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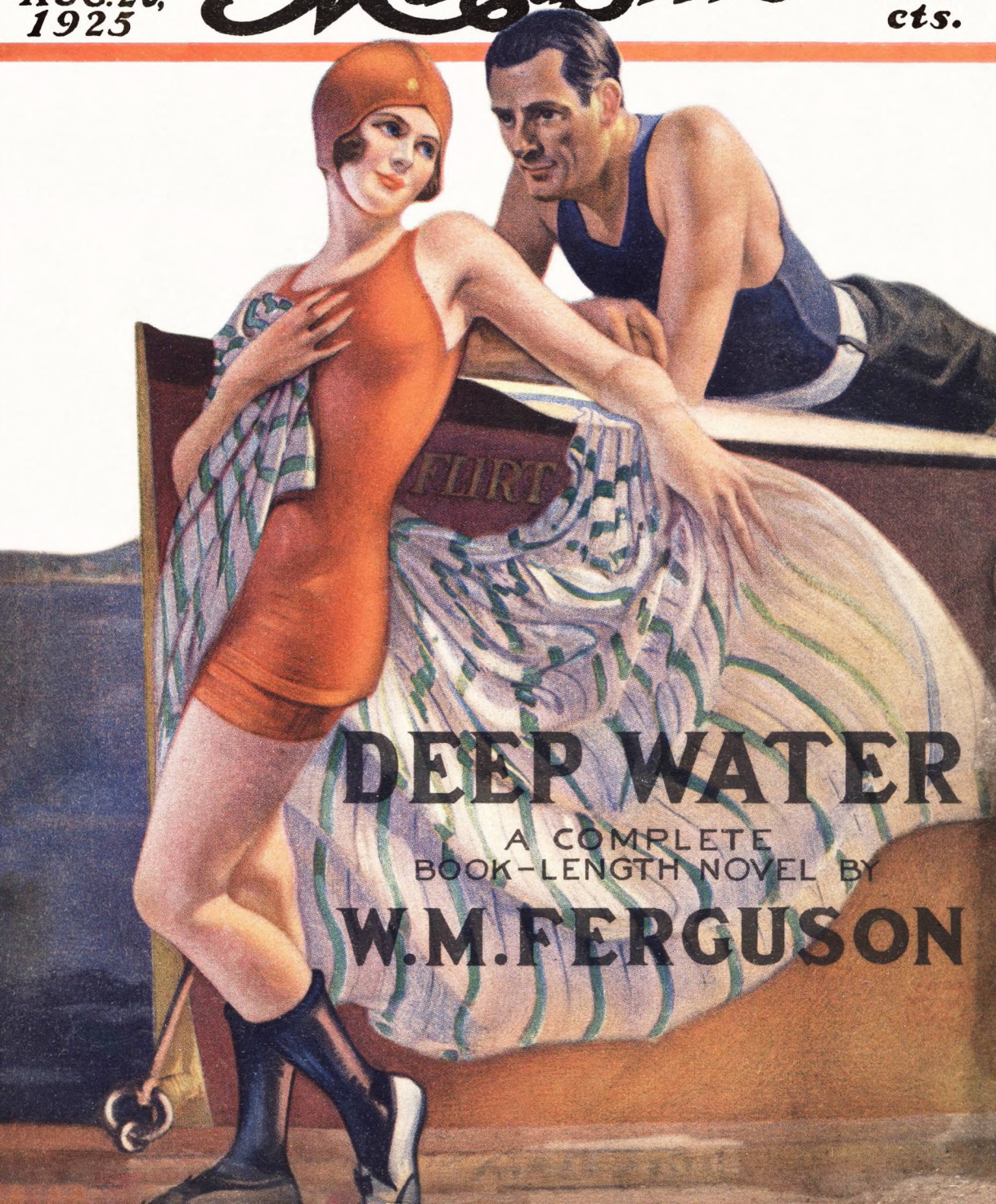

DEEP WATER

A COMPLETE BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL BY

W. M. FERGUSON

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. LXXVII. AUGUST 20, 1925. No. 3

Deep Water

By William Morton Ferguson

Author of "The Banister Mystery," "The Big Fool," Etc.

Sometimes, a great adventure swings slowly open to us on the hinges of a very trifling incident. It did for three young men, and in the guise of a hoary mariner drew them away from the civilized comforts of New York City to the primeval islands of the mystic South Seas.

CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH I ASSUAGE A THIRST FOR THE CLASSICS.

IT was after I had left the public library and reached the corner of Broadway and Eighty-second Street, that she overtook me. She was a little breathless, a little hurried, a little over five feet. And she had black eyes and a dimple.

I had noticed her—she was the kind one notices—and she had noticed me. There is no use being mock modest about these things; one is born handsome and fascinating, or one isn't. Moreover, by happy chance, I was wearing a new suit, a thing of sartorial beauty and splendor.

I had debated whether or not to wear it, but the fact that my friend James Adams happily failed to arrive home for supper decided me. On such trifling circumstances do great events wait. Undoubtedly that suit, "Gent's Snappy Spring Model," was the finishing touch, and she found me as attractive as I found her.

You must understand that this was no vulgar flirtation; she wasn't that kind nor am I. There is simply no explaining nor resisting this instantaneous and mutual thing called attraction, the unspoken call of youth to youth and beauty to beauty. The glance of an eye, and the thing is done.

This mysterious and magnetic force had drawn her to my side in the library; ignoring the common herd and vulgar fiction, she had threaded her way unerringly to where I stood and browsed among the classics. But though acutely conscious of her presence, aware of an absorbing interest which she tried vainly to dissemble, I gave no sign. At least I didn't speak, nor did she.

I HAD been the first to retreat, giving in my book at the desk and having the card stamped, conscious that she had turned and was following me, conscious of my new suit and proud of its effect as viewed from the rear. I walked slowly. It was a gorgeous night. I was lonely. I was twenty something. I was rich. I had fully thirty cents which I could squander with reckless abandon on Romance. And Romance followed me, overtook me, I repeat, at the corner lamp where I stopped to look for something I hadn't lost.

"I—I beg your pardon."

"Certainly." And, with a courtly gesture, I lifted Adams' straw hat.

We inspected each other anew under the arc light, violet as her eyes. And so intent was her regard that presently the awful thought assailed me that perhaps my bow tie had basely slipped its moorings and got entangled in my ear.

"Shall we go over to the Drive?" I suggested, fortified by the secret discovery that the tie was still safely anchored. "It's a lovely night for a walk."

"Is it?" she said without enthusiasm.

"Or a ride?" I hastened to amend, eager to parade my plutocracy. "We might motor to Rector's," jingling seductively the twin dimes and nickels, "and then take in a show. Or else——"

"I don't want to go *anywhere* with you," she broke in almost violently. "I don't even want to know you. If—if you think I do, you're entirely mistaken. It's the book I want, not you. That's what I want to speak to you about—the book and nothing else."

"Ah, yes, the book," I murmured, and looked at it—Ovid's "Heroides and Amores." "Quite so, the book."

"I didn't think you'd misunderstand," she said accusingly.

"No, certainly not. How could I? Of course. Yet, it's the only copy they've got and you want it? Quite so. How stupid of me."

"I say, I don't want the book!" she burst out. "Do you think I don't know the Greek poets by heart, too? What? Yes, that's what I said—Latin. I've read that book, every bit of it. I've had it out, just returned it, in fact. I don't want the book; I want what's in it."

"Ah, I see. How stupid of me. I should have known that."

"No, you shouldn't, but you do now. I'd have explained long ago if you had only let me speak. I haven't been able to get in a word. I returned the book to-night and only remembered, when halfway home, that I'd left a letter in it. I meant to mail it, you see, and forgot. It was all stamped and everything. A *very* important letter. I—I didn't like to speak to you but I've had to, you see. You must return it—I mean the letter."

"It shall be done, madam. A sealed, stamped and addressed letter all ready for mailing? I didn't see one, but then I hardly looked at the book. If it's here now——"

"Of course it's there. It's got to be."

But it hasn't or wasn't. We conducted the search together.

"Oh, it's gone!" she exclaimed at length with something approaching a gasp. And she looked at me again, suspiciously, even accusingly.

"Perhaps," I suggested, "it wasn't in the book."

"Perhaps it *was!* And it didn't fall out. It was there when I entered the library. I'm sure of it."

"Then the librarian's found and removed it."

"They didn't find it! They overlooked it. Do you think I didn't ask first thing?"

"Well," I said, still conscious of her accusing eyes, "nobody would have any interest in keeping such a thing—even my-

self. People are very honest when there's nothing worth stealing. I've lost more than one letter and had it mailed by the finder. Obviously it either dropped out of the book before you turned it in, or some reader, glancing through the book, found it before I got there. In either case there's nothing to worry about; I'm sure you'll find it's been mailed."

Now that was a very sensible speech but somehow it failed to give her comfort. And to my equally sensible query if there was money in the letter and, if not, what made it so frightfully important, she managed to convey the impression that it was none of my business.

I yearned to know more about this mysterious letter and the girl with the purple eyes; I yearned and I tried, but I failed. For, apparently satisfied of my honesty and that I hadn't purloined the letter, she lost no time in giving me the slip.

I returned to the library. It was near the closing hour, one of the librarians had left but Miss Stringer was still at her desk.

"That book hasn't been out for over a week," she said to my inquiry but not to my astonishment. "We haven't many members like you, fond of such reading. As for the lady—yes, I noticed her. You mean the one with the champagne crêpe de Chine, white French straw with red quill, green eyes——"

"Oh, no. I can't vouch for the other details but her eyes were the color of a Siberian topaz."

"Siberian fiddlesticks! Green as gooseberries, that's what they were. Green eyes and red hair. She followed you out."

"What's her name?"

"I don't know; never saw her before. She isn't a member, as far as I know, and she didn't give in that book or any other. And she didn't inquire about a letter either."

"You're sure?"

"Perfectly," said Miss Stringer, who was generally sure about everything, even the day she was going to die. "What's more, we couldn't possibly have missed it. We do find funny things, and sometimes we overlook others. But a bulky letter? Oh, quite impossible. Besides, as I say, she never had the book. She was only trying to scrape up an acquaintance with you."

"Who had the book out last?"

MISS STRINGER jabbed her pencil more firmly into her hair and turned obligingly to a card cabinet. "There it is —Simon Greenlees—returned on May 25th."

"Perhaps she's his daughter," I said, "and something important, if not actually a letter, was really left in the book and they only thought of it now. What's his address?"

"I don't know," replied Miss Stringer quite seriously. "He's dead. Yes, and he hadn't any daughter. He was an old bachelor and lived on the Drive. I knew him rather well in a way though he never talked about himself. He was one of these people who take to reading late in life. He wasn't well educated though he seemed to have traveled a great deal."

"It's funny then he should take out a book like the 'Heroides.'"

She shook her head. "Not necessarily; a person could appreciate it without knowing Latin. I was able to help him a bit, direct him to the best English translations of the classics. He was self-made, I should say. He gave the long sound of 'O' to Ovid, and accented Epictetus on the second syllable. Rich, yes, and yet he preferred to come here. A lot of them do."

"Did he return the book himself?"

"Oh, no; he hadn't it more than a few days when he died. It was returned when they settled his affairs. You might have heard of the accident; he fell down the elevator shaft and broke his neck, poor old soul."

"And he hadn't any relatives?"

"None that I know of. He seemed lonely, and I only saw him once with anybody, a man he met here one night. No, he left nothing in the book, and I'm sure the green-eyed girl never knew him. There's no mystery about it except the

mystery where some women get their cheek and impudence, and some men their gullibility. You should have known better than to fall for an old game like that. Or perhaps you wanted to! Anyway I hope she didn't get your watch."

"A physical impossibility, Miss Stringer. It's laid up where moth and rust—in the safe-keeping of an avuncular relative."

"Go along with you," she said, eying anew my expensive regalia.

So I went along with her, as far as the nearest subway kiosk where she tubed it to her home in the Heights, and I then proceeded toward the apartment I shared with Adams.

The neighborhood was a place of smells, the abode of the roach that perambulates by day and the bug that prowleth by night; of the festive organ grinder, the majestic Wagnerian chorus of the flat-wheeled "L" and surface car, the leather-lunged juvenile and colicky infant. Yet everything has its compensations: our building had been rechristened "Berkeley Hall," done in a gorgeous gold scroll on the front door; for which, and other excuses, our rent was jacked up another notch. Also a specious air of grandeur had been lent by some varnish, a couple of green tubs alleged to contain rubber plants—Adams said they were the original bullrushes in which Moses had been found—and a new set of cheap, but arresting awnings.

Moreover, a mere block to the east there stood a vast array of real plutocratic apartment houses, bearing similar magnificent names as ours; therefore one's address might be pleasantly confounded with them in the phrase, "Berkeley Hall, near Central Park West, you know." Yes, but much nearer, indeed almost on, appalling Columbus Avenue.

All this to show that ours was a neighborhood where anything was liable to happen and generally did. And so, in a measure, I was prepared for what actually occurred. I mean that I wasn't greatly astonished, having had various arguments with my neighbors, especially Mr. Stavinski, the gentleman who methodically tortured a bassoon on the fourth floor. Only a few hours previously I had succeeded at long last in decoying him into the open and putting the long-suffering instrument out of its misery; and so I thought what now happened to me merely a continuation of the amenities.

It was a foul ambuscade; he was waiting for me in the vestibule behind one of the other doors. Our landlord believes in hiding his light under a bushel, and especially at that hour the hall was a thing of mystery. The inner door had clicked to my ring, thus showing that Adams was home, when I received a wallop behind the ear that produced all the further illumination necessary. I turned and fought, saw more lights and little else.

The janitor came up, suggested that I was drunk and that I'd have to leave if I didn't quit making a nuisance of myself. The library book was gone and my pockets were turned inside out. A singular thirst for the classics seemed to be abroad in the land.

CHAPTER II.

CONCERNING OURSELVES AND A VISITOR.

MY friend Adams, having left the door on the latch for me, had returned to the kitchen where, in shorts and tunic, he was engaged in vaporizing the crockery. This is a highly scientific and abstruse labor-saving device, invented and patented by him, which consists in filling the sink with dirty dishes and permitting the hot water—when there is any—to dribble on them; after which you chuck them on the shelf to dry. It took a great mind like Adams' to invent it. He is fearfully particular about such things, finicky as an old maid.

"The next time you're out gallivanting," he growled without turning from the sink, his corpulent form encircled by a checked apron, "I wish to goodness you'd leave the key under the mat as arranged. I'm not built for climbing fire escapes, especially on a hot night, and I tore my pants, too. Yes, I had to get through the window from Stavinski's, and he wasn't going to let me because you'd ruptured his bassoon. I had to threaten to bust him one

before he would. You've got to cut it out, George, this scrapping with all and sundry. You're making us a bit unpopular, that's what it is."

"*I* did you say? Who kicked the 'I cash clothes' man downstairs? Who punched the ice man in the eye? Who smacked the butcher's boy? *You!*"

"Entirely necessary and proper," he retorted with his perverted sense of justice. "The worm will turn, even if it's a fat one. I'm a perfectly peaceable citizen if I'm treated right. I don't go hunting trouble."

"Neither do I. I never fight. But if you had to try and write with that damned bassoon gurgling and wheezing all the time—— It's not like drawing rotten pictures, where you don't have to use any thought or intelligence——"

"Oh, don't I? Let me tell you again and finally, you poor penny-a-liner——" Here, turning from the sink, he saw me for the first time. "Oh, no, you never fight!" he sneered. "What was it, a steam roller?" And then his eyes bulged and in a suspiciously meek voice he asked where I had procured my new raiment.

"Why, the suit came to-night," I explained. "As you weren't home, I thought I'd save you the trouble of breaking it in."

"Break," he said in the same voice, "is right."

"Yes, I'm afraid it's a bit mussed," I confessed. "You see——"

"Mussed?" he roared, clutching his flaming hair. "Ye gods! And that's my new straw katy—split to the wide! And that's my new tie, too! And you're wearing my shirt—the only decent one I'd left! You've got on *everything*, you filthy blighter!"

In the midst of our ensuing discourse, during which Stavinski banged viciously on his ceiling—evidently, though bereft of the bassoon, he was determined to annoy us in some fashion—the doorbell rang.

"Who the blazes is that at this hour?" panted Adams, arising with reluctance from my bosom. "Go and see."

It wasn't the husband of the offended lady on the third floor, the laundryman, nor, in fact, any of those who tried vainly to ruffle our cheery and peace-loving natures. I inspected the visitor carefully. I had never seen him before; he was large all over and had a round face as smooth and shiny as a pebble. He was reassuringly well dressed but it was only after a parley that I admitted him.

"Gentleman to see *you*," I said to Adams. "A detective."

The visitor seemed more interested in our abode than in us. We stood in what was supposed to be the drawing-room, but because it was the only room with a northern light, Adams, in his selfish fashion, had turned it into what he called a studio. He's always bleating about northern lights as though he were an aurora borealis. As I've often assured him, light of any kind is fatal to what he calls his art. And so the place was littered with paintbrushes and tubes, palettes and paper, and these appalling daubs in black and white which he bullies feeble-minded art editors into printing and sometimes even paying for. A dish bearing traces of ancient ham and eggs—— But a place inhabited by my friend Adams is better imagined than described.

ADAMS, having donned his working pants, all covered with paint and food, was inspecting our visitor, his carmine locks bristling like an incensed Airedale's. "A bull, eh?" he said. "I knew something like this was bound to happen sooner or later." And he looked at me darkly.

Said the visitor indulgently: "My name's Bland and I'm not a precinct or headquarters man. I'm from Washington. Federal agent. Secret service." And Mr. Bland, removing a capable hand from a side pocket of his sack coat, opened the palm and flashed a badge, proving Adams' surmise correct.

"I want to know something about you boys, have a little talk with you," proceeded the visitor, bland as his name. "Which of you is Broke?"

"Both of us," said Adams promptly. "A more or less chronic condition pro-

duced by the high cost of living and the low pay of publishers."

"My name's Broke," I said. "I'll save you the trouble of looking me up in 'What's Which in America' by admitting that I'm Broke, the author."

"He's a dizzy writer," explained Adams confidentially. "Acquit me of a mere vulgarism. He writes bloody stuff for bloody magazines. Red-blooded fiction—dripping with red blood, perspiration, and tears. He should have been arrested long ago. I've often warned him about it. I'm Adams, the artist."

"He designs labels for goats to eat, and corsets that no female could ever wear," I explained. "Whatever his morals, I can assure you, Mr. Bland, that he simply hasn't the skill to counterfeit a note that would fool a fool. So I think you must be in the wrong pew."

Mr. Bland, thumbs in the armholes of his vest, rocked on his flat heels and continued to regard us with indulgence. But I wasn't deceived. He conveyed, I fancied, a suggestion of false benignity.

"How'd you know I was after phony notes?" he suddenly shot at me like a bullet from a gun.

I EXPLAINED it was merely a surmise, based on the law of probability, and what I had said was by way of a jest.

"Yeah?" he retorted pleasantly. "Well, now, I'll tell you; I'll take that fifty-case note, Mr. Broke, without any more how-d'you-do. Hand it over."

"Did you say fifty dollars?" I exclaimed. "If you can find fifty cents I'll be glad to give you half. I've got exactly thirty cents till my next check comes in."

His look suddenly became formidable. "None of that, now, if you know what's good for you! Be wise, son, before it's too late. I ain't aiming to make trouble for either of you boys, because I don't believe you were in on the play, but by holding out you're making yourselves a party after the fact. I know how you're fixed, and how a guy can be tempted, so just come across and we'll say no more about it, see?"

My friend Adams edged forward, an empty turpentine bottle in his hand, and what I knew portended the hospital for somebody in his eye. "What's the big idea?"

Our visitor, displaying surprising agility for his bulk—indeed moving like running oil—instantly put a safe distance between himself and the turpentine bottle, his hand flashing at the same time to his hip pocket. He kept it there, thumb hooked in it. He didn't seem at all alarmed even though I had outflanked him. The thin-lipped mouth, a wide slit amid the vast cheeks, still smiled but his eyes were menacing chips of blue stone. Peculiar eyes of a whitish blue; puckered, countersunk. They were the eyes of a killer.

"Be good, boys," he said softly. "Don't be boobs. Now you listen to me; I want the note that was in that book, and I want it quick, see?"

"You'll want a stretcher quicker if you don't get out of here!" said Adams.

"Hold on, Jim!" I exclaimed, Adams being all set for one of the rushes that had made him famous on Brokaw Field. "What's that you said, Mr. Bland—a book? Can—can you possibly mean a library book?"

"Not only can, but do," said Mr. Bland with a satiric glance. "You suddenly remember it, eh? And, to further refresh your memory, it was a fifty-dollar note in an envelope. That note's phony, if you don't know it. It was slipped there by 'Auburn Annie,' one of the slickest ribs that ever shoved the queer. I'll say Auburn is right—hair, birthplace, and the jail where she's done time. Two spaces she got last."

"Great John!" I said, and groped for a chair. "And she had such wonderful hazel eyes! Jim, as I told you, I wasn't fighting—you wouldn't let me explain—— But the book's gone, Mr. Bland; it was stolen! I assure you it was. The book and the bill too!"

Mr. Bland was patently from Missouri, but at length even he was compelled to believe the truth of my story. And while I related it, Adams, who a moment be-

fore had been ready to lay down his worthless life in my defense, made sneering noises and regarded me in a pitying manner as though I were an abject imbecile.

"H'mph!" grunted Mr. Bland as I finished. He had unhooked the sinister thumb from his hip pocket and had even accepted a cigarette from Adams, whose derogatory opinion of me he seemed to share. "H'mph!" he said again and blew brown smoke. "A letter, eh? Well, I s'pose that's one name for a note. I'll say that that little skirt has got some idea of humor, but she'll laugh on the other side of her pretty mug before I'm done with her. You were a sucker in need, Mr. Broke, all right, and she's dished me again. Y'see the whole point in this game is to catch 'em with the goods, and that's what I ain't been able to do."

He accepted his evident defeat with philosophy and no apparent rancor; the difference, I take it, between a professional and an amateur. It was all in the game and he was a good loser.

"That fifty's been giving us a lot of trouble," he continued in quite a friendly manner. "We believe it to be the work of 'Spud' Morgan who ain't been sprung long from Atlanta. This Annie party is his wife. We haven't been able to find the plates—nothing—but we've been trailing her as a shover. I don't want to go into details and so I'll come down to tonight. I know she had that phony note on her, but I didn't know she knew I knew, see? Oh, she's a cute one. It's clear she must have known, just as she knew what it would mean if she was caught with it."

HE ruminated a moment, then continued: "She gave me the slip—I was waiting for her to pass it in a store—dodged into the public library and stuck it in a book. I didn't know this at the time, you understand; I only guessed it afterward. I cut her trail again later on, nabbed her, took her over to the station house and had her frisked by the matron. Nothing doing, of course, and I had to let her go. But I knew she'd planted the note somewhere——"

"But why didn't she destroy it?" I interrupted. "She had the chance, and there were lots of ways."

"Well, now," said Mr. Bland, "that brings us to what you may call the psychology of crooks. Know what I mean? They all have their peculiarities and it's our business to know 'em. I knew she'd only destroy that note as a last resort. It was her husband's work—and they're as proud of fine work as honest folks—and why destroy fifty bucks that could be passed? She thought she'd fooled me—and she had!"

He confessed that she had eluded him for the second time and he hadn't seen her again. It was only by inquiries, and luck, that he identified her with the woman who had been seen following me from the library, talking with me on the corner and looking at a book I held. Cleverly enough he had deduced the rest. The library was closed and he could gain no information there; but from the description furnished him of me, further inquiries at length gave him my name and address. As yet he had been unable to learn where the elusive Annie Morgan lived or where her husband was lying low.

"I thought I'd got 'em here," he concluded, "but all the accounts I heard of you boys—even if they weren't so flattering—didn't support the idea you were in with them. I didn't know, of course, about that beating up you got, Mr. Broke. It seems I got here too late. I've been on the gravel train right through. Of course she knew your name and address—wasn't it on the library card?—and she tipped off one of her pals to wait for you."

"Yes, there would have been plenty of time to arrange that," I agreed, and explained how I had returned to the library. "And a confederate might have been standing near us for all I know. But the point is this: The money wasn't in the book, Mr. Bland, and she knew it. She saw that for herself."

"And did she see in your pockets?" he asked dryly.

"She believed me when I said I hadn't taken it," I retorted. "I know she did."

"Aw!" said Mr. Bland, and made a gesture of pain. "You said you hadn't taken a letter, but you didn't say anything about money? No, of course, not. And, of course she couldn't say it was a fifty-dollar bill; folks don't forget and leave *that* in books. And it being in an envelope too——"

"But how do you know it was?"

"Aw!" said Mr. Bland again. "She asked you for a letter, didn't she? It's an old dodge, a sealed envelope addressed to herself or a pal. She knew, if any one happened to find it before she returned to the library, that it was a hundred to one they'd mail it. I tell you it has whiskers."

"It may have a full beaver," I conceded, "but the fact remains that I didn't take the money. And if I didn't take it, who did?"

"Yeah, that's the point."

"Well, I hope you believe now that I never saw the money. If I had, I might have kept it. We don't know what we may do when suddenly tempted. In any case, if I had taken it, I wouldn't be fool enough to keep it now. I wouldn't try to pass it, knowing it was counterfeit."

Mr. Bland nodded. "Yeah, that'd be mighty dangerous, young man. Mebbe it dropped out in the library or somebody picked up that book before you did. We'll see. I'm dished but not done. Now could you gimme any idea of this guy who jumped you?"

"No, the light was bad and I hadn't a chance. He lammed me with a sand bag. One thing I do remember distinctly because it had nothing to do with sight—he smelled strongly of musk."

Mr. Bland gazed speculatively into the bottom of his straw hat, then set it firmly on his round mouse-colored head. He arose with decision. "Well, boys, I won't keep you any longer. Sorry to have troubled you, but no hard feelings, I hope. Here's a last word—keep all this under your hats. You never met any Mr. Bland of the secret service, see! If you don't cheep a word it'll help a lot! I want to keep it out of the papers, see? Many a crook has been tipped off by the press. And if you'll take a hint from me, Mr. Broke, you'll be mighty careful about believing the stories of strange women, no matter what kind of eyes they've got. You might have been murdered or, if I hadn't believed your story, got into a bad jam with Uncle Sam."

Adams echoed this sentiment when at length our visitor had gone. "Serves you darned well right," he added in his sympathetic fashion. "It all comes from having nothing to do, and this passion for playing the gay Lothario. You've smirched our reputation, for I'm not sure even now that Mr. Bland really believes you didn't take the envelope. I'd like to know, simply as a matter of curiosity, what happened to it."

"Then," said I, "let me relieve your curiosity." And, lifting his damaged straw hat from the easel where I'd hung it, I inserted a finger in the sweatband, unfolded the envelope and laid it on the table.

CHAPTER III.

THE ENVELOPE.

ADAMS' first action, after various remarks which I omit as unprintable, was to make sure that the hall door was securely locked against a surprise return visit from Mr. Bland. Then he begged to know what had happened, not merely to my morals, but my sanity.

"I'm not trying to protect any woman," I managed to insert at length. "I tell you there was no money in it. It was empty, exactly as you see it now; empty and torn open like that. I give you my word for it, Jim."

He transferred his eyes from me to the envelope. It was the kind you may buy anywhere and it bore the address, in a sprawling hand, "Cecil Carlton, The Sonoma, Cathedral Heights, Manhattan, New York." A large vivid-green stamp was in the usual corner. It depicted a native paddling a canoe, a background of thatched huts standing on piles in the

water, palms in the distance. A beautiful stamp in both color and execution. At the top in white letters was the single word, "Brunei."

"Huh!" said Adams, tapping it. "I suppose you stole it for this?"

Now Adams doesn't collect stamps and never did. He knows nothing of its joys and sorrows nor what it means to pursue and capture the missing number of a set; knows nothing of the loving labor and self-sacrifice demanded of the philatelist. I have no Tapling collection but he couldn't have comprehended that I'd rather starve than part with my album.

"It wasn't stealing," I replied. "This Mr. Carlton, whoever he may be, didn't want the stamp or he'd never have left it there. It's no 'Post Office Mauritius' or anything like that; it's worth about a couple of cents, and nothing to anybody who doesn't collect. But it happened that I hadn't got it."

"And so you stole it. Exactly. This driveling vice of yours has been steadily undermining——"

"It's better than collecting immodest pictures like you."

"They're works of art, you fathead! You can't understand, of course. And I don't steal them. If it wasn't stealing, and you didn't know perfectly well it was stealing, why did you stick it in my hat?" he finished triumphantly.

"Because you've a big head full of wind and you won't buy a hat to fit me. I stuck a bit of newspaper in the sweatband before I went out, and even then I found it still wobbled a bit. So when I happened on the envelope I stuck it in too. If I'd simply wanted the stamp couldn't I have torn it off? I tell you it's really not worth anything."

"A likely tale!" he sniffed.

But it was the truth. The insecurity of Adams' hat, which I'd discovered too late, had bothered me and I'd killed two birds with one stone, as it were. I wanted the stamp but I also wanted another wedge for the hat. It was one of those trivial incidents on which sometimes great issues hang; so trivial and yet so all-important that, looking back on it later, one may well think it designed by Providence.

I proceeded to explain how I had placed the envelope in the hat before the girl with the wonderful honey-colored eyes had appeared on the scene. "She asked me for a letter, sealed and ready for posting, which this obviously isn't," I continued. "I told no more than the truth in denying all knowledge of it. I was curious to know, if in reality she was after this envelope, why she should prevaricate, and why it was so valuable. But she gave me the slip before I could find out anything."

"It seems a bit queer," conceded Adams, "that she'd put the phony bill in such an envelope. Mr. Bland's idea that she meant to have it mailed to her or a pal, at a pinch, doesn't seem to fit. Of course she mightn't have had any other envelope handy. And she might have sealed it, you know, and then somebody stole it before you got there."

"According to Bland," I said, "she had plenty of time to get a proper envelope and stamp, time to do about anything. Why not drop it in the mail box, instead of a book, when she was at it? Has it not occurred to you that when our visitor declared, 'You never met any Mr. Bland of the secret service,' it may have been the one truth he uttered? Do you think, on the whole, he talked and acted like the Federal officer he professed to be?

"I doubt Bland and his story, Jim. I may be wrong, but I doubted it so much that I decided to say nothing about the envelope. In any case, if it's all true and I admitted possession of it, nothing would have made him believe that I didn't take the money. How did he know that this Annie Morgan had the phony bill and put it in an envelope? If he knew all that, why doesn't he know where she lives? How did she manage to give him the slip twice to-night? I tell you that Bland and his story smell pretty fishy—about as fishy as the one the girl told me."

"If you're right," said Adams, who really is capable of intelligent thought at times, "it means there was a letter in this envelope which both the girl and Bland,

and evidently others, were anxious to get hold of. It must be valuable, valuable enough to prompt at least assault and robbery. How did it get in that book? Who stole it and why? Is Bland a pal of the girl's? Was it he who waited for you behind the door——"

"No, I'm sure about that smell of musk."

"Then a pal of his, say. And when they found it wasn't in your clothes nor even the book—which they took to make doubly sure—Bland comes here for another try. Where is this place Brunei? Never heard of it."

STAMP collecting, if it does nothing else, brushes up geography. I replied that it was the chief town and name of a territory on the northwest coast of Borneo. "It became a feudatory state under British protection over thirty years ago, but that stamp wasn't issued until the year 1907."

"Borneo, eh?" said Adams, his eyes brightening. "That's the jolly old place where they've blowpipes and poisoned arrows and are so fond of skulling. We take it then that this fellow Carlton has been in Brunei or knows somebody there. This person writes him an all-important letter——"

Adams had quite a respectable imagination of his own, when he let it off the lead, and he proceeded to evolve theories at which my own would have blushed. Carlton was a reformed pirate, master of A Chinese junk and he had secretly buried the loot——

We enjoyed ourselves, smoking and yarning until the small hours, caught by that supreme lure of the ages—buried treasure.

The morning found us ashamed. In its hard light, faced by the day's work and the conventional crime of "Yes, We Have No Bananas," as perpetrated by an early barrel organ, our talk of the previous evening seemed very puerile indeed. Neither of us mentioned buried treasure. Adams, perhaps in deference to a Scotch ancestor, seemed in particular to bitterly repent at having so outraged his common sense. And apparently he blamed me for having lured him from the path of sober self-respect. "I hope Bland lands those two counterfeiters," was his only reference to the subject.

I settled to the morning's grind with purpose, if not vim, and straightway found myself thinking of Bland and the envelope and the girl with the sapphire eyes. They insisted on mixing themselves up with the yarn I was attempting to write. Of course Bland's story must be true, but I couldn't help speculating, romancing, weaving a mystery even if none existed. At least I could make a far better story out of it than the one on which I was engaged. Somehow I was entirely out of conceit with the latter; it seemed infinitely stale and trite. And if it bored me, it was certain to bore the editor, not to say the reader. At last, even after vainly attempting a page or two of the Great American Novel—at which I worked with loving care, when I could steal the time, and at which inspiration had never balked before—I gave it up, cursed the morning for a finished failure, and went into the studio.

I found Adams, dead pipe in mouth, sitting moodily before an easel from which the cloth that generally covered it had been removed. It was the Great Academy Picture; proof that he, like myself, had been unable to concentrate on the daily grind. "I'm going to take the air," I announced.

"I'll bet you're going out on the trail of this piffling mystery you were gassing about last night."

"Well, I thought it wouldn't do any harm to look up this chap Carlton, just for fun, you know. I thought——"

"Pah!" said Adams. "Try and talk sense for once."

CHAPTER IV.

HIS NIBS.

MY first visit was to the library where I reported the loss of Ovid, promising, of course, to make it good if the book wasn't returned. Miss Stringer knew me well enough—or thought she did—to know

that I hadn't pawned it. I had chosen the lunch hour and thus she had time to discuss the problem, though I said nothing about the envelope. As I had pointed out to Adams, even if Bland's story were true, the fact that I had the envelope, if known, would only cause me further trouble, and both he and I had agreed that, mystery or no mystery, our best plan was to keep all knowledge of it to ourselves. Apart from it there was enough in my deleted story to interest Miss Stringer, she agreeing that nobody would steal the book, especially in such a manner, without an imperative reason.

"It's not even as if it were a copy that some dishonest bibliophile might covet," she said. "It seems as if there really had been a letter in it like that girl said. Yet I don't see why we overlooked it, or why it should be so valuable. Have you thought it might be a case of attempted blackmail, an incriminating letter of some sort that could be used against her? Yet why hide it there? She never had the book, as I've told you, and I know she isn't even a member."

"But Mr. Cecil Carlton is a member?"

No, the files showed that he wasn't. There wasn't even a member with that surname. And I only detected my tactical error when Miss Stringer very naturally asked what Mr. Carlton had got to do with the matter.

"Why, wasn't that the name of the person who, you said, had the book out last?" I asked more or less ingenuously.

"No, it wasn't. I said Greenlees. Of course you've told the police of your experience?"

"Oh, yes," I said vaguely and untruthfully. Then I went away.

And the mystery deepened when I reached Cathedral Heights and discovered that Mr. Carlton, like the renowned Mrs. Harris, appeared to be a purely imaginary character. The address on that envelope savored very much of my favorite version of my own, which is to say that The Sonoma was much nearer Amsterdam Avenue than the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. Indeed it was a mere humble flat house, like Berkeley Hall, but camouflaged somewhat better. It owned a hall attendant if no elevator. He was a colored gentleman, who looked as dumb as a dumb-waiter, but he assured me positively that no Mr. Carlton lived there or ever had.

From Cathedral Heights I went over to the Drive. I had received Greenlees' address from Miss Stringer, and The Chalfont was what Berkeley Hall and The Sonoma so feebly and futilely aspired to be. Here I had the good fortune to meet in the person of the superintendent, who lived on the premises, an obliging and helpful informant. He was a globular gentleman answering quite appropriately to the name of Ball. It is possible that a slight misconception made him more informative than he otherwise would have been. You've heard of my father, of course; he collects bricks as I collect stamps or debts. I kept my parentage a deep secret because I meant to succeed without any parental pull. But it transpired that Mr. Ball recollected seeing me on one occasion, when I was a respected member of my family, and he took it for granted that I was still an ornament in the parental office. He also assumed that my visit presaged but the one thing—that Broke & Co. meant to gobble The Chalfont as they had gobbled other property in the neighborhood. I had been sent as a sort of emissary to spy out the land, and Mr. Ball chuckled secretly at having recognized me.

Now all this superfluous astuteness on his part was very helpful and I proceeded to play up to the misconception. I pretended to be looking for an apartment for a friend, and Mr. Ball, with a knowing smile he couldn't quite conceal, showed me over the only vacant one, that occupied by the late Simon Greenlees.

"I don't think my friend will care to pay such a figure," I said at length. "All right for people like the late tenant—Greenlees, the sugar people, I suppose?"

"Oh, not at all," said Ball. "No connection. I don't know how or where he made his pile. Queer chap. I've seen many interesting people in my job—the

domestic and hidden side of them—but none that made me so curious as Simon Greenlees. But all this is of no interest to you, Mr. Broke."

"Oh, indeed it is. I'm as curious as the next. If there's a story——"

I don't know if Ball still thought my interest camouflage, or if he merely wanted to oblige me and make sure of his job in case The Chalfont changed owners, or if he really welcomed the chance of talking. Perhaps it was a mixture of all three.

IT soon developed, however, that he was still smarting under the rider attached to the verdict of the coroner's jury in the Greenlees' inquest, and, naturally enough, wanted to put himself right. At least I thought this his main reason for rising so readily to the Greenlees bait. The old man's death had nearly cost him his job, and might yet with a new owner.

"'Carelessness,' that's what they said; and they recommended this and that. But there was no carelessness on our part, Mr. Broke; I *know* the door was shut, as the boy said—he's a splendid employee——"

"Don't ye tell me what I can do or can't do, ye yaller spawn of Ham! I'm comin' in, I say. Avast there!"

As these words were suddenly roared out we saw, from the dining room where we stood, the hall door, which Ball had left ajar, bang open as though hit by a battering-ram. Framed on the threshold stood a man whom, even had we not heard him speak, we should have known for a deep-water sailor. Indeed he seemed the personification of a type fast disappearing, or a breed I'd met with only in pictures.

He wore a double-breasted blue serge, the coat too tight and the trousers too short and wide. The latter flopped about his thick ankles as he rolled in, offering a chaste view of white cotton socks and a prodigal exposure of elastic-side shoes: obviously carefully treasured shore clothes of a venerable vintage.

A sunburned straw hat, with a faded but still-riotous ribbon, crowned a face that resembled a weather-beaten and overripe tomato; while a pongee shirt, low collar and rusty-black bow tie, in the center of which was stuck firmly an obviously imitation pearl pin, so large and luminous was it, completed his arresting attire. My friend Adams, having his own peculiarities of dress, would appreciate the use of a stickpin and bow tie. I would have to tell him about it.

This visitor's shoulders seemed to grow out of his right-angled ears, yet they were neither conspicuously broad nor square. Indeed there was little about him to suggest the strength and agility I suspected were his. A squabby, rather tubby sort of man who reminded me greatly of a turtle. But I've observed—and Adams is a case in point—that there's no going by fine lines and impressive measurements. Some of the best athletes are done up in the clumsiest packages, and these squabby gentlemen are often possessed of a truly discouraging dynamic force and energy. They may not be wonderful boxers, but at what is known as gutter fighting, they leave little to the imagination.

We had immediate verification of this truth. The elevator boy, though he was no stripling, had evidently been arguing with his passenger all the way up, making the trip under protest, as it were. And now, as the door was flung open, he sought to prevent the other entering.

As I say, he was no stripling but a six-footer with lank black hair, a prominent gold tooth, and a complexion like bacon rind. And the sailorman swept him aside with one hand, with a single movement sent him skidding across the marble hall where he fetched up on all fours against the wall. He arose in a flash and, in another, had whipped a razor from his shoe.

"Look out!" I cried, and the sailor turned and crashed a fist as the other leaped, not a moment too soon but not a moment too late. A beautifully timed welt that sounded like a tire bursting.

Ball was scandalized; nothing like that had ever happened, could happen, at The Chalfont. And, apart from its incredibility, it was over as quickly as the flicker of a film. I almost doubted if it had actu-

ally happened. But there was the sailorman nonchalantly blowing on his lumpy knuckles and pocketing the razor, and there was Adolphus—so Ball had called the elevator boy—slowly emerging from his "Good night, daddy!" position.

BALL, anxious for the reputation of the house, shooed us into the apartment. He clucked like a harried hen and looked like one. That Adolphus, whose virtues he'd been extolling to me, even carried the racial weapon, was astounding enough.

"Tibbs, that's my name," said the sailorman when at length Adolphus had gone. "His nibs—Tibbs," a gnarled thumb tapping the swelling bosom of the pongee shirt. "Now what's all this about old Greenlees being took to the angels, hey? Is it or ain't it?"

Ball, greatly on his dignity, suggested stiffly that he wasn't in the habit of answering indiscriminate questions from total strangers, nor receiving such informal visitors. Mr. Tibbs had acted in a way no——

"Cap'n, if you please," broke in the other briskly. "That's my title. As for askin' questions, I've a right—yes, and a pretty good left too, if I ain't spoke civilly. Simon Greenlees was a friend of mine, and the last word I had from him he didn't say nothin' about kickin' the bucket."

"It's conceivable," said Ball acidly, "for one to die without broadcasting the fact beforehand." And he proceeded to give an arid account of Greenlees' death.

Captain Tibbs seemed genuinely but not unduly moved, as though death were a common enough factor in his life, so common as to lose its awesome novelty. "Fell down and broke his bloomin' neck, hey? And after him fixing to—— Well, well, that's the way things happen in this world; man proposes and the Almighty calls the turn. I'll say it ain't what I expected, and you could knock me down with a sledge hammer like. I knew nothing about it because I hadn't made Frisco at the time. Made her on Toosday and come right on here. And so he's dead, hey? Well, well, we've all got to go some day and some way."

"You say," began Ball, "he had arranged with you——" He paused appropriately but Tibbs didn't rise to the bait. Perhaps he hadn't heard. He was looking round the luxuriously appointed drawing-room where we stood.

"Who gets all this posh truck?" he demanded.

"Nobody," said Ball. "It belongs to the house. It's an apartment hotel, you know, though one can furnish his own apartment if he likes. Mr. Greenlees didn't. What business was he in?"

"Dunno," said Tibbs shortly. "Hadn't seen him for years. But he must have left something. Who gets it, hey?"

"Why," replied Ball, evidently irritated by unsatisfied curiosity, "Mr. Poynter's the one to answer that. He's the lawyer. So far as I understand, Mr. Greenlees left practically nothing but a few personal effects. He had had reverses, I believe, and he died intestate. He had no relatives?"

"Dunno. These personal effects, are they still here?"

"I believe so, pending the completion of the necessary legal formalities. I suppose the State will get the proceeds, if there are any."

Tibbs peered into the adjoining room. "Where are they, these personal effects, hey?"

Alas! for appearances and the spirit which, I had conceived, looked out of Captain Tibbs' bright blue eyes. In spite of, or because of, his forthright methods, I had felt drawn to him, so much so that I contemplated telling him about the mysterious envelope. But now as he put the question as to the exact whereabouts of the late Mr. Greenlees' personal effects, he produced a large bandanna and proceeded to mop his creased and scalded neck. A truly innocent gesture, seemingly as innocent as his question, but my nose instantly became aware of a strong odor of musk. There could be no mistake and, from what Adolphus had received, I could visualize that same swift arm demolishing Adams' straw hat and walloping me most thor-

oughly. Forthright methods? I rather fancy so.

Thus, I promptly dug an elbow into Ball's fat ribs and, proving quick on the uptake, he needed nothing further.

"Oh, they aren't here now," he said. "They were removed this morning, in charge of Mr. Poynter, of course."

If Tibbs had contemplated their examination, this revised statement evidently proved an insurmountable obstacle even for him. He didn't pursue the subject but asked several questions about Greenlees' death, where Poynter lived, and so forth. Nor did he appear greatly interested in the answers. His thoughts seemed elsewhere.

At length he rumbled out a word of thanks, clapped the sunburned straw hat on his grizzled head—the turtlelike head, I observed, was adorned with more than one scar—and rolled down the hall and out the door, the wide blue trousers flapping about the white cotton socks and elastic-side shoes, leaving as legacy that odor of musk. On the whole, a colorful character, his nibs—Tibbs.

CHAPTER V.

THE HUNTED MAN.

NOW I had no intention of telling even Ball more than I must, and so when he asked an explanation of that elbow dig and my evident sudden distrust of our recent visitor, my reply was quite truthful enough in parts. "I thought if Greenlees' things were really here, he might try to take them by force. He seems a law unto himself."

Ball nodded. "As a matter of fact, they *are* here—locked in a bedroom. There are only a couple of trunks and, until the place is rented, I don't mind. This Captain Tibbs—if that's his real name—is just the sort of character I'd expect Greenlees to know. I mean——"

He was no more than properly launched on his subject when we were interrupted for the second time. We didn't hear the hall door open, didn't hear anything until made aware that somebody had entered the drawing-room where we still stood.

IT proved to be Mr. Poynter, the lawyer, who was entirely unlike the mental picture I'd formed of him. Poynter—the name suggested a long-nosed individual of the conventional legal type, and already I'd taken a certain prejudice to him. Perhaps he was a rascal, one of the villains of the piece. In the sort of yarns I write, lawyers, like butlers, generally are. It's the accepted thing, and readers hate to be disappointed. As I say, however, Hector Poynter—I soon learned his Christian name—was astonishingly and delightfully different, a fine big chap, perhaps ten years older than myself, and with a healthy tan on his smooth hard cheek that testified to earnest endeavor on court and links when the day's work was done. A sane mind in a sane body, I summed up.

Ball, saying nothing, of course, of my connection with Broke & Co., introduced me as a friend to whom he had been showing the apartment.

"Any connection with old Phineas Poynter?" I asked, as the visitor gave me a hearty hand and a straight look from his frank brown eyes.

"Why, do you know him?"

"No, not personally. But everybody has heard of him, of course."

"Nephew and junior partner—some day maybe," he smiled. "So you're not a friend of the late Mr. Greenlees? I thought—I couldn't help overhearing something of your conversation. So you think, Mr. Ball, there was a mystery connected with him?"

Ball looking embarrassed, Poynter added: "My dear man, it's no more than I've thought myself at times, and thought myself a fool for thinking—which perhaps I am."

"But I thought," said Ball, evidently astonished, "you knew all about him, had known him for years."

Poynter shook his big blond head. "Very little; in fact, nothing. I only met him about a month ago; he came to the office and my uncle turned him over to me. It seems he'd been bitten badly in a bucket shop and, when it was too late, wanted advice. 'Stick to your own last'

—a wise saying of the ancients. It's funny how often shrewd fellows, who've made a pile in their own game, aren't satisfied until they've gone and lost it in one they know nothing about."

"But what was his game?" asked Ball. "I mean what was his business? I was never able to find out—not, of course, that I tried to. But I mean it was one of the mysteries about him."

"And as much a mystery to me," said Poynter. "A strange secretive character, and apparently very lonely. But he never told me anything about himself and he wasn't really a client of ours. Of course my uncle wouldn't handle such a small case personally, and I could really do nothing. It was too late. When Greenlees learned that there was no chance of getting his money back, because the snide brokerage firm hadn't a sou left, he let it drop. He wouldn't go after them, stick 'em in jail when it meant taking the stand."

"Didn't want the publicity, eh?" said Ball.

"Or didn't think it worth while," shrugged Poynter. "So that was the beginning and end of our business relations; and I've undertaken to wind up his affairs, such as they are, because there's no one else. You see, we continued to be friendly; at least he asked me to drop in for a chat here whenever I could—which wasn't often. I felt sorry for him; he seemed to want to talk to somebody. I warned him about leaving speculation severely alone, but obviously he didn't. He died almost penniless; yes, there's no more than will cover the funeral expenses, if that. I'd no idea he was so near the rocks."

"Nor I," said Ball. "But his year's lease of this place would have expired next month, and he'd given notice. Surely his bankers must know something about him!"

Poynter shook his head. "A mystery to them too. Apparently he hadn't been in New York more than a year, and he opened an account with the First National —a draft on the Crédit Lyonnais for one hundred thousand. There hasn't been another deposit since, and practically all of it's been checked out. And there isn't a darned thing among his effects to show where he came from or anything about him. He struck me as a man who'd made his pile in the backwoods and come here to have a royal good time, do all the things he'd always wanted to do. And that he went through a hundred thousand in a year proves that he did something besides speculate foolishly. But, upon my word, if he'd tried to hide all trace of his identity he couldn't have done it more thoroughly."

"Ah," nodded Ball. "Exactly. You say he seemed very lonely, but wasn't it more than that? Hunted, I should say; that's the word. The 'Hunted Man,' that's what I called him to myself."

POYNTER rubbed his chin and looked thoughtfully at Ball. "Well, now that you put it in words—yes, I must say I'd something of the same impression. Perhaps not exactly that, but—— As I say, he seemed very lonely as though anxious, yet afraid, to be intimate. I felt sorry for him; that's why I went out of my way to call when I could. And, frankly, I was curious too. Apparently he was so rich, yet forlorn; a striking example of the truth that money can't buy happiness. More than once he seemed on the point of making me some confidence, speaking intimately of himself. But he never did, and of course I couldn't quiz him. Hunted? Well, I don't know. But of course you'd better opportunities of observation than I."

"It was his general attitude, not only toward the other tenants but everybody," said Ball with authority. "You know the rigmarole that had to be gone through over the phone between Adolphus and him whenever you called. Well, it was even worse with other visitors—not that he had any regular ones. But even if we wanted to fix the phone or lights, the electrician had to pretty near show a birth certificate. He wouldn't let the place be cleaned except at a certain hour, as if somebody might get in and hide there.

And down in the restaurant he had his table way back in a corner where he could see everybody that came in. If the cops had been after him he couldn't have kept a sharper or more furtive lookout."

"The police?" exclaimed Poynter. "No, no, he wasn't a criminal; I'm sure of that."

"Well, I'm not so sure," said the superintendent, shaking his head. "He was afraid of somebody, there's no getting away from that. And one night I'd say he met 'em, for he came in all white and trembling as if he'd seen a ghost. It was a few nights before his death; he'd been to the public library——"

"The library?" I echoed. "Yes, Miss Stringer said he met a man——" It was too late to retract the words, nor was I sure that I wished to. After all, what did it matter? If I'd been deceived as to the honesty of Captain Tibbs' blue eyes, I couldn't be mistaken about Poynter's frank brown ones. This, apart from the fact that he was nephew of the senior partner of one of the biggest and most reputable law firms in the country. And Ball also was above suspicion. These two had kept nothing back from me, taken me wholly into their confidence, and I might as well be equally candid with them; indeed, better—if we were to probe to the heart of this mystery. So, as they looked at me in surprise, I told Ball to finish his story and that then I'd tell mine.

"Ah," he said, rubbing his hands with naïve pleasure, "I was beginning to suspect that your interest in Simon Greenlees wasn't merely academic. But to proceed, I happened to meet him that night as he came in, and, I repeat, he looked as if he'd seen a spook. He gave strict instructions that he wouldn't be at home to any visitor, and it was then for the first time that he spoke of giving up the apartment. Perhaps the person he was trying to dodge was Captain Tibbs." And Ball told of the other's visit, making no mention of the unpleasant incident concerning Adolphus.

"Tibbs?" queried Poynter. "Never heard the name. Certainly Mr. Greenlees never mentioned it—but then, as I say, he never mentioned anything about his past. So this personal friend showed an interest in the personal effects? He thinks they're in my possession and he asked for my address? Perhaps it's as well he didn't know they were here; though, as I say, they really aren't worth anything."

"I shouldn't have denied that they were still here if it hadn't been for Mr. Broke," said Ball. And with that I proceeded to tell all about the envelope.

BALL, his duties totally forgotten, listened open-mouthed in delight, his curiosity at white heat. "I *knew* there was a mystery connected with him!" he exclaimed at length. "Fancy you tripping over one of the threads like that! It's wonderful, as good as a story. Mighty clever of you about that smell of musk. But you should have followed Tibbs when he left here, found where he lives. We may never see him again. You could have had him arrested for assault and robbery——"

"On what evidence? The law demands more than a smell," I said. "And if Tibbs is after something of value he isn't the man to leave without it, or I miss my guess."

"Quite right," approved Poynter. "This is a very interesting development and, as things stand now, there's nothing to be gained, but perhaps everything to lose, by calling in the police. You acted most wisely, Mr. Broke, and I'm glad nobody else knows about all this but your friend Mr. Adams. As you say, we haven't any evidence; we really know absolutely nothing and we mustn't scare the birds off, for perhaps it's only through them that we'll learn anything. Fact is stranger than fiction, gentlemen, and in my profession we've daily proof of that. It seems reasonably certain that Simon Greenlees, though he died practically penniless, possessed something of great value—potential, it would seem. Now let us see how the thing works out: This man Tibbs whom——"

He had a fine clear head, like his noted uncle, and his theory of events was the same as my own, with the single exception

that I still clung to a sneaking doubt as to the complicity of the girl with the wonderful pansy eyes. But of this I said nothing; at this period any profession of mine regarding her innocence might only write me down the priceless ass that Adams so often called me.

"It's of no particular consequence," summed up Poynter, "whether this girl, Bland and Tibbs are confederates or not. Tibbs may have come here ignorant of what Bland knew—that this precious document, or whatever it may be, was in that library book. Or, if confederates, failing to find it on you, Mr. Broke, or in the book, they may think it still here; and so Tibbs came for a look, not knowing you two were here. But why the envelope should be in the book and the contents here, why it should have been stolen, perhaps, and by whom; why Bland thought it was in the book—all that's too obscure and involved to theorize about. We can only hold to the truth that, whether enemies or not, they were Greenlees' enemies, and that they're after something that I, for one, will do my darnedest to see they don't get."

"But supposing," said Ball, "they've a perfect right to it? Even if Greenlees wasn't a crook——"

"People who have legal rights don't use illegal methods," broke in Poynter. "I liked Simon Greenlees and it's my elementary duty, if nothing else, to protect his estate. He *may* have heirs, next of kin, though I've advertised so far in vain. If there's any claim on his poor effects, let the claimants come forward like honest men and state their claim. But as for any hole-and-corner business, let them try it, that's all."

"I'm with you there, of course," I said. "You may count on me for any help I can give."

"Oh, me too, of course," said Ball. "Nobody'll get into that room without a permit from you, Mr. Poynter. I'll see to that. It's a question if Tibbs really believes that Greenlees' things have been moved, and no doubt we'll hear from him again in one way or another. But what in thunder can this missing letter be about?"

"I haven't the least idea," said Poynter. "It sounds like the mysterious paper they're always trying to steal in melodrama. Yet it must actually exist, though it needn't necessarily be a letter or document of any kind."

I pointed out, however, that whatever the envelope had held it couldn't have been of much bulk, otherwise the librarians would have noticed it. "Miss Stringer doubted that they could even overlook a letter, so that suggests the question: Was it actually there when the book was given back?"

"If it wasn't," said Ball, "that would wipe out all connection with Greenlees. And there must have been some connection. Why? Because Tibbs comes here, obviously to have a search, and he's the person who assaulted you and stole the book."

"All the same," I argued, "somebody might have stuck it in the book after it was returned—don't ask me why or by whom. Who gave the book back?"

POYNTER said that he did. "I came across it making an inventory of Greenlees' things and, when I saw it belonged to the public library, I turned it in. Of course I never thought of examining it; and, as you say, if the envelope was actually there it couldn't have bulked large for there was absolutely nothing to show that anything was inside."

I asked if there might not be something among Greenlees' effects that had a bearing on the matter; something that, in the light of what Poynter now knew, might possess a new significance.

He accepted the suggestion with alacrity. "Although," he said, "there are no private papers or anything like that. But let us go through everything again; three heads are better than one, and it won't take long. I'm sure Greenlees wouldn't mind if he were here; and perhaps he's aware that we're trying to act for the best."

It proved to be just as Poynter had said; the two big trunks into which he

had packed everything carefully contained nothing but what one would expect to find in the case of a rich old bachelor making his home in an apartment hotel. Apparently he had kept nothing that had served its purpose, neither clothes nor letters.

There was absolutely no background, nothing to suggest what he had been or where he had come from. As Poynter had said, if he had meant to remove all trace of his identity he couldn't have done it more thoroughly. But had he? I've known old bachelors who, without design, have left no clearer background. These restless solitary souls, pathetic figures, who live in hotels and never in any one long, travel light. And even among securely anchored folk there are those who make a practice of never keeping what they call worthless truck.

"I suppose," I said at length, "there's no question that his death was an accident?"

"Oh, none whatever," exclaimed Poynter. But he seemed momentarily startled. "What put that idea in your head?"

"Well, it wouldn't be the first time an 'accident' had been engineered. And Mr. Ball was saying, when you came in——"

This brought the superintendent back to his grievance and he proceeded to finish it. "The verdict should have been suicide," he wound up. "Even if the door hadn't been properly closed—and I'm sure it was—why should he think the elevator was there when it wasn't? He rings for it, and then before the boy can get down from the next floor, he steps into the shaft. Of course nobody saw what happened or——"

"The fact that he rang, precluded the suicide theory," said Poynter. "Why do so if he meant to kill himself? No jury likes to bring in a verdict of felo-de-se without pretty conclusive evidence. I'm not saying it mightn't have been that, but certainly not what you suggest, Mr. Broke. You know he was absolutely alone at the time; there's no question of that.

"Now as for this Cecil Carlton," he continued, "I never heard the name. Yet it's obvious Greenlees must have known him and that he's a very essential factor, perhaps the pivot point of the whole matter. If at all possible we must get in touch with him. You say he isn't known at that address? What is the date on the envelope? Let us see it."

So I had to admit that I didn't think of examining the postmark until after leaving The Sonoma, and that now it would be impossible until I got home. "I thought, in case I might be robbed again, it might be just as well not to have it. It might furnish a sort of clew, for all we know."

"I think you were wise," nodded Poynter. "That date, and even the writing, may prove of some importance. I've an appointment at five——"

"Suppose you drop in on the way down. And I'd like you to meet my friend, Adams."

CHAPTER VI.

MORE ABOUT THE ENVELOPE.

IT'S funny how quickly you can get to know some people. I liked Hector Poynter from the first, and apparently he reciprocated. I told him I'd been at Princeton and in the Argonne, but I didn't tell him that my father was the Broke who collects bricks. This, I repeat, was a family skeleton rattled before nobody.

I knew, of course, that old Phineas Poynter had made about a million out of other folks' law troubles, and that our social orbits must have crossed in places. I mean that I'd heard of the nephew, that Hector Poynter moved and had his being in the sort of world I had left, and that, had I cared to reveal my parentage, we should have found that we knew many of the same people. But I said nothing, and he, on his part, made no parade of his connections.

"I was born in Gloucester," he said in his frank way, "and meant for the sea. Funny how often we miss our real niche in life. Circumstances picked me for my uncle's heir and successor—all according to how I behave, of course—and so here I am. The law's mighty dry but I try to

squeeze all the romance out of it I can. That's why I became interested in old Greenlees. Romance, mystery, adventure —it's what makes life livable."

He had given proof of his discriminating taste and fine understanding by saying how he had read and admired my stories. And now I replied, noting again his capable tanned hands, and no one would ever take him for a lawyer.

He laughed. "I try to get outdoors all I can, winter and summer. But a thirty-footer and the Sound is a poor enough makeshift at best. Nothing like the sight and smell of deep water, the heave and dip of a windjammer. I remember a trip in an old whaler out of Bedford; the sea's in my blood and, if I was footloose, I'd be on it. It beats me why a man like you, whose office can be moved anywhere, sticks here."

"That's all very well," I replied, "but you have to do more than to write the stuff. You have to sell it, and that's the hardest part. I haven't reached the envied pinnacle of fame where agents are tumbling over one another to represent me, nor where, if I lived at the back of beyond, editors would hunt me down and beg for sustenance. And that goes for my friend Adams too. The personal appeal still means a whole lot, and he can't get models in the backwoods. When we've finished our masterpieces it'll be different, of course; that won't be long now, and then we'll cut loose on a real vacation, the first in many moons. My masterpiece is a story of New York, something really worth while. Far different from anything you've read of mine. I've only been doing pot boilers. This is what I've always wanted to write and never could. I mean I couldn't afford to."

"In what way?"

"Why, I had to eat, and the magazines don't want serious stuff. I've tried, and they all agreed it was great work—but they would not buy it. They said they didn't want that sort of stuff from me. So what chance have you to improve?"

"Perhaps what they meant was that you didn't do this serious stuff as well as you do the other. There's 'Micah Clarke' of Doyle's, and yet he was doomed to 'Sherlock Holmes.'"

"That's just it. I'm far better at real literature but they want to doom me for their own profit. But I'll break the chains. Book publishers—some of them —are different; they know real literature and can market it. And when 'As a Man Soweth——'"

That was the name of the Great American Novel, and Poynter proved a most sympathetic and understanding audience, quite different from Adams who, with his crude humor, had suggested the appropriate nom de plume of Singer. He has no soul for real literature and so I gave up talking about it. But to Poynter I spoke of what it represented in the way of high endeavor, lofty thought, and deep emotion. I was going to tell him the plot and touch on some of the finer passages when, to his evident grief, we reached the hectic façade of Berkeley Hall.

We found Adams, sporting his customary hot-weather regalia, in the studio and an unwonted burst of rapturous labor. Palette on arm, brush in hand, ham sandwich in mouth, cigarette behind his ear, he was daubing away frantically at the picture of Sing Sing, or whatever he called it. Expressing no surprise or even politeness at the entrance of Poynter, he acknowledged the introduction with a nod and grunt, then, breathing heavily, proceeded to sling on more paint. "Just a minute. Got to get that effect while the light holds," he mumbled through the ham.

"One of his inspired periods," I whispered to Poynter. "You're lucky to catch him at it. There's genius for you!"

At length Adams gulped the last of the sandwich, splattered a final brushful of lurid color on the canvas, stepped back and struck an attitude of shameless admiration. "I've got it!" he exclaimed. Got it this time!"

And now I began to doubt Poynter's fine understanding for he proceeded to praise the picture as he had praised my stories; and whereas my work deserved it, this as certainly didn't. Universal praise

is no praise and Poynter, I saw, was too good-hearted to be a good critic.

"Fine!" he wound up. "The face especially. You were lucky to find such a model."

"You've said it," nodded Adams, running a green-smeared hand through his carmine locks. "Lucky's no name for it. If you'd sampled all the ones I have you'd know. Those with the looks had no intelligence, and vice versa. If you'd only seen their idea of Jael's expression—Lord! but I've shed bitter tears. I could get hold of nothing but dumb-bells, either in shape or intelligence or both. That's what's been holding me up. And then this dream walks in."

I COULD have pointed out that he got what he paid for, when he *could* pay anything.

"Where'd you get her?" asked Poynter.

"Luck, luck!" said Adams, waving his arms. "She walked in to-day, the very one I've been combing the city for. Not a regular model, otherwise I'd never have had a chance at her. She doesn't know her own value yet, and please God she won't till I've done. She heard from a friend who tried to pose for me that I wanted a model, and she needed the money."

"Still needs it, I dare say," I said significantly. "I hope she gets it. Also that you didn't receive her in that costume and now if you'll let me tell you who Mr. Poynter is and why he's here——"

It took some time for Adams to forget he was an artist and remember he was a human being. But at length he had the grace to put on a pair of trousers and show an awakening interest in the matter of Simon Greenlees.

"And now I want Mr. Poynter to see that envelope," I said at length. "What have you done with it?"

"Nothing. I never had it."

"But I put it there last night," I said, pointing to the littered table. "And now it isn't there. You must have taken it, else who did?"

"I didn't," said Adams. "I never touched the bally thing. Of course you put it somewhere else and have forgotten."

"Of course I didn't and haven't. But you have. Probably you used it to light your pipe——"

"I tell you I never touched it," said Adams as he dropped into a chair and mopped his cerise countenance. "Yes, I know it was on that table, not because you say so, but because I saw it. I remember now that just before Miss Stoker came—— Yes, that's her name, the new model, I mean——"

"And when she went, it went too," I broke in. "Of course. I've been thinking that for some time. That's what she came for. No, of course you didn't see her take it; you wouldn't. You've made a proper fool of yourself."

"Well, nature saved you that trouble," snorted Adams. "And it's all screaming piffle anyway. Your luscious imagination has stepped on the gas again and you're off in high. Miss Stoker is a lady, even if she is a model. And why in the name of fishes should she take the dashed thing?"

"Because," said Poynter, "she may be the person who, in the first instance, tried to get it from that book. I believe Mr. Broke may be right, it sounds plausible."

"Well, he should know," said Adams shortly, and turned to me. "You saw that woman last night, and now you see this picture. Do they look anything alike?"

"Well, I don't know," I said. "Her eyes weren't pink like that——"

"Pink?" echoed Adams, coldly amazed.

"Forget-me-nots—that's what they were like. Beautiful! And she didn't look like a murderess either."

"Jael was more than that," said Adams, gazing anew in fatuous admiration at his masterpiece. "Oh, much more than that. And a woman who hasn't some devil in her, who can't depict what a murderess feels like, isn't worth a hoot. Of course the face isn't modeled yet but there's more than enough to show if the two were one

and the same. I *know* they're not. Miss Stoker isn't the type of your questionable acquaintance. Even if they *are* one and the same, where would be the sense in taking the dashed envelope when she knew there was nothing in it?"

"But supposing she didn't know?" said Poynter. "There's nothing to show that she did. Even the man Bland has only Mr. Broke's word for it that the envelope was empty. He never saw it."

Poynter spoke quietly but I could see that he was stirred. "The envelope may have been misplaced," he added, "and it may turn up. Our imagination may have gone off on top gear, as you say, and yet it's funny that all these possibilities connected with it. At least we can settle one thing; give me this Miss Stoker's address and I'll soon find out if she's genuine or playing a game."

"Why," said Adams characteristically, "I'm dashed if I know what it is. I meant to write it down at the time. It was somewhere up in Harlem. Yes, and Lexington Avenue. But I don't know the number."

"And when is she to return?"

"To-morrow morning at ten. And I know she will."

"We'll see," said Poynter. "I must go now—I'm late as it is—but I'll ring you up later."

"We've no phone, hall or otherwise," I said.

"Then I'll call, let you know in some way," replied Poynter. "Have a good look for that envelope, make sure it isn't here. And, of course, mum's the word. I wish we hadn't said so much before that man Ball—not that I don't trust him, of course, but he's such a talker. I do think there may be something in all this worth investigating. Let us hope so."

When finally Adams and I were alone we resumed where we'd been forced to leave off; that is Adams, freed from all restrait, pointed out that nobody but a thundering ass would ever have left the envelope on the table, and that, of course, there was no use looking for it.

BUT we did—went over the whole shop without result.

"It's all your fault that it's gone," said Adams. "And not only that, but after solemnly agreeing to keep the thing to ourselves, you've gone and blabbed it all over town."

"You'd have done exactly as I did in the same circumstances. Anybody would—I mean anybody with intelligence. Poynter's the very man to help us, and it was his right to know. Of course you know all about him, and he'll be a great help. And I'm sure Ball won't talk."

"Then from all I've heard, he'll need to be struck dead," said Adams. "Anyway, what would be the good if we did find the envelope? What was inside it?—that's what we want. Everybody seems to be trying to swipe something that's no earthly use. And, whatever has happened to it, I know that Miss Stoker didn't take it. And she'll be here to-morrow; you'll see! She isn't your questionable acquaintance at all."

"James," I said seriously, taking another long squint at his masterpiece, "I think you're wrong. I only saw the lady by artificial light, and none too well at that; all the same, and incomprehensible as it may seem, I've got to admit that that picture does look like her. I don't know how it happened that you managed to catch the likeness but I'm sure that Miss Stoker is my acquaintance of the library."

"Piffle!" said Adams, looking disgusted. "Do you think I'm a fool, that she could hand me a yarn——"

"I think she could, James. Didn't she hand me a beautiful little fairy story too? She's a born raconteur. Yes, she knew I lived here, that I'd recognize her most likely; but couldn't she have watched, waited until I went out this afternoon? What matter if I happened to recognize her picture *after* she got what she came for? She took a chance on my leaving the envelope here—after what happened it was likely I would—and the chance was right."

"Too thin," said Adams. "Transparent, in fact. Good enough for one of your

yarns, no doubt, but things don't happen like that in real life."

"Don't they? Then you don't know much about real life. In any case I'm going out to look up Miss Stoker; two hunters are better than one, and I've met this young lady while Poynter hasn't. I know who to look for."

"And Greater New York's such a small place," said Adams politely. "Of course it doesn't matter whether she lives in Astoria or the Bronx, to say nothing of Staten Island and the suffering Jersey shore. Why, you poor fish, don't you realize that if you're right, Stoker isn't her name and she doesn't live on Lexington Avenue?"

"Oh, sure, but I'll just mosey up there and see."

"Well," said Adams, waving his arms, "if that's the hopeless way you feel about it——"

"Not so hopeless, James. I not only know what she looks like but there's a point that even Poynter overlooked. You say she gave the name of a former model of yours, and I suppose she had to by way of credentials. Now she may actually know this girl as she said—not merely have found out the name of somebody who'd posed for you. You see?"

He admitted grudgingly that it wasn't such a bad idea. "Her name's Maisie Donelly and she lives——"

He hunted out an old notebook and gave me the address. "And you'll find that the fair Donelly knows all about her and that her name's Stoker. But supposing the contrary and that you succeed in finding this very sharp needle in a very large haystack, may I ask what exactly you propose to do?"

"I haven't the least idea, James. It will all depend on circumstances and what happens to be in the lap of the gods."

"Well, I've something else to do," said Adams. "Somebody has got to work. And I don't see any visible signs of that check you've been expecting from Hemingway. A bit overdue, isn't it? Romance is all very well if you can afford it."

CHAPTER VII.

AN HEROIC ADVENTURE.

LOOKING back on this adventure of ours I think perhaps that among the many remarkable happenings that were to occur before it was done, the most remarkable was the way luck consistently favored me this night, at a time when it appeared to have deserted me completely.

At all events my hope of gaining some information from Miss Donelly proved totally abortive. I found her at the Amsterdam Avenue address given by Adams and she disclaimed all knowledge of such a person as Miss Stoker.

I proceeded to walk home—every nickel counted until that belated check arrived—and then the gods suddenly emptied their lap in the most unexpected and lavish fashion. So suddenly, indeed, that it nearly proved my undoing; for I almost walked into the girl and the man Bland before recognizing them.

We met at the corner of Eighth Avenue near One Hundred and Sixteenth Street. A glimpse under the electrics was all I took; they hadn't recognized me and I walked on quickly, then turned. Arm in arm they continued north while I followed, closing up the gap when I dared and thankful for the crowd. At least I should find where they lived.

But they weren't going home, not just yet; they finally entered a restaurant, and it was here that the most stupendous bit of luck was handed to me. I was wondering how I could enter the place and get near them without being seen and recognized by either or both, when they appeared at a table in the window. The window was curtained, and there were green things growing in it, and evidently it never occurred to them that they could be seen from outside. Or they had no reason to fear a spy. But the curtains didn't meet and, above the bank of green stuff, I could see a section of the table. I could see no more than their hands but that was enough; for the girl had an ornate beaded bag, and presently she opened it and emptied the contents on the cloth.

Now I wasn't more than a few feet away, smoking a gasper and simulating an interest in the passing Harlem show but with an oblique eye on the opening in the curtains; and amid the usual truck you find in a woman's hand bag I saw distinctly the envelope with the green Brunei stamp. There could be no mistaking it. Quite obviously she was displaying to her confederate the result of her bold theft.

At length she returned it to her bag and I was left to ponder a pretty problem. I had found the envelope again, I was separated from it by only a plate-glass window, yet how was I to get it? So near and yet so far!

I should prefer to draw a veil, in the manner of the early Victorian novelists, over the immediate subsequent proceedings. When one is twenty-something and has been taught certain things in France, and how to get what one goes after—— However, I needn't attempt excuses; suffice that I stole the hand bag, committed unadulterated and barefaced highway robbery. After all, if you want a thing very badly the simplest way is to take it. I acted precisely, if in humbler style, like some of our great financiers.

And it was very simple indeed. Bland and his companion weren't long in the restaurant—no doubt they had gone in more for a quiet talk than any desire for food—and as they emerged I stepped up behind the girl, wrenched the swinging bag from her side and bolted. Audacity and a certain nimbleness of foot and wit are all one needs in these affairs.

THEY never saw me, never knew what had happened until it was over. But a passer-by did—why can't people mind their own business?—and it was here that the gods emptied the last of their lap. I was being pretty hard pressed by the mob scene when the parental town car turned a corner and I took the running board in my stride, tore open the door and tumbled in. There is no mistaking the parental cars, just as there is no mistaking their owner.

He was on his way to his private collection of bricks on upper Fifth Avenue and it was the first time we had met in months. He wasn't surprised at my unconventional entrance; he is never surprised at anything. He claims that it's because he's my father.

"Hello, George," he said. "What's all this shouting about?" And he peered from the window as we shot under the "L." "Why are all those people running?"

"There's a fire," I explained.

He suggested that we proceed to the fire but I explained that it was probably a false alarm and that I'd rather talk with him. I was conscious of the bulge in my side pocket caused by the purloined bag, conscious of the parental eye. He has a funny way of looking at you as though he were asleep, and you never find out till long afterward what he knows or doesn't know.

"Well, George, it's good of you to risk your neck to meet me like this," he said, leaning on his gold-topped cane. "It is indeed, my boy. I appreciate it. Am I to order fatted calf for one? Not yet a while, eh? You're not coming home? Oh, very well. And how's the writing game coming along?"

