him forever. Joe Jump High gathered that something of the sort was on the program but it didn't seem possible that he was actually going to bring them here. We thought he'd have 'em so pickled on the stuff that they wouldn't know the difference and he could make 'em think they'd been here when they hadn't. But we underestimated the man."

Day was looking around the place curiously and as she looked again the slow flush crept up over her face burning it red. Morton saw and stopped as he saw her horror mounting.

"And I?" she said before she could stop herself. Morton tried to shrug a light dismissal of that subject.

"You! Who knows? Maybe he wasn't going to bring you."

"I—I think he was," she whispered. "Oh, thank God you came."

"I didn't come," said Morton prosaically. "I was hanging round ready all the time."

"Yes," she said humbly, "I know you were."

He turned away out of the tent and began to lead her back to their pack. "It would be a good shelter for you," he suggested, looking back, but she shuddered and refused vehemently.

"I'll camp in the rain or anything else rather than go in that place again," she declared. "I never want to see another tepee as long as I live."

Morton said no more for a while. They went back to the stream. A test of the waters of the smaller one showed them fresh except for a slight taint of sulphur but the bigger creek was scummed with oil, a fact that struck Morton as interesting. The wits that for so many years had been exercised in living expensively on an inadequate income and spending a principal that was none too large were, after all, fairly keen wits now that he had the chance to let them loose. He whistled as he stood at the junction of the two streams and watched the oil floating almost imperceptibly onward in the larger stream. Then he looked back toward the cañon from which it issued.

"My knowledge of geology," he muttered to himself, "is crude and long rusted and in-

adequate, but such as it is I'll bet my last chip on the board of fate that there ain't any oil ever been found in basalt and lava formations of this sort. It comes out of what they call sedimentary strata or I'm an Injun myself. Question then is; where the devil does this stuff come from? Answer: it's got to come from outside this hole and the only place outside it could come from is the basin. Likewise, I'll gamble on a hunch that it doesn't sneak up from the depths under that lake out there and creep in here. And if that's true, the only place it could come from is that well they've shot off out there without providing adequate storage. There was oil all over the darned lake and, by the sacred hop dreams of the great god peyote, it's come drifting in here on the surface of the waters. Go to the head of the class, Sturgis! You've gone and found the trail of the elusive Flying Cloud right off the reel!"

With elation which he tried hard not to show filling him he went back to where Day sat listlessly beside the pack.

"Well, cheer up," he said easily. "I know it's hard on you to be flung in this hole without any company but mine, but I think we may find a way out. I'm something of a sleuth when I set my mind to it."

"I don't care if we never get out," said Day despondently. "Why should I wish to get out? What have I to go back to?"

Morton looked around at the barren prospect judicially, ending his survey with a glance at the scanty contents of the pack.

"Well, if nothing better, to a good square meal," he said bluntly. "I don't wish to frighten you, but this place doesn't seem very well stocked for human beings. Of course there are probably fish—but we have no fishing utensils. Otherwise I guess all that rifle will be good for is to make a noise. We will be hungry in a short time."

"I don't care," said Day.

"But you *must* care! Why, you can't dream of sticking in this hole for long!"

Day suddenly put her head down on her knees, folded her arms around her face and began to cry.

"I *don't* care!" she reiterated desperately. "I don't want to live—here or anywhere else! I've nothing to live for. My grandmother—deserted and be-betrayed me; Mr. Stewart—and now you! Let me alone!"

Morton stared helplessly at her, totally bewildered.

"Your grandmother—and Stewart—and now me!" he repeated. "But your grandmother was out of her mind. She was doped to her eyes! As for Stewart, you don't have to give that rat a thought. I'll kill him for you if he worries you, as soon as I can get my hands on him. As for me—I've gotten you into this but I didn't mean to."

"You didn't have—to be such a—scoundrel in—the first place!" sobbed Day incoherently. "You didn't—have to—come out here—and annoy me at all! You didn't have to carry me off and—do what—that Stewart man—was going to do! I can't go back! I can't!"

"Well," said Morton helplessly, "I'll be damned!"

Then he got angry. "See here!" he said hotly, "are you insinuating that I did this deliberately? If so—you're—you'll—well, you needn't say any more! That's quite enough!"

"You brought me here and—and—what will people say?"

"To hell with what they say!" shouted Morton, exasperated beyond endurance. "I should worry what they say! If any dirty-minded lout says anything where I can reach him he'll need a repair shop and a good mechanic to put him together again! As for your grandmother, she's probably come out of it by this time and throwing a fit over what she has done. If it's that fool will you're thinking about, forget it! I don't know much law but if that thing would hold a minute against a contest I miss my guess! So what have you to worry over?"

Day suddenly stopped crying and looked up.

"That will!" she said. "The idea! I wouldn't touch a cent of her money now if I were to die for not taking it! I'll work my fingers to the bone rather than accept anything after this!"

"Have it your own way," said Morton. "But don't you accuse me of being like Stewart. You know as well as I do that I worship the ground you walk on. You ought to. You deliberately set out to make me."

"You only wanted my money," said Day indignantly. "You're not capable of decent love!"

"Thanks!" said Morton with dignity. Then he turned and walked away.

"Where are you going?" asked Day sharply.

"I'm going to find a way out of this hole,"

he said angrily. "You can stay here until I come back."

He took another step but was interrupted by a plaintive voice.

"I knew it," declared Day. "That proves it. If you had the slightest consideration for me you'd never leave me all alone."

Morton came back fairly boiling with rage.

"That's enough!" he said as he sat down on the ground. "I'm through! Of all the unreasonable, contrary—well, I'll not say what I really think if I can contain myself. But don't push me any farther, please."

CHAPTER XVII.

This situation was obviously impossible and Morton had just enough sense of humor left to realize it after his first anger had died away. It gave gradual place to a philosophical acceptance of a woman's unreasonableness and as soon as this occurred he again began to worry about their situation. It was ridiculous to sit there doing nothing when, as he was firmly convinced, the way of escape was fairly plain and easy. He finally ventured to suggest this to Day.

"Even if you don't care to escape," he said, "it might be well for us to do a little exploring and see what our resources are likely to be. That is the orthodox first procedure with all castaways that I have ever read about. We have two cans of soup, three of corn and two of beans, one pound of bacon and a considerable supply of coffee. I don't know whether coffee alone will support life but I am disinclined to experiment with it—which is what we will have to do within a short time unless we find something else.

"It is possible and even probable that Flying Cloud or whoever established this shrine here has gathered a store of food and hidden it somewhere. We might go and look for it if you care to."

"I don't care to," said Day wearily, "but we might as well for want of something better to do."

She got up from the ground and looked dubiously at the rifle and then at Morton. The latter picked it up and handed it to her but she shook her head.

"You carry it," said she.

"I don't think we'll need it," he replied and tossed it to the ground. "There seem to be no animals in this place."

Day perfectly well understood his object in deliberately disarming himself while she retained his pistol but she gave no sign that she appreciated or noted it. They had no further preparations to make and set off silently to explore the valley.

Their first objective was the head of the larger stream and Morton headed toward the cañon through which it emerged. Arrived at its mouth, which they did in a few minutes, and rounding the rugged rock barrier that hid its depths to them, they got a good view into it. It was a remarkable sight even from there. It seemed to be a riven split in the basalt, rough and rather narrow but very level at the bottom. The stream seemed to have a sluggish current, arguing that there was no abrupt outlet to it. Little wisps and streamers of oil floated lazily on it, but, noting the scanty quantity, Morton began to feel some doubt of his original theory. The lake, as he had seen, had been recently covered with a thick scum of the stuff escaping from the inadequate storage provided for it. If this was the outlet to the lake there should be more oil.

The cañon itself was faced on either side with high, jagged walls of smooth-faced basalt which reared in great blocks and slabs in ever higher-mounting pinnacles. It could be climbed down here but the climb would not be easy and, as he knew, the outer face of the circumscribing barrier would present nothing but sheer cliffs against any attempt at descent.

As they worked their way inward along rather narrow and rocky banks the cañon gradually narrowed until, after they had gone a mile or more, the stream filled it from cliff to cliff. The water was shallow, however, and blocks of rock abounded along the edge of the walls, enabling them to progress with fairly dry feet, though slowly and with difficulty. The confining walls rose higher and higher in great steps until they finally crept along between towering, gloomy cliffs that almost shut the light out.

The air in the gigantic split was cold and damp and the silence was profound except when one of them spoke when echoes caught the voice and hurled it back and forth until the whole world seemed to be filled with rumbling, threatening murmurs. The effect of this was so eerie that they ceased to attempt communication by word of mouth. Even their steps started the mysterious echo whispering all around them.

Finally the cañon narrowed to its end, a gloomy, lowering pit blocked ahead of them by riven and split shafts of black and slippery rock which leaned inward, almost forming a cavern through which the water sluggishly flowed, or rather, lay stagnantly, as it seemed. It was dark and forbidding down there and Day was frightened as they stood with those giant walls looming above them and almost shutting out the light of day. She looked at the black, gleaming water lapping the scooped-out hollow of the rocks and shuddered at its cold depths.

But Morton was more prosaically inclined. He first examined the gigantic pillars and slabs of the cliff. Cracked and fissured and seamed as it was it might be climbed with infinite difficulty but once climbed it would but bring him out on the plateau and the sheer cliffs of the outside. Down here, where the water lapped the black and glistening basalt lay the easy way of escape—if his theory was right.

A wisp or two of sluggishly streaming oil hung to the edges of the water but they were scant indications of what he believed. He carefully made his way to a rock that lay near the water and from that he lowered himself into the cold depths. He could not touch bottom at all. Then he climbed back and considered the matter while Day shivered uneasily.

"I'm sure that this is an outlet from that lake," he whispered, but in spite of his precautions the echo caught the whisper and flung it back mockingly: "Out—lake—let!" it rumbled over and over in threatening incoherency. He went on, ignoring the rumbling accompaniment with difficulty, drawing Day's head close to him in order to lessen the echoes as much as possible.

"Flying Cloud must have discovered it—maybe handed down to him—maybe he merely chanced on it in a time of low water when the passage might be exposed. I don't know and it doesn't make much difference. But it follows that the wall here must be almost paper thin, and that it extends downward in the water not more than a foot or two. If the channel underneath was blocked to any depth or was very wide they couldn't possibly get through with that tepee. And no man could risk a dive and underwater swim through much of that. I'll gamble that any one could dive down there, swim a few strokes and come up outside. I've a mind to try it, anyhow!"

But Day seized his arm convulsively. "You shan't!" she hissed, her whisper as tense as a scream. "You don't know! You don't dare!"

Morton's face was drawn and white as he contemplated the ordeal. After all, all he had to go on was a few wisps of oil which might deceive him. He didn't know that there was a passage here. And to go down, only to come up in some gloomy, lightless cavern from which there might be no escape, or worse, to actually encounter a passage, but one longer than the few feet he suspected, and to swim into it only to find himself unable to come up again, was a terrifying prospect to the most dauntless of men. Yet he drew a long breath and shook himself together.

"You're dead right I don't dare," he said sorrowfully. "I'm scared so stiff I'm nearly freezing with it. But it's the only way to know—and I'm going to take a chance."

But Day had other ideas. She grasped his arm and began to pull him from the spot. She said nothing but there was no resisting her imperious mood. Morton followed her over the rocks, scrambling after her reckless progress until they came to a wider and less gloomy part of the cañon and she stopped for breath.

"Just the same," he said, "it's got to be done, sooner or later. Otherwise——" He did not finish the sentence.

"It won't be done as long as I am alive," declared Day emphatically. "After I am dead I won't be able to prevent you doing it but until then you'll please have a little consideration for me."

"But, Lord love you, I am considering you!" cried Morton. He spoke incautiously loud and the echoes caught it and flung it roaring back.

"Consider—love—Lord!" in endless reiteration. Day turned and resumed her progress and Morton followed.

"Consider me!" she exclaimed. "You don't consider me. To dive to your death and leave me in this horrible place all alone is no consideration at all. I'd go mad in an hour!"

"You'd have more to eat at any rate," said Morton sullenly.

"That's all you think about—eating!" said Day scornfully.

"You'll begin to think about it too pretty soon," muttered Morton to himself darkly.

"I tell you," said Day as emphatically as

her whisper would permit, "that if you attempt that—that—I'll take this gun—and shoot myself the moment you go. You will then have had the responsibility of murdering me, as well as hopelessly compromising me."

"I—what?" he exclaimed again and the echoes roared:

"What—what—what?"

They had to pause and let it die away and then Day went on without an answer while Morton followed her with an expression of hard contemplation on his face.

It took them more than an hour to get out of the gloomy chasm and the grassy glade on which they emerged looked cheerful and comforting to them after their experience. Day hurried to the pack and began at once to make coffee and heat a can of soup.

"Since you must have food," she said scornfully, "I'll get you some immediately. As for me, I don't care to eat."

Morton stepped forward and kicked the unoffending gasoline stove over.

"That stuff," he said coldly, "will feed us —you—for two or three days only. After that you will starve. You'll oblige me by ceasing to waste it and going on rations from this moment."

"Very well!" said Day with scornful dignity and retired to a remote spot to sit down and ignore his existence. Morton picked up the rifle and started away from the camp. She watched him go with no apparent curiosity.

He crossed the shallow stream and struck out across the lava flats toward the opposite side of the valley, where the stream again vanished among the rocks. He stopped to examine one or two of the volcanic vents but he went no nearer to the four "ghosts" than a hundred feet, the fumes from the sulphur causing him to cough even at that distance. He found nothing of particular interest in this place and so took up his journey until he passed out of sight among the farther rocks.

He was gone about an hour and then came back slowly and as though tired. He found Day much as he had left her and she said nothing to him, though she gave him one look of reproach for leaving her. Morton remained cold.

He flung the rifle to the ground near her.

"That's that," said he. "I had a faint hope that the outlet of the stream might present a better way. There is no outlet. It runs into a wide flat of porous lava and simply seeps away through it. There are probably a hundred small springs on the eastern wall of the valley which are fed from it but they do us no good. And there isn't a sign of life in the place nor a place where food might be hidden that I could find."

Day shrugged indifferently.

"That means," continued Morton, "that I try the other way."

She showed animation at that.

"If you do, I'll die!" Her protest was sharp.

"It is the only way out," he reiterated sullenly.

"At least," said Day, on a note of pleading, "you'll wait until the food is gone. I —I want to live as long as possible—even here!"

Morton winced at the grief in her voice. "I'll wait," he said, "until there is food for one day left."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"It will have to be to-morrow morning," said Morton. It was late in the evening, verging on ten o'clock, but neither of the two could sleep. The food had lasted several days, but it was going. There had been strife at first over it. Morton had declined to eat at all and when he took that attitude Day had promptly followed suit until he had to yield. After that each of them strove to trick the other by pretending to eat, a plan which had not worked very well, except to conserve the supply through joint economy. But now there remained nothing but one can of corn and a small piece of bacon. They were both of them hungry, too.

Day wiped her eyes surreptitiously but Morton saw her do it.

"It's the only way out," he said for about the hundredth time.

"I suppose so," said Day. "Death, one way or the other, is about the only way. It might as well be soon as late, too."

"You're not going to die," said Morton sharply. "To-morrow I'll start early and dive under that cliff. In an hour or a little more I can get around the lake to the oil camp. I'll be back by noon with a rope and a lot of food. Then I'll dive back and haul the food through after me. After that

the men will blast out a hole through which we can walk right out. Nothing to it!"

"If you don't come back by night," said Day, "I shall shoot myself. I'd rather die here, anyhow, than have you do it."

"You've got a lot to live for," said Morton inanely.

"I haven't," said Day flatly. "Not one thing."

"If you're referring to what you've already called to my attention," he replied acidly, "you need not trouble yourself. I didn't intend to bring you here and no sane man would ever imagine that there was anything wrong."

"I don't know," said Day. "You have a bad reputation for being utterly selfish where women—rich women—are concerned."

"Maybe I have," said Morton hotly. "I don't deny it. But my worst enemy wouldn't dare to hint that I was that kind of man. Besides, you've had your proof. You've goaded me and taunted me and in spite of it you're quite safe and sound. You seem foolishly sensitive to me. I didn't look for it in you. But if your good name is troubling you so intensely, that can be remedied as soon as we get out of here."

"I don't see how?"

"Oh, I'll marry you and then depart from your life in the proper manner and keep low until you can get a divorce, if all this melodramatic rot is troubling you."

"You'll marry me?" repeated Day wonderingly. "But—then—how would I know you didn't do it because I was rich—and that you'd keep your word—about the divorce, I mean."

"Oh, damn!" said Morton despairingly. "Of all the idiocy! To Sheol with your money! Beside, you've been declaring all this time that you wouldn't touch a cent of it even if that will wasn't good. If that's so, where do you get off with this mercenary stuff? Seems to me it doesn't sound mercenary."

"I didn't think of that," said Day. "It's true that I won't have any money. But what would you do? You haven't any either, have you?"

"Oh, don't worry about me," said Morton sarcastically. "I've had my lesson. You can lay your last chip that henceforth and forever I'm wedded to earning my bread by the sweat of my brow. No more ventures of this sort for me. I've had enough!"

"I'll have to go to work too, of course," said Day reflectively. "It won't be easy. I've never had any training and about all I could do would be to go out as a nurse or governess. And if this escapade got noised around, how would I get such a situation?"

Morton glowered at her and swore under his breath. He wanted to take her by the shoulders and shake her until her teeth rattled. At the same time, although her buckskin clothes were shapeless and crude, and her hair was gathered almost untidily in a haphazard manner on her head, while her face was suffering from sunburn, she was so utterly feminine and desirable and she seemed—merely seemed—so helpless and appealing that his impulse to gather her into his arms and comfort and pet her and talk sheer idiocy to her was at least twice as strong. He had to fight both impulses, which gave his countenance a rather unbecoming scowl.

"I suppose," said Day forlornly, "I had best do as you say—and marry you. After we get out——"

She paused doubtfully and he was impelled to question.

"What?"

"I hope that you will be kind enough, chivalrous enough, to repeat your proposal, so that I can decide under more propitious conditions just what to do."

"Oh, I'll do that," said Morton wearily.

It was cloudy and lightning was beginning to flash above them while the thunder was rumbling threateningly. Up to now they had slept in the open but Morton considered the weather with some anxiety as a few drops of rain fell and the wind began to moan above them, though it did not yet stir the air in the valley. They had a bright wood fire and the cold did not affect them as yet.

"I think you'd better take to the tepee tonight," he suggested.

Day agreed with a shudder. "I hate the idea," she said, "but it looks stormy, doesn't it? Maybe it will rain so that you can't go," she added hopefully.

Morton laughed. As though a storm would hold him back!

He sat before the fire, huddled in his leather coat after she had gone, morosely considering the wreck of his life as it appeared to him at this moment. The thought of his coming ordeal no longer troubled him. It was quite clear that Day despised and

hated him and so, if he failed and did not come back, it would only mean that his troubles were over for good. To be sure, she would also die horribly in that case, but she was doomed to that anyhow, whether he stayed or went. He doubted his deductions now more than ever, although there was a little more oil on the water than there had been.

The thunder growled louder and the lightning was now playing tag among the cliffs. He shivered and drew the coat about him, hugging the fire. It would be a wretched night in preparation for his ordeal but it made no difference what shape he was in when he made the attempt. The thing was bound to be either easy or impossible. The storm also seemed to suit his mood, which was turbulent.

Something swished hissingly out of the blackness and fell about his shoulders. Then he was jerked violently backward with his arms drawn tight to his sides. The jar hurt his half-healed shoulder and the shock of his contact with the ground half stunned him. He tried to struggle to his feet, was jerked back again and then something bounded out of the darkness to press upon him with a hard and heavy knee. Swift hands swept a rope about his legs and then to his arms until he was trussed like a fowl. After which the figure rose and stood before the fire.

"I think that will do," said a voice which he recognized with mingled disgust and rage.

"My old college chum, the educated Injun!" he said, his plight bringing back some of his old-time insolence. "Say, is this another act in the great drama of the plains?"

"No," said Flying Cloud composedly. "It's merely your finish."

"You let me up," said Morton in disgust, "and I'll show you something about finishes. You got one good wallop on the map and I'd take pleasure in giving you another sample."

Flying Cloud meditatively kicked him in the ribs with a moccasined foot.

"You've had some extraordinary luck," he said thoughtfully, "you and Miss McGregor. But I think it is about over now. It's almost providential, finding you here—and quite as I would have it. Where's Day?"

"Go to the devil—if he'll accept your kind," said Morton unpleasantly. "The next time I see you I hope you'll be ornamenting the end of a rope."

"You're evidently mistaken in your assumptions," said Flying Cloud, smiling slightly. "Why should I ornament a rope? I haven't done anything to deserve that—as yet."

"Oh, shut up!" said Morton wearily. It was inadequate but all he could think of.

"There seems to be considerable misapprehension all around," said the Indian. "Some of my own people and some of yours all seem to have jumped at conclusions and are very angry. Yet I don't see why they should be. I've committed no crimes. Some of my friends did lose their heads and staged a slight riot, but I can't be held responsible for that, can I? And even so, there was excuse. To have one's marriage violently interrupted is disconcerting and to have one's bride carried off is still more so. However, since I have found you, all goes well."

"Does it?" said Morton.

"Yes. Where is she?"

Morton did not answer except with oaths.

"In the tepee, I suppose. Well, she can remain there for the present. It was erected for our honeymoon as well as for some of the ceremonies which my late disciples delighted in. It's really amusing to find her here, isn't it?"

"I'm laughing myself to death at it," snarled Morton.

"Don't," said Flying Cloud. "I'd much rather you waited until I can dispose of you more properly. My—er—wife will probably enjoy the spectacle. If you'll excuse me now I'll make my arrival known to her."

He bowed to Morton and stepped toward the tepee but before he reached it it opened and Day stepped through it. With one hand she held the flap close behind her.

"You—Flying Cloud!" she said deliberately. In the flickering firelight and the intermittent flashes of the lightning, she looked pale but her eyes were very large and steady. The tall Indian stood some ten feet away from her, half naked, wholly savage in appearance except for his incongruous cropped hair. He folded his bronze arms and smiled at her.

"Me—Flying Cloud!" he said, somewhat dramatically. "I have come to complete the —arrangement—that our friend here so inconsiderately interrupted. To be sure, I did not know that you were here—but it all turns out well, doesn't it?"

"I think not," said Day. "What are you going to do?"

"That," said the Indian, "depends largely on you. You see, it occurs to me that you might be reluctant to go through with our original plan. But this young man—I think you were getting fond of him, were you not?—lies in such a position that perhaps his plight may influence you. You see, I have a knife and he is quite helpless."

"Yes!" said Day without change of expression. Flying Cloud stepped over to Morton.

"His scalp would be an acquisition, according to the code of my race," he remarked.

Morton spoke: "Don't let this mangy cross breed bluff you, Day," he said. "Let him go the limit. He'll get what's coming to him."

But Day paid no attention. "You'll really do that?" she asked Flying Cloud.

"Of course," he said coolly, "unless you prove complaisant."

"I'll not bother you about the will, Flying Cloud," said Day plaintively. Flying Cloud laughed.

"I don't believe you will," he agreed.

"You'll not spare him, then?"

"Most assuredly not," said Flying Cloud and in the gleam of the firelight his face showed ferocious and cruel. He was worse than Indian in that moment.

"Very well," said Day and raised her hand and shot him through the body with the pistol that she had held behind her. Then she fainted.

Flying Cloud reared from where he stooped above Morton and clutched his breast. The hand that held the knife opened and he dropped the weapon. He swayed, looking blindly at the sky where the lightning flashed. Then he straightened with a convulsive effort and began to walk slowly away. He went jerkily and without sound, his hand over the wound.

Morton rolled over and groped for the knife. It took him some time to grasp it and then he could not use it, although he had heard of people who set knives on edge and sawed their wrists back and forth across them until their bonds were severed. All Morton succeeded in doing was to stick the point into himself several times without any appreciable effect on the rope. He struggled furiously and with futility for an unknown length of time during which the slowly stalking figure of the Indian went out of sight. He was obsessed with the idea that the man was not badly wounded and would return in a short time. He must be ready for him.

The rain began with a rush drenching him and Day. It had the added effect of reviving her from her swoon, which she came out of with wild eyes and disheveled hair. She staggered up with a cry, half suppressed, looked about her as though seeking to gather her wits together and then ran over to him where he writhed in gradually weakening efforts. She snatched the knife from his hand and cut the rope. It was an ordinary horseman's tie rope of horsehair.

"Oh! Oh! Did I kill him?" she kept repeating.

"I hope you did," said Morton as he scrambled up, "but I have my doubts. He walked away."

Then Day began to cry with great choked sobs, her head buried in her hands. She was utterly distraught and Morton sank down at her side and tried to comfort her. The only way he could do it was to put his arm around her and hold her close. She seemed to accept this as an effective method and buried her head on his shoulder to cry more comfortably. In this pastime they both forgot Flying Cloud and the pistol, which lay in front of the tepee being rained on. Day's doeskin garments were also getting wet, but, fortunately, the rain ceased after a short time.

"Oh, Morton! Morton dear!" said Day through her sobs, "it was horrible. I never shot any one be-before—but he—he was going—going to *scalp* you!"

"Yes, yes, sweetheart!" said Morton soothingly. "Of course he was—and I need my hair. He deserved it! It's all right!"

"Are you sure?" she begged him. He said he was sure and she allowed herself to believe him finally. But she was so shaken that she had to keep on clinging to him with both arms.

It was a long time before he had leisure to consider the revolver. To be sure they had Flying Cloud's knife, which seemed to have been his only weapon, but leaving the revolver where it was was not just the safest thing. So Morton finally lifted Day up and supported her with one arm while he went over—accompanied by her—and retrieved the gun. Then they went back to the fire and sat down again. Day leaned against Morton and gradually allowed herself to regain her composure.

Flying Cloud did not come back. The storm had seemed about to clear away but the skies remained dark, even seemed to get darker. After a long time they even smelled the faint reek of what seemed like smoke. Day was exhausted from her emotions and Morton was in little better case. Finally she dozed fitfully and then went into deeper slumbers. He got her blankets out of the tepee and wrapped her in them as she lay before the fire. Morton sat up, struggling to keep awake. The reek of what seemed smoke grew more perceptible but he was too tired to heed it.

He slept finally and the day dawned upon them as they found relief in temporary oblivion. But it was not such a day as they might have looked for. It was a day that had little to offer over the night. Dark and murky and odorous with the reek of burning oil, the sky shut off by rolling masses of greasy smoke, it seemed to them as they awoke to dazed comprehension that the judgment day had come.

"By George! The oil well must have caught fire," said Morton, as he looked up at the blackness rolling over them.

"I don't care," said Day and smiled tremulously at him. There was a great fear behind that smile.

Morton felt an awkward disinclination to answer. He mechanically set to work opening their last can of food and slicing the remnant of bacon.

"We've got to look up—that fellow," he said at last. "I can't leave you alone while he's in here."

"You won't leave me at all, Morton, will you?" she asked pleadingly. "Surely some one will come! They will get an airplane and fly in as you intended to do."

"They don't know we're here," he said hopelessly. "And there's a fire out there now to distract them. I'll have to go—after we've settled with Flying Cloud."

Day fell silent and quietly set to work to clear up things, carefully packing away the scanty remnants of the food. Then she arose.

"We'd better start then," she said dully. Morton also was ready and they walked slowly away in the direction the Indian had taken. The trail was easily followed by the blood that he had left behind him.

It led them to the cañon whence the stream flowed and up it, zigzagging drunkenly over the level ground and later over rocks and through the water. They went laboriously and slowly for an hour when they were brought to a standstill by a great, rending, tearing sound that mounted to a roar. The ground under them shook and trembled and the water rippled in waves to the sides of the cañon. Rocks rolled down from the cliffs and they crouched fearfully lest they be hit.

The sound died away to what seemed like a distant, sustained rush of wind and the reek of oil smoke grew more apparent. A hot wind stirred the air about them, coming down the cañon and it brought fumes of burning oil with it. The ground shook no more and pretty soon Morton suggested further exploration. He wanted Day to remain behind but she vehemently refused. So they went on together, very cautiously.

Another half hour of crawling and twisting over rocks brought them to a narrow part of the cañon about half a mile from the head of it. Around a slight bend they could see the final wall and Morton edged around this to stand there fascinated. Day crept beside him and cried out with horror and astonishment.

It was not the sight of Flying Cloud where he had fallen not a hundred yards ahead of them that brought the cry. True he lay there quiescent and forever still, his body across a rock and his head and an arm hanging down the water. It was the sight of the rolling inferno of smoke and fire that they looked on where the end of the cañon had been. There, shot with fire and clouded with black smoke, yawned a giant cleft through which, at intervals, they caught faint glimpses of the sky beyond. And below it, rolling majestically and inevitably along the surface of the sluggish water, came the film of burning oil, so long held back by the wall of rock stretching across the outlet no more than a foot or so below the water level.

The oil crept on and they heard the roar of its burning as it came. It crept up to the body of Flying Cloud and licked it and consumed it. The smoke rolled ahead of it and climbed the sheer walls of the cañon. And the realization of peril smote suddenly on them.

"For Heaven's sake beat it!" cried Morton and grasped Day's hand. They turned and ran, crawled, scrambled over rocks and down the chasm. Fortunately the oil came slowly, far more slowly than they went.

They gained the mouth of the cañon in time, with bursting lungs and trembling limbs, and sought safety in the open meadows as far from the water as they could get. Morton dragged down the tepee and seized their packs, not much of a load by this time, dragging them up the smaller tributary stream to safety. There they sat down and watched the affair.

The smoke and fire finally rolled out of the cañon and across the plain, stalking slowly and majestically along the water course.

It burned all that day, all the following night, all the next day. Then it died away gradually. They watched it sleeplessly and fearfully, hunger and suffering forgotten. At last Morton saw the smoke clearing from the mouth of the cañon.

"It's time to go, I think," he said. "If it isn't too hot."

Day got up and followed. They were haggard and weak and they looked as though they had been through hardship but they were cheerful, though subdued. They went through scorched and burned tree trunks and out over the meadow greasy with black deposit and soot. They too were smeared with the stuff, as was everything in the valley.

When they got to the cañon and had penetrated into it some distance they heard what sounded like shouts in the distance and Morton paused.

"I think they are coming," he said as he turned to Day. "The fire must have heated the rock and split it so as to burst a door open for us. They've found it from outside, I suppose, and your troubles are over. Shall we go and join them?"

"I don't know," said Day and cast down her eyes. "There was something I thought of. It—it was about that proposal, you know."

Morton frowned. "Why, Day!"

"I—I thought—maybe we'd better not wait until—we were out there to get it all straight," she said and worked the sand of the cañon bed with a sadly battered shoe tip.

"Day!" said Morton and Day looked up at him. "Did you call me 'dear' when you were full of that dope?"

"I think so," said Day with a blush. "You see, that peyote has the effect of making everything seem very beautiful and desirable and when you came in I thought *you* were beautiful and desirable. It was queer, wasn't it? I'd been thinking Flying Cloud was the same up till then, but when I heard you I completely dismissed him from my mind. It is the most terrible stuff!"

"Maybe," said Morton. "But what about now?"

"Oh," said Day. "Well, I'm afraid it has demoralized me. I—I—somehow I can't help retaining—something of that—feeling."

"Day!" said Morton solemnly. "I'm not a fortune hunter any more. I'll go to work! Honestly I will."

"I'm glad of that," said Day. "I hate to work—and I haven't any fortune any more."

She smiled quaintly at him and gave him her hand. After several moments of oblivion he found time to come out of the trance he was in.

"You know," he said, "maybe we won't be so darn poor after all. There's just a chance. You see, I'm a great gambler and when I took this job I cashed in all I had left—sold my car and that sort of thing. Then I was rusty on surveying and I studied my topographical manual pretty assiduously. I wasn't much impressed with the scheme to prove this place was the boundary line and didn't think it could be done.

"I got to thinking how it would be if the courts didn't pay any attention to this claim and the Indians lost out. They always do lose out, you know. That manual had some stuff in it about State grants of alternate sections for school funds and I figured it out that, since the land was surveyed, if it was thrown back into what they call the public domain the school would certainly have a right to those sections. I went up to the State capitol while my ship was being rigged and looked it up. Sure enough I found that the authorities of the State had, as a matter of routine, filed their claims to these sections with the land office as soon as any doubt of the location was raised. So *I* just went and got advice and filed on as much of it as I could swing with the money at hand for oil and mineral privileges under the State laws. Lord knows how it will come out and maybe I've thrown my money away, but, on the other hand——"

"What?" asked Day.

"Oh, shucks. What difference does it make as long as it has turned out this way?"

The men from the outside were near and swarming around them with shouted con-

gratulations, all the riotous impulses vanished in their gratification. The estimable Stewart, however, was not among them. But Mr. Baxter was and very much excited. As soon as he could do so he took possession of them, hustling them through the yawning and still smoking and choked gap to a waiting car in which he whirled them toward the camp.

"Miss McGregor," he said with becoming gravity as they rolled along, "I'm mighty sorry to be the bearer of bad news to you, but it's just possible there may be compensations. First off, here's the worst. Your grandmother's dead."

Day looked soberly at him. "I'm—sorry," she said. "Really sorry. But, if you can understand—recent events have made it impossible for me to think of her as I used to."

"Yes, I guess that's right. She was Injun at the last and that's a fact. But that ain't all. She's left her property to the Injuns."

"I know," said Day. "It makes no difference."

"Well, I'm damned glad of that. And now for the compensation. It ain't just the easiest thing in the world to be part one race and part another, Miss Day, and I reckon you've felt it even though you'd pass for white in any company."

"She needn't feel it," broke in Morton. "Let any lobster even *think* the worse of her for that and I'll sure floor him!"

Day pressed his hand but Baxter drove on unseeing.

"A lot of us think that a way," he said, "but there's others that ain't so considerate. Wherefore I reckon it won't come with no shock if I tell her that she ain't Injun at all. She was adopted by McGregor and his half-breed or quarter-breed wife when she was a mite of an infant. Her pa was a nester that come squandering out here to make a livin' when there wa'n't no livin' to be made. He and his wife was took down with mountain fever at the same time and died of it on their way to Payson across the mountains. They was on the reservation and they asked McGregor to take the baby. He and his wife didn't have no children of their own and they adopted you. But you ain't any kin to Mrs. Stewart and you ain't her heiress."

"I'm glad," said Day softly, and turned to Morton with a smile.

