FINE CHRISTMAS STORIES

By H. DeVERE STACPOOLE & H. H. KNIBBS

SECOND JAN. NUMBER

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Holiday Number

The All-American Team Chooses the All-American Skate

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Clarkson Tech, right defense
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Bobby Giddens
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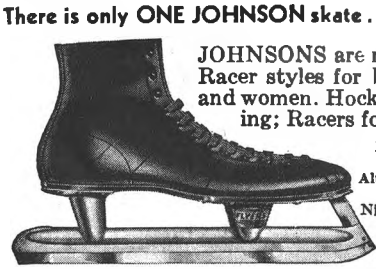

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H. DE VERE STACPOOLE and HENRY HERBERT KNIBBS

Don't fail to read them.

Volume XCVIII Number 3

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The Popular Magazine

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CONTENTS FOR SECOND JANUARY NUMBER

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They dared Officer Kane to play

..and his music held them spellbound

ETHEL'S house party was at its height—when suddenly there came an ominous knocking at the door. Ethel ran to open it and —there stood Police Officer Kane.

"I want to see the man of the house," thundered Kane.

"I'm sorry," stammered Ethel nervously, "but my father is not at home."

"Well, what's going on in here anyway?" continued the officer sternly. "Every one on the block is complainin' of the noise. I've a good mind to arrest the lot of you."

Ethel was mortified—what a disgrace!

"Oh, please," pleaded Ethel, "please don't do anything like that."

Then Kane burst out laughing.

"Don't worry, lassie—you were all havin' such a fine time I couldn't help droppin' in," he explained.

"Oh," sighed Ethel, "how you frightened me. Won't you join us?"

Kane Joins the Party

"Ha," laughed Kane, as the Victrola started again, "why must you play that canned music—can't any of you play this beautiful piano? Sure, I'd like to give you a tune myself."

"I dare you to play for us," shouted Ted Strong.

"I'm afraid I'll have to be goin'," stammered Kane, embarrassed.

"Mr. Kane, I think you might play for me after the fright you gave me," smiled Ethel.

"Well, b'gorry, maybe I will," agreed the officer. And as he sat down at the piano everyone laughed. But the noise stopped when he struck the first rollicking notes of the famous "Song of the Vagabonds."

"More—more." "That's great —play another," they all shouted as the last notes of that snappy march song died away. Kane then started that stirring old soldier song "On the Road to Mandalay," following it with song hits from the latest shows.

"Well," he laughed, as they finally let him get up from the piano, "I'll have to be on my way now."

"Thank you for your lovely music," said Ethel. "You must be playing a good many years?"

"Sure and I haven't been playin' long at all."

Then the questions came thick and fast, "How did you ever learn so quickly?" "When do you find time to practice?" "Who was your teacher?"

Kane Tells His Story

"Well, to tell you the truth I had no teacher. I've always loved music but I couldn't take regular lessons on account of my duties as a policeman. Then one evenin' I saw a U. S. School of Music advertisement, tellin' of a new way of learnin' to play. I didn't believe it myself but I sent for their Free Demonstration Lesson that showed me how easy it was, so I wrote for the whole course.

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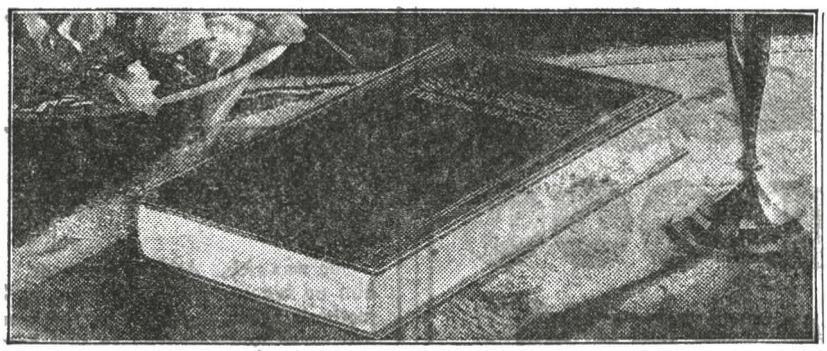

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One More Christmas

By Willard E. Solenberger

ACROSS the low Judean hills
Three Eastern wise men made their way
On camels, where a wondrous star
Led to a manger, filled with hay—

The cradle of a newborn Babe,
Whose mother wore a holy look;
While cattle gently lowed around
An awe-struck shepherd with his crook.

Then others came—you know the tale
Of treasured gifts from all the East;
Of kings uneasy on their thrones,
Because of Him whose pomp was least.

Two thousand years have nearly passed,
And yet that lowly manger birth
That wise men hailed, still weaves its spell—
"Toward men, good will; and peace on earth."

And men of every race and creed,
In lands around the seven seas,
Have felt the joys of Christmastide
And lived the richer, knowing these—

One day of days, when children's eyes
Are brighter; and men seek the art
Of giving gladly from their store
Of love within the human heart.

When Andrew Grayson, New York Multimillionaire, Was Sound, the Trouble

The "ZINGARA" MURDERS

CHAPTER I.

LADY OVERBOARD.

ABOUT one thirty of a July morning Stanley Nickols, head of the Willantic, Connecticut, police, turned his car into Rockland Drive, stopping for a while at the side of the road, lights switched out, to enjoy a quiet cigar. Parking, according to the signposts, was forbidden. But after all, a police official has some privileges. And Nickols wasn't stopping for a petting party. After some time the throb of an approaching motor cycle reached his ears. He grinned to himself, for he never wore a uniform and his car was so well concealed among the bushes that the patrolman would probably fail to recognize it, in which case the joke would be on him.

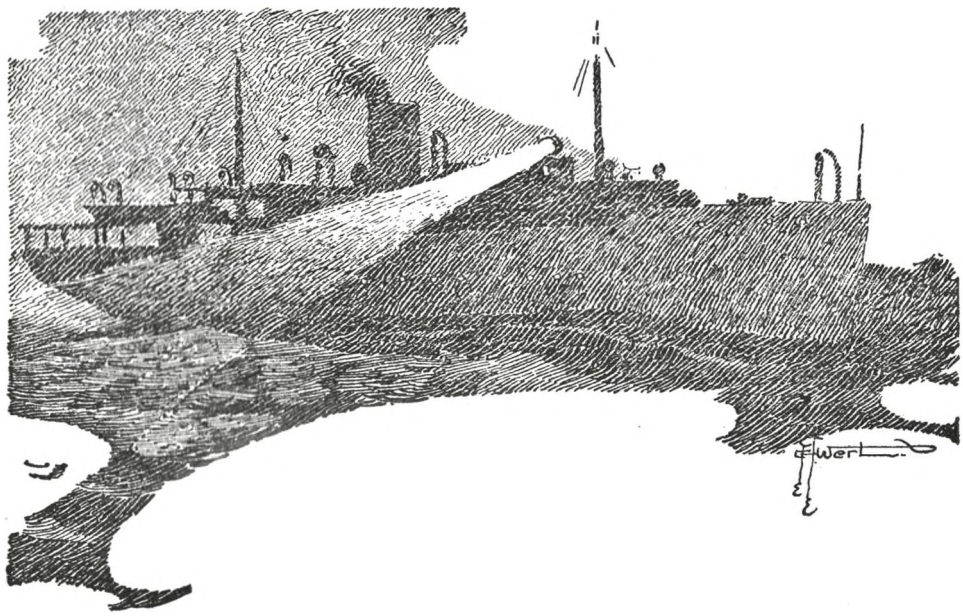
The motor-cycle headlight swung into view, illumining the half-hidden car; then the machine came up alongside, its sputter ceasing as a voice demanded gruffly:

"Hey! Can't you read—or don't you believe in signs?" The officer's pocket flash swept the interior of the car, whereupon he said, in quickly altered tones, "Oh, excuse me, chief! I didn't get you at first."

"All right, Jim," Nickols replied easily. "Anything doing?"

"Another hot party on the *Zingara*," the patrolman, one Jim Beesom, told him. The *Zingara* was a private yacht owned by a wealthy New Yorker named Andrew Grayson. It had been anchored in Rockland Bay since the first of the week. "A warm bunch of babies on that boat," Beesom continued. "A while

Killed as His Yacht, *Zingara*, Lay at Anchor in Long Island Had Only Started.



By METCALF JOHNSON

ago they were airing their tonsils with a ditty that went:

"'Oh, give us a drink, bartender, bartender,
For we love you, as you know.
And surely you will oblige us, oblige us,
With another drink or so!'

"Yes, sir, chief; a warm bunch. And I'll tell the world they got their drinks. Enough hard liquor on the *Zingara* to float a sharpie. Bet you they don't have to patronize Zeb Hoskins."

Hoskins was a local character of rather unsavory reputation. Ostensibly a lobster fisherman. Zeb, it was rumored, did not confine his stock in trade to the succulent crustaceans caught in his traps.

"Any guests from shore on the boat, do you know?" Nickols asked.

"Guess not. Just those Grayson brought with him. And it's *some* party. None of *our* business, though."

"No," Nickols agreed, "we've got other matters to worry about besides the *Zingara*."

Beesom went on his way, and Stanley Nickols drove slowly down the road until opposite the yacht's anchorage, perhaps a hundred yards offshore. At this point there was an old stone wharf, relic of the days when coastwise traffic had been important in Long Island Sound. Nickols discerned several small boats tied up at the wharf, and inferred that some of the *Zingara's* crew were on shore leave. Again he snapped off his lamps, and sat in the car, watching the yacht. Lights were turned low on the vessel.

Suddenly he heard a sharp feminine scream, followed by a splash.

"Girl overboard," Nickols thought. "Likely in no condition to swim, either." He left his car, running down a path to the wharf.

A confusion of shouts came from the *Zingara,* and several other splashes, probably of men plunging in to the rescue. Came the flat *plop* as a life preserver landed on the water; then sounds of swimming. More shouts, both from the boat and the water.

"Where is she?"

"Look out, Boris! That's my leg you've got. Let go!"

"Dive for her!" a woman's voice called frantically. "Do *something,* can't you?"

And so on—a chaos of tumult and misdirected effort. A creek emptied into Rockland Bay, draining a large salt marsh that lay back of the belt of higher ground bordering the shore. It was now ebb tide, and a strong current would be sweeping toward the Sound. Nickols recalled this as he hastily manned the oars of a dinghy and headed his craft at an angle beyond the yacht, about toward the spot where he judged a helpless person would be carried. This maneuver was well planned, but it chanced that one of the rescuers, seemingly actuated by greater intelligence than his friends displayed, had beaten Nickols to it.

"I've got her!" cried a crisp voice. "This way with that boat!"

A few lusty strokes put Nickols beside a man who supported a white-clad form. Suddenly they were bathed in a dazzling glare, as some one on the *Zingara* made belated use of the yacht's searchlight.

Nickols at first thought the girl unconscious; it was she herself who proved the contrary.

"I'm quite all right now, Larry. Thanks a lot!"

"Good enough! Grab the side of the dinghy—— Help her aboard, old chap!" This last was to Nickols.

With his aid she managed to scramble over the gunwale, half laughing, and chattering on excitedly.

"It's absurd to be such a bother. I'm frightfully sorry. Humiliated, too, for I've always thought myself a capable swimmer. But it all happened so quickly that I must have swallowed quarts and quarts of sea water—— I was in bad shape when you got to me, Larry."

"It was the hooch she swallowed, not the salt water, that really made the trouble," Nickols thought to himself. "Sober now—after the ducking." Aloud he said, "Do you feel better?"

She shivered violently, though the night was warm.

"I'm chilled through." The thin, filmy gown clung soggily to her, emphasizing every curve of an unusually graceful figure. Stanley Nickols, being no less susceptible than the average male, could not fail to observe this appreciatively.

"I say, Valerie," the swimmer interposed, "you ought to get into some dry togs right away." He was still clinging to the side of the dinghy, which had drifted some little distance from the *Zingara.* Comparative quiet now reigned on the yacht, with the assurance of a successful rescue. Nickols took up his oars.

"Want to come aboard yourself?" he asked the swimmer. "Tide runs strong here."

"I'll say it does. But I imagine I can make it, old chap. Thanks just the same. However, I'll stick by the dinghy, if you don't mind. If needed, you can give me a tow."

A few minutes later they were back at the yacht, where Valerie's friends, now that tragedy had been averted, were disposed to treat the affair as a huge joke.

"How's the water, Valerie?" was the solicitous inquiry of a man whose dinner clothes were conspicuously dry.

"Not being able to swim, I couldn't jump after you, old dear. Your loss and my gain."

"Thank you," Valerie said in a low tone to Nickols. Then, rather crossly as she mounted unaided to the deck, "Where's Carol? I want her to help me out of these soaking clothes."

The swimmer hesitated a moment beside Nickols, who was on the point of shoving off.

"I say, old chap," the swimmer said in surprise, "not leaving us, are you? Better come aboard the *Zingara* and have a peg. We might have had trouble out yonder, but for your timely help."

"Thanks, no," Nickols rejoined. "It's late, and I really must be getting on."

"As you say. Glad to have you stop if you care to. By the way, my name's Larry St. John." He pronounced it "Sinj'n."

"Mine is Stan Nickols, of the Willantic police. I happened to be on the shore drive in my car when the excitement started."

"I see." St. John's tone seemed to Nickols less cordial, as though voicing a vague resentment that an officer should be involved in affairs aboard the *Zingara*. "Well, if you'll excuse me I'll toddle up for a change."

As he rowed toward the shore Nickols was oppressed by an uneasy feeling that he might have missed a bet by declining St. John's invitation.

"Though naturally a police officer wouldn't be regarded as a welcome guest at a booze party," he reflected.

Nickols drove home and went to bed, to be awakened at about six by his telephone.

"Chief of Police Nickols?" a strange voice asked.

"Yes. What do you want?"

"This is Andrew Grayson's secretary speaking. I'm calling for Mrs. Grayson. Mr. Grayson has mysteriously disappeared from his yacht, and we're alarmed about him."

"When did you first miss Mr. Grayson?"

"Just a short time ago. We searched the boat, without success. Apparently he was last seen about the time Mrs. Orloff fell overboard."

"Where are you calling from?" Nickols next asked.

"I'm at Mr. William Gordon's cottage." This was a place west of the Norcross estate. "I haven't said as much to Mrs. Grayson," the speaker went on, "but I fear that Mr. Grayson might have gone overboard to help Mrs. Orloff, and been carried off by the current."

"That seems quite possible. Was he a good swimmer?"

"Much better than average. But expert swimmers occasionally drown."

"Especially with a skinful of questionable liquor aboard," Nickols told himself. Aloud he said: "I'll start an investigation right away. Probably Mr. Grayson is all right and will turn up in due course. We'll hope so."

Nickols at once took steps toward organizing searching parties to cover the near-by waters, though if Grayson had been drowned the chances of immediate success were not bright. The body would not come to the surface for several days, and there was a fair possibility that it had been carried out into the Sound by the strongly ebbing tide. Dragging Rockland Bay below the *Zingara's* anchorage seemed to offer the best prospects.

Having given the necessary orders, Nickols got into his car and headed for Rockland Drive, following the shore from the east. A thin fog hung over the water, and vaguely, through this gray blanket, Nickols perceived a gas boat coming in, recognizing it as the one Zeb Hoskins used when making the rounds of his lobster traps.

The boatman was steering directly

toward him, and Nickols stopped his car, planning to notify Zeb of Grayson's disappearance. Any man familiar with the set of tidal and shore currents would be a valuable aid in a search for the body.

Hoskins grounded his craft on a small sand beach close by Stanley's parked car, imperatively beckoning him to approach.

"By gad, he's found it already!" Nickols gasped, for huddled among the fishing equipment amidships he perceived a body.

"Got a floater for you, chief," Hoskins called callously. "Picked it up off the buoy on Tautog Reef. Who is it, d' you know?"

"Andrew Grayson, owner of that yacht up in the bay. We were just notified that he'd disappeared."

"Any reward offered?" Hoskins inquired shrewdly.

"Oh, you'll get something for finding him, no doubt."

Expertly Nickols went through the dead man's clothes, while Hoskins watched in silence. Keys, a small pearl-handled knife, some loose coins, a wallet containing fifty-odd dollars in bills, an expensive watch which had stopped running—doubtless due to action of salt water—and three soggy cigars—these comprised the results of the search. Nickols put the valuables in his own pocket.

"Now help me carry him up to my car," he told Hoskins. Then, abruptly, "What's this?" for, as he turned the body over, he noted a large discolored bruise at the base of the skull.

Hoskins grunted, staring.

"Good gosh, chief! I didn't see that before."

"How long ago did you find him, Zeb?" Nickols demanded.

"Ten or fifteen minutes. I started ashore right away, and then I saw your car going along the drive, so I steered for it."

"And the body was floating in the water?"

"That's correct."

"All right. Well, we've got to get the poor devil to town. Come on, Zeb."

Together they carried the body up to Stanley's car, placing it in the back. Hoskins turned to leave.

"Better stay with me, Zeb," Nickols said quietly. "Throw out an anchor to hold your boat."

A motor-cycle officer came along Rockland Drive as Zeb Hoskins rejoined Nickols.

"Stop at the first house and phone Doctor Brockett to be in his office," the chief of police ordered. "Then notify the folks on the yacht that Grayson's body has been found. After that, report back at headquarters."

"O. K., chief!" With a brisk salute the traffic officer started his engine and disappeared.

CHAPTER II.

AN ANONYMOUS LETTER.

DOCTOR JARIS BROCKETT, the coroner, was waiting in his office when Nickols and Zeb Hoskins arrived with the body. Brockett enjoyed a splendid reputation among his fellow physicians, truest test of a doctor's real worth and abilities.

Briefly the police official explained what he knew of events leading up to Grayson's sudden death.

"Then the inference seems to be," Brockett said, "that in diving from the yacht to rescue this woman, Grayson struck a floating timber and was killed."

"Something like that," Nickols admitted.

"Say, I've got work to do," Zeb Hoskins spoke up. "How about me beating it now, chief?"

"I think we'll have to hold you for a while, Zeb," Nickols told him—"until this thing is cleared up. You'll likely be wanted by the coroner as a witness."

Brockett nodded, and Hoskins glowered at them, displaying what seemed to them to be a wholly unnecessary resentment.

"There's really no occasion for you to act so abused, Zeb," the coroner rebuked him. "Our detaining you is largely a matter of form. I should say your duties can't be so vital but what they could stand a few hours postponement."

While they were talking, a stranger appeared. Obviously he was greatly perturbed.

"Wickham's my name," he introduced himself—"Ted Wickham. I'm Mr. Grayson's secretary, the man who phoned you this morning. I understand his body has been recovered."

"Yes," Nickols replied. "This lobster fisherman"—he indicated Hoskins—"picked it up off the mouth of the bay an hour ago."

"Have you searched the body?" Wickham demanded excitedly.

"Yes, as a matter of course. Here's what he had." And Nickols produced the articles taken from Grayson's clothes.

"Nothing else?" in tones of disbelief.

"That's all. Why?"

Wickham frowned.

"This looks serious, gentlemen," said he. "To my certain knowledge Mr. Grayson had on his person something over twenty-five thousand dollars in large bills, as well as a very valuable piece of jewelry, when he disappeared from the yacht last evening."

"H'm!" Nickols mused. "That does add complications, doesn't it?" His eyes strayed toward Doctor Brockett, and then the two of them glanced at Hoskins.

"What the hell you looking at me like that for?" Zeb protested hotly. "I ain't got the plunder!"

"Nobody's accusing you—yet," Nickols said. "Did you find any valuables on Grayson's body—other than those I removed?"

"No," was Zeb's sullen answer. "I didn't even look. Search me, if you think I've got the stuff."

"Naturally you wouldn't have it on you now," Nickols replied, unmoved; but none the less he went through Zeb's clothing, to which indignity the lobsterman submitted with ill grace. However, nothing was found.

"This man *must* have robbed Mr. Grayson's body," Wickham insisted. "No doubt he's had a chance to plant the booty in a safe place by now."

"The chief's been with me all the time since I landed," Hoskins shouted angrily. "Search my boat, too, if you want to. But I tell you I ain't got the stuff and I ain't even seen it."

Wickham glanced inquiringly at Nickols, who nodded confirmation of Zeb's statement.

"I saw him come ashore, all right."

"Let's search the boat, then," Wickham stated. "As Mr. Grayson's secretary it is my duty to recover the money and jewelry."

"What was it—this jewelry you speak of?" Nickols asked.

"A star-shaped sunburst of diamonds, which must be found. I wish you'd search this fellow's boat immediately. Mr. Grayson's sudden death is bad enough alone, without the robbery."

"Come along, then," Nickols assented.

He gave orders to have Zeb taken care of, and at once drove Wickham to the place where the lobster boat was beached. They went over the craft from bow to stern, inside and out, but no trace of the missing valuables could be discovered.

"What makes you so sure Grayson had the money and sunburst when he went off the yacht?" Nickols at length demanded, when it was certain that their search was fruitless.

"Well, he had them earlier in the eve-

ning, and they're not in his private safe. I know the combination, and I looked. I'm positive Hoskins is guilty. He looked like a hard-boiled customer."

"Oh, Zeb's perfectly capable of robbing a dead man if he thought he could get away with it," Nickols agreed. "He's been accused of a lot, first and last. But about this I'm not so sure. Where could the plunder be hidden?"

"Rather up to the local police to find out, I should say," Wickham responded coolly. "Or else get some operators on the job who can deliver."

"Who else on the *Zingara* knows that you suspect Grayson was robbed?" Nickols asked. Wickham's slurring remarks he deliberately passed over without comment.

"No one, of course!" Wickham said tartly. "I didn't know it myself until I reached the coroner's office."

"All right. Keep the business to yourself."

"Suppose Mrs. Grayson asks?"

"Stall her off. Say anything you wish. Later the folks on the boat will be examined by the coroner relative to Grayson's death. Meanwhile, sit tight."

"I hope you know what you're doing," Wickham grumbled, apparently out of sorts because Nickols was not more impressed with the gravity of the financial loss involved, which seemed to weigh more heavily in Wickham's mind than Grayson's death. Nickols was finding it decidedly easy to dislike Wickham.

"As a secretary, this bird's a joke," the police official mused. "He's more of the lounge-lizard type." And as a shrewd afterthought, "Wonder if there's anything between him and Mrs. Grayson."

"Drop me at the boat landing, will you?" Wickham asked; and Nickols obliged. After leaving Wickham he drove thoughtfully back to Willantic, stopping at the coroner's office. Brockett was alone.

"Examined Grayson's body yet?" was Nickols' first query.

"Only superficially. Death was without doubt primarily due to the injury at the base of the skull, which I suspect to be fractured. An autopsy will prove or disprove that."

"Has it occurred to you, doctor," Nickols asked quietly, "that we might have a murder case on our hands?"

The coroner registered surprise.

"A murder! What makes you think that, Stan?"

"Let me ask you a question, before answering yours. Suppose the autopsy shows no trace of water in Grayson's lungs. What would you infer?"

"That he was dead before he hit the water," was the coroner's prompt reply.

"Exactly. Now suppose, further, that a diver struck some obstruction—say a partially submerged log—in such a way as to be instantly killed. Wouldn't there be a last gasp—a sort of reflex action of the breathing organs—that would take in more or less water? Not much, perhaps, but certainly some?"

"You could safely count on that," the coroner agreed. "Your inference, then, is that absence of water in the lungs would preclude chances of accidental death—pointing toward foul play?"

"That's it. We know he didn't drown, because the body floated. The whole thing simmers down to whether the skull injury was accidental or not. Consider the location of the bruise, low at the base of Grayson's head. Could a diver hurt himself there by plunging into a chunk of driftwood?"

"Highly improbable," Brockett said thoughtfully. "But remember there was a booze party on the *Zingara*. Grayson might have been so nearly intoxicated that his dive became a fall. If he landed flat on his back in the water, and a log chanced to be directly under his neck, we'd have this sort of bruise."

"That theory requires a lot of coincidence," Nickols objected. "Too many

ifs in the way. But there couldn't have been any floating spar to hit. The *Zingara* is anchored bow and stern, crosswise with the tidal current. I noticed that particularly this morning. The tide was ebbing strongly when the Orloff woman fell overboard, and it happened on the south side of the yacht—that is, toward the Sound.

"Grant, if you wish, that a piece of driftwood came down out of the salt creek with the current and struck the north side of the yacht. It would inevitably bob along either toward the bow or stern, and then go on with the current. See the point? It was a physical impossibility for Grayson to dive into any driftwood at the time he is supposed to have done so."

"He might have struck some part of the boat," Brockett suggested.

"Wickham told me that Grayson was an expert swimmer and a skillful diver. It's hard to see how he could have hit the back of his head, even in an intoxicated fall."

"You may be right. Murder—and robbery. According to Wickham, there's a small fortune missing. What about Zeb Hoskins?"

"I'm thinking of Zeb, too," Nickols confessed. "If Grayson was stupefied by liquor it's conceivable that the tide carried him out in a semiunconscious state and that he wasn't dead when Hoskins picked him up. There was a fog early to-day, you know. Zeb might have gotten wind of the valuables and slugged him. How does that sound?"

"The autopsy," the doctor answered, "will show approximately how long ago Grayson received that skull injury, which would definitely clear up that one uncertainty. Of course Zeb Hoskins is open to suspicion. But if Grayson really was slugged—I'm as yet hardly willing to admit it—the crime probably happened on board the yacht. In the general confusion, when that woman—what's her name, now, Stan——"

"Orloff," Nickols supplied—"Valerie Orloff. I get you, doctor! Under cover of her fall the body was dumped overboard, and one extra splash went unnoticed. But wait! Her tumble might have been faked—all part of the game—to give somebody else a good chance to pull the dirty work. Come to think of it, she staged a pretty fast recovery after we dragged her out of the bay. Say, this thing's getting deeper by the minute!" Nickols rubbed the stubble on his chin, regarding Doctor Brockett through half-closed eyes.

"How do you suggest we handle it?" the coroner asked.

"Let's give out the impression that we agree with the theory of accidental death. Meanwhile, rush through your autopsy, in hope that it may throw some light on the business. Later you can examine witnesses from the yacht. The important thing, it seems to me, is not to let the murderer realize that foul play is suspected."

"Providing there is a murderer," Brockett interpolated.

"Oh, to be sure! That proviso's always understood." Nickols glanced at his watch. "Nine o'clock. What I most need right now is a shave and some breakfast. Been going it steady since Wickham's phone call got me out of bed this morning."

At ten thirty, when Nickols was seated at his desk in police headquarters, running through certain affairs of departmental routine, one of the clerks brought in the second mail delivery.

"Here's a funny one for you, chief," he said. "Some bird's afraid to show his handwriting." And he tossed over an envelope addressed by means of letters cut from printed matter and pasted on.

"Might be a hot tip," Nickols grunted.

Within the envelope was a brief newspaper clipping, which Nickols handled carefully, on the chance that it might later be tested for finger prints.

It was a simple enough item, and the official's face remained blank as he perused it; but then he noticed that certain letters were marked by faint pin pricks, as follows:

Anglers of this locality are bringing in fine catches of tautog and weakfish almost every day. Dave Ross, who is summering at the Inlet, came ashore last Sunday with two dozen blacks, the largest weighing six and a half pounds. Congratulations,

DAVE.

To put together the significant letters was the work of an instant, and chief of Police Nickols had his message:

Grayson was murdered.

CHAPTER III.

CAPTAIN BONNEY.

STANLEY NICKOLS lacked some of the advantages which metropolitan training and experience would bring to a police official, but he was shrewd enough to know that any anonymous communication is frequently the work of a crank or practical joker. Several considerations, however, led him to the firm conviction that the message just received was authentic.

The elaborate method used to assure secrecy pointed that way. A crank would probably have attempted to disguise his handwriting, or printed the characters. Nor did Nickols believe that any practical joker would try to throw doubt on what must appear an obvious case of accidental death.

"The party who posted this," he mused, "didn't drop it at the main office. He put it in a mail box somewhere on the outskirts of town. And that must have been before people in general were even aware that Andrew Grayson was dead. Clearly this was sent by some one on the inside. Looks like a straight tip to me."

He tested the clipping for finger prints, but results were negligible.

"Smooth, that guy! He knows his onions."

Next he called Doctor Brockett on the phone, the coroner himself answering.

"How about the autopsy, doctor?" Nickols demanded.

"Just finished. I was on the point of calling you myself. Come over and I'll give you the results."

It took Nickols only a few minutes to reach Brockett's office.

"Grayson died from a fractured skull and dislocated vertebræ," the coroner announced. "No other signs of injury were on his body."

"What about the lungs?"

"Not a drop of water."

"And the time that had elapsed since Grayson received the hurt? What is your opinion as to that, doctor?"

"At least six or seven hours."

"That's in Zeb's favor. Now as a medical expert, doctor, what would you say was the probable cause of the injury you examined?"

"Of course, it's a little hard to state—for certain, that is. But it looks very much like a blow from some large, blunt instrument. One thing is positive, beyond any reasonable doubt: Grayson was dead before submergence in the water. However, I believe that falling violently against the rail or some other projecting part of the boat's equipment, for example, could have produced the results we have here. I still hesitate to accept your foul-play hypothesis."

Nickols now showed his hole card.

"Ah!" said Brockett, leisurely perusing the clipping. "Interesting—to a sportsman. Are you—er—perhaps kidding me, Stan?"

"No," Nickols said grimly. "Not at all! Put your glasses on and look again. I missed connections the first reading." Then, after a pause, "Get it now?"

"Um—yes. 'Grayson was murdered,' eh?" Brockett muttered. "By gad, Stan, you were right!" He removed his glasses, meditatively tapping the pa-

per with them. "That is, assuming this to be straight. Have you considered the other possibility?"

"Yes, and it doesn't have the earmarks of a fake." Briefly he elaborated his reasons for believing the message genuine.

"Then somebody knows about the crime and wants to start a police investigation without being involved himself," the coroner murmured. "That's not hard to understand. What's the next step?"

"We're going to interview the *Zingara's* captain. His name is Arthur Bonney, and he's known here in Willantic. We'll start this thing pronto. Jim Beesom's at headquarters now. I'll send him after Bonney."

Beesom was summoned by phone, arriving shortly.

"Take my car, Jim," Nickols ordered, "and drive down to the wharf at Rockland Bay. You'll find one or two boats there, I expect. If not, hail the *Zingara* and have them send a dinghy after you. The yacht's captain is a man named Bonney. I want you to bring him back with you, but take care not to let any one on the boat know what's doing. Be discreet, Jim."

"I get you, chief." And Beesom departed.

"Captain Bonney may be involved in the mess himself," Brockett remarked. "Though no doubt you've considered that."

"Of course! Every person on that yacht is under suspicion, and Zeb Hoskins as well," Nickols declared grimly. "But the chances are Bonney's clear. He has a good job as captain of that boat, a job which Grayson's death might jeopardize. My idea is to get a slant on Bonney, and, once he's eliminated as a suspect, pump information from him. In that way we can pick up significant facts regarding the people on board."

In due time Beesom returned with Captain Bonney, who proved to be a clean-cut chap of about forty-five, possessing a frank, open countenance. Quite the typical yachtsman, as far as appearances went.

"A most distressing affair, captain," Nickols remarked blandly, after mutual introductions, "Mr. Grayson's death."

"It is, sir. We're pretty well knocked out about it on the *Zingara*."

"Some official inquiries are essential, of course," Nickols resumed. "Doctor Brockett and I would like to ask you a few questions relative to the tragedy."

"Naturally," Bonney assented, with a grave inclination of his head. "However, I fear I can be of little assistance. You see, I was not on the boat last evening."

"So? And where were you, may I ask?"

"I was in Willantic—at the home of Mr. Carleton Burns. Mr. Burns and his charming wife are old friends of mine, and they threw a little bridge party in my honor."

"Excuse me," Nickols said abruptly, and he pulled Brockett's telephone toward him, giving the operator a number.

"That you, Carl?" he asked, a moment later. "Nickols speaking. You and the wife had a card party last night, I hear. . . . Mind telling me who was there? . . . H'm—I see. And what time did Captain Bonney leave? . . . Oh! Stayed with you all night, eh? Thanks, Carl. That's all. . . . Oh, no; nothing like that! I'll tell you some time. So long!"

Arthur Bonney half rose from his chair; his face was flushed with anger.

"Wasn't my word sufficient," he sputtered.

Nickols checked the furious outburst by an uplifted hand.

"Just a moment, captain!" he begged placatingly. "I'm going to be frank with you. We have definite evidence that Andrew Grayson's death was due to foul play, and——"

"Good God!" Bonney gasped, settling back in his seat. "You can't mean he was murdered!"

"That's exactly what we do mean."

Bonney appeared quite shocked, as was to be expected.

"Gentlemen, I wish to apologize for my show of temper just now," he assured them. "You were wholly justified in checking up my statements."

"I'm glad you take it this way, captain," Nickols said. "Doctor Brockett and I, of course, did not really suspect you of the murder, but in an examination of this sort it is always best to clean things up as one goes on. Now we need your help."

"I am at your disposal."

"Good! First we want to know who was on the *Zingara* last night—every one, crew as well as guests." He pulled a memo pad from his pocket. "Let's have the roll. Some, of course, I've met already. I'll start the list with Mr. Grayson, the victim. Was his wife in the party?"

Bonney nodded assent, and Nickols went on.

"Then I know there was Grayson's secretary—Ted Wickham by name—a woman named Valerie Orloff, and one Larry St. John—he helped me pull Mrs. Orloff out of the bay. That's as far as I can go unaided. Now who else was there?"

"Valerie Orloff's husband—Boris—and Mrs. St. John. These two couples were guests for the cruise. Wickham might be regarded as practically a member of the Grayson household. There were no other outsiders. In addition Carol Fox—Mrs. Grayson's personal maid, a colored girl—and Steve Brewer, also colored. Steve is a sort of assistant steward; waits on table, mixes and serves drinks, and so on. They keep Steve busy," he added dryly.

"I imagine so. What about other servants and the yacht's crew?"

"Everybody else was ashore."

"The whole works?" Nickols ejaculated in surprise.

"Yes. Mr. Grayson let 'em all go. You see, there was a dance on at a resort down East. Mr. Grayson always treated his help very generously. One of the crew spoke to me of the dance, asking that I put it up to Mr. Grayson, who promptly said every one who wished to could go. Most of 'em were out till near morning."

"So that when Grayson was killed there were exactly"—Nickols paused, referring to his penciled list—"eight persons on board besides himself. The Orloffs, the St. Johns, Wickham, Mrs. Grayson, and the two colored servants?"

"To the best of my knowledge," Bonney replied, "that is correct. It seems unlikely that any one came back after I left the boat."

"And that was at what time, captain?"

"About nine, or a little later. Mr. Burns came for me in his car."

In his mind Nickols identified one of the eight persons referred to as sender of the anonymous note. Here might be a chance to find who it was.

"How many of these people who were on the *Zingara* last night went ashore this morning?"

Bonney reflected; then smiled.

"Every one," he answered. "You see, things have been rather hectic since Mr. Grayson's sudden death."

"There's a possible lead wrecked," Nickols mused. "Small chance to pin down the sender of the message." Aloud, "So far so good. Now, Captain Bonney, we'd like you to tell us all about the relations between these men and women on board. Vulgarly speaking, what's the dirt?"

Bonney's handsome face clouded.

"It's rather embarrassing to tell tales out of school, don't you know," he said with obvious reluctance. "As captain of the *Zingara* I may have seen and heard things from time to time that

don't sound too well. Yet they may have been harmless enough."

"I appreciate all that, captain. Your unwillingness to peddle unsavory gossip does you credit, but don't forget that a man has been killed. I'm sure you wish the guilty person or persons to pay the penalty for this crime. Murder is a serious business."

"Yes," Bonney agreed soberly. "That it is. I'll do my part."

"Shouldn't we have a stenographer to take this down?" Brockett interposed. "The information may be important."

"Verbatim records are not necessary —as yet," Nickols opined. "This is merely an informal conference, rather than an official inquiry. I'll make notes, and I wish you'd do the same, doctor, of whatever strikes you as significant. All set? We'll begin with the Graysons. How did they get on together, captain?"

"Not so well," Bonney replied, with a rueful smile. "It is an open secret that Mr. Grayson has had innumerable affairs with other women. Though not a big man physically, he was of the good-looking, athletic type—masculine sex appeal no end. A lot of 'em fell for him hard."

"Who was his latest affinity, do you know?"

"Pauline St. John."

"Ah!" Doctor Brockett observed.

"And Mrs. Grayson accepted this St. John woman as her guest on the *Zingara* under such dubious circumstances?" Nickols asked unbelievingly.

"She may not have known the real facts. I can't say as to that, though I doubt it. Mr. Grayson's infatuation for Mrs. St. John was of recent date."

"I see. And did Mrs. Grayson herself, perhaps, have—let us call it—a boy friend—to use the popular term?"

Bonney hesitated for a second before answering, his expression inscrutable.

"Well—Ted Wickham is, I imagine, rather too fond of her."

"Ah!" breathed Doctor Brockett, who was not without an innocent taste for the spicier side of life.

"Tell me something about Mrs. Grayson. Grayson's second wife, isn't she? Or is she the third?"

"She is the second. Mr. Grayson's first wife divorced him seven years ago. The present Mrs. Grayson was Gloria Caron, a motion-picture actress, who at one time enjoyed a modest fame in screen circles. You may recall some of the films which featured her. She is a woman of unusual charm and personal beauty, though the unhappy life she has had with Mr. Grayson has left its mark on her features." He spoke slowly, adding, "I have always been very sorry for Mrs. Grayson."

"Does she reciprocate Wickham's feeling?"

"I hope not, because Wickham might be classed as no better than an attractive scamp. He is not without likable qualities, though quite unscrupulous. I don't think Mr. Grayson suspected his wife in this connection, though there are rumors that he's had a private detective camped on her trail. None of that aboard the yacht, however."

"Some of the crew or petty officers might have been bribed to watch her," Brockett suggested hopefully.

"I hadn't thought of that." The thought seemed unpleasant to Bonney.

"Humph!" Nickols grunted. "Now as to St. John—English, isn't he?"

"Yes, and a cool one—perfectly capable of using his wife as bait to shake down Grayson or any other rich man for a good haul. He's not well fixed for ready money. I've heard—it may be false, of course—that St. John was expelled from an exclusive London club for a cardroom scandal."

"What about the Orloffs? Where do they fit in?"

"It's been pretty obvious that Valerie Orloff was badly smitten with Mr. Grayson. She's a raving beauty, with a sort

of ripe, exotic charm that should appeal to any man. In spite of it she failed to make Mr. Grayson who's snubbed her cruelly more than once in favor of Pauline St. John. And the funny part of it is that Valerie and Pauline seemed to like each other. May have been purely superficial, however."

"Do you know why the Orloff couple were invited on this cruise?"

"Boris Orloff has had a business deal pending with Mr. Grayson. Some foreign jewelry to dispose of at a bargain —smuggled into the country, perhaps."

"H'm!" Nickols mused aloud. "That's interesting. Has the deal gone through?"

"I believe so. I understood that negotiations were concluded yesterday at about noon."

"And did Boris know that his wife liked Grayson?"

"Valerie's a smooth article and may have kept him in the dark. Boris has showed symptoms of being jealous as the very devil of her, and I fancy she was a little afraid of him; playing with fire, you see, and knew it well enough."

"How did Grayson and his secretary get along?"

"Fairly well, for the most part, though when Mr. Grayson was in liquor he was now and then very ugly toward Wickham. The situation was quite unusual. Mr. Grayson had not much more need for a private secretary than I. He retired from active business several years ago."

"Was Wickham with him then?"

"No."

"How do you account for his employing Wickham? It seems queer that he'd pay a good salary—as he must have done —for the services of a man who, as you infer, had little to do."

"I suspect," Bonney replied, "that Mr. Grayson hired Wickham in self-defense."

"Ah!" from Doctor Brockett. "Blackmail!"

Bonney nodded.

"That's how it looks. Mr. Grayson was quite a heavy drinker, and he treated Wickham decently enough save when under the influence. They have staged an occasional pretty violent scene."

"Indeed! Recently?"

"No later than last week. I was about to mention that. The yacht was in New Haven harbor, where we stopped to pick up the Orloffs. It happened rather late at night, when Mr. Grayson's liquor had put him in a mood of ugly recklessness. I was not spying on them, you know, but I couldn't well avoid hearing." He paused apologetically.

"We understand," Nickols encouraged him. "Go on, captain."

"Well, there were some pointed remarks passed, which wound up with Mr. Grayson's telling Wickham to get the hell out; that he was through."

"Discharged as secretary, you mean?" Doctor Brockett asked.

"Yes, sir. It was plain enough. Wickham laughed, and defied Mr. Grayson to discharge him. 'You can't pull that game; I've got too much on you!' Those were his words, as nearly as I recall."

"And what came of it?" Nickols asked.

"Nothing. Wickham stayed on board, and to the best of my knowledge there was no further reference to their quarrel."

"And since then Grayson and Wickham have been—superficially, at least—on friendly terms?"

"Well—yes. I should say so."

"A word or two now regarding those colored people—Carol Fox and Steve Brewer. What do you know about them?"

"Carol appears like a quiet, respectable girl who knows her place. I'm positive Mrs. Grayson thinks highly of her. She's brighter than the average of her race and station; well educated, too.

High-school graduate. Steve is nobody's fool, either, but he's got a temper. I've been thinking about this. Steve may be your man."

"Yes?" Nickols showed a sudden access of interest. "How's that?"

"I've told you that liquor makes Mr. Grayson very ugly—*made,* I should say, since the poor fellow is no more—and it seemed to change his attitude toward those under him. What I'm coming to is this: The other day Steve stumbled with a tray of cocktails. Mr. Grayson had been drinking, and for no other apparent reason became suddenly furious. He launched a vicious kick at Steve, who had half fallen, and called him a clumsy lout of a nigger. He used other expletives also, even less complimentary.

"I thought for an instant Steve would kill Mr. Grayson before I could get to him; don't know when I've seen a fellow so blind angry. But he caught hold of himself, and went off muttering. That darky's not a man I'd like to have entertaining a grudge against me."

"H'm!" Nickols muttered, making notes on his pad. "That takes care of those who were on the boat—so far as is known—when Grayson was killed. Can you vouch for all members of your crew? You've known them for some time?"

"Yes—with a single exception. A man left us at New Haven, when we stopped to pick up the Orloffs. I hired a new hand in his place—a fellow named Nick Petrosk."

"He had recommendations, I suppose?"

"Yes. They were very good, though I must confess that lack of time prevented my checking on them. Nick has proved satisfactory."

"Well, I guess I'm through." Nickols leaned back in his chair, arranging the notes he had made. "Anything further you think of to ask, doctor. I've rather monopolized the conference."

"Well, now, let me see," Brockett meditated. Then, "Have you noticed anything suspicious since returning to the *Zingara,* captain? That is, anything that would apparently bear on our theory of foul play?"

"Not the faintest suggestion of a clew in that respect," Bonney replied. "Why, may I ask, do you believe Mr. Grayson was murdered?"

Brockett glanced doubtfully at Nickols, who responded:

"I'm sorry, captain, but for the present we are not at liberty to divulge the facts at our disposal. And it is, of course, unnecessary for me to say that this conversation must be considered strictly confidential."

"Oh, to be sure. That's quite understood. Is there anything further you wish of me, gentlemen?"

"Not now, captain," Nickols replied. "Thank you very much. We may have to call on you again in the future."

After Bonney had retired Nickols sent a whimsical glance at his fellow investigator.

"I wonder," he observed pensively, "if I haven't pulled as serious a bloomer as the lad who failed to touch second base."

"What do you mean?" Brockett demanded.

"Look at the beautiful mess we're in now! Of those eight people we discussed, Bonney has contrived to throw suspicion on at least six, though I must say he did attempt in a casual sort of way to place Mrs. Grayson in a favorable light. The only ones apparently cleared by his information are Pauline St. John and the maid, Carol Fox. Let me summarize it briefly:

"Mrs. Grayson might be guilty. Motive: Grayson is carrying on an affair with another woman practically under her very eyes. He has long been unfaithful.

"Ted Wickham has quarreled violently with Grayson, and is in love with

Mrs. Grayson. A triangle of that sort has unlimited possibilities. In Wickham's favor we might add that it would seem foolish for him to kill the man who is his meal ticket. On the other hand he might hope, after Grayson was removed, to marry the widow. He and Mrs. Grayson may have conspired together in a murder plot.

"Valerie Orloff: In love with Grayson, who spurns her advances. 'Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned,' and infatuation may change to bitter hate at a second's notice.

"Boris Orloff: According to Bonney, of a jealous disposition. A Russian, if names mean anything, and Russians have a dash of the Oriental in their make-up. What more natural than for Boris to kill the man who has caught the fancy of his beautiful wife?"

"It would be more natural for him to kill the beautiful and unfaithful wife instead," Brockett objected.

"Don't malign Valerie. She's had no chance to be unfaithful, according to the captain. In any event, I'm not so sure you're right. Especially if Boris imagined that Grayson was less indifferent than Bonney supposed.

"Next is Larry St. John, whose wife seems to be Grayson's latest inamorata. Again the eternal triangle. On the other hand is Bonney's statement that St. John is the sort to use such an affair to his own advantage. Yet sudden jealous anger might make him blind to that aspect.

"Now in the normal order of suspects we come to Steve Brewer, the hot-tempered darky, who was shamefully abused by Grayson. Steve is not without a sufficiently powerful motive. And lastly, there's Zeb Hoskins. Zeb is likely to have some explaining to do, though so far I admit we haven't anything positive on him.

"Another motive, which can be added to the various ones already enumerated, is the robbery. Somebody got away with approximately fifty thousand dollars, if we credit our information. And there you are!

"Pauline St. John can hardly be guilty. A woman does not usually kill the man while he is still lavishing attentions on her—the killing in such an affair is a later development; so in the light of present information Pauline St. John has a clean bill of health. As to Carol Fox, Mrs. Grayson's maid, she is an unknown quantity. We know nothing for her or against her."

"A fine set of people collected on that yacht," Doctor Brockett muttered. "A fine set!"

"Yes," Nickols agreed, with the significant addition, "if we credit all Bonney's statements at face value. That's what I meant by referring to my pulling a bonehead play."

"Do you doubt Captain Bonney?" Brockett asked.

"Yes and no. He was so damnably glib with that rehash of gossip, despite his reluctance, which may have been real or feigned. And Bonney was curious about our evidence."

"Why, that's only natural, Stan. And the fellow has an air-tight alibi."

"Oh, he didn't actually do the killing. That's certain. But I'm not so sure his hands are spotless. With the big robbery involved, chances are it's no one-man job."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"I'm going to do now what I should have done before tipping my hand to this smooth-spoken yacht captain," Nickols declared grimly. "I'm going to do a little more checking up on Arthur Bonney."

CHAPTER IV.

AN ARREST.

NICKOLS left the coroner's office and returned to police headquarters, pondering the various items picked up from Bonney.

"This afternoon," he reflected, "I

want to see what the *Zingara* looks like at close hand; but first, some more information on our friend, the captain, seems called for. Carl Burns might be in a position to help."

A phone call brought word that Mr. Burns had not returned from lunch, and Nickols went over to the Elks Club, where Carl usually ate. Fortunately Nickols found his man seated alone at a table.

"Tough break for Andrew Grayson," Burns remarked, after they had exchanged greetings. "By the way, why did you want the up and down on Bonney's being at my house?"

"Oh, just the usual line of inquiry," Nickols told him casually. "Good friend of yours, is he?"

"No," rather shortly. "To tell the truth, I'm not crazy about the fellow, though Evelyn finds him entertaining. She's known Bonney longer than I have. You know there's a sort of romantic glamour about any man who's sailed the seven seas. All the girls thought Bonney was a great card last night. I was disgusted with his line."

"Yes?"

"Yes! Too much of the *double entendre* about it for mixed company. I tell you, Nickols, this modern trend is all wrong. We're making a serious mistake to encourage our wives and sweethearts to smoke cigarettes, drink cocktails, and laugh at those questionable jokes."

Stan Nickols grinned to himself, despite the keen interest he felt in these sidelights on Arthur Bonney. Burns was known to be a man of strict, mid-Victorian ideas regarding women, whom he still considered as living in the dark ages of long skirts and tight corsets. Then, half ashamed of his comment, Burns added:

"Oh, I dare say Bonney's a good enough egg. But he owns an over-vivid imagination. You've got to discount a lot of his stuff. Probably that tendency goes with his trade; sailors are noted for their yarn spinning."

"Some of 'em, anyway," Nickols agreed. Then he fired a blind shot. "How's Bonney fixed—financially, I mean?"

"Not so good, I guess; though it's his own fault. He's had a quaint notion that a man can play the bucket shops and win. Took a nasty trimming when stocks broke that time last fall. From one or two remarks I've heard him drop he must be badly in the hole."

"Married?" Nickols inquired.

"Bonney married?" with a grunt of derision. "Not that chap! He likes to play around too much to be pinned down, or my estimate of him is all wet."

Nickols gathered other facts from his acquaintance during their lunch, but nothing that seemed to have definite bearing on the Grayson affair. Yet he had learned enough to feel justified in adding Bonney's name very definitely to the list of possible suspects.

"So Bonney's hard up, eh?" he thought. "Might be he got away with the missing valuables. Pumping Carl Burns was a wise bet."

After separating from Burns, Nickols returned to Brockett's office, sharing his most recent information with the coroner.

"I've been letting my mind delve into this business," Brockett remarked, "since you left me. I should say that certain parties could be safely eliminated."

"Who, for example?"

"Well, those in the water when the thing happened."

Nickols shook his head.

"No! That's dangerous reasoning, doctor. To be sure, Valerie Orloff didn't kill Grayson, but she may have fallen overboard deliberately, and thus be an accessory. Boris and St. John went after her, while Wickham stayed on board—claims he can't swim. Take Orloff and St. John. The most obvi-

ous way to divert suspicion from himself would be for the person who slugged Grayson—under cover of Valerie's fall—to go off the yacht to her rescue as soon as he'd disposed of the victim."

"That's right," the doctor agreed. "Good Lord, Stan, the further in we go the worse it gets!"

"Yes, and there's one line we haven't even touched. Remember the fellow Nick Petrosk, who joined the crew at New Haven when they stopped for Orloff and his wife. There may be a connection; both names are Russian."

Brockett shrugged his shoulders with a gesture of desperation.

"It's too much for me. What are your plans now?"

"If you can spare the time, doctor, we'll go over to the *Zingara* and glean what crumbs are available. Use our ears for all they're worth. Remember that we're supposed to be investigating an accidental death."

They drove to Rockland Bay in Nickols' car, finding a dinghy moored at the wharf, which provided transportation to the yacht. A plan of procedure had already been agreed upon. Captain Bonney greeted the visitors as they came aboard.