I have a somewhat exaggerated picture of my success as an author, while conveying anew the suggestion that I should never return to the parental roof until he recognized the dignity and worth of literature and my ability and right to pursue it. "There are more things than bricks in the world, sir," I concluded. "And better."

"And worse, George," he said with meaning. "I think, as I've intimated before, our whole difference lies in the understanding of that word literature."

"Everybody has to make a start, sir. A master builder must first serve his apprenticeship. *Your* first effort, I believe, was a shanty."

"Not quite that, George, though nothing to write home about. And the 'shanty' is standing yet; it had the stuff to survive. That's the point. Also that, though put up under my own name, nobody else had to suffer for it. At least you might

respect my gray hairs by using a pen name. Consider how it reflects on me——"

It was a good excuse to open the door and get out. We aren't a sentimental family, that is, the parental half. I'm full of poetry and sentiment, inherited from my dead mother, but my father had as much proper feeling as one of his cherished bricks

"Well, ta-ta," he said, waving the gold-headed cane at me. "When the bailiffs come in, George, you'll find the parental bricks mighty handy."

"I'll starve first!"

"No doubt of it," he agreed cheerfully.

MY friend Adams, as you've gathered by this time, is an individual who seldom acts like any normal human being. I had gone without supper, I had accomplished a most daring feat, I had wrung success from failure by displaying the greatest intrepidity, resource and courage, but was I received by him like a hero? No, I was not.

"That'll be *your* finish," he growled as he lit the kitchen gas stove. "You've become a footpad, a thief, and for what? You've the dashed envelope, yes, but what the Harry good is it? Answer me that."

"Isn't the answer pretty obvious? The envelope itself must contain the key to the mystery. Surely you thought of that?"

"Surely I didn't," he said, waving the coffeepot. "I'm not entirely off the tick yet if you are. Bally rot!"

"It may be rot, James, but why should they have kept it? If your charming model stole it from here, thinking it contained a letter or something, she had all the time in the world to find out since that it contains nothing. In fact I hardly see how she could have kept from discovering there was nothing in it when she first lifted it. Supposing the envelope itself has something written on it in invisible ink?"

"Supposing your grandmother! This isn't one of your silly yarns. You're a riot, George."

But I noticed, that while obviously busy with the stove, and scorning to show any further interest, he directed a wandering and speculative eye on me while I opened the hand bag. Conscience smote me as I brought to light a dainty handkerchief, a crumpled five-dollar bill and some change, a small vanity case, a latchkey, a string of subway tickets, a few patterns of silk and last of all the envelope. Sight of the money somehow caused my exploit to appear in a less pleasing and heroic light. What I had done on the spur of the moment now seemed heinous indeed. I had stolen five dollars and some sixty cents, money that the girl might need even more than I; and those poor belongings—there can be a peculiar pathos about such things.

"Well?" said Adams with ill-concealed impatience as I examined the envelope under the light. "Of course it's just full of startling information, eh?"

"There's a bit anyway, James. I didn't notice before that this has never been mailed. There's no postmark on the envelope—only on the stamp. I can't make out the date."

"Well, what of it?"

"But why stick a canceled stamp—— I say!" I was holding the envelope close against the strong electric light. "There's something here!"

Adams, his assumed indifference discarded, almost upset the coffeepot in his rush. "Where?" he demanded, peering over my shoulder.

"On the stamp, the back of it. See!"

"Rot! No, hold on—yes, by gravy! You're right! What on earth is it?"

It was a design of some description. Through the paper of the big stamp and envelope there showed faintly a black tracing such as no philatelist had ever seen before.

"Don't soak it off!" warned Adams as I reached for a glass of water. "The ink'll run."

"It's probably waterproof," I said, "Whoever stuck it there would take that precaution. However——" The coffeepot was boiling and I held the back of the envelope against the spout; the steam did its work and, lifting off the stamp

with my philatelic tweezers, I laid it face down on a clean piece of blotting paper.

"It's a map!" cried Adams. "The map of a blessed island! This beats old Robert Louis—a map on the back of a postage stamp! Didn't I tell you all along we'd find something? What's the word? 'M' —'O'—— Where's your magnifying glass?"

The Brunei stamp measured one and one tenth inches by one and three tenths, quite a large enough surface for the purpose to which it had been put. A used specimen, the cancellation had aided in preventing the drawing showing through; and, having been evidently floated off the original envelope, all trace of gum had been removed from the back, thus presenting a clean surface. The drawing completed—it was done with a fine pen and waterproof ink—it was then regummed. The draftsmanship, if not that of an expert, was skillful enough, depicting what was obviously an island. It was three-cornered, but with the base concave.

We had no more than begun to examine it when the doorbell rang imperatively.

"Supposing that's Bland or Tibbs or the cops?" exclaimed Adams. "You may have been recognized. We won't open."

"We've got to. Poynter said he'd be back."

"But it mayn't be. We'd better hide this bag and get ready to repel boarders. The Lord knows what may happen before we see the last of this business."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MAP.

HOWEVER, it proved to be Poynter, who cocked a curious eye as Adams coyly pocketed the stove lifter with which he had armed himself.

It transpired that our visitor had failed to discover anything about the elusive Miss Stoker. "There's no person by the name in that neighborhood," he wound up. "But a funny thing has happened; Greenlees seems to have had a relative, after all, for I've heard of one at last. Here's an answer to my advertisement; it was delivered at the office this evening and my uncle brought it home. The envelope was marked personal and important. Rather a curious missive!"

It was dated from a South Side street in Chicago and the writing, diction, and spelling were indeed curious enough. For the sake of clarity I have made several changes in punctuation, but otherwise it was as follows:

MR. POYNTER, ESQUIRE,
Pine Street, New York City.

DEAR SIR: Have seen your ad in the *Tribune* to-day and would say I am soul relative and kin of the diseased Mr. Simon Greenlees. Would also say I am a nephew, his soul sister marrying my father, since when both are since diseased too.

Would say that for years I was mate of the trader *Tonga Belle* out of Frisco and am only out of hospital here in Chicago, which is my home and where I was run over by a trolley car, the same being why I didn't see your ad before.

Would say my Uncle Simon never held any truck with us, the same being since he made his pile in the Islands and thought his sister shouldn't have went and married a brakeman which was my father on the Illinois Central. But my father was a honest man which maybe Uncle Simon wasn't. Would say I wouldn't have took a penny from him while he was living, the same being he never offered me any, but if he's diseased and I'm soul kin, would say I'm in line for his fortune, the same coming in mighty handy as I'm thinking of getting married now, having worked hard all my life, and the same being a fine young lady who's tired cooking for a North Shore family.

In closing with kind regards would say I'll come on to New York when able as per your conveenience, the same being that my leg is still soar. Yours respectively,

PETER B. HIGGINS.

P. S. I'll bring my berth certificate and other creditentials. Would say I should like the fortune in reel money as I'm only a plain sailorman and know nothing about stocks etc.

"It would appear that Mr. Higgins is an optimist," laughed Poynter. "Of course I never suggested there was a fortune, merely requested any relatives to communicate with me, but he takes it for granted that there is one. Now, is the inference based on the obvious fact that Greenlees lived like a wealthy man, or has this nephew reason to know the source of

his wealth? He speaks of the South Seas, has been there himself, and that Brunei stamp——"

"But how do we know he is a nephew?" I said. "Supposing it's a fake, a trick of Tibbs and his pals to get hold of Greenlees' effects, including that envelope? You see——"

Poynter, as I knew he would, received the news of my exploit far differently than had Adams. "By Jove!" he said, his eyes sparkling, "you're a man after my own heart, Broke! It's just what I'd have done myself if I'd had the chance. You're a holy wonder, succeeding all along the line where I failed."

"Highway robbery, that's what it was!" sniffed Adams.

"Call it what you like," said Poynter. "In dealing with crooks you've sometimes got to use crooks' weapons, and the man's a fool who doesn't. You simply gave them a dose of their own medicine, Broke, and you may take it from me as a lawyer that you'll get into no legal trouble over this. The law's the last thing they'd resort to, and any court would uphold you. You say the stamp——"

I produced it and the three of us proceeded to examine it, Poynter profoundly interested. It left a good deal to the imagination, this miniature map, even with the aid of my philatelic magnifying glass. There was no scale, no compass, and the only writing was "Mka—V." A line running upward from each of these, met and formed a triangle. Also, immediately below the concave base there was a broad horizontal line and about midway of this and on either side, that is top and bottom, the letters "H" and "P."

"Well," said Poynter at length, "considering all the circumstances, you'd certainly say we were hot on the trail of good old buried treasure. Yet it's mighty sketchy, to say the least; so sketchy in fact that I don't see why Greenlees, if he actually made it, took the trouble to hide it in such a remarkable way. This island might be in the moon for all anybody could tell."

"And probably is," said Adams.

BUT I pointed out that it was only reasonable to suppose there were those to whom this map, woefully deficient though it might be, would prove sufficient enough. No doubt Captain Tibbs and Bland had been Greenlees' partners in some questionable enterprise and it was the old story of dishonor among thieves.

"From all that Ball said," I concluded, "it's evident that Greenlees had reason to fear somebody, and there is this man Higgins' suggestion that he was none too honest. Say that Greenlees cheated his partners and that the secret lies in this island. It needn't necessarily be buried treasure of the conventional kind; the island itself may contain natural wealth in some form. But say, whatever it is, that Tibbs and Bland, though quite aware they'd been cheated, didn't know the secret; yet, if they saw this map, they would recognize the island and jump to the inevitable truth. And, because Greenlees couldn't trust memory alone, he made and hid the map in this manner, omitting all but the bare essentials."

"But what *are* the bare essentials?" demanded Poynter. "That's the question. What can you make out of it?"

"I don't know about that line and those letters," I replied, "but I've been thinking it all over and I think I can make a good guess as to the rest. Miss Stringer, the librarian, said that Greenlees wasn't an educated man, and perhaps he knew nothing about latitude and longitude. Or else —and this may be the more probable—he wouldn't trust to paper the exact location in degrees. But I believe that 'Mka' stands for Mallekula."

"Never heard of it," said Adams whose real knowledge of the South Seas hardly extended below Coney Island.

"That's because you don't collect stamps or write stories," I said. "It's my hobby and business to know such things. It's in the New Hebrides and perhaps you'd recognize it under the name of Malicola. Mallekula is the local name."

"But what makes you think it stands for that?" asked Poynter.

"Because it's only reasonable to infer

that it's in the south Pacific. This man Higgins says his uncle made his fortune in the islands, and that means the south Pacific. And there is no other island there, to my knowledge, that 'Mka' would stand for. That isn't all. I believe that 'V' stands for Vati, a smaller island about two hundred miles south of Mallekula. Taken in conjunction there would be little doubt of this. And this isn't a map of either of them; they aren't that shape. I believe it's a small island—you know there are hundreds of them, many uncharted—lying somewhere at the apex of that triangle."

"Clever," pronounced Poynter. "But a pretty tall order to find."

"Good enough for the man who's been there," I replied, "and that's the whole point. It may also be identified by its conformation."

"There aren't any islands like that in the South Seas," said Adams with authority. "They're all saucer-shaped atolls, the craters of extinct volcanoes. I've read all about 'em. You see there used to be a mountain range——"

"Quite so," I hastened to interrupt. "But here we're dealing with something quite different, islands of dense bush and forest and volcanic mountains. The New Hebrides are nearly three thousand miles beyond Hawaii, a different proposition in every way. This may represent the island as seen from a certain angle at sea, not its actual shore line. I mean it may rise to a triangular point like that in the interior. Greenlees wouldn't make it any plainer than he could help; he would put down only enough to jog his memory."

"But where does the Brunei stamp come in?" asked Adams. "Borneo isn't near the New Hebrides." As I say, geography isn't Adams' strong suit and this was more in the nature of a query than an assertion.

"Near enough," I replied, "for Greenlees to have been there. And I'll bet that that's all Brunei has to do with it. Any old stamp would have done, if it was large enough, and in all likelihood there's no such person as Cecil Carlton. Greenlees knew that Tibbs and Bland were after the secret and, I repeat, as he daren't trust to memory alone, he gets an old envelope, fakes an address, and sticks the stamp on it. If a search were made nobody would ever think the secret lay there. Tibbs and Bland must have known that Greenlees would make a map of the place, and we've evidence that he'd reason to fear such a search being made. I think there's no doubt that the person he saw that night in the library was Tibbs or Bland."

"But this supposed treasure—why leave it on the island?" asked Poynter.

"There may be many answers to that," I said. "My idea is this: Obviously, Greenlees came here with funds enough to last him some time, and whether they were the proceeds of legitimate trade or part of this island wealth, needn't concern us now. The main thing is that he knew he could afford to spend as he pleased, having this reserve to fall back on. I think his whole manner of life shows that; he meant to have his fling in his own way and then, when the money was gone, go back to the island. And the longer he delayed, no doubt, the safer it would be."

POYNTER was walking the floor. "Well, you may be right; that's how things happen in this world. We should know more after seeing this fellow Higgins. Of course you can bet I'll take precious good care to investigate what he calls his 'creditentials.' I'll wire our representatives in Chicago to look him up on the quiet, and I'll have a good line on Mr. Higgins before we meet. I'll write him telling him to come on here for an interview.

"Of course Higgins will be told nothing about the map until after we've had a talk with him—and you two must be present. Clearly, if he proves his claim, he has a right to know. He may be able to support in some fashion our belief that Greenlees made this map. If not—— Well, we shall see. A good deal will depend on the sort of character he proves to be. I only propose to do what is clearly my duty, no more and no less."

"I quite understand," I said, "and that's entirely agreeable to me."

"I knew it would be," said Poynter warmly. "And now," picking up the envelope, "I'll take charge of this in the meantime and put it beyond reach of Tibbs and Bland."

"Oh, no," said Adams quickly. *"We'll* take charge of it. It stays here."

Poynter, for the first time, showed anger. "Is it possible," he said, standing stiff as a poker, "that you don't trust me? In that case——"

"Oh, it's not a question of trust," broke in Adams. "But, until it's proved to belong to Greenlees' estate, you've no right to take charge of it."

"I wasn't thinking of claiming any right," retorted Poynter sharply. "My only thought is for its safety. It's possible that Tibbs and Bland may learn it's here, while they wouldn't know if I took it. It has been stolen twice while in the keeping of you two, and I could lock it in the office safe. What do you say, Mr. Broke? I suppose that after all, until we know the rightful owner, it's for you to decide. Whatever my claim may be, I'm willing to waive it."

"Then I'll keep it," I replied. "Of course, as Adams said, it's not a question of trust. But I'm the one who took the thing and, if there should be any trouble over it, I'm the one to meet it. I don't want anybody else to suffer. Yes, they stole it twice but I'll guarantee they won't steal it a third time."

"Well," said Poynter, handing me the envelope, "for Heaven's sake be careful. As for responsibility, the three of us are in this together and you won't find me shirking my share." Then he laughed. "It's funny how this buried-treasure stuff gets under the skin of even the most hard-headed of us, and I, a lawyer, should certainly know better."

Yes, strange how it got under one's skin, stranger still its capacity for working like a virus and souring the milk of human kindness. So I had read, and so I had now witnessed in the case of Adams, usually hail-fellow-well-met with strangers and the most unsuspicious of men. And the funny part was that he had almost quarreled with Poynter over something that in all likelihood we should never possess, something perhaps that didn't even exist!

"That's all very well," he said when, at length alone, I taxed him with his behavior. "But if I hadn't been here you'd have handed over that map like a sheep. You're too fond of taking everything and everybody on spec. Oh, yes, he seems all right, and I'll admit he's a mighty good judge of art, but what do we know about him?"

"Don't be an ass. I know all about him and so does Ball."

"Anyway he's a lawyer," said Adams, "and their motto is two for one every time. And you never know all about anybody, if it comes to that. What do you know about his private character? Also, my boy, the more kale you've got, the more you want. Oh, I dare say he's all right but anyway, I'm going to look him up, not, of course, that there's anything in this dashed 'Arabian Nights' entertainment."

CHAPTER IX.

MR. PETER HIGGINS.

A WEEK passed, a week singularly lacking in the excitement and adventure for which I was keyed up. I wasn't assaulted and robbed when I walked abroad, though fancying several times I was followed, nor was any attempt made to burgle our flat. Adams and I were disappointed; we had secreted the map where even an income-tax inspector couldn't have found it, and we laid ourselves out as decoys, inviting mayhem and theft, but all to no useful purpose.

"But, of course," said Poynter, "it only goes to show that they don't know you've got the stamp map. And that they didn't go to the police, proves that they daren't. They've no rightful claim to the map. They didn't even care to face an inquiry about the hand bag."

This was true; the papers duly reported

the daring Harlem highway robbery but the victim, when the police arrived, had disappeared. The only account they got was from the officious passer-by who had led the hunt after me.

My belated check had arrived and I was richer by some fifteen hundred dollars, the price of a full-length novel plus an unexpected windfall from the movies. One of my yarns had got across for a six-reeler and, though I only received half, the publishers grabbing the other, it was much more than I'd ever got before.

Fortune had also smiled on Adams; corsets and soup were booming and he'd also made a hit with B. Wright & Son, the big Newark canning house. "We can't be wrong when we can B. Wright"—you know the ad. Puerile stuff, of course, but they paid well for what they wanted, with the result that the mutual exchequer showed a credit balance of about three thousand.

Thus relieved of pressure we turned to our respective masterpieces with a will, and by the end of the week they were all but finished. Obviously had it not been for them we would have been far richer than we were; I mean we simply worked in order to get enough ahead so that we could devote all our time to them. They had cost us more than time, thought and energy, but we gave it gladly. What is mere money? Had its acquisition been our sole aim we should have gone into the grocery or bootlegging business. No, we weren't business men—the consequence being that no matter how much we got ahead the exchequer never lasted half as long as we thought it should. It had a most unaccountable and despicable trick of collapsing like a pricked balloon, and how or where the money went we never could tell. I always thought Adams had a lot in reserve, he always thought I had, and then we suddenly discovered that neither of us had.

I had paid for the lost Ovid and, in a secret conversation with Miss Stringer, inquired in roundabout fashion concerning the man she had seen with Greenlees in the library. Her description of him was vague; so much time had elapsed and she hadn't noticed him particularly. She thought, however, he was big and clean shaven, a description that would fit either Tibbs or Bland—and many another.

Captain Tibbs hadn't appeared again at The Chalfont or called at Poynter's office, the latter fact going to prove that he had no intention of doing so openly. "This shows, if nothing else," said Poynter, "that he isn't what he claimed to be. If he were really Greenlees' friend and had nothing to hide, he'd have lost no time calling on me."

ADAMS had looked Poynter up and, if he had ever doubted the other, those doubts were now dismissed. Poynter came up in the evenings, when the day's work was over for us all, or else he'd make an appointment to dine with us in town where we'd romance and speculate to our hearts' content about the map. Ball, of course, hadn't been told anything further, nor did we mean to let him into the secret. As we grew more intimate Poynter let drop the fact that he and his uncle didn't get on too well, and this rebellion at authority was an additional bond between us.

Toward the end of the week Mr. Higgins' "creditentials" were proved to be all right, Poynter showing us a report from their Chicago representatives. Everything that Higgins said was true, including his engagement to a North Shore cook, and he had been two weeks in hospital. He had also sent another original epistle acknowledging Poynter's reply and explaining how, though discharged as cured, his "soar" leg hadn't felt equal to the long trip, However, he would be at Mr. Poynter's office on Monday, "as per your suggestion and conveenience, the same God willing and all being well."

"So far, so good," commented Poynter. "Evidently an honest God-fearing sailorman—I've noticed that often sailors are the most truly religious people—who comes of hard-working, respectable stock, a family well known in that neighborhood. But when he finds out that there's no for-

tune in 'reel' money—— You see I didn't tell him because then he mightn't have thought it worth his while to come on. Now, I don't think we'd better discuss this matter at the office. You see my uncle knows nothing about it and he'd be sure to find out. As I told you, he wouldn't waste any time on Greenlees, and he'd only say I was wasting mine. I'm entirely on my own in this, as much as you two, and I think we'd better go to some beanery where Higgins would feel at ease."

"After meeting him at the office, why not bring him up here?" I suggested. "It would save us a trip down and we couldn't find a better place for a quiet talk."

And so it was finally arranged. "But," said Poynter, "I shan't bring him here, or tell him where the map is, if my own opinion of him doesn't confirm the favorable report we've had. I must be satisfied of his honesty and fair dealing—that he won't make a false claim. If he knows anything about the map it won't be from anything I tell him."

You can imagine that Adams and I waited for the arrival of Peter Higgins with impatience and curiosity, and the following days seemed to drag interminably. We thought finally that he hadn't kept the appointment, or had failed to satisfy Poynter, when, on the Monday evening toward eight o'clock, both arrived.

Higgins proved to be a somewhat older man than I had expected, about forty-odd, short and stringy but with the arms and hands of an ape. He had a luxurious bleached walrus mustache, liberally stained with tobacco juice, of which he seemed inordinately proud. As with Captain Tibbs, there was about him that unmistakable stamp of the deep-water sailor, and his stay ashore and in hospital hadn't effaced the stain of tropic sea and sun, though his parchmentlike cheek was saffron where Tibbs' was coppery red. Not a beauty, by any means, but he had a trusting brown eye like that of a Newfoundland dog. In the hiatus between trousers and vest I glimpsed a very broad leather belt studded with brass nails as though he required something solid to keep his pinched stomach and lean flanks together. He looked as if a good feed wouldn't do him any harm, and his left leg, in rather threadbare blue serge, had a decided limp.

Poynter was sporting something new, the order of the court-plaster cross. It peeped forth from the blond mane on his right temple.

"Sorry we're late," he greeted, "but we had to rescue a damsel in distress—with the usual result these decadent days. They'd have got the map, if I'd had it or Mr. Higgins hadn't kindly joined in. Shake hands with him; he deserves it."

"Oh, 'tweren't nothin'," said Higgins, shuffling embarrassed feet. Then he wiped his huge hand mechanically on his trousers and tendered us a palm like rhinoceros hide. I'm no weakling but I had to exert considerable pressure to keep my fingers intact. Decidedly a deceptive citizen as regarded strength—even more so than Tibbs.

"Do you mean to say," exclaimed Adams and I in unison, "that it was Tibbs and Bland again?"

"Not a doubt of it," nodded Poynter calmly. "*And* Miss Stoker, or whatever her real name may be. The usual decoy, and I feel like a prime sucker. Chivalry's a bad investment these days. Female crying in a dark hallway; knight-errant rushes in—total result, hospital or morgue. No, it doesn't pay."

WE listened in silence as he proceeded to relate what well might have ended in his obituary. Higgins, his knowledge of New York nil, had in trying to reach Pine Street taken a train which eventually landed him in the Bronx. He didn't reach the office until six, at which hour old Phineas Poynter had left, thinking his nephew had gone home. But Hector, knowing that Higgins' train was in, had gone to the station to see if he could find some trace of him when the other failed to arrive. Not succeeding in this, he had returned to the office in time to meet the strayed mariner. Having the office to himself, he had a preliminary talk with

Higgins there, the street being dark and deserted when they finally left. The ambush had been set in a vestibule a few doors distant.

"They knew my uncle had gone home in the car and that I'd have to pass that doorway to reach the Broadway sub," he concluded. "They must have been keeping careful watch on me. Maybe they didn't know Mr. Higgins was with me, or they didn't care; thought they could handle us both, very likely. They were waiting behind the door—same trick they pulled on you, Broke. The girl was crying and I thought she was a typist who'd had an accident or something."

"But are you sure it was she?" I asked. Somehow, in spite of all appearances, I had clung to a belief in her innocence, comparative at least. No doubt of her prevarications, of her theft of the map, of her intimacy with the evil-eyed Bland; but she might have done all that and yet been able to square her conscience. To play, however, such a despicable part as that of decoy——

"I'm as sure of it as I stand here," declared Poynter. "There was a bit of light from the street and she sat facing it—yes, half lying in the vestibule so that when I bent over her they could wallop me from behind the door. I've your description of her and there's also that fine picture of Adams. She's the same girl; no question of it at all. She grabbed me round the legs, held me for the wallop, and she laughed when I got it. Yes, sir, she did! Then Higgins barged in. I saw Bland clearly and also Tibbs—I'm sure it was he from your description. There was at least one other man too."

IT must have been a fine séance while it lasted, and Adams obviously shared my disgust at having been among those absent. To think that after our elaborate invitations to combat they should have ignored us and picked Poynter! But how often are the truly deserving thus served in this unjust world. However, it had proved Poynter's mettle, and that of Higgins, and this was a better passport to our friendship than the latter's "berth" certificate.

"Thanks to Higgins, I broke out of the trap," added Poynter, "and we legged it for Broadway. Of course I said nothing to the police. They must have guessed you stole the map, Broke, saw me coming here and thought I'd taken it. Even if they knew I hadn't it on me they could have taken me somewhere and put me over the jumps till I squealed. We've got to realize we're up against a hard bunch and no mistake."

"I'm sorry I've got you and Mr. Higgins into this," I said.

"Oh, 'tweren't nothin'," repeated Higgins with a deprecatory gesture. "It's pie to what I been through in the day's work. And you needn't never expect no pink-tea business from Cap'n Tibbs."

"Then you know him?" we exclaimed.

"Know of him," said Higgins. "I guess most every one in the South Seas has heard in some ugly shape o' Bill Harpey. That's his right name—if he's got one. A hell roarer, that's what he is and no mistake, the same being he was born that way. And his runnin' mate's a slush called Roger—'Soapy' Roger. Aye, a fine pair. The Jolly Roger, that's what they'd oughter be sailin' under by rights. I didn't get a good look at these gents to-night but, from all I've heard, I guess they're Harpey and Roger and no mistake. And you couldn't have cut the wake of a couple o' finer blackguards 'twixt here and Sydney. No, sir, you couldn't."

"I should never have taken Bland for a sailor," I said.

"No, and nobody else neither, the same bein' that he ain't. He's just a shore slush, sort o' jackal for Harpey."

"And Tibbs seemed a man of some education," I added. "I was ready to class him as a rough diamond."

"Oh, he's got ejication," said Higgins. "Master's certificate and all that. But what's ejication without character? He's rough and he's hard, all right, but he's no diamond—though he's done his fair share o' I. D. B. Yes, and blackbirdin', and bootleggin' and the Almighty knows

what. Him and Roger and *The Faithful Friend*—why, the niggers take to the bush when they spot her tops'ls comin' over the dip. And them that takes to it is lucky."

Mr. Higgins had spoken earnestly, his doglike eyes holding a strange glow.

"Of course I've told Higgins about the map," said Poynter with a meaning glance at us. "While he can't prove it the property of his uncle, he has ample reason for believing it must be. I understand he has some reason of his own for disliking and mistrusting Tibbs and Bland."

"I hate 'em," said Mr. Higgins simply. "I hate 'em like poison, and a very good reason too, the same being they butchered an old shipmate o' mine in Raratonga."

Adams had brought out a sacred offering of home-brew and Mr. Higgins, now feeling more at ease, produced a small box of hammered brass. From this he took a vast quid of what he affectionately termed "red hair" and inserted it dexterously in his leathery cheek with every manifestation of appreciation. Having thus fortified himself, and declining the proffered brew—evidently he was a person of discernment—he wiped the back of a tattooed hand across his walrus mustache, rubbed it on his trousers, and proceeded to tell us about old Greenlees, and incidentally himself.

CHAPTER X.

A GENTLEMEN'S AGREEMENT.

PETER HIGGINS was a "native son;" he had been born "south of the slot" in San Francisco—he took for granted that we knew the full meaning of that esoteric phrase—and, as a boy, ran away to sea when the family moved to Chicago. A hard-boiled youth and harder-boiled manhood—that summed him up.

For over twenty years the South Seas had been his home and he spoke of Polynesia and Melanesia as though they were his back yards. He had been A. B. on a Union liner out of Sydney, mate and part owner of an inter-islands trading schooner, and apparently he had tried his hand at everything from sugar raising in Suva to pearl raising in Sulu, copra planting in Guadalcanar to gold hunting in Guinea. But the sea, the love of which he got from his mother's side of the house, always claimed him sooner or later—generally sooner—and apparently he had left more than one prospective fortune in the soil or waves.

Nor was he addicted to the personal pronoun. All this, and more, concerning himself, sifted in during his talk about Simon Greenlees. The latter had also been a sea rover but always with a very definite aim toward pelf, a quality which the nephew lacked. Greenlees, as Higgins had said in his letter, never had anything to do with his sister's family, and Higgins himself had only met him once or twice. But he had heard of him in the "Black Islands"—as, he explained, Melanesia was called.

"Now, as I told you, sir," he continued, addressing Poynter, "I don't want to claim anything I've no right to. My uncle's dead, God rest his soul, and it's not for me to be throwing bilge on his name, the same being that I've heard tales o' him and plenty. But that he knew Tibbs or Harpey, and Roger, any beach comber in the Black Islands can tell you. And that he was thicker with them than he wanted generally known, I've no reason to doubt."

"Where was his home?" asked Poynter.

"Naviti in the Fijis was where he done business as a trader," replied Higgins. "*The Faithful Friend* always put in there sooner or later. Over a year ago, as I heard, my uncle upped anchor and he ain't been seen in Naviti or nowhere since. And the tale goes that he struck it rich, the same being that it was a secret pearl lagoon or guano island. Anyway that was the last heard of him, so far as I know, in the South Seas."

"And that's the last *you* heard of him?"

"In a way, yes," nodded Higgins, shifting his quid to port. "But on my last trip to Honolulu I heard the tale of a man who'd come there with one o' the finest pink pearls ever seen. He said he was a copra planter from Samarang and that he'd got it from a Kanaka diver who'd

held out on his boss. He said his name was Brown but, from all the description I had o' him, he might have been my Uncle Simon. I ain't saying he was, understand, but he may have been. Seemingly he was hard up for he sold the pearl to a dealer —that's how the tale got about—and hit the next steamer for Frisco."

"I'm sure I speak for the three of us," said Poynter at length, "when I say I think there's no reasonable doubt who made this map and what it relates to. There's far too much coincidence in all this for it to be unrelated fact or mere surmise. It's a fact that Simon Greenlees struck it rich somewhere, that he knew Tibbs and Bland —or Harpey and Roger—and that they've done their best, or worst, to get the map. And now I think it's time you saw it for yourself, Mr. Higgins."

Accordingly I produced the stamp from the inner case of an old broken watch that I'd left lying openly on my bureau and Higgins proceeded to examine it.

"That's rum," he exclaimed. "I know that island, seen it myself, or I'm a nigger. She ain't charted—off the regular trade routes—but she lies north and somewheres betweenlike o' the New Hebrides and the Fijis. Somewheres in these here two drawn lines."

"Then you were right, Broke!" exclaimed Poynter, clapping me on the shoulder.

Higgins looked at me with renewed interest.

"No, I've never been out there," I explained. "It was only a guess that it stood for Mallekula and Vati."

"A mighty good one," commented Higgins, "to say nothing of you knowing the other name for Malicolo. Yes, that's where she is, right enough! somewheres in that big stretch. We were blown way off our course in a sou'east hurricane, Honolulu to Suva, when we raised her one night and near gutted ourselves on the barrier reef."

"Well," said Poynter, "all this dovetails with the story of your uncle, Mr. Higgins. He must have discovered this island, or its hidden wealth, while at Naviti. Whether it's guano or pearls—and the latter supposition would seem to have support—you appeared to be the heir, the rightful owner of this map."

"Oh, I don't know about that," spoke up Adams, and slipped the stamp from under Higgins' corrugated nail before any one quite realized his intention. "Everything may point to Greenlees owning this but it doesn't prove it. And, if it comes to that was *he* the rightful owner? We don't know. And, if it hadn't been for Broke, where would you have been? He not only got the map but he solved its secret—for there isn't a doubt that he's right. Clearly he has some title to it."

"Not title," said Poynter, shaking his head. "Consideration, yes—and perhaps we all have some claim to that. But, to my mind, there's no question that the real and only valid title rests in Mr. Higgins. You agree, Broke?"

"I think everything would point to that conclusion," I said.

"Well, I don't!" exclaimed Adams. "That's flat. And possession is nine tenths of the law."

I don't know how it would have ended, for Adams was certainly up on his hind legs and ready for all comers—and, of course, I should have had to back him—if at length Higgins himself hadn't broken the deadlock. He looked distressed and puzzled like a dog who sees three humans, for whom it cares, begin to quarrel over something it can't understand.

"Look here, gents," he said diffidently, "in the first place there mightn't be no treasure; in the second it's yet to be got; in the third I ain't claimin' to hog it. What Mr. Adams says is right, and if it hadn't been for the whole boilin' of you I'd never have heard a word o' this. You've been fair by me and what I says is, share and share alike. How's that?"

ADAMS lost his aggressive attitude at this and looked shamefaced. And Poynter said: "No, no, Mr. Higgins, that's far too generous. I couldn't think of it. Anything I've done in your behalf

was only in the nature of a self-imposed duty and without any thought of gain. I merely want to protect your interests——"

"Who from?" demanded Adams, flaring up again. "Do you think anybody wants to steal them? If you do, just say so. But Broke and I have some interests to protect too, if it comes to that. All we want is a fair break and we mean to get it, understand? I'm not asking any fifty-fifty split——"

"But that wouldn't be so generous as it may look," put in Mr. Higgins dutifully. "An even break all round means an even share o' expenses. It's goin' to take some coin—and I, for one, ain't got any."

Somehow this all-important angle of the problem hadn't occurred to us.

"Money, eh?" said Poynter, running a hand through his blond mane.

"Sure," nodded Higgins, "the same being that we ain't got wings yet. Money to charter a ship and fit her out, say, for a six-month trip at least."

"But," said Poynter, "you could get somebody to finance you on the strength of this map and your story. It's my duty to tell you that."

"Thanks," replied Higgins, "but could I make 'em believe it? And, if they did, they'd want pretty near all of it—and stick a supercargo aboard to see they got it. No, sir, I've had my experience o' them money sharks that stake a man; I know more'n one in Frisco who'd risk the gamble but I'd be left to hold the bag. I don't want any truck with 'em."

Poynter was walking the floor. "Well, we don't want to take any advantage of you, Higgins. And, if it comes to that, I don't know that we're much better off financially than you. Speaking for myself, you mustn't judge by appearances; it's not what a man gets but what he keeps, and New York hasn't a saving atmosphere. Frankly, though I'm connected with big money, I've always managed to spend more than I earned, and I needn't look to my uncle for a red cent in this gamble. How much do you figure it would take?"

"Well, o' course, if it was to be a one-man job you could get a steamer direct to Suva, then pick up a schooner and crew there. But there'd be a risk——"

"Too much, to my mind," broke in Poynter. "You wouldn't want anybody out there to know of it. And I suppose it would cost about as much in the long run. I meant chartering a schooner from San Francisco."

HIGGINS fortified himself with another helping of red hair and began an elaborate calculation on his gnarled fingers. "That's about six thousand cash," he announced at length. "She'd come to that at least. That's with me runnin' it, the same being I could get the charter and stores cheaper than any one else. I guess I've a right to say that, it being my line."

"Six thousand!" exclaimed Adams.

"More or less," nodded Higgins. "I ain't runnin' it too fine. Depends how it's to be done—and, to my way o' thinkin', the only way to do a thing is to do it proper and shipshape."

"You're right about that," said Poynter. "If it's worth doing at all, it's worth doing right. I'd stake you to this money in a jiffy, Higgins, if I had it. Maybe I can raise it all——"

"You don't have to," I broke in. "We can raise our share, Adams and I."

"Good!" cried Poynter. "You mean it? That would be only two thousand apiece and I could raise that without my uncle. We put up the money and Higgins puts up the map and his experience."

"But Broke and I haven't got four thousand," said Adams.

"We've got most of it," I replied, "and what we haven't got I'll guarantee to get."

"We'll form a limited company," said Poynter. "Higgins says share and share alike but he should get half, the other half to be divided equally between us three."

"No, sir," said Higgins before we could reply, "what I still says is share and share alike, I wouldn't feel right otherwise."

"Well, that's mighty decent of you," said Poynter. "It's far more than we deserve, but if you really feel that way about it we'd be fools to refuse. It's clear you're no business man, Higgins."

"Mebbe not in some ways," agreed the other. "And I don't want to be. But the man don't live who can do me in the eye when it comes to charterin' a ship and buyin' stores. Every man to his line, I says. Fair is fair and you've treated me fair all through. You trust me and I trust you, the same being the only fit way for a partnership."

"There'll be no question of that," said Poynter. "We're sports, not hucksters, and if you should find nothing on that island you won't hear us squealing about our lost stake or suggesting that you're held out on us. Isn't that right, boys?"

"That's right," said Adams heartily. "Which makes it all the easier to add that Broke and I are going along."

"I say, you really don't mean it!" exclaimed Poynter.

"Every word of it," said Adams. "I don't see why part of this grubstake can't go to feed us, seeing we've got to eat somewhere for the next six months. If we raise four thousand kopecks we'll be about one thousand to the bad. We can sublet this flat and perhaps make a bit on that. I don't mind gambling my money but why not get a living out of it too?"

"I wasn't figurin' on carryin' any deadwood," said Higgins, shuffling his feet, "the same being I don't want the responsibility. It won't be no South Seas' paradise like mebbe you've read about. The Black Islands—— You may be served up as roast 'long pig,' to say nothin' o' shipwreck and all that. There's a lot o' cannibals out there yet, even if you don't find 'em in the guide books."

"Look here," said Adams, "I'm fat but I'm not frail. Broke and I did time in France, and your Black Islands can't show us anything worse than we went through over there. You won't find us deadwood but pretty much alive. We can work our passage the same as you or the hands."

"But we don't know anything about boats," I said, and Adams kicked me under the table. "At the same time, I think we can manage not to be a hindrance."

Higgins shook his head. "I don't want the responsibility," he repeated.

"Responsibility be damned!" said Adams. "Share and share alike you say; well that goes for responsibility too. Either we come along or the deal's off where we're concerned. That's flat. I wouldn't miss the chance of a trip like this for a farm."

Poynter, who had been listening in silence, suddenly struck the table a bang. "You said something that time, Adams. If you're going, I'm going too! Yes, I am. I'm not going to be left out of this."

Higgins scratched his head and then shook it again. "Seems to me there's no sense in makin' this gamble worse'n it is for you, Mr. Poynter, the same being it would be foolish to stake any more on the findin' o' them pearls. I mean if you was to risk losin' a good berth with your uncle——"

"That's my affair," interrupted Poynter. "I've had my nose to the legal grindstone for three long years without a break and I'm fed up to the back teeth. It's simply a question whether my uncle intends to treat me like a white man or a poor relation who isn't supposed to have any rights."

"Well, gents," said Higgins with a smile, "you're payin' the piper so I guess you can call the tune. Comin' like this on your own hook and after fair warnin', I'll be right glad o' the company, the same being I've took to you all. I thank you all very kindly and will do my best by you as cap'n, partner and friend." And he made us a funny little bow.

"Well said!" exclaimed Poynter. "Share and share alike. A gentlemen's agreement. Let's shake hands on it all round." And, lifting high a glass of home-brew, "Here's to the venture! Come fair weather or foul, good fortune or bad, here's to freedom and the open salt sea trail!"

CHAPTER XI.

SOME CONSEQUENCES OF THE AGREEMENT.

ADAMS had retained the map, pointing out that in view of the attack on our partners it was obviously safer where it was. Evidently Harpey and Roger—as I

may call them henceforth—had no idea we had it but, in any case, we had proved our ability as custodians.

In spite of the gentlemen's agreement Adams had suggested a written contract, each man to retain a copy. "For our heirs and assigns," he explained with a smile, "in case all of us should finish up with Mr. David Jones." He carried both these points, Poynter drawing up the document.

The four of us had discussed in detail that same Sunday night the danger of further attention from Harpey & Co. and we agreed that the sooner we started for the coast, the better. Though all of us had a lot to attend to, Adams and I also had our masterpieces to finish and it was decided that we couldn't go before the end of the week. Friday was the day agreed on. This being settled, Higgins declared that he would return home on Monday, declining Poynter's invitation to put him up for the night.

"I dumped my grip at a seamen's lodging house on Front Street when I landed," he said, "and that's where I'll spend the night, the same being that the sooner we separate, the better. Harpey and Roger know me by sight, and though I guess they didn't recognize me to-night or know I'm in New York, there's no tellin' what they may stumble on if we give 'em half a chance. And if you gents are going to stay here for five more days, the less you see o' each other the better too. Ain't no use takin' more risks than we can help."

This was quite true and Poynter said to us: "You two had better not be seen near my uncle's office, nor will I come here except at night when I know the coast's clear. We mustn't be seen with each other during the day."

"Well, I'll join you gents in Chi," said Higgins. "And so that we won't be wastin' no time I'll drop a line to an old shipmate o' mine out Tiburon way. He keeps a shut mouth and is in the way o' findin' the sort o' craft we'll need at rock-bottom price. That's his business and he'll do the best for us, the same being he's white and by the name o' Barnaby."

Poynter, delicately enough, spoke about the return fare to Chicago, but Higgins, with dignity, declined the proffered advance.

So we shook hands with the honest sailorman who, accustomed to vast distances, spoke of meeting us in Chicago as though it were only across the street, and that was the last we saw of him until we reached the Windy City.

THE following day I went to the parental office where I had spent a futile year or so trying to love and understand bricks. I lost no time because, apart from all else, the old adage informs one that the quicker a nettle is grasped the better.

I returned home a sadder and wiser man and poured out my unexpected defeat to Adams. "Not a cent, James, unless I shoot the whole works and go back for a life sentence in that blamed office. Of course I can do neither. If he knew the sort of investment it was he'd have a fit. A fine, generous parent! He has always been inquiring if I wanted money and the first time I ask for it and eat dirt he won't even lend it to me. You get more from strangers than your own flesh and blood."

Poynter, when he appeared the following night, had a tale of his own to tell.

"Well, I'm footloose and fancy-free, as the Prince of Wales says," he greeted us. "I've been turfed out from the avuncular home and office. Surest thing you know. Six months? No, he wouldn't give me six days. He nearly went through the roof. To be treated with such base ingratitude after all he'd done for me—and me working like a nigger for years at a beggarly pittance. Say, you can't beat relatives. 'If you dare to leave without my permission, Hector Poynter, you leave my roof forever! Never dare to darken my doorstep again!' Or words to that effect. Blue lights and slow music. Exit the renegade nephew. Well, it's no more than I expected and it had to come, map or no map. I'm feeling more of a man to-night than since I left old Gloucester. To the devil with my uncle and his money! So say we all of us."

Poynter lugged out a fat wallet and slapped it. "But my stake's here as I promised. I've a draft on the Bank of California for two thousand, and a few hundreds cash. Realized on all my worldly goods, called in whatever debts I could, and borrowed whatever my friends would give. Now we'd better appoint a treasurer of this company; in all modesty I think, perhaps, that I, having the most business experience——"

"Time enough when we get to Frisco," said Adams. "Each man can pay his own expenses till then. You needn't be afraid of us losing our stake; we'll take traveler's checks for three thousand—and that's all we can raise."

"I fell down on that other thousand," I explained. "I'm sorry, but I couldn't raise it with a derrick. Can't you? Of course that will mean you'll be entitled to more than a fourth share."

"I'm not thinking of that," he said, walking the floor. "I'd shove it in, and gladly, on the same old basis if I had it. But I haven't, nor can I get it. If you'd need a derrick, I'd need dynamite. I've strained the whole works roping in what I've got."

"Then it's up to us," I said, "and I'll manage to raise the rest of our stake somehow. I've an idea where I can get it."

"That's the way to talk!" said Poynter. "You're a sure enough go-getter, Broke. Anybody can get anything if he goes after it hard enough."

Accordingly the next morning I went down to see Hemingway, managing editor of the Randall & Dagget publications.

"But I sent you fifteen hundred only the other day!" he exclaimed. "I went beyond our price for American serial rights just to——"

"Yes, but I want another thousand. I'm taking the road for six months or more and I'll need shoes. In exchange I'll turn in, before the end of the week, a full-length novel which I'm finishing."

"Full length, eh?"

"Yes. I think you'll find it the best thing I've ever done. If it wasn't, I wouldn't ask for this advance."

He tapped the desk with his pencil. "If it's as good as that last yarn—— Decidedly you're coming on, Broke. I'd like to have a look at this manuscript—— However, you may have it. Friday's check day and if you drop in during the morning with the manuscript I'll have one ready for you. Will that do?"

Would it do? Would a duck swim!

"Well, I've got the dough," I said casually to Adams. "Earned money too. What were you saying about business ability?"

CHAPTER XII.

WE SET FORTH.

THE rest of the week was a busy one and I like to look back on those days of feverish bustle, high expectation and endeavor. Adams got his masterpiece finished at last and sent it off to the Academy to be hung—an ominous, but fitting, word, I said—at the coming exhibition, while I polished up the last chapter of the Great American Novel and sent it down to Hemingway.

We also succeeded in getting the flat sublet for six months, with the option of another six if we didn't need it then, at a profit of five dollars a month. Not much, but better than eating it dry. Adams, who was developing a fine taste for haggling, conducted the negotiations. The rent was to be paid to the agent but Adams held out for our thirty dollars profit in advance. It was a good stroke of business on such short notice and I was glad I was indebted to my father for nothing, not even for this new tenant who had appeared so providentially to help us out of this dilemma.

Poynter, being denied the avuncular roof, was making his temporary home in a cheap rooming house over on Tenth Avenue. Decidedly a come-down for him but, as he said truly, every penny had to be considered and the sooner he got to roughing it the better.

We only met him after dark in the lower Drive, for he was afraid to disclose his connection with us to the possibly watching Harpey or Roger by coming to the

flat even late at night. And here as we lay on the grass and watched the sparkling panorama of the great river, we talked like three conspirators, relating the day's doings and discussing the coming venture from every angle. Already he had become the leader of the expedition, if not by tacit consent then by force of personality or by virtue of age and experience.

It transpired that he had actually been to the South Seas, as far as the Marquesas and Low Archipelago, as ship's boy under his father. He was fundamentally of the same breed as Higgins, of deep-water heritage and even training, while Adams and I were no more than land crabs.

Poynter was certain that Harpey and Roger would make another try for the map, and as the day for our departure drew near his anxiety and admonitions increased. We kept a sharp lookout, taking no risks and ready for any emergency, but we saw or heard nothing further of the two worthies and the girl. Poynter said it seemed too good to be true and that he wouldn't feel really safe until we'd passed the Golden Gate. "But, of course, if they think I've the map and have no connection with you, they mayn't have been able to trace me to my present address. At the same time——" And he shook his head.

Friday morning offered a possible solution of the riddle. Adams was wrapping up in newspaper some tools of his trade he meant to bring along when he chanced to see what all of us had missed. It was a small news item in Monday's *Telegram* that caught and held his attention. It stated that late Sunday night a patrolman, going his rounds, found in a William Street doorway a man who had been badly stabbed. He was taken to the Hudson Street Hospital where, on regaining consciousness, he refused to give his name or say anything about his injury other than that it was a personal job that he would settle in his own way when he got out. He was making a surprising recovery and the police regarded the affair as the aftermath of a recent East Side gang feud.

Was it coincidence or not? The description of the victim, such as it was, would fit either Harpey or Roger, both big men, and the address mentioned wasn't far from Pine Street. As for the discrepancy in time, the victim might have collapsed and lain unconscious for hours after leaving the real scene of the fight. And naturally his companions, no doubt thinking him done for, wouldn't risk the attention of the police by notifying them.

"Stabbed in four or five places and a wonder he's still living," commented Adams. "I don't like that. Is it the real reason Higgins beat it back to Chicago? Suppose, when you're down seeing Hemingway, you drop in at the hospital and find out? You know Harpey and Roger by sight."

"And, if I recognized him, he'd recognize me, wouldn't he? And then he'd pass the tip to his pals. We aren't supposed to have any interest in either of them. Besides I've more than enough to do. Let well enough alone. Of course Poynter doesn't know anything about it or he'd have told us. No doubt it's only coincidence; if not, we should worry. They only got what they've been asking for and we're well rid of one of them."

The check was waiting for me, as Hemingway had promised, and I cashed it for traveler's checks at our bank where we had already transformed our whole account into the same medium. Adams and I were to carry an equal share of this merely for the sake of not having all our eggs in one basket. He had also made an exact copy of the map and we had hidden it and the original where they would take some finding.

Hemingway asked where a letter would reach me and I told him truthfully I didn't know. "Up to the end of the next ten days, and perhaps longer, the general delivery in San Francisco will do, but after that—well, I'll let you know. Have you had time to look over that novel?"

"No, but I know it's all right. Then I'll keep the rest of the payment till I

hear from you? Well, good luck on this mysterious pilgrimage, wherever it leads you. You ought to find some good material."

I CALLED dutifully at my father's office to say farewell, but he wasn't in. I had no time to look him up.

Poynter told us we needn't be paying freight on trunks across the continent, that we could get all we needed in San Francisco, but I had to make some necessary purchases for Adams and myself, considering the state of the mutual wardrobe. I also bought a couple of .38 automatics and half a dozen boxes of cartridges. For fear of being ridiculed we kept this particular purchase secret. But we were young enough to believe that no adventure could be worth while if it didn't offer an excuse to carry lethal weapons, and we felt very martial indeed as we packed them in our suit cases.

Poynter was at the station to meet us as we climbed aboard the Chicago limited without further incident worth recording. Indeed after all our precautions and expectations it was a very tame farewell to old New York and we felt rather flat. Poynter, however, heaved a sigh of relief. and settled back comfortably.

"This is from Higgins," he said, producing a letter from his wallet. "It was forwarded from my uncle's office and came just before I left. Lucky we got it in time."

In characteristic terms the honest sailorman informed "Mr. Poynter, Esquire, and Gents" not to expect him in Chicago as he had decided to go on to Frisco. "The same being" that he'd run into an old shipmate—he seemed to have them all over the world—who told him of a schooner just made for us. "The same being if we lose no time and nab her. She has a good eight-knot kicker, which is just what we want. She's a converted yacht, used to be owned by one of the nobs of Nob Hill, and whatever she may look like you know the stuff's there, copper sheathed and all that. She went into the islands trade when her owner died and then got confiskated by the government for rum running or dope smuggling or something not entirely regler. The *Mary Kearney*, that's her name, the same being she's been laying up in Tiburon for two years, having been knocked down to my friend Barnaby at auction. He thought her a good buy but folks thought her a Jonah and she's been left on his hands. But there's them that know her true value and have been trying to get her cheap of late, and I have wrote Barnaby to give me first say for the sake of old times, the same being I'm going on to look her over. She ain't reely hoodooed, my friend says, or he wouldn't have spoke of her. There's a difference between a reel hoodoo and hard luck, the same being that I know and none better. But ships is like folks; there's them that gets a hard name for no fault of their own. But if she don't smell right I won't even touch her."

"All very true," commented Poynter. "And that's right too what he says about smell—not a physical smell. A ship has a distinct personality. Anyway I've known some old deep-water men to possess this faculty. I've known them to refuse ships with a clean record and take others with a supposed hoodoo. And they were right; sooner or later some terrible thing always happened to the hitherto successful ship. It's queer and there's no explaining it. Of course sailors are notoriously superstitious, but there's superstition based on ignorance, and there's this. Higgins has it and his head's screwed on right too."

"I wonder," said Adams, "if he had the superstition that the farther and quicker he got away from New York and the police the better it would be for him. Have you seen this?" And he passed over the clipping from the *Telegram*.

Poynter whistled softly and his brows went up as he read the item. "You think this relates to our experience of Sunday night? Higgins never said he used a knife, and it was far too dark to see."

"If it's true," said Adams, "it's just as well to know the sort of man we're sailing with. A man who uses a knife like that——"

"Lucky for him and me that he did," broke in Poynter. "You must remember that a knife is the sailor's natural weapon."

"All the same," persisted Adams, "I don't like him using it like that. It's too ruthless, altogether too cold-bloodedly ferocious."

"There was nothing cold blooded about it," said Poynter. "You'd know that if you'd been there. And we don't know he did use it—that this has any connection with our affair—though maybe it would explain why we've been left alone since. But in the dark, this fellow may have been knifed by the girl or one of his friends in mistake for Higgins or me. You may be sure he won't make any bones about telling the truth. If it's true, it won't change my opinion of him a jot; I guess he saved my life and that's enough. He's honest and he's no trouble hunter but you needn't expect a kid-glove captain. Nor do we want one. We're going where a man won't have the law at his shoulder all the time. I'd rather that fellow was lying in the Hudson Hospital than Higgins or myself."

OF course all this was sound common sense, with which I agreed, and, as usual, Adams came out at the thin end of the argument.

The only incident during the remainder of the trip to the West, worthy of record, happened just as we pulled out of Chicago.

Poynter had almost missed the train and came into the observation car with a heated and troubled countenance. "It's a funny thing," he said, "but I'm sure I saw that man Ball again."

"Ball?" I exclaimed. "You mean the superintendent of The Chalfont? And when did you see him before?"

"I thought I saw him at the Grand Central the day we left. I wasn't sure. And now——"

"But Ball couldn't get away," I interrupted. "He's tied to his job."

"Quite the contrary," said Poynter calmly. "The last time I was up at The Chalfont about old Greenlees' things there was a new superintendent. I don't know whether Ball quit or was fired but anyway he'd left. I meant to tell you but it slipped my mind for I didn't think of it as important at the time."

"Do you mean you think this fellow's following us?" demanded Adams.

Poynter shrugged. "I'm not one to raise false alarms; at the same time, you mentioned the other night that Harpey and Bland seemed to be pretty well posted about us. Of course I'd thought that too. Well, Ball heard what Broke said about the book and he had his own reasons for believing that Greenlees possessed a valuable secret. You haven't been to The Chalfont but once, Broke? No, I thought not. And I know you haven't been talking. But Ball might have guessed whatever he didn't know."

"If it comes to that he might have known far more about the map than he ever said," I remarked. "As you know, he was accused of negligence in connection with Greenlees' death, something about the corridor not being properly lighted. He said it was totally uncalled for, but supposing it wasn't? Supposing he engineered the whole thing—that it was murder?"

"Got the old gory imagination working again, eh?" said Adams.

Poynter laughed, then sobered. "All the same, I'm sure it was Ball I saw. He seemed to dodge like he did at the Grand Central. I've gone through the whole train but didn't see him. Of course he has a perfect right to be in Chicago or anywhere. We don't want to imagine things—nor do we want to be lulled into a false sense of security. Greed of gold can play the deuce with a man. And we mustn't overlook the possibility, if not probability, that the respectable and harmless-looking Ball may have joined hands with Harpey and Roger. You may laugh, but I shan't really feel comfortable until we've Bonita Point astern."

However, Poynter glimpsed nothing further of Ball—if indeed it had really been he—and we settled down to enjoy the rest of the trip.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE "MARY KEARNEY."

HIGGINS met us at the station and, our pockets not running to the Fairmont, he piloted us through the business district to a rooming house up by the Embarcadero near Battery Street. The honest sailorman's optimism was evidently still going strong for so certain was he that he would arrive with the necessary funds that he had paid a deposit on these two rooms, one of which he had been occupying.

It didn't seem a very savory neighborhood, to say the least, and I soon learned that the notorious Barbary Coast wasn't far off, in Pacific Street.

"Ain't much of a dump to look at," said Higgins apologetically as we downed our scant baggage, "but she'll do our day, the same being I've put up here before and she's tidy and honest, which is more'n you can say for many a better showin' place, the same being that she's run by an old shipmate o' mine. Besides which, the likes of you wouldn't be looked for here, the same being that we ain't out o' the woods yet. Meaning? Well, mebbe I seen Bill Harpey to-day and mabbe I didn't."

"Tibbs?" exclaimed Poynter. "But, look here, that's impossible. In the first place—— But what did you do with that clipping, Adams?"

Higgins, his doglike eyes mildly surprised and pained, denied that he'd used a knife. "Fair is fair and I don't hold with that sort of thing. Not that I wouldn't if I'd no choice but I never carry a sticker ashore. If I'd knifed 'em I'd have said so and no bones about it neither. It's what they had oughter to get, and I only wish they was layin' in a New York hospital."

"Perhaps one of them is—Roger if not Harpey," said Poynter. "He may have been stabbed by mistake. Where did you think you saw Harpey?"

"On Kentucky Street, down by the Santa Fe," said Higgins. "Just before you come. It's years since I seen him and I only got a passin' slant at him. Couldn't see where he went, no more'n as if the ground had swallered him."

Poynter pondered, ruffling his blond mane. "Well, I don't know; I'd just as soon you hadn't thought you saw him. There's the fact that Ball——" And he told Higgins all about him. "I suppose they could have guessed we'd make for here, or Harpey may have beaten us across."

"If they're lookin' for trouble, I'm their man," said Higgins, hitching at the broad brass-studded belt. "I gotta bone to pick with Bill Harpey, the same being it's been standin' on his plate a long time like I told you. If he's here this town ain't big enough for him and me."

"No, there must be none of that if we can possibly avoid it," said Poynter sharply. "This is no time for satisfying private grudges no matter how justified you may be. All our money's in this venture and it would be a fine thing if, at the last moment, you were laid up in hospital or jail. We'll be ready for these fellows if they should attempt to trouble us again, but we aren't going to do any looking for them. You've got to understand that, Higgins."

The honest sailorman touched his forelock. "All the same, sir, it's kind o' hard lines to pass up a chance at that swipe, the same being that I mayn't have another. The sooner we clear, then, the better. And the closer we lay till our mudhook's up the better too mebbe."

He had accomplished a great deal, seen to an infinite number of things in the time at his disposal. The *Mary Kearney*, lying at a private wharf of Barnaby's in Tiburon, entirely satisfied his mysterious olfactory sense and he had been over her from keel to truck.

He had negotiated about stores and even a crew. Of course all this was tentative, pending our approval, and he had given out that we were after pearl shell in the islands. We would carry a limited cargo of trade goods to bear out the fiction and they could always be disposed of at a profit.

"Barnaby's askin' three thousand cash

on the nail," concluded Higgins. "He's keepin' my offer under his hat, the same being a coupla hundred less and bed rock. We can't do no better anywhere else nor half as good."

I can't say that my first sight of the *Mary Kearney* was thrilling; indeed I had thought her one of the derelicts destined for the boneyard. It occurred to me that if she was a converted yacht, that conversion had been indeed whole-hearted and that I had seen many a smarter-looking schooner carrying bricks from Haverstraw. Neither did her smell, when we climbed aboard, appeal to me particularly; if it was perfect psychically, it was a bit too strong physically. However, I didn't say anything, conscious of my own ignorance, and because it would have been a shame to dampen Barnaby's enthusiasm. She was his ewe lamb, it appeared, and he spoke of her almost with tears in his honest blue eyes. He wouldn't dream of leasing her to any but an old shipmate like Higgins. Why, he had the offer of almost double our figure but he wasn't satisfied with the party's credentials.

POYNTER and Higgins, very quiet and methodical, poked into every nook and corner, ably abetted by Adams. I found it more enjoyable and polite to listen to Mr. Barnaby, who really had to have some audience, than, like Adams, to go poking my nose into this and that and pretending to a knowledge I didn't own.

The end of it was that we decided to take her, Poynter saying he had made inquiries elsewhere and was satisfied we could do no better if as good.

"Of course there's no such thing as friendship in business," he added, agreeing with Adams for once, "and Barnaby's making no sacrifice."

So Adams and I cashed our checks, it being agreed that Poynter should settle for the stores and other stuff until his stake petered out, and, after a lot of dickering, we closed the deal next day for twenty-nine hundred. Adams insisted on having the lease made out in the names of the four of us, and Poynter saw to it that no clauses were inserted to our detriment and Barnaby's benefit. He had also put in black and white that, without further notice or advance payment, we were to have an option on the schooner for the balance of the year at a reduction of twenty-five dollars per month. This was a pretty shrewd stroke and Barnaby only agreed to it after prolonged haggling. We needed a lawyer like Poynter to handle such matters and I think he endeared himself to Adams by this display of what, in other circumstances, I could only term downright meanness.

If friendship has no place in business—a cynical creed I didn't believe in—and Barnaby naturally wanted to get the best price possible from even his old friend Higgins, he showed more than willingness to do all he could for us in other ways. I don't know what he suspected about our trip but he knew that, though contemplating no illegal enterprise, we wished our chartering of the *Mary Kearney* and our departure to be kept as secret as possible. The schooner was to be outfitted where she lay, and we were to sail from Barnaby's wharf. All this, as Higgins said, was common enough in the trade of the islands, ships trying to beat rivals to favorable markets. "I told him about Bill Harpey and Roger," added Higgins, "though, of course, I didn't say anythin' about the real reason we was so anxious to slip 'em. If they're in Frisco, Barnaby may hear o' it; for even if they took other names, he knows 'em by sight. They'll get no change out o' him if they come askin' questions about the *Mary Kearney*. She'll be ready to sail in a couple o' nights from now and we'll slip out on the first o' the ebb."

CHAPTER XIV.

WE HEAR AGAIN FROM HARPEY.

NATURALLY Adams and I had divergent interests and on the final day, having completed the rest of our personal purchases, we set out to take our last chance of indulging them. He wanted to visit the art institute, I the public library

which I had heard was noted for Macauley's collection of English parliamentary papers and a unique collection of sixteenth-century literature.

Accordingly we parted at the corner of California and Powell Streets, and so absorbed did I become ultimately in the library's treasures that the time passed unheeded.

It was growing dark when I finally left and, hurrying homeward, remembered that I had never called at the post office. Of course all the odds were against there being a letter for me at the general delivery; none but Hemingway knew this temporary address and he wouldn't have had time to go through my long novel. On the other hand such experienced editors are wonderfully quick and skillful readers and, with what seems the most cursory inspection, can winnow the chaff from the wheat. If Hemingway had had the opportunity to see the manuscript at all he had had time to know something of its surpassing value; nor would he lose time writing me about it. His praise was always as prompt and unstinted as his condemnation, he being no subscriber to the general tomblike silence of publishers.

I hurried back to Market Street and it was well I had decided to do so for two letters were handed me by the clerk. One envelope bore the familiar name of Hemingway's firm, the other the no-less-familiar writing of my father. How had he known where I was? Obviously, receiving my farewell message and knowing the publishing firm that handled practically all my stuff, he had got the address from them. But reputable publishing houses don't give addresses of their authors to all who may inquire; they will undertake to forward letters but that is all. To secure it my father would have to state his relationship to me, and I wondered what Hemingway thought when he learned I was the son of Broke the multimillionaire. Well, I couldn't help that now, and perhaps he wouldn't hold it against me.

Here at least were two letters that, apart from present hurry, could wait to be read later, and for very different reasons. My father could have nothing pleasant to say; it would be full of the usual sarcasm and probably abuse. But the reading of Hemingway's I should postpone as one postpones a great treat, enhancing its enjoyment by anticipation. Until the proper time came for giving it the attention it deserved, I should have the pleasure of imagining all the flattering things Hemingway said about me.

It was quite dark by now, and so immersed was I in pleasant thought concerning the immense impending triumph of my novel, that I succeeded in losing my way, unfamiliar enough at best. A nice thing if I should be late and we missed what Higgins called the first of the ebb, a mysterious but evidently all-important working of nature. To hear him speak of it one might think that the tide had never conducted itself in this remarkable manner before nor would do so again; that if we didn"t take advantage of it at precisely the right moment we should be bogged at Barnaby's wharf forever.

Not being a level tract like lower Manhattan, it would require an idiot to get lost for any length of time in San Francisco. The person who thought of sticking all those lumps about the place had the right idea of signposts. I knew that one of them, Telegraph Hill, was near our rooming house and I worked round to it after my own fashion.

I WAS picturing the Hollywood industry begging me to accept thousands for the screen rights of my novel, when a dark alley near by emitted sounds of conflict and a muffled appeal for help.

The alley was no exception to the general run in the way of darkness but there was enough light to show me one man being attacked by two. Of course he might have been the instigator of the trouble, but I didn't stop to inquire.

It was quite a merry affair while it lasted, for a third man had materialized and joined in against us. My unknown friend was a doughty warrior nor did he remain unknown for long. Nobody could swear and fight like that but James Adams

and it was indeed he. Having had so much experience against each other we make quite a good combination in these involved affairs and, in this instance at least, it proved a bit too good for the opposition. They soon legged it out the alley and up the street, leaving us with no worse than a few lumps and bruises.

"What the Harry are you doing here?" was Adams' first reproving query. "You should have been home long ago. Me? Oh, my watch stopped and so did the Institute clock. I'd no idea of the time. No, I wasn't mooning about as usual. Anyway, as I passed that alley some Christian soul stepped out and let me have it on the head."

"There's nothing like solid ivory, James. I heard you yell for help——"

"Me? Not much! You heard one of those puny crooks. I could have eaten the two of 'em after my head cleared a bit. You ought to know better than to step into a mess like that. If I hadn't been there—— You have me lying awake nights looking after you. However," he condescended, "you gave that fellow the knee in great style. I'll say you can be a fine dirty fighter."

"That's what comes from training with you."

Our quarters proved to be near at hand and we found Poynter and Higgins in a great state, it transpiring that they had been about to go out and look for us. Both of us must have been a sight—I know that Adams was, now that I saw him clearly for the first time—judging by their look of astonishment.

"What did I tell you?" snapped Poynter when we had related our tale. "Haven't I been warning you to get home before dark? I knew something like this would happen, and it's only a miracle you escaped. There are thugs round here who'd cut your throat cheerfully for a nickel."

"It's Bill Harpey's work or I'm a Dutchman," said Higgins, "the same being that I heard for a fact to-day that he's here. Barnaby himself seen the big slop He's been dickerin' for a ship too."

"It's quite probable," I said, having thought the matter over, "that they meant to bag us both, not knowing which had the map. That alley's on the route we always take, but I lost my way and came into the neighborhood from a different quarter. But though it was too dark to be sure, I don't think any of those men was Harpey himself."

"Don't have to be, not when he can get others to turn the trick," growled Higgins. "We don't know how many swipes he's got standin' in with him, but if he's after a ship then he's got a crew—the sort o' dock wallopers he always picks. The sooner and quieter we hit Tiburon the better. Might have got killed or ruined everythin', to say nothin' o' missin' the first o' the ebb, and all through not heedin' orders." The honest sailorman was evidently seriously annoyed with us for the first time, nor can I say that he wasn't perfectly justified.

It would appear that the more preparations one makes to meet trouble, the less are they required. Such trouble as we had experienced came when least expected, and now when we were ready for anything further that Harpey might attempt, nothing happened. It reminded me of the child's query to the motoring parent: "Daddy, why do you always blow the horn when there's nothing round the corner?" No doubt the obvious answer, in our case as in that, was that our precautions prevented trouble.

At all events, we went off finally like a damp firecracker, the *Mary Kearney* embracing the beloved first of the ebb and, aided also by a gentle offshore wind, rounding Bluff Point and so into Raccoon Strait and past quarantine on Angel Island. Higgins himself was at the wheel, Poynter by his side, and as we passed Lime Point he waved a hand at the lights of San Francisco away to port. "Slipped him, by the hokey!" he exclaimed exultantly, referring evidently to Harpey. "Now stay there, you big swipe, and rot!"

Another couple of miles and Bonita Point was safely astern as Poynter had often wished. And so we passed out the

Golden Gate to meet the great Pacific. Our venture had begun in earnest.

Of Higgins' seamanship there could be no question; it didn't require any knowledge of the subject to understand that, in such darkness, none but an expert could have so handled the *Mary Kearney*. And even Poynter, now at the helm, seemed an expert too. Of course he couldn't possess Higgins' intimate knowledge of the currents and channels, and he was merely obeying the other's directions, but he spun the wheel as though it were the most familiar object in life. Assuredly he had come into his rightful heritage. In blue-flannel shirt and peaked cap on the back of his golden head, his fine body swaying in harmony to the lift and dip of the deck, he looked the picture of a deep-water sailorman as he stood there under the stars. I thought of the "Hymn to Apollo:"

> God of the golden bow,
> And of the golden lyre,
> And of the golden hair,
> And of the golden fire——

Adams and I felt very much out of it; now indeed we were the sleeping partners, and these two active ones had no attention to spare us. Everybody seemed to have a job, and to know how to do it, and so we found a spot on the main hatch, filled our pipes and prepared to enjoy our leisure. After all, there's an advantage in ignorance. It wasn't our fault if we couldn't turn in and work.

CHAPTER XV.

SOME SURPRISES.

HAVE you ever been seasick? I don't mean the common or garden variety, or even the virulent form that's temporary, but the terrible protracted ailment peculiar to Adams and me. We held the joint record for the A. E. F., a remarkable achievement of its kind, but we beat it easily aboard the *Mary Kearney* without half trying.

Seasickness such as ours, is a far more serious thing than is popularly supposed. I've known people to die from it, and they've been the lucky ones. To you who may be happily immune, or sensible enough never to leave dry land, let me state that Adams and I were utterly unable to leave our cabin for the best, or worst, part of five days. We could keep absolutely nothing on our stomachs but the blankets.

An ocean liner can offer certain palliatives but the *Mary Kearney* had none. To lie there in that confined cabin and listen to the slatting of the sails and the creaking of every rib in her poor old body; to smell the awful smells that poured from the galley—— We swore that our first sacred duty, if we survived, would be to strangle the cook, Ebenezer George Washington Brown, and boil him in the grease he loved so well.

And why is seasickness considered so funny by those who are immune? If one happens to be nauseated on land nobody ever thinks of laughing, except those profound jokers who could even see the hidden humor in a Russian massacre. But on the sea the whole thing is transformed by some mysterious process and the sufferer is regarded, not only as a universal joke, but something of a disgrace to humanity and a malingerer to boot. You've no right to be sick, you're not half so sick as you think you are, and anyway it doesn't matter in the least. You ought to know how funny you look and laugh accordingly.

Our partners were no exception to the general rule and they awoke a resentment within us which, I think, was never wholly expunged. Perhaps we were jealous of Poynter, only too conscious of the sorry figures we cut especially in comparison with him. At the same time, had our respective positions been reversed, I am sure we should have acted with more consideration. And even admitting that we saw him through jaundiced eyes, physical and mental, it seemed to me that he was coarsening in thought, speech and manner. At all events when Higgins capped their remarks by offering, as a sure cure for our ailment, the piece of fat pork and string of which Adams had once

spoken so lightly, we bolted the door and endured the rest of our misery alone.

IT was toward evening of the fifth day that we first appeared on deck, feeling much like criminals released from the prison hospital. We had found our sea legs at last and, though very wabbly, were ready in due time to look even fat pork in the face. There was simply nothing left in us to be sick.

The schooner, under a cloud of canvas, was bowling over a sapphire sea into the eye of the westering sun, and the warm but invigorating breeze would have put new life into a corpse. Here indeed was a scene, made familiar to us by brush and pen, that came up to all our expectations and atoned for the nightmare that was past.

The *Mary Kearney* was a topsail schooner—in my ignorance I had thought all schooners such until Higgins explained that the name was applied only to those with a "jackass" rig, this meaning that the foremast topsail was square—and it was the first time we had really seen her since our one and only inspection at Barnaby's wharf. I must say that we were now agreeably surprised, the "taste o' paint and tar" having materially improved her appearance. One could almost believe that she really had started life as a yacht.

It was also the first time we had seen any of the crew, apart from the gangling lout who masqueraded as cabin steward, and here there was also a surprise. From such specimens as we now glimpsed I could only surmise that Higgins had been grossly deceived regarding their virtues, or that these virtues were the kind that are deeply imbedded in a man's heart. Judging solely by externals, which I knew to be no judgment at all, I should have said they merited Higgins' opprobrious epithets of "slop" and "swipe."

The man whom we found at the wheel, as we came round expecting to see Poynter or Higgins, was a particularly choice specimen. I have seldom seen an uglier, and certainly never a dirtier. He had only one eye, and a seamed sunken saffron face sprouted gray bristles like an angry porcupine. Amid that foliage I wondered how he could locate his mouth—until I saw it. A cadaverous stooping figure, he seemed more appropriate to an old man's home, but he was evidently tough as a string of rawhide. His toothless gums, seemingly hard as whalebone, munched tobacco, the juice of which he shot seaward at intervals, not always with success. When not putting down this shrapnel barrage, which burst on deck or rail, he hummed the tune of "Blow the Man. Down."

We learned later that this venerable gentleman, Benjamin Sweet by name, was the bos'n, and that "Blow the Man Down" was obviously the only song he knew or ever had known. I could imagine him learning it far back in the mists of antiquity, perhaps from the joyous Brethren of the Coast as they harried the Spanish Main. He looked like a reformed pirate and I'm sure his grandfather sailed with Morgan.

Mr. Sweet, humming and spitting industriously, paid us no more attention than if he had been stone blind as we went to the taffrail where the brass wheel of a patent log was spinning. Adams became so interested in trying to discover how the contraption worked that he almost fell overboard. He certainly would have done so had I not grabbed him by the legs and yanked him back over the rail. He seemed quite angry about it.

"It's nothing to do with the log, you fool!" he exclaimed heatedly. "I wanted to see our name. It's been painted out, changed to the *Julia* something. I tell you it has. Take a look yourself. You'll be able to get over farther than I."

So I hung over the counter, while he held my legs, and there sure enough was the name *Julia Bateman.* Nor was that all; the port of San Francisco had been replaced by San Diego.

POYNTER appeared at this moment and asked if we were trying suicide or was our seasickness over. "Oh, yes, the name's changed and the port too," he said. "You'd have known before, of

course, if you'd been able to take an interest in anything. After your experience with Harpey's gang that night Higgins did it the last thing before sailing. Of course the next morning we spoke several ships but they can only say we're the *Julia Bateman* out of San Diego. Though Harpey may suspect, we needn't give him any more absolute information than we can help."

"You mean he'll follow us?"