"Shucks!" said that young man. "What do we care, anyhow!"

Day leaned toward him and they almost missed Baxter's next utterance.

"And you, young man! There's a gent named Bancroft, of the Northwestern Oil Company, waitin' to talk business with you. Don't you let him inveigle you none, is my advice."

Morton looked up at the lawyer's back.

"Oh!" he said. "Say, Baxter, will you draw up a power of attorney or whatever is necessary for yourself and settle that matter for me? I'm going to be too busy to attend to business."

"You're what?" said the startled Baxter and looked around. What he saw as Day drew back with a vivid blush caused him to swing to the front abruptly.

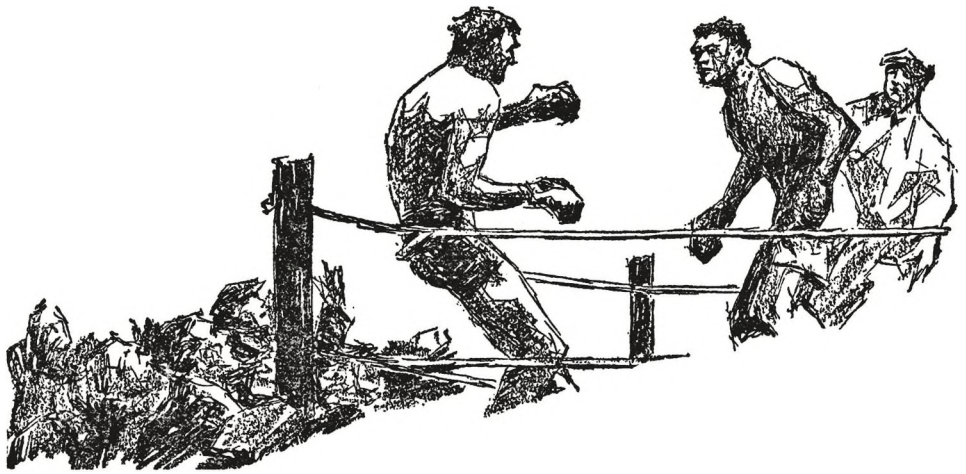
"Well, now, I reckon maybe that's natural after all," he mused.

Then he attended strictly to his driving for the rest of the way.

Don't miss the complete novel in the next issue—a fine sea story by George Hugh Banning.

THE BEAU OF ROYALTY

KING ALFONSO of Spain is royalty's niftiest dresser. He keeps a hundred and fifty suits on hand and buys a hundred new ones a year. His tailor bill is $7,500 annually, and with extras such as ties and fancy vests his clothing costs him at least ten thousand dollars a year—this in a country where ten thousand dollars goes considerably farther than it does in the United States. This dandy among kings has four valets, the chief of whom receives a salary of $1,500 a year and all his master's cast-off clothing—which is worth another $2,500 to him. The king never wears a suit more than a half dozen times, and often discards one after wearing it only once. Judging from some photographs of his majesty he wears some of his suits once more than we would wear them.



The Count of Mont and Cristo

By C. S. Montanye

Author of "The Merry Wife of Windsor," "Oliver's Twist," Etc.

Mr. Ottie Scandrel suffers an unexpected attack of acute intelligence.

TO the list of the world's greatest travelers—Noah, Columbus, ex-President Wilson, Balboa, the Teddy Bear Girls Burlesque Show and the others on the records—add the name of Mr. Otto Scandrel. Any schoolboy knows the wise crack a party named Horace Greeley once made about going West but it took Ottie and his Duplex Twelve to grab Monsieur Greeley at his word and steer for the land of the alfalfa, the object being pugilistic and not cattle punching. The bus, a wicked job from the wheels to the top, had cost a mere three thousand emerald sailors and a few extra pennies. It had been delivered F. O. B.—which puzzled Ottie until he burned out a couple of bearings and found out *that* meant full of bills. Getting him discouraged and keeping Scandrel out of the driver's seat, however, was the same as expecting a sailor to be interested in a glass of water. A month after he and the Duplex were on friendly terms Ottie collected two valises, three pairs of spats, myself, and turned the nose of the boat in the general direction of Ohio and the city where two slightly celebrated heavyweight pugilists were scheduled to engage in fisticuffs. We got to the scene of conflict, the only casualties being four chickens of the feathered kind, one pushcart and a half a length of somebody's best front-yard fence.

When it came to fast driving Scandrel had Mulford and Oldfield looking like a pair of Civil War veterans with rheumatics.

Once the big mill was over we checked out of Ohio in a hurry. In the fiscal year of 1630 A. D. Francis Bacon made a remark about nobody ever knowing what was going to happen next. Francis knew how to tell 'em because if I had mentioned the fact to Ottie that before we hit Broadway again *he* was destined to meet a cuckoo for looks and a certain party labeled "Young" Cristo who was a rough-and-tumble battler and no mistake, why, Scandrel would have no doubt slapped me for a Swiss cheese. All of which should be a prologue for this narrative.

Get a kick out of this!

If Ottie stepped on the gas going *out*, he had his heel on it coming *in*. All we saw of two States was a river, a bridge and a telegraph pole. Six or seven of the local gendarmes in as many counties tried to pick us up. They had about as much chance of drawing alongside as you and I have of taking a taxi ride across the Pacific. We came and went and I didn't have an opportunity to say more than four words until

we had to stop at a railroad crossing and I lamped a big sign that told the wayfarer he was now in a state of coma and New Jersey.

"You'd better slow up going through," I said. "Jersey justice is no more celebrated than the French Revolution. If you don't want to get a knock in the poke do thirty and be satisfied."

"Thirty?" Ottie sneered. "Do I look crazy or something? I was just thinking of feeding this boiler more juice on account of this road being so level. The bolognie who sold me the car had a song and dance about it going ninety miles an hour if you snapped your fingers. I got sore thumbs but all she's been able to do is eighty-seven so far. Even at that there ain't a bull on two or four wheels that can sniff my gasoline when I push this baby. Haven't I been giving the ha-ha to the cops right alone, Joe? Away with that noise and hold on to your ears. If I can't swing the needle to ninety on this piece of road I'll turn this bus in and get a victrola!"

With that he went over the railroad tracks, kicked open the cut-out and began to click off some big speed. There is no telling how far or fast he would have gone for the reason that twenty minutes later we ran into the open mouth of one of those ingenious Jersey speed traps that dot the highway where it windeth. This was in the form of a number of heavy ropes stretched directly across the road. The Duplex went through them like an Italian goes through a pint of spaghetti but as luck would have it the back wheels skidded dangerously to one side, we shot into a ditch and tore up it for about a third of a mile more.

When my boy friend finally managed to jam on the brakes three constables wearing bigger stars than Times Square will ever see jumped off an equal number of motor cycles and hopped up on the running board.

"Yer under arrest, yer golderned dizzy fule!" the first of the trio bawled.

"Seventy miles an hour, by heck!" the second chanted.

"Sich insane recklessness ain't never been seen in this county before!" the third hollered.

Ottie threw open the front door and climbed out.

"So you're the jockos who tried to put this three-thousand-smacker ship on the shelf, hey?" he yelped. "Come on, let's see how you can take it!"

With that he shot over a short right uppercut that caught the first minion of the law squarely on the button. This party passed out of the picture, as cold as seven o'clock in the arctic circle. His two comrades seemed stunned for a minute by the assault and battery they had just curled an eye at. Ottie swung around to paste them each in turn. As he did so the second musketeer hauled out a horse pistol that was as long as a man's arm. Scandrel threw up his hands with a speed the car had had nothing on.

"Don't shoot!" he bellowed. "I can explain!"

"Keep 'em up, consarn ye!" the bird with the cannon snapped. "Try to strike me and the fust thing yer know yer won't know nothin'! Got them handcuffs handy, Ez?" he asked the third musketeer who was gaping at us both. "Keep yer eye on that there other rascal in the autemobile. Then search around and see where they've got the liquor hid. You know how Judge Falkus is when the evidence ain't complete!"

"Leave my car be!" Scandrel barked. "If you put as much as a scratch on that chariot I'll use my influence at Washington and break you and that's a promise!"

The constable with the gun laughed derisively.

"How can yer?" he inquired. "Think I'm a gol-ding fule? Use yer influence with Washington? Hee-hee! Listen to him, Ez. He don't even know Washington's dead!"

Ez had a fit of laughter and after ordering me out of the car searched it. The only place he didn't look was in the magneto. He seemed slightly disappointed that the only damaging evidence he could unearth were Ottie's three pairs of spats.

"Ain't no liquor nowhere," he confessed at the end of his investigation.

"Then they drunk it up, the villains!" the other snapped decidedly. "Take a look at Ira, Ez, and see how he's gittin' along. Best thing to do is put him in that there autemobile." He nudged Scandrel with the cannon. "Lookie here, stranger. I won't put them cuffs on if you'll drive us into town. But if yer don't I'll jewel yer and drive yer car myself. Won't I, Ez?"

"I reckon yer will, Obadiah," Ez answered with a chuckle. "Ain't no one round these here parts what can drive worse!"

"I'll roll you in!" Ottie said hastily. "Get that, Joe! They should put the cuffs on

me and then bust up my car in the bargain! Sweet, hey?"

We drove into the town of Wonderville, passed down Main Street and crept up to the side door of the courthouse. This was a bleak wooden building over which hung a sign that read: "Hezekiah Jenkins' Hay, Grain and Feed Co." One half of the structure had been liberally plastered with three sheets of the Teddy Bear Girls Burlesque Show which it seemed was playing the hamlet for a single night only.

The minute we got inside Ottie began to laugh. For a fact, the courtroom looked like something out of a slap-stick movie comedy. Its furnishings consisted of the judge's bench, a table where the clerk of the court held forth, a railing that stretched across the entire room and two rows of chairs where six or seven interested spectators were parked. To the left was a door marked "Pen" and to the right was a window where the greater part of the flower of Wonderville's youth had congregated.

"Really, this is a snicker!" Ottie chortled. "Take a look at the judge, Joe! If he ain't making a mistake wasting his time here when he could be cleaning up on any Broadway stage, then Stonewall Jackson never saw a gun!"

His honor was certainly a card. He was a little, dried-up individual with a bunch of fur on the end of his chin, a pair of gold-rimmed cheaters that were halfway down his beak and watery blue eyes. If he had collected wrinkles he couldn't have had more and a cow could have learned something about chewing from his honor. The only thing he did to perfection was when he aimed for the mark and let go.

"Wait till I hand him a piece of talk!" Scandrel went on with another chuckle. "I'll bet he doesn't know whether law is a profession or something they serve with whipped cream. I'll just——"

Blam!

Down came the judge's gavel and the seated spectators jumped up as one man and rushed toward the door. Even the prisoner at the bar, a colored gentleman with a pair of feet on him, almost jumped out of his coat.

"Order in the courtroom!" Judge Falkus yelped, glaring at Ottie. "Young man, I'll 'tend to ye after I finish my calendar. What was ye sayin', Rastus?" he went on, looking down at the dark person before him.

The black boy shuffled his dogs.

"Yo' honor, I ax yo' ain't the air free?"

"Of course the air is free," Judge Falkus snapped. "Who said it weren't?"

The prisoner grinned.

"Well, yo' honor, 'at's all I stole—jus' plain air, suh."

Blam!

"Yer charged with stealin' an autemobile tire!" Judge Falkus roared, shaking the gavel like a war club.

Rastus rested an elbow on the bench.

"Jedge, I'll tell yo' jus' exac'ly how it was. Las' night I was walkin' past 'Buddy' Hinkle's garage, and jedge, yo' honor, I seen a big sign what said 'Free Air,' plain as day. So I jus' na'churally thought I'd take a li'l' of that free air away. So, jedge, yo' honor, I jus' took that tire to wrap up the air in."

This put the courtroom in stitches and made Ottie hysterical.

"Ain't we got comicals!" Scandrel bawled. "This here has got them Keith sidewalk comedians looking like acrobats!"

Blam!

Judge Falkus' gavel stopped the merriment like a six-inch shell.

"Six months in the cooler and—how much money have you got with you, Rastus?" he asked, looking down over his glasses.

"Nine dollars, jedge!" Rastus answered.

"Six months in the pen and nine dollars costs!" his honor stated crisply. "Take him away, Seth. Next case!"

He took aim and fired as Ottie and myself were pushed forward. Obadiah stepped to the front and reeled off the list of our crimes. According to him the only thing we had stopped at was arson and counterfeiting. While he went on with the monologue Judge Falkus kept shaking his head.

"Seventy miles an hour and assaultin' an officer of the law!" he repeated. "Hmmm! This looks mighty bad. Waal, I'll fine yer a dollar fur each mile, thutty dollars for punching poor Ira and fifty dollars costs. Just add that up, Seth. Next case!"

"Hey, wait a minute!" Ottie yelled. "Ain't I got no rights around here?"

Judge Falkus held his gavel suspended in mid-air.

"And ten dollars more fur askin' fule questions!" he roared. "Next case, by crickety! And when I say next case I mean next case!"

"Can you equal this, O'Grady?" Ottie moaned when we were led over to the clerk

of the court to pay the fine. "All this good jack wasted in a snare like this. On the level, if I ever come through this town again it will be in a harp cart with the mourners behind and no mistake!"

When we got outside Ottie started the Duplex and zigzagged down Main Street to the nearest garage. Here he called out a mechanic who introduced himself as the same Buddy Hinkle mentioned in the court-room. Ottie asked what was the trouble and how much it would cost. Hinkle lifted the hood, dove in and came up with a face full of grease.

"You've got a cracked bearing, the brakes are burned out, you're pumping oil, there's something the matter with the water jacket and the magneto needs attention. Oh, yes," he added, as an afterthought, "your clutch seems to be slipping and your carbureter ought to be adjusted. Leave the car here until the first of next month and I'll have it running like a sewing machine. All it will cost you is a hundred and fifty dollars."

"Lay a finger on this car again," Ottie raved, "and I'll slap you for a wreath of celluloid roses. All set, Joe?"

"Yes. Where are you going?" I inquired.

"To another garage—where do you suppose?" Scandrel snarled. "There must be one honest man somewhere in the State!"

At this the mechanic had a spasm of laughter.

"There ain't no other garage for thirty miles either way!" he hollered. "And if you drive that car from here to the corner you'll as like as not burn out the upholstery. Leave her here until to-morrow morning and I'll fix her so she'll do everything but sing. I'll make the price right because I don't like Judge Falkus no more than you do. Once he fined me twenty-five dollars for selling him a shoe for his car that blew out at twelve thousand miles. I'll put your bus right for a hundred fish. I wouldn't do that for any one else, neither. O. K.?"

Ottie's answer was to step on the gas. There was nothing stirring. He got out and cranked while the mechanic laughed.

"You win!" Ottie sighed, dashing some moisture from his brow. "A hundred bucks is a bargain. You won't get another nickel more if you cry your little eyes out. And if it ain't ready to-morrow morning a. m. you won't be in a condition to be interested in anything but your own personal repairs. Get me?"

The mechanic clucked like an eagle.

"Hey, Eddie," he hollered to some one back in the garage. "Bring out a gallon of gas so I can run this bus into the shop—the tank's dry!"

We learned the only hotel doing business in Wonderville was the Ritz-Carlton on Main Street. The party that handed us the information wanted a dime for his trouble. It was all I could do to keep Scandrel from slapping him.

"Anyway," he mumbled when we walked on, "I know one historical fact."

"What's that?" I asked.

"The name of the birthplace of the James brothers!" he growled. "For a fact, I'll bet that ninety-nine out of every hundred waiters hail from this trap. Wonderville, is it? The boy that named the place certainly had the right idea. It's a wonder the federal authorities don't put the population in jail!"

The Hotel Ritz-Carlton was a four-story wooden building. Any stranger might have mistaken it for a livery stable until they stepped into the lobby. Then they would have been sure of it!

"Two rooms and double on the bath," Scandrel snapped at the clerk on duty. "And if you've got any comedy in your system don't try it out on us. We've had a couple of laughs already to-day."

The clerk shook his head.

"I couldn't give you accommodations under twenty bills apiece if you were Napoleon," he said. "This here hostelry is entertaining the Teddy Bear Burlesque Show which are playing to-night at the op'ry house and there's only one room left. Mr. Carlton told me to save that for some rich motorist passing through to New York."

"We're him!" Scandrel hollered. "Gimme the register and a loan of your pen!"

"Front, No. 85!" the clerk yelped. An elderly gentleman in a bell-hop's uniform put down a two-year-old magazine he was reading, took off his glasses and shuffled forward. "Show these two boys up to room 6000. Dinner from six to seven," he said to Ottie. "We're serving a swell meal for two fifty flat without music."

"Try and compel me to eat it!" Scandrel said over his shoulder.

That night we hunted up the only other restaurant in town and dined for a dollar exactly on a plate of beans, a cup of mud and a piece of something the waitress was

willing to go on the stand and swear was apple pie.

"They's a swell show at the op'ry house," she cooed at us when we got our skimmers and prepared to foil indigestion through the medium of exercise. "You two fellars ought to be sure and see it. Even if you can't get a seat at the box office you can buy your tickets off Judge Falkus' nephew. He's a speculator!"

"I'd speculate that!" Scandrel hissed. "Here's a nickel tip. Try not to run wild on it!" When we got outside he began to laugh. "I'll bet they'd probably cuff you for fifty shillings a chair at the theayter. I'm going back to flop on the pad and try and sleep this burg off. Honest, Joe, looking forward to to-morrow when we can exit rapidly is the same as looking forward to Christmas Eve. Sweet tomato! What a hole this is to be sure!"

We strolled back to the Hotel Ritz-Carlton. The minute we went into the lobby Ottie put on the brakes and came to a dead stop. The reason for this was a blond girl who stood in the entrance of the dining room, making the seven wonders of the world resemble one eighth of nothing. She had beauty that would have made Venus hurry back to the nearest ocean and class enough for a night school. The opium-pipe fantasy was turned out in some wise scenery which it is safe to say Wonderville had never seen before or would observe again. Honest, she looked as if she had been poured into the frock she wore.

And she had a pair of eyes that would have interested Bluebeard!

This astounding example in pulchritude plus was conversing with a little, sawed-off individual who wore a diamond horseshoe scarf pin and a brown derby. But we didn't notice him until afterward. Ottie's eyes were out so far you could have flicked them off with a baseball bat.

"Now, Ruby," the boy in the brown hat was saying, "what's the use of argument? I freely admit I owe you two weeks' salary but Houdini couldn't get more than sixty-five cents out of me if he tried. Business has been in rags, as you know. Have a heart and wait until we get into Pennsylvania. The mining towns will kick in big."

The beautiful blonde shook her head.

"Nothing doing, Mr. Saltus. You told me that same thing last week. You said that when we got to Wonderville you'd pay me every cent you owe me. If you don't come through after to-night's performance, I'm bound for Broadway. Don't ask me how I'll get there. Chris and me might have rotten judgment but we've got darn good feet!"

"Now, Ruby," the little man went on, "be reasonable. What would be the sense of quitting when you're on the threshold of wealth and riches? Answer me that. Be patient for another week and I'll raise you five dollars more. I must be crazy to want to pay you such a big salary but I do want you to know my heart is in the right place."

"I quit after to-night's performance!" the blonde repeated firmly.

The other grabbed her arm.

"Now, Ruby——"

Scandrel pulled down his waistcoat and crossed the lobby. He shoved his pan close to Mr. Saltus and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Don't be now-ing this little lady no more!" he hissed. "Step out of it or I'll knock you through the window!"

"Oh, a tough guy, eh?" the other sneered.

"I shave with a piece of broken glass!" Ottie answered, dragging back his left.

"I do believe it is time for me to be at the theater," Mr. Saltus murmured, steering for the front door.

"Tell me all your troubles," Scandrel said chummily to the blonde. "There's nothing I would enjoy more. My name is Scandrel —formerly 'Battling' Scandrel, the welterweight box fighter and *Mister* Scandrel, the screen star. This here," he said, giving me a careless nod, "is Joseph O'Grady, who operates a gym for pug-uglies up in the Bronx. Let's all sit down now that we're acquainted."

"I'd love to," the blonde purred, "only I have to leave for the playhouse directly. I'm Ruby Sinclair with the Teddy Bear Girls Burlesque Show. That little half portion you scared off was Harry Saltus, the manager and owner of the production."

"It's a pleasure to know you, Miss Sinclair—er—I'll call you Ruby if you don't mind," Ottie continued. "I and Joe were just this minute slipping down to the opera house to buy a couple of seats for to-night. Can't we meet you after the show and take you to—now—supper?"

The smile Miss Sinclair handed him made an arc light look like an inch of candle.

"I'm so sorry," she sighed, "but I've al-

ready promised to go to supper with quaint old Judge Falkus. You see, the lock on one of my valises broke when I was crossing Main Street this morning and while I was picking up my—eh—its contents, I was arrested for blocking the traffic. Judge Falkus gave me the choice of going to supper with him to-night or spending thirty days in the lockup. What could I do but make the date?"

"Anyway," Scandrel said, not to be baffled, "we'll walk down to the hall with you."

The show at the op'ry house set us back three-fifty apiece, this being the price of the tickets we bought from his honor's nephew, who wanted five fish at the first asking. To our surprise the theater was jammed.

"I'll bet the acoustics here are rotten," I said when we sat down.

"I don't smell nothing yet," Scandrel mumbled. "Listen, Joe. The programs cost a dime each. I should have asked Ruby if she didn't have an old one she could lend us."

The show proved to be the usual mélange of hoke and bunk and possessed only three outstanding features. Two of them—her eyes—belonged to Ruby Sinclair and the other was a party who billed himself as "Young Cristo, America's Most Promising Welterweight."

"Here's a smile," Scandrel said when the card went up. "Young Cristo, hey? I didn't know Columbus left any relatives in the box-fighting game. Whose shoes has *he* been shining?"

He had hardly finished speaking before Saltus and his brown derby appeared before the footlights. The manager of the show requested and got silence. He then made a long rambling speech to the effect that Young Cristo had never been defeated in the prize ring and that after an exhibition of physical culture he would put on the gloves and box four rounds with any healthy man in the audience. The sum of one hundred dollars was promised if the volunteer could stay the four rounds and fifty dollars for every round thereafter that would find him on his feet at the bell.

"Here's where we get back a little of it!" Scandrel howled, trying to get out of his seat.

It was with the utmost difficulty that I managed to hold him down.

"Just a minute, fathead!" I ordered. "How is that baby going to pay you a hundred berries when you heard him admit he couldn't pay Miss Sinclair the salary he owed her?"

"I'll fight the two of them for nothing!" Ottie yelled, making frantic efforts to free himself.

Fortunately, at the same minute, one of the local yokels beat his companions to the stage by climbing over the orchestra via the shoulders of the drummer. Saltus went through some song and dance of looking him over and let the kid shake his coat and vest. He handed him a pair of gloves and made another long speech.

Exactly ten minutes later Young Cristo had stiffened the pride of Wonderville, wasting merely one punch in the effort!

"Let's go back to the hotel and turn in," Scandrel said, when the last curtain fell. "That Cristo bolognie wasn't so terrible, was he, Joe? Shall we retire or shall we stick around and watch Ruby come out and meet Judge Falkus?"

"That will be fine," I said.

"Then let's beat it in haste," Ottie answered. "I've spent enough money to-day!"

There was no sign of my playmate the following morning when I crept out of the feathers. He wasn't in the dining room but the clerk gave me a pointer and I set out for Buddy Hinkle's garage. There, in front of the entrance, was the Duplex Twelve in which sat Scandrel, Ruby Sinclair and a well-built young gentleman I recognized at once as being no other than Young Cristo himself.

"We was just going to stop off at the hotel for you, Joe," Scandrel chirped. "Ruby and Chris have quit the show cold and I'm rolling them back to mad Manhattan with us. You sit in the back seat and keep Chris company. Hey, gyp," he called out to the mechanic, "where's the change out of that big bill I gave you?"

"I forgot to tell you," Hinkle grinned, "that I had to clean the spark plugs. That makes us even!"

"Adieu!" Ottie growled, stepping on the gas.

Three days later, or Tuesday, Scandrel came up to my Bronx gym. For some time there had been scenes of activity there. Looie Pitz, Ottie's former manager, had picked up a hustling brakeman who was just able to scale down to the welterweight division and who gave the promise of going on to better things. The name of Looie's

soup purchaser was Two Round Mont. Pitz was polishing him up prior to looking around and grabbing off a combat in any of the local fight emporiums that paid the prelim cards more than fifty bills. Personally, I believed that while Two Round Mont wasn't so rotten he wasn't the caliber that would climb to the top of the heap. And he had such a job making his poundage that anything with starch in it would have made him a light-heavyweight.

"Look it, Looie," Scandrel began, when he had lured Pitz into my office. "I'm—now—interested in Young Cristo, a fast welter whom Joe saw perform out in Wonderville. This Cristo fights like a tiger full of hop and carries brutality in every knuckle. He comes from the West and the only thing he knows about New York is never to take out your watch when strangers ask the time. Really, it's remarkable the way Young Cristo can box as well as fight. He's as game as they come and he hates to go to bed at night because it means laying down. He's——"

"Yes, I know," Pitz interrupted coldly. "And he's so rough that every time he puts on a clean collar he tears it to pieces. What's the answer?"

"He's looking for a manager," Ottie yelped. "Here's a chance for you to sign this young man and make yourself financially independent for life. What day can you have a chat with Chris and watch him do his stuff?"

"The day before yesterday! That's over with now," Pitz replied in the same frosty tone. "What do I want with another welter when I've got a boy now I'm going to make a champ out of? Don't be bothering me with all this guff, Ottie. These wild cats from the small-town slabs curl up like lap dogs when they meet a regular box fighter. Don't tell me nothing about them. If you're looking for a manager take him down to the S. P. C. A.!"

"You're cuckoo!" Scandrel hollered. "You're thicker than dumb—throwing away a chance like this. Listen, just to show you what a mistake you're making I'll manage Young Cristo myself, fling him into shape and then challenge *your* sapolio!" He looked at me. "Laugh that off, if you can, fellars! I know the fight game inside out. Take it from me, I'll show you, Pitz!"

"You'll have to," Looie replied with the trace of a smile. "My boy will fight any one from a cake eater to a hairy ape if there's money in it. Come inside and take a look at him."

Two Round Mont had just gotten through tossing a sparring partner around and was about to slip upstairs for a rubdown. He was a big clown with a pan no artist would ever yearn to paint and he featured a jaw on him that was like a brick wall. No fooling, the former brakeman was the clam's camisole when it came to appearance!

"Get back in the ring and step a few frames," Pitz ordered. "This here is Mr. Scandrel who has got a boy your size and weight that might fight you some day. Show him that you're no small-time mockie."

"Do I have to?" Two Round Mont asked. "I don't remember nothing in my contract about performing for strangers. What do you think I am—a trained fox terrier?"

Looie's color was red and then plaid.

"You heard me!" he bellowed. "Slap somebody around or we part company here and now!"

"All right—if you feel that way about it," the other growled, shedding his bathrobe and climbing through the ropes.

One of his partners, a light-heavyweight, was routed out. After the gloves were laced on Looie Pitz pulled out his clock.

"You'd better time him with a calendar," Ottie murmured. "This baby looks to me as if he's built for comfort more than speed. Get them pair of anchors masquerading as feet and look at the legs on him. If my boy couldn't get him on points without even flicking a glove at him Captain Kidd was never on a boat!"

"Be yourself!" Pitz growled. "If you see a chorus girl in the street can you tell if she knows how to dance by the rouge on her face? Two Round is dynamite!"

"All set to blow up?" Ottie replied. "Pardon me while I slip downstairs for a minute. I left my girl friend waiting for me in the boiler. I'll bring her right up. She likes to laugh as well as any one else!"

There was no denying the fair Miss Sinclair looked her best. Among the roughnecks she created no more consternation than a pickpocket in a church. Ottie introduced her around. When Two Round Mont bowed to her from the ring he almost fell over the ropes.

"It's awfully nice of you all to allow me to watch the training. I suppose I have

you to thank for that, Mr. Two Round," Ruby added, staggering Pitz's coming champ with a smile.

" 'At's all right, Cutey," he stammered "I'm here every day. Stop in any time and you'll always be welcome as far as I'm concerned."

He continued to express his gratitude in words until Pitz ordered him to get busy.

It might have been Ruby Sinclair's presence and it might not have been but the fact remained that Two Round Mont's exhibition caused Scandrel to frown thoughtfully. The brakeman was a rough-and-tumble fighter of the same school Young Cristo had attended. His sparring partner was anything but a push-over yet he was excelsior with Two Round that had met its match. Two Round Mont burned him up in the first few minutes with every variety of punch known to the trade. He slugged him and jabbed him and displayed the knowledge that while he didn't know anything more about boxing than a deaf mute does about singing it would have been a clever boxer indeed who could have weathered the extreme ferocity of his tearing-in tactics.

Don't laugh, the only thing he didn't hit the light-heavy with was one of the ring posts and a board out of the floor! And as a demitasse for the set-to he caught Pitz's nod and slapped his sparring partner across the chin, dropping him on the spot like a four-ton bag of sand.

"Terrible, eh?" Looie said, turning to Scandrel.

Ottie shrugged.

"They all show up great in the gym. However, we'll get together on a scuffle one of these fine days. You'll pardon us if we leave, won't you? If Ziegfeld is in I want to introduce Ruby to him. Yes, she's going in the 'Follies.' "

"For a fact?" Two Round Mont cut in, putting on his bath robe. "I had an idea she was there already."

"What an extremely nice compliment," Miss Sinclair said, handing the battler another dizzy smile. "You must come and see me no matter what show I land in, Mr. Two Round——"

"Call me Artie," Mont begged. "Will I come and see you? Do they keep goldfish in bowls?"

To Scandrel this conversation was as interesting as a telegraphic request for money.

"Come on, baby," he grunted. "Let's step!"

He and Eve's double vanished. Two Round Mont snapped out of it with a shake of his head.

"What a gal that is, to be sure! And yet I heard a guy yesterday saying matrimony and owning a flivver were the same thing!"

"Act natural!" Looie Pitz commanded. "Your business in life is to fight for money —not for nothing! Upstairs and get the idea of that moll out of your nut. She ain't bothering with you."

"Don't be too sure of that," was the answer.

Shortly after that Ottie rented a camp at Mount Vernon and began to condition Young Cristo. For all the four-round exhibitions the young man had engaged in while with the burlesque show, he was soft and needed a general overhauling and tightening up. I saw him twice during the course of the next month with Ruby Sinclair. Once he was crossing Times Square, as pleased as Paris was with Helen of Troy and once I flashed him on the avenue, looking in a millinery-store window, Miss Sinclair beside him.

Before the end of another two weeks Young Cristo had created quite a stir in a Brooklyn fight factory. Going on in a prelim he had flattened his adversary with exactly one punch. Precisely three evenings later Two Round Mont created a similar sensation at a Harlem fight club. Opening the card with a six-round fracas he turned the fans inside out by knocking *his* opponent over the top rope and down among the press representatives before the echoes of the gong had faded. After that each won his next three battles in one round by clean K. O.'s and the sport scribes not only began to sit up and take notice but cried loudly for an encounter between them. This, naturally, was consommé for Ottie.

Hurled out in a neat but noisy one-button green-serge suit and with plaid spats over a pair of pups that made electric light look dim, Scandrel breezed into the gym one morning with the enticing Miss Sinclair in tow and cornered Looie Pitz.

"Well, how about it now?" he grinned after the Sultan's favorite had found a chair. "C'mon, chirp, Pitz. I can get the final bout at the East New York Club a week from Thursday night for our pushers. It's

a ten-round affair with a guarantee as a tag line. Do you want Two Round to meet my boy or have we got you petrified?"

Pitz curled a lip.

"Get away with that stuff! The only thing I'm frightened of is being pinched for assisting at a murder! I'm no more afraid of Young Cristo than Shakespeare was of ink!"

"Then you'll fight?" Scandrel bawled.

"With anything from battle-axes to six-shooters!" Pitz made haste to reply. "What's the matter with talking money here and now?"

"Not a thing," Ottie said, "only I and Ruby have got a date for tea and after that I want to take her into the Shubert office and introduce her to one of the brothers. I have hopes of placing her in the Winter Garden."

"I have the same hopes," Miss Sinclair put in.

He and Looie fixed up a date to talk business and Ottie exited with a smirk and the beautiful blonde. We watched him from the window and saw him hand Miss Sinclair into the Duplex with a courtesy the films had little on.

"The conceited ignoramus!" Pitz snarled. "Look at the airs of him. To watch him you might think he had water on the knee from the way he's continually bowing. Here's a funny one, O'Grady. Don't tell Scandrel, but Two Round has been out with that skirt of his twice—the first time he took her up to one of the Post Road inns and the night before last he was shaking a brogan with her down at one of the Forty-second Street dance mills!"

A couple of days after the bout at the East New York Club had been arranged to every one's satisfaction I ran into Two Round Mont and Ruby Sinclair in the lobby of one of the most expensive hotels on Bunk Boulevard. Ruby made believe she didn't see me. Two Round Mont was so taken up with her that he didn't have eyes for anybody else. I let the chance encounter ride until I met Scandrel again and happened to mention the ex-burlesque sensation.

"Isn't she on your list of friends?" I inquired after Ottie had said something about not having seen Ruby of late.

"Her?" he replied. "Say, what a sucker Adam was giving away a rib. There's not a dame in the world worth one bone to my way of thinking. Tie this if you can. The other night I was getting out of the subway at Simpson Street and one of these big black-and-yellow clock arks stopped at the steps and who gets out of it but Ruby and that brakeman of Looie's. I ain't seen Miss Sinclair since although I've got a date with her for to-night. I'm thinking of keeping it—just to bawl her out!"

"Who do you care who she goes with—you're not engaged?" I said.

Scandrel shrugged carelessly.

"I don't mind if she runs around with Chris because she knew *him* before I met her in Wonderville. But this Two Round mock orange come *after* me and if I had a telescope I couldn't find out what she sees in him. Wait a while longer," he chuckled. "What a pasting Chris is going to hand him over in Williamsburg! And what a disappointment Looie is in for. For a fact, I'll have him selling pencils in the street yet for a living!"

When it had been definitely decided Young Cristo and Two Round Mont were to meet in the main bout at the East New York Club the papers began to ladle out columns of free advertising. The fact that both boys were rough and tough and had settled their own private quarrels by minutes instead of rounds and without the waste of any lost motion created more interest than a bank. As the time drew near for the scuffle they were equal favorites in the Broadway books with perhaps somebody willing to shade the odds a trifle on Scandrel's bread ticket simply because Young Cristo *looked* worse than Two Round!

