Vol. 43 No. 5
TWICE-A-MONTH
PRICE 20 CENTS

The Popular Magazine

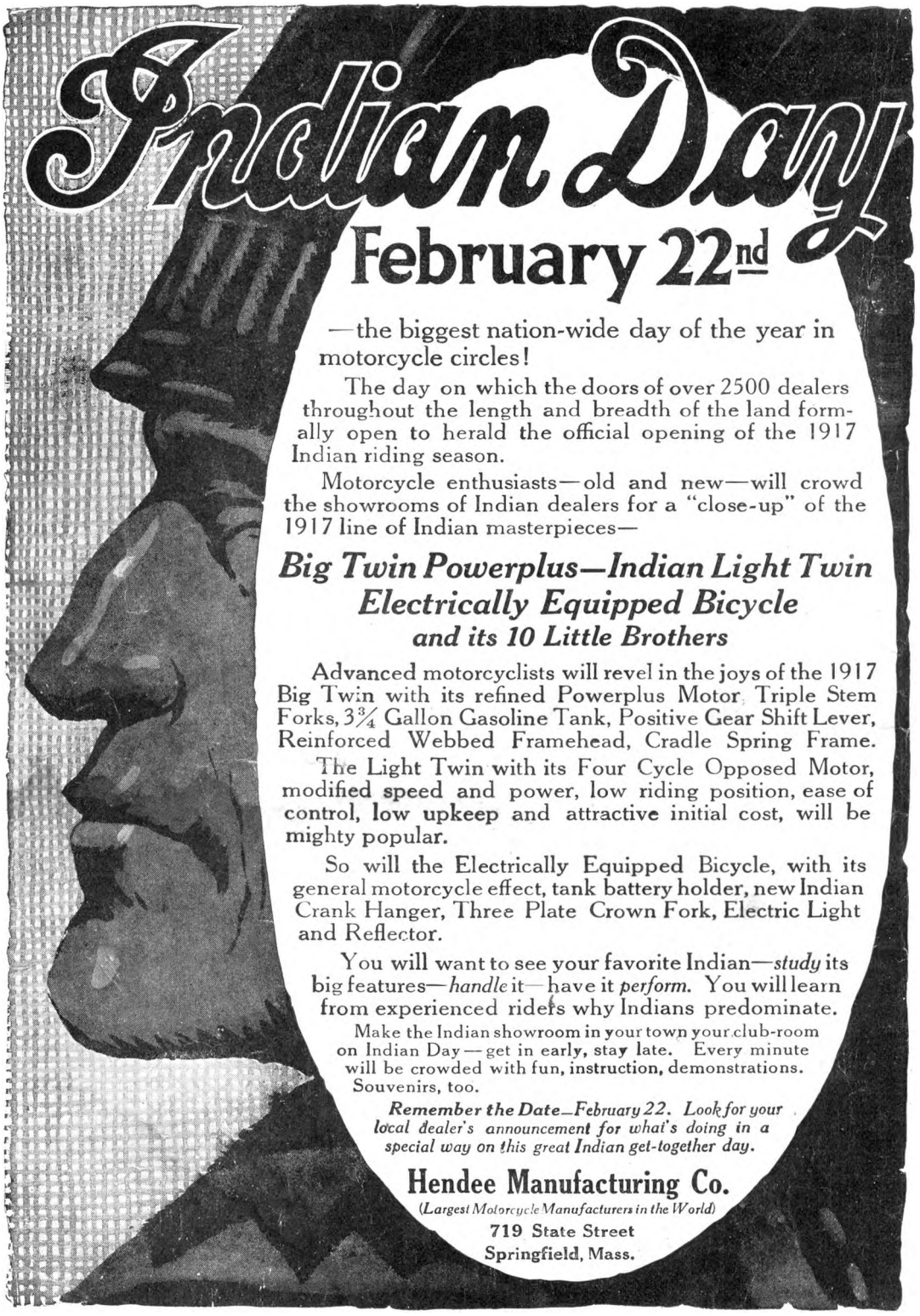
PUBLISHED
FEBRUARY 20TH, 1917

WASHINGTON

Published FEB. 20, 1917

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

Volume XLIII
Number 5



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They All Write to the POPULAR

From Cape Town, South Africa.

September 26, 1916.

DEAR SIR: Several copies of your POPULAR MAGAZINE have come into my hands accidentally, amongst others the one published on April 7th, in which commences that delightful story, "The Way of the North," in four parts. I have managed to get the three parts, but failed to get the conclusion of the story. I am inclosing coupons to the value of one shilling, three pence, and ask you to be good enough to forward to the above address the POPULAR for May 20th.

I just love American magazines, particularly your POPULAR, and although I am a British woman, born and bred, I do not think there is an English periodical to compare with it, except "Nash." Your stories are always out of the ordinary, so live, and, as you say in one of your "Chats," no matter how popular an author may be, his story does not go in if it doesn't "measure up." That no doubt helps to keep all your novels so "top hole." Yours faithfully,

MRS. E. E. TURNER.

From Bedford, Virginia.

December 9, 1916.

EDITOR POPULAR MAGAZINE: This is only to wish you a happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year. I owe you much for causing many a leaden hour to pass lightly. You say you "do not know everything about editing a magazine," but you certainly know a good deal. Not all your stories please me—that goes without saying; but the stories *I* do not like *other* people do. Love stories bore me. I don't like war stories. Fielding's stories I like, Hamby's I delight in, and I read all the stories about the Northwest Mounted Police. With best wishes, really your friend, MRS. M. B. BEAUFORT.

From Jacksonville, Florida.

October 28, 1916.

DEAR SIR: I came to Jacksonville in 1904, got a job at seven dollars per week, and began reading the POPULAR. I have never missed a copy of the magazine since. I now own my own home and have my own business, and I attribute a great deal of my success to the splendid moral and mental uplift which I obtained through the constant association with the red-blooded men and women of the POPULAR.

I do want to thank you and the many others connected with the POPULAR for the many past years of helpful pleasure, and wish you even greater successes in the future. Your friend, E. L. WINN.

From Spokane, Washington.

December 2, 1916.

TO THE EDITOR: I want to "render unto Cæsar." I have been a reader of POPULAR many years. You certainly have a fine string of writers, and whenever I want to take a flyer in fiction I turn to the POPULAR because of the variety of reading offered. Most of all I enjoy stories by H. C. Witwer. He is more than an author—he is a tonic. With best wishes, H. W. DRAPER.

From Mars, Pennsylvania.

November 2, 1916.

GENTLEMEN: I have taken the POPULAR since it was first issued, and if it would have been necessary at any time to choose between buying a meal and buying the POPULAR, I would have skipped that meal.

The POPULAR is absolutely alone in the magazine line. There is none quite like it.

Do you ever get inquiries for a year's complete copies of old numbers, from people that possibly only started recently to read the magazine? I would be willing to sell all my back numbers, running from 1909 to present date. Yours very sincerely,

H. W. HENDERSON.

From El Centro, California.

January 7, 1917.

GENTLEMEN: Have been a reader of your magazine for twelve years. Started in 1904 as a kid, and haven't missed a copy since. Do you remember the covers in 1904? Some were by Underwood. And the serial, "Lost Cabin Mine," and "Chip" stories! The diplomatic stories that ran years ago were good.

I have been around the country a bit, but I always get the POPUAR. By the way, it is the favorite reading among cow-punchers and homesteaders I have had experience with. But I have one kick. Why in Sam Hill does an author, that is good otherwise, use an expression like this: "Throwing on more power;" or "He threw her gears in so hard that showers of sparks flew inside of the steel case?"

Tell them to acquire a few expressions from a chauffeur or mechanic. I may be critical, but it jars on me when I run across a break like that, especially as I savvy how to drive dirt roads and make time myself. Well, adios. H. L. PULFER.

Unique and Humorous Adventure Novel, by Henry C. Rowland, Complete in the Next Issue. Order Now!

VOLUME XLIII NUMBER 5

TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

CONTENTS

FEBRUARY 20, 1917

Twice-a-Month Publication issued by STREET & SMITH, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York. ORMOND G. SMITH and GEORGE C. SMITH, Proprietors. Entered at New York Post Office as Second-class Matter under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, $4.72. Foreign, $5.44.

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. XLIII. FEBRUARY 20, 1917. No. 5.

The Benevolent Liar

By Roy Norton

Author of "The Phantom U-Boat," "The Mediator," Etc.

How a man can be the living embodiment of good will to men and yet be a colossal liar. This is the interesting phenomenon that Norton presents in this rich novel of the foothills of the Sierras where Joshua Leander Price has his habitation. He is a great giant of a man, this Josh Price, with good humor and kindliness written in every line of his rugged face. He is the kind of man who tempts you to superlatives. You will find his story of engaging interest as told by Norton.

(*A Complete Novel*)

CHAPTER I.

MR. JOSHUA LEANDER PRICE, known in parts of Arizona, New Mexico, and Chihuahua as Josh Ananias Price, dumped a handful of some black stuff he called "kawfy" into the water that boiled in a battered old pot, and with the deftness of long experience, put it at the edge of his camp fire to simmer, after which he poured some batter into an equally ancient and veteran frying pan preparatory to making a few "flapjacks" for his breakfast. He paused to flip a live coal off the bacon that kept warm in a tin plate, to throw a pebble at a burro that was trying to gnaw a hole in a meal sack, and to bawl: "Git outa that! You, Pete! You're the worst dag-goned specimen of a thief I ever did see. I'll sure bust your gosh-durned back if you don't keep away from them things!"

The burro, one of three that loafed about at the foot of the little cliff in the Sierras where Josh had camped overnight, merely dodged the pebble, shook his long ears, and laughed. He had reason to, for his owner was notorious for bloodthirsty threats, but peaceful intentions. But all further threats that Josh might have made, or other pebbles that he might have thrown, were forgotten in the next instant, when, with a startled yell, and with frying pan in hand, he leaped wildly to one side and ran a few yards before turning. A rumbling crash in the brush above, a startled exclamation, and a downpour of shale accompanied a stranger in his descent. He rolled through the brush at the edge of the little cliff, grabbed desperately at every bush that promised succor, bounded over the first little ledge, rolled and twisted toward the second, took a nine-

foot drop into the camp fire, upset the coffee and the bacon, and scattered brands in all directions.

He came to a full stop, seated, and with the bewildered air of a man who speculates as to whether he is yet alive. He rubbed a mop of black hair and tentatively felt a slight wound on his scalp that was leaking blood. He looked at his ensanguined fingers with a puzzled expression, brushed a threatening coal from his trousers, and felt his feet, which the prospector observed were bootless and covered with socks much the worse for wear.

"Great Scott! Young feller," remarked Josh, approaching him, while the batter for his intended flapjack dripped in a little white rivulet from the edge of the frying pan, "do you most always come down a mountain that-a-way? You do seem to be in an all-fired big hurry."

A pair of blue-gray eyes lifted themselves up to his and became suddenly alive to their surroundings. Then abruptly the young man turned over on his hands and knees and looked giddily back up over his trail through the brush. Something about his appearance transfixed the prospector with surprise, but he quickly concealed his emotion.

"I thought—I thought I was a goner —up there!" the young man said, as he more fully recovered from the shock. "I——" He climbed to his feet stiffly as if he had sustained many bruises not inventoried, and replied, with a mirthless grin: "Of course not! Of course I don't always come down that way. I slipped and—here I am!"

"Gee whiz! But you was comin' some! Nothin' busted, I hope?" said Josh solicitously.

The young man stretched and tested one limb after another, seemed reassured, then suddenly scowled and answered: "No, I'm all right. Where does that trail go?"

"Down on to the road," replied the prospector, with an odd look in his eyes. "The road that runs to Shingle Flats. Why? You ain't a stranger hereabouts, are you?"

"Not exactly," said the young man hesitantly. "I—well, I used to run around these hills some when I was a boy."

"Humph! That wasn't very long ago, was it? You don't look more'n twenty-two or three now."

"Twenty-five," corrected the visitor, again staring back up the mountainside as if contemplating a return whence he had come.

"Had any breakfast?" queried Josh, returning to the fire and kicking the scattered embers back into a heap. "Ain't no use in bein' in a rush. Good Lord! You've already cost me one pan of bacon and the makin's of one flapjack. Might as well stick around and make it more."

"My—my hat and boots are up there and——" lamely objected the visitor, who was evidently more than hungry.

"Hat? Most times I don't bother about 'em; but every man has his own ways of lookin' at things," Josh interrupted. "If you cain't eat without a hat, I'll just naterally lend you one, and I'll lend you some boots, too, to climb up and get yours. Ain't no good climbin' rocks barefooted. Also it's hard on a feller's socks, if he has any."

He dived at the grub box, took out the bacon, some beans, a can of condensed milk that had been opened and therefore had leaked, and from the bottom produced what he called a hat. He proceeded to wipe the condensed milk and some stray sugar off with the sleeve of his shirt.

"There!" he said triumphantly. "There's some hat. She's a good one. Wore it myself, off and on, for 'most four years. I'll get the boots out of a pack. Um-m-mh! Here they are. My best ones, too. Big for you, but—— Now sit down there, boy, and pretty soon me and you'll have some chuck that'll make you forget all about tumblin' down the hillside. Besides, I—feel like talkin' to you."

The stranger looked tempted, though undecided, but accepted the hat.

"What's your name when you're home?" Josh asked, with pretended carelessness, as he cut some strips of

bacon with a sheath knife that he took from his belt.

"Rogers—Tom Rogers," the younger man answered absently; and if the prospector had not been looking at the slices of bacon, he might have observed something furtive in the way Rogers—Tom Rogers—frowned over the tops of the pine trees toward the trail below, then looked back up the hillside, as if still in doubt what course to pursue.

"Um-m-mh! Good name, too," commented Josh, as he held the long-handled frying pan above the blaze. "S'pose you get some fresh kawfy goin' there. You certainly put a dent in my pot—comin' down the hill, hoofs foremost, the way you did. Lucky she's a good pot. Bought her 'most two years ago. Give six bits for her. Kawfy's in the grub box somewheres. Um-m-mh! Rogers, eh? Good name, Rogers is."

He gave another scrutinizing glance at his guest; but the latter, as if doubt had given way to decision, was already seeking the coffee.

"Now, son, you just sit over there with your back against that wall you fell over, and me and you'll have a sure-enough feed," the prospector said, when his preparations were complete, and Rogers obeyed after another sidelong glance toward the trail. Evidently, from the way he plied his fork and knife, he was famished; but if the shrewd old man squatted opposite him observed this fact, he did not comment on it, although his eyes twinkled now and then as he lifted them in the act of hoisting huge chunks of bacon or flapjacks into his leathery mouth.

"That's better," he said, with a satisfied gulp, as he straightened out his long, drooping mustache and prepared to roll a cigarette. "Finish her up, boy! Finish her up! There's a couple more of them prime cakes there, and a strip of bacon that I ain't calculatin' to feed to the burros or pack to the next camp."

Rogers accepted, and appeared more at ease when his hunger was satisfied.

"It's right decent of you," he said gratefully, "to take me in this way—considering how I upset your breakfast when I came."

"Everybody's welcome here in my house," responded Josh, waving his hand around in a circular gesture, indicating that everything in sight—the ragged hills, the forests, and the blue sky—were his abode. "Grub and hospitality's about the only two things I ain't stingy with. And they're about all I've got to give, too," he added, with a chuckle. "I ain't exactly——"

He paused, and his eyes opened a little wider. His hearing, rendered acute by a life passed in the lonesome places, where each sound is noted, had caught a sharp, staccato drumming of horses' hoofs, and this was instantly followed by men's voices as the riders came abruptly around a bend in the road below, where a sheer cliff on one side and a deep cañon on the other had cut off the sounds of approach.

Rogers, with a sharp exclamation, leaped to his feet, his tin plate with its contents falling to his feet. There was no mistaking his fear and intent. He was planning to run, but the plan was carried no farther.

"You sit down there, just like you was, and be mighty quick about it!"

His host's voice lost its leisurely, careless drawl and became sharp and peremptory. Also his host exhibited another menacing change, inasmuch as his words were accompanied by one swift movement that brought a worn and heavy pistol from a belt and into line with his guest's head. Rogers shrank back against the wall with that air of desperation which overtakes the cornered animal.

"Sit down, you fool!" the prospector again ordered. "I'm runnin' this show. Be quick about it! Pick that tin up and go on with the eatin'!"

The younger man, seeing that to disobey was to court a more imminent danger than any other that menaced him, slowly obeyed. The voices on the road below became audible.

"Smoke up there on the hillside. Whoa!" they heard one man say, and then the voice of another: "Some of us better go up and find out what it is."

"Hello, down there!" the prospector shouted, without turning his head or

shifting his eyes from Rogers, whose face had blanched and whose hands holding the plate shook nervously.

Voices answered in a scattered shout, and the brush beside the trail crashed as some of the riders turned their horses' heads upward.

"For the love of Heaven," Rogers appealed, in a strained voice, "give a man a chance, can't you? Let me go!"

"You sit still and go right on with that eatin'," Josh rumbled back. "And they ain't no need for you to look as if you'd just bit a man on the leg and was ashamed of it."

With that same surprising quickness, he slipped his pistol back into the ragged old leather holster just as the foremost riders broke through the brush and came forward on their panting, sweating mounts. It was too late for Rogers to attempt flight. There was nothing for him to do but obey the prospector's order and at least try to eat. It was but a sorry pretense, and yet that same desperation assisted him to make an effort.

"Mornin'! Some decent weather we're havin', eh?"

The prospector's voice had resumed the same unperturbed drawl when he addressed the newcomers.

"Great Scott! What's up?" it added. "Look as if you'd been comin' from somewhere in a hurry."

"We're trying to pick up a man that stuck up the Horseshoe gold wagon last night and got away with a clean-up," explained the rider nearest Price, as he threw himself from his saddle and stared first at him and then at the man with the plate on his knees. The others were appraising the three burros, the grub box, and all the familiar outfit of the veteran prospector.

"Psho!" replied Josh, getting to his feet. "Stuck up the—— How much did the feller get?"

"About five hundred ounces," answered the spokesman. "And he came this way. We lost the trail back up on the barrens, about two miles behind here, and it wasn't very good going at any place. Who are you fellows?"

"Good Lord!" said the prospector plaintively. "I thought everybody knowed me. I'm——"

"Old Josh Price, or I'm a liar!" interrupted another man, who had followed the others up from the trail. "Well, you old horned toad! Where'd you blow in from?"

"Dear me! If it ain't Specimen Jones, I'll eat my outfit!" responded the prospector, hastening to a handclasp with the latest arrival. "I ain't seen you for four or five years. Not since —— Say, mebbe you could find your way around that town of Needles now! I guess not! She's a city, Specimen. A sure-enough town! Doc Booth's been elected sheriff of old San Berdoo, and—— Hey! This ain't the place you wrote me about, is it? The place you said was promisin'? It don't look none too much good to me, so far."

"Why, you old mule, you ain't come to nothin' yet! Shingle Flats ten mile from here."

Jones proceeded to introduce Josh to all the others of the party as an old-time partner and friend who was "sure some good miner," and Josh dolefully regretted that he had nothing to prove hospitality. He seemed suddenly to recall the object of their visit and said: "Who'd you say this feller was that stuck up the gold wagon?"

They grinned and swore, explaining, in the meantime, that they would like that information themselves; but, in view of the fact that the bandit was masked and had cleared away so expeditiously, they had no idea of his identity.

"Too bad," sympathized Josh, with a wag of his head. "Me nor Tom, here, ain't—— Lordee, but I'm a sure impolite old cuss! Forgot to introduce you to my pardner. This is young Tom Rogers, boys, and he's a right good pardner, too—considerin' that he ain't much more'n a kid. Tom, come and show the gentlemen you ain't forgot how to shake hands since you been trainin' under me."

Rogers got to his feet and shook gravely all around, but with such an air of embarrassment that the prospec-

tor felt called upon to apologize for him.

"Bashfullest cuss I ever did see!" he commented. "Always been that way. But he's all right. You boys'll like him. Now, we been here all night, and we ain't seen nor heard nothin' nor nobody. If that stick-up come past us in the night he must have done it mighty quiet, because one of them burros of ours, that old white devil over there, is a regular watchdog. First he brays loud enough to wake the dead, then he comes rushin' up to me and says: 'Hey! Git up, Josh!' and starts in to tell me what he saw. 'Most always it's somethin' that don't amount to nothin', and I cusses and goes back to my blankets. And last night he said nothin' at all."

Already the man hunters were showing signs of restlessness.

"That settles it," declared one. "The feller we're after either kept up on the high places, or else he dropped over the divide the other way. I think some of us better keep on down the road, and the others go back up to the Deacon's Trail, cross the ridge, and take down the other cañon."

"Good! That's right!" came a chorus of approval, as the party remounted.

"See you up at Shingle," Specimen Jones bawled over his shoulder. "If you fellers get there before I do, Josh, make yourselves at home in my cabin. Ain't no lock on my door, and there's a jug under the bunk. Stay there till I get home. Want to talk over old times."

"Good! We'll be there," asserted the prospector. "I was headin' for you. Hope you catch that tinhorn that you're after and decorate a tree with him."

His voice rose in a crescendo due to the needs of widening distance as the party rode away, and Specimen Jones' voice trailed back: "No, nothin' like that! The sheriff's here with us, and ——" The remainder was lost. The sounds on the trail below died away in hasty turmoil and clatter as the posse divided on its new project. A jay bird that had been trying to make itself heard resumed the effort with better success, and Rogers dropped limply back against the rocks of the cliff and stared at the prospector, who eyed him steadily.

"Well, Tom Rogers," Josh said quietly, "what for did you go and rob that Horseshoe layout? Ain't no use in your lyin' to me, you know, because I know you done it. I hates a liar, unless he's lyin' about somethin' that's worth while, and then I bank on him. I reckon it's up to you to give it to me straight, with nothin' but the plain truth, after which, bein' as I'm goin' to sit as judge and jury on this case, I'll decide what I ought to do about you."

"How do you know I robbed it?" demanded Rogers, lowering his eyes.

"Because I do. How do I know you ain't a professional robber? By the way you acted. What makes me think maybe it's the first time you ever did rob one? Because you was in a panic. Why did they lose the trail? Because likely you remembered a half sole or a patch on your boots and got rid of 'em, landin' here in your worn socks. The minute I saw the soles of 'em, I knew you were runnin' away from somethin'. And that ain't all.

"See here, young Tom Rogers, I'll tell you somethin' else: You're a natural-born fool! You ought to be ashamed of yourself, if ever a man was. You! Tom Rogers! A son of old Bill Rogers, who was as white a man as ever made each day he lived an honest one, and, when his time come, probably walked right up to God Almighty, looked Him square in the face and said: 'Lord, I've come, and I ain't afraid, because I done my best. And now I've come home.'"

As he spoke, all his homely awkwardness was suddenly garbed in dignity. The rough, careless drawl had given way to a stern, uncompromising earnestness, and his eyes probed sharply, relentlessly. The culprit turned white, and his lips trembled. He gulped and looked at the ground until surprised by the latter portion of his protector's speech.

"You—you—knew my father!" he stammered.

"Knew him? Of course I did. Knew

him for twenty years. Knew your mother that died when you was a baby. Could almost have sworn you was my old pardner's boy before you ever opened your mouth to tell me your name. You're the dead spit of him. In all but one thing. All but one! Bill Rogers never did a man out of a penny in his life, and—Heaven pity him!—would turn his poor, tired old bones over in his Mexican grave if he knew that his only son—the one he slaved to educate—was nothin' more than a dirty, no-account, pestiferous thief! I kept 'em from gettin' you. Do you know why?"

He walked around the edge of the camp fire and up to the figure that appeared to shrink and flatten itself against the gray wall of rock, and shook a gnarled finger in Rogers' face. He spoke in a voice that was softened with pent feeling: "I was with your dad when he died. I buried him—buried him with these hands! I heard the last words he ever said. He said to me: 'Josh—look after him—help him—do what you can do for my Tom. Be a father to him, and a friend, if he needs one.' I promised; but he died while tryin' to give me your address, and I couldn't find you. I'm here now. And I'm goin' to do what I'd want any one to do with a son of mine in this fix. I didn't let 'em have you. Why? Because it wasn't up to me to see old Bill's son go out on the end of a rope. I'd rather try you myself, and then if I found you guilty, make you walk up on the hillside, there above, give you a last chance to square it with the Lord Almighty, and then put a bullet through your skull. My boy—son of the man I loved—it's up to you now to talk straight. There ain't nothin' standin' between you and a half-decent death but what you can say for yourself, and I'm the judge."

The holdup looked at him with perturbed eyes, but saw no hope through appeal. The prospector was as inflexible and cold as the mountain itself. One of the burros was nosing around the grub box, an intrusion that at any other time would have provoked a volley of objurgation and swift punishment, but now was unheeded. The culprit felt that he was actually on trial, and his knees weakened. He sat slowly down on a convenient bowlder in an attitude of helpless dejection.

"Yes, I robbed the wagon," he said huskily. "But—it was the first time I ever stole a cent from anybody."

"Point one for the defense," growled Price, without a sign of softening. "Go on. What made you do it? Just pure cussedness?"

"No, it wasn't!" retorted Rogers, with a show of spirit. "If they didn't owe me something, nobody on earth ever will! They robbed my father. He called that mine the Washoe, and——"

"Oh! Hold on a minute! The Washoe, eh? So they gave her a new name? I knew about the Washoe. Your father told me. It was a steal. Cash Vance got that property by bribin' a couple of perjurers to help him, and jumpin' the claim, takin' it to the higher courts, and—— Yes, they busted your dad, all right. He couldn't hire any good attorneys, and——"

He stopped and for a long time contemplated the ground at his feet, while Tom Rogers, encouraged, watched him. And then the fugitive abandoned reserve and spoke as one confessing, seeking sympathy, and with a desperate desire to clear himself.

"I was in a San Francisco school when my father died," he said impetuously, "and the first I knew of his death was when the head master came to me and told me that father hadn't remitted, and asked if I knew the reason why. Father didn't write to me very often. It had been six months since I had heard from him, and—I was worried. I wrote to his last address, at Nogales, and the letter came back. Scrawled across the envelope was: 'Died last November, over by Tinto.'"

He stopped for a moment, as if thinking of that crisis, while the prospector nodded affirmation and said: "That's right. He did. Well?"

"I wanted to become a mining engineer. I didn't know what to do. I wrote the postmaster at Nogales for

information, and he wrote back that my father left nothing. So I had to quit school and go to work. I worked two years to get enough to go to Berkeley for one year, and then had to quit again. I worked another year, but had bad luck, and you see I didn't know enough of anything to get steady work, and the times were hard. Then I went to Alaska, and had no luck. I came back and tried to get work and couldn't. I was desperate, I walked up here to Shingle and went to the Horseshoe and got a chance to talk to Vance. I told him who I was and that my father was dead, and all about how I wanted to finish my education, and—tried to borrow enough money from him to carry me through."

He uttered the finishing sentence in a suppressed, hesitant voice, as if ashamed of a past weakness.

"And he wouldn't let you have it—old Vance, who stole a fortune from your daddy?" Price's voice denoted sympathy.

"No! Him? He laughed at me and told me to get out of his office. That he wasn't running an orphans' home, and had no use for anything that had ever been connected by birth or otherwise with my father."

"Um-m-m-mh! What then?"

"Well, I—I got angry at that, and hit him. He yelled like a kicked dog. A bookkeeper and another man ran in and piled onto me. They were helped by a yardman, because, you see, I'm pretty strong. They broke one of my ribs, and—— Oh, well, it doesn't matter about all that! When I recovered consciousness, I was lying beside the road, with dried blood all over my face, and so weak I could hardly crawl to a stream below and—— A teamster named Tim Jordan, a very old man, and very kindly, too, found me, and ——"

"Good old Tim!" interjected Josh.

"He brought me down to Shingle and made me stay at his cabin until I got better, and then loaned me money enough to send for my trunk, and I got a job as swamper over at the Glory Mine. Old Vance saw me on the street down at Shingle the first time I was off shift, and he went to the boss at the Glory and told him I was a crook and that if he kept me around the mine he ought to double lock his safe. This boss, Mike Corrigan, was a pinhead who wanted to curry favor with Vance in the hope of getting something at the Horseshoe some time, so he called me in and gave me my time. Then I got a job in the office at the Lady Ellen Mine, and Vance discovered me there two days later. He owns stock in the Lady Ellen. Is one of the directors, I think. So he got me fired again. That was the finish. I gave up trying to do anything up here on the Big Divide, and pulled out for Keswick. I couldn't get a thing to do. They were laying off men. I went from one place to another, trying to find work, until my money was gone. Then—well, I got sore. There didn't seem to be any place on earth for me, while this man that robbed my father had everything. And so—I came back and—— Yes, I did hold up the pay wagon when it was coming down to Shingle to turn a clean-up over to Wells-Fargo."

The judge of the open-air court got to his feet and walked slowly, backward and forward over the little slope of mountain grass as if mightily perturbed by all he had heard, and finally came to a full stop in front of the plaintiff as if reaching a decision.

"You've heard that old thing about two wrongs not makin' a right, ain't you?" he asked.

The plaintiff nodded a sullen assent.

"Well, where's the clean-up you stole?"

Rogers winced a trifle, as if recalled to the fact that he had become a thief.

"I buried it under a bowlder not a dozen yards from where I stopped the wagon," he replied.

"Um-m-m-mh! I see."

The walk was resumed in thoughtful silence. Josh rolled another cigarette, lighted it with economical care from a dying ember, puffed vigorously, and, when it was burned down to the peril of his drooping, white mustache, threw it away and squatted opposite his pris-

oner. A coarse lock of white hair fell across his eyebrows and seemed to annoy him. He threw off his battered old hat and carefully combed his hair with his fingers as if intent on preserving his toilet.

"All right, so far," he said. "But what I want to know is, how you feel about it, now that you've cooled off and seen what an all-fired mess you've got yourself into."

Tom Rogers was palpably distressed by the question. He stared moodily at a distant mountaintop and shook his head.

"It's pretty bad," he confessed boyishly. "I was sore. I didn't care so much for the money, after all, I think, as I did to get even with old Vance. When I thought of all he had done to my father and to me, I—well, I wanted to play even with him. Just once!"

The prospector looked at him with eyes that had regained their quiet, tolerant humor, and grinned.

"After all," he said thoughtfully, "you're nothin' but a boy. Bill's boy, too. But, you see, you went about things the wrong way. I'd have a heap more respect for you, and so would every man on the Divide, if you'd waited till you got well, given Vance a right good beatin', paid your fine or served your time in jail, and then toddled off about your business. Robbin' a stage or a train or a pay wagon, in California, happens to have but one punishment, which is hangin'."

He paused for another moment, scowled meditatively at the nearest burro that cropped steadily at the short mountain grass, and added judicially: "That bullion has got to go back."

"But you don't know Vance. That wouldn't square it up with him!" exclaimed Rogers.

"It sure will—the way we'll do it," asserted Josh, with his habitual, lazy smile. "Square it up? We'll hand Shingle camp a laugh that'll make it impossible for old Vance to ever refer to that there subject again. And I reckon you'd be sort of glad to get the whole thing off your conscience, wouldn't you, Tommy?" he asked, betokening by his friendly and familiar freedom with nomenclature his forgiveness.

"I would; you can be sure of that!" fervently replied the culprit.

"All right. It goes." The prospector stopped and assumed a whimsically judicial air. "This here court, havin' heard all the evidence, and believin' it, hereby acquits the aforesaid whereas prisoner, Tommy Rogers, and by the same token constitutes itself guardian for the aforeas Tommy Rogers, because he, bein' a natural-born fool, needs one if ever anybody did. Court's adjourned."

He got to his feet and turned his back, pretending to busy himself with picking up his camp outfit, also to keep from looking at the man he had tried and certainly would have executed under other circumstances. Also because he wished to avoid the culprit's expressions of gratitude that were promptly silenced. But he blinked his own eyes with steady persistence under a storm of mental ridicule, and called back over his shoulder gruffly: "Come on, lad! Earn your breakfast and the one you spoiled by helpin' me break camp. You and me's got to be movin'."

And young Rogers, freed from immediate fear, found himself obedient and anxious to earn his new guardian's approval.

CHAPTER II.

Well up in the tops of the Sierras, surrounded by cañon and gorge, backed by rugged hills and peaks from some of which the snow never disappeared, dozed the fine old camp of Shingle. For fifty years it had been a camp, and it told mutely through its shaded streets that some of those who founded it had loved it and had faith in its future. Many of the ancient cabins and "store buildings," erected from the downfall of its original forests, still stood, with moss-covered roofs and beautified by age, as a reminder of those who had built them, and whom they had outlasted. The original Main Street, tree-bordered, lay straight and true, and padding through its summer dust came

the prospector and the rashly impetuous one, followed by three patient burros. The prospector admired vociferously the vista. The amateur robber admired his new friend. The burros admired nothing at all.

A stage with four obviously fresh horses tore to meet them, with jingling harness and rumbling wheels, and as it passed the little cavalcade the driver cracked his whip, grinned, and shouted "Hello, old-timer!" to which salutation Josh grinned, waved his hand through the cloud of gritty dust, and then said to his companion: "I see you got 'em all fussed up. They got one shotgun messenger outside and two in." But the perturbed and repentant bandit failed to appreciate the joke and plodded doggedly ahead. The prospector's eyes twinkled.

"Tommy," he said, "I ain't slept in a bed now for nigh on to three months, and I'm hankerin' for one—in a hotel. A sure-enough hotel, where they got a clerk with his hair greased good and slick and parted right down the middle. I got money enough to pay for both of us, and we'll put these pesky animals in a corral. Then, this evenin', me and you will take a stroll. Sabe?"

The robber did not, and showed it in his staring eye.

"How far is it to where you cached that clean-up?" queried Josh.

"About two miles."

"Good! And the moon don't come up till about nine o'clock now, and that gives us a heap of time. Come on!"

"What is your plan?" Tom asked at last.

The prospector's eyes twinkled under his shaggy eyebrows as he recognized in his new protégé's question a further sign of anxiety.

"First," he replied, "me and you'll find where Specimen Jones holds forth, and like as not there'll be a corral there for my friends. After that—we'll take a paseo around the camp and see what she looks like, and—do some thinkin'."

He trudged steadily forward and changed the topic, commenting on the board sidewalks, the tiny lawns, and struggling flower beds. Off in the distance, continuous wooden awnings and a well in the middle of the road betokened the business part of the village.

"By the great horn spoon! This is sure some camp, all right, all right! Looks like a sure-enough town," Josh exclaimed, as eagerly as a boy faring into a great adventure. "Now that, I reckon, is a church. Hope she's a Baptist or a Methodist. I always like to go and see the sinners soused. And if that ain't a schoolhouse, I never saw one. Camp? This ain't no camp; it's 'most as big as Frisco! She's a town. No, she ain't; she's a city! A regular metteropawlis! Thousands of folks live here!"

"Nine hundred in the camp itself," corrected Rogers.

"Nine hundred! Lordee! Some city!" exclaimed the prospector.

"But there are probably two thousand men working within a radius of four miles," added his informant.

"Anyhow," said Josh, with a long sigh, "she looks like nine hundred thousand to me, and—say, I'm glad I come here. Look how homelike she is! See all them signs down there? Them's saloons, or I cain't read. That's my favorite sort of a town. Churches for them that wants 'em. Schools to bring up real young Americans. Saloons for them that's thirsty. And I sure do hope they've got a gamblin' house or two for them that wants to do a little sportin' with old Miss Chance. If they've got them, too, this place is about as near paradise as a feller could wish for without bein' a hawg."

"Yes, they've got them also," enlightened Rogers. "But I don't gamble, and I don't drink. So I don't know much about them."

"Neither do I! Neither do I!" was the prospector's cheerful response. "But I'm great on seein' every one happy and contented, I am. Now—— Hello! What's that? The stage and express office?"

He stopped abruptly and looked at a low, weather-beaten building that, unlike its next neighbor, was without

a wooden awning and a well-whittled bench.

"Yes."

"Um-m-mh! That sort of suits me, too—that is, the way she's located," he added enigmatically, and grinned his slow, quiet grin as he started forward again. He peered with his keen eyes right and left, ignored the sidewalk loafers who bestowed casual stares at them, and said nothing until they reached the well and trough in the middle of the street.

"Come on up, fellers, and have somethin' on me," he invited his burros, as he seized the wooden pump handle and began to work it vigorously. "Here's to Shingle, fellers! Drink hearty!"

He worked the pump with one hand and by a considerable strain stretched his neck and bent his broad, lean shoulders around until his mustache and mouth intercepted the stream from the spout and assuaged his own thirst.

"Have some, Tommy?" he asked. But Rogers shook his head.

"Hey! Any of you men know where Specimen Jones lives?" he shouted to a group that lounged in front of a general-merchandise store.

"Sure," responded a man in a blue flannel shirt and wearing a stained white hat at such an angle on the back of his head that it suggested juggling or necromancy to retain it in position. "Straight up to the end of the street, first trail to the left after the last house, only log cabin on the hillside with a corral."

"Good work! Them's directions, pardner!" replied Josh, with an attempt at courtesy, and added, in a lower voice, to Rogers: "See! What did I tell you? Real folks live in this camp. All so kind and friendly and cheerfullike that it just makes a feller feel good to hear 'em talk. Come on, now; let's go up to Specimen's corral and get the packs off these fellers."

All the way up the street he continued to voice his admiration. Everything—the day, the weather, the houses, the shade trees, and the birds therein—seemed to please him. He fell to whistling melodiously, reiterating the first bars of "Turkey in the Straw" with many a trill and flourish as evidence of his contentment. Awkwardly assisted by his companion, he removed the packs from the burros, who looked mildly astonished that the day's work was so soon done, gave each a caress and tweaked its long ears, then poked his head curiously into Jones' cabin.

"Humph!" he declared. "Specimen ain't changed none. He always was a mighty shiftless cuss about keepin' his cabin right. Bet a dobe dollar this ain't never been scrubbed out." But he did not enter, appearing to be eager to get back to the delights of what he regarded as a very attractive city. He looked thoughtfully at Rogers as they walked.

"I reckon you'd best go and get a new lid," he remarked. "That one's a leetle too big, and somehow that canned milk ain't improved it none. Got any money?" he demanded, stopping in the trail. "No? Well, chop out them objections, son. I got plenty. Here! Let's go in back of this shed."

He led the way, and proceeded to drag his shirt tail out and fumble at the fastenings of a belt around his lean loins. Releasing it, he squatted on the ground and extracted from one of the divisions a roll of currency that had been carried there so long that it was a mere flattened, stained mass. From it he carefully thumbed off twenty five-dollar bills. He brusquely silenced all of Rogers' objections with: "Shut up! I owed your dad a heap more than that when he died, and now I'm payin' a little of it back." And it was a lie, for the elder Rogers had died owing him.

He replaced the belt, rearranged his shirt and trousers to suit his taste, and led the way down the main street. He halted with wide eyes in front of a clothing shop and said: "By Jiminy, but them's pretty clothes, ain't they? I had a checked suit like that once, and she was a daisy; but a woman I knew made fun of it, and so I had to give it away. 'Most busted my heart, though. Now, that one with the yellow stripes ought to look good on a young feller

like you. Huh? No? You like that plain blue one? Well, every man to his taste. S'pose you go in and get that and kind of fuss yourself up a bit. I don't like to have nobody runnin' around the city with me that's got a hole in the seat of his pants so big that a porous plaster couldn't patch it. That's a good feller. Put 'em on and —— Say! Better not buy new boots. Keep those. Sabe? You'll find me down the line here somewheres. So long."

Josh walked happily down the street, staring in at every window and pausing before some of them with approval. He came to a halt in front of a place that bore the legend, "Prospector's Paradise," said: "Looks first class," stood on tiptoe in front of the swinging, wicker doors, and from the six feet three inches thus attained, surveyed the interior.

"By crackey, pardner," he remarked to the surprised proprietor, "it sure does look like its name."

Some of the loungers inside laughed. Josh grinned cheerfully, and, on the proprietor's invitation, pushed against the doors and entered.

"That's a mighty fine lookin'-glass you got," he exclaimed, staring at the bar fixtures, which were, after all, fairly good. "And what a shiny rail that is! Ain't solid silver, is she? See you got a pool table, too. And some right nice pictures. Well, well! This is sure some place!"

By this time the proprietor, nonplused and fearing that his place was about to be wrecked by an insane man, reached surreptitiously for a bung starter; but the prospector evidenced familiarity with the action by holding up a big red hand and exclaiming: "No offense, boss; no offense! I was in dead earnest. I'm a stranger in this camp."

His grin was absolutely a declaration of peace, his next words a confirmation.

"Come on up, boys," he called loudly. "Gather up and get acquainted with me. I'm Joshua Leander Price, who never done no man any harm, and ain't got no livin' enemies, and is fond of his feller men. Come to see if I can find anything around in these hills, ask no assistance, and just want to be friends. Do me the favor. And don't be bashful."

They proved that they were not. One man only declined.

"I see you ain't drinkin', stranger," Josh remarked, and every one drew a long, weary breath, as if expecting an outburst; but they were mistaken.

"That's right," declared Josh. "I don't believe in drinkin' strong liquors myself. The strongest thing I ever drink is sody pop. Give the boys what they hanker after, but a little rosberry pop for mine," he said to the proprietor, and then added, as if in explanation: "I likes the rosberry best because it's such an all-fired purty color."

They told him they hoped he would like the camp, and, secretly amused, drank to his health.

"Yes, sir," he said to the proprietor of the Paradise, as he put his glass down on the bar, "I don't believe in drinkin'—for myself. Just look at me!"

He stepped back, squared his broad shoulders, and inflated his great chest.

"Ain't never been sick a day in my life. Sixty-one year old and goin' on sixty-two. Don't know what an ache or a pain is. And I owe it all to the fact that I'm teetotal."

The crowd around the bar grinned in good humor. It encouraged him.

"If everybody would drink sody, the same as me, and the saloons didn't sell nothin' but sody, most folks would be a heap sight better off. Liquor makes men fight. I never had a quarrel with anybody in my life. I don't see the use in fightin', nohow. And I'm honest enough to tell you men that I stand for 'most anything, because I'm afraid to fight. Don't believe in it, I don't. The Good Book says: 'A soft answer turneth away wrath.' Can't go back on that, can you? Well, when you drink nothin' but sody pop—I like rosberry the best—you don't want to fight."

The proprietor of the Paradise stood in a daze. He threatened anger. But

his new customer averted it by begging all hands present to smoke a "good seegar" with him, and this, too, was paid for.

"I orders seegars this time," he said, "because I know that most of you men here wouldn't take a second drink if I asked you to. Do me the favor. Not a pain or an ache. Why, do you know, I never tasted beer nor spirits nor red liquor in all my life, and that's what makes me so all-fired healthy!"

Unobserved by him, the wicker screens from the street had swung open and shut again, and a man stood inside with a mild stare of astonished curiosity. But now, catching a view of Price's face in the mirror, he doubled over with delighted laughter. Josh turned with a scowl on his brows. The man straightened and came forward.

"Josh Price, sure as I'm alive! How are you, you old sour-dough ruffian? Oh, I heard you!" he added, as Josh, with a wide grin, seized the extended hand. "Never tasted liquor in your life—that's good! I've seen you when a barrel wouldn't satisfy your thirst—down in Mexico!"

Josh's grin did not in the least fade, nor was he abashed.

"Did I say I never tasted it?" he demanded. "Good heavens! I'm gettin' old, I am. Absent-minded. What I meant to say was, I hadn't tasted it for nigh onto six years, come this May, Hank. What are you doin' up this way, you mangy old coyote? Why, Hank, it's like old times to see you again! Now, I sure do like this camp."

The men who had been playing pool resumed their game, the proprietor of the Paradise languidly began clearing up the glasses and polishing them, and Mr. Henry Williams explained that he was now the manager of a small but promising mine back up in the hills. Josh appeared to remember some errand he had to perform and shook hands with his newly found friend.

"See you later," he called, moving toward the door with his long, steady stride. The screen swung outward and back into place.

"Sort of an amusing, harmless old chap," commented the man behind the bar. Williams chuckled.

"Amusing, yes," he said slowly, as he filled his pipe. "Harmless, no. He's just about as harmless as a ton of nitroglycerin balanced on top of a ladder. He can draw and shoot faster and truer than any man I ever knew or heard of. He can fight with both hands, kick with both feet, gouge, and bite. He can turn handsprings and somersaults in a rough-and-tumble and knock a man out every time he revolves. A pinwheel at a Fourth of July celebration is as slow as a land crab compared with him, and if there's anything on earth that he's afraid of and doesn't dare tackle, you can win a prize by taking it down to the Mexican border and displaying it to the awe-stricken and subdued citizens thereof!"

The proprietor of the Paradise stopped at the critical moment of wiping a long glass and betrayed his astonishment.

"It's true," asserted the manager of the mine. "And you just pass the word around that he's about the last man that's ever come to this camp to pick a fight with. It'd have to be picked, because he doesn't hunt trouble, and will stand a lot; but when he turns loose, take my tip and hit for the brush, fast and hard."

And in the meantime Josh had traveled onward, found a few more old acquaintances, and comfortably installed himself on the well-shaded porch of the City Hotel, where he expectantly awaited his protégé. Another man sauntered up, glanced at him sharply, and then smiled and came forward.

"Hello, Josh!" he hailed, and to the prospector's unrestrained delight, proved to be another friend, but of different stamp. The latest was Frank Barnes, a man with a closely trimmed white beard and steady, dark eyes, who explained that he owned a prosperous mine a short distance from the camp, and had his home in the town. They were talking quietly, indeed seriously for Josh, when Tom Rogers appeared, clad in his new attire, and was thereupon introduced.

"I have seen you before, it seems to me," commented Barnes, frankly staring at him.

"Yes, I worked here at one time," Rogers replied.

"And now him and me are in partnership," Josh added, much to Tom's astonishment.

"Wasn't your father Bill Rogers, who used to be down in Tucson?"

"The same," assured Josh.

"And a very good man, too; we were warm friends," said Barnes, eying Tom keenly. "I wish you success."

He stopped abruptly and turned as a girl of about twenty years of age came hurrying toward them, and his face lighted with a warm expression.

"This is my daughter, Edith, just home from an Eastern seminary," he said to Josh, who promptly thrust out his huge fist and introduced Rogers.

The latter felt suddenly embarrassed. He was still the culprit; repentant, it was true, but with danger hanging above his head. His conscience stabbed now that he was thus brought face to face with a girl who, he acknowledged to himself, was the most attractive he had ever seen. He felt that by one reckless act he had cut himself off irrevocably from such as she. He surmised that she was of the type that he most admired, the self-confident girl who loved out-of-doors. Her white hat, daintily dented, her trim, short skirt, her new riding gauntlets, her high tan shoes, her mannish, simple blouse with its plain collar and tie, and the sun tan of her face told it all. Her eyes, a violet so deep as to appear dark in any save the full light, were open and candid. Her lips, cleanly cut and well curved, with corners suggesting a readiness to laugh or to be firm, did not belie the strength of her chin and round, white throat. Her hair, blond and heavy, was a trifle disarranged as if she had but come from a ride. He stood to one side with unaccustomed awkwardness until, with a cheerful nod to him, she accompanied her father down the street, leaving the prospector to pass more enthusiastic comments on the discovery of another old-time friend.

"This camp," he declared, "is just like comin' home from somewhere a long way off. I knew a lot of the Tucson boys had drifted up here, because I used to hear about 'em once in a while; but I didn't have no idea there was so many. Now, Tommy, I've taken a room for you here, too, No. 27. Just make yourself at home, same as me. We pay for these chairs out here on the porch, just like drummers or owners or any other nabobs. We put our feet on the railin' the same as them, and spit over it the same as them."

He stopped and stared at Tom and then added, in a gruff rumble scarcely audible a few feet away: "I'm tellin' you this so's you'll quit lookin' like a dog in a pound, or a man that's a-runnin' away from a jail. Ain't you got any nerve? Well, if you have, leave it to your Uncle Josh and stick your chin up. They ain't got you yet, and they ain't a-goin' to."

It was after the sun had set, and the streets were filled with loungers who discussed the robbery of the Horseshoe clean-up, and the admitted failure of the posse to capture the thief, that Josh beckoned to Rogers and said: "Well, come on. Time we was goin'. We got to go and get that stuff and turn it over so's you can be a clean man again."

Outside the camp, they talked more freely.

"What I'm up to," he said, "is this: We'll get that stuff, sneak it down here to the camp, lay outside till about midnight, when things is quiet, then go down to that express office, bust a winder open, and chuck it inside. I printed a note on brown paper this afternoon that goes with it. Here it is. Want to read it?"

Rogers took the paper and in the dusk deciphered the painstaking characters:

Gold from the Horseshoe mine. Borrowed over night in the hope that old Vance who owns it will die of heart bust or else get the aforesaid heart cracked so itll spill onct in a while and may the Lord have mercy on his soul when he croaks.

THE COMMITEE.

"You see," Josh explained, "that'll make the camp think it was all a joke. We gets the clean-up through the winder, then we rings the express agent's bell. He lives upstairs. I found out to-day. He comes down, but we ain't there. We're up on the line, watchin' some game, and I makin' noise enough so folks'll think I've been there all the time, loadin' up on sody pop."

To him the conception seemed one of rare merit, a great intrigue, involving wonderful acumen. He was as proud of it as a man could be who had discovered a way to reach the moon. He chuckled and beat Tom on the back with great glee. But Tom was only too anxious to have the load off his mind and willing to adopt any means. He saw in this restitution a chance to undo his frightful blunder, committed in an insane outburst, and to begin over again.

"Good!" he said quietly. "I don't care how it goes back, just so it does. I didn't realize that——" He threatened to break down, and the prospector patted him kindly on the back.

"It's all right, son," he said. "You did a fool trick; but I'm goin' to get you out of it. I sort of reckon that the Lord Almighty ain't holdin' up a grudge against a man when he just makes a mistake."

The darkness closed upon them, lighted only by early stars shining through the high spaces and clean air. The road stretched dim and winding before them. They trudged silently forward for a long time, each absorbed in thought, until Tom caught his companion by the arm and whispered: "It's just around that bend ahead. If we cut across here we shall come to a pile of rocks. I would know them if it were darker than it is; I made sure of my landmarks."

They walked cautiously from the trail, Tom in the lead with outstretched hands to pull aside the tangles of brush and briers that sometimes barred his advance. Both were leaning forward and peering into the night.

"This is it," mumbled Tom. "Right here. This big pile with a scrub pine on top. It's in a line right under that. There is a round bowlder just my height, and in its foot there's a crevice and a hole. I put the gold in that and pulled the brush over."

"Go ahead," was all he heard, and still as frontiersmen can be from training and habit, they slipped forward. Tom stopped and dropped to his knees, fumbled with his hands, and then barely suppressed an exclamation of despair.

"Why—why, it's not there!" he gasped. "Some one has been here! The brush has been pulled away!"

He leaned forward and thrust his hand into the hole. He was like a man seized with a chill, and straightened himself back to a sitting posture while his hands were still outstretched.

"Sure this is the place?" the prospector whispered in his ear.

"Certain! Quite certain!" he declared hoarsely.

"S-s-sh!" came the warning whisper, and the prospector crawled in front of him and thrust his own hands into a cavity. It was empty.

Suddenly he lifted up a trifle, caught Rogers by the shoulder, and pulled him downward. He wriggled forward as if the night itself might hear, and whispered hurriedly: "Keep still! Crawl back on your belly, and don't make a sound! Don't let a twig crack under you! Some one has found this stuff, and it's ten to one they're layin' out around here tryin' to nab us."

With painful deliberation and caution they silently retreated from off the gray rocks that, on a lighter night, would have exposed their presence. They suppressed their breathing painfully, each sound being magnified to their ears. They reached the undergrowth, and, side by side, lifted their heads from the earth and listened. Not a sound was audible.

"Come back down to the road," whispered the prospector, and again they crawled cautiously for a long and strained interval. They came to it at last more than two hundred yards from the place where the bullion had been concealed, and got to their feet.

"I—I told you the truth! That was

where I hid it!" asserted Rogers, as if he had been accused of a lie.

"No use to say that," gruffly replied the prospector, in a low rumble. "I believe you, boy. You wouldn't lie to me, I know. Only—who the deuce do you suppose found it?"

He sat on a bowlder by the roadside and pondered, while Tom, with all his hopes dashed earthward, stood dumb. It was as if the chance to begin again and redeem himself had been torn from his hands. He was hopeless. Looking up, the prospector read the dejection in his attitude and got slowly to his feet.

"Tommy," he said, in the same low undertone, "don't be cut up about it. If the sheriffs didn't get it, some Piute has stumbled on it. If so, it's up to us to find him, make him shell out, and square the account. You go back to the hotel and wait in my room for me to come. I'm goin' back."

Josh waited a few minutes after the younger man's departure, then began a cautious exploration, his real object being to learn whether any one was watching the cache. With the adroitness of a Blackfoot Indian, and as silent, he made detours around the central point, pausing now and then to listen, or to reassure himself that any slight noise was meaningless. Emboldened, he proceeded more rapidly, until convinced that no menace was at hand, after which he walked to the pilfered cache, and, shading a match in his hat, closely examined it.

There was the proof that Tom had not lied; for some one, in removing the heavy bullion, had been compelled to drag it over the moist earth, thus leaving a distinct trail. Cautiously, burning match after match, the prospector scanned the spots of sparse earth. He gave a little grunt when he picked up a trousers button and slipped it into his pocket. He found a clean, distinct footprint at one place where the moist, sandy loam lent itself to the imprint, and for a long time studied it, using match after match.

Rendered more confident by the fact that he had not been disturbed, he proceeded to lay a little blaze of twigs by the light of which he made careful measurements of his new clew, using for the purpose a scaled rule on the back of the hoof pick in his knife. Having neither pencil nor paper, he found a slab of slate, scratched thereon a copy of the shoe print and his figures. This task completed, he searched the other side of the bowlder, and paused, astonished by finding another shoe print. He bent farther over and made another pile of twigs and lighted them to assure himself that the flash of his match had not been deceitful.

There was no doubt of it! Sharp and distinct, and evidently made either at the same time or at nearly the same time as the man's mark, was the clear impression of a woman's shoe, small, compact, and advancing toward the cache from that side of the rock. He found two others leading away from it and studied them carefully, seeming to draw some conclusion therefrom. He reversed his slate tablet and again took measurements that he recorded with painstaking fidelity. His tablet he wrapped carefully in his big bandanna handkerchief, slipped it into the pocket of his blue flannel shirt, trampled the fire out, and stood thoughtfully for a full minute before moving. Then he dropped to his knees and gathered every particle of charred twig and even some of the earth beneath in his hands and filled his hat with this evidence. Carefully he obliterated not only his own footprints, but the others that he had found, working on hands and knees.

He crawled around to where he had lighted his first little blaze, added its refuse to his hat, and swept away the print of the man's step. He worked with patient thoroughness until certain that not a trace was left anywhere around the gray bowlder.

For the distance of a mile he carried his hat in the hollow of his arm before leaving the road to dump his burden into the undergrowth. He dusted the hat carefully, clapped it on his head, and, as he resumed his way toward Shingle, whistled softly as if he had not a care in the world.

CHAPTER III.

Shingle, as the prospector saw it from above, looked like a poet's dream. The moonlight streamed through the big trees that bordered each side of the main street, now transformed into a band of dull, frosted silver, and made shadows like marvelous lace. The lights shone yellow and soft through big shop doors, old shop windows with narrow panes, and pretentious new ones of plate glass. Men lounged and argued in the gloom beneath the wooden awnings, and the spire of the church caught and threw back yellow rays, as if its tawdry gilt had been transmuted to purest gold. On a lawn in front of a cottage was a little party of youths and girls. They sang the current popular song of the day, "A Spanish Cavalier," accompanying themselves with a guitar and a mandolin. In the moonlight the dresses of the girls became white spots, and the lawn a swarthy green, pricked out here and there with dimmed colors of flower beds. The picket fence in front of the cottage, merely a line of white stakes in the daylight, had taken on a beauty of its own, with a fanciful border of shadows. A mocking bird in a neighboring tree tried to assist the song with its melody.

Josh stopped, leaned against the trunk of a tree, listened until the Cavalier was properly dead, and remarked to himself: "Gosh all hemlocks! I wisht I was young again and they'd let me come in there and sing with 'em. I wonder if they'd kick if I come in and sang 'em the 'Cowboy's Lament?' It's a good old tune. And I can just naturally make a guitar curl up and cry when I pester its strings."

It was no knowledge of etiquette or manners that decided him to forego the pleasures of introducing himself, his accomplishment on the guitar, and the "Cowboy's Lament," but a recollection of the repentant, harassed son of his old partner that caused him to refrain from opening the gate and walking bravely forward.

"That boy, Tom, I like!" he mumbled to himself in the subconversational mumble that so many prospectors who live in the solitudes adopt when hungering for sound. "And Tommy," he added, as he resumed his progress, "is sure in one whale of a fix."

He progressed steadily and safely past all temptation by keeping to the exact center of the road until he reached the City Hotel, on whose porch were the prevalent loungers, with feet cocked up on the porch rail, and each distinguished by a single spot of brilliant, glowing, intermittent red, as cigar or cigarette answered to a deliberate draft. He avoided these by tramping straight up the steps and through the open door, pulling his hat over his eyes to shade them from the outflaring light.

He tramped heavily up the stairs, peered at the painted numbers on the doors to make certain of his destination, and battered with bony knuckles on No. 27. Still blinking his eyes to adjust them to the light, he entered and closed the door behind him. He threw off his hat and said: "Sit down, Tommy. Sit down. I always did hate a man that was too cussed polite."

"What did you learn?" asked Tom, with tragic eagerness.

"Not much of anything. Give me one of my boots."

Tom obeyed, and the prospector drew the slate tablet from his pocket and gravely measured it and consulted his records.

"This boot," he said, as he handed it back, "is a heap too big for your foot. Tommy, was the pair you had on when you ran loco too big for you, or just your size?"

"They fitted," was the response. "Why? I wear eights."

"And these are tens. And so the track I found there must have been made by either an eleven and a half or a twelve."

He laid the slate tablet on the little stand and scowled meditatively at the floor.

"But what's this on the other side?" asked Tom, picking the slate up and turning it over curiously.

"That's what I cain't quite make out," replied the prospector. "It was a

woman made that track, and, by gee whiz, I got an idea from her trail that —yes, I'm 'most sure of it! There must have been a woman helped whoever wore the big boot to get away with the boodle. Now, what we've got to find is, who it was. And that ain't all."

He fumbled in his pocket and produced the trousers button. and took it to the light. He drew a prospector's folding magnifying glass from another pocket, opened a leaf, and inspected the button.

"Um-m-mh!" he said. "The pants you had on were brown. This was torn off a pair that was gray. Torn off, too, because here's a few threads of the goods hangin' on. Let's see. That means that the fellow who wore the boot was a tall man who wore a dark-gray pair of pants, and had to do considerable stoopin' to get down to pull that thirty-odd pounds out of the place where you hid it. He wore suspenders, which mighty few men do in this neck of the woods, and he wasn't a regular workin'man, because no regular workin'man wears anything but a belt. The woman that was with him has a small foot, so most likely she's not such a mighty big woman. Of course that single boot track proves that the posse missed the spot when they went up there, because otherwise there'd be a lot of tracks. Also the button proves it; for some of the posse would sure have found the button. Most likely the boot belongs to the man that shed the button while strainin' at the sack and draggin' it from the hole."

"Also, whoever found the gold and took it away was not an officer and had no intention of returning it to its owner," added Tom. "Because, if that had been the case, there would have been a constant watch over that spot with the purpose of apprehending the thief—me—when I returned to get the bullion."

"You're right about that," agreed Josh. "I know there was no one watching, because I had to light little fires to look at the tracks and make those measurements."

He glanced up at the face of his protégé, and saw the slow despondency and hopelessness that spread over it. Rogers seemed to shrink into his chair, bend forward, and droop.

"It means—it means," he said hoarsely, "that I can't undo what I've done. That I'm to keep on feeling that I'm a thief, and that there is a reward out for my capture. That, no matter how I behave myself after this, I'm to live in fear. I must have been insane!"

He ended with a groan, and haggard lines marked themselves slowly around his clean-cut face. The prospector watched him with shrewd, appraising eyes, marking the signs of despair and remorse. Tom got to his feet and walked to the open window and stared out into the night, blind to its beauty. Josh whistled softly between his teeth, as if thinking over the situation.

"Mr. Price, I see that——" The young man turned abruptly and faced the watcher.

"My friends, and particularly the sons of my old pardners, call me Josh," interrupted the prospector quietly.

"I—I can't thank you enough," Tom continued impulsively; "but you see it's no use. I've learned a hard lesson. If a man makes one blunder, he is damned."

Josh leaned back in his chair and thrust his hands inside his belt. Rogers came closer until he stood looking down at him, wild-eyed and white with nervous tension.

"I can see more," he added. "That for me to stay here—anywhere in this part of the country—might get you into trouble. I made another blunder by letting you try to help me. If ever they proved the robbery against me, you would be under suspicion as my accomplice."

The prospector grinned, liberated his hands, and proceeded to roll a cigarette.

"Mr. Price——"

"Josh!"

"Well, then, Josh! You've been so decent to me, and so kind, that I can't risk involving you in this mess. I've made my bed, and must lie on it. I'm going to do the only thing I can do, and

that is to get out of Shingle to-morrow and go to some foreign country—Mexico seems best—and never come back."

"Nope!" was the prospector's unexpected and decisive answer. "You're goin' to stay right here in Shingle."

"Then there is but one other thing for me to do—give myself up, confess, and take my medicine."

Josh looked at him admiringly, drew another big puff at his cigarette that consumed half its flimsy length, and got slowly to his feet. He walked across the room, and, with a frontiersman's fear of fire, threw the stump into the slop jar, lifted the pitcher, and poured water over it, then strolled to the window and stuck his head out and glanced all around to make certain that no one was within hearing. He closed the window, pulled down the shade, and came across the intervening space until he stood beside the harassed bandit.