Poynter removed his pipe and spat thoughtfully, then wiped a five-day beard stubble with the back of a grimy hand. "Higgins says yes, and he knows the blighter best. In fact we've been on the lookout for him; for all we know, he may have cleared before us, meaning to wait outside and trail us across. But he'll hear of no craft called the *Mary Kearney,* and I guess we can show a clean pair of heels to him."

He hauled in the log, an eye on the dial. "Twelve knots. Not so dusty, boys, all considered. Ain't had to start the kicker either. At this rate we'll raise Honolulu in jig time. Got to put in for water, fruit and greens. Pity you haven't been able to sample the grub but you'll get square now. Feeling pretty good again, eh? That smoke, Brown, is certainly some cook and no mistake."

"Then, from the samples I've seen, I'd say he was about the only one of the crew that isn't a mistake," I remarked. "If they're all supposed to be hand picked, Higgins must have done it in the dark. Look at old 'Grandpa Grime' there; I suppose the birds that built in his whiskers picked his eye out?"

"Oh, you mean Ben Sweet?"

"He may have been Sweet in Noah's day," said Adams, "but he's gone a bit sour by this time."

Poynter laughed, then rubbed his blond stubble. "Well, I'll say they ain't much to look at, and Higgins may have got the worst of the deal. As I've said before, and as you know yourself, he's a bit too trusting. At the same time, if he picked carefully, he hadn't such a choice to pick from. No deep-water man wants to sign on for a temporary job like this if he can get a regular berth. Nor can you go by looks in this trade. Sweet's a fine sailor and not so old as he may look, though too old for his regular job. That's how Higgins got him, and we were lucky. As for the rest—well, what some don't know I'll soon teach 'em."

"You're coming on, Poynter," said Adams. "Going to be a regular old 'Bluenose' bucko mate, eh? But about this new christening, how will it work when we get to Honolulu? Won't the port authorities examine our papers and want to know why the name's been changed?"

Poynter shrugged. "I'm asking no questions, and what we don't know won't hurt us. We can leave all that to Higgins. No, of course he won't paint in her real name again; that'd only be undoing what we've done and blaze the trail for Harpey. If he follows us he'll be bound to touch at Hawaii too."

"You mean then that Higgins will fake papers?"

"I tell you I'm asking no questions. That's his job and he'll get around it somehow. The essential point is that there's no such craft as the *Mary Kearney* until we've nabbed what we're going for."

"I don't like it," said Adams, voicing my own feelings. "You'd think we were rum running or something. It's not legal if——"

"A fine way to talk after Broke's stealing the map," laughed Poynter.

"It wasn't stealing!" I exclaimed. "I mean I was only getting my own back. At least I had some right to it, and they none. You should know that perfectly well."

"Of course I do," said Poynter, and he clapped me on the shoulder. "I only mean it was a bit irregular and you were driven to it by necessity. Well, we're still driven by necessity and it's no time to be splitting legal hairs. Whatever Higgins does, he does for the common good. There's no crime in changing a ship's name and I haven't said anything about fake papers, have I? I simply don't know; I haven't asked any questions and I don't intend

to. And don't you either. He knows how to manage these things and we don't, and he's not the man to run foul of the law. You know how honest he is, but he's no fool. I'd rather break the law technically a hundred times than have Harpey and his gang catch us once on that island—a place where there's no law at all."

We agreed that this was no more than common sense. But what did the crew think of the change of name? They might talk if we didn't.

"They won't," said Poynter, "because they've got nothing to talk about. They think we bought her outright from Barnaby and they were told we'd give her a new name to change the hoodoo. If later on, when we're homeward bound, we realize that after all the old name is best—well, that's our business and it won't matter then if they talk their heads off. The thing we've got to remember, if we're to get safely away with these pearls, is that we're the *Julia Bateman* out of San Diego."

"I suppose it's necessary when you look at it that way," said Adams when we were alone. "And, as he says, the whole venture's a bit irregular. Hope it doesn't become any more so. Funny how one thing leads to another. Poynter's changing, don't you think? I suppose it's reversion to type. He has certainly made good as a sailor but he's getting careless about his speech and appearance."

"Bossing a crew like this would have that tendency, I suppose. Certainly his uncle would have a hard time recognizing him now."

"Maybe we'll change too," laughed Adams. "Maybe we have already. Well, I guess I'll try and get a bit of that sea and sky on this canvas before the light goes."

So while he busied himself with brush and paint I rummaged in my pocket and brought out Hemingway's letter which I'd taken from my other suit. Now was the time to enjoy the long-deferred treat. I pitied Adams, daubing away so futilely, and I meant to speak very lightly of my great triumph.

THE letter had evidently been written before my father inquired about my address, for Hemingway made no mention of the fact. I have preserved that letter, it is one of my choicest possessions and here it is in full.

MY DEAR BROKE: The reader happened to bring me your manuscript after you left. He had thumbs down on it—and he's right. Of course I haven't been able to go through it all carefully, nor do I intend to. It is quite hopeless and nothing could change my opinion. I only wish I had known it wasn't in your usual vein and that you evidently intended it for "Randall's."

To be quite frank, the style is artificial and lifeless, the theme trite, sordid, and unspeakably dull. You have sacrificed all your originality and humor, your vitality and wholesome outlook for what is no more than a poor imitation of the French realists. There is no *story* worth the telling, even well.

Now, Broke, you are at your best in romantic adventure narrative. You have a first-rate style, and it is improving steadily. You touched some really great heights in that last story I published, and you did not strain after them, either. I think perhaps you have the wrong opinion of "highbrow" stuff and your own. Most young writers have. Like every other, there is a great deal of bunk in the writing game, false values and false honors. I don't say that you may not be another Zola some day, but certainly that day has not even dawned. Personally I do not think it is your genre at all. However, I don't want to deter you if you really think it is, neither do I want to see you at this critical stage hopelessly bogged in the morass of mistaken "literature." Such a form of expression, if it comes to you at all, will only come after long and arduous cultivation. Practice, if you must, by all means, but don't extirpate all your natural gifts nor think that such a medium is the only one worth while. In the meantime why not write a story round this mysterious trip you are taking?

Of course all this is merely my opinion, and I shall be glad to send "As a Man Soweth" to any other house you care to name, holding it until I hear from you. And as regards that thousand advance, I shall charge it against the next acceptable stuff you send in.

With kindest regards and best wishes for an enjoyable trip. Yours faithfully,

ARTHUR HEMINGWAY.

I can look back on it all now and laugh; yet, while memory lasts, I don't think I shall ever forget how I felt then. Nor can I adequately describe it. I was stag-

gered, dazed; all the superlative beauty of sea and sky was blotted out, and the seasickness I had suffered seemed as nothing in comparison with this soul sickness. A bitter black rage and mortification filled my wretched heart.

"What's the matter?" asked Adams, turning from his canvas.

"Oh, nothing," I replied, filling my pipe and pleased to note that hand and voice were quite steady. "I've had a line from Hemingway; didn't read it until now. It seems he doesn't want that masterpiece of mine; thinks it first-class tripe, in fact. I say, you've caught that coloring fine! Didn't know you were such a whale at seascapes."

Jimmie Adams wasn't deceived for a moment, however capable my acting. And, when it comes to things that matter, he is really a fearfully decent sort, a pal you can tie to.

"Damnation, Dick!" he exclaimed, coming over and squeezing my arm, his honest freckled face the picture of outraged grief. "Why, that's the finest story I ever read! Well, maybe I didn't read it all, but no matter. It was bully stuff. Hemingway must be crazy."

"And that isn't the worst of it, Jim," I continued. "I'm a thousand dollars in debt. I've put into this trip money I've no right to."

"You should worry," said Adams again. "Why, that's only a fleabite to our share of what's on that island. Well, if there shouldn't be anything, there's my Academy picture. There's no gamble about that. It will put us on easy street."

I hadn't the heart to tell him that he was due for as great a blow as I had received; greater, in fact, because it wouldn't be the verdict of one man with an ax to grind.

"No," I said, "the debt is mine, not yours. I undertook to raise it and I'll do so yet. No, you needn't try to argue about it; it's mine and I'll work it off. I'll give Hemingway the kind of stuff he appreciates and then I'll quit him so quick it'll make his head swim. I'll write a yarn round this trip of ours, have the pearl lagoon raided by Harpey and ring in the usual beautiful female in distress—all the mildewed old props that get across. I'll make Poynter the hero because you're too fat——"

What else I might have said, out of the bitterness of my heart, was stifled by the appearance of a tall sturdy figure in soiled white cap and dirty apron. Obviously it was our wonderful black chef, Ebenezer George Washington Brown, out for a breath of air before serving dinner. He stood half a dozen yards distant against the lee rail, staring out over the darkening sea and sniffing audibly, his bacon-colored countenance illuminated by the brief afterglow.

"That's funny," I said. "I think I've seen that fellow before or he reminds me of some one. By George! I believe it's Adolphus, the bell hop of The Chalfont!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SHADOW OF HARPEY.

WE said nothing of my alleged discovery until half an hour later at dinner. Hunger had set a keen edge on our appetites, but even so, neither the cooking nor food was up to our expectations. I didn't speak until the gangling lout, Subton by name, had left us with the coffee and biscuits.

Poynter was incredulous and Higgins, who had forgotten whatever little reference had been made to The Chalfont, had to have the matter explained.

"Why," said he, wiping the walrus mustache with the back of his hand as he finished the last of the coffee from his saucer, "if this is so it looks serious, the same being on account o' that fellow Ball."

"But I saw Adolphus the last time I was up there!" exclaimed Poynter. "That was after Ball had left. Yes, of course, he could have reached Frisco before us. But I don't believe it. You only saw him once, Broke, and you must be wrong."

I was quite ready to admit this. Of course amid our colored population of ten million there must be thousands and thousands of bacon-colored gentlemen who, to

the casual observer, would appear very similar.

"And it's true I only saw him once," I finished. "But it wasn't merely going up and down in the elevator, Poynter. An incident happened that day, before you arrived, that made me pay particular attention to Adolphus. Ball and I didn't tell you about it at the time and I forgot about it afterward."

I told of the little affair with Captain Tibbs, or Harpey, much to the edification of Poynter and Higgins. "And," I concluded, "there is no question that Ball was very intimate with Adolphus."

"But that would argue—unless it was all acting—that they were against Harpey," said Poynter. "Yes, of course they might try for the island on their own hook. But I saw that negro a bit oftener than you, Broke, and though I'd no occasion to notice him particularly, I'm sure you're wrong. There's a bit of resemblance—I saw that myself—but that's all."

"Let's have him in, the same being it's too serious a matter to be long in doubt about," said Higgins decisively. "Either the papers he showed me are fakes, or they ain't. And if you get a close-up of him under this lamp it may settle it. I'm a peaceable man ordinary but if that swipe has lied to me he'll wish he'd never been born." And in very methodical fashion he began to remove the broad leather belt, a truly terrible weapon with its heavy buckle and brass-studded nails.

"There mustn't be anything like that," I said.

"Why not?" demanded Higgins.

"Because I won't stand for anything brutal."

"Yes?" said Higgins mildly, still unfastening the belt. "Now you listen to me, Mr. Broke," and his mild eyes and meek manner somehow struck me for the first time as rather terrible. "Am I cap'n here or not? I'm the master o' this deck, by the say-so of you gents, and I know how to deal with swipes, the same being it ain't no time for kid gloves neither. You make dead sure that man is what he says he ain't and I'll bring the truth out o' him!"

Before I could say anything further he rang the bell and, when the gangling Subton appeared, ordered him to "Tell that sea cook to step in here at once." He still spoke mildly but it seemed to me that Subton's long and foolish face looked frightened as he went out.

THERE was tension in that cabin when the cook entered, sensed by all, if not expressed. Peter Higgins might be captain and perfectly justified out of his own experience in doing what he contemplated, yet I knew we had no intention of standing by and permitting such a thing to happen. Of course he might be only intending a bluff, yet the ways of the sea are not those of the land, he had been brought up in a hard school, and we confronted potential peril. Even an ordinarily humane man might well regard it as no more than an unpleasant but elementary and necessary duty. At best, however, it would mean a clash of authority that might have far-reaching results.

Therefore it was a great relief to me, as to all of us, no doubt, when I found that I couldn't honestly hold to the opinion I had expressed. Careful scrutiny by the light of the swinging lamp increased my doubts instead of resolving them; and Ebenezer, in evident astonishment, said that he had never been in New York, in fact had never been east of the Mississippi in "all mah bo'n days, boss." He knew no other trade than that of sea cook and he had spent practically his whole life in the coasting trade from Galveston to San Francisco. Everybody in Galveston, his birthplace, knew the George Washington Browns, he said proudly; just as everybody knew he would still have been cook on the *Lester Lowell* if she hadn't gone down off Santa Barbara. Thus what promised to be something of a tragedy, ended in something of a farce. We had to laugh at Ebenezer's idea of his social prominence, and our laugh was that of relief.

"Adolphus had a gold right eyetooth," said Poynter suddenly. "I remember that

now. It was very noticeable. Do you recollect it, Broke?"

"Yes, I do. You're right about that. And Ebenezer has hardly any teeth at all. That would settle it if nothing else."

This seemed to be the last scare, as I may phrase it, we were destined to have regarding Harpey; his shadow seemed to have lifted for good and all. For as day succeeded day, each rivaling the other as the splendid spell of fine weather held and we drove steadily southwest, no following sail or smoke appeared to break or sully the rim of the flawless blue bowl encircling us. For, in fear of such pursuit, Higgins said he was steering a course off the regular trade route. And any lingering suspicion I might have entertained regarding Ebenezer was dismissed the more I saw of him. He made no attempt to avoid Poynter or me and, indeed when off duty, appeared rather to court notice than otherwise.

These were wondrously happy days, busy for Adams and me though we took no part in the working of the ship. I had a lively consciousness of my monetary debt to Hemingway and I determined to wipe it off without loss of time. I should follow his suggestion and, utilizing only the local color afforded by our venture, and those incidents susceptible of exciting embellishment, write a novel at breakneck speed. Why trouble to prune and polish when it wasn't appreciated? A good slashing knockdown-and-drag-out adventure yarn, full of split infinitives and sudden death, would get the money.

A portable typewriter was among my baggage, for even if bent on a holiday I should have as soon thought of leaving it as I would my toothbrush, and by the time we reached Honolulu I might have hammered off my debt. Under the spur of necessity, and unhampered by thought of style and finish, I should be able to double my customary modest daily output.

ADAMS, captivated by the ever-changing beauty of the sea, was planning an ambitious program of seascapes, a hitherto unexplored field in which he had found an unexpectedly felicitous touch, and so we set up a sort of joint workroom on the quarter-deck. I soon discovered, however, that I couldn't write slovenly stuff if I tried; and, moreover, as my rancor and bitterness grew less, the disturbing thought assailed me that Hemingway really didn't publish slovenly stuff. When I thought of those who contributed to his pet magazine, its circulation and the price it paid, the new writers it had discovered, filched from Hemingway by more superficially ornate rivals; when I thought of the man himself, our frequent chats, all he had said in that letter, his really admirable personal character——

"I'm not so sure," I remarked to Adams, "that after all there mightn't be a bit of truth in what Hemingway said."

"Well, do you know," said Adams, like a true pal, "I was just thinking that myself."

"Of course I'll send the manuscript down the line, and of course he's wrong about it, but I mean I believe he's quite honest in his opinion."

"I believe he is," agreed Adams.

"In fact, Jim, I was sore as a crab and I got off a whole lot I didn't mean. You'll forget I ever said it."

"Oh, sure. Said the same thing myself, after a rejection, many a time. I always say it as a matter of principle."

"And, Jim, when I come to think of it in the light of Hemingway's criticism, maybe it wasn't such an all-fired masterpiece. What's your honest opinion?"

"You won't hit me? Well, George, from what you read me my honest opinion is that it's punk. I said so all along, didn't I? Of course I don't pretend to be any judge; I only know what I like and don't like, and I certainly didn't like it. But maybe the rest was much better and you changed a lot of it."

"Maybe I didn't. Somehow things look different at this distance, and in this glorious sun and air. I'm not so sure that I'll bother about sending the manuscript down the line.

"Why, as it is," I said to Adams, "nobody will believe this trip is fact. And, for

that reason, many a true story has had to masquerade as fiction. Anyway what I began in a spirit of contempt has ended by gripping me in earnest. I'm going to write as simply and plainly as possible a true account of this trip and all that led up to it. I'll change nothing but the names."

"And how is it going to end?"

"We don't know, do we? That's the beauty of it. It will keep me guessing like the reader. If it turns out too flat I can change it. But so far as it has gone I'm going to stick to the truth, and it will take me all my time to get it on paper to date."

"You'll have to change the rest of it," said Adams. "Either we find a fortune on that island or we don't—which is no more or less than the reader will expect. An anticlimax either way. It's too much to hope that Harpey will supply an exciting finish."

"There may be quite enough interest, not merely in the finding or nonfinding of those pearls, but the effect of success or failure on us four partners. How shall we react under it?"

"There's something in that," he conceded. "It's generally success, not failure, that shows a man up. Well, remember to tell the truth about me. Reveal me as a strong silent character and, for Heaven's sake, don't call me fat. I'm not, you know; merely a bit luscious. In short, my dear Boswell, do me simple justice and make me the hero of the piece."

"That remains to be seen. I'm afraid there aren't going to be any heroes, just as there aren't any villains. Even Harpey's too much of a shadow to be a real villain; but perhaps he'll materialize later."

"If he doesn't," said Adams, "you'll have to invent one. I never heard of a story minus a hero and villain."

AND so I set myself to write all that you've read, while Adams painted, and thus we kept hard at work as ever we had done, which perhaps is the best sort of holiday after all. And, our daily stint finished, we watched, in the cool of the evening, Ebenezer dance a breakdown while Ben Sweet wrestled with a most unmelodious accordion. Or we played cribbage with Poynter or Higgins, yarned about the pearls, or lay on the main hatch smoking and staring up at the wonderful stars.

The change we had noticed in Poynter seemed to be arrested, and by this I don't refer only to the merely physical. For that matter we had all changed outwardly and, apart from health, not for the best. It is always so when a woman isn't around and the life is primitive enough.

Undoubtedly Higgins was the worst offender because the honest sailorman had so few social graces to lose. His sleeve or tattooed forearm served him as combination napkin and handkerchief; he vied with the veteran Sweet as the champion tobacco squirter; he had long since abandoned all connection with a razor; and he was getting on most distant terms with soap and water. In fact outwardly he had become just as tough a little sea terrier as one would care to meet, and this despite his mild eyes and meek voice. Indeed the latter characteristics seemed, by contrast, to make the rest more pungent.

On the other hand Poynter no longer lapsed into those crudities of speech, natural to Higgins but foreign to him, which we had first noticed. And at table he didn't transgress the laws of his caste. His appearance was also smarter; his little blond beard was trimmed carefully and altogether he was pleasingly different from the raffish figure who had explained that day why the name of the *Mary Kearney* had been changed His swagger, his suggestion of amused superiority, had gone also and he was his old self, the nephew of Phineas Poynter masquerading as a sailor, not a castback, the descendant of some questionable old sea rover. It was only natural that, finding himself on his beloved element, after kicking over the traces of convention and routine, he should have gone to the other extreme, then checked when, his spirits vented, he felt the pull of heritage and training.

Perhaps also the crew had something to

do with it for his remark that looks don't go for much in the seafaring trade, was being proved right. In spite of their unsavory appearance they were a docile, good-natured lot, willing and obliging, and I spent many an agreeable hour among them. The piratical-looking old bos'n in particular was a kindly soul with a love for cats and canaries. He had a dry humor of his own, testified by a sly twinkle in his solitary eye, and he told me a good deal about his life in the China trade and the home he had made for his widowed sister in the suburbs of Oakland To cap it all it seemed he was a vestryman in the little local Episcopal church and was studying to take a Bible class on his return.

IN short I was acutely disappointed in Sweet and his mates; they were sheep in wolves' clothing. Certainly there was no trouble of any kind with them, and we never heard Higgins nor Poynter follow an order with even the mildest threat or epithet. Higgins said that the fine feeding had much to do with their good humor, yet neither Adams nor I found any improvement on our first meal. But, as by now, we could have digested a horse, and as Poynter found no fault with the menu, we concluded that ship's fare wasn't to be judged by house-fare standards—no, nor the cooking either. But if it was plain and greasy, there was enough of it to satisfy our raging appetite, and that was the main thing.

At length there came a day when Higgins told us that the two-thousand-mile trip—the first and shortest leg of our journey—was almost over and that, all continuing well, we should sight the Sandwiches the following morning. He used this old name and at first, my thoughts being ever on food, I thought it a welcome addition to our menu.

Toward evening of that same day we sighted a sail and Poynter and Higgins spent a long time studying it through a big telescope. We had a squint through the glass and I saw that it was a full-rigged ship, and a very beautiful sight she looked coming up over the rim of the sea on a course almost parallel with our own But Higgins, judging from his expression as he reclaimed the glass from me, evidently saw nothing beautiful about her.

"He thinks it may be Harpey," explained Poynter with a worried expression.

"Why?"

"Because he knows a ship as you know a person. He can't be sure at this distance."

"But if that's Harpey's ship, *The Faithful Friend,* where did she come from?" asked Adams.

"She ain't," said Higgins, lowering the glass. "She was a two-masted schooner like us, the same being there ain't much else used in the islands. But the point is this, gents: I got an eye and memory for ships and a full-rigged one like her rounded Rincon Point the night we cleared from Tiburon. Aye, mebbe it was too dark for you to notice her particular, but not me. And that ain't all, the same being it ain't the first time, by no manner o' means, we've sighted her. That same night she hung on our quarter and we seen her off an' on for a week and more. To you she was only a sail on the horizon, if you seen her at all, but not to Poynter nor me.

"Same old trick, takin' in sail," said Higgins, closing the telescope with a snap. "That settles it to my mind."

"Looks bad," admitted Poynter, pulling his blond beard.

"She's Harpey or I'm a Dutchman," said Higgins, spitting copiously. "We give him the slip and he ain't takin' no more chances. He'll stand in during the night. Mebbe he'll board us. His crew's twice ourn and more."

"Board us!" I exclaimed.

"And why not?" said Higgins. "Don't he know we're bound to have the map somewheres on us?"

"But that would be rank piracy!"

"And what else was you expectin' from Bill Harpey?" asked Higgins in evident astonishment. "Ain't I told you the sort he is, and ain't you had proof o' it al-

ready? What's the difference between knockin' us over the head here or in New York or Frisco? What's the difference between sea thievin' and land thievin'?"

"The difference is one of Uncle Sam's sea cops," said Poynter. "We're too near Honolulu and Hilo, Higgins. It would take time, and there's no dark alley here to dodge up. A gunboat would get him sooner or later."

"Aye, you've said it," nodded Higgins. "Harpey's only reckless when he has to be. But we're going where sea cops are mighty scarce and he knows it; none better. He'll either trail us to the island or board us south o' the Gilberts."

"Trail us, I should say," remarked Poynter.

"Aye," said Higgins, "he'll let us do all the work and then step in. That's Harpey all over. He don't have to take risks on this job. He thinks he's got the legs o' us and that he can juke round until we make our last landfall, playin' with us like a cat and mouse. But that's where he makes his little mistake. He don't know we've got a hefty kicker because I ain't never aired it while he was around, the same being I'd a good reason why."

"What's your plan?" asked Poynter curiously.

"Why, just this," said Higgins. "We give the Sandwiches the go by and, when the light breaks to-morrow, he'll have a helluva job findin' us. We hold to our course till it's dark and then, with doused lights, let our old kicker rip, crowd on every stitch and set a course round Mauna Loa. There ain't no reason for puttin' in at Honolulu anyway; I only give it out for Harpey to hear."

"And you never even told *me!*" exclaimed Poynter. "You sly old dog! A trap, eh?"

"Aye, a trap," nodded Higgins complacently. "No, I wasn't even tellin' my mate, the same being it mightn't have caught nothin'. But it has and Harpey'll lay off Honolulu waitin' for us to come out. Well, let him lay, says I, and the longer the better."

CHAPTER XVII.

SOME FURTHER HAPPENINGS.

HIGGINS' adroit plan succeeded admirably and the next day, with Mauna Loa a dull blur astern, there wasn't a sign of the ghostly full-rigged ship that had haunted us. Again the shadow had been lifted; again we had given Harpey the slip and this time, we felt, for good.

"For," said Higgins with lively satisfaction, "the end o' the Sandwiches is now twixt him and us, and by the time he makes up his mind to see why we ain't comin' out, we'll have put a fine stretch o' blue behind us."

"But he'll follow," I said.

"Follow where?" grinned Higgins. "He ain't got no idea where the island is; she may lie in the Low Archipelago or Sulu Sea for all he knows. His only chance was not to lose contact with us; he's lost it now and he won't have another chance. We could even dodge him till doomsday among the islands if we had to. No, we've seen the last o' him and I led him on just for the sport o' it. He's had his little trip to the Sandwiches for nothin' and I guess he's a bit out o' pocket and temper."

We soon changed our course—Poynter marked it on my pocket map for me—crossing the regular trade route between Nygaloa and Honolulu and striking a line that would take us between the Gilberts and Ellice. And here in Central Polynesia we made our first landfall, putting in at one of the small islands. All this may sound very nautical and complicated but it is surprising how, in the proper environment, one can acquire a knowledge of such matters. And from the data I have given you you can trace our course as easily as did I, thanks to Poynter's instructions. I was feeling quite a seasoned navigator and daily, when the log was taken, I marked off our course in red ink on the map I had bought for the purpose. Adams, having no mathematical bent nor interest in navigation, rather scoffed at my efforts but I persevered.

The island where we touched, as Poyn-

ter informed me and showed me on my map, was called Barber. We put in for fresh water and such native produce as breadfruit, mango, and taro which I had read a great deal about but never tasted. And I may say here that, to me at least, they taste far better in print. But perhaps the Ritz, as represented by Ebenezer George Washington Brown, doesn't know the art of serving them.

Naturally Adams and I wished to go ashore and explore but Higgins wouldn't hear of it. For all his certainty about Harpey he wasn't taking any chances, saying we must be ready to weigh anchor at a moment's notice and that something might happen to us ashore to delay our departure.

"But what sort of trouble could we get into?" we protested.

"The same you find everywhere and mostly here—women and drink," he retorted. "I ain't thinkin' of you two so much as the hands. They're spoilin' for a spree, the same being it's only natural, and if you went ashore there's no reason why they shouldn't too. I ain't gonna run the chance of sailin' short handed, of havin' 'em pickled here in palm toddy or settin' up housekeepin'. No, sir, there ain't gonna be no shore leave for nobody."

"He's entirely right," said Poynter emphatically when we aired our grievance. "He knows the lure of these islands and you don't. We've come this far without any trouble and we needn't court it now. Desertion is the rule rather than the exception in these latitudes, the crew must be kept in hand and we needn't make Higgins' job any harder."

VIEWED in that light there was no answer, so we didn't set foot on Barber either. Higgins was the only one to go ashore for a brief and necessary visit. The crew grumbled a bit but that was all. Natives came alongside in bumboats and canoes, we broke out some cases of trade goods and a brisk market started in the waist. It was diamond cut diamond between Higgins and Poynter—not forgetting Adams—and these guileless-looking children of the sun, and I doubt if the imported bolts of gaudy calico and glass beads had much the better of the breadfruit and taro. The good old game of despoiling the Egyptians is not what it used to be even in Polynesia, and the native has learned from his white brother more than such things as the Good Book and bad gin.

"But how about getting divers here?" I asked Higgins as our brief stay over, we prepared to leave Barber.

"And have 'em eatin' up pay and grub from here to the island? Not much! Sure we'll need 'em—if there *is* a pearl lagoon—but time enough when we get there."

"But it must be either pearls or guano."

"Or nothin'," said Higgins, whose optimism seemed to be lessening the nearer we approached our goal. "I told you from the start it was all a gamble, and I'll believe the stuff's there when I see it. If it's pearl shell we can get all the divers we want down around there. Me, I can do a little fancy divin' myself, enough to find out, the same being if there are any beds at all, o' course. All oysters ain't pearl, you know——" And he launched into an informative talk, one of many, on the pearl oyster. "Rottin', o' course, is the easiest," he wound up, "but it'll all depend upon the extent and value o' the shell."

No doubt you have wondered why, during all this time, I have made no mention of my father's letter. The answer, I'm ashamed to say, is that I had never read it. Indeed, if I am to stick to truth in this narrative, I must confess I'd forgotten all about it. We had long since taken to duck and drill, or preferably no coat at all, and the one I had worn that last day in San Francisco was at the bottom of my locker. I had removed Hemingway's letter from it, but not my father's, and thus there was no visible reminder of it. But one day, about a week after leaving Barber, a chance remark of Adams' jogged my memory and, telling him of my neglect, I went down to our cabin and got the letter.

Sight of the well-remembered writing

stirred me as it had never done before. Perhaps I was a bit homesick, the novelty of our trip having worn thin, or perhaps I was secretly disturbed by thoughts I hadn't communicated even to Adams. For one thing it seemed to me, if not to him, that Poynter was changing again, slowly but surely relapsing into his former coarseness of speech and manner. As for Higgins, he had grown daily more uncouth and dictatorial, more inclined to assert his authority as captain, even in trivial matters, against Adams and me. Perhaps the truth was we were getting a bit on one another's nerves, what with the heat, the monotony, and being so much together. Adams too seemed to have revived something of his old antagonism toward Poynter and, all in all, there had been a distinct lack of harmony since leaving Barber. To mention but one incident, Adams criticized the food, which certainly wasn't improving, and Poynter had suggested that there would be less time for faultfinding if one were helping to work the ship. There was truth, no doubt, on both sides.

PERHAPS also the ignominious failure of my masterpiece had knocked a bit of conceit out of me, made me inclined to value my own opinion less and that of others more. At all events my father's writing seemed like a friendly hail from home and, pondering our past relations, I wondered had my conduct been all it should be. I had been so absolutely certain that my novel would be hailed instantly by everybody as a masterpiece; might I not be equally mistaken regarding my father's lack of sympathy and understanding? How about my own, and the cocksureness and even callousness of youth? Lack of thought, I hope, rather than lack of heart. He had always been so good to me. Had I ever tried to understand his viewpoint? He had built up, unaided, a great business; he loved it as I loved the profession I had chosen. He had educated me, trained me to fill his shoes; and not only had I refused but I had, in a sense, sneered at those shoes. What return had I given for all that he had done for me? He must be lonely, though he never complained. He had been true to my mother's memory——

Adams came in as I was half through the letter.

"I feel pretty rotten, Jim," I said. "I should have hunted up my father that day, said good-by in person and told him where I was going. He's cut up about it though he doesn't say so. He got the San Francisco address from Hemingway. What's the matter?" Glancing up for the first time, the open letter on my knee, I had seen Adams' expression.

"Something's happened," he said calmly, squatting on the opposite bunk.

"Hope you haven't bashed Poynter?"

"No, it has nothing to do with him. I've made an interesting discovery. After you'd gone I went round to the galley for a paint rag and, in these rubber shoes, Ebenezer didn't hear me. He was cleaning his teeth—an upper set. They were in his hand and he was polishing the gold one lovingly."

"What! You mean they're false?"

"What else could I mean? It's not a whole upper set; it's bridge work, connecting that gap in his upper jaw. The highest art in dentures these days is to have a fake within a fake, have one tooth obviously filled or crowned so as to make the others look the more genuine."

"The devil!" I said. "Then I was right, after all, and he's Adolphus of The Chalfont!"

"So it would appear, my friend. Obviously he's very proud of those teeth and, when he thought himself alone, couldn't resist the temptation of admiring them. It's characteristic of his race. It must have gone to his heart to go without them so that you wouldn't recognize him."

"What fools Poynter and I were not to think of them being false!" I exclaimed. "Somehow you never connect a negro with false teeth. And I never thought of it either in connection with that gold one. It makes all the difference in the world, identifies him completely. Does he know you saw him, and have you said anything to Poynter or Higgins?"

"No, I came straight here to talk it over with you first. I gave him every chance to slip the plate back in his pocket, after I'd dodged away and let him hear me coming. But what's the matter?"

"I want to read you something," I said in a rather strangled voice as I got up and locked the door. "Pay attention. My father writes toward the end: 'I don't understand how you could have met Hector Poynter, or how he can be actively concerned in this investment, as you said, when he hasn't been in town for a month and more——"

"Eh, what's that?"

"Listen, will you? He continues: 'I made it my business to reopen an old acquaintance and lunch with Phineas Poynter to-day. He assured me that his nephew—he has only one, you know—has been in Florida for over a month fighting a big traction case and that he won't be home for some time. *There is absolutely no doubt about this,* and I have seen letters that Hector wrote his uncle about the case. Perhaps you've been pulling my leg. If so, all right; if not, I'm sending you this information to the only address I know.' "

THERE was a long silence; I looked at Adams, Adams looked at me. For the moment there seemed nothing to say.

"Very nice," remarked Adams at length. "I understand now why I never really took to Poynter—or whatever his right name is. But I was under the impression, my dear boy, that you knew all about him."

"I know all about Hector Poynter and it never entered my head that this—this impostor wasn't he."

"No, of course it wouldn't. Entirely characteristic."

"Well, what about yourself? Didn't you tell me *you* had looked him up?"

"Also entirely characteristic, I'm afraid," sighed Adams. "It's becoming too painfully obvious that we aren't business men. Yes, I looked Hector Poynter up and found his private life O. K. My object was to find out the sort of character he was out of office hours, not to prove if this fellow *was* Poynter. That never entered my head either. And nobody told me he was in Florida because they evidently took it for granted that I knew. I've more excuse than you for I understood, of course, that you knew him by sight."

"I never said I did."

"You never said you didn't. Your folks and his moved in the same circles and I took it for granted, especially when you said you knew all about him."

"Well, it's no use kicking ourselves now, Jim. I know it's all my fault. But everything conspired to fool me. You see, because I didn't want him to know who I really was, I never spoke of people and things that both of us would be supposed to know. He still thinks, of course, that I'm a poor devil of a writer with no connections. That's the irony of it; by a mere natural question or two I could so easily have discovered him to be an impostor. Also, if I had only read this letter when I got it, or even before we had lost touch with civilization—but what's the use? It looks as if we were in pretty deep water, Jim, and all through my gullibility. I wouldn't mind so much if I hadn't roped you into it too."

"Piffle," said Adams. "We're better in it together and it isn't the first jam we've been in by a long shot. And I contributed my share of the gullibility."

"No, you didn't. You were suspicious from the first but I blanketed all your efforts. If this fellow isn't Poynter, who is he? You realize, of course, that if he has lied in one thing—and there's no question of that now—that he has probably lied in a good many more."

Adams nodded and rolled a cigarette. "If Poynter isn't Poynter, then Higgins probably isn't Higgins, just as Ebenezer isn't Ebenezer."

"Nor Ben Sweet a vestryman and Bible student," I snorted. "Nor the whole darn crew anything but the scum they look. What do we actually know about Higgins? Nothing but what Poynter's alleged agents were supposed to have looked up in

Chicago. By George! it opens up such an appalling vista of lies that you don't know where to begin!"

"Why, at the beginning," said Adams. "It doesn't matter who they really are, what their right names and antecedents may be; they've got what they went after —the knowledge and location of this island we're bound for. They got that map by one means if they couldn't get it by another. They're crooks, and there's no question that at least Poynter, Higgins, and that nigger are all in cahoots."

"You even think there's no such person as Bill Harpey?"

"Well, like the famous Mrs. Harris, he would have proved a very useful invention. I don't know; such a web as we've been caught in isn't to be disentangled all at once. It's hard to believe there's no such person; we've come to believe in him as kids believe in Santa Claus. And, whatever his name, there's no question that there's such a person as Captain Tibbs. You saw him if I didn't. Is he one of the gang? If Poynter and Higgins aren't two of the slickest con men that ever sold a sucker Central Park, then they're missed their true vocation. I'll say that. They're artists, even granting that we're the easiest sort of come-ons."

"Were, Jim, not are. This game's beginning where we're concerned. The next move is up to us. What is it to be?"

A step sounded on deck, coming toward the cabin, and we both recognized it as Poynter's.

Adams got up quietly and unlocked the door. "For the present, nothing," he whispered. "Don't let them see by so much as a look that we know anything. We've got to talk to the bottom of this thing, find out just where we stand and what it all means."

CHAPTER XVIII.

DEEP WATER.

WHEN you have lived intimately with men, as had we with Poynter and Higgins, apparently sharing the same hopes and fears and united by a common enterprise, and then discover suddenly that they are in reality utter strangers and your enemies to boot, the effect is so tremendous as to beggar description. A sense of utter unreality possessed me as though I had discovered the sea on which we sailed to be made of glass.

Adams and I had no opportunity of resuming our analyzation of the situation until we were again in our cabin for the night. He had pointed out the danger of discussing it anywhere else, not only the risk of being overheard when we fancied ourselves alone, but the courting of suspicion by being seen in close confabulation. And now he took me to task for my behavior at dinner. "No wonder," he said, "that Poynter asked if you were going to be seasick again. You were as dumb as a clam."

"I'd so much bottled down, Jim, that I was afraid to let go the cork on any subject. I'm not much of a hand at pretending, and when I looked at those two prize liars and thought—— However, let's talk it out and see what it all comes to."

"Well," said Adams, squatting beside me on my bunk, to converse the better in an undertone, "we've had time to do some thinking and I guess we've done some. You're better at putting thoughts into words and doping out tricky plots—it's your trade—so suppose you give me your idea of the true story of this trip. I'll ask anything I don't understand."

So I agreed, and my synopsis began as follows: Poynter had imposed on Ball, the superintendent of The Chalfont, as he had imposed on us. Poynter and Higgins were at least two of the men whom Simon Greenlees had been dodging, and probably Higgins was the man whom Miss Stringer saw with him in the library. Adolphus was their confederate; either he had been bribed or they had known him before. At all events they had some knowledge of Greenlees' secret and Poynter, with the connivance of Adolphus, visited the flat oftener than Ball knew.

"Hold on," said Adams at this point. "If Greenlees knew Poynter of old and had reason to fear him, why, after taking

such precautions against visitors, did he admit him?"

"There are two answers to that; he mayn't have known him of old or, if he did, he couldn't afford to show hostility."

"I see. They knew something to his detriment, something connected with this pearl lagoon?"

"Yes. He couldn't afford to defy them but—and we've Ball's evidence for this—he had given up his lease because he meant to try and dodge them again. We have only Poynter's word for it that he knew Greenlees for a month before the other's death. As a matter of fact it may have been Poynter whom Greenlees saw in the library. It seems probable that Greenlees wasn't sure how much they knew. The situation, we may say, was this: Poynter didn't know the location of the treasure, and Greenlees was receiving as a visitor a man whom he had reason to fear and suspect. We can even imagine that nothing was ever said about the pearl lagoon, that it was a sort of game in the dark. And Greenlees was suddenly killed."

I proceeded to point out how, with the connivance of Adolphus, it might well have been murder, Poynter arriving and departing without the knowledge of Ball. Under the circumstances, who could say that Greenlees hadn't been pushed into the elevator shaft or been the victim of a cunningly contrived "accident?"

"We may infer," I said, "that Poynter had succeeded somehow in learning about the map, that he knew of its existence even though he had no opportunity of examining it. But he didn't know that, in the meantime, Greenlees had removed it from its original hiding place—wherever that may have been—stuck it on that old envelope and put it in the library book."

"Then if he didn't know, who did?"

WHY, Captain Tibbs, the girl, or that fellow Bland. Tibbs may be Bill Harpey, and Bland 'Soapy' Roger, rival crooks after the map. No lie is so convincing as half a truth and Poynter may have told us many facts. He merely omitted to mention that Higgins and he were crooks too. At all events Poynter was unable to find the map after Greenlees' death—you must remember that there is only his word for it that he returned the book to the library—and, in order to search for it, he tells Ball that he's Greenlees' lawyer."

"Why did he take the name of Poynter and claim to be old Phineas' nephew?"

"He didn't claim to be until I asked. No doubt it hadn't entered his head until then. Poynter may be his real name. But everybody in New York has heard of Phineas Poynter, the lawyer. He asked me if I knew him and I said no; but I didn't say, of course, that my father knew him. And so Poynter, seeing the advantage of such a connection, promptly claimed old Phineas as his uncle. He didn't think that an obscure writer would ever know the contrary. I think he did it more to impress Ball than me, for at that time he didn't contemplate my continued acquaintance, perhaps. But right after that I gave him the clew he was looking for, told him about my assault and the theft of Ovid. Even if in the meantime he had learned nothing about the envelope, he would be quite clever enough to put two and two together."

I next pointed out that, if the envelope hadn't been stolen by the girl representing the rival gang, before we had learned about the map, in all probability Poynter would have got hold of it and we should have seen the last of him.

"And only for you, Jim, he would have succeeded anyway. He tried to get possession but you objected. And so failing that, and all chance of stealing it, he produces a mythical heir. You remember how he stuck out for Higgins' keeping it?"

"All very clever, the more you think of it," nodded Adams as he filled his pipe. "Those letters of Higgins—I remember now that we never saw the envelopes and postmarks. And the way he steered us off meeting Higgins at the 'office.' And then the quarrel with his 'uncle;' it gave us no excuse to visit Pine Street, and all this about Harpey helped too, kept us un-

der cover. And when a man's been disinherited by a millionaire uncle he can't be expected to finance the expedition, that's certain."

"While he's at liberty to go where he pleases," I added. "The reason Poynter learned how to handle a ship so quickly is because he'd never forgotten. The Lord only knows what he's been in his day but he never broke connection with the sea for twelve years. I'm sure of that. He's simply showing something of his true self and all the other was acting. Yes, a complete break with his 'uncle' was obligatory; they not only needed the map but our money."

"If they hadn't needed our money," I said, "they'd have cleared out after the good look they got at the map that night. For its possession isn't essential to them. They know now where the island lies and, both being experienced navigators, you may be sure they know the exact latitude and longitude—at least near enough to make no mistake. That was all they needed, and it explains why they've been content to let us keep the map."

"It explains why they made you rustle that extra thousand," said Adams. "Of course Poynter never put in a cent. He had none to put in, no more than his fare to Frisco. *We* paid for the stores and everything, just as we paid for this blasted old hooker. We never asked to see the color of Poynter's money because we aren't business men. He bluffed us with a wallet stuffed with newspaper. Even before this happened about your father's letter, and though we haven't said anything, I guess both of us had some idea how handsomely we've been done in the eye. Of course that blubber-faced blighter Barnaby was in the game, not that he has to know anything about the pearls, but that he knew we were suckers to be trimmed. And after we paid Barnaby Poynter got back enough to pay for the stores. We don't know what anything really cost and I guess we never will. But I'll bet that, besides getting off penny free, they salted by a good lump of our hard-earned cash."

"And hard borrowed too," I added. "That's the unkindest cut of all."

"It all comes from not having any practical knowledge of such things, George. That and the cursed artistic temperament —yes, and plumb laziness too. Well, we've had our experience and bought it dear as usual. The next man who can do me out of a penny will be a wonder. I wonder if there ever were two such awful suckers."

"There's one born every minute," I reminded him. "The cleverest man living can be fooled at some game, and no man living can know every game. They certainly did us up brown." And thinking of how completely we'd been taken in, I suddenly burst out laughing.

"It's not much of a laughing matter," said Adams. "Do you realize that that hammering we got in Frisco was probably arranged by our worthy partners?"

"And they couldn't hammer us before," I said, "because we held on to the bank roll. You remember how Poynter tried to have himself appointed treasurer? If he had we'd never have got as far as Frisco, never have quit New York. They had to let us come. But once the money was paid over—well, they'd have sailed without us if that ambush had succeeded. You remember how they looked that night when we turned up?"

"Yes, and as for this supposed ship that's been following us, that's a myth too," said Adams. "That was a perfectly innocent one we saw, and we've only their word for it that there was ever another. But it served as a good excuse for not putting in at Honolulu. Probably they're known in these seas and they were afraid we might learn something about them. That's why they wanted us to keep away from the docks in Frisco."

"There's also this matter of Adolphus, Jim. You see Poynter didn't know of that incident with Tibbs; or, if Adolphus told him, he didn't say I was a witness. He thought I hadn't noticed him particularly and that removing the false teeth would be precaution enough. And though I was apparently satisfied of its being a

case of mistaken identity, they may think I've lingering suspicions. In any case Honolulu has cables and wireless; it's a link with America and the world—and they want all links cut. That's why they changed the name of the *Mary Kearney*.

WHAT it all comes to is this, Jim: We're aboard the *Julia Bateman* and all trace of the *Mary Kearney* is lost. We're officered by a couple of rogues and manned, no doubt, by the same. We're bound for an island nobody knows, out of touch with civilization and no chance of renewing it. It looks very much to me, my friend, as if that island was meant to be our eternal home."

"Shouldn't be surprised, George. Maroon us or pistol us in the good old piratical style, eh?

"But why bother to lug us to the island? We aren't necessary to them. They don't really need the map, as you say, or they could get it if they liked. Why not have fed us to the sharks before this?"

"Time enough for all that when they're in safer waters. There's no necessity so long as we don't kick up a row. Perhaps they mean to maroon us. Whatever their intention, I'm quite sure they don't mean to divide the profits of this venture with us. Also it's equally obvious that they're quite certain it's pearls or guano. No doubt they know all about it."

"Well," said Adams after some further talk, "it looks as if you were right about us being in pretty deep water; but forewarned is forearmed and we've got those Colts that Poynter knows nothing about. I see now why he was so certain we wouldn't need any weapons. Darned good thing we brought them on the sly. Thanks to them and your father I guess we hold the trumps in this stacked deck. What do we do, stick 'em up and order them into the nearest port?"

"That would be the Gilberts."

"Maybe," said Adams dryly. "Do you still think that the route which Poynter so obligingly marked on your map is our real one? Why, that mayn't have been Barber we touched at—of course they wouldn't let us ashore—and this island we're bound for mayn't be anywhere near the New Hebrides or Fiji. You don't know any more about navigation than I, and that's less than nothing."

I admitted the truth of this as it was no time for continued self-deception. My precious chart might be worthless, and probably was so far as exactitude went. "At the same time," I said, "I haven't forgotten, if you have, all they tried to teach us at Princeton—providing you ever did learn anything but football. I know something about the stars. We may be a few hundred miles from where I think we are but we're going in the right direction. And I know the island is where I said it was. We'll soon cross the line and the Gilberts are the nearest port of any size."

"Well," said Adams, "we've come for pearls or guano and we mean to get our share. If we come to a show-down and dump Poynter and Higgins in the Gilberts, are we any better off? Could we get a trustworthy captain and crew? And, after this experience, would we know one when we saw one? Also how about money? We're practically broke. And what about the talk? We'd have to prove our charge, face a lot of official red tape; meanwhile some crook beach comber—and the place is full of 'em out here—might cut in ahead of us and jump our claim. We might find ourselves a lot worse off than we are. We can handle these precious partners of ours but we mightn't be able to get the whip hand of others."

And so, after further discussion, we decided to let the first overt act come from Poynter and Higgins; unknown to them we should be armed, ready and waiting for the first sign of open treachery. Or, if circumstances demanded it, we should start the ball rolling at our own convenience.

"We'll go armed night and day," said Adams as, from the bottom of his suit case he brought out our automatics. "I say, what have you done with my cartridges?"

"I didn't touch them. I gave you three boxes and kept three."

"I know you did. But mine are gone."

So were mine. We turned the cabin upside down but not a cartridge did we find. Then we sat down and looked at each other, the useless weapons in our hands.

"Deep-water men," said Adams. "Yes, we're all that. It's getting deeper and deeper too."

CHAPTER XIX.

STORM.

IN all my imaginary tales of adventure I had never conceived such a situation as that which now confronted us. We were utterly impotent; for though, even if unarmed, we might succeed in taking Poynter and Higgins by surprise, we couldn't hope to overpower the whole crew. And as regards the latter, it became increasingly plain that, whatever their knowledge of our venture, they were completely under the dominion of their officers, the latter including the bos'n, Sweet. The harmony that existed between them, and which we had so misjudged, was evidently that produced by two of the strongest and basest motives known to humanity—greed and fear.

"We needn't look for any help in that quarter," summed up Adams. "There isn't a decent sailor among them; they're nothing but dock rats and probably most of them have sailed with Higgins before. They've been laughing at us from the start, known all along that we were the goats."

"There's Subton," I suggested. "He seems a bit different, rather a decent sort. And through him we might find others who'd help us."

Adams vetoed this. "It would be chucking away the only advantage we've got—that Higgins and Poynter don't know we're on to them. We mustn't let them know we suspect a thing, or give any of the hands a chance to warn them. I guess we've had our lesson about trusting people. We can trust nobody but ourselves and it's you and me against the whole ship."

"Well, and are we to sit down and wait until it's convenient for them to knock us on the head? The best defense is attack."

"Not always," said Adams. "Say that we knock them on the head, make Higgins and Poynter prisoners, how about the crew? Even if we succeeded in intimidating them, who's to run the ship? It would be different if either of us was a sailor, or if we meant to run for the nearest port and let the pearls slide. My idea is to let matters stand as they are until we reach the island—see the business through. We'll stand as good a chance there as here; perhaps better."

"Yes, but supposing *they* don't let matters stand? That's the point."

Adams argued that it was all odds they would. None but a criminal lunatic committed murder gratuitously and, so long as we gave no trouble, there was no reason for such a desperate step. That we had been unmolested all this time argued that murder, unless forced on them, was no part of their plan.

We took every possible precaution, locking our door at night and piling our trunks against it, while throughout the day we stuck close together. Watching my opportunity, I stole a sturdy potato knife from the galley; I whetted it to razor edge and carried it in an improvised sheath under my left arm. Adolphus—I was absolutely certain now of his identity though we said nothing to our partners—if he missed the knife didn't report its loss, or at least we heard nothing about it. Adams had likewise secretly armed himself; he had procured an old file which he had succeeded in fashioning into a very terrible weapon. This and a whetstone he stole from the carpenter's chest.

It is quite possible that in spite of our elaborate precautions we should have fallen victim to some stratagem, for no one can be eternally on his guard; and it goes without saying that we couldn't have resisted indefinitely and successfully an open and combined display of force. That we didn't fall victims to either argued, as Adams said, that gratuitous murder was not part of their plan.

"Even if they've diddled us over the charter and stores," said Adams, during one of our frequent secret talks, "it doesn't mean that they intend to do us out of the pearls. It's hard to believe they aren't on the level and I've been wondering if, after all, we shouldn't tell them about Adolphus. You see there's nothing but your father's statement—— You don't suppose that somehow he could have made a mistake about Poynter?"

"No, I don't, and you don't either. He doesn't make mistakes like that nor was there any chance of making one here. Whatever else he may be, Poynter isn't the nephew of Phineas Poynter. We may tie to that."

"Well, it's a darned puzzling and difficult situation," frowned Adams.

WE improved this return to outward harmony by setting to work in earnest to learn something about seamanship, although we pretended that it was merely an excuse for killing time. Neither Poynter nor Higgins showed any objection, not even when we persuaded Ben Sweet to let us try our hand at the wheel. He showed us how to steer by the card but regaled us chiefly with tales, no doubt apocryphal, of his home near Oakland, his cats and canaries, widowed sister, and the position he held in the church.

About a week after crossing the Line we had cause to reflect that whoever named the Pacific had a sense of humor. The weather had been so wonderfully fine ever since leaving the Golden Gate as to become monotonous, but now it proceeded to atone for it. It started with a squall that came up out of nowhere, continued with a waterspout and ended with a hurricane. I don't care to think about it even now; that whirling gray funnel rising from the sea like some horrific jinni from a bottle, and the pursuing, ravenous, mountainous seas that threatened to poop us at any moment, are still parts of my least engaging nightmares. And yet, though it ended in a tragedy, it is not all nightmare; the relieving touch, the high light in that black picture, is the conduct of Higgins and Poynter. I can never forget that either.

How many tons of moisture does a good juicy waterspout contain? Higgins told me, an approximate guess, but I have forgotten. More than enough to have splintered the *Mary Kearney* to matchwood if it had caught us. And that it didn't was only due to Providence plus—a very big plus, this—Higgins at the wheel. Sweet had proved himself past such work by being knocked off his meager pins almost at the first great blast, and if I hadn't managed somehow to grab him as he caromed to the scuppers, Adams then anchoring us with his weight, I think his putative ambition to teach a Bible class would have ended right there. The rest of the hands, driven by Poynter's imperious voice that for a time rose superior to the roaring wind, looked as frightened as I felt. Only Higgins and Poynter seemed undaunted—yes, and Sweet who, as we helped him below with a broken arm, said things about old boreas that I had never heard in church.

The wind! I had thought the worst of it over but it was yet to come. I had known many a sixty-mile gale but it seemed a mere zephyr to this. We ran before it with bared poles because there was nothing else to do, nor did we know how long we should be able to do even that. We ran as the scared rabbit from the pursuing whippet, only that somehow we always managed by a fraction to escape the ravening jaws of the pursuing sea. Have you ever looked up and seen nothing but a wall of green water? Terrible enough from where we crouched but infinitely worse from where Poynter, who had relieved Higgins, stood at the wheel. A sight to test the strongest nerves, so much so that I believe some ships have a structure built behind the wheel for the purpose of shutting out the view from the helmsman. But the *Mary Kearney* had none.

Horrific but fascinating to watch the pursuing wave mounting higher and higher until it towered over the stern and seemed about to crash its pent-up fury on its puny prey. Fascinating, horrific, but not

once through his long vigil did Poynter seem aware of the ever-towering menace at his shoulder. I like to keep that picture of him, a viking defying the elements. There was a set smile on his grim mouth and his blond mane streamed forward like a pale blown flame.

Curiously enough, tragedy came when the fight was won, when the sky cleared as suddenly as it had darkened and the wind decreased. The sea, as though venting its baffled hate in one last despairing effort, sent up a wave that pooped us cleanly, and at that moment Adolphus appeared on deck for the first time. The flood of water took him over the lee rail as though he were a cork. It happened in a breath and there was absolutely no chance of saving him; we had almost more than we could do to save ourselves. I had a glimpse of his face as he went and I can never forget it, nor the choking cry flung to us by the wind. He was lost, for no small boat could hope to live in the sea still running, nor could it even have been launched. Little could he have thought, nor any of us, that such was to be his fate. Greenlees' Island, as we had come to call it among ourselves, had claimed its first victim.

CHAPTER XX.

THE ISLAND.

"THERE she is, gents," exclaimed Higgins as he squirted tobacco juice over the rail with lively satisfaction. "It's her and no mistake, the same being I'd know her among a million. We've fetched her at last, God willing and all being well."

He passed us the telescope and through it the faint bluish smudge on our port bow resolved itself into a three-cornered hat with a white cord round the base, this being the foam of the breakers on the barrier reef. Even through the powerful glass it appeared phantasmal, unreal like a mirage because, as Poynter explained, we were seeing it through the curtain of spray flung by the surf, the minute drops of moisture shimmering like diamond drops.

The great storm, which had brought in its wake another stretch of glorious weather, had cleared the air in more ways than one. Men cannot suffer a common peril like that without experiencing a closer communion of the spirit, and Adams fully shared my admiration for the conduct of Poynter and Higgins. They, while making light of it—Higgins' only comment was, "Well, that tailender saved us work with sail and screw"—were flattering enough to consider that I had saved Sweet's life, and so did the bos'n himself. Also the passing of Adolphus, which our partners received with philosophy and fortitude, not only removed an undoubted menace but enabled Adams and me to shoulder our share of the common burden, descend from the questionable status of passenger to that of active coworker. Thanks to bohemia both of us knew how to cook, and not only to cook well, but to make the most of a limited larder. And so we took charge of the galley and ended the reign of burned grease and onions. The forecastle appreciated the change quite as much as the afterguard.

I don't mean to say that this new era of harmony and good feeling entirely dissipated all suspicion of our partners. There could be no question that Poynter wasn't the nephew of Phineas Poynter, and we doubted if Higgins was the nephew of Simon Greenlees. We still suspected also that we had been cheated over the chartering and outfitting of the *Mary Kearney*, and might be again over the division of the pearls. But we had progressed sufficiently in human experience to realize that a man might be a hero in some circumstances, a rogue in others. And we had definitely abandoned the idea that Higgins and Poynter contemplated murder.

"Murderers aren't made of such stuff," Adams had summed up. "No, nor out-and-out scoundrels either. They may mean to play fair with us, and perhaps Adolphus alone was responsible for everything. Anyway, now that he's gone, there's one less to watch and we're saved the trouble of wondering whether we should tell them about him. It's an ill

wind that blows nobody good. All the same we'll keep our eyes skinned and not be caught napping."

SO that was the position of affairs when we sighted the island, and certainly the attitude of our partners couldn't have been more disarming. We were all excited, now that the goal was reached at long last, and even Higgins had shaken off his pessimism, cracking jokes and carrying on like a schoolboy.

"Of course the hands knows it's pearls, the same being I told 'em," he said. "And if they don't like to stick they can be paid off when we run down to Vila for divers —which, of course, I'm hopin' we'll have to do."

The booming of the surf on the barrier reef soon grew audible as we neared the island and its contour became visible to the naked eye. Higgins had once remarked that Port Vila was fit to stand with the three most beautiful harbors in the world—Rio, the Golden Gate, and Papeete—and I could well believe it if the coloring was anything like this. It was a little gem in miniature, a triangular emerald in a flawless turquoise setting, wholly different from the sinister picture Higgins had drawn of it.

But when we drew nearer still most of the enchantment vanished and I saw that it had been lent by the vaporlike curtain of the barrier reef. True, sea and sky remained blue and the island green, but it became a cruel and poisonous sort of green, while the peak which I thought luxuriant foliage showed as harsh volcanic rock. The opening in the reef stood directly across our path and, as Higgins had said, the island was perhaps two miles at its widest point. But what it looked like from the other side it was impossible to say, the cone of bush and rock completely shutting out our view. Higgins said that the reef encircled the whole island and that the opening confronting us was the only one.

"There ain't never but one, and that there line on the map stands for the lagoon," he added. "I'll say right now that it ain't guano. See any birds? No, and there never was. It ain't the place for 'em, as I thought all along. There's places birds like and there's places they don't, same as humans, and I ain't saying they're wrong. A crool-lookin' green that."

"Then it must be pearls?" exclaimed Adams.

"Got to be," said Higgins. "As sure as you're a foot high."

"Have you thought yet what those letters 'H' and 'P' mean on the line?" I asked. For they had perplexed us all.

"I have," replied Higgins, stretching a sinewy forearm. "See them pa'ms, them two big fellers? You get them two in line and keep 'em there. It's directions to open the reef."

I hadn't been able to distinguish the trees referred to, if Adams and Poynter had, but I could well believe some such landmarks necessary if we were to safely navigate that narrow opening. To me it seemed all too narrow and I thought surely that the *Mary Kearney* must rip her sides out on the guarding bayonets of coral. But Higgins, at the wheel, showed his superb seamanship again, nor did his faith in his interpretation of those two letters waver for a moment. After backing and filling, like a horse jockeying for the start, he set the *Mary Kearney* full slap at the reef and, as I waited for the crash, he suddenly spun the wheel and, the voice of the breakers roaring in our ears, we shot through the smother of foam. Then, safe inside, the schooner swept round in a beautiful curve, the slatting sails came down with a run as Poynter barked an order, and the anchor rattled out into the still pea-green waters of the lagoon.

"Well, was I right about them pa'ms?" asked Higgins, spitting copiously. "Cursed nasty channel that; if we'd drawed another foot I'd ha' gutted her, the same being I would have for sure without them sailin' directions. Did you hear her scrapin'? But a miss is as good as a mile and here we be at last. And now for them oysters, gents!" And he cut a few fantastic capers.

"I'll go down right now for a look-see

before gettin' out the boat," said Higgins eagerly. "We might be over the best and biggest beds right here. It ain't five fathom. Anything over that makes naked pearlin' a job."

"Well, take care," said Poynter, shaking his head. "What about devilfish?"

"The sooner we find out the better, the same being you'll never work the beds or get a nigger down if there's one o' them goggle-eyed swipes on the job. Me, I know how to fix 'em, and none better. Don't you worry."

He reappeared bereft of singlet and trousers, naked but for a loin cloth in which was stuck a large two-edged black-handled knife. A savage-looking, unlovely figure with his meager bandy legs, deep chest and apelike arms covered with coarse hair; unlovely but made for the water. That torso spoke of supple strength and lung capacity, nor did he carry an ounce of weight in the wrong place.

"HEAVE a line!" he shouted, springing to the rail. And Sweet, whose left arm was still in splints, helped Poynter to do so. Higgins stood for a moment poised, then entered the water almost without a splash in a perfect swan dive that made his ugly body look beautiful. I can do a bit of that thing myself and I know an expert when I see one.

I dare say it was little over a minute before he reappeared, though it seemed far longer and I had begun to think of those white-eyed horrors, mentioned by Poynter, that inhabited the deep blue caverns. He swarmed up the rope and over the rail, his eyes inflamed and his wide chest heaving as he sucked greedily at the fresh air. "Well, they ain't *here,* anyway," he gasped. "Nary a sign of one."

We got out the whaleboat and Higgins reappeared in singlet and trousers, the black-handled knife now in a sheath at the back of the broad brass-studded belt. Obviously it was for opening such oysters as we brought up as specimens, but I thought suddenly of the man in New York who had been stabbed. Had Higgins really done it? Perhaps. At all events, sight of the knife served to bring Adams and me back to a realization of our position, something that in the excitement we had been in danger of forgetting. We had still a sharp lookout to keep.

The four of us entered the boat with two of the hands, Sweet remaining in charge of the schooner. We were equipped with a large fish basket and a water glass, an article on which we had seen Higgins working at odd moments. It was a large can that had contained gasoline for the engine and, cutting out the bottom, he had inserted very cleverly a piece of window glass. He explained that the lagoon wouldn't always be so clear and that the glass overcame the trouble of surface ripples. It was the same idea as the glass-bottomed boats that they use for marine sight-seeing off the coast of California and elsewhere.

Now I know an oyster bed when I see one and so did Adams. That was one solid chunk of actual knowledge in our vast desert of theory and ignorance. Whatever their difference in size and variety, whether it is Long Island Sound or the South Seas, oysters are oysters. You can't make them anything else. And let me say here at once, so as to get it over quickly, that not a single sign of a solitary oyster did we find. It was a rare day and without the aid of the glass we could see down through the crystal water to the floor of the lagoon. We saw the green, pink and lilac coral gardens, wonderful fish of every color in the spectrum, saw all the entrancing beauty and splendor of the tropical submarine world which poets and writers have tried to describe in vain. We saw lavish beauty when we were seeking for ugliness, for not once did we glimpse the tangle of weedy gray that spoke of oysters.

We gave it up at last, not merely because the light was beginning to fade but through sheer physical weariness and disgust. The whaleboat crept back over the blue shadows to the *Mary Kearney* like a wounded slug. Even the two forecastle nondescripts who had shared none of our fatuous elation were rowed out, glum with fatigue. We had passed the stage of com-

miserating profanity and only now, I think, did we realize the extravagant hopes that each of us had built. Poynter sat, a glowering figure, head in hands, while Higgins, munching doggedly at his quid, had relapsed into his former slough of pessimism. I do believe that Adams and I felt it the least—or reacted quicker. We had the resilience of youth, and bohemia had given us some pretty hard and consistent knocks. How often had our beautiful air castles come tumbling about our ears? Well, this was merely another one. We had gambled and lost; that was all.

"What are you laughing at?" rasped Poynter, raising his head and scowling. "I don't see anything particularly funny in it. Where the blazes is the screaming joke?"

"I wasn't laughing," I said. "But, anyway, we've had the trip."

"To hell with the trip!" said Poynter.

Higgins seemed as badly hipped over the matter as Poynter, though perhaps for a different reason; at all events when we sat down to a gloomy dinner that evening their tempers were such that they almost came to an open quarrel.

"Six thousand gone west!" exclaimed Poynter, not for the first time. "I've lost every penny I owned and made of my uncle an enemy who'll never forgive me. That's what it comes to. I've lost more than anybody. Three puling suckers, Adams, Broke and I. That's what we've been. A fine fairy tale. There never was anything on this blasted island but rock and mud. It was a bad day for us, Higgins, when we fell in with you."

"What have I got to do with it?" demanded Higgins. "Didn't I warn you fair? It ain't my fault if I ain't lost money too as well as time. A nice way o' talkin'! I'd ha' knowed nothin' about this bloomin' island but for you gents. You had it all cut and dried before I ever seen you. You'd ha' come anyway for all o' me."

"Not a bit of it," declared Poynter. "If you hadn't said that fellow in Honolulu with the pearl was your uncle——"

"I never said nothin' o' the kind!" cried Higgins, banging a fist on the table. "Truth is truth, and fair is fair, the same being I said he mightn't be. I leave it to these here two gents. I warned you fair, and no man fairer."

"Perfectly true," said Adams. "It's entirely our own fault if we didn't heed the warning."

"Now then," said Higgins, glaring at Poynter, "I feel it as bad as any of you and worse, the same being I'm sort o' responsible in a way. I knowed it was all a gamble and I said so, and I shouldn't ha' been persuaded and throwed in with you. Not the way it's turnin' out. But I've been gamblin' like that all my life, and you said you was sports and that there'd be no grousin' over a lost stake."

"And I hope that's what we are," I said. "Have you heard Adams or me grousing? No, and you won't. It's all in the game; we went into it with our eyes open and, if we've lost, it has been a bully experience anyway."

"Now that's handsome of you gents," declared Higgins, his doglike eyes on Adams and me, "the same being it's the way to play this here game o' life. Handsome, that's what I calls it. You've took the gaff without a whine. I'll say that."

AT this, Poynter, as though shamed into a better show of spirit, did his best to make amends. "I didn't mean what I said and I hope you'll forget it, all of you. I'm tired and sore, that's all. No, it's not your fault, Higgins; it's nobody's fault. And, as you say, I guess we'd have had a try at it anyway without you. Things happen like this; we've lost and that's all there's to be said."

"We haven't lost yet," remarked Adams. "There's an end of the lagoon we haven't had time to search. And even if we should find a small isolated bed it may hold the best pearls in the world. That often happens. I've read about it."

"It don't happen here," said Higgins, shaking his head. "If it does, I'm a Dutchman. Oysters never growed in this here water and never will. It ain't right for 'em. That's my opinion."

Higgins raised a skeptical eye. "Well, I s'pose it'll do no harm to have a look-see, the same being there may be a lucky card waitin' for us at the bottom o' the deck yet. If not, we'll cut the losses of you gents best we can by selling off the trade goods on our way back. We'd oughter make a tidy somethin' on that. A couple o' days should be more'n enough here." Apparently, unlike Poynter, pessimism had gripped him firmly again and he was reconciled to failure. He seemed to have lost all heart in the venture, which perhaps wasn't to be wondered at.

CHAPTER XXI.

"FALSUS IN UNO, FALSUS IN OMNIBUS?"

ADAMS, with Poynter and four of the hands, spent the best part of the following morning in the whaleboat searching the waters surrounding the island, while I with the two others of the crew, one of whom was Subton, manned the dinghy and combed the end of the lagoon we hadn't searched the previous evening. The wind of yesterday had gone and the sea outside the barrier reef was like blue glass.

Higgins and Ben Sweet remained aboard the *Mary Kearney;* the bos'n's arm prevented him from taking an oar and Higgins had declined to participate further in the search, though he didn't say so directly. Perhaps during the night he had brooded on his wrongs, as represented by Poynter's words, or believed that further endeavor was a pure waste of time. At all events at breakfast there had been a marked stiffness in his attitude toward Poynter and, making the excuse of physical disability, he had declined to accompany us. "That douche o' cold water give me a touch o' my old enemy rheumatiz," he said, rubbing a shoulder, "and I'm stiffer'n a crab. Anyways I ain't needed; you gents knows an oyster bed as well as me. You'll get along just as good without me, mebbe better. Guess mebbe I'm a Jonah. Me, I'm gonna lay off and take a holiday. Earned it too, I guess."

"As you please,' said Poynter shortly. "Suit yourself."

Now all this may have been true; Higgins may have had rheumatism or, as Poynter said privately to us, he had got on his high horse and, like a child, wanted to be coaxed. On the other hand, as Poynter had suggested that both Adams and I accompany him in the whaleboat, all this hard feeling between Higgins and him might be merely another example of their capacity for play acting. Higgins, with the connivance of Poynter, might wish to be alone for quite another reason.

"For, of course," as I said to Adams the previous night when we were alone in our cabin, "it may be buried treasure of the conventional kind and they hope to smuggle it aboard without our knowledge. All this talk about a pearl lagoon and the consequent disappointment would be to throw us off the real scent."

"A pretty idea," he nodded. "I'll admit I hadn't thought of it. And then with the treasure safely aboard—whatever it is—we sail back and part good friends, partners in adversity. A very pretty idea indeed. They wouldn't have to indulge in any rough stuff, run the risk of having the police sent after them if they didn't murder us. A slim deal like that would suit them down to the ground. I believe you've hit it, George."

"Perhaps. We needn't ask what the treasure is or how Greenlees came to leave it here, but it would need to be of reasonable bulk and in a handy enough place if they are to get it aboard without our knowledge. It may even be that the crew as a whole is to be kept in ignorance too. I've been wondering about those letters 'H' and 'P.' Of course the treasure may be buried anywhere on the island but they'd need to have specific directions. Of course you saw those trees that Higgins steered by? I'll admit that I didn't."

"You didn't? Well, I didn't either. I thought you had—and Poynter said he did—and I didn't want to admit my sight and intelligence inferior."

"The same here, Jim. Of course, if we're right, Poynter would pretend he saw them. All that play about the difficulty of passing the reef in a schooner

may only have been more play acting, a means of explaining what those letters meant. And Poynter's suggestion about there being beds outside may be only paving the way to get us out of sight. We'll see to-morrow. They may divide forces and, if so, we must too. We'll have to keep an eye on both of them."

It will be seen therefore how events of the following morning appeared to support our reasoning, and when I proposed to search the end of the lagoon instead of going in the whaleboat, Poynter tried to dissuade me. "It's not worth searching," he said. "I'm sure Higgins is right and oysters can't grow in the lagoon. I'm sure also we'll find them outside. Anyway it can wait." But I stuck to my proposal and Adams backed me, saying that two search parties were better than one and that it would save time, and to this piece of logic Poynter found no convincing answer. He yielded, and certainly with good grace.

WE pulled away toward the end of the lagoon and I hadn't the faintest hope of success so far as pearl oysters were concerned. But while I pretended to search I could keep an eye on the *Mary Kearney*. Neither Higgins nor Sweet could leave her in the remaining small boat without my knowledge; I could see that, no matter what distance I might be away. If either or both put off they should find me following, hard on their trail wherever they went; or I could go back to the schooner and watch them return with their booty. If secrecy was their object they were cooped up there without a chance of leaving.

As I had expected, this part of the lagoon proved as barren of oysters as the rest of it and an hour was spent in fruitless search though my real interest was the schooner. No boat had put out from her and, if my suspicions were right, the whaleboat would soon return. Their plan having failed, they would have to think up another.

It was here on the return trip that I noticed the big lump of coral for the first time. I use "big" merely in a relative sense. The reef at this end stood well out of the sea, forming a sort of natural breakwater of serrated coral, and about midway of this was a peaked lump that dwarfed the rest. This fact, however, only became conspicuous if the observer were on an equal or lower level as, seated in the dinghy, I now was. From a higher level, such as the deck of the *Mary Kearney*, one would not have noticed it particularly. But now it caught and held the eye, standing out boldly against the sky. Might not that cryptic "P" more logically represent this peak or point? Logically. Because obviously no tree grew on the reef and the letter was on the seaward side of the line that evidently represented the lagoon. At all events it was something to ponder over, especially when I observed that the schooner lay anchored directly opposite this mark.

I found Higgins and Sweet playing cribbage on deck under an awning they had rigged up, and the former merely grunted, "I told you so!" when I confessed to failure. Soon afterward the whaleboat returned with a similar tale. Yet Poynter, though seemingly in an irritable humor, refused to admit defeat; he would have another try, circle the island.

A wash in our cabin before lunch gave Adams and me the opportunity for a necessary talk and I told him about the peak of coral on the reef. He thought well of my idea though, of course, the reef itself could not conceal the treasure. Our task would be to find the meaning of that other letter and its precise relation to the first. Taken in conjunction they might supply the solution. The fact that the schooner lay opposite the coral peak and that, if we were to be kept in ignorance, the time for smuggling the treasure aboard would be relatively restricted, would argue that the cache was near at hand.

"All the same," said Adams, "we might spend a lifetime trying to find it. And, if our theory is right, how long are they going to stand us balking them like this? They mean to get it, of course, whether we know about it or not."

"Of course, though they'd prefer we didn't. For, if it comes to a show-down, there's the crew. I believe Sweet's in the know but I'm not sure about the rest. And it makes a difference whether our partners have to fight two men or eight. Besides they need them to handle the schooner. Granting the ignorance of the crew, they're just the sort of scum to raise hell if they knew a fortune in real money was around. And, even if they didn't, they'd talk.

"Anyway my idea is this: Instead of continuing to balk them we'll let them find the treasure, if there is one. It will save us the trouble and prove whether our theory is right or wrong. We'll help them to get us off the scene, if that's their intention. In other words we'll spy on them."

"How?"

"Why, easily enough. You go again with Poynter on this trip outside but I'll refuse. I'll say that after this morning's failure I'm sick of the whole thing, convinced, like Higgins, that we're only wasting time. You play up to me, call me a quitter and all that. If they can fake a quarrel, so can we. I'll say I'm going to take the dinghy and explore the island, climb that rock and see what's on the other side. If I know anything of Subton and Andersen, or whatever hands are left this time, they won't want the job of rowing me ashore. But if they should be sent along to watch me, I'll manage to give them the slip somehow. I'll take those small glasses of yours, lie up in the bush and watch the schooner. If nothing happens then our theory is wrong; our partners really thought there were pearls and they've been fooled like ourselves. If we're right, I'll see Higgins and Sweet ship the real treasure aboard."