That's how evenly matched they were.

On the afternoon of the fight I flivvered up to Mount Vernon and paid Ottie a little social call. Scandrel was in the gym watching a crap game while Young Cristo was drying out. He was as excited as a prima donna with her first bouquet.

"How's the cash register?" I asked.

"Ready to ring up the nickels!" he declared. "I met Looie last night and I got him so worried that he don't know where he gets off at, no fooling. Send in the family jewels on my boy and you'll be wearing ermine for the rest of your life. If he was a tiger in the ring before he's the whole zoo now! The bout is to go ten rounds—on paper. If it lasts three I'll be overcome with astonishment. Edison couldn't invent anything to keep Chris using that deadly right of his. He's bichloride in large doses.

If I don't send him through to a champeenship I'll lack brains. Stick around, Joe, and I'll snap you over to the battlefield in the Duplex. I had a couple of new axles put in and all the plumbing overhauled. She's running now like a watch in a gold case."

"Is Miss Sinclair to be one of your guests?" I queried.

Scandrel gave me a look sharp enough to shave with.

"To tell the truth," he said, "Ruby is a little piqued with me because I had a date with George Cohan for lunch, to chew the rag about getting her into one of his shows and I didn't keep it and so she's a little peeved. Ain't that a woman all over—expecting you to build them a theayter while they're putting on their make-up? Sherman was right!"

When we reached Williamsburg we found the reserves were out to handle the crowds that were pouring into the fight club. With the greatest of difficulty we managed to obtain admittance to the building where the prelims were already on.

"How do you feel now, Chris?" Ottie asked anxiously.

Young Cristo laughed.

"Like a duck taking its first swim! I'll crack this flush in the ring for real money and out in the alley afterward for nothing. If he can stay longer than one frame with me it will be because *both* my arms are broke!"

After he had gotten into his white trunks and gym shoes I slipped down the corridor and looked in on Looie Pitz and Two Round Mont. The latter had the rubbers working on him and featured one of his usual crooked grins.

"How does it look?" I asked Pitz.

Instead of meeting my eyes he stared across my shoulder.

"Well," he replied with a shrug, "all I can say is that if Two Round don't slap him out with one punch it'll be on account of the lights bothering his eyes or something. He's just foaming to go! The manager of this club ought to have charged a hundred bills a throw here for a chair tonight. Honest, Rome at the top of its fame will look like a kindergarten after the brutality upstairs to-night!"

Young Cristo entered the ring first. He rubbed his shoes in the resin box and went to his corner with his handlers and seconds. Two Round Mont followed directly and got an ovation about the same size as the one his opponent had received. He sneered in Ottie's face when Scandrel went over and examined his bandages, shoved a rubber tooth protector in his mouth and looked the house over with a scowl. He didn't move his eyes until the bell rang a dozen times and an announcer began to spill his usual spiel.

Oh, the ex-brakeman was really ice and iron!

While the referee was giving both boys instructions I looked at my neighbors with some interest. The very next minute I observed the fair Ruby Sinclair sitting pretty in the first row of seats back of the boxes. She was looking up at the ring as if she had never seen one before and was being stared at by a few thousand of those present who probably had figured they could see a prize fight most any night. Ruby was upholstered in green silk and looked a half a dozen more times as fascinating as usual.

Really, Anthony would have had quite a task picking between Ruby and Cleo in those days before the Nile came into style again!

Two minutes later the ring was cleared, the bell clanged and the bout was on.

Young Cristo immediately led with a right to the jaw. It encountered nothing but leather and he fell back as Two Round Mont, blocking the blow, uppercut savagely and jabbed with his left. He got a couple of leads through to the body which Young Cristo took with a change of expression. It was a cinch for any one to see they had hurt. Young Cristo covered up and fell into a clinch, the crowd howling for a knockdown. The referee tore them apart and just missed a poke in the pan for his trouble. Rushing in, Two Round Mont slashed over a right hook that missed but he registered with his left again and knocked the other to his knees. It began to look like glory for the Bronx, the only thing out of place being Looie Pitz's expression.

Looie seemed as pleased with the proceedings as a party whose house had just been struck by lightning!

To confusion that made any boiler factory quiet Young Cristo got to his feet again and came back with a right swing to the button that dropped the brakeman for the count of seven.

"Go out and take him!" Scandrel bellowed.

Telling Young Cristo to go out and take him was similar to advising a sailor marooned on a raft in mid-ocean to dive in and swim for the shore. Two Round Mont came up like a cork, blocked a terrific right to the head and slid the old left across again. It was purely a luck punch but it slowed Young Cristo up and gave Two Round a chance to get over his first grogginess. Both clinched and then went to it, slugging each other like a couple of steam drills. For a fact, Bunker Hill, Gettysburg and the Argonne Forest had never seen as much action. They tore each other to pieces while the crowd went hysterical and Scandrel, cuckoo, was fighting three of the press representatives under his boy's corner!

The end came as suddenly as might have been expected. Reeling across the ring, Young Cristo spun around and fell on Two Round with the last couple of blows he had in stock. At the precise same instant the bearcat brakeman hooked over his wicked left. Both punches rang the bell, having behind them all the steam each was capable of delivering. The sound of the double sock must have been heard as far south as Miami!

Two Round Mont collapsed as if he had been shot through the heart. He did a nose dive to the canvas. The referee had clicked off "two" when Young Cristo who had been swaying like a leaf in a gale threw up his hands and hit the floor—*out himself like a light!*

When I was able to get through the crowd and work my way around and into Two Round Mont's quarters, I found that party had not only come out of his trance but had another battle on his hands—this time with no one else but Looie Pitz, himself.

"I ought to have left you on the freight!" the manager was moaning. "Why didn't you follow out your instructions and do what I told you? You go cuckoo and I'm out the sure winnings of twenty-two hundred dollars! I ought to have you pinched!"

"Don't be like that," the battler mumbled. "Manager or no manager I'll have to give you a good lacing myself if you pan me. If you want to know why I didn't write your ticket it's because Ruby—Miss Sinclair—told me she would never listen to any proposal of marriage from me unless I flattened Young Cristo! What a sucker I'd be to throw away a chance like that!"

"Marriage?" Pitz screamed. "You big mockie, that gal was using you for a come-on! Ain't you got enough brains to see that?"

I left them both with their argument and looked up Ottie Scandrel. I discovered him coming out of his boy's boudoir, grinning like a cat that had discovered a new mouse hole.

"Really, O'Grady," he chuckled, "this evening has been exceptionally comical. Listen to this and help me laugh. The other night Two Round Mont had dinner with Ruby and happened to mention the fact that Pitz had set him for a flop. Looie sent in a couple of thousand dollars on Young Cristo to win by a knock-out, figuring he might as well grab off a little extra sugar. Well, when Ruby told *me* what Two Round Mont had told *her* I give her a few instructions of my own. I don't know what she said to Two Round to make him change his mind but I do know her and I made believe we were slightly on the outs so he wouldn't get suspicious. Ain't we got fun? To-night's bout is out. We'll get another fight in the near future and to-morrow I'll have a little chat with Pitz and just give him a nudge on *who* spilled his beans. Now, pardon me if I tear away. I got a very important date."

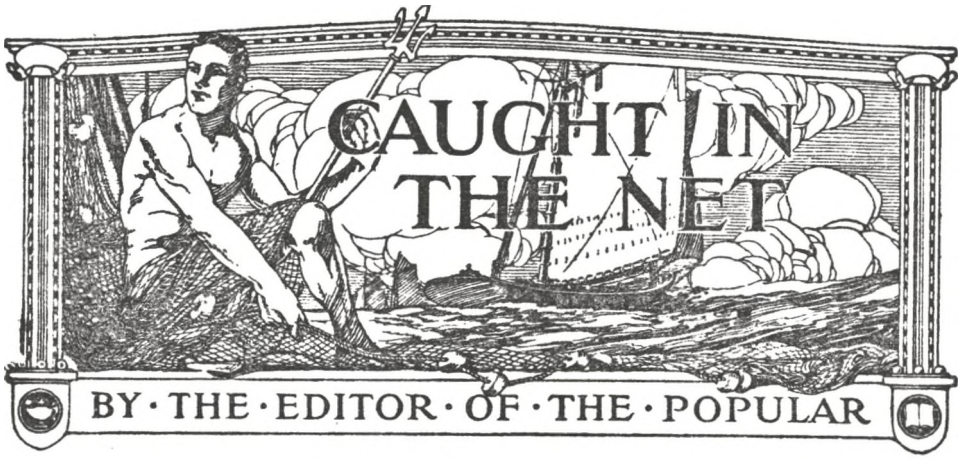
"Let it ride and I'll buy you the best supper seventy-five cents can purchase," I said.

Scandrel gave his watch a tumble and grinned.

"Not a chance in the world! I'm rolling Ruby over to one of them classy kafes along Longacre. May be I'll run into Klaw or Erlanger there and fix her up with an introduction so she can get a job. Sweet, hey? Well, one good turn deserves another—as the party with the corkscrew was heard to remark."

Behave yourself!

Another story by Mr. Montanye, "Page Mr. Scandrel," in the next issue.



A WORTH-WHILE GAME

THE crowds of tennis lovers—most of them players themselves—who will gather in the new tennis stadium at Forest Hills, Long Island, within the next two weeks to watch the final battles for another year's possession of the Davis Cup will be a fair indication of the widespread interest in this fine game. The new concrete bowl has a capacity of thirteen thousand and it is unlikely that there will be a single seat unsold when the umpire mounts his tall chair for the first match. This trophy of the team championship of the world has been played for seventeen times since it was offered by Dwight F. Davis—now our assistant secretary of war—in 1900. The British Isles have won it five times; Australasia and the United States six times each. Of course the spectators at this year's matches will be keenly anxious to see the American team retain the cup, but good shots made by the challengers will win unstinted applause and if their skill brings them victory they wil take with them across the seas not only the big silver bowl, but the hearty congratulations of American players and followers of the sport. For that is the sort of game tennis is; the game is the thing, and winning a secondary consideration.

To us it seems one of the most worth while of all games, and one that should receive more attention from the athletic authorities of our schools and colleges. Football, baseball, track athletics, rowing—fine sports all, but sports that unfortunately few men are able to keep up after they become active in the work of the world. Having played on a school or college football team is a pleasant thing to look back on; but the man who learned to play tennis at school need not look back on it—he can look forward to playing again on his next half holiday. Like golf, tennis can be played with pleasure and benefit from boyhood to well past middle age—and that is the real test of a sport's value.

THE NEED OF AIR LAWS

FIGURES recently furnished the secretary of commerce by the Aëronautical Chamber of Commerce of America strikingly bear out the contention of leading exponents of aëronautical expansion that the hazard of flight to-day is very much overestimated and that the airplane is a comparatively secure mode of transportation when operated under proper conditions. If accidents continue to frighten the public away from the proposition of travel by the air it is not the fault of the airplane but of the circumstances under which the airplane is flown, very largely.

Last year approximately fifty per cent of the twelve hundred civilian aircraft operated in this country were managed by reputably established individuals or organizations with fixed bases and sound business policies. The remaining six hun-

dred craft were flown by itinerant pilots, "barnstormers," who moved from point to point, as opportunity afforded, and who were not in the least concerned with the building up of a reputation for reliability.

During the year one hundred and thirty-four accidents to civilian aircraft were reported. Of these only twelve stand against the score of the established aërial-transport concerns. The grand total of one hundred and twenty-two accidents lies to the discredit of the haphazard flyers. And the discrepancy is easily accounted for. On the one hand is a group of business men, with reputation at stake, using only airworthy, serviceable equipment and employing a staff of expert pilots and engineers. On the other hand is a rabble of careless individuals, living day by day from hand to mouth, operating equipment frequently obsolete and poorly serviced, slighting inspection and repairs, cutting down expenses at the cost of security, and concerned with nothing more remote than the day's cash receipts. The results tell the story; seven deaths and seven injuries to the score of responsible organized aviation—sixty-two deaths and a round hundred injuries to the record of irresponsible itinerant flight!

But the public, unfortunately, does not distinguish. An airplane is an airplane to the layman. One accident, regardless of the attendant circumstances, gives the entire proposition of flight a bad name.

It is a reproach to the competent authorities at Washington that nothing has been done to regulate the conditions under which airplanes may be flown. A man may not drive an automobile on a country road without a license. But he can operate an aërial conveyance for commercial gain without the suspicion of an official credential. If our railways and our steamboat lines were operated with the same disregard of all the dictates of common sense and prudence the country would be in arms.

The reputation of a business or a profession is often measured by the record of its worst exponents. Just now the reputation of aviation is in a very parlous state. And little wonder. It will go on from bad to worse until Federal intervention in the form of stringent laws and regulations comes to protect the profession of flight from the irresponsible activities of criminally careless and incompetent individuals.

THE ENIGMA OF CONSCIOUSNESS

UNENLIGHTENED man endowed trees and streams, winds and rocks, and inanimate things in general with personality and consciousness. Poets and mystics have maintained the possibility of this animism but the practical people of the world have always pooh-poohed it.

Up to recent years science has supported the hard-headed majority and therefore it is something of a shock to find mathematicians and physicists of to-day admitting that matter and energy, for all their formulæ and analysis, are still profound mysteries, and that consciousness, ever changing, may be of infinite degree and kind. In a word, we are in the midst of a vast multitude of universes, beginning with the invisible electron and working up to solar systems of incommensurable scope, with a variety of intelligences possible to the magnificent scheme.

Tackling the greatest concepts of consciousness, is it not almost beyond our grasp that such positive ingredients of our life as time and space and motion are merely figments of our imagination? They are only fixed ideas of our developing consciousness. Both Einstein and Buddha agree on this astounding fact, though by entirely different processes of thought and by altogether different language and symbol. Thus mathematician and mystic may be said to meet on common ground!

Our five senses, marvelous as they are in their interpretation of everything for us, really delude us in regard to the Eternal Verities, or at least they are not adapted to cope with their unknowable elements. So our sensory organs hoodwink us, or, better still, erect hypotheses in their own defense.

But the inner mystery called consciousness changes and expands with increase

of knowledge and intelligence. Brilliant geniuses that they were, can you conceive Aristotle or Bacon comprehending the ordinary fact of the present time that we can see, hear and speak for thousands of miles?

The riddle of consciousness is brought closer to us when we consider other forms of contemporary life. To a snail, for instance, climbing over the surface of an apple, the spheroid fruit is an endless straight line. And to a dog, running past a table, its changing angles are its motion. This may appear absurd to us, until we remember that men once thought the world was flat and proved it, and that the sun moved from east to west.

Snails and many other creatures live in a world of one dimension, dogs and kindred animals live in a world of two dimensions, men are now living in a world of three dimensions, but we are assured that we are on our way to a world of four. Expanding consciousness will take it in, and *time,* we are told, will doubtless be the fourth, an inconceivable solid!

LIFE AT A PIN'S FEE

HOW much is your body worth to you? Perhaps you have never thought of it. Not so long ago, a man sold his left ear for two thousand dollars, and it was grafted onto another head. Occasionally, we come across some case, reported in the newspaper, where a crippled person is awarded a small fortune for loss of limbs or eyes. And, to the majority of us, no amount seems too much for the destruction of bodily members.

But should a man be permitted to risk his life in doing hazardous stunts for publicity purposes or the titillation of jaded nerves? This question came up recently, when one of the "human flies," scaling one of the high buildings in the metropolis, fell and was killed while watched by a crowd of curious persons.

After the thrill of horror was over, the inevitable American question was asked: "How much did he get for his risky work?" The wage was trifling compared with the danger involved.

"Let me tell you what I was offered for a dizzy stunt recently," said a stunt artist to us when we expressed incredulity concerning the small pay of the human fly.

"A feller wanted to stir up excitement around his store," continued our companion. "He runs a big department store. 'Do a few tricks for me,' he says. 'All right, whadda you want?' I says. Now, I've done lots of dare-devil stuff in reg'lar shows and in outdoor places, but this bird had some program for me.

"First of all, he was goin' to open the act by having me pretend to fall outa the winder of the sixth story, then climb to the roof. After that I was to walk on me hands along the eight-inch curbing of the roof—balancin' on me hands is my specialty, you see. As a grand-stand finish I was to shinny up the flagpole and stand on me hands on the top of it. I had done stunts like this, but the flagpole had a fixture on the top so's I could get a grip. This bird wanted me to balance just on the ball of his. I mighta tried it, too, but guess what he wanted to give me for all this?"

Of course we could not estimate, and shook our head.

"Seventy-five dollars!" exclaimed the dare-devil with a wry grin. "And it was to be a credit slip on the store at that!"

WHAT IS ENGLISH?

A RECENT flurry in the schools of New York City suggests the inquiry. "Unless insistence on correct speech is constant," writes a high New York educational official, "pupils will not improve but will relapse. There is so much defective speech and foreign accent that pupils and teachers become accustomed to it, are unconscious of it, and bad habits go uncorrected."

This is not nearly as alarming as it is interesting. What, after all, is the language of America? Is it English, any more, or is it indeed, as certain purists have

been warning us, a kind of a mongrel tongue, an intermediate dialect, branching farther and farther from the seasoned root that flourishes in the textbooks? Already Englishmen have worn threadbare the hoary wheeze about speaking English fluently and understanding American with difficulty. Half a century ago the witticism, if it then existed, was of questionable flavor. But to-day there seems to be a great deal of foundation in fact for the suggestion that the language spoken by Americans has acquired distinct national characteristics.

They are not alone, as in the past, characteristics of accent and inflection. They are grammatical characteristics as well. In sections where populations of European blood predominate there are thousands of native-born Americans, unable to speak the tongues of the countries of their forefathers, who still have adapted foreign words and alien locutions to the English root and produced dialects in current use which are understandable only with difficulty by their countrymen from other sections.

Consider the effect upon the hopeful young aspirant for the presidency of the United States who, being called in from play by his naturalized parent, is handed a copy of the First Reader and admonished, "Go right away upstairs; your English lesson you should be studying!" And consider further the effect upon the speech of the country at large when hundreds of thousands of such young hopefuls grow to manhood and womanhood and scatter to the four winds of the Western Hemisphere, taking along with them the influence of a culture medium which has taught them that language is not an exact science but a transitory device for the transmission of thoughts and desires. They may not retain the precise accent and locutions that went with their early training but they certainly will not hesitate to twist the established rules of grammar, rhetoric, accent and inflection to suit their whim. They will be able to say intelligibly whatever they want to say, but they will say it their own way, not the Oxford way.

And occasionally they will manage to express a thought in a peculiarly striking and precise manner not approved by the textbooks. The happy "Americanese" will be overheard, perhaps, by a neighbor, who in turn will find occasion to employ it. Other neighbors will be struck with its vocal virtue. They will adopt it. And within a short space it becomes a locution.

Nobody knows who the poetic soul was whose observant brain first translated the falling of the autumn leaves into a name for a season of the year and spoke of the coming of "fall." Englishmen know no such term for autumn. But the word in that application has become the best of good usage in America. It is not English. It is American.

There is little reason for the calamitous moaning of the purists over the trend of language in America. The Americans are only doing to English what the Norman-French did to Anglo-Saxon. They are grafting bits of alien tongues onto a domestic root and, it is to be hoped, enriching and amplifying the language in the process.

POPULAR TOPICS

AMERICANS ate almost 691,000 carloads of vegetables and fruits last year, an increase of 92,000 carloads over 1921. Most of this transportation was needed for carrying white potatoes from where they were grown to where they were eaten, 240,000 carloads being transported. Apples were next on the list with 93,000 carloads, and other heavy shipments were of grapes, watermelons, cabbages and peaches.

THIS doesn't mean that we have ceased to be a nation of meat eaters. Sixteen and a quarter billion pounds of meat were consumed—more than ever before. This is a per capita average of 149.7 pounds, an increase of six pounds over the preceding year. Mr. Average Citizen ate his weight in meat and pork was his favorite, the per capita consumption being 76 pounds. Then came beef, 61.4 pounds;

veal, 7.3 pounds; and lamb and mutton, 5 pounds. As meat prices were high this increased consumption seems to show a generally prosperous condition throughout the nation.

THIS indication of prosperity made us feel good, but it wasn't so pleasant to read the department of labor's announcement that when the census was taken in 1920 there were over a million children between the ages of ten and fifteen years working in the United States—378,000 of them being less than 14 years old. As the census was taken at a time of industrial depression there probably are many more child workers at present. Of course many rule-proving exceptions started work at an early age and became successful despite that handicap, but extensive child labor is good for neither the individual nor the country.

JOHN BARLEYCORN has been on the receiving end of a good many hard jolts these last few years, but he has lots of friends in the Whitechapel district of London. At a recent election there 14,726 votes were cast. The dry candidate received 130 of them.

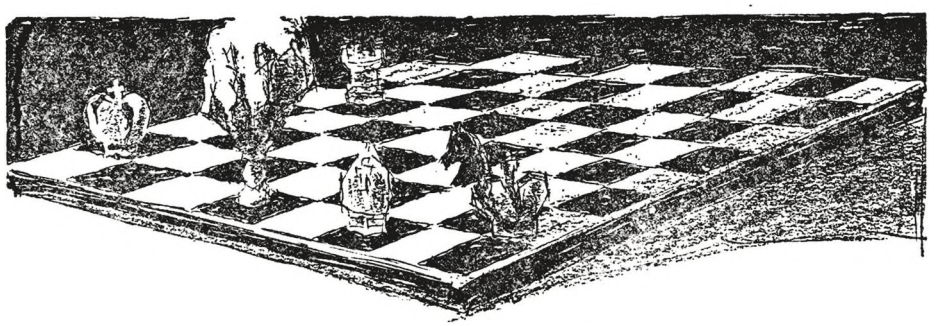
PERHAPS these Londoners had heard that last year it cost the United States government almost fifteen and one-half million dollars to try to enforce the prohibition law and to bring people who had fractured it to trial. Forty-four per cent of the time of our Federal attorneys was taken up by liquor cases.

WOMEN employees of the German postal system are much sought after these days. They are being deluged with offers of marriage. A pleasant feature is that the older they are the more offers they receive. The reason? The government has offered to provide dowries for them—the amount to be equal to a month's salary for every year of service. As a general thing the older women have been in the service longer than the younger ones—hence their greater popularity with wife seekers.

IN England they manage it even better. If a bachelor workman who is receiving an unemployment dole from the government gets married the dole is increased. Then if Friend Wife can be induced to go out to work all is lovely—for the husband.

EDUCATION in Sweden is going downhill—during the winter months at least. Courses in skiing are provided in the public schools and skis provided for children too poor to buy their own. From thirty to forty hours of instruction are given during the skiing season and the innovation has proved its value both in bettered health and better classroom performances.

LORD CARNARVON estimated that the treasures buried with King Tut-ankh-amen are worth fifteen million dollars. Doctor John Rogers Musselman, assistant professor of mathematics at Johns Hopkins University, says that if this sum had been invested at six per cent and the interest compounded the Tut-ankh-amen estate now would be worth a sum expressed by the figures $14,288, followed by eighty-four naughts. The dictionary makers haven't gotten around to giving a name to this much money. Another Baltimore mathematical fan says that Doctor Musselman is all wrong; that the sum would be $4,800, followed by eighty-seven naughts. If any reader would like a pleasant evening's entertainment he might figure out just what this would amount to in German marks.



A Queened Pawn

By J. H. Greene

Author of "Indian Nerve," "A Dead Reckoning," Etc.

In life as in chess, even a pawn can be queened.

CRAVEN, United States consular agent at Santo Marco, faced his usual hot, languid, empty day. To keep mentally and physically sanitated from the moldering dry rot of that coast he magnified his duties, made it a patriotic performance to order his files, to sharpen his pencils, to oil his typewriter, which in that latitude rusted as easily as do men.

He lived on the edge of an adobe town, cut off from the mainland by mosquito-infested, alligator-swarming swamps. In front of his residence was the sea, but a sea as indolent as the land, subdued to the climate, fretted only by the eddies of distant tornadoes and spent northers.

The high sun brought the slack hours of the siesta. Craven had never taken easily to the siesta habit, not even with liquor to induce the need. He looked seaward. There was no distant smoke, no sail, not even a native fisherman's log pirogue to bring interest from the waters. He remembered the complaints that the fishing was failing. Even the fish were abandoning Santo Marco. The town was asleep, drugged with too-brilliant a daylight. The very waters below the wharf dragged like molasses.

So Craven got down his chessboard and its men. He had revived his juvenile interest in the game and when he had no partners he tried the problems in old papers. At other hours he could count on either Alvarez or Elwynn, but the two had been making nights of it since Alvarez had come from the capital. Their siesta would be prolonged and dangerous to disturb.

So Craven tackled a three-move problem he had never been able to solve, and was setting up his men on the red and black squares when an intruding shadow cut off the glare from the sea. The visitor was Elwynn, the only American in the town beside Craven, a disreputable, a down-and-out, a man the coast had a strangle hold on —but a chess player.

"Hello, Bob," said Craven. "Just in time. How about a game?"

"To hell with your chess! Take those white and black horrors away. Alvarez brought down a new dancer and she wore a riboza with a chessboard pattern, red and black squares like that. Gave me the geometrical jimjams. Squares—I see squares everywhere."

The pulque-besotted Elywnn still retained a precision in his diction; there was distinction in his dirt that even jail could not make look like a native's, but he brutally swept the board and underneath his raw-hide boots he tried to trample the pieces—kings, queens. knights, rooks, bishops, pawns into splinters.

Curbing his anger, Craven tried to rescue the little wooden companions of his exile, for hot words might undo all his efforts with Elwynn.

A part of Craven's duties was the helping of wrecked sailors, stranded hunters, and prospectors from the interior, robbed and

nearly murdered travelers—anybody who could claim consular passage or human service, anybody who wanted to get back home, or back to themselves. The little agent took a delight in these salvagings and none had appealed to him so deeply as Elwynn.

He knew this much of the man; that Elwynn was in wrong at home, for something to do with radicalism and sedition; that he was some kind of writer who at rare intervals asked for checks to be cashed on magazines forbidden to the mails. But Elwynn was a wonderful chess player, a genius when the aguardiente stimulated instead of soddened, a master at all times. He had played Craven and Alvarez together, himself blindfold, not needing to recall a move nor to take a peep at the boards. Elwynn was worth putting on his feet.

The good temper of the agent, in a land where trifles lead to homicide, affected Elwynn.

"Excuse my disorderly reflexes, Craven," he said. "If I had done that to Alvarez he would have knifed me. But those green and gold squares won't let me sleep. Craven, I can't sleep night or day. In Santo Marco and not able to sleep, eternally conscious, not able to forget——"

His voice rose to a mournful wail, his eyes were haunted hollows of misery.

"Hope I didn't smash your men, though. Yes, I've decapitated your white queen."

He clumsily tried to mend the piece.

"Sorry, your majesty. A spasm of my original sin. I had to put my heel on you, but you can still sweep the board. Back on your green and gold, Queenie—back on your red and black."

He maundered as he fumbled with the queen—a cheaply manufactured effigy—half tenderly, half ferociously, blearing at it as a savage at an idol.

Craven was familiar with delirium and despair, for the jungle beyond the town vomited malarial and sun-smitten men eaten by ants and mosquitoes, disappointed treasure seekers who had come to gut a continent, whom the continent flung back, voiding the ghosts of their dreams around the dance halls. As a rule Craven let these ghosts lie; few men have strength enough to wrestle with their pasts; repentance and remorse are not for the weakly. But Elwynn somehow, despite his degradation, seemed to belong to the strong. A man who can name the knight's moves, without looking at the board, covering every square once and once only, was worth more than good advice and mere charity.

"What are you talking about, Bob," said Craven, "with your green and gold squares? Those squares are red and black. You're seeing complementary colors from looking too long at that dancer. See here, I'll give you one small drink, with a bracer, if you will sit down to a game."

Craven broke his country's laws by keeping liquor in that house that was technically his country's territory. He had no right to dispense it, but laws and rights ignore exceptions, and every man in his deepest need is an exception. So he gave Elwynn a small glass, supplemented by a few drops of nux vomica. Elwynn swallowed the drink, ignoring the bitterness of the medicine.

"Now set up the men," said Craven. "I'll play white. I'll need the advantage of first move.

Elwynn still fumbled with the white queen, seeming loath to let her go to Craven's side.

"Back, little girl, where you belong on your gold. I won't wring your neck this time. Sweep the board, Queenie, take my bishops and my knights, eat up my pawns, check me, you little cat, check me."

"Fool's mate," cried Craven, for Elwynn had left his center open, had neglected to cover, and had allowed himself to be trapped in that mate of beginners.

"Fool's mate, eh, Craven? Good for you. Fool's mate! You've done it again, Queenie. Give me another drink, Craven."

"Not another drop till to-morrow. You're not playing up to your standard. Your brain is going, raving about greens and golds. Come, take a round turn on yourself, man. If I had your brain I would be ambassador at St. James' and you're wasting yours in on dancing girls, getting deeper and deeper in the mud——"

"You need not concern yourself about my brain, Craven," growled Elwynn. "I lost that game on purpose. I wanted her to win. I was looking for that fool's mate. Give me another drink and I will give you a bishop and mate you in fifteen moves."

Craven refused another however, fearing the returning vigor was delirium.

"Very well, sir," said Elwynn, rising steadily. "I thank you for the one and the fool's mate. Good day, sir."

"Where are you going?"

"To the sharks—to the alligators. I prefer the sea, but as you said, rightly, I belong to the mud. Don't try to stop me, don't argue, don't make me doubt. Can't you see that it is doubt that has brought me here? Let me act for once on a conviction, even if it comes from alcohol and an alkaloid. I belong in an alligator's belly."

It was delirium of the worst kind, but the strength of it did not seem to reach to Elwynn's muscles and the well-conditioned consul was able to force Elwynn back into the creaking chair. It was not the first time that Elwynn had talked of suicide, though never before with such passion. The muscular defeat only intensified Elwynn's self-scorn; he babbled, he whined, he implored, he prayed, for more drink or the liberty to jump in the swamps.

"It's no use, Craven. I'm done. I'm off the board. Let me make the only decent move left, while my brain lasts. I don't want to wait for paresis and have it an accident. Let me do it myself, on purpose, while I am a self. I started this suicide years ago. Let me finish it."

The struggle and the argument were interrupted. Alvarez, the mongrel magistrate, appeared announcing a yacht coming into the bay. He also gave Craven a packet of American papers that he had brought from the capital.

Elwynn immediately grew quiet, and Craven went out to look at the yacht and to see if there was enough wind to blow out the flag. The yacht steamed in over the light-streaked sea, every line of her, every turn in her course, even her ripples were United States. There was not a loose rope's end on her, not a rust stain on her paint. She hailed from the orderly ports of the North and was a floating reproach to sottish, somnolent Santo Marco.

But Craven heard something tear inside the office, and then what sounded like a gasp. He had left Elwynn in his despondency alone with trophies of native weapons, a revolver in the drawer, and enough strychnine to poison a dozen. But Elwynn was erect, alert, keenly interested in the yacht that he was looking at through the consul's binoculars.

"I took the liberty of removing the wrappers off those papers. May I borrow one?" he said.

Craven gladly offered the lot; he had tried to get Elwynn to read from his scant store of books. Elwynn had only scoffed at the consul's taste in literature. But Craven had seen more than one disreputable turned round by a home paper and Elwynn was certainly more collected than he had been a few moments earlier. His slouch was gone, his knees were straight, and he folded away the gaudy Sunday supplement with the same steady fingers that moved his chess men when he played to win.

"I owe you an apology, Craven, for running off the rails just now. It wasn't liquor or the climate. It was memory. They used to call me 'Memory' Elwynn. A game of chess I once played and on green and gold squares——"

The rattle of the yacht's anchor chain brought him to the door and he spoke rapidly as if anxious to get his explanation over, to prove his sanity to Craven.

"A game we played at college on the campus. Open-air chess with human pieces, green grass for the black squares, the light squares cut sod of spring dandelions. It was my idea—I had an æsthetic sense once. But I lost the game, lost Queenie, lost myself——"

"How?" ventured Craven. But the question was a tactical error. Damned souls burning to unburden themselves must not be prompted. Elwynn was recalled from his green-and-gold lawns to his bitter present.

"On purpose," he cried belligerently. "It was the only way I could lose. I was a champion, but a bit of a girl, a coed in my classes who was the white queen, checked me, put me off the board, put me on the chute that ends here in Santo Marco. You see I taught philosophy, but I could not teach her. She was clever enough to get by her quizzes but when I asked her to marry me this little bit of hard-shell Connecticut lectured me, preached to me, told me I was sunk in the mud of materialism, that a proposal from me was an inconsistency and an insult. So I lost her. I sacrificed her. I wanted her off the board. I gave up the pretty little moralizer to a black pawn. On purpose, Craven, with full malice, because I wanted to lose. It was chess suicide. I could have won, but I lost on purpose."

There was no want of energy in Elwynn now, the energy of defiance, the consistency of the wrong head.

"And I am going to keep on losing. Damn

your reform, your uplift! I am happy. I am a success! I have attained the end of all philosophy. I am Diogenes on his ash heap about to interview an Alexander of dollars—Mr. Stanley Hawes of Standard Oil."

He pointed a yellow, cigarette-stained finger to the end of the wharf, where Alvarez, surrounded by the beggars and sweets sellers, was reaching out a hand to a rather stout but active man to climb up the ladderless wharf. The new arrival radiated wealth from his shoes to his stick pin, but was calm to the effusive welcome of Alvarez, stolid to the beggars, as standing on his stocky legs he took in San Marco.

"The man that played black, that took my white queen. Yes, he married her, he is success—your kind—he is uplift. Come on, Alexander, let's compare balance sheets."

Elwynn was snarling bitterly. His record in strike troubles at home, in darker and deadlier politics of these States occurred to Craven.

"If you are hoping to pay off any old grudges round here, Elwynn," he said, "just keep at more than gunshot range of this wharf. These planks are United States and I have a company of marines in my Smith & Wesson."

"You bromide," laughed Elwynn scornfully. "Do you think I intend to stage a melodrama? I am going to enjoy this fellow and you are going to ask me to dinner. Don't be alarmed; I have not forgotten the conventions. I am still Memory Elwynn. I will be back as soon as I can borrow or steal some glad rags, soap and a razor."

Elwynn almost ran between the adobe houses, where no one ran even in times of revolution, and Craven turned to the wharf to meet Mr. Stanley Hawes.