He laid a big hand on Tom's shoulder and said quietly: "You're still doin' the wrong thing, son. You're just ready to pile another blunder on top of all the others. The man that runs, or even turns his back on trouble, my boy, is always lost. If ever trouble starts out for your scalp, the only possible thing to do is to load your gun, grit your teeth, and go after it like a wasp after a dog's hind quarters. Get him first. Shoot on sight. Shoot fast, hard, and steady. Shoot to kill. Trouble never licks any one but quitters. Trouble is a coward that hops on the weak and stomps 'em when they're down. It's a coyote pretendin' to be a wolf that runs and whines when a brave man kicks it in the ribs. Nobody but a coward runs from it, and, unless old Bill Rogers, your daddy, was a livin' lie, which he wasn't, it ain't like a son of his to show a yaller streak. You've done it once, just because you're still a boy and didn't stop to think, or didn't have no real friend to step in and check you. Well, you've got a friend now. I'm it. And there ain't goin' to be no runnin' nor whimperin' nor wincin' under the pack straps, because, as sure as there's a God, I ain't goin' to let you! Me and you are goin' to fight this thing to a finish, and sooner or later we're goin' to win—goin' to prove that we're men! Regular, grown men, with hard hands, steady heads, and out to fight! Not babies, squallin' for help and afraid of the dark!"

He stopped abruptly as he observed the effect his words were having on his companion, and clumsily affected not to see the latter's distress; for Tom Rogers, hitherto without powerful friends or allies, threatened to break down entirely, now that brave and sympathetic support had been freely volunteered. He slouched into a chair, his fingers twisted themselves together hardly, as if he were fighting for restraint. He tried to voice his gratitude, but could not.

"Great Jehosophat," exclaimed Josh, "but it's hot and smoky in this here room! Gets to my eyes, too!" He walked quickly across to the window, lifted the shade, then the sash, and looked out meditatively until certain that Tom had been granted ample time to fight his battle.

Presently he turned from his contemplation of the night, pulled the window shut again, drew the shade, and removed his shirt, exposing his big, hairy chest and muscular arms.

"Now, about your daddy," he said casually, "I forgot to tell you that when he died he left about a thousand dollars in cash I was to give to you when I found you. I gave you a hundred to-day, and I'm goin' to give you nine hundred more out of this belt to square that part of it up, and so you won't feel like a busted man in case you get tired of bein' around with me."

"I don't need it," impatiently asserted Tom. "And maybe you can't spare it now, anyhow."

"Spare it? Good heavens, boy, look here!"

He pulled compartment after compartment of his belt open, dumping on the table the contents of each in wads of flat, folded bills.

"Tommy," he drawled, "there's a

little more than ten thousand dollars of Uncle Sam's greenbacks there."

In this he told the truth.

"And I reckon I must have that much more at least down in Frisco bank," wherein, having no bank account at all, he benevolently lied.

"So, you see, you don't need to have any hesitancy about takin' what's really yours." And this latter lie, knowing it as he did to be a lie, because Bill Rogers had died with scarcely a dollar in his possession, did not hurt.

"What I want you to know is that if worst comes to worst, we've got money to fight. And, besides that, I'll feel a heap better, and you will, too, if you know you've got something of your own. Nothin' like money on hand to make a man confident. Without it, he's as lost and lonesome and unprotected as a man without a gun. You'll be twice the man you are, knowin' that you've got a shot or two of your own, a friend that'll stick, and the stuff to make a fight with."

He slipped his shirt over his head, picked up his piece of slate, jammed his hat on his head after fingering the four dents to suit his idea of dress, and started for the door.

"Say, Josh, you've forgotten something," said Tom, aroused to his intended departure. "Your belt and money."

"So I did! So I did!" exclaimed the prospector, opening the door into the hallway. "But I'm too tired and sleepy to bother about that to-night. You just keep it for me till to-morrer, son."

And he banged the door shut and trudged toward his own room.

"It's a shame to do it," he thought to himself, as he jerked off his clothing and tumbled into bed, "but I've got to make that Tommy feller know that I trust him clean through and through. He may not sleep a whole lot comfortable, thinkin' over his responsibility; but even lyin' awake and just thinkin' it all over will go a long way toward makin' a man out of him, and, anyhow, if Bill Rogers is hangin' around watchin' us, although we cain't see him, Bill will be right happy and will agree with me that I'm just naturally doin' the best I can to make good. Besides, if the boy's a sure-enough crook, he'll never have a better chance than this to get away with somethin', and if he is I want to know it now, before I dip in any farther."

And within five minutes, any one passing through the hallway might have wondered if a rhinoceros was installed in a certain room, for Josh had gone to sleep as placidly as if every cent he had in the world was in a steel-armored bank instead of lying on the table in front of a self-confessed thief of the mountain highway.

CHAPTER IV.

When Tom Rogers arose after a disturbed night in which he awoke at least a dozen times, alarmed by the fear that he had heard some one stealthily trying to enter the room and rob him of more money than had ever before been in his possession, it was late. His head felt "stuffy," due to having slept with his window closed and bolted. He threw up the shade, and, when the sun struck him full in the face, berated himself angrily for having overslept. He made a hasty toilet and went out into the hallway to discover that the prospector's door stood open and the room vacant.

"Mr. Price had his breakfast and left nearly an hour ago," the clerk informed him. "He said to tell you that he didn't know when he would be back, but for you to amuse yourself seeing the sights and to be here for dinner."

"He didn't say where he was going, did he?" asked Tom.

The clerk grinned and said: "Yes. Told me he was going out to buy sticks of barber-pole candy because he had always had a fondness for it and proposed to eat a bellyful now that he had a chance."

Somewhat disgruntled because he was still possessed of the prospector's money belt, Tom went to the dining room for his breakfast; but in the meantime Mr. Joshua Price was merely walking backward and forward the

length of the street, sometimes peregrinating absently into a side street, and earning the reputation, as Miss Elfrida Violet Jones, the village dressmaker, said, of being "a nasty old woman chaser;" for, wherever he saw a woman near at hand or in the far distance, he promptly pursued her and stared at her feet. Sometimes, as if not thoroughly satisfied, he almost ran in front of them, and stared fixedly for a second time. Occasionally he followed his victims doggedly until they became annoyed and cut across the road to escape him. On these occasions he stopped in front of the first plain imprint in the dust and made mental measurements. Once he went to the trouble of pulling from his pocket a new carpenter's rule, purchased that morning, and making measurements.

"You think you're funny, don't you?" expostulated one certain young lady distinguished by an inordinate mass of peroxide hair and flashy clothing; but Josh continued to ply his rule and did not even look up to grin, thus convincing her that he was not trying to be humorous, but was merely insane.

By eleven o'clock the sun shone so hotly that none but the most hardy women ventured out. Josh was still persevering and as patient as a burro hanging around a camp trying to steal food. For the moment he was resting indolently against a tree trunk, but with an observant eye that roved up and down all streets visible in the hope of sighting some other person appareled in a skirt. He had been there now for a full fifteen minutes, as some of those who lived in the near-by cottages could attest; but he was placidly blind to all inspection from the corners of the blinds, through lace curtains, or more openly.

"The female population of a big city like this," he ruminated, "is certainly goin' to take a long time to run down. Never knew there was so many women on earth with different-sized hoofs. That blond dame was the closest, but she had a bunion, or somethin' like that, so she's out of the runnin'."

And then he suddenly straightened and scowled. The blond lady was coming down the street again, attired in another outfit of flashy clothing, consisting of a plaid walking skirt and a pair of mountain shoes. She carried a stick and swung away from the camp with a good stride, as if bent on taking a stroll to reduce weight. Mindful of her previous excoriation, and being quite in awe of a woman with a sharp tongue, Josh ducked hastily behind the corner of the nearest cabin and remained in seclusion until she had passed. He stretched his neck around the corner to note the direction she took, and the woman who lived in the nearest house remarked crabbedly: "Ah, ha! That's the kind he is! Just an old ruffian! And I'll bet anything on earth that he follows that dreadful woman down the street! Humph! Claire de Montague, she calls herself! He needn't have taken the pains to hide hisself, because she likes to have men walk right up and wink at her."

And, sure enough, the prediction was fulfilled when Josh, still scowling, decided it safe to satisfy his suspicions by taking a new measurement of the new shoes. He lounged off up the street with hangdog air, after a sufficient time had elapsed, and followed the road that the blond one had taken, but took the utmost precautions to assure himself that she was not aware of his espionage. He could see her far ahead, walking sturdily up the road, and glanced to either hand to see where it would be possible to stalk her.

"That's it. The curve up ahead, there. I remember that when comin' to the camp," he thought to himself. "Now I must beat her to that point around the bend, and—we'll see!"

He dove into the brush beside the road with a frontiersman's disregard for the footing, leaped like a goat across a low, rocky divide, stooped and ran from cover to cover, scaled a rocky wall that the road had avoided, and was lying full length behind a manzanita bush when she passed. He fixed his eyes on one spot where her foot had stirred a cloud of dust, and never moved them from the spot. He waited

with the utmost care for more than ten minutes; then, with eyes still fixed on the spot, stumbled downward toward it, finding every obstacle on the side of the hill in his progress.

"Goin' to be no mistake!" he muttered to himself. "I got my eye on the track she made, and no other, sure."

He grinned with satisfaction when he found a clean, deep imprint in the road and bent above it with his pocket rule and a piece of slate. A minute later, he straightened up, and the grin broadened and he chuckled.

"By the piper that played before Moses, I got her!" he declared. "That's the woman that was with the man that got the clean-up! And she knows all about the house that Jack built! Next thing is to find out who she is, and where Jack is."

He was decidedly absent-minded when he met Tom at the City Hotel in time for luncheon and took his belt and clasped it around himself without comment. He had already forgotten his desire to test the young man, and accepted its return as something that might happen between two partners at any time and place. He aroused himself after the meal was finished and they were standing on the veranda in front of the hotel.

"S'pose you go up to that corral and take care of the burros," he said. "Poke your nose into Specimen Jones' cabin, and if he's there, tell him I want to see him and will be up at his cabin at about nine o'clock to-night."

"I'll see to it at once," assented Tom, eager to do something, and walked rapidly away; while Josh, after casting a sidelong glance at those at the far end of the veranda, walked slowly up the street, keeping to the shaded side.

"It's in the rum joints that I can pick up most of what I want to know about that blond dame," he thought, and put his plan into action. He went from one to another, ingratiating himself, and now and then asking a discreet question, until at last he met Williams, and he tactfully led the conversation by degrees to his object.

"Say, Hank," he said, "I saw a woman this mornin' that I'd like to know who she is. About thirteen hands high, free stride, except for one hoof that's a little out of kilter, wears sure-enough clothes, got sort of green-gray eyes, a tongue sharp as a razor, and more yaller-white hair than would make a saddle blanket and one gross of don't-forget-me-love watch chains. Now, who might she be?"

Williams vented a roar of ridicule. "Want to know who she is? Say, Josh, you've either changed your ways since I first knew you, or you're plumb crazy! Thought you never mixed up with women? That's Clara Montague. And she's bad medicine."

"Has she got any favorites among the men?" demanded Josh.

"Not a chance for you," was the miner's reply. "She likes those that have money—all except one, of course, a worthless, lazy, trifling tinhorn sport that runs a chuck-a-luck game down at the Sport. No one else around this camp envies him. When a man gets that low——"

"What's this party's name?" demanded Josh.

"He's known here as Cotton-tail Burke. What his real, honest-Injun name is I don't know. They do say that he did time in San Quentin once for sandbaggin' a man; but I don't believe it. He ain't got the nerve."

He stopped for a minute and reverted to questions concerning Tucson, but found the prospector singularly absent-minded. A messenger from his mine called him on a business matter, and Josh took the opportunity to make his departure. He had barely gained the street when he nearly collided with a man who was swinging along with his hat pulled over his eyes, and who snarled angrily at interference. Josh started an apology, and then abruptly stopped and changed his tone of voice.

"S'pose you look where you're goin'!" he rumbled belligerently. "For two cents I'd boot you the length of this street, you lop-eared old crook!"

The man, who had pursued his way, turned at this, exposing a lantern jaw, craggy brows, and small eyes set too

closely together, and too cold and light to be reassuring. His high shoulders, above a singularly tall frame, and his extraordinarily long arms, jerked angrily.

"Don't get too fresh, or I'll——" he began, and then suddenly stopped and stared in surprise.

"You'll what, Vance?" demanded Josh. "Didn't expect to see a live one, did you? Thought it was one of these Shingle camp fellers that'd stand for your rough work. Well, it ain't. I see as how you remember me. Yes, it's me, old Josh Price, still on earth, and, believe me, Vance, I'm still hungry for just one thing. That's an excuse to fill you so full of lead that a derrick couldn't lift you. You know," he continued, with a particularly long drawl and a particularly significant grin, "all I'm waitin' for is an alibi. Soon's I can arrange that, you're goin' to be snuffed out, Vance. Graveyard for yours! Why don't you fight like a man, you dirty old thief? Ain't you got no guts? Let's see, it's nigh on to twenty year ago since you was the rampagin' bad man of Tombstone, Arizony, and I pulled your nose in the street, took your gun away from you, and spurred you with it for a full half mile. And they's another score since then that ain't settled, Vance; but I ain't goin' to tell you what that is until settlement day, and when it comes, what I did to you in Tombstone is goin' to seem like a friendly caress of love. Adios, Mister Bad-man Vance, who's become so respectable. Adios! You can find me any time you want me by raisin' your voice."

The wicker doors swung wide and a number of heads and shoulders were thrust out, as if gleefully anticipating a street duel; but Vance merely glared wolfishly, shrugged his shoulders, snapped his fingers, and walked deliberately away.

"That's the way I stand with him!" declared the prospector to the men in the doorway, and then promptly turned in the opposite direction, went to his room in the hotel, shut the door, and doubled up with joy.

Almost immediately the door opened and Tom entered, looking troubled.

"See here, Josh," he said, "I just heard that you had threatened old Vance in the street. I don't wish you to get into any trouble on my account."

"Trouble!" Josh grinned and then laughed boisterously. "Trouble! There ain't goin' to be no trouble," he asserted. "You don't sabe, that's all. I wasn't the least bit sore at the old curmudgeon."

"Then why——"

"Son, I had an object in that. I was doin' some advertisin'. I want folks around Shingle to talk about my havin' it in for Vance and bein' his enemy. I want every one here to think that I'm just ready to skin and eat Vance alive. A man like that has enemies, don't you see? And a man's enemies talk to a feller who is supposed to be hankerin' to get him. In other words, I'm goin' to learn more about Vance from now on than I could ever learn if folks didn't know that I was gunnin' for him. You just wait and see."

Tom shook his head doubtfully and looked worried.

"Now, see here, Tommy," the prospector said, "you got to get your mind off your troubles. I'm goin' to give you somethin' to do. I want you to circulate around this afternoon, without lettin' any one suspect you're lookin' for information, and find out anything you can about a feller named Cottontail Burke, that's the white-haired boy with a blonde called Clary Montague. But don't let it seem as if you was carin' much about him, or too all-fired anxious to learn. Just gumshoe for your information. And, Tommy, quit broodin' over your trouble. Why, we're goin' to clean this mess up before you're many months older. Sure!"

He shoved Tom from the room, opened a crumpled old leather valise that was fastened with a huge padlock, took out some papers, swept everything from the washstand, including his hat, to the floor, spread his papers out, and began to scan them carefully. Now and then he referred to a crude map and whistled between his

teeth. He was making notes when, an hour or so later, Rogers returned.

"Say, Josh," he said. "Cotton-tail Burke isn't here. He took the stage this morning."

The prospector was on his feet at a bound.

"Did he have any baggage that you heard of?"

"Yes. A suit case and a big bag. And said he would be back here at the end of the week."

"Which means that he ain't comin' back at all," Josh declared. "Tommy, as sure as we're alive, the gold from the pay wagon went out of here in his baggage! And we can't chase him, because we ain't got proof enough. We're done, sure as you're a foot high and weaned, unless we can keep track of him through that yaller-haired woman."

His companion could not follow his reasoning, and Josh painstakingly explained his theory, ending with: "She'll go to him as soon as she thinks it's safe. They always do. That is, unless he gives her the slip and gets away with all the swag. We just naturally got to keep our eye on her from now on and make sure that she can't get out of this town without our knowin' it. And when she goes, we've got to know where she goes, and get the detectives to work to find out if he's cashed in gold anywhere. It's most likely that he'll not be in any hurry about it, waitin' for things to blow over. Yes, that's most likely. It may take a year, but, boy, we're goin' to have that clean-up back. Meantime, I'm goin' to give you a job that'll take all your time. See them papers?"

Tom looked at them absently, but at the prospector's next words sat up more eagerly.

"There may be a mighty big fortune in 'em. Maybe hundreds of thousands of dollars. And I'm goin' to let you in on it with me."

He drew his chair over by the washstand and pointed out spots with his stub of a pencil as he talked.

"In 1854 there was a camp in a flat up above here called Bonanza City. She was great placer ground, and I reckon there must have been pretty well over a hundred cabins scattered along the flat. There were three hard-rock miners blew in there—Mexicans they was—and they didn't have no luck with the placers, and so they went to snoopin' for ore. And the funny part of it was they struck a ledge right square in the street of the camp. They set up an arrastra and went to takin' out some rock and workin' it. First everybody laughed at 'em. Then, when other ground worked out, other men went lookin' for ore; but nobody found much—at least, anything worth wastin' much time on. Also they found pay ore over here on the other side of Shingle—that's the Washoe, there, that spot—and the greasers finally owned all there was of Bonanza City, and used old cabins for firewood to save the trouble of cuttin' it. They kept pluggin' along, doin' not very well, as times went in them days, until they got down so deep in their shaft that the water run 'em out. Then one of the fellers up and croaked, and another had to go back to Sonora, and the third man, bein' left alone, had to give up. His name was Juan Carvallo."

He straightened back and tilted his chair against the wall, indicating that the maps were of no further use to demonstrate, and made a cigarette.

"Now, this Carvallo was a ploddin', secretive, wise old coot. He knows that mine is no good without pumpin' machinery and a hoist and all that, which he can't buy; but he's got an eye to the future, Carvallo has, so he just goes to work and puts about four layers of logs crosswise over the shaft, leavin' about six or eight feet space on top of 'em, and that six or eight feet he fills with dirt off the old dump and says: 'Adios! Maybe some time I'll come back.' But he never does. He goes back to Sonora, with quite a little home stake he made out of placer ground over near Placerville, and about fifteen years ago I was superintendent of a mine down in Sonora and gets to know him.

"I liked the old feller first rate, and, besides, I was sparkin' his youngest gal.

Then Diaz comes along, accuses Juan of harborin' insurrectos, and fines him. Diaz's *Generalissimos* comes again, about a year later, and they won't believe the old man when he tells 'em he's broke. They take the poor old cuss down to the nearest jail and tell him if he don't dig up they'll just naturally stick him up against a wall and make a lot of holes through him. Well, I couldn't stand for that. I goes to the *Justicia* and makes a talk. No good. He's scared plumb stiff of this *Generalissimo*, who is hangin' around. I goes to the *Generalissimo* and gives him a thousand dollars out of my own pocket for himself, to let Juan escape. I waits a week, with everything ready, horses and so forth—so's Juan can get across the line—and the old man don't show up. So back I goes to the *Generalissimo* one night to ask why for. He gives me a nasty grin and says he wants a thousand more. I roared. He starts for the door to yell for a soldier to have me arrested.

"I was on top of him in one hop and banged him over the head with my Colt's just to keep him from yellin'. So help me Moses, I didn't intend to hurt him much, but his skull was made of paper. No good at all. He was deader than a canned salmon when he hit the floor.

"'By Jiminy, that's too bad!' says I, lookin' at him. 'I didn't mean to hurt him so much. I wouldn't have killed that man for ten cents!' I collared the order for Juan's release, turned off the lights, and went out. And when I got Juan out, him and me had to go some to beat the rurales to the border line. Juan's girl, the one I was sparkin', promised to meet us across the line, but, on account of seein' a Spanish bullfighter shortly after we left, she didn't come, and old Juan never forgave her.

"His other daughter come and told us about it, and I sort of took care of both 'em for a while. Then she croaked. I had that poor old cuss on my hands for about three years, and I was sure enough sorry for him because he was a real old *Cavallero*. He always pretended that he was borrowin' my money—never think of accepting a gift—and he used to dog it up and down the street and tell about what he was goin' to fall heir to some day. Then he was taken sick and the doctor said it was the finish, and the old feller said he couldn't think of no way to pay me back except to give me a map and tell me about this mine. Now, maybe he was lyin'. I don't know, because the first time he told me about it he said there was a lot of ore in sight that would run about twenty dollars to the ton, but that ore kept gettin' richer and richer until just before he cashed in his checks it was worth a hundred and twenty."

He stopped and stared at the ceiling, while Tom Rogers, highly interested, thought he had been overcome by his memories. He looked at the breathless Tom from the corner of his eye, and was pleased to note that the latter had forgotten his own trouble.

"Now, son," he continued, in a fatherly voice, "of course old Carvallo may have been mistaken. Maybe there's nothin' in it at all, and maybe there's a big fortune in it. Anyhow, I'm goin' to let you in on it for one-half. And if there's a lot of gold there, when we find it, we'll pay back that five hundred ounces so's you can feel like a free man again and hold your head up with the best of 'em."

Tom could not speak. He was stricken dumb by this new evidence of friendship.

"But—but what can I do to help?" he finally asked.

"Why, it's this way: We can find out where Bonanza City was easy enough, but it's goin' to take some maneuverin' to find out who owns the land, to buy it, and then to dig holes until we find that old shaft. Then we'll see what has to be done next. Maybe a whim will hoist out enough water so we can come to the ore and see whether we want to go ahead. Maybe it won't, and we'll need a pumpin' plant; but, anyhow, Tommy, I've got enough here in my belt to do either, and it takes at least two men to open her up and find out what to do next. That's why I'm

takin' you in with me—just because it's a two-man job."

And this was his latest benevolent lie, because if ever a man was fully qualified to travel alone it was this same benevolent liar.

CHAPTER V.

It was quite dark when Josh made his way up the hillside to Specimen Jones' cabin and found that worthy placidly smoking his pipe on a bench in front and admiring the heavens and the visible stars therein.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Josh? I thought, when I heard you comin' up through the brush, it was an eight-legged mule. Well, how are you?"

The prospector lost no time in coming to his subject.

"Specimen, what are you doin' for yourself?" he demanded. "Got any ground? Got a job? Or are you just putterin' around and makin' a dollar here and there?"

Jones spat judicially into the darkness and grunted.

"I did have some ground," he said, "and I laid off on it because I ran out of funds. I did have a job over at that old scalawag Vance's—the Horseshoe, he calls it—and I couldn't stand for him. I called him some names one day when he got too strong, and—now I ain't got no job."

"Fine!" said Josh. "I got one for you. I want you to go in and win the heart and confidence of that yallerhead, Clara Montague. There's five dollars a day in it, which I understand is above union scale for that kind of work."

Specimen Jones snorted with indignation.

"You ain't in earnest, are you, Josh?" he asked.

"Sure as shootin'! I want you to get to know her so well that she can't take a scratch without your markin' it down."

Specimen grew more indignant.

"Things ain't breakin' well with me," he remarked tartly, "and I need work; but I ain't goin' to take the job on because I've got a good reputation in this country."

"Lawsee! How you have changed!" exclaimed Josh admiringly. "You 'most always had a reputation, down in Arizony; but, by gosh, I can't say as it was a good one!"

He suddenly dropped all banter and became serious.

"Specimen," he said, "I'm only half fooling. There's a lot more to what I want than I can tell you. It's not on my account, but it goes for me just the same because I've got a hard job in front of me and I need all the friendship and help I can pull. I'm payin' off a debt I owe to a dead man who was white. Some day I'll tell you all about it. I can't now, because I haven't a lot of time. What I've got to know is this: Where Cotton-tail Burke went—without him suspectin' that any one is after him."

Specimen looked around and peered at the prospector's chiseled face through the gloom. Josh was leaning forward on his elbows and knees, and his heavy chin and straggling mustache, his high brow, high cheek bones, and thin, commanding nose were outlined against the dim light. A sense of ruggedness, as complete as the ruggedness of the dark hills, emanated from him.

"I believe you do want to know—somethin'," said Specimen, in a serious tone. "It's always been mighty hard to tell when you were jokin' or in dead-sober earnest; but, Josh, if I can help you, I'm there. Never mind the five. You've done a lot of things for me in the old days, and you've done a lot for others that didn't appreciate it. You're white! You're a nasty customer when you get down on anybody, but you do stick by a friend. We're friends; that's understood. Now, what do you want? I'll do it."

The prospector deliberated for a moment, as if selecting words.

"The fact is," he said quietly, "that I've got an idea Burke toted off in a couple of grips the gold that was taken from the Horseshoe pay wagon. I ain't dead positive that he did. I think so. But I've got reasons of my own for

wishin' to make sure. The only way I can do it, without tellin' the officers, is to play my own game. The only way I can find out is to keep my eye on Clara Montague. They were——"

"Yes, I know all about that." interrupted Jones. "And you're right. If he got that clean-up, sooner or later she'll join him. Say, do you see that dark spot—down there to the left, next to the trail?"

He put one hand on the prospector's knee, bent forward, and pointed with the other:

"That's her cabin. From here I can keep an eye on it by days, and—I can get closer by nights. If it'll do you any good, Josh, to know every move she makes, you shall know it. And it ain't worth five a day, or anything a day, unless I get a job."

"No, that don't go. You get day wages. I don't want you thinkin' of anything else. I want to know what she does, and if Cotton-tail Burke is waitin' for her, and she starts from here, where she meets him."

"All right; that's my job. Now, where does old Vance come in on this?"

"He don't. I've got no more use for him than I have for a rattler."

"Me neither." He sat for a moment thoughtfully pulling at his pipe, and then said: "Say! Was that pardner of yours any relation to Bill Rogers, that used to be here a long time ago?"

"Yes. Son."

"Does he know that his father found what he called the Washoe—and old Vance renamed the Horseshoe?"

"Yes."

"Does Vance know that he's Bill's boy?"

"Yes."

"Did Bill ever tell you how they beat him out of his claim?"

"Perjury."

"Right again. Now, here's what I'm gettin' at: Vance may try some shinanigan with that pardner of yours. I don't know nothin' about the statutes of limitation, but I reckon it's too late to open the old case up again, anyhow, ain't it?"

"Yes, it's pretty late to fool with anything that way, and, besides, Vance has got money to fight clean through to the United States supreme court with the smartest lawyers that money could hire, which is more than me and Tommy Rogers could do. Why?"

"What I'm thinkin' about is that one of the fellers that swore to a lie for old Vance is dead, and the other one —— Guess I told you I worked up at the Horseshoe? Well, the time I had that fuss with him and got fired I was mighty sore. Thinks I, that night, as I got my blankets out of the bunk house, 'I'll just slip around up the back way to Vance's cabin, and I'll pound him to a pulp just to show him he fired the wrong man.' His cabin is up on the top of a hill, all by itself, where he can look down over the whole plant. Nobody's ever there with him. He sleeps there and takes his meals down at the mess house after the gang's been fed and cleared out. There's a path comes down the ridge behind, through the redwoods, right square up against his cabin. Easy enough to come that way and not be seen, even in daylight, till you're right at his back door. I wasn't takin' any chances of his gettin' away or givin' an alarm, so I got around on to that path and laid in the brush alongside until I could see him light his lamp. About ten o'clock he came, and I was just waitin' a minute for him to get settled, when along comes another feller, and I saw by the way he acted he was headin' for the same place. I was right annoyed. I slipped off my gum boots and follered him, thinkin' to go for Vance as soon as this feller left. I sneaked up to the window, that was wide open, and heard the two of 'em havin' a prodigious row. This visitor had come for money, and it seemed he'd already had quite a lot from Vance, and Vance swore he wouldn't dig up another cent. Then this feller gets hotter and hotter and says: 'If it hadn't been for me and Joe, swearin' to the lies about you locatin' this mine first, you'd never have got it. And you promised us we was to have a quarter interest each.'

"'You did get it. And you sold out your shares to me,' yells Vance.

"'When you got us rotten drunk!' says the other feller.

"'And you blew that five thousand in, and since then you've held me up for that much more, pretendin' it was a loan. You'll never get another cent out of me. And, what's more, the next time you come here, I'll drill a half dozen holes in you if I swing for it!'

"I took a chance and peeked in. It was a lowbrow called Karluk Pete that was with Vance. He ran a doggery down at the end of Main Street that had got such a reputation for knock-out drops that nobody was goin' there any more. Well, they yowled and cussed each other backward and forward until Vance gives in a little bit. He gives Pete a thousand dollars, with the agreement that Pete's to get out of Shingle and never come back. In the meantime, Vance had got so sore he'd pulled a big gun and laid it on his table while he talked, and, as I didn't want to have a killin' on my hands, I gave up the idea of wallopin' him a few for luck, and sneaked away. Hadn't got back to the path when this Pete comes along, mutterin' to himself, and, sure enough, the next day he sold his place for a hundred dollars and disappeared."

He stopped, and Josh said impatiently: "But I can't see what all this has to do with Tommy Rogers."

"Why, it's this way: Pete landed back here this afternoon, drunk, and busted again, and I think Vance turned him down, because Pete is swaggerin' around town threatenin' what he's goin' to do to Vance, and all that sort of stuff. The town marshal, on Vance's request, found Pete and told him if he heard any more talk of that kind he'd run him out of town. Pete closed his jaw; but if it wasn't for that statute-of-limitations business, Pete would probably turn State's evidence now for a piece of real money."

"Yes, but if it's too late——"

"Why, then, here's another way: If Vance goes after Tom Rogers' scalp, maybe Pete, with an affidavit, might be used as a bluff against Vance to make him pull his horn out of Tommy and leave him alone. Don't you see, if Vance found out that Pete had some one behind him that would put up a fight, he might go slow?"

Josh meditated in silence for a long time, turning the possibilities over and over in his mind. A self-confessed perjurer, he decided, would scarcely go far as a credible witness, even if the statute of limitations did not intervene; but there was, of course, the chance that Pete's affidavit might be used as a weapon, though a poor one, in case Vance attempted to harass Tommy. Mentally he used strong expletives because Tommy had the flaw in his armor caused by the robbery of the pay wagon. If that had not taken place, and the son of his old partner was armed with innocence, to fight Vance in any way would be a pleasure.

He shook his head doubtfully and said: "No. Much obliged, Specimen, but I'm afraid it's no good. I don't want this Pete hangin' onto me for money and support from now till doomsday. I would give him a couple of hundred, though, for that affidavit, just in case of accidents. And at the same time I'd tell him that if ever he came after me for another cent I'd put it in the hands of the district attorney to bring a case against him for perjury."

"Limitations again!" exclaimed Specimen Jones.

"Yes, but bluff again!" responded Josh. "If he's as ignorant as you say he is, it might scare him off me in the future."

"I'll see if I can get it for you," volunteered Specimen. "And in the meantime I'll look after Burke and the blonde."

Josh walked thoughtfully down the hill, but he could not see any very promising future for clearing up the robbery and making restitution. The trying part of the situation was that while a return of the gold would, in his code, effectually wipe Tom's slate, there was no way to make the restitution and render the holdup a harmless joke in the eyes of the camp, unless

he could recover the original gold. Having shouldered the fight, the deeper he entered the more determined he became; for the proverbial bulldog was a slack-jawed beast compared with him. It was his boast that he had never "started anything" that he "didn't finish." Moreover, he felt a vast personal responsibility, as far as his protégé was concerned, and Tom's remorseful melancholy disturbed him, inasmuch as he feared the culprit could never be himself again until the stain had been erased.

CHAPTER VI.

"Well, Tommy, I found out who owned the place where the camp of Bonanza used to be, and I bought the whole blamed place for a thousand cash," the prospector jubilated at the table on the following noon. "And this afternoon we'll walk over and take a look at her. The feller says there's a cabin there with a fireplace in it, that he built two or three years ago when he was trying to scratch a livin' by workin' some old pay dumps."

"Then I suppose we may as well take your outfit right over?" suggested Tom, in an inquiring tone.

Much to his surprise, the prospector said not until they had looked the ground over, and perhaps not until they had found the old shaft. Tom wondered at this piece of executive planning, failing to see the advisability of walking three miles each way daily; but Josh insisted that he liked the hotel, the company, and the sights of Shingle.

"Besides," he added, "we're in no such terrible rush that we can't afford to take the walk mornin's and evenin's."

The man who had sold them the property conducted them to it by a trail that was nearly overgrown, and they looked down into a little valley with nothing to indicate the former camp save here and there a slate or stone fireplace that stood, sentinellike, above the heaps of rotten logs.

"It's a mighty pretty place, anyhow," exclaimed the new owner. "If we don't find nothin', it's still all right. If we do find somethin', it's goin' to be a paradise, and we must do the fair thing by the feller I bought it from. I told him why I was buyin' it, because it didn't seem right to take it from him on the blind, and he said he'd heard that yarn but didn't take stock in it."

They inspected the cabin, and with that also Josh was highly pleased.

"She's sure some little home," he said. "I never had but one cabin with three whole rooms before, and I always did want one. By crackey! If we find anything, me and you'll just add an L onto this for a kitchen and eatin' room, and then we'll put a little lean-to on that for a cook's bedroom, and she'll sure be a palace. Then we'll put a big, deep porch around the whole inside of that L and one end of the buildin', and we'll get some flowers growin' when we ain't got nothin' else to do, and——"

He stopped and frowned when he discovered that his enthusiasm was not being responded to, and thought to himself: "Great Scott! What can I do to make this Tom Rogers quit broodin' over things and get interested?"

They traveled over the little flat, examining it carefully, but could find no trace whatever of the old shaft. Not even a remnant of a waste dump was there to indicate its existence. It was nearly time for the evening meal when they retraced their way to Shingle, the prospector still perturbed by his companion's reticence and depression.

After the meal was finished, Josh stepped out into the long street that was now being traversed by men whose day's work was finished and by swarms of children who played boisterously in the dusk. He wondered why so many traveled in one direction, and so joined the stream. It led him to the post office that seemed to be a gathering place. Behind the crude glass partition he heard the steady "thump, thump" of the cancellation stamp, then the window flew open and a line formed. He envied those who expected mail, and particularly those who received so many letters that they rented a box.

"Ah, good evening, Mr. Price," said

a cheery, girlish voice behind him, and he turned, blinking his eyes in surprise that any woman should address him.

"Oh!" he said, thrusting out his brown hand. "You're Frank Barnes' little girl, ain't you?"

"Yes," she said, smiling with amusement, "I'm Edith Barnes."

"Gosh almighty! You look to me as if you'd growed more, or done something to yourself since day before yesterday," he said, staring at her slowly from the top of her head down to her boots. "Anyhow, you've got big enough since then to get into long dresses," he added.

"Oh," she laughed, "that was my riding skirt. I remember now."

"Short ones do make a heap of difference," Josh agreed. "I reckon I'd of paid more attention to you if I'd thought for a minute you were a real, growed-up woman. I thought you was just a kid."

He laughed so heartily and so infectiously that all those near by smiled and stared at him, seeing in him a great giant of a man from the hills with good humor and kindliness written in every wrinkle of his rugged face. Then, as if suddenly recalling something, his face sobered and he looked at her thoughtfully.

"You're about eighteen year old, ain't you?" he asked, with his customary frankness.

"Me?" Her eyebrows lifted above her violet eyes, bringing a whimsical little line between them, and she smiled, showing white, even, and beautiful teeth. "Eighteen? Why, I shall be twenty-three next month."

"Goin' on twenty-three, eh? Let's see; goin' on twenty-three from goin' on twenty-six is three years. Um-m-mh! I'm pretty close to sixty. By Jehosophat, that's it! I'm too old to interest young folks a whole lot. Sure as shootin' I got it!"

Edith Barnes looked at him in bewilderment as he reckoned aloud, and wondered if he was trying to make a joke, but was perplexed by the intensely serious look in his eyes.

"Say, Miss Edith," he said, "I'd like to walk a piece with you. I got somethin' I want to talk about."

"Certainly. Glad to have you," she assented, turning toward the door with the bundle of mail in her hands. "I am going home, and I know how glad father would be to have you visit him. He has told me ever so many things about you since we met the other day."

"Oh, Lord, I hope not!" exclaimed the prospector, with signs of distress.

"Oh, nothing to frighten you," she said a little maliciously. "My father likes and admires you, so doubtless he has been discreet; but—you have had a very exciting, peculiar life, Mr. Price."

"Josh, to my friends," he objected. "I ain't used to being called mister by anybody, and I don't call nobody I like mister, either," he explained, as they passed out into the street. He talked perfunctorily until they had left the main street of Shingle and started down the shadowy length of another that, bisecting it, led its way through the only pretentious residential district in the camp, and now he tuned his fine voice to a shade of thoughtful melancholy suited to his aims.

"I told you back there in the post office," he said, "that I wanted to talk to you about something, and—well, it's mighty confidential, Miss Edith, and I hardly know how to begin."

"Heavens! Sounds almost like a proposal," she exclaimed in pretended alarm; but, looking up at his face, she saw that it was very grave and unsmiling.

"It ain't about me exactly," he hastened to explain. "Not that I don't know how to propose to a girl, but—it's a long time since I did, and—Miss Edith, there won't be any more as far as I'm concerned, because I've had a heap of sorrer in my life."

She became grave and attentive, quite curious to know what this strange adventurer had to confide.

"Nope! It ain't about me," Josh said, after waiting to get due effect of sorrow. "And maybe I'm doin' wrong in tellin' you something that I ain't no business to tell, and that'd make a certain friend of mine terribly cut up if

he knew I'd ever told it. But, you see, I can't help it. It's about that young pardner of mine, Tommy Rogers," he said quietly. He paused and added, almost to himself: "Tommy Rogers! As nice a young feller as ever lived. Like a son to me, he is! Tommy Rogers, that's dying from a broken heart."

There was an immense pathos in his tone, and, oddly enough, it was genuine, too. Its sincerity won. With the sense of magnetism possessed by great actors, great orators, and great liars alike, he knew that he had her, for she stopped abruptly and with parted lips and sympathetic eyes looked up at his face, at his puckered brows, and grave eyes. He did not waver. He was the embodiment of crude, unfaltering truth.

"It's true," he asserted. "Dying of a broken heart, that boy that is like a son to me; willed to me by as fine a man as ever lived, for whom I'm a guardian appointed by the dying, who has not another soul in all this big world to help him and back him and fight for him but me—that boy will either go mad from suffering or die, if I can't get him to forget. And, Miss Edith, I can't! I'm an old man; I ain't educated like him. We don't think the same, or about the same things. He's a college man. I never was to school after I was ten years old, and am an old, ignorant, hard-workin', stupid, thick-brained prospector. Good company for mules and roughnecks and them that can't read, write, nor talk. He knows books. I don't. He can read 'em without follerin' the lines with his finger and gettin' stuck on big words. Tommy gets books—Latin books; those funny-lookin' Greek books—and he reads 'em, Miss Edith. Then he makes figures—lots of 'em, strings of 'em—figures that don't count nothin' to a ignorant old cuss like me. Why, do you know what the head professor down at Berkeley University told me after Tommy left?"

He stopped and looked down at her while she waited.

"'Mister Price,' says he, 'I do hate to have you let Thomas Alfred Rogers leave this seat of learnin'. I do,' says he, 'because that young man is certainly the brightest and most promisin' student we've ever had in the engineerin' course. You should keep him here till he's finished.' And, Miss Edith, bein' an old fool and stubborn and ignorant, I held back his own money from him—money his dying father had left me to educate him with, because I thought he knew enough and ought to have the money to start out with."

He noted with satisfaction that she drew away from him as if repelled by the knowledge of his hideous shortcomings. He played, with his rare knowledge of human nature, upon her heartstrings as adroitly as a harpist might finger his wires. He spoke in a hoarse undertone:

"I didn't know. I stood in his way. In the way of the right thing. He was dead right and I was dead wrong, and I'd made a blunder that I can't ever undo, and that I'd give my life to square up. I—yes, me, Miss Edith, just me—stole from that lad a career. Why, I don't know what he might have been. Maybe another John Hays Hammond, who can smell gold under a mountain ten mile high."

He thrilled when he felt her hand impulsively laid upon his arm, as he stood with eyes fixed upon the path at his feet as if unable to lift them above his humiliation. She was sorry for him. She tried to comfort him.

"Don't grieve over it," she said, in her rich young voice, filled with sympathy to the point of overflowing. "You did make a mistake. But you did what you thought was right, and perhaps, after all, it was as well."

In the face of her undoubted distress and her wasted regret, he was ashamed of himself for an instant, but pursued his way toward his object. He must so impress her, there and then, that she should be welded to his need.

"And that was but the beginnin' of it all," he declared remorsefully. "He come down to Val Verde and he went to work. There's mighty few such industrious fellers as Tommy is, I may tell you, Miss Edith. He was makin' good at the big mine as an engineer.

And then he falls in love with a girl. She ain't got nothin' in the way of money, but a home stake in the way of looks. She's a school-teacher. She's about the finest girl I ever knowed. She's a regular angel. Well, I've an idea, although, mind you, I ain't sure about this, and I don't want to talk about things I ain't certain about—but I got an idea that they was waitin' till they got a little older to get married. Then one night there's a fire. Whish! Up it goes! It's in the boardin' house where she lived, and it was a big, tall lumber buildin' that burned like it was full of pitch and tar and paint and oil and all that sort of stuff. My Tommy runs down the street to it with fear makin' his eyes hang out, and, he asks a fireman if everybody's safe. The fireman tells him he thinks so. Just then up comes a woman who's wringin' her hands and cryin'. 'Miss Brown!' she says. 'Minnie's not here! She lived on the top floor!' Tom busted past the fireman and into the house. 'That guy's a goner,' says the fireman. 'A salamander couldn't run in there and ever run out again alive.' And he tried to stop Tom, and they bring another hose and the fire chief yells, and there's all sorts of trouble in about a minute; but my boy Tom has gone."

For a moment he wondered whether he had gone too far, but concluded from her strained attitude and twisted fingers that she was terribly alive to his story.

"Well," he continued, in a lower voice, "the fireman was wrong, because Tom did come out, on the roof. And in his arms he carried somethin' wrapped in a bedquilt, somethin' that didn't move. Somethin' that lay quite limp and quiet. He stood there on the roof, with the light flamin' up about him, as if dazed. He'd fought to the end, you see. He was all in! He'd gone just as far as he could. He'd got her; but all there was ahead of him was to finish—with her in his arms. Her that he loved, the little school-teacher of Val Verde!"

He paused to draw a deep breath.

"Miss Edith, I know it's a lot of fun to make jokes about firemen in these small towns, but don't you believe it! They're just as brave men as them that fights in the big towns. They saw them two up on the roof, up there alone, and they put their ladders against the burnin' walls, climbed through the hot flames that lapped 'em in their eyes and faces; climbed still higher when they felt the sides of the buildin' quiverin' and tremblin' and just about to fall, and—they brought 'em down, Tommy Rogers and the thing he carried in his arms; the thing that had been alive just a little while before; the thing that had danced and sung and laughed and done its best; all that was left of the little school-teacher—and the man that tried to save her. Sometimes I think the heart of Tommy Rogers died with her that night at the foot of the ladder, lighted by the flames and with the crashing of the wooden walls behind him."

He paused, and suffered a stab of remorse when he saw that she had dropped the bundle of letters on the board walk, and was holding her handkerchief to her eyes and sobbing with sympathy. He blinked at the white spots at her feet, for his imagination had swept forward until he, too, had felt and suffered all that of which he had so freely lied. For an instant he almost believed in the truth of his purely fictitious story, and his own eyes were moist.

"That was more than two years ago," he said, in a thoughtful, reminiscent tone. "Two years ago, and he ain't never been the same since. He does what I ask him to. He works hard and faithful, but he never goes out anywhere. No woman can interest him more'n a half an hour or so. He sits around, when he thinks I ain't watchin', with his head in his hands—leanin' on his knees. He studies his books sometimes, and then brushes 'em away and looks a long way off—backward, Miss Edith—back at what's gone and can't never come back again no more."

He stopped, stooped, and picked up the letters. He shifted and sorted them to a compact bundle and held them in his hands, waiting for her to speak.

"Poor, poor boy!" she said brokenly. "Poor, poor Tom Rogers! But what can I do? Tell me."

She turned and looked up at him as he towered above her with his straight neck, his confidently poised head, and his broad shoulders. His conscience hurt him a trifle as he looked down on her white, upturned face.

"I'm not sure that you can do anything," he said gravely. "Girls ain't interested him none since then. He's like a man that has lost the only thing that keeps the world and all that's in it movin' and liftin' its head and strainin' its muscles and forever tryin' that thing we call hope. I don't know nothin' but this, that it beats me; that I can't make him forget; that—that I can't make him see the stars again. And I thought that maybe if you, that's his kind, the kind that reads books and can talk about 'em, and think of things that us ignorant fellers don't know nothin' about—that if you was to try, you could."

He stopped, forgot his lie, and abruptly spoke the truth with all the fervor that truth reveals and nothing else can simulate or conceal.

"Miss Edith," he said, "I feel that I'm to blame for what Tom Rogers is. If I'd tried harder, it wouldn't have happened, and he wouldn't be this way. He'd be happy—just the happy son of his father that I loved, old Bill Rogers, my pardner. It's not right for the soul of a man to shiver when he's but twenty-five, and to think that the greatest game of all, the game of life, is done, and him barred from any further playin' on its so many numbers. I can't brace him up. Help me, won't you? You're his kind. You've got the young heart and the young mind. Help me make Tommy Rogers forget. Help me to get him interested in what's doin' to-day and to-morrow and forgettin' all about yesterday. I want you and me to be pardners in a mighty big work —somethin' more worth while than I've ever done before—the makin' of a man!"

He held his hands toward her in open appeal. She dropped hers into them. She looked up at him, still under the spell of his imagination.

"If I can help your friend to forget and to 'brace up,' as you say, you may depend upon me. I don't know that I can. But it does seem as if I could help. Now what must I do?"

"Just be nice to him," the prospector said. "Make him feel that there's a lot of things to be done yet, and that the game's never out and finished till the player's finished and played out."

"I'll do it, Mr. Price——"

"Josh, to my friends!"

"I'll do it. You bring him up to the house. I'll see that he makes friends with a lot of others. If there's any way to make him forget that horrible experience, I'll do it."

"Horrible experience? Horrible experience?" questioned the prospector, forgetting for the moment to what she referred.

"The loss of—the fire, I mean," she said, taking the parcel of letters from his hand.

"Good Lord!" said Josh, aghast. "Whatever you do, don't ever say nothin' about that! Don't let him have an idea you ever know about it, because if you did, so help me Moses, you'd never see him again! He's an awful sensitive cuss about his past, miss. Never did know nobody like him. He'll try to cover it all up. Why, do you know, he might even make you think, by what he says, that he's only knowed me—yes, even me!—for no more'n a few days? True! Sure's you're born it is. He's that sensitive that I never speak about nothin' that happened more'n a week ago. Don't ever let him talk about anything that's done with. It sets him right back, it does. He gets to thinkin' and studyin' and broodin', and he don't get over it for days. Sabe?"

"Yes," she said, "I understand, and I shall be careful. You leave it to me. I'll do my best. And if I can help that poor man out, I'm going to! Bring him up to our house to-morrow evening. I shall be there. Perhaps I can have a friend or two in also."

"That," said Josh, "is what I call bein' a good girl! Now I reckon we'd better be hikin' along with that mail for your paw."

CHAPTER VII.

It required much finesse on the part of the prospector to induce his protégé to buy suitable clothes and then entrap him into a visit to the Barnes home; but the result was eminently satisfactory and proved Josh's philosophy of youth. Their sole argument was brought on by Tom's assertion that he had no right to visit decent people until he had made himself decent, but Josh shrewdly surmised that the temptation to again converse with Edith Barnes would overcome this gentlemanly reluctance. Edith herself proved an adept, and Tom's fine resolutions were overcome within the next ten days without his appreciating it. The tenth day brought up another debate when Tom refused to longer continue at the hotel, where he did not feel financially able to pay his board, and Josh was compelled reluctantly, yet admiringly, to surrender; for on that tenth day Tom boldly defied him and proceeded to make the cabin on the claim habitable for his own requirements. And Josh, who had daily formed a stronger affection for his new partner, declined to be separated and also left the hotel.

"I didn't want to stay there, nohow," he said, to smooth the situation over. "I was doin' it because I wanted you to feel good, Tommy. I didn't know whether you'd like this sort of thing; but it's home to me. And it ain't no farther than it ever was, if we want to hike into Shingle in the evenin's. It's just walkin' in and out on the same night, instead of doin' it in the mornin' and evenin' shift."

He was glad to discover signs of restlessness in Tom on the third evening at the cabin, and to hear the latter admit that he had promised Edith Barnes to call.

"Good!" he declared. "Glad you're goin' in. It'll be company for me. I got to go in myself to-night to see Specimen Jones. I told him I would, so we both got promises outstandin'."

Which happened to be a lie uttered because he wished to encourage Tom to visit Edith Barnes. Yet it proved that his visit to Specimen was well timed, for scarcely had he entered Shingle when he saw his old friend on the street off guard.

It annoyed him. Specimen, he thought, was neglecting his espionage over Clara Montague. And that was certainly vital. He said: "So long, Tommy. I'll come by Frank's house and pick you up about half past ten," and advanced upon the unsuspecting Specimen. The latter, instead of being discomfited, gave signs of satisfaction.

"Do you know, Josh, I was comin' out to see you to-morrow," he said. "Come on down the line with me a little way. Show you somethin'."

He conducted the prospector to a combination saloon and gambling house a few doors farther on, pulled the swing doors aside, and pointed at a man who was steadily rolling a wheel and advising the few loungers in the room to "Put your money down! It's the lucky turn! Black or red! Odd or even! Single O or double O! Everything wins to-night!"

"That," said Specimen, as he let the doors close again, "is Cotton-tail Burke."

Josh's hopes were dwindling, falling like a burned-out meteor. He could but fear that all his deductions were wrong and that he had wasted time on a false lead.

"He came back on the up stage this evenin'," said Jones, "wearin' the same clothes he went away in. Neither less money showin', nor more. Carryin' the same grips he toted when he left. And that Clara said to him, when she saw him—because I was listenin' through her woodhouse door—'Well,' says she, 'well, had to come back to eat, did you? I told you things was too dull in the big town for you to land a job there. And all you've done was to blow in that hundred dollars I let you have. You'll hang around quite a

while before you get another hundred out of me!'"

"Sure she didn't know you was there and listenin'?"

"As sure as I am that I'm alive!"

"Well, what then?" Josh asked, in a discouraged tone.

"He pleaded like a whipped dog, and begged and whined about hard luck, and borrowed a hundred more from her, after which he come down here and got this job on percentage. You can bet your boots he never walked off with no ten thousand in either of the grips he toted. I'd stake my life on that."

The prospector could not conceal his disappointment. He stood frowning absently into space when Specimen, endeavoring to cheer him up, added: "But I got a little good news for you. I got that affidavit from Karluk Pete for twenty-five dollars. He's bawlin' his head off up and down the street about Vance, and cussin' him right and left, and intimatin' what he'll do to Vance if he comes his way."

Here at last was a little ray of light to brighten the gloom, and the prospector was pleased.

"Come on up to the cabin and I'll get it for you," Specimen said. "It's all in good shape, I'd swear to that. I stumbled into Frank Barnes and——"

Josh gave a gasp. For an instant he was afraid that Specimen had overreached himself in good attempt.

"And Frank is as good a lawyer as there is around this camp, although he ain't workin' with a shingle over his door. Frank listened to what I wanted, and seemed tickled to death. He says he likes that Tommy Rogers first rate, and would do anything he could to help to protect him."

Josh breathed deeply again.

"So I got Frank to go along to ask questions—a lot of things I couldn't have thought of: whether Pete was talkin' of his own free will; whether he had received any money for his confession; whether he had anything that Frank called 'ulterior motive' in tellin' the truth, and a whole lot of questions like that. Frank paid the court stenographer to take it all down, and Squire Meachim give the oath and asked some more questions and put a big red seal on it at the bottom which Frank and me and the stenographer and the squire's son all signed. Oh, she's some affidavit, all right!"

Josh fingered it over, line by line, when he received it, his cautious brain working out each sentence, and then folded it, put it in his pocket, and produced some bills.

He counted out one hundred dollars and tossed it across the table.

"Specimen," he said, "you pay the stenographer and Pete and keep the rest. It's worth it to me. You've done me a big favor, although I don't know as it's worth a cent for what I want; but you did all I wanted you to do. That don't square the good will. But some day I'll clean that up, too."

They walked together down the main street, and Josh parted from Specimen with his usual "So long!" He trudged thoughtfully to the Barnes home, and stopped outside, astonished. The house was brilliantly lighted. The music of violins and piano sounded cheerfully, and through windows open to the summer air the prospector could see girls in light, floating dresses dancing with young men. Boys and girls they seemed to him. He leaned upon the pickets meditatively. Tom was there, dancing, and for the moment happy, unaware that all that on which he had builded the hope of retrieving a youthful and terrible slip had come to naught.

"Good Lord!" said Josh to himself. "Tommy's believed that I was on the sure track, and that pretty soon his nightmare'd be over. How can I tell him? How can I? Where can I begin again?"

For several minutes he stood there, watching.

"Lucky he had them good clothes on," he thought irrelevantly. "He looks better'n any young feller in there. Be a shame to call him away. I'll sneak around and see if I can find Frank."

He opened the gate with needless caution and started across the lawn to-

ward the side of the house, when the glow of a lighted cigar at the extreme end of the veranda caught his eye. He advanced toward it and spoke, while looking over the railing:

"That you, Frank?"

"Why, it's Josh! Sure it is I. Come up and have a smoke."

"No," Josh explained in a low voice. "I just called for Tommy. I didn't know they was a party——"

"Neither did we," laughed the mine owner. "It was a surprise party. They do those things here in Shingle. Come on up."

"No, I can't do that. You see, if Tommy saw me here he'd insist on goin' back with me. He's as thoughtful and unselfish as if I was his dad. And I don't want him to break away; he's havin' such a good time. Remember, Frank, we used to be able to work all day, then walk anywhere from five to ten miles, dance all night, and walk home in time to work next mornin'? Gosh all hemlocks! It was fine!"

"It was that!" assented Barnes. "But now——"

"Too hard work!" the prospector finished the sentence. "No, I'm not comin' in. When you get a chance, tell Tommy I've gone home, and that I said if the crowd was any good they'd all be here to come out on the porch and see the sun rise. And for him not to bother, but to come home when he gets good and ready. I always did like to be the last one when I was twenty-five, just as I always did see the last circus tent peg pulled when I was a boy back in Missoury."

"All right, I'll tell him. You're right. Can't ever be young twice."

Josh trudged steadily away and back to the lighted street, intent on passing directly through it and out to the trail. It was later than he realized, for the light over the hills to the east presaged the moonrise, and the streets were less populated. He was passing a shop where a clerk was just in the act of turning out the lights for the night, when a voice halted him and he stopped to speak to Specimen Jones, who apparently had something to communicate.

"I was hopin' to see you," said Specimen, glancing around to make certain that he could not be overheard, and frowning when he saw a group close by. "I'll walk a ways with you."

"What's up?" asked Josh, when they had passed the last of the lighted buildings and were in the middle of the long road that led to the end of the camp.

"I don't quite know," said Specimen thoughtfully; "that is, I can't quite get what it means. It's about that affidavit of Pete's. Somethin' has made him all-fired anxious to get it back again. I got an idea he has seen Vance—you know——" and he held up a working thumb and an index finger, indicative of counting money. "And now he's sorry he took the twenty-five. He was mighty ugly and fussed up when I told him I'd given you the affidavit before he met me, and wanted to know if I thought you'd give it back. I laughed at him. 'Give it back?' says I. 'Not on your life, Josh won't!' 'Then I'll take it away from him,' says he, losin' his temper. That sure did hand me a real laugh. 'You let that job out, unless you're tryin' to commit suicide,' says I. That sort of cooled him off. He's not there with the nerve by a whole lot. He did time for sandbaggin' a man from behind in a Sacramento alley, so you see the sort he is. I thought I'd ought to tell you. I was worried about it, some. Thought maybe I'd have to walk clean out to your cabin to put you on your guard."

The prospector laughed contemptuously.

"He'll not get that paper back," he asserted. "I'm gettin' old, but I can still take care of myself. In fact, that's been my main job 'most all my life; but I'm obliged, all the same, Specimen. Where is this feller Pete, now? I sort of think I'd ought to look him up and have a few sweet words in confidence with him."

"I don't know where he went," said Jones dubiously. "He hunted me up about an hour ago. I put him off by tellin' him that you had most likely gone to your hotel; but he'd found out, somehow, that you was out on Bo-

nanza, and I pretended I didn't think it was so. I ain't seen him since. Hadn't I better go out with you, Josh, if you're goin' home?"

Josh laughed boisterously at this offer, and slapped Specimen on the back.

"Great Scott, man! He won't do nothin'. But if he tries anything on, I'll be there, all right."

As if dismissing all perplexities from his mind, Josh turned down the long trail, venting a mellifluous whistle. He came to a place where the path cut through an old watercourse, bordered by high, sheer sides of stone, gray and mellow in the moonlight. The whistle was abruptly punctured by the venomous, significant report of a rifle shot.

Josh fell straight forward, with outflung hands, and lay still and inert on the trail, while a slow, dark stain crept across the stone beneath his head. The echoes of the shot, caught by near-by cliffs, sounded loudly, were tossed farther, and answered in diminuendo from distant crags, and again the serenity of the night was unbroken. Crickets and night birds, frightened to apprehensive silence, cautiously renewed their chirping; but Josh did not move. Again the night life became suspicious. Something moved from behind a bowlder, watchfully intent on the fallen prospector. A man advanced with extreme caution, his rifle ready for instantaneous use, and kicked the fallen man in the ribs to discover signs of life. The body responded but inertly under the impact of the heavy boot. The hands were still lifeless. The man thrust a toe beneath the prospector and rolled him over until Josh lay on his back with his face upturned to the moonlight, and its pallor was accentuated by the dark stream from the temple that altered its course and sought passage through his white, disordered hair.

"Got him, all right!" muttered the assailant vindictively, and dropped the rifle to one side on the bare rock and fumbled at the prospector's shirt. There was small time wasted, inasmuch as the white ends of the legal paper protruded. The man straightened up, opened the sheets, peered at them in the moonlight, identified the meaning, and chuckled. He slipped the affidavit into his pocket, grinned at the white face, picked up his rifle, and slipped hurriedly away over the mountainside with the adept certainty of the veteran frontiersman.

CHAPTER IX.

It was not yet dawn when Tom, with conflicting memories, in which Edith Barnes had the most prominent part, turned into the Bonanza Trail. He had resolutely hastened his departure from the Barnes home when informed by the mine owner of the prospector's message; and now, walking homeward, he thought with something more than affection of all that Price had done for him. He asked nothing more than to "make good" and merit such loyalty. He was strangely confident, happy, and hopeful, when he came to the narrow place in the trail, and then, in the waning moonlight, he saw what lay thereon.

He walked fearfully forward, in a bent attitude, until by stooping over he recognized the face, and, with a strained cry, fell on his knees by the prospector, calling his name in desperate concern. He lifted the head, exposing the little, dark pool beneath, and suffered all the alarm of death, then slowly he rested the head back and with nervous, hasty fingers plucked open the blue shirt. His fingers came in contact with the exposed flesh, and he thrilled with the knowledge that it was still warm. He laid his ear against the heart and found it still beating weakly, and then pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and tried to wipe away the stains from the temple and examine the wound. He could not define the extent of its gravity, and, almost in panic, fell to chafing the listless hands and wrists until aware that such ministrations might prove futile and a waste of time.

He got to his feet and saw that the moon must shortly wane, and that he must do something if he would work with its failing light to guide. He struggled, desperately exerting his no mean strength, and finally got the limp

and heavy weight up on his back and shoulders. He staggered forward under his burden, bent, panting, and straining until it seemed that his heart must burst with the effort. The cabin was less than half a mile away, and fortunately on a gentle, downhill course; yet, strong as he was, it required his ultimate strength to do the journey. His jaws were set, sweat dropped from his forehead over his eyes and nostrils, and he counted his steps to assure himself of progress. He reeled dizzily when, at barely a snail's pace and half dragging his burden, he came to the cabin door, threw his weight against it, felt the wooden latch snap, and fell on the bunk, where he lay for a moment, too exhausted to shift the inert weight from his back.

He wondered, almost in a panic of helplessness, what to do next; then, trembling, undressed Josh, got him beneath the blankets, and tried the efficacy of laving the still face with water from the household pail. Failing to revive his partner, he ran to the other room, slipped off his patent-leather shoes, tore off his collar and tie, his coat, vest, and suspenders, seized his working belt, buckled it tightly around him, and caught up a pair of loose, old shoes that he had found for comfort. He was panting from his haste when he pulled the cabin door shut behind him and started back toward Shingle.

To reach Frank Barnes was his goal, for Barnes would know best where to summon a surgeon. Dripping and panting, he raced up the long avenue of trees and through the gate, and saw, with an immense joy, that two of the windows of the house were still dimly lighted, indicating that the last of the dancers had but recently gone, and that host and hostess were preparing for bed, but not yet asleep. He forgot the bell in his distress and banged savagely and insistently on the door. A window over the veranda was thrown open, and he heard Barnes' call: "Well, well? What's wanted? Who is it?"

"It is I, Tom Rogers, Mr. Barnes," he called hoarsely. "Come down! For God's sake, come quickly!"

He heard Barnes, the man of action, who knew the value of time in emergency, running down the staircase, and the door was jerked open. Tom leaned against the doorpost and between pants stammered his news. He was not even aware that a slim, girlish form in a white dressing robe and slippers had come behind her father, and, with clasped hands, was listening.

Barnes swore one heavy, angry oath and whirled.

"Edith!" he commanded. "Run across the street just as you are and get the doctor. Tell him to bring his emergency case. Then you go out to his stable and saddle his horse while he is dressing. Tom and I will be out in the road, waiting. Hurry, now! That's my girl!"

Without a word, she sprang past them and toward the gate.

"Tom, you go in to the sideboard and take a big drink of brandy to pull you up."

He was halfway up the stairs before Tom could obey, and in an incredibly short time was racing downward again, dragging his shirt over his head as he came, and shouting instructions:

"Follow the path around the house to the stables, where I shall be saddling a couple of horses!"