"We'd like to talk with Mrs. Grayson," Nickols told him.

"She's resting in her cabin," Bonney rejoined. "But I'm sure she will see you." He touched a button, and presently a neatly dressed colored maid appeared. "Carol," said Bonney, "please tell Mrs. Grayson that two gentlemen would like to see her on deck. They are not reporters."

"Yes, sir." And Carol Fox disappeared, returning with word that Mrs. Grayson would soon be at their disposal.

"You may as well be comfortable, gentlemen, while you're waiting," said Bonney, and he conducted them to easy-chairs on the after deck.

After some delay a woman appeared at the head of the companionway. She was a blonde, of rather full though graceful figure, and not noticeably made up. Her dress was a semineglige, its color somber—doubtless because of the recent tragedy. She wore no jewelry. Her age was apparently about thirty-five, but Stan Nickols shrewdly added another ten, which probably came not far from the truth. Mrs. Grayson, he decided, was a woman of nervous temperament, rather than possessing the placid, easy-going disposition one usually associates with the blond type.

Captain Bonney introduced the visitors, mentioning their official connection with the near-by town, and then withdrew. Coroner Brockett uttered a few words of conventional regret, which Mrs. Grayson accepted graciously. She made no pretense of being overcome with grief, however.

"Of course," the doctor went on, "in a case of this sort we are obliged to make certain inquiries, to determine beyond question of doubt the cause of death and events leading up to it."

Mrs. Grayson's eyes fluttered from one to the other of her callers.

"But I thought there was no doubt as to how my husband died," she said. "He was drowned, in an attempt to save Mrs. Orloff's life."

"That, to be sure, is the presumption," Brockett agreed suavely, "but an official inquiry is called for none the less. I shall trouble you no more than is necessary. Did you yourself see Mr. Grayson plunge overboard?"

"No. I was not on deck at the instant when Valerie Orloff fell into the water."

"When did you last see Mr. Grayson alive?"

"Only a few minutes before. I was talking with him in the living room below decks."

"I see. What were you discussing with Mr. Grayson?"

She showed a flash of haughty displeasure.

"That, Doctor Brockett, is a matter which can concern nobody but Mr. Grayson and myself. I consider the question uncalled for."

"I beg your pardon. Do you know where Mr. Grayson went after leaving you?"

"I suppose he went back on deck—from what took place."

"Pardon me for asking this, Mrs. Grayson, but it may have a bearing on his death. Was Mr. Grayson intoxicated at the time?"

She smiled somewhat cynically.

"Oh, we'd all been drinking, as you no doubt know very well. However, Mr. Grayson was most emphatically not intoxicated. He was able to take care of himself."

"Where did you go after separating from him?"

"To my stateroom. I had felt chilly on deck and wanted a wrap. I was still in the cabin when I heard cries of alarm and splashes as of people falling overboard."

"How long was that after you left Mr. Grayson?"

"A short time. Certainly not more than three or four minutes. I ran up on deck at once, and learned that Valerie had slipped over the rail. It all happened very quickly. Men were swimming about in the water, and I heard a small boat coming from shore. Then Larry St. John called out that he had her, and the excitement died down."

"There is one point that needs clearing up, Mrs. Grayson. As I understand, Mrs. Orloff was rescued at about two, yet Chief of Police Nickols was not notified of Mr. Grayson's disappearance until fully four hours later."

Again a nervous fluttering of the eyes.

"It sounds strange, I know, but actually not one of us missed him, perhaps due to the drinking. I assumed he'd gone to his cabin. Everybody retired shortly after Valerie was brought on board."

"How did you finally come to note Mr. Grayson's absence?"

"Why, I couldn't sleep, and went to his stateroom, which, much to my surprise, was empty. Mr. Grayson's clothes were not even there. I gave an alarm immediately, and the yacht was searched without success. When it became certain he was not on board, Mr. Wickham went ashore and phoned to Willantic."

"I see," Brockett murmured, with a side glance toward Nickols. The explanation seemed lame, yet it might be plausible, especially following a drinking party.

Suddenly Mrs. Grayson gave a little start.

"There's one thing I ought to speak of, now that a police official is on board. Mr. Grayson's death drove it completely from my mind."

Nickols pricked up his ears.

"What is that, Mrs. Grayson?" he asked.

"My cabin was entered and a dinner ring stolen."

"When was this?" Nickols snapped briskly.

"Yesterday afternoon, though I didn't realize the ring was missing till later. For a time I was under the impression that I had locked it in my jewel case, but not finding it there, I finally recalled that the ring was left in plain sight on my dressing table. Very careless of me."

"Was it a valuable ring, Mrs. Grayson?"

"Not particularly, as rings go. Five or six hundred dollars, perhaps somewhat more. A diamond, set off by four small pearls."

"Do you suspect any one?" Nickols next asked.

"Yes, though it's more than mere suspicion. Carol reported seeing Steve

Brewer—a colored man who acts as assistant steward—leave my stateroom stealthily. Carol followed, and Steve went to his own cabin. Then she told me."

"Ah, quite a female detective, this Carol Fox!" Nickols grunted. "So the ring is probably concealed among Steve's belongings, since we can assume he's had no chance to dispose of it. Did you miss anything else, Mrs. Grayson?"

"No article of value. One other object was gone, but it seems too foolish to mention."

"What was it?"

"A silk stocking."

"A silk stocking!" Nickols echoed blankly, while Doctor Brockett and he exchanged puzzled glances.

"Absurd, is it not?" Mrs. Grayson declared, the ghost of a smile playing on her lips. "Do you wonder I hesitated to mention the loss? Yet it's the truth. A new pair of gray silk stockings had been hanging over my dressing-table chair. Later only one was to be found. I noted this when I dressed for dinner."

"But that is preposterous!" Brockett muttered helplessly. "What would a sneak thief want with one silk stocking?

"Perhaps Steve Brewer can tell us," Nickols suggested. "We'll put it up to him presently. He's still on board, I suppose?"

"Steve was on duty this noon at lunch. No doubt he believes the ring has not been missed."

"I'd like a look at your stateroom, Mrs. Grayson," Nickols said, seizing this pretext for a survey below the *Zingara's* deck. "And I'll want to talk with your maid, too."

"Come with me, please." Mrs. Grayson rose, preceding them down the companionway. Brockett nudged his associate.

"Dope!" he whispered, nodding toward Mrs. Grayson, as the lady's heels clicked down the polished hardwood stairs. Nickols greeted this news with a significant lifting of the eyebrows, but made no verbal comment. He knew that Doctor Brockett was an authority on narcotics and their effect on the human system.

Mrs. Grayson's boudoir was small, though furnished with the last word in luxury. It was a trifle too garish for the best of taste, perhaps. Nickols surveyed it briefly.

"Call your maid, please," he said after a moment.

Carol Fox answered the summons.

"Carol," her mistress began, "this gentleman is the chief of police at Willantic. I want you to tell him exactly what you saw yesterday."

Carol's story was merely a more detailed account of what Mrs. Grayson had already said up on deck. Doctor Brockett watched the girl narrowly as she talked.

"All right," Nickols said when she had finished. "Now we'll pay Brewer a visit. Possibly"—bowing to Mrs. Grayson—"you'd prefer to have Captain Bonney guide us."

She thanked him with a little smile.

"You are a considerate official, Mr. Nickols. Naturally I am not anxious to go down into the crew's quarters. Get Captain Bonney, Carol."

In due season they were joined by the captain, to whom the situation was explained.

"Looks like trouble for Steve!" was his grim comment. "Come ahead, gentlemen—— No, Carol!"—as the maid seemed disposed to follow—"we don't need you."

Doctor Brockett jerked a thumb toward Carol Fox, lips close to Stan's ear.

"More dope! Is the damned craft full of drug addicts?"

Bonney was inclined to be chatty as he led them down into the vessel's hold.

"The crew and help on this yacht are

mighty well taken care of," said he. "Running water and forced ventilation with refrigerated air. An old-time sea captain would die of horror at the mere thought. Well, here we are."

He knocked on a door at one end of the passage they had been traversing.

"Who's there?" a voice demanded.

"Captain Bonney. Open up, Steve."

The door was speedily unlocked, and the trio entered. Brewer eyed them doubtfully. He was a lithe, slim-waisted mulatto, now half-naked, with the muscular development of a light heavyweight. Evidently Steve had been lying on his bunk reading, as a magazine lay tossed to one side.

"What can I do for you, cap'n?" he asked respectfully.

"Here's the man who wants you, Steve." Bonney waved a hand at Nickols. "He's the chief of police over in Willantic."

"What's he want with me?" Steve grumbled, showing a trace of surliness.

Nickols wasted no time.

"A ring was stolen from Mrs. Grayson's cabin yesterday," he said curtly. "We think you've got it. Come across Steve!"

"Humph! I didn't steal any ring! Who says I did?"

"Search the place," was Bonney's impatient suggestion. "Of course he'd deny it. If the ring's here you ought to be able to find it."

"Sure, boss," Steve added. "Go ahead. Look all you want to. Only you won't find anything that don't belong here."

Expertly Nickols went through the small cabin, which, after all, offered not much in the way of hiding places. Steve's person, and his belongings, produced no results. Then the bunk and a small cubby-hole were ransacked. The Negro watched, a sneer of derision on his face.

"I told you you wouldn't find any ring," he said.

Nickols did not reply, his eyes roving about the tiny compartment. In one corner was a stationary washbowl. He approached the bowl, taking from his pocket a small flash light, the beam of which he shot down into the drain pipe.

With a grunt of satisfaction Nickols fumbled at the opening in the bottom of the bowl, plucking forth a pin bent like a fishhook. Fastened to the head end of the pin was a section of heavy linen thread, and to the thread was attached a woman's ring, set with a fair-sized diamond and four smaller pearls. The bend of the pin had been hooked over one of the crossbars designed to prevent objects from falling through. There was just room for the ring to slip past.

All of Steve Brewer's cocksure air vanished; chagrin, fear, and admiration for the policeman's astuteness struggled for mastery on his features.

"How come you thought to look there, boss?" he stammered.

Nickols laughed coldly.

"That trick was stale twenty years ago, Steve," he said. "You must have got it from the second-rate detective stories you read. You were a fool to steal Mrs. Grayson's ring in the first place, and a worse fool to think you could get away with this kid stunt."

"I guess I was, boss," Steve admitted abjectly. "But I saw the ring a-smiling at me on the dressing table, and my fingers just sort of itched for it."

"What I'd really like to know is this," Nickols continued. "What did you want with the silk stocking?"

"Silk stocking?" Steve gave an impression of profound bewilderment.

"Yes, the gray silk stocking you took from Mrs. Grayson's stateroom. What's the big idea?"

"Don't kid me, white man. You're talking riddles."

"All right. Have it your own way, Steve, for now. Come along."

Something gritted sharply under Captain Bonney's shoes. He stood on a spot that had been covered with a small rug, pulled aside in their search for the stolen ring. Bonney stooped, running his fingers across the floor.

"Where did all this sand come from, Steve?" he asked.

"I reckon it must have dropped out of my shoes, cap'n. I got 'em full walking on the beach yesterday."

"Well, no matter," said Bonney. "Let's go!"

They paused briefly at Mrs. Grayson's stateroom on the way to the deck. The ring was identified and returned to its owner, who congratulated Nickols on his shrewdness.

"But I'm almost sorry you found it, Mr. Nickols," she went on plaintively. "Really, it's worth the cost of that ring to break in a new man to take Steve's place."

"Acts sorrier to lose the darky than she was to lose her husband," Nickols thought to himself.

He happened to get a glimpse of Carol Fox, as the maid stood behind Mrs. Grayson, looking past her mistress at the disconsolate and shackled Steve. Carol's features were twisted into such a diabolical glare of concentrated hate that Nickols was quite startled. Then Carol detected his gaze on her, and the expression instantly vanished.

CHAPTER V.

TWO TICKETS FOR NEW YORK.

I'VE got an idea, Stan," Doctor Brockett whispered, as they went up the companionway. "Why not have last night's scene acted through again by the people involved?"

"Good notion," Nickols approved. "We'll do that, provided they're all on board." He mentioned the matter to Bonney, who readily assented.

After some little delay the various persons were assembled. It was Nickols' first encounter with Pauline St. John and Boris Orloff. He took occasion to scrutinize them both unobtrusively. Pauline's physical charms were less conspicuous than Valerie Orloff's, though she was certainly very attractive and he could understand her appeal to a man of Grayson's reputed nature. Boris was dark of hair and complexion, his national characteristics strongly marked. He smoked cigarettes incessantly, a habitual sneer curling his thin lips.

"That fellow's scared," Nickols thought. "I can spot the symptoms."

Valerie's eyes were red, as if from weeping, though she had skillfully employed the make-up art to render the effects of her emotion less noticeable. She was the only one of the group who displayed signs of grief, which checked with Bonney's statement of her infatuation for Grayson. Like Boris, she seemed to be laboring under a strong mental stress.

Doctor Brockett assumed charge, since the affair ostensibly came under his province rather than that of the police. Briefly he explained what was wanted.

"Is this necessary?" Wickham grumbled.

"Perhaps not absolutely necessary," Brockett rejoined soothingly, "but I should like to carry the experiment through. Did any one see Mr. Grayson dive overboard?"

They looked doubtfully from one to another, but nobody volunteered an affirmative answer.

"What are you trying to prove?" Wickham demanded bluntly. "That Mr. Grayson committed suicide—or that one of us killed him?"

An audible gasp followed this unvarnished statement of the issue; again questioning glances passed among the group. There was an instant of embarrassed silence, broken by Brockett's smooth voice.

"I am merely striving to get at the truth. There are a few unexplained facts in Mr. Grayson's death that require clearing up." Then, more invisively, the doctor said, "Mrs. Orloff, where were you when you fell from the yacht last night?"

"Sitting on the rail close to the stanchion."

"Take that place, if you will, please." Valerie silently obeyed him.

"You, Mrs. St. John?"

Pauline hesitated the merest trifle, flushing.

"I had walked around the other side of the boat—looking for Mr. Grayson." She flashed a brief look of defiance toward Mrs. Grayson, at this confession of her interest in the dead man.

St. John, it next developed, had been standing by a smoking stand, perhaps thirty feet from Valerie's perch, in the act of helping himself to a cigar.

"And you?" Brockett turned to Wickham.

"I was chasing a drink for Valerie. Steve was supposed to bring up a tray, but it seemed he'd gone asleep on the job."

Boris Orloff declared that he had been leaning against the rail, about halfway between Valerie and the *Zingara's* stern.

"The party was pretty well broken up about this time, wasn't it?" Brockett murmured. "Where were you, Steve?"

"In the buffet, mixing drinks."

"What about you, Carol?"

"I was lying down in my cabin. I had my clothes on, in case any one of the ladies should want me."

"Very well. That seems to account for everybody on board last evening. Mrs. Grayson, I understand, was in the saloon below deck, where she had exchanged a few words with her husband."

Stan Nickols, watching Mrs. St. John, saw her mouth tighten grimly.

"Pauline knows something about that conversation between the Graysons," he thought. "She may have followed him down."

"One moment, doctor!" It was Pauline St. John speaking. "There was at least one other person on the *Zingara* last night."

"Indeed! Who was it?"

"I don't know. But as I went around the stern of the yacht, I saw some one slip out of sight in the shadows close to one of the lifeboats."

"Did you get a good look at this unknown person?" Brockett asked.

"No. Whoever it was evidently wished to remain hidden."

"How long was this before the commotion caused by Mrs. Orloff's fall?"

"Several minutes. I really thought very little of it at the time."

"I see," was Brockett's noncommittal comment. "Well, suppose we go on with our demonstration. Everybody, except Brewer, please go to the places where you were last night at the time of the accident. Rejoin us when I signal, following the same course as you did when you heard Mrs. Orloff's cry. Try to imagine Mr. Grayson's actions as well."

He waited a moment, allowing time for the various participants to take their respective positions.

"Now, Mrs. Orloff, your cue! Tell us exactly what happened and how it happened."

Valerie nodded soberly, impressed by Brockett's deadly seriousness.

"I sat here on the rail," she said, "swinging my legs and holding to the stanchion—just as I'm doing now. A little while before, we'd been dancing to the radio, and I was somewhat out of breath. All of a sudden I realized that I'd had too much to drink. I felt ill. I shuddered—like this——"

Valerie gave her body a realistic twist —followed by a quick gasp of dismay as her hand slipped from the loosely held stanchion. Frantically she clutched to

regain it—and missed. The startled beholders saw two silk-clad legs pointing skyward; two trim little brocade pumps twinkled briefly in the air—and disappeared over the *Zingara's* rail. *Splash!*

"Good God! If she hasn't done it again!" Brockett exclaimed, rushing, with others, to the vessel's side. This time no one dove to the rescue, however, for Valerie came up swimming, throwing the water from her eyes with an expert flip of the head.

"Two times, eh," Boris Orloff drawled, gazing down at his drenched spouse, hands in pockets. "That's almost a habit—yes?"

The tension which had gradually pervaded the group as Brockett stage-managed his setting was dispelled at this ludicrous fiasco, replaced by a spirit of relieved levity. Valerie was helped aboard, oozing salt water like a sponge, vexed with herself and out of patience with the coroner, whom she seemed to hold innocently responsible.

"You ought to feel satisfied," Wickham said to Brockett, chuckling. "Valerie showed you the whole works—and how! Seriously, it was a fool stunt, and deserved no better fate."

"We might label the experiment 'Ruined by an overdose of realism,'" Doctor Brockett responded, taking the gibe good-naturedly.

A moment later Wickham muttered in an aside to Nickols, "I want a talk with you. Will you be in your office at five to-day."

"Yes. Bring Mrs. St. John, if you can," Nickols replied. "I'll expect you both."

Not long afterward the two officials went ashore, taking with them Steve Brewer, who was duly incarcerated in the Willantic jail, charged with theft.

"Do you think we accomplished anything?" Brockett asked, when the two men were alone.

"Yes, though there's a long way to go. That Valerie's a mighty smart girl. I wish I knew whether she fell on purpose or not."

"Which time?"

"Both. As her husband so tersely expressed it, two times begins to look like a habit. Suppose she dreaded some disclosure, as a result of reënacting the scene. Falling overboard again would be a fine way to break the spell."

"Yet," Brockett observed, "both falls could easily have been unintentional. You recall the yarn of the buzz-saw operator who lost one finger, and then another when showing his foreman how the accident happened. But tell me, do you feel that any of your suspects are satisfactorily eliminated?"

"Not beyond doubt, though on the basis of where they claimed to be standing, Boris Orloff and Larry St. John sound innocent. My theory now is that Grayson was slugged below deck and then pushed overboard through a porthole. I may be wrong as to that, but there is at least one opening down near the stern big enough for such a purpose. And Grayson was not a large man, you know. How did Mrs. Grayson impress you, doctor?"

"Not altogether favorably. She didn't tell us all she knew. There was an air of forced repression about her. I've run across the same symptoms in patients who tried to conceal something they felt would not redound to their credit."

"My notion exactly. Tell me, doctor, to what extent are she and that colored girl dope fiends?"

"The term 'dope fiend' is a bit strong; I should say neither has gone quite that far, though of the two Carol is much the worse off."

"Either might have acquired the habit from association with the other," Nickols mused. "How does the thing usually start? I mean with a woman of Mrs. Grayson's type, not the everyday hophead the police run up against."

"In any one of a hundred ways.

Often it begins with a desire to deaden pain, mental or physical. Or merely in search of a new thrill. By the way, we uncovered one new possibility—the person Pauline St. John saw lurking on the deck."

"Or pretended to see," Nickols amended. "I expect to have a talk with Pauline this afternoon, and I may know more about her after that. Wickham, too. They're due in my office at five. You'd better be here."

"I will," Brockett promised.

Ted Wickham appeared according to schedule, accompanied by Pauline St. John, whom Nickols asked to wait outside during the conference with Grayson's secretary.

"Done anything about locating those valuables I spoke of?" Wickham asked.

"I haven't forgotten the matter," Nickols assured him.

"Do you know," Wickham continued, "I'm beginning to think there's something to your theory."

"What theory?"

"Why, that Mr. Grayson was murdered. Fairly obvious that that's your notion, after sending an officer for Bonney this morning, and all the rest. I may be able to steer you onto the guilty chap." He paused to light a cigarette.

"Go ahead," Nickols invited. "I'm listening."

"Yesterday Mr. Grayson paid Boris Orloff twenty-five thousand dollars for that diamond sunburst, which, by the way, is worth considerably more. It's supposed to have belonged to one of the czar's family, and fell into the hands of certain dishonest Russian plunderers. Boris has been marketing pieces for them in the States.

"After lunch a stud game started in the *Zingara's* cardroom. Mr. Grayson, Larry, and Boris played. I merely watched. Mr. Grayson played poker all over the world and with all sorts of people. What he didn't know about the game isn't worth knowing. St. John is crooked as a corkscrew and clever as the devil with a deck of cards, but Mr. Grayson was too smart for him—never gave him a chance to get his stuff started. And as for poor old Boris, he was hopelessly outclassed by both the others.

"The upshot of it was that by dinner time Mr. Grayson had won back the twenty-five thousand he'd paid Boris for the pendant. Boris was frightened to death, white as a sheet—for, you see, he'd lost money that didn't belong to him. I imagine he might have pulled down five thousand or so as commission, but he'd shot away the whole roll. He accused Mr. Grayson of cheating."

"How did Grayson take that?" Nickols asked.

"Oh, he laughed it off. Told Boris he was drunk, and promised him a chance for a comeback. Boris wasn't drunk, though. I'll swear to that, and when the game broke up he was ripe for murder, if any man ever was."

"So you charge Boris Orloff with killing Grayson and robbing him of the pendant and the roll paid for it, do you?"

"Yes," Wickham rejoined positively.

"This morning you were equally sure Zeb Hoskins, the lobsterman, had taken the money and diamond ornament from Grayson's dead body," Nickols reminded him. "How do you account for the discrepancy in your views?"

If Nickols had thought to embarrass Wickham he was mistaken.

"Why, at that time I really thought Mr. Grayson's death was accidental. I knew he had had the valuables in his possession earlier in the evening, and the natural assumption was that the man who picked up the body had also robbed it." Wickham offered his explanation in a matter-of-fact way that carried a certain degree of conviction with it.

"If Boris Orloff is guilty, where do you imagine he's hidden the booty?" Nickols asked.

"I've no answer for that conundrum. I went through Orloff's stateroom, entering by a master key I had access to among Mr. Grayson's effects, but found nothing of value. It may be Valerie's carrying the plunder on her person."

"When did you have a chance to do this?"

"This afternoon—since you left the yacht. Boris and Valerie came ashore."

"Which would give them opportunity to dispose of the money and sunburst—if they had it," Nickols put in.

"Yes, that's true," Wickham agreed morosely. "We may be too late."

"A New York express leaves at five forty-seven," Nickols mused. "I wonder——" He sounded a buzzer on his desk, and when an attendant appeared, said, "Send in McBraid. He ought to be here now."

After a short delay a plain-clothes man entered.

"Mac," said Nickols crisply, "a couple named Orloff may possibly try to leave town on the five forty-seven. They're off Grayson's yacht." He gave a description of each. "Tell 'em to go back to the *Zingara*. My orders. If they refuse, arrest 'em both as material witnesses. Don't think that will be necessary, though."

"O. K., chief. Anything else?"

"If they start back to the yacht, you might trail 'em and make sure they get there. On your way, Mac!"

Nickols presently terminated his interview with Wickham, sending out for Pauline St. John. Wickham intimated a desire to be present, but this was vetoed by the chief of police.

"Mrs. St. John," Nickols began, "when Doctor Brockett questioned you on the *Zingara* to-day, why did you conceal from us the fact that you had been below decks just before Mr. Grayson's death?"

Pauline's quick flush betrayed that the shot had gone home. Obviously she was a woman of less self-possession than Valerie Orloff. She sat silent, eyes lowered before the official's glance, and made no attempt at denial. Her long fingers, scrupulously manicured, twisted nervously together in her lap.

"The best thing you can do is tell the whole truth, Mrs. St. John," Nickols urged gently. All at once, and quite to his surprise, she burst into sobs.

"It's so terrible!" Pauline moaned. "I wish I'd never seen that dreadful boat!"

"Yes?" Nickols' voice was sympathetic. It began to look as if Pauline had not been unresponsive to Grayson's admiration. By an effort she regained her composure.

"I know what you think—that Mr. Grayson was murdered. It's true, too. And I know who did it."

"Ah!" Doctor Brockett murmured.

"Who was it?" Nickols demanded.

"His wife—Mrs. Grayson."

"Did you actually see her kill Mr. Grayson?"

"No, but I'm sure she did. No one else could have done it. I heard them quarreling in the saloon."

"What were they quarreling about?"

"About that diamond sunburst Boris sold to Mr. Grayson. I was to have it, and somehow Mrs. Grayson became suspicious. She demanded the pendant, and Mr. Grayson refused her. 'If you give it to Pauline,' Mrs. Grayson cried, 'I'll kill you, Andrew!' I heard her say that. She was almost beside herself with rage.

" 'That settles the matter,' Mr. Grayson answered. He was becoming very angry himself. 'Pauline gets it!' "

"And did you?" Nickols questioned.

"No. A few minutes later Mr. Grayson was dead. I *know* his wife killed him! She's got the sunburst now!"

Doctor Brockett sent an expressive glance across at his companion, throw-

ing out his hands with a significant gesture. Charges were coming fast.

"About this person you professed to have seen lurking on the *Zingara,* Mrs. St. John?" Nickols said. "Was there really such an individual?"

Her glance hurriedly sought his face; then lowered.

"Yes. I did see some one skulking along the deck."

"Before you went below and heard Mr. Grayson bickering with his wife?"

"Yes. But that man was probably only one of the crew. It's foolish to try and drag in any outsider."

"The crew are supposed to have been ashore."

"I know, but one might easily have remained behind."

"H'm! How do you suppose Mrs. Grayson killed her husband?"

"How should I know that?" Pauline's voice shrilled as if she were close to hysterics. "But she did it! Mrs. Grayson takes dope—she and that colored wench of hers."

"Doctor Brockett discovered that in the short time we were on the boat," Nickols said calmly.

"She claims Andy got her started," Pauline went on stormily, "but it's not so. Lots of those motion-picture people have the dope habit."

Shrewdly Nickols was wondering what more Pauline might disclose under proper pressure. It was clear that her charge against Mrs. Grayson was prompted by animus, but there might also be a sounder basis. What she was telling checked with other information Nickols possessed.

"Of course, the mere fact that Mrs. Grayson threatened to kill her husband does not prove that she did," he stated judicially. "You have made a serious charge, and frankly I fail to see a sufficient motive for the crime."

"Gloria — Mrs. Grayson — wanted Andy out of the way so she could marry Ted Wickham. I'm not blind to what's gone on. They might have been together in it, but Gloria's most to blame. Another thing—Andy had lately cut down on her dope supply. He told me he was going to cure her of the habit. Craze for dope might have given her nerve enough to carry the job through."

Brockett nodded to himself. Pauline's charges were beginning to sound more damaging. Well did Doctor Brockett know to what extent an addict's craving throttled all sense of moral values. Nor was Nickols unimpressed. He recalled the anonymous message, now conceiving that Mrs. St. John might be its author.

"Ever hear of Dave Ross?" he asked her. The woman's mystification was genuine, or at least very adroitly simulated.

"Dave Ross?" she repeated. "Who is he?"

"He's a fisherman. Made a big catch of tautog the other day. I thought you might have read about it in the *Shore Line Times.*"

"I never heard of Dave Ross, nor do I read the *Shore Line Times,*" Pauline maintained. "What's it all about?"

"Nothing of importance," Nickols said. "Well, we won't detain you any longer, Mrs. St. John. Thanks for your help. You and Mr. Wickham are at liberty to return to the *Zingara* now. And, oh, by the way, I wouldn't mention what we've been saying here to him or to any one else."

"Indeed I won't," Pauline promised.

In the meanwhile Boris Orloff and his wife were walking toward the Willantic railway station.

"For God's sake, buck up, can't you!" Orloff said. "I think we're going to make it. Don't blow the game now. It's a stroke of luck that police official didn't put the *Zingara* under quarantine before we got off."

He glanced anxiously at her as he spoke, and was in no degree reassured

by the sight. Valerie looked bad, quite lacking her normal cool self-possession. Her eyes were circled with dark rings, and even a casual observer might have inferred that she was perilously near collapse. Her legs were tottering as they crossed the gravel-strewn automobile drive to the station platform. The absurdly high heel of one pump rolled on a rounded bit of stone. Valerie stumbled; would have fallen, had not Boris closed his fingers tightly on her arm.

"Snap out of it!" he hissed, almost savagely.

Valerie's teeth sank into her crimson lips; she walked forward, limping a little, supported by Boris' hand.

"Sprain your ankle?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"Just a slight wrench. I'll be all right in a minute."

Boris left her seated in the waiting room, and approached the ticket window.

"Two for New York," he said distinctly. Then returned to his wife. "The train leaves at five forty-seven," he told her, lowering his voice. "We'll slip off at New Haven. A Waterbury bus pulls out right from the station, and we'll hop that. Damn this daylight saving! Otherwise it would be nearly dark by then. From Waterbury we can lose ourselves for a while somewhere in the Litchfield Hills. Later work north to Canada. The most important place we've got to steer away from is New York City."

"Only seven minutes to wait," Orloff said encouragingly. "Then we're clear."

Valerie's toe beat a nervous tattoo on the floor; abruptly stopped when he gave her ribs an admonitory jab with his elbow. Slowly the minutes dragged. At last the train whistled from a distance. About them eddied the characteristic bustle and confusion of train time in a railroad station; out on the platform there was the brisk rumble of hand trucks as baggage was shifted.

"Come on," Boris muttered. "It's all right, Valerie."

With a deafening roar the New York express thundered in.

"This way!" and Boris steered her toward a coach, more suitable for his purpose than the luxury of a Pullman. Valerie's foot was already on the bottom step, Boris helping her up, when a stranger intruded.

"One moment, please!" he said curtly. "I'd like to have a word with you two."

His hand flipped back the lapel of his coat, giving the Orloffs a momentary glimpse of a small, official-looking badge. Weakly Valerie stepped down to the platform, making way for other travelers who were forming an impatient line behind her.

"I'd stick around if I were you," the stranger told them.

"By whose orders?" Orloff demanded angrily.

"Chief of Police Nickols. He says for you to go back to the *Zingara*—and stay there till further notice."

"I don't know whether we will or not," Boris said belligerently.

In this emergency, when the blow had actually fallen, Valerie seemed more composed than during the uncertainty of waiting.

"Don't make a scene—now, Boris!" she begged, her hand resting on his arm. "It might be worse, you know."

"That's good advice," the plain-clothes man approved, shrewdly sizing up Boris Orloff, who for an instant looked almost desperate enough to pull a gun.

"All aboard!" came the warning call. Slowly the train began to move. Boris watched it, his eyes dull.

"We're sunk!" he muttered under his breath. The rôles were now strangely reversed; Valerie, frightened though she was, and desperate, too, displayed a higher degree of stamina than Boris.

"Stiffen up," she adjured him impa-

tiently. "I tell you things might have broken a lot harder for us."

"Want a taxi to take you to the boat landing?" McBraid asked.

"Please!" Valerie assented, and a moment later they were entering the machine.

"I'll ride with you, if you don't mind," the officer announced. Without waiting to be assured that it was perfectly all right, the plain-clothes man climbed in after them.

"Rockland Drive," he said to the driver. "Stop at the old stone wharf."

CHAPTER VI.

THE AVENGER.

IN the light of his interviews with Wickham and Pauline St. John, Nickols deemed it useless to attempt further concealment of the actual situation, at least from persons aboard the *Zingara.* Most of them must already have drawn their own conclusions.

No inkling of the truth had yet leaked out to the general public, and one or two reporters, attracted to the scene, had proved satisfied to accept the theory of death by accident. Thus it had been recorded in the papers, for which the chief of police was duly thankful.

Some one on the yacht was guilty. Of that Nickols felt positive, though the murderer's identity still remained a mystery. Practically no one of Grayson's associates had a clean bill of health in the official's mind, but evidence pointed more directly at certain members of the party than at others.

"There's only one thing to do at present," he told Doctor Brockett. "Put an officer on duty at the old wharf and another on the yacht, with strict orders that no one leaves the *Zingara* or comes aboard without authorization. A temporary telephone line can be run to the wharf, so our man there can call headquarters if he needs to. A few hundred yards of new wire will do the trick."

"Folks on the yacht will resent being put under even that much restraint," the coroner observed.

"Let 'em resent it!" Nickols snapped. "The *Zingara's* to stay in the bay, and they're all to stick to the *Zingara,* until this business is cleared up. We'll get a break before long."

These details were promptly arranged for, Nickols himself making another trip aboard the vessel to explain the new regulations he had put in force.

"It's probably no secret to most of you, if not all," he told them, "that we know Mr. Grayson to have been the victim of foul play. I'm not making any wild threats, but from now on each of you is subject to police supervision."

This was received with varied degrees of emotion.

"Aren't you exceeding your authority, Mr. Nickols?" Gloria Grayson demanded icily. To judge by appearances she had little or no interest in seeing the murderer of her husband brought to justice.

"Any one who thinks his personal rights are being trampled on is at liberty to send for his lawyer. However, I might suggest that friendly cooperation with the Willantic police would be more to the point than an attempt to block our work."

"In other words, what you imply is this," Wickham spoke up: "The person rash enough to hinder you is rendering himself open to added suspicion."

"Very well put," Nickols commented. "And I'll add that practically all of you are open to suspicion right now, some, of course, more than the rest."

"But it is an outrage—this being detained," Boris Orloff sputtered indignantly. "Me—I have important business in New York that must be attended to."

"Your business will have to wait—or be transacted at a distance, Mr. Orloff," Nickols told him. "Whenever you wish, an officer will be detailed to ac-

company you to Willantic. From there you can telephone to the city or send a wire."

Boris subsided, muttering to himself. Valerie was looking at him, an expression akin to terror momentarily marring the beauty of her features. She was deathly pale, save for brilliant spots of rouge on either cheek, which stood out in striking contrast to her pallor.

Wickham noted this little byplay between husband and wife; his glance caught Nickols' eyes, as if to say, "Get that? What did I tell you?"

"Of course," Nickols said, "I can't actually force my program through without your full cooperation. But I can do this much—make wholesale arrests of all persons whom I desire to hold as material witnesses. It would be some time before your lawyers could arrive and go through the necessary red tape for release from custody. You would have to spend hours—perhaps a night—in jail. That would be unpleasant and give you quite undesirable publicity. Why not be reasonable about the issue?"

He paused, glancing around the silent circle, which, with the exception of Steve Brewer, comprised all who were known to have been on board the night Grayson died, and Captain Bonney in addition.

Wickham conferred with Gloria Grayson in private for a moment, and then with the rest.

"We agree," he told the chief of police.

"It is more than likely," Nickols resumed, "that the person who killed Andrew Grayson is here now, listening to my words. I have strong reasons to suppose that at least one other here present shares the secret. My duty is to discover the guilty, and, Providence permitting, I expect to do so."

Nickols was a bachelor, living in a first-floor apartment on the edge of Willantic's business center. His second anonymous communication regarding the Grayson case was delivered some time during the night—a folded sheet of common brown wrapping paper, which he found thrust under the door next morning. The message was printed in capital letters, drawn in pencil by aid of a ruler, as follows:

> If you want the weapon that killed Andrew Grayson look under the third porthole from stern of yacht—starboard side.
>
> THE AVENGER.

Nickols handled the paper gingerly, having due thought for finger prints, but a quick test showed not a trace.

"This bird is smart, whoever he is," the chief of police mused. "He knows that even straight lines drawn free hand would be pie for a handwriting expert, so he used a ruler. Clever! And the paper can't be traced either. I've been hoping for another hot tip. 'Under third porthole,' eh? H'm! That means on the bottom of the bay, of course. Just what I suspected. Grayson was shoved overboard through the big porthole, and then the party who slugged him disposed of the weapon the same way.

"Was it Mrs. Grayson—Boris—Ted Wickham—St. John—or somebody else? Boris couldn't have done it if he was up by the main deck rail when his wife fell overboard. But was he? Might not have been where he claimed. Lights were turned low enough so almost anything was possible.

"'The Avenger,'" he mused on. "That doesn't sound like one of those people on the yacht. Too melodramatic. Well, we'll know more after investigating the bottom of Rockland Bay."

He took an early opportunity to show the paper to Doctor Brockett.

"If some one on the *Zingara* came ashore to plant this," the coroner said, "your operator there must have been asleep on the job."

"I've been thinking about that myself," Nickols admitted.

"Was it the same party who sent the other message?"

"I should say not, though we can't be positive yet. It's apparent that the sender or senders wish to remain anonymous. Now there's a risk of discovery involved—twice as much for two messages as for one. Why not give all the information at once, and so cut the risk in half?"

"I see your point. Admitting it's true, the identity of the murderer is known to at least two other persons, each of whom wishes to see the guilty punished."

Nickols shook his head.

"You're reasoning too fast, doctor. My belief is that the murderer himself sent one of these notes."

"But why?" Brockett protested. "To help put his own neck in a noose?"

"No, not at all. In the hope of fixing the guilt on some one who is actually innocent, but against whom there may be strong circumstantial evidence. Some one the murderer wishes to see in serious trouble. There's the big clew for us to follow."

"Ah!" the doctor murmured. "That sounds plausible, come to think it over. And the other note was sent by some one who saw the crime committed?"

"So I believe."

"And which of these two more or less uncertain—I almost said hypothetical—persons sent the first message?"

"My theory is that the murderer sent that one, fearing Grayson's death might be accepted as an accident. He wanted the crime put on some one else, remember."

"Pretty thin reasoning, I'm afraid, Stan," the coroner objected. "But we can theorize more satisfactorily after your latest tip has been followed up. I suppose that's the next step."

"Yes. We'll drag the bottom some time to-day. If that doesn't show results it will be necessary to call in a diver to help us."

When they reached the bay with the equipment used for dragging operations, Nickols sized up the tide.

"It's flood now," he told Brockett. "I'd say that the yacht would be at least fifty feet north of her position at ebb."

"That's right, too," the coroner conceded. "You think of everything, don't you, Stan? I'd have started dragging directly along the vessel's side."

The man then on duty at the wharf —one Jack Norton—had been stationed there during part of the night.

"Did anybody come ashore from the *Zingara* last night?" Nickols asked him.

"Not a boat left her while I was here," Norton said. "But——"

"But what?" Nickols insisted.

"Well, it was kinda funny, chief. It was moonlight, you know, and all of a sudden I thought I saw what looked like a man's head stick up out of the water. Then it went down and didn't come up again."

"How far offshore?"

"Mebby a couple of hundred feet."

"Might have been some diving bird," Nickols suggested.

"If it was the kind of bird that wears feathers, chief," Norton declared, "I'm cuckoo; that's all. I'll swear that what I saw was a man's head, with swimming goggles on. But where he went to is too much for me."

"Well, no matter now. If the thing appears again let me know."

Thereupon Nickols went on to supervise the dragging operations, which were carried on at the place where the *Zingara* would lie at ebb tide—about fifty feet south of the third starboard porthole. A curious group collected at the yacht's rail, watching with no little interest.

The first two or three hauls of the dragnet brought up nothing of signifi-

cance, but better luck was presently with them.

"By golly!" one of the men muttered, as the contents of the net came into view. "There's a sandbag!" Eagerly he plucked it forth from the collection of starfish, oyster shells, and worthless odds and ends that had been rotting on the bottom of the bay. "Made from a woman's stocking—a silk stocking! Here y'are, chief!"

Nickols looked closely at the sodden object his assistant passed over. It would indeed serve as a vicious weapon, perfectly capable of cracking a man's skull. The stocking was new—of gray silk.

"It's what I wanted, boys," said he. "All right. We're through here. Land Doctor Brockett and myself at the yacht, and then you can go ashore."

This was done. Captain Bonney met them as they reached the deck, others of the cruising party close at hand.

"A newspaper, please!" Nickols said.

Wickham handed one over. The end of the stocking was tied with an ordinary overhand knot, but pulled very tight; that, and the soaked condition of the fabric, made it resist Nickols' efforts for a time, but finally he had it loose, shaking the sand out on the opened paper.

"May I have that other stocking, Mrs. Grayson?" he asked. "Mate to the one you reported taken?"

"Get it from my cabin, Carol," Gloria Grayson ordered. "It's in the dressing-table drawer."

As might be expected, Mrs. Grayson's stockings were of the very best quality, bearing the mark of an exclusive Fifth Avenue shop. This aided in identification, and when the two were compared there could be no doubt; they were duplicates.

"Then the person who murdered Andrew must have stolen the stocking from my cabin!" Mrs. Grayson gasped.

"So it would seem," Nickols agreed dryly. "Now everything's clear but finding who it was."

He caught a glimpse of Carol Fox's eyes from the outer fringe of the circle, big with mingled suspense and excitement; saw her lips half form the words, "Steve Brewer!" At the same instant Bonney spoke.

"Brewer, by George! He stole Mrs. Grayson's dinner ring, just before she missed the stocking. And there was sand on the floor! Remember, Nickols?"

Carol approached, plucking timidly at Nickols' elbow.

"I saw Steve stuffing something in his coat pocket," she said tensely, "as he came from Mrs. Grayson's stateroom. I couldn't tell what it was, but it looked like cloth. I know it was bigger than the ring. Steve must have killed Mr. Grayson."

"Looks that way," Bonney agreed. Then to Nickols in a low voice, "A word with you in private."

Bonney led the official to the seclusion of his own quarters, and closed the door before speaking again.

"A matter has come up which I think you ought to know," he then said. "Nick Petrosk—that new hand—is missing. I saw him on the boat last night, but this morning the fellow's gone. His duffel bag has not been taken, though."

"How did this Petrosk come to know you were a man short? What led him to apply for the job, I mean?"

"It seems he was an acquaintance of the chap who left, whose name was Peter Janov. Peter tipped Nick off that there was a vacancy, sending him around to see me."

"What sort of chap was Peter?" Nickols inquired.

"All right, except for his views. He was a communist, and his ideas were pretty rabid. Other members of the crew didn't take to him because of that, and they were accustomed to ride him severely at times. Peter always had a

stock of more or less inflammatory pamphlets on hand. Comrade stuff. Let us rise and strike off the shackles, you know. Rot like that. He'd pass them out, in hope of gaining converts to the cause."

"Did Janov give any reason for quitting his berth on the *Zingara?* Had he seemed dissatisfied?"

"No—to both queries. Just said he was through. He acted rather sorry to leave. It might have been a game between them to get Petrosk on the boat." This had already occurred to Nickols as being more than probable.

"Did Nick live in New Haven? I believe you said he was taken on there."

"I can't say as to that. One of his recommendations was from a member of the New York Yacht Club."

"Well, I'm glad to know this, captain," Nickols said. "Give me a description of Petrosk."

"He's about five feet ten in height, and should weigh close to a hundred and sixty-five. Hair black, eyes blue, excellent muscular development. Very lithe and quick in all his motions. Somehow to me he seemed to suggest the idea of a caged tiger; boiling with suppressed energy; small anchor tattooed on the left forearm."

"All right, captain. Thank you."

They returned to the deck, where Nickols rejoined Doctor Brockett. The latter had been chatting with Valerie, who had quite taken his fancy. She seemed more herself than on the previous evening.

"Things look bad for Steve Brewer," the coroner remarked. "Mrs. Orloff has it from Carol that he's been cherishing a deep-seated grudge for some time."

"Yes," Valerie added. "Coral claims he told her he was going to 'get' Mr. Grayson sooner or later. I never did like Steve, though Gloria considered him a first-class servant—up to the time he stole her ring."

"Can't say that I blame you for feeling that way, Mrs. Orloff," Nickols agreed. "Rather cheeky, that business of his sneaking into Mrs. Grayson's stateroom after whatever plunder he could pick up."

"You really think that Steve is the murderer, Mr. Nickols?" Valerie spoke with an elaborate air of unconcern.

"Well," Nickols countered, "he might have some trouble proving himself innocent."

"You policemen never tell much, do you?" Valerie pouted, and, turning on her heels, she swept away, somewhat miffed. Perhaps it was due to her failure to get definite information.

"The next thing to be located," Brockett said in a low voice to his companion, "is that missing diamond sunburst. The person who killed Grayson has it—a clew that should be followed. Why not have a thorough search of the yacht—and all on board as well?"

"We may come to that——" Nickols broke off, flashing the coroner a quick warning. Gloria Grayson had come up the companionway, and stood listening, within easy earshot of them.

"Well, doctor," Nickols instantly went on, "there's nothing to keep us longer aboard the yacht. Let's go ashore."

"That was a foolish slip I made," Brockett disgustedly confessed, when they were in the car headed for Willantic. "I'm most devilishly sorry, Stan. Did it do any harm, do you fancy?"

"On the whole—no. A peculiar expression flitted across Mrs. Grayson's face, and I think your remark may have been seed planted in fertile ground. We may reap a harvest."

"And the next step in the pursuit of this—ah—elusive criminal?"

"A chat with Steve Brewer now comes on the program."

Nickols then went on to tell Coroner Brockett of the conversation between Captain Bonney and himself.

"But that makes it look as if the

Russian sailor was guilty," Brockett exclaimed. "Janov and Petrosk were friends, and since Janov's a rabid radical, chances are the other is, too. Any one of ultracommunistic leanings would resent the mere existence of a rich idler such as Grayson. It may be a Red plot to get rid of one more capitalist. Janov lacked nerve for the murder, so Comrade Petrosk took his place."

Nickols could not help grinning at the coroner's sudden burst of enthusiastic deduction.

"Better join the police force, doctor," he chuckled. "You're making out a fine case against Nick Petrosk, but just the same I'm keen for an interview with Steve. I intend to try a mild dose of third-degree argument on that darky."

CHAPTER VII.

CAPTAIN BONNEY'S STROLL.

STANLEY NICKOLS lost no time in having Brewer brought before him on their return to police headquarters. Coroner Brockett was of course present at the interview.

"I'm sorry for you, Steve," the police official began. "In about three months, more or less, they'll be hanging a darky up at Weathersfield, and you'll be it. You're in dutch, Steve."

Brewer displayed a wholly natural perturbation at this alarming news, though he appeared greatly mystified.

"W-what you talking about, boss?" he gasped, rolling his eyes till the whites showed. "How come you mention that there happening to me? All I did was swipe a ring."

"Applesauce! You made a sandbag out of that silk stocking you took from Mrs. Grayson's stateroom," Nickols said brutally. "You slugged Mr. Grayson on the back of the head with it, and then pushed his body overboard through an oversized porthole. Then you threw the sandbag overboard. We got it out of the bay to-day."

The mulatto's face grew gray with an ashen pallor.

"So help me God, boss, I never did!" was his earnest declaration.

"I'm a bad man to lie to, Steve!" Nickols threatened. "You were sore at Mr. Grayson, weren't you? You said you were going to 'Get him,' didn't you?" Steve remained silent. "Come on, speak up!" Nickols commanded harshly. "Isn't that so?"

Brewer passed uneasy fingers around his throat, as if already conscious of the tightening hangman's noose.

"Well?" Nickols snapped, his voice as sharp and incisive as the crack of a whip.

"Why, yes, boss," Steve faltered. "I reckon I may have made some foolish cracks like them you say. But—I—I never meant it. I never killed Mr. Grayson. Honest to God!"

Abruptly Nickols changed his attack.

"What do you know about happy dust, Steve?" he asked in more gentle tones.

"Happy dust?" Brewer repeated. "I know it's good stuff to let alone. I don't crave no happy dust in my system!"

"Never peddled dope, did you?"

"Huh! Why now, boss, that's something else again. I might have sold a little, now and then, to some chap that wanted it right bad. Not as a regular line of business, I don't mean."

"That's why you went into Mrs. Grayson's stateroom, was it, Steve? Looking for a chance to steal some happy dust?"

"You're a powerful smart man, boss. Yessir, that's what I was looking for. And like a damned fool I had to take the ring instead, that they could prove on me."

"Didn't find any happy dust, eh, Steve?"

"Not enough for one sniff, boss."

"You and that colored girl, Carol Fox, are pretty good friends, aren't you?"

The Negro grunted contemptuously.

"Say, that yaller cat likes me the same way most folks like poison ivy. Huh!" Steve cackled derisively, "if she had her way I'd have a steady shower of bad luck and nothing else but."

"What's Carol got against you, Steve?" Nickols asked mildly.

"It's like this, boss. Carol, she craved to make marriage with a colored chap what's got him a nice little plumbing business up in Harlem. He's a honest, decent fella, and he'd make most any gal a mighty fine husband. Bud Jones, his name is.

"Now, Carol she's crazy about Bud, and I guess Bud figures she's the gal he'd be proud to make Missis Jones. I know Bud, and I like him; he's a friend of mine, see? And when I realize as how he's falling strong for Carol, it makes me mad. Boss, you know Carol's a happy-dust gal?"

"Yes," Nickols told him. "I know that, Steve. Go on."

"Well, I makes bold to ask Bud Jones if he wants marriage with a gal what's got her a taste for happy dust. Bud, he says no. Next time this flossy Carol Fox comes rolling her eyes up at him, she gets left out in the cold. Some way Carol finds out who told Bud Jones on her, and spoiled her chances to land a husband that's got him plenty money to spend on a wife. She's plenty sore at me, I bet you."

"Where has Carol been getting her happy dust?" was Nickols' next question.

"She gets it off Mis' Grayson, and Mis' Grayson she got it off Mr. Grayson, except when he now and then felt ugly and wouldn't come across with the stuff." Then, reverting to the accusation Nickols had hurled at him: "I never killed Mr. Grayson, boss. He was mostly mighty kind to me; it was the booze made him act meanlike at times. Take that last day he cussed me out. Next morning he give me a ten-dollar bill. 'Steve,' he says, 'I was drunk last night. Forget what happened.'

"I pockets that ten-spot grinning.

" 'Mr. Grayson,' I says, 'I is already forgot what it was you called me '

" 'Good!' he says."

"H'm!" Nickols mused. "Steve, did you see those two silk stockings hanging over Mrs. Grayson's chair when you sneaked into her cabin?"

"Sure, I remember seeing 'em, but I never touched 'em. Shucks! What would I want with a lady's silk stocking? They was there when I went out. If a stocking was gone, somebody else must have got it."

"Queer about the sand in your cabin, though," Nickols reminded him.

"I favors low shoes, boss, see?" Steve earnestly pointed at his capacious footwear. "I got the sand in 'em on the beach, just like I told Cap'n Bonney, and when I took 'em off at night, it spilled over the floor. I didn't have any broom handy, so I covered the stuff with a rug.