"And then what?"

"Why, then we pretend we've been fooled and we sail home. And either we appropriate the stuff en route or we wait till we get to Frisco and the police. We can decide that later according to circumstances."

After some further whispered discussion this plan was settled and we proceeded to carry it out. Everything transpired as we had surmised, Poynter saying that now that I had proved the lagoon a dud I could accompany Adams and him outside. My decision to go on an exploring expedition instead required no backing from Adams; evidently so long as I removed myself it didn't matter particularly where I went. But if it came as a godsend to them, neither of them showed it. Poynter expressed disgust at my throwing up the sponge, as he phrased it, and praised Adams' doggedness and incidentally his own.

The first hitch in my plan came when the two hands who had been left—Subton and Andersen, to their seeming disgust, had been ordered to take their turn in the whaleboat—said they would go ashore with me. They had received permission, there was no duty to keep them aboard, and I couldn't decline their company without arousing suspicion. Had they received secret orders to watch me, or was this a move to get rid of them also? Or was it merely a natural desire on their part for some relaxation, to stretch their legs on land? I determined, at all events, to get rid of them in some fashion once we were out of sight of the schooner.

WE left Higgins at his eternal game of cribbage and took a straight line shoreward. One of my companions was an undersized ferret-faced dock rat from Sydney—so he said, though it might have been Limehouse—who called himself Snell; the other an obvious Latin-American of some sort who, however, claimed the name of Brown. Seemingly they had no ambition for overexertion and their one idea was to take the most direct route possible.

"I hope you boys are in good condition," I remarked, throwing out a feeler. "It won't be any picnic climbing that in this heat." And I pointed to the volcanic rock topping the bush, palms, and dazzling white strip of beach. But once we're up there should be a great view."

"None of that for little 'Orace," said

Snell in his nasal whine. "Blimey, I've 'ad enough of work. And there's nothink in the bleedin' plyce worth seein', not even a moll."

"Wouldn't be so bad if there was," opined Brown, his muddy eyes moody.

At this, Snell, who appeared to be a connoisseur on the subject, began to speak of what he had seen and done in the islands before leaving the Southern Cross. Brown, not to be outdone, replied with reminiscences of the coast from Rio to Valparaiso. It was vile talk, indicative of the standards of both, and at length I had to tell them to stow it.

"Ow!" said Snell who was pulling stern oar opposite me, and he turned up his yellow eyes. "I suppowse it ain't fit for nice young ears. Ow now!"

"Mind your own ears," I snapped, for I was properly on edge. "If you're wanting a thick one, I can give it to you. None better, as Captain Higgins would say."

"Yus?"

"Yes!"

"Ow!" he sneered. Then his mean eye slipped from mine and he whined surlily, "I wasn't meanin' nothink. A beggar 'as a right to talk."

"Not on your life, bo," put in Brown over Snell's shoulder. "Youse ain't supposed even to breathe wit'out askin' teacher's leave."

I let this pass, though I ached to stretch them both. Discretion prevailed for once. It might be part of a plan to provoke a row with me. Well, on dry land, I could make shift to handle the two of them. If it came to the worst, I had a knife they knew nothing about.

"Wot sort of a plyce is that?" exclaimed Snell, pointing a grimy finger toward the fringe of palms. "I seen it from the schooner. Blimey, it looks like a sort of an 'ouse, a tumble-down 'ouse. And they said nobody ever lived 'ere."

Obviously it was the remains of a rude shelter, at one time thatched with palm. The roof pole had gone and only the four uprights remained. I also had seen it from the schooner and thought it perhaps connected with some savage funeral rite, a burial hut such as our own American Indians employed.

"Some bloke's been shipwrecked and lived here," said Brown as we poked about. "Wonder if he croaked here too. But there ain't no bones."

"Gah!" said Snell, "it fair gives me the 'orrors, the shadders and all that poisonous green growin' stuff, ferns like trees and them creepers big enough to strangle you. Gah! it ain't 'ealthy, that's wot it ain't."

"Well, I'm going on," I said at length. "Over the top. Coming?"

"Nah," replied Snell with a grimace. "Little 'Orace is goin' to cool his pretty tootsies. We'll go paddlin', Brownie and me, like a couple of turkle doves. 'Ave a bleedin' sun bath and then go fishin'. No swottin' through this ruddy muck for little 'Orace. 'Ow abaht it, mate?"

"Aw, sure," said Brown indifferently. "Nuttin for mine that reads like woik."

So I left them, apparently with mutual pleasure, and struck up through the bush while they returned to the beach of powdered coral. Of course it had occurred to me that they might have a very good reason for declining to accompany me, and that, convinced of my departure, they would return to the spot we had left. It was probable, indeed only logical, to infer that the rude shelter had been occupied by Simon Greenlees and that "H" represented house or hut. Might not the treasure be buried here and Snell and Brown been deputed by our partners to bring it aboard? I could be counted on to be away for several hours, quite long enough for them to transfer it to the schooner and then return to await me.

Bearing in mind that there was a telescope aboard the *Mary Kearney,* more powerful than my small glasses whose bulk did not betray their presence, I reached a projecting point of rock that commanded the curving beach and the whole lagoon. It was perhaps halfway to the summit and afforded excellent covering; and here, lying prone, I brought out the glasses and prepared for my vigil. If I was unable actually to see the ruins of

the hut I could distinguish the place where it stood and watch if my late companions approached it.

APPARENTLY my story was wrong or they were in no hurry; without the aid of the glasses I could see Snell and Brown, trousers rolled high, paddling in the shallow water, picking up shells and disporting themselves generally like two slum children who had been given a day at the shore. They kicked water over each other joyously, their staccato yelps coming up clearly, shattering the brooding silence of the place where not even a sea bird cried.

I turned my glasses on the *Mary Kearney* lying like a phantom ship as though suspended between sea and sky, her hull and naked spars mirrored in the lagoon. I could see Higgins and the bos'n clearly, seated under the sun sail and still hard at it with cards and cribbage board. Away to my right beyond the reef the whaleboat showed, a dark speck against the blue, anon turning to silver as the sun struck her at a new angle. It must be scorching monotonous work and I wondered how long Poynter could sustain the fiction of finding shell.

An hour passed and the picture had changed but little; Higgins and Sweet had not moved but the whaleboat had crawled round almost out of sight, while Snell and Brown, now stark naked, were wallowing in the shallows. They would catch a fine case of sunburn if they weren't careful, but perhaps their skins were as thick as their sensibilities.

Did "H" and "P" represent the hut and the lump of coral? If not, why should the *Mary Kearney* lie directly between them? Was that only coincidence? How could the treasure be buried on the reef and here too? What relation did those two letters bear to each other? Had they any connection with the treasure? Was there any treasure? If there was, why this stupid delay? Was I not a fool? These questions, to which I could find no satisfactory answer, kept repeating themselves in my heated brain like a nonsense rhyme.

Another half hour and the whaleboat had vanished, but Snell and Brown were putting on their clothes while Higgins and Sweet had actually stopped playing their infernal game. Instantly I became alert; my commendable patience was to be rewarded at last.

Was it? It was not. The strains of "Blow the Man Down," as rendered by Sweet's wheezy accordion, came faintly over the water, while Higgins had sprawled himself in Adams' deck chair as though for the rest of the day. Snell and Brown had boarded the dinghy and brought out fishing tackle.

Finally I gave it up, crawled away from my dud observation post and proceeded toward the summit. It was either that or fall asleep, and I might as well see what was on the other side. I could still keep an eye on the schooner and dinghy, though it was obvious that our theory was all wrong; there could be no treasure and, in this instance at least, Higgins and Poynter had not deceived us. That seemed the only logical explanation of the day's happenings. As Snell had said, there was nothing on the island worth seeing; it was only stubbornness that kept me going, a stupid sort of perversity. No, there was nothing worth seeing.

Nothing to see? Oh, blind fool! Within a short space of time you are destined to see the most awful picture of your life.

CHAPTER XXII.

WHAT I SAW ON THE ISLAND.

AS I rounded a shoulder of bush and rock near the summit of the ridge, the whaleboat suddenly swam into my vision again. It had completed its first quarter circle of the island, was perhaps some five hundred yards from shore. The crew rowed with languid monotonous strokes, as though half asleep, so that amid that vast space the boat seemed hardly to move at all. I thought of a snail pursuing its sluggish course on a piece of glass.

I was about to turn away and resume my climb when a sudden movement in the boat caught and held my wavering eye.

Something had galvanized the crew to quicker life; they had stopped rowing and shipped their oars smartly. Something had happened, was happening; something unusual, of importance, that commanded the concentrated interest of one and all. Could it be possible that by some freak of fortune they had actually stumbled on shell? Or had Poynter been right from the first. So tenaciously does hope cling to life in the heart of the treasure hunter that, though I could see little without the glasses, I was now absolutely certain they had found the shell whose existence I had derided but a moment ago.

I clapped the glasses to my eyes but my hands so shook with pleasurable excitement that I found difficulty in getting the focus. At length, however, the boat became the center of a small blue circle and I saw that Poynter was seated in the stern with Adams at stroke oar. Thus they sat facing each other and, as I brought the glasses to bear, Adams turned as though to address the man behind him. This man I identified as "Bull" Andersen, the mongrel Swede. At the same moment, before I had time to realize his intention or to call a warning, had it been possible, Poynter whipped out a knife and flung it full at Adams. He flung it with all the ease and surety of an expert, flung it viciously and with full force of arm and body at my defenseless and unsuspecting friend.

Shall I ever be able to forget that picture, cut like a cameo on the bright blue stone of the sea? No, not while memory lasts. Have you ever stood by impotently, not only unable to lend a hand but unable to make even your voice heard, and seen a loved one foully done to death? Please God it may never happen to you; for this, you may believe me, is the refinement of torture, the essence of hell. For all my service in France, not until that terrible moment did I understand the true meaning of the old phrase about the blood freezing in one's veins. For all that broiling sun I seemed turned to a thing of ice; I was unable to do anything, not even remove the glasses that seemed as though frozen to my eyes. I didn't want to see any more, I couldn't bear to, yet I was compelled by some ghoulish irresistible force. And that same force compelled me also to note every small horrible detail. I noted and remembered, for instance, how the sun glinted on the haft of the knife protruding from under poor Adams' left arm; noted the star-shaped stain spreading slowly on his white shirt, saw his look of pain and surprise as he fell.

You may judge the force of that vile treacherous blow, the weight of the knife, when I say that it almost tumbled Adams' two hundred pounds into Andersen's lap. No doubt his having turned and being off his balance had something to do with it; he couldn't have suspected what was coming, no more than I, nor would he have had time to brace himself against the impact. Poynter's action had been almost too quick for the eye to follow; one moment his hand lay on the thwart beside him, the next it came up in a lightning curve and, with a flick of the wrist, sent the knife like a silver thunderbolt into Adams.

I could not see if Andersen helped Adams to his feet; the glasses were all too small and the rest of the drama was played at the same speed. Adams' knees were hooked on the thwart and I saw the Swede's hands on his shoulders, but I don't know whether he was trying to hold him down or help him up. The other men were now on their feet, gesticulating and crowding aft so that I thought, as one does think mechanically of inconsequent things amid the most tremendous happenings, that it would serve them right if the boat suddenly capsized. And I prayed that it would—anything so long as it disposed of Poynter.

Whether helped or impeded, Adams got to his feet and plucked the knife from his side—not the poor weapon he had fashioned and since carried, but the one buried in his own vitals. That he could do this Spartan deed is testimony enough, not only to the great vitality, but the superb courage and determination of the man. He had surely received his death wound and

he must have known it, yet capitulation, while breath lasted, was no part of his nature and he meant to go out fighting—take his murderer with him if he could.

And now I come to the last soul-searing detail, the most terrible of all. Poynter had got to his feet also and for a moment Adams and he confronted each other. Perhaps Poynter had drawn his revolver; this I couldn't see but, armed or not, he was surely more than a match for a dying man. I could imagine his sneer, his gibe, his taunt, as, his fine body like a bent bow, he stood balanced in the gently rocking boat waiting for poor Adams' fumbling attack. It was a moment of arrested motion, brooding tragedy; the whole world seemed to hold its breath. God knows all the odds were against my poor friend, and yet seemingly they weren't enough to satisfy that boatload of cowardly vermin. For a final act of treachery deprived Adams of his miserable fighting chance. Andersen suddenly rose up behind him and, shortening his shipped oar, brought it crashing down on Adams' head.

IT was a two-handed oblique blow and Adams, dropping the knife and throwing up his arms, pitched sidewise, stumbled against the gunwale where he was caught and held a fractional moment, then lurched heavily into the sea, a split plume of white marking his going.

When I looked again, my eyes drawn in horrid fascination, the scene had resumed all its old aspect of sleepy tranquillity and brooding peace. The whaleboat was pursuing its sluggish course and but for that speck, now missing, that had once been James Adams, it was all as though nothing had happened. And though it had seemed a lifetime to me, though I have taken so long in the telling of it, I don't suppose that in reality the whole tragedy, from the moment Poynter flung the knife until the blue sea closed over Adams, took more than half a minute. In that short space my friend had gone before his Maker and Hector Poynter stood revealed, not only as a Judas, but branded with the mark of Cain. He had been unmasked at last, but at what a terrible price!

Yes, the scene was the same and the sun still blazed down from blue sky on bluer sea; nothing apparently had changed, everything was the same. And yet for me everything had changed and nothing could be the same again. No, not if I lived a hundred years and drank life's cup of joy to the dregs. Always would there be that memory, that sense of irreparable loss. No matter who or what should come into my life, never could I forget what had gone out of it. So much, even, unwittingly, does one soul make its presence felt in this life; and truly we neither stand or fall alone.

As horror and fury passed, grief claimed me and, measuring something of what this great loss meant to me, I flung myself down on the ground and cried as I had not done since childhood.

THEN from violent grief and a sense of outrage at the workings of Providence, I passed to a feeling of utter loneliness and desolation so that I seemed to dwell in that nether hell of ice of which Dante writes. And finally there came overpowering hatred toward Hector Poynter and Andersen the Swede. Not a searing flame like that which had first swept me, but something infinitely cold and hard and malignant, slow and implacable like a cancerous growth. "I'll pay them out somehow, Jim," I said. "Higgins and the whole bunch. But Poynter and Andersen I'll *kill!* I'll kill them, so help me, if I have to follow them to the end of the world, or if I have to wait a lifetime. That's a promise, Jim. I'll get them as they got you, without mercy or compunction. They're dogs, and they'll die the death of dogs." And I swore a great oath to seal my vow to the dead.

This forced on me a realization of my own position, forced me to consider for the first time how Adams' loss affected me in a practical sense. And it was high time I did so. It was all very well to talk of revenging him but here I was left single-handed against a shipload of cutthroats; left not

only alone but high and dry on a desert island that might well be my tomb. Why had Poynter thus thrown off the mask which he had worn so long and carefully? True, he had no reason to think I was a witness of his foul treachery, the murder of my friend, but why had he considered the deed necessary? It behooved me to consider this. Was it merely the logical outcome of the hidden ill feeling that had existed from the first between them, all the more intense because submerged; a sudden murderous impulse brought to the explosive point by the tropic sun and continued friction? Or was it a concerted plot, our partners despairing of smuggling the treasure aboard without our knowledge, or having decided on our removal long since? If so, then I should be next on the list and perhaps at this very moment Brown and Snell, assigned to the deed, were stalking me.

This thought stirred me to action; I had forgotten my erstwhile companions and, owing to the projecting formation of rock, I had climbed beyond sight of the little cove if not the lagoon itself. I had wasted precious time in useless lamentation; Brown and Snell might even now be removing the treasure from the hut, or watching me from behind some bush.

Obviously if I was to square accounts with Poynter the first requisite, as I hadn't firearms, was to get in contact with him; I must get back aboard the *Mary Kearney*, and if I didn't want to swim for it, my only vehicle was the dinghy. You will see that, apart from the cold hatred that urged me on, I had really no choice in the matter; I must either starve or be hunted to death on this desert island, or meet a quicker fate aboard the schooner. My only hope was to take Poynter and Andersen with me beyond the veil; certainly the former if I had but the one chance.

So I began to retrace my steps, making no effort at caution. My knife was in my hand and, if Brown and Snell were waiting in ambush, so much the worse for them. I felt equal to any odds and, if there must be bloodletting, then the quicker it started the better. As for my conduct once I was aboard the *Mary Kearney*, that should depend on circumstances. Concerted plot or not, I would pretend ignorance of Adams' murder, belief in whatever specious tale was told of his death, and thus gain some opportunity for squaring accounts. For the treasure, if my dear friend's death meant that such actually existed, I no longer cared a straw; nor for my own life either. Revenge; that was my sole thought.

I had not gone far in my descent before the whole lagoon lay again like a bright jewel beneath my eyes, and I spied the dinghy not so far from the spot where I had last seen it. And through the glasses I saw that Snell was still industriously fishing while Brown, a handkerchief over his face, sprawled luxuriously in the stern. The whaleboat was nearing the opening in the reef, while Higgins and Sweet, draped over the schooner's rail, were apparently vying with each other as to which could shoot tobacco juice the farthest into the glassy water. The scene looked so familiar that it was almost impossible to believe that the awful tragedy I had lately witnessed had actually happened, just as it seemed impossible that the cowardly hand which flung the knife was the courageous one that had held the wheel during the terrible storm. What an enigma is man!

At all events it would appear that I had done Snell and Brown an injustice and that they at least had no knowledge of the murder plot. And yet I dare not be too sure of this. However, there was nothing for it but to go down boldly and hail them, saying I was ready to return to the *Mary Kearney*.

It was here, as I entered a little sun-splashed glade, that I heard a sudden movement close at hand—I who had thought myself the only living creature on the island.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHAT I FOUND ON THE ISLAND.

IN that brief space between seeing and hearing I caught something of Robinson Crusoe's thrill on meeting with the footprint in the sand. Like him, I had every reason to believe myself absolutely

alone, not only from my fellow man but all animal life. And complete isolation such as that, must be experienced to be appreciated or understood. To hear suddenly a sound in that tomblike silence, the stealthy approach of some large living creature—I didn't know what to expect as my heart thumped and I stood ready with drawn knife.

Evidently if she had heard me she did not realize my proximity for it was she who advanced, a golden girl stepping out softly into the little clearing where I had stopped dead in my tracks. A golden girl, gold of skin if not hair, who seemed to be born of the countless cubic feet of sunlight. It had all happened more quickly that I can tell; one moment there was virgin bush, the next we were confronting each other. And the moment after that I found myself looking into the cold bluish eye of a large navy revolver. I had no chance to prevent this, even had I guessed her intention. She must have been hiding the weapon behind her, ready for instant action. I considered it most unfair, not to say unladylike.

"Drop that knife!"

"If you don't mind, I'd rather not."

"Drop it, I say!" Her voice was low but so is the growl of a dog that means business, and her eyes were as steady and hard as the gun she held.

"I'd rather not," I repeated. "If I've no occasion to use it just at present, I shall have later. And it cost me such an effort to get. I'm sure you won't mind if I keep it."

"Drop it—and for the last time!"

What can you do with a female like that? Surely the most persistent and unreasonable member of a wholly unreasonable sex.

"Oh, very well," I said with what dignity I could. "If you really insisted. But it's only a potato knife, hardly good for anything else. Do you grow potatoes here?"

"Kick it over."

"Won't you let me hand it to you? It seems so rude——"

"Kick it over!"

So I kicked it. With a quick movement she picked it up, the eye of the revolver searching my abdomen. I hate a soulless stare like that; it gives one a most embarrassed feeling.

She stepped back a few paces and waved me forward. "March! If you try to escape, make one false move or call out, I'll shoot. And you'd better believe that I know how."

"I'm entirely willing to take your word for it," I replied. "You needn't mind demonstrating it. But you know this is all silly nonsense; I'm not a wild beast and if you'll let me explain——"

"March!"

"Oh, very well. But where to?"

"Over the top," she said, pointing to the way I had come. "If you look back, what happened to Lot's wife wasn't a circumstance to what will happen to you."

"The parallel holds good, madam, for I too have come from a very wicked city."

Yes, man is an enigma; a moment before I had thought of nothing but revenge, was sensible only of my great loss, and now here I was eager to bandy words with this golden girl who so seriously threatened my health. Such is youth, I suppose, and life. But then I hadn't seen a woman of any kind for a long time, and really she was a very pretty girl.

"March!"

"As you please. A wicked city, madam, where the most innocent-looking people do the most unexpected things, such as pilfering from library books and studios. It's called New York. I wonder if you've ever been there?

"You don't recognize me?" I pursued. "Well, let me refresh your memory. You are the nocturnal admirer of dear old Ovid, the great Grecian poet——"

"I *never* said he was Greek!"

"Ah, you admit your identity?"

"I hadn't the least intention of denying it," she said calmly, right elbow now resting against hip and the gun still bearing steadily on me. "And if you think I didn't know you, Mr. Broke, you're quite mistaken. Your appearance isn't so easily forgotten."

Here was a tribute at last! I blushed becomingly. "You flatter me, I'm afraid."

She shook her head. "Though you aren't so grotesquely dressed, you're quite as ugly as when we last met."

Shade of Beau Brummel! To think that such had been her opinion of poor Adams' new suit and my pulchritude!

"However," she added, "that's beside the point. Are you going over the top or aren't you?"

"The answer is in the negative. I was demobilized long ago, and my business lies in the other direction. Besides, now that you know me, there's no necessity for this nonsense."

"It's precisely because I do know you," she said in the same calm aloof manner, "that it's necessary. And the only nonsense is what you're talking, your apparent belief that you can fool me as you did before."

"What an outrageous remark! Fool you? Why, it was you who fooled me. You know it was. Look here——"

"I'm looking, Mr. Broke, and I don't intend to look anywhere else. And I'm not going to argue with you any more either. If you really can't help talking you may talk to yourself; but in the meantime you're going where I've told you to go—or you're going into another world. Is that quite understood? Then march!"

"But I tell you——"

"And I tell you to march. I won't tell you again."

Was there ever such a woman? So I marched until I came abreast of her where I halted. "If I may make a suggestion," I said, "these things are managed better if the revolver is loaded."

"Wh-what? It *is* loaded!"

"Really? But I can see daylight through the chambers. That's the worst of a revolver. If you think it's loaded, go ahead and shoot."

HER forehead wrinkled, her mouth opened, her eyes wavered and turned doubtingly to the weapon—and in that moment my hand shot out and fastened on her right wrist. She screamed once, more with fury than fear, and then proceeded to fight right valiantly and silently. But I got possession of the gun before it could damage either of us. After which I swung out the cylinder, dumped the cartridges into my hand and dropped them in my pocket.

She had paled under her tan, seemed to find difficulty in breathing, and her eyes, whose color I had never been able to determine, grew definitely black. "You—you *beast!*" she said. "I hate you! You—you are the most despicable person I ever met!"

"Well, that can't be helped. I'm sorry I had to use such an old trick but you wouldn't be reasonable and it's high time we talked common sense. Now you can tell me how and when you came here, all you know about this business of Simon Greenlees and his supposed treasure."

"Can I? How nice! But as you know so much, you can find out the rest."

"You must tell me."

Her brows went up. "Oh, really? And how do you propose to make me? It should be rather interesting." And she waited expectantly with a derisive smile.

"I'm no outdoor sheik," I said, "nor indoor either. I propose simply to appeal to your reason and sense of self-preservation. Both of us are in a pretty tight place and you'd better realize it. In the past few days I've done a good bit of thinking about your connection with this treasure hunt, and recent events have also suggested that I was right in believing you innocent."

"Innocent of what?"

"Of—of theft and—oh, everything."

"Thank you, sir," she said meekly, and dropped me a curtsy. "That's really noble of you."

"Sarcasm is all very well," I retorted, "but you didn't tell me the truth about the library book, you did steal the map from the studio, and you do know that man Bland—or whatever his real name may be. But I don't believe now that you were responsible for my assault that night, or other things. And I don't believe you were the willing tool of crooks."

"Oh, thank you again, sir. You relieve me greatly. And, while on the subject of thieves, may I ask if you know who stole my hand bag one night in Harlem?"

"What? Oh, well—er—yes. You see, I did. I can explain that——"

"I'm sure you can," she nodded brightly, "just as you can explain, no doubt, why you stole the map in the first place. I'm sure you can explain anything, including your association with that ship down there."

"Yes, I can. Those men aren't my friends but enemies——"

"What!" Her eyes widened. "Really? And why?"

"Because they are. They are my enemies just as, I'm sure, they are yours. You must believe me. I'll tell you all about it after you tell me all about yourself and this treasure."

"No, no," she said eagerly, "you tell me first all about yourself. I'm sure it must be far more interesting and I can't bear to wait. Oh, you must. Let us sit down here. Now begin at the beginning and don't skip anything. I'd no idea of this. How did you ever come to know them?"

"Well, 'tis a long story," I said, seating myself at her side, "but I'll make it as short as I can. At least I've got a gun now to deal with them, if they come after me, and I believe I could hold this place against the lot. Now to begin with, there——"

I DID not get much farther than that. Was it a sudden gleam I caught in my fair and attentive companion's beautiful eyes ere they could be lowered, or was it a slight sound in the bush at my back? Perhaps it was a combination of both. At all events suspicion came too late; before I could move a silken band took me silently and inexorably round the throat; a heavy body bore me to earth. I fought, of course, but all in vain. I was garroted into oblivion.

When I recovered it was to find my hands crossed behind me, a stout stick thrust between arms and back, wrists and elbows bound to it. A very workmanlike job for I could hardly move a finger. The person who had evidently so successfully accomplished this and the compression of my windpipe was a Chinaman, which accounts perhaps for the cunning and skill of the business. He was very large, fat and bland, dressed in a scandalously tight sailor suit into which his yellow person seemed to have melted like butter. A comic-opera figure at which, in other circumstances, I should have laughed. He was looking cheerfully and speculatively at me, head on one side, while he stretched and twisted a large gaudy silk handkerchief, quite evidently the improvised garrote.

"He make velly good corp, missy," he said insinuatingly to the girl at his side. "Allee same better so too. I make velly quick nice job. Yes?"

She shook her head and advanced to where I lay. "If you hadn't fought so stupidly your throat wouldn't be so sore. I'm sorry I had to use such an old trick but you wouldn't be reasonable."

"You needn't bother to rub it in," I replied. "I understand what a fool I've been, that you were only playing for time. You knew that your friend, this grotesque laundryman, was near and had heard you scream. I appreciate the trickery and deceit. I should have expected it."

She colored. "You're hardly qualified to discuss ethics. It's high time we talked common sense, Mr. Broke. Now *you* can tell *me* how and when you came here, all you know about Simon Greenlees and his supposed treasure. I don't mean the highly imaginative narrative you were concocting for my benefit——"

"I concocted nothing! What I told you was the truth. Those men down there are my enemies——"

"Oh, fie, Mr. Broke.

I was now at boiling point, what with her mocking eyes and the humiliation and impotency of my position. It is difficult to be dignified or impressive while lying like a trussed fowl.

"I tell you they are!" I exclaimed.

"And they've just murdered my best friend. They've killed poor Adams——"

"Oh, la, la, Mr. Broke. What a misfortune!"

"He velly fine damn liar, allee same like Gelorge Washingson," said the Chinaman admiringly. "He make velly good corp, missy. Better so too. 'Dead man have no tail,' as ploverb says."

At this, especially her jeer at poor Adams' death, I went off the deep end and lost control of temper and tongue. "You're like a couple of apes, as stupid, cruel, and ludicrous! There's some excuse for that yellow caricature because he doesn't know any better. I've told you the truth about those men and it's your own funeral if you don't believe it. But perhaps they're friends of yours. Anyway, I've said all I'm going to, and you may go ahead and do what you darned please. I don't care a rap!"

She had flushed hotly, then paled. "I'm sure the worst of them down there has better manners than you," she said coldly. "Help him up, Sam. And now, Mr. Broke, we'll proceed on that journey I spoke of. You may believe that this time there's no doubt about the revolver being loaded. And, if you refuse to walk, Sam will drag you. Suit yourself."

I HAD no relish for this last indignity, and Sam, who had put away the silken noose with evident sorrow and produced a length of stout rope, conveyed in a most cordial but unmistakable manner that he would have no objection to transferring it to my neck. So with a shrug I began the upward ascent, the Chinaman at my side and the girl bringing safely up the rear.

If I had plenty to occupy my mind I was also kept busy in another fashion, for if you have ever tried to climb steep rock and penetrate dense bush without the aid of your hands, you will agree it is no picnic. And this in heat that made a New York August seem wintry. But at length we came to the top and began the descent, and here I received a surprise for there was no sign of a ship on this new blue bowl, though more than one might have lain there unknown to the *Mary Kearney*.

"If you promise to behave yourself, Mr. Broke," said the girl, probably seeing that I found it equally awkward to descend, "I'll untie your hands."

"I'll promise nothing," I retorted. "And surely the word of a person of my character isn't to be trusted."

"No doubt you're the best judge of that," she said equably. "As you please."

So, in savage humor, I skidded and stumbled on my way, willing to suffer anything rather than accept a condescension from her. And I managed to give the perspiring Sam a very thin time of it indeed, which was some compensation.

Finally, about halfway down, we came to a place where the bush had been cleared and a little camp made. And here I found awaiting us the man I had been told was Bill Harpey.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A TALK WITH HIS NIBS.

THOUGH his rich tomato face was now covered with a generous beard stubble and lined with anxiety and suffering, I knew him at once for the visitor at The Chalfont who had designated himself "his nibs, Tibbs." I knew that penetrating blue eye and, if nothing else about his dress, that bow tie in which the vast pearl still reposed triumphantly.

He made no attempt to arise from the rude couch on which he lay, and I now saw that his left leg was bandaged from knee to shin and that his right hand was supported by a sling.

"Thank the Lord ye're back, girl," he greeted. "I was feared something had happened ye sure. But what sort o' baggage is this?"—his eyes on me. "A prisoner o' war, hey? They've landed?" He started up but she pushed him back gently.

"He's the only one, the Mr. Broke I told you about. He claims now that they're his enemies——"

"So they are," I broke in.

"But," she continued, as though I hadn't spoken, "I wasn't taking any chances. Of

course I couldn't let him return and tell all about us. I don't know how much he has seen. They will search for him, of course, but maybe they'll think he has been drowned, or they won't look as far as this side. Anyway there was nothing else to do."

"He make velly good corp, boss," put in Sam persuasively, repeating his litany. "Better so too. I make nice quick job. Velly fine. 'Never do to-mollow who you can do to-day,' as ploverb says."

"By the piper!" exclaimed Tibbs, who had been eying me all this time, "you're the lad I saw at The Chalfont! Cissey," turning to the girl, "I told ye about that, how he hollered and saved me from that nigger's razor. Well, Mr. Broke, what have ye got to say for yourself? I tell ye straight I liked the cut o' your jib that day and, sink me, if I thought you the sort to go mixing yourself up in this thieving business with swabs like Harpey and Roger."

"Harpey and—and Roger?" I stammered.

"Why, sure; those are their names. Mean to say you didn't know it?"

"Why," I managed to articulate at last, "they said that *you* were Harpey."

"Me?" cried Tibbs purpling. "The impudent swabs! And what reason had ye for believing that lie?"

"The same as I had for believing many another—inexperience and an idiotic trust in my fellow man. That I believed you to be Harpey is nothing to the other things I believed."

"He velly fine liar, boss," pronounced Sam, regarding me with pride. "Velly much better than Gelorge Washingson."

Tibbs waved him away, and I added: "It's the truth, and I hope you'll believe what this woman wouldn't."

"There was no reason why I should believe you," said the girl calmly, "and every reason why I shouldn't. And I see no particular reason to believe you even now, though you may impose on my uncle."

"I beg your pardon, I wouldn't. I didn't know anybody was on this island. I thought you—— Look here, sir, may I ask if your name really *is* Tibbs?"

"Well, lad, I never heard tell I'd another since the day I was born. Cap'n Horatio Tibbs—that's me. And this is my niece, Miss Carlton."

"Carlton! Cecilia, Cissey—sometimes even called Cecil, sir?"

"Aye, but not by me," said Tibbs. "I don't hold with these here newfangled notions o' calling wimmen like men. It ain't respectable to my mind. But I guess old Greenlees used it on that envelope as a sort o' extry precaution like——"

"It's for Mr. Broke, not us, to explain —if he can," protested Miss Carlton. "And you're telling him nothing he doesn't know."

"I beg your pardon, I'm hearing it for the first time. I've been such a credulous fool, Captain Tibbs, that I can't blame you if you doubt my version of this business, but all I ask is a chance to tell it."

"Ye'll have it, lad. Cut him loose, Cissey. Now heave to and spin your yarn, Mr. Broke. Make it as short as you can like."

So using what skill at words I possess, I proceeded to give a condensed and deleted account of all that you have read here, saying nothing of my father's bricks but showing his letter regarding Poynter.

"And so," said the girl when I had got thus far, "you had really nothing to connect my uncle with your assault but the smell of musk!"

"It's a weakness o' mine," explained Tibbs. "I've always been very partial to it, and there ain't no law against a man using it. When I get all rigged out for shore I don't feel properly dressed and genteellike without a good dose o' it. I sprinkle it liberal because, being used to spices and such all my life in the islands' trade, it takes a right-smart stink to get proper hold o' me."

"There's nothing to apologize for," said his niece. "The idea of thinking a man a criminal because he uses musk! I never heard of such an excuse."

"The man who hit me over the head used it," I retorted, "and therefore he

was a criminal. And very few white men ever use it. I believe now that Adolphus was the guilty one; at least colored people are partial to it, and he was probably warned not to use it any more when I was around. Anyway in the circumstances I think I'd good reason for jumping to the conclusion I did."

"Perhaps it was no worse than your other jumps," she conceded. "But, apart from your flattering opinion of my uncle and me, I don't see what excuse you had for keeping the map. You stole it twice and, whoever the real owner might be, you knew perfectly well you'd no right to it. I think——"

"Now, now," said Tibbs, "let the lad finish, can't ye? There's something to be said on his side too. And let me tell you many an older head has been fooled by Roger and Harpey."

So I continued my story and when it came to the telling of poor Adams' death, and I had to live the recent scene anew, my voice faltered and I could scarce find words so that even Miss Carlton could have no reason to doubt my sincerity longer. She had the grace to look ashamed, sitting white lipped and silent, while Captain Tibbs swore under his breath, his honest blue eyes ablaze with indignation. And in that moment I knew that my first spontaneous liking for the man had been well and truly founded, and that my greatest piece of folly was the turning of a deaf ear to instinct. In spite of the old adage, second thoughts are far from being always best.

"So that's my version of it, Captain Tibbs," I concluded at length, "and all I'm asking is a chance to square accounts for my friend Adams. You'd better believe, for your own sake, that it isn't a case of these fellows looking for me as a friend, but as an enemy whose death they've got to make sure of. They may have landed now——"

"Not a bit o' it," said Tibbs confidently. "In another half hour, for all this sun, the night'll drop on us like a blanket, and they know that. There'll be a moon, o' course, but they'll do nothing till daylight. You may bank on that. They know you can't get off this blessed island and that you're bound to be here whenever they care to come for you. But mebbe they may think it easier to let you starve yourself to death. You may have been marooned without knowing it, fallen into a trap, like, while you thought you were setting one for them."

"Yes, that may be possible."

"Well, as for your story," he added, "I believe every word ye've told me, lad, and there's my hand on it. Ye've been treated shameful, not that I don't say ye didn't bring much o' it on yourself. We're right glad to have ye with us and, before all's said and done, I guess ye may have your fill o' trying to square accounts with those swabs. But that's all as the Almighty ordains. And now, while we have some victuals, I'll tell ye my side o' the business and just how we stand."

OF course I had guessed by this time that the trio must be victims of shipwreck; apart from the absence of a vessel their nondescript attire suggested this as did the varied collection of articles I saw lying about, evidence of salvage rather than deliberate and unhurried choice. And indeed it proved that the great storm which had so nearly been the last of the *Mary Kearney* had sent Tibbs' ship to the bottom, the only ultimate survivors being these three. The Chinaman was Sam Lee, the cook. In their desperate struggle for survival Tibbs had broken an arm and wrenched a leg. He told of the wreck very graphically, though saying nothing of his own heroic deeds, as we partook of an astonishingly good meal conjured up by Sam who, I may say here, merited everything that Tibbs said of him. What that Chinaman couldn't do, nobody could. He had sailed under Tibbs for years and no more resourceful, efficient and loyal servant ever lived.

To begin with then, I may say briefly that Horatio Tibbs was of old New England seagoing stock and had spent the better part of his life knocking about the South Seas. He never made a fortune in

his various enterprises but, for the past five years, had captained and owned his own ship, the *Tahiti Belle,* which traded between the Societies and San Francisco. In short, a figure such as Higgins had represented himself to be but of better substance and background.

Cecilia Carlton was Tibbs' only relative. Born and bred in New York, her father's death and loss of fortune during the war had left her an orphan with a living to earn. She qualified as a stenographer and typist and found lodgings with a married couple by the name of Lewis who lived at The Sonoma. Thus the bell hop who had assured me that no "genaman" by the name of Cecil Carlton had ever lived there, spoke the virgin truth; but had he not been so dumb events would have taken quite a different course. Thus do trivialities make history.

Miss Carlton corresponded with Captain Tibbs, who had helped her as best he could, and one day chance brought about a meeting with Simon Greenlees in whom, it transpired, she recognized an old friend of whom her uncle had spoken. Greenlees seemed pleased at the mutual discovery, the acquaintance developed, yet he always remained a mystery to her. She sensed a secret in his life, his loneliness and even fear, but he never spoke of his recent past. She wrote to her uncle about meeting him but the letter took a long time to catch up to Tibbs.

"That letter o' my niece's," said Tibbs, "was the first word I'd had about Greenlees in years. We came from the same town and served aboard the same ship, the old *John Hancock* that bummed around for two years from Tahiti to the Solomons. We weren't much more than lads then, and after that life took him one way and me another. I heard no more of him than a word here and there, and then came silence. You know how it is. It may be that he settled as a trader in Naviti like you were told—it's nigh two thousand miles, remember, from Tahiti to the Fijis and I ain't been as far out in years. Anyway I was right glad to hear he was alive and kicking and that, from all Cissey said, he must have managed to make his pile. Of course she mentioned nothing then about this secret in his life."

I CAN do no better than continue at this point with Captain Tibbs' own words.

"It's funny," he proceeded, "how one thing leads to another. Here I hadn't heard of Greenlees for years and now, right after my niece's letter, there came one from him. Of course she had given him my Frisco address. He said how he'd heard I'd been drowned long ago, how glad he was to hear of me and the pleasure it gave him to meet my niece. He was real taken with her, it seemed; only in a friendly way, you understand, for he was older even than me. Fatherly, that's what you might call it. Then he said he was real anxious to charter the *Tahiti Belle* on her next trip out and that the matter was urgent. He'd been waiting to find a partner he could trust and here was the very man and ship, me being raised from the dead, like, and directed to him by Providence. There was a fortune, he said, laying out there near the New Hebrides and he'd give me a fair split, more'n I could ever make in a lifetime o' trading. It wasn't any gamble but a dead sure thing and it wouldn't take any money to get it, no more'n the ship. It was his by right and all we had to do was go lift it. More he wouldn't say until he saw me, and he urged me to come on to New York when I was berthed, or appoint a place where he could meet me. But he didn't want to leave for Frisco until he knew I'd got this letter. He said that it all had to be kept dead quiet, and I mustn't let on to a soul, because there were those who'd some idea of his secret and they'd stop at nothing to grab off the stuff. As a warning, in case I happened to come across them or had heard o' them, he said their names were Bill Harpey and Joe, alias 'Soapy' Roger, and that two more plausible rascals never drew the breath o' life.

"Now," continued Tibbs, "I knew he was right enough about that last because it happened I'd heard tell o' them, though

I'd never actually met 'em. They had a name in the South Seas and even Frisco that wasn't what you might call fragrant. They were just about the sort o' swabs that they pictured Harpey and Roger to you. It would seem like that, with all their failings, they ain't blind to their true characters. There's something funny in the idea o' their giving out their real names to you, hey?"

"I don't see why they did, apart from a peculiar sense of humor," I said. "It was an unnecessary risk."

"Why, no," said Tibbs, "I don't look at it that way. Supposing by chance you'd heard tell in Frisco o' Roger and Harpey —supposing somebody had even said they'd seen 'em—why then, without thinking o' asking what they looked like, you'd believe naturally Harpey was me. It would have proved their story instead o' ruining it. And nobody can make up a lie that's better than the truth. I guess they thought it a mighty slick idea."

"Well, perhaps it was. Anyway it worked. But which of them is Harpey?"

"Why, Higgins, o' course," said Tibbs. "I know his description, and he's had that game leg ever since I first heard o' him. He's a master mariner, and you've got to understand that Uncle Sam's got nothing on either o' them, and that whatever they've done out here has only got back in the way o' tales that can't be proved. They were right in saying they were too slick to be jailed by any country. As for Roger, or Poynter, he's more than the picture they gave o' him; he's the brains o' the team. He must have come from good folks and had a proper education, what some folks would call a gentleman scamp, which Harpey ain't. I don't know the past o' either o' them, nor do I want to, but I know Roger was mate o' Harpey's ship—though mebbe they were equal owners—that I heard tell was lost off the Bismarcks."

"And the man Bland?"

"Now you're asking something I know nothing about," said Tibbs. "Mebbe he had sailed under 'em at one time or he's just a land shark they knew. But I've got to hark back and tell ye the rest. Where was I at?"

CHAPTER XXV.

MISS CARLTON'S STORY.

ON consideration I think it best, in order to avoid confusion, to stick to the names Poynter and Higgins. For though known extensively as Roger and Harpey, it is questionable if even these were the real names of my false partners.

To proceed, it would appear that Greenlees must have written to Tibbs before meeting with Poynter or Higgins in the public library that night, and that he spoke of the matter as urgent simply because he was nearing the end of his available financial resources. Yet one may believe that fear of Poynter and Higgins had also something to do with his decision and that he thought it would be wise to change his address again—leave the country for a time. Plainly he had reason to believe they were hunting him.

"Why didn't he change his name?" I asked. "I assumed that 'Greenlees' must be a false one."

"I guess it's pretty plain," said Tibbs, "that Poynter and Higgins didn't know it was his right one. Now I didn't think too much about this proposition o' Greenlees—I mean the money end o' it—but it made me curious; apart from that I'd be right glad to see him again, and I'd meant anyway to pay a visit to my niece. So here were two birds I could kill with one stone. Meaning it to be a surprise, like, I didn't write Cissey I was coming, not knowing exactly when I could. I knew she'd be working when I arrived so I went straight to The Chalfont, not knowing that Greenlees was dead and buried. If I'd seen my niece first I'd have known more'n I did. She hadn't written me about Greenlees because she didn't know when the *Tahiti Belle* was due in Frisco. And anyway she wouldn't have had time to tell me about his death, and what she'd learned, because she didn't know about it till later."

WHAT Miss Carlton had learned was contained in a letter of Greenlees'. It is to be remembered that she had never visited him at The Chalfont and—evidently since his meeting with Poynter—his comparative intimacy with her had ceased. And she had been too ill to find out the reason. It is clear that Greenlees was afraid of Poynter learning that he knew her, connecting her with Tibbs and thus deducing the fact that the other meant to sail on the *Tahiti Belle*. Greenlees' letter had been mailed the day before his death and obviously he was finding the tension between himself and Poynter unbearable. The secret nocturnal visits which he dared not prevent, whose real object he feared but did not rightly know, were becoming unendurable. One can imagine with what anxiety he awaited the coming of Captain Tibbs, the one man he could trust, his one sure friend on whom he could rely. And yet there is every reason to believe that he had no intention of telling even this friend the whole unvarnished truth. He was in an extraordinarily difficult position all around and, considering what must have been his state of mind and the infirmities of advancing age, no doubt he took the only course possible. At all events in the letter to Miss Carlton there was a sealed envelope bearing the inscription, "To be opened only on proof of my death," and, thanks to her memory, I may here give in full the contents of the covering letter. Simon Greenlees, it will be borne in mind, was not a highly educated man.

DEAR MISS: I guess you wonder why I haven't had you out to lunch or to the pictures or seen you at all for this while. I have a good reason. Please don't try to see me *in any way* until further notice. *This is very important.* If you do it will only make a lot of trouble for me. If you want to help me don't try to see me and don't open the other letter until you know I'm dead. You are the only friend I have here and I know I can trust you to do this. I will write you again when I hear from your uncle, who is coming to see me. Don't be scared, for nothing is going to happen to me. But please do as I say.

Now, unknown to Greenlees, Miss Carlton had left town the day before he wrote to her. Also unknown to him, she had been ill and her employers gave her ten days' vacation which she spent up in Saranac. The letter was duly forwarded but she didn't see the brief account of Greenlees' death nor learn of it until her return. Then she opened the second envelope and found another letter. This she kept and it was now shown to me. It was as follows:

DEAR MISS: Come to my flat at once, go to the bookcase, and on the top shelf, right-hand side, you'll find a book of poems called the "Heroides and Amores," by an Italian by the name of Ovid. It's a library book, and in it you'll find an old envelope with your name and a big green foreign stamp on it. Take it; it's worth a fortune. Don't let anybody see you take it, especially a big, tall, clean-shaven chap, who looks like a gentleman and who may call himself anything. But his real name is Joe Roger and he's a crook. Remember also the name of Bill Harpey. They're both crooks, and they'll stop at nothing to get the stamp. You can't be too slick or careful. Don't think I'm crazy; I only wish I was.

Give the envelope to your uncle when he comes and tell him to look on the back of the stamp. Tell him he'll find there what I wrote about, and that it's the place where I broke my leg when him and me were on the old *John Hancock*. I won't risk sending it to you, you see; and these directions I'm giving you are no good to any one without the stamp. Tell your uncle it's in the middle of the lagoon, on a line with the big lump of reef coral and the old hut. He can't go wrong. He'll find it shipshape, sewed in oil silk and sailcloth. That's where we were berthed and I dropped it over without anybody knowing. I want you and your uncle to have it. Tell him it's mine and that I earned it dear, but that I knew Harpey and Roger meant to do me out of it. Don't ask any questions about it, but get it and enjoy it. Watch out for Harpey and Roger, and don't trust *anybody* but your uncle. Do just as I say, and God bless you for helping me to beat those rascals at the last!

P. S. I put it in the library book because they know it don't belong to me. Get it before it's given back. They'll go through all my other belongings. God bless you again!

In the middle of the lagoon! Why hadn't I thought of that? Yes, of course, on that hard clean floor anything would be safe. But such a place to hide it! And yet, as I understood later, it was the one and only place.

Obviously Greenlees had meant to claim the unopened letter from Miss Carlton had he lived to meet her uncle, and even in that letter, though he should be dead when it was read, it was patent that he had left much unsaid.

She went to The Chalfont and, of course, Adolphus had his own reasons for saying nothing about her visit. Ball wasn't on the premises or at least not in evidence. It was the dead hour of the evening, between eight and nine o'clock.

LEARNING that Adolphus could admit her to the apartment, she decided there was nothing to do but take him into her confidence to a limited extent; that is, she said she had known Mr. Greenlees, that she had been out of town and had only just learned of his death, that she had loaned him a very valuable book that hadn't been returned. Would Adolphus let her see if it was still there so that she could put in a claim to the executors? She wouldn't remove it, of course—merely make sure it was safe.

The apparently harmless request of such a pretty and persuasive girl might well have been granted in any case, but Adolphus probably had his own reasons for consenting. It would appear reasonably certain that Poynter and he at least suspected the existence of the stamp map, that they had searched high and low without success. What had become of it? Had this girl the clew?

At all events he consented, pretending to accompany her merely as a matter of form but, no doubt, keeping a sharp and secret eye on her.

She could find no trace of the book. Did Adolphus happen to know if any had been removed? Yes, he knew that one had been returned the other day by Mr. Greenlees' lawyer to the neighboring branch library where it belonged. If Adolphus gave this information in the hope of seeing what effect it might have, Miss Carlton believed at the time that he learned nothing from her reception of it. She replied that of course it couldn't be the book she was looking for, that Mr. Greenlees must have loaned hers to some one else. She gave Adolphus a tip and her best smile and went straight to the library. This, as you will have gathered, was the night I met her.

Naturally she wished to avoid whatever publicity was possible. Without making inquiries at the desk she went to the classics corner to see if the book was there; and here she not only saw me examining it but the envelope, though she was unable to see what I ultimately did with the latter.

Now she had a lively recollection of Harpey and Roger and Greenlees' injunction to trust nobody but her uncle. And the description she had been given of Roger exactly fitted me, Greenlees having omitted the essential fact that Poynter was blond and handsome. For all she knew Harpey and Roger might have discovered the secret of the book—I might have been either of them and have beaten her to it. On the other hand I might be the perfectly innocent object I seemed. The fact that I took the book might be construed either way. She was at a loss how to act but finally decided on the line adopted.

"I thought naturally," she now said stiffly, "that even if I spoke of a letter an innocent man would have said he had found an envelope."

"It was difficult to confess that it was in my hat," I replied. "And I thought you weren't telling the truth——"

"And I *knew* you weren't."

"I'm sure I should have eventually if you hadn't disappeared like that. If you had told me the truth——"

"How could I?" she demanded with asperity. "It was you who made all the trouble by not telling it. I had every reason to believe you were Harpey or Roger or one of their friends. I *knew* you had the envelope but there was nothing more I could do then, short of trying to take it by main force. And the less you knew about me the better, for at least I had seen your name and address on the library card and I might be able to think up a way of getting it later—as I did. That

your name was Broke didn't prove that you weren't Roger, for Mr. Greenlees said that he might call himself anything. And at least you *looked* a gentleman. Why should you take the envelope and then deny all knowledge of it if you didn't know about the stamp map?"

"I didn't deny knowledge of it. You asked for a letter——"

"Pooh! Any honest truthful person would——"

"Now, now," said Tibbs, "let's get on with it."

IT would seem that meanwhile Adolphus hadn't been idle, that he was far more astute than Miss Carlton thought. Perhaps he guessed the secret of the book or thought merely that her inquiry was information that Poynter should have at once. Perhaps he phoned the latter or, getting leave from Ball, followed the girl in person. At all events it is certain we were watched that night by one or all of the quartet comprising Poynter, Higgins, Bland and Adolphus. But in this matter of theory and surmise I need not go over again the ground already covered.

Miss Carlton was ignorant of the assault on me and the attempted theft of the envelope, for it had not been necessary to follow me home. She knew my name and address and there was nothing to do but try and think of some means of acquiring by guile what it was impossible to get by force. Discreet inquiry in the neighborhood gave her plenty of information about Adams and myself. "And," she said accusingly, "all I heard about you certainly didn't support the idea that you were harmless law-abiding citizens. A Mr. Stavinski, who happened to be in the corner grocery when I was asking about you, volunteered the information that you were capable of *anything.*"

Then came her daring visit to our flat when she knew I had gone. She admitted that it was no more than a desperate expedient, but added naïvely that she always believed in taking a chance and that audacity often succeeds where caution fails. "Anyway," she added, "I could do no more than fail, and it was worth trying. I learned the name of that model during my conversation with Mr. Stavinski whom I found a very nice and obliging person."

It seems clear that Poynter knew the girl by sight and had even learned her address; that he identified her by Adams' picture and, on the plea of verifying the name and address she had given, lost no time in communicating with Bland. Posing as a detective was evidently the latter's specialty and he proceeded to act as he had done with Adams and me. But I can best tell what followed in Miss Carlton's own words.

"After I got home with the envelope," she said, "I decided to see what was on the back of the stamp. I was alone for Mrs. Lewis had gone on an errand, her husband wasn't home, and we had no maid. I steamed the stamp off, just as you did, and when I saw there was a map on the back it occurred to me naturally, as it did to you, that in case the original should be lost or stolen I ought to make a copy of it. Then I stuck the stamp back on the envelope because I didn't want my uncle to know I'd been so curious."

"There you are," said Tibbs. "You can't beat the ladies. If I didn't tell her what was on the stamp she'd know anyway; and if I did tell her she'd pretend to be mightily astonished."

"Well, as it turned out," said Miss Carlton, unabashed, "it was well I did it. And I hadn't been *told* not to. I had no sooner finished when the top doorbell rang. I thought it was Mrs. Lewis or her husband so I hid the copy, stuck the envelope back in my bag, and removed all trace of my work."

Unnecessary to say, the visitor was Bland who, showing his badge and saying he was a precinct detective, marched into the parlor. One can hardly blame even so clever a girl being taken in by his bogus credentials. Had he known she was absolutely alone there is no doubt his methods would have been more direct and he would have taken brutal advantage of his luck; for there was her bag lying

on the table with the end of the envelope sticking out. In her haste she had failed to conceal it properly. If Bland saw and recognized it he gave no sign; that he did see it is certain but it is more than likely that he was not sure of it were the envelope he sought. He could not risk an open investigation and attack, and no doubt he came with his specious tale already prepared.

"He told me," said the girl, "that a robbery had just happened at the office where I worked; that the cashier had been arrested at his home in Harlem and that he implicated me. He was detained at the station house and I should have to go there. You see that he not only knew the name of my employers, that the cashier lived in Harlem, but that I hadn't been at the office all day."

Miss Carlton, if clever, was not an experienced girl; she knew nothing about police methods. Nor, in the circumstances, would a detective have to show a warrant. Bland was clever enough not to say she was under arrest, yet he made it clear that she had no choice but to obey. His specious story and bearing might have deceived the most seasoned.

Naturally she was upset, frightened, angry. Her keys and money were in the bag and she took it with her as a matter of course. If she had not done so mechanically, Bland would have seen that she brought it or managed to possess himself of it in some manner. As they left the flat they met Mrs. Lewis, to whom the girl said nothing.

"I was so upset," she continued, "that I'd almost forgotten all about the envelope. At least it no longer occupied first place in my thoughts. I continued to assure Mr. Bland that I was innocent and, though he hadn't seemed to believe me before, he gradually became more sympathetic. 'Let's go in here where we won't be seen,' he said finally, as we approached a restaurant, 'and talk it over. Of course I've got my duty to do but I don't want to bring trouble on an innocent party if I can help it. And no matter how innocent you are, some mud's sure to stick once you get your name on the blotter. I don't mind telling you that I can use my own judgment in this, and I won't have you up before the desk if I'm satisfied you're telling the truth. I've got a girl of my own about your age at home.'"

"I know," Bland told her, "that you haven't had time to plant it anywhere. If you turn out that bag and give me your word that it ain't on your person, I'll save you the indignity of being searched by the matron."

She complied, and whatever suspicions she might have had at this point would have been dismissed by Bland's attitude when he saw the envelope. Apparently it had absolutely no interest for him. Of course he could make no attempt to take it then, and, before he could execute whatever plan he contemplated, I stepped in and stole the bag. To have the prize virtually in his hand for so long and then to lose it! I could imagine what Poynter must have said to him, how Bland himself felt.

The bogus detective quickly lost himself in the crowd that pursued me, and Miss Carlton had not seen him since. It was only then that her vague doubts and suspicions became certainties and she believed it was all part of a prearranged plan, the thief being Bland's accomplice. Perhaps it had been their plan and I had forestalled them. Perhaps Poynter himself, following the couple, had actually seen me peering through the restaurant window, knew me for the ultimate thief. At all events I had innocently told him all about it. How he must have laughed inwardly as I paraded my triumph! I had played into his hands at every turn.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE TREASURE.

THANKS, then, to Miss Carlton's curiosity my daring theft was of infinitely less consequence to her than otherwise it might have been; and on reaching home and meeting with her uncle she told him all that had happened, producing the copy of the map.

Aided by what Greenlees had said in his letter to the girl, Tibbs had little difficulty in identifying the island. "If I didn't exactly know her by the map," said Tibbs, "I remembered that trip with Greenlees in the old *John Hancock* and his breaking his leg, and I knew I'd have no trouble finding her. She's about where they said, for there was nothing to be gained by lying to you, though their course mightn't have been the one given to you." Tibbs then told me our exact latitude and longitude which, as we had no chart, left me little the wiser.

Believing that Higgins and Poynter had the map, and knowing their reputation, Tibbs rightly conjectured that it would become a race for the island; for, of course, he could take no legal measures to stop them. He could prove nothing and they were at liberty to go where they pleased. His advantage lay in their not knowing about him—of course he had no reason to think that Adolphus and I would tell Poynter of his visit to The Chalfont—and the probability that they would have to find a ship.

"While there was the *Tahiti Belle* all ready to go," he said. "With any luck I could beat them to it, lift the stuff before ever they raised the island. My niece insisted on coming along, and the long and short of it was that she got her way. She generally does."

SO they left for San Francisco the following day, unknown to Higgins and seeing nothing of his crew. As Tibbs, to the best of his knowledge, was not known to them by sight, and they were not aware that he knew Miss Carlton, there was no concrete reason why they should think his visit to The Chalfont connected with Greenlees' treasure. But it suited their purpose to make it so appear to Adams and me. Even, however, if they did guess Tibbs' interest in the matter they did not know he had a copy of the map, supplemented by the key contained in the letter. They did not suspect for a moment that he could forestall them.

Thus the *Tahiti Belle* had almost a week's start of us—for short as had been our stay in San Francisco, Tibbs' had been shorter—and it goes without saying that we had never sighted her. Yet we succeeded in overcoming much of the handicap for the *Mary Kearney* had a "kicker," the *Tahiti Belle* none. And but for Higgins' steering a less direct course, for the alleged purpose of dodging our mythical pursuer, together with the restrained use of the auxiliary engine, there is no doubt that we should have overhauled her. Higgins and Poynter thought the time factor of no great consequence when, as a matter of truth, every minute counted.

Reckoning it up as best we could, the *Tahiti Belle* could not have been much more than two days ahead of us when the great storm broke. Tibbs had no mate like Poynter, nor perhaps was he himself as good a hand at the wheel as either Higgins or Poynter. Whatever he might have been once, he was now past his day while they were in their prime. At all events he laid no blame on dead-and-gone subordinates and, like a true sailor, when I told how the *Mary Kearney* had been handled, gave full praise to Poynter and Higgins. If they were great rascals they were also great seamen and, in both respects, he was anxious to give them their due.

Their landing on the wrong side of the island had been due to necessity, there being no choice in the matter. Miraculous indeed to reach land at all. The *Tahiti Belle,* after running a great race before the hurricane, was finally pooped and battered to the bottom when actually within sight of her goal. The whaleboat—Tibbs' arm was broken in the launching—only lived long enough to be smashed to pulp on the barrier reef. And how these three managed to survive, to be flung up more dead than alive on the beach, was one of those chapters—remarkable alike for human endurance and the play of the gods—peculiar to many sea epics. Certain it is, however, that but for the redoubtable Sam Lee things even then would have gone very hard with Tibbs and the girl.

"For you see I was crocked," said Tibbs, "and I couldn't even lend a hand with the salvage, such stuff as came ashore when the whaleboat was gutted. The *Tahiti Belle* went down like a plummet; that's why you saw no wreckage. What we salved ain't much but Sam's the kind that can make a whole lot out o' nothing. And Cissey has been a real trump too, proved her right to come along. And what with such edible stuff as grows here, and handy fresh water, we've made out pretty comfortable, like."

When, from the top of the ridge, Sam Lee had sighted the *Mary Kearney* standing in, they had very wisely decided to make no signal until satisfied of our innocence. She might be a trader, off her course and putting in for water, but far more likely Higgins and Poynter. They moved the camp up into the bush and removed all trace of their presence in case the visitors happened to investigate that section of the beach.

THEY were not left long in doubt concerning our identity. A revolver and pocket telescope were among the articles Tibbs had thought to bring on leaving his doomed ship, and Miss Carlton, from the ridge the previous day, had watched us through the glass, seen us drop anchor and quarter the lagoon in our vain search for shell. She was able to recognize Adams and me, if not Poynter and Higgins, and, from her subsequent description of the latter couple, Tibbs had no difficulty in putting a name to each. As for the events of this day, she had gone up to watch us and been absent so long that Sam Lee went in search of her, arriving in time to witness her struggle with me. He had no weapon and so used the only method of attack possible. Miss Carlton had seen nothing of the murder in the whaleboat for her whole interest lay in watching me, and she had no view of that part of the sea from where she lay concealed.

"Then, of course, you haven't been able to get the treasure," I said at length. "It's still there in the lagoon. Have you any idea what it is? But, look here; they must have read those directions right, for Higgins, under the pretense of searching for shell, went down right after we'd anchored. And, if he knew what to look for, and if the real treasure is there, why didn't he see it?"

"He did see it," said Miss Carlton. "That's what he went down for—to find its exact location and get it aboard without your knowing. I couldn't understand, of course, at the time, but now I do."

"But he didn't get it aboard!" I exclaimed. "He had nothing with him when he came aboard, no place where he could hide anything. There was a watch all night, and I've watched him all day. Neither Sweet nor he left the ship."

"They didn't have to," she said calmly. "When he went down yesterday a line was thrown over, wasn't there? Yes, I saw everything. Well, that line was still there to-day. And so yesterday he simply fastened one end to the bundle, then drew it up to-day when Sweet and he were alone."

I felt my face going hot with a fool's flush. The simplicity of the thing, its low cunning! And with me watching, fondly thinking I had him checkmated! This was too much.

"How do you know this?" I demanded. "I didn't see him pull anything up."

"But I did," she replied. "It was when you were making your way up to the ridge. Sweet was supposed to be fishing, you know. Yes, I am quite, quite sure. There is no possibility of a mistake."

"By George!" I exclaimed, and could find nothing more to add. So the plot had succeeded only too well and what Adams and I had conjectured was right. We had been removed adroitly from the scene, long enough for the simple plan to be executed. They had won the game in spite of the handicap, beaten all of us, and now we should never know what the treasure was. They could go scot-free, guilty of murder and theft; sail away into the blue, leaving us to our fate.

I sprang to my feet. There was Sam Lee and myself, two able-bodied men, and

we had a revolver. We could contrive something, however desperate——

"But they haven't got the treasure," said Tibbs. "We've got it."

I sat down and stared at him. "Y-you've got it?"

"Sure," nodded Tibbs. "If I wasn't able to get it, Sam Lee was. Mebbe you know how good a chink diver can be, but ye won't see the best till ye see Sam. I thought we ought to make a try for the stuff first crack, in case something happened, like, and Sam got it easy as kiss the morning after we landed. And then he had the bright idea—real Oriental, like,—of leaving a fake in its place, a nice little bundle o' nothing, all done up shipshape and proper, in case Harpey came looking for it. It wouldn't be fair, after all their trouble, not to let 'em find *something*. And it would look like as if Greenlees had been playing a joke on 'em, see?"

"Well!" I said. "I'm glad somebody else has been fooled. I wonder how they'll like it."

"And now, lad," said Tibbs, "ye make look your fill o' this here treasure that's cost my ship and crew and the life o' your friend, and which mebbe ain't paid for even yet. There's things ye can buy too dear in this world, Mr. Broke, and they're generally the things ye think you're getting for nothing. Mebbe ye've learned that, hey?"

A PEARL lagoon, yes; nor had such confined waters anywhere yielded before or since such a treasure. Pearls pink and black, the smallest as big as a buckshot, the largest as small as a marble. They had been wrapped in a chamois bag wadded with cotton, this sewed in oil silk, this again placed in an empty one-pound tobacco tin, the whole weighted and sewed in sailcloth. Pearls such as I had never seen together at one time in my life, or thought to see, and whose monetary value I could not attempt to estimate!

Night had come swiftly but the tropic moon made bright the little clearing. Tibbs dumped the contents of the tin in his hat and ran a hand through the creamy mass, letting the pearls dribble through his fingers like sand. But his eyes were on me.

"Over half a million dollars, lad, in the open market," he said at length. "What do ye think o' that?"

It was a great sum but to my father, for instance, it would not have meant so much. I was tremendously impressed by the size, beauty and number of the pearls but, though now broke in more than name, genuinely unmoved by their monetary value. I suppose it all depends on viewpoint and habit. I had been accustomed to hear my father and his cronies talk in millions, and perhaps I have shown already that I possessed no financial acumen, no money sense.

"I think they're great!" I said. "I only wish Adams had lived to see them, to paint their beauty. I can't begin to tell you what a really great artist he was. He could have done them justice; I can't."

Whatever Tibbs saw in my face, read in my words, it seemed to please him. He replaced the pearls in the tin and gave it in charge again of Sam Lee. Then he eyed me anew.

"Ye didn't seem much staggered by that fortune, Mr. Broke."

"Why, I'm glad I saw such beauty. And I might have died of unsatisfied curiosity if I'd never known what the treasure was. But as for what they may be worth——" And I shrugged.

"But, as I understand it, ye're only a poor writing chap," said Tibbs. "You and your friend sunk all your savings—aye, and were fleeced proper too—in the venture. Ye were thinking o' the fortune then, hoping to find one, o' course?"

"Yes, of course. All that's true enough but neither of us was thinking simply of the money value. There was adventure, experience, travel—oh, everything; values that can't be reckoned in money."

"I understand, lad. Ye're a good bit like myself."

"I got all that and I'm not kicking," I added. "We didn't think then that anybody but Higgins had a legal claim on the treasure. Anyway what's the good of

thinking of half a million, or a hundred million, that belongs to somebody else? Those pearls belong to you, of course, and so——"

"Do they?" broke in Tibbs, regarding me steadily. "Aye, they were left me by Greenlees; there's no question o' that. But don't ye see, Mr. Broke, that when I tackled this business I thought it was absolutely on the square? If I'd thought otherwise I'd never have put a hand to it. Simon Greenlees was as straight as a string when I knew him, and ye keep thinking o' old friends as ye *did* know 'em. Ye forget, like, that they may change in character as well as face so that ye'd never know it was the same man. I never thought, until you spun your yarn, that he was hiding out from Harpey and Roger. You see what I mean? Ain't you seen it all along?"

"Well, it wasn't for me to speak of it. You mean, of course, that Greenlees must have been their partner and that, considering their characters, the pearls were stolen?"

"Aye," nodded Tibbs. "God forgive me if I'm doing an old friend a mortal wrong, but what else can ye think? It's not only the character of those two rogues, Mr. Broke, but the whole circumstances and the fact that such a collection o' pearls couldn't be found honestly by any one man, no, not if he had the luck o' the devil himself. They're the pick and choice o' the whole South Seas, if I'm any judge. And even if Greenlees had discovered such a secret lagoon, or bought 'em honest, why go burying 'em here like that and be afraid to have the law on Roger and Harpey? No, I can't see but the one answer; if he wasn't their partner they knew he hadn't come by them honest, like. There was something mighty wrong about the whole business and he knew, if he told me, I'd have had no part in it. He never meant to tell me the truth o' it."

"WELL," I said, "do you expect to learn the truth from Higgins? Do you think, because they were possible partners, they are entitled to a share? Of course you could depend on them giving you Greenlees' share, and then taking us all home as a united family! They wouldn't claim it was all theirs, that Greenlees had robbed them of it. And we'd forget about the murder of Adams!"

"Save your sarcasm, lad," said Tibbs. "I'm not so soft as that. It stands to reason they've no more proper title than Greenlees; either they helped him in the crooked work or they meant to profit by knowing what he'd done. But what I'm coming to is this: I've no proper title either; I can only look on 'em as a sort o' trust fund, something I've got to make every effort to restore to the rightful owners. And so, lad, I can't be offering you a share in what I don't rightly own."

"Of course you can't. Why, I'm not entitled to any share, Captain Tibbs. Surely you didn't think——"

"No, Mr. Broke, and I don't. I'm glad to say that. But entitled or not, ye'll have a fair share if it so happens we can't trace the lawful owners. Little or big, ye'll have your share o' what I may honestly come by, you and Cissey and Sam. We're partners, the four o' us, though it's all odds we'll have nothing to divide."

"I'm not entitled to any share, but it's certain there will be nothing to divide if Higgins and Poynter learn you're here. The fact that you have the pearls changes everything. I'll have to return to the *Mary Kearney*."

"Why so?"

"Because if I don't they'll come and look for me. It's no longer a case of sailing away with the boodle and leaving me to rot. And if they have to search for me they'll be sure to find you."

"Not necessarily," said Miss Carlton. "How could you go back after the murder of Mr. Adams?"

"But they don't know I know. They'll tell some tale and I'll pretend to believe it. Now that they haven't got the treasure they won't have to serve me as they served him. The fact is that if I wasn't here they would have no reason to land on the island at all."

"But it's perfect nonsense!" she exclaimed. "What could you do—one man against the whole crew?"

"We don't know that it's a case of the whole crew. Even if Andersen helped in the murder, and the others did nothing, it doesn't prove that they know about the treasure. With luck I might be able to do a whole lot. Even at the worst it would be a sure way of ultimately rescuing you. I could sail with them and manage somehow to send help."

"But it's possible," said Tibbs, "they'll up anchor and away before finding they haven't got the treasure. All the more likely if the crew don't know about it."

"Possible," I said, "but not probable. Poynter and Higgins won't wait to have a secret look at it. Would you yourself? Would anybody? They'll take the first chance they get."

"You seem very anxious to return," said Miss Carlton. "Why are you so set on it?"

"I've explained why. Do you think there's another explanation?"

"Have I said so?"

"You don't need to. You may as well say you think the real reason is that I want to tell them the treasure is here. Oh, I know *you* don't trust me, if your uncle does. You have made me feel it——"

"You've no right to say that! But if you make your own cap, and it fits you, you may wear it. And I do think the reason you give for returning is perfectly stupid."

"Now, now," said Tibbs. "What's the matter with you two anyway? We've trouble enough without making more. There's some reason in what ye say, Mr. Broke, and it's not a question o' trust either; but if there's a chance o' those rogues sailing off, one way or the other, and leaving us in peace, we'd be fools not to take it. I'd rather stand my chance here than with them. We can make out, and it won't be long before the *Tahiti Belle's* posted as missing and a search made."

"You don't really believe that," I said. "They'll think, and rightly, that she went down in the storm. There will be no search, and no ship would put in here except by accident. I would only be one more mouth to feed——"

"Ye'll not be going alone to the mercy o' that murdering lot," said Tibbs emphatically. "I wouldn't let ye, lad. That's what Cissey was thinking when she said that——"

"I wasn't thinking anything of the kind!" declared his niece.

"Now, now," said Tibbs.

"There's no 'now now' about it," she said quite violently. "*I* know what I was thinking and nobody else. If Mr. Broke prefers to be murdered like his friend I'm sure it's no concern of mine. I shouldn't dream of interfering. Surely he knows what is appropriate. He is of age and seems quite intelligent."

"Now, now," said Tibbs for the third time as he scratched his grizzled head and looked askance at the moon. "Anyway, Mr. Broke, we can do with an extra man, like. At the worst, if it comes to a fight, we can hold the ridge against the lot o' them for at least there's plenty o' food for the Colt. There's nothing to be gained by hurry. We can keep an eye on the ship—Sam's up there now—and see what the morning brings."

"For pity's sake let him go if he wants to!" said Miss Carlton.

CHAPTER XXVII.

WHAT THE MORNING BROUGHT.

THUS, as had been so often the case with Adams, I allowed my predilection for immediate action to be overruled by a policy of wait and see. Perhaps Captain Tibbs was right, nor did it follow necessarily that by such delay I burned my bridges, made it impossible to rejoin Poynter and Higgins. If they did not send a boat for me until morning the fault was theirs, not mine. Or if Brown and Snell had waited for some sign of my return, I could fake a sprained ankle and say I had been unable to get back when night overtook me. At least the night was between me and an irrevocable deci-

sion, and much would depend on how they acted. If they landed to make a search then I must either go to meet them as putative friend or take my stand as open enemy. All my desire was against leaving Captain Tibbs, especially after the remarks of his niece, but I should have to do what seemed best. And so, though yielding, I gave him to understand it was no hard-and-fast promise but that circumstances must dictate my line of action.

These thoughts engrossed me as at length I climbed to the top of the ridge where I surprised Mr. Lee—or rather he surprised me, so much did he comport himself like a shadow. The lagoon lay like a misty pearl in the moonlight and, as I had expected, the *Mary Kearney* was still there. She showed no riding lights, indeed no light of any kind that I could see, and more than ever put me in mind of a ghost ship. But, lying bow on to us as she was, both the forecastle and cabin might have been lighted for all I could tell. I swept the shore and lagoon with the small glasses, more ineffective than ever in that light, but saw no sign of the dinghy.

"I've come up to relieve you—stand watch," I said to the Chinaman, a stolid spectator. "Captain Tibbs knows I'm here."

"Velly good," he nodded, but did not move.

"You don't need to stay," I added.

"Me watchee too," he said urbanely. "'Tlwo heads better than one,' as ploverb says."

"But this is a case of eyes. There's no need for two to watch. You'd better go."

He heaved a sigh, shook his head, smiled. "Velly fine night. Velly good to sit up here on top of world with wise lady moon and holy thoughts. Velly fine."

"I see," I said. "But I don't think your thoughts are very holy, my friend. You still think I'd make a velly fine corp?"

He smiled brightly and spread his hands. "Velly good Chinese ploverb—'Tlust a wife so long as husband's mother's eyes see her.'"

"I see. You mean to be a sort of mother-in-law to me even if I'm not exactly a wife? You don't trust me any more than Miss Carlton does!"

And with that the girl herself appeared. "It's quite all right, Sam," she said. "And my uncle wants you."

Clearly the self-appointed mother-in-law still had his doubts, but with another "Velly good!" he obediently dematerialized. Perhaps sight of the navy revolver in the girl's belt did something to reassure him and he did not go beyond call.

She did not follow him but stood hesitant. "I—we—that is, my uncle was afraid Sam might think you were trying to escape. So I—well, my uncle thought I should come up and see that he didn't attack you. His loyalty is so—so exuberant."