A minute later, Tom, slowly regaining his breath and feeling the grateful stimulant, followed. He saw a light from a window across the road and heard voices. He stood to one side of the stable door, leaning against a post and slowly recovering, when Barnes shouted: "Catch this horse as he comes out! I'll bring the other."

He obeyed and mounted, as they trotted slowly across the lawn and through the open front gate, instead of taking a more devious way, and came to a halt in the road. The doctor seemed unusually slow in coming, Tom thought impatiently. He saw a white shape rush past them toward the Barnes house, and the mine owner shouted: "Edith! Is he coming?"

"Yes," floated back, and again they waited.

Once more she appeared, more somberly clad, and ran past them.

"I'll hurry him up," she called.

Barnes was strangely silent, sitting restlessly on his restive horse with all the skill that displayed the many years he had passed in the saddle.

"You can bet your life on one thing," he said, suddenly turning toward Tom, "that if they've killed Josh Price, I'll get the man that did it if it takes all the time and money I've got! There is one of the whitest, squarest, truest men that ever lived. You don't know how white he is. I couldn't tell you in a week of all the decent things that man, rough and ugly as he is, has done for others. His faults were all brave ones. His weaknesses the kind that had no malice."

Tom shuddered at the use of the past tense, and wondered if the surgeon would be too late or helpless to avert this tragedy that threatened to leave him bereft. Two horses came clattering through the surgeon's gate.

"Why—why, Edith! You're not going, are you?" Barnes asked, in a tone of surprise.

"Certainly," she said. "Perhaps I can help."

"Well, come on, then! We've no time to waste."

He suddenly released the reins of his mount and swung the horse on its hind heels and galloped down the road. The others followed. Tom's horse was ahead of the surgeon's and Edith's when they came to the end of the long main street down which they had thudded, surrounded by echoes; but already the mine owner had gone from sight. He bent forward and urged his horse to a run, the wind whistling past his ears and chilling his sweat-drenched shirt. He came to the cabin to see the miner's horse standing, with laboring sides and relaxed head, beside the open door. He flipped his reins over his horse's head in Western fashion and went in. Barnes was bending over the prospector, who did not seem to have moved. In but a short time Edith and the surgeon had joined them and the latter had taken charge.

"Hold that lamp closely, here, some one!" he said, and the girl caught the lamp from the table and obeyed. Tom noted with admiration that the hand that held it did not waver or tremble.

"Water!" said the surgeon tersely, opening his case.

Tom hastened to bring the pail.

"Frank, bolster his head up higher with something," said the surgeon. "Now! That's better. We'll see. It looks pretty bad—but—never can tell."

He immersed his fingers in the pail, wiped them on some cotton from his case, poured an antiseptic preparation over them, and began bathing the wound and feeling it with deft fingers, while the light brought out the intent frown of his brows and eyes. He turned at last, caught a pair of glittering scissors from the case, and began deftly clipping the wet hair from about the wound. No one spoke. All stood in an absorbed attitude of suspense. The red light of dawn filtered in and about them until the lamp began to pale; and then, with the last bandage placed, the surgeon straightened himself stiffly as if the bent posture had cramped him, and said: "That will do. We shall not need the light any longer."

Edith put the lamp on the table, with a sigh of relaxation, and blew it out. Tom poured fresh water from another pail into the washbasin that stood on a little shelf outside the cabin door, and the surgeon walked to it, laved his hands, and accepted the proffered towel. He stood wiping his long, competent fingers with it when he pronounced his verdict.

"It's a bad wound," he said to his three auditors, who stood breathlessly intent. "A mere fraction of a part of an inch—a small part—and all I could have done would have been nothing. I may have to trephine as it is. I can't tell until I have a better light. The skull is furrowed for some distance, and in one place has been shattered. The brain has not been broken, I think. I can't tell yet whether there is pressure on it, but I am hopeful——" He paused thoughtfully, while Tom's heart throbbed like a steam hammer and

Frank Barnes leaned his head forward with wide eyes. "Yes, I'm reasonably certain that he will live."

Tom suddenly felt weak in the knees and dropped to the bench beside the cabin door.

"Thank God for that!" exclaimed the girl, scarcely above a whisper; but Frank Barnes unexpectedly brought a closed fist into an open palm with an explosive "spat" and said: "Good! What you say, doc, goes for me, and that settles that. Now, the next thing is, who did it, and why? This is no job for a sheriff, who has to be brought down from the county seat. The town authorities of Shingle have nothing to do with it, because it's outside their jurisdiction. We don't want a lot of curious muckers talking about it and butting in out here to get in our way. And I'm going to tackle this proposition myself, because I've got the right of an old friend, the time, and, if it's any use, the money."

"Well, Barnes," said the surgeon, "I think he will pull through. And if you wish it kept quiet, I shall say nothing to any one. You may need a nurse, and——"

"I shall do that part," interrupted Edith. "I took a course. I am capable."

"That's right, Edith," agreed Barnes approvingly. "If your mother were alive she'd volunteer in the same way. Now, doc, you give my girl instructions. And you, Tom, come along with me back up to where you found Josh. You and I have got a little work to do. Hold on a minute! We'll unsaddle those horses and give them a little water. They're cooled out now."

"I shall remain here a while," the doctor said quietly. "I must make another inspection of that wound when it gets broad daylight." He consulted his watch. "I have four hours to spare," he concluded.

It was broad daylight when they stood above the bloodstained spot in the narrow place of the trail, and Tom had finished his explanation.

"Good!" said Barnes. "Now, you see, he was probably walking straight ahead when he was creased. The trail is straight that way for two hundred yards. The bullet must have been fired from somewhere ahead and on Josh's left side, because that would be the angle to inflict such a wound on the right side. That is, unless his head was turned, which is not likely. If it had been fired from the other side, the bullet would have entered his head and killed him. Whoever did it was a good shot, I think. So we will go down the trail again and see what we can see. I think it must have been at fairly short range, because the bullet was at high velocity when it struck, leaving a clean, sharp furrow. A half-spent bullet would have smashed his head like an egg. Are you a good trailer? Had any experience?"

"I'm afraid not," Tom admitted.

"Then you stay here. I am, and I don't want any extra tracks to bother over, or any extra broken twigs, or any other signs brushed out."

He sat in the road and pulled off his boots and Tom watched him as he began, bent and methodical, his search beside the road.

"I think," he said, straightening up and thoughtfully scowling down the trail, "that if I were to ambush a man in this place, expecting to shoot him by moonlight, I'd probably get behind those bowlders down there. Guess I'll go there first."

He came back into the trail, and Tom kept abreast until they reached the selected place. Barnes left the road and began a careful investigation. Tom could see that he was beginning to show disappointment as yard after yard of bare rock was vainly inspected, and then saw him halt in his tortuous progress and drop to his knees.

"Got something here!" Barnes exclaimed. "Come up and see what you think of them. Pretty plain sign, too, you can bet."

Tom joined him, and saw where a man had stood behind a bowlder.

"He waited quite a bit," Barnes said. "See? He smoked two brown-paper cigarettes, and, getting cramped from waiting so long, got up occasionally and

moved around to stretch his legs. He shot with a rifle. Stood it here while he waited. It's got a rubber shoulder shield, I have an idea, because the corners aren't sharp, and this ground is pretty moist."

Tom made a wider circle.

"Here, Mr. Barnes!" he called. "Here is a very moist place, and the marks are plainer than any down there."

The mine owner joined him.

"Fine! It certainly is," he said. He looked up and saw that Tom was closely inspecting the boot print with puzzled eyes.

"Why—why," Tom blurted out, "I'll swear I believe that is almost exactly the size of the footprint that Josh was trying to identify! Like the one we found back there by the bald rock on the main road."

Barnes appeared bewildered.

"Down at the cabin, some place, Josh has a piece of slate with exact measurements," exclaimed Tom, still staring at the print. "I'll go down and get it, and a ruler, if I can find them."

He looked up exultantly, saw the inquiring look in Barnes' eyes, was abruptly aware that he had said too much, and flushed. He bent far over, nervously pretending to make a second investigation of the telltale mark, and, with averted head, walked back toward the road.

"I'll get them," he called over his shoulder, while he hastened away.

"The same that . . . Piece of slate —— What on earth does he mean?" self-questioned the mine owner, sitting down and staring absently at the marks.

And Tom, down in the road, around the first bend, was standing still, biting his lip, and trying to measure the possibilities before him. If his surmise were correct—that the man who had discovered the loot from the robbed pay wagon was the same who had shot Josh Price, Tom Rogers' protector—then to forego the connecting evidence might mean that the man who had tried to murder Josh Price would escape. And to bring that piece of slate would necessitate some explanation to Frank Barnes, father of Edith Barnes, who already, in a half dozen meetings, had brought the repentant, distressed amateur outlaw to her feet.

He was suddenly aware that through two contributing factors he had achieved patience and hope, and had picked up the clean threads of life again, and that one of these was the stanch friend who lay hovering between life and death in the cabin below, and the other the girl who had received him and indirectly lifted him from despondency over failure and mistake to a plane where he could find hope. These two had given him courage to begin life anew. His throat restricted, and he felt like one who lays all upon an altar of sacrifice. He resumed his way, mindful of the man waiting for his return, and stumbled down the trail.

Stretched on the bench beside the door, the surgeon lay asleep, unmindful of the rising sun. From the kitchen end of the cabin came the smell of coffee brewing for future needs, and of bacon, crisping and appetizing. Pete, the favorite burro, was standing watchfully, his head inside the kitchen door. Tom stepped quietly inside, and, solicitous, stood above the bunk on which his partner rested, as quietly as before. Tom bent his head above the relaxed, parted lips and listened. The breathing of the unconscious man seemed deeper, stronger, more regular, as if vitality were fighting and winning from death, the opponent.

Knowing how great a value the prospector had placed upon that tablet of slate, Tom sought it in the most certain spot beneath the head of the bunk. His fingers found it with the first effort, and he withdrew it gently, as if fearing to rouse its grievously wounded owner. He picked the trousers up from the back of a homemade chair, where he had thrown them in haste, and the new carpenter's rule slipped from a hip pocket, its burnished brass binding catching and reflecting yellow rays of light. He tiptoed from the cabin needlessly, but fearful that his movements

might disturb the sleeper, and ran around behind it toward the trail.

"That's funny!" exclaimed Frank Barnes, kneeling over the track whose measurements he had taken and tallied upon the slate. "Mighty odd! But the measurements of this track are identical with those on a piece of slate!"

Still resting on his knees, he looked up at the young man who stood beside him. Something in the tense lines of the latter's face arrested him. He got to his feet and folded the rule and held it and the tablet in his hand.

"Well," he said, in a puzzled voice, "what I didn't quite get was why Josh had this other track marked down. What was he looking for? What had the other track to do with this? Where and how did he get it, and why? Explain it to me. Maybe we've got the answer of the whole confounded thing here, and to me it looks mighty important, as far as finding out what we've got to know is concerned."

"It is important," said Tom, looking him squarely in the eyes, but speaking in a voice heavy with hopelessness. "It is the measurement of an imprint left by the man who got the gold stolen from the Horseshoe. Josh and I tried to find him in the hope of returning that clean-up, because I was the man who held the pay wagon up and robbed it, and cached the gold."

CHAPTER X.

For a moment the mine owner appeared dumfounded. His level eyes, widely opened, fixed themselves on the younger man's face quite as if questioning his sanity, and marked the suppressed, quivering lips, the tightly shut, firm jaw, and the dilating, finely curved nostrils. Tom's mental stress was so palpable that it softened the contempt and wrath that for an instant flamed in Barnes' mind. An inkling of the bravery and sacrifice required for the confession came to him, checked him, and determined him to withhold judgment until he knew more.

"So," he said slowly, "you are the man who stuck up that gold wagon, eh?"

Tom could not speak, but dumbly nodded assent, and his eyes dropped their direction and fixed themselves on the ground; but not before Barnes had noted the swift, despairing look of pain in them.

"Well, Tom, that sounds pretty bad to me," he said. "Now there's only one thing to do. Suppose we sit down here while you tell me all about it."

He set the example by walking over to a big, flat-topped bowlder, and Tom followed after. The mine owner, observing him, fathomed his inability to speak, and gave rein to his generous liking for the young man, and his own natural kindness.

"Don't be afraid to tell the truth, Tom," he said. "You are talking to a friend who was also the friend of your father. Just turn loose!"

This unexpected sympathy threatened for a moment to be Tom's undoing, and his eyes grew suspiciously moist. His first sentence came with difficulty, and then, resolved to plead his case on truth alone, he spoke freely and without reservation. His story was that which he had told Price, save that now he added thereto an overwhelming gratitude for all that the prospector had done for him. He did not even conceal his own morbid but conquered depression, nor his objections to visiting the Barnes' home while an uncleared crime hung over him.

"Yes," the mine owner declared, "I see how you felt about it. It does credit to your sense of decency. Your attitude is quite probably the one I should have had under similar circumstances."

Tom felt that strange sense of callowness and youth again, but had scant time to think, for now the mine owner flashed shrewd and searching questions from his keen, analytical brain that required all Tom's bravery to answer. He was not conscious of trying to make either appeal or defense in his replies, but subconsciously was fighting as hard as he had ever fought for anything in his life for Barnes' esteem, or at least a shred thereof, and his very candor

saved him. There came a time when the mine owner, who had watched him intently throughout the conversation, thoughtfully looked away at the distant mountaintops and sat silently for a long time.

"I have been very miserable, sir," Tom said, almost as if speaking to himself. "I thought I should go and give myself up. Confess! Accept the punishment I had earned. But Josh wouldn't let me."

"And he gave you the right advice!" said Barnes, with unexpected emphasis. "Cash Vance would have shown you no mercy. He is vindictive, unspeakably dishonest, but, withal, a fearless man. He has the power of courage. Do you know that most men are afraid of him? That he never scruples at anything to gain his objects?"

"I'm afraid I do," said Tom bitterly.

"He has money—lots of it. Nobody knows how much. And he doesn't quibble over using it. And he has reasons for hating you and wishing to harm you. There is no hatred in the world like that a bad man bestows on one he has deliberately wronged, and there isn't the slightest doubt, also, that Vance robbed your father. You, as Bill Rogers' only son, have fallen heir to that hatred." He paused and laughed harshly. "What I can't understand is, how it happens that Josh hasn't killed him long before this. It's like him. You don't know Josh Price. He has certainly tamed down a lot since the days when we were close friends. He is actually becoming sensible, peaceful, and law-abiding. No—Josh was right, I think. Once you confessed, it would have been the end. It would have played into Vance's hand. He would have forced it uncompromisingly and with all his accustomed vigor. He would have used all his influence to have you hanged, then applied for a prison permit to witness your execution, to make certain of your demise, and he would have smoked a cigarette and grinned when the drop fell. I tell you, Tom, there are mighty few men courageous enough to court trouble with Cash Vance. I keep clear of him as I would of a blind rattlesnake in dog days. The only man I know that takes any chances with him—outside of Josh, of course—is that lying thug, Karluk Pete, who is brave with a wolf's bravery, and as cunning."

He got to his feet as if recalling the immediate duties of their quest, and Tom was as one in a great hazard, and waiting apprehensively for some further indication as to how his confession had been received. The mine owner, rousing himself from meditation, turned toward him.

"Well, Tom," he said, "you keep on following Josh Price's injunctions. Say nothing to any one else about—about that break you made. There's no more piffling saying quoted than the one which says: 'What's done can't be undone.' Because nearly always it can. We'll see. Now let's get busy."

Tom was grateful for his support, yet felt that he had forever cut himself off from continuation of his delightful friendship with the mine owner's daughter, and, reflecting over it, he admitted that Barnes was justified in an interdiction. Tom felt that he was still unclean.

They returned to the cabin, where Edith had a breakfast waiting for them, but throughout the meal Tom did no more than answer her questions. They left the doctor still asleep, and returned to make an effort to follow the trail of the would-be murderer. Tom was deathly tired before noon, but the mine owner traveled as if fatigue were an unknown thing and he but a seasoned machine of steel. The only point they succeeded in establishing, and that a useless one, was that after shooting the prospector his assailant had climbed directly up a steep hill to a crest that extended for miles and was entirely destitute of vegetation. Here it was completely lost; and even Barnes, indefatigable and patient as a hound on a scent, had to confess himself beaten.

"It's no use," he said. "We will return to the cabin, get a bite to eat, and decide what next to do."

As they approached it they saw Edith Barnes emerge and look up the trail

anxiously, with her hand shading her eyes from the glare of the sun. When she saw them she beckoned, and they hastened to her side.

"The doctor is in there," she said quickly, "and he thinks that Mr. Price is regaining consciousness."

They tiptoed into the room just as the prospector slowly opened his eyes. For an instant they were filmed and dazed, and then they gradually resumed their brightness.

"Hello!" he said weakly, and would have tried to lift himself on his elbow had not the surgeon gently restrained him.

"How did—how did I get here? What's the matter with me, anyhow?" he asked, and added, with a feeble grin: "Looks like a party."

"Some one tried to snuff you out on the trail last night. Tom found and brought you here this morning," the mine owner said.

A puzzled look came into the prospector's eyes, and then he said, with signs of excitement: "Tommy, Tommy! Look in the pocket of my shirt and see if you find a big dockyment there—an affidavit it is, made by Pete."

The mine owner gave a low whistle, and Tom picked up the shirt.

"No," he announced, "there is no paper of any kind here, and I am certain there was not when I found you."

"Well," said the prospector wearily, "Karluk Pete told Specimen Jones yesterday he'd have to have that paper back, and said he'd get it. Specimen warned me, but—Pete's got his paper, all right."

He smiled a wry smile and closed his eyes as if exhausted, and the surgeon gestured to them to leave the room. They hovered in the doorway for an instant, and the surgeon also tiptoed out.

"Good!" he said, with a look of professional satisfaction on his face. "Splendid! He's as tough as a hickory. Marvelous what vitality some of these old-timers have. He has gone to sleep, and must not be disturbed. It will do more good than medicine."

The mine owner stood scowling thoughtfully, but, when the surgeon started for his horse, followed and beckoned to Tom.

"This is a council of war," he said. "Now, what strikes you as the best plan? Shall we go ahead and get out a warrant for Pete's arrest, on what evidence we have, or——"

"I shouldn't," said the surgeon. "We have nothing very tangible."

Barnes told of finding the footprints, but Tom noted that he made no mention of the slate tablet. The surgeon again shook his head.

"Why not get a tab on what sized boot Pete wears before you shout?" he asked. "Perhaps it wouldn't fit, and then, in the meantime, you'd have given the alarm to the actual shooter and also probably given him ample time to get away."

"That does sound reasonable," said Barnes thoughtfully. "What do you think, Tom?"

"That seems the reasonable course to me," Tom replied; "but—I don't feel competent to advise, under the circumstances."

Barnes caught the significance of the conclusion.

"You are even more capable of advising than I am," he retorted. "But I think I'll saddle my horse and go in with the doctor. I can do a little scouting without attracting any one's attention or suspicion, I think. And you, Tom, in the meantime, had better let Edith get some sleep. The doctor and I will be back some time this evening, and we will then arrange for a night shift."

The doctor was permitted to take the lead, and just before the mine owner started after him he bent down from his saddle to Tom and put a hand on his shoulder.

"Don't brood over things, boy," he said, in a kindly tone. "It's bad enough, Heaven knows. But I'm glad you told me, because—well, because I'm a pretty fair sort of a friend myself."

He had straightened in his seat, touched his horse with the spur, and was galloping away before Tom could speak. He stood and watched the broad

shoulders swinging easily to the horse's stride, but Barnes never looked back.

"Why, Tom, what has happened?" Edith Barnes asked when, a few minutes later, he appeared in the kitchen door. "You look positively happy about something."

"I am," he said; then added, with a sense of guilty evasion: "Happy because the doctor thinks Josh will recover. Aren't you?"

"Of course I am," she said. "He is very wonderful to me, you know, and my father seems to have a very warm affection for him. Poor Mr. Price! What an outrage!"

Tom was compelled to argue with her and insist upon her taking a rest, for she with almost equal insistence thought he required it more; but in the end she surrendered, and he made her a bed by spreading blankets outside in the shade of the heavy trees, where she went gratefully, and was soon fast asleep. Tom watched through the long afternoon beside his protector's bunk, but Josh slept as heavily as a tired child.

The sun had set, and he was still keeping his solicitous watch, when he heard voices and the clattering of hoofs over the trail. He went to the door and looked out. Edith, disturbed, was sitting up and sleepily rearranging her disordered hair, while riding toward him came three men whom he soon identified as the mine owner, the surgeon, and Specimen Jones. They dismounted, and the surgeon asked concerning his patient and then went into the cabin.

"Well, Tom," said Barnes, in a voice heavy with weariness, "I had quite a day of it. I thought it over on the way in and went up and enlisted Specimen, who can be depended upon through thick and thin. We learned, first of all, that Karluk Pete paid his room rent in full yesterday at noon, and said he was leaving. Next, that he had not been seen since late yesterday afternoon, but that is not all. Specimen, you tell him the rest, while I give these supplies I brought to Edith."

"Frank told me about the foot track," Specimen said, "and I went to the place where Pete roomed and told 'em he had promised me a pair of old shoes that he had left there. It was a good guess, all right, and the reason I made a stab that way was that when he talked to me yesterday he was pretty well togged out with new duds. I was dead sure that if he had money enough to get glad rags he'd go the whole hog and get new shoes at the same time. Well, sure enough, the woman goes out back to a trash heap where Pete's room had been cleaned out, and fishes up an old pair of shoes. 'You're dead positive these is the ones Pete left?' I asks, and she says: 'Yes.' I thanked her and took 'em over in a piece of paper to Frank's house, and we took measurements of the soles. Tom, sure as shootin', the tracks you found up there where Josh was sniped weren't made by Karluk Pete, and we've got to look farther to find our man."

CHAPTER XI.

A week slipped past, during which both Frank Barnes and his daughter slept at the cabin, Edith acting as day nurse, while Tom took the task of night watchman over his wounded friend. And then the surgeon announced that the prospector was out of danger and no longer required constant watching. Josh, in the meantime, had come to long hours of lazy silence, but he imparted no confidences as to his trend of thought. To Tom, who for a whole week had been brought into such close contact with the mine owner's daughter, her departure was like the breaking up of the world. Living together in such circumstances—for the sick room has no etiquette—had brought about an intimacy that could not have been accomplished in months under ordinary circumstances. His fear of loneliness was mitigated by Edith's announcement that she would come each day and watch her patient while Tom renewed his work. He was abashed by secret exultation, and yet heartsick, knowing that he could never be anything more

to her than they had been during that one week.

"Well, Tom," she said, early in the next forenoon, when she arrived and dismounted, "I am here. I brought one of father's old picket ropes, and if you'll stake my horse out where he can be happy it will save me a lot of trouble."

She thus came without pretense to meet the altered conditions, and Tom learned to watch for her coming. Intent on doing two men's work in prospecting for the lost shaft, he fell to his task. And he had but one great ambition, which was to find it himself and surprise his wounded benefactor with the result.

"You see," he admitted shyly to Edith one afternoon when, Josh being asleep, she came down to where he stood buried waist-deep in the latest hole, "Josh Price has been a foster father to me. Quite that, and more—more than you know."

He stood looking meditatively at the pile of clay and gravel beside him and did not observe her smile. She remembered the prospector's crude appeal for her assistance, and her consent to it; but now she was ready to admit to herself that she sought Tom's companionship for Tom alone.

"I'd give almost anything to find the old Bonanza Mine myself and surprise him with the find when he is able to come out. It would be, in a way, proof that I appreciate all that he has done for me and all his enormous kindness."

"You are fond of him?" she asked.

"Fond of him!" His youthful eyes lifted themselves to her face with no trace of embarrassment. "I'm more than that, Edith. I'd—I'd give my life for him."

He climbed up and sat beside her on the barricade of earth he had thrown out while digging the pit, wiped his perspiring forehead with a not overly clean handkerchief he dragged from his hip pocket, and added: "You don't know what he means to me. You can't begin to measure his patience—his kindliness—his philosophies—his astounding decency. Why, do you know, I couldn't have believed, a little while ago, that there were such men on earth. I was a lot worse than friendless when I met him."

"My father is fond of him," she said thoughtfully.

But, as if his mind had leaped past her speech, he added: "And about the only way I can show him, just now, how much I appreciate all he has done for me is to find this shaft before he can get out again. Do you understand what I am trying to express?"

"Of course I do," she replied, smiling at his eagerness. "It would be fine. I'm going to help. I like him, too. We shall be partners in the search."

And she was better than her word, for thereafter, for three weeks, there was not a day when she did not put in all her spare time trying to assist him, until she, too, became absorbed in the quest. Each night her father came for her, and to pay a visit to his old friend. She succeeded in quietly enthusing Barnes, and cautioned him that they hoped for a surprise.

The flat showed the scars of Tom's wasted industry. It was pitted with the shallow holes he had dug in his quest; and even his helper, Edith, began to betray discouragement. She took to wandering away from the pits and scrutinizing the ground foot by foot, as if doubting the study Tom and Josh had given it before beginning work. One day she came in short skirt and high boots, and scaled a cliff that overlooked the flat, as if from that lofty height to discover its secret. She "helloed" to Tom, who paused long enough to wave his shovel at her before continuing work. When he looked again, she had disappeared. On the following day she trudged boldly away in a direction of her own choice, and that night made no comment on her new efforts; but when she came at an unusually early hour on the next morning, did her volunteer household work, left Josh propped up with his necessities within reach, and hastened away, Tom saw that she was carrying a stout walking stick of cudgel proportions.

"What on earth are you carrying that timber for?" he asked jokingly.

"Oh, prospecting on my own," she asserted. "And where I go there might be a stray rattler or two."

He looked solicitous.

"I don't think you should take such chances," he declared. "It alarms me."

She laughed gayly at his grave face.

"Why, son," she said, in admirable imitation of Josh's rumbling drawl, "I reckon as how I killed more'n a million of 'em before you were born'd."

But Tom, as he worked that morning, could not help being anxious for her; and hence, when but an hour or two later she appeared, running and calling to him, said to himself: "Guess she's found one at last, and is going to ask me to come up and slaughter his snakeship."

"I want you," she called, within talking distance. "Up this way!"

"Is your snake a big one?" he asked good-humoredly.

"It looks fair sized—to me," she said, with a half smile.

"Thought you had killed a million of them."

"Not like this," she replied. "But—here, you'd best let me show you the way!"

"I'll not step on him," Tom retorted. "And, besides, by this time he's probably rattled his good-by and gone."

"I hope not. Oh, you just wait till you see!" she said, leading the way almost recklessly through a heavy tangle of brush and undergrowth.

Tom suddenly broke through a thorny patch of wild blackberries, and stopped with an exclamation of surprise.

"Why—why who on earth would have thought there was a little cove in here like this? Josh and I didn't even suspect it. And—say, Edith, is that the ruin of an old cabin over there? And there's another one!"

"Yes, and that's not all!" she exclaimed, giving way to her excitement and seizing his hand. "Come on, Tom! Run!"

Humoring her, and himself excited, he ran forward by her side until she came to a quick stop and pointed at her feet.

"Look! Look!" she commanded. "I was not brought up around mines for nothing. That stuff, there, is not country rock. It's ore, Tom! I think I've found an old waste dump."

Eagerly he began picking up and examining the pieces of rock at his feet. He gave a low whistle of amazement.

"If it's not an old dump," he declared, "it is worth investigation. That is very promising float—— Um-m-mh! No, I don't think it is a float. It's hard to tell, but I doubt if that was ever surface rock." He looked at her with excited eyes, holding the piece of ore in his hand. "By Jove, Edith! Suppose you really have located the old Bonanza! But I can't see how you found this place."

"I found it from the top of the cliff," she said gleefully. "It is just a cove in the foothill with a narrow entrance, and it can't be seen from any place except by looking downward from high above. That is why you and Josh missed it. Tom, do go back and bring the pick and shovel up here. I'm too curious to wait very long. I shall begin to dig with my hands!"

He scrambled through the barrier across the gap of the cove, and with long strides ran back to his uncompleted pit, possessed himself of the tools, and regained her side, panting heavily.

"You say where I shall dig," he invited, opening the collar of his flannel shirt for coolness' sake, and his eyes danced with excitement as they met hers.

"I think it is safe to dig just about here," she advised. "You see, there is a little slope here, and if this was the old waste dump it would have traveled quite a little distance in fifty years' time. Dig right here," she indicated with the toe of her boot. "Pshaw! I wish I had a shovel to help!"

He seized his pick and drove it into the earth with the gritty sound of steel striking rubble.

"Hear that?" he asked, without looking up. "Sounds good to me."

"Me, too!" she agreed. "You just pick along there about ten feet in that direction."

He obeyed, his strong young shoulders driving the steel with all their weight and strength, and when he looked up again she had seized the shovel and was throwing aside the loosened earth. He smiled at her enthusiasm and impatience, and drove the pick harder. He took the shovel from her hands, and she sat as closely as she could without interfering, and with her eyes fixed on the bottom of the hole he dug.

"It's—it's like some sort of romance or fairy story or big hazard!" she declared breathlessly. "It's just like digging at the end of the rainbow for the pot of gold. Oh, I do hope we find it! I should be so happy for your sake and Josh's."

He was not too engrossed in his toil to note that she mentioned him first, and a strange glow amounting to semi-intoxication warmed him.

"I don't care for myself so much," he asserted, in words broken by his constant physical effort, "as I do for Josh. It seems to me that if I could make him happy, I should myself be the happiest man on earth."

She did not answer, but continued staring with an eager, curious gaze as each shovelful of earth was thrown. Child of the mines that she was, she looked with an experienced eye on the character of the earth and bits of stone and ore that his vigorous young arms were tossing from around his feet. She got up to seize it in handfuls, the clean, moist-smelling earth, and to inspect pieces that she picked from it.

"If this isn't the old Bonanza, Tom," she said gravely, "it is at least worth prospecting. There's a lot of ore. Good ore, I'm certain."

He looked up at her from the corners of his eyes, as he saw her cleansing a piece now and then with reckless disregard for her rough skirt, and smiled. She laid her selections to one side in a little pile.

"I wish we had some water here," she said plaintively. "I'd like to wash some of this stuff off. I think some of it would show gold. I'll bet there's a ledge somewhere around here that threw some of the gold that made the placers in the flat below."

He delighted in the unconscious way in which she relapsed to mining phraseology, but did not pause in his work. Now, as the ground hardened, he alternated shovel and pick. The sun was climbing higher and burned his broad back with its glare. He had to pause at last and rest.

"Whew! You can't say I'm not working my best, boss!" he exclaimed, leaning against the edge of his little pit that was now waist-deep.

"That's all right," she retorted, in the same vein. "Maybe I'll raise your wages. While you are resting, suppose we look around a little way. I've something to show you."

He climbed from the pit, glad to rest his muscles for a spell, and followed her.

"There," she said, pointing with all an explorer's triumph, "is the ruins of what was once a cabin. See it?"

"It does look like it," he assented.

"And over here," she declared, again leading the way, "is another one. There are at least ten or twelve of them here that I have found, so far."

She pointed them out with her earth-soiled fingers. She laughed when indicating one, and said: "It was lucky I had on these high, stiff boots over there, because I did kill a rattler. Five rattles and a button! Wish to see it for proof?" she concluded gayly, looking up at him with dancing eyes.

"No," he said soberly, "I'll take your word. I don't like the thought of your being so near to harm."

He spoke with unconscious betrayal of his heart, and then was abashed. She suddenly turned from him to hide the swift tenderness of her face, lest she also betray a secret that hitherto she had not admitted.

"Well, this must have been the Bonanza that you are looking for," she said, in haste to divert the conversation. "I've no doubt that in the undergrowth over there we could find traces

of other cabins and all that. Naturally there could have been no town here. The camp stayed where it was in the first place—that is, down there in the flat below. More room there to build."

"I think we must go back," he announced; and then, with an assumption of gayety: "I'm too anxious to get that hole down to six-feet depth to stay here and look at heaps of stone and buried logs."

She followed somewhat soberly behind him, and again took her post at the edge of the excavation. He seized the pick and drove it heavily into the bottom of the pit. Then instantly all else was forgotten, for it did not yield. He twisted it backward and forward until it was released, seized his shovel and forced it through the disturbed earth, while the girl leaned forward on hands and knees. He threw the earth away rapidly, exposing a log, earth-rotted, then by its side another and yet another. He threw the shovel down and looked up at her, exulting.

"Well, Edith," he said, suppressing his excitement and gratification, "it looks to me as if you had found the old Bonanza shaft."

"You mean we have," she said, meeting his eyes; and, although neither could have told why, they both flushed and looked away.

CHAPTER XII.

By mid-afternoon the top layer of logs was removed, and Tom rigged a crude shears and pulley, and, with Edith's enthusiastic assistance, hoisted the first ones away. He affected to ridicule her excitement, but, had he admitted it, his own was scarcely less intense, and when the shadows lengthened, he wished for a longer day. On their return to the cabin, Josh, watching them hopefully, observed a change, and turned his bandaged head to one side with a smile and stared at the wall.

"They're comin' a lot closer together because they ain't no old slob like me hangin' around to interfere," he thought. "I reckon the search for the old shaft'll have to wait for a while. It'll still be there, somewhere, when I get up and start out again. Tom's got her goin', sure! I'll give him a chance by pretendin' not to notice it and by stickin' to this cussed bunk a week longer'n I wanted to."

He carried out his part so well that he went to sleep immediately after his supper was eaten, thus giving Frank Barnes an opportunity to slip away and become an adviser in the amiable plot. The mine owner was therefore absent from his own property on the following day, leaving everything to his superintendent. And the superintendent would have been vastly surprised could he have seen the employer of several hundred men, known to be one of the wealthiest in the district, pulling and hauling at a rope to hoist away half-rotten logs, begrimed from head to foot, bareheaded and clad in his undershirt, and as enthusiastic as his two young helpers over the task of discovering what could be found in a mere dirty hole in the earth. He was enjoying an exciting vacation and was as young in spirits as Tom or his own daughter. He had even brought a basket of lunch, and a long plumb line, when he came to the cabin that morning, where he bade Josh an unusually boisterous good-by and tiptoed away lest the stricken prospector hear the direction he took. It was he who shouted the loudest when the first log of the last layer was hoisted out and swung to one side on the moist pile of earth.

"Now, Tom," he said, "the plumb line! We'll see how far down the water is, and, if we can, how deep those old-timers went."

He perched himself precariously on the edge of the shaft and let the weighted line slip through his fingers until the first faint splash told him that he had reached water. He dragged it up, counting the white strips as they sped through his hands.

"Ninety-five to water!" he exclaimed, in surprise. "Had no idea they went so deep. How on earth did they hoist enough with the old-time whims to make it pay? Edith, keep farther away from the edge, there! Do you wish to

fall in? Now we'll see how deep the water is—if I've got line enough to plumb it."

In a tense silence he again lowered his weight and looked incredulous when the line suddenly slackened in his hands. He swung it to and fro to make certain, and then said: "Well, that beats me! It's on the bottom."

He pulled it up while Tom and Edith watched, and exclaimed: "That's odd! And it looks bad. There's less than twenty feet of water. They must have had a sump hole. And they quit work on account of the water, the old chap told Josh."

They interchanged looks. All were oppressed by a sense of failure. The old-time miner, Juan Carvallo, had done as so many others did—dreamed through the years of what he had left behind, magnifying values and discounting truth, until he had created totally new conditions in his mind and come to believe in them. All were too familiar with mining to believe that but twenty feet of seepage water had kept the Mexicans from delving deeper had there been ore of even fairly paying worth in sight.

"Well," said Tom, "I'm going to the bottom of that shaft, just the same. And I don't think we should say anything to Josh about it yet."

"Good for you, Tom!" agreed Barnes. "All we could tell him now would merely disappoint him. Shall we clear the mouth of the shaft?"

"Sure."

And they fell to work doggedly, but with some of their enthusiasm gone. They carried pails of water from the spring and threw them down to start the dead air. They made a fire crate and lowered it close to the sump to create a circulation of air, after which they were through for the day. When Barnes arrived the next morning, he came with a cavalcade that, following previous instructions, kept well away from the cabin and went directly to the old shaft. It consisted of two of the mine owner's confidential men, and they brought with them three burros loaded with a triple-geared windlass, a bosn's chair, an air pump, and large supplies of hose, and a miscellaneous outfit of dynamite drills, sampling sacks, and everything that would be required for an examination of the vein, if exposed, or at least the contact where the vein had been worked.

Tom insisted on the right to be lowered first, but Barnes said: "No, Tom, I'm much more experienced than you, and—well, we can't tell how safe it is until we've examined the walls of the shaft."

"That is the very reason I'm going first," Tom retorted, as he slid into the bosn's chair with a bull's-eye lamp in his hand, and said to the men on the windlass: "Lower away slowly, and stand by for signal."

"He's got the grit, all right," asserted Barnes to Edith. "I like him for that." But Tom was already beyond hearing. the wire to the gong slipping slowly through the hollow of his arm. Far below him the candle that had been lowered to test the air burned steadily, seeming to increase in size and brilliancy as he descended. He examined the side walls of the shaft foot by foot, halting once to tap at a threatening point, and getting a sufficiently clear ring of steel to assure him there was scant danger of a cave-in. He was glad to observe that it was good holding ground, free from limestone or swelling rock. The candle burned still brighter as he passed it. Directing his light downward, he saw that he was within a few feet of the water, and signaled for a stop, intending to ascend slowly while examining the shaft as he went for signs of ore. With a kick against the wall, he swung himself around in his chair and gave an exclamation of surprise. Behind him was the opening of a drift.

Tom increased his swing, and landed on his feet in the entrance. His lantern showed that at some time water had filled it, but now it was merely glistening with damp, and a tiny rivulet trickled into the sump hole. It led upward on a gradual ascent for a short distance, and there it was blocked by fallen timbers. The air here was half

stagnant; but he persevered, and by dropping to his knees in the opening of the drift and flashing his light forward, saw a clear space beyond. He examined the walls. There was no doubt that the Mexicans had driven on the vein, which had faulted and been picked up.

He went back, resumed his chair, and was hoisted above, where he reported his discovery to Barnes, who, in his turn, was lowered away, made an examination, and returned above ground.

"Well, Tom," he declared hopefully, "at least we don't know that it's a dead one. I'll tell you what's happened. At the time Carvallo worked it, they probably had to keep water out of the drift. Then comes an earthquake, possibly the one of 1874, that was felt heavily throughout this district. It altered the watercourses in a lot of other mines, I am told, and so it is likely that it cleared some of the subterranean outlet channels below this ground, making this a comparatively dry mine, down to its present depth, at least. When Carvallo stopped work and gave up, the drift filled with water. When the earthquake shifted things and made the drift comparatively dry, the drive caved. The air is none too good. We'll lay the hose line and work the air pumps. I'd shoot it if I wasn't afraid of bringing the whole work down. We'll get a few props while the boys, here, clear the air, and see what is behind that cave."

At six o'clock that evening, Tom and Barnes succeeded in reaching the end of the drift and found the ore body as it had been left by the Mexicans. They brought away such samples as they could break loose, and Barnes announced that he would take them that evening to his own assay house and bring the returns in the morning. Tom did not know for a long time that the mine owner and his daughter were up nearly all the night listening to the hum of the mufflers and watching the seething cupels; that they hung above the finely adjusted scales, capable of weighing a lead-pencil mark on a piece of paper. His first knowledge of results was when Barnes arrived in the morning and beckoned him out with an emphatic hand.

"Tom," he said, "if there's much of that ore there, the Bonanza Mine was not badly named. Those samples we took run nearly three hundred dollars a ton!"

Tom leaned against the rear wall of the cabin for support.

"We can't keep it from Josh much longer," the mine owner added. "My boss carpenter will be here by ten o'clock to decide what he needs, and on a rough guess I ordered twenty full sets of timbers and stulls packed over from my yard this morning. The first lot will be here pretty soon, and I wish you would get your three burros ready to go back with my three for the next lot, because three are all I have. I believe in going after a thing when you want it. We shall know within the next forty-eight hours whether the Bonanza is worth going ahead with. Otherwise Josh would hear something, and perhaps, by getting excited, would check his recovery. Edith, at ten o'clock, will try to keep him interested so that he will not hear anything."

He was unaware that in the meantime Josh Price had sat up in his bunk, run his fingers thoughtfully around his bandages, and said to himself: "Gosh almighty! I can't keep this bluff up much longer. Not even for Tommy! If he can't win that girl within a day or two more, he don't deserve her. I just naturally got to get out of here and get my boots and pants on, or I'll sure bust!"

He was, however, a hopeless invalid in appearance when Edith Barnes sat beside him at ten o'clock the next morning, talking steadily to prevent him from hearing any unusual noises.

"Where's that Tom?" he asked, interrupting her in something she was saying.

"Out digging holes probably," she replied.

He rested quietly with half-closed eyes for a moment, and then said: "Oh, diggin', is he? I thought maybe he was just loafin'. I'm beginnin' to think

he's nothin' but a lazy loafer, after all. Not much good, I'm afraid."

Had she been watching his face she could have seen that a shrewd, bright eye was turned toward her expectantly, and undoubtedly watching to see how she would accept this innuendo. Also that the eye closed when, taken unawares, and angered, she rushed to Tom's defense:

"A lazy loafer! Not much good? I'm sorry you said that. If you knew what I do about Tom Rogers, you would be thankful that you have such a partner. I can tell you right now, no matter what you think, that he has half killed himself with work since you have been here with this wound. Loaf? Why, he has done two men's work! The days aren't long enough for him. The only person he thinks about is you."

Josh sat up suddenly, much to her alarm, and shook a fist in the air.

"Only person he thinks about is me? Why, confound his fool hide! Thinks about me when you're around? What in tarnation has he been doin' all this time? Here I stick, torturin' myself to give him a show to make good, and all he does is to dig holes! I didn't know there was any such plain, cussed idiots runnin' loose. I'll get out of here and tell him to——"

Alarmed by his vehemence, she rushed forward, and, with a hand on his shoulder, begged him to rest quietly.

"Don't think about him," she said soothingly. "Just be quiet. If you don't, you'll never get well. That's good. Lay yourself down."

He dropped back under pressure of her hand and shut his eyes.

"Tom has been doing the best he could. You have no idea how hard he has tried. You are very unjust, because, I suppose, you are ill."

He waited for more, but, as she did not speak, became crafty again and uttered a loud groan. She gave him a drink of cold water and adjusted his pillow.

"Do you like Tommy?" he asked, in a feeble voice. She turned away, and did not know that he was watching her through his eyelashes. She did not reply, but seated herself and stared away until nothing more than her profile could be seen. "I'm mighty fond of him," the prospector said quietly. "And, Edie Barnes, if you ain't, too, I'm goin' to be a right disappointed man."

He saw her face flush, and then she leaped to her feet and started toward the door.

"Edie! Girl! Come back here; I need you!" he shouted after her, in a voice of such assumed distress that she halted and turned toward him. "I'd like another drink of water," he said feebly, and she hastened to give it to him. He but tasted it, and caught her hand lest she escape. "Sit here by me in that chair," he said, in a much stronger voice; and, humoring him, she obeyed.

"Little girl," he said, staring at the poles of the roof above his head lest a direct gaze impel her to flight, "you'll never have a better friend than me. I've nothin' to ask from you. Anything or everything I've got to give, I give to you. And I want to be your friend—your real friend. Frank Barnes is as fine a man as there is. I know. But a daddy can never quite be, in some things, like—like some one else. A girl's sort of ashamed to talk to her father because she's afraid he won't understand. There's a lot of things she wouldn't tell her father that she'll tell some other friend."

She wondered what was coming, and was interested through expectancy. She gently released her hand, but sat quietly.

"I've done a lot of thinkin'," he drawled on, "since I've been layin' here on my back, waitin' to get strong enough to go out and find and murder the son of a Piute that creased me! And I'll get him yet—don't forget! I'll carry four guns after this, because five holes through him won't satisfy me. I want to drill him twenty times, and then take off his hide, salt it, and hang it on a rack outside the cabin to tan. But as I said, I've been thinkin'," he went on, unmindful of her horrified start, "and what I've come to is this: That

I've got a few friends—your daddy and Specimen are two—but I've got but one thing that's mine. That's Tommy. His dad gave him to me. He belongs to me, Tommy does. I'm responsible for him. I'd wallop him if he done wrong, and, miss, I'd shoot the man that done Tommy wrong. He ain't had a square deal. He ain't had the right chance. And he's got to have it from now on, because I'm his guardian, by will of a white man that's dead and expects me to look out for the son that he gave me."

He turned his head until his searching eyes caught hers with a look as direct as the thrust of a sword, and said: "I'm dead set on your fallin' in love with him, and him with you, because you're the only girl I've ever seen that was good enough for him, and Tommy Rogers is the only man I've ever seen that was good enough for you!"

She started from her chair and rushed toward the door, but his voice pursued and overtook her:

"And I tell you, you'll do it, because I've got my mind set on it! Put that in your pipe and smoke it!"

And then he rolled over in his bunk and chuckled with a sense of duty well done, and said to himself: "He's got her, sure. He's got her!"

With equal abruptness, he sat up with a jerk and dragged the bandage from one ear, listened intently, and said: "What's that? Some mucker is runnin' a string of burros over this claim, and my old Pete's talkin' to 'em. I know Pete, and he don't never squall that way unless he's sayin' 'Hello!' to some strange mule. Wonder what in tarnation that means?"

CHAPTER XIII.

A weird-looking giant, under whose hat a bandage protruded, and who had to sit down and rest at intervals, trailed after a string of burros up across the gentle slope of the valley, passed through the brier-torn entrance to the shaft, and stumbled to a seat on the pile of rotted logs.

"Well, Tommy," he croaked, "you and Frank Barnes and Edie fooled me, did you? Found the old hole up here, eh? That's all right, son. Don't worry about me. I'm all right. And I know you wanted to surprise me and that I beat you to it."

He rested his back against a tree, dragged the hat from his head, beat the earth with it, and laughed uproariously. They protested in vain against his coming. He waved them aside and demanded the full account of the finding of the shaft.

"Good!" he said. "Glad I did get up, because now I'm in time to give it a name. It's goin' to be officially called the Lady Edith. And if that name don't bring good luck, nothin' will!"

Tom and Barnes, who were acting as windlass men, were called by the gong to lower timbers to the carpenter and his mate, and returned to Edith and the prospector just in time to see the latter suddenly fix his eyes on a footprint by his side, bend over it suddenly, peer at it, and then turn around and stare with equal intentness at the girl's clay-stained foot. He gasped for an instant, then blurted out: "By gee whiz! You—you are the girl that made the track by the bowlder on the Washoe Trail the day after the gold wagon was robbed!"

There was a moment of confusion, in which Josh, regretting his impulsive speech concerning a discovery over which he had brooded so long, participated. Tom stared at him angrily, as if about to protest the accusation, and Frank Barnes looked steadily at his daughter. She, in turn, flushed, looked at her foot, then at Josh, and last of all at her father.

"Well, Edith, what have you to say?" demanded the mine owner quietly.

For an instant she stood looking at him pleadingly, and then hung her head, while the suspense of the three men increased and they fixed their eyes upon her. Tom felt like crying out that it didn't matter, and trying to shield her from something he knew not what. Barnes' face became stern. At last she lifted her eyes bravely to meet his, and

replied: "Yes, father, the footprint was mine."

"And you——" The mine owner stopped, as if fearing to voice a suspicion. She took the sentence from his lips.

"Oh, dad!" she exclaimed, her lips going white. "I have never lied to you. I have never evaded. But—but I have kept something from you—for the first time in my life!"

Her reply accentuated his distress, as well as the anxiety of Josh and Tom.

"Do you know how ugly an appearance is given by your confession? Do you know that——" But Josh, who had slowly lifted his huge bulk to its feet until he towered above the others, suddenly reached out a huge hand and clutched Barnes' arm with fingers that dug into the muscles with savage intensity.

"For the Lord's sake, Frank! You orter be ashamed of yourself, scarin' her that-a-way over nothin'! Give the girl a chance! What if she did keep somethin' from you? That's nothin'. Ain't you ever kept nothin' back in all your life from her? You're goin' at her as if she was a dad-blamed skunk!"

He stopped, and, suddenly thrusting out his arm, swept it around her and unceremoniously dragged her toward him. He saw that she was on the verge of hurt tears.

"There, there!" he said consolingly. "You see, Edie, girl, you don't sabe what it is that's riled your dad. Wait till I explain it to you."

In surprise she stared up at him. He did not look at the others, but down at her, with kindly, sympathetic eyes.

"The day before that Washoe hold-up," he said, talking with swift fluency, "I come along that road, and one of my burros stumbled over a stone and busted a tendon. I didn't have time to sort my outfit, so took what he had in his pack and hid it under that big bowlder, in a little hole I found there, intendin' to come back and get it. You see, I didn't think at the time, bein' a careless sort of an old cuss, and not dreamin' anybody could find and pick it up before I got back; but the fact is, there was an old carpetbag on that burro that had my mother's picture in it, and my clean shirts, and some locks of hair, and—about all the money I had."

She gave an excited start and tried to interrupt him, but he held up a big finger and said: "No! Just you wait! I got to finish this yarn of mine now, while the goin' is good and I'm strong. See?"

She nodded assent, and he continued: "Well, somebody lifted all that stuff before I could get back. I wouldn't have cared so much about the money, but—but, Edie, I can't get them locks of hair nor my poor old mother's picture back. Yes, it was the only one I had, and maw's been dead for more'n forty year. Hold on! That ain't all!"

He stopped impressively, and she drew away and stood looking up at him.

"Tom and me found the place robbed, and all we could find about who done it was two sets of tracks. One set was made by a woman—the ones you made. The others by a man, who had robbed me of 'most all I had, and, Edie, the man that robbed me was the man who shot me from ambush a while after! We have got to know who the man is. Your daddy found this man's track up there in the gulch where he plugged me from behind a bowlder. You don't want your old friend—me, Josh Price—shot at again, and maybe the next time with better aim. Now, what I'd like to know is who that man was, and maybe you can tell us. That's all that makes your daddy so riled about it. He thinks that maybe if you hadn't kept your mouth shut, likely I wouldn't have been plugged, because before that I'd have found that root-diggin' son of a thief and filled him so full of .45 holes that he'd have made a nice colander to strain string beans with. Your paw ain't sore, honey. He's just vexed. I ain't sore; I'm only laughin' to think how we been fumblin' around all the time on false scents, when, maybe, if you'd told your paw, we'd have been saved a lot of time. Now, how did you

come to be there at about the same time the robber was?"

"At about the same time? Why, I saw him stealing it!" she exclaimed.

The three men leaned forward as if fearing to lose any of her words. Forgetting her father's censure in her anxiety to assist the prospector in his search, she said: "Why, father! You remember you told me that if I didn't get home earlier when I rode across the range to visit Mary Carlyle, you wouldn't consent to my going any more?"

He smiled a trifle as he recollected his admonition. It encouraged her, and she caught his arm and looked up into his face as she proceeded, while he stared down at her:

"I rode out on the Washoe Road without thinking of going to see Mary, and was—well, just idling. I came to that pinnacle rock and climbed up on it, leaving Dandy to nibble at the grass on the other side of the road. Then I thought I could gallop over to Mary's and be home early, and climbed down and rode. That morning you had given me that new pair of long gauntlets that you had sent to San Francisco for, because you thought I should protect my hands, that you said were getting scarred. And, not being accustomed to wearing riding gloves, I left them there on top of the rock, and didn't think of them again until I was miles away. Then I got to Mary's and—and forgot the time. I was terribly distressed when I rode away. It was in the bright moonlight. I thought to myself that you would think me unappreciative if I didn't return with the gloves. I was certain you would miss them, because you had taken so much trouble to surprise me with them. Also, I was afraid you would be angry with me for being so late; so, when I came to the Pinnacle, I dropped off, let Dandy crop the grass, and went to get them.

"I climbed up on top, and then saw something that frightened me. It was a man who was dragging something from a hole on the opposite side of the rock and had not heard me. It was heavy, and the man had to get down on his hands and knees to pull it out. He stood up and gave a big, deep breath, and looked around as if afraid of something, listened, and then went on with his work. I kept very still, because I was a little bit frightened. When I saw him stoop again, I dropped back and ran away on tiptoes, with your new gauntlets in my hand. Then, when I came home, you had been detained at the mine for some reason, and—I was very glad. You hadn't found out! And, dad, I have not gone out on any late trips since, have I? You know that I don't deceive you, don't you? And that I wouldn't have had it happen for the world? And that now I'm ashamed and hate myself for not telling you all this before?"

Barnes suddenly threw both arms around her hungrily, picked her up, and kissed her as her hands leaped upward to clasp his neck. Tom looked away, and the prospector smiled with a slow, wistful, envious smile, as if wishing that he had such a daughter of his own. The lie he had told had slipped away into the past and was already forgotten. He saw her struggle to free herself, her confession incomplete, and she turned both hands toward him and looked up into his rugged face.

"Oh, Josh!" she cried. "Just think! If I had told it all then, as I should have done, you might have caught the robber and wouldn't have been shot! And that isn't all. You might have got back your mother's picture and all those other mementos that you have lost. And it was all my fault!"

"Humph! Forget 'em! Forget 'em!" he rumbled. "I'll forgive you. Maybe it ain't too late yet. What I'd like to know is if you knew the man."

She shook her head in the negative.

"Would you know him if you saw him again?"

She was perturbed and frowned thoughtfully away from him.

"Perhaps," she said, after a pause. "You see, although it was moonlight, from where I was, his hat concealed his face, and he stooped; but—— Yes, I am certain I should know him again if I saw him in just the same way.

There was something about his shoulders—they were very high, and one was peculiar—and, yes, when he bent forward he didn't bend straight. He put his right hand on the ground and dropped down like—like I don't know what; but he bent down as a man who had been wounded might, as if it hurt him if he bent straight forward. And —yes, I'm sure he must have been a very tall man."

"That's not very much to identify a man by," said Barnes, expressing his disappointment. "Think, Edith! Think hard! Can't you remember something more than that?"

She bent her brows into a frown while they watched her, but at last she shook her head.

"I can't! I can't! I wish I could. I was afraid he would look up and see me, or that I would make a noise, and was very frightened."

"Maybe you'll think of somethin' else later," said Josh hopefully. "And, anyhow, you've cleared up some of it. That lets all the others we've suspected out of the job, and havin' no trail at all is a heap better than trustin' to a wrong one. We'll just keep on tryin' to find that gent with the funny foot."

He wavered on his feet as if stricken with faintness.

"I don't think it wise for you to stay up here," Edith protested, in alarm, as she came to his assistance. "You are supposed to be convalescent, but not well. I must help you back to the cabin."

But Josh seated himself and protested so vigorously that on her father's advice Edith departed without him, and they watched her as she went down the new trail and out of sight, to prepare their luncheon.

"Well," Barnes said, "in any event, nearly every one seems to have lost interest in capturing the robber since they learned that Cash Vance carried insurance on all clean-ups passing between the Horseshoe and the express office, and has been paid his loss in full. The insurance company should have had a better messenger to guard its end of the bargain."

He stopped, aware that the prospector was staring at him.

"What I'd like to know, Frank," said Josh, "is why you coupled up my bein' robbed of my valise and stuff with the Horseshoe robbery?"

Barnes made no attempt at concealment.

"Because, Josh," he replied, "I know that you lied to save Tom. Tom told me all about it on the night when he tried to learn who had ambushed you. You never lost a valise with money and locks of hair and photographs in all your life."

"Maybe that's so," agreed Josh, grinning brazenly. "I'll swear I do get mixed up about things sometimes. I'm a terrible liar, I am, ever since I got hit on the head with a shovel by my mother when I was fourteen years old."

"Why, you told me one time that you never saw your own mother; that she died when you were born, back in Missouri!"

"So she did! So she did!" Josh asserted. "Good Lord! How I wish I had a memory like yours, Frank Barnes! Anyhow, I'm glad Tommy told you, because you don't seem too proud to associate with him. Also, Tommy's a fool to go blabbin' about ——"

"He told me—and it was a hard confession to make, don't forget—because he was ready to take his chance of sacrificing himself for your benefit," the mine owner answered hotly. "I admire him for it. It proves to me that he is decent. You've no right to——"

"Great Scott! Talk about kickin' over a wasps' nest! You needn't get so blamed crusty about it, Frank," the prospector roared; but they saw by the look in his eyes as he turned them on Tom that he was immensely pleased and proud of Tom's action. He suddenly laid a hand on Tom's shoulder. "Tommy, I had a hunch when I picked you up that you were all right. And I'm proud of you, bein' as you're not only my pardner, but that you belong to me; proud that you had the nerve, boy, to stand up and take the gaff when old Josh Price was down, out, and un-

able to do his own fightin'. You've made mighty good with me. And somehow I think you've made good with Frank Barnes, too."

"He has!" declared the mine owner. "Otherwise I wouldn't take such an interest in—— Oh, let's drop this! Come on, Tom! We've got to lower some of that timber."

And, glad of any excuse to end an embarrassing situation, Tom hastened after him, while Josh leaned against a tree and chuckled. He stared meditatively at the ground for a moment and said, with the air of an artist who, on reviewing his work, discovers an irremediable flaw: "I'd ought to have run some baby's shoes into that valise when I told Edie about it. Baby shoes always gets a girl or a woman. Plague on it! Why didn't I think to have baby shoes in it? Maw's picture was very fair work, and them locks of hair was good; but I've used 'em until I'm sick of 'em. I'm sure enough gettin' old and stupid and stale!"

CHAPTER XIV.

The prospector was himself again before the fall months slipped away, and, absorbed in work on the mine, laid in abeyance his quest, which had become a double one, for he was now intent not only in solving the facts concerning the Horseshoe clean-up, but in learning who had shot him, and taking the sort of vengeance that his personal law demanded. The Lady Edith was sufficient for the time being, inasmuch as it proved highly profitable, and there was much to do. By the spring season it had become a "regular mine," with a small stamp mill, hoist, and picked staff of men, and the partners worked long hours. They still dwelt in the little cabin they had come to regard as home and from whose door they could see the rolling smoke from the boiler stack that peeped above the rocky wall of the glen. Tom, to the prospector's disgust, announced that his first ten thousand dollars should go to the insurance company that had paid Vance's loss, as a "conscience fund." And then, as spring itself was passing to summer, came news that brought Josh back to the chase. It was delivered by Specimen tersely on an evening when Josh and Tom visited the camp.

"Karluk Pete is back again. Landed here in rags yesterday."

"Did, eh? Where is the coyote now?"

"Along the line somewhere. Got a gun?"

Specimen was evidently apprehensive of results; but the prospector snorted: "Naw! Don't need one. Just want to see if he gives himself away at sight of me. Come along."

They sauntered into the Paradise, and there, leaning against the end of the bar and scowling gloomily, was Karluk Pete, who turned slowly as they entered the door. Not by the movement of a muscle in his hard face did he betray any emotion. He accepted a drink with the air of a man who drinks with all comers, and by no sign indicated that he had more than a cursory interest in either the prospector or his companion. He even brightened up in time, and confidentially asked the prospector to please hold the affidavit against Vance until it became necessary to use it.

"Why?" asked Josh, probing him with keen eyes under which Pete did not waver.

"Because," declared Pete, "I don't want any row with Cash Vance till I have to have one. He's a vindictive sort of a cuss. One time I thought of asking you to hand it back, but decided to let it drop. I left the town a day or two after, anyhow."

His manner was that of hardened frankness, and the prospector was inclined to believe that there was small use in paying further heed to his movements; but Specimen still insisted stubbornly that any one was worth watching. Josh discussed it with Tom on the homeward trail that night, but the latter was inclined to agree with Specimen Jones that the whole world required surveillance, and shook a dubious head.

The previous habit of life was resumed again for weeks—the habit that

had become fixed by Tom's industry; for now he followed rules of his own making, self-inflicted and hard laid, that demanded at least two hours' study each night. That he had long since passed the work required by a university to qualify him as an engineer did not deter him from advancing higher. His sole deviations from the regularity of twelve hours a day at the mine and in the assay house, followed by an evening's study, were on those nights when he visited Edith Barnes. Yet, curbing himself in his resolute self-discipline, he had stilled the cry of his heart. To the prospector's annoyance, he had abandoned the great chase and fixed his ambition on the "conscience fund" that was to clear the slate of his delinquency. Josh began to leave the affairs of the mine to his partner, and doggedly tried to assist Specimen. And the mine did not seem to suffer, although he was a veteran in counsel.

That the Lady Edith was becoming an extremely valuable property did not alleviate the perturbation of his mind, which had become set and indurated with the idea that he must clear up the looting of the cache beneath Pinnacle Rock, and identify the man who had tried to murder him, before his protégé would permit himself to approach on more intimate terms the daughter of Frank Barnes. And on this the prospector's wishes were fixed. And then, when hope was at low ebb, came another turn of the wheel, unexpected, unforeseen, unsurmised, so strangely does fate reward those who persist.

"Hello, Josh! Is that you and Tom?" a voice halted the partners on a June night when they were traversing the shaded main street of Shingle. Josh looked at a man hurrying across the street toward them, and in the brilliant moonlight identified Specimen Jones, the unrecognized superintendent of the Lady Edith Mine.

"Sure it is. Got anything new?" he asked eagerly.

"Not much," admitted Specimen. "Only this. Last night I did the old stunt over again and trailed Pete out to Vance's place."

He peered about to make certain that they were beyond others' hearing, and Josh said: "Come out on into the middle of the road. That's the safest place, always, to tell secrets."

"I can't get a single line anywhere else," said Specimen, in a subdued voice, when they stood in the moonlight, "but I thought it might be interesting to know what Pete was doing to Vance, and I made another trip and hung under the window of Vance's cabin. It appears that Pete's got him going. And you can't guess how! Pete says that he's got Vance because Vance tried to bribe him to do some other dirty work, as near as I can make out, and that if Vance doesn't come across he'll put somethin' up that's not barred by any statute of limitations. And Vance has lost a little of his old-time nerve. He tried to bluff Pete out, but it wasn't a good bluff, because in the end, swearing like a packmaster all the time, and telling Pete that he'd kill him yet, Vance gave in and coughed up some more money for Pete to feed to the gamblers along the line."