"I know it looks like I might have made me a club in my cabin out of Mrs. Grayson's stocking and some sand. But tell me this, boss: if I'd done all that, aiming to kill somebody, and spilled a little sand on the floor, do you reckon I'd be fool enough to leave it lay there? Huh! Guess not! I'd clean it up careful, every last grain."

As usual Nickols proved noncommittal.

"You put up a pretty good argument for yourself, Steve. But somebody slugged Mr. Grayson with the silk-stocking sandbag. You're in a bad jam. The prosecuting attorney could take this evidence and hang you with it. You wouldn't have a chance.

"But it might happen that there are other facts bearing on the matter that you can give us—facts that might help clear you. Come clean, Steve—if you've anything more to say."

"Oh, I can say more—if I feel like

talking, boss. And I reckon I do. Why don't you ask Mis' Grayson about how come her husband got killed?"

"So we're back to Gloria again, are we?" Nickols mused, with a silent glance at Brockett. Aloud he said, "Mrs. Grayson?"

"Yeah—her and Cap'n Bonney. Smooth, they are—but they ain't fooled Steve Brewer."

"What do you mean—Mrs. Grayson and Captain Bonney?" Nickols demanded gruffly.

"Why, they're powerful sweet on each other, boss."

Brockett emitted a sharp exclamation of surprise, and even Nickols himself was not immune to this fresh sensation.

"I think you're lying, Steve," he said. "There's no reason for us to believe that the captain and Mrs. Grayson care for each other."

"Huh!" Steve grunted. "Most likely you know more about it than I do, boss. Me—I don't know a thing. Probably you been on that boat plenty times when I wasn't."

Nickols let that pass.

"Do you mean that Mrs. Grayson killed her husband?" he asked. "Bonney couldn't have done it, for he wasn't on the *Zingara* that night."

"I never said either of 'em did it. But maybe they hired another party to do it." Steve chuckled shrewdly. "Folks mebby think Mis' Grayson likes Mr. Wickham. Huh! He ain't got a show. It's Cap'n Bonney! She'd be glad to marry the cap'n, I reckon, if her husband was dead."

"Who was this third party involved?"

"I don't know, boss." Steve's voice was regretful.

"You're making all this up, Steve," Nickols accused him sharply, "just as a sort of alibi for yourself."

"No, sir, boss," Steve maintained. "I ain't making it up. Those are facts I told you."

"All right, Steve," Nickols said. "We won't need you any longer at present." And Brewer was taken back to his cell.

"Well?" Doctor Brockett inquired, when he and Nickols were alone.

"Yes! Some mess, isn't it? Practically everybody we have any evidence against can produce pretty good evidence against some one else."

"And what a collection of possible motives!" the doctor added. "Jealousy, unrequited love, hatred, revenge."

"Don't forget avarice," Nickols said. "Grayson is supposed to have had a fortune on his person when killed."

About eight that evening the police chief received a phone call from the man on duty at the old wharf. Captain Bonney was asking leave to go ashore.

"Where's Bonney now?" Nickols wanted to know.

"He's still on the boat."

"Hold everything till Mac gets down there. I want him to shadow Bonney. You can explain the delay by telling the captain you had trouble in locating me. Understand?"

"O. K., chief!"

To McBraid Nickols gave explicit instructions.

"Trail Bonney wherever he goes. If he hides anything, get it. No matter what happens, don't show yourself, and don't arrest him."

Then Nickols settled down to wait for whatever might develop from the trap he had baited.

In due season Captain Bonney received permission to leave the *Zingara*. A sailor rowed him ashore, and with a curt greeting to the man stationed at the old wharf, Bonney struck off down Rockland Drive, heading east. Mac took up the trail—a silent, unobtrusive figure that drifted along among the shadows. Trees bordered the road, and at the right through openings in the foliage, glinted the moonlit waters of Rockland Bay.

Bonney moved leisurely, puffing at a cigar. Twice the captain abruptly reversed his steps, as though to settle the possibility that he might be followed. But Mac was too shrewd to be caught —melting into concealment of the bushes.

At length Bonney seemed satisfied that he was unobserved, and quickened his pace, while McBraid speeded up in turn. Thus they proceeded along the winding road.

Three large oaks grew in a triangle at a point some two hundred yards from the wharf. Near the base of the largest, perhaps thirty feet off the road, was a low ledge of weathered granite. Opposite the oak trees Bonney paused, with a final backward glance. Had he but known it, Mac was almost at his heels.

Convinced that the coast was clear, Bonney slipped quickly into the bushes, his objective the jumbled pile of rotten granite slabs. Bending over, he thrust something under a big flat piece of stone, and immediately turned back toward the road. He had been absent from it only a matter of seconds.

Mac, peering through the moonlight from the shelter of a convenient bush, took in the whole affair. He waited until certain that the captain had resumed his stroll; then removed the object Bonney had taken such pains to hide, thrusting it into his pocket. Thirty seconds later he was again unconcernedly on the trail.

At ten thirty exactly Mac appeared in Nickols' presence, ready to report.

"Well?" the chief inquired.

McBraid gave a summary of Bonney's actions.

"Get it?" Nickols snapped at mention of the article hidden by the three oaks.

Without a word Mac extended a small, plush-covered case.

"Know what's in it?" Nickols asked, to which Mac shook his head. He was not a man who used words needlessly.

Nickols pressed the catch and up flew the lid, disclosing a star-shaped pendant of superb diamonds surrounding a center stone which glowed in the electric light with unusual color and brilliance.

"By gad, Mac; that's beautiful!" Nickols enthused, holding the trinket out for the plain-clothes man to inspect. "Plenty of murders have been done for less excuse."

"Very pretty," Mac conceded.

"The czarina may have been wearing this," Nickols remarked pensively, turning the diamonds so that they caught the light with a dazzling play of fire, "when the Reds stormed the palace."

"Yeah?" Mac nodded dubiously. "Mebby so, chief, but it sounds to me like a lot of hooey."

"Don't be so sure. We've pretty straight evidence that this sunburst came directly out of Russia. But what else did Bonney do?"

"Nothing. Just stalled along the drive as far as the point. Then beat it back to the yacht."

"Anything more to report?"

Mac scratched his head hesitatingly.

"I saw one queer thing, but it didn't have any connection with the bird I shadowed. In one place I had a good view of the bay, where the moonlight fell on the water, between the *Zingara* and shore. All of a sudden a man's head popped into sight; then it sank and didn't come up again. I watched to see. That's a hot one, now, ain't it?" And Mac grinned shamefacedly, as if not expecting his story to be credited.

Nickols' face was thoughtful.

"Jack Norton saw the same thing last night," he said. "You sure it wasn't a big fish breaking water?"

"Did look some like the head of a fish," Mac admitted. "Mebby you're right."

"Well, anyway, you did a good job of work, Mac. Now I want you to go after Bonney. Got a car here?"

"No, sir."

"Take mine. It's parked in the side

alley. Here are the keys. If Bonney comes without any argument, well and good. If not, arrest him. Keep the other folks on the *Zingara* from getting wise if you can."

By eleven fifteen Mac had returned, bringing the *Zingara's* skipper with him.

"Any trouble?" Nickols asked in a low tone.

"Not a bit, chief. He came like a little lamb." And thereupon Mac departed.

For a moment Nickols faced Bonney quietly, from back of the desk at which he sat. Then he said:

"Sit down, captain. I'm sorry to disturb you at this late hour, but there were one or two questions I wished to ask."

"Quite all right, I'm sure." Bonney's efforts to appear at ease were a trifle forced, Nickols felt.

"You obtained permission to leave the *Zingara* this evening, captain. May I ask where you went?"

"Why, for a stroll along the drive. I wanted to stretch my legs a bit, you see."

"Yes, I see; or at least I think I do. But what I can't see is why you should be so keen on hiding this ornament." And Nickols flashed the diamond pendant on Bonney's startled gaze.

"Good God!" burst involuntarily from the yachtsman's lips. His skin grew pale under its healthy coat of tan. "Good God!" he repeated.

"You have nothing to say other than that?" Nickols inquired.

Bonney squared his shoulders back.

"Nothing," he stated defiantly.

"You don't deny concealing the sunburst?"

"Why bother to deny a thing which is obviously true? You've got me, haven't you? That should be enough."

"Don't you wish to tell me how the piece came into your possession?"

Bonney shook his head, lips remaining firmly closed.

"The conclusions we may draw," Nickols said, "are—well, shall I say, detrimental to you, captain? No doubt you are aware that shortly before his death Andrew Grayson bought the pendant from Boris Orloff. Supposedly it remained in Grayson's hands up to the time of his murder, when it disappeared. We are justified in assuming that the killer was actuated, in part, at least, by a desire, or perhaps willingness, to rob, though other motives may have entered in."

"It is ridiculous to infer that I killed Grayson," Bonney declared. "I have a perfect alibi."

"To be sure," Nickols agreed smoothly. "I did not mean to imply that you actually struck the blow that killed him. But as it happens, I have reason to believe that Grayson's death would not have been displeasing to you."

Bonney appeared startled.

"What do you mean, sir, by that damned innuendo?" he blustered.

"You may interpret my statement as you see fit, captain. What I am trying to do is show you the wisdom of frankness. Where did you get this diamond sunburst?"

"I refuse to answer," Bonney replied stiffly, "on the grounds that I might incriminate myself."

"As you wish, captain. That is your privilege. But it leaves only one course of action open to me. You are under arrest, Captain Bonney, charged with being an accessory before the fact in the murder of Andrew Grayson!"

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. GRAYSON'S STORY.

STAN NICKOLS was not surprised to receive, early the next morning, a phone call from the emergency instrument installed at the old stone wharf.

"There's a fellow on the *Zingara* wants permission to use the telephone,"

he was informed. "How about it, chief?"

"Who does he want to call?"

A delay followed, then the officer again spoke:

"It's Mr. Wickham; he wants to talk with you, chief. Didn't say so at first, or I'd let it go right through."

"All right," Nickols assented. "I'll hold the wire."

Another delay. Finally:

"Wickham speaking, Mr. Nickols. What's happened to Captain Bonney? A man came for the skipper last evening, and we haven't seen him since."

"Bonney's under arrest," Nickols answered.

"What?" Wickham yelled unbelievingly into the phone. "What's that you said?"

Nickols repeated his statement.

"What's he arrested for?"

"For being an accessory in Grayson's murder."

"Oh!" said Wickham feebly.

A moment of silence ensued. At last Nickols was about to hang up, under an impression that the call was over, when another voice sounded over the wire—a woman's voice. Evidently Wickham had not come ashore alone.

"Chief of Police Nickols?"

"Yes."

"This is Mrs. Grayson. Is it true that you have arrested Captain Bonney in connection with my husband's murder?"

"Yes, Mrs. Grayson, that's correct."

"Oh!" It was a sort of terrified gasp. Then, in a lower tone, as if she was whispering, lips pressed close to the transmitter: "There's been a frightful mistake. I must see you at once, Mr. Nickols. Privately. It's—it's very important."

"I'll be in my office for the next hour, Mrs. Grayson. Would you like me to send a car for you now?"

"If you will, please. I'll wait here at the wharf."

"H'm!" Nickols mused. "I thought I'd get a rise out of her—or somebody."

In due season Gloria Grayson was announced. She appeared highly distraught.

"Tell me," were her first words, "what makes you think Captain Bonney had anything to do with killing my husband?"

Nickols covertly studied her under pretext of arranging some papers on his desk. Finally he said:

"One of my operators observed him hiding a valuable piece of jewelry—a diamond sunburst that you may have heard of. We are justified in assuming that the person who killed Mr. Grayson robbed him. Of course, I knew that Bonney did not actually kill your husband. He was in town when it happened, at the home of a well-known Willantic citizen, who vouches for the fact. But he refused to give any explanation of how the ornament came into his possession."

Gloria stared at him, one hand pressed against her bosom. Nickols could see its rapid rise and fall.

"Captain Bonney," she said, "is too chivalrous a gentleman for his own good. He is assuming responsibility for a crime of which he is innocent, in an attempt to shield me."

"You, Mrs. Grayson!" Nickols affected vast astonishment.

"Yes," she confessed bitterly. "I didn't tell the whole truth when you and Doctor Brockett questioned me on the yacht day before yesterday. I gave Captain Bonney the sunburst yesterday afternoon, asking him to hide it."

"Why did you do that, Mrs. Grayson?" was Nickols' quiet question.

"I heard Doctor Brockett mention search of the yacht—of the people on board. I was terribly frightened when —when he said that the murderer could be identified through possession of the sunburst." Her voice raced along, in broken, disconnected sentences. "I had

it, you see, in a small safe in my stateroom. I knew I'd be compelled to open the safe. There was no other place I could think of where the pendant could be hidden. It's all my fault that Captain Bonney's in trouble." She began to weep quietly.

"There's one thing you haven't explained, Mrs. Grayson," Nickols reminded her—"a rather important detail. How did you happen to be in possession of the sunburst?"

"It was very simple," she said, dabbing at her eyes with a handkerchief. "The case was in the outside pocket of Mr. Grayson's dinner coat the night of his death. He was quite intoxicated—I lied to Doctor Brockett about that—and he never knew when I took it out. I was in my cabin locking the pendant in the safe—instead of getting a wrap, as I claimed—when Valerie Orloff screamed and fell overboard."

"That's about what I thought happened," Nickols mused aloud. "Do you realize, Mrs. Grayson, that now you yourself rest under grave suspicion of having killed your husband. I think Bonney believed you guilty."

"I'm afraid he did. I had no chance to explain everything when I asked him to dispose of the sunburst. But, of course, you know very well that I didn't kill Andrew."

Nickols permitted himself a slight smile at this naïve denial.

"A prosecuting attorney could make a pretty serious case against you, however, Mrs. Grayson. Let me call attention to facts which he would be sure to bring out. You had just quarreled violently with your husband, who has been —you will pardon me, please—carrying on an affair with another woman on the boat. You were even heard to threaten him with death, unless he gave *you* the pendant instead of this other woman, for whom Mr. Grayson evidently intended it.

"There is still a further motive as well. Mr. Grayson had cut down on your drug supply recently, had he not?"

Gloria's eyes had grown big with terror as Nickols listed his damaging line of arguments. Clearly she had no idea that so much was known.

"Yes," she sobbed, "he did that to torture me, knowing that I had to have the stuff or go mad. You can't imagine, Mr. Nickols, how cruelly Andrew used to treat me. I said to my maid one day that I wished *he* had the habit; that *he* might be compelled to go without his drug when the hellish craving came on. It's a frightful slavery—but what can one do?"

"Cures are not unknown," Nichols replied, moved to pity for the unfortunate woman's sore distress. "Will power and a sincere desire to be cured will often work wonders. Many people have been cured. Believe me, Mrs. Grayson, your case is far from hopeless. Doctor Brockett is something of an authority on narcotics. Why don't you have a frank talk with him?"

"Well—perhaps—some time. You'll release Captain Bonney now, won't you, Mr. Nickols? If you have to make an arrest for appearances' sake—let me take his place."

"That won't be necessary, Mrs. Grayson—as long as you agree to continue staying on the yacht, where I can get you if needed. And I'll turn the captain loose this morning. Now I'll have a man drive you back to the *Zingara*."

Gloria Grayson departed, profuse in her expressions of gratitude. She was quite different from the rather haughty personage who had allowed herself to be interviewed on the yacht.

"Too bad about that woman," Nickols mused. "There's a lot of good in her, despite it all. Steve was right, in one part of his story at least. It's Bonney she loves, not Wickham. And what a poor excuse for humanity this fellow Grayson must have been!"

Nickols then sent for the captain,

whose haggard, careworn face betrayed a sleepless night.

"Ready to talk yet?" Nickols demanded.

"No, sir. I have nothing to say."

"Good!" was Nickols' unexpected approval—at which Bonney blinked. "We police," Nickols went on, "sometimes get the reputation of being a hard-boiled gang of pirates, but it's not always true, captain. I admire your courageous and unselfish stand in this matter, which, fortunately, is no longer required. Mrs. Grayson just came to interview me—of her own accord, I might add. You're free to go."

Bonney's face registered a mixture of emotions.

"You're not arresting her, are you?"

"No. I've already sent Mrs. Grayson back to the yacht."

"By Jove, sir, you're white! Thanks!" He clasped Nichols' hand warmly. "You know, Gloria—er—Mrs. Grayson, I mean—is deserving of great pity. I—I wish I could help her."

"You refer to the unfortunate habit of which she's a victim?"

"Yes. She might be cured—if the right man took her in hand. What she needs is sympathetic, understanding care. I hope—when this hellish mess is eventually cleared up——"

Bonney stopped, his face working with emotion. Then, with an abrupt shrug of the shoulders, he left.

Nickols next spent some time in long-distance telephoning, calling both New Haven and New York. He wanted to learn whether the police of those cities had anything on Peter Janov and his pal, Nick Petrosk. Neither was known favorably or unfavorably in New Haven. The New York police, however, reported having kept an eye on one Nickolas Petrosk, whose description checked with that given by Captain Bonney.

Petrosk was an inventor by profession, not without considerable ingenuity, but appeared to spend most of his time and energies in communistic agitation. He was known to be on intimate terms with prominent foreign radicals who had visited the United States; had been arrested twice in connection with riots staged by striking garment workers over on the East Side. Things of that sort; nothing very serious. The recommendations shown Bonney were probably stolen or forged.

Doctor Brockett happened into headquarters as Nickols was concluding the phone calls.

"What's new, Stan?" the coroner asked; and Nickols brought him up to date. For a few minutes they argued on this or that aspect of the affair. Finally the coroner shook his head.

"If you clean up this mess, Stan," said he, "you deserve a lot of credit. It's too much for me."

"A case of this sort usually clears itself up, sooner or later," Nickols rejoined, puffing at his pipe. "Let it take its own pace, and facts rise to the top to be skimmed off, just as cream does in a bottle of milk. Give the thing a chance—and it's sure to jell."

"Good luck to you, then!" And Brockett departed.

It had turned out to be one of those hot, muggy, blistering days, typical of the worst southern New England's midsummer has to offer—a day when no breath of air stirs—when even the shore fails to bring customary relief. A beastly day for work—or anything else.

Hours dragged slowly and uneventfully. Nickols had been so busy with the Grayson affair as to fall sadly behind on routine matters, and now he made a valiant effort to catch up. To tell the truth, he had to drive himself, damning the humidity. Yet always in the back of Nickols' mind lingered thoughts of Andrew Grayson, murdered on his palatial yacht with a silk stocking sandbag. Now and then he caught

himself listening—waiting—for what he did not know.

The approach of sunset brought no relief from the hot wave, which, according to evening papers, was widespread over the East. Big cities reported numbers of heat prostrations.

Nickols had dinner in the Elks Club; then went back to his office and started an electric fan. It was as cool there as anywhere. Some one had sent out a questionnaire to police officials all over the country; all sorts of information and tabulations on various crimes were wanted. Stan's impulse was to fling the thing in his wastebasket; but it came from a government official at Washington, and——

"Oh, hell!" he grunted, proceeding to get busy.

But as Nickols' fountain pen filled out endless blank spaces on the paper, he again found his brain wandering—it was tense, thronged with vague, intangible anticipations.

"Guess it's the heat," he muttered uneasily. "I never had a dose of the molly-grubs like this before; what my old grandmother would have called a premonition."

Suddenly the telephone on his desk shrilled. He pulled the instrument toward him.

"Chief of Police Nickols speaking," said he.

"This is Jack Norton, down at the wharf." The officer's voice was trembling with poorly suppressed emotion. "My God, chief, come down here on the swift prod. Hell's popping, and I don't mean maybe!"

In a second Nickols' lethargy dropped from him; he was once more a coolly efficient chief of police.

"What you getting at, Jack?" he snapped. "What's happened?"

"That Orloff woman on the *Zingara*. She's gone!"

"Gone?" Nickols echoed. "Run away, you mean?"

"Hell no! She's dead! It's a queer business, chief!"

"I'll be right down," Nickols told him.

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT HAPPENED TO VALERIE.

THE strain of distrust and uncertainty was beginning to tell on members of the Grayson yachting party. Their pleasure cruise had come to an abrupt end in an ugly tragedy, and now each individual could not help feeling that some of the black specter of suspicion hovered over his own shoulders. Small wonder that nerves were on edge, that tempers grew touchy. It was not enjoyable to be bottled up on a boat with one whose soul bore the taint of murder.

The hot wave made matters all the worse. There was little to do save read or play bridge; and cards, under such circumstances, carried small appeal.

Strange enough, of the entire party Valerie Orloff seemed in the best spirits, as though resolved to face whatever had to come with a measure of equanimity. Toward the latter part of the afternoon she could stand the physical discomfort no longer. Most of the party were gathered on the main deck, praying for a breeze.

"I'm going overboard and have a swim," she announced. "Who's with me? All in favor say, 'Aye!'"

The response was not enthusiastic, and Valerie wrinkled her lips in a little *moué* of disappointment.

"The noes seem to have it," she observed.

Pauline St. John languidly stretched her bare arms.

"Such a bother; changing one's clothes!" she murmured. "It's too hot to think, even, let alone move around."

"But it will be cool in the water," Valerie coaxed. "Come on!"

Leaning against the *Zingara's* rail was a slim young chap in uniform, one

of the police officers detailed by Nickols for duty on the yacht. His name was Joe Parsons, but a luridly flaming topknot caused him to be universally known as "Red." Valerie caught his eye, smiling, whereat he grinned responsively. She came and stood beside him.

"Can you beat it, Red?" Valerie wanted to know. "A real live bunch of go-getters, aren't they? Say, won't you go in the water with me? I'll dig you up a suit."

"Gosh, Mrs. Orloff, I'd like nothing better," was Red's wistful reply. "But no can do."

She perched herself on the rail, one arm circling a stanchion—in the identical position from which she had twice before fallen. Boris glanced at her through bloodshot eyes, muttering a sullen warning. He had been drinking steadily since his frustrated attempt to get away. Valerie paid no attention, nonchalantly swinging her shapely legs and smiling at Red.

At length Larry St. John lazily bestirred himself.

"Oh, what the hell! I'll go overboard with you, Valerie, just to keep peace in the family."

"That's the stuff, Larry!" Valerie cried. "I'm glad there's one he-man in the crowd."

The two went below, presently returning clad in their bathing suits. Red's eyes followed Valerie admiringly.

"Gee, she's a beaut!" he muttered. "That dame could land a job in the 'Follies' without half trying. A knockout, what I mean!"

A moment later the bathers were in the water, laughing and calling to each other, and to the people on deck.

"You're missing it, folks," Valerie cried. "This is the first time to-day I've been comfortable."

The tide was not long past full, with practically no trace of current. Larry and his companion swam out a little distance from the vessel's side, and then stopped, floating on their backs, luxuriating in the grateful coolness. The sun had already set and the shore was now bordered by a line of shadows, though where the swimmers floated it was still light. They were perhaps a dozen feet apart, and fully a hundred feet from the *Zingara.*

A speed boat roared across the mouth of the bay, bow high in air, driven by a powerful outboard twin.

"Look at that baby go!" Ted Wickham muttered. "Must be making forty miles an hour. I don't see how those little motors can do it—and stand the gaff."

Thus for a brief instant their attention was drawn from the bathers to the rocketing speed boat.

Suddenly Pauline leaped from her deck chair with a piercing scream. One shaking arm pointed toward her husband and Valerie. Before the startled members of the group could shift their gaze, Valerie shrieked in turn—a blood-curdling cry that echoed eerily across the smooth water.

Now they could see her desperately struggling against some invisible antagonist; that much was certain. Again the girl's horrified scream of terror rang forth. As the observers watched, dismayed and powerless, she was pulled beneath the surface. The last they saw of her was one white arm, which waved a final despairing appeal—and vanished.

"Oh, God in heaven!" Pauline St. John gasped—and dropped to the deck in a dead faint.

Two or three strokes had put Larry over the spot where his companion had disappeared. One quick breath—and under he went.

"It's got Larry, too!" Gloria Grayson cried.

"No!" Wickham said. "He's diving —trying to get her. A boat! Quick!"

He followed Red Parsons, who was already over the *Zingara's* side. A dinghy was moored to the temporary

landing. Oars rattled as they jumped aboard. Larry reappeared on the surface even as Red sent the boat toward him.

"She's gone!" St. John said, and shivered violently. "Poor kid!"

"But what was it?" Wickham demanded. "I wasn't looking this way when Pauline yelled. Then all I saw was poor Valerie being pulled under. For God's sake, man, what had her?"

"Don't ask me!" Larry caught the side of the dinghy, supporting himself. He was shaking from the horror of his experience, face pale under its out-of-doors tan. "I can't do Valerie any good now. Guess I'll climb in with you fellows."

Silently the two helped him aboard. Larry slumped down amidships, shoulders bowed, the picture of remorse at his failure.

"If I'd been a little closer I might have saved Valerie," he muttered. "I almost did, at that. I felt the thing that had her. It was smooth and slimy, like the side of a fish. I couldn't hold on, and it got away. Then my wind failed. I had to come up for air."

"A shark, most likely," Wickham suggested. His horrified eyes searched the water, as though looking for a spreading blotch of red that would prove the hypothesis correct.

"A shark? Say, be your age!" Red Parsons grunted, picking up the oars. "That wasn't any shark. They don't come in the Sound big enough to carry off a grown woman!"

"Then what was it?" Wickham insisted.

"God knows! What a hell of a break. Gee, but that girl was pretty! And now she's gone! Just like that! Fifteen minutes ago I was laughing and talking with her. She asked me to go swimming. And now——" His voice trailed off.

They rowed about for some time, fruitlessly, and then, soberly, they returned to the *Zingara,* where Mrs. Grayson and Carol Fox were trying to restore Pauline St. John. Carol's chocolate face had the sickly color of gray paint; her eyes bulged whitely in their sockets; teeth chattered together. Boris Orloff, cold sober in the horror of Valerie's sudden passing, stood at the rail, staring moodily out across the quiet waters that held their sinister secret.

"Some whisky!" Gloria ordered.

Carol filled a small glass from a decanter on a near-by stand. Her hand shook so that most of the liquor was spilled, but a swallow remained. This Gloria held to the unconscious woman's lips, forcing the clenched teeth apart.

"Did anybody really *see* what happened out there?" Wickham demanded, watching the efforts to revive Larry's wife. "I mean, when it started."

Boris turned from the rail.

"Pauline must have seen something pretty frightful—and Valerie, too. God knows what it could have been." And Orloff again faced the Sound.

"We'll find out in a minute," Gloria said. "She's coming to."

Pauline choked at the sharp sting of spirits in her throat; abruptly she sat up on the couch where they had laid her, eyes glaring wildly about. For a brief instant they were blank, to be flooded with sheer terror as recollection of the scene returned.

"Oh-h-h!" It was a long-drawn, anguished wail, accompanied by a spasmodic quivering of her body. "Oh, God!" she moaned. "I'll never forget it. Never! That awful *thing!* And poor Valerie! The look on her face as it dragged her down to death! I can still see it!"

Pauline covered her eyes, and her voice broke in a hysterical fit of sobbing. Larry St. John came forward, kneeling beside his wife. Water dripped from his bathing suit, but no one thought of that. He took one of her hands in his, gently smoothing it.

"What did you see, Pauline?" he asked. For a moment she drew away.

"I saw a head—a black head, with horrible, bulging eyes—come up close to Valerie. She didn't see it as soon as I did. Then it went under as I screamed, and something that looked like a black tentacle struck toward her. She couldn't push it away—it held her. If I only hadn't seen it!"

"A giant octopus?" Wickham muttered, questioning Larry with a glance. "I didn't know they had 'em in these waters."

"What's an octopus?" Red Parsons asked curiously.

"A devilfish," Bonney explained. He had been in his quarters at the time of the tragedy. "They have a big head at the center, and long arms with suckers on them. Frightful-looking beggars. Make you think you've got the D. T.'s."

"Oh, I get you," Parsons nodded. "Mebby that's what it was."

But Pauline shook her head positively.

"I saw a devilfish once," she said. "This wasn't a devilfish."

"Then what *was* it?" Ted Wickham persisted. "Haven't you any sort of notion at all, Pauline?"

"I don't know. Please don't ask me any more," she begged piteously. "I want to forget—if I can. But I'm afraid I never will."

"Well," Red observed to nobody in particular, "guess I better turn in a report to the chief. He said notify him right away if anything happened, and I'd say this calls for a few remarks. Though I reckon it ain't sewed up with what I'm supposed to be here for. Golly, I'm sorry about that girl! It was one tough break she got!"

In due season Stanley Nickols stopped his car at the old wharf.

"What's it all about, Jack?" he asked Norton.

"From what Red told me it was pretty rough. And the way that woman screeched! Bet I'll hear it in my sleep for the next month."

"But what killed her?"

"Nobody knows. She's gone. Better get your dope from folks on the yacht. Me—I don't savvy it at all."

"Right!" said Nickols.

Within a few minutes of going aboard he had all the facts in his possession; that is, all the facts that seemed to be available. Pauline St. John was not on deck.

"If it's just the same," Larry remarked, "I'd prefer that you don't query my wife on this business. We've given you all she knows anyway, and poor Pauline's badly done up after the horror of it. She's in her cabin now—asleep, I hope. I gave her a powder."

"That's all right," Nickols assured him. "I can see how she would feel. I won't bother her at all about it."

"Thanks a lot," St. John replied. "Very sporting of you. I appreciate it."

They stood with Ted Wickham near the companionway, where Captain Bonney presently joined them. Nickols beckoned to Parsons.

"Didn't *you* see anything, Red," he asked, "when this business broke loose?"

"No, sir, not a thing. You see, we were all watching a speed boat."

"Any of the *Zingara's* crew?"

"Not a chance for information there," Bonney assured them. "I've already inquired. The men were all below decks, where it's really more comfortable than in the open air, weather like this."

"I was close enough to the thing to touch it," St. John said. "I've been trying to analyze my impressions ever since. It felt smooth; I said slimy at first, but slimy isn't a good word. Greasy, perhaps; or slippery without any trace of slime or grease. I wish I could have held on."

"It's your luck you didn't, Mr. St. John," Red Parsons told him. "Probably be dead now if you had."

Nickols nodded agreement.

"I'm fully convinced that's true," he said.

His stay on the *Zingara* was short, since there was really no occasion to linger.

"Too bad about Valerie Orloff," Nickols mused as he headed his car back toward Willantic. "Poor Valerie! I couldn't help liking her. I judge her life's been far from happy. Made mistakes, of course; bad ones, too, no doubt. And a bitter price the girl's had to pay. We can only hope she's found peace and happiness at last."

CHAPTER X.

THE VICIOUS TRAP.

THE shore line of Rockland Bay, particularly the east side, is rather rugged and precipitous for Long Island Sound. You will find a sand beach near the old wharf, but in most places the waves beat directly against a coarse-textured granite, sculptured by the age-long processes of erosion.

Even in a short distance the shore topography shows a wide variation. There are miniature cliffs, with jutting crags and pinnacles; nooks and crannies carved out in the wave-bitten granite; sometimes a gash cut back inland, marking the removal of less resistant material; irregular flat shelves of barnacle-coated rock, where the greenish-black kelp swings lazily in the surge of the tide.

It was the morning after Valerie Orloff's tragic death. Stanley Nickols, accompanied by a member of the Willantic police force, was slowly traversing the shore east from the old wharf.

"We'll probably find Mrs. Orloff's body somewhere along the granite cliffs," he had predicted.

They rounded a projecting spur of rock some hundred or more yards beyond the wharf. The patrolman clutched at his superior's elbow, silently pointing ahead.

On a flat, barnacle-covered mass left exposed by the falling tide, lay the remains of a woman, clad in a bathing suit. The two men ran forward, stumbling over the uneven footing, slipping on the tough kelp, whose slimy tentacles clutched at their ankles.

"Good God!" the officer panted, his face showing a mixture of horror and amazement. About Valerie's slim white throat were two turns of a silk stocking, pulled tight and knotted. "Strangled! But I thought they claimed something pulled her under water when she was swimming!"

"That's the story," Nickols told him. "I knew it was murder. Something I didn't count on—it might have been prevented."

Sadly he glanced down at the girl's pale, upturned face. She still wore a gaudy little crimson bathing cap, from the edge of which a single damp, brown curl had escaped. Yet, in spite of the terror that marked her passing to the dim land of shadows, Valerie's features were serene, composed. You could easily have believed her asleep, not dead. It seemed as if somehow, somewhere, she might have found the peace and happiness Nickols wished for her.

"Poor Valerie Orloff!" he said softly.

Hardened though he was by experience with crime and violent death, Nickols could not avoid a feeling of distress and sympathy for this beautiful girl, whose life had been snuffed out under such frightful circumstances. Stooping, he gathered the limp form into his arms, carrying it tenderly up to the road.

"Get my car," he ordered. "I'll wait here. Then we'll take her to the coroner."

They found Doctor Brockett in his office.

"This, of course"—he indicated the silk stocking—"was put on after the girl's death, which could only have been due to drowning. Then her body was

placed where you found it by the murderer."

"Check!" said Nickols grimly. "I told you that before we went to look for her."

"Except the silk stocking detail. What do you make of that? It's so unnecessary."

"A smoke screen, I suspect," Nickols responded. "The murderer wished to becloud the issue. Or he may have a perverted sense of humor.

"You can go on with an autopsy, which probably will do no more than confirm what we already know—that it was drowning, not strangulation, that killed her. And notify her friends on the *Zingara* that the body's been found."

"And yourself?" the coroner asked. "What are you planning now, Stan?"

"I want to do some investigating—while the tide's still going out. See you later, doctor."

Nickols drove directly back to Rockland Bay, leaving his car at the wharf. The section he wished to explore was that beyond where Valerie's corpse was recovered. Nickols took pains to keep close to the water's edge, below the granite cliffs, which would render him invisible to any one on the road or beyond it. Unseen eyes might be watching from the woods, though Nickols was inclined to doubt this possibility. Still, he played safe.

For a time his investigations produced nothing that seemed suspicious, but finally Nickols found himself approaching a narrow, fairly deep gash that extended inland for fifteen or twenty yards.

"A good secret landing place—for one coming in from the water," he mused. "Especially at high tide. Well hidden, too."

He walked along the rift, eyes alert for signs that some one—something—had been using it as a thoroughfare. He was looking for a bit of crushed kelp, a spot where the barnacles had been scraped from the rocks—items like that.

The chasm ended in a cozy little rock shelter far enough above the high-tide water line to be dry save during a storm of unusual violence. The shelter had been occupied not long since, as shown by a litter of fresh cigarette butts and the paper wrapping from a bar of candy. Underbrush grew dense at the back, and through the growth was perceptible a faint trail of recent origin, leading out to the road. Nickols noted this much, though taking care not to show himself; there was always the chance that some one might be watching, hidden in the woods north of Rockland Drive.

He did not delay at the rock shelter, and was soon retracing his steps down the chasm, studying its bottom of kelp-covered rocks. A scheme was already taking shape in his mind.

"It might work," he decided. "Then again it might not. A long shot, perhaps—but worth trying. If this is the place—— I *know* this is the place. My scheme will work."

Keeping close to the protecting shelter of the granite walls, Nickols slipped back toward the old wharf, and thus regained his car. He now headed for Willantic, stopping at Seth Holland's store—"Hardware and Sporting Goods."

"Seth," said Nichols, "I want a bear trap. Can you steer me onto one?"

"Pretty scarce. The biggest spring traps in demand around here are for foxes. Let's see, now—a fellow was mentioning bear traps to me a month, six weeks ago." Seth scratched his head as an aid to thought. Then triumphantly, "Walt Coburn's the fellow! He's got one."

"Where does Coburn live?" Nickols asked.

"He's a farmer. Lives on the Lower Meadow Road, just this side the ice pond."

"All right, Seth. Much obliged."

Nickols headed for the farm of Mr. Walt Coburn. When he finally returned, in the back of his car was the bear trap—a powerful, vicious contrivance, equipped with fifteen feet of strong steel chain.

Brockett had concluded his autopsy, reporting Valerie's death due to drowning, as was supposed.

"The body couldn't have floated," he said, "with the lungs full of water. It must have been placed where you found it."

Briefly Nickols then explained his plan.

"If I'm right, and the killer enters and leaves the water by way of that rift in the granite, I can get him in the trap. There's one place where he's almost sure to step. But, of course, setting a devilish contraption like this below the water level is rather questionable. I hate to risk it."

"I see. You're thinking you might catch an innocent person. But those no-trespass signs have kept people away from the rocks. I think you're justified, Stan."

"We seem to be dealing with a mighty clever and dangerous criminal," Nickols mused. "If I station men on guard to nab him when he slips down from the woods, he might escape."

"You imagine he takes to the water at night only?"

"At night—or when it's nearly dark—and at high tide. That checks with the way he got Valerie Orloff and with the two other times when he's been seen. I'm going to try it, doctor. The tide's dead low early this afternoon. Now I think I'll visit the *Zingara*."

Those on the yacht had already learned the horror that centered about the finding of Valerie's body. They knew that no grotesque creature of the deep had pulled her down to death; that she, like Andrew Grayson, was the victim of deliberate murder.

"This is terrible, Mr. Nickols," Gloria protested. "You can't expect us to stay here indefinitely. Valerie's frightful death ought to prove that no one on board the boat is guilty. Can't you let me take the *Zingara* out of the bay?"

"I'm sorry," Nickols replied. "You'll have to stay a while longer. Not more than twenty-four hours, I hope. By the way, where's Orloff?"

"Drunk in his cabin. You can't blame him for taking that way to forgetfulness."

"No," Nickols agreed. "I certainly don't blame the poor devil."

That afternoon, when the tide was fully out, Stan Nickols slipped along the shore, carrying the bear trap in a burlap bag. He kept close to the rocks, thus trusting to avoid being seen from the woods. Once at the narrow chasm he worked fast.

The bear trap had been cleaned of rust and thoroughly doused with oil. Nickols had already practiced setting it; now, with a foot depressing each of the double springs, he spread open the vicious jaws, raising the pan. Gingerly he took his weight from the springs; the trap remained set.

Next he passed the chain around a massive slab of submerged granite, which the erosive action of the sea had undercut, leaving its shape ideal for Nickols' sinister purpose. The chain he fastened with a stout padlock.

The set trap was placed on a small, flat shelf close to the bottom of the chasm, concealed in a luxuriant growth of the ever-present kelp. The chain leading from the trap was hidden from casual view in the same way.

"A hellish thing to do," Nickols muttered, as he concluded his task. "But the bird I'm after deserves all this—and more."

Then he left, retreating along the base of the rocks as stealthily as he came.

The officer who had night duty on the

Zingara was one Roy Thomas. Nickols gave him definite orders.

"Keep your eyes open, Roy," he warned. "It's important. I suspect some one may try to come aboard tonight with the idea of doing murder. I've taken steps to prevent it; but just the same—watch out!"

"I gotcha," Thomas replied confidently.

Somehow the chief of police could not share his confidence.

"I'm worried—a little—about this, Roy," he confessed. "Perhaps I'd better have another man on the boat with you."

"That's all nonsense, chief!" Roy Thomas meaningly tapped the butt of his automatic. "Guess I'm big enough for the job. Any bozo that starts to come on that yacht will get himself burned good and proper!"

CHAPTER XI.

RED HARVEST.

CAPTAIN BONNEY was first up on the *Zingara's* deck next morning. Casually he glanced about, his eye lighting on a huddled shape close to the rail, where steps led down to the temporary landing.

"What—another!" Bonney gasped, and in an instant he was bending over the body of Roy Thomas. The officer was dead, struck down from behind, his skull very obviously fractured.

Bonney's sharp cry brought members of the crew running toward him.

"Look around down below!" the skipper ordered. "The killer didn't come for this poor chap alone—or I miss my guess!"

As he spoke, Ted Wickham appeared, clad in pajamas; behind him Larry St. John, who had donned a florid dressing gown.

"What's doing, Bonney?" Wickham demanded; then, seeing the body. "Good Lord!" He and St. John questioned each other through narrowed eyes; Larry, never forgetting his nonchalant pose, lighted a cigarette. He had been badly shaken when Valerie died; this was different.

Another sudden shout from below deck; commotion—the sound of running. An excited sailor shot up the companionway, taking the stairs three or four at a time.

"Mr. Orloff got his, too!" the fellow gulped. "He's dead in his cabin—head bashed in!"

"Don't touch the body!" Bonney snapped his commands curtly. "Leave everything just as it is till the police get here." He turned to a sailor. "Row ashore and have that officer at the wharf telephone for Chief Nickols." Then, addressing Wickham and St. John: "Shall we take a look below, gentlemen?"

Silently they descended to the cabin occupied by Boris Orloff, opening the door on a scene of wild disorder. The dead man lay on the floor, a ghastly sight. The murderer had evidently ransacked the entire stateroom after his crime, in a feverish search for valuables. Bedding was pulled from the mattress and flung off to one side. Orloff's luggage had been opened, the contents all strewn about.

In one corner lay an object, sodden with moisture and bloodstained.

"The weapon used," St. John said briefly, indicating it. "Another one of those things—made from a woman's silk stocking. Crude—but effective."

"God!" Wickham croaked. "I've had about all I can stand of this damned boat!"

"Right!" was St. John's crisp rejoinder. "Getting so one never knows who'll be next—eh, what?"

"We've seen enough," Bonney said, motioning them out, and shutting the door. He called to a sailor, who was looking curiously down the passageway. "Stay on guard here. Don't let any-

body in until Chief of Police Nickols comes. Understand?"

"Aye, aye, sir!" The man snapped to attention at his post.

Nickols was dressing when the summons reached him. Such a startling development was wholly unexpected.

"I'll be down directly," he told the officer who had phoned. "You take charge of affairs on the *Zingara* till I get there. Don't let 'em disturb any evidence!"

Then Nickols called Doctor Brockett.

"Everything's gone sour!" he grunted into the instrument. "Roy Thomas and Orloff are both dead on the yacht. I'm going down there now. Be ready if I stop for you?"

"O. K., Stan," the coroner replied, and made good his promise, though he had precious little time to do it.

"Gets me that Roy proved careless on the job," Nickols said, as his car swept swiftly along. "I warned him that something serious might happen—that there was a faint chance of an intruder coming aboard, bent on murder. He should have been ready."

"Your bear-trap scheme didn't work?"

"Apparently not. At least the killer got past it going out. We'll stop there on the way and see if he had equal luck in coming ashore."

Nickols swung into Rockland Drive from the east, stopping his car just before they reached the narrow rift where the trap was set.

"Come on," he told Brockett, and started down toward the water. In one hand Nickols held an automatic pistol.

Cautiously they proceeded, Nickols leading. After a time he paused, listening. For a moment all was silent save for the ceaseless sucking back and forth of water against the rocks. Then Doctor Brockett started, and a queer, prickling sensation crept along his spinal cord. He had heard, faint but unmistakable, the clink of a heavy steel chain.

Nickols jerked his head significantly toward the sound. Noiselessly his lips formed the words, "We've got him!"

With redoubled care Nickols led on, clambering around a gray mass of granite, Brockett close at his heels. Again he paused; from where Nickols now stood the whole length of the chasm could be seen. Again Brockett heard the subdued clank of steel links against rock; an icy chill seemed gripping at his heart. What horrible thing was this, caught like some stealthy prowler of darkness in the jaws of a just retribution?

He pressed forward, eager to quench his overwhelming curiosity—peering breathlessly over Nickols' shoulder. A black creature was stirring in water that eddied about it, waist high—a creature darker than midnight—with an oily, repellent, horrible blackness, as if escaped from the inferno's deepest pit. It seemed human—and yet inhuman; humpbacked—a grotesquely large head—repulsive, goggling eyes.

Such were Brockett's first impressions. Then he suddenly realized that he was merely looking at the *shell;* that within this black covering was the real creature they were after. As he watched, it bent over, pulling mightily at the chain which held it captive. Once more the steel links clanked—sinister—suggestive.

The chain did not yield an inch, and with a gesture of tragic helplessness this strange apparition ceased the effort. Like a trapped animal, it raised its head; the huge goggle eyes were directed full at the spot where Nickols and Brockett crouched.

"Look out!" Brockett cried desperately, sensing that their presence was discovered. He saw the thing grab swiftly at a belt around its waist, where hung a pistol holster.

Swift though it was, Nickols was yet quicker. From the muzzle of his automatic burst a tongue of flame, followed

by others in rapid succession—four or five altogether. There was no return fire, for Nickols—an expert pistol shot—had sent his bullets home with ruthless efficiency. Sprawled in the narrow chasm lay this strange monstrosity, quivering in the final throes of death. Streaks of crimson were already reddening the water.

"And that's that!" Nickols remarked coolly.

Together they hauled the thing forth on the rocks.

"A skin-tight swimming suit," Nickols said. "The hump on the back contains, I suspect, a tank for compressed oxygen, supplied through a tube to some sort of breathing apparatus attached to his mouth. A valve must allow for escape of used air. Thus he could stay under water indefinitely, the weight of the oxygen tank helping overcome the body's buoyancy. The suit itself contained no air. Help me release him from the trap."

It was awkward work, but they managed to depress the springs, and Brockett pulled free the imprisoned foot.

"Now we'll shuck the suit off," Nickols said. "Do you wonder who's inside?"

"I'll hazard one guess—Nick Petrosk, the Russian who deserted from the *Zingara.*"

"You're good at guessing. Nick Petrosk's the man—but there is one more surprise coming to you."

After a moment or two they had the body out. Nickols quickly searched it. Several thousand dollars in bills were found in a money belt clasped around the dead man's naked waist. But somehow Doctor Brockett confessed to a strange feeling of disappointment, now that the mystery seemed solved. To find Petrosk the murderer was like an anticlimax.

"I can see why this fellow killed Grayson," he muttered. "But why the others?"

Nickols shot his companion a queer look.

"You're missing connections, doctor. Petrosk didn't kill Andrew Grayson. That's the surprise I said you had coming. He did kill Valerie, Orloff, and Roy Thomas. Roy was on guard, to prevent the tragedy I feared might come if Petrosk got by the trap. His carelessness cost Boris Orloff's life, and his own. Help me lift the body higher on the rocks, above reach of the tide. We'll leave it here for a while."

"But why," Brockett persisted, "did Petrosk want to kill Boris and Valerie?"

"Boris has been acting for a group of Russians, marketing jewelry that once belonged to the Russian nobility. Valerie was his wife, one who presumably had a share in his deals and knowledge of them. Boris was suspected—and rightly—of being false to his trust, and Nick Petrosk was put on his trail as spy; also, it finally developed, as executioner.

"The Orloffs must have known their deadly danger, or at least suspected it. When they tried to slip away, they were driven by fear of Russian vengeance, not dread of facing justice for the killing of Grayson. Now, doctor, let's be getting on to the *Zingara.*"

Brockett was thoughtful and silent as they left the shore and climbed up the rocks to Nickols' car. Finally he spoke.

"I'm beginning to follow your reasoning a little better; but who killed Andrew Grayson?"

"I'll give you one guess," Nickols replied dryly.

"Ah!" the doctor rejoined. "But I don't think I'll take it, Stan. So far I've hung up a perfect record, which I prefer not to risk spoiling. Still, there are one or two details regarding Petrosk that——"

Nickols pressed the starter switch.

"What are they, doctor?"

"Well, what did Petrosk know about the Grayson killing?"

"He must have seen it. You recall Pauline reported some one skulking along the deck a few minutes before Valerie's fall overboard. Either he didn't leave the yacht with others of the crew, or else returned. He saw the murder done—and knew how unusual a weapon was used. Also he saw Grayson's body disposed of—and the silk stocking sandbag as well."

"Then he sent the first anonymous note?"

"No, the second. He wanted us to find the weapon that killed Grayson. The *Zingara* was then under police supervision, but Nick had already deserted. It was a very easy matter for him to shove the paper under the crack of my door."

"But why go to all this bother? Why drag the silk stocking *motif* into his own killings?"

"Doubtless to make us think that his own killings had something to do with the first murder, and in that way to render his chances of escape all the better. Possibly it was merely to gratify a distorted sense of humor. Nick knows—but he can't tell us."

"What made you suspect Petrosk was going about under water in this elaborate way?"

"He was known to be a very clever inventor. I learned that from the New York police. Twice a mysterious head was reported above the water of the bay. Those facts, and the otherwise inexplicable manner of Valerie's death, pointed at something of this sort. The swimming suit is small and light enough so that Petrosk could have brought it in his duffel bag, planning to use the device as a means of escape or as an aid in committing the crime if conditions called for it. The strange coincidence of another murder being timed with his was something Nick was quick to take advantage of."

By now they had arrived at the old stone wharf. Jack Norton was approaching shore from the *Zingara* in a small boat.

"I'm glad you're here, chief. There's been shooting——"

Nickols interrupted him.

"Telephone for the police truck," he said. "You'll find a dead man up the shore—the fellow that pulled the job last night. Then come back here for the two bodies on the yacht.

"And now, doctor, we're overdue on the *Zingara*."

CHAPTER XII.

WHO KILLED GRAYSON?

NICKOLS faced a group of excited, worried people when he stepped on the *Zingara's* deck. Questions burst on him like a flood.

"There is no need to be alarmed," he told them. "This morning a murderer has been tried, convicted, and executed."

"That pistol shooting, eh?" Wickham interrupted. "You got the killer, then?"

"*A* killer," Nickols corrected him. "There will be no more murders, however. That I can safely assure you. But before going on with the inevitable explanations, the doctor and I have a duty to perform."

First attention was given to Roy Thomas, lying where Bonney had originally found the body. It was now covered by a tarpaulin.

"I'm sorry about this," Nickols said in a low tone, speaking mainly to himself. Roy had been a favorite of his, and the chief of police felt some blame for Roy's death.

After a brief and cursory survey of the two bodies, and a more detailed investigation of Orloff's cabin, Doctor Brockett ordered the corpses taken ashore. A little later Nickols had every one connected with the series of episodes assembled on the after deck. Faces were tense with expectation.

"This case," Nickols began, "was unique in my experience, since it involved two wholly separate murder

plots. They happened to overlap, and to a certain extent to intertwine, though at the start had no connection with each other.

"The patrolman, Roy Thomas, was killed because his presence on board interfered with the murder of Boris Orloff, who was doomed to death for treachery to a trust imposed on him by a group of Russians. Mrs. Orloff had already paid the price of her close association with Boris. Actually she may have been wholly innocent of a share in the offense for which they both died.

"Roy Thomas was careless or overconfident, in spite of my warning. Nick Petrosk, spy and assassin of the group of Russians, gained the deck unknown to Thomas, and struck him down from behind. Then he attended to Boris Orloff, who, following the effects of a prolonged debauch, fell an easy victim in his cabin."