"You shouldn't have bothered," I replied. "It didn't matter."

"But it did and—and it does. I overheard what you said to him about not being trusted. I want to apologize——"

"Oh, nonsense. You've nothing to apologize for. It was all my fault. I had no right to say what I did."

"Oh, you had. I *did* make you feel that I didn't trust you. I *wanted* to make you feel it. I was perfectly abominable; I know I was because I tried to be."

"Well, I can be without trying. That lovely remark about apes, classing you with Sam——"

"Yes, that's what finished me. It hurt because it was true. Oh, yes, it was. It was abominable to laugh at your friend's cruel death, stupid not to see that you weren't pretending. Perhaps I didn't want to see, I was so mad about the way you got the revolver from me. It was only afterward that I realized its truth and what it must mean to you. I am sorry, awfully sorry, and ashamed. And, of course, I really do trust you, believe everything you've told us. Will you forgive me, Mr. Broke?"

NOW the combination of beautiful moonlight and women is too well known to need explaining; it is properly recognized as the oldest and most danger-

ous combustible in the world, capable of causing more havoc than the most modern high explosive. It has wrecked empires if it has also created a new heaven and a new earth. Add to this not an ordinary moon but a tropic one, the song of the sea on the reef, the night wind, blowing soft and warm, that whispers such mysterious things to the heart and sets the blood dancing. Add again that I had not seen a white woman for many long weeks and that, if I had only met this one once, I had been unable to forget her. Circumstances had not allowed me to; she had commanded my thought, intrigued my fancy, sported with my imagination, earned my condemnation and approval at one and the same time. She had been an inhabitant of my mind, if not heart, far longer than I had realized or cared to admit. Add finally that now she stood very near to me, half in provocative shadow, the long lashes of those charming and baffling eyes whose color——

"There's nothing to forgive," I muttered lamely.

She waited a moment, then turned quickly away.

"But—but if you had the sins of the world, nobody could help forgiving you them," I added.

She turned again as quickly. "What a lovely untruth! You *can* tell some nice ones. But I don't ask forgiveness from everybody, only somebody."

"And a nobody has answered."

"But even a nobody is always somebody to somebody. Then," quickly, "we're friends, Mr. Broke?"

"If you will so far honor me, Miss Carlton."

She gave me a shy hand. I took it very gravely. I am sure that the moon, wise old lady indeed, was laughing. But it was very serious to me.

"I must go," she said, reclaiming her hand. "But it's heavenly up here!"

DECIDEDLY. And the fact that hell might break out below, perhaps only helped to make it the more so.

"I really must go," she said. "But I wonder what they are doing down there. You would think they were asleep."

"Perhaps they are—the fo'c's'le at least. They turn in early like animals. Perhaps Poynter and Higgins are in their cabin opening the prize package. I'd like to see their faces when they do."

"I must go," she said. "But what do you think they will do?"

"What can they do but go home?—unless they find you are here. Of course if they suspected that they would know your uncle had forestalled them. I think we should move everything up here. If they come to look for me to-morrow they'll be sure to pass the ridge. Four of us couldn't hope to hide out against a determined search—the discovery of one would be as bad as all—and then where should we be? We should have to defend an untenable place while this is the key position of the whole island. I wasn't a general in the war but it doesn't take one to see that. If they should come up—providing I didn't meet them—we could warn them off with a bullet or take the chance of their passing without seeing us."

"But you won't meet them? Please, Mr. Broke. You could do nothing alone against them; nobody could. It would only be throwing your life away to no purpose. Why should they kill your friend and spare you?"

"But, you see, we don't know why he was murdered. It may have been unpremeditated, a result of the long-slumbering animosity between Poynter and him. I think it must have been. Adams didn't know the secret of the treasure any more than I——"

"No, but they meant all along to kill you both. I'm sure they did. They would have murdered you when you returned to the ship."

"Why not before? They had plenty of opportunity. No, I don't think they meant to. Anyway, as I said before, they haven't the treasure now."

"It makes no difference; they will kill you anyway. I know they mean to if they can. Promise me that you won't go."

"I could promise you anything but that,"

I said. "Please believe that I'm not trying to play the hero or martyr or that I'm thinking only of revenge. I'd hate to leave, and I wouldn't think of going for a minute if it was the hopeless chance you say. I'm neither as brave nor as stupid as all that. The odds are all against them serving me as they served Adams. The fact is that we couldn't hold out here indefinitely against a concerted attack. There's the water supply, for one thing; it's not far but far enough to be cut off. The night dews, heavy as they are, wouldn't be enough. They have firearms, even a rifle, and they'd have the run of the place while we'd be cooped up here. Then there's the question of food; if we're cut off from the sea that would be serious too. We've got to think of all those things, and we can't count on being rescued at the last minute like people in books. Finally, if I joined them, I could not only send help to you but make sure of saving my own life."

"Ah, what an argument! As if I could believe that. Do you think we would save our lives at the price of yours? Then you are determined to go and risk your life?"

"Only if we see that the whole crew is against us. I doubt if they are. While they might, through fear of Poynter, wink at Adams' murder, it would be a different matter to take an active part in more. And, if they don't know about the treasure, why should they? So you see how many ifs there are and how much depends on their not knowing you're here. They mayn't search for me or it may be only a perfunctory one. In that case they may sail without me—but I'll catch them up some time and make them pay for Adams' death."

"Well," she sighed, "I must really go. But, you know, they might pass us here on the ridge without seeing us. I do hope they won't come at all. Isn't it funny to think how we met?"

"Velly solly," said Mr. Lee, appearing at length, "but ten o'clock gone and boss wants you, missy."

"Ten o'clock? My goodness me!" exclaimed Miss Carlton. "It *can't* be that time."

"Velly fine night," said Mr. Lee. "Time pass velly quick with wise lady moon. 'Pleasure have no clock,' as ploverb says." He looked from the girl to me and I saw that by some mysterious process I had gained his confidence and regard. Perhaps Tibbs had convinced him of my trustworthiness.

DAWN found us established, with all our scanty belongings, on the apex of the ridge, Tibbs having heartily approved of my plan. Of course there had been no sleep for any of us but, though spent and weary, excitement kept us on tiptoe. What would the morning bring? If a search were made would they pass and repass this crown of the ridge without discovering us? There was less cover up here and even the sun might prove an all-too-formidable foe, while our available supply of water was necessarily scanty.

There had been no sign throughout the night from the *Mary Kearney* but as the glory of the morning burst on the lagoon, turning it to pink and gold, the ghost ship awoke to life.

"Nice sort o' doings," muttered Tibbs at length, watching through his small telescope. "The fo'c's'le mixing with the afterguard. What sort o' discipline is that? I say, lad, there's something queer going on, like."

There was, as I could see by the aid of my glasses. The whole crew were now gathered aft, crowded about the cabin. Most of them had come running from the forecastle half dressed. There was no sign of Poynter, Higgins, or even Sweet.

"Is it mutiny?" queried Tibbs excitedly. "Are the swabs going to talk turkey to their officers? What the blazes is it? They've all gone below."

At length the crew reappeared, singly and in twos, gesticulating and evidently greatly excited. They gathered at the rail where they huddled like a lot of sheep without a leader. And still there was no sign of their officers.

"Poynter, Higgins, and Sweet can't be

there," I said. "Could they have landed here in the night without us knowing? See, they're getting the dinghy ready. They're coming ashore. Those two manning her are Brown and Snell. I'm going down."

"You're not!" cried Miss Carlton.

"I am. I must. Whatever has happened I can take advantage of it. If Poynter and Higgins aren't aboard—— We can't miss this chance. I'll be as safe as a church." And in another moment, without waiting for further words, I was on my way.

Before ever I reached the bottom I could hear my name being shouted; the dinghy had beached and its erstwhile occupants, making a trumpet of their hands, were paging me.

"Blarst me, 'ere 'e is, mate!" cried Snell to the distant Brown as, with a fictitious limp, I came suddenly on the little Limehouse "Aussie" peering about apprehensively near the ruined hut. He seemed genuinely delighted to see me.

"Ow, Mr. Broke, but you give me a queer turn!" he added. "This ruddy plyce being wot it is—a chamber of 'orrors, that's wot. Where the 'ell 'ave you been? Brownie and me waited 'ere till arf parst eight, 'ollerin' our 'eads off, and not a sign of you. We thought you'd been and gone and got murdered too. Ow, Mr. Broke, there's been 'ell to pay, 'ell to pay all round! It's this ruddy plyce!"

"What has happened?"

"There's been a norful time!" exclaimed Snell. "First of all I've got to tell you that your pal, Mr. Adams, 'as gone west. He's been and gone and got drownded."

"What! Drowned? Y-you can't mean it!"

"I do, s'welp me. Yus, yesterday in the w'aleboat. 'E lorst 'is balance somehow and fell overboard when they was changing plyces. 'E went down like a stone. They rowed rahnd and rahnd and never seen a sight of him. I know 'ow you feel abaht it, losing a good pal, and 'e was a fine cove. But don't take it too 'ard. We all got to go some time. Drownded, yus."

BROWN had joined us. We could not be seen from the schooner. "That's the tale," he nodded, "but between us three, Snellie and me don't think she smells just right. Those guys seem to have somethin' on their chests, and I heard your friend say a fish had nothin' on him. They say he couldn't swim but I know better. But that ain't the worst of it; the whole afterguard has been bumped off."

"What do you mean?"

"Just that," said Brown. "I ain't sayin' who done it but you can count Snellie and me outa it. We ain't no angels but murder ain't in our line a-tall. First we knowed—or anybody was supposed to know—that guy Subton come bustin' into the fo'c's'le to spill the news. He was standin' the morning watch and when he went below to do chores——"

"It was a norful sight!" broke in Snell eagerly, not to be forestalled in the grisly recital. "There was the three of 'em—Higgins, Poynter and Sweet. A norful sight. It must 'ave 'appened larst night. Brownie and me 'ad no 'and in it; we turned in after standing the second dogwatch and slept like a couple of turkle doves. Didn't we, Brownie?"

"It's between that squarehead Andersen, Subton and that bunch that manned the whaleboat," said Brown. "They say they know nothin' about it and that Higgins, Poynter and Sweet must have croaked each other, had a falling out. Mebbe they did. What was the bos'n doing down in their cabin? And there sure was some scrap; the place looks like a slaughterhouse. Andersen and Sweet had the middle watch and the Swede says he heard nothin'. I don't know. But what could they scrap about?"

"I haven't any idea," I said untruthfully. "But they might have blamed each other because we didn't find any shell. It's easy enough to start a fight in this climate."

"Yus, it gives you the fair 'ump," nodded Snell, looking about him darkly. "Anyway Brownie and me ain't going to 'ang for wot we 'ad no 'and in. We come 'ere first chance to find you. We want

to get out of this ruddy plyce—all of us —and now you're the only cove who can sail that old hooker. You're an ejicated cove and we know 'ow you learned all abaht navigatin' from Poynter. Lucky thing you did or where would we all 'ave been? We'd 'ave 'ad to stay 'ere and rot. So you're an orficer now, Mr. Broke; the navigatin' orficer and capting."

"That's right," nodded Brown. "The other hands say so too. There ain't nothin' else for us, see? Even if they're guilty of murder they can't stay here. Mebbe they mean to desert when you get them near a port. Or mebbe they ain't guilty. Snellie and me, of course, ain't shown that we think they may be. The three of us can keep on that way while also seeing they don't try any dirty work when we near a port. Five of us has gone since we left Frisco and now the odds is only three to four. We can stand that."

"We can," I said, "but that isn't the point. If it depends on me we'll have to stay here and rot. I know no more about navigation than the rest of you. That's the truth."

"Strike me pink!" exclaimed Snell in dismay. "I thought you was ejicated?"

"I thought so too," I said sadly, "but I've learned otherwise on this trip. I've learned the difference between theory and practice. In theory I could navigate the *Mary Kearney* to any port you said, but in practice—nothing doing. I could find nothing but a rock, and I wouldn't know that till I hit it. If you're willing to risk your necks on my supposed ability, I'm not. I'd rather rot than be drowned."

"Ow 'ell!" wailed Snell. "I'll go barmy if I 'ave to stick in this ruddy plyce. I'll go clean off the tick. It's a Jonah and something'll 'appen to all of us. I'd rather be drownded and get it over with. S'welp me I would."

"Gee!" said Brown. "We're up against it for fair. We ain't even got a steersman like old Sweet. So we're stuck, eh?"

"No," I replied, "we aren't. I've a friend here who can save us. He's a master mariner by the name of Captain Tibbs. Let's go and see him."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A HANDFUL O' PEBBLES.

IF I had casually informed my companions that I had secreted a seaplane back in the bush, all ready for our conveyance, they could not have been more astonished or incredulous; and it was only after I had given a substantial, but partly fictitious, account of Tibbs and how he had come to be shipwrecked—of course I said nothing about the pearls—that they consented to believe me.

We had no more than begun our upward climb when the girl herself appeared in company with Sam Lee who now possessed the revolver.

"Blimey," exclaimed Snell at sight of the Chinaman's remarkable attire, "if 'ere ain't Chin Chin Chow in a kid's sailor suit! Look at 'im, Brownie. 'E ain't 'arf a larf!"

But his laugh quickly vanished as Sam covered him with the revolver.

"It's all right," I said. "Higgins and Poynter are dead and these men are our friends. And they know, Miss Carlton, that only your uncle can get us away from this place." And for her benefit I repeated the fictitious account of the shipwreck which I had told Snell and Brown. They were regarding her with open admiration but no disrespect.

"You two go ahead," said Miss Carlton to Snell and Brown in whose friendliness she evidently did not intend to repose too much faith at present. She waved them forward with the revolver as once she had waved me. "March! We shall tell you where to go."

"Nah then, lydy," said Snell as he stepped out briskly, "you needn't be feared of us running awye or cutting up rorty. We'll be only too glad to meet Cap'n Tibbs if he tykes us awye from this perishin' plyce. We've 'ad our fill of it, Brownie and me."

"What did you mean by coming down like this?" I demanded in a low voice as we fell in behind. "Yes, it has turned out all right but it might have turned out all wrong. If this hadn't happened to

Poynter and Higgins and those two fellows had discovered you——"

"Oh, don't scold me, sir," she broke in which her bogus meek manner, raising humble eyes.

"But you know it was wrong——"

"No, I don't. Did you think we were going to let you go alone, and unarmed too? I told you last night we wouldn't. You're stubborn, Mr. Broke, but so am—so are we. Sam had those two covered all the time."

"I think your uncle was right, Miss Carlton, when he said you generally managed to get your own way. Supposing Poynter and Higgins had been on the island and come on him unarmed while Sam was away? It was awfully decent of you, of course, to want to protect me——"

"Oh, don't flatter yourself, Mr. Broke. What an opinion you have of yourself! It wasn't simply to protect you at all. You see, something happened just after you had gone. This is truly an island of surprises."

"What happened? What was it?"

"Something tremendous," she said with dancing provocative eyes. "Haven't you seen that I'm still all in a flutter?"

"Yes, but I thought naturally it was produced by seeing me again."

"Did you indeed? As if I cared a straw if I ever saw you again. Haven't I said I hated you? Why, I don't really know you and we've never even been introduced. Haven't we only met twice?"

"No, this is the third time—and once was enough."

"You mean too much!"

"In a sense, yes. But you haven't told me what happened."

"No, nor am I going to. Fancy saying you didn't want to meet me again! Yes, you did mean that. I'm very angry with you and I'm *not* going to tell you what happened. You may bully and threaten all you please but I *won't.*"

Nor did she. But when we gained the crown of the ridge I saw for myself.

An island of surprises, yes; and this was the greatest, gladdest surprise of all—so great that I rubbed my eyes and stared. For there, sitting large as life with Captain Tibbs, was none other than my friend James Adams. Battered and damaged, it is true, with his flaming head done up in a fantastic bloodstained turban fashioned from his—or rather my—underwear, but none the less the fat and smiling James.

"Hello, George," he greeted, as though nothing had happened. "Still a squire of dames, eh? The early bird—a bird of paradise—and the worm."

I went up to him, my heart overflowing, and hit him a sound crack. "Why, you old tomato," I said, "I thought you were feeding the fishes. Couldn't they stand you either?"

"You poor drooling sap, George," he said, returning my thump with interest, "why didn't you come down to the beach so as to make sure I was drowned? Yes, Tibbs has told me all about it. You've got a head like a hen, George. You knew darned well I couldn't drown if I tried. Blubber never sinks. I was bunged a bit but that's all."

"I wasted a perfectly good prayer on you, James," I said. "It wasn't fair."

BUNGED a bit; yes, that was all. I should have remembered his head was solid ivory, his hide like that of a rhinoceros. Had I not tested them often to my cost? And the knife flung by Poynter had been caught for the most part by the improvised knife sheath worn under Adams' left arm. It had been sticking in leather, not his vitals, and he got no more than a flesh wound. The story, as related by him, was not the epic tragedy I had imperfectly witnessed, neither was it the triviality that Adams tried to make out. It was simply luck that he reached shore before a shark happened round, but it was his wonderful stamina and aquatic ability that, half senseless as he was, enabled him to swim under water and reach the shallows beyond sight of the whaleboat. He lay on his back, nose out of water, until it had gone, then crawled up into the bush where he stayed throughout the night. He had been in no condition to look for me nor had he any reason to believe that I

was still on the island. With the coming of dawn he began to explore the island and thus happened on Tibbs and his party.

"No," said Adams, harking back to Poynter's attack, "it wasn't premeditated, though he and I hated each other and both of us knew it. But the thing never would have happened if it hadn't been for my old trick of thinking aloud. You remember, George, when we first met, how often I used to do it until you guyed me out of it. I had a lonely life as a kid and it came from that; I talked to myself because there was nobody else.

"Well, I hadn't done it for a long time, and I thought the habit was forgotten, but yesterday it suddenly cropped out again. It's easy enough to understand and it might have happened even if I'd never had such a habit. You know the effect of prolonged concentration, and it was so quiet, hot and sleepy out there in the boat that it was just as though you were alone. I'd been thinking all the time, George, about the lump of reef coral, the position of the schooner, and the old hut—how they were all in line. Nobody had said a word for a long time and we were rowing like a lot of dummies. And then suddenly an idea hit me out of nowhere. 'Why, it must be in the lagoon!' I exclaimed. It's funny but I didn't know I'd spoken aloud, didn't realize it. I actually thought it was somebody else and I turned round to see. And then Poynter's knife hit me and I knew I'd spilled the beans for fair. I'd said enough for a clever and suspicious man like Poynter to guess the rest. He saw in a flash—I knew it when I met his eyes—that you and I knew Greenlees' treasure wasn't shell, that Higgins and he hadn't fooled us. I had to be removed—and anyway he hated me. I had signed our death warrants, as you would say in one of your stories, George.

"It's quite evident," he concluded, "that the crew know nothing about the pearls, and I don't believe that even Andersen was told. There was no necessity to tell anybody, and why should they single out a man like that? He's a dumb squarehead and there wasn't any quarrel between Poynter and me. Those fellows in the whaleboat couldn't see what happened, how it started; it may have looked to them that it was all my fault. Andersen may have thought he was saving Poynter from an unprovoked attack."

"Well," said Tibbs, an arm about each of us as he limped down to the lagoon, "we'll soon learn the truth o' it. But I don't believe that the crew had a hand in last night's business. It's dollars to doughnuts that Poynter didn't believe that what Higgins and Sweet hauled up was nothing but a lot of pebbles. The disappointment was too much for him and he believed the other two were trying to do him out o' his share. I guess that was the way o' it. It's the way many a treasure hunt finishes even if the partners aren't crooks. I've seen more than one in my time. And though Harpey and Roger were partners for years a happening like this was bound to come in the long run. You can't expect nothing else when you ain't dealing on the square and your partner's as big a rogue as yourself. It's queer to think it all happened over nothing but a lot o' worthless pebbles."

When at length the overloaded dinghy reached the *Mary Kearney* we experienced no difficulty getting aboard, if the hoisting of Tibbs be excepted. I was ready in the bow with cocked revolver, for any sign of opposition from the hands lining the rail but none was offered. Indeed they hailed us with every manifestation of delight. But their amazement and pleasure became tempered with dismay and uneasiness when Adams, in the stern, appeared from behind the sheltering bulk of Sam Lee. And yet I could not say that even Andersen, staring stupidly with his corn-flower-blue eyes, acted like a foiled murderer who has been trapped.

"Well, my lads," said Tibbs, fronting them on the deck, "here's a new captain come aboard o' ye and that's me, 'his nibs, Tibbs' of the *Tahiti Belle* of which some or all o' ye may have heard. She's lying out there in the deep and the storm that lost me my ship has brought me another, like. I'm taking command o' the *Mary*

Kearney—which I understand is her right name—with your leave or without it. I'm taking her back to her home port and it's for you to say whether you'll help work her willing or unwilling, wages to be paid in Frisco according to the articles ye signed. But, willing or unwilling, work her ye will until we're in a way o' signing on others in your place. Now have ye got that straight? Very well then, speak up."

SUBTON stepped forward, nudged by the others. "We'll be damn willing to get out of this cursed place, sir. We'd no hand in the killin' of the afterguard—no, nor what happened to Mr. Adams either. He knows that."

"I know that Andersen clouted me with an oar," said Adams, staring grimly at the embarrassed Swede. "And you all know that too."

"Ay dink you kill Poynter for sure and Ay ban save him," said Andersen. "She ban God's own trut', Mr. Adams, sir. Ay ban most asleep, and den I see you wit' knife all ready—so. Ay yump up and bash you—so.

"She ban God's own trut', sir," said Andersen, while the others nodded vigorously.

Then Rooney, a Cork man, spoke up. "If yez'll sthep down below, yez'll see that thim three kilt thimselves entoirely. Snell and Brown could have towld yez that, had they waited to have a good look. 'Tis plain on the face of it, sorr, though for why they done it is beyant me. Shure there's nothin' they could have scrapped over but a handful of pebbles. They must have went crazy."

"It's probable," said Captain Tibbs gravely. "I've seen many queer things happen, like, in these seas. And, lacking a better explanation, there's them that calls it the judgment o' God."

When we went below, leaving Miss Carlton and Sam on deck, and entered the cabin shared by Higgins and Poynter, the truth of Rooney's words became evident. Certainly there was nothing to preclude the theory, while there was much to support it, though the trio were lying in different parts of the room. Sweet, who obviously must have taken the part of Higgins, had evidently been killed early by a single knife thrust, and then the other two had it out with the same weapon. It could not have lasted long and probably happened during the middle watch; discipline was slack and, though the men would not own to it, it is more than likely they were asleep. In any case the probabilities are that, unless one happened to be below, nothing could have been heard; for we can imagine that such a struggle was waged in deadly silence.

And now there the three of them lay, Higgins hunched in a corner and Poynter sprawled in the lower bunk, each of these two with half a dozen mortal wounds. Pebbles were scattered all over the floor together with the other evidence of Sam Lee's prize package. Had the Chinaman reckoned on producing this? Perhaps. He was a subtle soul, versed in the ways of the human heart. It was a terrible sight, and sad. And I wondered by what strange chance of heritage or circumstance men of such obvious parts, especially the educated Poynter, had come to take the wrong turning that led to such a tragic end. As I said before, I prefer to remember these two as I knew them during the great storm.

"Well," said Tibbs, shaking his head, "knowing what we do, and what the crew don't, I guess there's no question about what happened. They waited until the middle watch, when they wouldn't be disturbed, and then Sweet sneaked off and came here for the divvy. The story's wrote plain, and there's their knives laying there to help prove it. Sam's Oriental trick worked, all right, but I never expected this outcome. Pebbles! A handful o' pebbles!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE LAST SURPRISE.

THE "Island of Surprises," as Miss Carlton called it, had not exhausted its stock, though that which I am about to tell came properly from the sea. It came

in the shape of a smoke smudge on the eastern horizon a few hours after the *Mary Kearney* had passed the barrier reef.

"By the piper!" exclaimed Tibbs, watching through the big telescope, "she's a man-o'-war and heading straight here. Now what do ye think o' that? Looking for the *Tahiti Belle,* I'll wager. French or British. No, she ain't; she's American. Hooray!"

She was, and one of the latest on the Pacific station; an oil-burning light cruiser doing thirty-five knots at least. She made a great picture as she came up hand over fist, the sun striking silver from her blue-gray sides.

"What did I tell ye?" cried Tibbs as we hoisted the Stars and Stripes upside down. "Come to look for the poor old *Tahiti Belle,* that's what she is. A ship like her don't have to wait to be posted at Lloyd's. I tell ye his nibs, Tibbs, ain't the sort o' man to go disappearing without his Uncle Samuel making a proper hullabaloo about it."

"I never knew, uncle, you were so well known and important," said his niece. "And I don't think you did either."

"I did so," retorted Tibbs, throwing out his chest and strutting as much as his lame leg would permit. "O' course I knew, but it weren't seemly to brag about it, like. But this will teach ye, my girl, a proper respect which ye ain't never had."

"Looks kind of good to see the old flag again, doesn't it?" said Adams as the cruiser approached. "So we'd have been rescued in any case, eh? Even if it had come to a life-and-death struggle we'd have been saved in the good old nick of time by the good old hard-boiled marines. It would have been just like one of your stories, George. But you see such things don't really happen except in your stories. I hope a prosaic and rational ending like this won't be lost on you, George."

"I think enough true things, neither prosaic nor even rational, *have* happened," said Miss Carlton. "You leave Geor—Mr. Broke's stories alone. They're far better than your paintings."

"If that's all you can say," replied Adams, "it isn't much. I've been thinking over that thing I sent to the Academy, George, and—well, when I get back I guess I'll go in for house painting. I need a bigger canvas—and they pay union wages. But, I say, who's the old duck getting into the launch? It must be the admiral but he has forgotten his cocked hat and lace trimmings."

As the motor launch approached I looked at the gentleman in flannels seated with an officer in the stern. "That, James," I said casually though my heart was thumping, "is my father."

It was, and he came aboard with a spruce young lieutenant and the captain himself. "Well, George," he greeted, "how has the investment proposition turned out? Thought I'd run over and see, trade being slack.

"Trade's slack—you know it's an off season, George," he repeated, "and I thought I might as well run out to Honolulu as anywhere else. And you know, George, for the sake of the family name I couldn't let you be done so shamefully in the eye by those con men. It would reflect terribly on me. I knew this partner of yours wasn't young Poynter, as I wrote you, and when you didn't answer my letter, I ran over to San Francisco and learned about the purchase of this awful old tub. All trace of her seemed to be lost, but then we got word of a schooner, the *Julia Bateman,* that answered her description. So the government very kindly sent out a search party and let me come along. That's the long and short of it."

I knew, of course, that under this arid description there lay a vast amount of intelligent deduction and patient research, to say nothing of expense and the employment of influence. "I'm very sorry, sir, I caused such a lot of trouble," I said. "I was a fool. You were right about that."

"Tut, tut," said my father, and so far forgot himself as to squeeze my arm. "We are all fools, more or less, only some of us never know it. And, even from a purely business standpoint, I don't know that the possibility of a hundred thousand

or so—which, I understand Captain Tibbs to say, may be your share of the venture—is a bad return on your investment. I did nothing better at your age. And now that those men are dead it will be harder than ever to trace the rightful owners of the pearls. I'd buy 'em on the spot if Tibbs would sell."

"I'm not counting on making anything by the pearls," I said, "nor is Tibbs either. And of course I'm entitled to nothing. But whatever he may insist on giving me I'll share with Adams."

"Adams?" echoed my father, and looked over to where he was chatting with Miss Carlton, Tibbs still talking earnestly apart with the officers. "James Adams, eh? Any relative of the artist they're all talking about, who painted that picture of 'Thingumbob?'"

"What picture? Do you—can you possibly mean 'Jael?'"

"That's the name, George; Jael or Baal or some biblical name like that. I saw a line in Honolulu about the hit it made at the last Academy."

"Jerusalem!" I cried, jumping to my feet. "Why that's the man himself! I saw that picture being painted, I even posed for the tent—so Adams says—and Captain Tibbs' niece gave him the inspiration for the face. I told him all along it would make his name. I said it was a work of pure genius but he wouldn't believe me. I say, this is absolutely great, the finest news I've heard in a dog's age. Why, darn his old hide, he has *arrived!*"

"And you, George?" said my father, looking up at me quizzically.

"Why I'm unmade all around, sir. *My* masterpiece was a failure and I've sunk every kopeck on this trip. Is that job still open, sir?"

MY father almost forgot himself again; instead of embracing me, as I had feared, he blew his nose vigorously. "Wide open, George," he said. "And, George, you won't have to give up this writing game either. I don't see why you should, why you can't do both. People can work and still play golf, can't they?"

"They can, sir, and even mah jong," I agreed. "No, I won't give it up and I'll write a story about this trip while I'm earning the ten thousand or so you're going to pay me. I'll need a salary fit for your daughter-in-law."

"Eh?"

"There she is over there, sir, with Adams."

My father, as I have mentioned before, was never greatly surprised at anything. "Well, George," he said, "from what I've seen of her she seems a sound proposition, thoroughly well built inside and out. You could do worse."

"And no better, sir. There's one pearl on that island I found, one worth far more than all the rest, that I mean to keep if I can."

"A sound business instinct, George, worthy of your family. But, God bless me! you can't be married? Have you even asked her?"

"No, but I'm going to now."

I went up to Adams, took him by the shoulders and swung him round. "My father," I said, "is anxious to meet one of the celebrities of the day. Go and talk to him and pretend somehow that you really are a genius. And for goodness' sake don't blab that I'm into Hemingway for a small fortune. Run along, now, Michael Angelo! You'll hear all about it from him."

LET me again go on record with the original statement that there is no comprehending women. When I left Miss Carlton to talk with my father we had been on the best possible terms, and now when I returned all that good understanding seemed to have vanished in the most complete and mysterious fashion. Had Adams been telling the truth about me? But she even listened coldly to my stirring account of his great success.

"Indeed," she said. "You are both to be congratulated."

"Why, I'm not. You needn't congratulate me—at least not just yet. What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing is the matter with me, Mr.

Broke. But—but I think it was perfectly detestable of you to pretend you were only a poor writer——"

"Why, so I am. Ask any editor or publisher. They even think I'm worse than I am."

"You needn't pretend to misunderstand. You know perfectly well what I mean. And all the time your father a multimillionaire, the Broke who owns half New York!"

"But that isn't my fault. I didn't help him get it. And besides he doesn't own quite half. Do him justice. And I haven't had a penny from him in years. Honestly I hate bricks, but when a man's going to get married——"

"I am not interested in your private affairs, Mr. Broke, matrimonial or otherwise. And the sooner you and Mr. Adams transfer to that warship and rejoin your famous and plutocratic friends at home, the better my uncle and I will be pleased. We are plain people——"

"Captain Tibbs certainly is, but not you. Why, it was your beauty that made Adams' picture—— No, now wait a minute; I'm not trying to be funny and I was never more serious in my life. We aren't going to transfer to any warship; we're entitled to stick here and we're going to, and my father's coming with us to San Francisco too. He says he has always wanted a trip on a windjammer and that he has nothing else to do. We'll have a bully trip back and it will give you time to know and condone his faults. You'll like your father-in-law, Cissey——"

"What! What are you talking about? And don't call me Cissey. Who's father-in-law?"

"Yours, of course."

"*Mine?* Why—why how dare you!"

"I'd dare anything in this cause. But there's Adams grinning at us; he never had any sense of decency. Let's shift out of range. I'm no public orator and I want to tell you about the real treasure I found on the island. It's wonderful to think it should end in us getting married——"

"Ve-very wonderful. Indeed, too wonderful to happen. Do you think I would ever marry you? And—and besides you've never even asked me!"

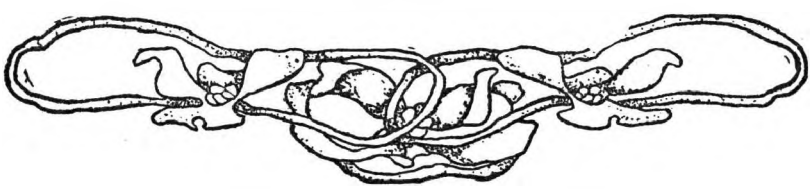
"Why, I've been asking you for the last ten minutes! And you've known for ages—well, ever since last night. You know, Cissey——"

"*Don't* call me Cissey."

"Sweetheart, then."

"That's better," said she.

"The Adam Chaser," by B. M. Bower, a new two-dollar book, complete in the next issue.



WHERE ZEPPELIN BEGAN

GENERAL ISAAC R. SHERWOOD, eighty-nine years of age and the oldest man who ever sat in Congress, is also the only surviving Union army officer in that body. Incidentally, he tells the story of how Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin first had his attention turned toward air navigation, an interest which finally resulted in his construction of the now-famous Zeppelin airships. Zeppelin was an officer for the United States in the Civil War and at that time took advantage of his opportunities to make captive-balloon ascensions. He soon saw what it would mean to be able to steer "balloon ships" through the air in both peace and war, and as early as 1873 he designed a large rigid airship.

McCloskey

By Robert McBlair

Author of "April Fool," "Red Maria," Etc.

A police officer discovers a proverb—the heart is a pawn between love and duty.

THE desk sergeant outside the police commissioner's office glanced up to see a red-haired, blue-eyed, freckle-faced young man in a gray suit looking at him out of a black eye as big as an apple.

"I want to see the commissioner." The young fellow gave an impression of directness and cleanness. There was a touch of brogue in his voice. "Tell him it's Dennis McCloskey—the felly he beat up at the gym."

"Didn't you know no better than to tackle him?" The desk sergeant went in the commissioner's office and came out, grinning widely. The next minute McCloskey was standing, hat in hand, before a flat mahogany desk.

Behind it, in a low white collar and dark clothes, a florid, youngish man, with an aggressive jaw and a brownish mustache, peered up at him keenly through thick-lensed glasses.

"Mr. Commissioner," said Dennis McCloskey, "I—I like you. And I want to work for you. I've come to ask you for a job on the force. But I tell you, first off, that I got to vote against you when 'lection comes round."

The commissioner showed a vast row of teeth in a burst of laughter; struck the desk with his fist. "Sit down!" he commanded. "Tell me about yourself."

"Nothin' to tell, Mr. Commissioner." Dennis McCloskey rubbed his short freckled nose with the back of a freckled hand. "I been makin' good money, workin' in a garage. But I got sick of the tips, and sick of the dirt. I wanted a job that was clean. So I quit. I got a friend, Johnny O'Leary, on the force. After I—after we boxed at the gym, I thought I'd ask if——"

"'Twas a good fight," the commissioner said, "if I did knock you out. I go up there as often as possible to try and keep fit. But it's seldom I find as nice a young chap as you to fight with." Dennis Mc-

Closkey flushed. "I remember"—the commissioner squinted his keen blurred eyes—"I remember slipping. My jaw was uncovered while I was off balance. And you stepped back, instead of putting me out."

Dennis made a gesture with his gray cloth hat. "I wanted to lick you clean," he explained.

"Exactly." The commissioner leaned forward. His keen eyes, blurred through thick glasses, seemed to dig down into Dennis' mind. Then he leaned back in his chair with something like a sigh.

"McCloskey," he said, "you are the kind of man I want. But it wouldn't be fair to let you in for this job without explaining to you what it means.

"You want to go into something where you will have many offers that are hard to resist: offers to give you dirty money in exchange for your soul. You will see men about you, apparently respected by all who know them, men who have become wealthy, happy and successful simply by accepting the propositions that you have refused.

"You will grow bitter, disillusioned, old. And then—possibly at your weakest moment—will come the greatest temptation of all."

Once more the commissioner leaned forward and peered into Dennis McCloskey's eyes.

"McCloskey," he said, "that time will come to you, as sure as there's a God in heaven. The devil will take you up on the mountain and offer you all the world in exchange for your soul. I say this because I think you are the sort of man who will rise from the ranks to a position of responsibility. If you refuse these offers you may be broken—unjustly disgraced, perhaps, and ground into the mire. And in the end you will be left with one thing only—the knowledge that your heart is clean.

"McCloskey," the commissioner ended, "I don't want you to take this job unless that knowledge means more to you than all the world."

Dennis McCloskey twirled his gray cloth hat, swallowed, and rubbed the tip of his short freckled nose with the back of his freckled hand. He swallowed again, and cleared his throat.

"Hell, Mr. Commissioner," he said. "That's the kind of a job I been lookin' for all my life!"

II.

THERE are men on the force to-day who will tell you that Dennis McCloskey, after establishing a glorious record, sold himself to the dope ring and fled town to escape being stripped of his shield.

But only Dennis himself, and perhaps two other persons, know why he resigned. And the starting point came on a sunny summer afternoon, about six years after he had joined the force, when he was twirling his stick up Beaver Street and thinking about nothing in particular at all.

Two motor cycles turned the corner, followed by a big blue motor, containing the mayor and a mustachioed man in a morning coat and high silk hat. Dennis McCloskey saluted and the car came to a stop.

The man in the silk hat jumped out, rushed up to McCloskey and began pumping his hand. It was the ex-police commissioner, now a big man up State.

"McCloskey," cried the visitor baring a vast row of teeth, "I've heard fine things of you. The most trusted man on the force!" Keen eyes gleamed through thick-lensed glasses. "How are you, my boy? Married? Any children?"

"Not married," answered Dennis, flushing crimson with embarrassment and joy.

"You ought to get married," declared the visitor with the candid enthusiasm that made him loved. "The nation needs the children of men like you."

The silk hat had leaped into the motor; the door slammed; the car started. At the corner the ex-commissioner looked back and waved his hand. Dennis saluted with tears of adoration in his china-blue eyes.

"He says I oughter get married!" he murmured as he threw back his shoulders

and recommenced twirling his stick. At the corner of a lane he tapped twice on the latticed swinging doors of Chucco's restaurant, a signal for the fat and greasy Chucco to come forth with a tinkling glass of ice water.

The doors opened and a girl he had never seen before looked out. Her hair—of a jet black with purple lights—was brushed straight back above a low pure forehead, exposing her small perfect ears. Her eyes met his. They were deep and brown and earnest, rimmed by curving black lashes. They seemed to Dennis somehow sorrowful—and brave. He tipped his cap.

"Good day, miss. Chucco sometimes gives me a drink of water."

Her even white teeth appeared in a sudden smile that wrinkled her straight little nose. Her fine skin was of a faintly golden hue—her mouth was curved and red. She disappeared, to return with a beaker of milk.

"Chucco has gone," she told him in a low musical voice, speaking in a clipped slightly foreign way. He was surprised at how small she was outside the swinging doors. From square shoulders, her rounded slim figure in black silk ran down like a wedge to the black silk of her slender ankles. He could have held both of her pointed high-heeled black slippers upon the palm of his hand. "We have bought the place from him," she added shyly. "Do you think we shall succeed?"

"Yes, indeed, miss!" He looked jerkily up and down the street, as if seeing the flowing stream of expected customers. She laughed softly. He returned the empty tumbler, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and laughed too—he didn't know why.

"You must knock whenever you are thirsty," she said, and looked up at him from beneath the narrow black moth wings of her brows.

Something seemed to turn over inside of him. He could say nothing, but tipped his hat, and flushed, and went off down the street like a fool.

From the corner he glanced back. She was standing on the doorstep, looking after him. The white tumbler was clasped in both hands to her breast. Something in her pose, in her large dark eyes against the pale pure oval of her face, made him think of pictures of the Madonna and Child.

Children! He turned into Broadway with a feeling of awe in his heart.

He saw her the next afternoon. A single red rosebud burned in the blue-black of her hair. He wanted to tell her that her mouth was like the flower, but he couldn't find his tongue.

Again on the next afternoon he saw her, and the next, and many afternoons after that. He had asked her to go out with him of an evening, but a cloud—like a lowered curtain—had come in her soft dark eyes, and he had not pressed the point. But a wild sweet singing had begun to haunt his veins. He could not sleep. And the time came when he knew that he must say his say.

The sky was a leaden gray that morning as he strolled up Beaver Street. Summer had dissolved unnoticed into fall. Wisps of clouds flew low across the roofs of tall buildings.

Dennis observed a gaunt, white-faced man shivering on the corner opposite Chucco's café, rolling a gray handkerchief in his gloveless hands. Poor creature!—a "dope," Dennis guessed. A burly man with his fur overcoat collar turned up above his ears, was crossing the street and as he stepped upon the curb stumbled and nearly fell. He caught roughly hold of the "dope," clung to him to maintain his balance.

DENNIS watched to see if the "dope" would resent it. But the creature thrust his handkerchief in his pocket and slunk rapidly away up the street. Dennis tapped twice upon Chucco's swinging door.

"I want to talk to you," he said when the girl, a black lace shawl about her head and shoulders, slipped through.

A familiar shadow darkened her eyes. It was the curtain that dropped between

them whenever he touched upon the future or the past. Her mother had died on Ellis Island while, as immigrants, they were awaiting disposal of their case. This much he knew. It was on the agony of that tragedy, in those surroundings, he concluded, that she drew the curtain down. And on something else. He wanted to take these sorrows for his own.

"Rose," he began, "Rose, darlin'!"

But he stopped. Pain twisted her small face. She carried her two little fists to her breast. She looked up at him in a dark, pleading daze—like a trapped animal, or a prisoner looking up through the bars of a cell. He could not bear it. He took one of her tiny hands.

"Rose," he said, "Rose! Let's meet things together. Sure, if you love me, there's nothin' to be afraid of at all!"

At that moment some one touched him on the arm. He turned to see the square blue chin and gray honest eyes of plain-clothes man Johnny O'Leary. A small black automobile stood empty at the curb.

"Sorry to be buttin' in. But, Dinnis, me lad, ye are to come to headquarters wit' me at once."

III.

AN hour later Dennis was still closeted with the fat, pinkly bald commissioner of police.

"It's unusual, of course, to pick a man from the ranks for a job like this," the commissioner was concluding. "It will cause grumblings in the force. But I believe, in view of the present circumstances, it will pay.

"Everybody knows the integrity of the ex-commissioner. The newspapers will feature the fact that you were appointed from the ranks at his suggestion. Honesty and efficiency rewarded—human interest, you see? It will line up the public solidly behind us. And we need their help.

"Dope has become big business. The dope ring is feeding hop to old victims free; but the hophead who doesn't bring in a new customer once a week has his supply withdrawn. So they bring 'em in wholesale. Girls. Boys not yet in long trousers."

The commissioner worriedly rubbed his pinkly bald head. "The 'dope' will do anything for money to buy his 'shot.' Crimes of violence have jumped way up. And the election is coming on."

Wheels within wheels. With vague but unmistakable sentences the commissioner had let Dennis know that the power of the dope ring derived from men high up in the political machine. The commissioner wanted to break up the dope game: first, because he hated it, and second because it was endangering his own job through the election.

McCloskey saw the plan. Protests would come from the men higher up—but the commissioner could answer: "The public won't stand for my firing McCloskey now." The inference perhaps would be: "You will have to stop him yourself."

McCloskey would certainly be the grain between the upper and nether stones. He thought of a pair of soft dark eyes. He was not ready yet to be crushed.

"I won't make you take this duty," said the commissioner, watching his face, "unless you want to do it. The ex-commissioner recommended you because you are square."

Keen, blurred eyes through thick-lensed glasses!

"When do I start?" Dennis asked. Wheels within wheels. But it is on such wheels that the world rolls forward—thanks to men like the ex-commissioner, and their disciples, like Dennis McCloskey.

"The narcotic squad," said the commissioner, "is waiting to report to you on what they have found so far." He named an uptown hotel.

Johnny O'Leary drove Dennis home, where he changed to plain clothes. Then they drove to the uptown hotel and went up together to a room full of men and smoke.

Dennis heard what the men had to say. You could go to a hundred corners in the city, roll a handkerchief in your hands, and some one would brush against you,

slip you an envelope and take your cash in exchange. It was peddled from taxicabs, from news stands, from soft-drink shops. The jails were filling with victims who were trying to earn their dope. The hospitals were filling with victims who had failed.

"Leave the little peddlers alone," said Dennis when their stories were ended, "and work to find the source."

The weeks passed without result. The source—the chief—the brains behind the game was as cunning, as wary as a fox.

"I'm goin' to Washington to-night," said Dennis to Johnny O'Leary as they dined one evening in a dingy Italian restaurant on the lower East Side. "This guy, whoever he is, plays a big game. If he's an international crook, the secret service perhaps can give me a clew."

"And the trip will give you a rest," said Johnny.

Dennis shook his head. "It isn't a rest I need. Johnny, I'm goin' to borry the little car for a bit to go on an errand of my own."

He went out, climbed into the roadster and drove to Beaver Street. The work had been taking his thought and his time, but all the while something within had been burning him away.

In Chucco's restaurant the chairs were piled on tables and a lone waiter in a white coat was smearing at the brown oilcloth floor with a mop. For a moment Dennis did not see Rose seated by a table near the street window, her chin in her palm.

"Rose," he said, sitting beside her, "you know what I want to say!"

She raised her hand to stop him, but he captured it and brought it down as he would have cupped a moth. In the half light her lips were very red against the oval pallor of her face.

"Rose!"

"No!" she whispered. "No, Dennis—I—I am married!"

He could only sit there, his hand trembling on hers, and stare dumbly into her dark lovely eyes.

The back door opened and a swarthy man, in a raccoon coat over a dark-green suit, came in. His thick-necked figure emanated a suggestion of unusual strength, despite the roundness of his paunch. His black eyes, swimming in fat, flashed brilliantly on either side of a wide hooked nose. A diamond sparkled on a thick finger as he twirled a black curving mustache.

He paused only for the fraction of an instant as he took in the scene. Then he gracefully doffed his black derby hat, disclosing a retreating forehead and crisply curled black hair; made a casual remark to the waiter, and went out the way that he had come.

Rose's eyes came back to Dennis and looked at him steadily. They told him that this was the man. Dennis had recognized him as the new proprietor of Chucco's—a man reputed to have made money speculating in stocks and who had determined to open a restaurant and settle down.

"Rose, this can't go on, darlin'! I love you better than life. Oh, Rose, tell me that you love me, too!"

For a moment her eyelids drooped and she swayed toward him. Then she shivered and withdrew her hand.

"Don't, Dennis!" she said so low that he could scarcely hear. "I'm married."

A clock on the wall ticked loudly into the long empty silence.

"Darlin'," said Dennis at length, "just to cheer me when things are dark—just to let me think that—some day—— Give me that rose in your hair, macushla. Somethin to wear next my heart."

She drew a trembling breath. "No, Dennis," she repeated, "I'm married."

"Then, listen," he said, and put his hand in his breast. "Here is a locket—a tiny gold thing, on a silver chain. It belonged to my mother—God rest her. Wear it for me—just to show me that you understand—that you do know my love is clean."

He folded it into her little palm and rose to his feet. She rose too, and looked for a long moment into his eyes. Then she slipped the locket into her dress, where the golden V of her throat met the soft

black silk, and pressed her hand against it there. Dennis turned and stumbled from the room.

IV.

THE next morning, in Washington, Dennis McCloskey took a taxicab to the secret-service headquarters. He sent in a card that the commissioner had given him, and was ushered in at once.

For three hours Dennis and the head of the United States secret service went over the record cards, photographs and finger prints of the outstanding criminals of the world, tracing the career of this man and that. It was like looking down from a height upon the tortuous trails of crime—leading late or soon to a violent death or jail.

Finally they came upon a photograph that made Dennis start. They traced this man. Three years in jail in Paris for a successful confidence game. Wanted in Barcelona for bribery in connection with the Madrid lottery. Traced to China and out again, leaving behind a hint of murder.

At last! Arrested in Montreal for importing dope, but skipped his bail! Arrested two years later in Chicago, on the same charge, and heralded as "king of the dope ring," but skipped his bail again and disappeared.

"That's enough," said Dennis, stuffing the duplicate photographs and papers in his pocket. "I am very much obliged."

"Remember," said the head of the secret service, "we want you up here working for us whenever you are ready to come."

They shook hands and parted. Dennis took the next train and arrived in New York at ten p. m. By eleven, he had arranged for the use of a large empty room in the rear of a building on Beaver Street, near Broadway. The next afternoon at two o'clock he addressed the whole narcotic squad in a room at the uptown hotel.

"You are to go from here by the back way to the address I will give John O'Leary. He has detailed instructions. When he gets my signals he will tell you what to do."

Then Dennis McCloskey left them and made his way alone to Chucco's. It was toward the end of the luncheon hour, but the restaurant was still busy, filled with the rumble of talk and streaked with blue layers of smoke.

Rose was at a high chair behind the cash register near the door. At his signal she followed him out.

"Rose," he said, "can I trust you with a secret?"

"Yes, Dennis." He knew from her eyes that she would keep her word.

"Rose," he said, "I must search this place, and make an arrest." Her hand, against her bosom, began to tremble. "There's nothin' for you to fear, darlin'. That's why I am here. I want to take you with me, first. I have arranged with the mother of a friend of mine to look after you till it is over."

"Dennis," she asked, "is it—is it *him?*"

"Yes."

"Then, Dennis," she shook her head, "I can't go."

"But, dearest, you don't understand! It's dope he's been selling. Don't you see? The girls he's draggin' down to the mud, the men and women and boys he's slowly murderin'?"

A slight shudder ran over her slender frame. She clenched her hands; looked up at him.

"Yes, Dennis, I know. But, Dennis ——" Her lips were parted. Her eyes looked past him as at some shining vision that she alone could see. "I married him. He is my husband. I promised before God to love and honor and obey.

"Dennis," she cried in a sudden fever of fear, "you can't do this thing! You are doing it, Dennis, to me—to mine. Dennis, you can't."

"It is my duty, Rose darlin'. Don't you see? I've got to keep my honor bright an' shinin'!"

Strange, how keen eyes behind thick-lensed glasses should come so steadily to mind.

"Dennis," she cried, and struck with her little fist against his chest, "if you do this —if you do this, it will be the end! Den-

nis, I mean it!" Her eyes told him that she meant what she said.

"Rose, it's duty. I must!"

She caught at his fingers, but he drew away and went down the steps. Just before the front door closed behind him, he looked back. It was like a knife in his soul—the hardening change that had come over her white face.

So long as she felt tenderly toward him in her heart, he could have hope. If she loved him, some day, dreams would come true. No one, not even Johnny O'Leary, knew what he had learned in Washington.

He could cross the street to the squad in their back room and tell them that the quarry had flown. Was duty—a skeleton creature that lived only in the mind—to rob him of her sweetness and warmth, of her red mouth and smooth flesh and steadfast woman's heart?

V.

"HEY, Dinnis!" He found beside him on the street the stocky figure of "Doggy" Flynn, resplendent in a checked brown suit, striped tie and tan derby. There was a curious smile on Doggy's tight lips. His sleepy brown eyes regarded Dennis with covert assurance.

Dennis disliked the man's muddy skin, flat nose, the grotesque way his left shoulder stuck up as he rested his weight on his maimed right leg. "Dennis, I have somethin' to say to you."

"Say it."

"Dinnis," Doggy lowered his voice, "I've got a message for you from your friends. There's a plot on to frame you if you keep pushing at this job. Git me? They'll pinch you and find marked bribe money in your coat!"

Dennis knew that Doggy was trusted by big men behind the scenes. To lose her was not a sufficient offering on the altar of the skeleton god! If he kept on his course he was to be broken, too, and carry with him till death a name for crookedness.

"Listen, Dinnis," Doggy went on. "Your friends don't want to see you broken, me lad. See here!" He cautiously opened his coat. In the inside pocket was a sheaf of crisp green bills. "There's fifty grand there, Dinnis. Fifty! And that ain't the half of it.

"They're your friends, Dinnis," he repeated. "They know how you feel toward a certain skirt. They want to fix it up for you. Oh, I mean everything proper!" he cried into Dennis' ferocious glare. "The chief helped her get through Ellis Island when she was half crazy over the death of her ma. She married him, I guess, for that. But there are reasons why the marriage can be easy wiped out!"

Dennis looked over the tops of the high buildings. A rift of blue sky was beginning to show through the banks of dirty clouds. He could take her and go away. People would talk about him whether he was honest or not. The dope ring was bound to break him sooner or later unless he gave in.

Fifty thousand dollars! A fortune! He could give Rose's beauty the surrounding that it deserved. Life at last was opening wide and free for them both.

Doggy limped closer, put his hand on Dennis' arm.

"You git the money now, see? They know if you say you'll do it, you will. They know you're ab-so-*lutely* square."

Through Dennis' mind floated at these words the picture of keen blurred eyes behind thick-lensed glasses. He seemed to hear a voice in his ears: *"Left with one thing only, the knowledge that your heart is clean."*

"Let's walk up to the corner, Doggy," he said to the gleam of triumph in Doggy's sleepy brown eyes. They walked until they came to a patrolman that Dennis McCloskey knew.

"Run this man in," said Dennis, indicating Doggy with his thumb, "and book him on a charge offering me a bribe. The money, you see, is right here."

"You squealer!" snarled Doggy Flynn, showing his pointed green teeth. "You dirty rat! We'll git you for this! You wait!"

Dennis turned on his heel and walked back into Beaver Street. He stopped by a corner of the big bank building across the lane from Chucco's and watched the lone patch of sunlight on the dirty pavement slowly swallowed up by the closing clouds.

It seemed a sign—as if the grim god of duty was closing him away forever from the sunshine of life. In his breast was an almost unbearable weight and pain. *"The knowledge that your heart is clean!"* He straightened his shoulders and drew a deep breath. Then he pulled a handkerchief from his hip pocket, removed his gray cloth hat, and three times mopped his brow.

For a few moments nothing unusual affected the late afternoon bustle of the narrow street. Girl clerks, business men, messengers walked with their usual briskness up toward Broadway or down toward the Wall Street section. An occasional yellow taxicab flitted past.

Then from a lane across the street two men in plain clothes emerged. They strolled across to the bootblack stand in the cellar next to Chucco's and disappeared. Two more came out of the big bank building and went up the lane beside Chucco's, where they stopped and apparently began a discussion over the market page of a newspaper.

Three men came out of the side entrance of the bank, stopped by an automobile at Chucco's back door and began fiddling with the right rear tire. Four men went into the stairway at the left of Chucco's restaurant and shortly emerged upon the roof of Chucco's building.

A PATROLMAN across the street looked at his watch, yawned, went to the police phone booth at the corner and leisurely called out the reserves. Dennis dropped his hand into his coat pocket, strolled across the lane and through the swinging doors of Chucco's restaurant. Two men, also with their hands in their coat pockets, followed him in.

There were perhaps a half dozen late-luncheon customers in the narrow, high-ceiled restaurant. Rose was seated on a tall stool behind the cash register near the door, a beautiful red rose in her blue-black hair.

Swaggering forward from the rear of the room came the man Dennis wanted—the thick-necked individual with the wide, hooked nose. He was curling his black mustache with a fat bediamonded hand. And in his brilliant black eyes was a gleam of triumph and of contempt.

The man's look changed at the expression on Dennis' face. His right hand flew to his hip. On the instant it reappeared with a spurt of flame.

Dennis' gun was pointed through his coat, but Rose was directly in the line of his fire. He jumped toward the side of the room as the dope chief fired again.

Even as Dennis moved, the thick-necked man had slipped like a cat through the first of two doors leading to the lane behind the building. Dennis leaped after him, but heard the bolt click as he flung himself against the door.

The two detectives who had followed him lent their weight. The door bent and groaned. All at once, from beyond it, came the crash of breaking glass, followed by four quick shots.

The door they were pushing gave suddenly outward. They stumbled over a thick-necked motionless figure in a dark green suit. One of its legs was inside a trapdoor cut into the floor.

The head and stalwart shoulders of Johnny O'Leary were thrust through the shattered upper glass of the locked back door. In his hand a blue automatic smoked.

"I heard him pulling at that trapdoor," explained Johnny excitedly. "So I busted the glass and gave him the gat. Say, Dinnis, look at your hat!"

Dennis took off his gray cloth hat and glanced at the two holes drilled neatly through the crown. Then he looked down at the thing on the floor.

Dully, he envied it. It at least was dead. It at least did not have to carry a weight in its heart. Dennis had followed honor, and it had lost him more than life.

The thing on the floor did not have to go on living and remembering that.

He turned wearily back to where Rose stood wreathed by blue layers of smoke in the strangely quiet restaurant.

"Rose," he said, "you can't stay here. I've a place down the street with the mother of a friend of mine, Johnny O'Leary. Will you go upstairs now and get your things?"

She lifted her eyes from the thick-necked figure beyond the doorway as if coming back from a terrible dream.

"Yes," she murmured; he had to stoop to hear the words. "And—I'll get you your locket, too!"

Numbly he watched her leave the room. In a few minutes, wrapped in a black cloth coat, a black lace shawl framing the oval pallor of her face, she reappeared, bearing her weight on the banisters as she slowly descended the stairs. Johnny O'Leary took the black bag from her fingers, and the three of them went forth into the gathering dusk.

Low dirty clouds had blotted out the sky as if trying prematurely to fill the narrow street with night. Corner lamps sputtered bluely through a nimbus of mist. A cold fine moisture, neither rain nor snow, glistened upon the slippery pavement and pelted stingingly into their faces.

Rose clutched at her flying coat and bent heavily forward to make headway against the gusty whipping rain. Dennis tried to protect her, but could do little good. It was as if nature itself was letting him know that he had forfeited the right.

HE wanted to tell her of the other things he had lost. Not the money—his pension, his hard-earned position on the force. For he realized that now there was but one thing to do to avoid being crushed—accept the suggestion of the head of the secret service, go to Washignton and work for the United States.

He walked by her side. Every step seemed to jolt his soul deeper in his chest, till at last there was nothing there at all, except an emptiness and a pain. And yet he dreaded when the walk must end.

Too soon he saw a yellow beam of light falling on the wet pavement through the broken green shutter of Mrs. O'Leary's first-floor window. The O'Leary door swung open.

Kindly, gray-haired Mrs. O'Leary came from behind a red cotton curtain at the end of the hall, extending a scrawny, comforting arm.

Rose took the shiny wet bag from Johnny O'Leary's hand. She flitted a look into Dennis' eyes; then withdrew her hand from her shawl and gave him a package in a folded bit of paper.

Like the brave man he was, Dennis tried to smile down at her. The old lady put an arm about Rose and drew her down the hall. The curtain shut off his view of her slim, bent figure and tiny, dragging feet.

"She gave me back my locket," said Dennis dully to Johnny O'Leary. "And with it all the love in the world."

Johnny curiously took the paper from Dennis' unresisting fingers. In the stupor of pain, Dennis watched it unfold; then his limp heart began to beat too fast for joy.

Johnny O'Leary stared at the transfiguration on Dennis McCloskey's countenance. He stood agape as Dennis in two strides disappeared down the hall where the girl had gone.

"Why, this is no locket," complained Johnny to an unheeding universe. "Faith, it's only a pitiful red rose!"

A new two-dollar book by "Sapper," continuing the adventures of "Bulldog Drummond" will appear in an early issue of POPULAR.

The Hawk of Holeb

By Holman Day

Author of "This Is the Woods!" "The Barony of Whiskeag," Etc.

Bluffing a bold front may be all right, but it's good to know when to run. Mr. Godden discovers that hawking is a bad game for the hawk to play at.

THE Hawk of Holeb sunned himself on the peak of his toplofty crag while he complacently sucked the meat off chicken bones. Once in a while he condescended to flap an empty croker-sack in reply to certain flutterings of white fabric at the foot of the great cliff.

This flip-flap affair had been going on for a week and had settled into a sort of long-distance flirtation between a man and a woman who had never come face to face to know each other and swap talk.

Mr. George Washington Godden, privately calling himself "The Hawk of Holeb" in order to whet the edge of his new hatred for all the world, was making some exception in the case of Miss Plooma Beeze, she who was fluttering the fabric at the foot of the cliff. Furthermore, on this day, as on days previous, he was sucking the bones of chickens that had belonged to her; he had raided her henhouse, as one of his ventures in swooping.

Mr. Godden had the advantage over Miss Beeze in the way of information regarding status and identity.

Among the items of his knowledge were the facts that she owned the set of sporting camps located on the narrow flat between the foot of Holeb and the forest-fringed pond and that she catered wholly to women from the cities, knickerbockered vacationers, spinsters from counters and desks, trying to swagger in the forest in the free fashion of men. And, to judge by Miss Beeze's elaborate stock of supplies crammed into the store camp, she was doing well in her venture; Mr. Godden was regularly tapping those supplies in nighttime sorties, blandly believing that she was not noticing the small dents he made in such abundance.

All at once, on the occasion now dealt with, Miss Beeze caught up with Mr. God-

den in the matter of information regarding status and identity—information such as it was!

Fire Warden Job Horkins, peripatetic news bureau for the region, soft-footed around the corner of a camp and caught Miss Beeze in the act of flapping a signal sheet. He cocked his eye, observed the aim of her gaze and saw far above on the peak of Holeb the flutter of the croker-sack.

"Ah-h-hah-h-h!" drawled Job and gave the lady an affable wink when she snapped around to face him.

She flushed and promptly proceeded with her work of hanging out the washing.

"Love does find a way!" remarked Mr. Horkins, believing always in making humor the keynote of his dealings with affairs.

"Don't be a fool," retorted the lady, having adopted masculine manner of speech along with her breeches. "If you knew anything at all, Horkins, you'd understand that a wet sheet always has to be snapped out before it's hung on the line."

"That feller up on the peak is prob'ly as iggerant as I am about wimmen's ways," averred the warden tantalizingly. "Considering the style he used in waving back he must have thought you was flirting with him."

"I haven't the least idea who it is up on that mountain—if there is anybody!" But there was the glint of curiosity in her eyes; there was almost a query in her remark. She was challenging the well-known and self-vaunted ability of Mr. Horkins to have at his tongue's end all the news, data, facts and figures of the region.

In this instance, Mr. Horkins felt that he was challenged and did the best he could, considering that he had not the least idea, either, who was up on the peak or why he was there.

In view of Miss Beeze's apparent interest in the unknown, Mr. Horkins decided to go it strong!

"Per-suming it was only by accident you was waving that sheet, you was running resks."

Her vivid interest gave a fillip to his fancy.

"The fact is, lady, that critter up there is the savagest and dangerousest outlaw that was ever loose in this region. He's so bad they don't dare to climb up there and git him. The officers are making believe they don't know where he is. If he'll stay there it'll be good reddance.

"Now be mighty careful how you snap out your washing after this. If he thinks you're flirting you may be in a way to tole down a catamount that won't be p'tick'ly interesting as a pet and a plaything."

Mr. Horkins had always admitted to himself that he did not understand women very well. Now he was especially puzzled by the expression he found on Miss Beeze's face.

She seemed to be trying to hide a certain grim delight that had been roused by Horkins' identification of the unknown on Holeb. Her jaw squared under the tanned skin. She squinted up at the mountaintop in a manner that suggested she was making some mental calculations. Distinctly, he had not alarmed her in the slightest degree, it was apparent.

MR. HORKINS was disappointed; he liked to give news that would jump listeners. "Good Jeffro!" he exploded. "You seem to take it calm enough!"

"What did you expect me to do?" she queried tartly. "Jump and squeal and dig in under one of my camps?"

"But what if your boarders hear about what kind of a critter is perching up there? Reckon they ain't got the kind of grit in their crops, such as you have."

Mr. Horkins was beginning to believe, to a certain extent, his own story about the unknown on Holeb. Also, his pride as a know-it-all was at stake. And who else except a lawbreaker would perch on the barren peak?

His gaze followed that of Miss Beeze; she was now making a casual survey of her paying guests.

Several of them were paddling canoes in the little pond in front of the camps. Others were shooting at marks. Two were energetically boxing with gloves.

"All the hens on this reservation seem to have plenty of grit in their crops, Mr. Job Horkins," said Miss Beeze.

"Mebbe! And making a bluff at crowing! The times is gitting to be devilish. You even seem to be tickled because you've got a hell-hooting outlaw for a neighbor."

"Mebbe!" She echoed the word with more scorn than he had used. "And there comes a time when a woman can use even a good, healthy, bloodthirsty outlaw."

"Geehoofered Hosy! Then you *was* waving to him—toling him!"

"You go to the devil, Horkins!" She adjusted her breeches belt with a manly swagger and went about hanging clothes on the line.

Mr. Horkins promptly obeyed her command. Without a word he started off to go to the devil—the one whom he had conjured out of his fancy—the reputed hellion on the peak of Holeb.

The warden excused the adventure to himself by the thought that duty called him; he had been ordered by the chief warden to climb Holeb when convenience suited and from the eminence observe ranges for data in case the State decided to establish an observatory station on the peak.

Ordinarily, he would not have picked out a hot summer forenoon for such a climb. But having dealt liberally with fancy he wanted to check up on facts. Importunate curiosity prompted him to go up and find out who this stranger was, anyway.

He walked out of the Beeze clearing, ostensibly headed away from Holeb. In the forest he swung from the trail and attacked the mountain.

It was a tough climb, a series of terraced precipices. Holeb was a bare upthrust of hornblende bearing a scalplock of stunted trees. The face of the cliff was hot under the sun but the warden zigzagged doggedly and crawled at last over the brow of the peak.

Still on his hands and knees, he stared at a man who lolled under the shade of a dwarfed spruce, just outside a small tent.

An eavesdropper would have found Horkins' first explosion of speech a cryptic utterance. He dragged a forearm across his streaming face and spluttered: "Gawsh! Posh!"

The man under the tree snarled and shook his fist. "I don't allow that name to be used on me no more, Job Horkins."

"You don't think I'm going to disgrace a high and honor'ble name, do you, by calling you even Wash? No, sir! Not now any more'n we've done in past times down in Ottic. Posh just about fits you."

Mr. Godden picked up a hunk of flint rock.

Mr. Horkins quickly pulled his gun.

"This ain't no way for old neighbors to git along, consid'ring they ain't seen each other for some time," quavered Godden, revealing the real craven nature behind his bluff. "You ain't come to git me with a warrant, have ye?"

"Deppity Sheriff Bangs still has that warrant ag'inst you," stated the warden grimly. "If you stay up here, I reckon it won't be wuth the strain and sweat for him to come with it."

"Then he might's well tear the thing up. I'm everlastingly shet of Ottic, condemn the low-down, pisen place!"

"All feelings, 'twixt and between, p'tick'ly recipercated," announced Mr. Horkins, speaking for Ottic.

HE sauntered over and sat down in front of Mr. Godden and nibbled from a junk of tobacco, like a squirrel shucking a nutmeat. "Your woman has got a bill of disvose from you, Posh," he announced.

"It's good reddance for me," mumbled Godden.

"Saving up my breath, after that climb, I'll simply say ditto to what I jest said on the matter of feelings, 'twixt and between."

"I'm now calling myself the Hawk of Holeb, and I'm making myself into what I claim to be," proceeded the denizen of the peak.

Mr. Horkins took a squint at the chicken bones scattered on the ledge. "Nat'ral enough, Posh! B'lieve that's what the warrant says—you was too much of a hen hawk."

Mr. Godden swore and put a lot of soul into the effort.

Mr. Horkins broke in. "You're to blame for what's been put onto you, Posh. Any man in these days who don't steal nothing but garden sass and hens, round amongst his neighbors, he don't git nowhere. It's these million-dollar rake-offs that make a stealer respected."

He munched his tobacco and gazed into the distance which the peak commanded. "'T any rate, Posh, you're up here where you can look higher from now on—both in matter o' scenery and projicks."

"I perpose to make 'em all suffer for what's been put onto me. I'm working myself into a mind where I'm a desp'rit' character.

"You're better'n the *Ottic Owl* newspaper for passing news around. Give out the word of what I've told you. And announce that if anybody comes climbing up here to git me I'll roll rocks down on 'em."

"Will so report. But if you don't go to Ottic I guess there ain't much li'bility as how Ottic will come to you. So that's all settled!

"However, being a hawk, as ye say, I suppose you're cal'lating on some sort of a swoop now and then. I've got a tip for you. The Beeze woman down yender, there," he pointed to the camps, "hints that she's got use for a outlaw. I've been boosting you up to her in that line."

"Huh! Helluva send-off you'd be giving me!"

"Oh, I didn't know who it was up here when I told her it was the savagest critter who ever borrowed horns from the devil. Used my imagination, of course, not knowing who was reelly on this peak. But I never go back on the facts what I give out for latest news. You're all set and safe to follow up the tip."

Mr. Godden devoted himself to prolonged meditation.

Mr. Horkins broke in on it even as he had previously interrupted speech. "Considering that you ain't got no reppytation to be sp'iled, why ain't a outlaw job a good opening for you?"

"Mebbe it is, I ain't saying it ain't! But now that I'm shet of wimmen I ain't got much of a hankering to shove my head into another noose."

"Noose!" sneered Mr. Horkins. "You've been flirting with the Beeze woman. I ketched her waving to you!"

"Perliteness pays, even in the woods. If I hadn't passed the time o' day with her, as ye might say, I wouldn't have stirred up things so as to git this outlaw offer, would I?"

"Wa-a-all, considering it as an offer, what ye going to do with it?"

"None o' your dam' business," returned Mr. Godden smartly. "I ain't giving you no tattle budget to run off with and scatter hoopity-hoorah."

"Suit yourself, Posh," said the warden, getting slowly upon his feet and peering under his palm, questing the location of other eminences as links in the fire-signal plan. "What you said about perliteness paying was prob'ly the first and only time you ever spoke the truth.

"I don't need your budget, you spoke of. Facts hamper me, anyway, when I'm reporting out news." He started away.

"What kind of cussed stuff are you going to circ'late about me?" demanded Godden with rage.

"Echo answers—it's just coming back from Baldknob over yender. 'None o' your dam' business!'"

Mr. Horkins then disappeared over the brow of the cliff.

II.

MR. GODDEN sauntered into the sporting-camp clearing at the foot of the peak.

'Twas the day after his conference with Mr. Horkins.

The expedition followed on prolonged rumination. Also, there had been further interchange of reassuring signals by the croker-sack-and-sheet system.

The Hawk of Holeb had taken no pains to improve his personal appearance. This was not a courtship affair, he told himself; it was strictly business and as an outlaw he was doing his best to look the part. He had blacked his whiskers with coals from the fire over which he had cooked Miss Beeze's chickens. Using pine pitch, he had cocked up his mustaches to angles representing ferocity.

Several knickerbockered females, beholding him, gabbled affrightedly and ducked away from the path he was taking.

Even Miss Beeze, overhearing the squawkings of her flock of guests, looked a bit dizzy when she came around the corner of a camp and perceived what her bait had hooked. There was no doubt in her mind about the identity of the caller; if this wasn't a real and savage outlaw there never was one.

But in her flustration she blurted the natural question: "Who are you?"

"I'm the Hawk of Holeb," replied Mr. Godden, with the most vicious snarl he could muster.

Several of the guests squeaked and got behind bushes.

"What do you want?" faltered Miss Beeze.

It occurred even to the numb intellect of Mr. Godden that he could hardly say that he had heard about her desire to get hold of an outlaw and that he was applying for the job.

Women made him uneasy, anyway. He had led a henpecked life in Ottic. He was now more flustered than were the women who stared at him. But he hid his emotions behind an ugly scowl, folded his arms across his breast and leaned against a tree.

Apparently he was meditating on hideous schemes; really, he was searching his soul for some sort of a lie to excuse his presence. He had expected Miss Beeze to do the talking, as an outlaw employer. She seemed to be too scared to talk; he was afraid he had overtrained in making up for the part.

"I suppose you've come here looking for something, Mister Hawk!" faltered Miss Beeze.

The visitor was entirely noncommittal; he did not even nod his head; he had no idea what he ought to say.

"If it's plunder, I suppose we'll have to let you take what you want."

"Wimmen is safe from me. Men is my meat," stated Mr. Godden with vigor.

Miss Beeze's countenance cleared. Manifestly, her thoughts were clearing, also. She was able to reflect on a certain matter of her own concern.

"There are no men here, Mister Hawk. As a matter of fact, these ladies and myself have no use for men of the ordinary kind. But we've been told you're an outlaw."

"Somebody told the truth for once."

Miss Beeze nipped her lips and her eyes sparkled. "I'm asking you to step into the office camp with me, Mister Hawk. It's a matter of business in your line."

SHE led the way and Mr. Godden swaggered behind her.

"I'm honestly afraid of you," she confessed frankly when she confronted him behind a closed door. "I never have seen anybody who looks so fierce—but I'm glad of it. First of all, I'm going to ask you to do something so that you'll seem more —more sort of human."

She hurriedly unlocked her cigar showcase and asked him to help himself. "Some of my ladies smoke and I carry a fine line of cigars. If you'll light up and puff I can talk to you better—if you get what I mean!"

"Oh, I can bring myself to set on the perch and be more or less sooavable when ladies is present," he said patronizingly, noting how he had secured the upper hand and taking full advantage of the fact. He helped himself to a handful of the biggest cigars, those with the gaudiest bands, and lighted one after he had stuffed the others into his pocket.

"I like your idees so far," he acknowledged loftily. "What else?"

He sat down, clasped his hands over the spot where his latest meal of fried

chicken—Miss Beeze's chicken—was comfortably doing him a lot of good, settled the cigar in the corner of his mouth and gazed at the ceiling, leaning back in the splint chair.

"The first else, Mister Hawk," she announced with biting decisiveness, "is putting you exactly right, where I'm concerned. I trust you haven't come down here thinking that I meant any sentimental foolishness when I have waved to you."

"I wouldn't have come if I thought that! I ain't no soft soaper of wimmen. Don't like 'em."

"Why did you come here, may I ask!"

"To put a stop to that wigwagging stuff. If it's business—then O. K. If it's trying to flirt——"

"You go to the deuce!" she blurted.

He pulled down his gaze and stared at her hard face. "I'm saying if it's any silly dooflicker stuff I won't stand for no more of it. I'm a outlaw, but I'm tetchy of my reppytation where wimmen is concerned."

"Well, here's a woman that'll never bring a smirch on your reputation, Mister Hawk. Now that we've come to a good understanding on that point, we'll get to business. Have you been a man-killer—is that why you're an outlaw?"