Josh stood for a full minute in deep thought.

"Well," he said, with a sigh of disappointment, "that's not gettin' what I want to know; but you keep on watchin' Pete, so's I can get the proper handhold on Vance. That's not exactly what I want, but it may help some. A feller never can tell. You're doin' all right, Specimen, but it begins to strike me you're a heap better miner than you are a detective. Anyhow, we'll try a little longer before we give up. I hate to give up on anything. I want to know who wears a foot like that print that was there by—well, by the place where I was shot."

An hour later, having accompanied Tom to Edith's home and finding her father absent, he started to retreat; but she prevented his going alone by declaring that she felt like taking a long walk.

"Come on!" she insisted. "Let us walk clear past the town and up to where the hill drops over. Where we can look back at the camp in the moon-

light, and at the hills behind, and the trees climbing up their sides, and——"

"Well, we might go a piece," consented Josh. "Only not quite so far as all that. We might go to where the road branches off to the Lady Edith, and Tom can bring you back from there."

He was still resolved to give his adopted son an opportunity to propose marriage, but this viewpoint did not reach either the protégé or the victim; so that when, the turn toward the mine reached, they insisted on his accompanying them farther, being in a lonely mood, he yielded. They were approaching the crest of a sharp foothill when a horseman rode past them at a merciless pace, enveloped them in a cloud of dust, and went on to the top, thence swiftly dropped from sight.

"A man like that oughtn't to be allowed a pony," the prospector declared wrathfully. And then: "Hello! Somethin' happened to him! His poor hoss stumbled, I think."

They ran up to the sharp crest and looked over it. Evidently the fall had not been serious, for the man had regained his feet and was trying to catch the horse; but the animal, dreading punishment, took flight and disappeared down the long, white road. Josh nudged the others and laughed.

"Serves him good and right," he muttered. "Lopin' a horse up a hill like that. Listen to him cuss! Let's get over here behind this rock and watch his didos."

Almost like a boy bent on a mischievous prank, he led the way, and they climbed the rock and peered over the top at the man in the road. The latter, after giving a final shake of his fist at his fleeing mount, came slowly toward the watchers and began picking up some white objects in the road.

"He had a mail bag that got busted when he fell," muttered Josh, chuckling softly. "Good! I'm glad of it! That voice—— By gee whiz! It's Cash Vance! See his ugly mug there in the moonlight, now that he's turned this way?"

He turned to grin at Edith Barnes, and saw that she had abruptly lifted herself a trifle higher, that her eyes were very wide, her lips parted, and her whole attitude one of startled suspense. And then, as if suddenly attacked by heart failure, she gasped and swayed. He leaped to the bowlders below just as Tom, discerning her weakness, clutched a point of rock beside him and swung his arm around her. She dropped to a sitting posture as if her knees had lost resistance, and while Tom supported her, the prospector bent solicitously above her.

"Good Lord! Edie, you ain't goin' to faint, are you? Got indigestion, or somethin' like that?"

She put her hands upward hurriedly, catching an arm of each of her companions, and regained her feet.

"Josh! Josh!" she exclaimed excitedly. "That is the man—the man I saw that night from the top of Pinnacle Rock! The man that robbed you! I could swear to it! The way he stooped when he picked up the letters; the queer lift of the shoulders; the way his hat looked over his face from above! Quick! Run after him! Catch him! Don't let him get away!"

She was almost hysterical in her eagerness to act; but Josh, who for an instant had been transfixed by astonishment, now frowned, and his lips drew to a harsh line.

"No! No!" he said, very quietly. "Just take it cool! I saw his face. I know him. We've got to make sure; surer than we could be by your belief that he was the man. Steady! Wait a minute or two till he's had time to get clean off the road. The dust—the dust, don't you see, will finish all we need to know. The road is as dusty as the trail to death. Tommy, slip away and get a good bunch of dry stuff. I'll want a lot of light in a minute, because somehow I think I'm just about at the end of the chase."

There was something ominous about him as he strode slowly out and downward toward the white, dust-laden road. He stopped, scowling down its long, clear length, to the shadowed point where it curved around a high,

gray cliff and was lost to sight. It was untenanted. Vance, with his long stride, unaware that his mishap had been observed, and angry at the escape of his horse, had disappeared, cursing as he went. The prospector stood for a long time to make certain that he had gone, his face grim and impassive in the moonlight, his huge body conveying intent menace and waiting to advance.

"The fire, Tom!" he ordered quietly. "Wait! Let me see!"

He bent far forward, cautiously treading on the edge of the road and staring at the dust.

"You can light it here," he said, in the same, quiet tone. "Right here. There's a clean track in the dust over there. And it was made by Cash Vance!"

Something about him half terrified the girl, who, with hands clenched in front of her, watched him—something so certain, so inflexible, so terribly intent on disproving a last doubt upon which a grave issue must be decided, that she could not speak. Looking at Tom, she discerned in his little movement that same terrible intensity, as he bent forward with a little pile of brush and struck a match. Its flame, rendered pallid by the light of the watchful June moon, caught a twig, gained its hot hold, spread, and swept until it took voice of its own and crackled and roared. No one spoke. It was as if the issue was too grave to be broken by words. On it a man's life hung; for there was no doubt of the deadliness of action and resolve in the quiet giant who bent above the dust of the road and slowly pulled the worn old rule from his pocket, opened it, and applied it to measurements which he had memorized.

The sense of portent was increased when he made doubly sure by taking from his pocket his carefully wrapped piece of slate and read the measurements engraved thereon. He measured again, comparing each result. He advanced to another print that lay registered in the dust of the road and clearly outlined by fire and moon, and, to make finally sure, repeated his checking with big hands that went direct and unfaltering to their task. Then, very deliberately, he folded the rule, replaced the wrapping about his tablet, put both in his pockets, and stood to his feet. He faced them, the night shadows accentuating his high cheek bones, his drooping mustache, and lean, projecting jaw, and said, as if announcing an irrefutable fact: "Well, Tommy, it's done. It's the end of the trail, just as I said. And, Tommy, as sure as there's a God in heaven, I've got him! It was Cash Vance!"

CHAPTER XV.

The prospector turned from the trail and said, in a dry voice: "Well, that settles it; and now——" He stopped and looked irresolutely down the road in the direction that Cash Vance had taken. The significance of the look did not escape his partner, who made a diversion.

"Josh," he said steadily, "it seems to me we have learned enough for tonight, and that our next move requires some deliberation. You cannot bring any legal case against Vance on the evidence in your possession, I'm afraid. It's better to travel slowly and surely than rapidly and at random. Besides, it is late. I must take Edith home. And I think it best that you go with us."

For a moment the prospector hesitated, as if loath to forego some half-formed plan, and then accompanied them as they turned back toward Shingle. He seemed absorbed in thought, and answered in monosyllables; but Edith had many suggestions to make and questions to ask, which, being founded on sympathy evoked through the prospector's benevolent lie, were scarcely to the point. They left her at the gate, after she had ascertained that her father, having been detained at his mine by an accident, would not be home that night. Josh openly regretted this, inasmuch as he had decided to consult with Barnes as to what might be the best step to take.

Tom did most of the talking on the

way back to the Lady Edith, and, after returning to the cabin with Josh, went to sleep with the fervent hope that his peculiar partner would do nothing rash. And he was fairly convinced that any reckless danger point was passed when, on the next morning, Josh went about his part of the work as if nothing troubled him or gave him cause for thought. Tom might have been less certain of the prospector's amicable intentions had he known that in the afternoon Josh sent a note by a teamster to Specimen Jones, requesting that loyal friend to come to the Lady Edith Mine at nine o'clock that evening and to bring his gun with him. And, as if coincidence was to play a part, it was just nine o'clock when Frank Barnes, wearied by a trying day's work, returned home after an absence of forty-eight hours. He had scarcely entered when Edith, hearing him arrive, hastened to him to recount her adventure of the previous night.

"Edith," he questioned earnestly, when she had concluded, "are you certain, absolutely certain, that Vance is the man you saw that night at Pinnacle Rock? There is a great deal more involved in this certainty than you can possibly know."

Impressed by the gravity of his tone, she replied, with conviction: "I could take my oath to it, father! I am positive!"

He got to his feet, throwing off his air of weariness.

"That being so, I must saddle my horse and ride out to the Lady Edith at once. It is very important that I consult with Josh about this new development. Of course you don't know its importance, but I wish you had sent word to me this morning." He stopped suddenly, frowned, and added: "I can't understand why Josh didn't let me know. It must be that—— By Heaven! I must get out there as quickly as possible! I know Josh Price! The fact that he didn't send me word means that he intends to go after Vance alone! It won't do! I must stop him! If I don't, he'll either kill Cash Vance or be killed himself!"

He started away, but his daughter detained him.

"I shall go, too, dad," she said.

"No, no! You could do nothing. It is best that you stay home."

"I can't!" she insisted desperately. "I must go!"

"No, you must not," he said; and then, facing her, discovered abruptly that he was no longer faced by a girl, but by a grown woman.

"Edith——" he began; but she hastened to him and stood in front of him, looking up with determined eyes.

"Father," she declared, "you said there was more to this than I know. That is possibly true, but also there is more involved for me than you know."

Astonished by her vehemence and defiance, he stared at her in his amazement.

"You don't mean to say that Tom Rogers has——" He stopped lest he betray his own knowledge of Tom's self-admitted delinquency.

"I mean, dad, that but once in my life have I ever kept anything from you or evaded telling you what was in my mind. And that I've forgotten all the humiliation it cost me since then. There shall be no more of it."

She lowered her eyes for an instant, and then bravely met his.

"If Josh Price is going to rush into trouble, Tom will go with him, because Tom thinks of him as if he were his father. And, father, I love Tom Rogers."

The mine owner turned and dropped into a chair, his hands thrown across its arms and falling listlessly. He looked away from her, fixing his eyes on the rug at his feet; and his head, habitually carried very erect, leaned forward like that of one who has sustained an unexpected blow.

"Has he—has Tom said anything to you that——"

"Not a word," she confessed, standing quietly before him as though prepared to truthfully answer any question he might ask.

He lifted his head, grateful that his trust in Tom had not been betrayed,

and for a time studied her face. She did not falter under his scrutiny.

"I am glad of that," he said. "It proves that he has played fair. If any one is to blame," he added, with absolute fairness, "it is I; for I encouraged the situation, wishing to befriend him, to make it easier for him in any way I might; because, entirely aside of what I think of Tom, his father and I were friends—yes, that was it,- friends! There were three of us, Josh Price, Bill Rogers, and I—and we were very loyal to one another—back there when we three were young. But, Edith, there are some things I cannot decide to tell you—yet—that make it almost out of the question."

He saw her quiver as from some harsh decree, and her hands closed, betraying her disappointment and stress. He felt the gravity of the moment. His dreams for her future had been vastly different from marriage with a self-confessed highwayman, although that bandit, ordinarily moral, clean, and honest, had yielded to temper, circumstance, and despair. There was one last hope.

"Perhaps," he said hoarsely, "Tom does not love you."

She accepted his questioning for all that it was worth, and recognized the possible signs of surrender. She seized the advantage of love, a woman's one irresistible weapon, and threw herself forward at his feet, clasping his bent head with her arms, and looking up at him with frank eyes and trembling lips. For the first time she was conquered by bashfulness, and hid her face by leaning it against the breast that had never denied her refuge.

"Yes," she asserted, "he does. Oh, dad, I know! Although he has never said a word. But I know! And, dad, I want him. Can't you understand? I love you; you know that; but—but it's not the same. I've known it for a year. It's not a foolish thing to me. It's something I can't get away from. It's something I can't forget, even when I'm asleep. I can't be happy unless I can have you both—you as well as him, dad—and I can't understand and——"

She broke off, strangled by the emotions of her confession, and he felt her break and give way, sobbing against his breast. He suddenly clutched her in his arms, lifted her to his knees, and drew her close. The hunger of his heart to retain all for which he had lived could not be denied. His surrender was complete. All ambitions and dreams; all his natural dislike for one who had stepped across the proscribed lines of life and law melted away like Sierra snowdrifts assailed by an August sun. He unclasped her arms and thrust her away from him gently, until he could look deeply into her eyes. She read their message. With a vain attempt at brusqueness, he exerted his strength and got to his feet.

"We are wasting time," he said. "It is more vital than you think. But, Edith, you—you can come with me."

It was his reply to all her appeal. For an instant they stood apart, speechless and silent; and then she slowly put her hands upward to him as he stood motionless, a rock of strength, and caught his face in her hands and kissed him.

"Get your things on," he said quietly, turning away and moving toward the door. "I'll saddle your horse as well as mine. We shall ride together, you and I."

A few minutes later they loped away through the quiet streets of Shingle camp, and out to the road that climbed gradually up toward the calm hills. The streaks of gleaming silver where the moon shone upon everlasting snows, the songs of the night birds, the peace of the night and all its beauties were unnoted by either. Some prescience bound them to an intent silence and warned them that they were on a journey of portent. Where the road turned off to the Lady Edith Mine they paused for a moment, the mine owner pulling his horse to its haunches and staring irresolutely, as if uncertain whether to lose time by riding to the Lady Edith or to continue to the Horseshoe.

"Oh, it can't be that Josh has been in too big a hurry!" he exclaimed, in answer to his own thoughts. "He acts

quickly, but—— Come on, Edith; we will go to his cabin."

They cantered down the long slope, through the narrow defile where the prospector's life had been nearly sped, and out to where the cabin at the head of the valley was in plain view. It squatted there in homely shape, its moss-grown ugliness made beautiful by the night. A strong, white light was visible from one of its windows, and the girl gave a sigh of relief.

"It's all right, dad," she said. "The light is Tom's room. He is there, studying."

Heedless of the plume of smoke behind in the cove where the mill rumbled and roared a continuous threnody as it fought and conquered the hard ore, they went rapidly downward and leaped from their horses. Startled by the noise, an inner door opened and Tom appeared with an open book in his hand.

"Why, hello!" he exclaimed, surprised at seeing them. "What on earth brings you here at this time of the night?"

"Where is Josh?" inquired Barnes, ignoring his salutation.

"Why—I'll be blessed if I know where he is," said Tom, like one recalling to his mind something forgotten. "He should be somewhere around. Come to think of it, Specimen Jones came in here an hour or two ago on horseback, and Josh went out with him —to keep from disturbing me, I suppose."

"You've got a phone line from here to the stables up by the mine, haven't you? Call up the stable boss and see if Josh took one of the horses. Hurry, Tom!" said Barnes. And Tom, abruptly aware that there must be some significance in the request, made haste to comply. He turned from the telephone a moment later with an anxious look on his face.

"Josh took the only saddle horse we have," he said, "some time ago, and told the stableman he was going out for a little ride. That was all. Wait!"

He struck a match, and, holding it above his head, walked to the prospector's bed and stared up in the corner. The match burned his fingers, and he struck another, again holding it up as if seeking some familiar object. He suddenly ground the match underfoot and came to the door.

"That isn't all that's gone," he said, his voice betraying perturbation. "He has taken his gun, holster, and belt, that have hung on that peg since the day we unpacked our stuff in this cabin!"

"Then that settles it!" exclaimed Barnes. "Get another horse, quick! We must get over to Cash Vance's place as soon as possible. It may mean life or death for some one."

Tom ordered the best horse obtainable brought at once, and rejoined them by the door as he pulled his coat over his arms.

"But if Josh was going to Vance's, why did he take Specimen?" he inquired thoughtfully.

"Because Specimen and Josh are old friends, and if Josh asked Specimen Jones to join him and fight an army, Specimen would grin, go with him, and stick to the finish. That's why! The very fact that they went away together proves that they're up to something pretty desperate!" exclaimed Barnes. "I tell you, my boy, that when those two take the trail together after Josh Price has strapped on his gun, some one is very apt to die. Now you can see that we've got to head them off—if we're not already too late. Josh is a fool. So is Specimen. It's about time they woke up and learned that the frontier days they knew are gone—that there is such a thing as law that does not permit a man to go out and shoot any one with whom he has had a big enough row. They don't congratulate the winner now; they hang him!"

CHAPTER XVI.

It was true that the prospector and Specimen Jones had ridden away together.

"I sent for you, Specimen," explained Josh, at that earlier hour in the evening, "because I need you for two things: One, that I want to reach Cash Vance's cabin by the back way you told

me about and which, of course, I don't know; and the second, because I've got to have somebody I can depend on to sort of be my rear guard. I can take care of Vance all by myself, but I don't want to take chances on that Karluk Pete comin' up the rear path to pay Vance a visit, and perhaps pluggin' me through the window when my back's turned. So you're the selected party. Sabe?"

"Sure!"

"And, Specimen, I ain't quite certain what may happen, because it's come to this: I'm goin' to wipe the old, cracked slate carryin' his and my account! Goin' to wipe it clean, to-night, if one of us has to be left on the floor for the coroner to look over. So, if you don't feel like bein' mixed up in it too far, you can just take me as far as that trail you know about, then forget all I've said and all about me, and ride home."

"Nope! It won't do!" asserted Specimen. "Pete might show up and do just what you said—shoot you when you were not lookin'. Besides, you never knew of my tryin' to spare my own hide at the expense of a friend, did you, Josh?"

"Humph! Course not! Well, here we go!"

"Got something new on Vance?" Specimen asked, after a time, observing the grim face of the prospector.

"I've got this, Specimen: that it was Cash Vance's boot that made the trail down there in the pass that night when I was shot."

"Then you're doin' the right thing, Josh. We both know that the one safe rule when a man is out for you is to find him and get him first," Specimen said gravely. "You can leave it to me to see that Pete don't interfere."

After which, being bent on serious business, neither talked as they rode steadily and easily toward their destination.

Vance sitting alone in his cabin, the room brilliant with the electric lights that, being developed by his own water, were used freely, was absorbed in sorting some papers on the flat-topped desk in his living room, and there was a most sinister scowl on his face as he totaled the sums he had given to Karluk Pete in the preceding three years. His pale-blue eyes—the eyes of a man-killer—were as hard and cruel as flint. He had gone to the limit of harassment. He was slowly coming to the determination to kill his tormentor at the first favorable opportunity. A habitual caution alone had restrained his hand a half dozen times before; for he was not afraid. There was but one man living of whom he stood in awe—Josh Price, who had humiliated him years before and threatened him openly on his advent in Shingle.

Nothing save the fact that Josh Price had somehow become partners with the son of Bill Rogers, dead and gone, had deterred Vance from striving to drive Tom Rogers out of the country where his presence was a constant and ugly reminder of Vance's ugly past. It was a past that he wished to forget, inasmuch as he was steadily growing rich, could retire comfortably at any time he chose and indulge in the fleshpots for which he had hankered, but eschewed, until he was completely beyond financial worry.

His conscience did not in the least trouble him. He had none. His confidence had grown, nourished by his escape from several episodes where his neck might have paid the forfeit, until it had been an easy matter up to that day when Josh Price, wandering carelessly afield, had invaded Shingle. And Karluk Pete, at first a mere stupid fool, blustering, brawling, bragging, had learned his hold and developed an insatiable demand.

Vance sat at his desk, balanced between his greed for more money and a desire to sell the mine at the big price it would readily command, and thus escape all future worry. But Pete must be put out of the way forever before such departure would insure future immunity from blackmail. He folded the papers carefully, laid them aside, and looked up. In a terrible flash it was revealed to him that it was too late!

Josh Price had entered so noiselessly that his coming had not been heard, and, with gun in hand, stood leaning against the wall beside the door, eying him.

For what seemed a long time, neither spoke. The cry that started to Vance's throat choked in its utterance. His ready hand that had started convulsively to the drawer where he kept a loaded pistol stopped as if transfixed as the prospector's gun gave a slight, significant flip that could forecast but one event—death. It was the intruder who first spoke, and so quietly that his voice seemed qualified with uncanny penetration:

"Well, Cash Vance, your time is up."

The sound broke the spell in which Vance was held.

"It is, eh? What do you mean by that?" he demanded, with some of his habitual coldness.

The prospector stood with unshifting eyes, and for a moment did not speak. His very attitude chilled the man behind the table more certainly than had juries who had tried him for his life. There was an appalling deliberation about this avenger, come silently from the outer night to settle all scores. Vance broke momentarily and twitched involuntarily with nervousness. The movement was misinterpreted by the man with the gun. For an instant the hand clutching the familiar weapon seemed to restrict as if about to hurl death, unerring, irrevocable.

"Wait! For God's sake, wait!" Vance pleaded.

"Then suppose you put your hands up, walk away from that desk, and stand with your back to me for a minute, while I go through you. That is, unless you're in a hurry to have the party ended and over with. Either way you like suits me."

There was no possibility of mistaking the truth of the statement. It was true! The prospector would have killed him as remorselessly as he would have put a broken-backed rattlesnake out of misery. Reluctantly Vance got to his feet and obeyed. He felt the pressure of the pistol to his back in a vital spot, and the swift movement of the hand that searched him for weapons, of which he had none.

"Good!" said the prospector. "You may sit down over there by the wall."

Vance found himself with the prospector barring the way to the door. Josh sidled to the desk, pulled open one drawer after another without relaxing his watchfulness, found Vance's gun, and slipped it into his own pocket. He seated himself in the chair by the desk, after pulling it far enough away to enable him to leap clear in case of need.

"You hound!" he said. "It's taken me a long time to get the goods on you, but as sure as there's a Big Livin' Justice up above us all, I've got it!"

"Came to abuse me after you got the drop, did you?" Vance snarled.

"You can't be abused!" was the sarcastic rejoinder. "There's nothin' mean enough to say to you, or about you, that wouldn't be truth. Truth abuses no man. Now, I'm goin' to caution you before I go on. It's not your night to talk. I'll do most of the talkin' and all of the shootin'. Get me?"

Vance nodded a surly nod.

"Very well. To begin with, you robbed my old pardner, Bill Rogers, out of this mine. You did it by gettin' two fellers to swear to a false prior location. One of 'em is alive, and made his affidavit to that effect. Karluk Pete I'm talkin' of. Do you deny that?"

"You've nothing to prove it."

"I haven't, eh? Did it ever strike you that a man that gives an affidavit once would sure do it again if he got his price?"

He saw Vance's eyes glare viciously and knew that his bluff had gone home. He did not pause in his indictment.

"You laid a plan to rob your own gold wagon!" Josh declared, with the certainty that had come to him through long analysis. "A man beat you to it up near Pinnacle Rock, where you was lyin' in wait. You let him turn the trick, and if he hadn't found the haul too heavy to run with, and hidden it, you'd probably have killed him. You'd have done it anyhow if you had known who he was; but you didn't. It looked

good to you. You let him go, and sneaked away. You saw a way to double the deal—get your clean-up back and skin the insurance company, without runnin' any risk whatever. Another man robbed the wagon, that was sure, and it was good luck for you, because you robbed the robber as well as the insurance company."

Vance, when his prosecutor began, assumed an impassable, bored air; but as Josh proceeded, and each shot went home, Vance turned white with astonishment. He had heard nothing but the truth.

"It's a lie!" he declared, so vehemently that his own guilt was thereby proved.

"Oh, no, it isn't! I've got the proof!" coldly declared the prospector. "Got it in two ways. I trailed you myself, and took the measurement of your boot, and another person looked over the top of the Pinnacle on the night when you went back for the gold, saw you take it, recognized you, and will swear on the stand that it was you she saw."

"A woman, eh?" Vance gasped.

"That doesn't matter. I've got the witness, and I can send you over the road on that count."

"Maybe, and maybe not!" Vance declared defiantly; but his temporary return of nerve was blasted by the prospector's next words:

"That is, I could if that was what I was after; but it ain't! Cash Vance, you're never goin' to be called into court. I'm the court on the next count, and you know what that means!"

There was no mistaking the significance of his words, and Vance drew a deep breath of terror.

"When I got Karluk Pete's affidavit —you remember that time, all right!— he weakened, and you saw what was comin' and had to have it back. There was only one way to get it from me. Both you and Pete knew it. Neither of you was man enough to fight for it, so you waylaid me on my trail and shot me for it—from behind—but the moonlight made the aim bad, and——"

He paused, for he saw a swift light flame in Vance's eyes, and knew that this time he was astray in his conjecture.

"That's not so!" Vance shouted. "I can prove an alibi."

Like a flash the prospector's quick wit caught for another weapon. He had no hesitancy in carrying his bluff through.

"That's another question," he declared; "a question between you and Karluk Pete, who has made an affidavit that you did do it, and that he saw you."

Vance went suddenly white with anger, and swore volubly, cursing the absent tool in a wild outburst of broken temper until the prospector rapped with his hard knuckles on the desk and silenced him.

"You stop that kind of swearin'!" he roared. "I'm a believer in the Lord Almighty! He's a friend of mine, and I won't let you sit there and use His name the way you're doin' any longer!"

Vance suddenly took refuge in a growling undertone, and struggled hard to calm himself. It was plain to his inquisitor that his nerves were frayed to the utmost.

"I came here to kill you for that, Cash Vance," the prospector said firmly, and Vance felt himself trembling under the strain; "but, since I got here, I remembered that I owed somethin' to some one else, the son of the man you robbed, the youngster you made life hell for, my pardner, Tom Rogers. No, you keep your mouth shut till I get through, or I'll change my mind again. What you're up against is this: The penitentiary—sure!—for the holdup business, if I let you off. Another term for attempted murder, also, if I let you off—and I never before wanted to kill a man as much as I want to kill you! It seems to me it's the only just thing to do—to shoot you down like a mad coyote, and kick you while you're gaspin'!"

It was the first time that he had raised his voice to a pitch of anger, and it sounded a pent vindictiveness beyond his words. His hand twitched on his gun, as if he fought his own impulse to

slay. His eyes narrowed, his jaws shut until he spoke between his firm, white teeth, and he half rose to his feet. Vance instinctively threw an arm upward to shield his face as from a shot, and for a moment they were transfixed in this attitude, until, recovering himself, the prospector slowly settled back to his seat.

"Enough of this!" he said coldly. "Vance, you've got one chance for your life—just one! No more! And I'm givin' it to you because I've got to think of Tom Rogers and what's due him, and I couldn't get it if I did what I'm hungerin' to do—put five shots through your cussed skull! If I had a hundred thousand dollars, I'd give all—every cent—for the pleasure of droppin' you and seein' you kick! But a feller can't always do what he'd like to in this world, and when he's got others to think of, and—— So I give you one chance."

Vance, with the cold perspiration plunging through the pores of his forehead, asked, in a whisper: "What is that chance?"

"You're goin' to deed the Horseshoe Mine to Tom Rogers—lock, stock, and barrel! You're goin' to be out of this country in twenty-four hours! You're never comin' back! You're bein' allowed to get away with all you stole—more than any other perjured thief was ever allowed. And it hurts me to let you get away so easily. That's your only chance. You take that chance within five minutes, or the coroner of this county will wonder, within a little while from now, how many shots went through one hole in your head, and whether that hole or the hole in your heart was the cause of your passin' out! It's now fifteen minutes past ten by that clock up there you bought with money stolen from my Tom. In twenty minutes you'll either agree or die! Time!"

He fixed his eyes on Vance, who writhed in his chair, looked at him questioningly as if to find one trace of weakness, and then helplessly stared at the floor. Pressed as he was, overpowered, facing certain death, Vance hesitated. The old greed held him, the old dislike of having any man triumph over him; yet he knew, as the minutes slipped by under the ticking of the clock, that he must yield. Its muffled clacking became a hammer, beating stridently on a loud gong, warning him of the passage of time. He looked sullenly at the watchful, waiting man in the chair, who sat steadily as a rock, inexorable as fate, and read the purposefulness of him. He remembered tales of frontier battles, historic, where the man confronting him had won against seemingly insurmountable odds and—— The ticking of the clock sounded faster, as if hurrying him to decision. Anyhow, he had enough. There was the sum put away in the banks of San Francisco against possible exigencies; the farm investment in the Santa Clara Valley; the stocks in that Los Angeles enterprise, and——

He stiffened as he thought of a loophole. A transfer, to be legal, necessitated witnesses, seals, the presence of a qualified official! That meant time! Time to get away from under the sinister stare of the gun! Time to plot! He would agree, and——

The hand holding the gun that had been laid across the edge of the desk suddenly shut tighter, leaped upward for the frontiersman's quick shot, and Vance had barely an instant in which to shout: "Good! I agree!"

The hand came almost reluctantly down, and a voice said: "You took a long chance. I'm only half glad—for Tommy's sake. Come over here and write. Let's see. I've got the regular legal form here in my pocket on a deed a lawyer drawed when I bought the Bonanza. We'll just copy that—changin' the names. Sit down, and don't waste no time, either, because it's gettin' late!"

Even then Vance hoped to hoodwink his persecutor; but the latter stood behind him and compared what he wrote with the printed form he had laid upon the desk. There was still one chance—a notary would be required. Painfully Vance wrote, the habit of clear, steady chirography alone guiding his pen. His

mind was groping hither and yon on possibilities for evasion. Once he made a slight mistake through sheer absence of mind, and was instantly alarmed by a sharp command from behind: "Tear that sheet up and write it over again! No shenanigan! Three mistakes and out! You left out the words, 'of my own free will.' They're there on the printed paper."

He recognized the constant vigilance behind, and forced himself to his unwelcome task. He neared the bottom of the page slyly, gleeful; for such a document, unwitnessed, unsealed, could have small value. It would necessitate a journey to Shingle probably, and in that journey many things might happen. An instant's relaxation on the part of the watcher, and—a dead man in the road, the recovery of the paper, and a long mystery as to who had murdered Josh Price! His pen scratched laboriously, the noise of its passage drowning the steady ticking of the clock.

"There it is," he said, signing his name with a flourish and blotting it hopefully.

"I've been thinkin'," said a puzzled voice behind him, "we ought to have this sealed and witnessed by some notary public or justice of the peace or some one of that sort."

"I can't supply you that," Vance said, half turning in his chair.

"He's a liar, Josh!"

Both turned, startled, toward the sound. In the window could be seen the head and shoulders of Specimen Jones, grim, ugly, and watchful.

"His bookkeeper is a notary, I know. I've seen him put his seal on papers, and he told me he was. I know where his cabin is. I'll dig him out and have him here in less'n five minutes."

Vance settled hopelessly into his chair when the prospector said: "Good! Go get him, Specimen, and have him fetch his seal. Tell him the boss sent for him. Hurry!"

The head and shoulders disappeared, and in the still night could be heard the clump of heavily running feet. Vance sat stodgily in his chair, bent forward and thinking. They had overlooked the witnesses. He barely heard, with his divided, harassed mind, the admonitions of the prospector, who had swiftly stepped across the room and to the side of the window as if to place himself clear of attack.

"When the notary man comes, you are to try to look pleasant. You are to tell him you signed that; that you've sold the mine to Tom Rogers, and that I'm actin' as Tom's agent. Then, when he gets his part done, you're to tell him to go back to his cabin. He'll still be up at this time."

Vance's hope of a flaw, overthrown by the voice from the window, was again climbing, and not without foundation, inasmuch as the prospector, intent on a seal, had actually forgotten the necessity of two witnesses to such a transfer. Vance meditated. Once he dotted an "i" that he had overlooked, and crossed a forgotten "t," but was harshly checked.

"Never mind fumblin' with a pen. I don't trust you, Vance! You're not in the clear yet. And don't forget that any move on your part, when that bookkeeper gets here, means a slug of lead. It does—if I hang for it! I swear it, and you know me!"

Again there was silence, prolonged; but suddenly Vance lifted his head hopefully. Relief was at hand. Mounted men were coming, the clatter of their horses' hoofs sounding sharply in the stillness of the night. He could not entirely suppress a triumphant grin when he glanced furtively at the giant by the window; but the latter had heard it also, and now sidled slowly along the wall, step by step, without shifting his stare from Vance.

"Cash," he said, in a low voice, "if you're figurin' on any help, it won't go, because the first one I'll plug will be you! I've gone the limit. Here I either win or pass out; but I'll not go alone. I'll have at least one for company, and it'll be you. It's mighty lucky I wore a coat. Here and now I put my gun in my coat pocket; but all the time it'll be pointin' at you, and no one else. Your only chance will be to get rid of

these friends of yours mighty quick. I'm gettin' old, and I ain't afraid to cash in my chips after one last play."

Like an alert, expectant sentinel, he moved carelessly back until he faced the open door, through which the moonlight showed a splendid panorama of the valley, with its industrial appendage of buildings, the mill, the boiler house with its triple stacks, the long, glistening tramway from mine to breakers, and, high over all, the serene mountains, placid, contemplative, and aloof, like observers who barely noted the man-made scars in their feet and were not disturbed by the issues of human life, that insignificant, ephemeral, parasitical wriggling below.

The horses came closer in that moment of tense expectancy. The sound of their movement became more distinct in crescendo as they approached. Vance debated whether or not he dared defy the prospector at the critical moment, and decided that he could. He was too familiar with bullet wounds to doubt that more than one pocket shot ever proved fatal, expert though the marksman might be. He had but small concern as to the identity of the visitors who could interrupt. Any one would do. Luck was again playing into his hands. Some one, the leader of the visitors, was running up the steep path to his isolated cabin. He frowned. Why should any one run? And then the futility of his hope was made plain. Tom Rogers, panting, distressed by apprehension, but ready to participate, stood in the doorway, scowling as his eyes adjusted themselves to the light.

"Hello, Tommy!" the prospector drawled. "Wasn't expectin' you, but —— Why, hello, Frank! And there's Edie, too! Quite a happy family, eh? Well, Tommy, I've bought the Horseshoe Mine for you and already paid the price. Me and Cash was just waitin' for a notary to come and fix it up."

"It's very good, then, that we came as witnesses," exclaimed Barnes, who was not in the least deceived by the prospector's words.

"Yes, Cash thinks he's got enough out of the Horseshoe to retire with," said Josh, grinning at his victim. "Sort of hasty call to go to—away from here. Where'd you say you was goin', Vance?"

Vance had shriveled into his seat, despairing, now that he saw the end. He did not answer.

"Speak up when I ask you a question!" ordered the prospector. "You may as well. Frank, here, knows all about it, and it was his girl that saw you drag that stuff out from under Pinnacle Rock. Believe me, you're in the hands of your friends, all right, if ever anybody was."

With the recklessness of a cornered rat facing the end, Vance suddenly bared his teeth and snarled at the prospector.

"You seem to know so much about it," he growled, "that it strikes me you know more than you ought to. Who robbed that gold wagon in the first place?"

"I did!" he declared. "Forgot to tell you that, but you're welcome."

Tom, who had been looking from one to the other, started to step forward and speak, but was interrupted by a voice outside, calling: "Here we are, Josh!"

Specimen Jones, accompanied by the notary carrying his seal, entered. Josh fixed Vance with his eyes and said quietly: "You explain it to him, Cash."

The latter saw no other avenue of escape than through obedience. He shrugged his shoulders and spoke in a constrained voice.

"I have sold the Horseshoe Mine to Mr. Rogers," he said to his employee, "and wish you to certify to the transfer. That is my signature."

The bookkeeper, a white-haired, overworked little man, fumbled in his pocket, produced a pair of spectacles, and affixed his seal. Specimen Jones and Frank Barnes each stepped forward and inscribed their names as witnesses, in a silence that would have been noticeable had not the prospector quietly hummed a tune as if to avert observance of anything unusual.

"I think that's all Mr. Vance wants of you," he said to the bookkeeper, but

frowning at Vance to remind him of their previous talk.

"Yes, you can go now," said Vance, without looking up.

The notary, with a studious "Good night," departed. Josh leaned forward, picked up the deed that lay flaring white on the desk, and handed it to his partner.

"Tommy," he said, "that's a little present from me. We won't talk about it now. You've got the mine that your father found. Vance is goin' to-morrow, and me and Specimen Jones and Frank will come over with you to see that you take possession. So, all this business bein' over and done with, we might as well pull out, because I reckon Vance has got a heap of things to do between now and the next stage."

He loitered behind while the others filed past, and paused in the doorway only long enough to say, in a growling undertone: "Vance, don't forget. You go to-morrow. And don't you come back, either, because the hankerin' I've got to kill you ain't goin' to peter out. When it comes my time to cash in, I'll probably have but one big regret, and that'll be that I let you get away with it. You're the only man that ever nicked me and lived. And I want you to remember this: that from to-morrow night between you and me there is no truce. I'll shoot on sight!"

CHAPTER XVII.

None of the party ever forgot that homeward ride. The prospector rode with his head down, like one disgraced, declining to converse. Neither Barnes, his daughter, nor Tom ventured questions after the first rebuff. Behind them, gloating to himself, came Specimen Jones. The strain and anxiety were over for some of them; for others merely in abeyance. It was not until they came to the turn of the Lady Edith Trail that the prospector pulled his horse to a halt and handed Barnes the folded paper he took from his pocket.

"Frank," he said, "I wish you'd have that recorded for me. Come out to-morrer mornin'. We've got to put Tommy in the saddle. You will, won't you?"

"Yes, I shall be out here by noon. And I'll bring Specimen with me."

"Good! Adios. '*Buenos noches!*" he reverted to the old border tongue, and rode away, forgetting until after he had started to wave his hand to Edith and to call to Tom that it was late.

On the following day, after they had taken formal possession of the mine, he relented somewhat and gave Vance an additional twelve hours' grace to clear away accumulations of years of theft. Vance, sullen and beaten, was still there, destroying letters exposing his past, when they left to return to the Lady Edith, where they had planned a supper celebration. And then, across the table in the cabin, the prospector told them of his conquest, cautiously distorting now and then to preserve Tom's secret; while Tom, grateful, troubled, bewildered, sat silent. This was the end of a great injustice. He was prospectively rich, and yet could take no advantage of his changed circumstances until all was cleared. His happiness was but an alloy. His greatest hope, without whose fulfillment all seemed worthless, was yet in the balance. The kindly eyes of the prospector, watching him, checking him, could not take from him the remembrance of his situation. He wished for more time to think. He wished to talk with his partner alone, and confide to him his hesitancy. He was glad when the ordeal was over, and they walked, Barnes, the prospector, and Specimen Jones leading the horses, up to the place where the trail debouched into the road, while Edith traveled by his side. He was absorbed in his problem, and bewildered by all that had so rapidly arrived at culmination. His partner's voice with its quiet drawl, the occasional interjections of Specimen Jones, and the steady comments of Frank Barnes, all walking ahead, did no more than deflect him from his train of thought. And then suddenly he was aware that they had come to the main road, that Barnes had exclaimed, "Hold on! What's this?" and that the leaders had stopped.

They had fallen apart and were bending over something that lay in the dust. Before he and his companion could overtake them, they heard the prospector's voice, clear and urgent, shouting: "Specimen! Ride to Shingle and get that doctor. Hurry, now!" And in a cloud of dust that swept upward in tiny swirls into the light of the night, Specimen Jones galloped away.

Tom and Edith quickened their pace and joined the others.

Josh was on his knees, and in the flare of a match Tom could see that his hand was thrust into the shirt of a supine figure on the ground. The match went out, and the mine owner struck another, holding it higher. Josh looked up and said: "It's Pete. Karluk Pete. Going out! Almost gone!"

They lifted Pete's head higher. It seemed to ease him, and after a strangling cough he succeeded in clearing his throat. He spoke in broken gasps.

"Off with me, ain't it?" he asked.

"I'm afraid it is," the prospector admitted. "We've sent for a doctor."

Pete started at the sound of the voice and said: "That you, Price?"

"Yes."

The dying man lay still an instant, coughed again, and said: "I'm glad. Got something to tell you. I'm sorry I shot you that night—farther down this trail."

He felt Josh start with surprise. He spoke rapidly, as if realizing the shortness of his time, while all his auditors bent closer to catch his words:

"Vance was afraid—that affidavit. Afraid to tackle you himself. Said he'd get me to the pen if I didn't get it back. Offered me five thousand if I'd croak you and bring affidavit. I was two-thirds drunk, but was afraid my trail would give me away. Vance gave me his boots to wear. He kept some one with him all evening so could prove alibi. He tried to back out of paying me when he heard you were alive. But I got most of it out of him—curse him! —in the long run. Got him scared! Had to! Knew he'd try to croak me some time, and——"

His voice lowered until it was but a monotone, and now he coughed long and desperately, with the short, hacking bark that foretold the end. The prospector lifted him higher. The cough subsided, and for a moment they thought he was dead.

"Was on my way there to-night—met Vance—he said I'd squealed—he shot. I fell—rolled over—got my gun —shot him. Crawled here, and——"

They waited for the whisper to continue.

"Pete! Pete! Do you hear me? Where is Vance now? Where is he?" Josh shouted into the dying ears.

Pete's reply was so low that it was but a faint whisper:

"In the road—in the road—over there —over——"

His head fell back with the limp surrender of life. Josh tried to arouse him, and Barnes thrust his hand into the open shirt and felt for a heartbeat.

"That is all. He is dead," he said, straightening himself on his knees.

The prospector lowered the head he held, and got to his feet. He looked up to where the moon had cleared the mountain silhouette, as if hastening to peer at them.

"Let's see if we can find Vance," he said, moving toward the road.

The horses fell to nibbling the grass beside the trail, unconcerned by the still figure near them. The seekers had not far to go, for almost immediately they came to all that was left of Cash Vance. He was lying flat on his back. They struck matches and looked down at him and straightened up.

"Just one shot, and—a good one!" Josh announced. "Straight through the center of his forehead. Probably saved me the trouble of doin' it myself some time."

He stopped for a moment and stood looking down at his vanquished enemy.

"When Tom sends that conscience money he talks about, the money he stuck Vance's wagon up for—we'll all have done all we can ever do. The slate's clean as far as it ever can be in this world."

He stopped, aroused from his meditation by a cry of anguish behind him:

"Tom! Tom, you——"

The prospector turned, not aware until then that Edith Barnes had followed them. He opened his lips to denounce himself for his blundering speech, choked, and then declared boldly: "You didn't get me right, Edie. It was me that stuck that gold wagon up. I was comin' along the road up there by the Pinnacle, and I heard a rumblin' noise, and——"

"Stop!"

It was the first time Tom had ever spoken to him in that voice. He stood with his lips open to continue, but had no further chance.

"Josh, let's have done with lies! I'll not sail under false colors any more." Tom turned on his heels and took two or three strides that brought him face to face with the girl he loved. "Edith," he said firmly, "I wished to tell you long ago, but—but when I got to know you better I—I couldn't. I was a coward!"

His humility and self-reproach lent a heartbreak to his tone. He struggled desperately to continue, determined to make his confession complete, and to strip himself bare, there in the place that had become solemn and somber through the presence of death. He looked at the dead man at his feet, and then back to where she stood with hands clasped tightly in front of her bosom, and saw that in the moonlight her face was pale and distressed.

"It was I who robbed him!" he declared. "I was made desperate by his injustice. And only God knows what would have been the end of me had not Josh Price found me, and had not your father encouraged me!"

She turned her face away from him, and, misconstruing her movement into one of aversion, he stopped and looked around despairingly. The prospector, with sudden concession and forgiveness, was bending above the dead man, laying his handkerchief over the staring face. Frank Barnes was looking at his daughter, and with unusual impetuosity abruptly moved toward her.

"Edith," he said quietly, "Tom told me of his bad slip, months ago. And since then—well, we have been friends. If your father could forgive him and accept him as a friend, and like and admire him, it seems to me you might at least be charitable."

The words had cost him much more than she or Tom might ever know; but where he believed her happiness involved, Frank Barnes never made a half sacrifice. He yielded all or nothing. As abruptly as he had intervened, he now turned and walked down the road. Josh slowly followed him. Tom lifted his head, and, broken by what Barnes had said, forgot all his resolutions in the stress of the moment. He flung his hands toward her and leaned forward, his eyes beseeching her to condone.

"Edith! Edith!" he exclaimed, all his yearning and distress rising unpent. "I couldn't tell you, because I love you! Love you so much! I was afraid to tell you. Afraid that, after you knew, you would never speak to me again. That you would have nothing to do with—a thief. Yes, just that! A thief! And I don't expect your friendship now. I haven't the right, now that you know; but I want you to remember, sometimes, if you think of me at all, that, no matter how contemptibly low I went—that time only—I love you! And that I shall keep on loving you—always—because I can do nothing else. Nothing else! Your father forgave. Can't you?"

His hands were again adding their mute but eloquent appeal, stretching toward her with open fingers and bared palms, as if all his soul had been opened for her inspection in this vital moment when she must decide upon his worthiness. Still she stood with averted head and nervously twisting fingers that twined and intertwined in the stress of this great shock when her love was put to a final test, and when the ideal of love, slowly but beautifully erected in her mind, lay crumbled and marred at her feet. She was fighting the battle that other women have fought since life and love began, the battle between social laws and the cry of the heart.

She was astounded by revelation. She was bruised and hurt by knowledge.

For a long time they stood thus, while her senses reeled, and disappointment thrust savagely into her mind. Slowly, despairingly, in sickening relinquishment, his hands trembled and fell heavily to his sides. Life had beaten him, after all. Prospective riches became tawdry, an embellishment of tinsel upon a field of mud; his long, patient hours of study but useless labor; his fight against dreary loneliness and unprotected boyhood but a forerunner of dreary loneliness and unaccompanied old age. Wealth might come to him and respect, but he would know always, in his self-estimation, that he was one proscribed, an outcast among decent men, because of that one false step. With dragging feet and hopeless spirit he turned to stumble away from her, defeated and vanquished.

"Tom! Oh, Tom! Don't go!"

He turned, with all his being in an immense rebound from the utmost despair. She had yielded, as other women have yielded since life and love began, and rushed to his arms; but in her clasp was something beyond relinquishment. It conveyed pity, protection, and a great desire to share and shield.

A few minutes later, two gray-haired men who had walked silently down the road, stopped and faced each other.

"Frank," said the prospector, staring gravely at his friend, "it's been a mighty heavy night for us. But I suppose we'll have to stand it, because we're gettin' old and comin' toward the discards. You've lost a daughter, and I a pardner; but I want to thank you for one big thing—bein' my Tommy's friend! And——" He gulped a little as if his happiness threatened to impel him too far in speech, and added callously: "By gee whiz! That doctor'll charge four dollars for comin' out here to look at Karluk Pete, and it sure is a waste of good, hard money!"

And then he laughed in a high, boisterous key.

SAVING HER BREATH

ON one of the trips westward of the Twentieth Century Express, a negro porter had occasion to assist a passenger move his baggage from one section to another. The passenger, an elderly man, appeared to be somewhat of an invalid, and the porter, anxious to please and make all things comfortable for him, observed that his air cushion was flabby.

"Let me blow some air into dis hyar pillow, sah," he said insinuatingly, his fingers fumbling with the screw of the air valve.

"Stop!" shouted the passenger. "Don't open that air cushion—it contains my wife's last breath."

Not a Chance in 10,000

By Victor Maxwell

Author of "Cougar," "When Little Things Count," Etc.

"Build up a good alibi and—go to it," was the keynote of the career of crime of the man whose story is told here. It was his thoroughness in alibi-making that finally trapped him in the police net. An ingenious yarn of the lawbreakers—one of the best that Maxwell has given us

(*A Novelette.*)

IT was Detective Sergeant Brady's theory that "you can make any crook show himself up if you only give him chance enough."

"Brady don't use any of this new-fangled stuff that you read about in the Sunday papers and the magazines," said the chief, in describing the work of his pet plain-clothes man to the district attorney. "He just uses common sense and his noodle; and, believe me, he gets 'em."

The district attorney appeared to be considering this information for a moment or two. Then he leaned forward and placed his finger on the chief's knee.

"He gets 'em, does he? Well, chief, I don't know but that I'd better turn Kincaid over to you and him, then. I've had two or three of my special agents on Kincaid for over a year now, but they haven't turned up a thing."

The chief smiled. "I don't want to knock anybody, Mr. District Attorney," he said, "but it's the truth that it takes training an' experience of a special kind to get these smart birds. Now, your special agents are no doubt a fine bunch of fellers—any fair-minded man will say that—but naturally, being in appointive jobs, they can't have had the experience my boys has got. Who is this Kincaid party, and what do you want him for?"

"Call in this wonder Brady, and I'll tell you both. Then, if Brady will take the case, we won't have lost any time in telling the history twice. I think I'd like to see your boys try it, chief."

Detective Sergeant Brady was in the "Index Room," passing away the time looking at the "picture books," as the big volumes that held the photographic records of criminals who had visited the city were called. He answered the call to the chief's office promptly, wondering what had "broken in front," and a smile of satisfaction wreathed his features as he saw the district attorney.

"He has a case for us, Brady, me boy," said the chief. "His own boys have been fussin' with it fer a year, he says. I told him it would be nuts fer you."

"I'd like a try at it, sir," said Brady, with becoming modesty, in the presence of the chief. "Tell me about it, sir."

The district attorney found cigars in his pocket, passed one to the chief and one to Brady, and, lighting a third one, settled back in his chair.

"A little over a year ago—last August, to be exact," he said, "complaint was made to my office by Zimmermann & Zeidick, the jewelers, that a man who gave his name as Theodore Kincaid had telephoned them from the St. Cloud Hotel and asked the jewelers to send a salesman up to his rooms. They sent up one of their oldest men, a fellow versed in all lines of the jewelry business and a man accustomed to 'sizing up' people. Kincaid, as he called himself, met the man in the lobby of the hotel and took him to his rooms on the fourth floor, where he showed the clerk a diamond sunburst from which some stones were missing. He said it belonged to his wife, who would shortly

arrive in the city, and that before she came he wanted to have the missing stones replaced.

"This Kincaid party, according to Zimmermann & Zeidick's man, seemed to be a successful business man of some sort, well to do, and familiar with stones. He and the clerk discussed diamonds at some length, Kincaid holding that stones of a yellowish cast could be used in filling out the sunburst, and the clerk declaring that only diamonds of the first water were suitable to replace the missing gems. In order to prove his point, the clerk offered to bring both grades of gems to the hotel for Kincaid's approval, and to demonstrate that the cheaper stones would not do at all. Returning to the store, he told Mr. Zimmermann that the man Kincaid was 'all right,' that his order would amount to at least two thousand dollars, and that he wanted to take some unmounted stones to the hotel to show the new customer. Zimmermann relied on the clerk's judgment, gave him ten diamonds in all—five of the finest grade and five that were not so good.

"The clerk returned to the hotel, easily convinced Kincaid that only the best stones would do to replace the missing gems in the sunburst, and secured his order for the work. With the sunburst and his ten stones he returned to the store—and then discovered that the sunburst itself was paste, and that four of the costliest of his ten diamonds were missing, and that paste jewels had been cleverly substituted for them. Zimmermann & Zeidick's is but a block from the hotel, and as soon as the trick was discovered the jewelers telephoned to the St. Cloud to have the house detective grab Kincaid and hold him. Then they notified the detective agency that does the work for all the big stores. Of course they ought to have notified the police as well—but you know how it is with these big stores: they hate publicity when they get stung, and they think the police tell all they know to the newspapers.

"Zimmermann, the clerk, and two private-agency men who had rushed around to the store then went to the hotel. The desk clerk told them that the house detective had Kincaid in his rooms, so they all went up. Kincaid's suite was on the third floor—they noticed that afterward—and the Kincaid that the house detective was holding wasn't the Kincaid who had put over the swindle. Zimmermann's clerk said the first Kincaid was stout, pompous, and wore a beard and mustache; while the Kincaid they had in the room was smooth shaven, rather thin, and considerable of a dandy. He had been a guest of the house for some time. Also fortunately he was very decent about the whole thing, accepted the apology of Zimmermann's people, and even helped them when they tried to find the other Kincaid. He invited the detectives to search his rooms, which they did. Of course they didn't find anything. And the rooms on the fourth floor, where the jewelers' clerk said he had been, were vacant, and the hotel people said they didn't know of any other Kincaid who might have been in the house.

"Well, as I have said, the case was reported to our office. We fussed with it a while, but couldn't get anywhere, so in time we forgot it. And then, about a month later, Kincaid bobbed up again in another case. This time the report came from a clerk in a cigar store over on West Avenue—young fellow he was, named Walter Page. He told us that a man named Kincaid answering the same description given by the jewelers' clerk had sold him a State-wide agency for a patented cigar lighter. The clerk paid five hundred dollars for the agency rights, and Kincaid left a sample lighter with him. He gave bank references, which turned out to be phony; and he showed Page a lot of literature and order blanks from a firm in Chicago that appeared to be manufacturing this cigar lighter. The clerk waited two weeks, and then, when his shipment of lighters didn't arrive, he wrote to the Chicago firm Kincaid had talked about—and in time got his letter back, marked: 'No such party at address given.' It was just pure bunk, nothing more.

"Remembering the first Kincaid case, two of my boys went up to the St. Cloud Hotel and found the same Mr. Kincaid there. And he not only denied all knowledge of the matter, but he had a pretty good alibi to the effect that he wasn't near the cigar store at the time the swindle was put over. He didn't get mad at the boys, and said he hoped we'd catch the man who was using his name in vain, and all that sort of stuff. And, again, because we couldn't hang anything on him, we forgot Kincaid.

"In about another month we began to get complaints about a fellow named Kincaid, and still answering to the original description, selling fake life insurance. This time, before we went to see Kincaid at the St. Cloud, we set a trap for him. The trap worked, all right, but it didn't catch anything. Then I went to see Kincaid, put him through a pretty stiff grilling—which he took in good part—but I couldn't get anything out of him.

"Through the early part of the summer, Kincaid was out of town, and we heard nothing about any other Kincaid. But just about a month ago there was an outbreak of worthless checks all over the city, and every one of these checks was drawn on Kincaid's bank and bore Kincaid's name. The Third National—Kincaid's bank—pronounced them forgeries, though they bore a fair imitation of Kincaid's signature. The bank notified us, and we got Kincaid down here at the office and confronted him with some of the men who had taken the checks. Nothing doing; they couldn't identify him.

"Kincaid was a little peeved at me for bringing him down and lining him up, although he admitted that the circumstances were peculiar. He said it *did* look strange that the other Kincaid didn't operate while he was out of town; but he was very positive that he knew nothing about the checks. And as nobody could identify him, or in any way hook him up, and as the bank itself was willing to call the checks forgeries and stand the loss, there was nothing to do but turn Kincaid loose and wait.

"And that's the way things stood until this morning, when John Burley, of the Citizens' State Bank, came into my office with another Kincaid case. Kincaid, he said, had come to his bank just after it opened, had introduced himself, and said he wanted to transfer his account from the Third National. He talked over Burley's telephone to the cashier of the Third National, who later identified him by his voice to Burley, and between the three of them they fixed it up so that Kincaid could draw a check on the Third National for his balance, deposit that in the Citizens', and get credit for the amount. While the deal was being fixed up, Kincaid told Burley of the trouble he'd had with forgeries at the Third National, and said that was why he wanted to make the change. It all looked regular; and when the transfer was completed and Kincaid said he was going to Chicago on business, and wanted eight hundred and fifty dollars, Burley let him check it out of his transferred account and walk out of the bank with it.

"Well, after Kincaid, with the pompous air and the beard and mustache, had gotten the eight hundred and fifty out of Burley, the other Kincaid showed up at the Third National and told the teller he was going to St. Louis to consult a throat specialist, and presented his own check for two thousand dollars. He was so hoarse he could hardly talk, but when he finally made himself understood he started something for fair. The teller, who had heard about the transfer of Kincaid's account scarcely half an hour before, rushed to the cashier, and so they got Kincaid in the president's office. Old Graham, the head of the Third National, told Kincaid about the transfer of his account that morning, and asked him what kind of a game he was trying to work.

"As for Kincaid, he went straight up in the air, denied all knowledge of any such change in his account, and threatened to raise Cain with the bank. Then the cashier noticed that Kincaid's voice was hoarse, and remembered that the

man who spoke over Burley's phone spoke normally. So the transfer was killed, Kincaid's check was honored, and the loss of the eight hundred and fifty was put up to Burley's bank to charge to profit and loss. And of course that brought Burley to see me.

"As soon as he got through telling me about it, I called up Doctor Hastings, the house physician at the St. Cloud, and asked him how Mr. Kincaid was. Hastings told me he wasn't any better, and that he had advised him to go to a throat specialist at St. Louis. Kincaid had caught cold a week or so ago, he said, and as a result the muscles of the left side of his throat seemed temporarily paralyzed, so he could hardly talk. I asked him if he was sure Kincaid was really sick, and he got mad and hung up on me. So then I went around to see him, told him that I was district attorney, and that I had reasons to be suspicious of his patient. He dug up his case records then, showed me a complete chart of Kincaid's illness—temperature, pulse, and all that—and made a perfect alibi for the man. And yet I'm morally certain that Kincaid is a crook, and that he is the man who has figured in all these other mysterious cases."

Detective Sergeant Brady and the chief had listened to the district attorney's account with closest attention. Brady had even made a few notes while the county official was speaking.

"What makes you think this here Kincaid is the guy?" asked the chief.

"Oh, I don't know exactly," replied the district attorney. "The man has talked to me frankly enough when I have interrogated him, and his record seems to be all that he says it is; but, just the same, I have a feeling that he's the man who is causing the trouble."

"And you're probably right, sir," said Detective Sergeant Brady. "His alibis are too good, sir—I mistrusted them myself as you told them. But I wish you'd come to us earlier, or that some of these fall guys had reported to us instead of to you. It's a dirty shame, this idea that business men have that whatever they tell the department is at once turned over to the papers. And it makes a lot of work for us, too, sir."

"Do you want to tackle this Kincaid thing, Brady?" asked the chief.

"I'd be as tickled as a kid with a new watch, chief."

"All right—run along, now, and report to me when you have something. I'll see that you're marked up on the report as on special work."

II.

The district attorney offered Brady the freedom of the records in the county office, but the detective sergeant said he would prefer to go in on the case just as he was, and work up his own evidence. So he returned to the upper floor of the headquarters building, and once again took up his study of the "picture books." If he was seeking anything special therein, he kept his own counsel, for so far as his fellow sleuths could see he was simply idly turning the pages and giving each of the photographs a glance so that his mind might be refreshed on criminal physiognomies. It was well past the lunch hour when Brady put up the last volume of the city's rogues' gallery and sauntered out to the street. He stopped at a cafeteria for a cheese sandwich and a glass of milk, paused at a cigar stand to buy some perfectos, and then walked to the St. Cloud Hotel. The clerk nodded to him as he crossed the lobby, and swung the register around for his inspection. Brady glanced at the names of the late arrivals, commented laughingly on the handwriting of some of the guests, and then asked the whereabouts of Billings, the house detective.

"He's down at the depot right now, Mr. Brady," answered the clerk. "Went down with Mr. Kincaid to get the Limited for St. Louis. Kincaid has been having some adventures recently with the district attorney, and he said he wanted Mr. Billings to go along with him and see him buy his ticket and get on the train, so that everybody will know for sure that he's gone. It seems that some crook has been impersonating

him and raising a rumpus—forged his checks or something."

"That so? I hadn't heard of any 'paperhanging' round town lately," said Brady. And then, after some gossip and small talk, he sauntered out through the bar and to the street, where he hailed a taxi and was driven to the depot. He walked quickly through the waiting room and hurried down the long train shed until he came to the gate leading to track No. 9, upon which the St. Louis Limited was awaiting its passengers. The ticket man at the gate answered his nod, and Brady stepped to his side and stood chatting about the weather and such things. Presently Billings, accompanied by a well-dressed but rather frail man, followed by two porters, hove in sight and passed through the gate. Brady glanced casually at them as they passed, and went on talking to the gateman. Before Billings and the porters returned, Brady had left the depot.

He walked thoughtfully through the business section of the city, eventually reaching the great marble building that housed the Third National Bank. Entering the revolving doors, he made his way to the center of the wide, tiled space about which the grilled windows were arranged, and waited there until Larry Dugan, the day watchman in the bank, noted his presence. Dugan had formerly been a sergeant in the police department—in fact, Brady had served under him as a patrolman in the early days. Dugan had quit the department following a change in the city administration for reasons best known to himself and the incoming officials; and shortly after that he had been given a berth in the bank.

"What's doing, Brady?" he asked, hurrying to the side of his old friend.

"A fellow named Kincaid, Larry; that's what's doing. Ever noticed him?"

The watchman drew Brady over to a desk at one side of the big lobby. "I'm glad you're on him, me boy," he said. "They've been having Protective Agency men on him long enough. He's a bird, he is, Brady, and too slick for the likes of them."

"What you got on him, Larry?"

"Not much yet—not enough to tell the bank about. But this morning, when he was in here makin' a fuss over the transfer of his account to the Citizens'—I didn't know what it was at the time, but the cashier told me afterward—I was standing over yonder by the draft teller's desk, and I had a good view into the old man's office, where they was all talkin'. You see, I thought maybe there'd be a call for me; they was all excited about something. And while I was watching, I saw this Kincaid bird drop his handkerchief sort of accidentallike on the president's desk, and then pick it up. And under where it dropped was a pile of some new, small, folding check books that the bank has just got out for its lady customers. They haven't been given out yet, and I don't know how many were in the pile, but I'll bet there was one less when that guy picked up his handkerchief."

"You always had a good eye, Larry. Here's a cigar, and forget you ever told me anything. Tell Mr. Graham I want to see him."

The president of the Third National was only too pleased to see Detective Sergeant Brady. He greeted him with a hearty handshake and passed him a cigar as he motioned to one of the big leather chairs.

"You want to ask me about Mr. Kincaid, I know," said the banker, smiling. "Fire away, Brady—only, thank goodness, it wasn't our bank that got stung this time."

Brady wrinkled his forehead. "Kincaid? I don't know any such party, Mr. Graham. What did he do?"

The president showed his disappointment. He imagined that he was a keen man, and that his intuition was something of which to be proud. But he laughed to cover his faulty guess.

"Oh, Kincaid is one of our customers who's been having some trouble lately," he answered. "Somebody has been forging his checks and impersonating him. It has cost us something to

find this out, and to-day it cost the Citizens' Bank something over eight hundred, too. I thought you might be on that case. What can I do for you, Brady?"

"What I wanted to see you about was another matter, sir. There's a bunch of bad printers in the city, Mr. Graham, and we're sort of checking up on them. I heard you'd had some new check books issued, and I thought I'd drop in and warn you to be a bit careful of them."

The president looked thoughtfully at the detective. "You mean, Brady——"

"I'd examine the packages, sir. Some of them may be short. You see, sir, these fellows might take some check books with them when they blow, sir, and so be in a position to hang up some perfectly good-looking paper when they get to the next town."