Elwynn kept his promise. He appeared in clean ducks, a white mess jacket he had borrowed from some fruiter steward, boots that had laces, and his face was clean of hair and dirt. He greeted Hawes as one globe trotter to another, and during the meal he justified his right to be called Memory Elwynn. For he talked like a travel book. With illuminating words and evocative phrases he made that map of Central America that hung in the dining room alive with more than the mosquitoes and strange bugs that were caught in its varnish. But he kept to description, touched politics only humorously, described mines without excoriating the Northern capital that exploited them, told anecdotes of the peons without waving the red flag, expounded the intricacies of revolutions he had nearly been shot in without bias, without rancor.

Hawes listened with an occasional monosyllable, an irrelevant and rather stupid question, observations in commonplace office English.

Watching the two men Craven almost veered to Elwynn's often-expressed opinion that only the dull can get dollars, that brilliant men do not succeed—not because they cannot but because they do not want to. They are failures on purpose, because to succeed is to arrive, to stop, to die somewhat. Only failures keep going.

The party broke up after Elwynn had promised to take Hawes duck shooting over the swamps. Sport seemed to be the only thing the phlegmatic magnate was vitally interested in.

"Don't know about this duck hunting," said Craven, after they had called their good nights to the launch that was shivering all the constellations reflected in the sea, and had returned into the house. "You certainly showed up well after your jag of this morning. But I don't think I ought to let Hawes go off alone with an associate of bandits and revolutionists. And I thought you were not carrying anything so bromidic as a gun?"

The consul saw for the first time the bulge in Elwynn's hip pocket. He reached out a hand, and without any resistance Elwynn let him withdraw a folded Sunday supplement.

"Don't tear it, Craven," said Elwynn. "Just look at the front-page story of Hawes' divorce suit."

Craven hastily took in the pictures of Hawes, of a pretty but firm-lipped young woman, entitled, "Mrs. Hawes, formerly Miss Queenie Alden, of Summerville, Connecticut," and a lurid exposé of the oil magnate's morals.

"He has lost his queen. Let me have that paper—it carries farther than a Smith & Wesson."

"What for? What are you going to do with it?"

"Do? Nothing. Everything is done. I am going duck hunting with my brother of the mud. Good night. If you were to ask me to have a drink, I'd say save it. Just

now I am drunk enough on my moral superiority to Hawes."

The little launch pushed into the bayous where the mangroves thickened as they left the sea. Other trees, rubber and swamp cedar, lifted over the matted verdure, and between the spreading, clawing roots of the mangroves sprawled the huge caymen of the Antilles. They flopped off the mud flats and banks, disturbed by the motor. The two men sat in the stern, Hawes with a shotgun over his knees. Both were gloved and wore nets over their hats and tucked under their shirts, for the morning air was misty with mosquitoes, midges, gnats of all kinds. The water of the sluggish river was lazily wrestling with the incoming tide, bubbling with iridescence in the brilliant tropic blaze.

"Oil," said Elwynn. "Those oil tankers and fruiters spill it in the bay and the tide brings it in. Plays the deuce with the fishing. Your oil-burning ships are going to depopulate the poor man's sea, Stan."

Elwynn had been talking all the way. He was still on his platform of superiority —the professor at large—but he could not be impersonal for long. He had to take this point against Hawes, although a breakfast on the yacht had brought them back to their college days, to using one another's Christian names.

"Don't keep your hand in the water, Stan. Those alligators will snap at anything when hungry, and lacking fish they are hungry. It would be poetic justice for you to lose an arm, but even my principles do not demand that."

Elwynn could not help being polished even in his venom, with this heavy silent man whose eyes were intent on the opening of bayou after bayou, the clawing, spreading roots, the shining reaches dotted with swimming snouts and lifted, scaly backs.

"I am going to lift my net," said Elwynn. "I have been food for mosquitoes long enough to be immune. Why, there aren't any!"

The inland waters seemed free of the pests, and Hawes also cleared his face.

"But where are the ducks?" he asked. "Maybe they are gone with the mosquitoes and the fish. Driven off by the oil. Stop the engine, Bob. I don't care about ducks. That's what I came after—oil."

Elwynn stopped the engine and the boat drifted. Hawes dropped his listlessness, pulled himself up in his seat, and the boat responded as if vivified, radiating ripples of energy over the lethargic tide as Hawes spoke.

"There is a big seepage all along this shore. It is not merely spilled oil from the ships. I struck it out at sea last night. That is what brought me into this port. Your talk about the fishing failing last evening was a clew. Oil spoils fishing in other parts. That is what has cleared this swamp of mosquitoes. Does that, you know. Look at that mud—it is gooey with crude oil. Dollars to doughnuts we are over a field. You are the first man I have let in on this, Bob."

Elwynn was amazed at Hawes' rapid-fire observations, at the cocksure certainty of the man. It was as if a mummy had awakened in its wrappings.

"But what made you think——"

"Just a hunch," interrupted Hawes. "I usually play my hunches. We met a sea gull that could not lift his wings from the sea. Poor little beggar was all limed with oil.

" 'Damn those oil burners!' said my captain, 'making the sea a swill bucket.' I stopped the yacht and brought the bird on board, cleaned his wings with soap and gasoline, and let the scared little thing fly off. But all the time the captain was talking. An Aitken he is, a Cape Cod Aitken, sailors from way back, and he told me the trouble oil was to his folks at home. Keeps away the mackerel, rots the nets by dissolving the tar out of them, fouls the beaches. Naturally I was thinking oil. Came south to get away from it, but here it was, a silver smear over the sea saying 'get back to business.' I didn't think the entire South American trade was enough to explain all that. It wasn't a mere patch, it was a trail to right here and I ordered the yacht's nose to follow my hunch. Never said why to the captain, though. You're the first man in on the proposition."

"Why me?" asked the astounded Elwynn.

"I've got to have a white man here on the spot as my representative. I don't know enough about this consul chap. Last night while you were talking, I figured you were the man. You know the land, the natives—how about it?"

Elwynn was mentally turned topsy-turvy. While he had been holding the floor last night, flaunting his colorful literary sense, Hawes had been planning. The thoughts of this wooden piece of office furniture would change this entire coast, revolutionize Santo Marco, build towns in this swamp, pump millions from its ooze. Three words from Hawes lifted Elwynn into the capitalist class.

"I suppose it means a certain sacrifice of your ideas, Bob," said Hawes. "But you have done enough for them. Come in with us, be a regular fellow. What is the good of ideas that leave you stranded in Santo Marco? You will have a good salary, your own house, vacations in Europe. Lots of time to write if you want to. And you can write what you like, swat the plutocracy all you like, so long as you keep our wells going."

Hawes' reference to Elwynn's writing, the contemptuous value placed on it by this man of action, aroused Elwynn's particular devil—his pride.

He was trying to keep to the good manners he had assumed last night, but his devil was too strong, the habit of soap-box indignation was too set for him not to make a point.

"Santo Marco has this advantage. They have no yellow journals like this," he said, drawing forth the Sunday supplement and handing it to Hawes. Hawes took the paper, read it without a word of comment, quite his wooden self again, and then handed it back to Elwynn with thanks.

"Steer for that bank ahead. I want to land there," he then said, starting the engine.

Hawes spoke as if giving an order; he lapsed into his former aloofness, and Elwynn was defeated and humiliated by a manner, lashed to the bone by a silence. If there were no yellow journals in Santo Marco there was at least one yellow man—Hawes had conveyed that without words.

A big alligator sprawled across their landing, and the launch was headed off under Elwynn's nervous steering. Hawes snatched the tiller and drove the boat's nose into the mud right under the reptile's tail. He then prodded the saurian with an oar till it slid into the water.

"If you are scared you had better come with me," said Hawes. "I know how to handle them."

They reached the center of a small island. The long roots of the mangroves made a black fretwork against the glimmering lagoons surrounding them. Hawes knelt and lifted a handful of the soil beaded with more than gold.

"Looks like another Tampico," said Hawes. "Better take my offer, Bob."

Hawes' persistence infuriated Elwynn. He could not get under the hide of this man; it was thicker than an alligator's—a man who had found him out, a man who had been silent under his stab of scandal, but who still wanted him.

"I must have a white man in possession, an American. Craven would do, but I don't know enough about him. He seems a decent chap, but he might wire rival interests. He might play the Señor Presidente, he might get capital. Now, you can't. You have no interests behind you, you can't get money. You're just the man I want."

Elwynn was certain that Hawes was merely enjoying him, gloating over him, dangling the potentialities of this swamp just to satisfy his crude cruelty.

"Because I'm not decent, because I am down, because no one would advance me a dollar——"

"Exactly."

Knee-deep in the ooze the two men stared at each other, ignoring the quick creep of the incoming tide, the nearing glimmer between the roots, the louder splash of the saurians. For Hawes was making the first move on his international checkerboard of high finance, and Elwynn's jangling disorder of frayed nerves and unforgotten grudges that he called his intellect was completely checked. How could a feeble and impotent epicurean rebel like Elwynn understand a man who was all purpose? Elwynn never had studied purpose.

"We have to act quick," said Hawes. "Wall Street, Lombard Street, French, Italians, Japs, will be snapping round here thicker than alligators."

"You can't make a pawn out of me."

"Why not! Pawns can be queened, can't they? Come, don't be a sorehead. Come and play in our yard."

But Elwynn was now dead to every human appeal. He wanted to hurt Hawes—to tread him into this mud as he had trampled on Craven's chessmen.

"Only one thing could persuade me to

help you to get richer," he said as they lifted their bogged feet toward the bank. "That is to help Queenie. Her alimony will depend on your income."

Hawes replied sharply as he edged between the mangrove roots.

"I cannot discuss my wife, Elwynn. I made you this offer because——"

He did not finish, for in reaching the bank he saw the tide had lifted the boat out of reach. She was adrift far out on the widening stream, impossible to swim to, for the water between was deadly with lifted snouts and emerging, scale-crusted backs.

Hawes permitted himself some temper.

"There isn't a thing you can do right, Bob. Absolutely incompetent. That is why I want you for the job. That is why I can use you. I want a man half native, a mañana muddler like you. A white man would not stick, or would try to do me. You're just white enough to squat here till I get a he-man. A bit of mud to stop a leak——"

But Elwynn was completely unnerved by their situation. The rising water was gaining on them—soon would deliver them to that incoming tide of starving saurians.

"We'll have to take to the trees," he cried.

These were thin, swamp-nurtured, perhaps oil-poisoned lumber, but after swarming up the mangrove roots they managed to find a solid trunk and two crotches to coil in away from the incoming horror below. Backs rose in the sinking mud like waves, grating metallically as they slid over each other, but Hawes kept to his tirade. His disgust was for the man before him clinging to the trunk, trying not to let his feet drop.

"You have never done a clean, finished job in your life, Bob. Always making mismoves, always letting some personal feeling jam your wheels. You forgot to tie the boat, thinking up epigrams at me. Always the cocksure wordy 'wobbly' on a platform trying to teach us chaps. Trying to teach when there isn't a single thing you really know. Didn't know there was oil here, didn't know what drove away the fish, didn't know enough to moor the boat."

Hawes seemed quite secure in his hold, but Elwynn was fidgeting, changing his position on his branch, and his face was beady. He did not answer, he could not affect contempt or superiority, he was verbally paralyzed, physically falling apart, nearer the paresis he dreaded. The beefy, healthy, sporting Hawes did not realize this at once; they were merely treed by alligators, and would have to wait for the drop of the tide, or relief of some kind. It was a good club story, but would be more amusing if he had brought his rifle. But the tree was shaking with Elwynn's frantic endeavors to get a sufficiently tight hold with his clammy palms.

"Bob, I believe you're scared. Good Lord, the fellow is scared stiff!" cried Hawes, his laughter ringing through the jungle, his contempt an actual bad taste in his mouth.

"So that is your trouble. Yellow. I always thought so. And you have been scaring whisky out of Craven. He told me all about you. He fell for the suicide panhandling. Why don't you do it now? Throw yourself to the alligators now. I don't want you, drunk or sober. I'd sooner trust a native; they are not afraid to die."

That disgust of the ugly that makes small boys torture spiders was resuscitating the small boy in Hawes, the elementary savage that sleeps in every man not too civilized out of his manhood.

"Slip all the way, Bob. That is the best thing you do. You never could hold on to anything. You let go Queenie, you took her first no as final, you know as little about women as you do about everything else. She would have had you if you had stuck."

"You lie, Hawes, you lie," Elwynn managed to gasp.

"I am not clever enough. She told me so herself. That's why I want you to drop. She really had a hankering after your fool theories. I dropped a pile trying to communize one of my mills to please her. She thinks you are a martyr. Wish she could see you now. When you drop you will prove your theories are as rotten as their author."

A scream came from the strangulated larynx of Elwynn as he slipped along the sagging branch and fell into the water. Exhausted by his vehemence Hawes clutched the central trunk, and the splash came up to him and Elwynn's scream was drowned.

Hawes was horrified, as his eyes met the empty background of jungle, at his irruption of barbarism. He heard more splashing; he dared to look down. Elwynn had fallen into a conical cage made by the mangrove roots, and inside this he was fighting for his life against the alligators that thrashed round in the waters without.

Hawes crawled over to the branch Elwynn had slipped from. His iron nerve was shaking; he had to hold tight himself now. Below Elwynn splashed like a bather in the surf, trying to scare the saurians, and tore off branches from overhead to strengthen his weak palisades.

"Keep moving, Bob," shouted Hawes. "I'm coming down to help."

Elwynn was kicking at jaws, stabbing at eyes with twigs, shouting, cursing, doing his pitiful best behind his weak defenses that the ferocity and weight of the alligators threatened to overcome, trying to keep his feet against the currents created by their swinging tails. But he was able to shout back at Hawes.

"Stay where you are. It is my fight!"

It was only a matter of minutes when the roots would give way, already smaller reptiles with jaws big enough to nip had slid through. Elwynn was torn in the calf, the waters were reddening, and the big caymen without scented their meat.

Hawes reached down and grabbed Elwynn's shirt. Elwynn thought he was being nipped in the neck and raised his hand. The thin rag of a shirt was tearing. Hawes was able to grip one of Elwynn's wrists, to take advantage of what he had acquired at college, an oarsman's back and a footballer's thigh, to haul Elwynn up and out of that trap just before the saurians swarmed in below.

"I'm going to strap you on," said Hawes, removing his belt.

"No strap," cried the exhausted Elwynn, rising on the branch. "I'm going to stick this out. A piece of mud is no use unless it will stick. You were right."

"Ah, forget what I said, Bob. Don't remember so much. I was yellow, not you. Yours was nerves, whisky and Santo Marco. This burg would give me worse willies than yours. Forget everything and let's have a new deal right now. They will soon find we're missing and dig us out. You are going north to hitch me and Queenie together again. Our trouble is not as bad as that rag makes out."

"Me?"

"Sure. Queenie will believe you when you tell her I have had my fight in the mud, too, and am through with it. Let's get back to business and build up a white man's world. Don't look down, Bob. Forget the alligators and the mud. And to help—let's play chess."

"How?"

"Blindfold. Visualise your board and your pieces. We've got to do something. Come on, make a start. Close your eyes, see the black and red squares!"

Hawes' suggestion was electric; Elwynn braced himself, clung tightly to the trunk, and closed his eyes.

"No—not red and black," he cried. "Green and gold, Stan, green and gold. Pawn to king four."

"Pawn to king four," answered Hawes.

Blindfold, deaf to all but their voices calling the moves, the two men started the game.

It was dusk before the launch came back. In it were Craven and the captain of the yacht, who had observed it drifting and empty on the tide. They were guided by the voices calling moves in the sleepy silence of the bayous. The players did not hear the motor till it was under them. Elwynn had to be laid on the bottom of the boat.

"The game is yours, Stan," he said feebly as again he closed his eyes.

"Going?" asked Craven as he noticed Elwynn's slackening jaws.

"No," said Hawes. "Coming back."

DOUBLE EQUIPMENT

THEY were discussing an incompetent railroad official's explanation of the poor service he had been giving the public.

"I see," said old Uncle Miah Hicksey, "some of these railroads have a double equipment, cowcatchers and bull throwers."

Ocean Tramps

By H. de Vere Stacpoole

Author of "The Garden of God," "Me and Slane," Etc.

Clothes do not always make the man—sometimes it is a little thing like Billy Harman's gaudy handkerchief.

III.—THE WAY OF A MAID WITH A MAN.

HAVE you ever tried to manage a South Sea canoe, a thing not much wider than a skiff, with mast and sail out of all proportion to the beam, yet made possible because of the outrigger?

The outrigger, a long skate-shaped piece of wood, is supposed to stabilize the affair; it is always fixed to port and is connected to the canoe proper in two chief ways, either by poles fore and aft or by a central bridge of six curved lengths of wood to which the mast stays are fixed. There are subsidiary forms with three outrigger poles and with two outrigger poles and a bridge, but it was in a canoe of the pure bridge type that "Bud" Davis and William Harman found themselves afloat in the Pacific, making west with an unreliable compass, a dozen and a half drinking nuts, a breaker of water and food for a fortnight. They had been shot out of a pearl lagoon by the rightful owner and robbed of two double handfuls of pearls which they had collected in his absence. Given the offer of a canoe to go to the devil in or honest work at two dollars a day with board and lodging free they had chosen the canoe.

They could work; they had worked like beavers for months and months collecting those pearls, but they weren't going to work for wages. "No, sir," said Harman, "I ain't come down to that yet. Billy Harman's done signin' on to be sweated like a gun mule and live in the harbor when he's old bones. The beach is good enough for him if it comes to bed rock."

It had certainly come to bed rock now, this glorious morning, two days out and steering into the face of the purple west, the great sun behind them just risen and leaning his chin on the sea line.

Harman was at the steering paddle, Davis forward. They had breakfasted on cold water and bananas, and Harman was explaining to Davis exactly the sort of fools they had been, not in refusing work and good grub and pay but in having failed to scrag Mandelbaum, the pearl man.

"Oh, shut up," said Davis. "You're always going back on things and you haven't it in you to scrag a chicken, anyhow. You're always serving out that parson's dope about it not paying to run crooked."

"Nor it don't," said the moralist. "There ain't enough mugs in the world, as I've told you more than twice. I don't say there ain't enough, but they're too spread about —now if you could get them all congeriated into one place I wouldn't be behind you in

waltzing in with a clear conscience an' takin' their hides. But there ain't such a place. 'Nother thing that queers the pitch is the way sharps let on to be mugs. Look at Clayton."

"What about Clayton?"

"Well, look at him. In we sails to that pearl shop and there we finds him on the beach. Looked like the king of the mugs, didn't he, with his big round face and them blue-gooseberry eyes. 'Here's a sealed lagoon for you,' says he. 'I'm done with it, got all the pearls I want and am only wishful to get away. Take it for nix. I only want your ship in exchange.' And we fall to the deal and off he goes.

"We didn't know he'd sailed off with all his pardner's pearls, did we? And when his pardner Mandelbaum turns up and collars our takin's and kicks us out in this durned canoe after we'd been workin' months and months, our pitch wasn't queered—was it? And all by a sharp got up to look like a sucker. Well, I hopes he'll fry in blazes if he ain't drownded before he cashes them pearls. I ain't given to cursin' but I could curse a hole in this dished canoe when I thinks of the hand we give him by fallin' into his trap and the trick he served us by settin' it."

"Mind!" yelled Davis.

Harman in his mental upset had neglected his steering and the canoe, paying off before the wind, nearly flogged the mast out as Davis let go the sheet.

There are two sure ways of capsizing a South Sea canoe—letting the outrigger run under too deep and letting it tip into the air. They nearly upset her both ways before matters were righted. Then pursuing again the path of the flying fish the little canoe retook the wind, tepid and sea scented and blowing out of the northwest.

II.

An hour after sunrise next morning Davis, on the lookout, saw a golden point in the sky away to the south of west. It was the cloud turban of Motul. A moment later Harman saw it too.

"Lord! It's a high island," cried he. "I thought there was nuthin' but low islands in these parts. Where have we been driftin' to?"

"I don't know," replied Davis. "Mind your steering; it's land and that's all I want."

"Oh, I ain't grumblin'," said Harman. He got her a point closer to the wind and steered, keeping the far-off speck on the port bow. The breeze freshened and the stays of the mast, fastened to the outrigger grating, twanged while the spray came inboard now and then in dashes from the humps of the swell. Yet not a whitecap was to be seen in all the vast expanse of water; the great sea was running with a heave in the line of Humboldt's current from south to north, but without a foam goat to break the ruffled blue.

At noon Motul had lost its turban of cloud but now it stood clear on the blue, able to speak for itself and requiring no adventitious aid to attract the eye of a mariner—a great lumping island molded out of mountains, scarred with gulleys down which burst forests and rainbow falls, for Motul was green with the recent rains and its perfume met them ten miles across the sea.

There seemed no encircling reef, just a line of reef here and there beyond which lay topaz and aquamarine sheets of water bathing the feet of the great black cliffs of Motul.

"Ain't a place I'd choose for a lee shore," said Harman, "but this canoe don't draw more than a pie dish and I reckon we can get her in most anywhere across them reefs. Question is, where do them cliffs break?"

They kept a bit more to the south and there sure enough was the big break where the cliffs seem smashed with an ax and where the deep water comes in, piercing the land so that you might anchor a battleship so close that the wild cliff-hanging convolvulus could brush its truck and fighting tops.

"We must make it before dark," said Harman.

"Don't matter," said Davis.

It didn't, although the moon had not risen. The stars lit Motul and the great dark harbor that pierces the land like a sword.

The breeze had almost fallen dead as they came in. Nothing but the sea spoke, breaking on the rocks and lipping up the cliffs where screw pines clung and the great convolvulus trumpets blew in the silver light.

Then as they stole across the water of the harbor, the dying breeze laying glittering fans before them, they saw right ahead on the shore, where the great cliffs drew

away, lights twinkling and dancing like fireflies, lights standing and moveless, lights crawling like glowworms. It was Amaho, the chief village of Motul, and the lights were the lights of the houses, the fish spearers, the lovers and the wayfarers of the chief town of Paradise.

III.

For Motul is Paradise in all things that relate to the senses of sight, smell, taste, hearing and touch, and its people are part of their environment. Here there are no ugly women and few old people; here bathing is perpetual as summer, and summer is never oppressive; here everything grows that is of any use in the tropics.

The pineapples of Motul are as white inside as sawed deal, yet you can almost eat them with a spoon and their flavor beats that of the Brazilian pineapple, the English hothouse and the pine of Bourbon; they have fig bananas with a delicate golden stripe unobtainable elsewhere, and passion fruit with a vanilla flavor only to be found at Motul.

Also there are girls.

Harman and his companion, faced with the lights of the town, determined not to land till morning. They dropped their stone killick in six-fathom water, ate the last of their bananas, turned on their sides and went asleep to be awakened by the dawn, a dawn of many colors standing against the far horizon on a carpet of rose and fire. Then, all of a sudden, tripping across the sea she pulled up a curtain and the sun hit Amaho, the bay, the beach, and the anchored canoes, including the stranger canoe that had arrived during the night.

"Look," said Harman, "they've spotted us." He pointed to the beach where a crowd was gathering, a crowd with faces all turned seaward. Children were running along the sands calling their elders out of houses to come and look, and now heads of swimmers began to dot the water and girls with flowers in their dark hair came toward the canoe, swimming with the effortless ease of fish; girls, young men, and boys, the whole population of Amaho seemed to have taken to the sea and with them Davis held converse in broken bêche de mer, while Harman gloomily considered the "skirts."

I think Harman's dislike of womenfolk had less to do with misogamy pure and simple than with a feeling born from experience that women tend to crab deals and interfere with the progress of prosperity, just as it is coming along to you by devious, not to say crooked, paths.

There was nothing in the way of any possible deal looming before them this morning. All the same the ingenuous Harman did not relax or unbend in the least before this vision of friendly mermaids, one of whom was boldly now grasping the starboard gunnel with a wet hand while another, to port, was engaged in putting a leg over the outrigger.

"They're a friendly lot," said Davis over his shoulder to the other. "Ain't much to be done here as far as I can see, no shell nor turtle, and they're too lazy to make copra. But it's a good place to rest in and refit."

"It'll be a good place to drown in if that piece don't get off the outrigger," said Harman.

"Well, what's your opinion, shall we shove her in?"

"Aye, shove her in," said Billy, and getting up the anchor they took to the paddles, making for the beach with an escort of swimmers ahead, to port, to starboard and astern.

IV.

It was the girl on the outrigger that did the business; a wild-eyed elfish-looking yet beautiful individual divorced from the humdrum civilized scheme of things as Pan or Puck. She only wanted horns and a little fur trimming or a small addition of wings to have done for either.

As it was she nearly did for Mr. Harman. In some miraculous way an affinity exhibited itself between these two, an attraction drew one toward the other so that at the end of a week if you had seen Billy anywhere about by himself, sitting on the beach or lying in the shade of the trees, you would ten to one have found Kinie—that was her name—not far off.

She had attached herself like a dog to the man and Billy, after a while and toward the end of the first week, found himself drifting far from his old moorings.

He and Davis had built themselves a house in forty-eight hours and food was on every hand. They had no cares or worries, no taxes, eternal summer and the best fishing south of California, bathing, boating, yet they were not happy. At least Davis

was not. It seemed to him that there was nothing to be done there. He would have felt the same maybe if he had suddenly been transported to heaven.

Civilization, like savagery, breeds hunters and your hunter is not happy when he is idle. There was nothing to be shot at here in the way of money, so Davis was not happy. Harman, dead to the beauty around him, might have shared the discontent of the other, only for Kinie. She gave him something to think about.

Drowsing one day under a jack-fruit tree, a squashy fruit like a custard apple fell on his head, and looking up he saw Kinie among the leaves looking down at him. Next moment she was gone. Jack-fruit trees don't grow apples like that. She must have carried it there to drop it on him, a fact which having bored itself into Mr. Harman's intelligence produced a certain complacency. He had been in her thoughts. An hour or two later, sitting by the edge of the beach, she came and sat near him, dumb and stringing colored pieces of coral together—anything colored on string seemed to fascinate her—and there they sat saying nothing but seemingly content till Davis hove in sight and Kinie, gathering up her treasures, scampered off.

"You and that gal seem mighty thick," said Davis. "Blest if you aren't a contradiction, always grumbling about petticoats and saying they bring you bad luck, and set you ashore—and look at you."

"I give you to understand, Bud Davis, I won't be called no names, not by no man," replied the other. "It ain't my fault if the girl comes round, and there ain't no harm in her comin'."

"Well, you've picked the prettiest of the lot, anyhow," said Davis. "Don't go telling me, girls are girls and men are men—but we'll leave it there. It's no affair of mine. *I'm* not grumbling."

On he walked, leaving the outraged Harman on the sands, speechless because unable to explain—unable to explain even to himself the something between himself and the wildly beautiful, charming yet not-quite-there Kinie.

The fascination he exercised upon her would have been even more difficult to explain. Davis was younger and better looking, Davis had made advances to her which Harman had never done, yet she avoided Davis, never dropped custard apples on his head or sat by him stringing bits of coral or followed him at a distance through the woods.

Nor did she ever try to steal Davis' pocket handkerchief.

Harman possessed a blazing particolored bandanna handkerchief. It was silk and had cost him half a dollar at Mixon's at the foot of Third Street, which adjoins Long Wharf. It was his main possession. He used it not as handkerchiefs are used but as an adjunct to conversation, as your old French marquis used his snuffbox. Stumped for words or in perplexity, out would come the handkerchief to be mopped across his brow. Kinie from the first had been fascinated by this handkerchief. She wanted it. One day he lost it and an hour later she flashed across his vision with it bound around her head. He chased her, recaptured it, reduced her to sulks for twenty-four hours, and a few days later she boldly tried to steal it again. Then she seemed to forget all about it—but do women ever forget?

V.

One morning some two months after they had landed, Davis, coming out of the house, found the beach in turmoil. Girls were shading their eyes toward the sea and young fellows getting canoes in order for launching, while children raced along the sands screaming the news or stood fascinated like the girls and like them gazing far to sea.

A ship had been sighted, and there she was on the far-rippled blue, the tepid wind blowing her to life and growth, the sun lighting her sails and turning them to a single triangular pearl.

Nothing could be more beautiful than the far ship on the far sea with the near sea all broken to flashing sapphire, the whole picture framed between the verdurous cliffs of the harbor entrance and lit by the entrancing light of morning.

But Davis had no eye for the beauty of the picture. He turned, ran back to the house and fetched out Harman.

"Fore-and-aft rig, maybe a hundred an' fifty ton, maybe a bit less," said Harman. "Makin' dead for the beach. Say, Bud, we been fools. Here's a ship and never a plan to meet her with nor a story to tell her."

"Well, what's the odds?" said Davis. "We're shipwrecked, or if you like it better.

we skipped from a whaler—what are you bothering about? We've nothing to hide, only the *Douro* and we've got rid of her. You've never thought of that, B. H. You've always been going on about Clayton getting the better of us by skipping off with those pearls in exchange for the *Douro*. Hasn't it ever got into your thick head that since we as good as stole the hooker he did us a good turn by taking her? There's not a port he could bring her into without being had and I'll bet my back teeth he's jugged by this, him and his pearls."

"If he is," said Harman, "I'll never say a word against the law again."

Then they hung silent and the ship grew. The wind held steady, then it faded, great smoke-blue spaces showing on the sea, then it freshened, blowing from a new quarter, and the stranger, shifting her helm, forged off on the starboard tack. She showed now to be ketch rigged.

"I've always been agin' the law," went on Mr. Harman, "but if the law puts that blighter in chokee I'll take the first lawyer I meet by the fist. I will so—I'll say to him, you're a man an' brother, law or no law."

"Oh, damn the law," cried Davis, whose face had turned purple and whose eyes were straining at the ship. "Look at her! Can't you see what she is? She's the *Douro!*"

Harman's hand flew up to shade his eyes. He stood for twenty seconds, then he gave a whoop and made as if to run to the sea edge where the canoes were preparing to put out.

Davis caught him by the arm and pulled him back.

"Who are you holdin'?" cried Harman. "Let me get at the blighter. Leave me loose or I'll give you the bashin' I have in me fist for him. Leave me loose, I tell you."

But Davis, undaunted and deaf to all protests, drove him steadily back among the trees and then made him sit down to hear reason.

"That chap would wipe the deck with you," said Davis. "There's more ways of killing a dog than by kicking him. What we've got to do is lay low and wait our chance. Get him ashore off his ship and leave the rest to me."

"Well, if I can get my fists on him that's all *I* want," said Harman. "I don't want more than that."

"I do," replied the other. "I want those pearls. Now skip down to the house and fetch up all the grub you can find; we've got to keep hid till things develop. That's our strong point—him not knowing we're here.

"And do you mean to say the Kanakas won't tell him?" asked Harman.

"Well, suppose they do? Suppose they say there are two white men on the island—how's he to know it's us? The Kanakas don't know our names or what we've come from. Now skip."

Harman went off and returned laden. They made their camp under an aoa by a spring, covering the food over with breadfruit leaves to keep the robber crabs from getting at it. Then they settled themselves down to watch and listen.

They heard the anchor go down and Harman, who climbed the aoa to a point where a view of the harbor could be glimpsed between the leaves, reported that the *Douro* was at anchor two cable lengths from the shore and swinging to the tide, that the canoes were all round her and that a chap in white was leaning over her rail.

"Looks like Clayton," said he. "Now he's left the rail and they're swinging out a boat. He's comin' ashore. Now he's in the boat—yes, that's him sure enough, know him anywhere by the way he carries himself; crawled over into the boat like a cat, he did. Yes, it's him, I can see his face now, all but his b'iled gooseberry eyes. Comin' ashore, are you? Well, I'll be there to meet you."

He came swarming down, only to be received into the arms of Davis—that is to say Reason.

"Coming on for night, I don't say no," said Davis. "We may be able to take the ship and get out with her. But there's no use in a free fight on the beach in the broad light of day with all his boat crew to back him. I've got an idea—it's coming into my head bit by bit, and it's this—the crew know us."

"Well, they ought to, since we captained them once," said Harman. "But what about it?"

"Just this. You know what Kanakas are. If we can knock Clayton on the head sudden to-night and get off without too much fuss we've only got to step on board and drop the anchor chain and put out. The Kanakas won't object. Seeing us come

on board again and taking over the ship they'll think it's all in the day's work and done by arrangement with Clayton."

"That ain't a bad idea if we can do it," said Harman. "We'll have to scrag him so that he don't squeal and do it without fittin' him out for a mortuary. I ain't a particular man but I've an objection to corpses."

"Oh, rot!" said Davis. "You've got to stow that bilge if you want to make out in this business. You'll be going about next with flowers in your hair like those Kanaka girls. I ain't going to hit to kill. If I get the chance of hitting at all I'm going to put him to sleep—that's all. If he never wakes up the world will be none the wiser nor the worse. Hullo, what's that?"

It was Kinie; her face showed peeping at them through the branches which her little brown hands were holding back.

"Scat!" cried Harman, shaken out of all other considerations but the thought that she had discovered their whereabouts and might give them away. "Off with you and back to the village, and if you let a word out of you——"

Before he could finish the branches swayed and Kinie was gone.

"After her!" cried Davis. "Get hold of her and tell her to spy on the chap."

Harman, getting on his feet, started off in pursuit and Davis found himself alone. He could hear the wash of the beach and the far-off voices of the village and as he sat putting things together in his mind the main question that kept recurring was whether Clayton would put out after taking on fruit and water, or whether he would stay.

After that came the question of the pearls. It was six months now since the day he had sailed from the atoll, and he was still tinkering about among the lesser islands; what had he done with the pearls? He had evidently been to no port of importance where he might have sold them, and if there was reason in anything there was reason in the supposition that they were on board the *Douro*.

Davis chuckled to himself at the thought. The thing was so simple. Once Clayton was put out of count nothing could be easier than to row off, seize the ketch and put out with her; the Kanaka crew knew both him and his companion. Davis chuckled at the thought that these same Kanakas had been through the same process before when he and Harman had "nicked" the *Araya*.

"And I bet you," he said to himself as he lay listening to the sounds of the beach and village, "I bet you they don't know they've been as good as stolen twice, or that me and Billy aren't part owners in the show turning up now and then to take command and give the other chaps a rest." He chuckled at the thought and then Harman came back through the trees, having interviewed Kinie.

The wayward one had shown surprising grip of the situation and readiness to assist. Yes, she would watch the white man with the red face and find out whether he was taking water on board that day and if not how long he was likely to stay: promising this she had run off.