"That's my own business now—just as it al'ays has been. I ain't giving no woman a handle to use on me by her blatting. I'm a outlaw—let it stand at that!"

"I'm not an outlaw, but I could conscientiously kill a lot of men," she declared with heat. "I've come very near doing it, as it is! If it wasn't for the general scare and the scandal that would come to my camp and the bother of all the law stuff, I would have shot the renegades who have been regularly stealing my stores.

"Night after night I have seen somebody sneaking in the shadows. I've had my rifle aimed and my finger on the trigger a dozen times."

Mr. Godden had an uncomfortable sensation, as if a parade of sowbugs were crawling up the back of his neck into his bristling hair. He scruffed his nape to assure himself that the sensation was due to post-dated terror and not to bugs.

"I didn't shoot," she went on, "because a killing on my premises would have been messy. Do you know the human squatter-sculch that's scattered around in this region?"

"No, ma'am! I ain't that kind of a outlaw—to mate with any such critters."

"So much the better! You'll have more of an effect on 'em if they don't know you! I have here a list of their dugouts," she proceeded briskly, pulling out a sheet of paper from the pocket of her jacket.

"That's why I have a job for the savagest man I can get hold of. It has come to me, no matter how, that you're so savage the officers are afraid to come after you. If that's the case a few more real crimes will only make you safer by adding to the general fear of you.

"But my job won't be a real crime—only a good service in cleaning off sculch, if you make the rounds and kill off some of the sneaking thieves. There ought to be a bounty on 'em, like there is on tree-girdling porcupines. Now, Mister Hawk, do you want the job?"

MR. GODDEN, to cover his emotions, critically inspected the glory of the band on his cigar.

"I should think you'd fairly jump at the chance to keep in practice," she prompted.

Mr. Godden's slow mind broke into a gallop for once in his life. It occurred to him that he did need a job if he were to keep on eating. The thought of venturing again to that store camp made the sweat break out.

With mental reservations as to how much blood he would shed in the region, he asked gruffly: "How do you per-pose to pay—so much per snout, as in the case of quill pigs, or by the day?"

"That's the way to talk—calm and businesslike!" she cried enthusiastically. "You're a real outlaw! You didn't even jump when I spoke of killing."

Mr. Godden snapped the ash off his cigar, crossed his legs and leaned back,

his thumbs under his suspenders. "We git hardened in my perfession!" he vouchsafed languidly. .

"Your style makes it all pleasant and easy, Mister Hawk. I hope you're going to be able to travel around among those people and scare 'em to death when you tell 'em you're on the job of protecting my camps. And if they think they're going to get bullets through 'em when they come stealing, the chances are they'll stay away."

"Mebbe!" agreed Mr. Godden. "Then it comes down to sort o' day's work!"

"Hiring an outlaw is all new to me. I'll have to ask you to set your own price."

Being hired as an outlaw was new to Mr. Godden. He wrinkled his forehead and pondered.

"I know how hard it must be for a free spirit to discuss money wages," she said sympathetically. "But you must put away pride as much as you can, Mister Hawk of Holeb. Let me help you out a little.

"Of course, I'll furnish you with kit and all supplies. Rifle and ammunition! Ten dollars for day work—double price for night when you're watching at the camp. You'll have to use your own judgment about shooting—say, one of 'em, at least. It'll be like killing a crow to hang up to scare the others."

"That'll be about it," averred Mr. Godden, liking the money terms proposed and deciding to seem savage for the sake of clinching the bargain. "My temper is sech that I'm li'ble to shoot one of 'em out in the field—the first one who gives me lip. That'll save any fuss and mess here.

"You understand, ma'am, this is all a big comedown for me—hiring out—but things has been moving pretty dull for me lately. Men is my meat, as I've told you, and I'm gitting hungry for fight!"

She beamed on him. "That reminds me that you must be really hungry for some of my food. We're going to have fried chicken and pop-overs for dinner. My lady guests will get a great kick out of having a real outlaw at the table. Will you sit down with us, Mister Hawk?"

"As I said before, I can perch and be sooavable when ladies is present—and if there ain't no foolishness going on."

"You'll find no foolishness in these camps," snapped Miss Beeze, nipping her lips in the manner familiar to her.

However, the noon dinner affair barely missed being a case of silly exaltation of the captured Hawk of Holeb.

The city women were up in the woods seeking thrills and novelties in adventures. This was truly something to take home as a topic and a tale!

Mr. Godden reigned in state at the head of the table and demolished mounds of pop-overs and built mounds of chicken bones.

After the feast he responded to urgent coaxings and related some of his adventures. He did not need to draw on an imagination which he did not possess. He had been whiling away the time on Holeb with some copies of a ten-cent library in paper covers. Having read the stories over and over he was entirely familiar with all the exploits of Bad Bill and rendered them with great effect.

When he at last swaggered away into the forest in the early afternoon, accredited emissary of terror, loaded with supplies, the women waved him an admiring farewell and gave him three cheers.

"Of course, we shouldn't approve of him or relish such stories," said one of the knickerbockered ladies. "But I just hanker to do things in the woods that I wouldn't think of doing in the city. If he feels called on to kill one of those creatures who are stealing the food Miss Beeze has such a job toting 'way in here, I really think I'd relish seeing the job done. The Hawk is just too deliciously savage."

"So sincere and naïve in his general deviltry," agreed another.

"It's really refreshing after all the false crust and hypocrisy in the city. What was a feudal knight, anyway, but a robber?"

"And if the history of manners is true, they ate chickens just the way our new friend did," put in one of the younger women, with a shudder. "He must have

got that style of handling a drumstick from long practice with a harmonica."

"What do you expect from a real outlaw, anyway?" demanded still another.

"Savagery," stated Miss Beeze. "I've hired him on that basis. I'm not going to allow him to associate with you ladies one bit after this. I'm afraid he'd get in a way to be tamed.

"And if he does show signs of being tamed—if he doesn't prove to be what he has cracked himself up as being—he'll wish the gallows had got him before he hired out with me." There was fire in her eyes.

III.

ON the Wikket Trail, less than an hour after he had started away from the Beeze camps, Mr. Godden met up with the circumambulatory Mr. Horkins. The warden's keen eyes noted the new, bulging knapsack and the rifle.

"Aha! Took my tip, did ye, Posh?"

"None o' your dam' business!"

"Echo is wonderful up in these parts," drawled Mr. Horkins. "But you ought to start a new holler. I'm gitting tired of that one."

Mr. Godden, making an elaborate show of utter disdain, walked around Mr. Horkins and marched on his way.

"Looka here!" protested the fire warden. "It was my boosting of you up by word o' mouth as got you your job—whatever it is she wants of a outlaw. Then I sweat and slathered to git the word to you. How do I come in on the cut I'm entitled to?"

Mr. Godden turned and retorted. "You ain't got no shingle out as a Outlaw Employment Agency, have ye? You go and gnaw bark, you cussed old quillpig!"

"If that's the way you're feeling about how I git my provender, all right! You've already had one vallyble tip from me. I was meaning to give you another, to save your old pelt, if you had showed signs of pardnership."

Mr. Godden was suddenly conscious that he needed all kinds of help in his curious new venture. "Excuse me! What was the tip?" he stammered.

Mr. Horkins, ferocious repudiation in his scowl, cupped his hand at his ear. "I hear echo coming back. You know what it's saying. Same thing!"

Then Mr. Horkins straddled away on his long legs and disappeared around the bend of the forest trail, paying no heed to Mr. Godden's urgent calls.

After a time the Hawk plodded on his own way, with a lot of the spirit of swoop taken out of him. There was no telling, he reflected, how that infernal tongue of Horkins' had been maneuvering. He had lied ably before he knew who was on the peak of Holeb; probably he had been circulating the truth since his exploration visit.

"The dam' gabbler would be li'ble to give out real facts in the common, no-'count places where he's been a-roving," muttered Mr. Godden wrathfully. "He could be saving wear and tear on that imagination he brags of—needing it for other lies—where they'd fetch him something."

Shortly Mr. Godden arrived in the common-and-no-account settlement of Wikket and was forced to the bitter conclusion that Mr. Horkins had dealt in facts there.

The loafing tobacco-ruminants grinned at him when he blustered, giving out his threats of what would happen if anybody came snooping around the Beeze camps.

"Oh-h-h, hell! We know well enough who you be," said one of the squatters listlessly.

"I'm the Hawk of Holeb."

"Wa-a-all, I'm the Rooster o' Wikket," declared the man, slowly scrambling to his feet. "If you're looking for a feather-swapping fracas, come on!"

One of the bystanders had something to add. "Stick another cipher into Posh and you've got Poosh—and that's for you!"

The taunting discovery of identity was practically enough in the way of discouragement; but Mr. Godden was acutely conscious of lacking real heart in another respect. Perhaps he himself was the sole offender in the raids on Miss Beeze's

storehouse! The men in the God-forsaken settlement did not look as if they had gumption enough to stay up nights and walk three miles to do any stealing.

"Well, you heard what I said!" was the emissary's mild threat, his ferocity tapering off into a very spindling point.

"Better say it over—or else you might be kind enough to whistle the tune," advised the self-announced Rooster. "Time is dragging heavy with us on a hot day like this. Things to laugh at don't come along very often."

THE torture of the situation was relieved for Mr. Godden at that moment.

The clamor of a woman's voice broke out in one of the shacks. She was giving somebody particular fits.

"Laugh at that!" advised Mr. Godden sourly.

"Oh, we don't git no more fun out of that! We hear it too often!"

Out of the shack leaped a man; a woman followed on his heels, beating him with a sapling.

In his mingled emotions of the moment Mr. Godden was not sure whether he was homesick or beatifically glad because his wife had divorced him. This affair was a sample of what he had been through in his own home. He felt a good deal of sympathy for the man and hastened to pick him up when he fell after stubbing his toe over a root.

The furious woman made as if to hit the Samaritan; indeed, she did launch one swipe at him which he warded off with the barrel of the rifle.

"Better be careful, Marm Tuttle," advised the Rooster. "This, here, is the Hawk of Holeb."

"If he had any feathers on him wuth the picking I'd have one piller 't any rate to keep my head off'm the bare boards," she cried. "Jase Tuttle don't furnish me one!"

She confronted the proclaimed Hawk and looked him up and down. "Huh! So you're that 'Posh' Godden. Warden Horkins has told us about you. And your wife has got a bill from you, has she? That's going to be my next move with this blasted, infernal hunk o' cat fodder o' mine."

Promptly terminating all further interest in Mr. Godden, she turned on her husband. "Now you go up there and tend to what I told you to tend to! You're too lazy to breathe unless I keep reminding you! Loafing around under my feet and letting the pertater bugs eat the tops off'm the only namable grub we've got to depend on next winter!"

"Can't hardly expect Jase to take much interest in killing off his own folks," averred the malicious Rooster. "With that appetite of his and that striped shirt, he's about as nigh being a pertater bug as they make 'em."

"Own folks or not, you go p'isen them bugs," Madam Tuttle commanded her husband. "And, remember, I'm keeping my eye on you out of the kitchen winder."

Mr. Tuttle, with apparent despondency, stumbled on his way to the task, climbing the slope to a field where stumps and potato herbage were mingled.

But he grinned slyly as soon as his back was turned.

Desire to escape from embarrassing company and his sympathy for a man who was getting full measure of what Mr. Godden had been through in the past—both emotions motivated the latter; he chased along and joined Tuttle.

"I'm watching you," screamed the fury. "Remember that!"

"It's hell, ain't it?" whined Mr. Tuttle through the corner of his mouth. "I've about made up my mind to climb onto a mount'in like you've done—only I'll pick out a higher one."

"I'll tell you what!" declared Mr. Godden in a rush of generous feeling. "You come along with me onto my peak. It's high enough—and there's plenty of rocks to roll down onto anybody who comes climbing up to bother us."

"She's got her eye on me!" panted Mr. Tuttle. "And I'm short winded and all full o' rheumatiz. She can outrun me."

"Well, it's come time to show what sprawl you've got!" urged the freeman.

MR. TUTTLE halted in his tracks and winked at Mr. Godden. The sly grin again wrinkled his features. "I reckon I know a way to git some sprawl into me —and she can go ahead and tucker her old eyes while I'm doing it. Mister, you're going to see what brains can do. And I keep letting her think I hate this job!"

With his new friend at his heels, Tuttle went into the field and lifted from the hollow of a big stump a battered five-gallon potato-top sprayer—a container provided with shoulder harness and having a tap and tube near the bottom.

"H'ist it up so't' I can stick my arms through the straps," adjured Mr. Tuttle, "and while you're fussing as if you was helping me settle it onto my shoulders, you just take a good long suck at the end of this tube."

"Damrat ye, what's your notion in trying to p'isen me with paris green?" demanded Mr. Godden, flaring into prompt rage.

Once more, Mr. Tuttle winked with much significance. "Listen, friend and feller sufferer! Last fall I buried a barrel o' cider and let it freeze. In the spring I tapped her and drawed out the middle where all the good old real 'ting' was concenterated, as ye might say!

"This here in this can is 'heart' cider. Have you lived all your life in a pro-hibeition State and don't know what 'heart' cider is?"

"You bet I know!" blurted Mr. Godden gustfully. "Let me at it!"

While his new friend sucked Mr. Tuttle expounded. "She's allus peeking at me. This is the only way I've been able to git tea'd up so as to stand her tantrums. And, onless all the other critters in this settlement was believing it's p'isen in this can, the stuff wouldn't last longer 'n you could stand on a stovelid in Tophet. Git me, don't you?"

"You bet I do!" stated Mr. Godden, taking breath.

Mr. Tuttle yanked away the tube and started off, turning his back on the window of his shack. He imbibed his partial quota as he marched, persisting until his eyes goggled from lack of sufficient air in his lungs.

"Of course, this system o' mine ain't having no pertickler effect on the pertater bugs," he informed Mr. Godden who was close at heel. "But I tell ye, mister, there comes a time when a man has got to think less about bugs and more about himself. If I didn't keep torched up reg'lar I'd lay down and die."

Mr. Godden himself was in a state of despondency which required stimulants. He had suffered a bitter blow in Wikket. He felt a sort of scrambled hope that enough of the "heart" cider would furnish the desperate spirit which he required to carry out his mission as the Hawk of Holeb.

Once more, under pretense of helping Tuttle with the straps, he sucked for the sake of courage. At any rate, he pondered, if he did not get courage he would be able to dull the sense of hurt pride. Also, he must get into a state of mind where he could face Miss Beeze.

As an ant solicitously cultivates the friendship of a certain little bug that exudes sweetness, so did Mr. Godden cling to Mr. Tuttle as a valuable asset.

There was one place in the world where the Hawk of Holeb had received more deference than had ever been accorded him in all his life. Now the Beeze camps seemed a desirable haven—his mood being inspired by what he was sucking from that blessed potato sprayer.

And one especial flare of inspiration was the thought that he could take along, not only the source of his new courage, to be periodically referred to in order to keep that courage up, letting Tuttle do all the work and lug the can, but could also produce Tuttle as Capture Number One, Exhibit A, the proof of derring do and of diligent attention to his job.

"Old friend," said Mr. Godden ten minutes later, "if you're feeling anyways like I'm feeling right at this minit you can give a buck deer a half-mile start and beat him in a ten-yard dash."

"That sounds kind o' muddled up," stated Mr. Tuttle after clucking a few

hiccups, "but I guess I can do it. Cuss it, if I git enough of a start I'll make a running jump and land right on top of Holeb peak."

They were near the edge of the woods, at the side of the field farthest from the settlement.

Taking no chances on allowing Tuttle to have a change of heart, Godden gave the can toter a push and sent him floundering through a screen of bushes.

Godden followed and picked Tuttle up.

"Gotta shuck this blasted old can," stammered Tuttle. "It tripped me!" Manifestly, he did not clearly know whether the can was on his back or under his feet.

"I'd like to see you shuck it," rasped Godden. "There's three of us friends in this party right now—and I ain't going back on the best feller of the crowd."

He kissed the side of the can and hustled Mr. Tuttle along through the woods.

IV.

THE return of the Hawk of Holeb to the Beeze camp in the late afternoon was attended by sinister portents and ominous heraldings.

Above the horizon a black cloud came slowly boiling; distant rumblings presaged a tempest.

Suddenly, in the near aisles of the forest, sounded shrill whoops and the cracking of a rifle's shots.

Miss Beeze and the knickered ladies gave over their bustle of snugging loose ends in preparation to meet the descent of the storm. They were suddenly more interested in the matter close at hand.

Mr. Godden came teaming his captive into view. No longer, as soon as he caught sight of his employer and the assembled deference payers, was the Hawk of Holeb showing a bit of consideration for the status and feelings of one whom he had previously and craftily adopted as friend and wassail comrade.

Captor was swearing at captive. In full view of the quailing women Mr. Godden shot bullets into the duff behind the heels of the quarry he was driving.

Mr. Tuttle leaped and shrieked in mortal terror. He began a zigzagging flight toward the women—welcoming even the sight of females in that exigency. He tugged at the straps of the can.

"Git it off'm me! Help me shuck it!" he pleaded. "It's full o' hell and he's been swigging the tophet into hisself."

Mr. Godden squinted at the can and was instantly aware of a sad error in judgment. His thoughts tumbled in his dizzy head and he propped himself against a tree to get his balance. He realized too late that in his condition of blurred wits he had forgotten all about Tuttle still having that can on his back.

"I guess I'm tighter'n I thought I was," he muttered. "Now she's going to ketch on!"

Miss Beeze had plenty of perspicacity; she needed only a little of it at that juncture. "How dare you come rampaging in here, the two of you, drunk as bears?" she demanded stridently.

"If you're sharp enough to see that much," retorted Mr. Godden, full of inspired intrepidity and quick choler, "you'd better use your eyes some more and see as how I've brought in the first crow. For a bonus I'll kill him right now. Mebbe I'll do it, anyway!"

In trying to aim the rifle he waved it like the wand of a crazy band leader. All the party, including Mr. Tuttle, took to the shelter of tree trunks. In the matter of selecting a target, Mr. Godden was exhibiting a great deal of catholicity.

"If this isn't the deuce on top of a thunder shower, then I'm no judge!" squealed Miss Beeze.

"And if this is all the credit I'm gitting," yelled Mr. Godden, wholly reckless, utterly infuriated by this shift from deference to denunciation, "I'll show you whether I'm the Hawk of Holeb or not!" He refilled the rifle's magazine and whooped as accompaniment to a fusillade that was certainly aimed nowhere in particular.

"He ain't no Hawk!" howled Mr. Tuttle, squatting behind his tree. "He's only Wash—Posh—Poosh Godden of Ottic."

The announcer's diction was slobberingly vague; he seemed to be making only some funny noises. Miss Beeze wildly and despairingly put that opinion into words.

"I'll tell you-all who he is," promised a new voice in the debate.

In spite of the risks involved, Miss Beeze and her guests peered from behind their trees.

MADAM TUTTLE was striding into the clearing, dauntlessly in the open.

"If you try to tell 'em you're a goner," threatened Mr. Godden.

"Bah-h-h! You couldn't hit the side of that peak if you aimed at it," scoffed the pursuer. "I'm the one that's got the good aim—coming straight here where I knew you'd stivver for, you cussed old cheat!

"Let me tell you, lady, if there's been any stealing done here, this Posh Godden has done it. He was chased out of Ottic for doing the same. He wouldn't dare to tackle even a chicken unless its head was under its wing! A nice critter you hired to trodge around these parts to tell decent folks their business!"

Matching the scorn of her speech with disdainful action, she clutched her sapling staff and ran toward the discredited outlaw.

But he was already licked; the bitter truth from her tongue had performed its work. There was nothing sensible that could be done in the case of this virago. Instinctively he acted as he had been accustomed to do at home—he ran away at his best clip after he had thrown down the rifle.

Miss Beeze made a gallant sprint and picked up the weapon and lamented her poor aim when she failed to nail Mr. Godden with a bullet as he turned the bend of the trail.

Mr. Tuttle also became a fugitive at that moment. He set away toward Wikket; his wife was close at his heels, paying not the least attention to Miss Beeze's queries for further facts regarding one Godden of Ottic.

"But this thing doesn't end here, ladies," she declared irefully. "I'm going onto the top of that peak and take my damages out of the pelt of that cowardly renegade."

"You won't have to go alone," said one lady, spokeswoman for the others. "We're up here looking for kicks—and getting at that lying knave will be the big wow!"

A grim, grum ruffle of thunder rolled along the horizon; they turned and gazed at the blue-black cloud.

"I'm not afraid of that man," stated Miss Beeze. "But I'm almighty scared in a thunder shower."

"It looks as if it's going to be perfectly terrible," agreed one of the group.

"We'll wait till it's over, ladies," directed the leader. "In the meantime, let's all pray that this faker will stick on that peak till we can get at him!"

But in spite of the mental petitions that were sent to headquarters that day, Providence, in a certain prankish humor, must have had other plans regarding Mr. Godden. For Fate proceeded to be much nicer to the ladies than they had ventured to request in their supplications.

V.

THE Hawk of Holeb prayed for wings to use in his flight to the top of the peak. However, he did the best he could without pinions. He paid no attention to the approaching tempest. Its threat was dwarfed by the menace of a woman and a rifle. As he climbed he kept looking down; he expected to see her on his trail.

He was glad because the lightning shuttled and the thunder banged.

"Thank Heaven!" he panted. "This'll drive her back! I hope this storm turns into the hell-hootingest rip-up that ever hit these parts. She tried to kill me! Come on lightning, gale and gen'ral cussedness! I want to git shet of that woman!"

At last he floundered over the brow of the peak and fell on his face and labored to get breath. As soon as he could spare a little of that breath he shouted to the echoing heavens, "Thank goodness, I'm here, out o' the clutches of them wimmen

—with a mount'in to set on! If they ever ketch me down there again——"

A howling blast drove speech back down into his gullet.

He crawled on his hands and knees toward the tent. It was flapping wildly. He was gradded by the fear that he was about to lose the only roof between him and a wet sky.

"I like to have prayers answered," he muttered, "but there's sech a thing as running the dish over!"

One side of the tent broke loose. The canvas cracked out sharp reports which urged him as Miss Beeze's pot shot had done.

On account of the shallow earth coating of the peak he had been able to peg the canvas only insecurely. He resolved to weight the tent with his own body; he gathered the ropes and tied them about himself.

"This ain't no ways like heaven, no matter how high up I am," he acknowledged when a roaring wind tugged. "But it's better'n being down there where them wimmen can git at me."

The newspapers on the days following that blow had many items about the vagaries of the tornado. But one of the most interesting episodes of the storm never did get into print because Holeb was remote from news centers.

Right in the middle of Mr. Godden's self-congratulation over being "shet of wimmen and their ways," the bellowing twister volleyed under his tent and swept him and his shelter off the peak.

It was a crude parachute, but it served! He was swept far out from the cliff and, after a dizzy flight, he dropped into the pond in front of the Beeze camps—a core of white spume and flapping canvas.

The cowering women observed through the windows of the main camp.

"For mercy's sake, what great bird can that be?" cried one woman.

"It's the Hawk of Holeb," announced Miss Beeze, having vision forest trained.

"Are we going to let the man drown?" pleaded a frantic lady.

"Oh, he was born, to hang!" replied Miss Beeze, with a calm made up of menace and perfect satisfaction. "You can see that the Hawk of Holeb must have web feet. He is swimming and towing that tent!"

Mr. Godden, however, was compelled to tow the drag—he could not free himself from the ropes. When the water shallowed so that he could touch his feet to the bottom he waded toilsomely, almost at his last gasp.

Therefore, he became easy prey when he sprawled on the beach.

The enthusiastic ladies made a bee of the affair, rolled him up in his tent and pounded him with sticks until Miss Beeze decided that sufficient wickedness had been knocked out of him.

Then they shucked Mr. Godden from his cocoon and allowed him to go on his way—as best he could! He was a long time in getting out of sight; part of the way he crawled on his hands and knees.

"Some different from flying, like he was doing a little while ago," was Miss Beeze's acrid comment. "But while he's crawling he's getting out of his noddle the idea that he's a hawk."

As a matter of fact, that notion was entirely out of Mr. Godden's head. He had no more taste for the peak of Holeb. Even if he had felt any hankering to go back he was conscious of being too feeble to tackle the climb.

"And if I was there," he growled sourly, "I'd have wimmen and a clothesline to look at! I want to git to some place, if there is one, and I can ever git my strength back, where a woman—where a woman——"

But he burst out into profanity and he never did finish the sentence, his paucity of words not coming up to his virulence of sentiment.

He may have found the desirable place.

At any rate, he never showed up at Holeb or Ottic again.

Down But Not Out

By C. S. Montanye

Author of "The End of a Perfect Play," "Revenge is Bitter," Etc.

In the great Cowboy Popularity Contest of Beverly, Eddie Rose is pleasantly surprised to learn that his popularity with but one, Luella Bright by name, is worth more than the thousands of votes received by his competitors.

PLACE the blame for any mistaken idea of the average cowboy's daily existence in the sunny spaces of Wyoming, for instance, on the celluloid drama. The movies, such as those clicked off in the effete East, would make it appear that puncher boy and ranch buckaroo have one continual thrilling life with stops only for meals. Just to show you that all is not white gold that resembles platinum, let's go back a few funny weeks to a certain morning when Mr. Jefferson Billings, the taciturn owner of the Centipede Ranch in the County of Wakefield, glanced at me across the matutinal coffee cups in the big dining room of the ranch house. Billings folded in half a telegram one of the wranglers had brought up from the Crossing an hour or two earlier, coughed and started in.

"Here's news, Sayles. Paddy Opp, one of my oldest friends, who hit the trail from Tulsa to New York a decade or so ago, is sending his son Martin out here for the boy's health. From what I understand, young Opp has been using the red paintbrush in the devil's playground and needs plenty of change and rest.

"Well, I couldn't tell an old bunkie like Paddy that we were trying to run a cow ranch and not a sanitarium out here, and so, a few weeks ago, I told him to go ahead and ship the young man to us. This wire is from young Martin himself. He's on the Limited which is due at the Crossing at one o'clock.

"Take a couple of the boys and appoint yourself a committee of welcome. I have a directors' meeting on at the First National in Beverly and won't be able to be present."

I nodded.

"Right. How am I to recognize the boy?"

Billings explained, lighted a cheroot that no asphalt Arab would have followed him for and glanced at his six-cylinder watch.

"By the way, don't let any of these humorists around the property get rough with Marty. From what Paddy wrote he's apt to be delicate. I guess that's about all."

The news that the Centipede was about to shelter an ailing exile from the land of the starched collar and the hard-boiled shirt created not a little interest. The wranglers, with their usual keen sense of rumor, rode the news around and made bids for berths on the buckboard when the piebald ponies were being backed into the shafts to go down and meet the Limited.

Curiosity was plentiful and disappointment obvious when I selected three of the crowd as official chaperons and handshakers. Number one was "Silent Pete" Waller, a pigeon-toed ignoramus who talked as much as a traveling salesman and who would have gotten over big at the wrong end of a custard pie. Number two answered to the roll call of "Lingo Sully," who was Waller's partner in patter and a total loss so far as any intelligence was concerned.

The third and last member of the trio was no less than "Cowboy Eddie" Rose, a pathetic little emigrant from Texas who was the principal clown in the Centipede's daily circus. Rose, who would have smelled as sweetly by any other name, had a certain ingratiating personality that had placed him high in the esteem of the most attractive of the few attractive young ladies in the vicinity. This, as you may or may not remember, was the charming Luella Bright who chauffeured a cash register at a local chop and steak resort known to the trade as the Palace Eating House.

Once on the A deck of the buckboard with the ponies doing their stuff, Waller began to laugh.

"So the boss is taking them on now for the rest cure? This is really comical. What do you suppose this Opp party has got—the mouth-and-hoof disease?"

"If he ain't," Rose butted in pleasantly, "he's liable to catch it off you—not the hoof ailment, the mouth disease."

"I'll give you the foot trouble here and now if you don't close up shut!" Waller snapped. "For a dwarf you've got more to say than a giant. Where was I——"

"Leave me talk," Lingo Sully interrupted. "I want to know how we're going to recognize this traveler."

I explained that a description of the Centipede visitor ran to height, hair the same color as red and that he would be carrying a pigskin valise. This held the three range stars of slapstick until we were past the Silver Circle, which happened to be the adjoining ranch and the hated rival of the Centipede. Over the port pony then, through the dust haze and across the smooth roll of the prairies, the huddle of Chester Crossing loomed up.

Once, in the careless days of the stagecoach the Crossing had been no more or less than a glorified livery stable where jaded nags were unharnessed and fresh steeds supplied. The government, however, had seen fit to hurl an orthodox post office at it, a regular railroad had erected a station there, and Chester Crossing, in importance if not in population, gave strong indications of eventually outgrowing Beverly, the county seat, that was some five miles distant as the nightingale flew.

"I suppose," Waller mumbled, "they'll be taking this Opp bird off on a slat. Sufferin' lizards! The Centipede ain't no place for cripples, though I do admit Wyoming's good for what's bothering you."

"That's funny," Rose cut in, with a wink at me. "It's made a physical masterpiece but a mental ruin out of you, Pete. Swing at me and I'll jam a six-gun up against your liver. You——"

"That will be enough of this," I stated with the full authority of the Centipede's paymaster and office manager. "Can't you boys ever get together without coming to blows?"

"I can," Rose smirked. "But what do you expect of any one with a tongue like he's got?"

The usual noonday crowd hung around the Crossing depot waiting for the celebrated Limited to pause long enough in its western flight to drop off a passenger or two, some postal sacks and sundry expressage in the form of goods purchased from the mail-order houses. The thermometer hanging on the door of the freight office would have registered zero if turned upside down; every time a hot wind stirred it rained alkali, and if sweat had been currency the loungers present would have been living on Fifth Avenue.

We parked the buckboard back of the telegraph department and went up on the platform. In the gathering I recognized "Big" Andy and "Red" Ferris, a couple of half-wits from the Silver Circle, some punchers from the Triple Star Ranch and one or two shopkeepers to whom the arrival of the choo-choo was ever exciting.

The trio from the Centipede rolled cigarettes, openly ignored the Silver Circle representatives, and lapsing into cow vernacular started the bull of conversation rolling.

Six minutes elapsed before the station agent poked his head out.

"Here she comes, boys!"

The hot rails hummed, a whistle sounded and the great iron horse, with more coaches attached than the average output of a successful automotive concern, steamed in and threw on the brakes Immediately, Rose selected one Pullman staircase to watch, Waller grabbed another and Sully a third, while baggage was slammed carelessly down on the station and a little crowd congregated about a chair car up forward.

Sounds of exclamations and laughter drew my attention to it. Simultaneously my three companions wandered back shaking their heads and the next minute the jovial Red Ferris, of the Circle, swung around in our direction and set up a holler.

"Hey, Centipede! Here's a party who says he's going out to the ranch. You'd better come over and rope him before these coyotes deefen him!"

There was a little stir, the crowd gave way and from the center of it emerged the expected guest himself.

"Holy mackerel!" Lingo Sully mumbled witlessly.

It wasn't so much the fact that Master Martin Opp was tall, overgrown and stout to the point of open obesity that caused the hilarity. Opp demanded and got attention on what he was wearing, and that was reason enough for any one's mirth. The largest Stetson ever turned out, a scarlet-and-green kerchief tied artistically loose with the point draped over his manly chest, elegant stamped-leather cuffs and light tan boots, to say nothing of crinkly black Angora chaps was only the half of it.

The rest of the regalia, which any dweller along the Atlantic seaboard was apt to imagine from the films was ultra-correct haberdashery, consisted of a wide leather waistband, not two guns but *three,* and spurs with seven-inch bands that sported engraved conchos. Really, the rowels on them alone would have given an ordinary Wyoming cayuse immediate heart failure.

For the rest Opp had hair as red as paint, a falsetto voice and a false set of teeth, eyes useful for cross-word puzzles —one horizontal and the other vertical— ears that would have covered *any* keyhole, a nose that went in for quantity rather than quality, and a drawling line of gab that required a bridge in his mouth to get the words across. Thus the visitor:

"I say there," he bawled at me, his face as red as two sunsets, "if you're from the Centipede Ranch get me away from these ruffians before I lose my temper and hurt them. I'm Martin Opp from New York. Here's my luggage. Don't drop it or it will leak. Let's go!"

The awed silence that was folded over the Centipede wranglers like a tent was finally broken by Rose's hysterical peal of laughter.

"'Get me away from these ruffians before I lose my temper! I'm Opp from New York!' Honest, this is killing me by inches. And will you take a peek at that pink Navajo blanket he's got wrapped

up on top of his trunk. I'll bet this dude wrangler thinks that Indians still use bow and arrows!"

Two seconds more and the unexpected happened. Stretching out an arm that was half as long as the departing train, Opp seized Rose by the shoulder and hauled him in close.

"Don't get rosy with me, kid," he snarled. "Back where I come from policemen are afraid to argue with me. I'm hard through and through so if you're looking for a little fun we'll go down to your nursery and play blocks. I'll knock yours off!"

The crowd pressed in to enjoy every minute of it while Rose, suddenly as meek as Mary's lamb, licked his lips.

"Can't you take a joke?" he whined, before he gave Waller a pleading look. "What a fine pal you've turned out to be, Pete. Make this big bully leave me alone!"

"And have him get new with *me,* mebbe?" Waller mumbled.

"Who are we," Lingo Sully put in nervously, "to take a slap at the son of the boss' old friend?"

Giving the frightened Rose a contemptuous shake, Opp tossed him carelessly over a trunk, scowled at the crowd who fell back hastily and had me conduct him off to the buckboard. There he helped himself to a front seat, failed to notice the three from the ranch climbing into the back and, with a yawn, watched me wind up and start the ponies.

"It took me two days to pick out these here clothes in Chicago," Opp began chummily, helping himself to the cigars in my vest pocket. "At that I had to get them off a fancy dress costumer. What's wrong with them, if anything?" he asked the abashed Sully with a glare.

"Not a thing, absolutely nothing!" Lingo assured him hurriedly. "They're pretty classy, to my way of thinking."

"You look great in 'em," Waller interpolated.

Opp grunted.

"Yes, I'm out here for my nerves," he went on. "The old gent said that Broadway was tearing me apart. Six doctors told me I needed the wide open spaces where there weren't no bootleggers. Back home it's getting terrible damp. Even the Statue of Liberty gets lit up every night. Haw-haw! The old gent thought that being among the cattle would cow me down some. Approach that if you're able."

"Expect to stay long? " I ventured.

Opp shrugged his bulky shoulders.

"It all depends on how I like it. So far this place looks like a dump to me. I might stay a week or a day.

"By the way, any good-looking gals out here? I don't want to boast, but I've got a wonderful way with the sex. Other guys knock 'em dead but I'm the little bright eyes that brings them back to life. I'll tell you about myself."

He rambled on pleasantly while the firm of Waller, Sully and Rose drank in his statements with open mouths. Opp tossed off a generous chunk of biography and let us in on several secrets. He admitted being one of the most popular men in the East, made us understand that the bobbed-hair flappers purchased carbolic if he failed to smile upon them, told us he was the hero of every dance floor and that he was as much at home at the White House in Washington as he was at any of the forty-seven clubs he belonged to.

He confessed being a graduate of Shoe College—the one higher than Oxford—and it seemed all the celebrities such as actors, screen stars, pugilists, head waiters, musicians, artists, bankers, stockbrokers both in jail and awaiting sentence, traffic cops, undertakers and authors were his everyday companions.

He ran down presently, sneered at the landscape and said nothing until we were in front of the first Centipede fences.

"Er—right over near that mesquite yonder," Sully plucked up sufficient courage to mutter, "is the spot where the boss once shot three coyotes in his pajamas."

"Yeah? What were they doing there?" Opp asked absently. "So that's the Centipede Ranch I've heard my old gent rave about so much. Well, it may look like

Buckingham Palace to him, but it's an earache to me.

"Still, I suppose I can put up with it if it means getting back my health. Show me where I sleep, tell me when we eat, and then don't bother me until I want to get some one to learn me a few tricks. Doctor Kress said I got to get plenty of rest."

While all the ranch hands around the premises rushed up to stop, gape and listen, I drew the buckboard to a halt in front of the ranch house, handed the pigskin valise with the pink Navajo blanket on it to Montana Monty, and had the boss' chink show the swaggering Opp to his quarters.

After that I strolled over in the direction of the bunk house and found Eddie Rose nursing a grouch and his shoulder.

"Where did he go?" Sully asked me anxiously.

"If he went where I hope he did," Rose whinnied, "he's all blisters now. The big hunk of cake—I call him that because he's so crumby—he'd better not get fresh with my shoulder again. I might be little, but I've got big ideas."

"It's a good thing for him that he didn't start nothing with me," Silent Pete grinned. "I love to take these tenderfeet when they get gay. Cripes! It wouldn't take *me* long to put him in his place."

Left to his own devices by Billings, who was worried and busy thinking up ways to offset the stiff competition supplied in the meat line by the Silver Circle Ranch, the overbearing Opp proceeded to make himself comfortably at home. Whether or not it was because of Rose's unfortunate remarks at the depot the day of his arrival or merely because of a streak of petty malice, the Centipede visitor began at once to systematically bully and have a lot of fun with the little cowboy.

With the permission of the boss, who knew nothing about this case of hate at first sight, Opp registered Rose as his Western instructor. Having a desire to learn fancy roping, he let Rose spend hours at a time in the sun glare of the corral, making him go through his repertoire with a rawhide lariat while he lolled under an umbrella, sipped the iced drink the chink brought out and yawned. He had Rose give him riding lessons on a swayback mare that had four legs and two teeth. He went in for pistol practice, ordered the little puncher to collect all the discarded headgear he could find and then capped the climax by standing the paralyzed Rose off at fifty yards and shooting holes in the sombreros that Rose held at arm's length.

It was all fun!

Because he was the guest of the boss the other wranglers forbore to interfere with his tyranny, and Rose, a hunted look in his friendly eyes, went desperately about his new duties, mumbling threats the sheriff could have jailed him on. Even the big Waller, Sully and Montana Monty, the branding-iron man, were moved to sympathy and were full of happy inspirations and ideas as to strikingly original methods Rose might use to turn the tables on his overbearing pupil.

A week after the arrival of Martin Opp, Master Eddie on a pinto cow pony, jogged down to the Crossing beside me—he bound for the Palace Eating House and its cashier while I had to go up to the office of the *Daily Ranger* at Beverly, where job printing and mimeograph letters were ripped off the press on the basis of so much for so much.

"This Opp polecat," Rose began, when we were in sight of the Crossing. "You've heard the expression about how worms turn, Mr. Sayles. Well," he went on earnestly, "for once I won't be insulted if you or anybody else calls me a worm. I'm going to do a piece of turning very soon now."

"How do you mean?"

He rubbed his nose against a flannel sleeve and made his expression plaintive.

"I don't know. I'm down but I'm not out. If I didn't like the Centipede so much and if I wasn't so strong for Luella I'd take six shots at Opp and run like hell. Guess what that monument of insanity wants me to do to-morrow?"

"I'm unable. You tell me."

Rose laughed like a stricken hyena.

"At nine o'clock, after Opp has had his breakfast in bed, I'm to hand break a couple of bad broncs so he can see how it's done. After that I'm to do some fancy riding and some trick falls on my sore shoulder. Then we're going to sit on the porch—listening to him is the worst part of it—and he's going to tell me the story of that night in a Russian kafe when he almost killed four waiters and fought some wolves with his bare hands. I've heard it twice already, but that don't make no difference."

He unloaded more of his woes and we turned into the Crossing's main thoroughfare. Then he rode his cow pony up to the fly-specked window of the only restaurant doing business in town, saw that Miss Luella Bright was out for tea and sighed deeply.

"I'll go up to Beverly with you, Mr. Sayles. When Luella suppers it means an hour or two. She don't eat at the Palace. I've been telling you right along she's as wise as they come."

The *Daily Ranger*, a newspaper with a respectable circulation, was owned and edited by an Oliver Printz. Ollie, a former real-estate man from Albuquerque, had bought the works, the presses, ink, office furniture and burglar-proof safe for a song and a couple of dance steps.

Printz, an egg with a pair of hard-boiled eyes and a chin that screamed for a razor, booked my order and passed around something out of a bottle that was guaranteed to ruin anybody's lining.

"Grand liquor!" Rose exclaimed, smacking his lips and smiling for the first time in seven days. "Where do you buy hooch like that, mister?"

"You don't," Printz explained. "You make it yourself. All you need is a stone jar, half a gallon of wood alcohol, two quarts of ordinary vegetables, three plugs of tobacco—the chewing kind is better—a pail of water and fifteen cents' worth of turpentine. Add a little sugar and let it stand two weeks.

"By the way, I want to make you both acquainted with the great, the remarkable Cowboy Popularity Contest that starts to-morrow morning. At that time the *Ranger* will print in each issue a coupon. This coupon when clipped and filled out with the name and ranch of the one sending it in becomes a vote. The three punchers who have the most votes when the contest ends will receive the following rewards: Seven hundred and fifty dollars will be paid to the winner, a genuine Ford automobile is the second prize and a two-hundred-and-fifty-dollar radio receiving set, guaranteed to work, will be given to the third highest in order of merit."

Rose opened his mouth.

"Seven hundred and fifty dollars? By golly, *that's* money! Tell me more."

"The object of the contest," Printz went on," is to increase the *Ranger's* circulation and by increasing it bring in more advertisers. Those who expect to enter the contest and win prizes should immediately interest all their friends and tell them to buy as many copies of the paper as possible. Right there is where the popularity idea comes in. Here are a half dozen circulars that explain the thing in detail. Keep one and give the rest to your friends."

"I haven't any," Rose sighed dolefully. "Come on, Mr. Sayles. I guess that hour is up now. Seven hundred and fifty dollars? I'm going to read these circulars down, across and up. I must be pretty popular myself—judging from the way I'm hounded."

The fair Luella Bright had returned and was in the cashier's booth at the restaurant when we left our ponies at the hitching rail and went inside. Rose, as excited as any one who had discovered a way of making gold out of straw, passed Luella one of the circulars and went into immediate conference—with the result that three diners walked out without paying their checks.

"We'll tell every one we know to buy the *Ranger* and keep the coupons for us," Luella Bright exclaimed, once she understood what it was all about. "Oh, Eddie! Just imagine winning all that money.

Think what we—you, I mean—could do with it."

"I don't have to think—I know," the small herder snickered. "We could rent a clergyman, buy a honeymoon East and still have enough left over to go housekeeping with when we returned. Swing a rope at that."

The young lady blushed.

"You do think of the weirdest things. You shouldn't take so much for granted either. You're little, you're nice and I like you but—that's all. Go over there now with Mr. Sayles and get Chingo to bring you something to eat while I read all about this popularity contest. It's really thrilling."

As Rose sat down the door opened, closed and an all-too-familiar voice sounded disagreeably.

"So this is the village of Biltmore, is it? Doctor Spencer told me to be careful of my diet, but I'll try any place twice. And unless my eyes deceive me there's my little playmate Edward. Haw-haw! Funny how we run across each other—as the automobile tires said to the railroad tracks. Move over and let a real man sit down at your table, kid."

"Hey, Chingo!" Rose immediately bawled in the direction of the kitchen. "Never mind that table d'hôte. I ain't got no appetite now."

Martin Opp pulled out a chair, tore up a couple of napkins to see if they were really made of paper, sneered at the thumb-marked menus, noticed the circular Rose still clutched in one hand and twisted his wrist around until he dropped it with a gasp of pain.

"What's all this stuff?" Opp ran an eye over the printing. "'Cowboy Popularity Contest. Seven hundred and fifty dollars in gold to the winner.' Say, this listens good to me. Back in the old home town I'm so popular that every time I go out for a walk I've got to have police protection."

"I believe that!" Rose murmured, shooting a look in the direction of Luella Bright, who was letting nothing escape.

"Yes," Opp resumed, "crowds of hero worshipers want to get my autograph and slap my back——"

"Slap it or break it?" Rose mumbled.

"I'm glad you went up to Beverly and got me this circular, Eddie. That's showing more sense than I thought you had. Any time there's anything doing around here you plant your ears in a flower pot and get me the dirt.

"Winning popularity contests is one of my playful habits. I'll step up to the newspaper office to-morrow and enter myself. I'll get old Jeff to give me an affidavit that I'm one of the Centipede wranglers and if they don't want to accept it I'll take the case to the law. Two-minute steaks," he said to the waiter. "If they take any longer than that by my watch I'll hang something on your jaw and it won't be false whiskers either!"

"How is the Wyoming air agreeing with you?" I inquired.

"All right, only——"

Breaking off abruptly, Opp straightened up and registered happy astonishment. For at least five tense minutes he sat immovable. Then he jumped up so quickly that he broke one of his ridiculous spurs in his haste and started in the direction of the cashier's booth.

"Well, well! Little Goldilocks, herself, right out of the story book! Baby, before you speak one word tell me this. How does it happen that I've been out here for more than a week and have never seen you before?"

"One minute!" Rose yelped, on his own feet like a shot. "Don't you ace around with Luella. She's my girl!"

Opp stopped and looked back over his shoulder, his lips twisted into a crooked smile.

"Your gal? You mean probably that she *was* your gal though what she saw in you is beyond me. From now on she's *mine*. Don't forget that, either—and remember this. You needn't hang around here any more. Eat elsewhere and don't try to flirt or make any dates with this chicken. If you do you're likely as not to land in the hospital. See?"

Resting an elbow on the change shelf

of the desk he coughed, pulled down the point of his flamboyant neckerchief and shook out his chaps.

"I suppose you've heard them tell about me, Martin Opp, late of New York but now of the Centipede Ranch. So your name is Luella. I'll call you Lou for short and you can call me Marty.

"What time do you knock off here, anyway? As the positive winner of that popularity contest I want to get acquainted. I think now that I look at you you can help me cop the contest. Anyway, let's talk it over."

Both the sizzling Rose and myself stared anxiously, expecting Miss Bright to protest as vehemently as was her custom when mashers became annoying. But instead of freezing him with her eyes and shoulder the young lady looked at Opp for a long, long minute. Finally she smiled dreamily, cast one final glance at the cow-puncher beside me and drew a breath.

"I'll be finished work here in an hour, Mr. Opp—I mean, Marty. Suppose we go to the movies at Beverly. You can tell me all about how you're going to win the contest there. It's so dark people won't hear us."

A trembling hand touched my arm spasmodically.

"Come on, Mr. Sayles," Rose begged in a choked voice. "You don't want to finish that coffee—it's cold now. Let's start back to the ranch. I—I don't like it here."

"Er—about that there soup," we heard the voice of Chingo saying as we went out into the twilight. "If you want a dish you'll have to wait. Oxtail is always behind——"

The effect of the popularity contest cooked up by Oliver Printz had an immediate and far-reaching affect on all those ranches within fifty miles of the county seat. As catching as a cold in the head, the thing became the one great event in nearly every wrangler's life and within a week after its start the clever Mr. Printz was forced to buy three new presses and engage a staff of assistants. Where once the average puncher's salary had gone gayly into the pleasures of the pool halls and stud-poker pots, they began to save every nickel they could get their fingers on so copies of the *Ranger* could be purchased and the voting coupons ripped and filled out.

The result of this wave of mounting interest was such that the harassed Mr. Printz was forced to change his rules and regulations and issue orders that no more votes were to be sent in until the last day of the competition. He made this request because of the shop and storekeepers for miles around who came to his office and staged brawls, to say nothing of fist fights, because each one wanted to slam his advertising copy in first. You have no conception!

Word reached the Centipede that the Silver Circle punchers were buying the *Ranger* in gross lots and this information spurred the home talent to high efforts. Montana Monty, Lingo Sully, Silent Pete, "Weary" Jansen and the rest of the buckaroos, with the solitary exception of "Texan" Rose, hit upon the happy scheme of pooling their combined earnings, purchasing the newspaper in quantity and then drawing straws to see who would get the entire number of votes to send in to the editor.

Through scenes of excitement young Martin Opp swaggered, smiling complacently and while no one ever noticed him with a copy of the *Ranger* in his hands, his pockets or under his arm, Opp never lost a chance to inform his friends and enemies that he not only was entered in the contest but was spending big money to put himself across. What he did with the votes or where he conducted his coupon clipping was a dark secret. The only open fact I got wind of was that the stout upstart was constantly in the company of the money-changing Miss Bright and that Rose, silent and stricken, no longer paid his usual nightly visits to the Palace Eating House.

Yet it was a sick breeze that blew nobody something, for Opp, busy playing *Romeo* to Luella's *Juliet,* had neither the time nor the inclination to learn wild Western ways and, the pressure removed,

Eddie went back to his bronc and the cattle that grazed on the range.

I looked in the bunk house one evening, found the gang shaking dice for the newspapers bought that day and discovered Rose stretched out on his berth with his boots off.

"Look here," I began, going across. "Aren't you in on the big contest? If you need money to buy the paper I'll speak to the boss and see to it that you get an advance on your salary."

He shook his head.

"Don't bother. I already sent in forty coupons and I don't care who wins that seven hundred and fifty. No matter who does, I'm sure of one thing. It won't be *me*."

He turned his face to the wall.

"Cheer up, Ed," I said. "You're acting like a child, not a man. Didn't you tell me once that you were down but not out? Suppose the false and fickle Luella did jilt you in favor of Opp? You should be glad that you discovered how little she cared before it was too late."

"It's all right to talk like that," he moaned, opening one eye, "but *you* didn't have to perform like a trained monkey for that big whale. *You* didn't have to listen to the story of that night in Russia when he half killed four waiters and choked the timber wolves insensible with his bare hands. He didn't swipe *your* girl. I hope I get trampled on in the next stampede. Leave me now," he requested, closing the eye.

When the end of the month approached with the Cowboy Popularity Contest at fever heat, the scandalmongers at the Crossing noised the news about that Big Andy, backed by Blaney Harrison, the owner of the Silver Circle Ranch and the Harrison bank roll, was being groomed to win the contest for the glory of the home ranch. This talk kept up until the day arrived when the votes were to be deposited at Oliver Printz's office.

All dusty trails led to Beverly. From dawn until nightfall cow-punchers, brimming over with expectant hope, loped through the dust haze, their precious packages of coupons stuffing out their shirt fronts. Riding back to the Centipede from a dinner hour at Beverly, I encountered any number of prairie cavalcades; lean, wiry Westerners on foam-flecked mounts. It was really a procession all the way back to the ranch fences where, finished with the evening bill of fare, the Centipede bunch loitered about the open door of the bunk house, listening to Montana Monty strum a secondhand Mexican guitar.

"Some music box, this here one," he drawled when I turned my sweaty horse over to one of the hands and joined them. "I traded a pair of old chaps for the guitar, Mr. Sayles."

"Them chaps were on their last legs too," Lingo Sully chuckled.

"Have you boys sent in your votes?"

"They went over at noon," Silent Pete Waller explained, diving in his shirt for a plug of tobacco. "I understand that Printz is going to announce the winners in public to-morrow and that a whole lot of guys are camping all night at Beverly. Give us a tune now, Monty. Play that one called 'A Sty in the Pigpen is Worth Two in the Eye!'"

The branding-iron man struck a doleful chord but before he could string it out Martin Opp came out of the gloom.

"Where's Rose?" he barked.

"I'm here," the little wrangler muttered sullenly.

"Say 'sir' in the future," Opp grunted. "You didn't comb my chaps to-day but I'm overlooking that because I'm in a hurry. I got a date with my brand-new sweetie, so throw a saddle on that chestnut gelding I was riding yesterday morning and be quick about it. Get me?" When Rose slouched off Opp poked out his chest.

"Well, fellers, you're looking at the winner of to-morrow's big contest. Pretty good for one who's been out here less than two months. I win because my old gent back home sent me a money order Tuesday and while he thinks it went for booze the truth is that it went for news.

"I spent every nickel of it on copies of

the *Daily Ranger*. And that reminds me. I hear that some jackass over at the Silver Circle thinks he's going to clean on this."

"Big Andy, sir," Silent Pete said when Rose led out the chestnut.

Opp sneered.

"Indeed? Take it from me. Big Andy, or whatever his name is, will be feeling pretty small to-morrow night. Once me and Lou are married, do a honeymoon and stake a claim on Park Avenue, I'll post card that poor sap at the Circle. You can't keep a real man under cover. Well, I'm blowing now. Fare thee well!"

Clambering awkwardly up into the saddle he started the chestnut lunging away with a cruel cut of his quirt and vanished in the gloom. Rose exhaled a breath and laughed mirthlessly.

"He's a soft drink! That's the dirtiest name I can think of to call him!"

Waller, coming up with the mail sack from the Crossing post office the next morning, explained that he had learned that the big doings would take place in Beverly toward two o'clock the same afternoon. In consequence the Centipede, handed a recess, was deserted at one, and several minutes after the half hour, having finished with the pay roll, I ran across Rose, sitting on a bench near the calf sheds, his head between his hands.

"Find a sombrero and hop into the front seat of the buckboard. We're going places," I told him.

"You mean that *you're* going over to Beverly," he stuttered. "I'll sit here and think. Did you ever notice how Luella pursed her mouth when she smiled and what eyes she had, Mr. Sayles?"

"Go in and get your hat. You're riding with me if I have to tie you up with a lariat and take you over that way. Coming peacefully or not?"

"I'll come," he retorted, "but I won't wear no chapeau. Maybe then I'll get sunstruck."

Chester Crossing, when we whirled through it, was practically deserted and the reason was strikingly apparent when we reached Beverly. The office of the *Daily Ranger* was on the main street and this open-air boulevard, from one unpaved end to the other, was jammed with highly anticipative punchers.

There were short ones and tall ones, thin ones and fat ones, handsome and ugly ones, well-groomed ones and untidy ones. There were weather-beaten trail riders, sheep-herders, chinks, gaudy Mexicans from the Southwest, half-breeds and three-quarter breeds.

Blaney Harrison was there with his white-silk shirt and varnished riding boots. Jeff Billings was present with a couple of First National directors and the throng was sprinkled with other interested ranch owners and cattle barons anxious to see how popular their employees were among the county residents.

We managed to wedge the buckboard into the shed back of the County Seat Hotel, found standing room only on its front veranda and looked the scene over.

Directly opposite was the newspaper office and directly in front of that an elevated wooden pavilion had been erected. This contained Printz's busy staff of clerks and in back of it was a huge blackboard marked off like the squares in a cross-word puzzle. It was apparent that the clerical force had arranged most of the packages of votes and were stacking them up in piles while the crowd breathlessly awaited a dénouement.

I had just finished searching for and finding the arrogant Martin Opp standing beside the winsome Luella Bright some six feet distant, when a quiver ran through the gathering and Oliver Printz, a new Mexican straw hat on the back of his head, sauntered out of his office and ascended the platform.

The newspaper proprietor who had as many ideas as Edison and three huge diamond studs in his shirt front that showed what the contest had done for *him*, sampled the contents of a flask, slipped it in his hip pocket and buttoned his vest.

"Glorious stuff, folks. Well, I expect we might as well begin. Friends, this rings the curtain down on the great, the wonderful, the incomparable Cowboy Popularity Contest given by the most suc-

cessful newspaper in the universe. Ready with the votes?"

"Aye, aye, pilot."

"Then we'll call them off and Luke will write down the names of the entries on the blackboard. After that," Printz stated, "we'll begin to take the count."

One clerk took his position at the glorified checkerboard while another began to call out names, each entry getting a cheer as it was jotted down.

"All set, Luke? Then let her buck. 'Duckfoot' Taylor, Sundown Ranch. Chad Green, Flying B Ranch. 'Doc' Mooney, 106 Ranch at Sandy Creek. 'Pink' Tunis, Four Bar X Ranch. 'Shady' Smith, Land End Ranch——"

The calling of the names continued monotonously until Martin Opp, the Triple Star, the Centipede and the Silver Circle outfits were on the blackboard and Eddie Rose had been listed.

"That means less than nothing," he croaked. "The first week of the contest I sent in forty coupons—before the rules got changed. Look at Luella down there, she——"

After another delay which made the crowd restless the count began with Oliver Printz giving the scene something of a Stock Exchange atmosphere by bawling out quotations which his clerk made haste to jot down on the squares on the big board.

"Two hundred and fifty votes for Pink Tunis, Luke. Five hundred votes for Big Andy. Just a minute. Here's another package with a hundred more tickets for Tunis. Somebody thinks *he's* a popular buckaroo. Five hundred votes for 'Buck' Jones, Triple Star outfit. One—two—three thousand votes for Big Andy, Silver Circle."

A roar went up which the numskull from the ranch that adjoined the Centipede took seven or eight bows on. I saw the perfect Blaney Harrison smiling thinly and noticed Martin Opp mopping his brow with a handkerchief two shades more refined than the yard of linen around his neck. Printz tasted his flask again and went on with the count, the bundles of votes being checked off and thrown into a huge packing case.

Beside me, Eddie Rose licked his lips when a half hour dragged by and his own name showed no score, while that of the stout and perspiring visitor at the Centipede had merely an insignificant one hundred coupons to his credit.

"They're gypping me out of my forty votes," Rose whined. "Look at Big Andy with fourteen thousand and five hundred hung up. Honest, if them Silver Circle bandits fell in a hog wallow they'd come up with a baby grand piano in one hand and a steam yacht between their teeth."

Twenty more minutes ticked away and found Blaney Harrison's wrangler leading by what appeared a safe margin. The second highest cow-puncher was Tunis from the Four Bar X Ranch and the applicant for show money was the choice of the Sundown Ranch.

Scattered midway through the list, Waller, Sully and Opp's count remained stationary, with Rose bringing up the rear.

Another half hour and it looked like Big Andy in a gallop. Then, when least expected, Mr. Unforeseen made a quick and dramatic appearance.

"Here's ten thousand votes for Ed Rose, Centipede Ranch!" Oliver Printz yelped, kissing his flask and getting ready on the last bundles. "Hold it, Luke. Five thousand more votes for Ed Rose—another five thousand and—ten thousand more. Make it thirty thousand in all!"

The amazed gasp of the little clown beside me was lost in the howl that immediately arose. Neither knowing what it was all about nor caring, but beginning to get a decided kick out of what had previously given every indication of being a runaway race for the Silver Circle, the bystanders set up an excited yipping.

Some one recognized the Texan on the porch and in a watch tick he got plenty of attention. Bellowing cries of strident approval echoed through the sunny spaces of Beverly's Rue de la Paix.

"'Atta boy, Eddie!"

"Make them thar Silver Circle coyotes pull leather!"

"Bust 'em, cowboy! Ee-yah!"

As the count stood, Rose was five thousand to the merry with a grand nest egg of forty-five thousand in all. Printz, whistling through his fingers for silence, waved a hand.

"One minute there, folks! We're not through yet. Here's another bundle of five thousand votes for Big Andy! Two more packages—one of three thousand and one of two thousand votes for the same party. That makes fifty thousand votes for Big Andy! One more minute. *Here's five thousand more for Centipede Eddie!* That makes it fifty-fifty and there's only one last thin little package to go!"

Rose, as pale as new-mown milk, licked his lips.

"On the level," he whispered witlessly, "I must have one of them fairy godmothers they tell the kiddies about. Fifty—thousand—coupons. Crawlin' crawfish!"

Realizing acutely that the very last scene in the afternoon's drama was about to unfold, the mob grew queerly quiet. With nerve-racking deliberation Printz picked up the last package of votes, moistened his throat and his thumb, counted them and made certain there were no more tickets to total up. Then, turning to the weary chalk artist at the blackboard, he coughed and spoke.

"Tie's broken, Luke. Credit Eddie Rose with forty more votes and put a great big X beside his name. Ladies and gents, the wrangler from the Centipede Ranch wins the great, the wonderful, the stupendous Cowboy Popularity Contest!"

Through the yelling, gesticulating crowd that shrieked Rose's name the ridiculously garbed Martin Opp, crimson from brow to chin, pushed a ruthless way. He stretched out one of his long arms, seized Rose by his lame shoulder and whirled him around.

"Win, do you!" Opp roared. "I'll show you how much you win, you little snake—you worm!"

"Worm is right!" the boy of the Golden West screamed. "And right here is where the worm turns!"

Squirming out of the clutching grasp of the Easterner, the former citizen of Texas dragged back his right arm and slammed over a healthy wallop that landed accurately on the center of Opp's plentiful nose! For one palpitating second the Centipede's visitor, reeling back, caught and clung to the veranda railing. Then, after a melodramatic and hushed interval, he pulled out his handkerchief, pushed it against his smarting beak and cowered back.

"Don't hit me again, Eddie," he pleaded when Rose, to carry on, took a step forward. "I was only fooling. I—I'm glad you won. You're a clever kid. Er—is there a water pump handy?"

He tottered away, Silent Pete Waller plucking up enough courage to take a swing at him while he was en route, and the next thing I knew a smiling, shy-eyed Miss Luella Bright was beside Rose.

"Oh, Eddie!" the fair cashier cried for his ears alone. "Did you imagine that I had really and truly thrown you over in favor of that despicable bully? I only did it for your sake, Eddie—to keep Opp from tormenting and hurting you and to help you win the contest to-day."

"Win the contest?" Rose gasped.

The girl inclined her shining head.

"All is fair in love and war. The copies of the *Daily Ranger* that Opp purchased he turned over to me so that I could clip the coupons and fill them out for him. He never told me what name and address I was to write on them, and so——"

"What?"

Luella's smile held all the glory of a thousand perfect dawns.

"And so," she explained, slipping her hand into that of the little cowboy's, "I put *your* name on each and every vote and handed them in myself, Eddie. Wasn't that a bright idea?"

By

EDGAR WALLACE

The Squealer

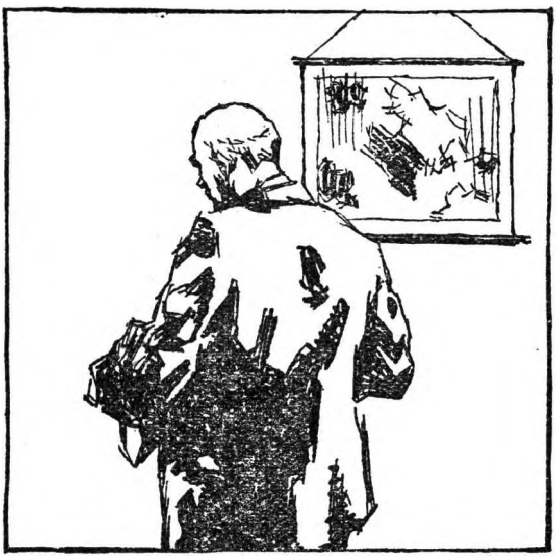
THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS.

JOHNNY GRAY.—The victim of a frame-up, has served a term in prison.

JEFF LEGGE.—The Big Printer, a counterfeiter, but known as such only to Johnny. He is the son of Emanuel Legge, and to secure for his father revenge upon Peter Kane, poses as Major Floyd and marries Marney, Peter's daughter.

OTHER CHARACTERS.—Peter Kane, a reformed criminal, who dotes upon his daughter, Marney. Marney Kane loves Johnny Gray and believes him innocent. Emanuel Legge, the father of Jeff, and an ex-convict who hates Peter Kane. Lila Sain, an accomplice of Emanuel's. Craig, a police detective. J. G. Reeder, a secret-service man.

THE STORY.—Having served a prison term, during which he learned that Jeff Legge, who sent him up, was no other than "The Big Printer," a notorious counterfeiter, long sought for by police and secret service, Johnny Gray returns to London, only to find that Marney Kane, whom he loves and hopes to marry, despite his jail record, has just been wedded to Major Floyd. Johnny feels that Marney loves him and believes in his innocence, and knows that Peter, her father and his friend—and unknown to his daughter, a reformed criminal—has effected this marriage for Marney's sake; not wishing her to marry a man with a prison record. At his first meeting with Floyd, Johnny recognizes Jeff beneath the disguise, but feigns ignorance. He tells neither Marney nor Peter, whose heart would be broken if he knew that his daughter's husband was the son of Emanuel Legge, an ex-convict just released from Dartmoor. This was Emanuel's revenge upon Peter, whom he accused of double-dealing in their last job, after which Emanuel went to prison, and Peter went straight. Johnny then discovers that Lila, a maid at Peter's house, is an accomplice of the Legges'; and, suspecting that she loves Jeff, gets her to tell where the bridal couple are bound for. At breakfast, Craig, a police detective, attempts in vain to get Johnny to squeal on the Big Printer. Lila warns Emanuel, who has come out to Peter's home to gloat over his vengeance, that Johnny has recognized Jeff and threatens to squeal. Johnny escapes a net which Emanuel had set, and manages to get into the same train compartment with him on the return to London, telling him that he knows Jeff is the Big Printer, and that he will send him to prison if he doesn't release Marney. He reckons without Emanuel, who, desperate, pitches Johnny through the door onto the tracks and leaves him for dead. Johnny is only slightly injured, and makes his way to London. On the way to their hotel in London, Jeff discloses his true identity to Marney. She is shocked, and upon reaching the hotel escapes to her room, where she locks herself in.



Author of
"The Missing Millions,"
"The Valley of Ghosts," Etc.

A Mystery Romance in Four Parts—Part II.

CHAPTER X.

FRANKNESS.

FOR a moment Jeff Legge stood helpless with rage. Then he flung all his weight against the door, but it did not yield.

He took up the telephone, but changed his mind. He did not want a scandal. Least of all did he wish to be advertised as Jeffrey Legge. Compromise was a blessed word—he knocked at the door.

"Marney, come out and be sensible," he said. "I was only joking. The whole thing was just to try you."

She offered no reply. There was probably a telephone in the bedroom, he thought. Would she dare call her father?

He heard another door unlocked. The bedroom gave on to the corridor, and he went out, to see the big chambermaid emerging. She was alone, and no sooner was she outside the door than it was locked upon her.

"I'll report you to the management," he said furiously. He could have murdered her without compunction. But his rage made no impression upon the phlegmatic Welsh woman.

"A good character I have, look you, from all my employers. To be in the bedroom, it was my business. You shall not use bad language to me, look you, or I will have the law on you!"

Jeffrey thought quickly. He waited in the corridor until the woman had disappeared, then he beckoned from the far end a man who was evidently the floor waiter.

"Go down to the office, and ask the manager, with my compliments, if I can have a second set of keys to my rooms," he said suavely. "My wife wishes to have her own."

He slipped a bill into the man's hand, of such magnitude that the waiter was overwhelmed.

"Certainly, sir. I think I can arrange."

"And perhaps you would lend me your pass-key," said Jeff carelessly.

"I haven't a pass-key, sir. Only the management has that," replied the man, "but I believe I can get you what you want."

He came back in a few minutes to the sitting room with many apologies. There were no duplicate sets of keys.

Jeff closed the sitting-room door on the

man and locked it. Then he went over to the bedroom door.

"Marney!" he called, and this time she answered him. "Are you going to be sensible?"

"I think I'm being very sensible."

"Come out and talk to me."

"Thank you, I would rather remain here."

There was a pause.

"If you go to your father, I will follow and kill him. I've got to shoot first, you know, Marney, after what you've told me."

There was a silence, and he knew that his words had impressed her.

"Think it over," he suggested. "Take your time about it."

"Will you promise to leave me alone?"

"Why, sure, I'll promise anything," he said and meant it. "Come out, Marney," he wheedled. "You can't stay there all day. You've got to eat."

"The woman will bring me my dinner," was the instant reply, and Jeffrey cursed her softly.

"All right, have it your own way," he said. "But I tell you this, that if you don't come out soon there will be trouble in your happy family."

He was satisfied, even though she did not answer him, that Marney would make no attempt to communicate with her father—that night, at least.

He got on to the telephone, but the man he sought had not arrived. A quarter of an hour later, as he was opening his second bottle of champagne, the telephone bell tinkled and Emanuel Legge's voice answered him.

"She's giving me trouble," he said in a low voice, relating what had happened.

He heard his father's click of annoyance and hastened to excuse his own precipitancy.

"She had to know sooner or later."

"You're a fool," snarled the old man. "Why couldn't you leave it?"

"You've got to cover me here," said Jeff urgently. "If she phones to Peter, there is going to be trouble. And Johnny——"

"Don't worry about Johnny," said Emanuel Legge unpleasantly. "There will be no kick coming from him."

He did not offer any explanation, and Jeff was too relieved by the assurance in his father's voice to question him on the subject.

"Take a look at the keyhole," said Emanuel, "and tell me if the key's in the lock. Anyway, I'll send you a couple of tools, and you'll open that door in two jiffs—but you've got to wait until the middle of the night when she's asleep."

HALF an hour later a small package arrived by messenger, and Jeffrey, cutting the sealed cord, opened the little box and picked out two curiously wrought instruments. For an hour he practiced on the door of the second bedroom leading from the saloon, and succeeded in turning the key from the reverse side.

Toward dinner time he heard voices in Marney's bedroom, and, creeping to the door, listened. It was the Welsh woman, and there came to his ears the clatter of plates and cutlery, and he smiled.

He had hardly got back to his chair and his newspaper when the telephone bell rang. It was the reception clerk.

"There's a lady to see you. She asked if you'd come down. She says it is very important."

"Who is it?" asked Jeffrey frowning.

"Miss Lila."

"Lila!" He hesitated. "Send her up, please," he said, and drew a heavy velvet curtain across the door of Marney's room.

At the first sight of Peter Kane's maid he knew that she had left Horsham in a hurry. Under the light coat she wore he saw the white collar of her uniform.

"What's the trouble with you, Lila?"

"Where is Marney?" she asked.

He nodded to the curtained room.

"Have you locked her in?"

"To be exact, she locked herself in," said Jeff with a twisted smile.

The eyes of the woman narrowed.

"Oh, it's like that, is it?" she asked.

"I told her who I was, and there was a row—that's all there is to it," he said coolly. "Now, what's the trouble?"

"Peter Kane's left Horsham with a gun in his pocket—that's all," she said, and Jeffrey paled.

"Sit down and tell me just what you mean."

"After you'd gone, I went up to my room, because I was feeling mighty bad," she said. "I've got my feelings, and there isn't a woman breathing that can see a man go away with another girl——"

"Cut out all the sentiment, and let's get right down to the facts," commanded Jeff.

"I'll tell it in my own way if you don't mind, Jeffrey Legge," said Lila.

"Well, get on with it," he said.

"I wasn't there long, before I heard Peter in his room—it is underneath mine—and he was talking to himself. I guess curiosity got the better of my worry, and I went down and listened.

"I couldn't hear what he was saying, and so I opened the door of his room a little bit. He had just changed. The moment I went in he was slipping the magazine into the butt of a Browning—I saw him put it in his coat pocket, and then I went downstairs.

"After a while he came down, too, and Jeff, I didn't like the look of his face. It was all gray and pinched, and if ever I saw a devil in a man's eyes, I saw it in Peter Kane's. I heard him order the car, and then I went down into the kitchen, thinking he was going at once. But he didn't leave for about half an hour."

"What was he doing?"

"He was in his own room, writing. I don't know what he was writing, because he always uses a black blotting pad. He must have written a lot, because I know there were half a dozen sheets of stationery in the rack, and when I went in after he'd left, they had all gone.

"There was nothing torn up in the waste-paper basket, and he'd burned nothing, so he must have taken all the stuff with him. I tried to get you on the phone, but you hadn't arrived, and I decided to come up."

"How did you come up—by train?"

"By taxi. There wasn't a train for nearly two hours."

"You didn't overtake Peter by any chance?"

She shook her head.

"I wouldn't. He was driving himself; his machine is a Spanz, and it moves!"

Jeff bit his nails.

"That gun of Peter's worries me a little," he said after a while, "because he isn't a gunman. Wait."

He took up the telephone and again called his father, and in a few words conveyed the story which Lila had brought.

"You'll have to cover me now," he said anxiously. "Peter knows."

A long pause.

"Johnny must have told him. I didn't dream he would," said Emanuel. "Keep to the hotel and don't go out. I'll have a couple of boys watching both entrances, and if Peter shows his nose in Pall Mall, he's going to be hurt."

JEFF hung up the receiver slowly and turned to the girl.

"Thank you, Lila. That's all you can do for me."

"It is not all you can do for me," said Lila. "Jeff, what is going to happen now? I've tried to pin you down, but you're a little too shifty for me.

"You told me that this was going to be one of those high-class platonic marriages which figure in the divorce courts, and Jeff, I'm beginning to doubt."

"Then you're a wise woman."

For a moment she did not understand the significance of the words.

"I'm a wise woman?" she repeated. "Jeff, you don't mean——"

"I have a dear little wife, and for the moment, Lila, our little romance is finished."

"You don't mean that?" she asked unsteadily. "Jeff, you're kidding. You told me that all you wanted was to get a share of Peter's money, and Emanuel told me the same. He said he was going to put the 'black' on Peter and get away with forty thousand."

"In the meantime I've got away with the girl," said Jeffrey comfortably, "and there's no sense in kicking up a fuss, Lila."

She was on her feet now, glaring down at him.

"And have I been six months doing slavey work, nosing for you, Jeffrey Legge, to be told that our little romance is finished?" she asked shrilly. "You've double crossed me, you dirty thief! And if I don't fix you, my name's not Lila."

"It isn't," said Jeffrey. He reached for a cigar and lit it. "And never was. Your name's Jane—that is, if you haven't been telling me lies. Now, Lila, be an intelligent human being. I've put aside five hundred for you——"

"Real money, I hope," she sneered. "No, you're not going to get away with it so easy, Mr. Jeffrey Legge. You've fooled me from beginning to end, and you either carry out your promise, or I'll——"

"Don't say you'll squeal," said Jeffrey, closing his eyes in mock resignation. "You're all squealers. I'm tired of you! You don't think I'd give you anything to squeal about, do you? That I'd trust you farther than I could fling you?

"No, my girl, I'm four kinds of a fool, but not that kind. You know just as much about me as the police know, or as Johnny Gray knows. You can't tell my new wife, because she knows too. And Peter knows—in fact, I shouldn't be surprised if somebody didn't write a story about it in the newspapers to-morrow!"