"We have had some new books, Brady—ten thousand of them. They were delivered to us last night. Much obliged for the warning; I'll have the boys count them. These are some of them on my desk, here."

Detective Sergeant Brady reached out and picked up one of the new books and appeared to be examining it critically. As a matter of fact, he was looking beyond the book he held in his hand, and was counting those that were in the pile. There were forty-eight.

"That's a neat and tasty piece of work, sir, and convenient, too," he said. "You say you got ten thousand of them, eh? How were they delivered?"

"In packages of fifty, Brady, like this one here," answered the banker. "I just broke this package open this morning to show to one of our customers. The books are designed to be folded, like this, you see, so that they will fit easily into a lady's hand bag."

Brady folded the book he held in his hand, and then placed it back on the pile.

"Mr. Graham," he said, speaking earnestly, "I wish you'd do me a favor, if you can. I wish you'd not give out any of these books till the first of next month. I—I sort of have a hunch, sir, that if you hold them back a little while you may make things easier for both of us—your bank and the department."

The banker looked closely at the headquarters man. "Your reasons, Brady?"

"Well, I'm not in a position right now, Mr. Graham, to give you all of them," Brady answered. "But one of them is that there are only forty-nine books in that package, sir."

President Graham was not an excitable man, but he was a banker, and any irregularity in matters of business is distasteful to a financier, to say the least. He swung about to his desk and methodically counted the new check books; then he counted them a second time. Brady was correct; there were but forty-nine, and there should have been fifty.

"I opened that package myself this morning, Brady," he said, "and it was marked on the outside: '50 books, series M-36.' Nobody has taken one of those books, for I have been here all the time. Evidently the package was short."

"It looks that way, sir. But I wouldn't say anything to the printing house yet, sir. Just hold those books back for the balance of the month, if you can, sir, and we'll see what we can find out."

Much satisfied with himself, Detective Sergeant Brady left the bank and turned his steps toward the St. Cloud Hotel once again. Billings, the house detective, was in the lobby as he entered, and the two men nodded curtly to each other. But Brady's business was with the clerk.

"This guy Kincaid," he inquired, "the fellow that Billings started to St. Louis—did he leave a forwarding address for his mail?"

The clerk reached under the counter and produced a small, black, indexed book, which he consulted a moment.

"You bet he did, Brady," he answered. "Merchants Hotel until August 20th. Want to write to him, do you?"

"Yeah," said Brady, with a laugh, and he turned away and walked over

to the telegraph booth, where he wrote a message on one of the yellow blanks.

"This goes 'collect,' sis," he said to the young woman behind the counter.

And as she tapped out the words on the sounder, a few minutes later, the St. Cloud Hotel operator wondered why one of the headquarters men should be sending such odd intelligence to a former guest of the house. For the message was as follows:

Collect, Day Rate.
THEODORE KINCAID, *Merchants Hotel, St. Louis, Missouri.*
Jiggers. BILL.

III.

Mr. Kincaid was shaving in his room at the Merchants when the telegram was delivered to him. He gave the bell boy a dime for bringing the yellow envelope to his room, and the youth stood leaning against the door jamb, waiting to see if there would be an answer. Mr. Kincaid tore the envelope open carelessly, unfolded the sheet within, glanced at it, and then shot a piercing glance at the boy.

"Where did you get this?" he demanded.

"From the clerk, sir. It just came in from the telegraph office, sir. The house loop is out o' gear, sir, so all messages come in from downtown now. Any answer, sir?"

"There's no answer," snapped Kincaid, and he closed and locked the door of his room. Then he sat down by the window and read the telegram again. It puzzled him, and it worried him, too. In the first place, he didn't know anybody named Bill—at least he didn't know any Bills who were close enough to him in friendship to send him that sort of a message. In fact, being a man who worked alone, he didn't have any professional friends at all. Yet the message was undoubtedly of a professional nature, and also undoubtedly it came from a friend. Of one thing Mr. Kincaid was certain: the message was a warning.

But exactly what kind of a warning was it? Did it mean that some part of his past had been uncovered, or that his present plans were known? Or did it mean that some person or persons were on their way to St. Louis to meet him—perhaps with unpleasant consequences? Any one, or all, of these things might happen, Mr. Kincaid knew very well—but what he couldn't understand was why "Bill" should send him a warning. Considerably perturbed, Mr. Kincaid returned to his shaving, and then put on his coat and vest and went out.

His first visit was to the telegraph office near the hotel. Displaying his message to the youth behind the counter, he pointed to the sundry signs and letters that decorated the upper part of the blank and asked the youth if he could decipher them.

"Sure, sir," answered the clerk. "They tell where the message was filed, what clerk handled it there, the class of message it is, and the route over which it came."

"Well, son," said Mr. Kincaid, shoving a silver dollar over the counter, "this is a code message, but the fool who sent it to me forgot part of it. If I knew where it was filed, now, it would help a lot."

The clerk looked at the dollar with brightened eyes, and then reached behind him for a book, dust-covered and canvas-bound and containing many loose pages. After consulting this, and comparing the message with what he found therein, he looked up.

"Your message was filed at the St. Cloud Hotel branch office, sir," he said. "Sent at four-thirteen this afternoon, a nonprotest, collect message, sir, over the duplex circuit."

"Thank you very much, son—that clears it up a lot," said Kincaid, and he walked out into the gathering darkness and made his way to the nearest telephone pay station. It was easy enough for him to get connected with the St. Cloud Hotel in the city he had left that noon, but he had some difficulty in making the St. Cloud operator understand that he wanted to talk to the girl at the telegraph booth in the lobby. Finally he got her on the line, however.

"This is Mr. Kincaid," he said. "I've been living at the St. Cloud for over a year—maybe you remember me? I'm in St. Louis now; just got here, in fact; and I find a telegram waiting for me. It's evidently a joke of some sort; it was sent from your office and signed 'Bill'—it was filed shortly after four. Now, I hate to get fooled by any of my acquaintances with a thing like this, so I called you up to see if you'd be good enough to tell me who gave you the message, if you remember."

"I remember the message perfectly, Mr. Kincaid," answered the clerk, with a laugh. "I thought it must be a joke or something at the time. Detective Sergeant Brady sent it."

Mr. Kincaid was glad indeed that he was sitting in a dark booth, and that the girl he was talking to couldn't see his face. As it was, he found it effort enough to force a laugh and say:

"Oh, so it was Brady, was it? Much obliged, miss—and when I get back I'll not forget your kindness. Brady, eh? Well, say, don't you tell him I called you up—let him think he put it over. And next week, when I get back, I'll let you in on it when I turn the tables on the old boy. Thank you, girlie."

Having secured his information, Mr. Kincaid returned to his room at the Merchants and considered things long and earnestly. And particularly did he try to fathom why Detective Sergeant Brady should have sent him a message of such a nature. He didn't know Brady—he didn't even know there was a Brady in the detective bureau. He wondered what sort of cases Brady specialized in. And why had Brady telegraphed from the St. Cloud, of all places? There were a lot of questions that just naturally unfolded within Mr. Kincaid's fertile mind as he pondered over the incident. Finally he decided that this Brady must be like some detectives he had heard about—not averse to standing in with gentlemen like Mr. Kincaid if there was financial profit to be gained thereby. Yet this conclusion didn't keep Mr. Kincaid from thinking about the incident all the time he was eating his dinner.

IV.

Detective Sergeant Brady had been doing considerable thinking, too. After sending his telegram, he had gone over to the west side of the city and hunted up Walter Page, the cigar-store clerk, who had purchased the State agency for a patent cigar lighter from a man named Kincaid. Page assured the detective sergeant that Kincaid was pompous, rather stout, as he recalled him, and that he wore a mustache and a Vandyke beard. This point troubled Brady considerably, for the Kincaid that he had seen was smooth shaven, rather thin, and didn't seem a bit inclined toward being pompous.

"Maybe he had false whiskers?" suggested Brady.

"What kind of a hick do you take me for?" demanded young Walter Page. "I admit I fell for the cigar-lighter stuff; but do you think I'd 'a' been the fall guy if this bird had worn false whiskers? Don't you think I got any sense at all? No, sir, this fellow's face decorations were real—his beard and mustache was both good and heavy and real curly. I noticed it particular; it was so curly it was almost like the hair on a nigger's head—all kinked up."

"His beard or his mustache?" asked Brady.

"Both of 'em; they was just the same—brown and kinky," answered the man who had paid five hundred dollars for one cigar lighter and some experience.

"And he was fat, you say?" persisted Brady.

"He wasn't exactly fat. But he gave you that impression, in a way. He held himself like the director in a big trust of some kind—as if he owned the earth. He had what I call a 'corporation front,' if you know what that is."

Detective Sergeant Brady nodded, bought a couple of cigars, and told the clerk that he'd see him again soon. Then he made his way back to the Hotel St. Cloud and dropped into the grill. He was eating sandwiches there and drinking imported beer when Billings found him. The house detective sat down opposite him, ordered a glass of

beer for himself, and looked at Brady as if he was amused.

"The day clerk tells me you're interested in Kincaid," he said. "And Lillie Dupree, at the telegraph booth, says you sent him a message that worried him some. He called her up on long distance and asked her about it. What's the big idea?"

"Nothin'—nothin' at all, Billings. I just thought I'd kid him a bit and see if I could make him nervous. So he called up Lillie, did he? And what did he tell her when she wised him up to me?"

"Said you'd been joshing him, and that when he got back he'd put one over on you. Told her not to tell you he'd called up. So to keep her word Lil told me, knowing that I'd tell you. Yet she can swear to him that she never said a word to you. That girl has learned something, she has, since she's been in hotel life."

"Kincaid was pretty hoarse when you put him on the train at noon, wasn't he?" asked Brady, eying the house detective closely.

Billings choked over his beer, so violently did he start. When he got through sputtering he looked at Brady shamefacedly.

"Holy cats!" he exclaimed. "Ain't I a bright one? Why, the crooked stiff! And he's been putting it over me right along! Sure, he was hoarse when I put him on the train—so hoarse he could hardly tell me he was going to St. Louis to see a throat specialist—yet to-night he talks to Lil over the wire without any trouble. That specialist must have done quick work. Brady, I'd believe anything about that guy now."

"A feller could doctor up his throat in half a day—resting and eating menthol tablets on the train," said Brady, smiling dryly. "Now, I tell you what I want you to do, Billings. You get hold of Doc Hastings, your house physician, and tell him there's a medico guy down in the bar who's had just about enough to drink. I'll be the medico guy, see? You can call me Doctor Strong, or Doctor Beers, or whatever you want. Now rustle out and get the sawbones to haul me out of here for the good of the house. Get the idea—the hotel don't want me to ruin my reputation in it."

Billings "got the idea," and went in search of the house doctor. He found him on the piazza outside the palm room, listening to the music to which many of the diners were dancing.

"Say, doc," said Billings, "there's a sawbones like you down in the grill—seems to be a good sort of a scout, but he's taking too much on board. Came in a while ago with some friends and lost them in the bar. Now he's trying to drink enough for them, too. Come on down and I'll introduce you, and maybe you can get him to bed. Honest, if he stays down there he'll do himself harm."

Being house physician in a hostelry like the St. Cloud carries with it many duties not usually performed by the average practitioner. Doctor Hastings had many times before coaxed doctors, surgeons, osteopaths, and other more or less professional brothers from the bar; so at Billings' summons he rose to do it again. He followed the house detective down to the grill, and there was led to Brady's table.

"This is Doctor Beers, of Duluth," said Billings. "Doctor Beers, shake hands with Doctor Hastings, our house physician."

After introducing the two, Billings moved away. Doctor Hastings looked critically at "Doctor Beers from Duluth," and concluded that the house detective had been unduly alarmed. The man at the table was not dangerously drunk—in fact, Doctor Hastings couldn't see that he'd been really drinking at all.

"Sit down and have something, doc," said Brady. "I've been putting this stuff away all evening, and it makes me feel pretty good."

Doctor Hastings shook his head, but he sat down just the same, and reached in his pocket for a cigar.

"So you've been drinking all evening, doctor, have you?" he said.

"Funny you don't show it more. I should say you'd hardly had a drop."

Brady looked up. "How much did this fellow Kincaid pay you, doc, to tell the district attorney that he had a paralyzed throat?" he asked abruptly.

Doctor Hastings showed but little surprise. "What makes you ask me that?" he countered.

"Because you're too good a judge of a man's physical condition to be fooled by any faking Kincaid may have done," replied Brady. "Here I sent Billings to you with the news that I was stewed to the guards and that you'd have to get me out of here; and when you come in I see by the first look that you gave me that you're sizing up the symptoms and that you figure it out that Billings gave you a bum steer. Yet if you were fool enough to think that Kincaid had a paralyzed throat you'd think I was tanking up and was about ready to explode. How much did Kincaid give you for that alibi?"

"And you are——" asked Doctor Hastings.

"Detective Sergeant Brady, of the headquarters bureau. And I'll tell you this, doc: just one word of this to Burley, of the Citizens' Bank, and you'll be on the inside lookin' out, instead of where you are now."

Doctor Hastings looked at the end of his cigar, discovered that it wasn't lighted, and reached for a match with a steady hand. Brady drank his imported beer and smacked his lips. Finally the house physician looked up.

"I don't know how Burley or the Citizens' Bank comes into this, Brady," he said. "Kincaid told me it was just the district attorney. He didn't give me anything for it, either—that is, not directly. It was this way: Kincaid came to me this morning and said he'd got into a jam on a business deal, and that the district attorney was on his back. Said if he could only show he had a sore throat for a week, everything would be all right. He assured me there was nothing really serious the matter—simply a sharp deal gone wrong, and that the district attorney's office was making a roar for election purposes. Well, I don't like the district attorney, and I do like Mr. Kincaid—I've known him ever since he came to the house, and found him a prince. He's a companionable chap, a good fellow, and at times he's done me little favors—lent me money when we've been out together and I've run short, and things like that. So I—I told the district attorney what I did. The case records I showed him were of another patient. The district attorney was very disagreeable; he treated me as if I was a servant, instead of a professional man. There is nothing the matter with Kincaid's throat—is there anything the matter with his actions?"

"He bunked the Citizens' Bank out of eight hundred and fifty bucks, that's all," said Brady.

Doctor Hastings shook his head. "I can't believe that, Mr. Brady. I can't see why he should do it. He has plenty of money—I've seen his deposit books at times, and he's had from ten to fifty thousand ever since I've known him. He's a broker, you know—why, he's even let me in on some of his deals, and I've made handsome profits."

"Not a chance in the world, doc. You're all wrong about him. And, what is more, doc, there's only one thing will keep you out of jail as an accessory, and that is keeping your mouth shut. If you give the slightest hint to Kincaid about this little talk we've had; if you send him the least tip, you'll have to explain it to the judge. And you're only getting off that easy because I think he's fooled you like he has the rest of them. Now, remember, you keep your mouth shut. I've got to leave you now, doc—glad to have met you."

V.

Leaving the St. Cloud grill, Brady made his way to the lobby and installed himself in a telephone booth. His first call was to the residence of President Burley, of the Citizens' Bank. Mr. Burley was not at home, so Brady had to try two or three clubs before he finally got in touch with the financier. Once

he got him on the wire, his business was soon transacted.

"This is Brady, of the headquarters squad, Mr. Burley," he said. "The district attorney was down to see the chief this morning, and he told him about this fellow Kincaid, who had some dealings with your bank. What sort of a looking man was he?"

"I especially asked the district attorney not to let the police get hold of that matter," said the president of the Citizens' Bank, somewhat testily. "Really, Mr.—er—Brady, I do not care to——"

"Now, listen here, Mr. Burley," interrupted Brady. "There's no sense in you bankers being so man-shy of the police. We could do you a sight more good than the private agencies you always have cluttering up your cases. And as far as what Kincaid got out of your bank, I'm not particularly interested in that, either. I'm working on a man called Kincaid—whether he's the man you want or not I don't know—and I don't care very much. If you don't want to tell me what the bird who plucked you looked like, I don't care. I'm sorry I bothered you."

President Burley was somewhat surprised at the tenor of Brady's remarks—as Brady intended he should be. "Get a man mad and he'll talk," had long been one of Brady's rules of business. And in this case, as in others, it worked, even as he had expected it would.

"Oh, I have no objection to giving you information, Mr. Brady," said the banker. "And if the district attorney has seen best to tell you about the case, I suppose I have no voice in the matter, anyway. But I am sorry he did, that's all. Now, as to this man Kincaid, he was about five feet eight inches tall, I should say; would weigh somewhere in the neighborhood of a hundred and seventy pounds, had brown hair, dark eyes, and an exceptionally curly beard and mustache—so curly, in fact, that it especially fixed itself on my memory. He was——"

"Thank you very much, Mr. Burley; that is enough," said Brady, cutting in on the other's conversation. "I guess your man isn't the one I am working on, so I won't trouble you any more. Good night, sir."

And, hanging up the receiver, Detective Sergeant Brady left the booth with a happy and satisfied smile upon his face. He went to his home, slept the sleep of a man who knows he has done a good day's work; and the following morning he was ready to continue his labors. Up until noon he spent the time visiting various places where the mysterious Kincaid had worked his smooth deals, and in every place he was assured by the victims that the man he sought had a remarkably curly mustache and beard, and that his general mien was that of a pompous and successful moneyed man.

Just before midday, Brady arrived at the west side cigar store, where Walter Page was chief clerk. He purchased several cigars, chatted a few moments about the weather and the prospects of the home team winning the day's ball game, and then he invited Mr. Page to go and have lunch with him. Half an hour later, the two were seated at a small table in a neighboring chophouse, and Mr. Page had just told Brady for the third time all the particulars of his purchase of the State agency for a patented cigar lighter from the pompous Mr. Kincaid.

"Would you like to get that five hundred dollars back?" asked Mr. Brady.

Mr. Page blinked his eyes. "Say, do you know what I was saving that money for?" he asked. "Me and a certain young lady was going to get married on that money. Would I like it back—well, what do you think?"

Whereupon Detective Sergeant Brady began to talk, and Walter Page began to listen. At the close of this one-sided conversation, the two adjourned to the West Avenue branch of the Y. M. C. A., where they procured letter paper, pen and ink, and some envelopes. And thereupon Detective Sergeant Brady dictated to Mr. Page, and Mr. Page carefully wrote down the things that the headquarters man told him to, as follows:

MR. THEODORE KINCAID, *Merchants Hotel, St. Louis, Missouri.*

DEAR SIR: You will doubtless remember that some months ago you sold me the State agency for a patent cigar lighter for five hundred dollars. It is useless for you to deny this, as the other day I saw you go into the Citizens' Bank, and later followed you to your hotel, the St. Cloud. I saw you stop on the way there, too; and I know what you did when you stopped. The clerk at the hotel gave me your present address, so that is how it happens that I am writing to you.

Now, Mr. Kincaid, I am a good sport. I don't want to go to the police with this matter. But I am in a position where I must have that five hundred dollars back. It is a matter of life and death with me. If I do not get the money from you by next Saturday it will be too late—and in order to save myself from going to jail for another matter, and so disgracing my family, I shall commit suicide by jumping into the river.

Please believe this is no bluff, and that I am desperate. I have to have the money to square what I have taken from somebody who trusted me. Now be a good sport, Mr. Kincaid, and blow back that five hundred dollars to me, and I will say nothing to the police. But if you do not send me the money by Saturday, I will write a full account of the deal to the police before I jump into the river; and I will tell them also what you did between the Citizens' Bank and the St. Cloud Hotel the morning I followed you. I mean every word of this.

Be sure and send the money, or I will be dead and you will go to jail. Send it to me at the store. Yours very truly,

WALTER PAGE.

Detective Sergeant Brady mailed the letter himself. He then gave Mr. Page some further instructions and advice, and, promising to keep in touch with him, went on his way, rejoicing.

Saturday morning, Detective Sergeant Brady was once again admitted to the private office of President Graham, of the Third National. After the usual greetings had been exchanged, the banker leaned back in his chair and waited for Brady to state the nature of his business.

"Did you have those check books counted, Mr. Graham?" asked the central-office man.

"I did, Brady, and I am rather inclined to believe that you were needlessly alarmed. While it is true that the order was 'short,' it was only short one book—there were nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine. And you must admit that in such a large order, a shortage of one book is not alarming. However, I have followed your advice, and have not given any of these new books to our customers."

"Maybe I was a little hasty in being suspicious, Mr. Graham, but still it's always better to be on the safe side. I guess it will be all right to start issuing those books next week, if you really want to."

The banker smiled. "I was going to suggest that myself, Brady. But I want you to feel that I am truly grateful to you for your interest in this matter. I am sure you had good grounds for your suspicions—have you rounded up those crook printers yet?"

The headquarters man seemed somewhat downcast. "I was wrong about that, too, Mr. Graham," he said. "The printers were all right. The crook was in another line. But, just the same, sir, he got one of those check books of yours—that's why you found your order one short."

President Graham was interested at once—profoundly interested.

"You mean, Brady, that that one missing book wasn't an error in count?"

"You got the idea the very first time, Mr. Graham, and it's about that that I've called, sir," said Brady. "Just before closing time there'll be a young man present one of these new checks for payment here at the bank, sir, and I want you to instruct your teller to honor it. It'll be for five hundred dollars, sir."

"You want to get the man when he actually has the money in his possession, I see," said the president. "Certainly, Brady, we will cash the check without question. I suppose you and Dugan will be there to arrest the man as soon as he gets the money?"

Brady shook his head. "Arrest him? What for? He'll have a right to the money—it'll be his, sir."

The banker frowned. He did not like Brady's tone—and, besides that, five hundred dollars was five hundred dollars.

"I'm afraid I don't understand you, Brady," he said.

'It will be a good check, Mr. Graham," replied the detective sergeant, smiling slightly. "It will be signed by one of your regular customers—a man who has much more than that sum to his credit here, sir, and one in whom I judge you have considerable confidence. The only odd feature of it will be that the check will be written on one of those new-style blanks that you haven't given out yet. That's why I wanted to speak to you about it beforehand. You see, sir, I promised the young man who will present the check that everything would be all right. He wants to use the money right away, sir; he expects to get married just as soon as he gets it, and then he and his wife are going off for a little trip. He would have been married last year, only he lost the money all of a sudden. I'm just getting it back for him, sir—that's all."

President Graham looked closely at Brady. He was beginning to wonder whether the detective sergeant had suddenly lost his mind, or whether he was joking with him. Suddenly an idea occurred to him, and he asked:

"And which of our depositors, Brady, will sign this check from a book we haven't issued, yet?"

"Mr. Kincaid, sir—Theodore Kincaid, of the St. Cloud Hotel, sir. He'll be back from St. Louis pretty soon, too, sir—his throat is much better. I saw a letter from him this morning, sir—in fact, I saw the letter with the check that I've been talking about."

The head of the Third National Bank stroked his chin and gazed thoughtfully at his desk. It was some minutes before he looked up.

"Kincaid, eh? So you've been working on that case, have you, Brady? And you've got something at last, too—I can tell that by your manner. Certainly the check will be honored, Brady. But tell me, how did he get one of those new books?"

"He dropped his handkerchief on your desk, over the pile of new books, and picked up one under the linen, the morning he was in here hollering about that transfer of his account to the Citizens', sir."

Mr. Graham didn't get the idea at first, but presently the full meaning of Brady's statement dawned on him.

"You say he picked it up in his handkerchief? Why should—— Why—why, bless me, Brady, the man must be a crook, a thief!"

"I wouldn't call him a plain thief, sir," laughed Brady. "I'd call him one of the smoothest birds that's hit these parts in some time. And I'm pretty sure I'll land him, sir—but it may take a little time. And until I get him to rights, I don't want him to have any trouble getting money. You can be sure of one thing, though, sir—he won't try to draw out any more than he's got; at least, not for a few days. And by then—well, I'll have him sewed up by then."

Detective Sergeant Brady proved to be a good prophet. Later that morning, Mr. Walter Page walked into the Third National, with a smiling young woman on his arm, and presented a check for five hundred dollars, signed by Theodore Kincaid. Mr. Page seemed just the least bit nervous as he slipped the paper through the wicket at the paying teller's cage; but as the young man behind the grille started counting out the money at once, with hardly a glance at the indorsement on the check, Mr. Page's spirits rose, and he squeezed the arm of the young woman beside him. And as he left the bank he told her that he guessed that fellow Brady was a pretty good scout, after all.

After Mr. Page passed out of the lobby of the bank, the check that he had presented was at once taken to President Graham's office, where it was regarded with a great deal of interest by the banker and some of his most trusted employees. They looked at the check carefully and often, and there was much shaking of heads and exclaiming. Finally Mr. Graham asked the cashier to ascertain how much Mr. Kincaid had remaining in his balance.

"I've already looked that up, sir," said the cashier, who was an efficient and rapidly rising young man. "De-

ducting this check, sir, he has with us exactly six thousand four hundred and eighty dollars and twelve cents."

Mr. Graham smiled approvingly. "Well," he said, "if he doesn't draw out too much before Brady gets through with him, there ought to be enough left to pay us for those alleged forgeries that we stood for, and to square up the Citizens' for what he got out of them. A remarkable man he is; almost beyond belief. Be sure and keep a close watch upon him."

"Hadn't we better notify the Protective Agency, sir?" asked the cashier, with a thought for the bank's protection.

Mr. Graham shook his head, and there was an unpleasant tone to his voice as he replied:

"No, Beverly. The Protective Agency has had its innings at Mr. Kincaid, and it didn't get anywhere. I think now we will leave the matter with the police. Brady seems to be an eminently competent man, and possibly we will discover in the end that the police can be effective in these matters."

VI.

Two days after Mr. Page cashed his check and started on his honeymoon, Mr. Kincaid returned to the St. Cloud Hotel. As he had mentioned in the note he sent to Mr. Page, he was much benefited by his trip to St. Louis; the hoarseness had vanished from his voice, and he was more lavish than ever in his tips to the bell boys. Also, his eyes were brighter, busier; in fact, his whole demeanor was more alert than usual. He seemed filled with nervous energy, or energetic nervousness.

Once in his room, Mr. Kincaid did not immediately unpack his suit case. Instead, he sat down and carefully perused the morning papers, reading even the shorter paragraphs that were tucked away in odd corners of the advertising pages. When he had thus gone carefully through all the papers, he appeared to be somewhat relieved, and a certain tenseness left his attitude. But still he did not unpack—he sat for a while in deep thought. Twice he halfway rose from his chair, but each time he settled back again and continued his meditation. At last he rose, crossed the room to the wall telephone, and asked for central. Then he gave a number, waited impatiently for the answer, and when he finally got his party, said:

"Is this police headquarters? Yes? Well, I want to speak with Detective Sergeant Brady. Can you connect me with him?"

Once again he had to wait, but in time a gruff voice came over the wire:

"This is Brady. What is it?"

"This is Mr. Kincaid, Brady—at the St. Cloud Hotel."

"Well, what do you want?" inquired the gruff voice.

"I wanted to tell you that I got your telegram, and to thank you for it."

"You must have got the wrong party, mister," said the gruff voice. "I didn't send no message to nobody named Kincaid. Who do you think you are talking to, anyway?"

Mr. Kincaid was somewhat nonplused by this reception, but he tried not to show it.

"I wanted to talk to Detective Sergeant Brady," he resumed. "I received a telegram from him when I was in St. Louis last week. And I want to express my appreciation——"

"Fergit it!" interrupted the gruff voice. "You're talkin' to Brady, and I never sent you no telegram. Somebody was kiddin' you, I guess. Sometimes the young sports think it's funny to telegraph a guy and tell him to call up the police."

A metallic click in his ear told Mr. Kincaid that Brady had hung up, and that the conversation was at an end. This left Mr. Kincaid in a new predicament. Ever since he had concluded in St. Louis that the mysterious telegram had been sent him by a well-meaning —or mercenary—detective, who had learned in advance of the plaint Walter Page was going to make, he had been wondering how he could best discover what the detective wanted. And now it appeared that this solution of the mystery was the wrong one, that Brady

hadn't sent him the message, and that even if he had he didn't want anything. So again Mr. Kincaid found himself in the uncertain mental state that he was when he first got to St. Louis—only now things were still worse. If Brady hadn't sent him the message, why had the telegraph operator lied to him about it? And who had put Walter Page on his track? And was he in any further peril? So much did these and other questions bother Mr. Kincaid that he spent the greater part of the day in his room, trying to solve in his own mind the perplexing problems that he was constantly thinking up.

In the evening he went down to the hotel lobby, determined to seek mental relaxation watching the crowd. He was idly smoking a cigar and glancing at the various types to be found in the hotel crowds, when he became aware that two men were watching him intently from their position near the corridor that led to the palm room. One of the two he recognized as Billings, the house detective—a leather-headed oaf, Mr. Kincaid was pleased to call him to himself. The man with Billings was a stranger to Kincaid; he was tall, broad-shouldered, well built, and well dressed, and he had an intelligent face. Also he had small feet, which latter detail rather reassured Mr. Kincaid, for at first he had feared that the stranger might be a detective of some kind. But Kincaid knew detectives didn't have small feet, so he felt a mite easier; even though it was perfectly evident that the two men were discussing him. He wondered what they were saying, and why they were eying him so intently.

While Mr. Kincaid was still puzzling over the two men, and at the same time trying not to let them see that he had noticed them, the pair stepped back in the corridor and disappeared from his line of vision. Desiring to know more about their movements, Mr. Kincaid rose and sauntered across the lobby, but Billings and his companion appeared to have vanished into thin air. Mr. Kincaid even continued his search to the palm room, then down to the grill, and even into the bar, without finding any trace of the two men. At last he returned to the lobby, and stood beside the desk, glancing idly at the register. And while he was so engaged, a hand was dropped on his shoulder and a suave voice said:

"Let's go into the smoking room, Kincaid, and talk about it."

"All right, Bill," said the guest of the house, turning leisurely, as if he was accustomed to being thus summoned. And then, as he walked slowly over the glistening tile floor, he was somewhat disturbed to discover that his first suspicion was correct—the man who had spoken to him was the stranger who had been with Billings, and whom he had unsuccessfully tried to find. Mr. Kincaid sensed a crisis in his career—but it was not the first crisis he had met and faced.

In the smoking room his companion motioned to two secluded chairs in a draped corner, and thither they went. Somehow Mr. Kincaid found himself sitting in the chair that was next the wall, while the stranger dropped into the one next the open space of the room. This gave Mr. Kincaid a vague feeling of being penned in, but he mastered this sensation quickly and turned an inquiring face toward his companion.

"And what was it you wanted to talk about?" he asked.

"I'll be blunt, Mr. Kincaid, and tell you," said the stranger. "I was wondering when you saw a party named Walter Page last?"

Mr. Kincaid had been prepared for almost any question but that one. Had the stranger accused him of a crime, Mr. Kincaid would have known instantly what to do; had the stranger asked him regarding certain banking incidents, he would also have been answered offhand. But as Mr. Kincaid hadn't seen Mr. Page for something over a year, and didn't want to see him, the question dazed him.

"Why—why, I haven't—— Say, who are you, anyway, to come at me like this?" said Mr. Kincaid, suddenly growing very indignant. And the next moment he realized that he shouldn't

have spoken that way at all; for the stranger turned back the lapel of his coat and revealed a polished metal shield on which the words "Police Department Detective Bureau" stood out prominently. Aside from this display of metal, the stranger made no reply.

Mr. Kincaid commenced to bluster. "Why, this is an outrage!" he declared. "I shall appeal to the management of the house at once. How dare you! I shall call the manager this minute."

"Go as far as you like, kid," said the stranger, in apparently unconcerned tones. "Go ahead and make a fuss if you want to. But if I was you, now, I wouldn't start anything round this hotel just yet—you don't look to me like the kind of a bird who'd enjoy a lot of newspaper publicity in connection with a homicide case."

Mr. Kincaid had risen from his chair, but at the mention of the word "homicide" he sat down again—very suddenly.

"What's the idea?" he gasped.

The stranger smiled. "There! That's more like it. Maybe you and I can just sit here and have a quiet little chat and get this thing all straightened out. Maybe you won't have to come down to headquarters at all, if you're reasonable. Anyway, it won't do any harm to try and talk things over, will it? Now tell me, when did you see this Page party last?"

"Page? Page? Why, I don't recall having ever met anybody by that name," said Mr. Kincaid, thinking very, very rapidly. He began to suspect that something had gone wrong, and that it might be embarrassing in the extreme to know anything whatever regarding a person named Page. "What did you say his first name was?"

"Walter Page, a clerk in the Havana Club cigar store, No. 192 West Avenue," replied the stranger. "Frail young chap, dark hair, light-brown eyes, one gold tooth in the front of his upper jaw, and a little black mustache like a paintbrush."

"I can't say that I recall him," answered Mr. Kincaid, after a silent moment—a moment in which he tried to give the impression that he was searching the archives of his mind for some clew to the character described. "I may have seen him, at that, you know; I've been in that part of the city, and I may have gone into that store and bought a cigar from him. But I can't say that I recall him. Why do you ask?"

"Mere matter of form, sir. We want to get all on the case that we can, that's all. So you don't recall him at all, eh? Nice young chap, he was, likable and trusting."

Mr. Kincaid gave his best imitation of a man searching his memory once again. In reality he was thinking of the word "was" that the stranger had used in describing Mr. Page's attributes.

"I really can't place him," he said finally, having determined on what he believed to be the best course under the circumstances. "What made you think I might know him?"

"The police found some letters in his room, Mr. Kincaid. These letters made the captain think I ought to see you. So you can't recall him at all, eh?" persisted the stranger.

"Not at all," said Mr. Kincaid, speaking very positively. "What happened to him, anyway—and what were the letters?"

"Now you're asking *me* something," said the stranger. "If I knew that, I wouldn't be sitting here, taking your time and my own. All I know is that he hasn't been in his rooms for two days, and he hasn't been at the store working. And last time he was seen he had considerable money with him. And then, you know, there was them letters—that's why the captain said I ought to see you."

"What did the letters say?" asked Mr. Kincaid, who felt that he should know about Mr. Page's correspondence at once.

"I don't know as I ought to tell you," answered the stranger.

Mr. Kincaid suddenly had an inspiration. He metaphorically kicked himself for not having had it sooner. His wits were not behaving as usual.

"Do you know Detective Sergeant Brady?" he asked his companion.

The man nodded.

"Well, you bring him here. He's a friend of mine—a pretty good friend. And I think he knows about this Page matter. In fact, he sent me a telegram ——"

"I know he did," said the stranger. "My name is Brady, Mr. Kincaid. I'm the same man you talked to over the telephone this morning—only then I had something the matter with my throat, the same as you had when you went to St. Louis."

Mr. Kincaid suddenly realized that his inspiration wasn't as brilliant as he had at first believed. And also he didn't like the way Brady spoke of having something the matter with his throat. Somehow, things didn't seem to be going as well as they usually did with Mr. Kincaid.

"Why did you send me that telegram?" he asked.

"To make you nervous," replied Brady. "And I guess it worked—seeing how quick you called up the St. Cloud, here, to find out who sent it. But I was working on something else then, not this Page deal. It hadn't broke then. Now stop your stalling, and tell me when you saw Walter Page last, and what you did with him."

"I'm not stalling. I don't know the man."

"Then why did you send him a letter from St. Louis to his store?" asked Brady.

"I didn't send him a letter," declared Kincaid.

"And suppose that I can prove you're a liar, and that you did! Will you still deny that you knew him?"

"I don't know the man. I got a letter, while I was in St. Louis, from somebody that signed his name 'Page,' saying he was going to commit suicide or something—but I paid no attention to it. I thought it was a joke one of my friends might be trying to play ——"

"Oh, so your alibi will be that he committed suicide, eh?" exclaimed Brady. "You figured that he'd be found all cut up, and you were going to spring this suicide stuff if the trail got near to you. Well, I tell you what you do, Mr. Kincaid—you come down to headquarters with me and tell that to the chief."

"Say, are you crazy?" blustered Mr. Kincaid, now thoroughly alarmed. "What do you——"

Brady rose and faced him sternly. "Now, listen here!" he said. "If you've done nothing, you've got no reason to make a fuss. And if it's otherwise, makin' a fuss won't do any good. Now you get up and come along quiet with me without making any rumpus—walk out of here just like you were one gentleman with another—or I'll put the bracelets on you and just naturally pull you out through the lobby on the back of your neck. Which is it to be—fuss or nice?"

Mr. Kincaid hesitated just about two seconds, and then he decided that it was going to be "nice." When he walked through the lobby and out the front door with Brady, even the observing doorman thought he was just stepping out with a friend. In fact, Mr. Kincaid was "nice" all the way to headquarters; trying to fathom the mystifying talk about Page, homicide, and things like that. Mr. Kincaid could not recall ever having had an experience anything like this in his entire career, nor could he satisfactorily to himself prophesy what the outcome would be. So he trotted along beside Brady, trying to forecast his interview with the chief and endeavoring to outline in his mind a plausible line of explanation. At headquarters, however, it developed that the chief was out.

"Come on upstairs, and we'll put you where you can wait for him," said Brady, leading the way to the elevator.

"Do you mean that I'm under arrest?" asked Mr. Kincaid, beginning to be genuinely alarmed at the trend of events.

Brady laughed. "I wouldn't call it being under arrest; that doesn't sound nice," he said. "You come with me and just wait for the chief, that's all."

VII.

When the elevator stopped at the third floor, Brady motioned Kincaid to get out. Then, taking the lead, he piloted his guest through a maze of corridors, finally ushering him through a door into a brilliantly lighted room. Before Kincaid realized it, a lock clicked behind him, and he wheeled about only to see Brady's back disappearing down the corridor he had just traversed. And not only this, but Mr. Kincaid was shocked to note that he was able to watch the vanishing Brady through a door—a door fabricated of interwoven strips of steel.

Kincaid's first impulse was to cry out in protest against this high-handed treatment, and to demand that he be allowed to send for an attorney at once. Then he thought better of it, decided that there would be plenty of time to get an attorney later if he really needed one—the thing for the present was to examine into his condition and to try and solve the reason for things. Mr. Kincaid was very sure that he had done nothing—at least, nothing that the police could fasten upon him with the requisite amount of proof; and he was sure that, if he kept his wits about him, he would be able to develop from his present predicament excellent grounds for a suit against the city. So he took stock of things.

This was easily done. He was in a brilliantly lighted inclosure, or room. The only door was of interlaced steel strips. The walls of the room, careful investigation showed, were of the same material and texture, save that the interlacing strips were narrower—more like screening. The room was illuminated by an arc light suspended from the ceiling, and its glare made it difficult to discover whether there was anything beyond the walls. Kincaid finally accustomed his eyes to the glare, however, and then he noted that beyond the surrounding walls there was a gloom, indicating that his present "cage" was placed in the center of a much larger space. And then it suddenly flashed upon him with disconcerting clearness that he was in what was known as the "observation cell"—a brightly lighted inclosure in a darkened room, which enabled the police to watch, unobserved, the actions of any prisoner confined under the shining arc light. Rushing to one of the walls and pressing his eyes against the narrow slits in the metal screening, Kincaid peered intently into the outer gloom, finally making out a gray-uniformed figure sitting on a bench in a corner of the outer room.

"Hey, you!" he shouted. "Come over here a minute; I want to talk to you."

The gray figure did not move. Mr. Kincaid reached in his pocket, and, finding a silver dollar, took it out and rapped sharply on the steel strips in front of him.

"This dollar is yours if you'll come here," shouted Kincaid.

The gray figure stirred, rose slowly, and slouched across the intervening space to the barrier that separated him from the man under the light. Thrusting two fingers through one of the slits in the metal wall, he deftly took the silver dollar from Mr. Kincaid's hand and started back toward the corner again.

"Hey, wait a minute!" shouted Kincaid. "That dollar was for information. Are you—— No, never mind that. What have they got me in here for, do you know?"

"You didn't say anything about talkin'—you said if I'd come here you'd give me a dollar," said the gray figure. "So I come an' got it. Besides that, I don't know what they've got you for—I'm only a 'trusty.' They told me to watch you, and, if you tried to kill yourself, to holler. You ain't goin' to croak yourself, are you? Because, if you ain't, I'm goin' to curl up an' go to sleep—I'm tired."

Kincaid laughed—the first real, hearty laugh he had indulged in for some time. Then he yawned. "Go to sleep, you poor unfortunate," he said. "Suicide is the last thing I'd try. Why, I haven't done anything—I don't even know why they've got me here."

The man outside paused a moment

in his retreat to his corner. "Don't stall me, bo," he said. "I wouldn't tell the bulls on yer—I ain't that kind. But I'm glad you feel so good about it—I'm going to take a chance on yer, and go to sleep. Gosh, but I'm sleepy!"

Mr. Kincaid was not sleepy, but he yawned in sympathy with the gray-coated figure without, who shuffled back to his corner, stretching and yawning prodigiously. Perhaps it was just as well that Mr. Kincaid didn't feel sleepy, for his quarters were not fitted for comfortable slumber. There was a table and a chair right under the arc light, and in one corner of the cage was a washstand. That was all. Mr. Kincaid paced back and forth in the small room for some time; and then, tiring of that, he drew the lone chair over against the wall near the door, and, tilting it back, sat down. He had hardly got himself comfortably settled when he heard steps approaching down the corridor. Keys rattled in the door of his cage, the steel stripping swung back, and two uniformed policemen entered. Behind them came Brady and a fourth man, the last apparently a brakeman on one of the interurban lines, judging from the clothes he wore.

"Take a good look at this feller," said Brady, speaking to the railroad man, "and tell us if you think it's him."

Mr. Kincaid also took a good look. But he could not recall having seen the other man's face before; it didn't even suggest any face that he had ever seen. The stranger, for his part, was looking closely at Kincaid. Finally he turned to Brady.

"There's no doubt about it," he said. "It's him. But he's shaved since then. He got on my train with the little fellow, and it was him that asked me to stop near the swamp to let 'em off."

"That's good!" exclaimed Brady. "Come on, and tell it to the chief."

As the four men started to leave, Kincaid spoke up. "I'd like to have a few words with the chief myself, Brady," he said.

The detective sergeant glanced back at Kincaid as he closed and locked the latticed door. "You'll get to see the chief in due time, Kincaid," he said. "Don't you worry about that. But just now he's busy with the coroner and some other folks."

VIII.

Left to himself again, Mr. Kincaid at first shrugged his shoulders and smiled at the very preposterousness of the situation. But the smile soon vanished from his countenance, and he began to think of the things Brady had said. At the hotel the detective sergeant had said something about a homicide case, and had persistently asked when Kincaid had last seen Walter Page. And now Brady said the chief was talking to the coroner; and the man they had just brought in had said something about "he got on my train with the little fellow, and it was him that asked me to stop near the swamp."

Brady, he also remembered, had said something about Page having left some letters—and suddenly Mr. Kincaid leaped to his feet with a start and set to pacing rapidly and nervously back and forth. Suppose something *had* happened to Page? Suppose Page hadn't received the check for the five hundred dollars he demanded, and had written the police and then committed suicide, as he threatened. Kincaid knew that he had mailed his letter to Page in ample time, but the mails sometimes did go astray. Or suppose Page really had been attacked or murdered by somebody who remotely resembled Kincaid; there were cases of mistaken identity like that. These thoughts worried Mr. Kincaid, for if the truth must be told, he was somewhat of an expert in mistaken identity himself, so he appreciated the possible danger all the more.

Busy with such thoughts as these, Kincaid did not at first realize that he was being watched; that somewhere beyond the barrier that confined him to the brilliant light was a group of men. Finally, however, the murmur of their voices impressed itself on Kincaid's troubled mind, and he stopped his pacing back and forth abruptly and peered

out through the crevices in the wall. When his eyes became accustomed to the outer dimness, he saw a group of six—no, seven—men standing regarding him. He could not make out their features, but he noted that two of them had gold-braided uniforms; evidently they were police officers of high rank. Of their conversation Kincaid could only catch occasional fragments, and these phrases were far from reassuring.

"He looks like a coward," he heard. Then the other voices joined in with various comments: "Hit him in the back, too. . . . Decoyed him out there, I suppose, on a promise that he'd give him the money. . . . Seems foolish to think that he'd take a chance like that for only five hundred. . . . Hold him for the grand jury, I guess; but if I had my way I'd take him out and hang him now. . . . Like to put him through and make him confess; it's only a waste of money to try nuts like him. . . . Let's all go in an' take a crack at him. . . . No, Jerry, the chief says leave him alone."

Finally, after more of the same kind of remarks, the men withdrew, and Kincaid still stood peering into the outer darkness. His breath was coming in hard gasps, and his brow felt clammy with cold sweat. Then he saw the gray-coated trusty shuffling toward him, and he felt grateful for even that much companionship. The trusty was holding out his hand; on reaching the latticed barrier he pushed something through one of the spaces between the metal strips—something that fell with a metallic ring on the concrete floor.

"Take your money, bo," he said. "I don't want that kind of dirt on any coin I got—it's unlucky. I heard them dicks talkin'—they thought I was asleep."

"What did they say? Tell me!" panted Kincaid.

"No—I don't want to talk to your kind," replied the gray-coated one. "But believe me, bo, they said a plenty. If I was you, I'd ask to see the chaplain, and get the load off my mind."

With this advice the gray figure silently shuffled off into the gloom of the outer space. Mr. Kincaid turned to pick up the coin the other prisoner had returned to him. He stooped over to reach it—and suddenly gave a faint shriek and leaped back. He stared at the coin as if fascinated—there was a red finger print upon it.

Kincaid backed away, shivering. Then, with an effort, he pulled his nerves together. He had done nothing—why should he be acting this way? He knew now that he had been made the victim of a common police trick—probably the red paint on the coin was still wet. He would see. Slowly he stepped forward toward the silver dollar. Slowly he forced himself to pick it up and examine it. Well, the paint wasn't wet; the red smear on the coin was dry and hard—and if it was painted, the job had been done by an expert. Kincaid didn't like it. He looked at the coin for some minutes, and then threw it back on the floor. He didn't care to have it in his pocket.

Resuming his pacing back and forth, Kincaid told himself that he was fast becoming a victim of "nerves." He assured himself that the police "had nothing on him." Why, even Brady had admitted that when he had said that he sent him the telegram in St. Louis simply to make him nervous. Hence, it behooved Kincaid to regain control of his nerves, so that he would not again give way to a hysterical outburst, as he had a moment before. And how could he steady his nerves best? By getting some sleep—or at least repose. Removing his necktie and collar, and unbuttoning his vest, he stretched himself upon the table and closed his eyes. The table was hard and uncomfortable, however. He fidgeted about a few minutes, then sat up and took off his coat, rolled it up into a pillow for his head and shoulders, and lay down once more. That made things better, but it also emphasized the fact that the table was so short it permitted his legs to hang down uncomfortably. He got up again and placed the chair so it would support his feet. Then he lay down again and closed his eyes. It

was brutal of the police to treat him so, even if they did suspect him of having made away with Walter Page. When he got out he would see to it that somebody was made to suffer for the indignities and discomforts that had been heaped into his portion.

He opened his eyes to take an inventory of the things of which he could specifically complain, and, to his surprise, found himself in absolute darkness. The arc light overhead had failed evidently. Well, darkness was better for relaxation and for the dozing which he felt would renew his strength of nerve and keenness of wit. So, with a long sigh of relief, he closed his eyes again, snuggled down against his coat, and tried to forget his predicament. Just as he was beginning to feel really sleepy, and to believe that he could take at least a nap, there was a sudden sputtering hiss right above his head. Kincaid leaped up, knocking the chair over as he did so, only to discover that the noise which had so startled him was the arc light flashing on again. He swore under his breath, rearranged the chair for his feet, and once again lay down upon the table. But, though he closed his eyes, his brain had resumed its turmoil again, and he felt less like relaxing than ever. And the arc light sputtered and hissed abominably, sometimes going out for several minutes and again simply flickering on and off as if the wires were broken or breaking somewhere.

The table, too, seemed to grow constantly harder, and his sides and hips commenced to ache. He tossed about on the polished surface of his temporary couch, trying to find a comfortable position. Unable to do this, his wrath rose, and he determined to refuse longer to be treated in such a barbaric fashion. He might be a prisoner, but certainly the police had no right to torture him. Rising from the table, he crossed to the latticed wall of his cage and shouted to the trusty on guard without:

"Hey, you! Call the guard or turnkey or doorman or somebody. I want to register a kick. If they're going to keep me here to-night, I want a bed—they've got no right to treat me this way."

The trusty shouted back from the outer gloom: "Call 'em yourself!"

Kincaid swore, walked to the door through which he had entered, and, grasping the metal slats in his hands, rattled them savagely. Aside from hurting his hands, the exercise seemed to have no effect. And Kincaid rather fancied that he must look a good deal like an angry monkey while he was doing it, and this did not improve his temper any. Finding that rattling the steel door did no good, Kincaid decided to shout. First he called for Brady, then he called "Police!" then he simply shouted oaths—each one specifying more minutely than the one that preceded it what he thought of his captors. This made him thirsty and increased his heart action, but had no further effect. So at last Kincaid stopped and once again called to the trusty:

"Hey, you! You said you were put out there to watch me if I committed suicide. Well, here's your chance to see it. See this pocketknife? I'm going to cut myself with it."

Apparently interested, the trusty rose from his corner and shuffled close to the barrier that separated him from Kincaid. After looking at the knife Kincaid was waving in the air, he grunted.

"You ain't got the nerve to do it," he said, with a sneer. "Maybe you could hit a guy on the back of the head when he wasn't looking, but you wouldn't hurt yourself—and then, that knife isn't sharp."

"Well, you'd better call the bulls, just the same," said Mr. Kincaid, with considerable bravado in his tone. "I'm going to try it, anyhow."

"Go ahead," said the trusty unfeelingly.

Mr. Kincaid stood regarding his penknife for a moment, and then he turned his back to the trusty, made a theatrical motion with his arm, and dropped in a heap upon the floor. There he lay perfectly still, listening for the hurrying footsteps that would signal him that the trusty had believed him

wounded and had gone for aid. But all he heard was a scoffing laugh.

"You're a bum actor," said the trusty, after a moment. "For one thing, you didn't stop to figure that the blade of that knife isn't long enough to do a good job. If you'd really stuck yourself with it, you wouldn't drop the way you did—you'd flop all over the floor like a chicken while you bled to death."

Mr. Kincaid rose and swore fluently. "I don't believe you're a prisoner like me at all," he said. "You don't talk right, and you're too quick to notice things. I think you're a cop."

"Maybe I am," answered the man behind the barrier.

"I knew it," declared Kincaid, as if he was pleased with his discovery. "Well, now you listen to me. You report to your superior officer at once, and tell him that I want to see him. You tell him that I'm being illegally detained here, that there's no charge against me, and that even if there is, I'm being given cruel and unusual punishment in violation of the Constitution of the United States. And when I get out of here I'm going to make you all sweat for it, too. Now, I demand my rights. I want the privilege of calling my attorney, and if I'm going to be kept here I want a place to sleep."

"Your spirit is improving some, isn't it?" said the man outside. "How do you know you're being held here illegally? How do you know you aren't booked 'for investigation'—or that there isn't a charge against you on the blotter? You haven't told me yet when you last saw Walter Page, have you?"

The man outside was evidently an officer. That much was now clear to Mr. Kincaid. And probably he was also noting what Kincaid did, and drawing his conclusions therefrom. Mr. Kincaid saw that he would have to be doubly careful.

"I don't have to talk about Walter Page, do I?" he remonstrated. "Suppose I say that I never saw him, that I don't know him? Or suppose I say I saw him yesterday? What difference does it make? If you haven't got your case against me, what are you holding me here for? If I lie to you about Walter Page, will you get me a comfortable bed to sleep on?"

"If you keep on lying to me, I'll see that you never get a bed—and never get to sleep, either, Kincaid. I've been waiting for just a chance at you—training for it, you might say; and I bet I can stand it longer than you can. Now listen to me: I'll make a bargain with you—I'll tell you, incident by incident, what I've got on you, if you'll tell me in turn, incident by incident, what you know about Walter Page. And when we get through, maybe we'll consider your comfort a little more."

"Who are you, anyway?" asked Kincaid.

"Me? Why, my name's Brady. You came here with me, Mr. Kincaid. And now we're going to begin and get acquainted."

IX.

Mr. Kincaid thought it over. Perhaps it would be well to humor Brady, and find out how much he knew, and what he suspected. He evidently suspected something, else he would not have forced Kincaid away from his hotel the way he did.

"Well, let's start," he said, after some minutes. "Your bargain listens good. You tell me the first incident in your story about this fellow Page, and I'll see if I want to swap reminiscences with you."

"All right; here goes," answered Brady. "Walter Page sent you a letter telling you that if he didn't get five hundred dollars by a certain date he was going to bump himself off. What did you do then?"

So Brady knew about that letter! This was disturbing news to Mr. Kincaid. How did the detective happen to know about it? Had he seen the original letter, or had Page committed suicide as he said he would, and sent a copy of that letter to the police? Or maybe Page had got the check and then had "squealed" to the police. Kincaid wished he knew what had happened; just a little information right now would assist him greatly in framing his

answers. He was so busy considering these possibilities, and the other angles of his predicament, that he didn't realize that he had been silent in reply to Brady's question. Then he suddenly saw that hesitation in answering the detective sergeant would make it appear that he had something to hide. He must say something quickly—why not stick to his denial of any definite knowledge of Page? That, at least, should bring Brady to new tactics.

"I don't know what you're talking about, Brady," he said. "I don't know this Walter Page person. Why do you persist in asking me about him?"

"Because," answered the detective sergeant, "if you don't know him, I can't see why you answered his letter and sent him a check for five hundred dollars."

Mr. Kincaid winced. So Brady knew about the check, too! Oh, well, at least he had something now to work on. And in the matter of checks Mr. Kincaid was accustomed to difficulties and to alibis.

"I didn't send him any check," said Kincaid shortly and positively.

"That's funny—your bank cashed it this morning, and they were quite sure it was your signature, too."

Kincaid actually smiled; it was all clear sailing for him now. "Brady, I give you my word I never wrote any such check," he said. "It must have been a forgery. You know, lately I've had several checks of mine forged that way: I'm beginning to believe that somebody connected with the bank must be using my signature."

Detective Sergeant Brady shook his head. "No, Kincaid," he said, "that doesn't stand to reason. It might in those other cases you speak about—I've heard of them, too—but in regard to this Walter Page check there isn't one chance in ten thousand for a forgery."

"Why not?" asked Kincaid, feeling more sure of himself every minute.

"No, not one chance in ten thousand, and I'll tell you why: This check, Kincaid, was written on a new-style blank—the bank had just got them out for their lady customers. Ten thousand of those new check books were delivered to the bank the day before you went to St. Louis, and none of them was given out until after you got back. And yet I know that you had one of these books with you—you were the only man who had one of those books outside of the bank, hence you were the only man who could write a check on one of those new forms and mail it to Page from St. Louis. You see, Kincaid, when you swiped that book out of President Graham's office the morning you were kicking about the transfer of your account, you sort of slipped a cog."

"That doesn't prove that somebody in the bank didn't forge the check," argued Kincaid, with all the boldness that he could assume.

"No, *that* doesn't prove it, Kincaid. But something else does—the other nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine checks are still intact in the bank—held there by my orders. So *that* rather knocks your forgery alibi into a cocked hat, doesn't it?"

Mr. Kincaid had to admit to himself that Brady was stating the case very fairly. His usual alibi surely wouldn't work this time. Just how Brady had found all these things out Kincaid couldn't quite understand, but it was evident that Brady had found out considerable. Probably he knew more, too—he didn't impress Kincaid as being the sort of a man who would tell all he knew. Yet Kincaid couldn't see anything in all this that dealt directly with Walter Page or when he had seen him last.

"What's all that got to do with Walter Page, anyway?" he asked.

"That's what we want to find out," said Brady in reply. "When did you see Walter Page last?"

Mr. Kincaid yawned—not from ennui, but because he couldn't help it. He was very tired, and the persistently repeated question about Walter Page simply served to impress his own fatigue upon his brain. He was also sleepy, and didn't feel able to deal adequately with the problem in hand. Evidently the police knew of the letter Walter had sent him, and of the check

he had sent Walter. In view of that, would he be injuring his standing if he admitted his dealings with Page more than a year ago? He yawned again while he was trying to decide this point.

"Why do you want to know?" Kincaid finally asked.

Brady answered slowly, as if weighing each word: "Well, it's this way: You are about the only man who'd have a motive for murdering Page, and from what I can find out about you, you're just the sneaking sort of a fellow who'd commit a cowardly murder if he committed any at all."

"You charge me with murdering Page? Why, that is ridiculous. You told me yourself that Page hadn't been seen for two days, and two days ago I was in St. Louis." Mr. Kincaid was righteously indignant.

"So *you* say," admitted Brady grudgingly. "But how are you going to prove it? You've been working this double-identity stunt so much, Kincaid, being one Theodore Kincaid in one place and another Theodore Kincaid in another, that it's going to be mighty hard for you to prove which Kincaid you were when you had dealings with Page. I don't think you've got any alibi at all, myself."

Mr. Kincaid considered this. He could see where his ever-ready alibi of "somebody must have used my name" might be embarrassing in this case, when he wanted to prove his St. Cloud Hotel identity of respectability. He wondered how much Brady knew about that, too, and decided to find out.

"What do you mean, Brady, when you say my 'double-identity stunt?' To hear you talk, one would think I was a criminal of some kind. I haven't done anything. And, what's more, this farce has gone far enough—I want to be given my constitutional privileges. I want to see my lawyer, and I want to be treated decently."

"My, my! You want a lot, don't you? And you the only man with a motive for getting poor little Walter Page out of the way. When did you see Page last time? You tell me that, and I'll give you your constitutional rights, all right."

Mr. Kincaid was very tired, very worried, and quite sleepy. He thought hastily, weighed his answer as best as his confused wits and emotions would permit, and finally decided that above everything else he wanted peace and quiet and an end to this ceaseless questioning. And, anyway, the police could come pretty near to proving that he sent a check to Page, so he might as well admit knowing him. Men don't send checks to total strangers.

"I'll tell you when I saw Page last," he said. "It was a little over a year ago. He and I had some business dealings. I sold him the State agency for a cigar lighter. But he didn't know how to boost the thing, and he hollered. Finally he wrote me that letter to St. Louis, saying he was discouraged, and talking about suicide. So I sent him that check—gave him his money back. There was nothing wrong in that, was there?"

"And you haven't seen him since?" asked Brady, as if doubting Kincaid's word.

"As God is my judge, Brady, I haven't seen him since."

"Will you write that down and sign it?" asked the detective.

X.

Mr. Kincaid took alarm again. What had he said? Had he trapped himself, that Brady should be so anxious for him to put it down in black and white? He had simply said he hadn't seen Walter Page for a year. Why should Brady think that important? He recalled each word he had uttered, weighed them. And he could see nothing in the admission that would give Brady the advantage of him.

"Yes, I'll write that down and sign it," he said, a moment later, reassuring himself by the thought that he had repaid Page his money.

"Just a minute till I get some paper," said Brady, and he vanished into the gloom beyond the barrier. Kincaid heard a door shut somewhere, and dur-

ing the moments that followed he thought over his predicament once again. As far as he could see, he would not be jeopardizing himself by making the statement Brady seemed to want; and he might thereby clear himself of this evident suspicion of being connected with a homicide case to which Brady and the other men had alluded. A rattling of keys in the latticed door of his cage told him that Brady was returning, and he looked up to see the detective sergeant enter, followed by two uniformed policemen.

"These boys, here, will witness what you write," said Brady, placing a sheet of paper and his fountain pen on the table before Kincaid. "Now you write what you just told me."

Mr. Kincaid took up the pen and looked at the paper. Brady yawned, the two policemen yawned, and Mr. Kincaid yawned, too. This reminded him of the fact that he was very tired and that his ordeal had been very exhausting, and he yawned again. Then he leaned forward and wrote:

The last time that I saw Walter Page was at the cigar store where he is engaged as a clerk, about one year ago. I sold him the State agency for a patented cigar lighter for five hundred dollars. Later Page was dissatisfied with the deal, and wrote me asking me to return the money. I sent him five hundred dollars as soon as he asked for it, for I always want people to feel that I am on the square.

"There!" said Kincaid, turning to Brady. "Does that suit you?"

Detective Sergeant Brady read the words on the sheet of paper, and slowly shook his head.

"Not quite, Kincaid. You'd better add onto that something about the fact that when you had this deal with Page you were wearing a mustache and a Vandyke beard. You were, you know. And it will help you to an alibi in this other matter."

Mr. Kincaid stuck his tongue in his cheek. Brady evidently did know some other things, aside from those he revealed. But what difference did it make? He had repaid the five hundred dollars to Page, so that showed he hadn't meant to cheat him. He picked up the pen and added another paragraph to his statement:

When I had dealings with Walter Page I was wearing a mustache and a Vandyke beard. Also I was somewhat stouter than I am at present.

"That ought to cover it all, Brady. Shall I sign it now?"

Again the detective sergeant shook his head. "Just a little bit more, Kincaid, and then we'll let you go to bed and rest. But we want to get this thing right. You'd better add on there that the beard and mustache were false—that they were curled-hair 'make-up;' and that after you left the store where Page was, you pulled the stuff off, so that you were smooth shaved when you got back to your hotel."

"But I gave him his money back," shouted Kincaid, who now had a glimmering of what was in the wind. "You can't hang anything on me in his case—I squared him as soon as he hollered."

Detective Sergeant Brady smiled. "Sure, I know that," he said. "And that being the case, why shouldn't you be willing to admit that for reasons of your own you wore curled hair when you went to see him first? The more of the truth you tell about your dealings with Page, the better chance have you got to get clear of this other thing. A coroner's jury will be a whole lot more inclined to believe a man who tells the truth about something he did a year ago and then squared up than they will be to believe a man who is evidently trying to cover up something. And, as you say, you gave him his money back, so there's nothing wrong."

Mr. Kincaid considered the matter carefully; but even while he was doing this he noticed that Brady and the two policemen were yawning. He yawned himself, shrugged his shoulders, and bent over the paper once again, adding:

The beard and mustache were false. I was formerly an actor, and am familiar with make-up. I wore false whiskers when dealing with Page because I thought he was the kind of a man who would be more favorably impressed by a salesman of mature years. The whiskers made me look several years older. After I had closed the deal I

discarded them. But just as soon as Page complained that he was not satisfied, I gave him his money back, for I always want my customers to feel they have been treated right. THEODORE KINCAID.