Briefly Nickols went on to explain the various points he had previously discussed with Doctor Brockett.

"Just how much Nick Petrosk knew of Orloff's defalcation," he added, "is uncertain. I suspect that Boris had been deceiving his people for some time regarding the returns from jewelry intrusted him to dispose of. In any event, Nick's frantic search strongly hints that he believed Boris still had money or valuables concealed in his possession. The search was not wholly vain.

"But, of course, you are mainly interested in learning who killed Andrew Grayson. Various clews pointed inevitably to one conclusion: that the murderer was actuated by several motives. First, personal spite against Grayson; second, the desire for gain, due to knowledge of the valuable property Grayson had recently acquired from Boris Orloff; third, a wish to frame another person at whom circumstantial evidence strongly pointed, and against whom the murderer felt a hate so deep-seated that it was almost a mania.

"The murderer, needless to state, was clever, and quickly took advantage of a fortuitous circumstance—that is, the commotion created by Mrs. Orloff's fall —to get rid of the body. Both falls Valerie experienced, I might say, were wholly unintentional, though they rendered her open to suspicion for a time. The splash made by Grayson's body went unnoticed among the other splashes incidental to the rescue of Valerie. I feel sure Grayson would have been killed in any event; indeed, it is highly probable that he was dead before the diversion poor Mrs. Orloff innocently created.

"Immediately on carrying out the crime, rendered the more easy because Mr. Grayson was under the influence of liquor, the murderer had a cruel disappointment. The diamond sunburst, which should have been in the pocket of his dinner coat, was gone. It has since been recovered. There was no time, however, to bemoan this unexpected bit of hard luck, and the victim's body was hurriedly thrust through a porthole overboard. The silk-stocking sandbag used to kill him, followed the body into the sea. Meanwhile Nick Petrosk, lurking on the ship, had seen the crime committed.

"It is possible that Grayson's death might have gone on record as an accident—though from the very start suspicion pointed toward foul play—had not the murderer's cleverness been outweighed by an overpowering desire to see an innocent person suffer the penalty of guilt. The killer sent me word that Grayson was murdered, and by that act paved the way to certain ruin."

Nickols paused, glancing from one to another of the set, strained faces before him. Then slowly, impressively, he said:

"The person who removed a silk stocking from Mrs. Grayson's stateroom, who then made a sandbag of it, killed Andrew Grayson, and later

pricked out a message on an item clipped from the *Shore Line Times,* is here before me—gripped with terror at thought of following the awful road which leads to death on the gallows. I know who killed Andrew Grayson. The guilty individual knows I know it. Shall I speak that person's name?" Again Nickols paused, dramatically—he continued:

"It was——"

A wild hysterical shriek split the air while the words were on his lips. Carol Fox, from the outskirts of the group, made a frantic leap for the *Zingara's* rail, bent on a suicidal leap to the water. Captain Bonney's strong right arm caught the distracted girl's dress, which the plunge she made half tore from her body. She turned on him, screaming, eyes rolling in frenzy, scratching and clawing at Bonney's face.

Wickham and St. John leaped to his aid, each seizing an arm, and by sheer masculine force they managed to subdue Carol, who in the space of a few seconds had undergone a frightful metamorphosis—one instant a quiet, well-trained maid; the next, a snarling, hissing demon of the jungle. Like a tigress at bay she glared at them, her half-naked breast heaving spasmodically.

Doctor Brockett produced a medical kit from his pocket.

"Drink this, Carol!" he said brusquely. "You'll feel better!" He held a small glass to her lips.

The sharp note of authority in the doctor's voice carried past the fog that clouded Carol's brain. Obediently she drank.

"Be calmed down in a minute or two," he remarked.

The prediction was verified, and presently the wildness faded from Carol's eyes, replaced by a look of dull despair, as tardy realization of her plight came home to the wretched girl.

"Who was the party Carol wanted to frame?" St. John asked curiously.

"Steve Brewer. He knew she was a drug addict, and spoiled Carol's chances to marry a respectable, well-to-do colored man of his acquaintance. Steve gave me these facts, though he did not once suspect that Carol was plotting to have him hanged for murder. Steve's slip in entering Mrs. Grayson's cabin and stealing a ring made him a good candidate for Carol's plot."

"But what did she have against Grayson?" St. John went on.

"Her supply of drugs came from him, through Mrs. Grayson." Nickols glanced apologetically at the lady. "When Mrs. Grayson's allotment was cut down, Carol suffered, too, even more than her mistress, who was not so far advanced in the habit."

"There's only one thing not cleared up," Wickham said thoughtfully—"at least only point that now occurs to me. What about the twenty-five thousand dollars Mr. Grayson won back from Boris in the stud game? You've got the sunburst. How about the money?"

"Carol," Nickols said, "where did you hide that roll of bills?"

Carol Fox had been sitting quietly in a chair, Bonney standing close by to prevent any other attempt at escape. Now she raised her head stupidly.

"Bills?" she repeated. Her voice was toneless. "What bills?"

Nickols explained.

"I just felt Mr. Grayson's clothes for the case those diamonds were in. I didn't know he had a lot of money on him."

"H'm!" Nickols reflected, his eyes traveling pensively about the group.

"This looks ugly—for all of us," Wickham said. "Somebody got away with that money, and we're all under suspicion until it's found." He appealed to Nickols. "You've put over a mighty clever exhibition so far, Chief Nickols, and I'll hand it to you. Also apologies for certain remarks I made earlier in the game. Now, can't you clear up this added detail? For my part, I'll gladly

submit to having my person and all my possessions searched."

Wickham spoke in so open and frank a manner that one could hardly suspect him of having the missing money.

"Wait!" said Nickols. "I don't think that will be necessary. "We're back now where we started—with Zeb Hoskins, the bootlegger-lobsterman. Zeb's been in the hoosegow since the morning he picked up Grayson's body, held as a material witness. No one would put up a bond for him, and he's still at Willantic."

"I said at the time he must have robbed Mr. Grayson's body," Wickham declared, "but that was before I knew a murder had been committed. Yet, granting that Mr. Grayson was dumped overboard with the bills, in his pocket, where could Hoskins have hidden them?"

"A possible answer has just occurred to me," Nickols said. "May we use your motor tender, Captain Bonney, for a little trip around the mouth of Rockland Bay?"

"Certainly," Bonney agreed.

Carol was placed in charge of an officer who had come out from shore to consult his chief, and the power tender was made ready for the trip. Naturally the entire party wished to go, and so they all stepped aboard the launch. Two members of the *Zingara's* crew were included at Nickols' suggestion. Bonney was at the wheel.

"Where away?" he asked.

"Head for that red buoy post half a mile out," Nickols directed. "The first place I want to investigate is a reef just this side."

Smoothly the powerful launch purred through the quiet waters of Rockland Bay, heading toward the open Sound. Nickols took his position at the bow.

"Slow speed when I call," said he. Then, to a sailor "Stand by, ready with a boat hook. We'll want to pick up a lobster buoy."

After a few minutes.

"All right. Slow down. A little more to the left. Excuse me, captain, I should say port. Good! Stop her!"

A small black buoy bobbed against her side. On it in white paint were the letters: Z. H.

"Pull that aboard," Nickols told one of the sailors. "It marks a lobster pot. Heave her up till we can see what's in it."

A sailor hauled on the rope, and presently the slats of a lobster pot could be seen through the clear, greenish water. Two good-sized crustaceans were in the trap, but nothing else.

"Let it go!" Nickols ordered. "We don't want those chaps. There's a heavy fine for robbing a lobster pot."

On they went, visiting Zeb's traps one after another, identifying them by his initials on the buoys. A second, third, and fourth gave them blanks.

"You're on the right track, though," Wickham muttered. "Keep to it."

Each of the four traps had held one or more lusty lobsters. The fifth had something far more valuable—a pint fruit jar, with cover tightly screwed down. It was stuffed with paper money—the missing twenty-five thousand dollars, which Nickols surrendered to Mrs. Grayson as the rightful custodian.

"This," said the chief of police, and his voice carried a ring of wholly pardonable satisfaction, "clears up the last doubtful point. Head back to the *Zingara,* please, Captain Bonney."

Gloria Grayson abruptly changed her seat to Bonney's side, one of her hands resting lightly on his. Nickols smiled to himself.

"Guess the captain's due for a promotion—before very long," was his thought. "Be a good thing for both parties. He has a lot of good points, and he, if any one, can save that woman. Bonney'll make her a better husband than Ted Wickham—from what I've seen of the two."

The Snow Angel

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

Two Americans Spend Christmas with a Mexican Family, Turn a Pretty Trick on a Sharper, and a Good Time Was Had by All.

WHEN Bill isn't busy visiting his Mexican friends among the still unspoiled villages of the Pecos Valley, or sitting in at a rodeo or attending an Indian dance in some pueblo up the river, he paints pictures. Bill's studio, a picture in itself, faces a winding road on the lower slope of the Sangre de Cristo Range, overlooking the town of Santa Fe. Asphalt has not yet flowed up the winding road past his home. When it does, Bill will take up his bed and walk. Or ride his frisky saddle pony, Peanuts, and pack the bed on Chico.

Venerable Indian caciques come to his studio to talk with him. Wizened and picturesque Mexican sheep-herders —mahogany antiques that have survived the disappearance of New Mexico's pastoral days—knock gently at his door, enter, drink coffee and smoke innumerable straw-paper cigarettes. The patron is a great painter, but, *por Dios!* he is a greater friend. Long-legged cow-punchers from the Las Vegas country drop in, shake hands with Bill, say a few choice words and depart. Occasionally Eastern enthusiasts arrive with letters of introduction. These are entertained according to their lights, or darknesses. If Bill were twins he could not be more popular.

Not so long ago, when burros strolled about the plaza as independently as the other citizens, or meandered up and down the motorless streets of the old town, when the doors of the saloons

were high, wide and handsome, and a man with either good or bad intentions could find a game running seven days in the week, Bill and I forgathered in the corral back of his studio to discuss the season. Christmas was in the offing and approaching rapidly. "What are we going to do Christmas Day?" I asked him, disregarding his dissertation on the perversities of his saddle pony, Peanuts—so called because there is a lot of him in one small package.

"That," said Bill, "is a blunt, cruel question. A bachelor's Christmas is so often determined by Christmas Eve—or some other eve." Bill gazed soulfully at the distant Jemez forest, far beyond the Rio Grande. He whistled a tune—"There Is a Green Hill Far Away."

"Without a city wall?" I suggested.

"Correct. You have a fine mind—but no subtlety."

"Thanks. And Peanuts"—I indicated the sprightly pony—"has a loose shoe."

"To say nothing of his morals." Bill still gazed toward the distant blue of the Jemez, some fifty miles across the winter haze of the afternoon.

"What are you going to do Christmas Day?" I reiterated.

Bill's answer, if he had an answer ready, was sidetracked by the appearance of a squat, dark figure meandering up the winding road from town. A pastoral figure topped by a dusty black, unregenerate sombrero, and garmented in overalls the color of turquoise from age and much washing, a black cotton shirt and a silk neckerchief which had once been a violent purple, but had weathered to the soft hue of native wine. Swiftly the figure became Sancho Panza, an old, if not highly respected friend whom we had not seen since the preceding Christmas. For Sancho lived on the distant Jemez plateau, far from the haunts of men and money.

Sancho, son of poverty, and by the same token father of many children. Sancho, court jester to the king of Moon Dreams, followed a song. So far as he was concerned, the world held nothing, just then, save himself and his melody.

"And he lifted up his voice in song," said Bill. "But he couldn't carry a tune in a washtub."

However, I noticed that Bill's eye glowed with an awakening interest. Sancho's robust melody, though a trifle off key, suggested rare possibilities of entertainment, for Sancho was an adventure in himself.

Remembering how, a year ago, Sancho, the poorest of the poor, had come from his cabin, barefooted in the snow, to greet us royally and offer us the hospitality of his home, when we had ridden tired horses up to his isolated rancho in the cold mountain starlight, we deployed round the corner of the studio, advanced to the edge of the road and stood at the salute. As Sancho approached, still singing, it became only too evident that he was filled with considerably more than the pastoral spirit of his forefathers. He walked less steadily than he sang, but there was no lack of vigor in either exercise. He swung a long stick as though driving a burro. Opposite us he stopped in the middle of the road, wiped the sweat from his broad, humorous face—for it is a steady climb to Bill's studio—and with a grin which obliterated the rest of his features, went on with his song:

"Arre, burro! Come, hurry!
Ungrateful, no good.
I bear all the worry,
You bear but the wood.

"If you had an old wife,
And nine children to feed,
I would say that your life
Was a hard one, indeed!

"Or a mother-in-law,
With her scolding and talking:
If only her jaw
Went as slow as your walking!

"It is warm down below,
And it's cold on the hill,
But curse high and low,
You will walk as you will."

Sancho stopped with a heavy sigh of satisfaction. "How you like that one?" he said with an affected solemnity that made us laugh.

"Nine children to feed?" said Bill. "I counted seven, last Christmas."

With a grand gesture Sancho dismissed such petty arithmetic. "The song she say nine. My woman she got eight, now. Pretty soon it is nine, yes? Damn good song, no?" Sancho wavered slightly as he came up and shook hands with us.

"Aren't you a little lame in the off hind leg?" queried Bill.

"Those shoes, she new. I buy him in Santa Fe, for the Christmas, to make the present to my woman. Too big for my woman, so I wear him."

"So you're in town to buy Christmas presents for the family?" asked Bill.

"Seguro Miguel! I buy everything."

Bill and I exchanged glances. It seemed that Sancho had bought not wisely but too well. If he had any money left it would go for liquor. It was the twenty-third of December, and it would take him a day to get back to his rancho in the Jemez. We knew that his wife and children and Sancho himself had gone barefoot all one winter season, that they had had little to eat, that even when sober Sancho was improvident. The situation called for diplomacy. We felt we owed Sancho much for his erstwhile hospitality on the memorable Christmas Eve when he had entertained us at his cabin with the best he had, and all he had, to the very bottom of the flour barrel. Bill invited him into the studio, put a piñon log on the fire and placed a big armchair for our elated guest. Sancho relaxed and expanded. He took off his new shoes and wriggled his gnarled and calloused toes in the warmth.

"Now she feel good!" he murmured, and promptly fell asleep.

We thought of the big-eyed, expectant children and their not too strong mother anxiously waiting for the return of their overlord laden with the bounty of Christmastide. We did not care to see Sancho's Christmas ship sink with all hands. Bill indicated the slumbering Sancho with a shrug. "Hell of a looking Santa Claus! All he'll have when he gets back to those kids will be a pair of new sheep-herder's shoes and a headache."

"But what can we do about it? We can't muzzle him," I said.

"He's good for a long sleep in front of that fire," said Bill. "Any further queries about what we are going to do Christmas Day?"

"Not a query."

"Then I'm going to lock this wild pigeon in the studio and leave him here till I can get Peanuts shod and buy a few Christmas knickknacks from the well-known What-not Store. You shake together your plunder for the trip. We're going to escort this unregenerate son of a wood-tick back to his native bean pile. Hear him snore!"

I told Bill I wasn't deaf.

About five o'clock that afternoon we returned to the studio. A window was open, the fire was out, the room sharp with cold and Sancho and his new shoes were gone. Bill deposited a bundle of candy and toys on a chair and remade the fire. "Just for that," said Bill, "I'm going to join the Hounds of Heaven and trail the old boy. When I find him I'm going to bite him in the conscience."

After dinner downtown, we interviewed the chief of police and asked him to have his men search not too obviously for the vanished Sancho, and when they found him to pinch him, but pinch him gently. We left a quart of good cheer with the chief, lest he forget. Then we prowled from adobe to adobe in the hope that we might find Sancho enter-

taining some of his countrymen, for wherever Sancho hung his hat there was laughter and hilarity. We frequented Mexican pool halls, dance halls and shops. We trailed from saloon to saloon until, as Bill remarked, all we needed was a torch to make us a procession. Midnight overtook us mentally fatigued but not altogether dispirited. We voted to go home and rest. On the way to Bill's *casa,* Bill stumbled over a heap of gunny sack along the roadside. He lighted a match and, carefully lifting each sack, shook it.

"No, he isn't here," murmured Bill solemnly. "He must have gone for a walk." And then I knew that home was the only place for us.

After breakfast, next day, we saddled up and rode down to town. A native policeman informed us that Sancho had been both seen and heard that morning, navigating his wagon down Agua Fria Street. Our informant told us that Sancho sang as he drove and didn't drive very well. "He pretty dronk," declared the policeman. "I look in the wagon. There is nothing. So I let him go."

"Very considerate of you indeed!" said Bill.

And we headed out across the morning mesa at a lope. The ground was frozen, the air sharp and our ponies shied and snorted. As we eased down the La Bajada grade Bill remarked casually that we were a pair of cheerful idiots, that Sancho was headed for home with an empty wagon, and that though we had some candy and toys for the children, we had no present for Sancho's wife.

"Nor for him," I said.

"No. They won't sell arsenic without a prescription. We might hang him. But I think he would enjoy it too much. He likes excitement. I think we ought to burn him at the stake. We could keep warm."

We arrived in Buckman at noon. Buckman is simply a name over the one-room station on the railroad that parallels, when it can, the Rio Grande. "Old Charlie," who is postmaster, station agent and population of Buckman, was away somewhere. We fed our horses in his corral and ourselves in his shack. Then we crossed to the farther shore on the sketchy bridge which spans the sullen river and climbed the Buckman grade. Our road, covered by a foot of snow, led us across the bench land into the forest of the Jemez. We followed wagon tracks. Bill called attention to the fact that two wagons had recently pulled the heavy grade.

We hoped to overtake Sancho before he reached home, that he might arrive with enough candy and toys to make him into some semblance of a Santa Claus. As our horses plodded through the moist snow, we saw that one of the wagons had stopped at intervals, and that the driver had alighted, gone ahead of the team and then had returned to his wagon. This puzzled us. Finally we came to where the road to Sancho's homestead branches from the main road along the foothills. We had ridden perhaps a half hour in the cold, blue twilight of the afternoon forest, when we heard, far ahead, the sound of some one singing. "No one but Sancho would dare to sing in this frozen Arcady," said Bill. "He would sing in an ice-cream freezer. Let's get our man!"

Our horses needed no encouragement. They had heard the voice of one singing in the wilderness and seemed to know that it meant feed, shelter and rest. We loped on and out of the shadowy forest into the glare of the wide, white emptiness that lay about the cabin and corrals of our elusive songster. We overtook him halfway down the big pasture. He pulled up his team and grinned. "It is that I make the big Christmas, no?" And Sancho waved his broken whip toward the amazing heap of plunder in his wagon.

Bill is not by nature suspicious. But he is everlasting keen. "Great!" he said, eying the miscellany of bags, parcels and bundles. "You must have given the Christmas tree a good shake."

Sancho observed an air of deep mystery. "I shake heem! She fall in the snow, yes?" And he grinned again. But Bill answered him with a grave face. "Sancho, where did you get that loot?"

Sancho hesitated. Then with the naïveté of a child, "I find heem. If I don' find heem, some hombre find heem, no?"

"Did you find this stuff in Old Charlie's shack, at Buckman?"

Sancho protested vigorously. "I don' go in those shack. I find heem in the snow, one time this one, one time this one. I pick heem up; if she get spoil in the snow—no good."

"Do you know who lost it?"

Sancho shrugged. "I think she fall out of those tree, like you say, for Christmas."

"And I think," said Bill, "it fell off the wagon that was ahead of you to-day. The only ranch south is the Skenk ranch. And there are only two wagons on the mesa, yours and the Skenk wagon."

"You pretty fast hombre," said Sancho, seemingly pleased with Bill's deduction. "Those Skenk he get dronk in Santa Fe. He drive the wagon fast. I see him, but I don' go fast. All the time he go like thees." And Sancho gave a very convincing imitation of an inebriated driver on a wagon seat. "When he come to the top"—Sancho meant the top of the Buckman grade—"he whip those *caballos* and she run. The wagon is broncho, and those thing she fall in the snow and I find heem. *Bueno!*"

"Merry Christmas. But not so good," said Bill. "You know you can't keep this stuff."

"I don' see those thing fall off the wagon. I jus' find heem," declared Sancho stubbornly.

"Yes?" said Bill, "I appreciate the fine distinction. But when Skenk sobers up, he'll trail back looking for this stuff, and he wouldn't like anything better than to land you in the calaboose."

"How he know I got heem?" queried Sancho blandly.

"He's all that his name implies," said Bill, "but he isn't crazy. If he suspects you have the stuff he'll get a warrant and search your house. Did you say he whipped his team into a run after pulling the Buckman grade?" And I saw Bill's face change in expression.

Sancho nodded. "He dronk. He stand up—like thees——"

"Hold on!" cried Bill. "I'll take your word for it. And by the same token, the Honorable Mr. Skenk will pay tribute to the gods of decency for beating his horses after they pulled the Buckman grade. Dump the stuff out of the wagon."

Sancho was dumfounded. "You dronk, too? Just leetle dronk?"

But Bill did not laugh. He climbed into the wagon and heaved the bags and packages overboard. He sorted them into two heaps. Flour, sugar, bacon, raisins, dried apples, baking powder, matches, he put into gunny sacks and told Sancho to reload them into the wagon and take them home. Bill also told Sancho to distribute the provisions and not leave them in packages. The rest of the stuff, which could be identified—canned goods, a length of light rope, a new halter, a pair of rubber boots, a five-gallon can of kerosene, a sheepskin-lined canvas coat and a pair of heavy gloves—Bill arranged in a pyramid and covered it with the wagon sheet. "Don't let any of the family come out here," said Bill as Sancho drove away. "And fetch back a shovel and an ax."

Meanwhile Bill and I made several big snowballs. When Sancho returned

we carried the snowballs far afield and rolled them toward the heap of supplies. While Sancho and I toiled at making mammoth snowballs which, when they arrived at the center of Bill's operations, looked like huge rolls of cotton batting specked with dried grass, Bill walked to the edge of the clearing and cut down a young fir. He dragged it back to the heap of plunder and set it up, trimmed of all its branches save two. Then we rolled the mammoth snowballs against it and packed them round its base. Bill wielded the shovel, and again Sancho and I went far afield and rolled more snowballs up to the sculptor. And Bill sculped amazingly. Foot by foot a white statue grew. As the sun slid down behind the edge of the blue forest, the snow began to freeze. Bill's gloves were soaking wet, his nose red, and his eyes watered, but his enthusiasm was undiminished. "More mortar!" he cried as Sancho and I paused to admire the creature of his invention. And just before the sun descended the Snow Angel was completed.

Weird and wistful just about describes the snowy creature. For Bill assured us that it was feminine—no stolid, conventional masculine snow image, but a lady, an angel unaware, doing a good deed in a naughty world. And the Snow Angel did have a convincing waist line, a bell-shaped skirt, a generous bosom, and slender arms, tipped with the green fronds of the fir. These, Bill explained, were her hands. Her face was oval, and slightly lifted toward the sky, as though imploring the stars to be lenient with the mortal who had created her. Sancho was spellbound. He walked slowly round the Snow Angel, an ineradicable grin on his broad face. "She damn good lady," he remarked finally.

"Yes, I must admit it," said Bill, stepping back to view his creation. "And she covers a multitude of sins. I hope we don't have a thaw right away."

Wet and weary we plodded over to the cabin. Sancho's wife, thin-faced, gentle, with patient eyes, greeted us with timid courtesy. Seven of the eight children sat in a row on the edge of the bed, their big, dark eyes round with expectancy. From the north window of the cabin they had watched us at our mysterious task. Pedrocito, a lively boy of thirteen, remembered our visit a year ago and wanted to know if we were going to shake the tree again.

"But she is shake!" declared Sancho. "All those thing she fall down and I bring heem."

"What an actor he would make!" said Bill in a low voice.

"What an actor he is!" I amended.

In the unoccupied cabin which Sancho had built for his married daughter who had gone to live in Santa Fe, we washed and made ready for the evening meal. While we were discussing the events of the day, and probabilities of the morrow, Sancho breezed in with an armful of juniper wood and made a fire in the box stove. He left but returned almost immediately with a mammoth coffeepot and a sack of home-grown tobacco. Pedrocito followed with cups and sugar. Sancho was explaining his abrupt departure from the studio—he said he left because the fire went out and his feet got cold—when Pedrocito's sister, accompanied by a still smaller sister, knocked timidly at the door, and entered carrying a clean, folded towel which had once been the half of a flour sack.

Presently came another timid knock and Chico, a round-faced, big-eyed, and scrub-haired little chap, entered and proudly presented Bill with a golden-yellow ear of corn. "For the horses," he lisped in Spanish. It developed that Chico had not been delegated to appear, but had invented this excuse. His originality was rewarded with a bright new ten-cent piece. Pedrocito's eyes were fixed on the silver piece. A miniature

frown touched his forehead and vanished. "I gave the horses much corn!" he declared excitedly.

Bill promptly fished up another ten-cent piece. Pedrocito took it and started for the door. His father called him back. "Have you nothing to say to the grand man who has given you much money?" he asked the boy.

Pedrocito pondered a moment. Then, "*Si.* It is that he gives the same money for little corn, or much."

Sancho's reprimand was lost in our laughter. He promptly fell in with our mood. "He pretty fast boy, no?"

"A darn sight smarter than his father," said Bill. "Let's see—Pedrocito, Carmelita, Tula, Chico—we're short four."

"I don' make to count. Too many," said Sancho, grinning. "My woman, she know." And he dismissed the children that he might, as we discovered, talk confidentially. "My woman," he said, as he made a corn-husk cigarette, "she say to me how I get so much with the five dollar. I say to her I breeng heem in the wagon. And she say, 'Sancho, I think you steal those thing.' Then I say to her, *'Nombre de Dios!* But is it not the Christmas?' But my woman she shake her head like she think I don' say right. You say to her I don' steal those thing, she say it is all right."

Bill poured a cup of coffee and sipped it. "I could not love thee so much, old top, loved I not honor more," he murmured. "But it is Christmas Eve, which comes, thank God, but once a year. Leave it to us, Sancho. We'll make your good wife think you are a blooming angel. But you ought to be shot."

Pedrocito arrived to inform us, breathlessly, that supper was ready. We followed Sancho to the other cabin.

Bill was given the place of honor, with Sancho at his left. The oilcloth-covered table was laden with the inevitable frijoles, a platter of bacon, home-made bread, butter, a pitcher of fresh milk, some little Mexican cakes the señora had made and reserved for the holiday, and a dish of raisins. Pedrocito and his sisters Carmelita and Tula, and the younger Chico, with the tiny Anita, were allowed to sit at the table. The two-year-old Manuela and the two infants were visible only as lumps on the bed. The children were exceedingly well-behaved, possibly because they were rather awed by our presence. Sancho entertained us, and the family, with humorous anecdote, as the frijoles, bacon, bread and coffee disappeared. Bill made it appear that the surplusage of provisions was due to a most fortunate meeting between himself and Sancho, and Sancho's wife was so grateful that Bill actually blushed. And Bill is not an easy blusher.

While our Christmas Eve, indoors, was a success, it was even a greater success in the open. After supper we carted wood to the Snow Angel and built a bonfire—but not too close, lest she melt and disclose her secret. As all the children save Pedrocito and Carmelita were without shoes, Bill got busy and manufactured some weird footgear from strips of gunny sack which he wound about their feet and ankles. His invention "took" immediately. The younger children snowshoed round the cabin till we lined them up and started out to see the illuminated Snow Angel. Even Sancho's wife was persuaded to come, and we assembled in a half circle about the fire and gazed with admiration and awe at Bill's handicraft. "What is it for?" queried Pedrocito the irrepressible.

Bill carried a mysterious sack, which young Pedrocito had been eying intently. "You stay right here until she calls you," said Bill, to Pedrocito. And Bill strode round to the back of the Snow Angel. And presently the Snow Angel spoke, in Spanish, but with a noticeably masculine tone. "Come and

get my Christmas present for the very little Anita."

Pedrocito hesitated, but Sancho urged him forward. A small package shot up over the Snow Angel's head and fell in front of the astonished Pedrocito. He grabbed it up and ran with it to his mother. Followed another name and another package, until the candy and toys had reached their individual and expectant destinations. Then the señora's name was called and she came back from the Snow Angel with something clutched in her hand which she held against the black shawl across her breast. Then, to make the illusion as complete as possible, the Snow Angel, with chattering teeth, told the happy family they might return to the cabin, and she added that her feet were getting cold.

In the seclusion of the guest cabin I learned from Bill that he had given Sancho's wife a five-dollar note. "But," said Bill, "I told Sancho that if he talked her out of it and came to Santa Fe on pleasure bent, I'd have him arrested."

"What about the plunder concealed by your work of art?" I asked.

"Oh, the Snow Angel is good for a month, up here. She may melt a little, round the edges, but her heart is sound."

"But don't you think Sancho will operate on her as soon as we leave?"

"I hope he doesn't until after Skenk shows up. And he'll show up. By the way, did you know that the Skenk brothers tricked old Sancho out of half his homestead, a few years ago? They hired a lawyer in Santa Fe, and tried to prove that Sancho's title to the land would not hold. He had no money to fight the suit, so he compromised by deeding them half his homestead. I wish I had known about it at the time. But I know it now. And that, my honest friend, is why I aided and abetted, and sculped and sweated to make the Snow Angel. If Skenk comes nosing around to-morrow, watch and pray for freezing weather." It seems that Bill had given Sancho some pertinent instructions.

About noon, Christmas Day, while we were regretting that we had eaten so much, Skenk arrived on horseback, a rifle across his saddle. His narrow, sour face was no handsomer for his recent potations. He seemed surprised to see us. Few town dwellers venture into the Jemez country in winter. After a curt nod, he ignored us. I was rather surprised that Bill chose to remain ignored. But he did—and I was still further surprised when Sancho greeted his neighbor cordially and invited him into the cabin. Skenk waved aside the courtesy.

"I lost some stuff off of my wagon," he declared, in a tone which seemed to imply that it was Sancho's fault. "I trailed back this mornin' and seen where you stopped and picked it up—plain as handwritin'. I want that stuff."

"I don' have heem," said Sancho, spreading his hands.

"I think you're a liar. I'm going to search your shack and every dog house on the place. If I find any of my stuff, you go to jail."

Accompanied by Sancho, Skenk searched the premises, houses, corrals and outbuildings. Pedrocito eyed Skenk belligerently. The rest of the children hovered round their mother, their eyes big and startled. Finally Skenk came back to where his horse stood within eight or ten feet of the Snow Angel, herself. Skenk mounted, jerked his horse round and spurred the gaunt, frightened animal through the heavy snow toward the distant road. Bill's face was black with suppressed profanity. Even Sancho frowned at the rancher's brutality. But the Snow Angel, her airy hands spread to the low breeze, and her face lifted coquettishly, stared at the winter sky as though unenvious of mortals and their troubled lives, and quite content with her destiny.

When Uncle Morris Visited the Lowensteins There Was Hell to Pay and Nothing to Eat.

Dolling, We Are Growing Thinner

By Raymond Leslie Goldman

AS Ben Lowenstein, fat, bald and forty-five, entered his apartment one evening in October, his nostrils were assailed by the aroma of nectar. The nectar in this case was undoubtedly *gedämpfte kalbfleisch,* and Ben felt the moisture increasing under his tongue.

"So, Clara!" he exclaimed a moment later when he greeted his wife in the front room. "It's *gedämpfte kalbfleisch* to-night!"

"Sure," Clara beamed stoutly. "Didn't I promise? And such a piece of meat, Ben! While I was fixing it, who should come in but Becky Hirschfeld, from next door, and she says she never seen better."

Ben grimaced wryly. "There's a family, Clara, which they are terrible butt-ins. Just now I was walking home from the subway with Henry Hirschfeld, and he has got to begin talking right away about how fat I am getting, and I should go on a diet, and take exercise even! He is crazy on the subject, Clara. Believe me, I told him something!"

Clara waved a plump hand. "Shush, Ben! You are always irritated with the Hirshfelds. They mean well enough. You got to understand how they are

only trying to be neighborly, because they live on the same floor with us."

"Neighborly is all right," Ben returned, "but he don't got to insult my wife, does he?"

Clara gave a start. "What do you mean, Ben, by insulting your wife? How did he insult me?"

"He said you also was getting terrible fat," said Ben.

He paused to let this sink in; and evidently it sank, for Clara compressed her lips, her face took on a dull red color, and, for the ensuing five minutes, she revealed her opinion of the Hirshfelds, in comparison with which Ben's opinion was actually complimentary.

"Wait a minute!" Ben interrupted at last. "What you said about them is right, but all you are doing now is repeating. If you get yourself all worked up this way, you would got indigestion with dinner. Believe me, Clara, I didn't listen with my mouth closed, neither. I told him he should talk diet and exercise with his wife's sister, Cora Katz, which he has got living with him, because she is certainly no living skeleton already."

Clara nodded her satisfaction. "Ha! And what did he said to that?"

"What could he said, Clara? He is trying to marry her off, and *oser* he'll ever make a match for her without she hasn't got a penny to her name. 'Kittens' they call her! 'Baby Ellyphant' would be better yet!"

"Except being too fat, she ain't so bad looking," said Clara fairly. "She has got a right pritty face."

Ben snorted. "Is somebody marrying only a face, Clara, without any money even? And she must be way over forty also."

"She's thirty-six," said Clara, "and she claims twenty-nine."

"That's closer as usual," Ben declared. "Anyhoe, I didn't come home to talk only about them crazy Hirshfelds, Clara, because I got a letter today by my office which you couldn't guess in a million years who it was from."

"Then why don't you told me?" she cried. "I haven't got a million years to guess in."

"From Uncle Mawruss!" he told her.

"You mean Uncle Mawruss Tyroler, from Los Angeles?"

"Sure. What other Uncle Mawruss have we got?"

"Have *I* got, you mean. Because he is my own poor mamma's brother. But what did he said, Ben? Where is the letter?"

Ben searched his pockets without success.

"I must left it by the office. But it was only a short letter and all he said was how he was coming to New York soon for two or three months a visit."

"What we got to do, Ben," she declared, "is right away write to Uncle Mawruss that when he comes to New York he should positively stay here with us as long as he is here. When a man is sixty-six years old, and a widerer, poor feller, it would be a terrible shame he should live all alone in some hotel where the food alone is enough to make him lonesome."

"You got right, Clara," Ben replied. "To-morrow I'll write him a nice letter about it."

He agreed with her suggestion so readily because it accorded perfectly with his own desire. Upon receipt of Uncle Morris' letter that morning, Ben had looked up the rating of M. Tyroler Dry Goods Company, of Denver, Colorado, for the year 1926; and when he perceived that the rating was between three and four hundred thousand, he had immediately made up his mind that he and Clara ought to be considerate of a lonely old widower like Morris Tyroler.

He speculated now upon the history of his wife's uncle, whom he had not seen for some eighteen years. At that remote period, during the early years of

Ben's and Clara's marriage, Morris Tyroler had lived in New York, conducting a small and not very successful notion store on Avenue A. He and his wife struggled hard to make a meager living; and then his health failed and the doctor told him that if he did not go out West, to Colorado, he would soon become a victim of tuberculosis.

The doctor's advice cost ten dollars, but the following of his advice would cost—well, a great deal more than the Tyrolers could scrape together. When they sold out their business and paid off their debts, there was just enough left over to pay the railroad fare to Denver. And if he were to die of starvation in Colorado, he might just as well die of tuberculosis in New York and be done with it.

It was then that Ben and Clara Lowenstein had come to his rescue. Ben, at that time, was a salesman for the Star Waist Company, now existing as the Lowenstein Skirt and Blouse Company, and his assistance of the Tyrolers had entailed a real sacrifice.

Of course, Uncle Morris had paid back every cent with interest. He had first regained his health; then he had secured a position as a bookkeeper; and finally, when he had saved enough capital, he had started another small notion store which rapidly grew to become the prosperous M. Tyroler Dry Goods Company, rated, in 1926, somewhere between three and four hundred thousand dollars.

It was in 1926 that Tyroler had sold out his interest in the business and had removed to that Mecca of the retired, Los Angeles. He was a widower then; and so far as Ben knew, he intended to remain loyal to the memory of his first and only wife.

While Ben was mentally reviewing these facts, Clara, too, was thinking deeply. Now she said:

"I am going to write to him also, Ben. I want he should feel like he's coming to relatives who would take care of him and take a interest in him."

Ben nodded. "But be careful, Clara, you don't overdo it."

"Overdo it!" she exclaimed. "What do you mean by that?"

"I mean," he said, "that just because you are practic'ly his only living relative, he mustn't get the idea that we are after his money, Clara. That's what I mean."

The letters were written and dispatched; Uncle Morris' letter of acceptance was received; and one Saturday noon, the day before the visitor was due to arrive, Ben was sitting at his favorite table in the L. & K. Restaurant with his friend, Sidney Soloman. Ben studied his menu for a while and then looked around the crowded tables to see, as it were, the major cause of the succulent sounds which penetrated, like a sucking surf, the loud hum of conversation.

"The weiner schnitzel looks good today," he declared.

"It's a little heavy for me," Sidney replied. "I guess I'll eat only a light chicken sandwich and a cup coffee."

Ben looked at his friend commiseratingly.

"You ain't feeling good, Sidney?"

"Oh, I'm feeling good enough," Sidney explained. "But to-day is gymsnasium day, and you got to be careful what you eat."

"What do you mean—to-day is gymsnasium day?" Ben inquired. "I know about Thanksgiving Day, and Valemtime's Day, and even mamma's and papa's days, but that there is something new with me."

"It ain't a holiday like that," said Sidney. "What I mean is how three times a week I go to the Business Men's Gymsnasium, in the top floor of the Julp Building over on Sixth Avenue which they got a feller by the name Perfesser Mozart he gives you exercises. Only

once I been there, last Thursday; but I go every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, from one thirty to three. So the perfesser told me distickly I should eat light lunches before I took the exercises."

The waiter stood by to take Ben's order of the regular daily lunch with weiner schnitzel, and Sidney's order of a chicken sandwich on whole wheat bread; and then Ben gave his attention to his friend.

"What for all of a sudden are you taking exercises, Sidney? Are you going to be a prize fighter or something? Such crazy business!"

"It's no such thing—crazy business," Sidney returned resentfully. "It does a feller good to take exercises once in a while. When we get up there in the gymsnasium we do all kinds of things, like play wolley ball, f'r instance."

"What is that—wolley ball?"

"It's a game where you stood on both sides of a net and push back and forth a big rubber ball. And if it once touches the ground, y'understand, then that's a point."

Ben's lips curled with disgust.

"A fine thing, at your age, Sidney. Games you got to play with rubber balls like you was a two-years-old baby!"

"Is that so!" said Sidney. "Well, three times a week wolley ball, and maybe a little ropes jumping and pulley pulling wouldn't hurt you none, neither. And all it would cost would be thirty dollars a season."

"You should live so long," Ben said fervently, "before I would make a lunatics out of myself with wolley ball and ropes jumping and pulley pulling—whatever that is! I am in the skirt and blouse business, Sidney, and I ain't got time to play games like that. God forbid if my mind goes back on me so I got to begin all over again like a kindergarten, at least I could wait till maybe I am ninety years old, anyhoe. And that's all I got to say."

The following morning Ben was up early; for Uncle Morris' train was to arrive at Pennsylvania Station at ten fifteen, and Ben wanted to be sure to be there in plenty of time.

"Come back in a taxi, Ben," Clara suggested. "Remember he's a old man and tired with his trip. Such a dinner I'll have for him, he never et better in his life. Lentil soup, roast goose with stuffing, mashed potatoes, wide noddles with gravy, boiled onions in cream, spinach with egg, and that grand strudel I fixed yesterday."

At ten fifteen exactly the train arrived, and Ben stood at the exit gate, scanning the passengers as they emerged. He looked carefully at the several elderly men who laboriously climbed the stairway from the lower level of the tracks, but in none of them did he recognize the well-remembered features of his uncle-in-law. When his eyes finally rested upon the face which unmistakably belonged to Morris Tyroler, he experienced a shock of surprise; for it was a trim man who was mounting the long flight of steps as agilely as a man of forty, unhampered even by the two suit cases he carried in either hand. When he reached the landing, he put down his luggage and doubtfully regarded the stout, bald-headed man who was approaching him with extended hand.

"Uncle Mawruss!" Ben greeted heartily. "Don't you remember me even?"

"Sure, sure!" cried Tyroler, giving Ben's hand a pressure that made Ben wince with pain. "But at first I didn't, because when I seen you last you was positively skinny, Ben, and you got hair on your head. Well, well, well! How you was, anyhoe?"

"Fine!" Ben replied heartily. "But you, Uncle Mawruss! The only way I recognized you was because you look even younger as twenty years ago before you got sick! For a minute I thought

you must be your own son, if you had a son."

Morris Tyroler grinned, revealing strong white teeth under a crisp mustache. There was a ruddy glow to his tanned cheeks, a youngish brightness to his blue eyes; and only the gray of his hair and mustache gave insufficient evidence of his sixty-six years.

"Well, Ben," he said, "we better be getting a move on. Where is your house?"

"By the De Luxe Apartments, Ninety-eight Street and Broadway," Ben told him. "Lemme carry one of the grips for you, Uncle Mawruss. We go only over there where we get a taxi."

"Wait!" said Tyroler. "This here is, now, Thirty-second Street, ain't it? And you got here, if I remember it, twenty blocks to a mile, ain't it? That makes it, at the most, maybe three and a half to four miles to your house, ain't it?"

Ben waved a depreciating hand.

"At the most four miles, Uncle Mawruss. But you should worry if it's fourteen miles even, because in the first place the taxi rates here is very low, and besides I am positively paying out for it."

"Oh, that ain't what I mean," said Tyroler. "But what's three to four miles? It's farther as that from my house in Los Angeles to the nearest Health Foods Store even! What do you want with a taxi?"

Ben shrugged. "For myself I don't mind it, Uncle Mawruss, but for you I thought maybe you wouldn't like a subway."

"You bet I wouldn't like it!" Tyroler agreed. "On such a fine day like this we would be crazy not to walk."

"Walk!" cried Ben. "You mean we should walk from here all the way up to Ninety-eight Street?"

"Sure I mean that," said Tyroler. "Do you call three to four miles a walk yet?" He laughed scornfully. "Now I could see, Ben, why you are so fat and ain't got any hair also, if every time you got to go a few miles you right away got to ride in something, a autymobile or a street car yet! If I was like that, lemme tell you, I would be in my grave ten years ago already and you would be calling me 'Uncle Mawruss, *selig*.' I see where you got a lot to learn, Ben."

"But, Uncle Mawruss——"

"Shush!" said Tyroler. "We are wasting up time here in this stuffy depot. I'll check these here grips with my trunk, and in a hour, at the longest, we'll be by your house already. A little walk like that will make you digest up your dinner."

The luggage disposed of, Ben and Uncle Morris emerged into the sunlight of Seventh Avenue and began the long northward trek. It was a cool morning in late October, but by the time the southern boundary of Central Park was reached, Ben was literally dripping with perspiration, and his short legs threatened to double under him.

"Ah!" exclaimed Uncle Morris as they crossed Fifty-ninth Street and turned into the park entrance at the Maine Monument. "Now we could go nilly all the way through the park! Trees! Grass! Fresh air! This here is something like, Ben!"

"Wait a minute!" Ben panted, stoping to draw a handkerchief from his pocket. Wearily he mopped his face and neck, and, removing his derby hat, wiped the inside band. "Listen, Uncle Mawruss, this here is positively killing me! At least, if you didn't walk so fast I could anyhoe wait to drop dead until I got home!"

Tyroler laughed heartily.

"Don't worry, Ben, about dropping dead. People don't drop dead so quick from a little walk."

"But I got blood pressure," Ben protested. "Honest to God, Uncle Mawruss, six doctors, which they socked me anyway twenty-five dollars apiece,

told me I got to be careful with my blood pressure."

"Sure you got blood pressure," Tyroler replied. "Anybody who don't walk in the fresh air and so forth is bound to get blood pressure. At sixty-six, I would got blood pressure also, I assure you, Ben, if I didn't walk at least five to ten miles a day, eat right, and take *doch* a little exercise! As it is, my blood pressure is like a young man of thirty-five."

"But I'm nilly dropping over, I'm so tired," Ben pleaded. "Look how I am sweating, Uncle Mawruss!"

Again Tyroler laughed. "That's just what you need, Ben—plenty of sweating. Every day a good sweating like that and you would lose anyhoe ten pounds a week. Come on, now; and because you are like a beginner with this, we'll go a little slower from now on."

How Ben ever managed to hold up for the duration of the march, he never knew. The last half mile, from Central Park West to Broadway, was a frightful nightmare which he could never later recall without a shudder. He survived, however, to stagger into his apartment; and while Clara was greeting her perfectly fresh and sprightly uncle, Ben wavered down the hallway to the living room and flung himself, full length, on the sofa. He did not know how many bones and muscles were in his body, but he did know that each and every one of them ached dreadfully. He could feel the blisters rising on the soles of his tender feet, and pulses all over his body throbbed with a hard rhythm which filled him with terror.

"Any second now," he groaned to himself, "and I would drop dead."

He was still living, however, when Clara and Uncle Morris entered the room; and because Clara had scarcely glanced at her husband until this moment, she stared at him now in frightened amazement.

"Ben!" she cried. "What's the matter with you?"

It was Uncle Morris who answered her.

"Don't get scared with him, Clara," he laughed. "Nothing is the matter with him except he is a little healthier now as he was for many years and he ain't used to it."

"He don't look healthy," said Clara doubtfully. "He looks like a red lopster even. Ben, what for do you lay down that way? Is that the way to act when Uncle Morris is just came here for his visit?"

"Could I help it?" mumbled Ben from the sofa. "Just ask him if we didn't walk all the way here from the station!"

"Walked!" gasped Clara. "Ben! Are you gone crazy?"

"No, I ain't crazy," he replied; and he was about to add. *"He* is the crazy one!" when he remembered that Morris Tyroler was rated between three and four hundred thousand dollars, not counting such life insurance as he might carry, and that Clara and her brother, Henry Kuttner, were the nearest of kin. So, instead he added: "Uncle Mawruss is a great walker, Clara, and he thinks it would do me good also."

"You bet it would!" put in Tyroler. "At first, of course, it makes him a little tired, maybe. But as soon as he gets used to it, he could walk ten miles even and it simply wouldn't bother him at all."

Before Clara announced dinner at one o'clock, Ben had soaked himself in a tub of hot water, had dozed for half an hour and had put on fresh linen; and then he was surprised to realize that it was with the most pleasurable sensations that the aromas of cooking foods reached his nostrils. Indeed, if one discounted the fact that he was unable to replace his shoes and could just manage to get his feet into bedroom slippers, and that he was afflicted with a dull ache from head to foot, he felt quite well and

looked forward to dinner with mouth-watering anticipation.

"Well, Uncle Mawruss," he said, as they took their places at table before the steaming lentil soup, "you got right about one thing anyhoe. I sure worked up a grand appetite!"

"But you got to be careful," replied Tyroler, "not to overdo it. Overeating causes more deaths as autymobiles even. I know this because out in Los Angeles, I go to lectures; and I belong to the Sacred Order of Dietary Nymphs, which it is something like a lodge only they call it a sect."

Clara shook her head flatteringly. "I bet you are a prominent man, Uncle Mawruss!" She paused. "Ain't you eating the lentil soup, Uncle Mawruss?"

"No, Clara," he said. "Lentils is like meat; they are nothing but proteen, which it is practic'ly poison in the human systems."

Clara grew pale. "You mean, Uncle Mawruss, how you don't never eat meat even?"

"I should say not!" he returned firmly. "You couldn't pay me to put in my mouth a piece of meat."

"But," Clara faltered, "but—what *do* you eat, Uncle Mawruss, if not soup or meat?"

"Well," said the young old gentleman, "I eat such things like fruit, also nuts, also fresh, raw vetchtables, also dates and figs and a little milk and plenty of water."

Clara tried to hold back her tears.

"But not goose with stuffing, Uncle Mawruss?" she quivered. "And not wide noodles with gravy? Or grand *apfel strudel?*"

"Poison!" Tyroler roared heartlessly. "All of this is plain poison, Clara! I wouldn't put such *dreck* in my stomach, Clara. And furthermore," he added, "I wouldn't allow you and Ben to eat it neither!"

"Say!" cried Ben, unable longer to control himself. But before he could say another word, something came down forcefully upon his slippered foot, outstretched under the table; and he knew that this something was his wife's heel.

With a false smile on her face, Clara sent all of her culinary masterpieces back to the kitchen; and with one warning, silencing eye on her empurpled husband, she directed the maid:

"In the cupboard, Nellie, you will find a bag of walnuts and pee-cans. Dump them in a bowl and bring them in. Also put them apples which is in the ice box on a plate and bring them also.

"Uncle Mawruss," she said when the maid had departed on her errand, "I am terrible sorry I didn't know just how you et or I could do better for you today. But from now on you would find everything the way you want it."

"You bet you!" agreed Ben with a strange smile. And under his breath he murmured: "Thank God, I could still keep from starving by the L. & K. Restaurant!"

During the following two weeks, Ben learned who were the real heroes of the World War—not merely the men who fought the battles, but the goaded rookies in the training camps taking unaccustomed exercise and living on fare that contained all the essential nutritional elements but certainly didn't taste like mamma's cooking.

Uncle Morris Tyroler held true to the principles of the Sacred Order of Dietary Nymphs even though he was three thousand miles away from the stronghold of such a sect. Likewise he held true to his threat to make Ben and Clara disciples of the Sacred Order. Like most people who have lost and regained anything, whether wealth, health or morals, he was a zealot in the Cause and he could not bear to see any one doing anything differently than he did it.

In Ben and Clara he had two helpless victims. If, under torture, one of

them was about to forget that Morris Tyroler was rated between three and four hundred thousand, the other was sure to remember; and there was a continual stepping on toes and kicking of legs under tables, and more silent and meaningful pantomime between them than in any three Charlie Chaplin motion pictures.

Having begun without delay the rejuvenation of his niece and nephew, Uncle Morris continued without abatement. Therefore, when Sidney Soloman visited Ben's office one forenoon, two weeks later, he saw at a glance that Ben was afflicted with something or other, and whatever it was, it was dreadful. Shortly after the recorded conversation between Ben and Sidney in the L. & K. Restaurant, Sidney had gone away with his wife for a vacation in the Pocono Mountains; and this was the first time he had seen Ben since the advent of Uncle Morris Tyroler. He entered the office just as Ben was rising, through necessity, from his swivel chair; therefore his first sight of Ben was at his very worst. With one hand grasping the arm of the chair and the other clutching the small of his back, Ben was rising slowly, and his groans would have wrung the heart of Nebuchadrezzar.