"And she'll do it," said Harman.

They had some food and smoked and drowsed in the warm, dark, hothouse atmosphere of the woods, now silent as death with noon.

Then somewhere about two o'clock the branches parted and the charming sprite-like face of the girl looked in upon their slumbers.

She had brought news. The big canoe was not taking water that day nor fruit. It might stay many days. Also the big man had been bidden to a banquet by the village and the feast was to take place on the edge of dark. They were preparing the palm toddy now and killing chickens and two pigs. Listen! She held up a finger and they could hear the far-off clucking of chickens being chased only to be choked. The pigs, clubbed senseless, had uttered no complaint.

Then the branches swayed and she was gone.

"This is good," said Davis. "That chap is sure to get drunk on the palm toddy and so we'll be saved the bother of knocking him out."

"Seems like Providence, don't it?" said Mr. Harman. "If you tell me there ain't such a thing, I tell you that there is—flat. Look at us, brought here and landed as careful as baskets of eggs, and look at Clayton sent after us to be skinned—ain't that Providence?"

"Oh, close up," said Davis. "You get arguing when a chap ought to be thinking. Wait till he *is* skinned before you talk of Providence. We haven't got the hide yet."

"No, but we will," replied the other, settling himself for a snooze.

Toward dark, awakened by Davis, he went off through the trees to prospect.

Then blackness came as if turned on with a switch; blackness that gradually died to starlight as the eyes grew accustomed to the change. Starlight that filled the woods with the eeriest forms made of foliage and shadow, while here and there great planets hung themselves amid the branches—Venus in a tamarisk tree and Jupiter on the top bough of a screw pine.

To Davis watching and meditating suddenly appeared Harman breathless.

"We're dished," cried the latter, "dished lovely. The *Douro* crowd are ashore down to the ship's cat and they're all stuffin' themselves and fillin' up with the drink."

Davis whistled.

"Haven't they left an anchor watch on her?"

"Devil a one," said Harman. "She's watching herself. Well, what do you say to that?"

Davis said nothing for a moment.

It was impossible to take the ketch away without the crew. Of course he and Harman could have taken her out, but he knew better than ever to dream of facing the Pacific in a vessel of that tonnage with only another pair of hands to help him. He had been through the experience years ago; he knew what it was for two men to take on a ten-man job. No, the canoe was better than that. Infinitely.

"Billy," said he suddenly, "buck up. We aren't done. Can't you see, the chap is so certain sure there's no one here to harm or meddle with him, he's let all his crew come ashore. Well as sure as he's done that he's left the pearls on board."

Harman fell to the idea at once.

"You mean us to skip in the canoe with them?"

"Yep," said the other.

Harman considered for a while in silence, while the sounds of the festival on the beach came on the new-risen wind from the sea.

He had sworn never to enter a canoe again. The prospect was hateful, yet there was one bright spot in it, a spot as big as a sun—Clayton's face on waking next morning to find the pearls gone.

He sprang to his feet.

"Kim on," said he, "we've gotta get water, grub and nuts aboard her. The breaker's lying back of the house. I'll attend to the water, you bring this stuff down and c'llect all you can from the houses, b'nanas and suchlike. Hump yourself."

Their canoe lay on the beach to the right of the village. It was fit and seaworthy for the very good reason that the native boys had been using it for sailing and fishing and when Davis came on to the beach he found Harman stowing the water breaker, the only figure visible, for the whole village was congregated where the great feast was going on in the break amid the trees.

They reckoned Clermont Tonnerre, the eastern outlier of the Paumotus, to be only some two hundred miles to the northwest, but they were running no risks. They wanted food for a fortnight and they took it; took it from the deserted houses and from the trees where the pandanus drupes hung in the starlight and the great banana clusters stood like golden candelabra wait- to be lit.

Then they pushed off and the harbor took them, and the night against which stood the *Douro* swinging to the outgoing tide on a taut anchor chain.

The ladder was down and as they came alongside, Harman, who was to commit the burglary, clutched it, sprang on deck and lowering the anchor light vanished with it down the cabin companionway.

Davis, with his hand on the ladder and rocked by the almost imperceptible swell, contemplated the night and the far beach. He could see the glow of the fire amid the trees and now just as the moon rose above the sea line, sending its silver across the harbor, his keen eye caught a form moving among the beached canoes. A moment later something ruffled the water—a canoe had put off. He saw the flash of a paddle and for a second the idea that Clayton had sensed danger and was on the pounce crossed his mind, only to be instantly dismissed.

It was Kinie. He knew it instinctively and at once. Kinie, who never drank palm toddy and who looked as though her food was mushrooms and moonbeams, had discovered their canoe gone. Very likely had been watching them getting it away and was coming out to prospect.

At that moment the light reappeared on deck and Harman at the rail.

"Bud," cried Harman, "she's bustin' with trade; cabin full, and I'll bet the hold's full to the hatches. That blighter must have

been peddlin' his pearls for trade goods, but I've got the balance, a dozen big uns. I broke his locker open and there they were —got 'em in me pocket. Steady the canoe whiles I get in."

He dropped into the canoe and they pushed off. Then he sighted Kinie, who was coming up fast, so close now that the water drops showed flashing from her paddle.

"It's that girl," said Davis, "confound her. We only wanted this to kibosh us. I swear by the big horn spoon I'll flatten her out with a paddle if she squeals or gives the show away. I will, b' gosh!"

But Kinie showed no signs of any desire to give the show away. She maneuvered her canoe so that it came gently beside theirs, stern toward stern so that her outrigger did not prevent her from clasping their gunnel. Kinie had come to say good-by. She had watched their provisioning without knowing exactly why they were doing so; then they had put off and she had recognized that they were leaving for good.

Seeing them hanging on to the ship she had taken heart and put off herself and now, patting Harman on the shoulder with her little hand, she was looking at him with the eyes of a dog, while he, slipping one huge arm around her, was putting her back and telling her to be a good girl and to get back to the shore quick.

"*Aroya manu,* Kinie—we're off—we're goin' away. See you again maybe, soon. There, don't be holdin' me—well, you're askin' for it."

"Oh, close up or you'll be capsizing the canoe!" cried Davis. "Shove her off. Now paddle for all you're worth. Mind! The outrigger is lifting."

The canoes parted and the moonlit waving water came between them like a river. Then, driven by tide and paddle, they passed the shadows of the cliffs at the harbor mouth and Harman, looking back, saw the glow of the festival fire like a topaz beyond the silver satin of the harbor water and against the glow the canoe of Kinie making for the shore.

Outside they ran up the sail while astern Motul with its hills and dark forests lay like a cloud on the water visible all night, dwindling to a speck in the dawn, destroyed utterly by the sun as he rose beyond it flooding the sea with fire.

"Well, here's another blessed day," said Harman as he took his trick with the steering paddle, "and that chap will be wakin' just now with a palm-toddy head on him to find we've done him. But he won't never know it's us, worse luck. Anyhow he'll have his headache. There ain't nothin' to beat a palm-toddy head unless maybe samshu, but, samshu or palm toddy, drink don't pay, nor bourbon, nor champagne—it don't pay. I'm not sayin' if a chap could get drunk and stay drunk I wouldn't be the first to jine in, but it's the wakin' up. Oh, *darn* petticoats!"

He had put his hand in his pocket for the handkerchief at that moment flaunting itself on Motul beach around the brows of its proud possessor.

"Mind your steering!" cried Davis. "What ails you? Mind or we'll be over."

"Me handkerchief's gone," cried the distracted Harman. "She's took it. Twice she nicked it from me before, and I ought to ha' known—she'll have flung them away for it's only the rag she wanted—buzzed them into the harbor most like. They were tied in the corner of it and she'd ha' thought them stones—ten thousand blessed dollars' worth of——"

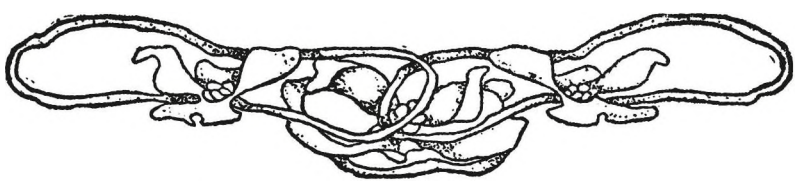
"Pearls!" cried Davis. "You aren't talking of the pearls!"

Toward sunset, steering into the golden remote and unknown West, the dejected Harman, breaking an all-day silence, perked up and became almost philosophic.

"The only good p'int about all this b[illegible]ness," said he, "the one bright p'int——"

"Oh, shut up," said Davis, "you and your p'ints."

Another story of this series in the next issue.



The Missing Millions

By Edgar Wallace

Author of "The Valley of Ghosts," "The Day of Uniting," Etc.

(A Five-Part Story—Part V.)

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE '58 PORT.

"KNOWLES has been seen in town," said Dicker, coming unceremoniously into Jimmy's office on the previous evening, just as he was packing his papers preparatory to going home.

"Who saw him?" asked Jimmy.

"One of our men spotted him half an hour ago crossing Coventry Street. He started off to overtake him, but missed him in the crowd. We may be attaching too much importance to Nippy," said Dicker thoughtfully. "In all probability it is guilty conscience that is keeping him away. Lately there have been one or two burglaries that looked like his work, though they hadn't quite the artistic finish which Nippy puts into his best jobs. What about those men you wanted for Marlow? The commissioner doesn't like sending out of London unless there's a very special necessity. I've had a talk with the Buckinghamshire police and they're quite willing to put a plain-clothes man on duty at Riverside if you want him."

Jimmy hesitated. It would be all over Marlow if it was known, as it would be known, that Riverside was watched.

"I will make private arrangements to-morrow."

He did not specify what those private arrangements would be, and Dicker did not ask. Before Jimmy went to bed that night he received the report that no further trace of the elusive Mr. Knowles—in whose fate Albert displayed an inordinate interest—had been found.

"Maybe he's hiding away from something, sir," suggested Albert as he brought up Jimmy's nightcap.

"That is Mr. Dicker's view too," said Jimmy.

"I don't mean that he's hiding from the police," said Albert earnestly. "He always struck me as being a very genuine sort of man and when he told me he was giving up burgling——"

"They all tell you that, Albert," said Jimmy, finishing his whisky. "Repentance is part of a burglar's stock in trade. I want to be up at five to-morrow. Set your alarm clock."

Jimmy invariably rose early under normal conditions. He found he could work best before the interruptions of the day started; and he was at his desk writing out reports that had been called for when the telephone at his elbow signaled urgently.

"Don't tell me anybody else has been killed," said Jimmy, recognizing the night inspector's voice.

"No, sir, no killing—only a burglary. Mr. Coleman's house was broken into last night."

Jimmy hung up and laughed helplessly.

Bill Dicker was in Mr. Coleman's study talking to him when Jimmy arrived; and it was evident from the appearance of the treasury official that he also had dressed hurriedly, for he wore his oldest suit and about his neck in place of the immaculate collar and cravat was a gaudy silk handkerchief. But what struck Jimmy immediately about the little man was the intense pallor of his face—a pallor relieved only by the red weal with which his unknown assailant had marked him.

"Here's a curious thing, Jimmy," said Dicker as he came in.

"Have they got away with much?" asked Jimmy.

"They've got away with nothing," said Dicker calmly; "and that's one of the minor curiosities. The house was burgled by an expert, all the alarms cut—and you know what skill that requires—three locks forced, another cut out, and yet the bedrooms have not been visited."

"But where on earth did he search?" asked Jimmy in surprise.

"The kitchen," was the startling reply.

"The kitchen?" repeated Jimmy with a frown. "That's queer. That is two kitchens have been burgled in one week!"

Bennett's version of the affair made the matter all the more puzzling. He had slept alone in the house all night, Mr. Coleman having taken up his residence at the hotel, the remainder of the servants sleeping out as usual. Bennett had heard nothing, and knew nothing, until he heard somebody walking down the stairs, and, coming out—he had slept that night in a small room on the ground floor—had challenged the intruder only to discover that it was a policeman who had seen the door wide open as he passed and had come in, and, failing to arouse even Bennett, had gone up the stairs to see if there was anybody else in the house. The front door had been forced, and here was a coincidence which Jimmy remarked upon, though it proved to have little importance; for neither the door of Jean's house nor of Mr. Coleman's had been bolted or chained. The intruder had got in with little or no trouble and had made his way through the drawing-room into the servants' hall, either forcing or cutting out the locks as he went. From the servants' hall he left no trail; apparently that uninteresting region was his objective. At any rate they could not trace him any farther.

After the first rapid inspection Bill Dicker took Jimmy's arm and led him out into the street.

"What strikes you as the most remarkable fact about this burglary, Jimmy?"

"There are one or two," replied Jimmy. "The first is that Bennett did not hear the policeman when he was standing at the foot of the stairs shouting out, 'Is anybody here?' "

Bill nodded.

"You've got it first time," he said. "Bennett says that it was the shouting of the policeman that wakened him. Either Bennett's scared or else he is a liar. He must have heard the policeman before."

"I'll bet any money that he wasn't scared," said Jimmy. "He's not that kind of man."

"Then he was drugged," said Dicker. "And in support of the drugging theory there is his statement that he had never found it so difficult to wake up, and that he heard the policeman like a man in a dream, and yet had not been able to move or speak when the officer shouted."

"Did he take any drink with strangers last night?"

"I have asked him that," said Bill. "He said he had had nothing except a cup of coffee before he went to bed and he remembers that it tasted unusually bitter. He was the only person in the house, and yet——"

"And yet," finished Jimmy, "if he was drugged, why did not the burglars go into his room and relieve him of his keys? It would have saved them a great deal of trouble."

Bill nodded.

"That was another point that occurred to me," he said. "Jimmy, this burglary is the work of a craftsman. Old man Coleman is of course convinced that it was the same fellow who broke into the house before, but that is a theory to which I cannot subscribe. The first man was an amateur; this is a professional and of a high order of intelligence. Notice how cleanly he has worked when it was necessary to cut out a lock. It has taken some time, too."

When the sun came up, and the light was much more suitable for a closer examination, the two men concluded their search and in course of time came to the larder, with its stone trap.

"Nothing to steal here, unless he's taken your wine, Mr. Coleman," said Bill Dicker.

Stooping to pull up the trap, he threw down a light from his torch.

"It's gone," he said suddenly.

"Gone?" repeated Coleman in a tone of horror. "Gone, you say?"

Bill did not reply but reached out his foot for the ladder and descended. In a little while he came back.

"You've lost your '58 port, Mr. Coleman, unless you've sent it back to its rightful owner."

Coleman shook his head. His face was now ghastly gray; the fingers which he brought up to his trembling lips were beyond his control. Twice, three times he tried to speak, but his voice failed him. And then:

"Gone? The wine has gone?" he quavered. "Oh, my God, you don't mean that!"

Jimmy was looking at him with narrowed eyes.

"Why, what is there in the loss of the wine to hurt you?" he asked softly.

"It—didn't belong to me," the man jerked out. "It didn't belong to me," he moaned, and Jimmy thought that the trouble through which this pompous man had passed must have turned his brain.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE SILENCER.

He looked round; they were alone. Bennett had gone back to his room to find a key that Dicker had asked for. By an extreme effort of will Mr. Coleman regained some of his old self-possession.

"Things like that annoy me," he said. "Losing other people's property—I ought to have returned it when you told me."

"Yes, I think so. Are you sure it is gone?"

Dicker flashed his lamp into the opening suggestively, and going on his knees, Mr. Coleman peered down. He was there for a long time and when he arose there was a look in his eyes which Jimmy could not understand.

"Yes, it is gone," said Coleman in a quiet voice, and looked round helplessly.

For the second time that week the house was searched from garret to cellar but nothing more was missing. Not so much as a silver spoon had been stolen by the midnight burglars. Jimmy paused for a little while in Dora's bedroom. The brown stain still showed on the floor and so rapidly had events moved that it was almost impossible to believe that it was only a few days ago that Parker had lost his life. And Kupie was the murderer! Kupie or one of his satellites.

The words of little Nippy Knowles came back to him—Tod Haydn, the iron-willed and the iron-handed—he was the force behind this gang of desperate men. Tod Haydn! To get him was to destroy forever the power for evil which this organization had yielded with such ruthlessness.

He was preparing to leave the house when Mr. Coleman joined him.

"Do you mind if I come out with you?" he almost pleaded. "This place gets on my nerves. I think, if I stayed here any longer, I should go mad. Poor Parker!—poor Collett!"

"Why do you connect the two?" asked Dicker sharply.

"What else can I do?" In his anguish the little man wrung his hands. "Didn't I know them both? Weren't they one a guest and the other a servant of mine? Wasn't Parker killed in my house and did not Collett himself go out from there to his death? Where are you going?" he asked.

Jim looked at his watch. It was a quarter past six.

"I ought to go to bed but I'm going to Scotland Yard," he said.

"And you, Mr. Dicker?"

Bill Dicker shook his head.

"No; I've got some work to do and I was sleeping practically the whole of yesterday afternoon."

"Would you mind, Mr.—I mean Captain—Sepping, if I came with you?"

"To Scotland Yard?" said Jimmy in surprise. "No, I don't mind at all, if you would like to go."

"Yes, sir, I should. There's something I'd like to tell you." He looked round nervously. "Yes, there's something I'd like to tell you," he said again.

"Very well," said Jimmy good-humoredly. "Come along."

They walked through Langham Place into Regent Street, strolled down that unique thoroughfare, unhampered by the pedestrians who a few hours later would be crowding the broad sidewalk. There was a sprinkling of people about at that hour; the market carts were returning and the usual early workers were hurrying to their places of business.

"You may think it is remarkable," said

Mr. Coleman, "that I should have made such an exhibition of myself; a public official has natural——"

Suddenly he stopped short and all the pathetic pompousness in his voice died away.

"I'm talking like a fool," he said brokenly, "just like a fool!"

He spoke no more till they were crossing Piccadilly Circus into Haymarket. And then as they were descending the slope toward Cockspur Street the staccato explosion of a motor cycle coming from behind made him look round suddenly. It was the loudest motor cycle that Jimmy had ever heard and he, too, turned to see a man in a yellow leather jacket, a closely fitting helmet and a pair of large goggles, coming at speed toward them.

"A noisy fellow that," said Jimmy, and then Mr. Coleman leaned toward him and would have fallen had not his companion caught him in his arms.

"Got it!" he said thickly.

Jimmy jerked him upright.

"Hold up," he said. "What is the matter with you?"

But the man in his arms did not answer. He thought at first the man had fainted, and, carrying him to a recessed doorway, put him down on the step. A policeman on point duty had seen the collapse and came striding across the road.

"I think he has fainted," said Jimmy.

"Oh!" said the policeman suspiciously. "Who is he?"

"He is Mr. Coleman, and I am Detective Inspector Sepping of headquarters," said Jimmy, and the officer's tone changed.

"There's an all-night chemist's shop open, a few doors up. Shall we get him in there, sir?"

Jimmy was stooping to lift the unconscious man when he saw a red stain creeping along the man's neck.

"He's wounded," he said, and pulled aside the coat.

The bullet had struck Coleman a little above the heart and he was bleeding desperately. They picked him up and carried him into the chemist's, but from the first Jimmy knew that the case was hopeless, and Coleman died a quarter of an hour later, as the ambulance was turning into the entrance of Charing Cross Hospital.

He hurried back to the scene of the shooting and found a policeman keeping at a respectful distance the crowd that had gathered even at that early hour.

"There were two or three shots fired. Look at those, sir." He pointed to two punctures that had been driven into the wooden-fronted shop. They were within an inch of one another. "An automatic pistol, I should say," said the policeman. "I didn't hear any shot, either."

"Did you hear the motor cycle?" said Jimmy.

"The man who was making such a noise? I nearly stopped him for riding without a silencer."

"He had a silencer," said Jimmy, "but it was on his automatic pistol."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CLOSE TO KUPIE.

His first thought, after his mind began to be normal, was of Dora. What effect would this new and greatest of all tragedies have upon the girl? She must be told, although the shock might kill her. He sent a message to all stations, ordering cyclist patrols to warn the men on duty to report the yellow motor cyclist, and almost immediately he had news of the murderer. He had passed under the Admiralty Arch into Green Park, had been seen going up Constitution Hill, and had turned into Hyde Park, moving in the direction of Knightsbridge. After that all trace of him was lost until about seven o'clock in the morning, when the motor cycle was found in a clump of rhododendron bushes, and, with it, the man's leather coat and hat. He himself had vanished.

Dicker saw the treasury officials and was surprised to learn how small and unimportant a position the late Mr. Coleman held.

"He was a clerk," said the chief of his department, and mentioned a sum which left Dicker speechless by its inadequacy. "I was always under the impression that he had money of his own," said the official, "and was working at the treasury as a hobby. He was a very inoffensive man and I suppose he was able to maintain the pretense that he occupied a very prominent position from the fact that he had a little room to himself and was not brought into contact with other members of the staff. At any rate," he said with a smile, "the other clerks would not have given him away and probably some of them practice the same

deceit. He had no enemies, as far as I know. Indeed, I know very little about his private life, though several times I have thought it curious that he should find his very dull work as amusing as he did."

"When did he come to you?"

"During the war," was the reply. "We were rather short of men and at that time he occupied a more important position than he has since the armistice."

When Dicker reached Portland Place he found that the news of Coleman's death had traveled before him. He was met by the troubled chauffeur-butler and shown into the drawing-room.

"This is terrible, sir," he almost wailed. "First Mr. Parker—I never think of him except as Mr. Parker; then poor Mr. Collett; now my poor master!"

Dicker took possession of the dead man's papers and when Jimmy Sepping came back from a hasty breakfast at his club he found Bennett waiting for him with a large sealed envelope in his hand.

"These are poor Mr. Coleman's documents," he said. "Mr. Dicker said I was to bring them to you and to tell you that he thinks he has found Kupie."

"Oh!" said the startled Jimmy. "Where has Mr. Dicker gone?"

"He's catching the eight-thirty for Northampton—at least he told me so," said Bennett with a half smile. "I don't know whether Mr. Dicker would give away information to an outsider and probably you know where he has gone. Mr. Sepping, what am I to do? I am simply distracted with worry. Poor Miss Coleman!"

"Does she know?" asked Jimmy and Bennett shook his head.

"Who do you think is Kupie, sir? I've got my own theory," he said earnestly. "Probably you'd think I was mad or spiteful if I told you."

"Who do you think?" asked Jimmy.

"I have an idea it is Mr. Walton himself," said the man doggedly, "and so did Mr. Coleman. I once heard him raving about Mr. Walton to Miss Dora. He as good as said that if he could tell everything he knew the police would be looking for Mr. Walton to jail him—not to rescue him."

"You can dismiss that idea from your mind, Bennett," said Jimmy sternly. "Mr. Walton is no more a criminal than I am." And, seeing that the man was not convinced he went on good-naturedly: "We suspect everybody now, Bennett. Mr. Dicker even suspected poor Mr. Coleman. I don't know what you ought to do. I think you'd better remain at the house until Miss Coleman is able to decide where she is going. I will go down to Marlow and see her. By the way, did Mr. Coleman ever say any more about Mr. Walton?"

The man hesitated.

"No, sir, he made one or two rather unpleasant remarks which I don't want to repeat, but then, he suspected a lot of people. One of his ideas was that Kupie was somebody at headquarters, somebody who had access to all the information that would turn up about crimes and criminals, the very stuff that a blackmailer would give his head to know."

Jimmy had one of his fantastic brain waves and acted on it.

"Did Mr. Coleman ever talk about Tod Haydn?" he asked.

"Tod Haydn?" repeated the other. "No, sir, I don't remember the name. But then I wasn't on what you might call speaking terms with the family until I took over poor Parker's job. Mr. Coleman had his limousine and as I drove outside I had no chance of discussing things with him and he was not the sort of man who would tell you much about his private affairs."

As Bennett went out of the office a clerk brought Jimmy a telegram. He placed it by the side of his pad while he finished the work he was doing. When it was completed he opened the wire leisurely, thinking it was one of the innumerable telegraphic reports that came to him in his official capacity.

Come to Marlow immediately. Joan has gone. Dora. Please send a policeman or get somebody to break in the door.

He stared at the message, trying to make head or tail of it.

Fetch a policeman? Why did she send that message? Was it a joke? There was an air of urgency about the summons that was not to be denied.

Joan gone!

He went pale at the thought of all that those very simple words might mean. As he came flying out into the courtyard one of the assistant commissioners drove up in his car and in a few words Jimmy explained what he required.

"Certainly, take the car, Jimmy," was the instant reply and in a few seconds he was

speeding toward Chelsea. He went through Maidenhead at a speed which transgressed all regulations, and clear of the town the car fairly flew up Quarry Hill and down the narrow, winding road.

There was nothing about the house that seemed in any way remarkable, except that, when he knocked, there came no reply. Dora had told him once that the servants were local girls who lived in the town. Apparently they had not been admitted either. He found the kitchen door bolted and barred.

Returning to the front of the house he saw an open French window leading on to the small balcony that formed the roof of the porch and without hesitation he jumped up and gripping the pillar with his knees drew himself to the level of the rail. Going through the open window he found himself in a woman's bedroom; the bed had been slept in. Moreover, the clothes of the occupant lay neatly folded across the back of a chair. A second window was smashed and the mirror in a long wardrobe was splintered, obviously by a bullet. All this he saw at a glance. Jimmy's heart thumped painfully. It was Joan's room! He recognized her bag on the table.

The door was open and he went out on to the landing and tried another door. He was in a small bedroom and guessed from certain indications that this was Coleman's own. The bed had not been slept in, as he well knew.

The third door was locked. He shook it and a weak voice called him. Stepping back, he brought his foot against the lock and the flimsy door crashed open.

It was another bedroom but he did not look at the disordered furniture or note anything save the woman who was crouching by the window. Her hands were tied tightly together and a rope passed round her arms locked her elbows painfully.

Jimmy looked at her, speechless. Was this girl with the red eyes and the bruised face Dora Coleman? She looked up at him piteously; her pale lips moved but she uttered no sound; and then, recovering from his paralysis, Jimmy lifted her tenderly and laid her on the bed. His knife cut the bonds about her arms and ankles and as the last strand was severed she collapsed with a groan of pain and for a while Jimmy thought she was dying.

He knew it was useless going to the telephone, but he tried, only to find, as he had expected, that Kupie had been to work with his usual thoroughness.

In the dining room he found a bottle of brandy, and, bringing it upstairs, rubbed her numbed arms and bathed her forehead until presently she recovered consciousness.

"Where is Joan?" he asked.

She shook her head wearily.

"I don't know. I did my best, Jimmy," she muttered. "I did my very best! She fired at them. I think she escaped, because he came back and beat me. Oh, my God!"

"Who beat you?"

She shook her head.

"Tod Haydn?"

For an instant he saw a spark in her eyes but it faded away again.

"You don't know Tod Haydn," she said, and then: "What is the use?"

"Dora, tell me what this man is to you."

She shook her head again.

"Nothing," she said bitterly, "nothing but my master. And Coleman's master. Poor Coleman! They will kill him!"

He could hardly believe the evidence of his ears.

"Was he your father?" he asked.

"No, he is no relation. Did they get him?" she asked huskily, seeing the look in Jimmy's face, for her mind was moving more quickly now and she understood the significance of the word "was."

"Yes, they got him," said Jimmy quietly. "Who was it, Dora—is Dora your name?"

"Dorothy Julia Coleman," she said wearily. "Yes, Coleman is my right name. I'm little Knowles' Julia. I thought you'd have guessed that long ago."

She asked for some water and he went into Joan's room for the water bottle. When he returned she was sitting up.

"Who is Tod Haydn?" he asked.

"I can't tell you. You will have to find him without my help, Jimmy."

And she was adamant on that point. The old dictum of the crook world held—"Thou shalt not squeak." The man had struck her like the brute that he was but she was faithful to the traditions of her class.

When she had recovered she told as much of the story as she knew. She was awakened by the shots and had heard Tod say: "She has gone to the boat house." After that she knew nothing.

"She probably took the launch," she said. "I told her how to work it and I had at the

back of my mind a fear that one day she might need the boat. What are you going to do with me?" she asked.

He shook his head.

"What can I do with you, Julia? You'll have to stand your trial, I suppose, for complicity in these murders."

He was shocked more than he had thought was possible for the most tremendous events in life to shock him.

"I know nothing about the murders," she said. "Tod never took us into his confidence. He fixed everything. Coleman is dead—are you sure? Will you swear that?"

"I swear that," said Jimmy in surprise. "Why?"

"Then I can tell you that he killed Parker, but he bungled it. So Tod said. Didn't you see the mark on Coleman's face? That was the whipping that Tod gave him."

"What was he to you?" asked Jim accusingly.

"Nothing," she repeated. "Tod was not a man who made love, or who wanted a wife. He is inhuman in some respects. I can't tell you any more, Jimmy—I suppose it is a great impertinence to call you Jimmy?" she said wistfully and his heart went out to the poor victim of Tod Haydn—a cipher, a tool, a nothing to this man who did not care for the love of women and counted his conquests by the standard of solid cash.

"You'll have to get him quick, Jimmy, or he'll get you. After they came back he told me I had betrayed them and had given her the pistol. That was when he hit me. We met on the island by appointment yesterday morning and he struck me then. Joan saw my face. Then early this morning the milk boy come. I couldn't unfasten myself, I could only hobble inch by inch but I managed to get to my writing table and scrawled out a telegram."

A light dawned on Jimmy.

"At the end of the telegram you wrote a message to the boy, telling him to send for a policeman or get somebody to break into the house?"

She nodded.

"The boy evidently didn't read the telegram; he sent it off as it was. How did you get it to him?"

"I pushed it through the open window, with some money I took from my bag. I tried to speak to him but he couldn't hear me—you see, the window was only open a little way."

Jimmy went out into the road in the hope of finding a messenger who could carry word to the Marlow police, and presently a cyclist came along by whom the detective dispatched a letter. He was talking to the girl when the sound of heavy footsteps in the passage below told him that the police had arrived.

"Rightly or wrongly, Dora, I'm not going to mention your part in this conspiracy," he said. "You can tell them the story you have told me, but Tod will have to be a stranger—do you understand?—a burglar who broke in?"

She nodded.

"You're very good to me," she said in a low voice. "Jimmy!"

He turned back from the door.

"I love Rex, that's all," she said with a quiver in her voice. "You needn't believe that—I don't expect you will. I was in the plot to swindle him, yet I loved him and love him still."

Jimmy went down the stairs in a very thoughtful frame of mind. He did not waste any more time than he could help. A car took him into Marlow town and from there he sent out inquiries along the river, but no sign of a lady in a nightdress and dressing gown had been seen. Perhaps she had got back to London. He called up her house but nothing had been heard.

Frantic with fear he chartered a steam launch and went down the river, guessing that she would go with the stream; but he had not gone far before he came against a blank wall. The launch had been found to the west of Cookham lock. It had been seen, lying at the bottom of the river, by an angler. Moreover, the lock keeper had not been aroused in the night.

"If the lady was in difficulties she would certainly have come to me, sir," he said. "I was up most of the night with toothache; a light was in my window and she couldn't have missed seeing it."

"What has passed through to-day?" asked Jimmy.

The lock keeper recited a long string of craft, ranging from a coal barge to a punt.

"*Molly* of Wapping," he said, ticking them off on his finger. "*John Morton* of Chelsea, the *Reliance* of Greenwich, the *River Queen* of Gravesend—that's a tug—and about four barges up and down."

"You didn't have a covered launch through, or any other kind of craft in which a lady might have been concealed?"

The lock keeper shook his head.

"The *Dora* went through at seven," he said.

"The *Dora?*" interrupted Jim quickly. "What is that?"

"Oh, she's a barge," said the man and Jimmy's hopes fell.

"Then the *Nancy* went through ten minutes later. Then the *Golden Heart* came up from Maidenhead."

Joan might have landed, and, if this was the case, his field of search was restricted. But none of the houses within miles of the river had been awakened in the night by a lady in scanty attire and the afternoon wore on without his receiving any tidings of the lost girl.

Hollow-eyed, weary of soul and body, Jimmy returned to Scotland Yard to find a new demand upon his tired brain. He had hardly dropped into his chair when Inspector Levy came in.

"Where's Bill Dicker?" he asked.

"I don't know," said Jimmy tiredly. "Oh, yes, he's gone to Northampton—to find Kupie. At least, that was the message he sent."

"Kupie be blowed! Bill had a conference this afternoon and he wouldn't miss that. Besides, he had two appointments at five. Who told you?"

"The man who brought the papers—Bennett, Coleman's butler," said Jimmy. "He said that Dicker was going to Northampton by the eight-thirty."

"There isn't an eight-thirty to Northampton and nobody knows that better than Dicker. There never has been an eight-thirty. There's one at a quarter past nine. Dicker's hardly likely to make a mistake. Where was he last seen?"

"In Coleman's house," said Jimmy becoming suddenly wide awake.

He got up from the table, opened a drawer and dropped a gun into his pocket.

"I very seldom carry lethal weapons," he said, "but on this occasion I shall. Round up all the men you can lay hands on to surround Coleman's house—I'm going to arrest Tod Haydn, alias Bennett. And may I be kicked for a fool for not realizing that Kupie and Haydn and Bennett are one and the same person!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

TWO O'CLOCK.

Taxicabs of all varieties and makes dropped a small army of detectives in Portland Place; and when the cordon had been completed Jimmy knocked at the door. It was opened by a middle-aged woman servant.

"I think Mr. Bennett is in his room, sir. I'll call him."

"Don't trouble," said Jimmy, stepping in before her. "Just wait here. I know the way."

He went up the stairs three at a time. Bennett's door was ajar and he pushed it open with the muzzle of his pistol. The room was empty. He looked out of the open window and saw immediately the immense difficulty of surrounding a house the back of which looked upon the courtyards of Portland Street. He did not stay to search the room but ran downstairs again and led the way to the larder beneath which was the concealed chamber. Over this a heavy dresser had been pulled.

"I was afraid of this," said Jimmy as he helped push it back.

In a second the trap was raised and kneeling down he peered into the void.

"There's somebody here," he said. "Get me a lamp."

One glance he took at the figure huddled in the corner and then dropped to the floor of the underground vault.

"Come down—two men!" he shouted. "Mr. Dicker is here!"

Dicker was unconscious when they pulled him up and laid him on the stone floor of the larder. His face was blue; he was in the last stages of asphyxiation and the wonder was that he had lived through the terrible ordeal.