Brady looked at the statement and nodded his head; then, turning to the two policemen, he said:

"Now we'll put a date on that, and you two boys sign it as witnesses. Step up, Bill, and put your John Henry on that—and you, too, Ed. And as for you, Kincaid, you can have all your constitutional rights now, and welcome."

When the statement had been witnessed, Brady picked it up, folded it slowly, and put it in his pocket. Then he smiled broadly.

"Take him downstairs and lock him up, boys," he said. "I'll book him—grand larceny and obtaining money under false pretenses."

The policeman yawned and reached forward toward Kincaid's shoulders. But he jerked himself away, and faced Detective Sergeant Brady.

"Where do you get that stuff?" he cried. "I gave him his money back, didn't I? What are you trying to do, anyway?"

"Don't you worry your head about Page any more, Kincaid," calmly answered Brady, reaching in his vest pocket for a cigar. "He's all right—he's off on his honeymoon now with the five hundred bucks that I made you dig up and give back to him. I dictated that letter he wrote to you—you see, I'd doped out what you did, and how you did it, but I couldn't prove it. Now I've got your own statement as to your method of working—false whiskers to conceal your identity when you wanted an alibi. Now we'll take you up first on the gypping you gave the Citizens' Bank; and if we can't get a conviction on that, we'll try you for declaring that your own checks on the Third National were forgeries. And if that doesn't work, I guess we can get Zimmermann & Zeidick to prosecute you for what you did to their diamond salesman. But I reckon we won't have much trouble with you, now that we've got you to admit the whiskers—it will be easy enough to identify you after that. Run along with the boys, now, and get a good sleep; I'll leave word for them not to call you until late."

Mr. Kincaid grew very pale. "Then all this stuff you said about Page and a homicide case," he said, in a shaking voice, "that was all——"

"That was all a bluff, my boy, to throw you off your guard. You see, I figured that to get you to show yourself up I'd have to get you badly rattled. So first I sent you that telegram; then I had Page write to you; and then I took you in charge myself and scared you to death. And I guess I handled you about right, didn't I?"

To himself Mr. Kincaid admitted that Brady was right. But he still thirsted for more information; for future reference he wanted to see wherein his scheming had failed.

"What put you next, Brady?" he asked.

The detective sergeant lighted his cigar and blew a few deep puffs at the sputtering arc light.

"I'll tell you what put me next, Kincaid," he finally said. "After the district attorney told me about you, and the trouble you'd given his boys, I looked you up in the 'picture books,' just on a chance. And I found you in there, too—from the time you were arrested in Chicago for skipping out with the box-office receipts of a show troupe you were handling in '95. So I figured it out that if you were an actor, you'd probably use some disguise when you were working your graft. And all your victims said you had a kinkly beard and mustache, and that you were a pompous-looking guy. The kinkly face trimmings was easy to dope out—curled hair on a fish-glue mold, that you could slip off easy. And the pompousness was easy, too, for an actor—all you had to do was to throw your stomach out and your head up and act haughty. The disguise could be easily ditched. And it seemed to answer. So when I had Page write to you, I had him say that he'd followed you from the bank to the hotel, and that he knew

what you did between the two places. I figured that if you were working as I thought you were, you'd fall for that. And you did. I suppose you stepped into an alley to pull your whiskers off, didn't you? And then went on as the 'honest' Kincaid that lived at the St. Cloud. And after you sent Page back his money I knew you were scared and guilty—so all I had to do then was to get you to admit it. I had you right, didn't I?"

"Pretty nearly right, Brady; all but one thing. I didn't step into any alley to pull my whiskers off—just mopped my face with my handkerchief as I walked along. Out in the open like that, nobody would notice it; and, anyway, the people coming toward me would only get one look before they got by. I thought the very boldness and simplicity of the game would get me by."

Brady laughed. "It did, Kincaid, it did—until I got after you. And I'll tell you this, too: if you'd used straight hair sometimes, instead of curled hair all the time, even I mightn't have tumbled. You'll learn in time, Kincaid, that variety pays in all things, even in your line of work. You had a good line, but you worked it to death. Now go on with the boys, and enjoy your constitutional rights."

SAVING HOUSTON'S MONEY

DAVID F. HOUSTON, secretary of agriculture, has less to say about himself than any man in public life. His reputation for "close-mouthness" was established at the time of his appointment to the Wilson cabinet, and has grown rapidly since. The most interesting demonstration of his ability to say nothing at the right moment was made known recently at a private dinner in Washington. The victim of his policy of silence was Logan Waller Page, chief of the office of good roads in the department of agriculture.

Page, who is an old friend of Houston's, received a letter from him a few days before the inaugural ceremonies. The writer requested the bureau chief to reserve rooms for him at some hotel. The Washingtonian inquired about rates at three big hostelries, flinched when he was told, and promptly made an arrangement for two small rooms at modest prices in an unpretentious caravansary.

He wrote a report of his activities to Houston, explaining the economy, and offering to obtain for the visitor seats on a reviewing stand from which he might witness the inaugural parade. He received a prompt letter of cordial thanks for the reservation of rooms and a courteous declination of the "bleacher seats."

On the day before the change of administration, Page was one of a little party of officials gathered in the office of ex-Secretary Wilson. There was much speculation about the incoming president's choice of a new head for the department of agriculture. Finally the outgoing secretary said he had heard that a man named Houston was to be appointed. Pressed for further information, the secretary stated that he understood the mysterious unknown was a native of North Carolina, a former president of the University of Texas, and at present connected with the Washington University in St. Louis.

Whereupon Logan Waller Page leaped to his feet and kicked over his chair in an ascent toward the ceiling.

"Give me air!" he pleaded. "Give me air—and lots of it!"

He did not stop to explain his dementia to his startled associates. He made a flying leap from the building, raced to the biggest hotel in Washington, and reserved the most expensive suite he could find in the name of "David F. Houston, Secretary of Agriculture."

Scorpion Stings

By J. Frank Davis

Author of "Garland: Ranger Service," "The Courage of Fear," Etc.

A comedy-drama which might be entitled "In Search of an American Heir"—with Colonel Buck Leonard, of San Antonio, behind the scenes

THERE are twenty-three reasons why I expect to win this last pot," remarked Buck Leonard, in a confidential voice, "twenty-two of them being that I need the money."

"Handsome is as handsome does," said the city marshal sententiously, riffling the cards.

"Pride goeth before a fall, and a busted flush played foolish before destruction," added Doc Milliken. "Personally, I don't care if you never win again; you've done it too often."

"Thanks for those kind words," murmured Buck, squaring his cards preparatory to taking a look at them. "As a matter of fact, I haven't been able to put it over you in more than a week, and you know it, you bald-headed stingin' lizard! Is anybody ahead of me openin' it?"

"Not little Jimmie," remarked Jim Sweetland.

"I might," said Carroll Emery. "Yes, notwithstanding the smallness of this pair, I'll do it. She's off for a small, brown chip, which gives everybody a chance to come in cheap."

"That makes me look 'em over," declared Buck gayly. He carefully inspected his cards. Three of them were eights. He thoughtfully surveyed the pot and the faces of his fellow players.

"Well," he remarked, "it's all in the draw. I might better these, and then again I mightn't. I'll make it cost five so as to drive doc and the other pikers out of it."

"You're an old crook!" declared Doc Milliken, without rancor, "and you're tryin' to run a whizzer. Hence and therefore I shall remain. On second thought, I shall do more. It will cost you five extra to remain in and draw cards. I do this not to keep anybody out—on the contrary, I want everybody in—but merely because you called me a stingin' lizard, and I propose to prove it and sting you good."

The city marshal looked at his hand and ditched it reluctantly. "I hate to throw these away," he confessed, "but neither of you has a good reputation as regards honesty in the community in which you live."

Sweetland threw his hand into the discard in eloquent silence.

"I," declared Carroll Emery, "am about to retire, for strategical reasons, to a previously prepared position. I'll show my openers when this cruel war is over; they ain't much. Pass!"

"Well, doc," said Buck, "the pikers having done what we expected, we'll make this a sociable little party by raising it another ten."

Doc Milliken, with a delighted grin, saw the ten and pushed forward all the chips he had in front of him.

"I think there's about twenty-five in the wad," he said. "I'll shoot it."

The game being the usual Texas "table stakes," Leonard could do nothing more than see Milliken's raise. He did so promptly, violently bemoaning the fact that fate prevented him raising it still further.

"Cheer up! You ain't as sorry as I am," said Doc Milliken. To the city marshal, making ready to deal the

cards for the draw, he added: "I could draw three, but I won't take but two."

"Better take all you need; he ain't comin' but once," advised Buck. "Don't want any more, eh? That proves I had you sized right; three littie bittie ones." He threw his three eights face up on the table. "Give me two cards—mostly eights," he demanded.

The cards fell—a queen and a deuce.

"Beat three eights and take it away. You can't!" Buck railed.

Milliken nonchalantly tossed face up a hand that contained three tens, an ace, and a nine.

"There's your receipt, signed, sealed, and delivered," he grinned, scooping in the chips. "I knew yours weren't much good. And the next time you address an older man than you are, be respectful, darn it! 'Stingin' lizard!'"

Leonard leaned over and inspected the three tens minutely. "I'd rather have your luck than a license to steal!" he snorted. "'Stingin' lizard!' You're an ol' scorpion, that's what you are, and one of these evenings anon—as they say in the books—I'm goin' to swat you and swat you good."

The city marshal, ignoring this interchange of compliments, prepared, in his capacity of banker, to cash the outstanding chips. The players moved back, stretched, lighted cigarettes, exchanged small talk preparatory to separating for the night.

"Where's young Dave Gray these days?" asked Jim Sweetland idly. "I ain't seen him, seem's to me, in a month."

"I met Jim Thorpe's girl down to the post office this evenin'," said Doc Milliken, with seeming irrelevance.

"He's up to Santone, I hear," responded the city marshal to Sweetland's question. "Immersed in a whirl of fashion and swell duds, so I'm given to understand."

Buck Leonard was rolling a cigarette, his peaked hat on the back of his head, his recent experience with Doc Milliken's three tens apparently already forgotten. Without any emphasis that might lead his companions to guess a connection between what they had just said and his words, he remarked:

"I don't reckon I'll be around for two or three nights. And I ask the prayers and best wishes of the brethren present. I am going on a dangerous journey to a great and wicked city."

"Buck must be goin' to Santone to tell a side-show man how to run his performance," laughed the marshal, who had heard some of the details of one of the colonel's experiences the spring before from their friend, the San Antonio chief of police, and had lost no time passing the story along to the coterie that gathered nightly in Doc Milliken's office.

"More dangerous than that," commented Buck. "I'm fixin' to set forth on the most hazardous undertakin' known to contemporaneous science. I'm goin' to stick my fingers into another man's business."

The Honourable Laura Paget—it must be spelled with a "u"—was the daughter of an hundred earls. David Gray was the descendant—to go into the matter as deeply as he knew—of one pioneer, one desperado, one sergeant in old General Zachary Taylor's army, two cowboys, and one cattleman—a cattleman being an ex-cowboy with a flourishing bank account.

He was twenty-four and an orphan. He owned a twenty-thousand-acre farm and many horses and steers, and he could write checks that would be perfectly good totaling almost seven figures. He could ride and shoot; he could wear evening clothes and dance; he had been East to college and West to see the country; and he knew quite a number of things about quite a number of subjects—none of them being women. He thought, for instance, that the Honourable Laura Paget was about his own age, or a little younger.

In him the mixture of pioneer, bad man, soldier, and cow-punchers had flowered to make a man. The blood of an hundred earls in her—perhaps the number wasn't really as great as an

hundred—had grown thin; the once great family had petered out and gone to seed. More to the point, a procession of dissolute title holders had played hob with the family possessions.

She was adventuring in America, and her adventures were aimed at finding a husband who should have wealth and not be too impossible; many a male scion of nobility has adventured similarly, and successfully.

She was a tourist, pausing in Texas to break the monotony and tedium of the journey east from the California fairs, and she remained in San Antonio because the atmosphere of the city was new and interesting. Also because her Uncle Lionel, her partner in the hunt, had told her the exchequer was getting so low they must remain in one place until in some manner he could replenish it. Also—but this was not at the very first, of course—because of David Gray.

Texas is inclined to take people at their own rating until they prove the contrary. Neither Laura nor Lionel was so foolish as to give undue emphasis to their line of illustrious forbears, but their obvious sophistication and breeding seemed to speak for themselves; they made valuable acquaintances promptly and unostentatiously. Some one, within a week of their arrival, asked them if they wouldn't like to shoot quail. They would. This some one knew the birds were thick on David Gray's ranch in Salado County, twenty miles from Mendon, and also knew David Gray. Arrangements for the hunting party were easily made. It included the English folk, two or three San Antonians, Gray himself, and a couple of Mendonites invited by him to help entertain the guests—Colonel Buck Leonard and his widowed sister.

Mary Thorpe was not one of the party. This was not surprising, because young Gray did not organize it. If he had, no doubt she would have been included; she had been included in most of his social affairs heretofore. Her father's ranch adjoined his. They had grown up together. They had been away to school at about the same time. He had been paying more or less attention to her all the days of his life; which, perhaps, explains why he did not quite appreciate her. He had come to take Mary as a matter of course; he had not even noticed, lately, how remarkably pretty she was.

So Mary Thorpe, from her window in Mendon—neither old Jim Thorpe nor David Gray lived on the ranches which provided them their principal income—saw the San Antonio party, that had come in on the evening train the day before, set out from the hotel southward for its day's hunting. She observed, from that distance, that the Englishman was ruddy and blond and most correctly dressed in hunting togs, and that the English girl was extraordinarily finished looking. Even from that distance she sensed that there was much artistry in Miss Paget's ensemble, and guessed her real age—almost. This while David, who had met the visitors for the first time the evening before, was commenting inwardly on Laura's wonderful complexion. Born and reared in a country where semi-tropic suns and Mexican customs have combined to make even the nicest of young women sometimes rouge a little, he was still no judge of such art as hers.

Colonel Leonard's sister stopped off at the Gray ranch house to superintend the getting of lunch, and David and his visitors continued in the two automobiles. The forenoon's sport was quite satisfactory, although the English people had difficulty getting used to quail hunting without dogs, and, for that matter, to the Mexican blue quail, which fly only over the nearest mesquite bush and then run out of range like race horses. Shooting birds on the ground seemed unsportsmanlike to them until they realized that only a quick and accurate shot could get them even thus.

After lunch, they sat on the gallery of the ranch house awaiting the cool of the late afternoon. The house had not been occupied of late. A scorpion, disturbed by this visitation to a place that he had come to regard as his per-

sonal property, ran down a pillar, across the shoulder that was leaning against it, down the sleeve that hung from that shoulder, and was scurrying across Lionel Paget's knee, its tail poised over its back, and its vicious sting vibrating, when it came within range of his vision. He struck at it and brushed it from his knee. Once in fifty times, perhaps, a man might do this and not be stung. Paget's experience came under the forty and nine.

He stood the pain with fortitude. The cry that he gave as the poison was driven into his hand was not loud, and thereafter he shut his teeth hard and made no complaint, although the torture of a scorpion sting in its earliest stages is almost unbearable. At his exclamation the others looked quickly toward him. Buck Leonard put his foot on the racing insect, now thrown to the gallery floor, and called promptly to his sister.

"Get the ammonia!" he shouted. "Mr. Paget's got bit by a scorp'. She'll be here in a minute," he assured the Englishman. "Nothing as good as concentrated ammonia for scorpions. Hurts quite some, don't it?"

Paget was very white. "It *is* a bit painful," he admitted. "If I could have a—a little spirits. It's very foolish, I dare say, but I feel—er—a trifle faint."

Buck supplied the need from a flask in the automobile. The sweat was standing out on Paget's forehead; his eyes winced with the excruciating pain. Buck's sister had brought a bottle of ammonia, without which no wise man or woman travels in south Texas, and was sopping it on the swollen spot where the quarter-inch spike of the insect had left its mark.

"Is it—er—dangerous?" Paget asked, calmly enough, after a moment.

David Gray answered him: "Not at all—at least not to a grown person in good health. An anæmic person or a small child—especially if the sting were near an artery, might be in danger from it. You'll be all right—in a surprisingly short time, too. You'll have forgotten it in an hour."

Paget smiled with an effort. "Thank you," he said, "but I'm sure you are mistaken as to that last statement. I may get over it, but I shall never forget it."

The first part of the prophecy came true, however, to his unalloyed surprise. Within a half hour the acuteness of his pain had vanished; within an hour, except for some soreness and a feeling of numbness in his hand, he was quite as well as ever.

He rode in the motor with the San Antonio friends and Colonel Leonard, returning to Mendon across the slanting afternoon sun. Miss Paget accepted David Gray's invitation to be a passenger in his car. He was tremendously impressed with the cleanness, the freshness, the high-bred voice and manner of the English girl. For one thing, he had never met a woman who seemed quite so well groomed. When she tentatively asked why he didn't return with them to San Antonio on the following day he accepted the suggestion with almost pathetic eagerness.

Undoubtedly she, too, was impressed with Gray's fine, upstanding manliness. He was an attractive boy—and she was a connoisseur. But it is no more than fair to state that she and her uncle had gone to some pains, immediately after receiving the shooting-party invitation, to look up the name of David Gray in that valuable and much-read volume known as Dunstreet's Report. Attractive boys—as attractive boys merely—had long since ceased to especially interest her.

Gray went to San Antonio on the following day, and he did not return, except for a few hours a couple of days later to pack a lot of clothes. He was not really neglecting his affairs in doing this; the cattle business, under the same superintendent who had served his father for years, ran itself so far as David was concerned, and the position that he held as a director in the Mendon State Bank, of which Colonel Leonard was president, called for no work on his part—he held it because his father's estate had been a

heavy owner in the bank and he succeeded the parent as a director as a matter of course.

Buck Leonard, a week later, stood in the bank one afternoon, holding in his hand a bit of paper that had chanced to fall under his eye. It was a check signed by David Gray, payable to the order of Lionel St. J. Paget, for five hundred dollars. For several minutes he stood in thought, turning the slip over and over in his fingers. The result of his musings, because he liked David Gray very, very much, was that he took train the following morning for San Antonio, and so planned his program that just before lunch time he ran into Gray by apparent accident and they ate together.

He did not beat about the bush when once he decided the moment was propitious for introducing the subject.

"I see a check of yours yesterday made to our English friend," he remarked. "Investment or loan?"

"Why, colonel, that's——" the boy began, flushing.

"Your business, of course. But no harm in askin'—especially if it's investment. You've taken my advice a good many times on business matters. No need to get especially het up about it, is there?"

"I wasn't going to say it wasn't your business," David explained, not very convincingly. "As a matter of fact, I don't mind telling you it was merely a little loan. The war has raised Ned with getting remittances from investments in England. I just let Paget have it for a fortnight or so until he should get funds from his agents."

"I see." Buck finished his demitasse and paid the check. "What is his business?" he asked casually.

"Huh? Oh, Paget's? He hasn't any. Estates, trust funds, and all that sort of thing, you know. He's what the English call a gentleman. You know he's the younger brother of an earl."

"No, I didn't. Well, well, that's certainly interestin'. Handsome young lady, Miss Paget. Traveled around a lot, too. Pretty good company, I guess."

"They're both mighty interesting people," replied David, rising. Buck observed that the lad avoided specific discussion of the girl, and that his voice held a self-conscious note.

"They're shorely that," agreed the elder man. "These earls and dooks are all interestin'—some of 'em one way; some of 'em another. I met up with quite a few of 'em the last time I was over; they were on the board of directors of that oil syndicate I was doin' business with."

It appeared David was going with Miss Paget that afternoon to play golf at the Country Club. Buck remained on the loggia of the hotel until she and Gray came out, and renewed his acquaintance with the girl—"paying his respects," he told her, with flattering old-fashioned courtesy. She responded to his geniality, chatting brightly; Buck Leonard poses in Texas as a very rough, crude person indeed, but when he sets out to make friends with those who live in the great cities, even the most polished find him an agreeable companion.

The Englishwoman and Gray drove away finally, and for some time Leonard remained on the loggia, his eyes narrowed on distance, as though at fifty yards he would try to read the inscription on the Confederate monument in the park across the way. He finally rose with the air of having come to a definite conclusion, went into the writing room, and labored over a message, mentally anathematizing the war regulations that made the use of a cipher code impossible.

He filed, a half hour later, a cablegram addressed to an individual whose office is in the City, in London. It asked all possible information regarding the character and responsibility of the Pagets, and suggested a reply by mail. Time would be lost thus, but again the censorship interfered to prevent any reply by cable that all the world might not read.

With the feeling that he had done all that he could do at the moment, Buck

philosophically put the matter out of his mind as much as possible, and returned to Mendon.

A few days later, as he sat dictating letters in his little room in the bank, David Gray entered. The boy was down, it appeared, for only a few hours. Buck dismissed his stenographer and gossiped. David was alert, cheerful, laughing; obviously in very good spirits. Leonard tactfully led the conversation to the subject of the Pagets.

"Still lingerin' in San 'Ntonio, like winter in the lap of spring, are they?" he commented. "Nice, pleasant people."

"Did you ever see such courtesy, such smoothness, such—er—polish?" demanded the boy, with an air that implied he knew his words to be lame and insufficient. "I tell you, Colonel Buck, meeting people like that shows us how crude we Americans are—especially we in Texas."

"I s'pose so. I s'pose so," admitted Buck. "I reckon it's the years of trainin' that are back of it. These earls that were the ancestors of the Pagets were bein' waited on by servants when our great-great-granddaddies were rustlin' to get three square meals a day—and lucky if they got two. And yet—your grandpa and mine might have et with their knives, or even with their fingers, once in a while, but they were pretty good sort of people, Dave. Pretty good sort of people."

"Oh, I'm not knocking my own folks, colonel; you know that. I'm not saying a word against Texas or Texas people. But you can't help, when you see folks like these, wishing we were a little smoother—now can you, colonel? Miss Paget, now—wonderful's the only word to express her ways. Wonderful!"

"Uh-huh," agreed Buck. "I guess you're right. Wonderful—and smooth."

If there was any significance in this choice of words, there was none in Buck's voice, and young Gray did not notice it. He went on to speak of the difficulties of Englishmen abroad getting their income from overseas. Paget, it seemed, had not yet received his expected remittance from home.

"Of course I have told him to call on me if he needs another little loan," the boy said. "Just imagine how we would feel if we were in England and couldn't get hold of a cent of our own money—as a lot of Americans were when the war broke out, you remember."

"It shore would be uncomfortable," Buck acquiesced. "There ain't no question, of course, about this feller bein' good for any reasonable loan? You've looked him up, I s'pose. Know about how he and his niece are rated over there and so on?"

Gray stiffened at the reference to the girl in such a connection. "Certainly not!" he replied. "There are some people that do not have to be looked up. It would be an insult to Miss Paget to doubt her word."

"Don't get touchy, son!" warned Buck, smiling. "No harm meant shorely. I wouldn't go to say anything against one of your friends. And she is a pretty good friend, I take it."

"I never had a better. And——" he hesitated, then went on impulsively. "I hope—I'd like—oh, it sounds conceited on my part, colonel, but I want to tell somebody, and you're my friend and dad's friend. Perhaps, some day, I might dare ask her to——"

Buck's smile was more affectionate than tolerant. "I see. Well, I won't say I hadn't rather you'd set your mind on some of our own kind of people—some nice Texas girl, for example. I'm never quite so sure of these smooth, polished foreigners."

"You're a good old scout," laughed the boy, "but old-fashioned. You don't see these things just like we young men do."

"Uh-huh," admitted Buck. "I'm shore some old, like you say. Gee, how the years do pass! Me, I'm most forty-six."

Letters from England take about twice as long to reach their American destination as in former and happier

years, a fact explained by the gummed label that now seals one side of the envelope, bearing the inscription: "Opened by Censor." Therefore, nearly three weeks had elapsed before to Buck came the following from his friend in the City:

DEAR COLONEL LEONARD: Receipt of your cablegram of the twenty-fifth ultimo is hereby acknowledged.

It is somewhat embarrassing to reply to your inquiries, inasmuch as were the writer to answer with any note of mystery or avoidance of the names involved, the letter might come under suspicion of the authorities as dealing with an improper subject, and fail to reach its destination. Therefore it will be necessary to mention names and complete detail. Were it not for the extreme obligation under which the writer is to you for the kind warning that you at one time gave him when the matter of a certain Texas syndicate was under consideration, which saved him and his associates considerable sums, the temptation would be great to ask to be excused from this task. Therefore I sincerely trust you will find it possible, in whatever use you may make of this information, to keep its source confidential, and perhaps you will find it consistent to destroy this letter.

Lionel St. John Paget, so far as birth is concerned, is exactly what he claims to be as indicated by your cablegram. I regret to be obliged to state, however, that he was allowed to resign his commission with the British army in India following an unpleasant incident in the Officers' Club at Delhi, in which he was actually caught cheating at cards. I might say, in justice to him, that his temptation to do this probably came from the dissipation of the family fortune, which has been practically nonexistent for a number of years.

He is naturally not persona grata in England, and has spent his time since in other countries. I am informed on good authority that he has been in America for the past four years, and a year or so ago he had certain relations with the Mexican general, Villa, as a result of which he was given a concession to sell mine explosives in the state of Chihuahua. Before he could profit much from this, I am informed, General Villa lost caste in America, and Captain Paget found himself out of employment.

It is a very delicate matter to refer to Miss Paget, who is said to be a very beautiful and talented woman. It has been reported that she has aimed to recoup the family fortunes by a foreign alliance. She was engaged to be married, about five years ago, to a young Australian farmer of means, named John Radford. He had business difficulties, and lost a great deal of money, whereupon she is said to have jilted him rather cruelly. The young man committed suicide. It was soon after this that the Pagets went to America.

The writer sincerely trusts this letter gives you the information you need, and begs to assure you he holds pleasant recollections of his acquaintance with you, which he hopes to renew if, when the war is over, you ever visit England again or he is ever able to get out to Texas.

Colonel Buck read the letter a second time, not observing that his stenographer, her hands full of papers, stood in the doorway of his private office. Then he gave way to a bad habit he had learned in younger ranching days, when only steers were in hearing, and spoke aloud.

"No use!" he said. "It wouldn't do any good and would only make him mad."

"What, sir?" inquired the stenographer.

"I was just soliloquizing, Miss Annie, about a friend of mine. I was sort of thinkin' about getting him bitten by a dog."

"I see," said the girl.

"Bet you eight to one you don't." He smiled up into her puzzled face. "Therefore you can bring your book, and we'll settle down to the cheerless toil of the grinding day."

"Colonel Buck," she confided to the bookkeeper, an hour later, "talks queerer and queerer every day of his life. He told me just now he was fixin' to get a friend of his bitten by a dog."

The bookkeeper looked out from under his eye shade and made a remark that struck Miss Annie as being fully as cryptic as the one she had quoted.

"If I had to get bit," he said, "I'd rather it would be a dog bit me than Colonel Buck."

Meantime, the colonel read the English letter a third time, made brief memoranda from it in a little, red notebook that he carried in his pocket, and carefully destroyed the communication. Then he put his affairs in order for a day or two. That night he forgathered with Doc Milliken and the others at the doctor's office and held three eights, with three tens in Milliken's hand against them, as has been

already recounted. The following morning early, he again went to San Antonio, this time in his automobile.

Early in the afternoon, without having seen David Gray, Buck was riding in the touring car on a road that led west from the city, with an erect, rather handsome, florid-faced man whose hair always gave one the impression that he had but a moment before brushed it. It had been an easy matter to get Captain Paget to accept his invitation to go for a ride. Colonel Leonard was a genial and well-liked soul, to say nothing of being a bank president.

They were rolling along a curving road four or five miles from the city when a jack rabbit, hopping across the path before them, cocked an ear to the pur of the oncoming car and set out in prodigious leaps to get as far away from there as possible in the briefest possible time.

"See the jack!" exclaimed Buck, rising in the tonneau. As he rose he drew a pistol from an unseen holster under his coat. As he drew it he fired, almost before the muzzle was clear of the holster. As he fired the rabbit seemed to stop in the middle of a bound and plowed limp along the ground.

"It's a shame to shoot a jack, but I just couldn't resist the temptation," grinned Buck, replacing the pistol almost as rapidly as he had drawn it, while the car rolled on without a pause. "He was goin' so fast I just nachully had to."

There was admiration in Paget's smile. "Rather wonderful shooting, I should call that," he said.

"Oh, we Texans learn to shoot," said Buck. "Besides, I was in the Ranger service once, you know." He sank back on the seat and resumed the desultory conversation where the rabbit had interrupted it.

They came, after a time, to a steep little hill with a stone hunting lodge on the top of it, and Buck ordered the chauffeur to stop the car that they might enjoy the view. Far off to one side the sky was zigzagged by the pleasing blue contours of the Boerne Hills; on the other lay spread the buildings of the city, blurred in outline and color by distance and sunshine.

"Pretty city, ain't it?" said Buck. "Too bad you've got to leave so soon."

"I beg pardon?"

"Didn't you tell me you was goin' East to-night? You and Miss Paget?"

"I don't know what you mean, colonel. You must have misunderstood me. I don't remember saying anything whatever that could have sounded like that."

"Billy," said Buck to the chauffeur, "there's a little largish stone off to the left here about seventy-five or a hundred and twenty yards that I wish you'd find and bring over here to me, so I can show it to Mr. Paget. It's laying over there at the foot of a mesquite bush. A kind of bluish stone, with pink lines in it—or yellow. If you don't find it under a mesquite bush, look under a live-oak tree. It's a rather larger stone than you'd expect, or maybe squarer. You keep lookin' until I holler to you; then you'll know you've found it."

The chauffeur, who apparently could not be surprised at anything Colonel Buck did or said, slid out from under the steering wheel and set forth without a backward look.

"What is all this about?" asked Paget, plainly nonplused. "What is this talk about a—a bluish stone?"

Buck was following the figure of his chauffeur with an appraising eye. "He's getting too fat, anyway," he said judicially. "The exercise will do him good."

Then, as the youth passed out of hearing, he faced Paget. "His being gone, that-a-way, will give us a chance to have that little confidential talk about your goin' away to-night," he said ingenuously. "Some like the Katy best, and some like the G. N., and some like the Sunset. I don't advise any one of 'em over the others. They all have evenin' trains."

There was an unpleasant glitter in Paget's eyes. "I don't understand the joke, Colonel Leonard," he said coldly,

"and I must say I don't especially care for it."

"Oh, it ain't any joke a-tall," replied Buck, whose lips were smiling, but whose eyes, fixed on Paget's, were as hard as steel. "The fact is——" He ceased to smile. "You all have played the game out, so far's San 'Ntonio is concerned. It's time to be goin'."

"This is—— What do you mean?"

"This: I'm onto you, and onto your game. And David Gray's father was as good a friend as I ever had. It ain't necessary for me to make a speech about it, is it?"

"I must say——" began Paget, with great dignity.

"You must not," interrupted Buck. "It's unnecessary and it wouldn't get you anywhere. There isn't anything to debate. I don't know where you're going from here, and I don't care, so long as it's out of Texas, but you're goin'—to-night."

"I think you have gone insane," sneered the Englishman.

"No, you don't. You think you can play the game out. But you don't know what kind of cards I've got. I've got good cards—winnin' cards—as good cards, say, as you held in that little game you played—the last one—in Delhi."

"So that's it!" breathed Paget venomously. "So you're a blackmailer. Why, you——"

"I wouldn't say it if I was you. Some kinds of language are dangerous in this section. You listen! You take a train out of San 'Nntonio to-night; you and your niece. You get out of Texas and stay out. She writes a nice little polite letter to Dave Gray to be delivered after you have gone that makes it plain to him she thinks he's about as valuable as the dirt under her feet. And you don't let him know afterward where you are, because, if you do, I'll make it my own personal business. Am I clear?"

"You are—and impertinent. What makes you think my niece would do any such thing as you suggest, even if I wanted her to?"

"Well, I dunno. Maybe the thought that if she didn't, young Gray might find out about that other young farmer—that Radford boy in Australia. The one that lost his money."

Paget sat very still for a moment. "Then you haven't told him," he said.

"No, and I ain't going to—because it will serve the same purpose to have you go away."

Paget leaned back with resolution on his face. "You might as well call your chauffeur back and return to town," he said. "I am going to remain in San Antonio, and we shall see whether you have more influence with your young friend than——"

"Oh, no, we won't. I may, but you won't—because you won't be here. You, cap'n, are about to go on a long journey. Did you ever hear about Sheriff Jerry Brown, down in Zimmer County?"

"No, and I'm not interested in——"

"Oh, yes, you are. Jerry is quite a feller. Last year, when the Plan of San Diego trouble was at its height down there on the border, Jerry had quite some job cut out for him; you know there are about a hundred Mexicans down in that county to every white man. Well——"

Paget's face bore a look of enforced patience. He did not interrupt again.

"Jerry knew the bad hombres in the county, and it was necessary to stop their little plotting game. But the jail wasn't big enough for half of 'em, and the county didn't have any money to pay the costs of keepin' 'em and tryin' 'em, and any jury that would have heard their cases would have prob'ly been made up more'n half of their friends, anyway. So what do you suppose Jerry done?"

Paget did not reply. His attitude denoted that he would perforce listen to whatever rambling dissertation Buck saw fit to inflict upon him, but that he had no interest in it; was inexpressibly bored, in fact. Leonard did not seem to notice this attitude; he went on as though the Englishman had expressed absorbing interest in the tale.

"Well, sir. He just started out—him and his deputies—arrestin' these

bad hombres, and every time he got a batch of two or three he would take 'em down to the river and holler at the Mexican guards on the other side. Those guards were Carranzista across from Zimmer County, of course. And all the Plan of San Diego plotters were Villista; I reckon you know that.

"Jerry he taken 'em to the river and hollered at the sentinels on the other side. 'More Villa men!' he'd holler —in Spanish, of course. And then he'd tell the hombres to walk across the ford pronto, and that if they turned back he'd sure shoot 'em. They all knew Jerry was a man of his word—especially after one or two of 'em had tried comin' back to find out. So over the ford would go the hombres, and sometimes they'd be able to convince the greasers on the other side they was all right and would join the Carranza army if given a chance, and sometimes they wouldn't be able and Jerry'd hear some shootin', maybe, back where the officer in charge had his headquarters. Yes, sometimes one and sometimes the other, although Jerry done told me there was more shootin' than enlistments. So Zimmer County saved a lot of expense, and order was restored, and everybody was satisfied that had any right to be satisfied."

Buck paused a moment or two and let his eyes rest on where Billy, the chauffeur, was standing under the shade of a live-oak tree, his back to the automobile. "Yes, sir," he repeated, after a bit. "Jerry shore restored order in Zimmer County." He paused again. "Good feller, Jerry," he mused. "He and I were in the Ranger service together. Do 'most anything for me, Jerry would."

Paget still gave no sign of interest.

"If I was to say to Jerry, when you and I and the deputy sheriff that arrests you get to Zimmer County——"

Paget spoke: "There is nothing I could be arrested for, and you know it."

"There may be nothing you could be *convicted* of," Buck corrected him courteously. "*Any* man can be *arrested* for *anything,* if there's a warrant. So if I was to say to Jerry, 'This here Englishman is a bad hombre, and it's a shame to have him hangin' around, clutterin' up the State of Texas,' do you know what I bet Jerry'd do? I bet he'd walk you right down to that ford and start you across.

"The greaser sentinel on the other side would be lookin' and maybe he'd say, 'Who's your friend?' or words to that effect. And I bet Jerry'd say, 'He's no friend of mine! There can't no man be a friend of mine that had the explosive concession in Chihuahua under Pancho Villa,' he'd say. Then, after a while, Jerry'd come back to town. Somehow or other, I don't think you'd be with him. Maybe you wouldn't be *anywhere,* by then. Those Carranzista soldiers are awful biased about people that have done business with Don Pancho."

At the mention of the dynamite concession Paget's mask of boredom dropped. He was looking at Buck with enough interest now.

"A pretty little scheme to get me murdered!" he growled.

"I wonder," mused Buck, aloud. "I wonder if those Carranzistas down south of Zimmer County would murder you just because you was tied up once with Pancho Villa! Well, it wouldn't be any business of the State of Texas."

"And what do you think Great Britain would be doing while you were working a scheme like that on a British subject?" Paget demanded.

"Well," Buck admitted candidly, "I s'pose when she first heard about it she'd be quite het up, although I don't know any way she'd hear of it until some time afterward. Then the first thing she'd do would be to look up your army record. Do you know, cap'n, I almost believe the second thing she'd do would be to forget it."

Silence followed. It had begun to be oppressive, when Paget spoke. "How the devil are we going to pay our hotel bill and get to New York?" he asked.

"Well, now, I was thinkin' about

that," said Buck. "And it struck me—me bein' a friend of yours and of Dave Gray's that-a-way—that maybe I'd cash your check for four hundred dollars. That would land you in New York with better than a hundred."

"My check! I gather you know that——"

"Certainly I know it wouldn't be good. But you would sign one of these checks that bears on it a guarantee that you have the necessary funds to cover it in the bank—and that's a felony in Texas. But I wouldn't—and couldn't—do anything about it unless you came back into the State."

The Englishman laughed shortly, without mirth. "You've got me, colonel. We'll go."

"And you understand," said Buck lightly, "that Miss Paget is to write the letter canning Dave Gray cold, and if either of you write him afterward, or let him find you, I'll come after you myself." He turned a menacing eye on the Englishman. "It wouldn't do much good to try to stop me," he added. "You noticed what happened to the jack rabbit."

"I know when the other man wins," said Paget shortly.

"Well, now, that's shorely fine." Buck raised his voice. "Billy! Better come back and we'll head for town. I don't believe it's worth looking for that rock any more. It was a funny little rock," he remarked to Paget. "Hard and smooth and polished and all that—but it had a little streak of yellow in it, if you knew where to look."

Buck personally supervised the Pagets' departure, that evening. His courtesy to both of them was something delightful to see; there was a reserve in their manner, however, that indicated, perhaps, they did not entirely appreciate it. After their train had left, he turned to the chauffeur.

"Billy," he said, "I'm tired. I feel's if I had done a real day's work, instead of just cavortin' around amusin' myself, as I have been. We'll drive to a hotel and get some sleep and head for home early in the mawnin'. One of the small hotels, Billy—say the Edgewood—where we won't run into anybody we know."

Mary Thorpe was passing through Main Street on her way to the post office, the next evening, when a familiar voice addressed her, and a tall, slouchy man came up behind her and caught step. He thought the girl looked a little pale and worn, although her head was carried as high as ever and she smiled back the cheeriest possible response to his greeting.

"I heard Dave Gray was thinkin' of comin' back after his little vacation in a day or so," he remarked, after a few unimportant sentences.

"That so?" The girl's voice betrayed not even interest.

"Uh-huh." He walked beside her a moment in silence. Then she felt his hand—a kindly hand—on her shoulder. "Little girl," he said, "you know I wouldn't go to meddle in your business a bit—not a little bit. I wouldn't tell you any advice a-tall that I wasn't shore was good advice. But I've known you ever since before you could talk, you know."

"Of course, Colonel Buck."

"That Davy boy, now. He's a good boy. Might be a little foolish sometimes, but never bad—never bad a-tall. You got my word for that. Of course, when he comes home he'll need a little disciplinin', but not too much. I ain't sure he don't need a little comfortin'. You and he are the same age, but girls are a lot older than boys, you know. Perhaps it's motherin' he needs. I don't know. Perhaps."

Mary walked a moment without replying. Then: "You mean after the way he's stayed away you think I ought to——"

Buck interrupted her. "He's a mighty good boy," he said. "It's awful easy to make mistakes. If he made one it wouldn't help things much to have you go and make one, too, would it? I ain't exactly sure, but I think he's comin' back to stay—if he ain't driven off."

And David came back two days later, and, after twenty-four hours of seclu-

sion, dropped into the bank. Buck welcomed him cordially and shut the private-office door. The boy had something on his mind, and, after a few aimless sentences, Buck helped him get it off.

"Somebody was tellin' me your friends, the Pagets, had gone up East," he remarked. "Where to?"

"I don't know. And I don't care." His voice belied the words. "Colonel Buck, you weren't far from right when you said those folks aren't our kind of folks. You'd have thought——" His voice trailed off.

"Funny people, these earls and dooks," commented Buck sympathetically. "Some are funny one way, some in others. I don't know. I guess they look at things a little different from what we do."

"I wouldn't treat a dog the way they treated me!" cried the boy. "I ain't ever going to have confidence in anybody again. Never!"

"Never's a long time," said the colonel softly. "Maybe you mean you ain't ever goin' to have confidence in that kind of folks again. They ain't the kind of folks we're used to, anyway. What was it the feller said in the poetry? 'Old things, after all, are the best.' How did the rest of that poetry run? 'And the flower in her bosom, I prize it above——' I can't seem to remember what it was he prized it above; I ain't read the piece lately. Oh, yes. He prized it above 'the brooch in my lady's breast.' That's it. Edifyin' little piece of poetry. Lots of truth in it. Goin' to stay with us a while, now?"

"I don't know what I'm going to do. I think—perhaps I've been a fool, colonel."

Buck grinned up at him warmly. "You wasn't thinkin', son, that you was the first young feller that ever stubbed his toe, was you? Well, I reckon all the folks in town will be glad to see you back. Yes, sir—all of 'em."

"The only thing to do with two pairs," remarked Buck oracularly, as he surveyed a pot which Doc Milliken had opened, two nights later, "is to raise before the draw. It'll cost you four dollars more to draw cards."

"That means you've got a four flush," remarked the doctor. "I'll see the raise and go you five better. Make good or hike!"

Buck laughed aloud, with unalloyed delight. "I got a sucker, Carroll," he declared to Emery, who had promptly thrown away his hand. "It's gone up ten more."

Doc Milliken saw this raise and drew two cards. Buck stood pat.

"I'll check it along with a white one," said the doctor.

"Twenty-five better," declared Buck, "and you know I'm prob'ly bluffin'. As a matter of fact, I got exactly two treys. The others are foolish cards that I'm holdin' up along with 'em because my fingers are paralyzed."

"You win!" said Doc Milliken, after a moment's deep thought. "I won't pay twenty-five dollars to look. The openers were three queens." He showed them.

Buck gathered in the pot with one hand, shouting delightedly, and with the other spread his cards face up. "Look at 'em!" he cried. "Two treys and not a thing else. The twenty-four dollars I get isn't a fortune, but, by golly! I've started the luck to runnin' the other way at last. And I made him lay down three queens!" he jubilated to the others.

The city marshal, grinning at Doc Milliken's discomfiture, was already shuffling for the next deal. Jim Sweetland, lighting a cigarette, thought of a bit of gossip that he had not mentioned and said, principally to Carroll Emery: "Just as I was comin' in, this evenin', I see Dave Gray and Mary Thorpe startin' off to ride in his roadster."

Buck Leonard was still beaming at Doc Milliken and gave no sign of having heard Sweetland's bit of neighborhood news.

"I told you what you was, a week ago!" he cried. "And I want to say this: It hurts like the devil to get stung by one of these here little scorpions, but it's shorely surprisin' how quick you can recuperate."

Borituaba's Honor

By Rowland Thomas

Author of "Fatima," "The Little Gods," Etc.

A story of Loree—one of the islands you pass on the way from Rangoon to Singapore. Loree has only partly been redeemed from savagery. The white man's burden there is lightening, but woe to him who fails to familiarize himself with, or scoffs at, the customs of the country.

I.

TUAN DJONG AND A TURBAN.

FROM the big bungalow at the southern tip of Loree, where the company's offices are, and the bachelor quarters and mess of the manager, Roberts, and Sykes, the technical man, and Reynolds, accountant and general factotum, a path leads north for a hundred yards or so to a smaller dwelling which houses Tuan Djong—"Lord John," translated, otherwise Jack Stallton, assistant resident manager of the Loree Rubber Plantations, Limited—with his wife and their six-year-old son, Bobby.

Down that path one evening when sunset was swimming into night with the least possible intervention of twilight, two Englishmen came walking, single file, for the path was not even one-man wide. Rankly upspringing herbage fringed it knee-deep on either side, and saw-edged grasses plucked at their puttees as they passed.

Sykes was trailing Stallton.

"I say, Jack," he complained, "this stuff gets worse and worse to drag through. It will be a confounded nuisance when the rains come."

Stallton grunted good-natured agreement. Like many dynamic men, he was inclined to be careless of his personal comfort, leaving small fussinesses to the born order takers.

"I'll turn some coolies to here some day for your especial benefit," he promised, and then halted in his tracks, barely avoiding head-on collision with one of the plantation laborers who had been coming swiftly from the opposite direction. "Look where you're going, boy!" he cautioned sharply.

The laborer happened to be a Malay, and, like all Malays, was a ceremonious gentleman, according to his lights. He promptly stepped out into the herbage, regardless of the barbs which plucked at his naked shins, turned to face his heaven-appointed masters, and made respectful salutation. "Tuan!" he murmured, and formally bent his head.

The attitude made his turban very conspicuous. It was enormous anyway. Above his wiry brown body and slim, lithe neck it seemed to hang as heavy as a sunflower hangs on its stalk. It was a gaudy bit of headgear, too. Even in the fading light its fiery scarlet, banded with dull Tibetan blue, glowed with barbaric insolence.

Tuan Djong's eyes began to twinkle.

For what followed there is a natural explanation and several excuses, none of which do any good at all. Hell, returning explorers assure us, is paved with the harmless intentions of its populace.

Tuan Djong was in high spirits. A vigorous animal, anyway, he had just topped off an active day in the saddle

with a peg of Roberts' excellent Scotch. Also, he was on his way to home and son and dinner.

As to excuses—well, for one thing he acted without malice. Some white men, called on to deal with brown men in the mass seem to find a perverse pleasure in flippant callousness, as if in being brutal they were also superior. Tuan Djong was not that sort. He had never knowingly insulted the least of the nameless hundreds who moved at his behest; had never gratuitously put affronts upon them. And in what he did that night he acted without knowledge, which is a second excuse. That clod of a laborer's code of personal honor, if such a thing existed, was unexplored ground for him.

His eyes began to twinkle. He overtopped by head and shoulders and half his chest the turban so suddenly thrust under his nose, and had to bend a little as he took in its grotesque glories with mock solemnity. The challenge of its resplendence proved too much to be resisted.

"Swap, boy!" he cried in the Malay which is Loree's current jargon, and snatched the headgear from its owner's glassily shaven crown. "Help yourself to some monsoon millinery, Sykes," he invited, laughing.

The technical man laughed, too, but stopped abruptly as he saw the passive laborer's face. "Easy does it, Jack," he cautioned. "The blighter is peevish."

That ended the fun, and Stallton's laughter was muffled in sheepish silence as he realized the undignified folly of his act. He tossed the trophy to its owner. "Come along, Sykes," he said. "We're late enough already."

The Englishmen swung on then toward the lights that beckoned fifty yards ahead. As far as they were concerned, the episode was ended.

II.

MARTIN SYKES, ETHNOLOGIST.

And would have been ended wholly had not Sykes, after saying good night at nine-thirty, come back after a moment and hailed the dimly lighted veranda, where the Stalltons had lingered to enjoy what freshness the oppressive night might yield them.

"Look here!" he called from the darkness. "I stumbled over this in your path." In his hand was a big turban, blue and scarlet.

"The beggar must have let it fall when you tossed it back to him," he said, coming into the veranda. "I'm wondering what you may have done to him, Jack. Better keep quiet on the offish with natives, I say. They have a bally lot of feelings we know nothing about."

"So have fish," said Tuan Djong, "but we catch them. You look excited, Sykes."

And Martin Sykes was excited. Besides his lawful devotion to the chemistry and botany of rubber, which he knew sufficiently well, he was guilty of an illicit passion for the mysteries of ethnology, a science of which he knew as little as a child. Less than such a child as Bobby Stallton, who had been a practicing ethnologist from his cradle days, when a Burmese nurse was training him to eat the rice a Singhalese houseboy brought her from the hands of a Chinese cook.

"It has something to do with this turban," said Sykes, with unction. "And it made him unusually sulky, or he wouldn't have let it lie that way. I'd like to know what tribe or subtribe the beggar belongs to. It might not have been written up yet, you know. But what shall I do with it, Jack? It's not precisely—nice. In fact, I've a well-founded suspicion it will soon be able to walk."

"Chuck it under the veranda, then," Stallton suggested. "Might as well save it. It's worth maybe tuppence new. But tuppence is something, when it's what you earn for a day. Chuck it under, Martin. The chap'll be looking for it as soon as he's over his miff."

"Right-o," said Sykes, and chucked it. "Good night again to you both. It seems to be getting a bit less breathless. We may sleep, after all."

III.

LOST, STRAYED, OR STOLEN—ONE PLAYMATE.

Bobby Stallton was the only white boy in the whole of Loree, just as his mother was the only white woman in many scores of miles.

And the next morning, when Bobby had evaded the ayah with infinite circumspection, slipping out through a gap in the wall of lantana which hedged the bungalow compound, and had trudged north along the grass-fringed path till he reached its junction with the main road of the plantations—the laborers were just passing there on their way to work—and had waited for twenty minutes which dragged like twenty hours, he came back again to bounds a very disappointed little white boy.

If he had been less preoccupied and listless, he might have noticed—and, who can tell, have been cheered a little by the mere fact of discovery—that a turban was lying under the veranda, close by the steps, and four or five feet in.

But Bobby, thoroughly downcast, dragged leaden feet up the steps without a look around him. He crossed the veranda to his mother's chair.

"Bo'it'aba never came by to-day at all!"

"Who," Mrs. Stallton asked, "might that be?"

"He's my playmate," Bobby told her; "but to-day he didn't come."

When one happens, as Bobby did, to be the one white youngster in an island like Loree—which is cumbered, for the rest, with a black and brown juvenile population, soft, rice-stuffed, vacuous, athletic as a school of jelly-fishes and mentally resilient as a collection of feather pillows—the loss of a satisfying playmate is a very serious matter.

But Mary Stallton, never having been a boy under such conditions, did not comprehend that, and the sympathy she expressed was rather perfunctory.

"Never mind," she said in her most motherly manner. "You can easily find another little boy to play with. But have the ayah see that he's clean first."

Bobby turned a shocked face upward.

"Boy!" he said. "Why, mother! I never said Bo'it'aba was a little boy. He isn't. He's a grown-up man like father—only not nearly so big."

"Why, Bobby!" cried Mrs. Stallton. A careful mother, she had no mind to let her first-born run at large among a mixed and turbulent population of a thousand Orientals. "Have you been chumming with a grown-up native? The little ones are bad enough for you, goodness knows. What ever was the ayah——"

She checked herself. "Tell me all about Botibaba," she invited smilingly.

"Bo'it'aba," Bobby made correction. "The ayah didn't know, because I fooled her. He's a Ba'ag Moro, and he's taught me how to swear in Malay, and he's going to teach me how to smoke through my nose like he does. And we kick football together, behind our backs and everything, just like the lascars do when they're waiting round for supper. He's let me feel the point of his knife—not his working knife, you know, but the little knife he carries under his belt where the Sikhs won't see it. And some day he's promised to show me the way he'd kill an enemy with it. The Ba'ag Moros are fighting people, you know. And he's going ——"

As she interrupted, Mary Stallton managed to mask her feelings. "Tell me, son," she asked "wherever did you discover this—this—paragon?"

"Ba'ag," Bobby insisted. "I found him all by myself. One day I got up early, before the ayah, and went up our path to the road. And a gang was going to work, and Bo'it'aba was in it. He said something to me that made all the men laugh, and I said something back that made them laugh again, and so we were friends after that, and every night and morning he stops out of his gang at corner for a good play with me. Only," said Bobby sadly, "to-day he wasn't there."

Mrs. Stallton said no more to her

boy. But to the ayah she gave emphatic instructions that thereafter the compound was bounds. And that night, after Bobby was sleeping, she told Tuan Djong the story.

"I'm afraid," she concluded, "that it's the beginning of the end. To think of sending Bobby to England, and being alone here all day! But what can we do? He's getting too big and active to coop in like a baby, and I certainly won't have him running loose among the field hands."

"Why not, pray?" said Stallton. "Let the boy go. They won't hurt him. In fact, he'll be picking up knowledge of natives that may be no end of use to him later. Don't go borrowing trouble, old girl."

"Perhaps that is what I'm doing," said Mrs. Stallton dubiously, and the matter was allowed to lie.

IV.

A MAN GOES BAREHEADED.

When Tuan Djong snatched that turban he might have snatched it from a slim, brown statue. In the face of the man who stood in proud humility before his lords not a single muscle moved. His eyes were steady and all surface. There was no expression at all to any part of him.

When Tuan Djong tossed the turban back he might have tossed it to a statue.

The turban fell to the ground. The Englishmen went on and vanished. Still the man stood passive, while the hot night settled round him. At last he stepped back into the path again. Without a glance behind him, his face a blank, his eyes set straight before him, he began to walk steadily southward.

A little later a single wayfarer strode silently from the darkness into the lighted and roaring street of Loree. Night had fully fallen. It was supper time. About the cooking fires and the eating mats were grouped men of many colors, talking. Around the fish shops and the rice shops other groups were gathered.

Loree is wholly cosmopolitan. It has as many accepted codes and costumes and dietaries as a zoo. But more or less roughly it subdivides into quarters. The Hindus keep to themselves. So do the scrawny Tamils, the effeminate Singhalese with their pugged hair and ornate combs of tortoiseshell, and the heavy-muscled Chinese who do coolie work in the rice and rubber godowns.

All these groups the man passed by, going on toward the quarter where, among the palm-thatched huts of the Malays, prevailed a tribal confusion worse confounded. There were half a dozen types there—lascars, Penang men and Straits men, men from the Federate States and Dutch East Indies.

The man held on past them all, without a glance or greeting, and reached at last the extreme end of the village, where a hut stood apart under a great mango tree. He stepped inside that hut and halted, his eyes held straight and level, his face blank light and shadow.

There were nine men present, squatting around a bowl of rice and a smaller bowl of sea snails boiled in the shell. One of them was old; the rest were young men. All were alike in physique—spare, lithe, and nervously alert. All looked, somehow, like hornets—a general impression which was due, it may be, to their turbans, big turbans of insolent scarlet barred with dull-tone blue.

As the one man, bareheaded, stepped into the midst of the others a sudden silence was followed by a sudden sound of breath intaken. But there were no comments, and no questions. Speechless, he sat down among his turbaned mates and scooped bent fingers into the common dish. When he had eaten, he lighted his cigarette.

Then the old man, whom the others treated with marked consideration, put a single question to him. "Does the matter," he asked, "touch all of us who are here and are your brothers?"

The late comer, vacant-eyed, inhaled the kindly smoke again, and answered quietly. "There is no matter," he said, and the inquisition ended.

But when the others were stretching themselves out to sleep that man got up and went out into the night. Stand-

ing and facing the sea, he heaved a breath that brought the ribs out under the satin of his skin. He threw his chin up, opened his mouth wide.

"Al-la-a-ah!" Out of the darkness rose a wail. "Allah-lila-hah-il-al-la-a-ah!" The echoes repeated it through the night, and up and down the street of Loree dogs started howling with long-drawn, plaintive wolf notes in their voices.

V.

"647—ABSENT."

Next day—which was the day when Bobby Stallton missed his playmate, Borituaba—the boss of a field gang missed one of his hands. The loss was not as tragical as Bobby's, but it made the boss angry, for it came at a time when he was under orders to close up all new work in the "Northern Tier" and get south for the tapping.

The "Northern Tier" marked the limit of the company's domain. You do not know Loree? Those toy ocean greyhounds, the good ships of the British India Steam Navigation Company, pass it on the run from Rangoon to Singapore. It is not a large island.

But only part of it has been redeemed from savagery. The bearing groves and nurseries, some fifteen hundred acres in extent, lie wholly on the southern side of the ridge of rock which marks the watershed. All north of that is untamed, and an hour's steaming walk from the docks and godowns will put you in sight of wilderness as virgin as any anywhere.

Well up on the ridge, at the very edge of the waste, lay the nursery of year-old plants where the gang boss missed his man. It was mid-afternoon when the timekeeper got round there, and the boss reported his trouble, with feeling. "Dock 647 a day. He didn't turn to till eight, and now he's skipped out again," was the substance of his report, but its decorations were lurid. The boss was a lascar, and in his prime had been mate on a coaster.

"What did he run away for?" asked the timekeeper promptly. He was a babu, high-schooled and full of curiosities. "Had you had trouble with him before? Did you notice anything strange about him? I must make my report, you know."

"What does any man run away from work for?" the boss asked irritably. "But I had noticed he was singing to himself."

"Ah," said the clerk, "that explains it. He was probably crazy. What was he singing about?"

"For God's sake, Babuji," retorted the lascar, "how do I know? I paid no attention. All my life I have heard sailors sing to themselves while they work. Does that prove they are crazy?"

"I will note him," said the babu, "as probably crazy."

"Put him down absent," said the boss. "And be sure you dock him."

VI.

A SONG.

I have no honor now—
A man snatched my honor from me
And threw my honor on the ground.
He left it lying there; other men saw it lie there.
I have no honor now—I am no longer a man—

I have no honor now—
My head is not covered with my honor now.
The sun sees my head uncovered,
The stars have seen my head uncovered,
All men can see my head uncovered with my honor.
I have no honor now—I am no longer a man—

I have no honor now—
A man took all my honor from my head
And left my head uncovered.
My head must go uncovered
Until I take my honor back from that man.
Until I have taken my honor I am no longer a man.

That afternoon, while the timekeeper and the gang boss quarreled, the man they spoke of was singing, as the lascar called it, in an obscure patois the words I have tried to translate above. All day long he had been chanting them to himself. All day and most of the night.

What sleep he had he had had under the stars. But he had slept little. Most

of the night he had roamed about Loree, unheeding direction, until dawn overtook him far up by the "Northern Tier" and forced him into hiding when the gangs came up to their work.

He had watched them, and after a time mere unchecked force of habit had taken him down among them. For a while, like the others, he pruned and delved among the year-old plants. Crooning and vacant-eyed, letting his fingers do their work mechanically, he yielded his personality to the numbing trance of labor.

He might have gone on so all day long. But toward noon the old lascar, passing, reprimanded him sharply for his tardiness of the morning. The interruption broke the spell. He watched the boss move on and vanish. He looked around him. Close by, the main road of the plantation held on up the ridge. The man, bent almost double, began to follow it, slipping from trunk to trunk of the primeval trees, which when the plot was cleared, had been spared to shade the nurslings.

With the last of the tillage the road became a trail which pitched very sharply up between the rocks and abruptly ended when it reached the apex of the ridge. There the man was left standing on the edge of subjugated Loree.

Even to the south, where the plantations lay behind him, the prospect was forlorn and wild enough. Everything grows too fast in the superabundant heat and light of the tropics, and even tended vegetation wears an unkempt and savage look. But how greatly botanical police work had changed the face of the island was at once apparent if one looked to the north. There Nature still had matters in her own hands. Spread over hill and valley, dale and hillock, was an unbroken mantle of rampant greenery. Creepers bound treetop to treetop, and all interstices between the trunks were crowded with undergrowth. It was the image of a living death.

The man, with a grunt suggestive of satisfaction—chance had led him to an ideal aerie for unquiet meditations—sat down on a terrace of rock.

I have no honor now—
A man snatched my honor from me
—I have no honor now—

—My head must go uncovered
Until I take my honor back from that man.

So he resumed his crooning, which was really brooding aloud. It was endless. No sooner had it worked up to its climax than it began all over again. The monotony of it was at the same time maddening and stupefying. It held the man enthralled through hour after hour. About noon he had climbed up there and sat down. At mid-afternoon, when the boss and the babu were talking of him, he had not stopped or moved. And now, when the sun was slanting over into the west, and the moon, only two days from the full, climbed out of the east behind it, he gave no sign of ending.

As the man "sang," his black eyes, vacant, rested on the wild scene before them. At only one spot in the vast landscape, backed by the far-away sea, was there anything containing elements of the picturesque.

VII.

A FIELD OF FLICKERING DEATH.

A little distance down the ridge, on the northern slope, walled and sheltered by a ring of aggressive trees whose branches, sprawling out into the open, cast crooked shadows, was a piece of grassland perhaps twenty acres in extent and as tame, as level, as evenly and lushly green as any piece of northern water meadow. Not even a tussock broke the velvet of its leg-deep covering of grass. The sun fell very warmly into it; big flowers bloomed there; birds and insects lazily garnered their nectar.

In its pretty innocence the spot was charming. But the man's eyes passed it over as they did all else.

Another hour dragged its way along. The day's end was very near. Long ridge shadows had fingered out across the wilderness. Long shadows of the

sprawling branches lay along the lush green bog. There in the heart of Loree not a breath of air stirred. The sun had dropped deep down, and the sky above it was already flushing with the rose that would pass almost as quickly as a blush. There was no motion save the flutter of wings in the hollow; no sound but what the man made.

—My head must go uncovered
Until I take my honor back from that man.

Between syllables, just at its climax, the song ceased. The singer bent forward in scrutiny, and his eyes brightened and quickened. He fixed them on the pocket of grass below him.

Down there a moth had very suddenly died. In the passing of a moth there is little to move a man. Thousands of them perish nightly, unthought of. But this moth's passing moved this man—apparently shocked him—for he began to tremble, whether with eagerness or with apprehension it would be hard to say. Perhaps it was the strange manner of its taking. For the moth—a mammoth luna, the giant of its species—had vanished before his eyes.

It had been poised above a wide-open flower, ready to alight. Nothing else was stirring near it. All at once, from the toy forest of grass stems under it, perhaps two feet to one side, there had shot a moving glint—a flicker—a tenuous streak of vivid white. No word just fits the elusive swiftness of it. Whether it had substance or was a darting light ray no eye could have detected it at that distance.

But—light rays follow straight paths. This ray—this flicker—was curved. In a trajectory high as that of a bomb from a mortar it had shot up from the grass stems toward the moth, hung just perceptibly poised, and plunged on down the descending arc. Then flicker and moth were gone.