"Nu!" cried Sidney. "What's the matter with you, Ben?"

Ben dropped back into the chair and swung about to face his friend.

"Shut up!" he greeted malevolently.

Sidney's face immediately became suffused with the dull red of righteous wrath. For a moment he stared; then he turned on his heel and for the door which he had just a moment before closed behind him.

"Shut up, he tells me!" he trembled. "After two weeks I come all the way up here to told him a hello, and he tells me I should shut up! All right, then—I'll shut up! Never, so long should I live——"

"Wait, Sidney!" shouted Ben in a changed voice. "Wait and listen a minute. So help me, Sidney, I didn't mean it! It was the pain, Sidney! It was the meanness I got inside of me! That is what it was."

This was indubitably an apology, and Sidney turned again, his curiosity greater than his anger.

"Pain?" he inquired. "Meanness? The pain you couldn't help, Ben, if you got a sickness some place; but you don't got to let out your meanness on me!"

"Didn't I told you I was sorry?" said Ben. "Sit down, Sidney, and forget it already."

Sidney sat down.

"Did you go yet by a doctor, Ben?" he asked. "The way you was holding your back when I come in here, you got maybe kidneys trouble, and if you leave something like that go too long, Ben, first thing you know you could got diabeetles."

"It ain't my kidneys in especially, Sidney," moaned Ben. "It's every place from the kidneys up and from the kidneys down. It's from the bottom of my feet to the top of my head; and if I had hair on my head, Sidney, even that would be sore even!"

"Tch! tch! tch!" commiserated Sidney's tongue. "I bet you you are getting flu."

"Are you telling me or am I telling you?" cried Ben. "Why don't you wait to find out instead of making guesses like you was one of these here high-price specialists? What's the matter with me, Sidney, is exercises!"

"Exercises!"

Ben nodded, and then, with a pained expression, placed his hand against the back of his neck.

"Yes, exercises, Sidney. And if you begin to talk yet about your Business Men's Gymsnasium and how you injoy it, Sidney, I positively would lose control of myself."

"Shush!" Sidney replied with a large

wave of his hand. "You don't got to worry about I should talk about that, because I quit that a long time ago, before I went away even. In fact, Ben, one of the reasons why I went away on such a vacation, Ben, was to rest up after maybe two or three times at that crazy gymnasium. After acting up that way with wolley ball and so on, I got such a soreness in my mussels, y'understand, which I thought I would drop dead every time I moved. So you are very foolish if you took exercises, Ben, at your age."

"Foolish!" Ben said bitterly. "Maybe you would be foolish like that also, Sidney, might you got a rich uncle like Morris Tyroler which he is worth, at the lowest estimate, nilly a half a million dollars!"

"I couldn't understand such talk," Sidney declared.

"Then listen." And Ben proceeded to explain in detail the circumstances surrounding the visit of his wife's rich uncle.

"So," he was saying ten minutes later, "it means how me and Clara has got to do like he says or he would get mad, y'understand, and maybe walk out on us. Didn't he say to us one day at the beginning even: 'There ain't no use in making a will in your favor if you are both going to die before me already! And the way you are living, you both could die any minute!' That's what he says, Sidney; so what could we do? So we got to do like he tells us; and such tortures we go through, Sidney, the children of Israel didn't even got it so bad when they was working for that feller Faro!

"In the morning it is up at before six o'clock and in nightgowns before the radio which we tune in on that feller which he says, 'Now stick yet the hands on the hips, and then push them up, and then push them out, and then push them down—one, two, three, four!' Then, Sidney, when we are nilly dropping dead with it, it comes a cold shower bath which it is like sticking needles into you, Sidney. *Then* comes breakfast. A piece fruit; a suck on a half a lemon which it send shivers through you; a glass skimmed milk and fifteen walnuts."

He paused for breath; and Sidney said:

"No wonder you feel bad, Ben. That's terrible!"

"Wait," Ben added. "You ain't heard only the beginning of it. After such a breakfast, which you positively wouldn't feed up a dawg with it, Sidney, what do I got to do but *walk all the way from by my house down here to the office!* Uncle Mawruss he walks with me—I guess to see I wouldn't jump on a taxi or a subway. Then at night he comes here for me, *and I got to walk all the way home again!*"

"My God!" gasped Sidney. "How could you stand it!"

"I couldn't stand it," Ben returned, "but I got to do it anyhoe. And at night for dinner, Sidney, it's more fruit and more nuts and vetchtables which you got to eat raw like you was a rabbit! And such things I got to *fress* with them, Sidney, until I am positively slowly starving to death!"

"But couldn't you go for lunches, anyway, by the L. & K., Ben?"

"Ha! That's what I thought in the beginning, Sidney. But Uncle Mawruss he thinks the same thing also; so every day at twelve thirty on the dot he comes here I should go to lunch with him. So he takes me to a crazy restaurant, Sidney, over on Sixth Avenue, which all they got is food for lunytics like Mawruss Tyroler, and there it's more raw vetchtables and fruit and nuts. Every time I walk in there, so help me, Sidney, I am afraid somebody would grab me and stick me away in a padded cell!"

Sidney heaved a deep sigh.

"If you got it like that," he declared,

"then all I got to say is I am sorry for you from the bottom of my heart."

"Well," Ben replied gloomily, "you could go ahead and be sorry, because that's the way I got it. Last night in whispers I tell my Clara how I couldn't stand it another week even. With her it's bad enough, but it ain't so bad like with me. At least she don't got to walk down here and back, and because Uncle Mawruss couldn't watch both of us at the same time, y'understand, she could eat all day long if she wants to, the kind of food which a human being could stick in his stomach. And she could lay down on the bed also from the minute me and him leave the house until just before we come back again in the evening. So she says I positively got to keep it up no matter how long he stays by us. Otherwise he would get mad and cut us off without a nickel even."

"Well, all I got to say," said Sidney, "is you would earn every penny you get, even if you got a half a million from him, Ben."

"You bet you!" Ben agreed. "And even if he is sixty-six, Sidney, and I am only forty-five, still when he dies, even if he dies in two months from now, I would be dead in my grave already. Any minute now I would positively drop dead with it."

Life is tenacious, however, and Ben did not drop dead that minute or any other minute during the next ten days. The fanatical Tyroler ruled the Lowenstein ménage with an iron hand; he laughed at Ben's obvious misery, terming it wholesome evidence of nature's cure, and promising that the various aches and pains would soon wear away.

"But they are getting worser and worser," Ben told his wife one evening in a hushed tone. "From morning till night I am always sick. Not a nickel's worth of business could I tend to ever since that feller come into this house!"

"For once you don't got to talk in whispers," she replied, "because Uncle Mawruss has went out again to-night. He went next door to the Hirshfelds', Ben. Maybe you ain't noticed at all how he is so often going over there, Ben, ever since them Hirshfelds called on us that night?"

Ben shrugged. "What about it, Clara? Suppose he does go over there even every night? That lunytic, Henry Hirshfeld, is crazy with diet and exercise just like Uncle Mawruss is crazy with it. So they got something like you call common together, ain't it? And I'm glad he gets out of this house even for a few hours."

"So!" Clara retorted. "You are glad about it, Ben? And what do you think would happen to Uncle Mawruss' money might he gets married again? What would you say to that?"

Ben smiled easily. "Oh, now I see what you are getting at, Clara," he said lightly. "You are getting worried about that Cora Katz! Well, don't be foolish, Clara; because a feller like Uncle Mawruss has got no intrust in such a fat woman like that there Kittens!"

"She has got a real pritty face," Clara said doubtfully, "and such a good nature you wouldn't believe it."

"Just the same, Clara, you don't got to worry," Ben reassured her. "We got enough to worry about, but not that. If that woman was nice and thin, now, I would say, 'Go ahead and worry.' But not when she is such a fat slob like that."

Ben persisted in this confident attitude despite Tyroler's increasing intimacy with the Hirshfelds, and he was not shaken in his belief until, one morning, the two men were trudging down Broadway on their regular morning march to Ben's office.

"Well, Ben," said Tyroler, "by this time I guess you are starting to like getting healthy, ain't it?"

"Healthy!" Ben returned sourly; for he was in a surly mood. "If feeling like I do is healthy, I would rather be sick, I assure you!"

"Shush!" said Tyroler. "Do you mean to told me you are still sore all over like you was? Ha! Couldn't I see the diff'rence how you walk now and the way you used to walk? Now you got peps in you, Ben, and you couldn't say otherwise."

The fact that this statement was true annoyed Ben all the more. His painful stiffness, while not entirely gone, was certainly disappearing; and he could double his former pace with scarcely any evidence of labored breathing.

"Even if I could walk better as I used to," he told his uncle, "still I am hungry all the time. And if all I got to look forward to is eating such things like nuts and fruits, y'understand, with never any real food like noddles or stuffed goose, then all I got to say is, what's the use living at all?"

"That's what Kittens said in the beginning," Tyroler declared. "But now she wouldn't quit her diet for anything. There's a fine girl, Ben. And sensible, you wouldn't believe it! Maybe you would say she is too young for me; but am I old, Ben? Even if I am sixty-six, am I old?"

Ben stopped short in his tracks.

"Uncle Mawruss!" he cried. "What are you talking about? Do you mean that——"

"Sure I mean!" Tyroler retorted. "Why shouldn't I get married again if I want to? Not that I asked her yet; but I am thinking about it a lot, lemme tell you! There's a girl which she would make for me a idill wife. Such a good nature she's got! Always she is making me laugh!"

Ben swallowed with great difficulty.

"But Uncle Mawruss," he protested feebly, "is it for laughing a man gets married? The reason why she is so good-natured is because she is positively like what you could call simple minded. I tell you——"

"Stop!" cried Uncle Morris Tyroler indignantly, accompanying the command with a traffic officer's gesture. "Stop, Ben Lowenstein, before you begin! Don't dare to insult a fine woman which she might any minute become your own aunt! All you are worrying about, Ben Lowenstein, is about my money! For me you got no use, and I could see it as plain like the nose on my face. Only my money—that is all you got any use for!"

"That ain't so!" shouted Ben. "Was it for your money I helped you out in Colorader twenty years ago? No! It was because you are my wife's flesh and blood! But now we got it here a show-down, Uncle Mawruss! I'll told you right out plain how I think such things like too much exercises and in especially eating like squirruls and rabbits is crazy business. Uncle Mawruss, and for myself, from this minute on, I positively quit!"

"Only my money!" Tyroler persisted in anger. "Well, Ben Lowenstein, maybe now you are in my will, but when I am married it would be something else again! Wait and see yet!"

"I wouldn't even wait!" cried Ben. "What you do with your money, I don't care! Am I poor? Am I starving except how you are starving me? From now on I would eat food and not sawdust, Uncle Mawruss, and whether you got married or you don't got married, it's none of my business! And that's the end."

With which ultimatum he strode away, hailed the first passing taxicab and rode in luxury to his office, leaving the disciple of the Sacred Order of Dietary Nymphs to finish his stroll alone.

When he returned that evening to his apartment, having come home via the subway, he found his wife in tears.

He did not have to inquire as to the cause of her grief, for she met him at the door and began to inform him as soon as he had crossed the threshold.

Uncle Morris, she declared, had departed bag and baggage some three hours previously, after telling Clara, in no uncertain terms, what he thought of the mercenary tendencies of herself and her husband.

"And where did he go to, Ben," she concluded hysterically, "but next door to the Hirshfelds! There, he says, they got sensible ideas about food and exercise, and they wouldn't be after only his money! *Ach, Gott!* He is going to marry that Cora Katz! He even said he would do it!"

"Well, leave him marry her!" Ben replied. "For my part, I wash my hands from him! If he wants to marry up with such a dumbhead, he could!"

"But what did you make a fuss with him for?" she asked accusingly. "He told me how you made a terrible fuss with him this morning."

Ben nodded grimly. "You bet I did! Am I a man, Clara, or a baby? Do I got to stand and listen with my mouth closed while he tells me we are only after his money? After all I done for him! You bet I told him a few things! You bet I did!"

"Just the same," Clara said more quietly and with a trace of guilt in her manner, "we didn't eggzackly forget his money, neither."

"Ain't we humans, Clara?" he returned defensively. "And anyway, what I went through since he come here is worth more than what he's got. What I want now, Clara, is dinner; and it don't got to be such a big one, because what I put away by the L. & K. for lunch was enough, I assure you. But whatever you got, *don't* show me no nuts and fruits!"

It seemed that there were other edibles hidden away in the kitchen which were of a more substantial character than nuts and fruits. It was evident that Mrs. Lowenstein and the servant girl had been amply fed during the time when Uncle Morris was keeping an eye on Ben.

"I see where I was the only one to suffer," nodded Ben as he began to demolish a large portion of cold *gefülte rinderbrust*. "And do you know, dolling, to-day I got on the scales and you wouldn't believe it but I weigh five pounds more as before that crazy Tyroler begun with me!"

He was just about to request a second helping when there came an interruption in the form of a violent ringing of the front doorbell. The maid went to the door, and a moment later Henry Hirshfeld rushed frantically into the dining room.

"Quick!" he screamed. "Come quick! Your uncle is dying!"

Ben's knife and fork clattered to the plate.

"Dying!" he echoed, leaping to his feet with an agility he was formerly incapable of showing. "Where is he?"

"In my dining room!" gasped Hirshfeld. "Quick!"

One glance at Uncle Morris told Ben and Clara that Hirshfeld had not exaggerated the plight of the old man. He was lying on the floor, thrashing his arms and legs about like a drowning man, and each thrash was more feeble than the one before.

"He's purple in the face!" screamed Clara. "For God's sake get a doctor here!"

Ben rushed madly from the room, and in less than five minutes he returned with Doctor Marx, who occupied an apartment on the first floor.

"Couldn't you save him?" Clara sobbed as the doctor worked over the now motionless figure. "Please, couldn't you save him?"

It was not until half an hour later that Doctor Marx found time to answer

this question. Tyroler had been removed to his bed in the Lowenstein apartment, and every one had gathered in the living room where the doctor joined them.

"He's got a chance," said the doctor. "A fighting chance, anyway. But he'll need the best of care for a while. You had better let me send for a trained nurse."

"Anything!" said Ben tremulously. "Send two nurses! Send three even! We don't want he should die. He is our own flesh and blood! We want everything should be done for him!"

"I think we'll pull him through," said the doctor reassuringly. "The only thing against him is his undernourished condition."

"No wonder," Ben said sadly, "with what that poor feller et."

Mrs. Lowenstein turned to the Hirshfelds and Cora Katz.

"What happened, anyway? What caused all this? Did he got appleplexy?"

"He choked," Henry Hirshfeld explained for the first time. "We was eating dinner and he puts in his mouth a piece of walnut. So just then Kittens makes him laugh, y'understand, and Mr. Tyroler begins to choke and get blue in the face. So my wife hollers out, '*Klopp* him on the back!' and Kittens gets up and gives him two or three, or maybe four, good *klopps* on the back. Then he falls on the floor and I run in here to call you."

Doctor Marx listened to this statement with deep interest. In the momentary silence which followed, he regarded the two-hundred-pound Kittens very intently. Then he spoke.

"So!" he declared. "Now I understand it better. I was perplexed about Mr. Tyroler's condition, which certainly was not caused by his choking on a piece of walnut. I treated him for a slight dislocation of the cervical vertibræ." He paused and looked at Cora Katz with decided coldness. "When you *klopped* him on the back, as you say," he remarked pointedly, "you should have remembered that you were hitting an old man and not Jack Dempsey!"

At one o'clock of a Sunday, five weeks later, Clara led the way into the dining room, where, on the white cloth, were already placed three plates of steaming lentil soup. Uncle Morris Tyroler, somewhat pale from his long illness, seated himself and lifted his soup spoon eagerly.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, drawing a deep breath as the savory fumes mounted to his nose. "Lentil soup! A wonderful dish that is, Clara!"

"*With* noodles!" added Clara with a large smile. "In the bottom is noodles, Uncle Mawruss!"

For the next five minutes they were all conversationally silent. But when the last vestige of thick greenish fluid was removed from the plates, Clara rang the handbell, the maid carried away the empty plates, and, in four trips, brought in the next courses: a stuffed goose, wide noodles, spinach with egg, boiled onions in cream, and mashed potatoes.

"Such a dinner!" sighed Tyroler as his plate was being filled. "Like this I never et since my poor Hattie, *selig*, died."

"But save a little room, Uncle Mawruss," Clara cautioned as she passed the plate. "We still got a grand *strudel* yet!"

"Don't worry he wouldn't got room," laughed Ben. "Such a appetite he's got it, you would think he was anyhoe only twenty-five years old! And no wonder! Didn't the doctor say how he was practic'lly starved to death? Now he is got to get fed up to get back his strength." He winked jovially at Tyroler. "Maybe you would rather have some walnuts, instead, ain't it?"

Morris Tyroler made an unpleasant face.

"Don't talk walnuts to me, Ben! I got a good notion I should sue that crazy Sacred Order of Dietary Nymphs yet for fraud! I ought to sue them—there ain't no doubt about that!"

"Ha!" Ben grinned. "Better you should sue them Hirshfelds, and in especially, that Cora Katz, for a salt and battering!"

Again Uncle Morris grimaced.

"And don't talk about them lunytics neither!" he retorted. "When I think how close I come to marrying up with that crazy ellyphant, I positively nilly lost my appetite!"

"Ben!" put in Clara. "Leave Uncle Mawruss eat now! Then he rests for a coupla hours, and *then,* if he feels all right, the doctor says he could walk to the corner and back."

Raymond Leslie Goldman is a regular contributor of ours. Another story of his will appear in these pages very soon.

LOST VALUABLES

MANY of the rings, coins, and other valuables lost on the beaches are washed into the depressions which form in the sand around the pilings. Beach combers use sieves and round-nosed shovels, sifting the watery sand and gravel until they find some lost article. It is surprising how many things are thus discovered. Some grafters on the beaches make a living by pretending to find jewelry which they have previously "planted" in the sand. They sell these fakes to gullible spectators.

"BLESSINGS ON THEE, LITTLE MAN——"

WHITTIER, the poet, celebrated the country boy, barefoot, tattered, slouching along the dusty road, with his fishing pole over his shoulder and a tune coming from his pursed lips. No poet, so far as we know, has as yet sung of the city boy, the kid of the slums, who hasn't any pole or pool, but who manages to go "fishing" just the same.

He lies on his stomach on a grating in the sidewalk, and dangles a piece of string down among the rubbish below. On the end of his string is an iron bolt, with some chewing gum stuck on it. We have watched boys fish up nickels, dimes, and quarters in this manner. Their patience is as infinite as that of any rural fisher. And they dangle and angle and maneuver with all the dexterity of an Izaak Walton after trout.

A group of kids were lying on a grating in New York one hot afternoon. A small boy among them begged for a hunk of chewing gum to stick on the end of his string, but they shoved him away. He was "outa luck." Buying a hunk was out of the question; he wasn't that rich. He solved the problem by running after a passing ice wagon, digging into the hub of one of the wheels, and grabbing a gob of black, gummy grease—which he placed triumphantly on his string. The grease caught more coins than the chewing gum of the other boys.

The MAN with a GROUCH

AT Levua even to-day there are to be found square miles of old forest. The true high woods of the tropics; trees fetched from Heaven knows where to shoulder one another and shudder in the sea wind and thrust at each other in the great storms when the coconuts of the beach palms are flying like cannon balls.

Here in this island there are redwoods, though smaller than the California giants, and mahoganies such as you see in the woods of Martinique; in the old days sandalwood was the chief export, but to-day it is all copra with a hint of pineapples, if they succeed with the new grounds that they are trying out beyond Mayano.

Just at the time of this story Flexner was running the trade station at Levua and making a mess of the business. Lombard, Drex & Co., of San Francisco, owned the station. It wasn't their fault that things were not going well; it wasn't the fault of the market, for prices were ruling high; it wasn't the fault of the trees that were bearing well; and it seemingly wasn't the fault of Flexner, for he didn't drink to excess and he was by all accounts and seeming a straight man and honest as day.

Old Reuben Lombard, puzzling over this matter, came to Levua to investigate matters for himself. He was a wise old man with a profound, and one might say appalling, knowledge of human nature.

Employees are mostly compounded of human nature. Especially on the Pacific coast and in the Islands.

Reuben had come across all varieties of it, from the stark naked and quietly drunk to the murderous and violent, from the incompetent and lazy to the competent and thriving. He spent a month at Levua making a holiday of the business and absorbing Flexner and the

A Story of the South Seas, and of a Man Who Wanted to Spend Christmas in England.

By H. DE VERE STACPOOLE

whole situation; then he returned to San Francisco and told his partner Drex that he was going to fire Flexner.

"He's a bad character," said Reuben. "I don't mean drink, women, cards or anything of that sort; I'm talking of him as a business man. He's never satisfied; that's what it amounts to. I got his past history out of him in talk. He started in life with some money safely invested in high-class stuff, but wasn't satisfied with five and a half per cent, so turned it into wildcat and went bust. At Levua he wasn't satisfied with the old trader's house, and built another in a better situation, with the result that the first hurricane took it and laid it all over the reefs. He wasn't satisfied with the way Sru, the headman on the west side, was doing his work and ruling his people, so he kept butting in till Sru began to see red and went for Sipi of the east side. Flexner had pointed out Sipi as an example; Sru went for the example and laid it out with a club. Then there was hells shines between the two sides of the island till the missionaries stepped in and patched things up.

"That's only a bit; there were lots of other little things.

"You know, the sort of man that messes about at home mending the window blinds, nagging the servants, and interfering with the wife's arrangements. Never satisfied, that's Flexner. It's mostly an American disease, but Flexner has put English additions to it—he's an Englishman. Sitting smoking on the veranda with him night before I left, I said to him, 'Now, ain't that perfect! Look at that lagoon full of stars and those lights on the reef where they're spearing the fish. Smell of the air!' 'Yes,' he says, 'but have you ever seen the Thames above Richmond on a fine summer's night?'

"Well, I reckon he'll see it soon."

"But look here," said Drex. "Dissatisfaction with things as they are ought to be the soul of progress in art and commerce."

"Oh, gosh!" said Lombard. "I'm not talking of things as they are, I'm only getting at the mentality that's always grousing because things aren't what they aren't—dissatisfaction as a matter of mind principle. If you gave this chap a ticket for Jerusalem with free drinks 'n' hotel expenses he'd ten to one grumble that it wasn't the New Jerusalem the booking was for. Anyhow, he's fired. I'm writing him tonight and I'm going to send Arrow in his place."

One morning toward the end of December, Flexner came out on his veranda in pajamas. The old trader's house which he was reoccupying stood on a bay of the groves facing the white sands of the beach and the blue water separating the beach from the reefs.

The outer sea beyond the reefs stretched like a sheet of lazulite to where above the far horizon the white trade clouds showed like a procession of ghosts born of distance and summer. On the beach were some Kanaka canoemen who had just come in with a take of fish, also a naked nut-brown child full of the joy of life and beating with a lump of coral on a tin can. It was like a scene from "Floradora," a picture that might have been born from the brain of Basil Dean in one of his southern or eastern moods. Only Flexner did not fit the surroundings, a ginger-colored man in striped blue-and-purple pajamas sitting now drinking his coffee, smoking a cigarette and reading a letter.

The letter was a month old. It was from Lombard, Drex & Co., telling him he was fired, had come by the mail brigantine, and informed him that his successor, Mr. George Arrow, was coming to Levua by the company's schooner, the *Golden Hope*.

Half an hour ago Kepi, Flexner's personal servant and man of all work, had roused him with the news that a schooner had been sighted from the bluff. "That's her," said Flexner, tumbling out of bed. He tubbed and resumed his pajamas and, taking the letter from his bureau, came out to wait the arrival of the newcomer and drink his coffee. He was quite unperturbed.

He was a good-natured man, even though, as Lombard said, he was never satisfied with things as they were. A man who took disaster as the natural expression of a world that was mainly all wrong.

When his house had been blown away he just said, "Well, that's that," and came back to live in the old trader's house; and now, waiting for his successor, he felt no animosity or irritation.

It was one of the things that ought to have been different, that was all.

His position was serious from a worldly point of view. He had saved scarcely any money, not more than seventy pounds all told, and what on earth he was to do for a job when he got back to San Francisco he didn't know. Another thing that ought to have been different, that was all.

He was finishing his coffee when the fore canvas of a schooner showed beyond the reef; when the rest of her, hidden by the bluff, came into view, she revealed herself as the *Golden Hope*.

There are ships that seem to have been built for beauty as well as use and the *Golden Hope* was one of them; one of the old-time fleet that included the *Mary Rose* and *Dancing Wave*, creatures rather than things, born, like the gulls, to live in harmony with the sea and in fellowship with the wind.

She formed a pretty picture as she came in with a snow of gulls astern of her, rounding with all her canvas

ashiver and dropping anchor in ten fathoms of water, a couple of cable lengths from the beach.

Flexner, pajamas and all, came down to the water's edge to greet the boat that was pulling ashore.

Captain Bartells was steering, and Arrow, the new trader, was seated beside him, a young and pleasant-looking man for whom Flexner at once felt a liking.

They all tramped up to the house, and after soft drinks and cigarettes on the veranda, Bartells, putting back to the schooner to superintend the unloading of trade, left Flexner and his successor to get acquainted.

They went over the house, the godown where trade goods were stored, and the copra sheds. Then they had dinner, and that evening on the veranda they talked very freely of the whole position, copra trade and what not.

Old Lombard had told Arrow his opinion of Flexner, and Arrow was on the lookout for Flexner's weak spot, but in all their conversation not one grumble was uttered by the latter. Flexner was supposed to be a man always dissatisfied, yet he showed no sign of dissatisfaction with anything. He talked quite openly of his own rather desperate financial condition, but he didn't grumble. Was Lombard wrong?

"It's funny to think that day after to-morrow is Christmas Day," said Arrow. "At least to me, for I was born north of N' York and Christmas has always meant six inches of snow 'n' holly berries and so on. I reckon I'm an out-and-out Christmaser of the good old type, and I'm not ashamed of it."

"Same here," said Flexner. "I was born and brought up at Maltby in Kent —my father lives there still—and Christmas always brings me back to old times. We didn't have much snow—haven't had much in England of late years—but there was holly and ivy and good will all round, not to speak of presents and the old folks in the village coming up for packets of tea and so on. I reckon England is a good place and it never looks better than when you see it from twenty thousand miles away. And Christmas is the best thing in England. Last time I was there was five years ago and the old governor gave a children's party. He's seventy-five but seems to grow younger every year. Hasn't lost a tooth in his head. And I bet this year he'll be giving another party—and twenty years hence it will be the same. We're a long-lived family, and he reckons to live to be a hundred."

"My poor old governor died six years ago," said Arrow. "He wasn't more than sixty-nine. We aren't a long-lived family by a long chalk. I'm the only one left, and it's a pretty lonesome world when it gets to that."

"Well, cheer up," said Flexner, and produced a bottle of whisky.

Yes, decidedly old Lombard must have been wrong.

In the tropics, and especially among the Islands, Fortune plays strange tricks with men, and often in short time. Fifteen minutes and a sufficient hurricane will lay down a plantation of thirty thousand trees worth anything from fifteen hundred to three thousand a year, according to the price of copra—or, in the old days, a shift of the helm at sight of a distant atoll might have landed you in an uncharted pearl lagoon.

While Flexner slept to-night the sleep of the just in his blue-and-purple-striped pajamas, Fate, landing at Levua and putting on the crown of Fortune, turned up her sleeves. She had fixed on Flexner as her man and she was going to do the thing royally and with gorgeous settings in two acts. And, getting toward three in the morning, with the stage lit up by a gorgeous moon, up went the curtain to a sound like the clamor of sea gulls on the beach.

Flexner sprang from his bed and ran

out on the veranda. Arrow came after him. The beach was alive with Kanakas running about and shouting and pointing to the inshore waters beyond the schooner, where, monstrous in the light of the moon, a great black bulk was dashing through the water, flinging huge arms to the air like a drowning giant or a——

Crash!

The foam shot fathoms high and the woods echoed to the concussion.

"Cachalot!" cried Flexner. "Cachalot fighting a squid! Gosh! look at them!"

The sight was phenomenal, for the cachalot was in a flurry.

Now the cachalot is fond of grazing on the great squid. Sometimes he lugs one up to the surface and you see something that looks like a fight, the sixty-foot tentacles of the squid thrashing about with tremendous sound and fury; but the cachalot is not fighting, he is just eating, quietly chewing like a cow and quite regardless of the emotions of the chewed.

But this thing was different. Something was wrong with the dinner. Either it had turned out poisonous in some way or the great beak of the squid had managed to get home somehow in an unpleasant manner.

Driving through the water like a torpedo boat, the cachalot made a quarter of a mile toward the west, sank, rose, sprang, crashed in a smother of foam, and came racing back, close to the beach now, the great arms of the squid moving hilariously and the Kanakas cheering on the runner.

"They'll foul the schooner! They'll foul the schooner!" cried Arrow. "Look! they're making straight for it!"

"No," said Flexner, "there's a sunk reef in the way. They're too close inshore. It runs out for two hundred yards, and there's no more than ten foot of water on it. They'll beach—done it!"

There was more than ten feet of water on the reef, for it was high tide. All the same, the reef did the business: for a moment the great bulk of the whale seemed to roll on it in a storm of foam, next it was free and making away for the reef opening and a life on the ocean wave.

The gallery gods on the beach hooted, howled and whistled—prematurely, for the first act was not over.

"Look!" said Arrow. "What's that?"

Something showed on the water this side of the reef, something like a half deflated balloon. It was the squid.

The tentacles were no longer thrashing the air, they were submerged and otherwise engaged. But the form was not idly drifting, it was moving here and there with a steady trend toward the shore, so close now that two great luminous disks in it showed, disks paling and glowing like lamps now fully lit, now fading. They were the eyes.

"What on earth is the matter with it?" asked Arrow, a chill at his heart.

"Tiger sharks," said Flexner. "They're driving it ashore and eating it."

The Kanakas, drawn back a bit, were dead silent in full enjoyment of the spectacle. Just as you may see a bit of bread pushed about on the surface of the water by struggling fish, so the great form of the squid was driven here and there. It vanished to bob up again like a wet balloon; but now only one luminous disk showed, the other was gone. Then it slowly submerged to appear no more; but the water was troubler by the struggle still going on and the little waves breaking on the salt white sands left a stain dark as ink.

Flexner and his companion turned back to the house.

"Do you often have that sort of thing here?" said Arrow after he had asked for and received a tot of whisky.

"I have never seen a cachalot in the lagoon waters before," said Flexner. "The boys often catch big squids, but

nothing to compare with that one. Interesting, wasn't it?"

Arrow went back to his couch for another couple of hours' sleep—risking nightmare.

The cheeriness of Flexner over this three o'clock in the morning interruption of an honest and decent man's sleep crowned everything.

"Interesting, wasn't it?"

Decidedly old Lombard had mismeasured his man. Arrow did not know that Flexner's main intellectual support at Levua had been nature study. Not a scientific naturalist, he was still one of those men—and there are many of them—to whom wild life makes an intense appeal; and, though the Thames above Richmond on a fine summer's evening might hold more attraction for him than a star-shot lagoon, the land of colored coral and the perfumed wilderness of the woods had saved him time and again from the ennui that leads to drink.

Fortune, who often uses men's better qualities just as Fate often uses their worse, depended on this fact in staging the second act of that little play which might have been entitled, "How Good Luck Came to Christopher Flexner."

The curtain rose again on the veranda of the old trader's house with Flexner and Arrow sitting at breakfast.

The inshore waters, emerald deepening into blue, showed no trace of the tragedy of a few hours ago—of the squid that was being digested by half a dozen tiger sharks, or the cachalot safely escaped into the violet ocean beyond the purple reefs. The schooner, swinging bow to the shore, made a ripple marking the outgoing tide, and on her deck was the burly form of Captain Bartells, busy superintending the unloading of some boxes.

"Cap said he'd be ready to start to-morrow," said Flexner. "Looks like it—the trade stuff will be loaded to-day, and it won't take more than a couple of hours to get the water on board."

"Christmas Day to-morrow," said Arrow, "but that won't hold him. Anyhow, I have time to write the couple of letters I want taken back to be posted at San Francisco—I forget whether you said you were going east from Frisco or sticking on the Pacific coast."

"I haven't decided yet," said Flexner; "it just depends how things turn out."

"Poor devil," thought Arrow. He did not pursue the subject of Flexner's immediate future and indeed he had business enough of his own to talk of, for in taking up or dropping a trade station there are a hundred little things to be discussed, so that it was getting on for ten and the sun of a perfect morning high above the bluff before they had finished.

Leaving the new trader to go over the accounts and make himself familiar with the store book and papers, Flexner came down to the water's edge, where the station boat was lying beside some beached canoes.

She was a white-painted, carvel-built twelve-footer. He had often taken her out for fishing, and there was still in the bows a tub of line, also the grains he had used the other day when he had gone after a school of small rays that had come into the shore waters.

Helped by one of the Kanakas he got her half afloat, stepped in, and pushed out alone.

He wanted to look at Levua from the sea for the last time. He would see it from the schooner to-morrow when they were putting out, but that would not be the same. He would not be alone and able to think and reflect and measure up things and reminisce.

He passed the schooner anchored over her own shadow on the coral floor. The hands had knocked off work for a spell and she lay like a thing deserted, the tide rippling at her anchor chain and the gulls flighting round her on the lookout for scraps. Beyond, and

halfway to the reefs, he paused rowing and looked down at what perhaps he would never see again—down through the water clear as air at the colored parterres of coral and the sand patches where great shells crawled, the home of the Haliotis, the branch coral and sea fan.

It was extraordinary to think that this submarine land of brilliancy and color existed in a world that at the same moment held London, fogbound perhaps, and Maltby with its leafless trees and sure-to-be-clouded skies; a submarine world that knew nothing of Father Christmas or the delights of the season that appealed to the exiled soul of Flexner.

Flexner was thinking something like this—he was a man whose reflections were, if not cheap, sometimes second-hand. Having brooded for a while and drifted fifty yards or so, he took to his sculls again and, turning the boat's nose, pushed out through the reefs to the open sea.

It was from here that he could see the island properly, and as he had so often seen it when fishing for palu or sailing for pleasure. A wonderful sight, either by the light of the moon or the full light of day, as now.

Broad-based, beyond the foaming reefs it lay, rising from the beach palms in a tempest of trees all blown by the wind to the heights where once the sandalwood grew and showing clear from out here the cliff fall where a torrent tumbled, a white plume against the green. Ceiba, breadfruit palm, tree fern and lesser redwood all blowing and tossing to the trade wind; and there, a mushroom brown break in the foliage, the village of Sru, headman of the west side—the same who had laid out Sipi with a club in the good old island fashion.

The tide was still on the ebb and out here the southward-running current was strengthened by the tide. Flexner, drifting and dreaming and fighting his trade battles over again, had let the boat go as it wished and as a result the break in the reefs was no longer visible. He might have drifted farther had not his eye been caught by something away on the water to starboard.

He thought at first that it was a dead fish floating just awash. Then he knew it wasn't, for there were no gulls about. Besides, sharks don't allow dead fish to float for long. He turned the boat and pulled toward the thing, urged not so much by simple curiosity as by the instinct of the naturalist, for something told him that this was not wreckage or driftwood from some island. Close to it now, it showed to be a great mass of some whitish substance, lumpy and mottled and veined with red. Gruesome, somehow, and repellant to the eye, but striking. No one could see that piece of flotsam without pausing to ask, "What on earth is it?"

The boat's nose came up against it with a gentle *dunch,* and Flexner, who had drawn in his sculls, leaned over and handled the stuff. It was as big as a big man and its shape was roughly that of a man wrapped in sacking. The end he had hold of was rounded like a head; there was a neck; then the mass swelled to the form of shoulders and tapered gently to the other extremity.

Just as a potato or flint takes a human or other form, so had this thing obeyed the law which rules over the world of freaks.

He tried its weight and found that, though he could raise the head a bit from the water, it would be impossible to get the thing on board. He desisted, and, kneeling on the grating in the bow, wiped the sweat from his forehead. His lips had gone dry as pumice stone, and his heart was now cleaving to his ribs like a bat to a wall, and now fluttering, batlike, before making another cleave.

He thought for a moment he would die, for the smashing news had come to

him from the void that he had struck ambergris.

What settled the business was a thing like a tiger's claw sticking on the mass. It was one of the hooks from the suckers of a great squid's immense and powerful tentacles.

He had never seen ambergris before, but he knew it by description; and now as his heart recovered itself and he could think before taking action, he saw clearly that this was no chance business but had to do with the drama of the night before.

The cachalot, evidently wounded either by the squid or the reef, had got clear and made north, swimming against the Kiro Shiwo. Up north it had spat out the ambergris, which had floated down on the current. A mathematician might have told from the flow of the current and the speed of the cachalot in its flight exactly where the stuff had been voided, but this was a matter of indifference to Flexner.

He had to salvage the stuff. How? He had heard enough from Pacific men's talk to know that it was worth many thousands of pounds; the breaking away of any part of it would be a heavy loss. He had the grains and a bucket half full of line. The grains were useless; it was impossible to tell the result of digging a fish spear into that mass of stuff—it might mean cleavage. Difficult enough to deal with as it was, it would be impossible to salvage it altogether if it were in two parts.

He brought the line from the bow to the stern, fastened a bight round the "neck" of the thing and the line to the after-thwart, then he tested the pull, took the sculls, and started.

He was south of the island a good way.

The Kiro Shiwo had carried him along with it and the tremendous question arose as to how he would be able to make enough way against it with the heavy tow?

Would the thing that had brought him fortune deny him fortune?

Every now and then he turned his head to see how Levua lay and if he were making progress; between whiles the towrope held his eye. He could see whether it was taut or not, but a towrope is never uniformly taut—a movement of the water, a slight diminution of the speed of the towing craft will slacken it; there is no uniformity of pull.

Sometimes he stopped rowing and, getting to the stern, hauled the tow closer to see how the rope held. After one of these examinations and with infinite difficulty he shifted the rope from the neck-shaped depression to below the bulge of the shoulders and did it so well that the pull of the rope was still fore and aft with the thing; had it been otherwise the mass would have been towed sidewise and would have made progress impossible.

But all this took time, and as he stood up from the job and looked toward Levua his heart half sank. He had made very little way. Fortunately the wind had died with noon and slack tide was due, but one could never tell in these seas what was coming from moment to moment, and if a squall were to rise or even if the wind were to wake up and blow from the north—well, good-by to Fortune. He took up the sculls again.

A burgomaster gull passed him with a cry that cut his nerves like a steel whip, and now from the sea to starboard *pop-pop-pop,* breaking from the water in one particular spot as if fired from a machine gun, came silver arrowheads, flying fish with black, staring, sightless eyes, flittering into the water to starboard and right athwart the course of the boat. If some great fish were following them close to the surface and were to foul the ambergris——

He drove the thought away and pulled.

Yes, he was making way; the change from slack had occurred and the tide was now running into the lagoon of Levua.

An hour later he was inside the reefs. The fellows on board the *Golden Hope* were getting the last of the trade stuff and provisions over into the boat alongside, and Bartells, superintending the business, came to the rail as Flexner drew alongside.

"Hello!" cried Bartells. "What are you towin'?"

"Shy us a rope," said Flexner.

He brought the boat alongside just aft of the provision boat, which was loading from the fore hatch.

Bartells, leaning on the rail, looked over down at the stuff that was now lifting to the swell of the incoming tide and duddering against the boat side.

"Ambergris," said Flexner.

"Gosh Almighty!" said Bartells. He had been in the whaling business and could measure the full size of the business at a glance.

Bartells was a friend of Flexner's, liked him, and regretted his having been fired. Bartells had his own opinion of old Lombard, who, according to Bartells, would skin the devil and sell the hoofs for glue—if he could get the chance.

"A moment," said Bartells. "You ain't in the company's employ no longer. Was your discharge dating from when?"

"From yesterday, when Mr. Arrow took over," replied Flexner, vaguely wondering but somehow guessing what the other was driving at.

"But it's on the contract you are to get a free passage home if so be you want it?"

"Yes."

"You found that stuff outside the three-mile limit," went on the captain, "for I was watching you. Consequentially it's yours."

"Yes."

"Well, we're open to take cargo for private owners; that's my instructions. You, being no longer in the company's employ, come to me asking me to take your stuff to Frisco at ordinary freight rates—is that your meaning?"

"Yes," said Flexner.

Here was a man thinking of his interests and safeguarding him from the rapacity of the company, so that there would be no bother at all about landing and disposing of his treasure. It is good to have a friend like that. He wanted to speak, but words failed him and indeed Bartells gave him no time.

The captain, with a pull of his whiskers and another glance at the floating gray mass, turned to Jarvis, the mate.

"Rig a tackle and get that stuff on board for Mr. Flexner," he said.

An hour later in the cabin, he said, "I'm a judge of weights, and that stuff weighs all two hundred pounds and a bit more, and amber-grease is worth twenty-five dollars an ounce in the market. That's five pounds of your money. You can add it up; it's a tidy fortune. Well, here's luck and chin-chin."

That night on the veranda of the old trader's house Flexner and Arrow sat smoking and talking. Flexner would sleep ashore that night, as the *Golden Hope* was not due to start till noon.

In the few tremendous hours since morning Flexner had been changed from a man without prospects to a man of substance, and he had risen to the business and the enjoyment of it. The whisky in the bottle on the cane table was several inches lower. Not that either man had exceeded; they were quite sober—and because of this, perhaps, it was that a reaction came in Flexner's mood.

He fell suddenly silent and sad. He seemed contemplating something at a long distance from the old trader's house, then he made a noise in his throat

that meant recognition of a fact and disapproval of it.

"What's wrong with you now?" asked Arrow, pausing in the act of pouring himself out some more whisky.

"Nothing," said Flexner, "only I was thinking that all the ambergris in the world wouldn't get me home for Christmas Day."

He spoke with an edge to his voice—an edge that indicated a distinct grouch.

"My God!" said Arrow to himself, putting down the bottle. "Old Lombard was right."

He went into the house to fetch his tobacco pouch. A cane chair got in his way and he kicked it viciously.

He felt like that.

Other stories by H. de Vere Stacpoole will appear in these pages from time to time.

FROM THE CONGRESSIONAL DIRECTORY

WHAT'S this about women being more sensitive than men about their ages? Who started the story, and what for? Anyway it's shot to pieces by the present issue of the "Congressional Directory," in which revealing volume are the biographies of the members of Congress—written by themselves.

In the present Congress are eight women. Five of them tell the year and day of the month when they were born; three are discreetly silent on the subject. But there are one hundred and fifty men members who refuse to reveal their birth dates and so leave themselves free to put over, if they can, the bluff that they are younger than they really are.

"I have noticed," says an old employee of the House of Representatives, "that the men who do not mind chronicling their ages are either pretty young or very old. They like to brag about their youth when they can pose as 'boy members' or about their age when they have been here so long that they are pointed out as veterans in legislative service."

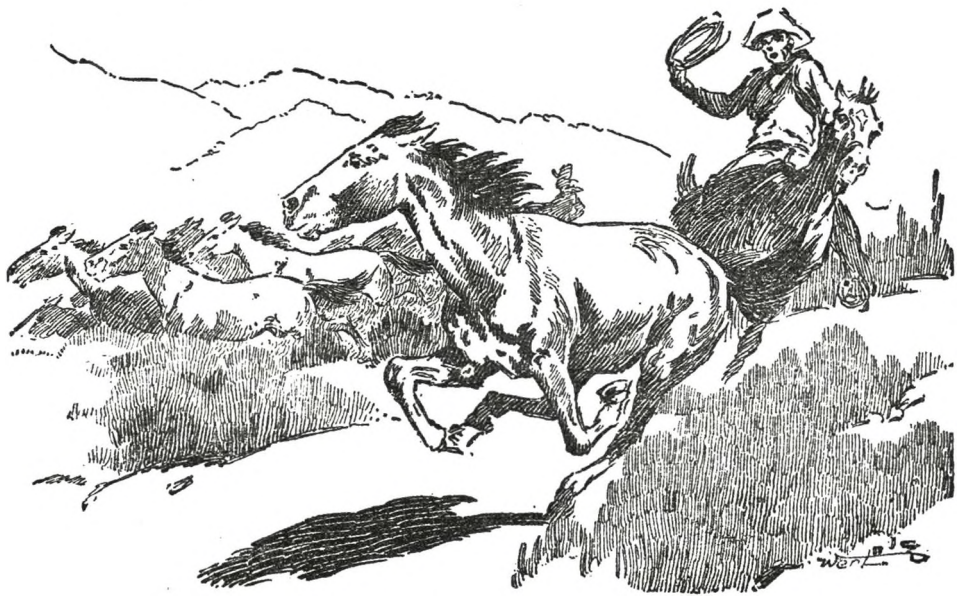
ONE WAY TO BEAT 'EM

SHE was a dear old lady from Washington, on her way home after a tour of Canada. She would have shuddered with horror if anybody had accused her of being a lawbreaker, a trouble maker, or a person deserving of trial before a judge and, possibly, fine or imprisonment. But, having resided many years in the national capital where there are many ways of getting things done, and being ardently desirous to take to an aged and ailing friend two bottles of good old Canadian rye liquor, she mapped out her own original procedure.

Her train was to cross the Canadian-United States border during the night. She put a five-dollar bill around the neck of one quart bottle, making it secure with a rubber band, and around the other a brief penciled note saying: "Please, mister, be merciful." Then she laid the bottles on top of her clothing in her suit case, set the suit case in the aisle beside her berth, and went to sleep with a conscience that troubled her not at all.

In the morning this dear old lady, who had learned so well the Washington lesson that there are many ways of getting things done, opened her suit case and found in it three quart bottles of liquor instead of two. To the neck of the third bottle was attached a note. It said: "From the tight guy across the aisle."

About a Boy Who Was Arrested Because He Loved a Horse.



NOT A REDEEMING TRAIT

By CAROLINE LOCKHART

AN old white pony stood in the moonlight patiently watching a coulee on the other side of a barbed-wire fence. Presently it whinnied eagerly, and a tall, lanky figure appeared, carrying a sack.

"Think you wasn't goin' to git no berries to-night, Shorty?" inquired Earl Hardin, the chore boy of the X Bar B Ranch, as he spread the wires and slipped between. Dumping the oats the sack contained on a bare spot on the ground, he slapped the pony's flank affectionately.

"Betcha thought I'd forgot you. I guess not! Had to wait until them birds in the bunk house was asleep an' it looked like they was goin' to talk all night. You and me does double shifts, ol' feller, and it don't hurt my feelin's none to steal oats fer you from the Widder Rice. Wants me to ride you all day and at night turn you into a pasture that's et down to the grass roots. What fer a way is that to treat a horse?"

The boy pulled a cocklebur from the old cow pony's mane and stroked its neck while it munched contentedly.

"My! You're slobberin' turrible, Shorty." he murmured in a troubled voice. "Your grub ain't doin' you no good that a way, but the ol' lady wouldn't spend two bits to git your teeth fixed, so it's no use to ast. An' you're the best cow pony on the ranch, I don't care what they say. Looks like they gotta pick on you an' me."

Whatever Shorty may have been in his heyday, there was no denying that he was a hard looker in his old age.

Dirty white in color and covered with the brands of his numerous owners, his ribs showed like laths on the walls of an unplastered building, while the well-like hollows above his eyes testified to the winters which had passed since he had suckled his mammy. His mane was scanty and his broom tail full of burs; yet the boy's heart melted within him as he laid his cheek against that of the ancient cow pony.

"Good night, ol' pardner. Sleep tight," he said whimsically, as, with a farewell pat, he picked up the grain sack and crawled back through the fence.

He was saddling Shorty in the corral the next morning when Mrs. Rice, arms akimbo, fists on hips, called sharply from the barn door:

"Earl, you been feedin' that pony oats?"

"No, ma'am," Earl answered in an injured tone. "Shorty don't git no oats. I jest turn him out to rustle every night."

There was both suspicion and dislike in his employer's hard gray eyes as she looked at the pimply, overgrown, unprepossessing youth and snapped:

"Well, somebody's been at them oats; that sack was full last night."

"Maybe the chickens was at 'em."

"Chickens!"—scornfully.

"'Twa'n't me. Hope to die, cross my heart and spit."

"'Kidneyfoot,'" Mrs. Rice said, using his ranch nickname, "I wouldn't believe you under oath."

The boy merely grinned as he reached under the pony's belly for the swinging cinch.

"I'll tell you again," Mrs. Rice went on—"and I want you to get this—only the work stock are to be fed oats. I don't aim to pay two dollars and two bits a hundred for grain and freight it sixty miles to feed to a ten-dollar cayuse—if he's worth that. If I miss any more oats you'll go down the road talkin' to yourself."

"If Shorty ain't work stock I don't know what he is. He's goin' all the time," the boy mumbled resentfully.

"None of your sass!" The widow's eyes gleamed angrily and she set the high heels of her heavy riding boots down hard as she strode to the house.

Over the top of the pony the boy stared after his employer, who looked like anything but the popular notion of a cattle queen, with her fringe of iron-gray hair hanging over the collar of a man's shirt, and wearing a khaki skirt.

"I guess I kin winter if you do fire me, you ol' wampus cat! But you won't, fer you'd have to pay full wages to anybudy else that done my work."

This was the truth and every man in the outfit knew that the widow imposed upon the boy shamefully. But none of them liked him well enough to urge him to demand what he was worth. He was "mouthy," a braggart and a snoop, lying as easily as he breathed and unabashed when caught. He was the butt of their jokes, with his gluttonous appetite, his awkwardness, the size of his feet. But he seemed to have a rhinoceroslike hide which no amount of sarcasm could penetrate. If he had a sensitive spot no one had been able to discover it.

The incident soon passed from the widow's mind, for Mrs. Rhoda Rice had more important things to think about—things that were keeping her awake at night. Too late the ambitious woman realized that she had overreached herself in buying high-priced cattle on borrowed money. Interest was due at the bank, merchants from whom she purchased supplies were politely but insistently inquiring when they might expect a check, wages were piling up each month, feed on the range was short, and her steers were not yet beef. In other words, the Montana cattle queen was at her wit's end for ready cash.

"If I could raise only a few hundred, it would see me through," she said to herself, as, braiding her thin hair to the vanishing point, she walked to the window of her bedroom that night and looked out. But how—where? It would be financial suicide to ship until her cattle were fat and she had nothing else to sell—except some hundred and fifty or sixty head of horses, mostly unbroken, for which there was no market. The situation looked desperate and she did not know which way to turn for relief.

She had grown gaunt as a wolf from worry; many wakeful hours had left circles under her eyes and deepened the lines about her mouth. Now another sleepless night was before her, she realized, as she raised her arm to draw the shade. It dropped as she saw a lanky figure walking rapidly from the men's bunk house down the gravel path to the barn.