He had not revived when Jimmy called at the hospital at seven o'clock that night, but the report was satisfactory. That he had lived at all was due, as Bill Dicker afterward confirmed, to the presence in the room of the outlet of a small leaden pipe. Apparently a previous owner had intended to wire the sunken cellar for electric light and to that end had had a pipe laid to one of the corners of the apartment. The wires had never been fixed and the leaden pipe served as a life line. A closer scrutiny of

Bennett's room satisfied Jimmy that the man had left in a hurry—though whether he had gone out through the window—it was an easy drop to the ledge below, and thence the way of escape was easy—or whether he had left the house just before the search party had arrived, it was impossible to determine; the more so as none of the servants had any very valuable information to give.

A pair of soiled yellow-leather gauntlets and a motor-cycle license, issued to him in the name of Bennett, were the principal finds. That he was able to keep his mind concentrated upon this new mystery amazed Jimmy in a dull, numb way. Behind his mechanical performance of duty was a heart-breaking terror for which there was no anodyne.

"Joan is lost, Joan is lost!" his brain repeated. "Why are you searching Bennett's room? Why are you sitting here worrying yourself about this crook, even though he is a triple murderer, when she is calling to you?"

It was ten o'clock when he left his office, a broken, haggard man. He was stepping into his taxi in the courtyard when an officer came running after him.

"Captain Sepping, somebody has been broadcasting this for ten minutes; we're getting telephone messages from all quarters."

Jimmy hurried back into the lighted hall and read the paper which the man had handed to him. The message was brief, but he could have wept for joy as he read it:

Tell Captain James Sepping, New Scotland Yard, that I am safe. JOAN.

Jimmy's legs turned to water and he sat down hurriedly.

"When did this come?" he asked huskily.

"There is the time on the corner, sir—nine-thirty-five and repeated at nine-forty-five, in the intervals between the concert that was broadcasted to-night."

He read the message again and a great load of anguish rolled from his heart.

"She is safe," he said unsteadily. "Thank you, sergeant."

Safe, but where, and how? He did not trouble to answer those questions as his cab carried him homeward. His heart was singing a song of joyous thanksgiving and he could have danced, if his weary body would have allowed him.

Albert must have been waiting for him, for as Jimmy took his key from his pocket the door opened.

"There's a lady to see you—just come, sir," whispered the man.

"Who is the lady?" said Jimmy. a wild hope surging within him.

"Miss Coleman," said Albert.

Dora! He had almost forgotten her existence, almost forgotten the tragedy which overshadowed her.

She was sitting by the table, her hands clasped before her, her dark eyes shining feverishly.

"Joan is safe," he said, closing the door behind him. "We have just had a wireless."

She nodded.

"Thank God for that!" she breathed. "Do you know anything more?"

The beautiful eyes searched his face.

"I know that Bennett is Tod Haydn," he said quietly, but her gaze did not shift.

"I am glad you know that, because, if you didn't, I should have had to tell you. Yes, he is Tod."

She said nothing more, until:

"Jimmy, can I sleep here to-night?"

"Sleep here?" he said in surprise. "My dear girl, there are no women in this house—I suppose you realize that?"

"Can I sit up and talk, then?" she asked desperately. "Don't you realize, Jimmy, that Tod will be looking for me? Have you raided the house?"

He nodded.

"And found nothing. Of course he will think I betrayed him. I couldn't stay at Marlow; I don't know where I can go."

"Of course you can remain here," said Jimmy heartily. "Albert, who is a stickler for the proprieties, will be shocked, but—in fact, I don't care what happens to-night," he said recklessly, and a slow smile dawned on her face.

"Because you have found Joan. Where he she?"

"That I can't tell you," he said, and explained to her how the news had come.

"How curious! Lawford must have been at the same place," she said. "Of course she is on the yacht."

"Yacht? But there are no yachts on the upper reaches of the Thames."

"They may have taken her to the coast," she persisted. "Lawford told us that he went a three-hour journey before he reached the place of his imprisonment."

"Did he ever tell you anything more than that?" asked Jimmy quickly.

"Little more than he told you. I've thought since that Lawford must have betrayed us all and that was why he was in such a hurry to get out of the country. I knew nothing of his murder until I was told. I didn't even know that he had committed the unpardonable sin." She changed the conversation abruptly and when he tried to resume where she had broken off he found she was not willing to continue.

Jimmy was desperately tired but the solution of the difficulty was an easy one. He must go to a hotel in the neighborhood, but to this she would not agree.

"You will leave me with your manservant," she said. "Won't you go to sleep and let me sit up and read?"

"Do you think he will come?"

"I'm certain," she said emphatically, "absolutely certain! He *must* kill me: there is no other way out for him! Don't you realize, Jimmy, that I am the only evidence living against Tod Haydn? Coleman would have betrayed him; he was going with you to Scotland Yard with that object. But Tod knew, followed him and killed him in the street—Tod always uses a silencer."

"If I promise to sit up will you go to bed?" he asked her, but to this she would not agree.

"I am not sleepy. If I went to bed I should lie awake thinking and wondering and fearing. Please, please lie down, Jimmy, and trust me. Is there a fire escape to this building?" she asked suddenly.

Jimmy did not know but Albert was well posted on such matters.

"Yes, miss, there is a fire escape."

"Does the ladder pass anywhere near your windows?" she asked, and an investigation revealed the fact that one of the flights ran so close to the window of Jimmy's bedroom that it could be touched with a stick.

"He will come at two," said the girl calmly. "That is a practice of his—they call him 'Two O'clock Tod' in the—the profession. If he doesn't come at two he won't come at all."

Jimmy made preparations for the night. The girl having refused the offer of his bed he had a couch made up in the sitting room and on this she lay down fully dressed. He had a small settee pulled into the passage, which he wedged up against the door. Here Albert took up his position, while Jimmy, going into his room, pulled his own bed from its unusual place and brought the head flush with the window overlooking the flat courtyard.

At midnight the lights were extinguished, with the exception of a small lamp in the sitting room, and Jimmy lay down, very wide awake, for he knew that there was something behind the girl's warning. As two o'clock was striking he woke with a start. There was a deep silence, broken only by the rumbling of a motor lorry in the street outside. He had drawn up the blind before going to bed so that he commanded a complete sidewise view of the window. The last chimes quivered in the air but nothing happened. Evidently the girl's fear was unfounded. He had reached that decision when a shadow fell on the window—the indefinite, almost invisible shadow which the stars throw.

Jimmy took the pistol from under his pillow and sat waiting. What would be the line of attack? Surely the man would not dare to come into the flat, knowing the girl was there, and believing, if he believed that she had betrayed him, that his visit was expected?

For a minute nothing happened and Jimmy began to think that his eyes had played a trick, and he had half decided to get up and investigate when something heavy smashed through his window and fell with a thud to the ground.

Only for a second was Jimmy undecided as to what had happened; and then, shrinking against the wall, he gripped the edge of the mattress and rolled it round him. There came a deafening explosion which lifted him from the bed and dropped him again—an indescribable sound of iron striking wall and ceiling, a pungent reek of exploded cordite, and silence.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

REX'S MILLION POUNDS.

A sector of steel had penetrated the bed and ripped the skin of his arm, but this he did not know till afterward. He had some difficulty in getting to the floor, for one of the bars of the bed had broken under the fearful impact of the explosion. When he did he reached out his hand and tried to switch on the light, but that had gone. So had all the lights in the flat, he discovered, and at last he pulled open the jammed and

splintered door and came into the room where Dora was lying.

There was no light here, until Albert came stumbling with candles and matches, and then Jimmy went back to survey his room. Not a whole article of furniture in the room remained; not a pane of glass in the windows. Every square had been cut clean out as if by a knife and the carpet in the center of the room was smoldering. This he extinguished with a jug of water; and while Albert was explaining to the startled tenants who flocked up to discover the cause of their discomfort—he found afterward that a hole had been blown through the ceiling of the flat below, though fortunately nobody had been sleeping in the room beneath him—he stepped gingerly about the shattered room looking for fragments.

"A Mills bomb," he explained as he came out to the troubled girl. "Did anything happen in here?"

The wall parallel with his bedroom bulged a little; half a dozen pictures had lost their glass and a flower vase had been blown off the table by the force of the concussion.

"Yes, it was a Mills bomb. I thought it was that when I heard it drop on the floor. I remember during the war a fellow dropping a bomb by accident and it is a sound you do not readily forget."

"He wasn't trying to kill you," said Dora slowly. "He thought I was there."

The clang of fire bells came from the street below. Some tenant whose telephone had not been put out of order had wisely rung the brigade as soon as the sound of the explosion had come to him. The courtyard of the flat was searched but as Jimmy expected there was no sign of the man—he would have been very surprised if there had been.

The damage to his flat was much greater than he had imagined. The electric wires were shattered, water pipes and gaspipes broken, fittings everywhere dissipated. Happily he did not have to explain the presence of Dora Coleman, for firemen and policemen were so intent upon their work that they seemed to accept her presence as natural and when somebody referred to her as "Mrs. Sepping" he did not trouble to correct the error.

Fortunately there was a furnished flat on the first floor, the owner of which was abroad, and the janitor, who had been charged with the responsibility of finding a desirable tenant, remembered the vacancy and offered to Jimmy a solution of his domestic problem for which he was truly grateful.

"Unless our friend disturbs us to-morrow night I think you'll be safe here for a day or two. But to make absolutely sure I'm going to take effective steps to prevent a repetition of this hilarious evening," said Jimmy.

It was eleven o'clock when he woke, staring round the strange room and wondering how he came to be lying under a sky-blue eiderdown quilt embroidered with pink roses. After he had dressed he went out into the passage and knocked at the girl's door.

"All right?" he asked, and, receiving a satisfactory assurance, he went out, not waiting for breakfast.

Bill Dicker had recovered consciousness during the night but he was still weak, the matron at the hospital told him, and offered the conventional warning.

"Did you get that lad, Jimmy?" was Dicker's first question.

"No, I didn't get him but he nearly got me."

"That's not exactly the same thing," growled Bill weakly. "Jimmy, if you go after Haydn you've got to remember that you're dealing with a real wild beast. And Jimmy, you've got to down him before he downs you! He has three murders behind him and the gray doors of the death house in front of him. And they can only hang him once! It is better to figure in the witness box than on the indictment as one of the late departed and lamented victims of this bright boy."

"The matron says if you talk too much you'll have a relapse, but you must tell me how you got in that infernal dark hole."

"He pushed me there. He thoroughly deceived me with a beautiful story of how he had discovered an outlet to the underground room and like a fool I went down. I had just reached the bottom when the trap dropped and I knew just where I'd been stung. I'm not proud of that achievement," he said ruefully.

Jimmy nodded.

"Bennett collected all the letters he had probably left behind him in Coleman's room and brought them on to Scotland Yard with a story that deceived *me!* Altogether a

plausible liar. And a minor mystery is explained, Dicker. The reason 'Bennett' did not hear the policeman shouting before he went upstairs. The explanation is that Bennett was not in the house! He must have come in after the policeman and was standing at the bottom of the stairs when the officer came down. The story of his having been drugged was, of course, all moonshine. Bennett was the supreme boss of the gang. I remember now little Nippy telling me how he insisted upon everybody playing their part, even when there were no onlookers—he played it mighty well!"

Here the watchful and anxious matron intervened and Jimmy had to take a hurried adieu.

He went home to lunch, which was not a usual practice of his, but he was anxious about Dora and all the time was wondering whether in his absence Tod Haydn would find a way of getting at her.

She was brighter and more her normal self. A night's sleep had brought a remarkable change, though the bruises still showed and the skin about one eye was discolored.

"The brute!" said Jimmy when she had described in a few vivid words the method of Mr. Tod Haydn with obstinate women.

"It might have been worse," said the girl quietly, "infinitely worse. He might have fallen in love with me, and that would have been fatal for me, for I should have killed him. I suppose you haven't heard any more about him?"

Jimmy shook his head.

"And you won't," she said decidedly. "Tod is not an ordinary outlaw. He's a clever actor, a brilliant strategist, he has a dozen bolts to which he can go if he is hard pressed."

"Do you know any of them?"

She thought for a while.

"Yes, I know some, but don't ask me. I'm not thinking about him. I'm thinking about myself. I believe you will get him. I don't want to be responsible for his capture unless——"

"And you don't want him to get away with Rex Walton's million, do you?" said Jimmy.

To his amazement the girl laughed.

"Rex Walton's million is no longer in the hands of Kupie," she said.

"Then who has it, for goodness' sake?" asked Jimmy.

"Rex has it," said the girl.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

TOD HAYDN MAKES A CALL.

Tod Haydn stopped at the corner of Lower Regent Street and bought a newspaper. Then he strolled along Piccadilly and turned into a fashionable restaurant. When Dora had described him as a good actor she had done less than justice to his extraordinary histrionic gifts. Nobody who had read the more faithful than flattering description of the wanted man that appeared in large type in all the evening newspapers would have recognized in that debonair man about town the "man of thirty-three, slightly gray at the temples, clean-shaven, square-jawed," et cetera. A small mustache ornamented his upper lip; the gray had disappeared from his hair; and the bushy eyebrows had gone altogether, having been replaced by a thin line of hair that met over his nose.

He read the description of himself, folded the paper and threw it under the table. Then he ordered his dinner with great care, for he was something of an epicurean and poor Coleman's supposed fastidiousness in the matter of food was due entirely to the requirements of his chauffeur.

His dinner eaten at his leisure, he came out, and after letting a number of the more decrepit specimens pass hailed a brand-new taxicab and gave the driver instructions.

"Take me up to Bond Street and don't stop till I tell you," he said. "You need not go too fast."

A third of the way up Old Bond Street was a doorway which he knew well. It led to a set of chambers above a tailor's shop. He glanced quickly from left to right. A man was leaning nonchalantly against a lamp-post a few paces from the door; another idler stood on the other pavement. Haydn grinned and did not signal the cab to stop. So she had told?

He felt no particular resentment against Dora Coleman. To prevent her talking he would have killed her without remorse; but as he had not killed her he expected no more than that she should inform the police of the places where he was likely to be found. That she had told the police nothing and that they had found at least three of his haunts without her assistance he did not know.

When the cab reached Oxford Street he leaned out of the window.

"Go along Maida Vale until I tell you to stop."

There was a small house in this wide thoroughfare which had a particular interest for Tod Haydn; and as he approached the place he keenly scrutinized the sidewalk. Next door to the house he was seeking a man was standing against the gate, smoking. He was a tall man who wore a derby hat, and he seemed to be waiting for somebody. Beyond the house were two other men talking together, and again the stamp was unmistakable. At the end of the road Haydn gave an order and doubling back in his tracks he came to the corner of a fashionable square, tipped the driver liberally and walked a hundred yards down Wigmore Street, turning off into a mews. Here, he knew, he was safe; and although there were certain very necessary articles to be procured from his other hiding places he could do his work with the machinery at his disposal.

He changed quickly into a faded green livery coat, attached to which was a cabman's badge; and, putting on an old cap, he went down to the garage beneath. The solitary vehicle in the place was a taxicab which was Haydn's property and to which a license had been duly issued. After a brief examination of the petrol tank he stacked four tins on the railed roof, opened the door of the garage and brought his car into the cobbled roadway. He only stopped long enough to lock up the garage and then he drove off at a steady pace, making for the west of London. He passed through the suburbs of Hammersmith and Barnes, moving on toward Staines. Somebody hailed him—a man and a woman who had come out of one of the big houses on the Staines Road. He smiled and went on, but pulled down the flag of his meter and rather wondered at himself that he had not taken that elementary precaution before.

Beyond Staines a road runs parallel to the river. Here there are few houses and the sloping meadowland runs uninterruptedly to the water's edge. He reached a place where there was a clump of trees just off the road and unerringly he drove the cab into the very center, extinguished the lights, and taking off his coat, which he folded and put on the driver's seat, replaced the coat by a tight black jacket.

His last act before he switched off the lights was to examine an ugly-looking automatic which he placed carefully in his belt under his waistcoat. This time, with another look round, he stepped briskly along the river path toward Maidenhead.

He had visited the place that afternoon; knew almost to an inch the position of the barge and had located the skiff he would employ for his purpose. It was eleven o'clock when he came opposite an island, by the side of which lay a long slab of blackness. Against the sky he saw the barge's tapering mainmast, which had been raised since he had seen it that afternoon. It was from this mast, as he knew, that the wireless aërial was stretched. He chuckled silently.

Twelve o'clock chimed from a distant church. There was no sign of life on the barge and Tod Haydn, sitting on the bank, his arms clasped about his knees, his keen catlike eyes watching the craft ceaselessly, knew that the hour had come for his attempt. And the attempt must be successful this time.

He walked along the path a little farther until he came to a small creek which was bridged over for the benefit of foot passengers. On the land side the creek wound tortuously for a hundred yards before it swerved round to rejoin the river some distance away. He had not more than a dozen yards to go before he found the skiff he had hidden in the rushes. The creek was too narrow to float him and the boat, and he stepped into the water, and pushed the boat before him until he had passed under the bridge and water came up to above his knees. Then he stepped gingerly aboard and pushed off with a boat hook. Hereabouts the river is not deep and he could punt his way across.

Stealthily he progressed, making no sound. Presently he shipped the boat hook and reaching out, touched the side of the barge. Here he waited for fully five minutes, listening. He heard nothing and tying the painter of the boat to a ringbolt, he climbed silently to the deserted deck and crouching low went stealthily forward until he came parallel with a covered hatchway closed by two small doors. He stooped and listened, then pressed gently. The door was fastened by a very simple catch and slipping a knife from his pocket he lifted the frail security without noise or difficulty.

A dim light burned at the bottom of the short flight of steps which confronted him.

Again he listened intently and his hearing was amazingly acute. The dynamo was not working, he thought; they were running the lights from the accumulator. His rubber-soled shoes made no sound as he descended the stairs to a narrow anteroom paneled with rosewood. The electric fittings were of silver, and silver were the handles of two doors which led from the apartment. He tried one and the door opened a fraction of an inch. Nothing to disturb the quietness. He pushed it open a little farther.

He was now in a larger room, furnished with a luxurious couch, two armchairs and a table. There came to him now the sound of voices speaking in low tones. He crept nearer and listened. Yes, it was he and the girl! He thumbed up his waistcoat and drew his Browning with a gesture that was almost a caress. Now he pushed open the second door—an inch—a foot. He had a clear view of the great saloon with its low carved ceiling, its silken hangings and its beauty of furnishing and fixtures.

Before the flower-decked fireplace was a settee, occupied by a man and a girl, whose backs were toward the intruder. They were talking in low voices, so low that his keen ears could catch no more than a scrap of their talk. Nearer and nearer he crept and the thick carpet would have deadened all sound even if he had not been wearing his silent shoes.

"It was Bennett, of course," the man was saying. "Wells was certain he recognized his voice when he pulled you on board, Joan. The question is, did Bennett guess that the barge was mine? I think it would have been wiser if Wells had put you ashore almost immediately."

"I feel safer here," said Joan and turned quickly at the gentle chuckle behind her.

"Keep your hands where they are," said Bennett, the barrel of his pistol resting on the back of the settee. "Mr. Rex Walton, I believe?"

Rex Walton did not answer.

CHAPTER XL.

THE "COSHER."

"Where are the rest of your crowd?" asked Tod Haydn.

"They've gone ashore," said Walton shortly.

Haydn's lip curled in an ugly grin.

"I hope, for your sake, that they went empty-handed, Walton," he said. "If, by any chance, they took what I'm looking for you will sleep this night in the river! You can sit down."

Rex did not move. His somber gaze met the intruder's without flinching.

"I suppose I've been rather careless," he drawled. "I should have expected this visit. In fact, I did. Where are *your* friends?"

"In hell," said Haydn with a malignity which sent a shiver through the girl's frame.

"I mean Coleman."

"Coleman is dead," said the man coolly, "and I was hoping that I should be able to tell you that your ladylove was dead also. But dear Mrs. Walton is alive—by the way, she *is* Mrs. Walton, isn't she?" he asked with an assumption of innocence. "Anyway, she's alive. I congratulate you. You ought to be very happy. I can only hope that she's more use to you than she has been to me. She's been a quitter since the game started. She wanted to quit when I sent a letter to your first ladylove—Edith something or other; and then she wanted to quit after I'd fixed up an introduction to you and the marriage was arranged. She's been quitting ever since. I'm afraid she's just a poor commonplace crook without imagination or enterprise."

He laid the pistol down on the broad top of the settee, took out a cigarette, and lit it.

"I'll give you a few tips about Julia," he said flippantly, "or shall I call her Dora? By the way, you will have to rename your barge. You've got to treat her rough—and that applies to most women. Spare the rod and spoil the wife, eh?" He picked up the Browning and without warning his tone changed. "I'm thirsty," he said. "I want some of that fine '58 port."

"It has gone ashore."

"You're a liar," said the other. "It is here, on this barge, and you'll lead me to it."

"I'll lead you nowhere," said Rex.

"Then I shall shoot this young woman—and I'm not threatening for the sake of creating a sensation. You understand? If you refuse to lead me to those wine boxes she's dead! And if you show fight I'll get you and I'll take a chance of finding what I am looking for without assistance. Is that plain to you?"

Rex Walton knew the man and his cold-blooded methods and had no doubt that he would put his threat into execution.

"I will count three," Haydn went on, "and if at the end of that time you are still of the same mind——"

"I'll save you the trouble of counting," said Rex. "You will not want my sister?"

"On the contrary, I shall want her very badly," said the other suavely. "Under no circumstances will I leave her here to give an alarm. Step ahead and step lively!"

With a gesture to the girl Rex moved slowly across the room, the way the intruder had come. They passed through the two anterooms and Walton took a key from his pocket and opened a door under the stairway. He put out his hand and switched on the light and the man who stood closely behind him, the muzzle of his gun within half an inch of Walton's waist, saw yet another door set in a bulkhead. This Walton opened, passing through into a small storeroom, and at the sight of two boxes lying in the center of the floor, Tod Haydn's eyes glittered.

"You can carry one back to the saloon," he said, "and you," he nodded to the girl, "can carry the other."

"It is impossible for my sister to carry a heavy box," said Walton hotly.

"Let her try," was the laconic reply. "Show her how to move it corner to corner."

Without a word the girl lifted the heavy box, and, exerting all her strength, dragged it toward their tormentor. After ten minutes' labor, which left her hot and breathless, the two cases were back in the saloon.

"Open the first," said Haydn. "I see your friends have already broken it."

Silently Rex lifted the lid. There was a packing of straw, which he removed, and beneath apparently lay half a dozen bottles in straw jackets, side by side.

"Stand back a few paces," warned Haydn, "and don't move."

With his eye upon his captives he stooped, and, with no effort, lifted the dummy lid, for dummy it was. Beneath, in a tin-lined receptacle, bundle after bundle of thousand-dollar notes were tightly packed. He drew them out one by one and from his pocket produced a stout silk bag into which he dropped them. Then he opened the second case and repeated his performance until the bag was filled. He drew a cord tightly round the mouth of the sack, knotted it and straightened his back.

"That's that," he said. "And now I am afraid that I cannot afford to leave you to tell stories about the wicked Tod Haydn."

Joan could not mistake the sinister meaning of his words. From the first she had expected no other ending to this visitation; and now, with the end in sight, she braced herself to meet the fate that waited her.

"That means, I suppose, that you're going to do a little shooting?" said Rex. His voice was very calm. "I suppose you know that one of your confederates has made a statement, which I have in my possession."

"Which confederate?" asked Haydn quickly.

"Mr. Lawford Collett—though I don't know why I should satisfy your curiosity. I've enough evidence to hang you, Haydn."

"In which case," said the other with a thin smile, "we will add that interesting document to our collection. You're probably bluffing——"

"Bluffing!" said Walton. "Look here." There was a tiny polished wood cupboard projecting from the wall and without hesitation he pulled it open. If he had shown any fear Haydn would have known. "There it is," he said.

There was a click and all the lights in the saloon went out.

"Drop!" he shouted and flung himself at his enemy's legs.

Twice, three times Haydn fired, and the noise of the explosions in that confined space deafened the girl. She had dropped upon her hands and knees and now she crawled in the direction of the fireplace and whatever cover the settee afforded. She heard the struggle of the two men in the darkness and guessed that Rex had reached his objective. For once Haydn was taken by surprise and before he knew what had happened he had been tackled low and brought to the floor. In another minute Rex Walton's knee was on his pistol arm and his strong hands at the murderer's throat.

The strength of the desperado was incredible. Recovering from the first shock of surprise he twisted free of the grip that held him and now he had to depend upon his hands, for the pistol had been wrenched from his grasp. He struck out desperately. One chance blow caught Rex on the jaw and momentarily knocked him out. Before he could recover the man had wrenched himself clear and was groping on the floor for his weapon.

Then Joan spoke quickly, entreatingly.

She spoke in French and Haydn was no linguist. As he found his pistol there was a quick rush of feet and the thud of a door. He staggered to the wall, felt for the switch and flooded the room with light. It was empty.

He flew to the door that was flush with the fireplace and threw himself against it, but it was locked. Walton had gone to his cabin and in his cabin he would find the means of protecting himself. There was no time to be lost. He picked up the sack and throwing it to his shoulder ran up the gangway on to the deck.

The change from the light of the room below to the darkness of the night was so sudden as to blind him effectually; but after a while he began to pick out objects and moved unerringly to the place where he had left the boat. He was untying the painter when the sound of quick footsteps on the companionway came to him and he turned, and putting up his hands, pulled a long cane from under his collar—a cane which Tod kept in a specially contrived pocket that ran down his spine. It was the "cosh"—a weapon in the use of which he was an expert.

As Walton reached the head of the stairs Tod struck home and Rex fell to his knees, his revolver clattering to the deck. For a second the man hesitated, his stick half poised for the second blow; and then, turning, he ran back to the boat, threw in the sack and dropped to safety. Another second and he was poling across the river to the opposite bank. Scrambling to land, he kicked the boat loose, and with the sack on his shoulder walked quickly back the way he had come.

He reached the clump of bushes and found the cab. Bundling the sack through the open window he started up the engine and stopping only to change his jacket jumped into the seat and backed out with amazing skill, for his mud guard did not so much as scrape the trunks of the thickly planted trees.

He was on the road now. A quarter of an hour later he was passing through Staines, and as the clock was striking two he had headed the cab into the garage.

"A good night's work," thought Tod Haydn with satisfaction as he put on the lights and turned to secure his booty.

One step he took and then stood stock-still. A man was leaning out of the window of the cab and in his hand was something which brought Tod Haydn's hands up above his head.

"And keep them there!" said Jimmy Sepping as he opened the door and stepped leisurely to the floor.

CHAPTER XLI.

REX WALTON'S STORY.

"I don't claim any credit for capturing you," said Jimmy. "It was Nippy Knowles who saw the car—he was taking me to the barge. What happened there?" he asked sternly.

"You'll find out in time," growled the other as he held out his hands.

As the second cuff was snapped on his wrists he asked for a cigarette.

"And a match too, I suppose?" said Jimmy sarcastically. "And an open tin of petrol at your feet, eh?"

He unlocked the door of the garage and swung his prisoner outside, and there were more people in the yard than Haydn had ever seen before at that hour of the morning.

"Here is your man, inspector," said Jimmy.

"Where was Knowles?" Haydn broke his silence just before he was being led away.

"We were both in the plantation and had just discovered your car when you came up. If you had opened the door you would have been arrested earlier; but I preferred to take you in the metropolitan area—it saves complications."

When Jimmy reached Scotland Yard he heard excellent news. Nippy's message was that Rex Walton had been stunned but not seriously hurt and the girl was unharmed.

It was not till the afternoon that Rex Walton, back again amid the familiar surroundings of his study, told the story of the missing million.

"It was about a month before poor Edie died that I got to know Coleman—whose real name, by the way, is Adolph Vermeuil. He was born of French parents in England and was an international crook of some standing, though he operated very little in England, as you will discover when you look him up. Coleman, as I will continue to call him, worked at the treasury under circumstances of which you are probably aware. After Edie's death I got to know Coleman better, and he invited me to his house,

where I met Dora and came—to love her. I ought to pretend that it was less than love. To-day, in spite of her duplicity, in spite of her association with this terrible gang, I have nothing but sorrow for her—sorrow and gratitude, for undoubtedly she risked her life to save Joan and for a long time kept the gang in ignorance as to the reason why I had made my seemingly extraordinary disappearance.

"I had heard of Kupie, of course, but only as a member of the general public would hear of a blackmailer's activities. I never dreamed that I should come under his notice. For a long time I received no letter, and for a good reason. The gang had decided not to take a few thousands from me but to take every penny I had. When at last the letters began to arrive they were couched in a peculiar and unusual tone and they threatened, not exposure of some of my past misdeeds, but my ruin, unless I gave up Dora Coleman.

"The objects of those letters are now apparent. They were twofold. Their first was to stiffen me in my determination to marry Dora—for they must have known something of my character, or, for the matter of that, the character of any decent man. The second object was to create in my mind an atmosphere of uneasiness as to my fortune. Here they succeeded. Very foolishly—I was in rather a nervous state at the time—I consulted Coleman and he it was who fostered my fears and told me amazing stories of Kupie's methods—tales which he said he had heard in confidence at the treasury and which I promised him I would in no circumstances discuss with any other person.

"Coleman, of course, was an instrument of Tod Haydn's, who had planned the most daring confidence trick of all time. Their plot was to induce me to liquidate all my securities and to place the money in Coleman's 'safe deposit.' He told me stories which, in my lunacy, I believed, of secret government arrangements for the deposit of securities and money in case of revolution. He even went so far as to say that the real reserves of some of the great banks were kept in secret hiding places beneath certain private houses—which he obligingly pointed out to me one day!

"You may think that I was a champion fool. I was. The record of every confidence trick, when it comes into the cold light of police investigation, shows the victim as an imbecile and the trick which deprives him of his money as crude and one which any sane man would detect. But those who have been in the hands of confidence men know that it is not the story they tell but the atmosphere that they create which enables them to make their biggest coups.

"Here was a man, living in an expensive house in one of the most exclusive thoroughfares in London—a man who was a government official and, so far as I knew, had been a government official all his life; a man who talked of millions and hundreds of millions carelessly, as you and I talk of hundreds. And add to that the fascination which his alleged daughter exercised upon me and my faith in her loyalty and sincerity.

"I have had a long time to think about those early days but I cannot recall a single instance when Dora helped either Coleman or her other employer by offering me advice. Indeed, all the advice I received from her was in the direction of caution; and I now believe that here, too, she was perfectly honest, and that she was trying to warn me without incurring the punishment which she knew would follow a discovery.

"I drew the money from the bank and delivered in three parcels the American bills I received in exchange. When they were all deposited Coleman gave me what he called a 'treasury receipt'—on, as I remember, a particularly thick and rough-faced paper."

"Do you remember the wording of the receipt?" asked Jimmy. "It had the word 'custody' in it, did it not? I only saw the letters 'tody,' but I guessed that was what it was."

Rex nodded.

"'Received for safe custody' was the wording, and to give me extra confidence the paper bore the stamped seal of the treasury. It was fairly easy, of course, for Coleman to put a blank sheet of paper under a treasury die; and when I tell you, in addition, that the receipt had the treasury address printed on the top you will find some excuse for me.

"The money was transferred but the letters continued to come in; and then I married Julia, as you know, on the day before the actual date fixed for the wedding. I intended marrying her for the second time

at Marylebone but I was panic-stricken at the thought that I might possibly lose her.

"When I came to Portland Place on that unhappy day I brought with me a wedding present for my bride, and it was my idea to slip it in her dressing case and let her find it when we reached our destination. Accordingly, at the appointed hour, I went up to my room, took the jewel from the small attaché case which I had brought to the house and had sent up to the room that had been placed at my disposal, and went into Dora's, hoping that her dressing bag or some other small baggage was open. As it happened her dressing bag was on the bed. I opened the lid, slipped the case under a silk dressing gown. As I did so my fingers touched a letter and brought it into view. It was addressed to me but unsealed. For a moment I hesitated. Was it intended that I should read it? But curiosity overcame me and made me do a thing which I would have regarded ordinarily as dishonorable. I took out the letter from the bag and read. The moment my eyes fell on the writing I knew it was from Kupie. It ran:

"You have married Dora and have placed your money in the custody of Coleman. For all his strong room, we shall take that money to-night.

"Pinned to the envelope was a note in a different handwriting, which ran:

"Dora to put this on his pillow to-night. Car will pick up Dora. She will leave for Budapest via Harwich until affair blows over. We will watch Walton; if he gives trouble we will fix him.

"It takes a longer time to tell than it took me to read. I knew now that I had been tricked and was penniless. My first impulse was to go back to the dining room and denounce these scoundrels. But what proof had I? I remembered then the receipt that I had placed in the drawer of my desk; but I knew also that this gang would stop at nothing to prevent my recovering the money. I went halfway downstairs to the landing, and acting on an impulse, I opened the door that led to the courtyard. With every step I took I realized the danger of my position and long before I met my valet by accident I had made up my mind what I would do. I had planned for Dora a unique honeymoon trip. Years ago I had a barge fitted up with all the care and luxury which is associated with a private yacht. It was a motor barge and I had a great deal of fun and enjoyed wonderful though solitary holidays touring the canals and rivers of the country.

"Wells was my chauffeur and chief engineer and when I suggested that he should come with me, and told him of the plot, he agreed."

"When Albert saw you last year," interrupted Jimmy, "with a week's growth of beard and dressed roughly, you were on your barge holiday?"

Rex nodded.

"I remember seeing Albert and I was scared lest he gave away my guilty secret! Yes, I was on the barge then. I renamed her *Dora* for the honeynoon and it was my intention to sail her with the aid of a man I should pick up en route. I had done all I could to make the holiday a happy one for Dora. I had fixed a wireless set, and obtained a special broadcasting license, and one of the things I had planned for my honeymoon was to instruct her in its working.

"I don't think I was quite sane when I went away. I saw nothing in perspective. But when I realized how Joan would be worrying I tried to telephone her, without success. My object was to get the money back. I had no doubt in my mind that something had already happened to the receipt; and I delayed moving in that matter until Wells urged me to let him telephone to you. The receipt, of course, was destroyed; I learned that the morning after it happened. My first attempt to enter the house in Portland Place——"

"Then *you* were the first burglar?"

Rex nodded.

"I was the first burglar," he said. "Nippy Knowles was the second. The first attempt was a failure and I was nearly caught. The second attempt was carried out by Nippy, to whom I explained all the circumstances."

"But why not come to the police, Mr. Walton?" asked the convalescent Bill Dicker, an interested audience.