The man who saw that trembled. He took breath once in a gulp that had the sound of a sob. Then he kept very still. He seemed to be waiting for something. Only his eyes moved, rolling in his head as they ranged the meadow's width and length. Minutes passed while he waited. Then he gasped again.

Far over toward his left, darting white had once more flickered along the grasstops, light and swift as a tongue of flame. And another moth was gone.

So the change began, and while the shadows gathered the meadow underwent a metamorphosis which made the man witness of a very hideous sight. He saw that stretch of grass—so innocent and peaceful while the sun fell there—turned into a field of death—visible death that flickered whitely as it came and went. More and more often glinted the swiftly curving flashes. More and more frequent were the victims, fluttering moths and insect-hunting birds.

The spectacle reached its climax when night had fully fallen and the swooping bats came out. Loree was bathed in moonlight, and under its cold beams the meadow shimmered with vague motion. It was constantly shot across, through all its limits, with those swift-flashing, evanescent curves. They cleaved the half light like lightning sword strokes, and were uncountable. Beneath their darting, constantly changing maze the grasses seemed to stir and shiver, as the sea stirs beneath its phosphorescence. They would have seemed as bodiless as phosphorescence but for one circumstance. A noise rose from the meadow, a noise thin as a whisper. Something seemed to be falling there, and to make an unceasing patter as soft as soft spring rain.

Such was the startling change the night wrought in that field of grass. All at once the solitary watcher of it stirred. He had seemed spellbound, terrorized. He had sat hunched far forward, while nervous trembling shook him and sweat beaded on his brow.

But now at last he stirred, and with a breath that wrenched him tore his eyes from the sight. Some mad kind of energy seemed to lay hold on him then. He leaped up, snatching the knife from his belt, and, striding swiftly to the nearest clump of shrubs, he cut

a long, straight wand. He trimmed the branchlets from it. With fingers that fumbled a little from his very eagerness he unraveled a strong strand from the bottom of his coarse cotton trousers. He worked a slip noose in it and fastened the contrivance to the end of his stick. So, in something more than a minute, he had equipped himself with a rude sort of snare. Even that minute, it seemed, had been too long for his impatience. He had cursed softly whenever his fingers were not deft.

Then something happened which would have turned a spectator sick. Before the man's eyes lay that field of flickering death. In his ears it pattered, ceaseless and soft as rain. Any one but a madman would have fled that sight and sound. And the man, once his snare was finished, strode toward them eagerly.

The impulse that drove him lasted halfway down the slope. There he trod on a fallen stick, and his cry of surprise and terror resounded through the night. For an instant he stood there shrinking and wavering for flight. Then his fury of impatience came back on him again, and he went on down in the moonlight.

At the rim of the bog he halted, groped his feet to a firm footing, and then, with muscles tense, he thrust his wand out over the dark level of the grass, its noose a-dangle. He stood as an angler stands and waits for fish to bite. But he showed little of an angler's indolent patience. His muscles were all twitching, and you could have heard his breathing a dozen yards away.

VIII.

RESTITUTION.

Through a day and a night and now a second day—in fact, ever since the morning when his playmate failed to keep his tryst Robert Stallton had been an undesirable citizen of the small republic hedged inside the lantanas. Whenever his father was at home he plagued him with demands for immediate restitution until the elder Stallton, indulgent enough, but knowing the impracticability of looking for one particular native among a thousand, had been driven to threats of punishment for teasing. Bobby, for such a little man, was a very determined one.

He had plagued his mother by alternately fretting and moping inside the limit of his bounds, till more than once she was tempted to enlarge them and weakly purchase peace at the price of discipline.

But at last, toward the very end of that second afternoon, Bobby came to his own rescue. He conceived the idea of playing polar bear in his den.

"And where," asked his mother, applauding, "is the den going to be?"

"Under the v'randa," Bobby answered.

But his mother's respite was brief. Bobby had hardly vanished when he reappeared with something that seemed to give him very great delight. Something soft it was, shapeless, and dully blue and very intensely scarlet.

"Look!" he cried excitedly. "Here's Bo'it'aba's turban! Now father and I can find him." He held his treasure up to Mary Stallton's nonplused gaze.

"Please," he begged, "just let me take it over to father? Then perhaps he can find him for me to-night."

Remembrance of a former discovery of that same vivid piece of cloth came then to Mary. "Bobby," she ordered decisively, "throw that thing back where you found it. You can't play with natives' cast-off clothes. And that one especially isn't—nice. It's—it's dirty, Bobby. Mr. Sykes spoke of it. Put it back, Bobby. At once!"

Bobby had to obey her, at the cost of a struggle which left duty and inclination wholly at odds inside him. Eventually inclination won the battle by a flank attack. His mother had not told him he might not go over to his father's office. She had not even told him he could not take the turban over. Of a second retrieval she had not said a word. And he did not want to play with it, but with its owner.

Any small boy could give a Jesuit useful pointers on casuistry. Five min-

utes later Bobby Stallton, a bundle tucked modestly under his arm, had slipped out through the hedge and was hurrying up the deserted path. He was quite alone there. A hundred yards farther on stood his father's office, but it was hidden by spreading, feathery clumps of bamboo. The sun was just setting.

Had Bobby begun his journey half an hour earlier, he would not have found the path so utterly empty. It had not been populous even then, but at least one man had been there—a slim, lithe, brown, half-naked man who, unlike most natives, went with his head bared to the sun. That man had emerged from the bamboos all at once, and, coming across lots to the path, had reached it at a point about fifty yards from the Stalltons' bungalow.

There he halted. His approach had had in it a suggestion of the slinking and the catlike, and after he stopped he took a long and cautious look around him. He was quite unobserved. The bamboos veiled him from the office. The hedge of lantanas shut off the Stallton home.

After his survey the man stooped low between the two walls of grass stems. From under his garments he took a small and shapeless bundle wrapped in cloth. He laid it on the earth and took out next a strand of thread—thin thread that a moderately sharp jerk was likely to snap—and a little sharpened peg of wood. He worked the peg firmly into the ground and to the protruding top of it fastened one end of his thread. In the other end of the thread he made a slip-knot.

These preparations finished, he unwrapped his bundle, and, once it lay open, with a lightning dart of the hand he seized one end of the object it had concealed. He had seized by the neck a slender serpent no thicker than his finger and nine or ten inches long. In color it was dullish green, but as he lifted it in the sunlight a flicker of white glinted from its belly. The little creature was so sluggish that it seemed comatose and hung quite limply from his fingers as with his other hand he adjusted about its tail the slip noose he had fashioned. Then he laid it down.

The work had been easily and quickly done, consuming a minute at the most. But the man was trembling as he finished, and drew hastily away, still crouching. Lifting his head a little to assure himself once more that he had not been seen, he wormed his way back into the shelter of the grass stems, which closed again after his passage. About ten yards from the path, he halted and lay still. He was facing the office bungalow, and by raising his head a little he had a full view of the path along which Jack Stallton passed every day at dusk as regularly as the hour came round.

If there had been catlike slinking in the way the man had come there, the feline was still more strongly suggested by the way he lay on lookout. He was quite motionless. But it was the quietude of tenseness, not of relaxation.

While he waited so the sun set. And then, of a sudden, a thrill ran over him and made every muscle twitch. In the southern distance, where the company's bungalow stood, a figure had emerged from the bamboos and was coming along the path. It was the figure of a big man dressed in khaki, and it moved with easy vigor.

The watcher's eyes blazed as he saw it come. His nostrils were distended as if they hungered for air. Again the muscles stirred all over him. A cat's do so as she gathers for her spring. The man was controlling such an impulse, and his straining tendons showed the effort. He licked and licked his lips with a dry tongue. They hurt him, twisted so tightly in a baleful grin.

Then all at once galvanic surprise went shooting to the remotest nerve cell of him. Concealment was forgotten. He leaped to his feet and looked where he had not looked till then—behind him.

The man wasted no moment in decision. "Bobbee! Bobbee!" he shouted, with agony in his cry, then dashed for a spot in the path midway between two

startled figures. He reached the place. A glint of something white rose up to meet him, a flicker of something white shot toward him. He put out a hand to grasp it in mid-air, but missed it.

Bobby and Tuan Djong had both set out at sunset, but Tuan Djong's legs were the longer, and they would have met well on toward home had not the child cried out a greeting from a distance. "Daddy!" he called, and ran to meet his father, who stopped and waited for him with his hands outstretched.

Then came that agonized shout of "Bobbee! Bobbee!" and the startling apparition of a wild, half-naked, bare-skulled creature running madly. It was too much for Bobby. No trace was there for him of his missing Borituaba. Wheeling, he ran blindly toward his certain shelter, home, an utterly terror-stricken little six-year-old.

It was just as well, for Tuan Djong found the native reeling. In one hand he held a little serpent, dead of a broken neck. In the other wrist were two livid dots where fangs had punctured. "It is all up, Tuan," the man said coolly. Then his eyes filmed, and he sank to the ground.

He was gone when the other Englishmen, answering Tuan Djong's shouts, came running from the bungalow.

Manager Roberts was all business. "It's a jumping paddy snake," he said. "I've seen them farther east, in the Pacific islands. They'll clear six feet, it's claimed. Luckily they're night feeding, and one's fairly safe in the daytime. Also, they mostly stick to swamp land. I can't understand this one being here. If there are any more," he grumbled, "I'm going to chuck the job."

Martin Sykes, less practical and more imaginative, had been stooping over the victim. "I say, Jack," he announced, "I'll be shot if this isn't the beggar you miffed a couple of nights ago. He's still going bareheaded, too."

As he spoke he straightened up and looked around him. "And by all that's strange," he said, "this will be about the spot where we met that other time. Of all the coincidences!"

He gazed about, astonished. A few steps up the path, where Bobby had dropped it in his panic, lay a bundle of something soft and shapeless. Sykes, ever curious, went and picked it up.

"Good Lord," he almost shouted, "the chap and his cap turn up together!"

Sykes was inquisitive, but he was also sentimental. He stooped and laid the recovered turban on Borituaba's breast; then straightened up, shamefaced. "Laugh if you like," he said, "but the beggar has his hat back—to be buried in. Jack miffed him horribly the other night, I fancy. You can't keep enough on the offish with natives, I say. They have so many codes and customs."

"He saved Bob's life," Tuan Djong said, and the little group paid silent tribute.

If Sykes had been the ethnologist he deemed himself, he might have told them how significant the turban is among certain tribes of Moros, being a symbol of proven masculinity, worn only by him who has begotten and has slain his man, and so announces his prowess for who so will to question.

They could not understand that, but very likely their lack of comprehension did not trouble Borituaba greatly, for just then a couple of coolies came shuffling up to carry him away. His turban, dull blue and insolent scarlet, went with him, on his breast.

There on the spot where, as he considered, he had lost his honor he had taken it back—at a price.

Your friend Najib, the Syrian, has had trouble with a European whom he calls "the Hell-person." Terhune tells the tale in the March 7th POPULAR.

Starr, of the Desert

By B. M. Bower

Author of "Flying U's Last Stand," "The Ranch at the Wolverine," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF OPENING CHAPTERS

Tuberculosis threatened the life of Helen May Stevenson, and her father, a poorly paid drug clerk, realizes the need for desperate remedy. His wife had gone the same way. With two hundred dollars that he had saved, Peter Stevenson binds the sale of a shack and land in New Mexico for his daughter and son, the latter a lad of fifteen. Then, being himself ill of an incurable disease, the father quietly commits suicide, that Helen May shall possess his insurance—enough to see her through the ordeal in New Mexico. In a letter he left behind him, Peter advises Helen May to raise goats, with the help of her brother, in the new land. She follows his instructions as a sacred trust. Their life in New Mexico proves dull and dreary. But the girl's health improves. Nevertheless, the loneliness is appalling. At least it is before Starr, the desert man, comes into her life. He is a mystery—a fascinating one. On the surface, Starr is merely a cattle buyer, ranging the country for bargains in good stock. But when Helen May confides in him her glimpse of a big, racing automobile containing four suspicious-looking men—apparently Mexicans—Starr is singularly eager to get details. And he goes in secret search of the tire tracks. Coincidently, Helen May is searching for her strayed goats. They meet, and Starr escorts her home in the moonlight, and a romance glimmers.

(*A Four-Part Novel—Part Two*)

CHAPTER VIII.

HELEN MAY, under a last year's parasol of gay silk from which the sun had drawn much of its pinkness and the wind and dust had drawn its freshness, sat beside the road with her back against the post that held the macaroni box, and waited for the stage. Her face did not need the pink light of the parasol, for it was red enough after that broiling walk of yesterday. The desert did not look so romantic by the garish light of midday, but she stared out over it and saw, as with eyes newly opened to appreciation, that there was a certain charm even in its garishness. She had lost a good deal of moodiness and a good deal of discontent somewhere along the moonlit trail of last night, and she hummed a tune while she waited. And the tune was:

Till the sun grows cold,
And the stars are old——

But part of the time she was wondering what mail she would get. Her chum would write, of course; being a good, faithful chum, she would probably continue to write two or three letters a week for the next two months. After that she would drop for a while to one long letter a week; and after that—well, she was a faithful chum, but life persists in bearing one past the eddy that holds friendship circling round and round in a pool of memories.

Her chum's brother had written twice, however; exuberant letters, full of current comedy and full-blooded cheerfulness and safely vague sentiment which he had partly felt at the time he wrote. He had joshed Helen May a lot about the goats, even to the extent of addressing her as "Dear Goat Lady" in the last letter—with the word lady underscored and scrawled the whole width of the page. Helen May had puzzled over the obscure meaning of that, and had finally decided that it would have sounded funny, perhaps, if

This novel began in the POPULAR of February 7th.

he had said it that way, but that it "didn't get over" on paper.

She wondered if he would write again, or if his correspondence would prove as spasmodic, as easily interrupted as his attentions had been when they were both in the same town. Chum's brother was a nice, big, comfy kind of young man; the trouble was that he was too popular to give all his interest to one girl. Helen May appreciated his writing two letters to her—he who hated so to write letters—but her faith in the future was small. Still, he might write. It seemed worth while to wait for the stage.

Just when she was telling herself that the stage was late, far over the ridge rose a dust signal. Her pulse quickened expectantly; so much had loneliness done for her. She watched it, and she tried not to admit to herself that it did not look like the cloud kicked up by the four trotting stage horses. She tried not to believe that the cloud was much too small to have been made by the clattering progress of the stage. It must be the stage. It was past time for it to arrive there at the post. And it had not gone by, for she had sent for a can of baking powder and a dozen lemons and fifty cents' worth of canned milk—the delicatessen habit of buying in small quantities still hampered her—and, even if the stage had passed earlier than usual, the stuff would have been left at the post for her—granting there was no mail. But it could not have passed. She would have seen the dust that always hung low over the trail like the drooping tail of a comet and took half an hour at least to settle again for the next passer-by. And, besides, she had come to know the track which the stage left in the trail. It *could* not have passed. And it *had* to come—it carried the government mail! And yet, that dust did *not* look like the stage dust.

Trivial worries, perhaps. But try living forty miles from a post office, ten from the nearest neighbor, and fifteen hundred from your dearly beloved home town. Try living there, not because you want to, but because you must; hating it, hungering for human companionship. Try it with heat and wind and sand and great, arid stretches of a land that is strange to you. The probabilities are you would have been out there just after sunrise to wait for that stage, and if it were late you would have walked down the trail to meet it!

Helen May remained by the post, but she got up and stood on a rock that protruded six inches or so above the sand. Of course she could not see over the ridge—she could not have done that if she had climbed a telegraph pole—only there was no pole to climb—but she felt a little closer to seeing. That dust did *not* look like stage dust!

She suddenly owned to herself that she was disappointed, and rather worried. For behind this cloud that troubled her there was no second one building up over the sky line and growing more dense as the disturber approached. She could not imagine what had happened to that red-whiskered, tobacco-chewing stage driver. She looked at her wrist watch and saw that he was exactly twenty minutes later than his very latest arrival, and she felt personally slighted and aggrieved.

For that reason she sat under her pink silk parasol and stared crossly under her eyebrows at the horse and the man and the dust-grimed, rattle-wheeled buggy that eventually emerged from the gray cloud. The horse was a pudgy bay that set his feet stolidly down in the trail and dragged his toes through it as though he delighted in kicking up all the dust he could. By that trick he had puzzled Helen May a little, just at first, though he had not been able to simulate the passing of four horses. The buggy was such as improvident farmers used to drive—before they bought flivvers—near harvest time; scaly as to paint, warped and loose-spoked as to wheels, making more noise than progress along the country roads.

The man held the lines so loose that they sagged under the wire-mended traces of sunburned leather. He leaned a little forward as though it was not worth while sitting straight on so hot

a day. He wore an old panama hat that had cost him a good deal when it was new and had saved him a good deal since in straw hats which he had not been compelled to buy so long as this one held together. It was pulled down in front so that it shaded his face; a face lean and lined and dark, with thin lips that could be tender and humorous in certain moods. His eyes were hazel, like the eyes of Starr, yet one never thought of them as being at all like Starr's eyes. They burned always with some inner fire of life; they laughed at life and yet they did not seem to express mirth. They seemed to say that life was a joke—a damnable joke on mankind; that they saw the joke and resented it even while they laughed at it. For the rest, the man was more than fifty years old, but his hair was thick and black as a crow, and his eyebrows were inclined to bushiness—inclined also to slant upward at the outer ends. A strong face, an unusual face, but a vastly likable one, it was. And that is a fair description of Holman Sommers as Helen May first saw him.

He drove up to where she sat, and she tilted her pink silk parasol between them as though to keep the dust from settling thick upon her stained khaki skirt and her desert-dingy, high-laced boots. She was not interested in him, and her manner of expressing indifference could not have misled a horned toad. She was too fresh from city life to have fallen into the habit of speaking to strangers easily and as a matter of country courtesy. Even when the buggy stopped beside her, she did not show any eagerness to move the pink screen so that they might look at each other.

"How do you do?" said he, quite as though he were greeting her in her own home. "You are Miss Stevenson, I fancy. I am Holman Sommers, at your service. I am under the impression that I have with me a few articles which may be of some interest to you, Miss Stevenson. I chanced to come upon the stage several miles farther down the road. A wheel had given away, and there was every indication that the delay would prove serious; so when the driver mentioned the fact that he had mail and merchandise for you, I volunteered to act as his substitute and deliver them safely into your hands. I hope, therefore, that the service will in some slight measure atone for my presumption in forcing my acquaintance upon you."

At the second sentence the pink parasol became violently agitated. At the third, Helen May was staring at him —mentally, if not actually, open-mouthed. At the last she was standing up and reaching for her mail, and she had not yet decided in her mind whether he was joking or whether he expected to be taken seriously. Even when he laughed, with that odd, dancing light in his eyes, she could not be sure. But because his voice was warm with human sympathy and the cordiality of a man who is very sure of himself and can afford to be cordial, she smiled back at him.

"That's awfully good of you, Mr. Sommers." She shuffled her handful of letters eagerly to see who had written them; more particularly to see if Chum's brother had written one of them. There *was* one; a big, fat one that had taken two stamps! And one from Chum herself—and—— But she went back gloatingly to the thick, heavy envelope with the bold, black handwriting that needed the whole face of the envelope for her name and address. "I hope you didn't drive out of your way to bring them," she said, "because I know that miles are awfully long in this country."

"Yes? You have discovered that incontrovertible fact, have you? Then I hope you will permit me to drive you home, especially since these packages are much too numerous and too weighty for you to carry in your arms. As a matter of fact, I have been hoping for an opportunity to meet our new neighbors. Neighbors are precious in our sight, I assure you, Miss Stevenson, and only the misfortune of illness in the household has prevented my sisters from looking you up long ago. How long have you been here? Three

weeks, or four?" His tone added, "You poor child!" or something equally sympathetic, and he smiled while he cramped the old buggy so that she could get into it without rubbing her skirt against the dust-laden wheel.

Helen May certainly had never seen any one just like Holman Sommers, though she had met hundreds of men in a business way. She had met men who ran to polysyllables and pompousness, but she had never known the polysyllables to accompany so simple a manner. She had seen men slouching around in old straw hats and shoddy gray trousers and negligee shirts with the tie askew, and the clothes had spelled poverty or shiftlessness. Whereas they made Holman Sommers look like a great man indulging himself in the luxury of old clothes on a holiday.

He seemed absolutely unconscious that he and his rattly buggy and the harness on the horse were all very shabby, and that the horse was fat and pudgy and scrawny of mane; and for that she admired him.

Before they reached the low adobe cabin she felt that she was much better acquainted with Holman Sommers than with Starr. He had a past which, she sensed vaguely, had been rather brilliant. He must have been a war correspondent, because he compared the present great war with the Japanese-Russian war and with the South African war, and he seemed to have been right in the middle of both, or he could not have spoken so intimately of them. He seemed to know all about the real, underlying causes of them and of this new and terrible one, and knew just where it would all end and what nations would be drawn into it before they were through.

He also knew all about raising goats. He slid very easily, too, from the war to goat raising. He had about four hundred, and he gave her a lot of valuable advice about the most profitable way in which to handle them.

When he saw Vic legging it along the slope behind the basin to head off Billy and his slavish nannies, he shook his head commiseratingly.

"There is not a scintilla of doubt in my mind," he told her gently, "that a trained dog would be of immeasurable benefit to you. I fear you made a grave mistake, Miss Stevenson, when you failed to possess yourself of a good dog. I might go so far as to say that a dog is absolutely indispensable to the successful handling of goats—or, for that matter, of sheep, either." He pronounced the last word eyether.

"That's what my desert man told me," said Helen May demurely, "only he didn't tell me that way exactly."

"Yes? Then I have no hesitation whatever in assuring you that your desert man was unqualifiedly accurate in his statement of your need."

Helen May bit her lip. "I'll tell him that," she said, still more demurely.

Secretly she hoped that he would rise to the bait, but he apparently accepted her words in good faith, and went on telling her just how to range goats far afield in good weather so that the grazing in the Basin itself would be held in reserve for storms. It was a very grave error, said Holman Sommers, to exhaust the pasturage immediately contiguous to the home corral. It might almost be defined as downright improvidence. Then he forestalled any resentment she might feel by apologizing for his seeming presumption. But he apprehended the fact that she and her brother were both inexperienced, and he would be sorry indeed to see them suffer any loss because of that inexperience. His practical knowledge of the business was at her service, he said, and he should feel that he was culpably negligent of his duty as a neighbor if he failed to point out to her any glaring fault of their method.

Helen May had felt just a little resentful of the words "downright improvidence"—she who walked rather than spend money and grass on a horse! She who daily denied herself things which she considered necessities, that she might husband the precious balance of Peter's insurance money! But she

swallowed her resentment and thanked him quite humbly for his kindness in telling her how to manage. She owned to her inexperience, and she said that she would greatly appreciate any advice which he might care to give.

Her Man of the Desert, she remembered, had not given her advice, though he must have seen how badly she needed it. He had asked her where her dog was, taking it for granted, apparently, that she would have one. But when she had told him about not buying the dog, he had not said another word about it. And he had not said anything about their letting the goats eat up all the grass in the Basin, first thing, instead of saving it for bad weather. This Holman Sommers, she decided, was awfully kind, even if he did talk like a professor or something; kinder than her desert man—no, not kinder, but perhaps more truly helpful.

At the house he told her just how to fix a "cooler cupboard" under the lone mesquite tree which stood at one end of the adobe cabin. It was really very simple, as he explained it, and he told her, in scientific terminology, just why it would be cool. He went to the spring and showed her where she could have Vic dig out the bank and fit in a rock shelf for butter. He assured her that she was fortunate in having a living spring so near the house. It was, he said, of incalculable importance in that country to have cold, pure water always at hand.

When he discovered that she was a stenographer, and that she had her typewriter with her, he was immensely pleased; so pleased that his eyes shone with delight.

"Ah! Now I see why the Fates drove me forth upon the highway this morning," said he. "Do you know that I have a large volume of work for an expert typist, and that I have thus far felt that my present isolation in the desert wastes was an almost unsurmountable obstacle to having the work done in a satisfactory manner? I have been engaged upon a certain work on sociological problems and how they developed with the growth of civilization. You will readily apprehend that great care must be exercised in making the copy practically letter-perfect. Furthermore, I find myself constantly revising the manuscript. I should want to supervise the work rather closely, and for that reason I have not as yet arranged for the final typing. Now, if you care to assume the task, I can assure you that I shall feel tremendously grateful—besides making adequate remuneration for the labor involved."

That is the way he put it, and that is how it happened that Helen May let herself in for the hardest piece of work she had ever attempted since she sold gloves at Bullock's all day and attended night school all the evening, learning shorthand and typewriting and bookkeeping—and letting the white plague fasten itself upon her while she bent to her studies.

She let herself in for it because she believed she had plenty of time, and because Holman Sommers was in no hurry for the manuscript, which he did not expect to see completed for a year or so—since a work so erudite required much time and thought, being altogether different from current fiction, which requires none at all.

CHAPTER IX.

"'*The human polyp incessantly builds upon a coral reef. They become lithified, as it were, and constitute the strata of the psychozoic stage——*' I told you the butter's at the spring! *Will* you leave me alone? That's the third page I've spoiled over psycho-what-you-call-it. Go on back and herd your goats, and for Heaven's sake can that tulip-and-rose song! I hate it!" Helen May ripped a page with two carbon copies out of the machine, pulled out the carbons and crumpled three sheets of paper into a ball, which she threw into a far corner.

"Gee, but you're pecky to-day! You act like an extra slammed into a sob lead and gettin' upstage about it. I wish that long-worded hick had never showed up with his soiled package of

nut science. A feller can't *live* with you, by gosh, since you——"

"Well, listen to this, Vic: *'There is a radical difference between organic and social evolution, the formula most easily expressing this distinction being that environment transforms the animal, while man transforms the environment. This transformation——'*"

"Hel-up! Hel-up!" Vic went staggering out of the door with his palm pressed against his forehead in the gesture meant to register great mental agony, while his face was split with that nearly famous comedy grin of his. "Serves you right," he flung back at her, in his normal tone of brotherly condescension. "The way you fell for that nut—like you was a starved squirrel shut up in a peanut wagon, by gosh! Hope you're bogged down in jawbreakers the rest of the summer. Serves yuh right—but you needn't think you can take it out on *me*. And"—he draped himself around the door jamb to add pointedly—"you should worry about the tulip song! If I'm willing to stand for you yawping day and night about the sun growin' *co*-hold, and all that bunk——"

"Oh, beat it—and shut up!" Helen May looked up from evening the edges of fresh paper and carbon to say sharply: "You better take a look and see where Billy is. And I'll tell you one thing, mister: if you go and lose any more goats, you needn't think for a minute that *I'll* walk my head off getting them for you."

"Aw, where do you get that line—walk your head off? I seem to remember you riding home on horseback with moonlight and a fellow to drive your goats. And you giving him the baby-eyed stare like he was a screen idol and you was an extra that was strong for him. Buh-lieve *me,* Helen Blazes, I'm wise. You're wishing a goat would get lost—now, while the moon's workin' steady!"

"Oh, beat it, Vic! I've got work to do, if you haven't." And to prove it Helen May began to type at her best speed.

Vic languidly removed himself from the door jamb, and, with a parting "I should bibble!" started back to his goats —which he had refused to graze outside the Basin as Holman Sommers advised. Helen May began again valiantly to struggle with the fine, symmetrical, but almost unreadable chirography of the man of many words. She succeeded in transcribing the human polyp properly lithified and correctly constituting the strata of the psychozoic stage, when Vic stuck his head in at the door again.

"From the des-urt he comes to thee-ee-ee,
And he's got a dog for thee to see-ee,"

he paraphrased mockingly, his voice going down to that terrifically deep-sea bass note of a boy whose voice is changing.

Helen May threw her eraser at him and missed. It went hurtling out into the yard and struck Starr on the point of the jaw as he was riding up to the cabin. Whereat Vic gave a brazenly exulting whoop and rushed off to his goats, bellowing raucously:

"When you wore a too-lup, a sweet, yell-ow too-lup,
'N' I wore a big red ro-o-ose——"

and looking back frequently in a half-curious, half-wistful way. Vic had been transplanted rather suddenly from the midst of many happy-go-lucky companions to an isolation lightened only by a mere sister's vicarious comradeship. If he yearned secretly for a share of Starr's interest, surely no one can blame him; but that he should voluntarily remove himself from Starr's presence in the belief that he had come to see Helen May exclusively, proves that Vic had the makings of a hero.

Starr dismounted and picked up the eraser from under the investigative nose of a coarse-haired, ugly, brown-and-black dog that had been following at Rabbit's heels. He took the eraser to Helen May, standing, embarrassed, in the doorway, and the dog followed and sniffed first her slipper toes and then her hand, which she held out to it ingratiatingly; after which appraisement the dog waggled its stub of a tail in token of its owner's friendliness.

"If you was a Mexican, he'd 'a' showed you his teeth," Starr observed pridefully. "How are you, after your jaunt the other night?"

"Just fine," Helen May testified graciously. It just happened—or had it just happened?—that she was dressed that day in a white crêpe de Chine blouse and a white corduroy skirt, and had on white slippers and white stockings. At the top button of her blouse—she could not have touched that button with her chin if she had tried—was a brown velvet bow the exact shade of her eyes. Her hair was done low and loose, with a negligent wave where it turned back from her left eyebrow. Peter had worshiped dumbly his Babe in that particular dress, and had considered her beautiful. One cannot wonder, then, that Starr's eyes paid tribute with a second long glance.

Starr had ridden a good many miles out of his way and had argued for a good while, and had finally paid a good many dollars to get the dog that sniffed and wagged at Helen May. The dog was a thoroughbred Airedale and had been taught from its puppyhood to herd goats and to hate Mexicans. It had learned to do both very thoroughly—hence the argument and the dollars necessary before Starr could gain possession of it.

Starr did not need a dog; certainly not that dog. He had no goats to herd, and he could hate Mexicans without any help or encouragement, when they needed hating. But he had gone to a great deal of trouble and expense to get this dog, because Helen May needed it.

He might have earned more gratitude for his thoughtfulness had he told her the truth instead of hiding it like guilt. He announced nonchalantly that he must be getting along, and that he had just stopped to get a drink and to see how they were making out.

"Blame dog's taken a notion to you. Followed me out from town. I throwed rocks at him till my arm ached——"

"Why, you mean thing! You might have hit him and hurt him—and he's a *nice* dog! Poor old purp—did he throw rocks, honest? He *did?* Well, just for that I've got a nice ham bone that you can have to gnaw on, and he can't have a snippy bit of it. All he can do is eat a piece of lemon pie that will probably make him sick. We hope so, don't we? Throwing rocks at a nice, ugly, stubby dog that wanted to follow!"

Starr accepted the pie and looked properly grateful and properly ashamed of himself. The dog accepted the ham bone and immediately stretched himself out with his nose and front paws hugging it close, growling threats at imaginary vandals. Now and then he glanced up gratefully at Helen May, who continued to speak of him in a commiserating tone.

"He sure has taken a notion to you," Starr persisted between mouthfuls. "You can have him, for all of me. *I* don't want the blame cur tagging *me* around. I'm liable to take a shot at him if I get peeved over something ——"

"You dare!" Helen May regarded him sternly from under her lashes, her chin tilted downward. "Do you always take a shot at something when you get peeved?"

"Well, I'm liable to," Starr admitted darkly. "A dog especially. You better keep him if you don't want him hurt or anything." He took a bite of pie. It was not very good pie. The crust was soggy because Johnny Calvert's cookstove was not a "good baker," and the frosting had gone watery, and Helen May had made a mistake and used too much sugar in the filling; but Starr liked it, anyway, just because she had made it. "Maybe you can learn him to herd goats," he suggested, as though the idea had just occurred to him.

"Oh, I wonder if he would! Would you, doggums?"

"We'll try him a whirl and see," Starr offered cheerfully. He finished the pie in one more swallow, handed back the plate, and wiped his fingers, man fashion, on his trousers. "Come on, Pat. He likes Pat for a name," he explained carefully to Helen May. "I

called him about every name I could think of, and that's the one he seems to sabe best."

"I should say he does! Why, he left his bone when you called Pat. Now that's a shame, doggums!"

"Oh, well, we'll let him polish off his bone first." Starr made the offer with praiseworthy cheerfulness and sat down on his heels with his back against the adobe wall to wait the dog's pleasure.

"Well, that makes up for some of the rocks," Helen May approved generously, "and for some of the names you say you called him. And that reminds me, Man of the Desert—I suppose you have a name of some sort yourself; I never heard what it was. Is it—Smith, perhaps?"

"My name's Starr," he told her, with a little flush under the tan of his cheeks. "S-t-a-double-r, Starr. I forgot I never told you. I've got a couple of given names, but I'd want to shoot a man that called me by 'em. Folks always call me just Starr—and maybe a few other things behind my back."

Helen May dropped her chin and looked at him steadily from under her eyebrows. "If there's anything that drives me perfectly *wild*," she said finally, "it's a mystery. I've just simply got to know what those names are. I'll never mention them, honest. But ——"

"Chauncy DeWitt," Starr confessed. "Forget 'em. They was wished onto me when I wasn't able to defend myself."

"Given names are horrid things, aren't they?" Helen May sympathized. "Yours aren't bad at all, but I think mine is perfectly imbecile. Fathers and mothers shouldn't be allowed to choose names for their children. They ought to wait till the kids are big enough to name themselves. If I ever have any, I'll call them It. When they grow up they can call themselves anything they like."

"You've got no right to kick," Starr declared bluntly. "Your name suits you fine."

His eyes said a great deal more, so that Helen May gave her attention to the dog. "There, now, you've licked it and polished it and left teeth marks all over it," she said, meaning the bone. "Come on, Pat, and let's see if you're a trained doggums." She looked up at Starr and smiled. "Suppose he starts running after them—he might chase them clear off the ranch, and then what?"

"I guess the supply of rocks'll hold out," Starr hinted, and snapped his fingers at the dog, which went to heel as a matter of course.

"If you throw rocks at that dog, I'll throw rocks at you," Helen May threatened viciously.

"And I'll hit and you'll miss," Starr added placidly. "Come on, Pat; let's get busy and see if you deserved that bone."

Helen May had learned from uncomfortable experience that high-heeled slippers are not made for tramping over rocks and sand. She said that she would come as soon as she put on some shoes, but Starr chose to wait for her; though he pretended—to himself as much as to her—that he must take the bridle off Rabbit and let him pick a few mouthfuls of grass while he had the chance. Also he loosened the cinch and killed a fly or two on Rabbit's neck, and so managed to put in the time until Helen May appeared in her khaki skirt and her high boots.

"That's the sensible outfit for this work," Starr plucked up courage to comment, as they started off. "That kid brother of yours must get pretty lonesome, too, out here," he added. "If you had some one to stay with you, I'd take him out on a trip with me once in a while and show him the country and let him learn to handle himself with a horse and gun. A fellow's got to learn, in this country. So have you. How about it? Ever shoot a gun, either of you?"

"Vic used to keep me broke, begging money for the shooting gallery down near our place," said Helen May. "I used to shoot there a little."

"Popgun stuff, but good practice,"

said Starr succinctly. "Got a gun on the ranch?"

"No—only Vic's little single-shot twenty-two. That is good enough for jack rabbits. What would we want a gun for?"

Starr laughed. "Season's always open for coyotes, and you could pick up a little money in bounties now and then, if you had a gun," he said. "That would keep you out in the open, too, which you need. I dunno but what I've got a rifle I could let you have. I did have one—a little too light a caliber for me, but it would be just about right for you. It's a .25-.35 carbine. I'm right sure I've got that gun on hand yet. I'll bring it over to you. You sure ought to have a gun."

They were nearing the goats scattered over the slope that was shadiest—chosen for Vic's comfort, and not because of any thought for his charges. Vic himself was sprawled in the shade of a huge rock, and for pastime he was throwing rocks at every ground squirrel that poked its nose out of a hole. The two hundred goats were scattered far and wide, but as long as Billy was nibbling a bush within sight, Vic did not worry about the rest. He lifted himself to a sitting posture when the two came up.

"Didn't think to bring any pie, I s'pose?" he hinted broadly, and grinned companionably at Starr.

"You've had two hand-outs since lunch. I guess you'll last another hour," Helen May retorted unfeelingly. "See the dog that followed Mr. Starr out from town, Vic? We're going to see if he can herd goats."

"Well, if he can, he's got my permission—that's a cinch."

"I do believe he can—see him look at them! His name's Pat, and he likes me awfully well."

"Where does he get that idea?" taunted Vic, and winked openly at Starr, who was good enough to smile over what he considered a very poor joke.

"Well, let's see you bunch 'em, Pat." Starr made a wide, sweeping gesture with his left arm, his eyes stealing a quick look at the girl.

Pat looked up at him, waggled his stub of a tail, and darted down the slope to the left, now and then uttering a yelp. Scattered goats lifted heads to look, their jaws working comically sidewise as though they felt they must dispose of that particular mouthful before something happened to prevent. As Pat neared them, they scrambled away from him, running to the right, which was toward the bulk of the band.

Down into the Basin itself the dog ran, after a couple of goats that had strayed out into the level. These he drove back in a panic of haste—dodging this way and that, nipping, yelping now and then until they had joined the others. Then he went on to the farther fringes of the band, which evened like the edge of a pie crust under the practiced fingers of a good cook.

"Well, would you look at that!" Helen May, never having watched a good "sheep" dog at work, spoke in an awed tone.

"Seems to have the savvy, all right," Starr observed, just as though he had not paid all those dollars for the "savvy" that made Pat one of the best goat dogs in the State.

"Savvy? Why, that dog's human! Now, I suppose he's stopping over there to see what he must do next. Is he?"

"Wants to know whether I want 'em all rounded up, or just edged up outa the Basin. G' *round* 'em, Pat!" he called, and made a wide, circular sweep with his right arm.

Pat gave a yelp, dropped his head, and scurried up the ridge, driving all stragglers back toward the center of the flock. He went to the very crest and sniffed into the wind to satisfy himself that none had strayed beyond his sight; returned and evened up the ragged edges of the band, and then came trotting back to Starr with six inches of pink tongue draped over his lower jaw, and a smile in his eyes, and a waggle of satisfaction at loved work well done. The goats, with a meek Billy in the foreground, huddled in a compact mass on the slope and eyed

the dog as they had never eyed Vic, for all his hoe handle and his accuracy with rocks.

Helen May dropped her hand on Pat's head and looked soberly into his upturned eyes. "You're a perfect miracle of a dog—so you can't be my dog, after all," she said. "Your owner will be hunting day and night to find you. I know I should, if you got lost from me." She looked at Starr. "Don't you think you really ought to take him back with you? It—somehow it doesn't seem quite right to keep a dog that knows so much. Why, the man I bought the goats from had a dog that could herd them, and he wanted twenty-five dollars for it—and at that he claimed he was putting the price awfully low for me, just because I was a lady, you know."

Starr was—as he put it—kicking himself for having lied himself into this dilemma. Also he was wondering how best he might lie himself out of it.

"You want to look out for these marks that say they're giving you the big end of a bargain just because you're a lady," he said. "Chances are they're figuring right then on doing you. If that fellow had got twenty-five for his dog, take it from me he wouldn't have lost anything."

"Well, but *do* you think it would be right to keep this dog?"

Since she put it that way, Starr felt better. "I sure do. Keep him, anyway, till he's called for. When I go back I'll find out where he comes from; and when I've located the owner maybe I'll be able to fix it up with him somehow. You sure ought to have a dog. So let it stand that way. I'll tell yuh when to give him up."

Helen May opened her lips; and Starr, to forestall argument and to save his soul from further sin, turned toward the dog. "Bring 'em home, Pat," he said, and then started toward the corral, which was down below the spring. "Watch him drive," he said to Helen May, and so managed to distract her attention from the ethics of the case.

Without any assistance, Pat drove the goats to the corral. More than that, at Starr's command he split the band and held half of them aloof while the rest went in. He sent these straight down the Basin until Star recalled him, when he swung back and corralled them with the others. He came, then, toward the three for further orders, whereupon Vic, who had been silent from sheer astonishment, gave a sudden whoop.

"Hey, Pat! You forgot something. Go back and put up the bars!" he yelled. Then he heaved his hoe handle far from him and stretched his arms high over his head like one released from an onerous task. "I'll walk out and let Pat have my job," he said. "Herding goats is dog's work, anyhow—and I told you so the first day, Helen Blazes. Hadn't herded 'em five minutes before I knew I wasn't cut out for a farmer."

"Go on, Pat—you stay with your goats," Starr commanded gently. And Pat—because he had suckled a nanny goat when he was a pup and had grown up with her kid, and had lived with goats all his life—trotted into the corral, found himself a likable spot near the gate, snuffed it all over, turned around twice, and curled himself down upon it in perfect content.

"He'll stay there all night," Starr told them, laying the bars in their sockets. "It's a little early to corral 'em—sundown is about the regular time—but it's a good scheme to give him plenty of time to get acquainted with the layout. You get up early, Vic, and let 'em out. Pat'll do the rest. I'll have to jog along now."

"Well, say," Vic objected, rubbing his tousled blond hair into a distracted, upstanding condition, "I wish you'd show me just how you shift his gears. How the dickens do you do it? He don't know what you *say*."

Before he left, Starr showed him the gestures, and Vic that evening practiced them so enthusiastically that he nearly drove Helen May wild. Perhaps that is why, when she was copying a sentence where Holman Sommers had mentioned the stars of the universe,

Helen May spelled "stars" "Starrs" and did not notice the mistake at all.

CHAPTER X.

Having wasted a couple of hours more than he intended to waste in delivering the dog, Starr called upon Rabbit to make up those two hours for him. And, being an extremely misleading little gray horse, with a surprising amount of speed and endurance stored away under his hide, Rabbit did not fall far short of doing so.

Starr had planned an unexpected visit to the Medina rancho. In the guise of stock buyer, his unexpectedness would be perfectly plausible, and Starr was well pleased to arrive there late, so long as he did not arrive after dark. Just before sundown would do very well, he had decided. He would catch Estan Medina off his guard, and he would have the evening before him in case he wanted to scout among the arroyos on the way home.

Starr very much wanted to know who drove an automobile into isolated arroyos, and without lights, over the desert trails at nights. He had not, strange to say, seen any machine with Silvertown Cord tires in San Bonito or in Malpais, though he had given every car he saw the second glance to make sure. He knew that such tires were something new and expensive—and so much so that they were not in general use in that locality. Even in El Paso they were rarely seen at that time, and only the fact that the great man who gave him his orders had happened to be using them on his machine, and had mentioned the fact to Starr, who was honored with his friendship, had caused Starr to be familiar with them and to recognize instantly the impress they left in soft soil. It was a clew, and that was the best he could say for it. It was just a little better than nothing, he decided. What he wanted most was to see the machine itself at close range, and to see the men—and there was good reason.

There was a secret political movement afoot in the Southwest; a movement hidden so far underground as to be practically unnoticed on the surface, but a movement, nevertheless, that had been felt and recorded by that political seismograph, the secret service of our government. It had been learned—no mere patriot may know just how—that the movement was called the Mexican Alliance. It was suspected that the object was the restoration of three of our States to Mexico, their original owner. Suspected, mind you; and when even the secret service can do no more than suspect, you will see how well hidden was the plot. Its extent and its ramifications they could only guess at. Its leaders no man could name—nor even those who might be suspected more than others.

But a general uprising in three States, in conjunction with and under control of a concerted, far-sweeping revolution across the border, would not be a thing to laugh over. Uncle Sam smiled tolerantly when some would have had him chastise. Uncle Sam smiled and watched and waited—and drummed his fingers while he read secret reports from men away out somewhere in Arizona and New Mexico and Texas and urged them to burrow deeper and deeper underground and to follow at any cost the molelike twistings and blind turnings of this plot to steal away three whole States in a lump.

This, then, was why Starr was so curious about that automobile, and why he was interested in Estancio Medina, Mexican American rancher who owned much land and many herds, and who was counted a power among his countrymen; who spoke English with what passed for fluency, and who had very decided and intelligent opinions upon political matters, and who boldly proclaimed his enthusiasm for the advancement of his own race.

But he did not go to the Medina rancho that evening, for the very good reason that he met his man fair in the trail where it looped around the head of the draw where he had heard the automobile running without lights. As on that evening, Starr had cut straight across the loop, going east instead of

west. And where the trail forked on the farther side he met Estan Medina driving a big, lathery bay horse hitched to a shiny, new, covered buggy. He seemed in a hurry, but he pulled up, nevertheless, to have a word with Starr. And Starr, always observant of details, saw that he had three or four packages in the bottom of the buggy, which seemed to bear out Estan's statement that he had been to town—meaning San Bonito.

Starr rolled a cigarette and smoked it while he gossiped with Estan of politics, pretty girls, and the price of mutton. He had been eying the new buggy speculatively and at last he spoke of it in that admiring tone which warms the heart of the listener.

"Some turnout, Estan," he summed up. "But you ought to be driving an automobile. All your friends are getting them."

Estan lifted his shoulders in true Spanish fashion and smiled. "No, amigo. Me, I can take pleasure yet from horses. And the madre, she's so 'fraid of them automobiles. She cries yet when she knows I ride in one a little bit. Now she's so proud when I drives the new buggy home. She folds so pretty her best mantilla over her head and rides with me to church, and she bows so—polite to all the señoras from the new buggy! And her face shines with the happiness in her heart. Oh, no, not me for the big automobile!" He smiled and shrugged and threw out his hands. "I like best to see my money walking around with wool on the back. Excuse, señor. I go now to bring the new buggy home and to see smile of my mother." Then he bethought him of the tradition of his house. "You come and have a soft bed and the comfort of my house," he urged. "It is far to San Bonito, and it is not so far to my house."

Starr explained plausibly his haste, sent a friendly message to the mother and Luis, and rode on thoughtfully. Now and then he turned to glance behind him at the dust cloud rolling rapidly around the head of the draw.

Since Estan had been to town himself that day, Starr reasoned that there would not be much gained by scouting through the arroyos that led near the Medina rancho. Estan would have seen in town the men he wanted to see. He could do that easily enough and without exciting the least suspicion, for San Bonito had plenty of saloons that were popular, and yet unobtrusive, meeting places. No need for the mysterious automobile to make the long journey through the sand to-day, if Estan Medina was the object of the visit—and Starr knew of no other Mexican out that way who would be important enough to have a hand in the mixing of political intrigue.

He rode on, letting Rabbit drop into his poco-poco trail trot. He carried his head bent forward a little, and his eyebrows were pulled into a scowl of concentrated thought. It was all very well to suspect Estan Medina and to keep an eye upon him, but there were others who came nearer to the heart of the plot. He wanted to know who these were, and he believed that if he could once identify the four Mexicans whom Helen May had seen, he would be a long step ahead. He considered the simple expedient of asking her to describe them as closely as she could. But since secrecy was the keynote of his quest, he did not want to rouse her curiosity, and for purely personal reasons did want to shield her as far as possible from any uneasiness or any entanglement in the affair.

Thinking of Helen May in that light forced him to consider what would be her plight if he and his coworkers failed; if the plan went on to actual fulfillment, and the Mexican element actually did revolt. Babes, they were, those two alone there in Sunlight Basin; with a single-shot "twenty-two" for defense, when every American rancher in three States considered high-power rifles and plenty of ammunition as necessary in his home as flour and bacon!

Starr shivered a little and tried to pull his mind away from Helen May and her helplessness. At any rate, he comforted himself, they had the dog for protection—the dog who had been

trained to jump the corral at any hour of the night if a Mexican came near. And the point was, he must not fail. If intrigue burrowed deep, then he and those others must burrow deeper.

So thinking, he came, just after sundown, to where the trail branched off in three directions. One was the direct road to San Bonito, another took a roundabout way through a Mexican settlement on the river and so came to the town from another angle, and the third branch wound over the granite ridge to Malpais. Studying the problem as a whole, picturing the havoc which an uprising would wreck upon those vast grazing grounds of the Southwest, and how two nations would be embroiled in spite of themselves, he was hoping that his collaborators, scattered here and there through the country—men whose names he did not even know—were making more headway than he seemed to be making here. He would not know, of course, unless he were needed to assist or to supplement their work in some way. But he hoped they had found out something definite, something which the war department could take hold of—a lever, as it were, to pry up the whole scheme. He was thinking of these things, but his mind was nevertheless alert enough to the little trail signs which it had become second nature to read. So he saw, there in the dust of the trail, where a buggy had turned around and gone back whence it had come. He saw that it had been traveling toward town, but had turned and come back. And, looking more closely, he saw that one horse had pulled the buggy.

He stopped to make sure of that, and to search for footprints. But these he found were indistinct, blurred partly by the looseness of the sand and partly by the sparse grass that grew along the trail there, because the buggy had turned in a hollow. He went on a couple of rods and he saw where an automobile had also come to this point and had turned and gone back toward town—rather, it had swung sharply around and taken the roundabout trail which led through the Mexican settlement; but he guessed that it had gone back to town, for all that. And the tire marks were made by Silvertown Cords.

Starr stopped and looked back to where the buggy tracks were faintly outlined in the dust of the hollow, and he spoke aloud his thought: "You'd think, just to see him and talk to him, that Estan Medina assays one hundred per cent satisfied farmer. He's sure some fox—that same greaser!"

After that he shook Rabbit into a long, distance-eating lope for town. Night came with its flaring forerunners of purples and crimson and all the gorgeous blendings of the two. By the time he reached San Bonito, the stars were out and the electric lights were sputtering on certain street corners. Starr had rented a small adobe cabin and a corral with a shed on the outskirts of town, where his movements might be unobserved. He did not always use these, but stopped frequently at a hotel with a garrulous landlord, and stabled his horse at a certain livery which he knew to be a hotbed of the town's gossip. In both places he was a privileged patron and was the recipient of many choice bits of scandal whispered behind a prudent palm, with a wink now and then to supply the finer shades of meaning.

To-night he chose the cabin and the corral sandwiched between a transfer company's warehouse and a steam laundry that had been closed by the sheriff. The cabin fronted on a street that was seldom used, and the corral ran back to a dry arroyo that was used mainly as a dump for the town's tin cans and dead cats and such; not a particularly attractive place, but secluded.

He turned Rabbit into the corral, went in and cooked himself some supper; and afterward, in a different suit and shoes and a hat that spoke loudly of the latest El Paso fad in men's headgear, he strolled down to the corner and up the next street to the nearest garage. Ostensibly he was looking for one Pedro Miera, who had a large sheep ranch out east of San Bonito, and who always had fat sheep for sale. Starr considered it safe to look for Miera,

whom he had seen yesterday in El Paso just nicely started on a ten-day spree that never stopped short of the city jail.

Since it was the dull hour between the day's business and the evening's pleasure, Starr strolled the full length of the garage and back again before any man spoke to him. He made sure that no car there had the kind of tires he sought, so he asked if Miera and his machine had showed up there that day, and left as soon as the man said no.

San Bonito was no city, and it did not take long to make the round of the garages. No one had seen Miera that day—and Starr's disappointment was quite noticeable, though misunderstood. Not a car in any of the four garages sported Silvertown Cords. But at the last garage an arc light flared over the wide doorway. Starr, feeling pretty well disgusted, was leaving when he saw a tire track alongside the red gasoline filling pump. He stopped and under cover of lighting his cigarette he studied the tread. Beyond all doubt the car he wanted had stopped there for gas. But the garage man was a Mexican, so Starr dared not risk a question nor show any interest whatever in the car whose tires left those long-lined imprints to tell of its passing. He puffed at his cigarette until he had studied the angle of the front-wheel track, and decided that the car must have been headed south and that it had made a rather short turn away from the pump.

This was puzzling for a while. The driver might have been turning around to go back the way he had come. But it was more likely that he had driven into the cross street to the west. He strolled over that way, but the light was too dim to trace automobile tires in the dust of the street, so Starr went back to the adobe cabin and put in the next hour oiling and cleaning and polishing a .25-.35 carbine which he meant to give Helen May, and in filling a cartridge belt with shells.

He sat for some time turning two six-shooters over in his hands, trying to decide which would please her most. One was lighter than the other, with an easier trigger action, almost too easy for a novice, he told himself. But it had a pearl handle, with a bulldog carved on the side that would show when the gun was in its holster. She'd like that fancy stuff, he supposed. Also he could teach her to shoot straighter with that light "pull." But the other was what Starr called a sure-enough go-getter.

He finally decided, of course, to give her the fancy one. For Vic he would have to buy a gun; an automatic, maybe. He'd have to talk coyotes pretty strong, in order to impress it upon them that they must never go away anywhere without a gun. Good thing there was bounty on coyotes—the money would look big to the kid, anyway. It occurred to him, further, that he could tell them there was danger of running into a rabid coyote. Rabies, he knew, had caused a good deal of trouble in other States, so he could make the danger plausible enough.

He did not worry much over frightening the girl. She had nerve enough. Think of her tackling that ranch proposition, with just that cub brother to help! When Starr thought of that slim, big-eyed, smiling girl in white fighting poverty and the white plague together out there on the rim of the desert, a lump came up in his throat. She had nerve enough—that plucky little lady with the dull-gold hair and the brown velvet eyes!

He went to bed and lay for a long time while thinking of Helen May out there in that two-roomed adobe cabin, with a fifteen-year-old boy for protection and miles of wilderness between her and any other human habitation. It was small comfort, then, to Starr that she had the dog. One bullet can settle a dog, and then—— Starr could not look calmly at the possibility of what might happen then.

"They've no business out there like that, alone!" he muttered, rising to an elbow and thumping his hard pillow viciously. "Good Lord! Haven't they got any folks?"

CHAPTER XI.

Soon after daylight, Rabbit snorted and ran a little way down the corral toward the cabin. Starr, trained to light sleeping and instant waking, was up and standing back from the little window with his six-shooter in his hand before Rabbit had stopped to whirl and look for what had scared him. So Starr was in time to see a "big-four" Stetson hat with a horsehair hatband sink from sight behind the high board fence at the rear of the corral.

Starr waited. Rabbit shook his head as though he was disgusted with himself, and began nosing the ground for the wisps of hay which a high wind had blown there. Starr retreated to a point where he could see without risk of being seen and watched.

In a few minutes, when the horse had forgotten all about the incident and was feeding again, the Stetson hat very cautiously rose again into view. Under its gray brim Starr saw a pair of black eyes peer over the fence. He watched them glancing here and there, coming to finally rest upon the cabin itself.

They watched Rabbit, and Starr knew that they watched for some sign of alarm rather than any great interest in the horse. Rabbit lifted his head and looked that way boredly for a moment before he went back to his feeding, and the eyes lifted a little, so that the upper part of the owner's face came into view.

A young Mexican, Starr judged him, because of his smooth skin around the eyes. He waited. The fellow rose now so that the fence came just below his lips, which were full and curved in the pleasant lines of youth. His eyes kept moving this way and that, so that the whites showed with each turn of the eyeball.

Starr studied what he could see of the face. Thick eyebrows, well formed except that the left one took a whimsical turn upward; heavy lashes, the high, thin nose of the Mexican who is part Indian—as are practically all of the lower, or peon class—that much he had plenty of time to note. Then there was the mouth, which Starr knew might be utterly changed in appearance when one saw the chin that went with it.

A hundred young fellows in San Bonito might answer equally well a description of those features. And the full-crowned, gray Stetson may be seen by the thousand in at least four States; and horsehair hatbands may be bought in any saddlery for two or three dollars—perhaps for less, if one does not demand too long a pair of tassels—and are loved by Indians and those who think they are thus living up to the picturesque old West. So far as he could see, there was nothing much to identify the fellow, unless he could get a better look at him.

The Mexican gave another long look at the cabin, studying every point, even the roof. Then he tried to see into the shed where Starr kept his saddle and where Rabbit could shelter himself from the cold winds. There was no door—no front, even, on the side toward the house. But the side was built out into the corral so that the fellow could not see around its corner. He moved along the fence—which gave Starr a very good idea of his height—and down to the very corner of the vacant laundry building. There he stopped and looked again. He was eying Starr's saddle, apparently taking in every detail of its workmanship. He looked again at Rabbit, who was turned then so that his brand, the double turkey track, stood out plainly on both thighs. Then, with another slant-eyed inspection of the cabin, he ducked down behind the fence and disappeared, his going betrayed by his hat crown, which was taller than he imagined and showed a good four inches above the fence.

Starr had edged along the dark wall of the room so that he had kept the man in sight. Now, when the hat crown moved away down the trail that skirted the garbage-filled arroyo, he snorted, threw his gun down on the bed, and began to dress himself, rummaging in his "war bag" for a gray-checked cap, and taking down from the wall a gray suit that he had never liked and had never worn since the day it came from

the mail looking altogether different from the four-inch square he had chosen from an agent's sample book. He snorted again when he had the suit on and surveyed it with a dissatisfied, downward glance. In his opinion, he looked like a preacher trying to disguise himself as a sport, but to complete the combination he unearthed a pair of tan ties and put them on. After that he stood for a minute staring down the fresh-creased, gray trousers to his tan toes.

"Looks like the very devil!" he snorted again. "But, anyway, it's different." He dusted the cap by the simple expedient of slapping it several times against his leg. When he had hung it on the back of his head and pulled it well down in front—as nine out of ten always put on a cap—he did, indeed, look different, though he did not look at all like the demon he named. Helen May, for instance, would have needed a second close glance before she recognized him, but that glance would probably have carried with it a smile for his improved appearance.

He surveyed as much of the neighborhood as he could see through the windows, looked at his watch and saw that it was late enough to appear downtown without exciting comment from the early birds, and went out into the corral and fed Rabbit. He looked over the fence where the Mexican had stood, but the faint imprint of the man's boots were not definite enough to tell him anything. He viewed the neighborhood from different angles and could see no trace of any one watching the place, so he felt fairly satisfied that the fellow had gone for the present, though he believed it very likely that he might return later.

As he saw the incident, he was not yet considered worth shadowing, but had in some way excited a certain degree of curiosity about himself. Starr did not like that at all. He had hoped to impress every one with his perfect harmlessness, and to pass for the stock buyer and nothing else.

He could not imagine how he had possibly excited suspicion, and he wanted to lull it immediately and permanently. The obvious way to do that would be to rise late, saddle Rabbit, and ride around town a little—to the post office and a saloon, for instance; get his breakfast at the best patronized place in town, and then go about his legitimate business. On the other hand, he wanted to try and trace those Cord tires down the cross street, if he could, and he could not well do that on horseback without betraying the fact.

The shed was built out flush with the arroyo edge, so that at the rear of the corral one could only go as far as the gate, which was closed against the end of the shed. It occurred to Starr that if the young Mexican had been looking for something to steal, he would probably have come in at the gate, which was only fastened with a stout hook on the inside.

The arroyo bank had caved under the farther corner of the shed, so that a hole the size of a large barrel showed at that end of the manger. Cats and dogs—and perhaps boys—had gone in and out there until a crude kind of trail was worn down the bank to the arroyo bottom. At some risk to his tan shoes and his new gray suit, Starr climbed into the manger and let himself down that hole.

The trail was firm and dry and so steep he had to dig his heels in to keep from tobogganing to the bottom, but once down he had only to follow the arroyo bottom to a place where he could climb out. Before he found such a place he came to a deep, dry gully that angled back toward the business part of town. A footpath in the bottom of it encouraged him to follow it, and a couple of hundred yards farther along he emerged upon the level end of a street given over to secondhand stores, junk shops, and a plumber's establishment. From there to the main street was easy enough.

Only a few citizens were abroad as he had expected, and Starr strolled over to the cross street he wanted to inspect. He found the long-lined tread of the tires he sought, plainly marked where they had turned into this street.

After that he lost them where they had been blotted out by the broad tires of a truck. When he was sure that he could trace them no farther, he turned back, meaning to have breakfast at his favorite restaurant. And as he turned he met face to face a tall young Mexican in a full-crowned Stetson banded with horsehair.

Now, as already mentioned, San Bonito was full of young Mexicans who wore Stetson hats and favored horsehair bands around them. Starr glanced at the fellow sharply, got the uninterested, impersonal look of the perfect stranger who neither knows nor cares who you are and who has troubles of his own to occupy his mind—the look which nineteen persons out of twenty give to a stranger on the street.

Starr went on unconcernedly, whistling under his breath, but at the corner he turned sharply to the left, and in turning he flicked a glance back at the fellow. The Mexican was not giving him any attention whatever, as far as he could see; on the contrary, he was staring down at the ground as though he, too, were looking for something. Starr gave him another stealthy look, gained nothing from it, and shrugged his shoulders and went on.

He ate his breakfast while he turned the matter over in his mind. What had he done to rouse suspicion? He could not remember anything, for he had not yet found anything much to work on; nothing, in fact, except that slight clew of the automobile—and he did not even know who had been in it. He suspected that they had gone to meet Estan Medina—but as long as that suspicion was tucked away in the back of his mind, how was any one going to know that he suspected Estan? He had not been near the chief of police or the sheriff or any other officer. He had not talked with any man about the Mexican Alliance, nor had he asked any man about it. Instead, he had bought sheep and cattle and goats and hogs from the ranchers, and he had paid a fair price for them and had shipped them openly, under the eye of the stock inspector to the El Paso Meat Company. So far he had kept his eyes open and his mouth shut and had waited until some ripple on the surface betrayed the disturbance underneath.

He was not sure that the young man he met on the street was the one who had been spying over the fence, but he did not mean to take it for granted that he was not the same, and perhaps be sorry afterward for his carelessness. He strolled around town, bought an automatic gun and a lot of cartridges for Vic, went into a barber shop on a corner and had a shave and a hair cut, and kept his eyes open for a tall young Mexican who might be unduly interested in his movements. He met various acquaintances, who expressed surprise at not having seen him around the hotel. To these he explained that he had rented a corral for his horse, where he could be sure of the feed Rabbit was getting, and to save the expense of a livery stable. Rabbit had been kinda off his fed, he said, and he wanted to look after him himself. So he had been sleeping there in the cabin that went with the corral.

His friends thought that was a sensible move, and praised his judgment, and Starr felt better. He did not, however, tell them just where the corral was located. He had some notion of moving to another place, so he considered that it would be just as well not to go into details.

So thinking, he took his packages and started across that gully which led into the arroyo that let him into his place by the back way. He meant to return as he had come; and if any one happened to be spying he would think Starr had chosen that route as a short cut to town, which it was.