"Kidneyfoot! The thievin' little whelp! I knew it! Stealin' oats for that buzzard-head, after what I said!" The widow ground her teeth. "I'd fire him, shore as hell, if he wasn't overdrawed!"

The men were at the breakfast table and Mrs. Rice was at the stove baking the matutinal pancakes when the chore boy set the milk pails in the sink.

"Earl," she turned upon him and demanded with savage vehemence, "what were you prowlin' around fer last night?"

"Me?" he asked in feigned surprise.

"Yes, *you!* I saw you sneakin' down the path."

"Oh," the boy said glibly, "I forgot to shut the chicken coop."

"That's a lie. You was at them oats again."

The boy merely grinned as he slouched to his seat.

"Kidneyfoot," remarked "Kicking George" solemnly, "you'll break into the reform school before spring if you don't mend your ways. I notice you been diggin' into my Bull Durham ag'in."

"Reform school—fer him? He's hammerin' on the door of the Big House jest as hard as he kin." "Tree-toad's" scornful voice changed to an injured tone. "Last Sunday I warshed out three pairs of socks and this mornin' I couldn't find a clean pair to put on."

A third cow-puncher, "Sody-water Jack," eyed the unabashed and grinning youth accusingly

"I bet if I peeled off that shirt I'd find a couple o' suits of underwear o' mine that's come up missin'. You're a reg'lar pack rat, Kidneyfoot."

"Er camp robber," Tree-toad supplemented. "He can't pass up anything shiny."

"Guess I come by it honestly," Kidneyfoot replied boastfully. "Pa done two jolts fer rustlin' and I had an uncle made his livin' sellin' damp horses till a posse got him."

"You musta inherited that appetite from a Poland China," Kicking George observed dryly as the boy scooped three eggs from the platter and harpooned a couple of pancakes.

"Yep," the boy said impudently, "our family was all good feeders. Pa et fast, ma et a long time, and grandpa took big bites."

The men went out laughing but the widow's face did not relax as she slapped a mound of pancakes upon the plate in front of Kidneyfoot. She disliked the boy so much that she hated to cook for him—almost begrudged him the food he ate, in fact.

A stranger in a car was driving away when the men jogged in at the end of their day's work. Either a stranger or a car was an event on the isolated ranch and there was much speculation as to who he might be and the purpose of his visit. The widow's silence during sup-

per gave support to the belief that he was either a creditor or a messenger from the bank ordering her to ship.

It was not until the next morning, at the breakfast table, that they learned their mistake.

"That was a horse buyer in here yesterday and I've sold the bunch," Mrs. Rice suddenly announced.

The men raised surprised eyes from their plates. With horses scarcely paying the freight when shipped, the old-time horse buyer had disappeared along with lightning-rod peddlers and agents taking orders for crayon enlargements of photographs.

"Didn't I tell you horses 'u'd come back?" Treetoad demanded triumphantly. "Haven't I said all along that folks 'u'd git tired of these autymobiles and want their ponies ag'in? Gimme the smell of a horse any time, to gas. Gosh a'mighty!" he added plaintively, "how I've missed the liv'ry stables sence they've been turned into garages. No place to set."

"Mebbe they's a war and we ain't heerd of it yet," suggested Sody-water Jack. "Mebbe he's buyin' 'em fer the calvary."

Kicking George growled in his throat: "Goin' to the cannin' factory, more like."

The clatter of knifes and forks stopped and every eye was turned upon Mrs. Rice.

"That's right." There was defiance in her voice but the widow flushed.

Conversation ceased abruptly. No one spoke until Kidneyfoot, whose jaw had dropped with the shock, asked:

"You don't mean them that's worked —them that's stove up and turned out?"

The disapproving silence nettled Mrs. Rice. She answered sharply:

"They'll be better off. I said *everything* and that's what I mean—saddle horses, old work stock and unbroke stuff. I'm goin' to round up every hoof. What good are they? Just eatin' off the range. We'd 'a' cleaned 'em out before if we'd done what we ought."

Kidneyfoot could think of no answer to her argument but declared with a kind of horror in his face:

"I don't care, 'tain't right; and I'd starve 'fore I'd eat horse."

"Same here, kid," Sody-water Jack spoke with warmth. With an attempt at humor he added: "I'd be skeered somebudy'd say 'Whoa!' and I'd choke to death."

Kidneyfoot stacked his dishes and slouched out. For the first time since he had been at the ranch he was not last at the table.

"I ain't no heart fer this work," Treetoad declared as the men came down to the corral to saddle up. "If I could git my money and had another job in sight, I'd quit."

"Same here." Sody-water Jack's face was sober as he licked and twisted a cigarette. "I ain't no granny, but I got a feelin' fer a horse."

"If you'd seen what I seen down in Nevady last summer where they were gatherin' horses fer the cannin' factory ——" Kicking George's face was grim as he straightened his saddle blanket and smoothed out the wrinkles. "I seen with my own eyes five hundred head of mustangs rounded up and throwed in a feed yard where they stood without a handful of hay until they was so starved they gnawed the boards halfway through. They was so weak they couldn't hardly load 'em on the cars.

"One of the fellers on the round-up told me he'd seen two hundred head stand in a corral, for God only knows how many days, without a drop of water, till their tongues was swelled and hangin' out.

"An' when I come through southern Wyoming I seen 'em drivin' a bunch of canners to the railroad, hazin' and hammerin' the cripples along till they dropped, leavin' colts behind when they played out—to die of thirst and hunger

or fer the coyotes to git 'em. I ain't noways chicken-hearted, but——"

"Where's them apes that draws a salary from the State to see that animals ain't abused?" Treetoad interrupted.

"Search me," Kicking George replied laconically as he threw the saddle on his horse's back and reached for the latigo.

Kidneyfoot listened, open-mouthed, to the conversation. He could not get it out of his mind—what Kicking George had said of the treatment of the canners. The picture of the mustangs gnawing the boards on the fence, the horses with their tongues protruding, black and swollen for want of water, came between him and the log as he worked on the woodpile.

It was another shock when the men returned with the news that there was a general round-up and nearly the entire band of wild horses that watered at the spring on Wild Horse Mesa had been trapped. The boy had watched them often and the sight never failed to thrill him, and now he listened with a sinking heart as he heard the details of their capture in the bunk house that evening.

The buckskin stallion that led the band had died fighting. Kicking, rearing and striking, biting, screaming like a human, he had battled until his beautiful head was bruised to a pulp from battering it against the logs of the inclosure.

Kidneyfoot thought of the last time he had seen him—neck arched, black mane and tail flying, his red nostrils dilated, and eyes bright with intelligence and cunning. The boy felt proud, somehow, that they had not conquered the buckskin stallion.

The appaloosie mare with the colt beside her had died of fright when they roped her—dropped without a struggle when she felt the noose tighten. The blue roan broke a leg and they killed him. The pinto two-year-old's neck snapped when they threw her, and so forth and so on.

More than once during the recital Kidneyfoot winced as if some one had slapped him.

The men had no heart for their work of rounding up the widow's horses, but they did it conscientiously, and the day before the buyer for the canning factory was expected the last one was in the pasture. Range horses that had never had a saddle on their back, worn-out work horses, old cow ponies stiffened or crippled from hard usage or accidents, composed the hundred and sixty head they had gathered. Some twenty mares with colts were among the number.

Kicking George looked at Kidneyfoot quizzically as he sat on the edge of his bunk after supper, polishing the conchos on his bridle.

"What you doin', kid—dollin' up Shorty?"

The boy nodded.

"Wastin' your time, ain't you?"

Kidneyfoot looked up quickly.

"What do you mean?"

"Ain't she told you? Shorty's goin' along with the others."

The boy stared at Kicking George incredulously.

"Aw—you're kiddin' me."

"No, I ain't; she told me to throw Shorty in with the bunch in the morning."

A pallor swept over Kidneyfoot's sunburned face, his heart for an instant seemed to stop beating; then, with all his strength, he threw the bridle across the bunk house and, kicking off his boots, hurled them after it.

"It don't seem right." The cowboy's voice was understanding and sympathetic, but Kidneyfoot was in his bunk with his back to them, his head covered. The blanket rose and fell with the sobs which he managed to stifle.

While the others snored the boy lay

awake visualizing the faithful little cow pony going trustfully to his death in the slaughter pen at the canning factory. The picture sickened him—he felt qualmish, as when he ate too much cake or bacon.

The next morning Mrs. Rice glanced at the place where Kidneyfoot was usually sprawling over the table, and demanded:

"Where's that ornery brat? He ain't milked yet."

The men exchanged covert glances.

"Mebbe he's takin' on a big sleep this mornin'," Treetoad replied innocently. "A kid needs a lot when he's growin'."

"Mebbe he's out around somewhurs and didn't hear the ding-dong." Sody-water Jack winked slyly at the others.

"George, go over and tell him to come off the bed-ground and be quick about it."

Kicking George came back from the bunk house and announced soberly:

"He ain't there. You don't s'pose somebudy's stole him fer ransom?"

Both the chore boy and Shorty had vanished, and with the horse buyer coming early, there was no time to track him.

"I'll git him!" the widow said grimly. "He can't travel far in a day on that pony. And I'm goin' to put him through fer horse stealin'."

Kidneyfoot's disappearance was no great surprise, but when the men rode to the pasture with the horse buyer and found it empty they stared unbelievingly. The wire gate was thrown back and the boy's huge footprints in the dust were unmistakable.

"He done a good job while he was at it," Kicking George observed dryly.

"Mis' Rice'll bawl like a panther," Treetoad snickered. "Now she *will* go after him."

The widow was correct in her surmise that Kidneyfoot would be unable to get out of the country on Shorty. A deputy from the sheriff's office found him asleep in a clump of willows with the pony grazing beside him.

Kidneyfoot refused to plead guilty when he had his hearing before the justice of the peace and was placed under a fifteen-hundred-dollar bond to appear for trial on the charge of horse stealing at the next term of district court.

No bondsman was forthcoming, so the boy was remanded to the county jail where he looked at a brick wall in a poorly ventilated cell for two months, with no other exercise than walking back and forth in his cramped quarters. He was reckoned tough and untrustworthy, so he was denied the privilege of mowing the courthouse lawn like the other prisoners.

The confinement in nowise improved his appearance and he looked more unprepossessing than ever, with his dull eyes and sallow skin, when he slouched into the courtroom the morning his case was called for trial.

He had made no effort to tidy up for the occasion and his untrimmed hair hung over the ragged collar of his shirt, which was soiled and out at the elbows.

Kidneyfoot suffered the further handicap of being represented by Lawyer Earnest Gumpertz, who was appointed by the court to look after his interests when it was learned he was a pauper. Lawyer Gumpertz was not only young and inexperienced, but he had an unparalleled talent for antagonizing a jury which made his championship in a jury trial almost equivalent to a defendant's conviction.

Lawyer Gumpertz immediately held a whispered conference with his client, urging him to change his plea to guilty.

"They've got the goods on you," he declared impatiently when he found the boy obdurate, "and you'll stand a better chance of gettin' off with a light sentence if you make a clean breast of it. Old Judge Gilchrist has been in the stock business himself, and he's quinine

on horse thieves and rustlers. You'll get the limit."

To all of which Kidneyfoot replied sullenly:

"I don't keer. I ain't done nothin' wrong and I won't say so."

"Half-baked," said Lawyer Gumpertz in disgust to the reporter of the local paper.

The youth was so clearly guilty that only Mrs. Rice and the deputy sheriff were called to appear against him.

In her town clothes, which she wore like a disguise, the former marched to the witness stand, even the feather in her hat looking militant and aggressive. Tense and bolt upright, her hard gray eyes gleamed while she pictured Kidneyfoot as a monster of ingratitude.

"I tried to be a mother to him, your honor. I done my best to make sumpin' out of him. Talked to him like he was my son 'bout lyin' and stealin'. I let him use this pony like it was his own. Grained it, to humor him, when none but the work stock got any."

Kidneyfoot, sprawling in his chair, snickered.

Lawyer Gumpertz prodded him, with his elbow and whispered savagely:

"Quit laughin', you idiot!"

Kidneyfoot covered his mouth with his grimy hand and kept on grinning while she continued:

"He's impudent, sneakin'——"

"Lazy?" the judge inquired mildly.

"No-o, not exactly; but you have to keep after him."

The judge regarded the witness speculatively.

"You feel very strongly about this case, don't you, Mrs. Rice? You'd like to see him in the penitentiary?"

"I would, your honor!" The voice of the witness rang like the clang of metal. "That boy"—she pointed her finger dramatically at Kidneyfoot while her eyes shone with malice—"ain't got a redeemin' trait—not a spark of manhood in him!"

"Well, Hardin"—the judge swung his chair and looked at the prisoner, after the deputy had given his evidence briefly—"do you want to take the stand and let us hear what you have to say for yourself?"

The jurymen's eyes were unfriendly as Kidneyfoot shambled into the witness box and swore to tell the truth, his face wearing its hangdog look.

Attorney Gumpertz, who had laid great stress upon the prisoner's youth in his opening speech, now asked ingratiatingly:

"You didn't realize you were committing a felony when you rode this horse off, did you, Earl?"

"I knowed I'd go to the pen if I was ketched."

The spectators laughed.

"But you intended to take him back?"

"Nope."

"Then why aren't you guilty as charged?"

Kidneyfoot mumbled:

"I didn't do nothin' wrong."

With a grimace and a gesture which said that he washed his hands of the case, Lawyer Gumpertz turned the witness over to the prosecuting attorney.

"A moron—a fool! Belongs in a home for the feeble-minded," he whispered from the corner of his mouth as the courtroom tittered.

"No questions," the prosecutor said dryly; and Kidneyfoot bounded from the chair with a look of relief.

"Wait a minute, Hardin." It was the judge who spoke.

Kidneyfoot sat down again, swallowing a lump in his throat.

"You like horses, don't you?"

The boy's slits of eyes widened as he fixed them searchingly upon the judge's face. Gradually the fear and suspicion in them faded and he replied with a heartiness that again brought a laugh:

"You bet!"

The smile which returned the judge

to the bench each election softened his stern face as he observed:

"I thought as much. Now, young man, I like horses myself, and I really wish to know what you had in mind when you took this horse. Did you intend to sell him for what you could get?"

"Nope."

"Wanted him for your own use?"

"Sorta—not exactly that."

"What was your reason then, since you were aware of the punishment if you were caught?"

Kidneyfoot squirmed but did not answer.

"Was it—er—pure orneryness?"

Mrs. Rice's war plume nodded a vigorous if silent assent.

A dull red flooded the boy's face; then, unexpectedly, with startling suddenness, he jumped to his feet and with eyes only for the judge he cried:

"She was goin' to ship Shorty to the cannin' factory, judge—that's why I done it! I couldn't stand it when I heard he was goin' with the rest. It wasn't right to do Shorty that a way, after all the work he'd done on that ranch. It would 'a' been pure murder and I'd been yallerer than she says I am if I hadn't took a chance to save his life."

Kidneyfoot's voice vibrated with pride as, in his earnestness, he leaned over the railing of the witness stand and went on:

"He's the honestest little cow pony that ever looked through a bridle, judge. An' he's all stove up from carryin' big boobs that never had no mercy on him because he'd go till he dropped. He don't know what it is to quit. He swum the Bighorn River with me when the ice was running and we missed the ford. He fought and fought agin' the current till I thought his lungs would bust." Kidneyfoot choked, swallowed, and hurried on:

"I didn't think I had a chanct, but he kept fightin' with every ounce of strength that was in him till he got a footin', and when he hit the bank he went down like he was shot.

"She says I haven't got a redeemin' trait, and maybe I ain't, but"—his head went back in defiance and his voice rang—"I'll set in the Big House till the walls turn green 'fore I'll say I'm sorry fer what I done!"

There was a lump in more than one throat in the courtroom as, white and trembling, Kidneyfoot sat down.

"Why didn't you buy—er—Shorty yourself?" asked the judge.

"She wouldn't sell him to me, judge," the boy replied, breathing hard. "She said I was overdrawed, but it wa'n't that. She was mad because I fed him oats when he was rode down and weak, and so she wanted to get hunk. She'd ruther sell him to the cannin' factory fer five dollars to be butchered like a hog, than let me have him fer a month's work."

"Let me see the papers in this case," the judge said quietly as Kidneyfoot left the stand and slouched to his seat.

He scanned them swiftly and passed them back.

"This boy is charged with the theft of a horse valued at fifty dollars, which amount makes the offense a felony, punishable by imprisonment for a term of from one to ten years in the penitentiary. The defendant swears, and I believe he is telling the truth, that the actual value of the horse is five dollars and it was the intention of the plaintiff to sell him for that price. If such are the facts, the offense is a misdemeanor and the case does not belong in this court."

His honor went on curtly, his eyes resting for a moment upon the crestfallen widow before they traveled back to the prosecuting attorney to whom he was addressing himself:

"It is apparent to me that there is malice—strong personal animosity—be-

hind the bringing of this action, and that the value of the horse has been exaggerated for the purpose of charging the defendant with a penitentiary offense.

"Also I take exception to the statement of the witness that this boy has not a redeeming trait. I have owned horses and lived among those who handled horses, all my life, and it is my observation that a man who is considerate of dumb brutes is never without much that is worth while in his composition, however grave his faults.

"I may say that I quite understand and share this lad's sentiments regarding the sale to the canning factories of horses broken down and worn out by years of faithful service. My sense of justice rebels against such ingratitude. To me there is no more pitiful sight on this green earth than a carload of such horses going to their death.

"The destruction of the range horses may be an economic necessity, as the proponents of the law legalizing their slaughter declare, but, be that as it may, no true Westerner can think of it without a heavy heart."

The old judge, whose hair had turned from black to silver in the West, gazed absently through the open window into space, and, musingly, as if speaking to himself, continued:

"Times, conditions, and people have changed so rapidly and so much that I cannot keep up. Nor can I adapt myself. I belong to the past.

"When the government killers have done their work—poisoned the last jack rabbit and prairie dog, taken the last coyote in their traps; when the game hogs with their pump guns have shot the last grouse and sage chicken at the water holes; when bogus sportsmen have slaughtered the last antelope from their motor cars, and more of their ilk have riddled from their airplanes the last flock of geese and ducks; when the stockmen, greedy for range, have pushed the last elk into the mountains to starve —when that time comes—and it is not so far off—I hope to be with them in the happy hunting ground."

Then, curtly, as he swung his chair, he finished:

"The jury is dismissed. Call the next case."

HEADING OFF CHEAP WIT

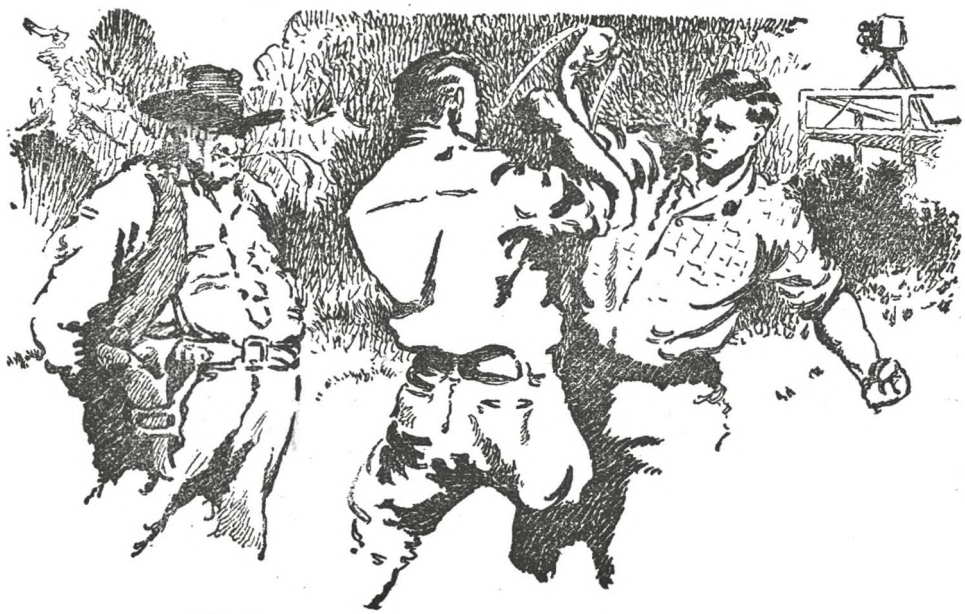
EDWARD SUTHERLAND, seven-year-old son of E. Ross Sutherland, of Hendersonville, North Carolina, thinks little of barber shops and less of barber-shop conversation.

Seeing that he needed a hair cut, his father took him to the biggest hair-cutting emporium in town. Edward sat through the ordeal, docile and uncommunicative, while the barber performed prodigies of witty chatter to entertain him and keep him still. Now and then the boy gave his father a sidelong and wintry look expressive of tremendous, not to say sickening, boredom. Finally, the hair cutter's garrulity exhausted his patience.

"Now," said Edward, "I suppose you're about to hand me that wisecrack about me needin' a shave! Well, I've heard it before.'"

BAD BLOOD

By CHARLES NEVILLE BUCK



In Five Parts—Part III—*The Story So Far:*

Gibney, a producer, who plans to make a native movie of Kentucky mountain life, goes there and stops at Joe Castle's shack. Two mountain lads quarrel, wounding each other. One is Cawdon Bratchell, stepson of the local judge; the other is Little Jase McCaleb, a rascal. At the town, whither the boys are taken by the sheriff, it becomes clear that a girl, Lakeery, is the real cause of the trouble. She scorns Jase and favors Cawdon. Later, Cawdon is again wounded, shot from the back. The sheriff, although lacking evidence, warns the scoundrelly McCaleb family that they had better cease their persecution of the judge's boy.

Cawdon, recovering, takes a part in the film being made. He grows jealous on finding that Maynard Sample, a young camera man, is being attentive to Lakeery.

Meanwhile, at the races, the sheriff arrests one Lacey on an old charge. Thus the clouds have been gathering for the storm to come.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HIDEOUS NIGHTMARE.

TALBOTT was back again in the hills with his prisoner safely lodged in jail and Lawyer Brook Seely was preparing a motion for bail. To-day the sheriff stood at Judge Bratchell's side, watching with the keen interest evoked by novelty the shooting of a scene in Gibney's experiment at depending on native talent for the making of a motion picture.

It was near "Uncle Jerry" Skrem's gristmill on the tumbling waters of Squabble Creek that these episodes were being filmed, and behind the ancient structure with its creaking wheel, the walls of the dripping cliff rose up fern clad and sun splashed through heavy verdure and blossoming rhododendron.

To the mountain sheriff, familiar with

screen drama only from the seats of the picture house, there was more magic in the mechanics of the work than in the performances of the girl and boy who were rehearsing a love scene before the sun-flecked wall of the old gristmill.

He was not adept enough in such matters to appreciate that Cawdon Bratchell, recovered with the surprising resiliency of youth from such recent and threatening injuries, was acting with the unconscious verity and conviction of a true gift. He could not appraise, as did the director, the naturalness of the girl's shyness or the untrammeled abandon of her emotion.

But Judge Bratchell, looking on in like silence, was gauging matters with a broader perspective, and in his eyes was a mingling of gratification and anxiety.

The native men and women of the cast and the casual onlookers grasped little of the drama's consecutiveness, and perhaps that was just as well.

The order of the scenes in their making, did not follow in the actual sequence of the story but grouped all episodes which fell in a given location. This procedure made of each a separate piece of action, a thing apart, and the rustic actors were like common soldiers who knew little of the headquarters plan.

But one thing was patent to every eye in the fringe of lounging spectators: the boy and girl were playing at a love-making which did not seem wholly fictitious. They were obeying instructions shouted through a megaphone, yet back of the artifice showed a spirit of the actual.

Turning his gaze away from the circumscribed area commanded by the camera and glancing about the onlookers, Talbott's eyes gathered into a frowning thoughtfulness.

It was less the presence of young Jase McCaleb at the fringe of the crowd, than the expression in the boy's eyes, which brought a furrow between the sheriff's brows.

Little Jase stood a bit apart, sullenly hulking of attitude, but as he looked at the girl who had so scorchingly rebuffed his love-making, resentment burned in his eyes. As he saw her submitting, with every seeming of willingness, to the ardent embraces of Cawdon Bratchell, his scowl took on an ominous darkness—which the sheriff marked.

To himself, Tolliver observed:

"Naught save fear can avail to make Jase hold his hand now. Let's trust the fear is ample."

Young McCaleb, looking at the girl as she gave her lips so unreservedly to the lips of her lover—ostensibly only the lover of a fictitious moment—growled through gritting teeth:

"Ther shameless hussy. She'd ought ter be plumb mortified."

Drifting gradually and as though by chance, Tolliver Talbott was presently standing by the side of the glowering McCaleb youth, and it was in a carefully lowered tone that he inquired, while his face remained blandly amiable:

"What fotches ye over this a way, Jase?"

The boy looked up and reddened to his high cheek bones under a questioning which he regarded as an intolerable infringement of his liberty.

"Ain't I got a license ter travel ther highways whar I've a mind ter?" he demanded in a voice which sought to be boldly assertive, yet which was flawed by a trace of whining timidity.

Talbott responded with a grave inclination of the head.

"Mebbe," he said. "An' I don't aim ter hamper you beyond reason, only—remember."

"Remember what?"

"I reckon you know. I meant what I said over there at your pappy's dwellin' house, an' if you aimed to defy

me, you had your chance then—two of 'em."

"What chaynces did I have?" retorted Jase.

"You stood there with a rifle-gun in your hands, face to face with me. That was one chance, Jase. I tarried in the door frame with my back turned before I went out and you still held your rifle-gun. That was another chance. Next time I don't aim to wait. That's a matter it will profit you to hold in mind."

The officer turned on his heel and strolled away. If any one had guessed the nature of the brief interchange, he must have guessed only from the eyes and lips of the boy—and they were so habitually churlish that they had seemed to alter but little.

Young Jase McCaleb hung about as the work went on. He even assumed a braggadocio of cheerfulness which was meant, with the almost pathetic clumsiness of the boor, to impress on the girl his complete indifference to her conduct, her preferences or her existence.

And in an interval between scenes while Maynard Sample's camera stood inactive, the sheriff glanced back to a bare space of gravel at the edge of the mill race to see the McCaleb boy engaged in a sport in which he qualified as a champion of sorts with young Sample as his antagonist.

A few detached loiterers afforded the audience to that contest, the pitching of horseshoes on the gravel, and as Talbott strolled over, their voices came in occasional ejaculations of interest and exhortation.

The two boys were gambling on their prowess, and Talbott was a shade surprised to find Jase tossing out quarters and half dollars with a seeming of financial recklessness. There was not much cash in McCaleb's pockets as a rule. Theirs was a house, the officer knew, where shiftlessness aggravated the sparseness of stony acres, and where actual want seemed always threatening.

Talbott's first thought was, "The boy's been blockading licker. They've got a still over there." But that reflection was academic and he dismissed it with a shrug of indifference. His work was arduous enough and comprehensive enough without encroaching on the duties of Federal and county officers in the hunting out of illicit stills.

What interested him more immediately was the observation that Jase was making an opulent gesture to conceal his inward rage—and in a moment he saw that the mountain boy was not losing but winning. He was toying with young Maynard Sample and capping his quoit pitching with a safe margin of better skill.

As the verbal asides of the play waxed vociferous, Jase was growing somewhat boisterous, and eventually Maynard turned the pockets of his khaki trousers inside out.

"That cleans me, Jase," he announced. "I guess I'm not so hot at this barnyard golf racket. Come around next pay day, though, and I'll take you on again."

The mountain boy drifted away, pocketing his winnings, and a few moments later the young derelict from down below found himself standing alone with the high sheriff.

"Son," said the officer thoughtfully, "if I was you, I don't believe I'd play around too friendly with Little Jase."

Sample looked up with his carelessly inquiring smile.

"Are you warning me out of pure benevolence, sheriff, because he always trims me?" came the easy inquiry. "Or are you only going to jail me for public gambling?"

Tolliver shook his head without abatement of his own seriousness.

"I reckon it wouldn't scarcely become me to fault you too severe for a little gamblin'," he admitted. "I've just got

back from Louisville—where I spent most of my time gamblin' on race hosses."

"That's about the only game I never buck," observed Maynard frankly. "I never happen to get started on it. I don't know whether a jockey is hired to pull a horse or whip it. Aside from the ponies, though, I've tackled most of the other games. If this lad Jase is my little playmate around here, it's only because there aren't many other devotees of chance. He'll tackle anything from shootin' craps with crooked bones—to this barnyard golf, and though he's neither sweet nor pretty, he's not as dumb as he looks. He plays a fairish game of poker, too."

"What I meant," explained the sheriff patiently, "is that just now. I'm kinderly keepin' my eye on Little Jase. He might start a heap of trouble brewin' if he's led on to hang round here too much. I'd rather you didn't encourage him. That's all."

The lowland youth nodded his head, and this time he was serious.

"I get you, sheriff," he said. "I'll lay off him—at least, round the location. I guess it will pay me at that."

It was not so far from Uncle Jerry's mill to the school back of Big Blue, if one had the strength of leg and wind for the abrupt and heart-trying climb up the nigh side and the stiff descent of yon side.

Lakeery could go through the arduous demands of rehearsal and acting until the light was no longer strong enough for work and then cross the barrier with an unruffled breath, and she always went alone. In these hills a man may face dangers along lonely ways, but a woman is accounted safe, and in spite of Cawdon's eager insistence, the girl was constant in her refusal to let him play escort in her journey home. She could not forget that twice this boy had been wounded from ambush, and in her breast persisted something of that cramping dread which had been the lot of womenfolks through generations of feudal hate, until it had become instinctive.

On the day when Jase had pitched quoits, she had not seemed to notice his presence, yet she had stolen furtive glances at him from time to time. His assumption of bravado had not escaped her, and toward the close of the day she had noted that his eyes were reddened as if somewhere there had been an accessible, if hidden, flask of white liquor.

So when she had breasted the backbone of Big Blue and started down the yon side, and when on the narrow path that ran twisting between broken pulpits of rock, she saw a figure waiting, she paused uneasily. When she recognized it as the figure of young Jase, her heart, for all its steady self-sufficiency, missed a beat.

Yet that startled moment was swiftly succeeded by one of relief at the thought that she had prevented Cawdon from participating in such a meeting.

Her nature was fearless, except for others, and when she came abreast of the boy who stood leaning, with a glowering face, against a huge shoulder of granite, she even nodded with a cool politeness as she said:

"Howdy, Jase. Are you restin' yourself?"

He surveyed her sullenly and she knew at once that he was slightly tipsy.

"I'm a-waitin' fer *you*," he told her shortly.

"I'm obleeged." Lakeery had dropped into vernacular with him, lest she offend him needlessly by a seeming of superiority. "But I ain't none afeared to cross Big Blue alone."

For a space he made no reply, but stood there with eyes burning out of a sinister and unpleasant face. He stood so that he blocked her path. Then he sought to smile scornfully but his scowl only gave way to an evil leer.

"I reckon ye don't crave my comp'ny, huh?" he demanded; and Lakeery, mindful of the consequences of her previous taunts, curbed the quick unleaping of her anger and cast about for a response calculated to turn away wrath.

"I'm right fagged out," she made diplomatic response. "After workin' all day, I'd liefer save my breath for slavish hill climbin' than to talk to anybody."

"Does ye call thet workin'?" he inquired, with a heavy sarcasm. "Huggin' an' kissin' an' carryin' on like a plumb hussy afore a crowd of gawkin' fools?"

This time an uncontrollably indignant fire flashed in the girl's dark eyes. She could not quell it or rule out of her voice an affronted tremor as she said shortly:

"I reckon that's my business. I'm plumb sure it ain't none o' yourn. You kain't understand such a matter as actin'." Then, commandingly, she added: "Stand aside an' give me rightful share of the road!"

"Thar ain't no tormentin' haste, I reckon," he told her insolently, as he continued to block the narrow path. "An' ef ye've got ther notion I aims ter spark with ye, ye kin p'int-blank ease yore mind."

Suddenly the brooding fires in his inflamed eyes leaped and he broke out tumultuously:

"You 'lowed a spell back that ye wouldn't wipe yore feet on me. Waal, I'm a-tellin' ye now thet I wouldn't wipe mine on *you!*"

As the color ran out of Lakeery's face under the sting of insult, she steadied into a quiet which was tenser than outbreak.

"Thet's the way a man like you would talk to a decent gal," she asserted with a withering contempt. "It's all you know."

"Decent gal!" he whooped derisively. "I 'lowed ye was a decent gal when I sought ter make love ter ye over thar at ther newfangled school whar yore silly head got turned with a passel of highfalutin' notions."

He paused a moment since his words were outrunning his thoughts, but he was not yet through, and presently he went more vehemently on:

"I 'lowed then ye was ther kind of gal a godly man could seek ter wed with——"

"A godly man!" she broke in on him, and her voice vibrated with an incredulous disdain which inflamed him to near madness. "Do you call a man godly that sneaks through the bresh an' shoots from ther la'rel?"

Even in his half-crazed temper he paused and his eyes widened in amazement.

She was, indeed, a convert to "fotched-on notions" when she spoke so scornfully of practices his people and hers had long accepted without radical question.

"What's feudin' got ter do with godliness?" he demanded brusquely.

She did not deign to make response to that beyond a curt repetition of the stinging statement:

"I reckon you wouldn't understand that, either."

"Wouldn't I?"

He came a step nearer, and his face was passion-twisted.

"Hit don't skeercely seem like thar's naught I *kin* understand ter hear *you* tell hit! But thar's one thing I kin understand, though!"

Lakeery was beginning to feel frightened. This half-drunken fellow was obdurately set on a quarrel, and it was an awkward place for such an encounter. She had not yet admitted her inability to cope with so dull-witted an antagonist, but a witless brute might be dangerous, and she was taking rapid thought. A half mile or so back she had passed with her quicker and lighter

strike "Deadear" Posen, who was going the same way but traveling at a slower gait, because he carried a sack of meal on his shoulders.

Deadear was so named in the bluntly inconsiderate fashion of back-country folk because his total deafness set him apart from the generality. That disability would have excited less interest except that with it went an almost unbelievable gift. Indeed, many persons hung to the conviction that for some unaccountable and perverse reason he shammed his ailment. You could fire a rifle off behind his back and he would give no start, no sign of knowing, yet often he would sit in a crowd and abruptly answer some comment made in a low voice. This was a miracle, of course, only to ignorant folk. Deadear Posen was merely an extraordinary adept at the reading of lip movements, and when he faced a man it was as if his hearing were not only adequate but keen.

If Lakeery could quiet Jase down for a space, reflected Lakeery, the man would come along the path, and she could make some excuse for going on with him.

Of these things the girl thought rapidly while Jase went insolently on:

"I've done told ye I wouldn't wipe my feet on ye, but I reckon I didn't jedgmatically mean hit."

Young McCaleb laughed savagely as he added his climax:

"I jest erbout *would* wipe me feet on ye. I tuck ye fer a decent gal—an' now I knows better. I've done watched ye ter-day an' I knows ye ain't naught but a shameless hussy—a woman thet——"

The girl had stiffened as if from an electric shock and her eyes were pools of black fire. Then she fell to trembling from head to foot and in almost inarticulate fury gasped out:

"You dirty liar!"

No longer did she think of defense, but of attack, and she struck him such a stinging blow across his mouth that his lips trickled blood where his teeth had cut them.

Jase gave back a step in surprise, momentarily unsteadied under the unexpected impact. Then he came forward again, and caught her roughly in his arms. There she struggled like a netted tigress, but the six-footer smothered her efforts in a ruthless embrace as he crushed her against him.

It took only one of his heavy-muscled arms to hold her helpless, once he had gathered her into his grasp, and with the other he forced her face up and held it close to his own, leering down into it.

Panting, kicking, struggling, the girl fought the brute strength of the man who was finding belated vent for all the repressed emotion which he had not dared release under the goading of the sheriff. She was wholly helpless and she grew faint with despair.

She felt his rough kisses on her mouth as he held her face upturned, but as suddenly as he had seized her, Jase McCaleb released her and stepped hurriedly back with an expression unaccountably altered. It had changed in a breath from savage effrontery to abrupt fear. He stood an arm's length away and bent his head listening, and though the girl's ears were ringing with the tumult of her confusion, she began to hear, too, the sound which had loosened his arms and changed his demeanor.

She had forgotten Deadear. Now a short distance away she heard his quavering voice raised in song. It was a wretched falsetto, but to the girl it seemed sublime music—a hymn of deliverance.

She stood there on weak legs seeking to rearrange her tousled hair, and she heard Jase suggesting in a voice half threat and half whine:

"I reckon hit won't profit ye none ter make no give-out about this hyar busi-

ness. Ye wouldn't nuver live hit down. Folks——"

She was ghost-white and shaken, but she was valiantly struggling to compose herself so that to the eyes of Deadear Posen she would not present a picture of telltale agitation. Her voice was an agonized and struggling whisper—like the voices of locked throats with which we seek to break silence in hideous nightmares:

"I—don't—need—ter make no give-out!" she gasped. "I aims ter kill ye, Jase McCaleb! I aims ter kill ye my own self!"

She closed her eyes for a moment, and drew a long, sobbing breath. When she opened them again, young Jase McCaleb was no longer in sight. The laurel had taken him and the girl drew herself together to start on, stumbling blindly at first and then, by degrees of stressful resolution, recovering her self-command.

From the ridge overlooking the school, Lakeery looked down with stricken eyes. The tract with its ordered acres and its trim log buildings, stood before her sight in the failing light like a haven of clean refuge. In the eastern sky a pallid crescent was already climbing, virginal and slight, and below it gleamed, with diamond clarity, a single star.

The girl was still tremulous and she halted to collect herself, for she meant to go down that slope with no indication to any one of the soul-sickening and contaminating stress through which she had passed. It seemed to her shrinking and horrified agitation that the whole thing had been as disgraceful to her as though she had not been its innocent victim. It was a matter to keep locked in her own mortified breast, and she meant to speak no word to any soul, least of all, Cawdon Bratchell.

At a whisper of the facts, Cawdon would hunt young Jase McCaleb down as swiftly and as relentlessly as a mad dog is hunted down—and when he found him, one of them would fall.

But it might be Cawdon who fell, and even if it were the other way about—the highly desirable other way—consequences would follow which must not be thought of—widespread blood-letting and warfare because of her.

After a troubled night, it was with a face that had stilled and banished its excitement that the girl presented herself on location the next morning, and if there was a difference which no one saw in the manner of her coming, neither was that any one's business. She remembered the words of an old granny:

"Layunie, she blouses out her waist apurpose so she kin tote a pistol gun."

Lakeery also carried a pistol gun.

CHAPTER IX.

TWO DEATHS.

YOUNG JASE was not among the camp followers and hangers-on at that day's activities, and the location shifted from the old mill to a log house some distance away.

At the close of the afternoon's work, Cawdon waited about as usual for the chance of a word with Lakeery alone—a word which had nothing to do with their parts in the picture.

"Lakeery," he pleaded, "let me walk back with you to-day. Since this business began, I never get a minute of time with you—by myself."

The girl laughed with a lightness that came hard.

"Don't be silly, Cawdy," she exhorted. "Your way lays oppositewise to mine. You'd just have to come back again—and then make a fresh start for the town."

"I know why you always refuse," he said, and his brows drew into furrowed protest. "You're afraid I'll get shot at again—but I'm sick of being babied and

coddled. I don't aim to be scared off the highway."

"Nobody 'lows you're afeared, Cawdy," she told him seriously; "but it's a slavish journey across Big Blue —and I'm not afeared to go by myself."

Yet when the judge's stepson had started reluctantly toward town, Lakeery went shyly over to young Maynard Sample.

"Maynard," she said, "will you go along with me as far as the ridge? I don't feel like goin' by myself this evenin'."

"As far as the ridge and farther. Yea, even to the ends of the earth an' you wish it." And he made a low bow of mock ceremony which the girl regarded with eyes so unsmilingly sober that the young man grew serious, too, and inquired: "What's up, Lakeery? Has some bum been frightening you?"

"I ain't to frighten," she answered stoutly. "I don't crave to have Jase McCaleb doggin' my footsteps, that's all."

Maynard nodded.

"Right-o," he agreed. "And I'm the world's best little bodyguard. If he looks at you cross-eyed, my dear, I'll undertake to knock him for a row of ash cans."

Then suddenly he dropped his breezy manner.

"By the way," he demanded, "what has he been up to anyhow?"

She retreated into vagueness of explanation.

"Nothin' much. Only pesterin' me—and I dassent tell Cawdy. It would bring on a heap of trouble."

Maynard inclined his head.

"I'll say it would. It would start hell a-poppin'. I'm beginning to get wised up on local politics. Your beloved Cawdy lives close to the throne. He can't go light-heartedly hell raising without sort of kicking the courthouse down on top of the judge. Well, I hate to lose my little crap-shooting playmate, Jase, but I'll sink him without trace if he gets fresh with you, Lakeery."

He grinned as he added:

"And that's true gallantry, since I've no favors to hope for myself."

It was only after several journeys across Big Blue with Lakerry that the wandering scion of the Sample line found himself late one afternoon standing face to face with Cawdon Bratchell and with a quarrel on his hands. It was on the river bank near the edge of town at a time when the picture company was scattered for the evening, and at first Maynard thought the meeting a chance one and friendly.

But Cawdon's first words disposed of that idea.

"Sample," said the mountain boy, "I want that you should stop walkin' home with Lakeery every night. I don't aim to tolerate it."

Maynard's brows lifted in surprise, and he started to answer—then remembered that he could hardly do so. If Lakeery was discreetly concealing from her lover her reasons for selecting other escort than his own, the young lowlander had no wish to betray her confidence.

So he merely smiled in his careless fashion and said:

"Sorry. What's your kick, Bratchell?"

The response was direct and simple.

"She's my girl."

"Just the same," Sample told him, "I can't quite see you giving me orders." A perverse impulse led him to add: "Are you afraid I'll beat your time?"

Cawdon's face darkened and his blue eyes glittered. His anger was the hotter because he had come near quarreling with Lakeery and did not wish to admit it.

Now he announced:

"I don't aim to have you do it any more. You can give me your hand on that or——"

He paused, and Sample inquired negligently:

"Yeah—or what else?"

"Or you and I must needs have a settlement right now."

"Suits me," concurred the lowlander cheerily. "The settlement, I mean."

Neither of them observed that a third figure had materialized under the scant and patchy shade of the old sycamore tree by the refuse-littered river bank—or that Tolliver Talbott stood, with his hands in his pockets, looking on.

"Boys," inquired Talbott amiably, "what are you two talkin' settlements about, anyhow?"

"Maynard Sample here," Cawdon gave terse reply, "has been walkin' over the mountain every sundown with Lakeery. I've bade him stop it—and he aims to keep on."

"Son," suggested the officer easily, "I mistrust if your arm's sound enough jest yet for a fist-an'-skull mix-up—but maybe it ain't any of my business."

"I'm tired of bein' babied and coddled," came Cawdon's hot protest. "I aim to fight this thing out, here and now. It's better than bearin' a grudge in secret."

The sheriff nodded his head.

"Yes, it's better than that," he agreed. "Maybe I ought to interfere—but I reckon I won't. I'll hold your coats for you, if you're hell-bent on fightin'! But when you get through, I want you to shake hands."

"This amiable séance," commented Maynard pleasantly, as he pulled off his khaki shirt, "is none of my making, but I aim to please."

He shrugged and grinned without rancor.

It was a clean stand-up fight, and the little sheriff stood by, nonchalantly chewing at a twig, with his hands in his trouser pockets. Such strength and willingness were contributed on both sides that once or twice Talbott stepped forward as if to interfere, but each time he shook his canny head and kept his place on the side lines.

Cawdon Bratchell had the same catlike quickness and the same rawhide strength that had been Dawes Fleetwell's, and the other boy had not made his battered way around the world without learning something of offense and defense. Perhaps ordinarily the country-bred youth would have come off easy victor, but he began to find that his boast about his arm was not quite warranted. It seemed to have weakened and it hurt so badly that he gritted his teeth and lashed out blindly.

Maynard fought with a cool head, and when he found that he could hold his own, he even took thought of his professional responsibilities. He would be out of luck with Gibney if, in the middle of the picture, he scarred and battered his star out of the usefulness of manly beauty. So the lowlander left the features of his antagonist undamaged and pumped his blows steadily to the body.

They weakened, staggered and lunged groggily, with sweat-blinded eyes, yet fought on doggedly, and still the sheriff refrained from intervention.

How long it would have lasted was never proved, for while the officer looked on with eyes too preoccupied to notice other things, and while the combatants saw faultily through their sweat, Joe Daly, the deputy, came hurrying and seized Talbott's arm.

"Ye kain't tarry here, sheriff," he announced. "Matt Lacey hes done broke jail. He's clean vamosed."

So quick were Tolliver's movements as he flung himself between the combatants and wrested them apart, that several of their weakening blows fell on his own body.

"Stop it, boys!" he commanded. "Ye've got ter shake hands now. There's a man broke out of jail an' I've got other fish to fry."

The two lads stood apart, panting and

unsteady, and it was Maynard who first spoke with shortened breath.

"Good scrap," he said. "But I haven't made any promises. Remember that."

"Maybe," answered the judge's stepson, "we'll have to do it all over again —later on."

That year spring ripened prematurely into summer in the Cumberlands and now, although it was still early in June, Carroll Gibney had been able to bring his novel undertaking within reach of completion. He had used both the earlier phases of swollen watercourses and the later condition of hardwood forests fully clothed in foliage and at their apex of rugged and picturesque beauty.

So, on an evening when the stars were bright overhead, he sat with Judge Bratchell in his chamber in the old courthouse, talking by the yellow glow of a kerosene lamp, and the director's eyes were lighted with an animation close to enthusiasm.

"I believe I've got something," he was saying confidently, "and I'm glad because, after all, it was playing a long shot, and I've put about all I have into the venture. I begin to feel confident."

"When you came," admitted the judge, "I was right dubious. You were usin' raw material and it was a far cry from studio conveniences."

The director nodded.

"Yes," he asserted. "It was a different matter from working on the coast. There we could develop our film and inspect it in the projection room from day to day. Here we had to use a lot of extra footage——"

"You mean——"

"I mean that not being able to decide at once whether or not the shots were good, we had to make a lot of extras —as insurance against failure. But what troubled me most were the human elements. They had to be delicately handled."

"That was right heavy on my mind, too," Judge Bratchell spoke slowly. "Almost anything new is apt to be dangerous here. There were chances for play fights turning off into real fights—and for blank ca'tridges turnin' out to be loaded. To be full honest with you, Mr. Gibney, I'll breathe freer when I shake hands with you and bid your outfit farewell."

Gibney smiled.

"I can understand that now—better than when I came. Well, a week or so more should see us through; and as for your boy, judge, he has real talent. If this picture doesn't flop, other directors may be coming after him with contracts ready for his signing."

Muir Bratchell's face clouded.

"That's one thing I've lain awake thinkin' over some several nights," he declared with anxiety in his voice. "When he was a baby, his daddy went to New York to try to be an actor—followed a vaudeville team off because they flattered him. He didn't set the town on fire, but he hired the boy out as a child actor—and the child supported him."

Again the circuit judge paused and sat with his fingers drumming on the top of his desk and his eyes deeply pensive.

"No great good came of that," he commented briefly. "The boy's about forgotten those times, and I hope they won't ever rise up and beckon to him out of the past. Broadway is all right for some, perhaps—Hollywood, too—but for him——" He broke off without finishing.

Gibney rose from his chair.

"I'll leave you to your work, judge, without further interruption," he said. "As for myself, I'm dropping into the hotel for a session of stud poker with your remarkable high sheriff and a few of his cronies."

The other man inclined his head gravely.

"Tolliver *is* a remarkable man," he declared earnestly. "He's a plumb fool for gamblin', but he plays a bold game—and honest."

As Gibney went down the dingy stairs to the hall, plastered with printed notices of sheriff's sales, Muir Bratchell accompanied him to the door.

Farther away the street grew brighter and more populous. There rose the new hotel and the equally new picture house, while beyond the river twinkled a scattering of lights along the mountain slopes where the camps and commissaries of the coal mines were still awake. But here by the old courthouse was the dark emptiness of long ago.

The judge lifted his hand and pointed to a window across the street. Its blind was drawn, but around the flapping edges came a glow of inner light.

"I reckon your poker game isn't the only one in town to-night," he made comment. "Looks like you could take your choice between two."

"But that," said Gibney in surprise, "is Brook Seely's law office, isn't it?"

Bratchell nodded.

"There used to be an old fellow here who was elected jailer," he answered reminiscently. "When a man asked him his business, he always said, 'Waal, I farms some an' I preaches some an' I jails some.' Brook Seely might say, 'I laws some an' I gambles some'—but I oughtn't to volunteer derogatory things about the members of our bar."

"He's young McCaleb's lawyer in the pending case for shooting at Cawdon, isn't he?"

Again the judge inclined his head.

"I reckon there won't anything come to that case," he conjectured. "But young Jase went in there a little while back. Like as not, he's in the game—and so is your young assistant, Mr. Sample. This was pay day, wasn't it?"

Gibney nodded and walked down the street to turn into the hotel, while back of the blind across the way from the old courthouse, a quartet sat around a table swept clear of legal papers and rededicated to cards, chips and glasses.

From time to time those glasses were replenished from a jug which, for a consideration, had been furnished by young Jase.

Brook Seely himself, in shirt sleeves, sat before a stack of chips which was not noticeably dwindling, and his sharply cut features were masked in the Buddhalike impassiveness which is supposed to mark the true poker face.

A student of physiognomy might have found that face worth study. The eyes were both bold and shrewd but set so closely together as to indicate greed. Brook talked with the modified dialect of the country lawyer who rather cultivates than avoids the crudities of his bailiwick, yet in this company he seemed the sophisticate.

On the morning after, young Maynard Sample groaned when the raucous jangle of the alarm clock in his bare hotel room roused him to the unwelcome responsibilities of another day. He lifted himself on his elbow and pressed a hand against a head which was tight and throbbing, but Maynard had the recuperative elasticity of youth and he sat only briefly on the edge of his bed in morose reflections upon his folly.

"I got pie-eyed last night," he told himself. "Pie-eyed and cleaned."

As he looked back it became difficult to recall with clarity the last unfocused hours of the poker session. He had the uneasy feeling that, besides being broke to the last penny of his pay, he had talked garrulously and boastfully. He vaguely remembered regaling his companions with a plethora of travelers' tales now grown indistinct.

Scraps of disjointed memories flitted elusively before him. He had searched, with much comedy effect, through his lean bill fold for assets to pledge for yet another stack of chips.