"What would the police have done? Who would have believed my fantastic story? I doubt if a magistrate would have granted a search warrant on my evidence. To reach either you or Joan was impossible. I had made a reconnaissance of both the house in Cadogan Place and your flat and I saw that they were too well guarded for me to reach you. After giving the matter thought I decided that it was best to work on my own. Then it was I remembered Knowles, and

after patient inquiry I located him and brought him to the barge, explaining exactly what I wanted. The money was somewhere in the house; and, to make sure that it should not be taken away, Knowles enlisted a few dubious characters he numbered among his acquaintance. These kept watch and examined practically every large package that left the house. The burglary was successful. The house was empty, for Bennett was away on one of his raids, and Coleman was staying at the hotel."

"How did you know the money was in the wine boxes?"

Rex Walton smiled.

"I knew of the cellar; that was enough. Dora had told me in an unguarded moment and from her anxiety to correct her blunder I guessed that the underground room was a secret which for some reason the family wished to keep."

"You captured Lawford Collett," said Jimmy, "but he told us that he went a three hours' journey. Were you at sea?"

Walton shook his head.

"No. In fact, we were at Richmond. The car drove around the country for three hours in order to fool him. Collett was scared when he saw me, and after one futile attempt to communicate with the outside world, he told us all he knew on the promise that we would assist him to leave the country. I have his signed statement. Collett was one of the gang; he was on the verge of bankruptcy and exposure when Coleman picked him up. He had misapplied the money of a client and was expecting a warrant for his arrest. And that is all.

"By an odd coincidence, Joan, who was escaping from Haydn, smashed her launch against the barge. Knowles and I were away at the time; in fact, we were committing the burglary at Portland Place. It was Wells who recognized her voice and pulled her on board just as those men were reaching for her. They were so taken aback that they made off, and it was then that Haydn must have guessed the secret of my hiding place."

Dora was in the sitting room of Jimmy Sepping's new flat, a book on her lap, her eyes fixed on the stream of traffic which passed the building, her mind so completely occupied that she was blind and deaf to all sight and sound. She heard the door open but did not turn.

"I want nothing, Albert," she said.

"It isn't Albert," said a voice, and she rose to her feet, pale and shaking.

Rex Walton came slowly toward her, at a loss for words.

"Sepping says he can keep you out of this case now Haydn is dead."

"Dead!"

He nodded.

"He committed suicide in his cell last night," he said.

Her restless fingers twined and intertwined one about the other; her grave eyes were fixed on his.

"Then I can go?" she said. "I suppose you'll have to divorce me," she added after a pause. "We are legally married, aren't we?"

He nodded again.

"He won't be able to keep me out of that case," she smiled faintly. "I am very sorry, Rex."

"Sorry—for whom?"

"For you," she said. "For myself—a whole lot. I'm sorry I hurt you so much and that I hurt the woman you loved so terribly. I'm sorry for it all. I'm sorry most for you. Will you forgive me?"

She put out her hand and he took it, holding it in both of his.

"I don't see how you can keep me out of the case—unless I run away," she said. "I should like to do that, Rex."

"Where would you go?"

She shook her head.

"I don't now—to Vienna—Rome. I have a little money—honest money, although you'll never believe that."

There was a long silence and then Rex spoke.

"Perhaps it would be as well," he said, "but you must give me your address, and after the inquiries have finished I will come to you and we will take up life where we put it down—at the door of the Chelsea registrar's office."

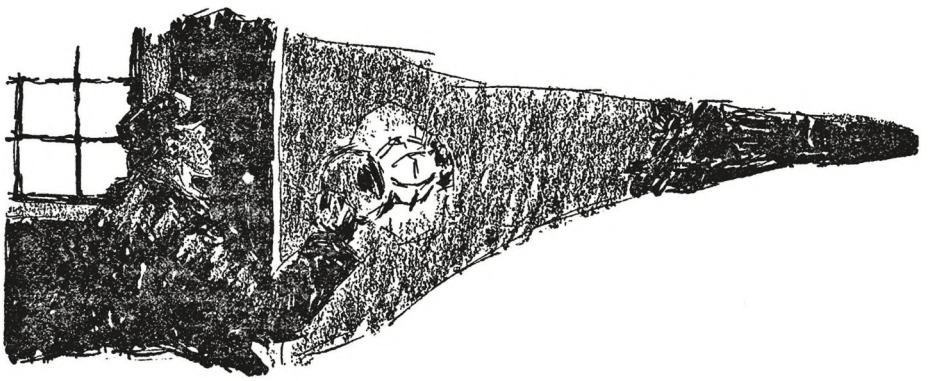
Her eyes fell and he saw her lips quiver.

"Do you mean that?" she asked in a low voice.

Rex Walton took her in his arms and kissed her.

THE END.

More of Mr. Wallace's work will appear in future issues.



The Invisible Flagman

By Calvin Johnston

Author of "The Agent at Ghost Station," "Rule G," Etc.

Of the blood-red lantern at S. G. station that braved the Black Dispatcher.

THE yard was cleared and the night crew sat soberly smoking in the switch shanty while waiting the whistle of the relief train from the smash of No. 16.

"Forever at the shoulder of a railroader," said the yardmaster, "stands the Black Dispatcher as he stood behind Dan Devore today. Else why did Dan, after closing the switch at the siding, jump upon the instant and open it again so that No. 16 was let in on the waiting freight train?

"Operator, towerman, trainman, each of us," said the yardmaster, "has at his shoulder the Black Dispatcher who gibbers of a thousand interesting things to turn the poor railroad man's attention from what he is doing; so that himself may dispatch the trains to a wreck."

The others, convinced that half the rules and regulations are made to warn and discipline the employee against the "Black Dispatcher" of the yardmaster, pondered the singular infraction by the brakeman who was to blame for the wreck.

Dan was a brakeman on the freight which had taken siding for No. 16 to pass, but instead of obeying the rule that a man guarding a closed switch must station himself across the track from the switch stand until the awaited train has passed, he had remained by the switch stand. And as one suddenly roused from sleep or absorption by the whistle of approaching No. 16 he had mechanically reached out and swung the lever opening the switch—lining the siding with the main line.

Said the yardmaster: "Before this I have seen a man do an act of death with a smile on his face as he was being entertained by some one nobody else could see at all. Ned Cole, conductor on the old P. D., did that very thing, overlooking his orders one stormy night on the Plains Division and piling his passenger in the ditch. He told me afterward that he had been sitting quietly alone in a seat of the day coach working on his report and his mind on his orders when all at once some one began talking to him in the most interesting strain he had ever listened to, about a cozy home with a light in the window and a little boy running to welcome him at the end of the run. And Ned Cole, an old bachelor d'ye mind, who had never till that hour given a thought to such things! But it was all so interesting that he listened nodding and smiling and forgot what he was doing till the voice in his ear dropped suddenly to a whisper that sent a chill through his marrow; and as he struggled to recall what he should be attending to the windows flew out with a loud crash and the coach crumpled up."

The old switchman present, who had also come down from the P. D., verified the above statement, which pleased the yard-

master; but the old switchman went further with the story. "That night Ned Cole, though crippled, rescued a little boy from the burning wreck, who afterward came to fame on the P. D. in the mystery of the Invisible Flagman."

The stir among the audience was more noticeable than the one which had followed the yardmaster's statement, so that the latter, instead of being pleased, frowned with annoyance that his Black Dispatcher should lose prestige to an Invisible Flagman.

"You would make up a mystery," he accused the old switchman, who raised his hand, admonishing:

"Hark! There is a name whispered to me to-night as it always is on a night of wreck—the name of 'Rusty' Cole. It is not for such as me to contradict a yardmaster, but I will tell the story and let whoever wants to do so doubt that Rusty employed the Invisible Flagman to save the fast West Coast Mail from wreckers. Sure, nothing could be fairer than that!" And all of his hearers but the disgruntled yardmaster agreeing, the tale was told forthwith.

It begins with the night when Conductor Ned Cole forgot his orders as you have already heard—it was a freak wreck, the engine having held the rails with the baggage and a diner and a coach rolling down the embankment. The passengers who were able crawled out, several injured, Ned Cole among them, and were rescued through the windows as the wreckage caught fire from the diner range, and all were gathered near the edge of the ditch waiting the wrecker and relief train with surgeons.

When the diner was no more than a red-hot skeleton and the coach burning briskly, a midget form wriggled from the bottom of the pit and scrambled to where Ned with his twisted spine sat braced up among Pullman cushions. And it was remarked that the boy, about four years old, paid no attention to hands outstretched by the passengers but toddled on till he came before Ned Cole. There he stood with his feet apart and hands clasped behind, surveying the man who had caused it all, with solemn eyes. Conductor Cole remembered the boy as seated in the coach with his father, whose bones were later found in the clinkered rubbish where he had been jammed between the seats. How the boy had squirmed out himself was a mystery. Ned asked his name and the one he gave sounded like nothing at all, so that Ned, troubled by the solemn, accusing gaze, said:

"I will take in this waif of the P. D., though I am no better than a waif now myself; and if it should be that nobody claims him, I will give him my own name for the one he has lost."

The little boy nodded with a queer shrewdness and stood aside, his hands still clasped behind him and feet wide apart, watching the wreck fire. The relief train arrived at last from Barlow, the division point, and the waif of the P. D., who was never claimed by relatives, went on with Ned Cole, watching the last whiff of smoke from the smoldering coach drift after like his father's ghost.

The wreck was the finish of Ned Cole, who of course found himself in disgrace with the company, and only escaped indictment for criminal neglect because of his injury. His back healed only enough to permit him to flounder about on crutches, and it being plain that he must live all his years on his seven or eight thousand savings, he moved out of his comfortable rooms. The big world where Ned Cole had ranged shrunk to a few square yards, his outlook through the dingy pane of glass in a cabin wall.

This cabin was just outside the Barlow town limits in a barren called the Waste, because of the town trash heaps near by. A friend told him: "You can still afford a better home than that," but Ned explained:

"In the cabin we can live cheaply and I will teach the boy to write and figure and in five or six years put him at school in Barlow." It was plain that Ned wanted to bring up the waif, crippled though he was, as a matter of conscience for having caused the father's death. But he had a queer, strong affection for him also, as though the voice he had been listening to when he should have been running his train had been a prophecy.

"A prophecy it was," he told me once, "if you will only consider the lighted window to have been in the burning coach; as for the boy who was to run to meet me at the end of my run, he must have been this one who searched me out among strangers." There are so many strange things happen in this world that I do not see why one more should make any difference.

There is little enough to tell of the two during the first years at the cabin. Ned

being almost forgotten by those who had known him well, and the boy too young to be remarked at all. But it is certain that he cared less for the teachings of Ned than for the wild screaming games he played with the shaggy children of a Polish section laborer who had his cabin by the city dump. To Ned it must have seemed that their lives were like the trash in the cabin dooryard shifted by the wind and melancholy for having no better place to blow to. But to Joey and the Polish children the big trash piles at the dump were treasure cities to be dug into and looted of bits of colored glass and gilt molding and tatters of silk or brocade.

Ned had named him after himself, but the roadmen called him Rusty because of his red sun-faded hair, and the smears of rust and grime on his face and hands. And it was the roadmen who had the most to do with his bringing up from the time he was twelve or thirteen.

When Rusty was about that age Ned one day called him on the carpet, which was only a patch of rags, on the cabin floor. "Callahan, the freight conductor, was by this morning with the report you have been jumping the trains," he accused.

"I jumped them," said Rusty, who was spare built as a monkey, with a shrewd little grinning face.

"Divil a second cripple from train accident we shall have in this house," said Ned. "And I have not been eight years teaching you all I know of writing and figures to graduate in the city dump; to-morrow you will go into Barlow with Callahan, who will bring you up and send you to school and I will pay the bill."

"Where will you be?" asked Rusty.

"I will stay here; there is no rent to pay and besides I can watch the trains go by in the daytime and hear them at night. It is all the company I have."

The boy stood before the crippled man as he had the night of the wreck, with hands clasped behind his back. "You'll want somebody to talk to," he said.

"How many have I had to talk to in eight years?" said Ned. "I often wonder who of the old gang of roadmen is dead and who alive and what they are doing and quarreling and laughing about now." Twisting in his big cushioned chair he looked out through the window down the track, the long, still, interested look that had for years made the lad wonder what he would be watching. "They are scattered all over the line," said Ned. "I would like to see what they are at," and he spoke the names of many of them.

"Won't you need me to talk to you?" asked Rusty again.

"Not at all," said Ned. " 'Tis little interest I take in the conversation of any one till he is educated at school. After that I will listen with pleasure, y'understand," and Rusty nodded with awe of the big words.

After that the boy sat on the floor in the corner thinking with his chin in his hands; and then for some reason of his own walked outside and around the cabin to peer into Ned's face through the window.

Almost from the hour the Black Dispatcher whispered to Conductor Cole of the lighted window and the little boy toddling to meet him at the end of the run, Ned had told himself: "I am a lucky old bachelor to have such a fine obedient little son," and for long he wondered that a blessing should be born out of the flame and wreckage for which he was to blame. And always one thought was in his mind—to bring up the waif so he would also be a blessing to himself and everybody that knew him. "Through him I can make atonement for the harm I have done," the cripple told himself during all the lonely vigil in the shanty.

So it was with a distress he had not known since the days just after the wreck that on this afternoon he watched the boy peer in through the window and then turn his back and walk out the dooryard and across the wind-blown waste to the track as a freight train swept out of the Barlow yard. And as if the suction had picked him up, Ned saw the mite in the distance clinging to a ladder, and then on the roof of the car where he waved his cap and was gone.

The cripple who could have braved the loneliness of the cabin with the boy near by at school broke down when Rusty deserted. During vigils by night, and long days passed in watching the papers blow over the waste through the pane in the cabin wall, Ned Cole could come to no understanding of the matter.

'Tis little we know. On an afternoon a week later a freight sweeping into the Barlow yards dropped off a midget form in the very tracks where Rusty Cole had been picked up; and the cripple with wide eyes watched him cross the waste and door-

yard and come in and seat himself in the corner with his chin in his hands.

"Only two of the old gang I have heard you talk about are missing," he said, "though I have not yet caught up with all of them." And he went on to mention several of Ned's old friends who had sent back messages.

The cripple's eyes began to shine and he was possessed with so queer a feeling that he had been transported bodily back into old times that he thought: " 'Tis like being bewitched," and as his troubles and vigils had taught him caution, he studied the boy closely.

The boy said: "My name is Rusty," and Ned nodded politely as if just making his acquaintance. And it was certain that the boy had also a new manner and used new words. "Faith, with his grin and bold jaunty air and cuss word for the company, he has brought back something of all my old cronies to me," thought Ned and was tempted to take up with Rusty's adventure and hear the messages of his friends.

But he remembered in time that the boy must be called down for his disobedience. "Stand on the carpet," he commanded, and Rusty did so, his feet wide apart and hands behind him. Then Ned gave him the call down for not going into Barlow to school along with Callahan's boys. "Have you no pride at all," he asked, "that you would rather be an ignorant boomer named Rusty than a gentleman of education?"

The boy thought over his answer as a much older person would do. "I will be a boomer," he said then as if the advantage was all in favor of it.

Ned went to the bottom of the matter and explained solemnly his guilt for the old wreck and the hope he had to make a fine man of the waif by way of atonement, but Rusty could not be persuaded or compelled.

"I will be a boomer," he said and began the story of his adventure, filled with messages from Ned's old friends and all the news of the switch shanties and cabooses and even telegraph offices.

The cripple's face lighted like an exile's back home as he listened, and watched the boy whose laugh and look and manner reflected the old times. "Now, dammit, I'll wash up and cook supper," he said, and when Ned called him down for the cuss word, laughed to himself.

"If I mention the education and elegant manners to him, he will be gone again," thought Ned. But before the week was out the boy sat up one morning early, listened, put on his clothes and crept out cussing. Ned had witnessed it all half awake and could not be mistaken in the signs; 'twas just as if Rusty had a run and the call boy had knocked. A freight swept by the waste and from his couch Ned saw in the gray light the black mite swept up by it on to the ladder; then a speck danced on the roof.

"The train starts in the yard, Rusty wakes up cussing, and catches it as it goes by," reflected Ned, and figured that schedules could be strung up and travel advanced a day a month by Rusty's system, which cut out the call boy and the argument that his time was fast.

Thereafter, when Rusty returned home, Ned, as a matter of conscience, would urge the advantages of education and elegance over booming, but he knew that one who caught his run automatically could no more be kept off a railroad than can a locomotive.

Farther and farther Rusty took these runs of his, till he searched out every friend Ned ever had and brought back their messages. He got to be as well known on the line as the secret-service spotters, boarding the fast trains like a monkey with never a fall. The officials heard of him and tried to keep him off, but the men liked him and he carried the inside gossip from station to station and division to division. Not a man would turn him in until one day ould Callahan himself caught him coming into Barlow and brought him into the office of Superintendent Rivets. At that time he had been booming along the P. D. for three years and was about sixteen.

The boy, now stocky and strong, with a bold grin, stood with his hands clasped behind while Callahan talked.

"I know all about him," said Rivets sourly. "He is a tough boy and I will have him in jail if he does not keep off my trains. We are having enough trouble with toughs without raising up another one."

"Sure, my father was killed in your wreck," answered Rusty, bold as brass. "And after I crawled out of the burning coach I had no home at all except on the P. D."

Rivets fixed hard eyes on him. "Ned Cole made a home for you," he answered. The boy looked back just as hard.

"You are a thankless little tramp," went on Rivets, "and will not repay all Ned has done for you by going to school."

The boy bit his lips. His grin had gone.

"And the P. D. has carried you deadhead ten thousand miles," said Rivets. "Has it taught you anything of railroading?"

"The boy knows train work as well as I do," stated Callahan. "and has bummed around the station offices till he can take or send a train order."

"If you won't go to school, I will give you a station job," said Rivets.

Rusty looked at him queerly. "I might as well be at school as in a job, Mr. Rivets," he answered, as if that explained the whole matter.

The superintendent snarled and then in a last effort to do the right thing by the boy whose life had been spoiled by the P. D., showed a wire from the west end concerning a trouble that all railroads have at times. "The country is overrun with bums swearing vengeance on corporations; and criminals who pretend to belong to their order," said Rivets. "You meet and mix with them in the box cars, on trains, in the yards or about the station."

"Sure," said Rusty, his grin coming back.

"Here is a wire of a spiked switch and attempted wreck. Read it! That's what you're heading for. Such company will bring you to the penitentiary."

Never an answer from Rusty to this or any accusation which had been made against him.

"Get out—stay off my trains! Remember my warning," said the superintendent.

At home that night, Rusty, laughing more than was usual with him, repeated all the news and gossip of the P. D. to the cripple, who listened with shining eyes.

The boy got out a strong black pipe and lighted it. "Something else happened I'll tell you about," he said in confidence. "A flat passenger went through here in a box car yesterday."

Three nights before that Rusty had been visiting with an operator at the freight division point on the west end till he grew sleepy.

"Set up the cot there in the corner and turn in," said his friend. Rusty answered that this was the end of his run and he would wait for No. 36, due at one o'clock, and go east in the caboose.

"You can beat that," said the operator. "There are two new empties—hay cars—down the lead for No. 36 to pick up. When I took their numbers I saw plenty of bedding on the floor."

This was a Pullman to order for Rusty, who said good night and finding the cars down the yard climbed inside one of them and kicked a heap of hay together at one end.

There he lay for a while with eyes closed in sleep, but ears wide open after the habit of trespassers, and presently knew that the car door was being pushed farther open. 'Twas all as black dark in the yard as in Ireland on Beltane night when every fire was put out, but Rusty did not need eyesight to reveal that a man had pulled himself into the car and after standing a minute, breathing heavily, had moved toward the other end.

The boy, used to strange and dangerous company in such places, did not disturb himself, though he would have made a great cursing had the bum come into his own end of the car. After a time No. 36 rolled in and the engine which was to take it out came down the lead and coupled on to the hay car. As it started, a second man was heard at the door and dragged himself in over the sill. "Hello," he said in a low tone; "anybody in here? Nobody! Good, I can get some sleep."

A moment's silence, then: "This car has a passenger," said the first man. "But that's all right, pal—make yourself at home."

The other laughed and closed the door so the trainmen wouldn't notice, then as the car moved slowly over the switches Rusty heard the two getting acquainted and telling where they were bound. All this did not disturb him in the least.

The car had been switched and set into the train when the first man asked the other if he'd like a drink of whisky; there was a sound of a tight cork being pulled and the gurgle out of the bottle; then the train started.

Either the rattle of the trucks drowned their voices or they stopped talking, and Rusty had begun his nap where he left off, when a scream that rose higher than the train noises brought him to a crouch, and he heard the voice of the second man into the car still screaming: "You've poisoned me!" Then came the flash and crack of a revolver. Rusty knew that a quick struggle

followed; then all was still again except for the train noises. He squirmed toward the door with the intention to push it back and drop out at the next grade, but as if the hearing of his companion in the car had become sharp as a cat's since the killing, he spoke up:

"Stay away from that door." Another shot; this man had got the revolver of the one he had poisoned. "Light a match and hold it to your face," he said, and so had a look at Rusty, keeping his own face covered. His revolver was up and his eyes glittered like a snake's between his fingers, but seeing he had a boy to do with he cursed and hesitated.

Then as the match went out he grabbed Rusty by the throat and sat down in the corner with his prisoner.

"Come on; since you wanted to get out I'll help you," he said of a sudden, and dragging Rusty to the door opened it and hung out, swinging the boy's body as if to throw him under the wheels. But Rusty doubled up and kicked his feet against the sill, and as the man let go rolled down the embankment into a muddy ditch.

After telling Ned of his adventure he showed his bruises with a grin and a cuss word; wirra, but he was a tough boy. "The second guy in the car must have been a cop o' some kind trailing the other," he said; "and finding he'd been poisoned pulled his gun and shot—but he only had time to shoot once."

"You should tell Superintendent Rivets," said Ned.

"Sure, he has that likin' for me he'd have me up for the murder," laughed Rusty. "Let dead men lie," he said.

In spite of Ned's pleading, who now began to despair of the boy, and the danger from murderous bums and wreckers, and the warning of Rivets, in two days Rusty was on the road again.

Once more he came back to the lonesome cripple full of gossip and news from the eastern division, and was gone again; and then on a rainy evening, ready for his supper and a warm shelter, he dropped from a caboose as it whizzed by a friend's station on the west end.

A lonely spot it was in the foothills, the station and stock pens being located a mile from the little village, and as Rusty started up the platform he heard laughing and singing.

"Bill has a bottle for company to-night," he grinned, "but he is through his trick." It did not matter, because this was not a night telegraph office.

Rusty, coming up to the little station, peeped in a window to see how his friend was celebrating, and discovered the agent was not alone. And as he watched it seemed that the scene which had been hidden from him in the darkness of the box car the night of the murder was being acted again under the office lamp.

The agent had thrown an empty bottle down on the table and now the other man was offering his own. He was a bony, black-looking man with a shock of hair under a dirty cap; he had an impudent swagger and talked with a loud voice. The agent had taken a swig from the bottle and passed it back and Rusty, not yet understanding what was happening, saw his friend clap his hands together and yell and roll on the floor. The bum looked on grinning, his eyes glittering like a snake's.

" 'Tis the man who poisoned the dick in the box car," said Rusty.

The bum paid no further attention to the agent doubled up on the floor, but went into the little wareroom where section supplies were kept, and fetching out a box of dynamite walked west down the track. It did not take much shrewdness to guess that he meant to blow up the culvert three or four hundred yards away.

"The big bum," said Rusty, and hardly had the man disappeared before he had glided into the station, across the body of the agent, and lighted the red lantern, for it was within minutes of the time of the West Coast Mail. With the red light burning he began calling the dispatcher at Barlow.

"Rivets—Bridge out S. G. station——" he had sent and was grabbed up and thrown into a corner, only to scramble to his feet. The bum, who had come back to make sure of the agent, opened his snaky eyes wide: "So, the wheels didn't get you," he said, "but this will," and slowly drawing his revolver, leveled and fired—and miles away in the foothills boomed the whistle of the Mail which no dispatcher could stop now. The agent lay still, the boy was a bloody huddle in the corner, and as the bum turned back to his job at the culvert he smashed the red lantern with another shot.

It was not the first time that the big

bracket lamp in a lonely station had lighted such a scene. The agent opened his eyes as a shiver ran along the earth from the explosion at the culvert and saw the boy on his knees by the wall take a lantern from its hook in the wall, collapse, and then pull himself together again.

He fumbled with the lantern, cursing the clear globe and then meeting the glassy stare of the agent, yelled at him: "Where's another red globe? A red globe!" But the agent, paralyzed by the poison, could not answer, and in fact there was not another red globe at the station.

The boy sobbed curses on the big bum and began crawling inch by inch. Pushing the white lantern ahead of him once again he turned his head and yelled, but the agent could only watch with glassy eyes though he heard him wailing that he couldn't stand or signal, and the engineer would be certain to run by a white light on the platform or track. Only the danger light, a fiery drop of blood in the darkness, would halt him.

Again the Mail whistled clearly; Rusty was stricken motionless; then all at once he began to laugh his curses; the agent's glassy eyes opened wider with wonder; then the lids flopped down, but even in his faintness he thought what a tough guy was Rusty to yell and laugh his curses on such a night as this.

Fifty miles away at Barlow headquarters that night the same thing was agreed upon by better-informed men than the agent. After long debating with himself Ned Cole had had himself driven in to give the facts of the box-car murder to the superintendent. So he cleared Rusty against any possible blame in future.

"It's only a matter of time," said Rivets, "till the boy gets in bad. I've warned him, you've pled with him. No use. He's a tough."

"Tough he is," said Ned with a groan. And the dispatcher brings in a wire: "Rivets—Bridge out S. G. station——"

"There he cut out," said the dispatcher. "We can't raise him. In his call he was signing Rusty——"

"The West Coast!" exclaimed Rivets.

"It was by the last night office."

"Something has happened to the agent," said Rivets. "The boy will flag—but——" Again he studied the wire. "Was the West Coast due at S. G. when that was sent?"

"Not for six minutes."

"The wreckers knocked out the boy at the key," said Rivets. The three men stared at one another, shivering and picturing the fast passenger lunging into the wrecked culvert at forty-five miles an hour.

"Nothing can save it," said Rivets in a hushed voice. He ordered out the wrecker. "Put my car on," he added, nodding at Ned.

"I'll go," said the cripple.

The two men waited in the office, hearing the little flurry in the yard below as the train was made up and the wrecking crew assembled. Neither spoke; Ned's head was bent low and Rivets paced the floor.

"Superintendent"—the dispatcher threw the door wide—"take the key——"

Ned hobbled after them into the telegraph office and Rivets answered the calling of his own name.

Slowly the message came and it seemed fainter and fainter as if dots and dashes were sounded from some station far beyond the end of all railways.

Rivets all safe. Tell N-e-d t-h-e n-e-w-s.

"All safe! Glory be!" said Ned. "And he wanted me to have the news as he always did. Everything that happened on the line. I would have been a lonely man without Rusty and his news." He fell silent with Rivets looking at him queerly; and for the first time a glimmer of understanding came to the two, of the boy's reason for turning down school and a job on the line.

S. G. could not be raised again and the silence on the wire had another and fearsome message of its own.

Rivets gave an order to the dispatcher. "Come," he said, and Ned was helped across the platform to the car. Each sat silent as the train speeded on, with a guilty feeling that they had been trying and condemning Rusty without hearing his defense.

"I will hold the West Coast at S. G.," said Rivets as they drew in, "and arrange for the transfer of mail and passengers to the train brought up west of the culvert."

A moment later they were in the little station which the train conductor had locked against curious passengers. The agent lay sick and groaning on a cot; sprawled on the telegraph table with hand still on the key lay the body of Rusty. A blurred red lantern which had flagged the train was on the floor where the conductor had set it. The engineer said he had seen it swung, though

it must have been done by an invisible flagman; 'tis certain Rusty could never have done it: and when the train was stopped the lantern was found at the edge of the platform and Rusty dead on the table.

"It's red!" screeched the agent, who had heard the talk. He sat straight up, reaching and holding his stomach with one hand and pointing with the other.

"And what of it?" demanded Rivets.

The sick man pointed to the glass on the floor where the wrecker's shot had smashed the globe. "'Twas the only one," he said; "the other was white. I heard Rusty cursing it—then the train whistled and he laughed. He was a tough guy."

But already Rivets, with the lantern in his hand, had forgotten the agent was talking. Smeared and blurred and scarlet the lighted globe glared at them as he held it high.

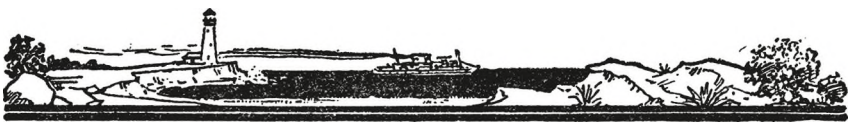
"Blood!" he said.

So Ned, and all on the P. D., got news of Rusty.

Though Rivets wanted Ned to come into Barlow to live on account of the loneliness the cripple would never leave the cabin. And they do say that, though day after day staring out of the pane in the wall on the trash blowing to and fro, he was not lonesome and had a smiling death.

For the Somebody who had spoken so entertainingly on the night of the old wreck when he forgot his orders returned to keep him company, and long and pleasant was the tale he told of a distant light at his run's end, with a tough boy running to meet him.

Mr. Johnston will have another story in the next issue.



THE COMMERCIAL BABEL

THE plight of the monolingual Yankee traveler who is enticed into the Parisian emporium by the comforting announcement, prominently displayed in the show window, "English spoken here," is one of the familiar tragedies of the tourist's experience. As everybody knows who has ever heard a returned globe trotter retailing his pathetic vicissitudes abroad, it always happens that the English-speaking clerk allegedly employed by the shop "has just stepped out," or gone to his grandmother's funeral, or something of the sort. The tale is ancient and lacks the interest of novelty.

But now comes a tourist who has a fresh experience to recount. Passing along the Boulevard des Italiens one bright spring morning, this particular Yankee wanderer—who happened to be a professor of languages on his native heath—was struck by the superlative claim of a fashionable haberdashery. "All languages spoken here," proclaimed the vainglorious gilt inscription on the plate-glass windows.

The polylingual American entered the shop and announced to the nearest salesman, in purest Arabic, his desire to purchase a dozen handkerchiefs.

"Pardon, monsieur?" said the salesman in equally pure French.

"I repeat," said the pseudo Arabian, still in the tongue of the sheik, "that I desire a dozen handkerchiefs."

"One thousand pardons, monsieur," pleaded the salesman, "but I do not understand a word."

"Is it possible," queried the American in limpid French, "that you ignore the beauties majestic of the Arabic?"

"Without doubt," said the salesman. "Why, if you please, should I speak the Arabic?"

"But the announcement on your window! It says 'All languages spoken here.'"

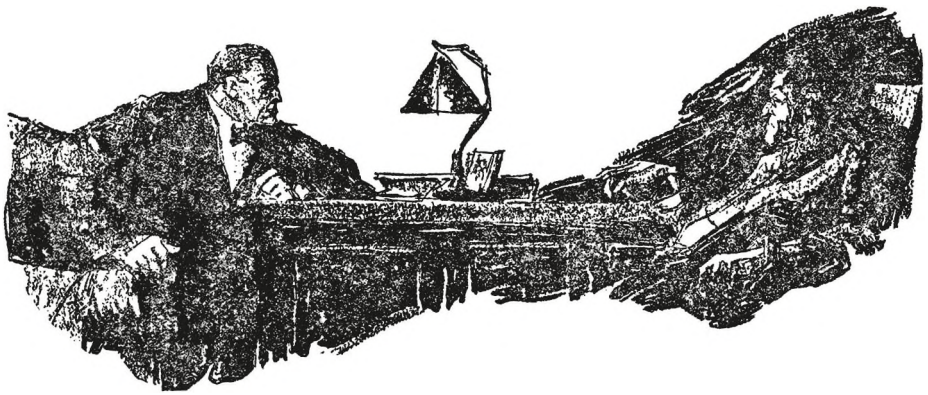
"Perfectly, but——"

"Is it that it is a falsehood, perhaps?"

"Not the least in the world, monsieur. All languages, indeed, are spoken here. But not by the shop people."

"By whom then?"

"By our customers, monsieur."



The Sentence

By Albert W. Tolman

Judge Lattimore atones.

AT high noon on the day of the Blackett murder trial Judge William Lattimore would not have exchanged places with the Angel Gabriel. At ten minutes past the hour he would gladly have taken over the hottest, sootiest stokership on the eternal furnace. Though he had not stirred from his chair, he had made a jest of space and time. He had traversed two hundred miles; he had gone back thirty-five years; he had fallen faster and farther than Lucifer, from heaven down to hell.

The judge was a portly, good-looking man of fifty-five. His smooth, fresh-colored, rather boyish face was surmounted by an abundant iron-gray mane. Calm, kindly, deliberate, he suggested an Episcopalian bishop. Though he had attended neither college nor law school, a good brain backed by political shrewdness had raised him from a petty constableship to his present high position. His marriage had solved the money question; for his wife was wealthy and came from one of the State's oldest families. He was proud of her, and she of him; and his twenty years on the bench had been unblemished.

Harvey Bayle, the aristocratic young prosecuting attorney, had been calling at the Lattimores the evening before the trial. The judge and his wife distinctly approved of his frequent visits; and, to say the least, Edith, their charming daughter, did not disapprove. That night the conversation turned to the Blackett case; and Bayle condemned the prisoner with the uncharitable frankness of youth.

"The coldest-blooded thug I ever set eyes on! Absolutely callous! Did you notice that pink in his buttonhole, judge?"

The judge's lips tightened.

"I saw it."

The shift to the trial seemed to congeal his powers of speech.

"And that woman in the black veil," continued Bayle. "Always sits in the same place. Who is she and why does she come?"

"I can't say."

"I know what makes you so serious, Will," declared his wife. "You're worrying because you've got to sentence that horrible wretch. It's a shame for a good man to be troubled with such a creature! He's too tender-hearted to be a judge; now isn't he, Mr. Bayle? Why, when he comes home from a murder trial he actually collapses. After court adjourns I'm going to take him to the Adirondacks."

Nine o'clock struck. The judge excused himself.

"A sound sleep'll make me fit."

He kissed his wife and his daughter and shook hands with Bayle.

"I'll see you in court to-morrow, Harvey."