He took out his pocket case, opened it, and from a thick wad of notes peeled five, which he flung onto the table.

"There's your money, and au revoir, beauteous lady," he said.

She took up the notes slowly, folded them, and slipped them into her bag. Her eyes were burning fires; her face colorless.

"There are three men after you, Jeffrey Legge," she said, "and one will get you. Reeder, or Johnny, or Peter—and if they fail, you look out for me!"

And on this threat she took her departure, slamming the door behind her, and Jeffrey settled down again to his newspaper, with the feeling of satisfaction which comes to a man who has got through a very unpleasant task.

CHAPTER XI.

MR. REEDER; INTERESTED IN SONS.

IN a long, sedate road in suburban Brockley, lived a man who had apparently no fixed occupation. He was tall, thin, somewhat cadaverous, and he was known locally as a furtive night bird. Few had seen him in the daytime, and the inquisitive, who, by skillful cross-examination, endeavored to discover his business from a reticent housekeeper, learned comparatively little, and that little inaccurate.

Policemen on night duty, morning wayfarers, had seen him walking up Brockley Road in the early hours, coming apparently from the direction of London. He was known as Mr. J. G. Reeder. Letters in that name came addressed to him —large, blue letters, officially stamped and sealed—and in consequence it was understood in postal circles that he held a government position.

The local police force never troubled him. He was one of the subjects which it was not permissible to discuss. Until the advent of Emanuel Legge that afternoon, nobody ever remembered Mr. Reeder having a caller.

Sooner or later, the net of the law would close upon Jeffrey, and the immunity which he at present enjoyed would be at an end. To every graft came its inevitable lagging. Emanuel, wise in his generation, had decided upon taking the boldest step of his career. And that he did so, was not flattering to the administration of justice; nor could it be regarded as a tribute to the integrity of the police.

Emanuel had "straightened" many a young detective, and not a few advanced in years. He knew the art to perfection. In all his life he had only met three or four men who were superior to the well-camouflaged bribe.

If his many inquiries were truthfully answered, the police had not greatly changed since his young days. Secret-service men were new to him. He had thought, in spite of the enormous sums allocated to that purpose in every year's budget, that secret service was an inven-

tion of the sensational novelist; and even now, he imagined Mr. Reeder to be one who was subsidized from the comparatively private resources of the banks rather than from the national treasury.

IT was Emanuel's action to grasp the nettle firmly. "Infighting is not much worse than hugging," was a favorite saying of his, and, once he had located Mr. J. G. Reeder, the nighthawk—and that had been the labor of months—the rest was easy. Always providing that Mr. Reeder was amenable to argument.

The middle-aged woman who opened the door to him gave him an unpromising reception.

"Mr. Reeder is engaged," she said, "and he doesn't want to see any visitors."

"Will you kindly tell him," said Emanuel, with his most winning smile, and a beam of benevolence behind his thick glasses, "that Mr. Legge from Devonshire would like to see him on a very particular matter of business?"

She closed the door in his face, and kept him so long waiting that he decided that even the magic of his name and its familiar association—he guessed—had not procured him an entry. But here he was mistaken. The door was opened for him, closed and bolted behind him, and he was led up a flight of stairs to the first floor.

Sitting behind a large writing table, his back to the fireplace, was a man whom he judged to be between fifty and sixty. His face was thin, his expression sad. Almost on the end of his nose was clipped a pair of large, circular pince-nez. His hair was of that peculiar tint, red turning to gray; and his ears were large and prominent, seeming to go away from his head at right angles. All this Emanuel noted in a glance.

"Good morning or good afternoon, Mr. Legge," said the man at the desk. He half rose and offered a cold and lifeless hand. "Sit down, will you?" he said wearily. "I don't as a rule receive visitors, but I seem to remember your name. Now where have I heard it?"

He dropped his chin to his breast and looked over his spectacles dolefully. Emanuel's expansive smile struck against the polished surface of his indifference and rebounded. He felt for the first time the waste of expansiveness.

"I had a little piece of information I thought I'd bring to you, Mr. Reeder," he said. "I suppose you know that I'm one of those unfortunate people who, through the treachery of others, have suffered imprisonment?"

"Yes, yes, of course," said Mr. Reeder in his weak voice, his chin still bent, his pale-blue eyes fixed unwaveringly on the other. "Of course, I remember. You were the man who robbed the strong room. Of course you were. Legge, Legge? I seem to remember the name too. Haven't you a son?"

"I have a son, the best boy in the world," said Emanuel fervently.

There was a telephone receiver at Mr. Reeder's right hand, and throughout the interview he was polishing the black stem with the cuff of his alpaca coat, a nervous little trick which first amused and then irritated the caller.

"He has never been in trouble, Mr. Legge? Ah, that's a blessing," he sighed. "So many young people get into trouble."

If there was one person whom Legge did not want to discuss, it was his son. He got off the disquieting subject as well as he could.

"I understand, Mr. Reeder, that you're doing special work for the government—in the police department?"

"Not in the police department," murmured the other. "No, no, certainly not, not in the police department. I scarcely know a policeman. I see them often in the streets, and very picturesque figures they are. Mostly young men in the vigor and prime of youth. What a wonderful thing is youth, Mr. Legge! I suppose you're very proud of your son?"

"He's a good boy," said Emanuel shortly, and Mr. Reeder sighed again.

"Children are a great expense," he said. "I often wonder whether I ought to be glad that I never married. What is your son by occupation, Mr. Legge?"

"An export agent," said Emanuel promptly.

"Dear, dear!" said the other, and shook his head.

Emanuel did not know whether he was impressed or only sympathizing.

"Being in Dartmoor, naturally I met a number of bad characters," said the virtuous Emanuel; "men who did not appeal to me, since I was perfectly innocent, and only got my stretch—lagging—imprisonment through a conspiracy on the part of a man I've done many a good turn——"

"Ingratitude," interrupted Mr. Reeder, drawing in his breath. "What a terrible thing is ingratitude! How grateful your son must be that he has a father who looks after him, who has properly educated him and brought him up in the straight way, in spite of his own deplorable lapses!"

"Now look here, Mr. Reeder." Emanuel thought it was time to get more definitely to business. "I'm a very plain man, and I'm going to speak plainly to you. It has come to my knowledge that the gentlemen you are acting for, are under the impression that my boy's got to do with the printing of 'slush' (counterfeit notes).

"I was never more hurt in my life than when I heard this rumor. I said to myself: 'I'll go straight away to Mr. Reeder and discuss the matter with him. I know he's a man of the world, and he will understand my feelings as a father.'

"Some people, Mr. Reeder"—his elbows were on the table, and he leaned over and adopted a more confidential tone—"some people get wrong impressions. Only the other day somebody was saying to me: 'That Mr. Reeder is broke. He's got three county-court summonses for money owed——'"

"A temporary embarrassment," murmured Mr. Reeder. "One has those periods of financial—er—depression."

He was polishing the stem of the telephone more vigorously.

"I don't suppose you're very well paid? I'm taking a liberty in making that personal statement, but as a man of the world you'll understand. I know what it is to be poor.

"I've had some of the best society people in my office"—Emanuel invented the office on the spur of the moment—"the highest people in the land, and if they've said: 'Mr. Legge, can you oblige me with a thousand or a couple of thousand?' why, I've pulled it out, as it were, like this."

HE put his hand in his pocket and withdrew it, holding a roll of money fastened with a rubber band.

For a second, Mr. J. G. Reeder allowed his attention to be distracted, and surveyed the pile of wealth with the same detached interest which he had given to Emanuel. Then, reaching out his hand cautiously, he took the note from the top, felt it, fingered it, rustled it, and looked quickly at the watermark.

"Genuine money," he said in a hushed voice, and handed the note back with apparent reluctance.

"If a man is broke," said Legge emphatically, "I don't care who he is or what he is, I say: 'Is a thousand or two thousand any good to you?'"

"And is it?" asked Mr. Reeder.

"Is what?" said Emanuel, taken off his guard.

"Is it any good to him?"

"Well, of course it is," said Legge. "My point is this: a gentleman may be very hard pressed, and yet be the most solvent person in the world. If he can only get a couple of thousand just when he wants it—why, there's no scandal, no appearance in court which might injure him in his job."

"How very true! How very, *very* true!" Mr. Reeder seemed profoundly touched. "I hope you pass on these wise and original statements to your dear son, Mr. Legge?" he said. "What a splendid thing it is that he has such a father!"

Emanuel cursed him under his breath.

"Two thousand pounds," mused Mr. Reeder. "Now, if you had said five thousand pounds——"

"I do say five thousand," said Emanuel eagerly. "I'm not going to spoil the ship for a ha'porth of tar."

"If you had said five thousand pounds," Mr. Reeder went on, "I should have known that three thousand was 'slush'—or shall we say 'phony'—because you only drew two thousand from the City and Birmingham Bank this morning, all in hundred-pound notes, series GI.19721 to 19740. Correct me if I'm wrong.

"Of course, you might have some other genuine money stowed away in your little hotel, Mr. Legge; or your dear boy may have given you another three thousand as a sort of wedding present—I forgot, though: a bridegroom doesn't give wedding presents, does he? He receives them. How foolish of me!

"Put away your money, Mr. Legge. This room is very drafty, and it might catch cold. Do you ever go to the Hilly Fields? It is a delightful spot. You must come to tea with me one Sunday, and we will go up and hear the band. It is a very inexpensive but satisfactory method of spending two hours.

"As to those judgment summonses"—he coughed, and rubbed his nose with his long forefinger—"those summonses were arranged in order to bring you here. I did *so* want to meet you, and I knew the bait of my impecuniosity would be almost irresistible."

Emanuel Legge sat, dumfounded.

"Do you know a man named Golden? Ah, he would be before your time. Have you ever heard of him? He was my predecessor. I don't think you met him.

"He had a great saying—'set a "brief" to catch a thief.' We called a note a 'brief' in those days. Good afternoon, Mr. Legge. You will find your way down."

Legge rose, and with that the sad-faced man dropped his eyes and resumed the work he had been at when the visitor had interrupted him.

"I only want to say this, Mr. Reeder ——" began Legge.

"Tell my housekeeper," pleaded Reeder weakly, and he did not look up. "She's frightfully interested in fairy stories—I think she must be getting toward her second chidlhood. Good afternoon, Mr. Legge."

CHAPTER XII.

A CLUB.

EMANUEL LEGGE was halfway home before he could sort out his impressions. He went back to the Bloomsbury Hotel where he was staying. There was no message for him, and there had been no callers.

It was now seven o'clock. Jeff must be told and warned. Johnny Gray, dead or maimed in a hospital, had ceased to be a factor. Peter Kane, for all his cunning and his vengefulness, might be dismissed as a source of danger. It was Mr. J. G. Reeder who filled his thoughts: the bored civil servant with a weak voice, who had such a surprising knowledge of things, and whose continuous pointed references to Jeffrey filled him with unquiet.

Jeffrey must clear out of the country and must go while the going is good. If he hadn't been such a fool, he would have moved that night. Now, that was impossible.

Peter had not arrived at the Charlton, or the men whom Legge had set to watch would have reported. If it had not been for the disturbing interview he had had with Reeder, he would have been more worried about Peter Kane; for when Peter delayed action, he was dangerous.

At eight o'clock that night, a small boy brought him a note to the hotel. It was addressed "E. Legge," and the envelope was grimy with much handling.

Emanuel took the letter to his room and locked the door before he opened it. It was from a man who was very much on the inside of things, one of Jeff's shrewd but illiterate assistants, first lieutenant of the Big Printer, and a man to be implicitly trusted.

There were six closely written pages, ill spelled and blotted. Emanuel read the letter a dozen times, and when he finished, there was panic in his heart.

"Johnny Gray got out of the tunnel all right, and he's going to squeal to Reeder," was the dramatic beginning, and there was a great deal more.

Emanuel knew a club in the West End

of London, and his name was numbered among the members, even in the days when he had little opportunity of exercising his membership. It was a club rather unlike any other, and occupied the third and fourth floors of a building, the lower floors being in the possession of an Italian restaurateur.

Normally, the proprietor of a fairly popular restaurant would not hire out his upper floors to so formidable a rival, but the proprietors of the club were also proprietors of the building, the restaurant keeper being merely a tenant.

It suited the membership of the Highlow Club to have their premises a little remote. It suited them better that no stairway led from the lower to the upper floors.

Members of the club went down a narrow passage by the side of the restaurant entrance. From the end of the passage ran a small elevator, which carried them to the third floor. The county council, in granting this concession, insisted upon a very complete fire-escape system outside the building—a command which very well suited the members. Some there were who found it convenient to enter the premises by this latter method, and a window leading into the club was left unfastened day and night against such a contingency.

On the flat roof of the building was a small superstructure, which was never used by the club members; while another part of the building which also belonged exclusively to the Highlows was the basement, to which the restaurant proprietor had no access—much to his annoyance, since it necessitated the building of a wine storage room in the limited space in the courtyard behind.

Stepping out of the elevator into a broad passage, well carpeted, its austere walls hung with etchings, Emanuel Legge was greeted respectfully by the liveried porter who sat behind a desk within sight of the lift. There was every reason why Emanuel should be respected at the Highlows, for he was, in truth, the proprietor of the club, and his son had exercised control of the place during many of the years his father had been in prison.

THE porter, who was a big ex-prize fighter expressly engaged for the purpose for which he was frequently required, hurried from his tiny perch to stand deferentially before his master.

"Anybody here?" asked Legge.

The man mentioned a few names.

"Let me see the engagement book," said the other, and the man produced from beneath the ledge of his desk a small, red book, and Emanuel turned the pages. The old man's hand ran down the list, and suddenly stopped.

"Oh, yes," he said softly, closing the book and handing it back.

"Are you expecting anybody, Mr. Legge?" asked the porter.

"No, I'm not expecting anybody—only I wondered——"

"Mr. Jeffrey got married to-day, I hear, sir? I'm sure all the staff wish him joy."

All the staff did not wish Mr. Jeffrey Legge joy, for neither he nor his father were greatly popular, even in the tolerant society of the Highlows, and moreover, strange as it may appear, very few people knew him by sight.

"That's very good of you, very good indeed," murmured Emanuel absently.

"Are you dining here, sir?"

"No, no, I'm not dining here. I just looked in, that is all."

He stepped back into the elevator, and the porter watched it drop with pleasure. It was half past eight; the glow was dying in the sky, and the lights were beginning to twinkle in the streets, as Emanuel walked steadily toward Shaftesbury Avenue.

Providentially, he was at the corner of a side street when he saw Peter Kane. He was near enough to note that under his thin overcoat Peter was in evening dress.

Slipping into the doorway, he watched the man pass. Peter was absorbed in thought, his eyes were on the ground, and he had no interest for anything but the tremendous problem which occupied his mind.

Legge came back to the corner of the street and watched him furtively. Opposite the club, Peter stopped, looked up for a while, and passed on. The watcher laughed to himself. That club could have no pleasant memories for Peter Kane that night; it was in the Highlow that he had met the "young Canadian officer" and had "rescued" him, as he had thought, from his dangerous surroundings.

There, had Peter been trapped, for the introduction of Jeff Legge was most skillfully arranged. Going into the club one night, Peter saw, as he thought, a young, good-looking soldier boy in the hands of a gang of card sharpers, and the "rescued officer" had been most grateful, and had called upon Peter at the earliest opportunity.

He waited until the figure had disappeared in the gloom of the evening, and then walked back to the avenue. This comedy over, there remained the knowledge of stark tragedy, of danger to his boy, and the upsetting of all his plans, and, the most dreadful of all possibilities, the snaring of the Big Printer.

This night would the battle be fought; this night of nights would victory or defeat be in his hands. Reeder, Johnny, Peter Kane—all opposed him, innocent of their coöperation, and in his hands a hostage beyond price—Marney Legge.

He had scarcely disappeared when another person known to him came quickly along the quiet street, turned into the club entrance, and, despite the expostulations of the elevator man, insisted upon being taken up. The porter had heard the warning bell and stood waiting to receive her when the door of the elevator opened.

"Where's Emanuel?" she asked.

"Just gone," said the porter.

"That's a lie. I should have seen him if he'd just gone."

She was obviously laboring under some emotion, and the porter, an expert on all stages of feminine emotionalism, shrewdly diagnosed the reason for her wildness of manner and speech.

"Been a wedding to-day, hasn't there?" he asked with heavy jocularity. "Now, Lila, what's the good of kicking up a fuss? You know you oughtn't to come here. Mr. Legge gave orders you weren't to be admitted while you were at Kane's."

"Where is Emanuel?" she asked.

"I tell you he's just gone out," said the porter in a tone of ponderous despair. "What a woman you are! You don't believe anything!"

"Has he gone back to his hotel?"

"That's just where he has gone. Now be wise, girl, and beat it. Anybody might be coming here—Johnny Gray was in last night, and he's a pal of Peter's."

"Johnny knows all about me," she said impatiently. "Besides, I've left Peter's house."

SHE stood undecidedly at the entrance of the elevator, and then, when the porter was preparing some of his finest arguments for her rapid disappearance, she stepped into the lift and was taken down.

The Highlow was a curious club, for it had no common room. Fourteen private dining rooms and a large and elegantly furnished cardroom constituted the premises. Meals were served from the restaurant below, being brought up by service lift to a small pantry.

The members of the club had not the club feeling in the best sense of the word. They included men and women, but the chief reason for the club's existence was that it afforded a safe and not unpleasant meeting place for members of the common class, and gave necessary seclusion for the slaughter of such innocents as came within the influence of its more dexterous members.

How well its inner secrets were kept is best illustrated by the fact that Peter Kane had been a member for twenty years without knowing that his sometime companion in crime had any official connection with its control. Nor was it ever hinted to him that the man who was directing the club's activities during Emanuel's enforced absence was Emanuel's son.

Peter was a very infrequent visitor to the Highlow; and indeed, on the occasion of his first meeting with the spurious

Major Floyd, he had been tricked into coming, though this he did not know.

The porter was busy until half past nine. Little parties came, were checked off in the book, and then—he looked at his watch.

"Twenty-five to ten," he said, and pushed a bell button.

A waiter appeared from the side passage.

"Put a bottle of wine in No. 13," he said.

The waiter looked at him surprised.

"No. 13?" he said, as if he could not believe his ears.

"I said it," confirmed the porter.

JEFFREY ate a solitary dinner. The humor of the situation did not appeal to him. On his honeymoon, he and his wife were dining, a locked door between them.

Again he tried the queer-shaped pliers upon the key of the second bedroom. The key turned readily. He put the tool into his pocket with a sense of power.

The clatter of a table being cleared came to him from the other room, and presently he heard the outer door close and a click of the key turning. He lit his fourth cigar and stepped out onto the balcony, surveying the crowded street with a dispassionate interest.

Glancing down into the street, he distinguished one of the "minders" his father had put there for his protection, and grinned. Peter could not know; he would have been here before.

Emanuel had been very confident that Johnny presented no danger, and it rather looked as though Emanuel's view was right. But if Peter knew, why hadn't he come?

He strolled back to the room, looked at the girl's door and walked toward it.

"Marney!" he called softly.

There was no answer. He knocked on the panel.

"Marney, come along. I want to talk to you. You needn't open the door. I just wanted to ask you something."

Still there was no answer. He tried the door; it was locked.

"Are you there?" he called sharply, but she did not reply.

He pulled the pliers from his pocket, and, pushing the narrow nose into the keyhole, gripped the end of the key and turned it. Then, flinging open the door, he rushed in.

The room was empty, and the big bathroom that led out of the suite was empty also. He ran to the passage door; it was locked—locked from the outside. In a sweat of fear he flew through the saloon into the corridor, and the first person he saw was the floor waiter.

"Madam, sir? Yes, she went out a little time ago."

"Went out, you fool? Where?" stormed Jeff.

"I don't know, sir. She just went out. I saw her going along the corridor."

Jeff seized his hat and went down the stairs three at a time. The reception clerk had not seen the girl, nor had any of the pages, or the porter on the door. Oblivious to any immediate danger, he dashed out into the street, and, looking up and down, saw the minder and called him.

"She hasn't come out this entrance. There's another in Pall Mall," he explained. "Jimmy Low's there."

But the second man on the Pall Mall entrance had not seen her either. Jeff went back to interview the manager.

"There is no other way out, sir, unless she went down the service stairs."

"It was that cursed maid, the Welsh woman," snarled Johnny. "Who is she? Can I see her?"

"She went off duty this afternoon, sir," said the manager. "Is there anything I can do? Perhaps the lady has gone out for a little walk? Does she know London?"

Jeff did not stop to reply; he fled up the stairs, back to the room, and made a quick search. The girl's dressing case, which he knew had been taken into the bedroom, was gone.

Something on the floor attracted his attention. He picked it up, and read the few scribbled lines, torn from a notebook; and as he read, a light came into his eyes.

Very carefully he folded the crumpled sheet and put it into his pocket.

Then he went back to his sitting room, and sat for a long time in the big armchair, his legs thrust out before him, his hands deep in his trouser pockets, and his thoughts were not wholly unpleasant.

The light was now nearly gone, and he got up.

"Room No. 13," he said. "Room No. 13 is going to hold a few surprises tonight!"

CHAPTER XIII.

ROOM 13.

TO Parker, the valet, as he laid out Johnny's dress clothes, there was a misfortune and a tragedy deeper than any to which Johnny had been a spectator. Johnny, loafing into his bedroom, a long, black, ebonite cigarette holder between his teeth, found his man profoundly agitated.

"The buckle of your white dress waistcoat has in some unaccountable way disappeared," he said in a hushed voice. "I'm extremely sorry, sir, because this is the only white dress waistcoat you have."

"Be cheerful," said Johnny. "Take a happier view of life. You can tie the tapes behind. You could even sew me together, Parker. Are you an expert needleworker, or do you crochet?"

"My needlework has been admired, sir," said Parker complacently. "I think yours is an excellent suggestion. Otherwise, the waistcoat will not sit as it should. Especially in the case of a gentleman with your figure."

"Parker," said Johnny, as he began to dress leisurely, "have you ever killed a man?"

"No, sir, I have never killed a man," said Parker gravely. "When I was a young man, I once ran over a cat—I was a great cyclist in my youth."

"But you never killed a man? And, what is worse, you've never even wanted to kill a man?"

"No, sir, I can't say that I ever have," said Parker after a few moments' consideration, as though it were possible that some experience had been his which had been overlooked in the hurry of his answering.

"It is quite a nice feeling, Parker. Is there a hip pocket to these—yes, there is," he said, patting his trousers.

"I'm sorry there is," said Parker, "very sorry indeed. Gentlemen get into the habit of carrying their cigarette cases in the hip pocket, with the result that the coat tail is thrown out of shape. That is where the dinner jacket has its advantages."

"Don't worry about the set of my tailcoat," said Johnny. "I am not carrying my cigarette case there."

"Anything more bulky would of course be worse, sir," said Parker, and Johnny did not carry the discussion any farther.

"Get me a cab," he ordered.

When Parker returned, he found his master was fully dressed.

"You will want your cane, sir. Gentlemen are carrying them now in evening dress. There is one matter I would like to speak to you about before you go—it is something that has been rather worrying me for the past few days."

Johnny was leaving the room, and turned.

"Anything serious?" he asked, for a moment deceived.

"I don't like telling you, sir, but I have discussed the matter with very knowledgeable people, and they are agreed that French shapes are no longer worn in silk hats. You occasionally see them in theatrical circles——"

Johnny put up a solemn hand.

"Parker, do not let us discuss my general shabbiness. I didn't even know I had a hat of French shape." He took off his hat and looked at it critically. "It is a much better shape than the hat I was wearing a week ago, Parker, believe me!"

"Of course, I believe you, sir," agreed Parker, and turned to the door.

Johnny dismissed his cab in Shaftesbury Avenue and walked down toward the club. It was dark now; half past nine had chimed as he came along Piccadilly.

It was a point of honor with all members of the Highlow that nobody drove up

to the club, and its very existence was unknown to the taximen. That was a rule that had been made, and most faithfully adhered to; and the members of the High-low observed their rules, for, if a breach did not involve a demand for their resignation, it occasionally brought about a broken head.

Just before he reached the club, he saw somebody cross the road. It was not difficult to recognize Jeff Legge.

JUST at that moment it would have been rather embarrassing for Johnny to meet the man. He turned and walked back the way he had come, to avoid the chance of their both going up in the elevator together.

Jeff Legge was in a hurry; the elevator did not move fast enough for him, and he stepped out onto the third floor and asked a question.

"No, sir, nobody has come. If they do, I'll send them along to you. Where will you be? You haven't a room engaged—your own room is taken. We don't often let it, but we're full to-night, and Mr. Legge raised no objection."

"No, I don't object," said Jeff; "but don't you worry about that. Let me see the book."

Again the red-covered engagement book was opened. Jeff read and nodded.

"Fine," he said. "Now tell me again who is here."

"There is Mr. George Kurlu, with a party of friends in No. 3; there's Mr. Bob Albutt and those two young ladies he goes about with—they're in No. 4." And so he recited until he came to No. 13.

"I know all about No. 13," said Jeff Legge between his teeth. "You needn't bother about me, however. That will do."

He strode along the carpeted hallway, turned abruptly into the right-angled passage, and presently stopped before a door with a neat golden "13" painted on its polished panel. He opened the door and went in. On the red-covered table was a bottle of wine and two glasses.

It was a moderately large room, furnished with a sofa, four dining chairs and a deep easy-chair, while against one wall was a small buffet. The room was brilliantly lighted. Six bracket lamps were blazing; the center light above the table, with its frosted bulbs, was full on.

He did not shut the door, leaving it slightly ajar. There was too much light for his purpose. He first switched out the bracket lamps, and then all but one of the frosted bulbs in the big shaded lamp over the table. Then he sat down, his back to the door, his eyes on the empty fire grate.

Presently he heard a sound, the whining of the elevator, and smiled. Johnny stepped out to the porter's desk with a friendly nod.

"Good evening, captain," said the porter with a broad grin. "Glad to see you back, sir. I wasn't here last night when you came in. Hope you haven't had too bad a time in the country?"

"Abroad, my dear fellow, abroad," murmured the other reproachfully, and the porter chuckled. "Same old crowd, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir."

"Same old bolt down the fire escape when the busies call—or have you got all the busies straightened?"

"I don't think there's much trouble, sir," said the porter. "We often have a couple of those gentlemen in here to dinner. The club's very convenient sometimes. I shouldn't think they'll ever shut us up."

"I shouldn't think so either," said Johnny. "Which of the busies do you get?"

"Well, sir, we get Mr. Craig, and—once we had that Reeder. He came here alone and booked a table.

"Can you beat it? Came and had his dinner, saw nobody and went away again. I don't think he's right up there"—he tapped his forehead significantly. "Anything less like a busy I've never seen."

"I don't know whether he is a detective," said Johnny carelessly. "From all I've heard, he has nothing whatever to do with the police."

"Private, is he?" said the other in a tone of disappointment.

"Not exactly private. Anyway," with a smile, "he's not going to bother you or our honorable members. Anybody here?"

The porter looked to left and right, and lowered his voice.

"A certain person you know is here," he said meaningly.

Johnny laughed.

"It would be a funny club if there wasn't somebody I knew," he said. "Don't worry about me; I'll find a little corner for myself."

JEFF looked at his watch; it was a quarter to ten, and he glanced up at the light, catching a glimpse of himself in the mirror of the buffet, and was satisfied.

Room 13! And Marney was his wife! The blood surged up into his face, gorging the thick veins in his temples at the thought. She should pay! He had helped the old man, as he would help him in any graft, but he had never identified himself so completely with the plan as he did at that moment. As for Johnny Gray——

The door opened stealthily, and a hand came in, holding a Browning. He heard the creak of the door but did not look round, and then:

Bang!

Once the pistol fired. Jeff felt a sharp twitch of pain, exquisite, unbearable, and fell forward on his knees.

Twice he endeavored to rise, then, with a groan, fell in a huddled heap, his head in the empty fireplace.

CHAPTER XIV.

"CAPTAIN GRAY HAS NOT BEEN HERE TO-NIGHT."

THE doors and the walls of the private dining rooms were almost soundproof. No stir followed the shot. In the hall outside, the porter lifted his head and listened.

"What was that?" he asked the waiting elevator man.

"Didn't hear anything," said the other laconically. "Somebody slammed a door."

"Maybe," said the porter, and went back to his book. He was filling in the names of that night's visitors, an indispensable record in such a club, and he was filling them in with pencil, an equally necessary act of caution, for sometimes the club members desired a quick expungement of this evidence.

In room No. 13 silence reigned. A thin blue cloud floated to the ceiling; the door opened a little farther, and Johnny Gray came in, his right hand in his overcoat pocket.

Slowly he crossed the room to where the huddled figure lay, and, stooping, turned it upon its back. Then, after a brief scrutiny, his quick hands went through the man's pockets.

He found something, carried it to the light, read with a frown and pushed the paper into his own pocket. Going out, he closed the door carefully behind him and strolled back to the hall.

"Not staying, captain?" asked the porter in surprise.

"No, nobody I know here. Queer how the membership changes."

The man on duty was too well trained to ask inconvenient questions.

"Excuse me, captain." He went over to Johnny and bent down. "You've got some blood on your cuff."

He took out his handkerchief and wiped the stain clean. Then his frowning eyes met the young man's.

"Anything wrong, captain?"

"Nothing that I can tell you about," said Johnny. "Good night."

"Good night, sir," said the porter.

He stood by his desk, looking hard at the glass doors of the elevator, heard the rattle of the gate as it opened, and the whine of the lift as it rose again.

"Just stay here, and don't answer any rings till I come back," he said.

He hurried along the corridor into the side passage and, coming to No. 13, knocked. There was no answer. He turned the handle.

One glance told him all he wanted to know. Gently he closed the door and hurried back to the telephone on his desk.

Before he raised the receiver he called the gaping lift boy.

"Go to all the rooms, and say a murder has been committed. Get everybody out."

He was still clasping the telephone with damp hands when the last frightened guest crowded into the elevator, then:

"Highlow Club speaking. Is that the Charing Cross Hospital? . . . I want an ambulance here . . . Yes, No. 38 Boburn Street . . . There's been an accident."

He rung off and called another number.

"Highlow Club. Is that the police station? It's the porter at the Highlow Club speaking, sir. One of our members has shot himself."

He put down the instrument and turned his face to the scared elevator man who had returned to the high level. At the end of the passage stood a crowd of worried waiters.

"Benny," he said, "Captain Gray hasn't been here to-night. You understand? Captain—Gray—has—not—been—here — to-night."

The guest book was open on the desk. He took his pencil and wrote, on the line where Johnny Gray's name should have been, "Mr. William Brown of Toronto."

CHAPTER XV.

STEVENS TELLS ALMOST ALL.

THE last of the guests had escaped when the police came, and simultaneously with the ambulance, Divisional Inspector Craig, who had happened to be making a call in the neighborhood. The doctor who came with the ambulance made a brief examination.

"He is not dead, though he may be before he reaches hospital," he said.

"Is it a case of suicide?"

The doctor shook his head.

"Suicides do not, as a rule, shoot themselves under the right shoulder blade. It would be a difficult operation: try it yourself. I should say he'd been shot from the open doorway."

He applied a rough first dressing, and Jeffrey was carried into the elevator. In the bottom passage a stretcher was prepared, and upon this he was laid, and, covered with a blanket, carried through the crowd which had assembled at the entrance.

"Murder, or attempted murder, as the case may be," said Craig. "Some one has tipped off the guests. You, I suppose, Stevens? Let me see your book."

The inspector ran his finger down the list and stopped at room No. 13.

"Mr. William Brown of Toronto. Who is Mr. Brown of Toronto?"

"I don't know, sir. He engaged a room by telephone. I didn't see him go."

"That old fire escape of yours still working?" asked Craig sardonically. "Anybody else been here? Who is the wounded man? His face seemed familiar."

"Major Floyd, sir."

"Who?" asked Craig sharply. "Impossible! Major Floyd is——"

It *was* Floyd! He remembered now. Floyd, with whom he had sat that day—that happily married man!

"What was he doing here?" he asked. "Now spill it, Stevens, unless you want to get yourself into pretty bad trouble."

"I've spilled all I know, sir," said Stevens doggedly. "It was Major Floyd."

And then an inspiration came to him.

"If you want to know who it was, it was Jeff Legge. Floyd's his fancy name."

"Who?"

Craig had had many shocks in his life, but this was the greatest he had had for years.

"Jeff Legge? Old Legge's son?"

Stevens nodded.

"Nobody knows that but a couple of us," he said. "Jeff doesn't work in the light."

The officer nodded slowly.

"I've never seen him," he admitted. "I knew Legge had a son, but I didn't know he was running crook. I thought he was a bit of a boy."

"He's some boy, let me tell you!" said Stevens.

Craig sat down, his chin in his hands.

"Mrs. Floyd will have to be told. Good God! Peter Kane's daughter! Peter didn't know that he'd married her to Legge's son?"

"I don't know whether he knew or not," said Stevens, "but if I know old Peter, he'd as soon know that she'd gone to the devil as marry her to a son of Emanuel Legge's. I'm squealing in a way," he said apologetically, "but you've got to know—Emanuel will tell you as soon as he gets the news."

"Come here," said Craig. He took the man's arm and led him to the passage where the detectives were listening, opened the door of a private room, the table giving evidence of the hasty flight of the diners. "Now," he said, closing the door, "what's the strength of this story?"

"I don't know it all, Mr. Craig, but I know they were putting a point on Peter Kane a long time ago. Then one night they brought Peter along and kidded him into thinking that Jeff was a sucker in the hands of the boys.

"Peter had never seen Jeff before—as a matter of fact, *I* didn't know he was Jeff at the time; I'd heard a lot about him, but, like a lot of other people, I hadn't seen him. Well, they fooled Peter all right. He took the lad away with him. Jeff was wearing a Canadian officer's uniform, and of course, Jeff told the tale. He wouldn't be the son of his father if he didn't.

"That's how he got to know the Kanes and was taken to their home. When I heard about the marriage I thought Peter must have known. I never dreamed they were playing a trick on him."

"Peter didn't know," said Craig slowly. "Where's the girl?"

"I can't tell you. She's in London somewhere."

"At the Charlton," nodded the other. "Now, you've got to tell me, Stevens, who is Mr. Brown of Toronto? It's written differently from your usual hand—written by a man who has had a bad scare. In other words, it was written after you'd found the body."

Stevens said nothing.

"You saw him come out. Who was he?"

"If I die this minute——" began Stevens.

"You might in a few months, as 'accessory after,'" said the other ominously; "and that's what you'll do if you conceal a murderer. Who is Mr. Brown?"

Stevens was struggling with himself, and after a while it came out.

"Johnny was here to-night," he said huskily, "Johnny Gray."

Craig whistled.

There was a knock at the door. A police officer, wanting instructions.

"There's a woman down below, pretty nigh mad. I think you know her, sir."

"Not Lila?" blurted Stevens.

"That's the girl. Shall I let her come up?"

"Yes," said Craig. "Bring her in here."

She came in a minute, distracted, incoherent, her hair disheveled, her hands trembling.

"Is he dead?" she gasped. "For God's sake, tell me. I see it in your face—he's dead. Oh, Jeff, Jeff!"

"Now you sit down," said the kindly Craig. "He's no more dead than you or I are. Ask Stevens. Jeff's doing very well indeed. Just a slight wound, my dear—nothing to worry about. What was the trouble? Do you know anything about it?"

She could not answer him.

"He's dead," she moaned. "I killed him! I saw him and followed him here!"

"Give her a glass of wine, Stevens."

THE porter poured out a glass of white wine from one of the deserted bottles on the table, and put it to her chattering teeth.

"Now, Lila, let's get some sense out of you. I tell you, Jeff's not dead. What is he to you, anyway?"

"Everything," she muttered. She was shivering from head to foot. "I married him three years ago. No, I didn't," she said in a sudden frenzy.

"Go on; tell us the truth," said Craig. "We're not going to pull him for bigamy, anyway."

"I married him three years ago," she said. "He wasn't a bad fellow to me. It was the old man's idea, his marrying this girl, and there was a thousand for me in

it. He put me down in Horsham to look after her, and see that there were no letters going to Johnny.

"There wasn't any need of that, because she never wrote. I didn't like the marriage idea, but he swore to me that it was only to get Peter's money, and I believed him. Then to-night he told me the truth, knowing I wouldn't squeak. I wish I had now, I wish I had! He is dead, isn't he? I know he's dead!"

"He's not dead, you poor fish," said Craig impatiently. "I might be congratulating you if he was. No, he's got a bit of a wound."

"Who shot him?"

"That's just what I want to know," said Craig. "Was it you?"

"Me!" Her look of horror supplied a satisfactory answer to his question. "No, I didn't. I didn't know he was here, or coming here. I thought he was at the hotel, till I saw him. Yet I had a feeling that he was coming here to-night, and I've been waiting about all evening. I saw Peter and dodged him."

"Peter? Has he been near the club?"

She shook her head.

"I don't know. He was on his way. I thought he was going to the Highlow. There's nowhere else he'd go in this street—I saw him twice."

Craig turned his bright, suspicious eyes upon the porter.

"Peter been here? I didn't see anything about Mr. Brown of Montreal?" he asked sarcastically.

"No, he hasn't. I haven't seen Peter since the Lord knows when," said the porter emphatically. "That's the truth. You can give the elevator boy permission to tell you all he knows, and if Peter was here to-night you can hang me."

Craig considered for a long time.

"Does Peter know his way in by the easy route?" he asked.

"You mean the fire escape? Yes, Peter knows that way, but members never come in by the back, nowadays. They've got nothing to hide."

Craig went out of the room and walked down the passage, stopping at No. 13. Immediately opposite the door was a window, and it was wide open. Beyond was the grille of the fire-escape landing.

HE stepped out through the window and peered into the dark yard where the escape ended. By the light of a street lamp, he saw a stout gate, in turn pierced by a door, and this led to the street. The door was open, a fact which might be accounted for by the presence in the yard of two uniformed policemen, the flash of whose lanterns he saw. He came back into the corridor and to Stevens.

"Somebody may have used the fire escape to-night, and he may not," he said. "What time did Gray come in? Who came in first?"

"Jeff came first, about five minutes before Gray."

"Then what happened?"

"I had a chat with Captain Gray," said the porter after a second's hesitation. "He went round into the side passage——"

"The same way that Jeff had gone?"

The porter nodded.

"About a minute later—in fact, it was shorter than a minute—I heard what I thought was a door slammed. I remarked upon the fact to the elevator man."

"And then?"

"I suppose four or five minutes passed after that, and Captain Gray came out. Said he might look in later."

"There was no sign of a struggle in Captain Gray's clothes?"

"No, sir, I'm sure there was no struggle."

"I should think not," agreed Craig. "Jeff Legge never had a chance of showing fight."

The girl was lying on the sofa, her head buried in her arms, her shoulders shaking, and the sound of her weeping drew the detective's attention to her.

"Has she been here, before, to-night?"

"Yes, she came, and I had to throw her out. Emanuel told me she was not to be admitted."

Craig made a few notes in his book, closed it with a snap, and put it in his pocket.

"You understand, Stevens, that, if you're not under arrest, you're under open arrest. You'll close the club for to-night and admit no more people. I shall leave a couple of men on the premises."

"I'll lock up the beer," said Stevens facetiously.

"And you needn't be funny," was the sharp retort. "If we close this club you'll lose your job—and if they don't close it now, they never will."

He took aside his assistant.

"I'm afraid Johnny's got to go through the hoop to-night," he said. "Send a couple of men to pull him in. He lives at Albert Mansions. I'll go along and break the news to the girl, and somebody'll have to tell Peter. I hope there's need for Peter to be told," he added grimly.

CHAPTER XVI.

"JOHNNY TO SEE YOU."

A SURPRISE awaited him when he came to the Charlton. Mrs. Floyd had gone—nobody knew whither. Her husband had followed her some time afterward, and neither had returned. Somebody had called her on the telephone, but had left no name.

"I know all about her husband not returning," said Craig. "But haven't you the slightest idea where the lady is?"

The negative reply was uncompromising.

"Her father hasn't been here?"

His informant hesitated.

"Yes, sir: he was on Mrs. Floyd's floor when she was missing—in fact, when Major Floyd was down here making inquiries. The floor waiter recognized him, but did not see him come or go."

Calling up the house at Horsham, he learned, what he already knew, that Peter was away from home. Barney, who answered him, had heard nothing of the girl; indeed, this was the first intimation he had had that all was not well. And a further disappointment lay in store for him. The detective he had sent to find Johnny returned with the news that the quarry had gone. According to the valet, his master had returned and changed in a hurry, and, taking a small suit case, had gone off to an unknown destination.

An inquiry late that night elicited the fact that Jeff was still living, but unconscious. The bullet had been extracted, and a hopeful view was taken of the future. His father had arrived early in the evening, and was half mad with anxiety and rage.

"And if he isn't quite mad by the morning, I shall be surprised," said the surgeon. "I'm going to keep him here and give him a little bromide to ease him down."

"Poison him," suggested Craig.

When the old detective was on the point of going home, there arrived a telephone message from the Horsham police, whom he had enlisted to watch Peter's house.

"Mr. Kane and his daughter arrived in separate motor cars at a quarter past twelve," was the report. "They came within a few minutes of each other."

Craig was on the point of getting through to the house, but thought better of it. A fast police car got him to Horsham under the hour, the road being clear and the night a bright one. Lights were burning in Peter's snuggery, and it was he himself who, at the sound of the motor wheels, came to the door.

"Who's that?" he asked, as Craig came up the dark drive, and, at the sound of the detective's voice, he came halfway down the drive to meet him. "What's wrong, Craig? Anything special?"

"Jeff's shot. I suppose you know who Jeff is?"

"I know, to my sorrow," said Peter Kane promptly. "Shot? How? Where?"

"He was shot this evening between a quarter to ten and ten o'clock, at the Highlow Club."

"Come in. You'd better not tell my girl—she's had as much as she can bear to-night. Not that I'm worrying a damn about Jeff Legge. He'd better die, and die quick, for if I get him——"

He did not finish his sentence, and the detective drew the man's arm through his.

"Now listen, Peter, you've got to go very slow on this case, and not talk such a darned lot. You're under suspicion too, old man. You were seen in the vicinity of the club."

"Yes, I was seen in the vicinity of the club," repeated Peter, nodding. "I was waiting there—well, I was waiting there for a purpose. I went to the Charlton, but my girl had gone—I suppose they told you—and then I went on to the Highlow and saw that infernal Lila—by the way, she's one of Jeff's old sweethearts, isn't she?"

"To be exact," said the other quietly, "she's his wife."

Peter Kane stopped dead.

"His wife?" he whispered. "Thank God for that! Thank God for that! I forgive her everything. Though he is a brute—how a woman could allow—but I can't judge her. Thank God, she's his wife, Craig!" Then: "Who shot this fellow?"

"I don't know. I'm going to pull Johnny for it."

They were in the hall, and Peter Kane spun round, open-mouthed, terror in his eyes.

"You're going to pull Johnny?" he said. "Do you know what you're saying, Craig? You're mad! Johnny didn't do it. Johnny was nowhere near——"

"Johnny was there. And, what is more, Johnny was in the room, either at the moment of the shooting or immediately after. The elevator boy has spoken what's in his mind, which isn't much, but enough to convict Johnny if this fellow dies."

"Johnny there!" Peter's voice did not rise above a whisper.

"I tell you frankly, Peter, I thought it was you."

Craig was facing him squarely, his keen eyes searching the man's pallid face. "When I heard you were around, and that you had got to know that this fellow was a fake. Why were you waiting?"

"I can't tell you that—not now," said the other, after turning the matter over in his mind. "I should have seen Johnny if he was there. I saw this girl Lila, and I was afraid she'd recognize me. I think she did, too.

"I went straight on into Shaftesbury Avenue, to a bar I know. I was feeling queer over this—this discovery of mine. I can prove I was there from a quarter to ten till ten, if you want any proof. Oh, Johnny, Johnny!"

ALL this went on in the hall. Then came a quick patter of footsteps, and Marney appeared in the doorway.

"Who is it—Johnny? Oh, it is you, Mr. Craig? Has anything happened?" She looked in alarm from face to face. "Nothing has happened to Johnny?"

"No, nothing has happened to Johnny," said Craig soothingly. He glanced at Peter. "You ought to know this, Marney," he said. "I can call you Marney—I've known you since you were five. Jeff Legge has been shot."

He thought she was going to faint, and sprang to catch her, but with an effort of will she recovered.

"Jeff shot?" she asked shakily. "Who shot him?"

"I don't know. That's just what we are trying to discover. Perhaps you can help us. Why did you leave the hotel? Was Johnny with you?"

She shook her head.

"I haven't seen Johnny," she said, "but I owe him—everything. There was a woman in the hotel." She glanced timidly at her father. "I think she was a hotel thief or something of the sort. She was there to—to steal. A big Welsh woman."

"A Welsh woman?" said Craig quickly. "What is her name?"

"Mrs. Gwenda Jones. Johnny knew about her, and telephoned her to tell her to take care of me until he could get to me. She got me out of the hotel, and then we walked down the Duke of York steps into the Mall. And then a curious thing happened—I was just telling daddy when you came. Mrs. Jones—she's such a big woman——"

"I know the lady," said Craig.

"Well, she disappeared. She wasn't

exactly swallowed up by the earth," she said with a faint smile, "and she didn't go without warning. Suddenly she said to me: 'I must leave you now, my dear. I don't want that man to see me.'

"I looked round to find who it was that she was so terribly afraid of, and there seemed to be the most harmless lot of people about. When I turned, Mrs. Jones was running up the steps. I didn't wish to call her back, I felt so ridiculous. And then a man came up to me, a middle-aged man with the saddest face you could imagine. I told you that, daddy?"

He nodded.

"He took his hat off—his hair was almost white—and asked me if my name was Kane. I didn't tell him the other name," she said with a shiver.

"'May I take you to a place of safety, Miss Kane?' he said. 'I don't think you ought to be seen with that rawboned female.'

"I didn't know what to do, I was so frightened, and I was glad of the company and protection of any man, and when he called a cab, I got in without the slightest hesitation. He was such a gentle soul, Mr. Craig. He talked of nothing but the weather and chickens! I think we talked about chickens all the way to Lewisham."

"Are you sure it was Lewisham?"

"It was somewhere in that neighborhood. What other places are there out that way?"

"New Cross, Brockley——" began Craig.

"That's the place—Brockley. It was the Brockley Road. I saw it printed on the corner of the street. He took me into his house. There was a nice, motherly old woman whom he introduced to me as his housekeeper."

"And what did he talk about?" asked the fascinated Craig.

"Chickens," she said solemnly. "Do you know what chickens lay the best eggs? I'm sure you don't. Do you know the best breed for England and the best for America? Do you know the most economical chickens to keep? I do!

"I wondered what he was going to do with me. I tried to ask him, but he invariably turned me back to the question of incubators and patent feeds, and the cubic space that a sitting hen requires as compared with an ordinary hen. It was the quaintest, most fantastic experience. It seems now almost like one of Alice's dreams!

"Then, at ten o'clock, I found a motor car had come for me. 'I'm sending you home, young lady,' he said."

"Were you with him all the time, by the way?" asked Craig.

She shook her head.

"No, some part of the time I was with his housekeeper, who didn't even talk about chickens, but knitted large and shapeless jumpers and sniffed. That was when he was telephoning: I knew he was telephoning because I could hear the drone of his voice."

"He didn't bring you back?"

"No, he just put me into the car and told me that I should be perfectly safe. I arrived just a few minutes ahead of daddy."

The detective scratched his chin, irritated and baffled.

"That's certainly got me," he said. "The rawboned lady I know, but the chicken gentleman is mysterious. You didn't hear his name, by any chance?"

She shook her head.

"Do you know the number of the house?"

"Yes," she said frankly, "but he particularly asked me to forget it, and I've forgotten it." Then, in a more serious tone: "Is my—my——"

"Your nothing," interrupted Peter. "The blackguard was married—married to Lila. I think I must have gone daft, but I didn't realize this woman was planted in my house for a purpose. That type of girl wouldn't come at the wages if she had been genuine. Barney was always suspicious of her, by the way."

"Have you seen Johnny?" the girl asked Craig.

"No, I haven't seen him," said Craig carefully. "I thought of calling on him pretty soon."

Then it came to her in a flash, and she gasped.

"You don't think Johnny shot this man? You can't think that?"

"Of course he didn't shoot him," said Peter loudly. "It is a ridiculous idea. But you'll understand that Mr. Craig has to make inquiries in all sorts of unlikely quarters. You haven't been able to get hold of Johnny to-night?"

A GLANCE passed between them, and Peter groaned.

"What a fool! What a fool!" he said. "Oh, what a fool!"

"Father, Johnny hasn't done this? It isn't true, Mr. Craig. Johnny wouldn't shoot a man. Did anybody see him? How was he shot?"

"He was shot in the back."

"Then it wasn't Johnny," she said. "He couldn't shoot a man in the back! I am sure of that."

"I think, young lady," said Craig with a little smile, "that you'd better go to bed and dream about butterflies. You've had a perfect hell of a day, if you'll excuse my language. Say the firm word to her, Peter. Who's that?" He turned his head, listening.

"Barney," said Peter. "He has a distressing habit of wearing slippers. You can hear him miles away. He's opening the door to somebody—one of your people, perhaps. Or he's taking your chauffeur a drink. Barney has an enormous admiration for chauffeurs. They represent mechanical genius to him."

The girl was calmer now.

"I have too much to thank God for to-day, for this terrible thing to be true," she said in a low voice. "Mr. Craig, there is a mistake, I'm sure. Johnny couldn't have committed such a crime.

"It was somebody else—one of Jeffrey Legge's associates, somebody who hated him. He told me once that lots of people hated him, and I thought he was joking; he seemed so nice, so considerate. Daddy, I was mad to go through that, even to make you happy."

Peter Kane nodded.

"If you were mad, I was criminal, girlie," he said. "There was only one man in the world for you——"

The door opened slowly, and Barney sidled in.

"Johnny to see you folks," he said, and pulled the door wider.

John Gray was standing in the passage, and his eyes fell upon Craig with a look of quiet amusement.

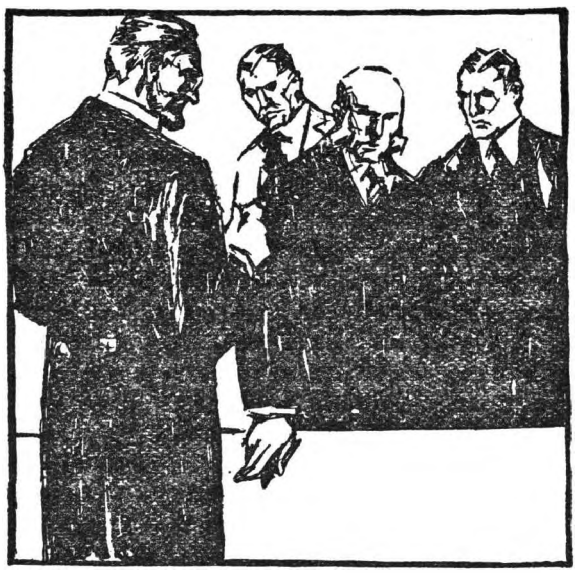
To be continued in the next issue of THE POPULAR, *on the news stands September 7th*

WHEN PERSHING RODE

WHEN Congress put through the bill cutting down the size of the regular army, it did so over the strenuous, strong and stentorian protests of the Honorable John W. Weeks, secretary of war. Soon after the mutilating had been done, Mr. Weeks and Representative Theodore E. Burton of Ohio sat together at a stag dinner.

"I notice," said Burton, casting around for a congenial subject, "that General Pershing recently rode seventy-five miles on horseback."

"No doubt," commented Weeks, "he was trying to find what Congress has left of the United States army."



The Man that Ruined Zeno

By Jack O'Donnell

Author of "The Pearl of Tia Juana," "Salvaged," Etc.

"Old Doc" Doane plays morals as well as he plays horses—and wins the cup in each event.

T AIN'T everybody that gets a laugh outa the long-haired moldy old guys that go noseyin' about the world tryin' to think up some new law which will take some more of the joy outa life. But just let *me* hear how a bunch of 'em are organizin' a mass meetin' to raise several thousand smackers to finance press agents, public orators and sky pilots while they tell the cryin' need of a law to curb the tendency to wear white pants, or somethin' like that, and I snicker until my tonsils ache.

Them kinda methods might get results back in the effete East but out here where men are men and reformers are smallpox y'gotta give 'em something different.

Take f'rinstance the case of Zeno. Y'ever hear how "Old Doc" Doane ruined that paradise for matrimonial misfits? Yes, he reformed it too, but he had to ruin it before he could reform it. That's where he differed from the ord'nary reformer. The apprentice reformer reforms a town first and after that it just naturally goes to ruin from lack of patronage.

Before I go any farther I'd better tell you newcomers to the racing game who Old Doc Doane is and where he comes from. Before he came to the Bush Circuit to give tone to the sport o' kings he was a professor in the English stable back at Yale college. The stewards what run that circuit gave him the gate when they find out he's in the habit of closin' his classes on pay days and goin' to the nearest race track to try his luck bettin' on the bangtails. They say every man has a weakness concealed about him somewhere and bettin' is the old man's. But he don't bet on nothin' but his own hosses.

Me and him get to be friends the first day he comes to the Bushes. That's down at Tall Oaks. Just why I cotton'd to him is a mystery, him lookin' like a character off the stage in his faded frock coat, his rimless specks and his long kind face topped off with the whitest hair that ever

made a barber's fingers itch. But there is something about this tall gaunt old man that I like and I give him a hunch or two which saves him a lotta trouble and—well, after that he seemed to like me and allus called me "Son" or Roy. That kinda made a hit with me too, 'cause I'd been called the "Feed-box Kid" so long I'd almost forgotten my real name is Roy Wheaton.

Well, as I say, me and him get to be good friends. I stick with him through beefsteak and rhubarb times—and they's plenty of both—and at last we go to Zeno for the second meet they hold up there.

We ain't in Zeno two minutes before the town's worst advertisement, a guy called "Pouch" Garvey, spits tobacco juice on Old Doc Doane's shoe. This Pouch person is about my size so before we're there two and a half minutes I have Pouch's nose writin' his moniker on the sun-baked station platform.

Then along comes old John Law in the person of "One-finger" Fallon, the chief of police. Fallon is strong for home talent, 'specially when it has a vote, so he laughs when we give him the straight dope on the fight, blames it all on me and Old Doc Doane and pinches us when "Dapper Dan" McCoy tells him we are bad guys. Imagine Old Doc Doane bein' called bad!

I guess everybody here knows Dapper Dan McCoy. He's been the master mind, as the papers say, in the band of gypsies which has been doin' their worst to ruin the racin' game on the Bush Circuit ever since "Handsome Harry" Kearns got ruled off. Well, McCoy and the old man had tangled down at Tia Juana the winter before—Old Doc Doane winnin' the prize—and Dapper Dan is just pinin' to get even.

It was natural enough for McCoy to be in Zeno, him bein' a hoss owner like Old Doc Doane, but it ain't natural for him to be on speakin' terms with the cops. So you can picture how our eyes popped when McCoy tells One-finger Fallon to throw us in jail and ask no more questions.

We're on our way to the hoosegow when a little old guy comes up and introduces himself to Doane as the editor of the *Zeno Clarion*, the morning newspaper. He says his name's Benson and that we're outa luck; that the best thing we can do is plead guilty and pay a fine, 'cause if we demand a jury trial the jury'll be packed against us. Well, they's something convincin' about this bird and when we remember Dapper Dan's part in the affair we decide mebbe he's right. So, we admit we're all wet when we go before the judge and he slaps a fine of forty-eight dollars and fifty cents, includin' costs, on us—which we pay.

WE thought that was all in the day's work—just a break of the game. But that night when we pick up the town's other newspaper, the *Desert Breeze*, and see the bedtime story about us on the first page our mouths and eyes open so far you mighta thought we was a coupla debby-taunts readin' about their comin'-out party.

The guy what wrote that piece could outlie Ananias. He had more imagination than a black man in a haunted house. But he was a prophet without knowin' it. The prophecy came along to'rd the tail end of the piece, after he'd made out a better case against Old Doc Doane than they ever had against Jesse James. It was to the effect that Old Doc Doane had come to Zeno to reform the town.

Now, if there was one thing that town didn't want at that p'tic'lar time it was reform. Of course, the guy what wrote the piece figured that the worst thing you could call a man was a reformer. That would get the crooked politicians, the shady business men who were backin' 'em, and the big gamblers of the town and track against him. The business guys was laborin' under the impression that a "liberal" administration and good business was twins.

"Son," says Old Doc Doane after he'd read the piece, "that article isn't calculated to make our visit in Zeno a pleasant affair. If I know anything about the State of Nevada at this period in its history it is a bad place for a man believed to be a reformer. We're liable to be annoyed

because of this article. And I think I see the fine hand of Dapper Dan McCoy in it. Let's look up that editor we met this afternoon and see if he can enlighten us."

We find the editor in a little old rickety shop on a side street. We ain't talked to him five minutes 'fore we have the lay of the land. Sure 'nough, Dapper Dan, bein' a regular citizen of Zeno for fifteen years, is right in strong with the town government. He's sort of a dictator, or boss, 'specially of the gamblin' end and the tenderloin.

"There are two papers here," said Editor Benson; "mine and the *Desert Breeze*. The *Breeze* is owned body and soul by the lawless element and the lawless element is in control. The less-reputable business men believing license means good business close their eyes to everything but the dollar. Under orders from the crowd in control they have withdrawn support from my paper and I'm facing bankruptcy. They don't want a decent newspaper any more than they want decent government."

"But why is Dapper Dan McCoy mixing up in this?" asked Old Doc Doane. "He's a race-track man, not a politician."

The editor just smiled at the old man as if Doane was a child askin' foolish questions.

"McCoy plays both ways from the middle at the track here," he explains. "He controls all the books and also races his horses."

"The scoundrel!" says Doane. "If he has anything to do with it I presume most of the races are crooked!"

"No," says Benson, "that's the funny part of it. The races here are as fair as at any other track, thanks to George Wingfoot, the real power behind racing in Nevada, but the dirty work is done in the betting ring. The bookmakers, under McCoy's directions, make false favorites and the sport-loving public, knowing little about form and such things, are fooled into betting on them."

"How about the sharpshooters?" says I. "That oughta be gravy for 'em! They'd oughta clean up pretty if the real contenders is made long shots."

"The real contenders *are* made third or fourth choices," says Benson, "but *not* for the sharpshooters. When they go to bet on a horse that the bookmakers figure will win, the bookies tell them that they are taking no more bets on that horse. Do you see how the real favorite in every race isn't really a betting proposition?"

"I do," said Old Doc Doane. "The sport-loving public is up against a game that is bound to break it!"

"They ain't got no more chance than a stutterin' man at a meetin' of the Lucy Stone League," says I.

OLD DOC DOANE is silent for a minute, then: "But, of course, the horse that the bookmakers pick to win doesn't win more than four times out of ten, does it?"

"That's about the percentage, I believe," says the editor, "but the betting public is so confused that they have only an outside chance of picking the real winner. They are prone to take the bookmakers' choice as the probable winner."

"Um-m-m!" grunts Old Doc Doane. Then he just sits and listens to Benson tell how the year before the people of Zeno was busted flat at the end of the meetin' and how sorry he is for them. He tells us that the majority of the people of Zeno are good law-abidin' folks, hard workers and all that, but like most people of the West they like to take a gamblin' chance.

Just before we leave Benson he says, "Gentlemen, I'm afraid you'll find yourselves quite unpopular when you get uptown. That article about you in the *Breeze* will have been read by everybody and they'll be on the lookout for you. But whatever you do keep your temper. If I know Dapper Dan and his gang nothing would please them more than to get you into an argument which would provide them with a chance to do you bodily harm. Just keep your temper!"

Did any of you guys ever try to keep your temper when you're gettin' gypped and insulted and hooted at and laughed at every time you turn around? No!

Well, just try it some time. It'll be good for your immortal souls. For a solid week me and Old Doc Doane stand the gaff. Durin' that time we was kicked outa three hotels on one pretext or another, we was bilked in the restaurants, made saps of by the actors in the vaudeville houses, slipped counterfeit money when Old Doc Doane changed a big bill, and razzed in a hundred ways. And every night the *Desert Breeze* had some kinda cock-and-bull story about Old Doc Doane's history on the Bush Circuit. These yarns was enough to excite a riot, but Old Doc Doane he don't say a word. I can see, though, that he's doin' some heavy thinkin' and knowin' him as I do I figured that some guy rated one helluva session.

The big moment came one night when the race meet's about ten days old. We are in the Gold Front Café plannin' to eat. They's two dozen tables without nobody at 'em, but the boss of the joint comes and tells us that they ain't no room for us. He just laughs at Old Doc Doane when the old man points to the empty tables. "Them's for our regular patrons," says the proprietor.

OLD DOC DOANE don't argue. He ain't the arguin' kind. He walks out and when we get to the sidewalk he says, "Son, my work is cut out for me. It has taken some time to figure just how the thing could be done, but now it is all clear enough. You'll think I'm crazy when I start, but that will be nothing new, will it, son?"

I can feel the pink sneakin' up to my flawless cheeks at that remark, 'cause I know he knows that more'n once when I first met him I thought he had gone dippy. But I don't say nothin' and he goes on. He says, "The best and surest way to cure a town that's suffering from the ills that afflict Zeno is through its pocketbook."

I don't ask no questions but just walk along with him. He makes straight for the office of the *Clarion*. Old Benson is sittin' in his office, figurin' on some books. I see at a glance that the old boy is about ready to take a run-out powder and he confirms that hunch in the first breath.

"Good evening, gentlemen," he says. "You're just in time to see this old ship sink. The last issue of the *Clarion* will appear in Zeno to-morrow. I'm through! Busted flat!"

"You don't mean the gang's ruined you?" asked Old Doc Doane.

"Exactly!" says the editor. "I can't run this paper without advertising so I'm forced to suspend publication!"

I can see that Old Doc Doane is doin' some quick thinkin'. He rubs his long thin fingers through his white hair, puckers up his mouth and then asks, "What will you take for the plant?"

"The plant itself isn't worth much," says Benson. "I don't suppose I could get ten thousand dollars for machinery, furniture and all. Why?"

"I'm thinking about going into the newspaper business!" the old man announces.

"Where?" asks Benson, grinnin', him thinkin' the same as me that Old Doc Doane is kiddin'.

"Here in Zeno!" says Doane, and he's serious. "My horses didn't take kindly to the sudden change in altitude so I'm not racing them here. Still, I want to stay and I've decided that a little fling at the newspaper game would be exciting. I'll give you ten thousand dollars for the plant, with the right to buy it back at that price if you ever want to. And I'll pay you to act as editor until I get onto the game. What do you say?"

Well, before I can get my breath the deal's closed, although Benson gave the old man fair warning that he was buying a flop. He didn't want to see Old Doc Doane get stuck and I liked him for that. But the old man had made up his mind, and in half an hour he is owner and publisher of the *Zeno Clarion*.

"Now, you go right ahead just as if nothin' happened," says Doane. "Get the paper out to-morrow morning as usual. But save about four inches of space on the first page for me. I'll fill that every day from now on. Just four inches—that's all I want!"

Then, after putting up some cash for runnin' expenses Old Doc Doane says, "Come along, son. I've got a job for you!" and we go back to our rooms.

When we get settled in the two most comfortable chairs in the joint Old Doc Doane looks at me with a smile and says, "Son, you are a hustler, aren't you?"

I plead guilty and he goes on, sayin', "It's your business to find out what's going on around the race track—to find out how horses are working, when the owners are betting and all the other information you can that will help you determine which horse is going to win a certain race. When you get that information you tell it to some better who agrees to put down a wager for you. Is that right?"

I tell him he has me finger printed perfect and he says, "You've given me some good information in the past, son, but I want you to make an extra effort in the future. I want you to be my clocker. I'm going into the tipping business!"

"Into the what?" says I. "I thought you was goin' into the newspaper business!"

"Well, I'm going to do a little of both," he says, still smilin'. "I'm going to give readers of the *Clarion* real information about the horses running at the local track. They've been betting blindly up to this time. Dapper Dan McCoy and his crowd have won all the money the local race-track followers had and I'm going to see that they get it back. Every morning I'm going to name the probable winners of the day. Now, son, do you see where you fit in?"

Did I? Well, I'll tell the populace I did.

That night we made—that is Old Doc Doane made—his selections for the next day's races. I took them to Benson and next morning readers of the *Clarion* found on the first page:

DOANE'S SELECTIONS FOR TO-DAY.

Well, the town laughed when they see that paper, but after the races that afternoon they rubbed their eyes and gasped. Old Doc Doane had picked four of the six winners! And the other two were in the money.

Still, nobody took the old man serious until the next day when he picked five outa six!

The third mornin' I walk down the main stem and look at the news stands. Every copy of the *Clarion* has been sold, and when I get to the newspaper office there's fifty kids there beggin' for more papers.

That afternoon me and Old Doc Doane go out to the track and take a ramble through the bettin' ring and out on the lawn. Every other guy we met had a copy of the *Clarion* and nothin' else in the way of a dope sheet. It didn't make no difference what odds was laid on one of Doane's selections—the mob just walked right up to the books and shoved in their dough.

WELL, you know what happened without me tellin'. Those bookmakers got busy and made a fair book. They had to. Of course they didn't make their prices accordin' to Old Doc Doane's choices but on them selected by their own handicappers and clockers. If these chimed with Doane's choices, all right—the odds was shaved just a little bit more. But if Doane picked one hoss and the bookies' board of strategy picked another, the one the layers' men picked would be made the favorite. You know, just like the books do on any other track. In other words they wasn't influenced by newspaper selections any more than they are at Belmont Park.

Well, me and Old Doc Doane is amblin' round the ring when we run into Dapper Dan McCoy.

"Well, Doc," says McCoy sneeringly, "I see you've gone in for toutin'."

"Is that what you call giving the betting public winners?" asked Old Doc Doane smilin'.

"Nothin' else," says Dapper Dan. "You're a lucky stiff, too, pickin' four and five winners the first coupla days. But that don't mean anything. I've seen lots

of touts do that well only to flop on the third or fourth day. You never hear of the flops."

"This is the third day, Mr. McCoy," says Doane. "How are my choices holding up?"

"You're still runnin' in luck," says Dapper Dan. "You've had two winners outa four."

"Wise players tell me they can beat the races if they get two winners out of six," says Doane.

"That may be true, but the wise players—the sharpshooters—ain't followin' your tips. You're gettin' the suckers, that's all."

"Lucky suckers!" I cut in. "Lucky suckers! If they just keep on stringin' with Doane's selections they'll have you guys eatin' sagebrush before this meet's over."

"Don't make me laugh!" says Dan, turnin' away.

Well, Dan was right about one thing and that was about the regular racin' followers. They wasn't stringin' with Doane, but that made the whole thing perfect. Those birds were there watchin' every angle of the bettin' and the racin' in general. They was quick to see a advantage in the odds and if Old Doc Doane made a bad pick and his followers shoved in a lotta dough the odds on his choice would shorten, but the odds on the real hoss in the race would lengthen. The layers had to do that to round out their books as best they could. And that very thing kept the element of chance right where it oughta be, for Old Doc Doane's purpose. He knew that no man livin' could expect to pick six winners off'n a six-race card more'n once in a year, and he wouldn't 'a' done that if he could. He was satisfied to hand his followers three or four. That kept the bookies guessin'.

What part did I play? Well, you guys know how much info a wise boy can pick up if he has friends among trainers, jockeys, exercise boys, telegraph operators, waiters and everything around a race track. And nobody ever accused the Feedbox Kid of bein' a dumb Dan. I slipped the old man many a sleeper which the boys on the backside thought they was puttin' over.

At the end of the first ten days of the tippin' game Old Doc Doane had picked thirty-nine winners outa a possible sixty. The shortest price of these was a one-to-four shot, the longest was a thirty-to-one.

One by one the handbooks in the town proper bit the dust. Then a terrible squawk went up from the regular layers at the track. The end books—the two-dollar babies, y'know—went first. Their short bank rolls couldn't stand up under the punishment Doane's followers was handin' 'em.

Then the big fellows began to holler for mercy.

Me and Old Doc Doane and Benson is sittin' in the *Clarion* office one night when in comes Dapper Dan McCoy and two other big layers. They're there to yell "Help!"

THEY didn't lose no time gettin' down to cases.

"Mr. Doane," begins Dapper Dan—and as soon as he lets out that "mister" I know he is ready to talk turkey—"Mr. Doane," he says, "we understand that you are the owner of the *Clarion*. We want to buy it from you. What do you want for the paper as it stands?"

Old Doc Doane looks up pretendin' he's the most surprised guy in the world. "Why, Mr. McCoy," says he, "I hadn't the faintest idea you were interested in journalism. Are you thinking of quitting the race-track game?"

"There's no use kiddin' about this, Doane," says he, kinda mad. "You know why I want to buy this paper so let's talk business. Every man has his price. What's yours."

"I hadn't thought much about it, Mr. McCoy," says the old man sweet as a girl graduate, "but I should think fifty thousand dollars would be a fair price."

Dapper Dan and his two pals went into executive session for a minute and when they come outa it Dan says, "Sold!"

"I'll make out the bill of sale," says Old Doc Doane turnin' to his desk.

"Hell's bells!" thinks I, "the old man is gonna weaken on his plan to break these bandits. Old Benson, too, looks kinda disappointed.

"I bought this paper for ten thousand dollars from Mr. Benson," says the old man, "and I gave him an option to buy it back at the price I paid for it. But I guess this sale will be agreeable to him if I give him all the profits. Won't it, Mr. Benson?"

"I don't want to interfere with your plans, Mr. Doane," says Benson, "but I would like to see you carry through your tipping business until the good people of Zeno get their money back—the money they were beaten out of by the crooked bookmakers last season."

"Oh, that'll be all right," says Doane innocently. "I'll get out a card with my selections which I'll distribute free!"

Dapper Dan jumped to his feet at that remark. "No, you don't!" he yells. "If you sell us the paper you've got to agree not to engage in any kind of business in Zeno in your own name or in anybody else's. You know damn well why we want to buy this rag!"

"In that case," says Old Doc Doane, "there'll be no sale. Good evening, gentlemen!" and he stands up and points his long finger at the door.

Dapper Dan tries to argue with Doane about the sale, boostin' the offer to sixty grand, but the old gent just shakes his head, sayin', "Before I get through with you fellows you'll be glad to play honest in politics as well as in sport. Good night!"

And out they go.

That was the beginnin' of one warm week in Zeno. The fact that Old Doc Doane was givin' three, four and sometimes five winners in his selections got noised around until even the clerks in the ribbon stores began makin' two-bit parlays. Faro dealers, crap shooters and poker sharks quit their jobs and went to the races. Even the police and firemen got the fever.

And everybody was talkin' about Old Doc Doane. The wise cracks against him stopped. So did the little pieces in the *Desert Breeze*. Everybody was makin' dough off the bookmakers and *they* was beginnin' to holler uncle.

Why didn't some of them turn player and take Doane's tips? Say, boy, you ain't been around race tracks long, have you? Well, if you had you'd know that there ain't a bookmaker livin' that don't think he's forgot more about hosses than the smartest tipster that ever lived. They all went broke playin' hosses before they got wise and went to layin' against 'em.

Well, anyway, at the end of that week into the *Clarion* office comes a delegation of prom'nent citizens which look like the reception committee for Home-comin' Week.

And who do you think is spokesman of this little party? No one else but the guy that runs the Gold Front restaurant where they wouldn't give me and Old Doc Doane a seat. And he's as excited as a pup with a rubber ball.

"Mr. Doane," he says, "we represent numerous business and professional men of Zeno, and we've come here to tell you that you are ruining business in this city. We don't know why you bought this paper but we are reliably informed that you have been offered a good price to sell it. No doubt you have your price and we are here to meet it—providing it's in reason."

HE stops and looks around at the rest of the gang and they all give him the yes sign.

"Just how am I ruining business in Zeno?" asked Old Doc Doane quietly before the restaurant gink gets goin' again.

"All our citizens are playing your tips on the races," he says, "and they won't even——"

"They must be winning a lot of money, then," says Doane, "and that should be good for business."

"But you don't understand," says the Gold Front boss. "The working people are doing nothing else. My waiters have all quit working. And to-night the chief

cook told me he had scrambled his last egg. Even our girl cashier has left us flat. Every big restaurant in town is having the same experience. The truth is, the working people of this town have become newly rich and refuse to work!"

"I understand there are a lot of former handbook operators and a few regular bookmakers looking for jobs," says Old Doc Doane with his best classroom smile.

"We know that. We've given them jobs but there ain't more than twenty of 'em all told!"

"Tell him what his damn tips are doing to the theaters," speaks up another of the delegation, a fellow I recognize as the manager of the vaudeville house where every actor that came on the stage had some nasty crack to make about Old Doc Doane.

"Every girl in the 'Hot Dog Follies' has sent in her resignation," says the spokesman. "Several of them are buying cars. The house will have to close its doors inside of a week!"

"That's good!" says Old Doc Doane. "I didn't think much of the show anyway and I don't believe it will work a hardship on art if the 'Hot Dog Follies' are never seen again."

"I represent the financial interests of this city," speaks up a pompous little guy with the cutest set of mutton chops on his cheeks you ever saw. "I'm a banker. I don't know just what this tipping business is all about, but I do know that the banks of this city have loaned a considerable sum of money to gentlemen who operate books at the track, and they—the bookmakers—tell us that unless you stop giving tips to the public they will be unable to meet their obligations—that is, their notes. Whatever this nonsense is, it must be stopped!"

"Well, now that *is* interesting!" exclaims the old man, shootin' a killin' smile at the moneyed interests. "I never dreamed that frenzied finance would call on me. Delightful!"