"And that was damned silly," he commented mournfully, as he went over to plunge his face into a basin of cold water. "That purse had been ransacked before. Well, it's another day—but there aren't many more pay days on this job."

All morning and all afternoon young Sample worked with the half-unrealities of a hangover clouding his brain and disturbing his nerves, but he worked none the less industriously. Silly impulses came to him and some of them he obeyed under the belated urge of the raw and powerful liquor of last night's debauch. For instance, in spite of his training in economy, he turned his camera, in an interval of idleness, on young Jase McCaleb and Brook Seely who were talking together at the edge of the small crowd. It appealed to his distorted sense of the comic to record how damn silly they looked. Gibney would raise hell, he reflected, when he discovered that rank waste of footage.

Joe Castle did not come frequently to town, but on a morning in early June he set the head of his thoroughbred toward the county seat, with empty saddlebags across his cantle. There were certain replenishments of the larder to be made, and the novelist, who had turned to the almost monastic sanctuary of a backwoods cabin, rode at an easy pace.

He stopped at the school to give his mount a breathing spell, and then plunged into the steeper woods for the crossing of Big Blue. From that point on he must often walk and lead his scrambling horse over ragged stairways of boulder and rubble.

It was perhaps a mile beyond the school that the trail climbed at a dizzy pitch and through an alley walled by high boulders, and it was there between the two giant pulpits of eroded stone that he came upon the body of a dead man.

At first he did not know it was a dead man. It lay with its face down and resting on one elbow, and the posture was one of ease, as though a weary-footed wayfarer had thrown himself down for a few moments of rest in that cool recess, and had fallen asleep where he lay.

But as Castle stood looking down, realizing reluctantly that he must rouse the napper in order to pass through the narrow gut of pathway, it struck him that the figure lay suspiciously still with that stillness which is peculiar to death.

He let his reins hang, and went forward to bend over for a closer scrutiny. There was no rise and fall of any muscle in respiration, so he lifted the head and studied the face. It was the face of young Jase McCaleb and, unlike the silent body, it did not wear the appearance of tranquil ease. The features were stamped with a horrified surprise—the dismay of a mortal moment crowded with whatever agonies come to a man unready to die when he feels the sudden grip of dissolution at his throat and heart.

Then Castle saw a small hole in the back of the blue-denim shirt just to the left of where the suspender straps crossed—the unmistakable hole of a bullet fired from a distance that left no powder burn. It was, he told himself, a puncture of entrance, not of exit, and its testimony was that this man had fallen with a wound inflicted from behind.

He must not, the novelist remembered, disturb the body until the proper officials had viewed it. He did not know who the coroner was, but he would go back to the school and telephone to the sheriff.

However, it seemed the part of common wisdom to look about the immediate surroundings for any further indications which he might add to his report.

So he began moving in a rough and

widening circle. This was difficult because the laurel tangle was thick and boulders broke roughly through the underbrush.

At length he turned back, this time with eyes that searched the woods on either side. It was perhaps a furlong distant that his eye caught something challenging to his attention a few paces back from the path.

There it was that he found another body. This body lay with its face turned upward—and it was the body of young Maynard Sample.

Castle did not know Sample, but he recognized the features and the dress as that of a lowlander.

"One of the moving-picture crowd," he told himself, "and it looks as if they had killed each other."

But as soon as he had made that conjecture, he questioned it and his eyes took on a look of perplexity.

There was a bullet hole drilled through this body, too, but this time Castle saw it from the front, and he was sure that it was an orifice of exit—not entrance.

Both men had been shot from behind and it did not seem probable that this could have happened had both fallen in a duel between themselves.

CHAPTER X.

"DID YOU SLAY THESE MEN?"

JUDGE BRATCHELL was alone in his chambers adjoining the old courtroom, waiting. The armor of nerve discipline and self-containment upon which he had placed his dependence through a life of constantly recurring peril was like a metal worn thin, and while he waited he paced the floor with eyes of deep anxiety.

Tolliver Talbott had not yet returned from the mission which had called him out into the hills, and until a report arrived, the judge could only know that a double murder confronted him which could scarcely fail of dire consequences and far-reaching repercussions.

One of those dead men, judged by community opinion, was better dead than alive—and yet he was less dangerous alive than dead. His taking off was likely to reopen old feudal wounds, start destructive fires running in blood already hot, and jeopardize the precarious balance of the law.

The other murder victim was a "furriner," and though he had been at times a wandering vagabond, his bearing was not that of human riffraff. Now that he was dead, family connections would in all likelihood develop which would carry the affair into the publicity of newspaper outcry and add regretably to the black and lawless name of the hill country.

Bratchell fretted for the opportunity of action. It was this bootless waiting which gnawed at nerves heretofore dependably steady through years of ordeal.

The door opened and Cawdon came in. For a space he stood there engaging his stepfather's direct gaze with eyes that were candid and unwavering. The judge had recognized his step on the stairway, and now his face had banished its furrows of harassment. He wore again the temperate and judicial guise of one accustomed to govern himself with a sterner discipline than that which he imposed upon his court.

"You sent for me?" inquired Cawdon.

"Sit down, son; I want to talk to you. Maybe you can help me."

"I will if I can—but I don't see how."

Muir Bratchell himself remained standing with his back to the window through which the June sun streamed cheerily, and after a moment or two of silence, he made an abrupt beginning.

"When you came back home after that first shootin' scrape with Jase, son," he said, "you were broodin' over things

you'd heard about your own pappy. You wanted that I should tell you the whole story."

The boy nodded and his eyes became somber with a troubled interest.

"Old Jase McCaleb said some right hateful things about him," he asserted. "He 'lowed I had the blood of a murderer an' a thief in me. I asked you what it all meant, but you put me off, an' I didn't ask again."

"I told you you had the best blood in the world in you—your mother's," answered the judge, "and in due time I aimed to tell you the whole story about your father. I hoped it wouldn't have to be till you came of age, son. You're my boy now, and I've sought to do the best for you I knew."

"You've done everything a father can do—and more than most fathers."

"A story like this isn't easy to tell," went on the judge slowly, "and a boy takes some things harder than a full-grown man. Still, I reckon the time has come. Do you remember the first years after you came back here to the hills from New York—after your pappy's death?"

Cawdon inclined his head.

"My mother and I dwelt alone those years—before you and she were wed."

"It was four full years, Cawdy, an' they were long years of a hungerin' heart for me. Folks knew how I'd always loved your mother, an' maybe they guessed that she cared for me, too. I reckon they wondered why I suffered her to go on bein' the Widow Fleetwell that long."

The boy offered no interrupting comment, and the judge's face twitched with a momentary spasm of hard-held emotion before he continued:

"It was because for that long a time I couldn't bring myself to tell her the story I'm goin' to tell you now, an' yet I couldn't ask her to wed with me until I told her. I couldn't do it an' stay honest."

"Then it was true—what the McCalebs said?"

"Both true an' untrue. Let me get at it my own fashion. It makes right slavish telling. Your mother an' I were pledged to wed when she was a young girl—and the comeliest girl on Seven Creeks."

"Before she wed with my own pappy?"

"Before that. In those days Dawes an' I were such close friends as you don't often find. Then he met Lissy. He was a man women couldn't resist an' he plumb swept her off her feet. They slipped away between sunrise an' sundown an' were wed. He an' I got to be bitter enemies then—but I still loved your mother. Your pappy went away to New York to be an actor, but he fell on hard lines there, an' you-all lived in a right sorry boardin' house off what *you* made in a theater. You had talent an' it saved them from absolute want. How much of those days do you remember, son?"

"Mighty little. It all seems like a hazy dream, right faint an' far-away."

The judge nodded.

"I went up there to New York on law business. I was workin' with some right celebrated lawyers on developin' this country here. I saw you act—an' met your mother again. Your pappy an' I laid by our grudges, but I reckon they still dwelt on in both our hearts."

He paused, then went on:

"Dawes had met up with some police officers there an' when the lawyer I was workin' with was murdered while he was investigatin' a crime ring, your pappy undertook to be a sort of self-made detective. Remember this, son. He was hurtin' for the needcessities that money would buy. Save for what you earned, they'd have gone hungry."

"Do you mean—that—that he stole money?"

Judge Bratchell shook his head.

"It was worse than that," he said, and

for a few moments he did not go on. "While I was there, Cawdon, it came to me to suspect a certain man of doin' that murder for hire. I didn't have aught of sure proof, but I went to that man an' told him just enough of what was in my mind to lead him to fear me —if so be he was guilty. Then I came on back home here to the hills."

"I reckon I don't quite understand."

"I 'lowed that if I wasn't doin' that man an injustice—if he had a guilty heart, he wouldn't scarcely dare to let me live—to expose him; he'd seek to follow me and kill me here. He knew I had other enemies that would be blamed for it. That was my notion."

"Were you right?"

The judge was standing in a stiff posture and his face, too, was rigid.

"The man did follow me," he announced. "He laywayed me just back of my house; but I was expectin' that, an' I got the drop on him. I took him down to my cabin an' we talked the thing out. If he'd lived, son, he'd have gone back to New York to the electric chair. Luckily for him, he didn't live."

The boy's face went white.

"You killed him?" he demanded in an almost fierce tone. "I reckon you don't have need to tell me the man that followed you was my pappy. Old Jase said somethin' about your lurin' him on."

"I didn't kill him," said Muir Bratchell quietly, "but it happened that other enemies of mine sought to layway me, too that same night—the first night I was home. They shot through the window of my house—an' they got the wrong man. There were three of them —an' only one went away."

"That man that followed you was my pappy?" insisted Cawdon tensely; and the judge inclined his head.

"He was your pappy, son, but I've sought to be your pappy ever since."

Cawdon sat stooped and unmoving for a moment, pressing his hands tightly to his face, and the older man did not at once speak again. He was experienced enough to know that there are moments which must be met alone.

At last the boy sat up and his lips twitched pitifully.

"Then they weren't lyin' after all—the McCalebs. I've got murderin' blood an' thievin' blood in my veins—an' I always thought I was the salt of the earth."

"You've got your mother's blood, Cawdon," Bratchell told him once again, "an' that *is* the salt of the earth—an' while I couldn't give you my blood, I've sought to give you all else I could. You couldn't be more to me, son, if you were my own."

The boy came to his feet.

"I reckon," he said laboriously and bitterly, "it hasn't helped you any—to have folks know—that your stepson was of such a low-down breed as that."

"Folks hereabout know aught of all that save that your father was shot by mistake for me," the judge explained soberly. "They have no need to know aught more."

He sat wearily down and he looked suddenly older and very tired. He was waiting in quiet but agonizing suspense to see whether the son of Dawes Fleetwell would answer the call of pure heredity and forget all else—or whether years of guidance and devoted care would prevail over the deep tap-root of an infamous fatherhood.

Young Cawdon stood brooding of eye and pale of cheek, and his pallor was ghostlike because of its contrast with his natural ruddiness. He was standing at a Gethsemane, but finally he came over and said with broken utterance:

"I've got only one father. If you can put up with me after all you know, I'll aim to deserve what you've done for me—the best I can."

Bratchell rose and the expression of soul-fear went out of his eyes, leaving them tranquil; yet so strong was the

force of mountain reticence, of undemonstrativeness between men, that in that instant of human closeness, neither offered or took the hand of the other. The judge said only:

"That's all I need to know. I don't have to ask you—any other question now."

Cawdon took his seat again and, while the tin clock ticked on its shelf, there was a long silence between them. Then a knock sounded on the door and when the judge called out, "Come in," Carroll Gibney entered the room.

"You were right, judge," he said in a heavy-hearted voice. "You said you wouldn't breathe quite easy till we were gone from here—and we didn't get away in time."

"It's not your fault, Mr. Gibney," Bratchell assured him. "I didn't send for you to censure you. I wanted you to tell me all you know about this dead boy that worked for you."

"Very little, sir. I picked him up on the coast. He was knocking round the lot. He was a rolling stone but a straight shooter. I liked him."

Bratchell was drumming lightly on the table top with the fingers of his right hand.

"He wasn't any common tramp, that boy wasn't. He was penniless and sort of irresponsible, but he came of good stock. There was a thoroughbred strain among his foreparents."

Gibney nodded his head.

"I'm sure of that—but I never questioned him much. Now, God help me, I don't even know where to send a telegram."

"That's what I wanted to talk to you about. His people must know."

"Who are his people? Where are they?"

Muir Bratchell's brow gathered in concentrated furrows.

"Sample," he said meditatively. "That's not such an uncommon name. Maynard is like to be the mother's maiden name—but that's not so uncommon either—and remember that this is a big country."

There was silence in the place for a space, then Muir Bratchell rose from his seat and took down from the shelves a thick volume bound in red.

"'Who's Who,'" commented Gibney, and the judge nodded.

"It's just a shot in the dark," he observed, "but it won't hurt to try."

Turning the pages he paused at last and said:

"Here are a half dozen Samples. Wait—— Yes, listen to this:

"'John K. Sample, born Westchester, Pennsylvania, 1865. Lawyer. M.'—that means married—'Caroline Maynard. Children, Caroline; John Maynard——'

"I guess we've found our man."

Gibney moved forward and bent listening while the judge read the brief, epitomized biographies.

"There it is," summarized the judge. "Note the date of birth. The father is most old enough to be this boy's grandsire—there you have the sort of separation between generations that may make a boy restive. The father's a college man, a corporation lawyer, a clubman. Like as not he's right rich. Here's the home address."

Muir Bratchell was already reaching for a sheet of foolscap paper.

"I reckon," he added dolefully, "we've got the sorry task of telegraphing him the ill tidings."

Again the door opened and this time it was to let in the short, chubby figure of the sheriff. His pink face was unsmilingly stern, and to his old friend the judge he nodded briefly. Of Gibney he took no notice at all, but from the instant of his entrance, he engaged and held the eyes of young Cawdon Bratchell with a glance of unbendingly and sharply inquisitorial as a pointed sword.

When he spoke, his voice, too, was as impersonally severe as if no ties of friendship, of almost blind devotion,

bound him through the judge, to the judge's family. His words came in unsoftened interrogation:

"Cawdon, did you slay these men?"

The boy looked up, and his face went brick red with indignant affront as if he had been struck without warning. His eyes wore the hurt of a friend's lack of faith, but they did not flinch or flicker, and while the judge himself started with indignant surprise at the bluntness of the interrogation, the boy spoke slowly:

"Sheriff, I didn't 'low you'd have need to ask me that!"

So intent was the officer on his searching gaze that it was as if the words of the answer had gone unheard, and once again he spoke in the same inquisitorial tone:

"Answer me, yea or nay. Did you slay these two men or either one of them?"

"No, damn you!" The response was spat out angrily now as the boy came to his feet. "I don't know aught more of it than you do!"

Talbott turned quickly to the judge.

"Have you told him about his pappy —what manner of man he was?"

Bratchell nodded. Never before had he felt so near to a quarrel with this man who had so long been his faithful lieutenant, yet the ingrained judicial quality was stronger in him than the assaults of temper. Tolliver Talbott had his duty, too, and it was the duty of searching down and finding. Had his conduct been less rigid, he would be unworthy of his salt.

But, suddenly and surprisingly, the face of the little man altered. The eyes widened and softened. The uncompromising straightness of the lip line relaxed into an easier curve.

"I had need to ask you, son," he said, "because so long as I'm high sheriff, I ain't my own man." He licked his lips, and one could see under what a strain his construction of duty had laid upon his resolution. "I was so nerved up that I didn't scarcely hear what answers ye gave me. But it wasn't your words I was goin' by anyhow; I was studyin' your face. Now I'm satisfied."

The lad still stood taut with the lingering hurt of affront, but he gulped that down and asked shortly:

"Did you suspicion me?"

Tolliver Talbott came over and laid a hand on his arm.

"In like case," he said simply, "I'd have had a bound to ask my own boy questions to the same amount—but what I suspicions or don't suspicion ain't so important after all. This business is bigger than that."

His face grew shadowy with anxiety, and he spoke again as one deeply preoccupied:

"The McCalebs will suspicion you, son, or make pretense of it."

"The McCalebs," answered the boy argumentatively, "aren't held in such high repute that many will believe them."

The little sheriff let the curb of his self-control slip so far as to speak with sudden and passionate vehemence:

"Don't be misguided! Jedge Bratchell here has still got a lavish of enemies that will fall in line behind the McCalebs. Old 'Red Bill' Featherstone is dead an' his crowd are deportin' themselves plumb pious right now—but they don't love the man that fo'ced them to be law-abidin'. When Red Bill had men murdered, Old Jase's brother was his boss killer. It used to be that jedges an' sheriffs hyarabout succored their friends an' punished their enemies. There's many a waggin' tongue would love to say it's still so."

Muir Bratchell turned to look abstractedly out of his window, and Talbott went on:

"This is a matter out of which his enemies will seek to 'stroy Jedge Bratchell, an' they'll strive their damnedest. God knows Little Jase needed killin', an' needed it plenty—I promised to

stomp out ther whole den of 'em myself if they didn't walk straight an' heedful—an' I meant it. But this boy was kilt cowardwise—an' the other boy was an upstandin' lad. He was shot from behind, too. Folks won't forget them things."

Bratchell turned from his mountain gazing and spoke slowly:

"You're thinkin' of me, Tolliver. You've always been a right true an' faithful friend. You're thinkin' of me more than the law."

"You *are* the law!" exclaimed the officer vehemently. "Let 'em 'stroy you an' thar ain't no more law hyarabout!" Then he became calmer. "The McCalebs have already kept them a lawyer to prosecute *some*body," he announced, using the hill parlance for "retained." "They've kept Brook Seely."

"He's no friend of mine," observed Bratchell dryly.

"He ain't no fool about me, neither!" the sheriff snorted. "He's out thar in the hills now nosin' round like a houndawg, an' he norrates that by nightfall he 'lows to sw'ar out warrants. He don't say who for."

"In view of the facts," suggested the judge, "we'd better be takin' thought."

"They'll aim to accuse Cawdy," declared the officer soberly, "an' we've got to find somebody else that had a motive. Joe Castle brought word in. He was the first man on the ground—an' he's kind of mysteriouslike."

Bratchell laughed in spite of his heavy anxieties.

"You can forget Castle," he announced decisively. "I know enough of him to give him a clean bill of health. Is there no clew as to what became of Matt Lacey?"

The sheriff shook his head.

"Nary one. No man has seed hide nor hair of him since he broke jail an' took leg-bail. I reckon he's far gone by now."

"Far gone or hidin' out near by," amended the judge. "Queer how he managed to saw the window bars! But he was a killer an' he's gone."

"He got away quite a spell back," demurred the officer. "I reckon he made tracks for the West. Moreover, what grievance did he have against either of these boys? Young Jase wasn't growed up when Lacey went away after killin' Luke Tubb, an' Lacey didn't know Sample."

Bratchell nodded acquiescence for the undeniable logic of that statement, yet he pursued the subject.

"Motives may be obscure—yet strong," he argued. "Lacey is runnin' away from a murder trial after a long while of freedom. If he came suddenly on some one who recognized him, he might seek to silence that witness. If he were seen by a stranger in the act, he might silence the stranger, too."

"He might," admitted Talbott. "But I don't take much stock in that theory, jedge. Lacey's gone clean out of old Kaintuck, as sure as I'm a foot high—an' he went some days afore this thing come to pass. We've got need to find us somebody else, I reckon."

CHAPTER XI.

CONFESSION.

IT was not until the next day that Attorney Brook Seely, accompanied by Sheriff Talbott, came into Bratchell's office where the judge sat with his stepson. By that time the judge had received over the wire a briefly poignant message:

HOLD MY BOY'S BODY TILL ARRIVAL. AM COMING AT ONCE BY AIR AND RAIL.

JOHN K. SAMPLE.

The visiting lawyer's shrewd face was somewhat embarrassed, and he made his beginning haltingly.

"I thought it wise to consult with your honor," he suggested mildly, "before proceeding any further."

"If this case it to be tried before me," replied Bratchell gravely, "there can't be any discussion of it out of court—beyond those features in which the judge may aid in getting the investigation under way. I don't quite see why you come to me instead of the commonwealth's attorney."

Seely's expression was pensive as he laid his hat down on the table.

"Of course I am in contact with the commonwealth's attorney," he announced, "and we are in accord. I have been retained by the family of young McCaleb to assist in the prosecution."

"Have you found some one to prosecute?"

"I hope to have done so, soon." The lawyer paused and cleared his throat, then he went on a shade hesitantly: "Your honor must pardon me if I speak with a frankness which may prove embarrassing—not less to me than to your honor."

"Why," inquired Bratchell, "should a conference between a judge and a member of the bar be embarrassing to either?"

Again Mr. Seely cleared his throat and ran a finger under his collar.

"It appears," he suggested, "that there was bad blood between your stepson and young McCaleb."

"You can speak of Cawdon as my son," Bratchell corrected him bluntly, "and if you mean that you regard my son as a suspect, of course the case won't come before me for hearing. In that event, I see less than ever why we should confer."

"I wasn't quite through. If you will hear me out, you'll see my purpose is not improper. Your son and young McCaleb had clashed once and each had been wounded."

"And once again," Tolliver Talbott cut in, "only one was wounded and that one was Cawdon."

"Which indicates a prima facie motive of enmity," continued the lawyer, disregarding the interruption. "However, that is not the point I came here to discuss. The presiding judge couldn't consider such things in advance." He paused, then went on: "Young Jase's father tells me that your sheriff here came to his house some time ago and threatened the whole family with death. He pistol-whipped Old Jase and abused the family."

Tolliver Talbott smiled grimly, but he inquired blandly:

"Are you aimin' to accuse me of this doubled-up murder, Mr. Seely?"

"I am most certainly not accusing you, sheriff," declared the attorney with an almost perceptible haste, "except of being temperamentally unfit to act as sheriff in this particular case. I want his honor to put your duties, so far as they affect the unprovoked murder of young McCaleb, in other hands. It is plain that you could scarcely coöperate with the prosecution. You threatened this boy, among others—and he's dead."

"How about young Sample?" inquired Talbott.

Seely shook his head as he made response:

"I have no concern with the case of young Sample. I represent the McCaleb family. But it is to be remembered in that connection that Cawdon Bratchell, there, had a quarrel with young Sample, too, which gave rise to a fist fight. It is a marked coincidence that both men fell close together. Apparently they were shot within minutes of each other—and both through the back—and an enmity for both had been manifested by Cawdon Bratchell."

Cawdon had been sitting silently against the wall. Now he rose and his face muscles stiffened, but his father raised a monitory hand, and in obedience to the signal, Cawdon sat down again without a word.

"You seem to keep harking back to intimations of guilt, directed against my son," said the judge. "I have told you

that if he is accused, I must vacate the bench as one who is personally biased. If that condition arises, we have no relations in this matter. Please confine yourself to questions we can properly discuss."

"I am not accusing your son, however," persisted the lawyer. "I thought at first that I should have to do so—and it distressed me. It is precisely because the trail has led elsewhere that I have come to you."

For once the eyes of the three other men mirrored the attentiveness of challenged interest, and the lawyer prolonged his pause as if to gain its fullness of dramatic effect.

"I have found a witness—not an eyewitness—but one to an incident before the fact," went on Brook Seely impressively, "and since it has a vital bearing on this whole affair, I would like to have him come in here. He is waiting in the hall."

"Why should I hear witnesses in advance of trial?" inquired the judge icily.

But Talbott cut in:

"Let him have his way. Let's hear this man, jedge," he suggested in a silky voice. "I've got a rather to know what facts Lawyer Seely is goin' on, in askin' to have me ousted from the case."

Bratchell shrugged one shoulder, and, as they sat waiting, Brook Seely went to the door with the unctuous mannerism of an actor, opened it, beckoned to some one beyond, and then stood aside as Deadear Posen came into the room.

"This man, judge," announced the lawyer, "is hard of hearin'. In fact, he's stone deaf, but he can tell what you say by lookin' at your lips move."

"I know Mr. Posen," answered the judge shortly. "I reckon we all do."

"Yes, your honor."

The lawyer turned toward the deaf man and spoke in a low voice but with an exaggerated lip movement:

"Deadear, tell the judge just what you told me."

The man who had made his entrance on the stage of the drama was gaunt and wore an unshaven face, but his eyes had the sharpened alertness of organs doing double duty.

"I was broguein' acrost ther ridge of Big Blue one evenin'," he said with the dull voice of the deaf, "an' I come up right suddintlike on young Jase McCaleb an' ther gal Lakeery from over ter ther fotched-on women's school."

He paused, and Cawdon Bratchell bent intently forward in his chair.

"Ther boy he was aimin' ter hug an' kiss ther gal," went on the witness, "an' 'peared like she wouldn't hev none of hit. She was clawin' an' kickin' at him like a wild cat—an' I seed he was actin' kinderly rough with her—though like es not he didn't aim ter do her no more harm then ter steal him a kiss or two and——"

"Just tell us what occurred. Don't construe it!" warned the judge sharply.

"I seed I'd better break hit up, inasmuch as ther gal was so bodaciously flustered," Deadear resumed, "but yit I 'lowed Leetle Jase, he mout fly mad at me—an' I didn't seek ter displeasure him too fur. Them McCalebs they're all hot-headed."

"Do you mean you failed to interfere?"

The sternness of the judge's voice was lost on the witness, but the motion of his lips and the light in his eyes served a like purpose.

"No, jedge, I did cut in on 'em," he made hasty response. "Only I done hit atter a more heedful fashion. I slipped back a piece an' then come on ergin, singin' right loudlike. I 'lowed he'd hear me—an' break away afore I got thar—an' in that wise I'd save myself from gittin' drawed inter a fracas."

"Go on."

"So then I came sa'nterin' back slowlike, an' when I was a leetle piece off I hid in the la'rel an' looked out. I seed ther gal standin' thar, all atremblelike

with blazin' eyes, an' Jase he stud some two-three paces off from her. His back was toward me. I don't know what he was a-sayin'."

"Go on."

"Ther gal, she was a-facin' me full squar' an' I heered her say——"

"You heard her say?"

"I *calls* hit hearin', jedge. Hit come ter ther same amount. I seed her lips. She was sayin'. 'I aims ter kill ye, Jase McCaleb! I aims ter kill ye my own self!' Them was her very words, jedge; 'I aims ter kill ye!' "

Young Cawdon had risen to his feet again. He was ghostly pale and the veins were standing out on his temples, but Talbott laid a forearm across his shoulders and cautioned:

"Wait a minute! Let's see where we stand."

"So it would seem," came the lawyer's low-voiced conclusion, "that we have a more direct motive than your son's, judge—a motive of revenge and a proved threat."

"Do you fancy," inquired Judge Bratchell coldly, "that any jury would convict a woman for defending herself against the unwelcome advances of a brute?"

"Not if she did it then and there—and shot from in front," declared Seely pointedly. "But later on—and from behind—that takes it out of the realm of justification and spells pure revenge." He paused, while Cawdon stood gulping down a lump in his throat with veins jerking in his wrists and temples.

Then the lawyer continued in a regretful voice:

"Lord knows, I don't want to prosecute a woman. Old Jase McCaleb himself would be more content if I punished a man. Perhaps I shan't even ask the extreme penalty. Perhaps the girl may get off with a penitentiary term. But the law doesn't choose its defendants. This was a brutal murder—and I seem to have no choice. I must proceed against Lakeery Paston. It will spoil her life in any event, of course—and my duty is a hard one, but at least it lets your boy out, judge."

Muir Bratchell's eyes were slits and his lips parted, but before he spoke, young Cawdon broke away from the sheriff's restraining arm.

"That's a damned lie!" he gasped. "It's a damned lie and I know it!"

"How do you know it, Cawdon?" demanded Brook Seely eagerly.

The boy's voice came vehement but decisive:

"I know it—because I'm the man you want! I know she didn't kill Jase—because I killed him myself!"

"Why did you kill him?" asked the lawyer quickly; and Judge Bratchell raised a hand as he came with an effort to his feet.

He looked like a man suddenly and mortally stricken, and for an instant it seemed as though he would not be able to stand on his feet. Then he steadied himself and straightened.

"I shall, of course—vacate the bench," he said slowly. "And being no longer—the judge—I am your lawyer—Cawdon." He moistened his lips and went on imperatively: "I forbid you to say another word—except on my advice."

Then the judge wheeled on Brook Seely and his eyes were jets of concentrated flame.

"You can apply to my successor for your new sheriff," he said shortly. "And now, you damned rat, begone from my office before I kill you!"

Events had been trooping since Brook Seely's visit, and from the window of his chambers on the second story of the courthouse, Judge Bratchell could look down on the squat jailhouse that sat morosely at its right.

Now it held a somber and galling interest, for Cawdon was in one of its cells.

Sheriff Talbott sat with his old friend,

and as the judge's eyes kept wandering painfully toward the unlovely dungeon, he spoke slowly:

"I reckon, jedge, Cawdy won't be hampered thar long. The county jedge will be like to allow bail—an' no matter how high it is"—he broke off and looked diffidently aside for a moment—"I reckon betwixt us we can get it all right."

Bratchell shook his head sorrowfully.

"The county judge doesn't like me, Tolliver," he offered reminder; "and this is a murder case—with a confession made in the presence of three witnesses." His lips jerked spasmodically and he added: "It's a right sorry state of affairs when you and I are two of the three that will have to admit on oath he made that confession."

The sheriff rose from his seat.

"You don't 'low that that confession means anything, do you, jedge? The boy's face was honest when he gave us his word that he knew naught of the business. His face was franzied when he confessed. It was right easy to discarn he was lyin' out of the whole cloth to save the gal."

Bratchell did not at once answer. His pained preoccupation seemed to deafen his ears, and Tolliver went on:

"It was sheer damn folly for the boy to speak up so quick an' unthoughted. He might have knowed we could have dealt with the matter better than him. That damn shyster's whole business here was to trap him into a confession! It wasn't ever the gal he was really after. It wasn't even Cawdy, on his own account. He was hittin' at you—the dirty rotter!"

Muir Bratchell roused himself and answered dully:

"However, Cawdon confessed—an' it's enough for the State to go on."

Talbott's face brightened momentarily as he offered reminder:

"The county jedge don't like Brook Seely no more than what he likes you. He's like to curry favor by allowin' a mod'rate bail."

Bratchell raised his eyes and spoke with a heavy weariness:

"That would be only a temporary comfort," he replied. "The trial lies ahead. Of course, I saw Cawdon's motive when he rushed into that confession before we could warn him. His immature mind and his impulse to protect the girl swept him into folly. All he saw was that she was going to be charged with murder—an' he struck out in her defense in the one way that occurred to him."

"That will all come out in time, jedge. It's just a word-of-mouth confession—it wasn't made on oath."

Muir Bratchell found scant comfort in that assertion.

"I've talked myself black in the face, Tolliver," he said. "I've been over there in the jailhouse with Cawdy all mornin'. I've tried to make him think of me as his lawyer rather than as his father. He won't change a syllable of what he said to us here. He won't explain a circumstance or answer a question. We might have an alibi if he'd point the way. He won't. He's set his mind on saving Lakeery—and I can't move him an inch."

"What does he say about his first statement—the one he made to us?"

"Only that he takes it back—that he has disgraced me and he wants me to disown him. He says the pinch came and he proved to be the son of Dawes Fleetwell after all—not mine."

"So he's got his eyes crossed an' his head sot like a balky mule, has he?"

Bratchell's voice seemed close to breaking, and there was in it the note of desperation:

"Yes, and it will just about send him to the chair."

"An' you, jedge?"

The question came almost gruffly, and the judge snapped back his head.

"Me?" he demanded dully. "It ends

me, of course. If they convict him, I'll resign. My usefulness will be ended; but that's neither here nor there."

"They haven't convicted him yet, jedge. Betwixt us, we'll find the man—or the men—that did this murder. Have you studied out any theory?"

Bratchell rose from his chair and now his tone became steadier.

"You heard what Deadear said," he offered reminder. "But he probably didn't tell it all—or didn't understand it all. It seems certain to me that what happened over there wasn't just a wild boy's escapade. It may have been more. I believe it was attempted assault. The girl may have had good right to kill Jase McCaleb."

"All she's got to do, if that's so, is to come out an' say so," observed Talbott with conviction. "But how about his bein' shot from behind? An' how about young Sample? Was she like to kill her friend, too?"

"That," declared the judge, "will be the damning evidence against Cawdon—before a jury. He is the one person who would seem to have the motive of bad blood against both, and yet——" He paused.

"Yet what, jedge?"

"Yet suppose my conjecture is right. Suppose Jase annoyed the girl again—suppose she had armed herself. Suppose, too, that this time young Sample, knowing her danger, was following and interfered. Mightn't Jase have gotten in his shot as he would seek to get it in from behind—an' killed Sample?"

"It's p'int-blank what he would do, but wouldn't the gal come right out an' tell that?"

"Would she—when Jase was shot in the back, too?"

"You mean that she flew mad—an' jest mowed him down—like he deserved, but like a body couldn't admit before a jury?"

Judge Bratchell was gazing down at his desk with a forehead gathered in furrows of concentration.

"Sometimes bein' shot in the back doesn't mean what it seems to," he suggested. "I've known men to draw an' shoot, standin' face to face with an enemy—an' then to find that, by reason of the enemy's havin' wheeled in an impulse of flight—the shot entered from behind. That might happen to a woman, too—a woman under great stress of emotion an' not quick enough with her gun hand to stop in time."

"Yes," mused the sheriff. "All them things might come to pass."

"But," went on the judge, "that's all conjecture. That's all a father seeking a way out for his boy. Unsupported by proof, it would sound fantastic."

"What does the gal say?"

"Not much that sheds light on the situation," announced the judge briefly. "She's nigh to a breakdown an' we have to go mighty easy with her. She says that she did threaten Jase—an' that she meant it—but that she knows nothing of either shootin'. I think the girl is over at the jail now. Miss Moreland is with her."

CHAPTER XII.

LAKEERY'S REVELATION.

BUT Miss Moreland did not go into the cell where an indulgent jailer permitted the prisoner to receive his guest. She sat in a wretched antechamber, with her fine face wearing a stamp of misery and accused herself, as overconscientious women will, because she had not, with some occult prescience, divined the dangers in advance and averted their result of tragedy.

It was a pallid and shaken girl who went through the barred door of the mountain jailhouse, and when she saw Cawdon sitting there on his cot, the gasp that broke from her throat was a sound of choking distress, and she took the two or three steps toward him, weaving giddily, until he held her sup-

portingly in his arms. She stood sobbing out:

"It's all my fault, Cawdy! It's all my fault!"

"Don't, for God's sake, don't!" he pleaded. "It isn't your fault at all, Lakeery! You haven't done anything wrong! The damn rattlesnake needed killin'!"

"Yes, he—he needed killin'," she broke out impetuously. "But he wasn't worth it."

The boy sought to quiet and comfort her, and his voice was steady.

"You're well worth dyin' for, Lakeery," he said, "if it comes to that. But why didn't you tell me—about Jase?"

"I didn't dast to tell you at first, Cawdy. That's why I wouldn't suffer you to cross Big Blue with me. That's why I asked Maynard to go along with me instead."

"Because you were afraid of Jase?"

Despite her distress, the ghost of anger rose, and through the tears of terror and misery, her eyes blazed.

"Not because I was afeared of him," she retorted, "but because I didn't want to have to kill him."

"Then," he told her bitterly, "it was all my fault from the start. Maynard was protectin' you an' I warned him off. I made him fight me—an' he never gave away a breath of your secret. You were aimin' to safeguard me from harm—an' I was drivin' you straight into it all the——"

"You didn't know, Cawdy. If I'd told you straight out——"

He flung back his head.

"If you'd told me sooner," he declared, and his words snapped like a pistol shot, "I'd have tracked him down straightway! He was my man to kill!"

"Oh, Cawdy!" she sobbed as she drew away and stood trembling against the wall. "I wish I was dead!"

The boy stood with clenched hands, rigid and preoccupied, as though for the moment he did not see her, or as though he were rather seeing the other scene, the narration of which brought him out of his chair there in his father's office and flung him into a false confession.

"And so," he said with a bitterness that blistered him, "and so I stood off gettin' sore about triflin' things—and compelled you to defend yourself."

At first the meaning of his words did not seem to penetrate her almost trance-like preoccupation; then slowly her eyes began to widen with a dawning and horrified realization, and she gave back from him as though he had struck her. Her voice was faint and struggling:

"What do you—do you mean, Cawdy? You talk almost like—I killed Jase myself—an' yet you've said—you did it."

Cawdon's recovery was quick, not so quick as he meant it to be, because the world seemed shaken around him, yet speedy enough to betray nothing of its faltering to her agitation.

"No! My God—no!" he exclaimed. "Of course I don't mean that! Haven't I already confessed?"

Yet he had until this moment not doubted that Jase had fallen under her weapon. A woman's right to defend herself against brutality is inalienable—but the shot in the back would riddle that defense.

Now, in the dismay of her eyes and voice, he read her entire innocence of any participation, and for an instant his whole sacrifice seemed needless. But in the next moment he told himself with bleak conviction that her innocence could not be proven, and that her only salvation lay in his maintaining his stubborn attitude—in sticking to his suicidal story.

Indeed, as he sought to think clearly through the confusion of these chaotic moments, it appeared even more imperative for him to shoulder the blame than it had been before. Lakeery told him that she had not killed Jase—and for him that was enough. To the prose-

cution it would mean nothing but self-shielding assertion, and the prosecution was resolved to convict one of the two of them. Manifestly it must be himself.

Yet now it was different. There was no blood on her hands, no haunting horror to scar her life. As for himself, she would in time forget him. Death, even disgrace, seemed easier to face.

"No, Lakeery," he declared fervently, "what I meant was that I denied you Maynard's protection crossing Big Blue alone." He paused, then went on, talking hurriedly:

"When they ask you how I knew about—about you an' Jase—let 'em think you told me long ago. You don't understand now, but that's the only way to help me." He was talking tumultuously so that she would not have time to see the weakness or question the logic of his argument. "Lawyers—even my father—may try to persuade you, to counsel you otherwise. But they don't know what I know. You must do as I say—for my sake."

The voice of Miss Moreland came from outside the door.

"You can come again, Lakeery," she said steadily. "But now we must be getting back across the ridge."

For a moment they hung in the embrace of leave-taking, and the ugly seeming of the cowardice he was assuming, that cowardice which kills without facing the foe, swept sickeningly over the boy.

"I want you to know this," he declared desperately. "It's true, whatever anybody swears to—I didn't kill Maynard Sample—and I didn't know the bullet would hit Jase in the back."

She gasped and nodded, but her lips refused to say "Good-by."

Lakeery came of a stock which had, through generations, faced the violences of feudal enmities and their bitter consequences. In her ancestry the women as well as the men, had been of the stuff of stoics, but her own fiber had been altered and softened by new experiences. She was a convert to the new order, and all new orders are intermediate.

Taught in the school of the "fotched-on women" to deplore the old illiteracies and the old hates, she could no longer front the onsweep of tragedy with the grim-eyed fatalism of her grandmothers. Now, face to face with the raw cruelties of her blood heritage, the old shield of a dull yet merciful acceptance fell and left her defenseless.

Lakeery clasped her hands to her face. She swayed on her feet, then crumpled down, and Cawdon was holding her in his arms and calling to Miss Moreland.

"It's been too much for her," said the Bluegrass woman simply. "We must have Doctor Brand see her."

Later—but that was not at the jail, of course—Doctor Brand gave her ruling with a grave face.

"It's things like this," she said, "which make me sometimes doubt the value of our work here. We're seeking to alter and straighten a warped code—but one rooted in generations. Between the place we find them and the place we seek to bring them to, lies a middle ground in which they haven't developed the new defenses, and have lost the old. This child has broken down nervously. It will be months before she'll stand on safe ground again."

Between the Honorable Alec Sarver, commonwealth attorney of that circuit, and Muir Bratchell, the judge, had stood a long and tested friedship, and now it was with a heavy step that the prosecutor knocked on the judge's door and entered in response to the invitation, "Come in!"

"Judge," he began slowly, "I've come into this room right oftentimes of late years, but I never came in before with such a heavy weight on my heart."

Bratchell inclined his head and his voice held the gruffness with which undemonstrative men sometimes seek to smother a show of sentiment.

"I know, Alec, I know," the judge said, and after a moment added, "We wouldn't have pulled together as yokemates so long if either one of us had been given to dodging duties that hit home hard. A prosecutor can't draw lines betwixt friend and foe."

"There's one thing I can do," suggested the State's lawyer. "I might pull out of this case—on the ground of our long relationship."

Bratchell shook his head and there was unequivocal decisiveness in the gesture.

"No, Alec, it wouldn't do. If we'd availed to compass anything here, it's been because we've brought folks to confidence us—to believe that in our court there's no difference between man and man. That must go on—even now."

"What do you aim to do, judge," the attorney demanded, "besides stepping down from the bench?"

"I aim," said the judge shortly, "to fight like hell." After a moment he added in a tone of melancholy reminiscence, "Alec, you know the history of the early days in Kentucky. You recollect about Governor Desha?"

"I recall," answered Sarver slowly, "that while General Desha was governor, his son Isaac was convicted of murder."

"Convicted—and retried and convicted again—and sentenced to be hanged," amplified Bratchell. "The governor had the power to pardon his boy—but he refused to use it and the boy refused to ask it." He paused and went on in a labored fashion: "The governor moved heaven and earth to defend his son—just as I aim to do—but he let the law take its course—until he couldn't endure it any longer."

"I'm not very clear in my history, judge. I don't recollect the details."

"They set the day for the hangin'," went on the circuit judge, "and the governor still held out. Then, on the morning of that hangman's Friday—they did it at noon those times—the boy cut his throat. But he didn't die; an' they were takin' him to the gallows in a cart, after the fashion of the times——"

"I remember now," said Alec Sarver hastily, anxious to cut short so painful a recital. "Then the governor *did* sign the pardon."

"Signed it," said Bratchell, "and at the same time sent his resignation to the legislature—as no longer worthy of public confidence. Leastwise, that's the story."

There was a long and painful silence; then Sarver said steadily:

"I'm willin' an' anxious to pull out, jedge. But if I stay in, I only know one way to prosecute—right up to the hilt."

"I know that. But you are a fair man and maybe I can show you before it's too late that the murderer was some one else."

"My God!" exclaimed the lawyer. "I'd plum' delight to be convinced of that!" His face clouded as he added, "But I'm afraid it would take some showing."

"As far as you've gone," asked Bratchell, somewhat diffidently, "does it shape pretty bad—for Cawdon, I mean?"

It was as if the barrier of the personal, of tense emotion, which had stood between the men, dropped with the question, and as if they could once more talk as lawyers. The prosecutor leaned forward:

"My mind is open—more than open. You know that. But so far only one defendant has been brought forward—with an adequate motive—and all crime must rest on a motive."

"You mean my boy, I take it?"

The lawyer nodded.

"Yes. I've heard your theory about

the girl; and I know Seely started off on that tack. But Seely was insincere. He was only playing on Cawdon's emotions. He was using the girl to decoy the boy into a confession—and he got it."

Bratchell put his next question stubbornly. "Why mightn't it have been Lakeery—full justified yet afraid to admit it?" The other man's eyes were unresponsive. "If the girl acted in self-defense—or in that half-maddened vengeance which is perhaps close kin to self-defense—it leaves the case of young Sample up in the air, and an effective prosecution will seek to link those two murders. Only one human being seems to have quarreled with both the victims. You have talked with Mr. Sample, I suppose?"

"So soon as he got to town," answered the judge. "He came here with the haste of a man borrowin' fire. I'd telegraphed him, an' he naturally turned to me."

It was with the simple unconsciousness of a stressed spirit that the judge slipped back into the phrases of his boyhood.

"He came to me with the sore sperit of a father that has lost his boy—an' I could feel for him. He was grateful because his son wouldn't have need to lay in an unmourned grave."

The prosecutor nodded, and the judge went on:

"But since I'd sent that telegram, I was threated with losin' a son, too. My boy was charged with slayin' his boy. We stood on opposite sides of the docket—in a murder case. So when I'd made my manners with him, I sent him on to you."

"Now," said Sarver soberly, "he can see nothing except the guilt of Cawdon. He's a lawyer himself. He harps on the obvious motive there; on the want of motive otherwhere. His boy was penniless; there was no chance of robbery having inspired violence. And he had no enemies hereabouts. Mr. Sample's sore spirit is cryin' out for legal vengeance. He'd been seekin' to locate his boy for a long time. Now he finds him murdered and seeks to avenge him. If it takes his whole fortune he'll go after Cawdon to the last ditch."

"My boy has borne a good repute heretofore," observed the judge. "That ought to stand him in stead now."

Sarver shook his head in sorrowful negation.

"Those things work out queerly, jedge," he said. "Folks are like sheep in follerin' a lead. I reckon it was the way both shots came from behind, though God knows that's been condoned before this. I never heard Cawdon called anything save 'Judge Bratchell's boy' before this business happened. Now I don't hear him called anything save 'Dawes Fleetwell's boy'—a young feller with bad blood in his veins."

The judge's face stiffened and paled visibly.

"Old Brother Bud Featherstone, the preacher," went on Sarver soberly, "has been abroad in the land like a prophet cryin' in the wilderness—an' he wields a certain influence."

"I know him right well," came the grave response. "When I held the office you hold now, I penetensheried his kinsman, Red Bill Featherstone; an' bein' a preacher of peace, Brother Bud's never forgiven me."

"Now," the State's lawyer told him, "he's quotin' you, jedge. He's carryin' the words you spoke in that trial up to the head waters of every creek, an' on to the cabins of the ignorant branch-water folks. He's seekin' to show that this law-abidin' business is all a case of whose ox is gored—an' I'm afraid a good many folks are hearkenin' to him."

"What words of mine does he quote, Alec?"

"The words you spoke to the jury in closin', jedge: 'If you suffer this man

to go at large, it will not be because you doubt his guilt. Take the case an' do your duty—or wear his brand of Cain along with him!' "

Muir Bratchell shoved back his chair. At length he said:

"I'm thinkin' of Cawdon's mother. 'Pears like she went through storm enough before she came safe into port. The picture you paint is a right hopeless one."

"I'm afraid so, Muir. The defense is fightin' against the hate of a right considerable part of the home people, an' the wealth an' legal power of a notable foreigner besides." He rose and bent forward. "After all, my part in this prosecution may require only lending the color of my office to the work. Sample will bring on the shrewdest an' most adroit criminal lawyers that money can hire, an' Brook Seely will try to keep pace with his fast legal company. Do you wonder that I'd liever get out, jedge? Say the word an' I'll do it yet."

Muir Bratchell stood with a drawn face, but he shook his head doggedly.

"I still say what I said before, Alec. Stick to your post and do your damnedest. Just as I mean to do mine."

"The best hope I see, jedge," commented Sarver from the threshold, "is for you to give us another defendant with a stronger seeming of guilt."

"That might be easier," admitted the judge dully, "if my client would help me—but a boy's romantic love is hell to cope with, Alec. He's bent on sacrificin' himself for the girl. He won't talk. He won't lift a hand. He says he's ruinin' me an' that I ought to wash my hands of him——"

Then into the tired eyes of Muir Bratchell flashed a sudden and burning light, and his voice snapped with electrical vehemence.

"But I don't aim to quit! I don't aim to shake hands with my boy in the death house or the State prison—I aim to do it in my own courtroom—when the jury says: 'Not guilty!' "

To be continued in the next issue.

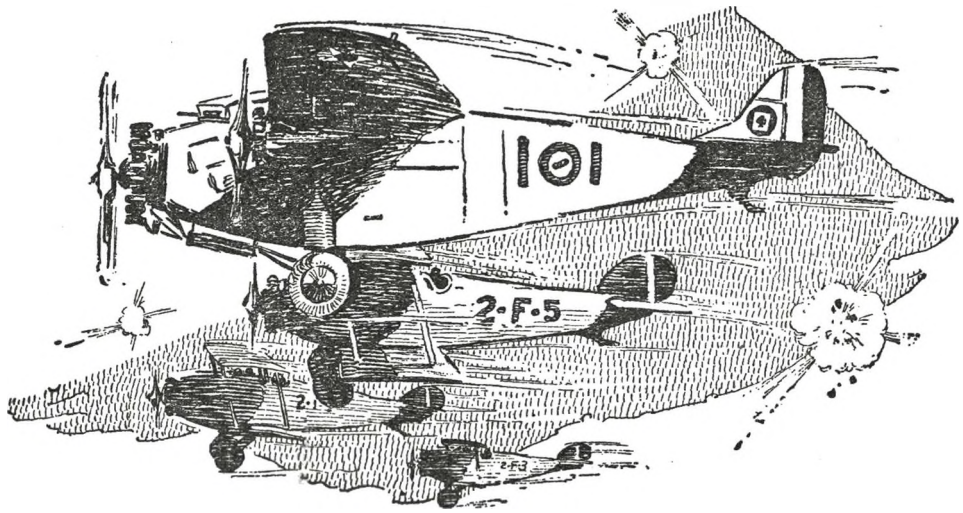
THE MAN WITH THE MIRACLE MEMORY

WHEN Representative Theodore E. Burton of Ohio died last October, Washington officialdom lost the most remarkable memory in its midst. Burton, who was an old bachelor, had served in both House and Senate for many years and for a long time was chairman of the House committee on rivers and harbors. So tenacious and accurate was his memory that, when he brought the rivers and harbors appropriations bill before the House, he knew the depth and length of every navigable stream in the United States, the depth of every harbor on the coasts, and the tonnage and value of all the commerce brought into and sent out of each one of those harbors.

He had an equally reliable memory for all sorts of things—bits of history, dates, and unique and interesting gossip about persons of ancient and modern times. It was said of him that he never forgot anything that had once attracted his interest. There was one thing, however, which he could never recall. That was the telephone number of his own residence. He was asked one day to explain this peculiarity.

"Oh, I don't know why it is," he replied; "except perhaps that my telephone number is of no interest—to me at any rate."

A War-time Flyer, Unable to Land Without Killing Himself, Decides to Die Gloriously.



In Mid-air

By R. J. McSWINEY

SIX thousand feet the aneroid registered, and the objective was already beginning to take definite form in the blurred landscape below.

A cluster of drab, canvas buildings, whose weirdly painted forms were hard to discern against the sea of mud constituting their background, was all that could, as yet, be seen of the airdrome that had been picked out for that morning's bombing raid into the enemy's lines.

It was a chill winter morning, with swiftly moving, low-lying clouds scurrying ceaselessly across the gray sky—ideal for such an expedition.

The squadron, flying high, changed course whenever the fleeting clouds interposed themselves between it and the crews manning the anti-aircraft guns below. These, having to estimate where each change of course would carry their targets, were firing largely at random and their shooting was correspondingly poor. The smoke from their bursting shells, appearing sullenly among the clouds like sinister wads of black cotton wool, dotted the sky everywhere but in the direct path of the raiding machines.