"Edith and I will be there, too," remarked his wife. "We've wanted for a long time to hear you charge a jury."

A slight frown creased Lattimore's high, broad brow.

"It won't be pleasant," he dissuaded.

"If you can stand it twenty years I guess we can once."

The frown smoothed out; but on the stairs it returned as he caught Clara's words:

"He's altogether too kind-hearted."

"That's right," assented Bayle.

A spasm of pain crossed the judge's face. He always knew what to expect just before he sentenced a murderer. He must get his rest early; for his sleep would be broken ere morning.

It came in the small hours; the nightmare of the bloody hand.

He was alone in his chambers behind the courtroom. The jury had agreed and everybody was waiting for him. He bent over the marble washbowl, frantically scrubbing the back of his right hand. A fresh bloodstain, a red, hideous blotch, stretched from his two middle knuckles almost to his wrist. He had scoured it until the skin was raw; but the harder he rubbed the redder, and angrier it grew.

Steps echoed along the corridor. Somebody rapped insistently on the locked door, gently at first, then louder, louder, louder, until the very walls seemed to shake with the thunderous knocks. The judge worked in fierce panic. No use—the stain wouldn't come off. He must face the courtroom, write the sentence, with his own hand carmine.

He woke, muscles twitching, breath fluttering, heart thumping, beads of sweat dewing his forehead, twisting his brows and grinding his hands together in futile agony.

Outside rioted a desolate February storm. Blinds were slamming. Rain gouts lashed the windows. The elm boughs whipped and creaked and sawed together. Two houses away Gordon Penfield's old hound was howling dismally, one long note and two short yelps, *oo-oo-ooh, ooh, ooh—oo-oo-ooh, ooh, ooh.* And as the cathedral clock chimed four Policeman Mike Donovan rang in from the corner box and reported in his big, indistinct, grumbling voice.

Resignedly Lattimore settled down to wait for daylight. Twenty years on the bench give a judge plenty to think about in his quiet hours. At last he came to Blackett. Without question he was atrociously guilty. In some places the State would never have had a chance to try him at all; he would have swung from the nearest telephone pole.

Turning to pleasanter things Lattimore remembered Bayle. He had been courting Edith for over a year. Of all the young lawyers at the Marchmont bar the judge could not have picked a more desirable match for his daughter. He had brains and backbone as well as blood. His only fault was his pride; and that was a good fault.

What a contrast between him and Blackett! Blackett! Pah!

The judge remembered too the banquet that night at the New Commune to commemorate his twentieth anniversary on the bench. Rumors of a massive silver loving cup had reached his ears. Prominent lawyers from all over the State would be assembled to do him honor. After all, his position had its compensations, even if he did have a bad night before he sentenced a murderer.

When Lattimore came down to breakfast Clara was already in her place, bubbling over with an important secret.

"What do you think, Will? Harvey Bayle proposed to Edith last night."

Even the great news, long anticipated, roused but a dull response from the judge.

"He's a fine fellow. There's no abler young attorney at the bar."

The meal over, Lattimore rose.

"Well, I must be going down to the courthouse. I want to run over my charge to the jury."

A half hour later Bayle knocked at his door. The judge gave him a cordial greeting.

"I've heard the news, Harvey. I'm glad for you both. I could wish no man a better wife than Edith; and I wouldn't ask for a finer son-in-law."

Bayle tried to reply but couldn't; he choked and wrung the judge's hand. Then he went to his room to put the final touches on his argument.

Court would not open for another half hour; so the judge reviewed the case. Never in his twenty years on the bench had he encountered a murder with so little palliation. John Coster, a real-estate dealer, had drawn five hundred dollars from the Old North Savings Bank. Blackett had followed him into an alley, shot him through the heart and taken the money. That was

all; but it was more than enough to give the prisoner the limit allowed by law, a life sentence.

Every seat in the courtroom was occupied. The space reserved for the bar was crowded with lawyers, among whom sat Lattimore's wife in her becoming gray broadcloth, and, beside her, Edith, a diamond glittering on her engagement finger. There too in the rear of the room was the woman in black. From the first day of the trial the judge had noticed her, slim, motionless, heavily veiled. Mystery, pathos, menace, radiated from her somber figure. Among the eager-eyed, carrion-hungry buzzards she sat aloof, a raven of sinister omen—of what —to whom?

The prisoner himself, star tragedian, sat toadlike between a deputy and Prime, his bullying counsel. Undersized, lean and cadaverous, he looked a burned-out Apache. His bullet head was thatched with a sandy gray stubble; his features were blunted, as if pummeled characterless. His quick little eyes of shifty, watery blue roamed furtively about the courtroom. He was dressed in a new tweed suit, with a gray flannel shirt and red tie; and he wore a pink, the gift of some mawkish sympathizer. His fingers, stubby and discolored, picked at his lapel; otherwise he seemed indifferent. Something vaguely familiar and unpleasant about the man woke in Judge Lattimore a sense of forgotten evil.

Prime began speaking. The best he could hope for was a verdict of murder in the second degree. He bombarded the jury with ten-inch guns of eloquence. He strewed flowers of rhetoric knee-deep before them. He cleft the quivering air with two-handed gestures. He roared and soared. He bullied, deafened, flattered, soothed, hypnotized. Then he waxed pathetic. He harked back to the realms of childhood and showed his client, an innocent boy, at his mother's knee.

Blackett's peers in the box were distinctly affected. Juryman Three in the back row gulped. Another with melancholy brown eyes sniffled. The sanctimonious foreman drew out his handkerchief and wiped his eyes. And the bored prisoner grinned weirdly.

Then Bayle sprang into the fray in a style that smacked of the Spanish Inquisition. He had racked Blackett with cross-questioning; had applied all sorts of legal thumbscrews; and had pricked him with red-hot interrogatories. Now, summing up, he turned the courtroom into a dissecting chamber and in the rôle of surgeon in chief used scalpel, lancet and saw artistically and without mercy, performing a post-mortem on the prisoner's living body. Blackett only yawned.

Lattimore heard Bayle's words subconsciously. Already he knew the verdict and the sentence. His thoughts were busied with the coming banquet. His body sat in the courtroom but his spirit was in the great dining hall of the New Commune. Surreptitiously he reached for a pad and began making notes.

An uncomfortable sense of being watched plucked him back to the trial. Blackett's eyes were glued upon him; his cynical features were aglow with a strange eagerness, like an unexpected fire flickering up from embers long deemed dead.

A violent fit of coughing, a legacy from his last cold, seized the judge. All faces turned toward him. Bayle stopped speaking; and a bailiff ran for a glass of water. At the end of his spasm Lattimore caught the criminal's insolent gaze, far different from his previous furtive glances.

All at once Blackett did a peculiar thing. Turning his head sidewise he laid his right hand flat upon his cheek; two joints of the middle finger were missing. Again he faced Lattimore with a long, cool, confident stare.

A door, shut thirty-five years, yields grudgingly; but at last this one opened wide. Though calm in outward appearance the judge was stricken with a sick, crawling terror. Beneath the scurf and grime of more than a generation he finally recognized the prisoner. And the thing that rocked his soul to its foundations was that he, William Lattimore, must sentence this man for murder.

He seemed to be hurrying back at lightning speed through a long, dark tunnel. At its end in a jewelry store before a blown safe he leaned with three others over a motionless figure, blood oozing from its right temple. A small man with the prisoner's face rose from a hurried examination.

"Dead, Bill! That crack of yours finished him! Divide! Scatter!"

There was a hurried partition of valuables into four packages, a quick departure. The youngest man, his right hand smeared with blood, had left his share of the loot beside

the dead watchman. There had been running feet, a policeman's shrill whistle, shouts, shots; but the four had gotten safely away.

That night had marked a turning point for the youngest man. He had gone to a distant city to begin life anew under another name. He had abandoned his bad practices and spent his days and much of his nights in unremitting toil. He had entered politics. He had become a constable, a law student, an attorney, a judge.

During those years he had atoned for his crime by all possible means, short of confession and self-surrender. The jeweler had been paid back with interest and regular contributions had aided the watchman's family. But, whenever he was ill or weary, that night came back again.

Lattimore's mind came back to the crowded courtroom as Bayle closed his argument. It was time to charge the jury.

When Lattimore finished the jury were led out to deliberate. His brain was reeling, as he adjourned the court, and went to his chambers. The man in him came uppermost. He slumped heavily into his armchair and clinched his nails into his palms.

A tap on the door! His wife and Edith? He steeled himself for deception. But it was only Prime.

"Excuse me for troubling your honor," apologized the attorney with his sardonic smile, "but my client wishes to talk with you privately. I've tried to discourage him but his mind seems set upon it. Shall I say you won't see him?"

Behind his mask of assumed imperturbability the judge debated.

"I'll see him. Send him in with Deputy Binney."

Prime was surprised out of his nonchalance.

"I haven't the least idea what he wants, your honor. Better keep a sharp eye on him. He's a desperate man and he may mean mischief."

He left the room. Lattimore opened the top drawer of his desk, where lay a revolver, kept loaded for twenty years. Soon the deputy entered, with Blackett slouching beside him.

"You may leave us alone, Binney," said the judge. "I will be responsible for the prisoner."

Reluctantly Binney went out.

"Sit there!" directed Lattimore.

Blackett dropped into the chair on the opposite side of the flat desk. There was a moment of silence. A gulf more than a generation wide cannot be bridged at once. The judge cleared his throat huskily.

"Well?"

The Apache grinned, throwing off his feigned humility.

"Not very glad to see me, are you, Billy? Don't even offer to shake hands. Rather chilly welcome for an old friend you haven't met for thirty-five years! Well, we'll pass that over. Don't know but I'd feel the same if I was in your place. I could see it made you uncomfortable when you recognized me. You'd have made a good actor, Bill! I could guess what was going on behind that marble mug of yours, but you never batted an eye. Some nerve! Don't wonder you didn't know me at first. Time has changed us both considerable. I wasn't sure of you till you threw that fit of coughin'. High livin', Billy! You've been hittin' the bubbles while I've plugged along lower down. Some different from that night in Patterson's jewelry store, eh?"

Judge Lattimore could not avoid glancing apprehensively at the closed door. He knew Binney's ear was pressed against it. Blackett, long schooled in caution, sank his voice.

"You needn't feel nervous, Billy! You don't s'pose I'd snitch on an old pal! You've no idea how glad I was to see you, Bill, sittin' up there, large as life, behind that bar. You were a sight for sore eyes. 'Why,' says I to myself, 'old Rain-in-the-face, that grand high muck-a-muck's my old pal, Billy Edgeworth! I'm in his court,' says I. 'Here's luck—what! I'm all right now. We'll have a little heart-to-heart talk together an' he'll use me right. He knows which side of his bread is buttered, Billy does!' "

He broke into a dry, throaty cackle. The judge felt as if he were suffocating. In his own chambers, baited by this crouching thug, he experienced a sense of unreality. He sparred for time.

"I thought you were drowned thirty years ago."

"Mighty near it. The bulls shot at me as I jumped off that wharf. I swum to a hole in the piles an' held on till they got tired lookin' for me. Two weeks afterward they found an' buried a body. It passed for mine. So I started fresh with a new name an' a clean record."

Judge Lattimore coughed.

"I'm sorry you haven't kept it clean," he observed with an attempt at dignity. "If you have anything to say to me, better say it at once. The jury'll be coming in presently."

Blackett cackled again. He stretched himself familiarly.

"Come off your high horse, Billy! It don't go down with me. I *have* got something to say to you an' I'm going to take all the time I want. Jury! A hell of a pile I care for the jury! Let 'em wait till I'm ready."

His face hardened.

"I killed Coster, damn him, yes! I'd do it again if I had the chance. I'm not afraid to tell you. We're in the same boat, you an' me, Bill. We sink or swim together. An' you've got to do some of the rowin' to help me out of this scrape, or you'll get yourself into a worse."

His voice trailed off into a threatening growl.

"I don't give a hang for all that bunch," he resumed, jerking his thumb contemptuously toward the courtroom. "There's only one in the whole push I'm really afraid of. It isn't you, Billy! Oh, no! I've got your fangs pulled. It's that woman in black. She's Coster's wife. You never can tell what a woman'll do. They ain't reasonable."

"What do you want of me?" the judge forced himself to ask.

A fit of coughing strangled him.

"Easy, Billy! Don't choke yourself. I'm comin' to it. A good many times I've had to do as a judge has said. Now a judge is goin' to do as I say, or it'll be the worse for him."

Lattimore signed him to proceed.

"I'd as lief be in a safe place," continued Blackett, "till Coster's wife dies or gets over it. I want you to let me off with five years."

The judge started in genuine surprise.

"Five years! Why, I can't do that, Jim!"

He compelled himself to use the name. Blackett noticed this and his lips wrinkled disagreeably. The judge kept on.

"If the jury brings you in guilty of murder, as they can't help doing, it'll be my duty to sentence you for life."

Blackett spat disgustedly.

"Duty? Hell! Don't be a fool, Billy! If you're so strong on duty why haven't you confessed to killing Perkins, an' given yourself up long ago! You're as guilty of that murder as I am of this. Be sensible! It won't matter a ten-cent cigar to you on which side of those stone walls I spend the rest of my life; but it'll matter a big sight to me. Let's understand each other! *I* don't want to take your job away. I'm mighty glad you're judge of this court; an' I want you to keep here. You can help me a damn sight more than if you were down an' out. I'll take five years without a whimper an' thank you for 'em in the bargain."

His voice dropped to a querulous whine. His broken nails clawed at the polished mahogany.

"But I can't, Jim! *I'm* not sentencing you; it's the law. The statute doesn't leave me any choice. Don't you understand?"

Blackett's insolent assurance deserted him.

"No, I don't understand," snarled he, angry and puzzled. "What you say in this court goes, doesn't it? It isn't a matter of can or can't but of will or won't."

Lattimore shook his head hopelessly. The prisoner, baffled, became furious.

"I didn't intend to put the screws on," he hissed; "but I guess I've got to. If you do me dirt I'll tell the *News* all about that Patterson affair. Breen's alive, too. I know where he is; an' he'll have to testify. It can't hurt me any; for I'll be in for life, anyway. But it can hurt you. You think you're above me. I'll pull you down."

They looked at each other, Lattimore sick, Blackett defiant. The judge tried again.

"My wife and daughter are out there."

"I saw 'em!" interrupted the prisoner venomously. "They came to look at me. Side show in a circus, eh? Red-handed criminal! Thug! Assassin! Guess they'll find I'm not the only one, eh, Bill!"

The judge winced.

"Future son-in-law too, hey?" sneered Blackett. "I saw how it was. Wanted to show off before his girl. Say, that fellow's downright insultin'. He abused me beyond reason. If ever I catch him alone I'll do him, as I did Coster. Don't you think I've got any feelin's?"

Lattimore broke down. He dropped his head on his desk and cried.

"For God's sake, Jim!"

His tormentor gave a short laugh.

"Yes—for God's sake! I thought I'd get inside your jacket!"

"Think of my family, Jim!"

"Damn you, think of mine! Just because you've been slick enough not to get caught, *I've* got to take my medicine, while you pass yours on to somebody else. No! If I drink, you drink, too. To hell with your family! What're they to me? Think of 'em yourself. That'll help 'em more. Your tongue's my only trump an' I'm goin' to play it to the limit. The worse you feel the better my chances are. Five years —an' the thing dies with me. A day more an' I'll pull your house down on your head!"

He crouched forward over the desk, eyes narrowed to slits.

"So they're givin' you a banquet to-night, hey? Let me tell you what'll happen if you don't use me right. While I'm rollin' north in the smokin' car of the express, in leg irons an' handcuffed to a deputy; an' while you're swillin' wine an' smokin' quarter-of-a-dollar cigars an' listenin' to those cut-throat lawyers tellin' what a good fellow you are, a man down in the *News* office'll be fiddlin' on a linotype; an' when you get over your big head to-morrow mornin' there'll be something on the front page that you won't like to read. An' pretty soon there'll be another trial an' another judge an' another prisoner; an' then somebody else'll be goin' up for life on the express. Banquet to-night? Well, you've got to earn it. If you don't take the chance, the more fool you!"

He caught his breath.

"Now I've said it. We couldn't understand each other better if we talked a year. You know what I expect; an' you know what you can expect if I don't get it. I'm in your hands, Bill; an' you're in mine. Call in your bulldog!"

With averted face Lattimore pressed an electric button. Binney appeared promptly and led Blackett out. The door closed and once more the judge was alone.

Beads of sweat oozed from his forehead. Shooting pains pierced his brain. So broadly and calmly had his river of life flowed on that none dreamed of the hideous thing buried beneath the silt on its bottom. Yes; Blackett was right. In the eye of the law he was as guilty now as on the night when he had slain Perkins. He had not intended to kill the watchman. He had struck in self-defense. But the deed had been done during a burglary and that by law was sufficient to constitute the killing murder.

For more than a quarter century that secret menace had been his most poignant incentive to a just life. What good to confess and let the law take its pound of flesh! That would not bring the dead man back. And, so far as he himself was concerned, which meant more to the State—twenty years of the lockstep in a barred suit or twenty years of justice administered sacramentally?

Yet now, when the thing lay so far back that at times he almost forgot it, on the crowning day of his judgeship, this tiger of the past, fanged and clawed, had leaped upon him full-grown.

Why should the upright judge be punished for what the callow burglar had done? He had seen harpy lawyers grow fat on their stealings and die peacefully of heart failure or apoplexy. They had escaped scot-free, in this world at least; while he, whose only aim had been justice, was caught between the millstones.

A vehement, unreasoning protest swelled within him. It wasn't just—it wasn't right! He had atoned! Hadn't he? Days, weeks, months, years, the lurking terror, the vulture feeding on his living heart!

Exposure now would hurt him far worse than ever before. He stood on a higher pinnacle and his fall would be greater. Besides, other lives were at stake. Years ago he alone would have suffered; but now—Clara—Edith!

Lattimore began pacing up and down, up and down. Shortly the jury would bring in a verdict. The minutes were racing by. He glanced at the familiar sheep backs in his library; but here was a problem none of his authorities could help him solve.

Suppose he gave Blackett only five years! It would outrage public opinion and disgust his colleagues, besides being contrary to law and his own sense of right. So short a term for such a devilish crime would be a joke. But if he awarded the prisoner his just deserts the latter would topple down to ruin the honorable structure of his judgeship.

And Clara! His wife! Twenty-five years unknowingly wedded to a murderer! The shock would kill her.

Edith, too! It would break her heart, blight her life. He knew Bayle's pride, his only failing. He would never unite himself with the family of a convict. A father-in-law dealing out even-handed justice behind

the granite walls of the Marchmont County courthouse was an asset any man might well be proud of; but a father-in-law pegging shoes or caning chairs behind the granite walls of Darlington prison would be a decided liability. Bayle would shrink from assuming it. So would anybody. But Edith!

Yet to grant Blackett's demand meant the purchase of the happiness of his wife and daughter by a deliberate wresting of justice. Ten years ago he might not have minded it so much. But with the passage of time the righteous administration of his duties had grown to be his religion.

Two broken-hearted women, or justice betrayed! That was his dilemma. Lattimore writhed like a transfixed worm as he trod the Wilton carpet. The wine of life, distilled to its lees, was pressed to his lips in one bitter draft, clotted, poisonous, deadly as hemlock, black as hell!

Tap! Tap!

He started in terror. The door opened.

"The jury have agreed, your honor!" announced Officer Griscom's grumpy voice.

With a tremendous effort the judge composed himself. He must go back to that torture chamber, must pronounce sentence—on Blackett—on himself, Bayle, Edith, Clara! God! He shriveled in red torment.

No escape, no way out? None. Stiffening himself he reëntered the courtroom. The buzz of voices hushed. It was the last act of the tragedy.

"Bring the jury in," he ordered thickly.

In the wake of the officer with the dancing mace the solemn twelve shuffled to their seats. The foreman announced their decision.

"Guilty of manslaughter!"

Through the tense throng swept a surge of surprised disapproval, quickly checked by the peremptory gavel. Everybody had anticipated a verdict of murder. Blackett's face wore an amazed grin. Bayle swallowed hard. Prime could not repress a smile of exultation; his spread-eagle eloquence had won.

Bayle took his defeat gamely.

"I move that the prisoner be sentenced at once."

The clerk passed the indictment to the judge, to have the sentence noted on the outside. The jury had failed. Everybody looked to Lattimore to remedy their error as far as possible by giving the prisoner the longest term fixed by statute for manslaughter, twenty years. And Blackett's ultimatum had been five!

Lattimore dipped his pen into the ink and held it suspended over the paper. He was about to settle irrevocably his own fate, Bayle's, Edith's, Clara's. That black drop was lifeblood—years, tears, sorrow, disgrace.

Over the courtroom brooded the hush of death. What should he write?

Twenty years, the justice that all expected, and ruin for himself and his family? Or five, the betrayal of his trust, but for him and his at least a temporary security?

Five or twenty? Twenty or five? Five or twenty? The question hummed through his brain.

From the back of the room looked down the blindfolded statue of Justice; in the bar sat his living wife and daughter. He must choose between that white marble figure and his own flesh and blood.

Hammers beat in his brain as he vacillated. Painfully bright pin points dotted the thick tremulous air. The walls withdrew at sickening speed to an immense hazy distance, then came rushing back. The classic faces in the frieze liquefied to grotesque gargoyles with gimlet eyes and sneering mouths, broadening, elongating, shrinking. In the human blur before him swam three faces—Clara's, Edith's, Bayle's. He saw too the motionless woman in black. He saw the prisoner, red flower on his lapel.

Blackett alone could interpret the struggle in the judge's mind. His confidence changed to uncertainty, trepidation, desperation. He leaned forward menacingly.

A lightning flash of understanding ended Lattimore's hesitation and made his course as clear as day. The bitterness of death was in his heart as with shaking fingers he scrawled a few words on the indictment and handed it back to the clerk.

The latter rose and cleared his throat.

"Prisoner," said he solemnly, "stand up!"

He stood, twitching.

"Simon Blackett, hearken to your sentence!"

Head thrust forward, apelike jaw dropped, he listened.

"The court, having considered the offense whereof you stand convicted, orders that you be punished by confinement at hard labor for a term of twenty years!"

A long sigh of relief and approval stirred

the thick air. The prisoner seemed to take on the twenty years in a second. Quite stunned, he dropped like a stone in his chair and hunched forward, an old man. Soon, however, he recovered his stolidity. The court adjourned. Ere the deputy clicked his handcuffs on Blackett's wrists, at the latter's request Prime called over Russell, the *News* reporter. For a moment journalist and convict talked together; then Russell returned to his place, alert and interested. Lattimore knew they had made an appointment for an interview.

The judge went at once to his room. But one thing remained for him to do and it must be done quickly, for Clara and Edith would soon be coming in. He had drained his cup to the dregs; and he was only human. The play was played out. It was time for him to go.

He snatched the revolver from the drawer.

His suicide was not to be the refuge of a coward, but a sacrificial act to save his wife and daughter. If he were out of the way Blackett would be deprived of the incentive of personal revenge. He might accept Lattimore's death and spare his family. The judge's act would be laid to his overwrought mental state. Terrible though the shock would be to Clara and Edith, yet it would be far better than the revelation of his past.

He jammed the muzzle against his temple and pulled the trigger; but the twenty-year-old cartridge missed fire!

Again he tried; and again the same result

Footsteps outside. The knob turned. Too late! Not here—not now! He thrust the weapon into his pocket.

The door opened hurriedly. In they came, innocent, unknowing, apprehensive, the three whose lives would be blasted by the disclosure of his long-concealed guilt. His glassy stare froze them.

"Will! Will! What is the matter?"

His wife clutched his sleeve.

"Papa! Are you ill?" cried Edith.

"Let me call Doctor Angier, judge," urged Bayle solicitously, reaching for the desk telephone.

Judge Lattimore forced a husky, deprecatory rattle from his throat.

"Don't, Harvey!" he groaned. "No! No!"

Disregarding his protest Bayle lifted the transmitter. A gust of fury shook the overstrained, tortured judge. He wrenched the instrument from the attorney's hand.

"Damn you!" he shrieked in a cracked, high-pitched voice. "I said *no!*"

Bayle stared, astounded. Lattimore's wife and daughter looked at him in horror. Had he gone mad?

Then the shears of Atropos clicked together.

Two faint, muffled reports.

A shuffling of feet, swelling in volume.

A confusion of voices.

Hasty steps. The door was wrenched open. He entered, uninvited—Binney, the lean deputy, pale, breathless.

"The woman in black!" he panted. "Crazy as a loon. Pulled a gun in the lower corridor—shot the prisoner. Just before he died he muttered something like this: 'I lied to the judge—I killed Perkins myself.'"

Fate had superseded Lattimore's sentence. He rose unsteadily. His set, staring eyes, looking back two hundred miles and thirty-five years, saw four men bending over a prone figure by a safe. For the last time the picture flashed away.

He glanced down. The red stain was gone from his right hand. He lifted it reverently.

"God!" he whispered.

It was not an oath. It was a confession of religious belief, a recognition that the Higher Powers had accepted his atonement of twenty years.

He tottered. His head drooped. The walls of the room leaned toward him, turned black. He fainted in Bayle's arms.

Another story by Mr. Tolman in an early issue.

HE LEARNED HIS JOB

AT a banquet in Washington a few weeks ago Chairman A. D. Lasker of the shipping board made a speech in which he admitted that, when Mr. Harding gave him his monumental job, he did not know one deck of a ship from another—additional proof that no job is too big for a man who is too big to think that it is ever safe to stop learning.

A Chat With You

WE have been reading about a surgeon who makes young men out of old men. He does it by a surgical operation. It seems shocking, unnatural and disagreeable—but so do all surgical operations, even to the pulling of a tooth. For all we know the thing may be feasible and in the line of progress. A man of twenty will jeer at it, a man of forty will be more moderate in his scorn, a man of eighty may take to the idea with eager interest. Much has been said about the cruelty and bitterness of life. It has been our experience that the older people get, as a rule, the more tightly they cling to it. It takes a young man—or an old fool—to throw it away recklessly.

* * * *

NOT even the youngest and most optimistic surgeon hopes to make a man so that he will live indefinitely, or forever. Not one of us has the faintest idea of what forever means. We are creatures of finity and in our present incarnation we can have no more idea of eternity or infinity than does the fish under water of the bending blue sky above his element.

But suppose a man could live two hundred years and keep mentally and physically sound all that time. Suppose that he kept on learning and forgot nothing. Would he remain a young man? Hardly. His spirit would come to be intimidated and cautious. No crusades, no voyages of Columbus, no victories of Nelson, no visions of the young men who went singing to the ships that were to take them overseas, no poems of Byron, would result from his length of years. He might well be pointed out as a hale and hearty old man. And we have no doubt that there is many an old man who would not have youth restored if he could. Health is enough. And being young once is enough, we think, for most of us.

* * * *

YOUTH is the most desirable thing in the world, but it is not so much desirable to the person who possesses it as to the rest of the world. Young people are often miserable themselves. Their happiness, to our way of thinking, is vastly exaggerated, but they do succeed in lending a color and vivacity to life that makes it much happier for older people. Also, it is those who are young in spirit who accomplish things and effect changes—almost always for the better. Steamboats, airplanes, the discovery of this continent, the building of our cities and the roads that connect them. were all done by young fellows, variously aged as to years, but youthful in the spirit that possessed them and expressed itself through them. It is not a matter of the passing years. There are sour old men of thirty-three and ebullient lads of twice that age.

* * * *

YOUTH is the season of faith and hope—sometimes of charity, but not always. The doctors may tell us something about preserving the physical instrument of mind and body through which it is expressed, but always their advice is in the nature of an excision or a patch. The spirit of youth cannot be pruned or patched.

It depends, so far as we can see, on a sort of hopeful and vivacious interest in life. To bet on a horse race, to travel crowded miles to see a baseball game, to be thrilled and lifted up by an opera or play, to attempt cheerfully the difficult and seemingly impossible enterprise of becom-

ing rich or famous—these are not sensible or reasonable activities to a man grown old in spirit.

Henry Ford, whatever his age, and however we may agree or disagree with him on various topics, has something of that quality which Lord Byron ascribes to the Isles of Greece—"Eternal summer gilds them yet."

His advice to the young man is not to save money and live cautiously against the rainy day that must some time come. It is to spend the money getting an education and learning something about the world. Stevenson in one of his essays comments on the eternal argument between the old man and the young man. The old man says to the young man, "Once, when I was young, I had rash ideas like yours; but now that I am old, I have changed my mind and know better."

Stevenson's comment is that it is quite possible that the old man was right when he was young and before he had changed his mind. Why should our second thought about a matter which we have no way of proving be any better than our first thought?

* * * *

WE have talked with various old men who had led what might be called rash and adventurous lives and we have never heard any of them express much regret. The game was worth while after all, and they were ready to do it all over again.

The only trouble with youth is that it is carried off so soon. The man who risks his life daily in gay adventures rarely lives to be old enough to talk about it much in the past tense. If we are going to stay young and stay alive at the same time, it is best for us to have most of our hairbreadth escapes by proxy.

* * * *

THIS is where the subject of fiction suggests itself. We could easily fill this magazine with tales written by those old and disillusioned in spirit, who see clearly the irony of fate and have lost sight of the possibility of overcoming it. This may have its place, but we think that the finest thing that can be done in any art, including that of magazine fiction, is to catch the fleeting beauty of youth, to incase it in the amber of fine workmanship, and to give it permanence so that other young men may recognize its truth and correspondence to their own fresh experience. Life is a battle against a fate that seems inexorable but is continually defeated. A man is old when he feels that he has served his time in the ranks. He is young as long as he is hoping and fighting.

* * * *

IN the next issue we open with a novel by George Banning, called "Sea Wrought." It goes in the list of the really exceptional and worth-while tales of adventure. Also, there is a fight story by William McGeehan, the famous writer on sport, as well as stories by Stacpoole, Knibbs, Curran, Niven, Johnston, Montanye, Beasley, Hall, Marsh, and Stevenson. None of these needs the services of a surgeon. They are all young in the most stirring and delightful sense.

Are You Happy?

ASK a hundred people what they want most in the world and the answer is likely to be —Happiness. To some, Happiness is represented by riches or fame. To others, leisure spells Happiness. But all agree that there can be no real Happiness without Health.

Summer is the time to build for Health and Happiness—the time of vacations. Long days to rest in—to play in—to dream in.

Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn were the ideal vacationists. They took a vacation whether they needed it or not—and had *fun*.

—This is what a real vacation means. To vacate your old environments, your regular occupation —your everyday self and have a complete change. To do the things that will fill you brimful of energy and "pep".

In planning your vacation—and of course you will take one—try to get away from the things you have been doing all year and do the opposite.

The Postman Does Not Need a Walk—

He needs a hammock and a lazy time. The town man needs the quiet of the country—the country man needs the stimulus of the town.

The mountaineer needs the ocean—the lowlander needs the hills. Women who keep house should board—and girls who never see a kitchen throughout the year should camp out and get their own meals.

One man needs solitude —another needs company.

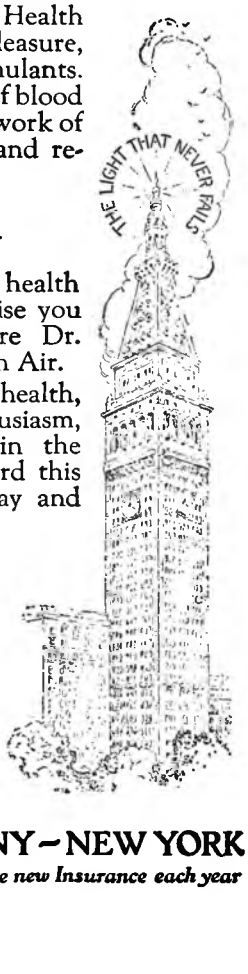
Think of your own needs and plan the vacation that will do you most good.

New ideas—new scenes—new people—all this is recreation. And recreation is necessary to Health and Happiness. Joy, pleasure, laughter are mental stimulants. They increase the flow of blood and so aid in the first work of building up the body and repairing wasted tissues.

Miracle-Workers—

There are two famous health doctors whom we advise you to consult. They are Dr. Sunshine and Dr. Fresh Air.

If you want more health, more energy, more enthusiasm, more earning power in the days to come, play hard this month of August—play and be happy.



During the past few years a great new movement has been growing all over the country —the movement to provide recreation and outdoor amusements for the thousands of men, women and children who live in towns, villages and thickly populated cities. This vacation movement has been carried along by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. In 1922 many of our district managers arranged jolly old-fashioned picnics for their local policyholders.

The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company is so strongly in sympathy with this movement that it has prepared a booklet, "What One Town Did", that tells just how to go about the work of providing adequate recreation centers.

Please send for it and help enlist the interest of your neighbors in plans for building health in your town.

HALEY FISKE, *President.*

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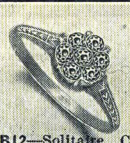


B12—Solitaire Cluster, 7 fine Diamonds set in Platinum in a fancy 18K White Gold mounting..$65

B13—Artistic Platinum top Friendship Ring set with 5 blue-white Diamonds, White Gold Shank. $135

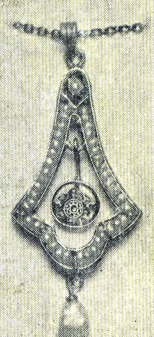
B14 — Superior fine Diamond in beautiful hand-engraved Platinum ring..$100

B15—Gent's hand-carved Belcher Ring set with fine blue-white Diamond...$45

B16—Sweet's Engagement ring set with fine blue-white Diamond $35

B17 — "Sweetheart" Platinum ring set with superior fine Diamond $150

B18—Unique Platinum top Green Gold ring set with 1 fine Diamond $40



B20—Beautiful Lavalliere geuine pearls, fine Diamond ..$28

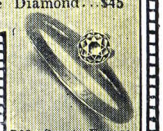
B19—Solitaire Cluster, 7 fine Diamonds set in Platinum $85

B21 — Four White Gold inverted hearts are set with 1 superior quality, sparkling Diamond....$75

B22—Ladies' Belcher ring set with 1 fine Diamond $25

B24—Solitaire Cluster, 7 fine Diamonds set in Platinum. 55.00

B23—Genuine Black Onyx set with fine Diamond in Platinum bezel $23



B25—Sweet Engagement ring set with one superior fine Diamond $85

B26—Beautiful hand-engraved White Gold mounting set with superior Diamond.$50

B27—Sweet Engagement ring set with one superior fine Diamond $65

B28—Sweet Engagement ring set with one superior, fine Diamond $100

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