Up steps One-finger Fallon, chief of police, the guy that pinched me and Old Doc Doane the day we arrived in town. And he's as full of conversation as an auctioneer.

"The police force is demoralized!" he announces like he's on the stage.

"I guessed that the first day I was in Zeno," cuts in Old Doc Doane quietly.

But One-finger don't pay no attention to the Doc's sarcasm. He goes right on, sayin', "The cops are more interested in grabbin' winners than they are grabbin' thieves. They ain't takin' no pride in their work and they won't go out on a case until they see the results of the race they bet on. I tell you, stranger, this town is all shot as a result of your damn tips!"

Old Doc Doane holds up his long thin white hand for silence. Then when they all get their tongues under wraps he says, "Gentlemen, I gather from what you've just told me that the working people of Zeno are getting back, or have got back, the money they were cheated out of by the unsportsmanlike methods the bookmakers used last year. You gentlemen are morally responsible for the conduct of affairs in Zeno and at the track. If you let crooks run your town and crooks operate at your track you may expect to suffer.

"You permit men of the Dapper Dan McCoy type to run your city. You throw strangers in jail without giving them a fair trial. You permit your restaurant keepers to become czars. You allow insults to be hurled at respectable persons from the stages of your theaters. You refuse to support a decent newspaper and permit a scurrilous rag to heap abuse on visitors. In short, your city is governed by the worst element in it, and you wink your eyes at corruption because you believe license means good business."

I'M watchin' the little duffer with the whiskers, the banker of the party, and he's turnin' pink, green, purple and red. Fin'ly he busts right out, sayin', "Sir! You are heaping insult upon insult. I admit that we have a liberal administration, but that has nothing to do with this tipping business that has ruined our city. We are here to discuss that, not our morals!"

"Very well, sir!" says Old Doc Doane standing up and runnin' his long fingers through his white hair. "What have you to suggest?"

"I suggest, sir, that you quit this tipping business or sell this paper!" says the banker.

"I won't do either—right now," says Old Doc Doane, "but I'll tell you what I will do. I want to see this paper live. It's a good newspaper, with a good editor, Mr. Benson. But it needs the support of you business men. Acting on instructions from the crooked element of the city you gentlemen have taken your patronage away from it. Many of you owe Mr. Benson money which you have refused to pay on demand. Now, I've talked it over with Mr. Benson and he has expressed a desire to resume control of the *Clarion*. But he says he wouldn't think of it unless he was absolutely sure of getting *all* of his old advertisers back. He also says that he wouldn't publish tips in his paper unless the crooked bookmakers went back to their old methods. In that case he does me the honor to say that he would send for me to come back and make the selections."

HERE the old man pauses for a minute. Then he adds: "And should he find it necessary to send for me I'd be only too glad to come back and do the job."

Now, mebbe some of your smart guys are gonna say that this was blackmail or some such thing, and mebbe you're right. But be that as it may those "business men" go into one of them executive sessions for about fifteen minutes and when they come out Mr. Banker guy is all smiles.

"Mr. Doane," he says, throwin' out his chest and puttin' on his chamber-of-commerce smile, "we believe we understand you perfectly. We understand you to mean that if all of the *Clarion's* old advertisers come back, pay up their bills and take new contracts——"

"Long-time contracts!" cuts in Old Doc Doane.

"Long-time contracts," agrees the banker. "That if all this is done, as we understand it, the *Clarion* will publish no more tips—that is, no more of *your* tips. Are we right?"

"You are, sir," says Old Doc Doane, tossin' a little of his own dignity into the meetin'. "Personally, I don't believe in lending encouragement to gambling—although it is one of my weaknesses—but there are times when a little of the hair of the dog that did the biting will cure the bite. Now, gentlemen, Mr. Benson will buy the *Clarion* back from me just as soon as he is satisfied with the amount of old business that returns to it. And that is entirely up to you!"

Well, the next day is a busy day at the *Clarion* office. Old Doc Doane gets writer's cramp signin' receipts and new advertisin' contracts. By nightfall the future prosperity of that good old sheet is cinched. Late that night Benson gives Doane the ten grand he'd been paid for the sheet, and a few days later the Zeno banker comes to Old Doc Doane and tells him that the business men of the town are glad things turned out as they did. He says they was gettin' tired of Dapper Dan McCoy and his crowd, and that they really did want a decent city.

Did Old Doc Doane ever go back? No, not yet. We hear from Editor Benson every once in a while and accordin' to his last letter Zeno is still reformed.

THE popularity of the automobile, says Irving Berlin, writer of many popular song hits, is the cause of the present taste for jazz music. Mr. Berlin says that the increase of speed in our daily life brought about by the Lizzie and its bigger cousins had to be reflected in the music of the day, and that high-speed jazz resulted.

If we can't have the motor car without jazz, let's go back to walking.

Flaming Cañon

By H. R. Marshall

Author of "Phantom Fighters," "Not a Dude Ranch," Etc.

What chance has one man, against five? Just one! But he must take it, and Bert Winslow did.

FROM far out on the desert Bert Winslow saw the little settlement perched high up the cañon. He turned toward it immediately. Tired, he was; tired beyond words! Three days in the saddle, three days of heat which made the desert dance and the mountains swell and diminish in the quivering atmosphere; three days of alkali dust, of sage and creosote bush, rock and sand; three days of soul-wearying distance! He was withered. His calico pony was tired, too; it stumbled on the least provocation.

"Almost there, Hash," Winslow announced, leaning forward in the saddle to rub the pony's ears. Habitually he talked to his faithful companion, as desert men do. "Keep at it, old man. There's water and rest at sundown." The pinto seemed to understand; his slender, wiry legs worked faster.

Winslow lounged in the saddle, utterly relaxed; his long, sinewy body swung back and forth from the hips with the pony's stride. Only in that way could a man bear up on such a ride. And Bert Winslow was a man who would bear up; that was evident from the set of his thin jaw, the determination of his eyes. Blue those eyes were, drawing to their corners a network of wrinkles, fanwise.

His face was the brown of the desert sand, his forehead marked with horizontal furrows—the tribute he had paid to the blinding glare of the waste. Young, he was, as desert men go; as young as a man can be who has fought the death fight with limitless space, withering heat and the desert's insensate cruelty.

As he approached the settlement, Winslow studied the houses. The sun, resting momentarily on a peak of the Sierra Madre Range behind him, gilded the little town, etched each building against a black background. Thirty or forty shacks

there were and in their midst rose the box-like structure of an ore crusher.

"What I can't make out," announced Winslow to his pony, "is what the town is. Never heard of it, that's a cinch. I guess I was more nearly lost than I admitted. Some mining settlement, of course. Well, I'll soon know."

Now he was on the cañon apron which sloped gently upward. Ahead, the cañon narrowed rapidly between sheer granite walls. Well into it and several hundred feet above the desert floor clustered the houses, close to each other and backing against the straight-sided mountain.

"Not a very lively place, Hash," Winslow declared. "Haven't any welcoming committee out or anything. Up, there!" The pinto stumbled wearily and Winslow swung from the saddle. "Walk with you the rest of the way, old boy," he promised, getting stiffly into stride. "Damme, I'm lame! " He placed both hands on his belt and hitched it up; then, reins through the crook of his elbow, he strode forward.

AS he approached the settlement he forgot his soreness in ever-increasing surprise. There was no action in the cañon town; the ore crusher stood silent and deserted; the little houses were obviously unoccupied. Doors swung idly on rusty hinges, revealing dust-laden interiors. What had once been a central path was overgrown with foxtail and galatea grass and weeds; rusty tin cans, strewn right and left, were half buried in dust or concealed by careful nature's creeping grass.

Uncanny, the place was, with its two rows of shacks crowded between the steep walls, residences for humans but now deserted by humans. It made Winslow feel creepy, uneasy, as if the place were inhabited by ghosts.

He stared into the first house—two rooms, and except for the thick coating of dust over everything, it might have been left by its owner only an hour before. A cheap dining table was in the center of the front room; on it were three tin dishes with black blotches on them—obviously the remains of food.

There were three chairs, built from packing boxes; a faded chintz curtain hung over a box cupboard. In the corner a set of double springs, rusty and sagging, rested on squared granite blocks. Even pictures were on the walls—a girl in a bathing suit which once had been red but now had faded to light tan, and a heavily framed ocean scene with boats scurrying back and forth with obvious indifference to wind and tide.

Someway it was like looking at a corpse, Winslow decided as he turned away. The second house was in the same condition. A pair of child's overalls—hung from the rafters to dry untold months before—brought back the little shiver to Winslow's spine.

"Creepy, it is," he announced and was startled by his own voice. "Any one who didn't know miners would think a plague had hit this place. But that's the way with them; rush into a place, rush out again, leaving everything they can't put in a bag."

Cursorily he investigated three or four more houses. One he decided to use for his own quarters. Its single door had warped shut and inside the dust was less thick than in the other houses. It was only a one-room shack with a crude fireplace at the north end, the door at the south, and square two-foot windows at each side. But it was habitable.

"There's no place like home," hummed Winslow as he unsaddled Hash. Suddenly it occurred to him that there might be a caretaker in the place. Out into the patch of weeds which had once been a road, he strode.

"Hello!" he called, clarion clear.

Down from the rock walls which loomed above him to the graying sky came the echo. Back and forth it sounded from the sheer cañon sides until it faded into silence out over the desert.

"No luck," conceded Winslow. "Criminy, it gets dark in this cañon quickly! Just leaps into blackness. Come on, Hash, we'll find the village pump or spring or whatever the population got its water from."

Until then it had not occurred to him that there might be no water in the place. Now he searched for it anxiously. Fortunately he found it, a dilapidated pump close to the ore crusher.

"This has been used recently, Hash. Thank Heaven for that! Else we wouldn't have dared drink it. See, there's priming water right beside it. Probably prospectors, working out on the desert, keep using it. All right, Hash—drink her up!"

Man and horse drank deeply of the reviving liquid, then turned back to their preëmpted habitation. In a patch of galatea grass back of the ore crusher, Hash was stake-tied. Then Winslow rustled wood. In a few moments he had a hot fire burning in the fireplace and was cooking his supper—tea, flapjacks, canned tomatoes and jerky. He was humming again, driving back the loneliness of the place:

"Then beat the drum slowly,
And play the fife lowly,
As they bear me along.
Oh, take me to the valley
And roll the sod o'er me;
I'm only a cowboy and know I've done wrong."

Odd, he reflected, how a man's music, when he is completely satisfied physically and mentally, turns to the most sorrowful laments. A safety valve, perhaps, against too much contentment. He was perfectly content now. Who wouldn't be, in front of a warm, light-giving fire, well fed, well housed, and well heeled? Yes, that was at the bottom of it, the knowledge that he had close to six thousand dollars in virgin gold in his belt.

That was why he was hurrying across the Mojave Desert, to get the treasure in some safer place than his belt. Over in the Panamints where an age-old stream had once been swirled aside by a granite pocket, he had found the gold. For two weeks he had washed the dirt, cleaned out the nuggets and the dust. The richest strike he had ever made! Enough to fulfill his ambition of buying a small ranch and becoming a cattleman. Small wonder he was heading for civilization.

Thought of the gold he was carrying reminded him how uncomfortably heavy the belt was. He unstrapped the two buckles which held it and carefully deposited the great belt on the floor beside him. From the opened end of it a little stream of gold dust poured out, and a single blackened nugget. The light from the flaming greasewood fire shone on the dust, making it sparkle and glitter brilliantly. Winslow turned to restore the glimmering particles to his poke. Involuntarily he glanced upward to the window. By sheer force of will he stifled a cry.

A man's face was framed in the dust-covered glass. And such a face! Almost covered with heavy black hair it was, large featured, with gleaming black eyes and protruding lips. Cruel, repulsive, greedy—a face which might frighten one on a daylit street and which was much more horrible here, appearing so suddenly in this dead town.

THE mind of Bert Winslow worked rapidly. With an effort he kept his eyes from the window and carefully gathered up the gold dust as if he had seen nothing. In a moment he reached for his blankets and placed the belt under them. Then he went across the room to the door and strove to bolt it, but the warped wood resisted his efforts. He finally shoved the table and two chairs—the entire furniture of the room—against it. He worked casually, never once glancing at the window. Only when he had removed his boots and curled up before the fire did he allow his eyes to wander toward the west opening. Again he was startled. A second face was in the window now, a lean white face which caught and reflected the light from the dying fire.

"They think they can't be seen out there," reflected Winslow. "The way they stare shows that they think they are hidden in the blackness. They saw the gold, too—at least, the first one did.

"Now who in the devil are they and why didn't they answer my hail? A couple of prospectors who came in after

dark? Hardly, or I'd have heard them. Anyway, this is a decidedly unhealthy place for me right now. If I read their looks right they want that gold and wouldn't mind a murder or two to get it. Take it easy, Win, old man—easy till the fire dies out!"

For a long time Winslow lay motionless, relaxed as if in sleep. Gradually the flaming fire burned lower until the room was dark. Embers crackled and blazed intermittently, but now the west window had become merely a black blind square.

Winslow acted quickly, rolling away from before the fire. He carried his belt and boots with him but left the blanket rumpled high as a dummy. In a moment he was fully dressed and trying the east window. It resisted his efforts until he cleaned the dirt from the sill with his fingers. Then it slid open, letting in a rush of cold night air which fanned the embers into flames again. Winslow ducked to the floor and studied the opposite window. There was no face showing now; the men had left, probably to plan their campaign of robbery. Rapidly Winslow raised his long body through the opening and dropped to the ground.

AT last, momentarily dismayed, he stood studying the little village, studying his next move. Far ahead, where the last black blotch of a house nestled against the cañon side, he saw the flicker of a light. That would certainly bear investigation, he decided. He pulled his nine-shot Luger automatic from its leather holster and started forward.

The light issued from around a heavy cloth hung over a small square window. The house was like the others of the settlement—low, loosely built, small. Stealthily Winslow made his way around it. There was just room to slip between the back of the house and the cañon wall. There the window was not curtained. Cautiously the young prospector pressed close to it. He was astonished by what he saw through the dust-covered glass.

Not two men were there, but four, grouped around a table upon which a kerosene lamp burned. A tough-looking crew they were, and they had earned their looks. The Saari gang was notorious the length of the desert, from Bishop to Mojave. Five Finns comprised it, alike in disposition and name, but different in appearance.

Their leader was Pete Saari, the black-bearded man whose face Winslow had first seen—a huge man, more like a gorilla than a human being. Aiding and abetting him in deeds nefarious were his two sons, Sam and Joe—the latter a thin, white-faced fellow, sick in mind and body—and his two brothers, Ossi and Wert. Claim jumpers, cache thieves, moonshiners, cattle-and-sheep rustlers were the Saaris, and right now they were planning to do a little murdering on the side.

"Sure we'll kick him off," growled Pete Saari through his heavy beard. "If we don't he'll report the robbery and have a flock of dicks on our trail." His voice came clearly through the flimsy side walls. "We ain't leavin' this dump, not when we've got our own little graft workin' so nicely."

"Couldn't we trail him out on the desert and then jump him?" queried Sam Saari. He was younger, less hardened than the others; murder, to him, was—murder. "That wouldn't give away our hidin' place and maybe he'd fork out without a fight."

"Mebbe," growled his father. "And mebbe not. Me, I'm thinkin' not; not by the looks of him. Anyway, he'd get out a posse. They'd find our still and put us out of business. What's the harm of bumpin' him off? Put him under a few feet of sand on the desert and nobody'll ever find him. Except mebbe the coyotes."

"Seems to me," announced the pasty-faced Joe, "that we're talkin' pretty far ahead of ourselves. We ain't even got his poke yet."

"I'm claimin' we have," grunted old Pete Saari. "Just as good as. He's bottled up tight in this cañon and we can do as we like with him. Ossi is down at the openin'; he'll not let this bird get by without puttin' a shot through his gizzard.

He let him get in thinkin' it was the best way to avoid trouble and knowin' he'd go out in the mornin' without seein' nothin'. But now that Ossi knows about that sack of gold dust, a flyin' devil couldn't get past him. This feller can't climb these walls very handily. What's more, I'm makin' the move to jump him now."

He leaned forward; the rays from the lamp shone on his bared, yellow teeth. "Wert, you and I'll bust through the door; Sam, you take the west window and Joe the east. It'll all be over in a minute. Half asleep, he won't have time to grab his gun, even. The first one that sees him move let flicker at him. Then we'll have his poke and a damned fine pinto to boot."

"Do the Sternes know about him?" asked Joe Saari. "They won't come meddlin', will they?"

"Them tenderfeet know damned well when to keep out of sight," answered the oldest Saari. "One little peep and they're done and they know it."

"I've been a-thinkin' sometimes," suggested Joe Saari, his white face working and his tongue licking his thin lips, "that mebbe we oughta lose Phil Sterne and take the girl. Just lose him, you know, and then——"

"You've been thinkin' a damned lot about that girl lately," warned his father. "Cut it out, Joe. Moonshinin' and women don't go together. Women! Ugh!" Old Pete Saari spat through his beard.

"Yeah," agreed Wert Saari. "Now let's take this feller's poke and get it over with."

The four Saaris rose from the table. Already their hands were feeling their guns. Single file and silently they marched out toward the one-roomed house where they expected to find Bert Winslow and his belt of gold. But Bert Winslow was leaning against the very shack they were leaving. His mind was exceedingly busy. That this gang was out to murder him was evident enough.

But what was the talk about the tenderfeet—the girl? Could there be two gangs hidden somewhere among the shacks of this deserted town? Evidently. But who were the others?

Winslow shrugged his shoulders in the darkness. Not for him to wonder about other people; his mind should be occupied with his own safety. His situation was precarious. In this narrow cañon four men were seeking his life. Farther down, at the mouth of it, a fifth was on guard to prevent his leaving. His horse had been stolen and hidden; no chance to climb those sheer walls in the darkness, and daylight would reveal him to his attackers.

He must move and move decisively. The best course seemed to be to find his calico pony and then chance a rush through the cañon mouth; maybe in the darkness he could crash through. But to find Hash!

Stealthily he searched the little settlement. Eerie, fearful work it was, dodging silently between the black blotches of shacks; stealing up on a mountain laurel in the hope that it was Hash, tripping heavily in the darkness and then waiting for the pounding of his heart to quiet.

THE darkness was heavy, inky. Overhead the stars seemed shiny pin points against a smothering black-velvet curtain. Every step must be felt cautiously lest his feet clatter on stones, each black bulk in the night approached with care.

Suddenly he heard a shot farther down the line of shacks. That was intended for his body, probably; instead it had only punctured the heap of blankets he had left in front of the fire. Now his situation was more perilous each moment. The game of hide and seek had changed. The Saaris were actively searching for him, and he, dodging them, must continue to look for his horse. The darkness, until now his enemy, had become friend as well. He heard quick footsteps clatter among the rocks and rubble of the cañon floor; one of the Saaris had gone down to warn Ossi, on guard at the opening, that the bird had escaped the net and was fluttering about the cage, seeking the outlet. And Bert Winslow decided to do that very thing.

There was little hope left of finding his horse in the darkness; he regretted the time he had already consumed. His best chance seemed to be in sliding down the cañon, past that murdering gang, until he reached the final guard. There, if he couldn't slink past in the darkness, he must shoot his way through. He stopped for a moment and studied the outline of the cañon walls against the sky, took his bearings, then crouched low to the ground and started toward the desert.

For a considerable way his progress was rapid. Past shack after shack he stole. Now he approached the most dangerous point—the one-roomed house where the Saaris had first seen his beltful of gold. Foot by foot Winslow edged himself through the narrow space back of the shack, ears strained, eyes peering intently into the darkness. Suddenly two forms loomed close to him. He pitched to the ground and lay motionless.

"Any sign of him, Pete?"

"No. But he's around; can't get out. Hidin' somewhere probably, waitin' for us to quit lookin'. I've sent Sam down to help Ossi guard the openin'. We'll get him, right-o!"

"Sure."

The two men separated and Winslow allowed himself a deep breath. Then he caught his lip between his teeth. One of the men was walking straight toward him. Desperately he tried to roll aside. Too late; the man saw his moving figure. A revolver shot cracked out, there was a shout. Winslow leaped to his feet and, head lowered, dodged around the shack. Behind him sounded more shots and the clatter of running feet. Bullets whizzed close to him; they ricocheted from the cañon walls and whined into the night.

One of them found its mark; he was half whirled by an impact against his left shoulder. He stumbled and almost fell, then caught himself and raced across to the next shack. Burning, his left shoulder was, as if a red-hot iron were being held against it; he was breathless, desperate, a hunted animal with the odds all against him.

"Spread across the cañon!" He could hear Pete Saari's order clearly. "Drive him up farther and we'll catch him!"

So that was their game, to bottle him up where the cañon narrowed into nothing. He must prevent that. His hope was to hide somewhere. One of the houses would be best. There, at least, he could fight it out with some fortification.

"Take it easy!" sounded the order of Pete Saari again—closer this time. "Don't let him get the drop on you! We can wait till daylight if we have to."

Yes, the hunters could wait until daylight and then catch their quarry with ease. Better, Winslow decided, to fight it out now. He doubled back toward his pursuers. There might be a chance of dodging past them. He rounded the corner of a shack, then recoiled.

A light was flashing in the next house, the yellow flare of a match. They were searching there for him, one of the Saaris inside, one in front and one in back. They knew he was on that side of the weed-choked road. If he could cross over without being seen discovery would be delayed.

AGAIN he retreated. At the last of the shacks he threw himself on his face and wormed his way across the road. Each moment he expected to hear the shout announcing his discovery, but he reached the opposite row of houses in safely. Behind them he slipped and down the cañon again. In a moment he was opposite the searchers. He waited until they moved forward, then dodged across the open space between two shacks.

"Pete?"

Within ten feet of him a man called. Ossi, relieved from guard duty by young Sam Saari, had come up from the cañon mouth to find how the search was progressing.

"Pete?" he called again, and there was menace in his voice.

"Shut up!" rumbled Winslow in instinctive imitation of Pete Saari's voice. But the ruse failed. Ossi shouted for help, at the same time emptying his revolver into the corner of the shack behind which

Winslow dodged. Now the young prospector was surrounded; he could hear the other searchers charging down on him. He slid along the house to the side window, slid it open and pulled himself in. There he would have to fight it out. But he was totally unprepared for what happened.

The steel O of a revolver pressed into his side. "Don't move," sounded a warning from the darkness as he instinctively recoiled. "I'll shoot, sure!" It was a woman's voice which conveyed the warning, low, vibrant, determined.

"You've got me," muttered Winslow, straining to see his captor.

"Who are you?" The question was insistent, quick.

"Bert Winslow, a prospector. Your gang is after me because I've got some gold on me."

"My gang?" repeated the woman. Outside sounded the footsteps of the Saari crew. Closing in on their prey, they were. The situation took a quick turn. "Jump for the rafters," whispered the woman. "There's some planking up there with some things stored on it. Crawl among them! Quick!"

WINSLOW realized that the gun was no longer pressing his side; for a reason the woman had suddenly changed from foe to friend. Or was she trapping him? He decided to trust her and jumped into the air, reaching for the rafters. He located one and jumped again, catching it and swinging himself upward. The pain in his shoulder almost wrenched a cry from him. In a moment he was crawling along on the crossbeams; then he felt planking under him. Far back he pulled himself, then curled up among stovepipe sections and boxes to wait.

"He's in this shack or the next one," shouted the voice of Ossi outside. "Tried to trick me, he did, pretendin' he was Pete. Watch out he doesn't pick you off!"

"Smart, hell!" rumbled the answer of Pete Saari. "We'll smart him. Take this shack first. The other is Sterne's den. It ain't probable he's in there. Slow, now! Slow! All right, go!"

There was the sound of a door being burst from its hinges, the tramp of feet on wood floors, then grunts of disgust.

"The next one then," ordered Ossi. "He must be in the next one. The Sternes ain't there; they beat it when this guy came; they thought mebbe he was a deputy. Give it the rush the same as——"

Winslow, perched up above the rafters, heard the woman move below him, then a yellow flare lit the room. She had struck a match and was lighting the kerosene lamp. Through a crack in the planking Winslow watched her from above. He could see only a yellow mass of hair and a slender figure in a patterned dress. Yet he judged her to be young.

"What's the matter?" the girl cried. She had walked to the door and thrown it open. "What's all the trouble?"

Without a word Pete Saari and Ossi brushed her aside and rushed into the room. Their revolvers were leveled, their eyes searching. In the side window which Winslow had opened appeared the white face of Joe; across in the other window was Wert.

The girl whirled on the men. "What do you mean coming into our house like this?" she demanded angrily. "What do you mean——"

"Didn't know you were here," Pete Saari rumbled. "Thought you had vamosed with Phil. We're lookin' for a guy."

"Well, get right out of here!" ordered the girl. "There's no 'guy' in here."

"Sure, I can see that," agreed Pete. Then suspiciously, "Why're you dressed?"

"Is that any of your business? If you think it is, I'll tell you I just came back down the cañon side to see if the coast was clear for Phil."

"Then Phil ain't around?" queried Joe from the window. His white face was strained, eager.

"Can't you see?" demanded the girl. Then she bit her lip. Hastily she added, "But he'll be coming right away."

"Not till you give him the high sign, I guess," Joe suggested leeringly.

"He'll come when——"

"Come on, boys," interrupted Pete Saari. "That bird has slipped us again. Got farther up the cañon, mebbe. Ossi, you go back to the cañon mouth and keep your eyes open." Suddenly he whirled and seized the girl by the shoulders. "And you listen, you spitfire! If you hear or see a long-legged prospector slinkin' around, you call us, sabbe?" He shook her roughly. "Call us damned quick! He don't know nothin' of the way up the cañon side, but if he finds it he'll have to start from here. And if he ever gets started without your tellin' us you're a dead goose! Sabbe?"

The girl wrenched free from the hairy hands. "You mind your business and I'll mind mine," she snapped. "Now go!" She took the lamp from the table and walked to the door. There she stood, one arm outstretched, her head with its crown of golden hair raised regally. Winslow could see her clearly now for the first time and he marveled at her delicate beauty. Surely she was out of place in such surroundings, a girl of refinement with cameolike features and wide blue eyes.

Pete Saari laughed mirthlessly. "Sure we'll go," he said. "Only remember if you see the feller we're lookin' for——"

"Call you," finished the girl. "I heard you before. Will you go now?"

For a moment after the Saaris left the girl busied herself straightening the room, smoothing the bed in the corner. Then she bolted the door and fastened the windows with wooden braces. Above, on the planking, Winslow stirred. Immediately the girl began to speak, low voiced, as if to herself.

"There's one of them snooping around outside yet, I think. Well, he better stay outside! As if I knew anything about a long-legged prospector. Now I'll put the gun under my pillow and try to sleep." She turned the lamp wick low, and threw herself across the bed in the corner and seemed to drop rapidly into sleep. Outside, some distance up the line of shacks, sounded the voices of the Saaris. They were still searching. But soon, Winslow knew, they would give up the job and wait until morning. He wondered whether daylight was far away. Already the night seemed age-long. And he must get away before dawn, or stay up on that uncomfortable planking for another day. That apparently was the girl's plan, and Winslow didn't relish it. His wounded shoulder had ceased bleeding but the pain of it made him weak, nauseated. He didn't know how long he could endure such torture. Besides, the girl's husband or whatever he was, would be back any time. He might be of a different disposition than the girl; he might decide to turn Winslow over to the gang and share in the loot. Apparently the fellow was already a fugitive from justice. How was the girl linked to such a man? Why was she in this den of thieves?

BELOW him the girl stirred. Winslow leaned forward to study her. The light cast shadows over her eyes and he couldn't tell whether or not she slept. Some way he gained the impression that she was tense, straining her ears to the night sounds. Suddenly Winslow knew why. There was a tap on the door.

"Who is it?" the girl called. "Phil?"

"Yes," came the answer.

"It isn't either. What do you want?"

"It's Joe. I want to come in and talk."

"You can't to-night. Come around in the morning, Joe. Phil will be back then."

"Let me in. I've got to see you."

"You come in and I'll shoot. I'm not fooling with your kind to-night, Joe."

"Ain't, eh? I'll show you!" There was the impact of a shoulder against wood, the bursting of hinges. Pasty-faced Joe Saari stood in the shattered door. "Why didn't you shoot?" he asked. A grin slit his white face. "I'll tell you why. Because I was in here this afternoon and took the shells out of your gun, that's why. Pull away at the trigger, girl, and see how much good it does you."

"You—you coward!" gasped the girl. She was on her feet now, her great blue eyes blazing defiance. "Get out of here!"

"Sure," chuckled Joe. "After a while.

After you've given me a kiss or two." He advanced, his long arms outstretched. The girl retreated along the side of the room, then tried to double back.

"Listen, girl, I've got you," announced Joe, following closely. "Now just be good and don't make me get rough. Else I'll have to hurt you and then lie in wait for Phil in the mornin'. Come on, be a sport! I don't want to hurt you but——"

"Get away! Don't touch me!" ordered the girl. She ducked under his arms and rushed toward the door. But Joe Saari was too quick for her. He leaped forward and caught her. For a moment the two struggled, breathing heavily. Once Joe cried sharply when her teeth sank into his wrist.

"You little hell cat!" he barked.

He had her arms warped behind her now and was holding them with one great hand. With the other he forced her white face up toward his. "I guess you'll kiss me," he said.

Something hit Joe Saari, hit him under the chin and lifted him from the floor, dropping him in a heap halfway across the room. It was the foot of Bert Winslow. He had leaped suddenly to the next rafter, caught it with his hands and swung the whole momentum of his body into that kick. Then he released his hold and dropped down on the dazed thug. Forgotten was the agony of the wounded shoulder.

"Quick!" he ordered. "The blankets! We'll gag him. There! That's it! Now tie another around his feet. Got any rope? That sheet will do. Here! Tie his hands while I hold them!" The girl obeyed rapidly; quick-witted in emergencies, she was. In a moment Joe Saari was helpless on the floor.

Bert Winslow turned to the girl. "I'll have to go now," he said. "Thanks for what you did for me." He extended a hand. Then: "Those other thugs wouldn't touch you, would they?" he demanded anxiously.

"They will now," the girl answered. "Joe'll tell them that I had you hidden. They might do anything to me if you get away. We'll have to go together." As she spoke she had caught up a coat and turned toward the door. "Quick! I hear them coming."

Her quick ears weren't quick enough. Already Pete Saari and Wert were approaching around the next shack, their huge figures looming black in the night. "Joe?" called the gangster. "Joe, what's the racket?"

"It's not Joe," answered the girl, pulling Winslow behind her. Her voice was steady. "Joe heard some one down the line and took after him. It's just me. I'm going up to tell Phil it's safe to come back."

"Where'd Joe hear——" began Pete Saari. His words were checked by a crash inside the shack. Instantly there was a flare of yellow light. Joe Saari had rolled against the table and knocked the lamp to the floor in an effort to warn his companions that Winslow was escaping. Instinctively Pete Saari and Wert leaped to the door and into the shack.

"Up, quick!" cried the girl. "There're cleats on the end of the shack. Follow me!" Already she was scrambling up the makeshift ladder. Winslow followed on her heels, setting his teeth on the pain which tore him each time he raised his left arm.

FROM the roof of the shack the girl leaped out into the darkness. "Come!" she called. Not knowing the distance, Winslow jumped too far and crashed heavily against a granite wall. Momentarily he was dazed and dropped limply to a narrow ledge. Just as he was toppling off the girl caught him.

"Keep hold of me!" she ordered. "We must climb fast!"

Stumbling, slipping, crashing against the side wall, Winslow followed up the steep ledge. Perhaps two hundred feet the two had climbed before a warning shout below told them they had been discovered. Already the shack, dried to so much tinder by the desert sun, was blazing, casting great pinnacles of flame to the sky, outlining in shadow and glare each gash of the

cañon walls. Silhouetted on the roof of the burning hut two figures posed for a second, then leaped across to the ledge.

"Wait a minute!" gasped Winslow. "Let me get outside you! They'll hit you sure; we're easy targets."

"No! The light's treacherous. But they're coming after us. Ouch!" A bullet chipped a piece from the granite wall, throwing the sharp bits in her face. "If we can get around the turn we're safe. Hurry! They're close behind!"

Indeed the pursuers were close; the clatter of their feet on the rock ledge sounded above the crackle of the fire. Suddenly the ledge switched back on itself. Winslow, crowding close after the girl, almost toppled off into space. He caught himself and scrambled ahead. The girl had stopped.

"Pull out this plank!" she ordered. "Quick! Here!" She guided his hand.

Wondering, Winslow tugged at the heavy board. For a moment he couldn't move it, then it tore away with a jerk. There was a sharp crack, a moment's silence and then a rumble, increasing in volume. Down the cañon wall started a miniature landslide. Rock bounded from the face of the mountain, tons of dirt rasped over the granite.

Winslow was stunned for a moment. Then he realized that the girl was crying joyfully. "We're safe now!" she said. "Good old Phil! He undermined that granite butte in case he was chased. Or if I was either. He didn't trust those Saaris. Look! The ledge is buried under tons of rubble. And they've stopped shooting now. They think we've crashed down, maybe. Or maybe they're wondering about the two who were chasing us. Oh, you ruffians!" she called out into the night. "Come and get us now!"

She seemed actually gleeful up there on the mountainside, above that cañon which glowed red in the flames of the burning shack. But her happiness was hysterical, Winslow realized; she had held up under the strain of the last hour and now was breaking in her relief.

He reached out and caught her hand to steady her. For a moment the two gazed in awe at the sight below them.

It might have been a scene from hell. Dust and smoke mingled in a cloud over the cañon. The fire from the shack had spread to those adjoining and flames were roaring high into the night, carrying great embers upward. Grotesque shadows chased across the cañon floor; human figures dashed back and forth. Cries rose faintly above the demoniacal laughter of the flames. Suddenly there was an explosion and a great pinnacle of flame shot up.

"That's the still," cried the girl. "It was in the ore crusher. The building is full of grain. It'll all go now; the whole settlement is doomed."

"Yes," Winslow agreed. "It'll all go. And the fire may start up the mountainside. If it does it'll lick the mountain clean."

"I don't think it will spread," the girl declared. "The cañon is a regular rock furnace. Let's stay and watch it."

WINSLOW did not wish to leave; he was enjoying these moments with this girl, stolen moments of rest after the agonizing, exhausting hours of the night; moments during which he could stand hand in hand with the girl and feel the bond between them growing ever stronger.

"Is there any way those thugs can get up here?" he asked. "They have run from below; they know it's all doomed."

"They'd have to go around by the desert and then up Three Palms Cañon. But that's a trip of hours. No, we're safe. The Saaris know this fire will show for miles; it will bring in desert people from all directions. They've fled for their own safety. Look! The crusher is toppling!"

With a roar and a crashing of timbers the great boxlike structure disintegrated; again embers shot toward the pin-point stars, scattering in their descent. Shack after shack caught the flames, each one a miniature torch which flared briefly in the night, then expired with a crash.

Suddenly a new light showed on the mountaintops, pale at first, the mere suggestion of brightness. Then it crimsoned.

"Dawn," called the girl. "Come, we must go on up to Phil."

Phil again! Winslow hated the man without seeing him, hated him for the hold he had on this girl.

"What will this—this Phil do now?" he hazarded. "His hiding place is gone. He's a—a fugitive, isn't he?"

The girl's embarrassment, her resentment, were obvious. "Yes, he's a fugitive." She faced Winslow, suddenly determined to trust him, tell him the whole story. "He stole money. From his employer. Oh, you know the old story. Thought he would put it back later and all that. They caught him and tried to make him pay it back. He couldn't; we'd spent the money. They were going to make an example of him. We fled to the desert. They traced us and we had to go on.

"Then we found the deserted settlement. We thought we could stay there until they stopped looking for him. It was good for Phil, the outdoors and all. His lungs aren't strong. We were getting along all right, and then the Saari gang came. They started a still in the ore crusher; sold moonshine liquor to the miners at Randsburg and Johannesburg.

"But they left us alone as soon as they found out we were outlaws like themselves. All except Joe; he was always bothering me." The girl's voice broke; there were tears in her eyes. "Oh, it's all been horrible. I think—yes, I know—it would be easier for Phil to go back and face arrest. Only he wouldn't live six months in jail. I don't know——"

Winslow thought over the story in silence for a few moments. Then: "You said something about restitution," he said. "Would they let him off if he paid back what he stole?"

"I think so, because they know imprisonment would mean his death."

"How much did he take?"

"About three thousand dollars; oh, more than we'll ever be able to save."

"Mrs. Sterne, you saved my life. No, no, there's no doubt about it. And of course you saved my gold, too. I want to turn it all over to you."

"Thank you," the girl said. She turned to him, smiling gratefully. "Of course we couldn't take it," she declared with finality. "Not from an utter stranger."

"Utter stranger?" repeated Winslow. "Are we utter strangers, Mrs. Sterne, after this night together? Could an ordinary lifetime bring two people much closer than we have been? You must take the gold! It's cheap enough payment for my life."

"You're a regular fellow," the girl declared. "Only we couldn't do it. I wouldn't and Phil wouldn't."

THAT was a poser and Winslow considered it a moment. "Suppose we try this way," he suggested. "I was going to buy a ranch near Independence with my money, but three thousand as a down payment will get it. We'll use the other three thousand dollars to—to release Phil. Then the two of you come and help me run the ranch, work it out, perhaps. There's a little tenant house you could have. Don't you see?" He was pleading earnestly now. "I must do something; I owe my life to you. You'll consent, won't you, Mrs. Sterne?"

The girl decided things quickly. That was her way. "If you'll really let us work, we will," she said. "And if you'll stop calling me Mrs. Sterne."

"But—but Phil——"

"Is my brother, of course. Here he comes now."

Winslow looked up the mountainside. He expected to see a big, lawless fellow; in reality a slender young man was coming toward him, a mere boy with blue eyes.

"Your brother!" repeated Bert Winslow. He gulped, stammered, tried to speak and gulped again. Then the girl's laughter rang out, clear, infectious.

"Are you withdrawing your offer, Mr. Man?" she asked. "Do I have to be married? Are you afraid of me now that I'm single?"

"Yes! Yes, scared to death!"

But he reached out for her hand, nevertheless. "Maybe we can mend that 'single' business," he said under his breath.

Seventeen Vertical

By Robert H. Rohde

Author of "The Isle of Missing Masters," "Providence Goes Wrong," Etc.

A little out of his line—cross-word puzzles—but the Great Macumber discovers a new use for them.

IN a secretarial career that obviously could not have been a long one, Miss Amy Lennon had adventured through worlds of dictation far removed from the flights of Yours-of-even-date-received correspondents.

I know she had served a consulting engineer, a chemist, a college professor, a lawyer and a physician. Also, if newspaper chronicles of her astonishing triumph did not exaggerate, a naturalist and a clergyman and a curator of anthropology had held places in her past.

At any rate, it was only after a most variegated preparation among the lesser professions that Miss Lennon came to vaudeville—to be declared at first sight by the connoisseur, Macumber, as by all odds the most attractive of all the well-favored young women inhabiting the wide spaces of the Consolidated Booking Offices.

So this girl's exaltation, when suddenly it came to pass, was all the more amazing to those who knew her at such distance as the Great Macumber and I.

I knew that Miss Lennon had become addicted to the cross-word puzzle. Her thralldom was secret from no one connected or concerned with the C. B. O. When her slender fingers were not flying over the keyboard of her typewriter they would be holding a pencil poised above a sheet covered with those tantalizing black-and-white squares which over one fateful week-end had shot dictionaries and books of synonyms into the top rank of best sellers.

In a way, the Great One and I approved. We had admired Amy Lennon from afar as a work of art, and we were agreed that mild mental exercise would probably not prove harmful to her. So far as concerned the cross-word puzzle craze in other manifestations, we stood as neutrals. In its earliest stage we had briefly been victims; but a rising intimacy

with the great god Ra and the slothful ai bred inevitable contempt, and within a week our shackles had fallen away.

Our mutual defection didn't exactly halt the march of the gnu or the flight of the roc. Mah jong's erstwhile popularity was scattered to the four winds as up-to-the-minute America leagued itself into cross-word clubs. Then came a national association, and a tournament that packed New York's biggest armory.

On the morning following the tournament I disgraced myself in the Rawley grill by turning over a pot of coffee. I had picked up a newspaper to discover that a cross-word queen had been crowned —and the face that smiled dreamily up at me from the *Standard's* front page was Amy Lennon's!

LATER in the day we had business in the office, and Macumber offered congratulations to the girl who had been acclaimed possessor of the country's richest vocabulary. She accepted the kudos modestly.

"I really had an unfair advantage," she said. "I mean, my amateur standing might have been challenged. You see, I've worked for men who between them must know about all the technical words in the English language—and use them. Naturally I've become familiar with them. Sometimes I'm afraid I'll never be able to forget them. But it was fun just to wander among words for a year or two."

The Great One, whose own vocabulary is a fearsome thing seemingly developed on the principle that short words should never be used when long ones can be made to serve, asked a characteristic question. Did cross-word eminence have a cash value?

Miss Lennon smiled.

"I'm wondering myself," said she. "They gave me a perfectly gorgeous cup at the armory last night—and now I'm waiting to see if anything else happens."

That something had happened, and something not altogether agreeable, I read in Amy Lennon's face when next we saw her. That was within the same week of her triumph over the cross-word cohorts in the Eighth Artillery Armory, on a day when we had decided finally to decline a summer tour. Seeing us in the C. B. O. reception room, the new sultana of synonyms rose hurriedly from her desk.

The Great One appeared not to notice the small frown, which had not quite vanished when she greeted us.

"How goes the puzzle market, lady?" he inquired. "Does fortune follow on the heels of fame?"

Miss Lennon accepted the place we had made for her between us on the suppliants' bench.

"I've been offered a chance to make a hundred dollars," she replied. "And there may be prospects of a great deal more."

I thought, myself, that the girl spoke dubiously, but Macumber was quick with a felicitation.

"One hundred dollars," he observed, "is a tidy pick-up. An excellent start toward wealth. I'm happy that your talent has won you more than an empty title—for I suppose it's the cross-word victory that brings the siller?"

Miss Lennon nodded.

"Nothing else, I'm sure."

"You'll doubtless earn the money easier than you earn it here," smiled the Great One.

"I—I thought I could. But I'm not so certain now."

"Tush! A body that can solve cross-word puzzles can construct them. I did it myself when the fever was on me. You'll soon discover the knack, Miss Lennon. Is it one of the newspapers that's seeking the champion's services?"

"No; it's a gentleman planning to publish a series of cross-word puzzle books. And I'm not worried about problems of construction, either, for I've made dozens of absolutely perfect puzzles for my own amusement.

"That isn't the idea. What I'm to be paid for—what I get the first hundred dollars for, at all events—is solving puzzles."

"It's a prize competition you're into, then?"

"Wrong! This is an out-and-out cash transaction. I solve nine puzzles, and I get the money. But, oh! what puzzles they've turned out to be! My head is reeling with them, and I'm almost ready to believe I'm being made the butt of a practical joke. But if that's the case, why should Mr. Bantry have insisted on paying me fifty dollars in advance? Tell me that, please!"

Macumber lifted a pleading hand.

"This must be another one who takes our mind-reading act seriously, lad!"

"But if it isn't a joke," persisted Miss Lennon, brushing away the interruption, "why shouldn't he have met me at his office this morning? Wasn't it he who made the appointment?"

AND now the Great One raised two hands.

"Please, lady! I'll have to know who Mr. Bantry is before I can presume to answer questions concerning him. Won't you be good enough to explain that? And also tell me why he wants cross-word puzzles solved at the rate of a hundred dollars for nine?

"This last sounds fair mysterious to me. I never heard of such a thing. Where does this prodigal hail from?"

"He has an office in the Bonner Building, just around the corner. Room 1105. He seems to have plenty of money; and he's sure he can make more out of cross-word puzzles, even though he's no expert himself. Why he wants me to work out the ghastly nine in there on my desk I can only explain as he explained.

"In the first place, you must understand that I never saw or heard of Mr. Bantry until yesterday. He called me by telephone here in the morning and introduced himself. Said he could put me in the way of making a great deal of money, and invited me to come to his office.

"The talk sounded businesslike enough, and so, at noon, I ate luncheon quickly and paid him a visit. His office is just a single room containing nothing but a desk and a couple of chairs. Mr. Bantry seemed prosperous, though. He was very well dressed—a man about forty, I should say, with sandy hair and a long nose like a tapir's.

"I've been thinking since, that there was something peculiar about him at the beginning. In his attitude, I mean. He should have been expecting me, and yet he didn't seem to know who I was. When I told him he acted as if he were surprised; and he was almost insulting.

"'Don't tell me *you're* the puzzle champ!' he burst out. 'No, no! You'll never make me believe it! Miss Lennon is going to be somebody wearing spectacles and carrying a bag of dyspepsia tablets!'

"Naturally I was cool, and Mr. Bantry quickly changed his tone.

"'Maybe,' he said, 'you could take all that for a compliment. I was flabbergasted not to see a typical schoolma'am. And I still can't believe you've got all the words in your head that the papers talked about. You'll have to show me!'

"I said I thought that could be done, but that I understood it was a puzzle constructor he wanted.

"'And that's what I do want,' he shot back. 'What I'm willing to pay well for. But when it comes to letting go of money, I'm from Moberly. I want to see what I'm getting.

"'Look here, Miss Lennon—if that's really who you are. I'm showing you a batch of puzzles. Put on your thinking cap and run over 'em for me. Let me see what you can do. I won't hold any watch on you, like they did at the shindig the other day; all I want is to have you show me your stuff.'

"Mr. Bantry had pushed across his desk the nine puzzles I'm weeping over yet. Looking them over quickly, I was surprised to see they were all of the same design—and that far from a good one. There were too many black squares, for one thing, and the pattern violated the association's rule calling for an all-over interlock. I told Mr. Bantry so at once.

"'Never mind rules,' he said. 'I'm asking for action. Do 'em!'

"I accepted the challenge and asked for a pencil. Not many minutes had passed,

before I realized I was being put to a really hard test. Finding myself held up on the first puzzle, I turned to another and then to a third. I couldn't complete these, either—not offhand.

" 'Your constructions are very interesting,' I told Mr. Bantry finally. 'They're so far out of the ordinary that it would likely take me hours to work a solution.'

" 'Take the hours, then,' he said. 'I'll pay for 'em. Bring me the answers and you get a hundred dollars—and I won't ask you to throw in any puzzles of your own. If you think my way of doing business is peculiar, just remember that after all a man with money to spend is entitled to get what he wants in the way he wants it.'

" 'Here's a fifty-dollar retainer that says I'm on the level. Drop it in your purse. Come in as soon as the puzzles are done. Then you'll get the second fifty and we'll talk more business.' "

Miss Lennon delved into the bag she had brought to the reception room with her and produced one ten-dollar and two twenty-dollar bills folded together.

"The money looks to be real," she said.

"Aye," nodded Macumber. "There's no doubt you're fifty dollars richer than you were before meeting Mr. Bantry. That was yesterday, you say? Well, how many of the nine puzzles remain unsolved?"

"Nine," sighed the cross-word queen. "And I'm wondering if I'm going to have to give the fifty back."

"Did Bantry make the suggestion?"

"N-o-o. I haven't talked with him since our first meeting."

"But I thought you said he'd made an appointment with you."

"I'll tell you how that was. He telephoned here this morning before I'd come in. I found a message asking me to come to his office at once. It being so near, I got permission to run out for a few minutes.

"Mr. Bantry's room was locked and there was no answer to my rap. I have his phone number, and I've called him at least half a dozen times since I returned."

"Hm-m!" grunted the Great One. "A curious business. Are you sure the man left no note for you? It might have been pinned to the door and later fallen to the floor, you know."

"I thought of that. There wasn't any note. I'm sure." The girl hesitated. "Perhaps you'd have better luck than I, Professor. Wouldn't you like to see the puzzles?"

"I'd much rather see Mr. Bantry, I'm thinking," said Macumber, springing up. "Come, youngster, we'll find out if the generous gentleman hasn't any more puzzles to farm among his friends at the rate of nine for a hundred.

"Room 1105, Bonner Building, eh? Then we should be back within the half hour, Miss Lennon—and I suspect there'll be something interesting."

THE Great One's eyes asked a question when we were in the elevator.

"I can't see much of a mystery in the case of Mr. Bantry," I remarked. "My mind was made up in regard to him many minutes ago."

"Well, now," clucked Macumber, "I'll confess you have an advantage over me. Would you be pleased to share your thoughts, lad?"

"Bantry," said I promptly, "is nothing more nor less than a masher. I was going to say an ordinary masher, but of course he's proved himself better than that.

"I dare say that Miss Lennon's photograph attracted him when the newspapers were broadcasting her victory, and that he resolved to scrape an acquaintance with her by hook or crook. The obvious method, he decided, would be by way of a mutual interest in the cross-word puzzle fad. And it struck him as good strategy to present himself to her attention in the rôle of prospective employer."

"Very clearly reasoned," smiled the Great One. "And how, lad, do you account for the extreme difficulty of the puzzles in the case? D'ye think that the man calculated to endear himself to Amy Lennon by giving her problems beyond her ken?"

"He'll be the one to ask about that,"

said I. "Here's the Bonner Building—and hadn't we better begin thinking how to explain our call?"

"That's something I'll not worry about until I'm certain he's returned to his office. What I'd figured on was making a few discreet inquiries of building officials and fellow tenants."

"Somehow," I said, "I've been gathering a hunch that we're going to find Mr. Bantry. I have a sort of feeling that——"

Macumber cut me off to address the Bonner Building elevator starter in regards to our visit.

"Bantry?" the man repeated. "Yes; he's a new tenant. Sublet a furnished office on the eleventh floor last week. No, I don't know what business he's in. What's yours? Oh—thanks! Thank *you*, sir!

" 'Fraid I can't tell you anything that's worth a five-spot. Yes; I remember seeing him this morning. Very early he came in. Ought to be up there now. Leastwise I didn't notice him go out."

The Great One stepped into the elevator.

"Wait here, lad," he said. " 'Twill be better not to march on our friend in regimental formation. A single stranger will upset him enough, I fancy."

My wait was a short one. It seemed that scarcely a minute had elapsed when Macumber was back. He wore a curious expression; his face was grave, intense—beyond that, inscrutable.

"Isn't he in?" I asked.

"He is."

"You saw him?"

"I did."

"What did he have to say?"

"Nothing."

"You saw him, and he wouldn't——"

"It was through his keyhole I saw him. But let questions go, youngster. We've come to a moment for action."

The Great One wheeled and darted into the street, leaving me staring after him. Almost at once he was back; and now a uniformed policeman trotted at his shoulder. Macumber swept me before him into an elevator.

It was the policeman who next peeped through the keyhole of Room 1105.

"Holy cat!" he cried, and then his blue shoulder sent the door crashing in.

Standing there agape on the threshold, I had my first and last view of the puzzling Mr. Bantry. He lay stretched out on the floor beside his desk, surrounded by a litter of papers.

I saw the long, oddly shaped nose that had sent Amy Lennon's thoughts to her cross-word zoo in her quest for a descriptive term. Under the twisted tapir nose a thin-lipped mouth was frozen in a snarl.

The next discovery made by my startled eyes uncovered the cause of Mr. Bantry's quiescence. A hunting knife had been driven to his heart—and left there.

II.

WITHIN an hour after our violent entry into his office the police had found another name for Mr. Bantry. His finger prints, checked at headquarters, revealed him as one "Frisco" Davies.

In life, it appeared, Davies had had other interests besides the publication of cross-word puzzle books. The records showed him at one time as a pickpocket, at another as a confidence operator.

When we called at the booking offices again our stay was brief. Miss Lennon, taking it for granted that we had found the Bonner Building room untenanted, agreed readily to let Macumber try his hand at the baffling puzzles.

Back at the Rawley, sitting side by side at the reading table, we examined them.

The puzzles were neatly drawn in pen and ink on sheets of coarse paper which had been torn severally at the ends. Many erasures in the unshaded boxes testified to the labors of Amy Lennon; and now only a few words had been permitted to stand.

There was no mark of authorship to be found, but each puzzle was titled in some such manner as "Ring-around-a-rosy" or "Menagerie Special." One bore the exhortation "Look out for Seventeen Ver-

tical," and to this particular definition the Great One gave a moment of study and reflection.

The definition given was "Homes of cliff dwellers." Miss Lennon, seeking a five-letter word to convey this meaning had resolved on "caves."

MACUMBER, after casting about for a synonym, tossed a puzzle to me and started work on another himself. Presently he gave it up as a bad job.

"I think we're wasting our time, lad," he said. "We can safely concede that Miss Lennon is better at cross words than the two of us put together. I don't believe these accursed things *are* bona-fide puzzles. Didn't suppose they were from the first, and now I'm convinced of it. Our angle of attack must be along other lines.

"Where did they come from? Now let's see what the paper tells us. No watermark, is there? Didn't expect there would be. It's cheap stuff. But I've seen paper like it. Aye, it comes to me now in a flash. D'ye mind the letter we got from our safe-blowing friend Murtree a couple of months since? Wasn't it written on this selfsame brownish stock?"

"Murtree," said I, "is in Sing Sing prison. You don't imagine that——"

"Why not?" demanded the Great One. "We've certainly the neatest of cryptograms to deal with here, and what more natural than a man walled in should resort to this devilish keen device to communicate with a friend in the outer world!

"Say what you will, to Sing Sing we go. We'll make the trip by motor—and at worst we'll have had a pleasant ride through a beautiful country for our pains."

And so, directly after luncheon, to Sing Sing we went. It was the chaplain whom Macumber sought on our arrival at the prison, and many minutes of desultory conversation between the two dragged along before the Great One approached the subject of our visit. He had let it be inferred that we had been motoring casually through the Westchester hills and had dropped in with nothing further in mind than a forgathering with an old friend.

Now, having circuitously led to discussion of cross-word puzzles, Macumber remarked:

"For a busy man, of course, the fad's an absurd thing to take up. There's no profit in it. But in a place such as this, padre, it could easily be a blessing. Have many of your prisoners, I wonder, discovered the nepenthe of the cross word?"

The chaplain shook his grizzled head.

"A few. But generally the men are not the type to interest themselves in mental gymnastics. Flanders, though—of course, he's an exception."

"The Flanders, you mean, of the Churchill Trust bond robbery?"

"He's the man. An extremely intelligent fellow."

"I've heard so. Only unintelligent thing I know of him doing was to permit himself to be caught. So he's turned puzzler, eh?"

"Yes; been hard at it for the last month. He's become quite an expert, it appears. Lately he's begun to construct his own puzzles."

"Is it possible, padre?"

"And more, Macumber, he's actually finding a market for them. A couple of weeks ago he made his start—sent a sample puzzle to an agent in New York, along with a letter saying he could arrange to supply constructions regularly if a buyer could be found.

"I was afraid Flanders was in for a disappointment; but upon my word, the agent wrote back that he had disposed of the first puzzle, which would be paid for on publication, and that he'd like to have more. Flanders has been working like a Trojan ever since. Only the other day he sent off quite a batch of constructions."

"They passed through your hands?"

"Certainly. It is one of my duties to censor all outgoing prison mail."

"I wonder," said the Great One after a little pause, "if you happen to recollect the name of Flanders' agent?"

The chaplain looked at him curiously.

"I'm afraid I don't."

"Nor the address?"

"Only that it was in New York City."

"You wouldn't have a record to refer to, padre?"

"No such records are kept—and I thank Heaven for not having the extra work piled onto me. But why, Macumber, do you——"

The Great One's face had fallen.

"A passing thought," he sighed. "The idea's of no importance. Come, lad. We've taken too much of the padre's time already. And we shouldn't be forgetting that if we don't start for town directly we might as well buy our taxi and run it oursel's!"

III.

WHEN we were at the Rawley again, Macumber stripped off his coat, rolled up his sleeves and smoking furiously hurled his mind once more against the problem of "Mr. Bantry's" cross-word puzzles. One after another he tried his luck with them, and all his strivings led only to an eventual confession of his defeat.

"I can supply all the horizontal words and all the vertical words," said he, "but there's no such thing as interlocking them. It simply can't be done.

"By gad, youngster, that will be the key!" cried the Great One. "Hasn't the tip been before our silly eyes this long time? Didn't the constructor say to look out for Vertical Seventeen.

"Now, let's see what we have. Take a sheet of paper, please. Write out the definitions of Vertical Seventeen—on *all* the puzzles. Just line 'em up, and put alongside the synonyms selected by Miss Lennon. I don't want to have a look until the job's finished. Don't speak to me until then."

Macumber, while I copied and tabulated, paced the room with swift, nervous strides. And he continued his pacing when I had passed over the result of my labors. The finished sheet, as the Great One eagerly scrutinized it, appeared thus:

VERTICAL SEVENTEEN

Constructor's Definition.	Miss Lennon's Synonyms.
Apostles	Disciples
A fastening	Bolt
Source of daily bread	Labor
Homes of cliff dwellers	Caves
Witless (slang)	Nutty
With the red rose	Thorns
Ties	Ropes
Figure	Shape
Select	Choose

For five minutes Macumber walked with this tabulation; for another five minutes he sat with it; and then again his fist thumped the table.

"What stupid asses we both are!" he grunted.

"In what particular way, maestro?"

"We refuse to back our own judgment—insist on butting our heads against a wall. First we decide that these puzzles aren't puzzles, and then it's as puzzles we try to solve them. We keep our eyes always on those meaningless squares. We say that this synonym must have five letters and that one seven. Nothing else will do.

"Aye, I'd stake my good right eye that these boxes are but a blind—that the solution's in the definitions. Hand me that pencil, quickly, and go back to your reading."

The Great One's burst of industry outlasted my reading matter. Coming to Finis and suddenly conscious of a ravenous appetite, I suggested a recess for dinner. Macumber shook his head.

"No, no!" he protested. "I'm on a warm trail. I'll not argue with you. Be off. Dine alone!"

I stood for a little, irresolute, and then without another word walked out. When I returned there was no Macumber. A hastily scrawled note lay on the table:

"Q. E. D. You'll hear from me later."

The hour then was shortly after seven. At ten the Great One's voice came to me over the telephone.

"Meet me in Sherman Square—at the subway station," he directed. "Start at once, and I'll be there by the time you

arrive. Better drop your pistol in your pocket. Bring mine, too. In my haste I failed to think of it, and as a result I've been courting heart failure since."

From Times Square to Sherman Square was a through run on the subway express. Within ten minutes after I had spoken to Macumber over the telephone I stood at his side. His eyes were sparkling.

"No, I'm not going to spoil the show by answering questions, lad," he said. "And for the matter of that, I'm not so sure that to-night'll be the night. I'm only giving an unknown friend credit for an intelligence equal to my own."

The Great One rested a hand on my arm and steered me east toward the park. In a street beyond the elevated railway he dodged into a tunnellike corridor running through the basement of an old-fashioned residence which appeared quite recently to have been remodeled into an apartment house. A low whistle called me.

Macumber struck a match to light our way through the passage, and carefully extinguished it as we emerged into a rear court. A wooden fence divided the court; and this the Great One calmly proceeded to scale, giving me a hand up from above.

"Now one more fence, and a higher climb," he whispered.

Beyond the second fence arose the rear wall of a building that shouldered a couple of stories above its neighbors. A fire escape ran down the wall, and I perceived that the lowest ladder was down.

"I borrowed a bit of clothesline to keep the thing from snapping back out of reach," explained Macumber. "Didn't want to have that first struggle all over again.

"Up we go, youngster—and on your tiptoes, mind. Some misunderstanding soul might shoot first and leave questions for the police to ask. Or the coroner."

Three stories up, I toiled, with my heart in my mouth. Then the Great One, leading the way, suddenly vanished from my sight. I would have climbed higher, but a hand thrust from a window restrained me.

"In here, youngster. This is where we spend the night. Comfortable enough diggings—if you don't object to being without light."

And that, during the long wait, was the last word I had out of him. Macumber had guided me to a couch, and there I sat in a gloom that seemed little less profound after my eyes had become accustomed to it. The Great One had closed the window and drawn the shade; and it was only indistinctly that I could make out his long figure lolling in a rocker beyond what looked to be a dining-room table.

Several times I thought I heard noises, and then my hand would dart automatically to the pocket which sagged under the weight of my pistol. But these, as I discovered, were false alarms. No light appeared, no steps came near; merely the noises occurred and ceased.

OUR vigil must have endured at least two hours when, at a sound, I saw Macumber straighten. And at that the hand which went to my coat pocket came out clutching the gun.

There had been a scraping as of a key uncertainly groping for a lock. For perhaps a minute this scraping continued. Then there came an emphatic click. Hinges creaked. I felt a draft. A door had opened and closed.

A hand touched my shoulder, and it took all my resolution to restrain a startled shout. The hand was Macumber's. It drew me into a curtained alcove.

"The big show's on," breathed the Great One. "Listen!"

Soft-falling footsteps were approaching us—along some sort of entrance corridor, I judged. I heard another staccato click that might have been the snapping of a light switch. Another scraping.

A match flickered and behind it a bulky silhouette was briefly illuminated. A man of vast proportions was coming from a hallway into the room where Macumber and I waited. I caught a flash of metal in his hand—a weapon of some sort, but whether it was knife or gun I couldn't make out.

His hand groped along the wall.

"Hell!" growled a heavy voice.

A moan answered—a blood-chilling moan. And even the instant knowledge that Macumber had been responsible for it did not prevent the ice from traveling my spine.

I could see the wide figure of the intruder stiffen. He stood frozen, listening.

Beyond him I was conscious of dawning light; rather of a faint, wavering radiance. The big man had seen this too. Still rooted, he was staring at it. He struck a second match, and the hand that held it was shaky.

"God! What was that?"

Craning over the match, he walked toward the wall against which the glow had appeared. He seemed to find comfort in the solid sound of his own voice, for he spoke again.

"Nothing. Nothing. Now where the devil's the kitchen?"

The match was flickering out. It fell to the floor, and a heel ground the sparks into the rug. From the angle of his head I knew our midnight visitor was following this operation with his eyes.

My eyes, too, were on the sparks; and when I raised them I was close to echoing the cry of stark animal terror that rang suddenly through the room.

On the wall where the glow had been was now a vast, grinning skull, flaming like a brand from the pit.

Another scream fairly shook the room.

"Frisco! Leave me be! Go back to hell where you belong!"

There was a flash, a report, a rain of crashing plaster. Then, with a single spring Macumber was on the big man's back. They crashed to the floor together, and as I launched myself into the scrimmage I was aware of lights flaring on and of men who wore shields rushing on to the battle.

IV.

I HAVE told here—for the first time in detail—the exact circumstances of the arrest of "Big Dan" McGrory. The trial of McGrory for the murder of Frisco Davies is now remote; but it may be recalled that the defendant, suddenly abandoning his repudiation of the confession made under spur of fright that morning in the Lancaster Apartments, saved himself what seemed an inevitable trip to the electric chair and accepted with resignation a deserved sentence of life imprisonment.

This sudden change in Big Dan's attitude spared Macumber the necessity of testifying; so the story of the Churchill Trust bonds as the Great One told it to me will still be fresh to the reader.

Neither Macumber nor I cared to linger long after the detectives, who had been concealed in the front part of the apartment through the night, had started for headquarters with their prisoner. We left it for the owners of the Lancaster to repair the damage to the wall done by McGrory's bullet and to erase the phosphorescent lines of the quite harmless death's-head which had served so well to break his nerve,

At the Rawley, over a Scotch and soda or two, the Great One rehearsed the story for my benefit.

"Our visit to Sing Sing, after all," said he, "was not so great a failure as we thought. At least I came away knowing that Sid Flanders was the author of Amy Lennon's puzzles. That meant, of course, that the cryptogram concealed in them referred to the Churchill Trust bonds—and that the solution was worth something like three hundred thousand dollars. For Flanders had managed to conceal the loot before his arrest and at the trial he stood pat, asserting they had been stolen in turn from him.

"And we've heard from McGrory, a while since, the story of the puzzles. Flanders, under an alias, held a lease on the apartment at the Lancaster and the rent was paid in advance for a considerable period. The bonds were hidden there, and for the time being safe.

"Flanders' problem was to get his spoils out of the place before they should be discovered. He thought of Big Dan, who has an underworld reputation of being at

the one time a ruthless crook and a man of his word.

"So Flanders wrote to McGrory, addressing him on the subject of cross-word puzzles, and yet, concealing between the lines an overt proposition. Would Big Dan act as his agent in the recovery of the bonds and accept a split?

"McGrory's reply indicated he was glad to oblige. That meant his word; and Flanders could bank on coming from prison to wealth.

"But Davies had wind of the negotiations. He stole the cryptic puzzles from Big Dan, and then discovered to his dismay that he could make neither head nor tail of them. An expert must be appealed to—and the expert first to suggest herself was the girl of whom Frisco had been reading in the newspapers, the winner of the American cross-word championship. I think we can agree that the method employed by Davies in getting Miss Lennon to help him was novel—indeed, refreshing.

"From one point of view, it is really too bad that Davies was found by McGrory. His ingenuity should have entitled him to a better fate. And yet it's well for Miss Lennon that Frisco didn't get the bonds. Instead of being better off by fifty or a hundred dollars, she'll now collect many thousands. We must see, certainly, that the reward offered by the Churchill Trust Company goes to her."

I stared at the unthrifty Scot.

"Oh, certainly," said I. "But tell me, maestro, how did you expect McGrory to find his way to the Lancaster Apartments when we had the puzzles?"

"We had *one* set of puzzles, lad. Did you for a moment think that Davies would have failed to keep copies with such a fortune at stake? And it was obvious his pockets had been rifled after the killing.

"Did you not notice the character of the papers strewed about him? Were they not envelopes and letters and such other items as a man will carry on his person?"

"They were," I admitted.

"So you know it all now, youngster?"

"Barring only the extremely unimportant question of how *you* found the trail to the Lancaster," I said feebly. "Of course I know you got the answer from the puzzles. But how in the name of——"

The Great One grinned and spread a sheet of paper on his knee. It was the sheet I had prepared at his direction the night before.

Now, cross-word puzzlewise, the synonyms offered by the gorgeous champion had been erased and others substituted. And there had been one other characteristic alteration which I will permit the reader to observe for himself. Now the tabulation appeared in this manner:

VERTICAL SEVENTEEN

Constructor's Definition.	Macumber's Synonyms.
Apostles	Twelve
A fastening	Lock
Source of daily bread	Oven
Homes of cliff dwellers	Apartments
Witless (slang)	Nobody home
With the red rose	Lancaster
Ties	Bonds
Figure	Number
Select	Pick

Macumber grinned, as I frowned over his revisions.

"And you don't get it yet?" he jeered. "Try shaking your words about a bit. Here, have the pencil. Figure it out. Ah, the light comes on!"

Need I write here the message I evolved from Macumber's synonyms?

Lancaster Apartments. Number twelve. Nobody home. Pick lock. Bonds (in) oven.

Why, certainly!

A Chat With You

WE do not flatter ourselves. We are the victims of no illusion. We know that before you turn to these pages you have exhausted everything else in the magazine. This is the last resort. When out of reading matter, naturally you turn here.

So we may discuss with you freely—knowing that you have read it all through—the one-hundred-and-ninety-page magazine that precedes this talk. What do you think of it anyway? So far as we know we are giving the biggest value for the money in the fiction market. But do you feel that way about it? Speak up.

* * * *

EVERY town of any account in the United States has its bookstore. And in these bookstores works of fiction ranging in length from sixty to one hundred thousand words are sold regularly and in considerable quantity at two dollars a volume. They are worth it. There is no greater civilizing agent than good fiction. It is the one great medium through which people of varying birth and breed learn to understand each other. Music, sculpture, painting—all the great arts have their high and lofty place fixed for them and each has its own peculiar distinction. Fiction—the art of the narrative, the tale, the story, the account of the doings and mischances, the failures and triumphs of a man or woman setting out as an adventurer on this strange planet—to us this seems the most human and intimate of all the arts. Do you read stories? If you do and if they are of any value at all you are coming closer to an understanding of the riddle of mankind and the universe with every story you read.

* * * *

AND now let us look back for a moment over the magazine you have just read. It opens with a full, unabridged, book-length novel by William Morton Ferguson. When we say that this is a two-dollar book we are understating rather than overstating it. "Deep Water," as you know already, is worth more than most of the current works of fiction. Ever since the publication of "Garrison's Finish," almost a score of years ago, Mr. Ferguson has been in a class by himself. His mastery of the art of romantic narrative has become increasingly evident with each new story of his. "Deep Water" is a two-dollar novel. It is worth two dollars. It will be sold for two dollars between cloth covers for those who wish to keep it in permanent form. Other magazines may tell you that they are giving you a real novel in each issue, but THE POPULAR originated that idea and is the only magazine in a position to carry it out. It costs more to send this magazine to press than any other all-fiction magazine.

* * * *

FERGUSON, McBlair, Holman Day, Montanye, Edgar Wallace, Jack O'Donnell, Marshall and Rohde have all helped to make up this issue of the magazine. The novel alone is worth buying it for, but the short stories are just as interesting and just as desirable. Go back over the magazine and if there is anything in it

you don't like tell us about it. And if there is anything in it you do like especially, by all means tell us about it. We want to hear from you.

* * * *

A MAGAZINE, to be edited well, should have more than one editor. As a matter of fact it should have four or five hundred thousand editors. This is the age of democracy. Whether we like it or not the dictators, the autocrats are going by the board. If you want to know the name of the editor of this magazine—you will not find it displayed at the top of the contents page. Don't look for it anywhere in the magazine. Look for it rather on your own business or visiting card—for *you* are the editor. Only one of them, you say? Yes, but you count just as much as any other, and it is up to you how much your influence is felt. So write in, if you are interested, and tell us what you think.

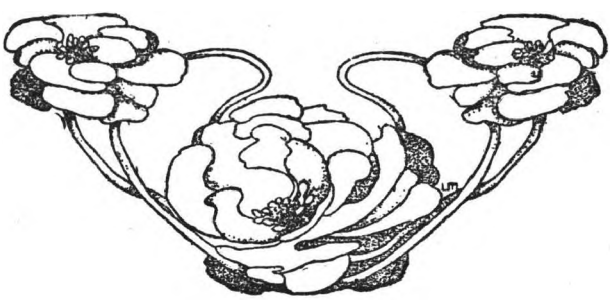
* * * *

WE open the next number with a book-length novel by B. M. Bower. We know, we have an abiding faith, that you as an editor approve of this. How many books by B. M. Bower have you read? Quite a few. How many were worth two dollars in story satisfaction? All! And you must take our word for it that this new one is just as good as any of the others. You have only two weeks to wait. In two weeks from now you may judge for yourself.

* * * *

AS you probably know already it is a story of the West. The "Adam Chasers" are people who are in search of fossil remains of prehistoric mankind. In their search they find a lot of other things besides fossils—adventure, romance, mystery—things like that!

This book is far from being the whole of the magazine. It is only a small part of it. T. S. Stribling is there with a wonderful short story. Then there are Ernest Douglas, Robert Russell Strang, C. Maxwell, Mildred Fitz-Hugh, Edgar Wallace, Mark Reed, R. K. Culver and James French Dwyer. Altogether we think it the sort of magazine that you would have made up yourself had you been sitting here. And may we suggest that you order in advance from the news dealer? We want to hear your verdict.



The Magic of Print

THE old-patent-medicine fakir knew well the magic of print. And the army of quacks who followed him have made use of the same magic. Most men and women accept without question *printed* statements which they might discredit were the same words *spoken*.

You will find quacks trailing along in the wake of every announcement of important medical research, with false claims of their "discoveries", their fake mechanical appliances and special treatments, their "health institutes" and their offers of free diagnosis and treatment by mail.

Millions for Fake "Cures"

Fake-medicine labels are more cautious than they used to be. The U. S. Government, through the Federal Food and Drugs Act, forbids false or misleading statements on the trade package. But this Act does not prohibit lying statements in advertisements, circulars, or window displays.

The vultures who prey on the sick advertise various remedies each guaranteed to cure a specific disease—tuberculosis, cancer, diabetes, kidney trouble, blood diseases, skin eruptions, epilepsy and almost every other serious ailment.

"Read the Label"

"DON'T take my word for it that this medicine will cure you! Don't take anybody's word! Read the label and see for yourself," the street corner patent-medicine fakir urged as he held up a bottle containing some colored liquid guaranteed to cure a long list of ailments and diseases. His confederate in the crowd asked to see a bottle—and then the sales began.

Sick folk are pitifully easy victims. They experiment and hope—tragically—until it is too late. Waiting even a few weeks to try out a new patent medicine or a course of treatments at some dubious "health institute", may mean death which might have been prevented by the right medical care.

Cancer and Consumption "Cures"

Of late there has been a renewed wave of advertising of specific cancer and tuberculosis "cures". No medicine has ever been found that can be depended upon to cure these diseases—despite seemingly substantiated claims of manufacturers. Testimonials count for little. Many quacks are still using testimonials signed by people who died years ago from the very diseases of which they claimed they had been cured.

When a cure for tuberculosis or cancer is found magazines and newspapers will shout the glorious news.

Do not be deceived by the magic of print. Avoid advertised "cures". If you are sick see your doctor.

Although no specific remedy for the cure of tuberculosis has been found at the time this is written and scientists are working constantly on the problem—there are literally hundreds of nostrums offered to the public as guaranteed cures.

Against this cruel exploitation of the sick, the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company invites the cooperation of editors and publishers everywhere.

It is true that the tuberculosis death rate has been reduced about 50% during the past 10 years and each year shows an improvement. This great battle is being won by a campaign of education through which people are being taught that although tuberculosis cannot be cured by medicine it can be prevented and even checked in its early stages and perhaps be permanently arrested—by fresh air, sunshine, rest and the right kind of nourishing food.

Booklets giving recent and authoritative information concerning Tuberculosis and Cancer will be mailed free upon request.

HALEY FISKE, *President*.

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