In the rearmost plane, forming the left tip of the wedge formation, Charley Reid was straining his eyes to obtain a correct mental impression of his target and to ascertain the relation of his altitude and speed to the objective on the ground. This would enable him to determine the crucial moment at which to operate the release gear and send hurtling earthward the three hundred pounds of concentrated destructive force, which he carried slung from the undercarriage of his machine.

He was flying an old type of tractor biplane, which, having gone out of date

for fighting purposes, had been assigned to raiding duties. Not being equipped for regular bombing, these converted planes carried but a single heavy torpedo, slung from the undercarriage in such a way that it could be released at will by the pilot from his seat, by means of a simple lever. The nose of the bomb is released first and, as the heavy fore end falls away from the plane, the wind catches it and drives it off the rear hook, whence it falls earthward, guided by the vanes and gradually assuming a more vertical descent as the resistance of the air overcomes its forward motion.

With his eyes now glued on the indistinct blur that represented his target, Reid made a rapid mental calculation to determine the horizontal distance from his objective at which to release his missile so that it should strike the ground at the desired point. A glance at the map pinned down in front of him showed that, when vertically above a certain road crossing, he would be at the required distance.

The crossing showed up plainly to his view as he rode past a rift in the clouds. He modified his course slightly to bring himself, the landmark, and the objective into correct alignment, and focused his gaze on the target, whose location was, now, clearly discernible, even through the scudding mist.

There! The leading plane of the squadron had dropped its messenger of death and defiance, and the large white feather of smoke that drifted quickly away from the spot proved that the pilot, not bothered by "Accurate Archie," the anti-aircraft gun, had been able to take careful observations and had registered a direct hit. They were evidently going to make a good job of it!

There, again! And again! In quick succession, now, the white feathers sprang up among the crowded hangars, and Reid could even hear the dull reports of the explosions. Figures, too, could be observed running wildly to the shelter of the trenches dug by the far-sighted Boche in anticipation of such an eventuality.

It would soon be Reid's turn. His hand went out to the release mechanism and he glanced downward, over the leading edge of his lower plane. No, not quite yet! A second more and—there! He was directly above his landmark and headed straight for the group of hangars. He pulled the lever smartly and, immediately, set himself firmly to meet the sudden jump of the plane on losing three hundred pounds of ballast.

Tensely, he clung to the wheel; but, to his gradually dawning surprise, no jump resulted. Instead, the plane began to behave in a most disconcerting manner. It tilted and side-slipped violently, first one way and then another, throbbing incessantly as though from the vibration of an immense spring and shaking so severely that he feared it might come to pieces at any moment.

Had he bungled? Was he hit? were his first thoughts. But no! Past accidents had taught him how the plane would have acted if such had been the case. This was something different and unprecedented in his whole experience. Quickly recovering from his surprise, he steadied the jolting machine and started to climb back behind the clouds as rapidly as he could. As he rose through the enveloping mist, the peculiar antics of his machine furnished him with the explanation of their origin. Evidently, the release gear had worked smoothly, freeing the nose of the bomb, but its other end, for some reason, must have failed to become unhooked from the rear pin. He was now carrying the torpedo suspended vertically beneath him from one end, swinging crazily in the wind, and its erratic oscillations were threatening to overturn the plane, which responded to every heave with uncomfortable joltings. He smiled

grimly in spite of himself; this was indeed a case of the tail wagging the dog!

Then the full significance of his position dawned on him. On the action of the release gear, the bomb had automatically become detonated, so that, now, the lightest graze on its sensitive nose cap would undoubtedly cause it to explode; he shuddered to think with what result to himself and his plane.

Realizing the extent of his danger and the necessity of freeing himself of the encumbrance, he tried to shake it off the hook, where it had caught. Nose-diving steeply, until the jerk of his machine told him that the bomb had reached the rearmost limit of its swing, he zoomed violently, trying to lift his plane at as steep an angle as practicable. But, unfortunately, the old E. 8 was not built for rapid climbing, and all his efforts resulted only in increasing the stress on his plane to such an extent that he gave up these maneuvers in fear of buckling his wings.

He steadied his plane again, and looked round him. The remainder of the squadron was nowhere to be seen; it was back at the airdrome by this time, he supposed. He looked downward to get his bearings and started off after them. They might be able to suggest something to rid him of his unpleasant appendage. Under the friendly cover of the clouds, he opened up his engine and was soon circling round his own flying field, at as low an altitude as he dared, in the hope that his comrades would see his plight and come to his assistance, though, as a matter of fact, he did not see how they could do anything to help him.

He dared not land. The shock of the bomb on the ground would certainly be sufficient to explode it, however easily he might attempt the feat. He could not stay up in the air forever, that was equally certain; and, besides, he had only enough gas to carry him for a few hours longer. Was he doomed? He realized that he was unless something was done, and done immediately.

His maneuvers had the result, first, of bringing everybody out from the hangars to watch him, and, then, of sending them hurrying off to shelter, in fear that the bomb was in danger of falling off and dropping among them.

For a few moments, he was at a loss for some means of communicating with the ground, and he cursed the parsimonious policy that had refused to equip these converted machines with wireless.

With difficulty, he extracted a notebook from his pocket and, steadying the plane to reduce the incessant jolting as much as possible, he set about the awkward task of writing a message. The control required the use of both hands and the rush of wind made the paper difficult to keep in place, but he accomplished the work eventually, writing a few letters, hastily, at a time. "Bomb stuck on rear hook," he penciled laboriously. "Can you suggest anything?" Then, descending as low as he dared over the center of the landing field, he cast his missives over the side.

Rising again in wide spirals to a safer altitude, he watched the flimsy paper float slowly down and was relieved to see that it had been observed, for a figure darted out of the headquarters tent and stationed itself in the center of the field to receive it. Would it never reach the ground? He could see it flutter earthward, blown hither and thither by the wind, the figure of the mechanic below changing position constantly, so as to be beneath when it landed. At length, it reached the ground, was picked up, and carried into the headquarters tent.

A long wait ensued, fraught with anxiety for the impatient Reid, during which a conference was, no doubt, being held. After some time, a ground flapper was brought out and commenced flashing a message to him. "Cannot

suggest anything unless you can shake it off, but do not try it here," he spelled out. So! It was as he thought. They could not help him.

Could he not, by flying low over some treetops, brush the devilish thing off? No, he knew that the concussion would be sufficient to explode the bomb. God! If he only had an observer with him, or if he could only leave the control for a few seconds!

His utter helplessness left him dazed and numbed. An overwhelming emotion of self-pity surged up in his breast and a bitter, unreasoning feeling of resentment against his fate held him in its grip. He groaned aloud in his despair and, for a few moments, was completely oblivious to his surroundings.

His brain cleared, however, and, gritting his teeth desperately, he struggled to regain the mastery over himself—to think clearly. There was no use giving in. No, he must die! Then let him choose a man's death and die in a fashion that would turn his fatal accident to some good account in his country's service.

A hazy plan was forming itself in his brain. Still circling over the home airdrome, he looked at his map, on which all targets were clearly recorded, and picked out a German headquarters that was marked for early destruction. Yes, that was it. He would land on this, and the explosion that sent him into eternity should send with him a number of the hated enemy. There would be no question, this time, of his bungling or missing. He would save his squadron a trip.

His mind once made up, he was not slow to act. He raised his elevators and soared up to a sufficiently high altitude to bring him above the shelter of the clouds and steered directly for his new objective. A few minutes were sufficient to bring him to its vicinity unobserved and, dropping slowly, he began searching the country for his new target. By frequent comparison of the ground with his map, it was not long before he recognized the commandeered château, where the German general and his staff had established themselves. He saw the broad ribbon of the *route nationale,* bordered with high trees and telegraph poles, and the building he was intent on destroying some twenty yards on the far side of it. He pointed his plane at the road in front of the house, where he planned to flatten out his dive, so as to crash into the center of its façade at a height that would allow the torpedo to strike over the entrance.

He began his steep dive, and as he felt the chill air rush and roar past his ears, his emotions underwent a great change. Now he experienced a wonderful exhilaration. Yes, he would die, but willingly and usefully! And, by God, he would wipe out of existence this Huns' nest of mischief in his passing! He could have shouted with the exaltation he felt at the moment—he was inspired in the performance of a great deed.

Below, he saw the fields widen out smoothly to his view, as his dizzy descent shortened his perspective, like a picture slide being focused on a giant screen; he saw the broadening white band of the road and the gables of the château beyond, rocking and swaying, come leaping and bounding up to meet him. He saw figures rushing madly about and was conscious of machine guns rattling somewhere on the ground, but his descent from behind the clouds had been so sudden and so swift that he was but a poor target for the gunners.

In a few moments he would be on the place.

As he flashed over the road between two giant elms, he flattened his dive and started his engine. A defiant yell was torn from his lips and he closed his eyes, waiting to be dashed to his glorious, if terrible, death against the gray-stone front of the building.

His eyes were barely closed when a violent jerk on its tail raised the nose of his plane in the air. Mechanically, like a pilot taught to act instinctively on the least untoward movement of his plane, he righted the machine, but the sudden rise had sent him clear, in that short distance even, of the slate roof of his objective.

This happened so quickly that the jerk of his machine caused him to open his eyes with the thought that he had missed again. The last of the peaked roofs was still streaming back beneath him, when a deafening explosion rent the air, and he was enveloped in smoke and dust.

His plane rocked violently, but he steadied it and instinctively turned toward his own lines, commencing to climb as rapidly as he could without interfering with the speed of his machine. Escape was his one thought, now; the rattle of machine guns and the bursting of anti-aircraft shells occupied the whole of his attention. He zigzagged, climbed, dived and climbed again; he resorted to every maneuver he had ever been taught and that his old craft was capable of performing, until, at length, his exhaust roaring and his engine at its highest speed, he crossed his own lines safely.

Once across No Man's Land, he toned his engine down and proceeded more leisurely toward his airdrome, allowing his thoughts to return to his miraculous escape.

Evidently, as he had swept across the road and flattened his dive, he had unintentionally swung the bomb against the telephone cables between two adjacent poles, and they had possessed sufficient resiliency and resistance to sweep it off the hook where it had become stuck. Its own momentum had carried the bulky torpedo the rest of the way and, as he passed over the far end of the château, the bomb was dashed against its front at the very place where he had intended it to strike. The jerk caused by the bomb striking the wires had tilted the machine sufficiently to cause it to clear the roof.

There was a happy smile on the face of the limp body that the mechanics lifted out of the nacelle of the old converted bombing plane when it made its clumsy landing at the airdrome shortly afterward.

BERNT BALCHEN: BOXER

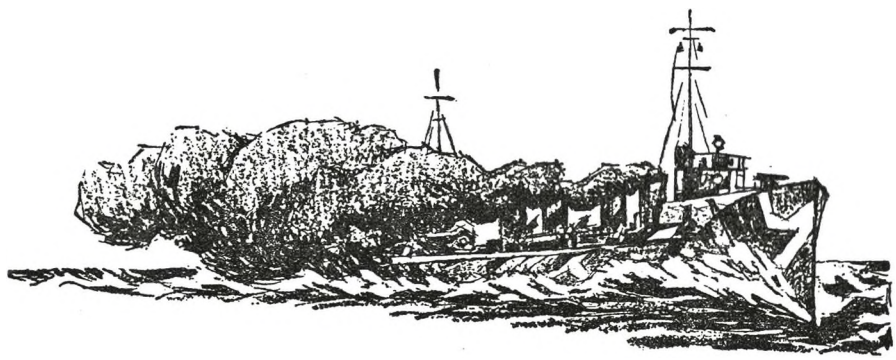
BERNT BALCHEN, chief pilot of Commander Byrd's south pole expedition, is a star as a boxer. So good is he in the squared ring that he has won an even dozen amateur boxing championships in Norway. Putting on the gloves is his favorite recreation; and when he is at home in Brooklyn, where he lives "because it is quiet," he goes almost every day to a gymnasium in hope of finding somebody to act as a target for his whirlwind style of punching.

Twice on flights into north pole territory Balchen had to kill husky dogs for food. When he is in civilized territory, he displays a curious meat preference. A man who crossed the Atlantic on the *Leviathan* with him asserted that at five out of six dinners, the famous pilot ordered eels.

He likes grand opera but dislikes jazz bands. He smokes an average of one cigarette a year. And he goes about bareheaded until the polar climate threatens to freeze his ears, at which time he takes to fur caps.

RECORD OVERBOARD

By CLARENCE L. CULLEN



The Gobs in Uncle Sam's Navy Like Good Phonograph Records, and They Mean *Good* Ones.

SOMEBODY had to start making a new collection of records for the talking machine of the *Syracuse's* crew for'ard. So I started. That's as far as I got—the start. If you'll belay breaking in on me, I'll tell you why.

I don't know how long people ashore can go on living with the Meditation from Thaze when she meditates fifteen or twenty times a day on a talking machine. "Tah-eece," you say? All right, then—Tah-eece. I don't savvy how to pronounce them foreign dolls' names, but I know that this here meditating Thaze walked the plank pretty early on that cruise of the *Syracuse*.

And she was only one of a whole lot. Talking-machine records, you've heard it said, last a lifetime if they're handled decent. Maybe they do—ashore. I never seen any that old aboard a man-of-war, and I've been shipmates with enough talking-machine records to ballast a pig-iron freighter to her plimsoll mark.

The records that finish out one cruise aboard a man-of-war are the ones that nobody cares about and that ain't played much. The record that all hands wants to hear at least once every day at the start of a cruise has as much chance to get back to its home navy yard as a ship's rat has to stand a cathead watch aboard a Chinee junk.

It ain't that they wear out. They just pipe out—disappear. If you only had one guess, you might say these here popular records aboard ship all find sooner or later what the papers calls a watery grave. And the queer thing is that nobody in the crew, if you want to believe them, ever tosses overboard a record that they're sick of. So records like that must commit suicide. In the middle of the night the record that the hull ship's company is tired of must work itself out of its shelf, slide to the deck, roll itself over the deck on its rim, climb the ship's side, inboard, and chuck itself out of an open port.

Anyhow, that was the verdict on what happened to most of the records of the crew for'ard's talking machines aboard the *Syracuse*. The overplayed ones was all pronounced to have did

the Dutch act by jumping into the Pacific Ocean.

They was all records that had been bought new, and they shipped with the crew for'ard for the three-year cruise on the China station. About a dozen of them, for the first part of the cruise, was so popular with the crew that they had to be played every time the smoking lamp was lit.

Then the fatalities begins. When men of a ship's company takes to hiding in bunkers and bilges to get away from talking-machine records they've learned to hate, fatalities among records is what's expected.

Of course there was some suet heads in that crew that could have gone on listening to the sextet from Looshy, played with the big needle and with the doors of the machine wide open, to the end of the cruise. But when most of the hands began to look like they had acid stomach when that record was blatting under forced draft through closed hatches and bulkhead doors, I seen that Looshy would soon be hurling herself overboard with one of them skys'l-note wild wails of hers, and that's just exactly what Looshy done before we called at Yokohama for coal the first time.

Say, was you ever cooped up where you couldn't get away with that sobby-song record, "You Made Me What I Am To-day, I Hope You're Satisfied"? Well, she shipped with us for that cruise, too. The ship's boilermaker, a Greek that didn't savvy much English, was so crazy over her that he'd clap her on the machine half a dozen times a day and evening. He'd have laughed himself to death if he'd understood the words she was singing, but he didn't, and so he'd dab at his eyes with a wisp of cotton waste and sort o' sob, with his shoulders heaving, while she was handing it out about the low-down deal she'd got. And that's why she, like Looshy, cashed in by way of an open deadlight when the cruise was in its infancy.

And so it went. One night, after deciding among theirselves that they was making life aboard the *Syracuse* a curse, "The Angels' Serenade" and "Oh, Dry Them Tears" and "The Rosary" and "Annie Laurie" and "Trinity Chimes" and "Träumerei" and "The Palms"—a hull raft of old blisters like those—all tied themselves together some time during the mid-watch and dropped over the side into the Yellow Sea. Nobody, of course, seen them go. But that's what must have happened to them, for they was all gone right enough when the bugs that could still stand for them went to the record case to look for them later on.

Well, anyhow, the *Syracuse,* homeward bound, mudhooked alongside Honolulu to coal ship. The first luff give it out that there'd be no beach liberty at Honolulu—fill bunkers and up-anchor for Frisco was the word. I was sulking over that, along with all the rest of the hands for'ard, when luck comes over the side and dishes me out a love tap.

We're standing by for the first bargeload of coal when a motor boat swings alongside and a movie director I knew boards us. Just before this cruise, at the Santa Barbara flower fiesta, I'd did a week's fool bluejacket stuff for a picture he was getting up. He seen me —I was gangway bos'n's mate—as soon as he come over the side.

"Ho-ho," says he, "you're just the camerawise shellback I want for a picture I'm making at Diamond Head. I didn't know you was aboard this hooker, but came aboard to ask the skipper for any flatfoot he'd loan me. I want to use you all day to-morrow. O. K.?"

"No chanct, boss," says I. "Nobody gets beach liberty here this time. Coaling ship to-day and to-morrow, and day

after to-morrow we up-anchor for home."

"Leave it to me," says he, and he went aft and seen the skipper. He knew the skipper and everybody else aft, him being one of these big-money movie junipers that makes it their business to know everybody that they might ever need in their business.

He fluffs around aft with the skipper and the wardroom officers for a while, and then he walks for'ard with the first luff.

"McGlone, you're for beach duty to-morrow," the first luff says to me. "Report to Mr. Bingley, this gentleman, at Diamond Head. He tells me he knows you, and that you're broke to camera, so you'll know what he wants of you."

The hands huddled around the smoking lamp was listening in on this, and I knew how they was humming the hymn of hate for me under their shirts, me being the only man for'ard of the ship's company that would make the Honolulu beach, with all of the warm numbers that a man-of-war's man ashore in Honolulu can pick out for himself. I ain't saying it wasn't pretty soft for me. To make it sadder for them, they'd heard that the price of beer in Honolulu had dropped from two bits a bottle to two bottles for two bits, and they'd been manicuring their teeth to bite off the necks of all the bottles that was on the Honolulu ice. So it's no wonder they hated me. I wouldn't have been surprised none if they'd eased some powdered glass into my coffee at mess gear that day.

When I pounced into the steam cutter to go ashore the next morning, a mob of them, sweating over their shovels on the starb'rd coal barge, sang out to me to fetch back some records for the talking machine. On account of all hands being so sick of the few records that was left, the talking machine had been out of commission, drying out its glue under a hatch for months.

"Blow yourself for an armful of records, you lucky swab," these unfortunate ship coalers bawls at me when the steam cutter passes their barge—me, all dolled up in a mustering uniform, sprawled all over the cutter's stern sheets, looking at them with one of them pitying smiles.

"I will if I have time, shovelers," I sings back to them, wishing I had one of them monocles rigged to me knife lanyard so's I could give them a sure-enough touch of high life by gazing at them through it. "I am going to be busy all day with a herd of three or four hundred ravishing movie mermaids that's waiting for me out at Diamond Head, and by the time I keep my dates with them and get through mopping up the Honolulu malt right off the ice——"

Then I had to dodge the lumps of coal they heaved at me. But I figured that I'd dig up a talking-machine record or two, if I came across any hot ones anywhere, just to take the bite off my showing up aboard that evening happy and maybe a little stewed.

I'm a motor-cycle bug, and I hired one in Honolulu for the ride out to Diamond Head. I was breezing through Waikiki, doing about forty knots without a wind shield on one of them level, palm-lined Waikiki streets close to the beach, when I heard a big haw-haw over and above the clatter of the motor that seemed to come from somewhere about two points off my port bow. I thought somebody must be breaking out the big laugh over seeing a man-of-war flatfoot zigzagging along a beach road on a motor cycle. I guess there was something funny about that.

But the big deep-sea haw-haw wasn't meant for me. I could tell right off, as soon as I stopped, that it was a talking-machine record. A Jap rug shaker in whites was giving the record

a try-out on the porch of a bungalow close to the road.

The record was a rummies' chorus all right—one of them heavy-weather sailors' choruses that nobody ever heard sailors sing, with a lot of that yo-heave-ho stuff in it and a big, bull-voiced laugh by the down-in-a-coal-mine bass bawler that makes you feel like rolling around and taking a laugh yourself. The cozy-corner sailors in that record was all pretty well soused, and they was singing according.

It hit me right off that this would be a rosy record for the *Syracuse,* the way things was rigged aboard her just then, and I wanted it before I heard half of it uncoiled. It would be a warm record to clap on the ship's company's out-of-commission talking machine that evening—the rollicking, lift-high-the-cup, let's-have-another song of a bunch of studio sailors all sounding like they was pickled proper, pulled on a crew that couldn't make the beach, no matter how parched they was, for some of that Honolulu beer reduced to two bottles for two bits. I figured that if my shipmates seen the joke while that sailor's anthem was being bawled at them from the machine, the worst they could do was to chuck me over the side for shark bait, and I was willing to take a chanct on that.

When the morris-chair sailors got through haw-hawing over their bun, and the Jap striker was taking the record off the machine, I anchored my motor cycle and swung alongside the porch of the bungalow.

"There's a lot of speed and jinj in that record, Hoshi," I says to the Jap. "I'd like to have that record for me ship."

He was one of them toothy, red-eyed, shirty Japs, and he hands me the sulky Jap glare, which there ain't no sulkier.

"Not sell phonograph machine-talk records here," says he.

"Maybe not," says I, "but twenty yen for a six-bit record ain't no stingy price, and that's what I'm offering."

I was willing to give ten bones for the record just to watch the faces of the thirsty mob for'ard of the *Syracuse* —particular thirsty after coaling ship all day—when they heard them walrus-voiced haw-hawers in the chorus bawling to have another kag brought right away.

But this Jap hall sweeper didn't like nothing about me. He started down the porch steps at me with his head down.

"No time for bluejacket boat ship navy sailsmen," says he, just like that, still trudging toward me with his pompadour bush lowered. "You ride motor-boat cycle machine away," he adds to that, "or I break your arms."

That's what we call "some Samurai talk" on the China station. A lot of them brush-domed, glitter-eyed runts that you heave alongside of in Japan ports, particular them that's wore khaki for a little while, work them kind of barks off on globe-trotter whites when they think they can skid by with it. But I ain't never been messmates with any man-of-war's man of This Man's Navy that took it on the trot to duck a Jap sawed-off with that Samurai-spieling habit.

So I leans against a royal palm and has a little laugh for meself. That gets this here Jap parlor hound even rawer than he starts out to be. He's a stocky kind of a shrimp, with thick bow legs like some of these ricksha pullers that run all day on half a dried fish and a handful of rice, and I could see he didn't hate himself much. The idea seems to be with him that when he swings right alongside of me I'm going to holler for help or head four bells for that beach at Waikiki you've heard the ukeleles sing about, the beach being only about a ship's length away.

But the royal palm kind o' rested my back, and anyhow, on the China station,

I got so I liked to watch these here ex-swaddies of the Mikkydoo's army when they thought they was going to break arms and things just like snapping twigs. So I waited for him until he was almost standing on me feet.

"You go?" he asks me, hissing hard through his teeth like a Jap does when he's dreaming that he's got you faded.

"Go where, Funny Face," I asks him, "and what for?"

He gives one of them Nippon war snorts, if you savvy what I mean, that sounds like an old woman in a Paisley shawl coughing in church on a wet Sunday, and then he starts to set himself to pick out the right kind of a jujutsu hold on the upper part of me freeboard.

Well, I always did like to watch a Jap and hear him breathe hard and heavy just before he started to jujutsu me. It's one of them jokes that works out slow and gives you plenty of time to hand yourself a laugh. I'm almost as much afraid of being jujutsu'd as I am of having a little girl heave a bean bag at me.

You see, the idea of the jujutsu Jap is that you're going to stand there like a fire plug and wait for him to pick out the right clutch that'll let him crack the most bones at one twist. Then you're going to let him reach out, careful and slowlike, so's he won't make any mistakes, and grab you by the wrists, or whatever else you've got that he aims to break. All this time you're supposed to be thinking about a letter to the home folks that you're going to write some day when you get time. After that you're supposed to stay right there where you are until he gets through making a proper wrecker's job of breaking you up for junk.

So I waits for this one to work it out under his wire mop just how he's going to break me off into short lengths methodicallike and neat. His idea, I see, is to walk around behind me and snap off both of me fins by way of a beginning.

When I seen just what his lay was, I took a good yawn and stretch for meself, looked around to see how the weather was holding, peeked down the foot of the street at some Kanaka surf riders standing up on their riding boards in the Waikiki combers, and then I plasters this here jujutsu artist on his port jowl with me right. He lays on the gravel path, looking up at me out of his red-rimmed standing lights, surprised and reproachfullike, as if I'd lathered him with a swab handle when he wasn't looking.

Then I walks up on the bungalow porch, takes that talking-machine record of the stewed sailors from where it rests on the top of the stack, stuffs it inside me mustering shirt, and saunters down again to where the Jap still lays blinking at me.

"Twenty yen is the figure I named for this here record, Hoshi," I says to him, "and that's nine United States bucks more than its price on the list, if I'm any judge. But I need this record in me business, and here's the duff for it," and I dropped two five-dollar gold boys on the gravel alongside of him. Then I got aboard me motor cycle and steered for Diamond Head to keep me engagement with Mr. Bingley's movie outfit.

I'd only went a mile or so when I hears an automobile coming a-roaring behind me, and I take a look back under me arm. It's the Jap, driving a yellow car the size of a Pearl Harbor house boat, and doing an easy two to my one without pushing her.

Nobody ever knows what a Jap's thinking under his hair, but this didn't look none too good. That record I had stowed under me shirt didn't belong to me. I'd made love to it and grabbed it at the wikiup where this Jap worked. The twenty yen that I chucked on the gravel beside him

wouldn't let me out if he was aiming to have me pinched. All he'd have to do was to make the roar that I'd swiped the record, and I'd find meself marooned in a Honolulu hoosegow, which would mean that I'd lose me perfectly good billet on a easy ship.

So I opens up wide, and the motor cycle pounces ahead like a dog that's stole a string of sausages. But fifty was all I could get out of her, and fifty was just lounging for the yellow firefly the Jap was tooling behind me. He did a little opening up himself. Then he slid alongside of me in about six jumps. In two hops more he was ahead of me, and, driving with one eye on the road ahead and one back of him on me, he cut me off. After two or three miles of this, him with his house boat keeping just far enough ahead of me to make a good windshield for me, he slaps on brakes sudden at a narrow turn of the road, aiming to make me smash into the stern of his car. But I made the turn around the starb'rd rear wheel without getting any closer to it than a sixth of an inch.

The Jap stalled his car in getting on his brakes, and by the time he got going again I was a mile ahead and in sight of the movie gang milling around at the base of Diamond Head. But the Jap got going again and was picking me up with every pounce, and when I nosed me motor cycle right up to the outskirts of the main movie gang, where the director was bawling at everybody at once through a megaphone, the Jap was right behind me in his snorting yellow bus. He pulled her up with a jerk, stood up and flickered his hair and hands and teeth all over the place, and began to yell.

"That navy ship boat sailsman a thief!" he hollered, with his eyes popping. "Stop-imprisonment him! He theft-steal from your home porch, Mr. Bingley!"

Mr. Bingley, me friend the movie director, lowers his megaphone and looks all this over as if he's thinking it's a part of the action of the show he's rehearsing that he must have overlooked. The cameras stopped clicking, and the movie folks that were acting open-air stuff without no more duds on than they needed stopped working and huddled around the director. By this time the Jap has hopped out of the car and keeps right on squeaking his head off, until the director waves his megaphone at him and shuts him off.

"What the—what is all this, anyhow?" says the director, looking puzzledlike at me and then at the Jap. He drops his megaphone, and begins to flick over the leaves of the movie play he's got in his hand. "Let's see—man-of-war's man on motor cycle and Jap house boy in car racing along Diamond Head Road, and Jap at finish accusing shellback of thieving; queer I don't see anything about all this in the manuscript. But it ought to be here at that. It's good. It'll slap some comedy into this sad-and-sweet thing, and that's what it needs." Then he turns to the Jap. "Hey, what's all this hooded-cobra hissing about, Kamura?" he asks him. "And who told you to yank my wife's car out of the garage and come Barney-Oldfielding down the Diamond Head Road two jumps behind a respectable and God-fearing man-of-war's man that's on his way here to work for me?"

The Jap, flacking his arms around, finally gets it out of his system so's the movie director can make it out. The movie director is the Jap's boss, and it's Mr. Bingley's porch that I snags the haw-haw record from. Mr. Bingley's wife had seen me paste the Jap in the chops from an upper window and had sent him after me in the car. The director listened to the Jap work all this out of his face, which was a lot swollen on the side where I'd leaned a mitt on him, and then the director turns a grin on me.

"I didn't know I had any talking-machine records as good as all that, McGlone," he says to me. "Is that the one you pinched that you're wearing as a breastplate under your shirt? Let's see it."

I broke out the record from where I'd stowed it and handed it to him. He looked at the name of it and laughed.

"Why," says he, "it's only a six-bit quartet record—booze-hoisting sailors' chorus with a bunch of them barber-shop basso-profundo rumble laughs in it. How come you happened to crave this record so, matey?" he asks me.

I told him I hadn't craved it particular until this Admiral Togo working for him as house boy had cleaned ship for jujutsu action after ordering me to troll my hoop. Then I explain to him how I wanted the record just ten bucks' worth to unreel it aboard ship that night so's to make my cooped-up and thirsty little messmates feel how much they was missing by not being in on all that merry oh-a-sailor's-life-is-the-souseful-life-ho-ye-ho-and-a-kag-of-rum stuff that the song was all about.

"Lofty aim, that," says the director, grinning some more. "Well, Mac, the record is yours. I'd like to be aboard the *Syracuse* when you play that rum song for 'em. Maybe I will be. So Kamura here was going to jujutsu you, was he, and that's why you kalsomined him? Well, we've got to film that! It's the comedy for this slow piece I'm doing. D'ye think you've got another wallop left that you could paste on the other side of Kamura's map?"

He got busy right away rehearing me and Kamura in a scene showing a Jap in the act of imagining he's going to break a man-of-war's man up into kindling-wood sizes by that jujutsu stuff and getting himself all messed up for letting his imagination double cross him that way.

"Now skate in, Kamura," the Jap's boss ordered him, "and let's see how many compound fractures and things you can wish on this navy boat ship sailsman before he swings on you."

Well, that was just Kamura's dish. You could see that he still felt that as a jujutsuist he didn't have no superiors and few equals, and, feeling that way about it, it wasn't no trouble for Kamura to show goods.

So, while the movie actors and actorines formed a ring around us, with the director standing by with his megaphone to give orders, me and Kamura starts in to rehearse. Kamura sort o' strolls over to me with his bean lowered, as he done before, like a bull that's going to horn me over the top of Diamond Head just because I've got red hair.

"Hey, look out, ship sailsman!" the director yells at me when Kamura's so close to me that I can feel his hot breath blowing on me left ear. "Get your guard up, Mac! He'll have you in splinters if you don't act more alive than that."

I didn't know whether the director was kidding or not. So I turned me back on the Jap, who looked as if he might, after a while, reach out and take a hold of me somewhere, and I walked over to the director and whispered to him.

"Say, chief," I says to him, "what's the idea? I don't want to pickle this slant eye again unless that's the dope. Is it?"

"The idea is to knock the billy-bedinged noddle off him if you can get away with it," the director whispers back at me out of a small corner of his face. "D'ye think you can? I hope so. He's been telling me ever since I hired him how he can jujutsu any box fighter that ever lived into a small stack of sun-dried bones before the mittist can so much as lay a finger on him. So go to it! He's even got me buffaloed with them chants of jujutsu victory, until I'm afraid to ask him to pass

me the butter when he's waiting on the table. Are you sure he won't crack you all up?"

I seen then that this here Kamura boy had been getting away with a lot of stuff with people that hadn't been to Japan. You've got to stall around Japan for a little while before you find out just what kind of a ring-around-rosy number this jujutsu thing is.

Kamura, when I'd walked away from him to have that chirp with the director, folded his arms and grinned around at the mob. His idea was that I was scared to death and was going to beg the director to call it off so's I wouldn't be all broke up into stove sizes. So now, behaving like I was a lot timid about it, I nudged back to where he still stood with his arms folded and that dentist's-sign grin all over his chart. He looked kind o' surprised to see me come back at all. I stopped far enough way from him to give him a chance to make another one of them slow charges at me with his pompadour down.

"Cameras!" the director yells, and the boys with the click machines get the range.

Kamura got near enough to me again to get the flavor of the hunk of peppermint gum I was chewing. I give me pants a hitch or two, looked back over me shoulder at the pattern of a sport coat one of the mermaid movie dolls had thrown over her set of scales, and scratched behind me left ear. Kamura, starting one of them lightning jujutsu movements, grabs with both of his hands for me right wrist. I took that wrist away from where it had been and planted the mitt at the end of it under Kamura's chin. It was a short-swung uppercut, and I didn't put anything into it, for the director wanted a lot of this stuff and I didn't want to put the Jap away right off. But Kamura looks peeved, and, with the cameras clicking away, he strolls around behind me. He expected me to stay with my back to him when he done that. These Japs are great little expecters that way. But I pivots around and sends the right over for a haymaker on his chin. He lays blinking up at me as before. So that part of the film comedy was over. The cameras had it all.

"Oh, great!" says Mr. Bingley. "Now we'll have the rest of it."

He had his mechanics rig up a porch, and put me and Kamura through the record-swiping scene. Then, with the camera boys trailing us in a big car and clicking the stuff at all angles, the Jap and me done our famous Diamond Head Road race between yellow car and motor cycle, and I rid the motor cycle over a low cliff into the Pacific Ocean, that being part of the director's comedy plot.

I was working for about six hours on this and the other stuff—a blue-jacket-and-mermaids comedy that I'd been hired for—and long before sundown I was tired of acting out for a living. When I was ready to grease back from Diamond Head for Honolulu on me fished-out motor cycle, the director brought me that talking-machine record that he'd been taking care of for me, all tucked away neat in a fresh envelope.

"It sure will be a hot joke on your little playmates aboard ship," the director says to me, "when you pull this record on them—with all that happy, lickered-up laughter in the singing bums' voices, and with these listening shipmates of yours so thirsty that their shoes are cracking. I'd sure like to be aboard to see and hear their rage. When are you going to clap it on the machine, Mac?"

At eight o'clock that evening, I told him; right after I got back aboard ship.

"Well, maybe I'll slip out to the ship after supper to have a chirp with the *Syracuse's* officers," says Mr. Bingley, "and if I do I'll have an ear open to

hear you pull this record on your bunch."

Sure enough, when I went aboard ship a little before eight o'clock, some cargoed up with that cut-price Honolulu malt, I seen the director aft, walking on the poop with some of the wardroom officers.

As I hoped and expected, me shipmates doddering around the gangway gnashed their teeth when they seen me coming over the side all lit up like a ferryboat, but able to navigate. It drove them daffy to see that I hadn't anyhow picked up enough of a bun to land me in the brig in double irons when I come aboard. That would have consoled them some.

I was carrying a small package in me arms, over and above that other package, and I gathered the gangway bunch around me and told them about the new Honolulu tango record I'd brought with me—the first Honolulu tango record to reach the islands, says I. Then I went below and broke out the dusty old talking machine from its hatch and set it in the gangway just for'ard of the ship's bell. They looked glad to see the machine again. They was lonesome for some music. They was lonesome for any old thing, with the lights of Honolulu blinking and blazing at them three ships' lengths away over the starb'rd rail.

So I clapped me swiped record on the machine. The word had got over the ship that I'd brought a hot record off from the beach, and all hands for'ard was on deck within easy hearing range of the machine. The officers aft had heard about the record that I'd brought aboard, too, and they was standing around on poop and quarterdeck, waiting for it to uncoil. I guess they was just as hard up for a drink and a little fun as the rest of the crew, and just as anxious to hear a new record from shore. The crew for'ard had nothing on the gentlemen aft for parchedness on that night in Honolulu harbor, for the officers hadn't been allowed beach liberty that day any more than the men. I seen Mr. Bingley, the movie director, standing by the engine-room hatch, waiting for that record that had belonged to him to yo-heave-ho on the evening breeze. I managed to tip him one of them knowing winks. Us two, you see, was the only two on board that knew what this record was going to be.

So I starts the machine a-going, fits the needle, and leans back against a ventilator to watch the faces of me shipmates when all of them mirthy haw-haws began about the bubbling juice of the barley and the swift-passing flagon and the black-eyed Susans waiting in every port and all them larboard-watch-ahoy lilts that sailors only sings in landsmen's sailors' songs.

Then the record starts to uncoil. I wondered what had become of the music part of it, even before I was stunned stiff about eight seconds later.

There wasn't no music of any kind in that record. There was just a Voice. It was a large, oily, tonsilly, solemnlike, deep-down-in-the-neck Voice. It was a Voice making a speech. It rumbled on and on.

You've read in the papers about the infuriated populace or something like that.

Well, that was me shipmates aboard the *Syracuse,* both fore and aft.

Aft, as much as for'ard—except for one man. That man was Mr. Bingley, the movie director. Before I beat it down to the berth deck and hid in a chink steward's provision locker, I seen Mr. Bingley holding onto an engine-room ventilator so's he wouldn't laugh himself right over the side. The only reason he'd swung aboard the *Syracuse* that night was to get that laugh for himself. He'd planted the laugh as careful as a dog plants a bone. All that he done was to make a switch in

records on me while he was "keeping for me" the record that I'd swiped from the Jap.

From down below in the provision locker where I was hiding, I heard the big, oily Voice suddenly shut off. Then one of me mates, him grinding his teeth like all the rest of the crew for'ard, came hopping below with the record, and showed me the name of it, printed on its face. Then I recognized that rumbly Voice.

The name of this here "new" record the boys had been waiting to hear was:

THE NEED FOR NATIONAL PROHIBITION.

By the Honorable William Jennings Bryan.

THE PRESIDENT IS A FARMER

WHEN Herbert Hoover speaks on farms and farm relief, he knows what he is talking about. He's been educated by a farm of his own. The president is no "book agriculturist." He's a regular old garden variety of dirt farmer, with a one-thousand-three-hundred-and-thirteen-acre expanse of land in California. Moreover, he's a shark on diversified farming.

Here's what he has on his far-flung fields and fertile hills: Vineyards producing ten varieties of grapes with an annual output of six hundred thousand pounds; two hundred acres in alfalfa; three hundred in cotton; one hundred in corn; one hundred and thirty in peach trees; ninety acres in watermelons; ninety in Spanish onions; sixty in potatoes, and seventy in apricot trees. He has also two hundred hogs, one hundred and fifty cows, and two thousand five hundred hens. The annual pay roll of his farm is seventy-five thousand dollars, and at the peak of the harvesting season he hires two hundred workers.

FEEDING A MULTITUDE

MADISON, Virginia, with a population of less than three hundred, is nine miles from President Hoover's famous "fishin' hole" in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Last fall, when the Madisonians invited Mr. Hoover to be their guest at an all-day picnic to get acquainted with "the folks," the newspaper men accompanying the president exclaimed: "How on earth will a little village like this feed the sort of crowd that is attracted by the Hoover presence? There'll be at least four or five thousand people on hand, and they'll eat a lot of stuff." Said the Madisonians: "Leave that to us."

Then they canvassed the surrounding countryside, asking every housewife to send food and plenty of it to the Hoover picnic. Never was there a more royal response to such a request. Not a housewife failed to cook and contribute. Some of them cooked for ten days. One farmer's wife sent the following "spread": twenty-two home-cured hams ready cooked, one hundred forty small or "individual" pies, a dozen big cakes, one hundred twenty-five chicken sandwiches, and twenty-five loaves of bread.

When the big day came, four thousand automobiles brought ten, instead of the predicted five, thousand people to the Vergilian feast on long tables under the trees; and after the multitude had eaten its fill, it was estimated that there was left over enough food to feed another thousand.

The POPULAR CLUB

Every reader of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, man or woman, qualifies as a lover of good stories and as a good fellow, and is therefore automatically and entirely without obligation elected a member of THE POPULAR CLUB.

IN the Chat in the last issue we were speaking of hobbies, and of their value. Mr. Webster, in his excellent dictionary, speaks of hobbies in this wise, saying:

A subject or plan to which one is constantly reverting; a favorite and ever-recurring subject of discourse, thought, or effort; a topic, theme, or the like (considered as) unduly occupying one's attention or interest.

That, as some famous fiction character used to say, will give you an idea. We quarrel, of course, with the word "unduly." A proper hobby could never be considered as a waste of time. For that matter, many of the inventions and discoveries that have aided mankind in its headlong progress have been the results of hobbies. There are numerous cases of men who have worked hard to become successful and famous in one line, only to discover unexpectedly that fame crowns them for something else they have done which seemed to them to have no special importance.

The word "unduly" should be stricken from the record. A hobby is a pursuit of which to be proud. And it doesn't matter whether it's trout fishing or juggling. Keep it up and enjoy yourself; it's your special accomplishment—and remember this: as long as you've got a hobby you can't be bored.

We are interested in your hobby, if you've got one. We invite you to tell us about it, in your own words. Your article—or composition, as we used to say in school—should not be more than three hundred words long. The best articles submitted will be paid for at our regular rates—for this is not a prize contest. The selected ones will be printed in this department. This is a regular feature, so start now.

CONCERNING H. DE VERE STACPOOLE

Author of "The Man With a Grouch," in the Present Issue, and of Many Novels and Stories Previously Printed in *The Popular*.

MR. STACPOOLE'S knowledge of the seven seas and the men who use them has been gained by a practical experience almost unexampled in its variety.

The characters in his books, sailors and landsmen and women, are created from the hosts of men and women he has met in courts, in cities, and the wild places of the world: men in all stations of society, from the highest to the lowest. *Paddy Button* of "The Blue Lagoon"—which has sold over a million copies and ran for eight months as a London play—was created out of several old sailormen. The *Prince of Canmora,* hero of "Toto," was com-

pounded of several Paris dandies, well-known frequenters of the boulevards.

As a child Mr. Stacpoole had seen Samuel Warren, author of "Ten Thousand a Year," at Hamburg; he had seen Verlaine and the Emperor Napoleon, Bismarck, and Moltke; he had talked with Aubrey Beardsley and Anatole France. Arthur Diosy has declared that his "Crimson Azaleas" is the only book that gives a real idea of Japan. And the Honorable William Vernon, who knew the Second Empire, has said that in "Drums of War" some of the characters are exact replicas of personalities that existed in the Second Empire —before Mr. Stacpoole was born.

The most extraordinary thing about this extraordinary man is the fact that his grip of the past seems as sure as his grip of the present, and that his scholarship is as great as his knowledge of interpreting life, as is shown by his translations of Villon, Sappho, and Ovid.

Mr. Stacpoole's mother passed her early girlhood in Canada. She was a woman of exceptional genius and force of character. Returning to Ireland with her people, she married the Reverend William Charles Stacpoole, a doctor of divinity of Trinity College, Dublin; but she never ceased to love Canada, where she had lived with that love of nature which she imparted to her son. She was a perfect mother, to whom all her son's books are mutely dedicated, except one which is dedicated to a perfect wife.

The love of freedom and open spaces and sea and skies and forests undoubtedly has come to him from the Canada he has never seen, and that no one will ever see as his mother saw it.

In "The Garden of God" this love is strongly shown, together with a strong antagonism toward what is called civilization that builds cities and breaks men or bruises them out of the shape God made them in.

Mr. Stacpoole is well qualified to speak from his knowledge of cities and wildernesses.

Had I been present at the creation, I would have given some useful hints for the better ordering of the universe.

ALPHONSO THE WISE.

THE IRISHMAN AND THE LADY.

There was a lady lived at Leith,
A lady very stylish, man;
And yet, in spite of all her teeth,
She fell in love with an Irishman—
A nasty, ugly Irishman,
A wild, tremendous Irishman,
A tearing, swearing, thumping, bumping,
ranting, roaring Irishman.

His face was no ways beautiful,
For with smallpox 'twas scarred across;
And the shoulders of the ugly dog
Were almost double a yard across.
Oh, the lump of an Irishman,
The whisky-devouring Irishman,
The great he-rogue with his wonderful brogue—the fighting, rioting Irishman.

One of his eyes was bottle green,
And the other eye was out, my dear;
And the calves of his wicked-looking legs
Were more than two feet about, my dear.
Oh, the great big Irishman,
The rattling, battling Irishman—
The stamping, ramping, staggering, swaggering, leathering swash of an Irishman.

He took so much of Lundy-foot
That he used to snort and snuffle-o,
And in shape and size the fellow's neck
Was as bad as the neck of a buffalo.
Oh, the horrible Irishman,
The thundering, blundering Irishman—
The slashing, dashing, smashing, lashing, thrashing, hashing Irishman.

His name was a terrible name, indeed,
Being Timothy Thady Mulligan;
And whenever he'd emptied his tumbler of punch
He'd not rest till he'd filled it full again.
The boozing, bruising Irishman,
The 'toxicated Irishman—
The whisky, frisky, rummy, gummy, brandy, no dandy Irishman.

This was the lad the lady loved,
Like all the girls of quality;
And he broke the skulls of the men of Leith,
Just by the way of jollity.
Oh, the leathering Irishman,
The barbarous, savage Irishman—
The hearts of the maids, and the gentlemen's heads, were bothered, I'm sure, by this Irishman.

WILLIAM MAGINN (1793-1842).

"YANKEE DOODLE."

IT'S strange the odd and unexpected bits of information one comes upon from time to time. For example, only recently we chanced to learn that one of the most famous paintings in this country came dangerously close to going into obscurity as a cartoon. Originally it was only a comic picture, showing three ragged figures stalking heroically across a green, one of them fifing, the other two drumming. Archibald Willard, an artist in Wellington, Ohio, was asked to draw something that would show the spirit of the song "Yankee Doodle," and he prepared this cartoon. Later he improved on it, changed the clothing and faces of the figures, and created the painting that we now know as "The Spirit of '76." Instead of semicomic characters, he made the fifer a vigorous, brave man who, though wounded in the head, continues to play his spirited march. The middle drummer became the spirited, stalwart, white-haired man with whom we are so familiar. And the ragged urchin on the right became a sturdy drummer boy in the Revolutionary uniform.

Willard was a carriage maker, and the part of the work he liked best was the painting of miniature landscapes on the sides of the carriages. Some one suggested that he try his hand at a comic paintng, and he worked up a picture of two or three children clinging to a cart drawn by their dog. The dog had discovered a rabbit and, forgetting that he was tied to the cart, was doing his best to catch his prey. Willard took the picture to an art dealer, who recognized its possibilities. In those days chromos were very popular, and Willard's painting, as a chromo, sold thousands of copies. But one day the art dealer said, "I've always wondered what the outcome was, in the picture." Obligingly, the artist did a companion picture, a sequel, showing how the cart finally tipped over, spilling the children, while the rabbit escaped.

It is not without good reason said, that he who has not a good memory should never take upon him the trade of lying. MONTAIGNE.

A Chat With You

THE day is coming to a leisurely close. Above us, a large, round, light globe is coloring in mellow amber the oaken panels of our office walls. The leaden, murky sky outside has lost the angry, sulphurous look it had all afternoon, and now, spreading across it, is the benign amethyst of early evening. All the buildings, dwindling in softened lines of perspective far down each street, seem purplish, too. And the lights in those many windows are like drops of gold paint spattered on a picture.

But the most interesting thing about this evening is that the first snow of the year is coming down. Below, the wide street is covered with it. The muffled traffic has drawn hundreds of lines in the whiteness down there, queer, unreal lines resembling the canals of Mars in some parts, and the craters of the moon in miniature in others.

* * * *

IT is very pleasant to sit here, smoking and reflecting. Memories of other old winter evenings come back to us as we study the busy, mystical descent of the snow. In that wild yet gentle swirling are all kinds of vague images—dervishes who spin ecstatically only to dissolve into nothingness; darting flights of white birds; Colonial ladies with powdered wigs and hoop skirts of white satin, curtsying through a minuet; ghostly gnomes and elves peering, bowing, ducking, doffing their caps, and disappearing; millions of white moths eddying around one another in swarms; figures leaping and reeling—and a huge, silvery beard flanked by a pair of jovial cheeks that fairly shine with fat mirth, a pair of merry eyes, the snow-mantled horns of reindeer. Has the snow affected our eyes—and our ears? Who laughed that ringing laugh? Was that the crack of a whip? What was that cheerful and delightfully familiar jingling that sent such eerie thrills down our back?

* * * *

IT'S winter—the best time of the year! Let the gales howl; draw your chair up to the warm, ruddy fire! Let's get Dickens down from the shelf—Dickens, with his old London streets and tumbly dwellings, and his unforgetable characters hurrying through the snow with their chins pressed against their cravats, their hearty greetings and red noses! What other writer has so fully captured the pervading spirit of a winter night? Remember the story of old Scrooge, and the big knocker on the door that turned into a ghostly head?

* * * *

WHAT was that other famous story of winter and Christmas? Wasn't it "The Nuremberg Stove," by Ouida? We had it read to us in childhood, and perhaps that is why it made such a deep impression. Those vivid descriptions of Nuremberg's medieval, crooked streets, with their overhanging houses, and the chimney pots, where the storks built their nests, silhouetted against the dark heavens! We used to pore over the rich illustrations, chilled by the black doorways and shadows, warmed by the orange lights in the homes, and wondering at the quiet mystery the thick, soft snow lent to the scene.

IT is still snowing outside. It may sound strange, but it never really occurred to us that winter was on its way until just now. Of course, all the stores have been fixing up their holiday displays, but we've just given them casual, half-cynical glances, and thinking what a job it would be to bother with all that holiday fuss. That feeling's all gone now. It must be the snow. We're right back in the mood—and last year we said, just as you probably did: "Thank Heaven, Christmas is over!" Isn't it odd—isn't it *great!*—how we come to look forward to it each year? The same old glorious expectancy, the same kick you get out of deciding what presents will please this one or that one.

THE shops down in the street are lighted now, brilliantly glittering as if they, too, were smiling because the snow has come and Christmas is coming. We're going to put on our greatcoat now and go down there, welcoming the white flakes that fall on our shoulders—and filled with that wonderful old spirit of happiness and good-fellowship. People won't think we're crazy when they see our eyes sparkling—for their eyes will be sparkling, too, and their arms—we can see from here—will be full of bundles. But before we go we're sending you and all your fellow readers of THE POPULAR one grand hail—the greeting that is reverberating round the world right now: "Merry Christmas!"

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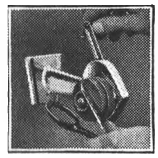

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