A block away from the little side street that opened to the gully, Starr stopped short, shocked into a keener attention to his surroundings. He had just stepped over an automobile track on the walk, where a machine had crossed it to enter a gateway which was now closed. And the track had been made by a Silvertown Cord tire. He looked up at the gate of unpainted planks, heavy-hinged and set into a

high adobe wall such as one sees so often in New Mexico. The gate was locked, as he speedily discovered; locked on the inside, he guessed, with bars or great hooks or something.

He went on to the building that seemed to belong to the place; a long, two-story adobe building with the conventional two-story portico running along the entire front, and with the deep-set, barred windows that are also typically Mexican. Every town in the adobe section of the Southwest has a dozen or so buildings almost exactly like this one. The door was blue-painted, with the paint scaling off. Over it was a plain-lettered sign: *"Las Nuevas."*

Starr had seen copies of that Mexican paper at the ranches he visited, and as far as he knew it was an ordinary newspaper of the country-town style, printed in Mexican, for the benefit of a large percentage of Mexican Americans whose knowledge of English print is extremely hazy.

He walked on slowly to the corner, puzzling over this new twist in the faint clew he followed. It had not occurred to him that so innocuous a sheet as *Las Nuevas* should be implicated—and yet, why not? He turned at the corner and went back to the nearest news stand, where he bought an El Paso paper for a blind and laid it down on a pile of *Las Nuevas* while he lighted his cigarette. He talked with the little, pock-marked Mexican who kept the shop. and when the fellow's back was turned for a minute he stole a copy of *Las Nuevas* off the pile and strolled out of the shop with it wrapped in his El Paso paper. He stole it because he knew that not many Americans ever bought the paper, and he feared that the hombre in charge might wonder why an Americano should pay a nickel for a copy of *Las Nuevas.* As it happened, the hombre in charge was looking into a mirror cunningly placed for the guarding of his stock, and he saw Starr steal the paper. Also he saw Starr slip a dime under a stack of magazines, where it would be found later on. So he wondered a great deal more than he would have done if Starr had bought the paper—but Starr did not know that.

Starr went back to his cabin by way of the arroyo and the hole in the manger. When he unlocked the door and went in, he had an odd feeling that some one had been there in his absence. He stood still just inside the door and inspected everything, trying to remember just where his clothes had been scattered, where he had left his hat, just how his blankets had been flung back on the bed when he jumped up to see what had startled Rabbit; every detail, in fact, that helps to make up the general look of a room left in disorder. He did remember, for his memory had been well trained for details. He knew that his hat had been on the table with the front toward the wall. It was there now, just as he had flung it down. He knew that his pillow had been dented with the shape of his head, and that it had lain askew on the bed; it was just as it had been. Everything—his boots, his dark coat spread over the back of the chair, his trousers across the foot of the bed—everything was the same, yet the feeling persisted.

Starr was no more imaginative than he needed to be for the work he had to do. He was not in the least degree nervous over that work. Yet he was sure some one had been in the room during his absence, and he could not tell why he was sure. At least, for ten minutes and more he could not tell why; then his eyes lit upon a cigarette stub lying on the hearth of the little cook-stove in one corner of the room. Starr always used "wheat-straw" papers, which were brown. This cigarette had been rolled in white paper. He picked it up and discovered that one end was still moist from the lips of the smoker, and the other end was still warm from the fire that had half consumed it. Starr gave an enlightened sniff and knew it was his olfactory nerves that had warned him of an alien-presence there, for the tobacco in this cigarette was not the brand he smoked.

He stood thinking it over, puzzling again over the mystery of their suspicion of him. He tried to recall some

careless act, some imprudent question, an ill-considered remark. He was giving up the riddle again when that trained memory of his flashed before him a picture that, trivial as it was in itself, yet was as enlightening as the white paper of the cigarette on the stove hearth.

Two days before, just after his arrival in San Bonito, he had sent a wire to a certain man in El Paso. The message itself had not been of very great importance, but the man to whom he had sent it had no connection whatever with the meat company. He was, in fact, the go-between in the investigation of the secret service. Through him the war department issued commands to Starr and his fellows, and through him it kept in touch with the situation.

Starr had used two code words and a number in that message. And he now distinctly remembered the girl who had waited upon him was dark, with a Spanish cast of features—when she had counted the words and checked the charge and pushed his change across to him, she had given him a keen, appraising look from under her lashes, though the smile she sent with it had given the glance a feminine and wholly flattering interpretation. Starr remembered that look now and saw in it something more than coquetry.

He remembered, too, that he had glanced back from the doorway and caught her still looking after him; and that he had smiled, and she had smiled swiftly in return and had then turned away abruptly to her work. To her work? Starr remembered now that she had turned and spoken to a sulky-faced messenger boy who was sitting slumped down on the curve of his back with his tightly buttoned tunic folded up to his armpits so that his hands could burrow to the very bottom of his pockets. He had looked up, muttered something, reluctantly removed himself from the chair, and had started away. The boy, too, had the Mexican look.

Well, at any rate, he knew now how the thing had started. He heaved a sigh of relief and threw himself down on the bed, wadding the pillow into a hard ball under the nape of his neck and unfolding the Mexican newspaper. He had intended to move camp; but now that they had begun to trail him, he decided to stay where he was and give them a run for their money—as he put it.

Starr could read Spanish well enough for ordinary purposes. He went carefully through *Las Nuevas,* from war news to the local advertisements. There was nothing that could even be twisted into a message of hidden meaning to the initiated. *Las Nuevas* was what it called itself—*The News.* It was exactly as innocuous as he had believed it to be. Its editorial page, even, was absolutely banal in its servility to city, county, State, and national policy.

"That's a bird of a thing to steal!" grumbled Starr, and threw the paper disgustedly from him.

CHAPTER XII.

That day Starr rode out into the country and looked at a few head of cows and steers that a sickly American wanted to sell so he could go East for his health—there being in most of us some peculiar psychological leaning toward seeking health afar. Starr went back afterward to town and made Rabbit comfortable in the corral, reasoning that if he were going to be watched he would be watched no matter where he went; but he ate his supper in the dining room of the Plaza Hotel, and sat in the lobby talking with a couple of facetious drummers until the mechanical piano in the movie show across the way began to play. He went to the show, sat through it patiently, strolled out when it was over, and visited a saloon or two. Then, when he thought his evening might be considered well rounded out with harmless diversions, he went out to his cabin, following the main street, but keeping well in the shadow, as though he wished to avoid observation.

He had reason to believe that some one followed him out there, which did not displease him much. He lighted his

lamp and fussed around for half an hour or so before he blew out the light and went to bed.

At three o'clock in the morning, with a wind howling in from the mountains, Starr got up and dressed in the dark, fumbling for a pair of "sneakers" he had placed beside his bed. He let himself out into the corral, being careful to keep close to the wall of the house until he reached the high board fence. Here, too, he had to feel his way because of the pitchy blackness of the night; and if the rattling wind prevented him from hearing any footsteps that might be behind him, it also covered the slight sound of his own progress down the fence to the shed. But he did not think he would be seen or followed, for he had been careful to oil the latch and hinges of his door before he went to bed; and he would be a faithful spy indeed who shivered through the whole night of watching a man who slept unsuspectingly and at peace.

Down the hole from the manger Starr slid, and into the arroyo bottom. He stumbled over a can of some sort, but the wind was rattling everything movable, so he merely swore under his breath and went on. He was not a range man for nothing, and he found his way easily to the adobe house with *Las Nuevas* over the door, and the adobe wall with the plank gate that had been closed.

It was closed now, and the house itself was black and silent. Starr stooped and gave a jump, caught the top of the wall with his hooked fingers, and went up and straddled the top where it was pitch black against the building. For that matter, it was nearly pitch black whichever way one looked that night. He sat there for five minutes, listening and straining his eyes into the inclosure. Somewhere a piece of corrugated iron banged against a board. Once he heard a cat meouw, away back at the rear of the lot. He waited through a comparative lull, and when the wind whooped again and struck the building with a fresh blast, Starr jumped to the ground within the yard.

He crouched for a minute, a shot-loaded quirt held butt forward in his hand. He did not want to use a gun unless he had to, and the loaded end of a good quirt makes a very efficient substitute for a blackjack. But there was no movement save the wind, so presently he followed the wall of the house down to the corner, stood there listening for a while, and went on, feeling his way rapidly around the entire yard as a blind man feels out a room that is strange to him. He found the garage, with a door that kept swinging to and fro in the wind, banging shut with a slam and then squealing the hinges as it opened again with the suction. He drew a breath of relief when he came to that door, for he knew that any man who happened to be on guard would have fastened that door, for the sake of his nerves if nothing else.

When he was sure that the place was deserted for the night, Starr went back to the garage and went inside. He fastened the door shut behind him and switched on his pocket searchlight to examine the place. If he had expected to see the mysterious black car there he was disappointed, for the garage was empty—which perhaps explained the swinging door that had been left open in the evening when there was no wind. Small comfort in that for Starr, for it immediately occurred to him that the car would probably return before daylight if it had gone after dark.

He turned his hand slowly, painting the walls with a brush of brilliant light. "Huh!" he grunted under his breath. For there in a far corner were four Silvertown Cord tires with the dust of the desert still clinging to the creases of lined tread. Near by, where they had been torn off in haste and flung aside, were the paper wrappings of four other tires—supposedly new.

So they—he had no more definite term by which to call them—they had sensed the risk of those unusual tires, and had changed for others of a more commonly used brand! Starr wondered if some one had seen him looking at tire tracks—the young Mexican he had met on the side street, perhaps. The

Mexican garage man, perhaps, had caught him studying that track by the filling pump.

"Well," Starr sententiously summed up the significance of the discovery, "the game's open—now we'll get action."

He glanced down to make sure that he had not left any tracks on the floor, and was glad he had not worn his boots. Then he snapped off the light, went out, and left the door swinging and banging as it had been before. If he learned no more, at least he was paid for the trip.

He went straight to the rear door of the building, taking no pains to conceal his footsteps. The wind, he knew, would brush them out completely with the sand and dust it sent swirling around the yard with every gust. As he had hoped, the door was not bolted but locked with a key, so he let himself in with one of the pass-keys he had carried for just such work as this. He felt at the windows and saw that the blinds were down, and turned on his light.

The place had all the greasy dinginess of the ordinary print shop. The presses were here, and the motor that operated them. Being a biweekly and not having much job printing to do, it was evident that *Las Nuevas* did not work overtime . Things were cleaned up for the night and ready for the next day's work. There did not seem to be even a watchman in the place. It all looked very commonplace and as innocent as the paper it produced.

Starr went on slowly, examining the forms, the imperfect first proofs of circulars and placards that had been placed on a hook file. *"Aviso"* stared up at him in big, black type from the top of many small sheets, with the following notice of sales, penalties attached for violation of certain ordinances, and what not. But there was nothing that should not be—nothing that could be construed as seditionary in any sense of the word.

Still—some person or persons connected with this place had found it expedient to change four perfectly good and quite expensive tires for four new and perfectly commonplace ones, and the only explanation possible was that the distinctive tread of the expensive ones had been observed. There must, Starr reasoned, be something else in this place which would be worth his while to discover. He therefore went carefully up the grimy stairway to the rooms above.

These were offices of the bare type to be found in small towns. Bare floors, stained with tobacco juice and the dust of the street. Bare desks and tables, some of the unpainted, homemade affairs, all of them cheap and old. A stove in the larger office, a few wooden-seated armchairs—Starr took in the details with a flick here and there of his flash light that he kept carefully turned away from the green-shaded windows.

News items, used and unused, he found impaled on desk files. Bills paid and unpaid he found also. But in the first search he found nothing else—nothing that might not be found in any third-rate newspaper establishment. He stood in the middle room—there were three in a row, with an empty, loftlike room behind—and considered where else he could search.

He went again to a closet that had been built in with boards behind the chimney. At first glance this held nothing but decrepit brooms, a battered spittoon, and a small pile of greasewood cut to fit the heater in the larger room; but Starr went in and flashed his light around the wall. He found a door at the farther end—and he knew it for a door only when he passed his hands over the wall and felt it yield. He pushed it open and went into another room evidently built across one end of the loft; a room cunningly concealed and therefore a room likely to hold secrets.

Starr hitched his gun forward a little, pushed the door shut behind him, and began to search that room. Here, as in the outer offices, the first superficial examination revealed nothing out of the way. But Starr did not go at things superficially. First the desk came under close scrutiny. There were no letters—they were too cautious for that,

evidently. He looked in the little stove that stood near the wall where the chimney went up in the closet, and saw that the ashes consisted mostly of charred paper. But the last ones deposited therein had not yet been lighted—or, more exactly, they had been lighted hastily and had not burned except around the edges. He lifted out the one on top and the one beneath it. They were two sheets of copy paper scribbled closely in pencil. The first was entitled, with heavy underscoring that signified capitals, "Souls in Bondage." This sounded interesting, and Starr put the papers in his pocket. The others were envelopes addressed to *Las Nuevas*—there was no more than a handful of papers in all.

In a drawer of the desk, which he opened with a skeleton key, he found many small leaflets printed in Mexican. Since they were headed *Almas De Cautivero,* he took one and hoped that it would not be missed. There were other piles of leaflets in other drawers, and he helped himself to a sample of each and relocked the drawers carefully. But search as he might, he could find nothing that identified any individual or even pointed to any individual as being concerned in this propaganda work; nor could he find any mention of the Mexican Alliance.

He went out finally, let the door swing behind him as it seemed accustomed to do, climbed through a window to the veranda that bordered all these rooms like a jutting eyebrow, and slid down a corner post to the street. It was close to dawn, and Starr had no wish to be found near the place; indeed, he had no wish to be found away from his cabin if any one came there with the breaking of day to watch him.

As he had left the place, so he returned to it. He went back to bed and lay there until sunrise, piecing together the scraps of information he had gleaned. So far, he felt that he was ahead of the game; that he had learned more about the Alliance than the Alliance had learned about him.

As soon as the light was strong enough for him to read without a lamp, he took from his pocket the papers he had gleaned from the stove, spread out the first, and began to decipher the handwriting. And this is what he finally made out:

SOULS IN BONDAGE.

The plundering plutocrats who suck the very lifeblood of your mother country under the guise of the development of her resources are working in harmony with the rich brigands north of the border to plunder you further, and to despoil the fair land you have helped to win from the wilderness.

Shall strong men be content in their slavery to the greed of others? Rise up and help us show the plunderers that we are men, not slaves! Let this shameless persecution of your mother country cease!

American bandits would subjugate and annex the richest portion of Mexico. Why should not Mexico therefore reclaim her own? Why not turn the tables and annex a part of the vast territory stolen from her by the octopus arms of our capitalist class?

We are a proud people, and we never forget. Are we a cowardly people who would cringe and yield when submission means infamy?

Awake! Strike one swift, successful blow for freedom and your bleeding mother land.

Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona were stolen from Mexico, just as the riches of her mines are being stolen from her today. Sons of Mexico, you can help her reclaim her own. Will you stand by and see her further despoiled? Let your voices rise in a mighty cry for justice! Let your arms be strong to strike a blow for the right!

Souls in bondage, wake up and strike off your shackles! Be not slaves but free men!

Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona for Mexico, to whom they rightfully belong!

"They sure do make it strong enough," Starr commented, feeling for a match with which to relight his cigarette that had gone out. He laid down the written pages and took up the leaflet entitled *"Almas De Cautivero."* The text that followed was, like the heading, simply a translation into Spanish of the exhortation he had just read in English. But he read it through and noted the places where the Spanish version was even more inflammatory than the English—which, in Starr's opinion, was going some. The other pamphlets were much the same, citing well-known instances of the revolution across the

border which seemed to prove conclusively that justice was no more than a jest, and that the proletariat of Mexico was getting the worst of the bargain, no matter who happened to be in power.

Starr frowned thoughtfully over the reading. To him the thing was treason, and it was his business to help stamp it out. For the powers that be cannot afford to tolerate the planting of such seeds of dissatisfaction among the untrained minds of the masses. But —and Starr admitted it to himself with his mouth pulled down at the corners —the worst of it was that the bombast under the vituperative utterances, the catch phrases of radicalism, there remained the grains of fact. Starr knew that the masses of Mexico *were* suffering, broken under the tramplings of revolution and counter revolutions that swept back and forth from gulf to gulf. Still, it was not his business to sift out the plump grains of truth and justice, but to keep the chaff from lighting and spreading a wildfire of sedition through three States.

" 'Souls in bondage' is right," he said, setting his feet to the floor and reaching for his boots. "In bondage to their own helplessness—and helplessness because they're so ignorant. But," he added grimly while he stamped his right foot into its boot, "they ain't going at it the right way. They're tryin' to tear down, when they ain't ready to build anything on the wreck. They're right about the wrong—but they're wrong as the devil about the way to mend it. Them pamphlets will sure raise hell among the Mexicans, if the thing ain't stopped pronto."

He dressed for riding, and went out and fed Rabbit before he went thoughtfully up to the hotel for his breakfast.

CHAPTER XIII.

Helen May was toiling over the ridgy upland which in New Mexico is called a mesa, when it is not a desert—and sometimes when it is one—taking her turn with the goats while Vic nursed a strained ankle and a grouch under the mesquite tree by the house. With Pat to help, the herding resolved itself into the exercise of human intelligence over the dog's skill. Pat, for instance, would not of his own accord choose the best grazing for his band, but he could drive them to good grazing once it was chosen for him. So theoretically Helen May was exercising her human intelligence; actually she was exercising her muscles mostly. And having an abundance of brain energy that refused to lie dormant, she had plenty of time to think her own thoughts while Pat carried out her occasional orders.

For one thing, Helen May was undergoing the transition from a mild satisfaction of her education and her mentality to a shamed consciousness of appalling ignorance and mental crudity. Holman Sommers was unwittingly the cause of that. There was nothing patronizing or condescending in the attitude of Holman Sommers, even if he did run to long words and scientifically accurate descriptions of the smallest subjects. It was the work he placed before her that held Helen May abashed before his vast knowledge. She could not understand half of what she deciphered and typed for him—and because she could not understand she realized the depth of her benightment.

She was awed by the breadth and the scope which she sensed more or less vaguely in "The Evolution of Sociology." Holman Sommers quoted freely, and discussed boldly and frankly, such abstruse authors as Descartes, Spinoza, Schopenhauer, Compte, Gumplowicz—some of them names she had never heard of and could not even spell without following her copy letter by letter. Holman Sommers seemed to have read all of them and to have weighed all of them and to be able to quote all of them offhand; whereas Schopenhauer was the only name in the lot that sounded in the least familiar to Helen May, and she had a guilty feeling that she had always connected the name with music instead of the sort of things Holman Sommers quoted him as having said or written—she could not make out which.

Helen May, therefore, was suffering from mental growing pains. She strug-

gled with new ideas which she had swallowed whole, without any previous elementary knowledge of the subject. Her brain was hungry, her life was stagnant, and she seized upon these sociological problems which Holman Sommers had placed before her, and worried over them, and wondered where Holman Sommers had learned so much about things she had never heard of. Save his vocabulary, which wearied her, he was the simplest, the kindest of men. Not kind as her Man of the Desert was kind——

Just here in her thoughts Holman Sommers faded, and Starr's lean, whimsical face came out sharply defined before her mental vision. Starr certainly was different! Ordinary, and not educated much beyond the three R's, she suspected. Just a desert man with a nice voice and a gift for provocative little silences. Two men could not well be farther apart in personality, she thought, and she amused herself by comparing the two.

For instance, take the case of Pat. Sommers had told her just why and just how desperately she needed a dog for the goats, and had urged her by all means to get one at the first opportunity. Starr had not said anything about it—he had just simply brought the dog. Helen May appreciated the different quality of the kindness that does things.

Privately Helen May suspected that Starr had stolen that dog; he had seemed so embarrassed when he explained how he came by Pat, especially, she remembered, when she had urged him to take the dog back. She would not, of course, dare hint it even to Vic, and theoretically she was, of course, shocked at the possibility. But—oh, she was human! That a nice man should swipe a dog for her secretly touched a little, responsive tenderness in Helen May—she used the word "swipe," which somehow made the suspected deed sound less a crime and more an amusing peccadillo than the word "steal" would have done.

The astonishment of Holman Sommers when he had first seen Pat strengthened Helen May's suspicion. She saw at once that he had recognized the dog. The fact that he had refrained from saying much about it seemed to prove that he knew the dog had been swiped—well, stolen—from a certain person; but since Pat was only a dog, and since the thief had presented him to Helen May, Holman Sommers was too considerate to hurt her feelings by telling the truth.

Oh, she saw it quite plainly as she trudged over to the shady side of a rock ridge and sat down where she could keep an eye on Pat and the goats. She told herself that she would ask her Man of the Desert, the next time he happened along, whether he had found out who the dog belonged to. If he acted confused and dodged the issue, then she would know for sure. Just what she would do when she knew for sure Helen May had not decided.

The goats were browsing docilely upon the slope, eating stuff which only a goat would attempt to eat. Helen May was not afraid of Billy since Pat had taken charge. Pat had a way of keeping Billy cowed and as harmless as the nannies themselves. Just now Pat was standing at a little distance with his tongue slavering down over his white teeth, gazing over the band as a general looks out over his army drawn up in battle formation.

He turned his head and glanced at Helen May inquiringly, then trotted over to where she sat in the shade. His tongue still drooped quiveringly over his lower jaw, and now and then he drew it back and licked his lips as though they were dry. Helen May found a rock that was hollowed like a crude saucer, and poured water into the hollow from her canteen. Pat lapped it up thirstily, gave his stubby tail a wag of gratitude, and lay down with his front paws on the edge of her skirt and his head dropped down upon them, and took a nap—with one eye opening now and then to see that the goats were all right, and with his ears lifting to catch the meaning of every stray bleat from a garrulous nanny.

Helen May had changed a good deal

in the past two or three weeks. Now, when she stared away and away over the desert and barren slope and ridges and mountain, she did not feel that she hated them. Instead, she saw that the yellow of the desert, the brown of the slopes, and the black of the distant granite ledges basseting from bleak hills were more beautiful than the tidy little plots of tilled ground she used to think so lovely. There was something hypnotic in these bald distances. She could not read, when she was out like this; she could only look and think and dream.

She wished that she might ride out over it some time; away over the mountains, perhaps—as far as she could see. She fell to dreaming of the old days, when this was Spanish territory, and the king gave royal grants of land to his favorites. For instance, all the country lying between two mountain ranges, to where a river cut across and formed a natural boundary. Holman Sommers had told her about the old Spanish grants, and how many of the vast estates of Mexican "cattle kings" and "sheep kings" were still preserved intact, just as they had been when this was a part of Mexico. Indeed, when she looked at the map of New Mexico she could see where certain parts were surrounded by lines and called such-and-such grant.

She wished that she might have lived here then, when the dons held sway and when señoritas were all beautiful, and the señoras were every one of them imposing in many jewels and in rich mantillas—and when vaqueros wore red sashes and beautiful serapes and big, gold-laced sombreros, and rode prancing steeds that curveted away from jingling, silver-roweled spurs. Helen May knew her moving-picture romance. She could easily vision these things exactly as they had been presented to her on the screen. That is why she peopled this empty land so gorgeously.

It was different now, of course. All the Mexicans she had seen were like the Mexicans around the old Plaza in Los Angeles. All the señoritas she had met —they had not been many—powdered and painted abominably the point of their jaws and left their necks dirty. And their petticoats were draggled and their hats looked as though they had been trimmed from the ten-cent counter of a cheap store. All the señoras, too, were smoky looking, with snakish eyes, and the dresses under their heavy-fringed, black mantillas were more frowzy than those of their daughters. They certainly were not imposing; and if they wore jewelry at all it looked brassy and cheap.

There was no romance, nothing like adventure here nowadays, said Helen May to herself, while she watched the little geysers of dust that went dancing like whirling dervishes across the sand. A person lived on canned stuff and kept goats and was abjectly pleased to see any kind of human being. There certainly was no romance left in the country—though it had seemed almost as though there might be, when her Man of the Desert sang and all the little night sounds hushed to listen, and the moon trail across the sand of the desert lay like a ribbon of silver. It had seemed then as though there might be romance yet alive in the wide spaces.

So she had swung back again to Starr, just as she was always doing lately. She began to wonder when he would come again, and what he would have to say next time, and whether he had really annexed some poor sheepman's perfectly good dog just because he knew she needed one. It would never do to let on that she guessed; but all the same, it was mighty nice of him to think of her, even if he did go about it in a queer way. And when Pat, who had seemed to be asleep, lifted his head and looked up into her eyes adoringly, Helen May laid her hand upon his smooth skull and smiled oddly.

No more romance, said Helen May —and here was Starr, a man of mystery, a man feared and distrusted by the sons of those passionate dons of whom she dreamed! Here was Starr, secret-service man—there is ever a glamour in the very name of it—the very essence and forefront of such ro-

mance and such adventure as she had gasped over, when she had seen it pictured on the screen! She was living right in the middle of intrigue that was stirring the rulers of two nations; she was coming close to real adventure—and there she sat, with Pat lying on the hem of her skirt, and mourned that she was fifty or a hundred years too late for even a glimpse at romance! And fretted because she was helping Pat herd goats, and because life was dull and commonplace.

"Honestly," she told Pat, "I've got to the point where I catch myself looking forward to the chance visits of a wandering cowboy who is perfectly commonplace—why, he'd be absolutely lost on the screen; you wouldn't know he was in the picture unless his horse bucked or fell down or something!—and I don't suppose he ever has a thought beyond his work and his little, five-cent celebrations in San Bonito, maybe. Most likely he flirts with those grimy-necked Mexican girls, too. You can't tell.

"And think of me being so hard up for excitement that I've got to play he's some mysterious creature of the desert! Honest to goodness, Pat, it's got so bad that the mere sight of a real, live man is thrilling. When Holman Sommers comes and lifts that old panama like a crown prince, and smiles at me and talks about ethical periods of the human race, and gens and tribal laws and all that highbrow dope, I just sit and drink it in and wish he'd keep on for hours! Can you beat that? And if by chance a common, ordinary specimen of desert man should ride by, I might be desperate enough——"

Her gaze, wandering always out over the tremendous sweep of plateau that from that point looked illimitable as the ocean, settled upon a whirlwind that displayed method and a slow sedateness not at all in keeping with the erratic gyrations of those gone before. Watching it wistfully with a half-formed hope that it might not be just a dry-weather whirlwind, her droning voice trailed off into silence. A faint beating in her throat betrayed what it was she half hoped. She was so desperately lonesome!

Pat tilted his head and looked up at her, and licked her hand until she drew it away impatiently.

"Good gracious, Pat! Do you want to plaster me with germs?" she reproved. And Pat dropped his head down upon his paws and eyed her furtively from under his brown lids, waiting for her to repent her harshness and smooth his head caressingly, as was her wont.

But Helen May was watching that slow-moving column of dust, just as she had watched the cloud which had heralded the coming into her life of Holman Sommers. It might be—but it couldn't, for this was away off the road. No one would be cutting straight across that hummocky flat, unless——

> From the desert I come to thee,
> On my Arab, shod with fire——

"Oh, I'm getting absolutely mushy!" she muttered angrily. "If I've reached the point where I can't see a spot of dust without getting heart failure over it, why, it's time I was shut up somewhere. What are you lolling around me for, Pat? Go on and tend to your goats, why don't you? And do get off my skirt!"

Pat sprang up as though she had struck him, gave her an injured glance that was perfectly maddening to Helen May, whose conscience was sufficient punishment, and went slinking off down the slope. Halfway to the band, he stopped and sat down on his haunches in the hot sun, as dejected a dog as ever was made to suffer because his mistress was displeased with herself.

Helen May sat there scowling out across the wide spaces, while romance and adventure—and something more—rode steadily nearer, heralded by the small, gray cloud. When she was sure that a horseman was coming, she perversely removed herself to another spot where she would not be seen. And there she sat, out of sight from below, and thus fancying herself undiscovered, refusing so much as a sly glance around her granite shield. For if there

was anything which Helen May hated more than another, it was the possibility of being thought cheaply sentimental—mushy, as the present generation vividly puts it. Also she was trying to break herself of humming that old desert love song all the while. Vic was beginning to "kid" her unmercifully about it, for one thing. To think that she should sing it without thinking a word about it, just because she happened to see a little dust! She would not look. She would *not!*

Starr might have passed her by and gone on to the cabin if he had not, through a pair of powerful binoculars, been observing her when she sent Pat off, and when she got up and went over to the other ledge and sat down. Through the glasses he had seen her feet crossed, toes up, just past the nose of the rock, and he could see the spread of her skirt. Luckily he could not read her mind. He therefore gave a yank at the lead rope in his hand and addressed a few biting remarks to a white-lashed, blue-eyed pinto trailing reluctantly behind Rabbit, and rode forward with some eagerness toward the ridge.

"'Sleep?" he greeted cheerfully, when he had forced the two horses to scramble up to the shade of the ledge, and had received no attention whatever from the person just beyond. The tan boots were still crossed, and not so much as a toe of them moved to show that the owner heard him. Starr knew that he had made noise enough, so far as that went.

"Why, no, I'm not asleep. What is it?" came crisply, after a perceptible pause.

"It ain't anything at all," Starr retorted, and swung Rabbit into the shade which Helen May had left. He dismounted, sat himself down with his back against a rock, and proceeded to roll a cigarette. By no means would he intrude upon the privacy of a lady—though the quiet, crossed feet and the placid folds of the khaki skirt told him that she was sitting there quietly—pouting about something, most likely, he diagnosed her silence shrewdly. Well, it was early, and so long as he reached a certain point by full dark he was not neglecting anything. As a matter of fact, he told himself philosophically, he really wanted to kill half a day in a perfectly plausible manner. There was no hurry—no hurry at all.

Pat looked back at him ingratiatingly, and Starr called. Pat came running in long leaps, nearly wagging himself in two because some one was going to be nice to him. Starr petted him and talked to him and pulled his ears and slapped him on the ribs, and Pat in his joy persisted in trying to lick Starr's cheek.

"Quit it! Lay down and be a doormat, then. You've got welcome wrote all over you. And, much as I like welcome, I hate to be licked."

Pat lay down, and Starr eyed the tan boot toes. They moved impatiently, but they did not uncross. Starr smiled to himself and proceeded to carry on a one-sided conversation with Pat and to smoke his cigarette.

"Sick, over there?" he inquired casually, after perhaps five minutes—either of them would have sworn it ten or fifteen.

"Why, no," chirped the crisp voice. "Why?"

"Seemed polite to ask, is all," Starr confessed. "I didn't think you was." He finished his smoke in the silence that followed. Then, because he owned a perverse streak, he took his binoculars from their case and began to study the low-lying ridge in the distance, in a pocket of which nestled the Medina Ranch buildings. He was glad this ridge commanded all but the "draws" and hollows lying transversely between here and Medina's place. It was Medina whom he had been advised by his chief to watch particularly, when Starr had found a means of laying his clews before that astute gentleman. If he could sit within ten feet of Helen May while he kept an eye on that country over there, all the better.

He saw a horseman ride up out of a hollow and disappear almost immediately into another. The man seemed to be coming over in this direction, though Starr could not be sure. He watched for a reappearance of the rider

on high ground, but he saw no more of the fellow. So, after a little, he took down the glasses to scan the country as a whole.

It was then that he glanced toward the other rock and saw that the tan boots had moved out of sight. He believed that he would have heard her if she moved away, and so he kept his eyes turned upon the corner of the rock where her feet had shown a moment before.

TO BE CONTINUED IN THE MARCH 7TH POPULAR.

The Habit

By Berton Braley

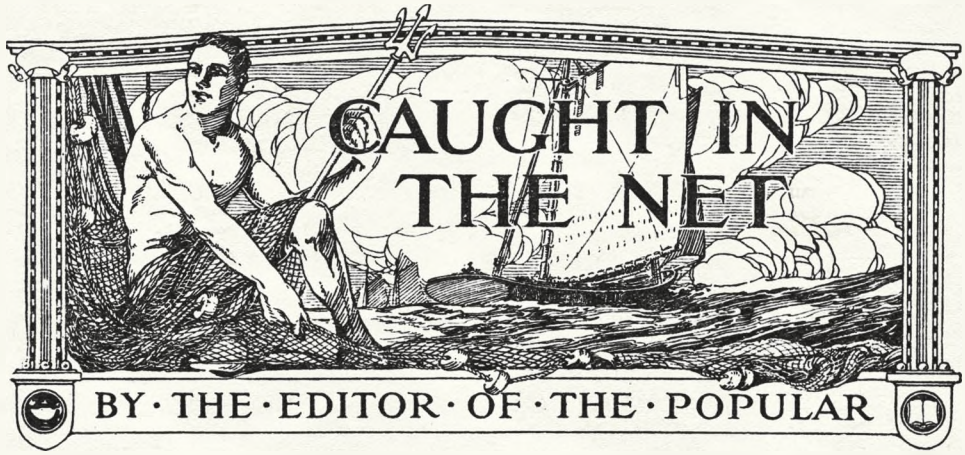
I SOMETIMES gets sick of the navy,
Of bein' a commonplace gob,
For life ain't no song when ye're workin' along
With bos'n's mates bossin' the job;
This scrubbin' the decks ain't no picnic,
With holystone drill, now an' then;
Yet when my time's through what I'll probably do
Is—go an' ship over again,
Poor simp,
Just go an' ship over again.

I often gets hungry with thinkin'
Of beds you can sleep in with ease,
Not havin' to climb to yer rest every time
Like a guy on a circus trapeze.
I dreams about chairs you can sit in
As long as you want to; an' when
I'm done with my bit I am swearin' to quit,
But I'm afraid I'll ship over again,
Oh, yes,
I'm sure to ship over again.

Our gunnery drill is hard labor,
An' keepin' yer uniform white
In grease an' in smoke is no Sunday-school joke,
An' as for the coalin'—good night!
I gets sort of sick of salutin'
These bloomin' one-stripers, but then
I s'pose there's no doubt when my 'list-ment runs out,
I'll go an' ship over again,
That's me,
A mutt who ships over again.

Civilians is round with the women
(An' pretty ones, too) all the year;
With me it's "Hello!" then "Good-by!" an' I blow,
Though maybe the girl sheds a tear.
I'm off to the North or the tropics
For six months or seven or ten;
An' when I return, why, she's married, I learn,
An'—I go an' ship over again;
Sure thing,
I'm sore, an' ship over again.

For somehow the navy has got me,
With travel an' strange furrin' scenes;
An' though I gets sore at its drills by the score,
An' sick of the mess with its beans,
There's something down deep in me whispers:
"You're one of old Uncle Sam's men,
And when the time's came you'll be signin' your name
To go and ship over again,
That's it,
You'll go and ship over again!"



THE COMMUNITY'S SPIRIT IN THE ROAD

OF all public works, none enter so intimately into the lives of all the people as do the roads. Because they are such common property, the highways of a country have always reflected the traits of the inhabitants with peculiar accuracy. This is true from the jungle paths of the black man, sliding furtively through the tall grass, to the splendid military roads of the Romans. Our own roads have the same facility for revealing national traits. The early trail followed the pioneer along the line of least resistance, over prairie and mountain, as indifferent to metes, bounds, and compass as its maker. But with the increase of population, the authority of boundary lines had to be acknowledged; and the settlers and their roads reluctantly came under the rule of fences. But if the highways now obeyed the section lines, they showed in their amazing width—especially the Western roads—the dominant American desire for bigness and freedom. Furthermore, they reflected most accurately in their almost impassable condition the strife between individualism and a slowly developing social consciousness. Usually in the spring this social consciousness attempted to function, and a group of farmers getting together with picks and shovels did things to the roads which the individualist, as he thumped over the newly made bumps, strongly asserted had better been left undone. The policy for the rest of the year was distinctly *"laissez faire,"* meaning: "Let her go!"

Nothing unifies a community—and booms the social consciousness—like a common interest in a concrete thing. Never has anything come our way quite so concrete and universal as the automobile. Reflecting the common interest, our road beds have improved more in the last ten years than in the preceding fifty. Still, our highways are not yet ideally American. It remains for the Lincoln Highway to give us a vision of a road ideally American in every detail —a vision so simple it can be applied to any road in the country.

The road is to be built of the best material, but, in addition to being a comfort to the muscle, it is to be a joy to the mind. The plan of the highway, drawn by Jens Jenson, calls for a right of way of 175 feet; and all the space left over from the road, bridle, and foot paths is to be planted to trees and flowers. These are not to be arranged in formal garden patterns or solid hedges, but in nature's own free, simple fashion, with open spaces allowing views of the sur-

rounding country. This wayside planting will be distinctive of each State the road crosses—thus, hawthorn and crab apple will be the dominant note of the Illinois section. Just what the desert States will show no man can say, as Burbank has offered to help nature put on extra shade for the traveler. In choosing these wayside trees, preference will be given to those of special value to birds for nesting and food. It being part of the plan that the road shall be a national reserve for birds and wild flowers, what could be more fitting than that the sunny prairie flowers, so dear to the heart of the pioneer, and fast disappearing before the plow, should find a refuge on the great Lincoln Highway?

Rest places for the traveler, with wells and fountains, are to be provided every four or five miles, and groves are to be planted at important crossroads where he may camp overnight. The architectural plan is most simple. Milestones and boundary markers are to be made of native stone. Arches and remnants of the walled city, which was never characteristic of America, and their use is discouraged, as being contrary to the spirit of the road which is freedom and friendliness, the great qualities of Lincoln himself, and the most precious attributes of the American people.

Our ordinary country road would naturally become a refuge for the wild life driven from the fields were it not for the zeal of the newly elected road overseer who regularly plows up the unused three-fourths of the road surface and burns out the seed harvest in the fence corners. With a little intelligent coöperation on our part, our roads could all be made friendly refuges for birds, flowers, and weary traveler alike, reflecting in their cooling shade the gracious, hospitable heart of the American nation as truly as the great Lincoln Highway itself.

HUSTLING

THE modern mind has a power of rapid generalization on a large chaotic body of facts, a gift for acting quickly in an emergency. It shows swift decisions in acute situations, prompt executive handling of men. These are the qualities of the journalist, the city editor, the factory foreman and superintendent, the traffic manager, the corporation lawyer. It is easy for the scholar and scientist to criticize the decision and the findings, to find haste in the method, and minor inaccuracies in the summary, but these leisurely gentlemen do not have to beat the clock and the calendar to a decision. So many voices to listen to, so many viewpoints to acquire in rotation—all this develops an adaptable, swiftly reacting mind, which easily fatigues of any one man who hangs to his conviction, and of any one conviction, long emphasized and obstinately adhered to. Fatigue is a mental characteristic of moderns. They refresh themselves by change. They are eager to hear a new thing, and to take up a fresh favorite. We tire quickly of our popular heroes. We sag away from our reform movements. Everything has its day, but it is a short day. The virtue of this is that every new matter has a hearing. The defect is that the new matter, if worthy, is shoved aside for a fresher and noisier arrival. We are experimenters. But we sometimes forget that the purpose of an experiment is to establish a law. It is not to touch off a series of chemical explosions. To finger and leave a succession of objects is not to succeed with them. Failure is not escaped by leaving a trail of failures.

"Why this wallowing in unbridled unity?" asked the most interpretive of

American philosophers, challenging those who seek the One. It is the question of all good Americans. "Why not variety?" Is not variety an answer to the weary puzzle of fate? A new home, a fresh job, another wife—life is picturesque with us. There is a "lot doing." The piper may not have to be paid in our time. Meantime there is excitement every minute. The effect of this has been admirable. It gives fresh hope to broken men, netted in tangles of Old World caste. We have caught hold of a new truth, and let it loose on a planet that had need of it. There is something in the face of the average American that comes from a consciousness of a worthy destiny. Opportunity to find his work, and self-respect in doing it, are what give the American that thrust in his personality.

In our pleasure at the discovery of this truth, we have given scant respect to another truth as fundamental. It is that in all the flux of things, the change and motion of the passing, there are unchangeable values, an element of permanence. For enduring growths, roots are needed, as well as a spread of ready, swift sprouts from the surface. There is a loss when local affections are scattered each new moving day. Not all the vitality generated by economic opportunity, and stimulated by restless activity, can carry on permanently, when there is no sheltered and unchanging place where the forces can be gathered. If all is spent in the moment of living, each access of power thrown haphazard to the new gamble, there is no reserve store.

Some day we shall rest our mind, and cease our effort to escape in speed and variety. For we shall never move fast enough to overtake dignity and simplicity, a quietness and poise. To win that distinction we must behave like the peasants of Europe, who go on turning their acreage and heaping their harvests behind the guns. They say the thing that is in their mind, and it comes freshly from contact with the soil and the open air. They have not spilled their inner forces on a hundred distractions. Their life alone in our modern world has a distinction of quiet growth in a beautiful setting.

POPULAR PORTRAITS

I.—Percival Lowell

WE have read that the ideal combination of man would be half mathematician, half poet, incongruous as this mixture appears. Thinking it over, we came to the conclusion that there had been distinguished individuals partaking of these contrary qualities. Goethe was a man of this type, with his love for exact science, and his lofty literary imagination. And Sir Oliver Lodge and William James loom up as kindred spirits, both men of science, yet giving their souls rein in the realm of the occult. Others of similar dual nature will come to mind readily enough, but none more daring and fascinating than Percival Lowell, whose death a few months ago was a loss of first magnitude in the astronomical sky.

For more than twenty years he had made the planet Mars his particular world, watching it in all its phases and changes, tireless in his researches and speculations, independent and original in his theories, and arousing international criticism by his startling deductions. In 1894 Doctor Lowell established his observatory at Flagstaff, Arizona, with the avowed purpose of penetrating the mystery of the great red planet. Before him, Schiaparelli, an Italian astronomer, had announced the discovery of one hundred and four canals on Mars. These

"canals" were a series of geometrical lines descried on the face of the planet through the telescope, which were baffling to explain. Doctor Lowell set out to solve the phenomenon, and as the years elapsed he tabulated some five hundred and fifty canals, one of them, discovered in 1910, calculated to be a thousand miles long. Also, he noted a regular and recurrent change in color in certain areas of the planet, the fading and strengthening of the canal lines from time to time, and the waxing and waning of the polar snow caps. Thereupon his imagination soared beyond mathematical bounds, and he saw in these mutations evidence of a world of organic life—perhaps a people of extraordinary intelligence and engineering genius, meeting their threatened extinction through water famine by means of a network of gigantic waterways which tapped the polar snow caps in the annual melting season, and conducted the precious fluid whither they willed!

Though his fellow astronomers could not refute this far flight of imagination with statistics or proof of any absolute reasoning, the majority of them cast doubt and ridicule on what they deemed to be an extravagant and fantastic theory. Many of them undertook to show him up in the light of a misguided enthusiast, and were pitiless in their learned attacks. They proved him contradictory and the victim of Martian hallucinations. But Doctor Lowell trod his appointed path of hypothesis undisturbed and confident to the very end.

His romantic rôle among astronomers, and his ability to write interestingly, caught hold of the popular mind, and fired the fancy of imaginative writers. Scores of novels were inspired by his picturesque deductions. One remembers vividly the fiction of H. G. Wells, the novel by Du Maurier called "The Martian," and the play, "The Message from Mars," in which Charles Hawtrey starred. German, French, and Russian novelists likewise were stimulated by the theories of Doctor Lowell. Literature benefited at his hands.

Besides his singular devotion to Mars, Percival Lowell made important discoveries concerning Mercury, Venus, and Saturn, and financed expeditions for solar observations in far corners of the earth. Honors and medals from numerous learned societies were awarded him, but it is reasonable to suppose that he cared more for Mars and its phases than for men and their vagaries.

REFORMERS

A WHOLE section of our modern community, made up of certain social workers and certain radicals, are living in the mental state of the medieval monks and nuns. They have cut themselves off from the normal responsibilities. Without family ties, they plan ameliorations for the race that are not checked up on collective experience. They live an abnormal life of enthusiasms unrelated to the great human situation. The things they wish for are surely coming. But the work that will bring those things is coming by other hands than theirs. Human nature is a tough old bird, very wary of vague words. It answers to its name only when it recognizes the accent of some one that knows the ways of the nest, and the laws of the wind.

It is a disease of modern thought to cut itself loose from the ancient foundations of belief, from the instincts that shaped it, and the emotional life that enwraps it. It is the danger of planning the welfare of somebody else's wife and other people's children, before you have passed through the few simple racial experiences, which render you competent to think in the terms of humanity.

Tang of Life

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

Author of "Still-Going-North Stanley," "Bonita," Etc.

There was just enough *mañana* in the atmosphere to make life not too strenuous; just enough tang of life to make it warm with possibilities for Waring, the gunman of Sonora, who had been sung in song and story, and who had wasted twenty years following dim trails where the light feet of Romance ran swiftly.

WARING, lean adventurer of the Southlands, rode up from Sonoratown to Yuma, seeking not gold, although he needed it; not companionship, which he could well do without, and not glory. His glory, such as it was, had been sung from Sonora to the Pecos; from the Gila Hills to the Montana line. Life had gone stale again, especially since that starlight affair with the Señora Dulzura, whose family name was not really Dulzura, although Waring had called her that—with good reason. Like many an adventurer before him, Waring rode seeking Romance. He had had his share of that goddess' bright favor, yet he still heard her whisperings in the south wind on the mesas; her laughter in the storm-whipped rain. Always she promised something better than he had hitherto experienced; some one last, glorious thrill that should eclipse all dreams of song, of battle, of love.

The sunshine over Yuma enthralled him. And Yuma, in those rich, ensanguined days, offered diversion as luring as the music of its name. Just enough mañana in the atmosphere to make life not too strenuous; just enough tang of life to make it warm with possibilities; and possibilities such as Waring recognized often led down dim trails where the light feet of Romance ran swiftly. Waring wooed Romance not with song, nor with gold. His was the swift, stern wooing of the fighter; not the boisterous frontier type of two-gun bravo, but the quiet, level-eyed, feline type of fighter whose stroke was as the lightning stroke of the lynx, felt before seen.

"We're going to like this town," he told his pony, Blanco, as he dismounted and threw the reins. And the desert-bred Blanco knew that a long and uninteresting journey was over.

Baker, dealing faro, glanced up. The almost slender figure glimpsed from under his green eye shade was strange to him. Baker was paid for dealing faro and for knowing men. He tried to place Waring, could not, and decided to let Waring place himself. The dusty boots told of a long ride. The high-crowned sombrero spoke of the Southlands. The close-fitting corduroys, with breeches tight at the knee, and coat short riding length, suggested a previous affluence. Not a cattleman, though a rider. Not a card man—or Baker was mistaken. Possibly a gunman, for Waring's gauntlet, drawn off as he reached to his pocket for a coin, dislosed a hand white, supple, and uncalloused. By elimination Baker sifted the possibilities. Waring flipped a coin to the table—and won. His good-humored astonishment drew a thin smile

from the dealer. Waring reached forward to place another coin. Baker saw that unmistakable soft bulge just under Waring's left arm. The stranger was either a fool or white lightning with a gun to pack it in a shoulder holster. Baker eyed the other as another bet was placed and won. Waring was absolutely indifferent. The faro dealer puckered his thin lips and whistled softly. The tune was "Waring of Sonoratown." And Waring's gray eyes lifted to the level of the dealer's. "You're Waring," ventured the dealer.

"I've been told so," was the smiling reply.

"Oh, I ain't nervous about speakin' up to a real one," asserted Baker. "It's only the would-bes I leave alone. This town's dead. Only excitement just now is the rustlin' goin' on over to the Santa Rosa Rancho. Losin' cattle somethin' scandalous——"

"Thanks," said Waring, cashing in a little ahead of the game.

Much had passed between the two that had been unspoken. They had measured each other, and each felt satisfied with the result. Baker knew intuitively that Waring needed money, and so he had mentioned the cattle rustling, for which Waring had thanked him. "And he wins every time—because he don't care a whoop," was Baker's unspoken comment as Waring turned to leave.

Waring paused at the bar, asked a question, and departed. Baker, alone at the table, shuffled the cards with expert indolence. "When he does begin to care—he is goin' to lose," he told the flitting pasteboards. And this terse, indifferent bit of gambler's philosophy was prophetic. For Waring was to care—and to lose; not at the squares or the wheel, but in the biggest game man can play. He cared for nothing, for no one except possibly the snow-white saddle horse that had borne him from the turbulent inhospitality of Sonoratown to the easy-going environs of Yuma. Life had gone stale. Once he had cared, suffered, and then ceased to care. Never dreaming that a woman would again awaken the inner silences of his heart, he had ridden to Yuma, following the phantom flitting of his erstwhile goddess Romance; Romance who was to lead him from his bitterly earned cynicism to the fair wonder of a new world, a new hope—and then——

The Santa Rosa Rancho, down Yuma way, had been losing cattle. Every one knew it. No one knew anything about it. Santa Rosa line riders, night herders, extra men hired as guards, the patron, the foreman, and even the cook packed iron and high-power glasses; rode day and night; trailed strange pony tracks that were lost in the southern reaches; threatened innocent Indians, and shadowed cigarette-smoking Mexicans—but still the great herds of the Santa Rosa dwindled like the silent merging of clay bank with the rain-fed Rio Grande. The patron of the Santa Rosa surmised that the lost cattle, like the great river, went south.

The patron, Señor Fernando Verdugo, was American born and quietly proud of it. He was a good citizen—a crude but kindly man. And his Señora Rosa Arguello Verdugo was beloved by all who knew her. The Verdugos were held to be even more than honest; they were honorable—a distinction appreciated even in easy-going Yumatown. The rancho lay several miles out from Yuma, and across these several desert miles drove Señor Fernando, his brisk pinto team well into the harness. The American girl with him was as pretty as her name, which was Phyllis. Usually, when they drove to town, Phyllis chatted or sang, which amused the rather stern patron. To-day she was silent. Her good friend, the patron, was troubled. The cattle were going—no one knew where. Word had come no later than that morning that several horses had disappeared. Phyllis, with the intuition of sincere affection, contented herself with gazing at the morning glory of the ever-changing desert A cloud of dust enveloped them, and she coughed. Señor Fernando frowned. He whipped up the pintos to escape

the rut of dust. It must not be that his almost-adopted daughter should cough. Beautiful and as delicate as the rare, wild rose of the hidden cañons, she had come to the Rancho Santa Rosa with a letter from a Northern friend of the Verdugos. Señora Verdugo had taken the girl under her ample care, delighting in her vivacity, her childish wonder at the mysterious lights and shadows of the desert land, her unfailing cheerfulness. And Phyllis grew strong in the clear, keen, dry air. She had not coughed for many weeks.

Señor Fernando was still frowning when he turned the team toward the gateway of a friend. Phyllis insisted on accompanying him to town, pleading errands. Fernando, instead of putting up his team, drove on into town.

"You are driving in on my account?"

"*Si!* Always, señorita."

Phyllis smiled. The frown vanished from Señor Fernando's brow.

Baker was not dealing faro that morning. He was enjoying the mild distinction of sunning himself in the clerical glory of black knee-length coat, flowing tie, and black Stetson in front of the hall in which he made his living. When Señora Fernando and Phyllis drove up, the black Stetson swept to Baker's knees. Phyllis smiled him a greeting. Waring, seated just within the doorway, rose and stepped to the sidewalk as Señor Fernando intimated a desire to speak with Baker alone. Phyllis, who had been gazing down the street to where the road and the desert merged, glanced at the slim figure in corduroys. Waring's eyes were momentarily indifferent. A pretty girl. The Mexican was undoubtedly a prosperous cattleman. Then Waring glanced again at the girl, who was gazing pensively at the distant spaces. He studied her face, prepared to glance away should she look up. He had studied the faces of many women. This was not the kind of a girl to stare at. Quite unconscious of his gaze, she sat holding the reins in one slender, gloved hand. Waring's eyes dwelt on the line of her girlish forehead, her full-lidded eyes, the sweet curve of her cheek—— "And her mouth," he thought, "*that* is perfect! The mouth of a Madonna!"

He felt that he had gazed long enough. Phyllis turned as he moved to stride away. He was evidently a stranger in Yuma, for she knew most of the townfolk.

Baker stepped out, followed by Señor Fernando. The dealer's hand touched Waring's shoulder. "My friend—Fernando Verdugo. Shake with him, Waring. I think you are just the man he wants."

Phyllis awoke to a keen interest. Was the tall, gray-eyed stranger a gunman? She hoped he was not. He carried himself quietly. Even in corduroys he had a certain distinction. As the señor talked with Waring the girl studied them both. Señor Fernando, short, grizzled, thick-necked, solid; the other slim, quietly alert of poise, straight-limbed—the bull and the panther. Phyllis smiled at her fancy.

There had been no introduction—no word of explanation. The stranger climbed into the buckboard, following the patron. Phyllis saw that the patron was preoccupied. When they stopped at a store the stranger stepped from the buckboard and stood until she had returned with her parcels, which he put under the back seat for her. She thanked him. He raised his hat, nodded, and got in. Again they stopped while Señor Fernando went into the bank. Waring also alighted. "I beg your pardon," he said quietly and gravely, "for introducing myself. I'm Waring, now an employee of the Santa Rosa."

"Oh! Yes! Señor Fernando was worried. He forgot."

"Of course. I don't blame him."

Phyllis flushed prettily. "The cattle, you know," she hastened to explain. Waring nodded. Well, if the girl did not care to introduced herself——

"I won't embarrass you much longer," said Waring, as Señor Fernando appeared.

"But you haven't—really——" she began when Señor Fernando took the

reins. At the livery stable, they stopped while Waring saddled Blanco. Phyllis watched him as he swung up and whirled to the road. He was a rider. The pintos, headed toward home, struck up a quick staccato. Waring, leaning forward slightly, silently took their dust, with Blanco fighting the bit.

The girl glanced back once. The rider had reined up and was gazing at the southern desert. She saw his clear profile against the sky. She admitted to herself that he was interesting, but she thought she did not like him.

Señor Fernando, aware of her silence, shrugged his shoulders. "That hombre, Waring—he is think where those my cattle go."

"Yes, Uncle Frank. You have hired him to——"

"He is the gunman of Sonora of which is the song. You have heard it, *si?* You sing the tune, but not the word. Like so—— Ah, in Sonora, Caliente, El Paso, Tucson—in all this land is he known. He is the lightning and the snow. The vaqueros say he is care for nothing, for no man or woman. That is I think why he is never killed. It is now of the cattle he is think for *pasear le tiempo, si.*"

Phyllis bit her lip. "He seems to be a gentleman."

"Oh, *si, si!* Of the manner, *si.* But of the heart, quién sabe?"

Waring, riding back of the buckboard, was not thinking of Señor Fernando's cattle. That would come later. He was thinking of the ripe, red lips of one Señora Dulzura and of a starlit night in old Sonora. Then, across his waking dream, drifted the vision of a girl who sat in a buckboard, gazing at the distant amethyst of the desert. "The mouth of a Madonna," whispered Waring. "And twenty wasted years between that perfect mouth and my desire."

The twenty wasted years became less apparent as Waring came to know the girl. His frequent absences on long rides, his quiet home-coming, his long silences as he sat in the patio in company with the señora, Señor Fernando, and herself became as habits to the girl. She missed him when he did not come. She said little to him when he was there. She often wondered of what he was thinking. Intuition told her that he had lived much, and that there was much for him to think of when he did not care to talk. He was uniformly courteous, alert to place a chair for her or for the señora, quick to anticipate a desire of the family to chat alone—when he would retire without obtruding even a spoken pretext; all of which appealed subtly to the girl until she wished in her secret heart that she could rid herself of her first instinctive dislike for him. Never did she dream that he thought more of her than of any other member of the family. A triviality awakened her.

The southern stars were low and softly radiant. The summer air was laden with a faint night fragrance of roses. Señor Fernando and Waring had been talking about the cattle, the rustlers as yet untraced, the country roundabout. Phyllis was astounded at the intuition of the silent gunman, who seemed to anticipate the señor's deliberate question and comment with the effortless ease of instinct.

"You are positively uncanny," she told him, laughing. Waring smiled. "Practice, perhaps. Just like handling a gun. Practice and experience will beat talent every time."

"I have been wanting to learn to shoot a gun," she said, with absolute sincerity.

"I might teach you a little bit about it. Say to-morrow morning?"

"That would be really exciting. Oh, will you?"

"Yes. I consider it a privilege."

The señora's eyebrows arched slightly. She glanced at Phyllis and smiled. Señor Fernando, smoking, caught the smile, and straightway appropriated it, being directly in line with Phyllis.

"Then I'll hunt up a gun," said Waring, rising. He bade them good night. Out in the men's quarters, he ques-

tioned unavailingly. No one packed anything smaller than a .45: Silently Waring saddled Blanco. Phyllis, in her room, heard the beat of hoofs, and went to the window. She caught a moonlit vision of Blanco loping down the road toward the gateway, east. The road led to Yuma. For some reason she could not sleep. She wondered what had taken Waring out, for she had heard him say he expected to be up early and ride south next day. Several hours later she heard the rhythmic pace of big Blanco as he swept past her window. Half awake, she listened. Waring entered the east wing of the house. He did not sleep with the men, but was as one of the Verdugo family. Phyllis rose and tilted the clock toward the low moon. It was half past two. She crept to bed, wondering.

"There are two ways," said Waring next morning as he stood beside her in a little arroyo back of the buildings; "the right way and the other fellow's way. I'll illustrate. Perhaps you will get the idea."

Phyllis saw the blue flash of the gun in his hand. From his hip he emptied it. A rusted tomato can a few paces away leaped and leaped again.

"Is that all?" she queried.

His eyes expressed surprise.

"I mean—did you shoot all the shots?"

"Yes—five. Now you try. Bend your arm just a little. That's it! Easy and loose—just as though it were an eggshell. The gun will jump, but that won't matter. Don't aim; just point it."

Phyllis trembled with excitement. The gun jumped and barked.

"That's good! Try again. Don't use the sights."

Again she leveled the gun and fired. She missed the can. "But I'm going to hit it," she asserted, her lips pursed charmingly.

"Of course. Don't grip too tight. Let the gun do its own work."

The can jumped as Phyllis fired. "Why—I never dreamed it was so easy."

"You have an accurate eye. Try again."

Twice she emptied the gun. Her hand began to tremble, so Waring suggested that they wait until the next morning.

"But won't you try?" she coaxed. "Uncle Frank told me that you were an expert. Please!"

Waring hesitated. Phyllis smiled. A lizard whisked across a rock some twenty feet in front of them. The gun in Waring's hand jumped and spoke, and the lizard vanished. "Pulls stiff," said Waring.

"Oh, yes! Mr. Waring, it's a new gun, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"And you rode to Yuma last night to get it?"

"Well—I had to go in——"

"Why?"

"Well, you couldn't handle a .45. You haven't the wrist. There wasn't a .41 or a .38 on the rancho—so I stirred up a friend in Yuma. Easy gun to handle."

Phyllis colored. "I'm sorry you went to that trouble. I'm sorry I said anything about shooting."

"You shouldn't be. You will make a good shot, with practice."

"You know I don't mean that."

"No? Well, I'd ride harder and farther than that—for you," he said suddenly.

Phyllis gazed at him. His face was grave. There was no trace of humor or deliberate gallantry. She knew that he meant what he said, and it frightened her. She fought back the slow tears that filled her eyes until she reached the hacienda. Why couldn't he have been just a friend? She was beginning to like him. And he was paid gold for killing men. Waring of Sonoratown—loved her——

The following morning Waring waited for her in the arroyo, but she did not come. He had been at fault, and he knew it. "I frightened her," he told himself. Then: "Twenty wasted years" sang their dreary burden of old loves and adventures as he strode back to the hacienda. There he made

ready for a long ride. Blanco would have to make up for lost time that morning. Before leaving he left a note at her place at the breakfast table.

Phyllis heard him leave, and came from her room. She had avoided meeting him that morning. She wished to commune with herself. She had known him a month now. She thought of the many quiet kindnesses he had performed for her and the señora. She still felt that she was afraid of him; and yet she could not dislike him unreasoningly as she had heretofore. She found the note and a big red rose by her plate. "I'll promise to be a good Indian," the note read. She smiled, knowing that he would keep his promise.

Learning that he was away for the day, she busied herself writing letters. Waring came in late that night. She did not know that he had returned until morning. And that morning Señor Fernando was unusually gay, whistling and humming a song. Phyllis learned that Waring had had track of the rustlers of the Santa Rosa herds; that the gunman would soon leave for a hazardous ride south; that three picked men were to accompany him. She shut her mind to imagination. She regretted that he must go—and yet she was glad. His presence disturbed her. Even then she did not care for him, but the very silence of his insistence filled her with a strange emotion. That morning she met him after breakfast and deliberately accepted his invitation to go to the arroyo. The excuse was to practice shooting. The reason—she wished to talk with him alone.

"I had your note," she told him lightly, although her lightness masked a trepidation of soul.

"Yes?"

"And you mustn't make love to me. I can't care for you. You know I came here to rest—to get strong. Oh, I dare not care for any one!" And her voice caught in a sob.

"I don't expect you to care for me," he said gently. "All I ask is the privilege of caring for you. I wanted you to know that I did care. I said I'd be a good Indian. I will. I'll be leaving this afternoon. I may be gone some time."

She knew what his going might mean. He might never come back. She appreciated it that he had not used *that* as an argument.

And, "I wish you would keep the gun—the .41," he said.

"Thank you. I really couldn't accept it. It was nice of you to get it for me. Keep it—but promise——"

"Yes!" he said eagerly.

"That you will never kill with it."

"I'll agree to that."

The happiness of her smile touched him. It was the mouth of a Madonna, girlish, sweet past all dreams, questioning, pensive.

"I never see you armed," she said presently. "All the other men carry guns."

"I carry one—here." And he drew a heavy revolver from his shoulder holster, and, rolling it, presented the butt to her. She examined the service-worn gun with curiosity. Along the stained and yellow ivory handle were a score of tiny notches. She felt them with her pink thumb nail. "What are these? There are none on that other gun."

"Just—a record."

Her eyes widened. She recalled having read of such things. Slowly she raised her hand. He took the gun. She turned full on him, her girlish eyes flaming. "Oh, I hate you!" she cried.

Waring stood where she had left him, tall and straight in the sunlight. For an instant his old, cynical smile flashed across his mouth. "Don't blame her," he muttered. Then he turned and strode to the stables. Blanco, saddled, nuzzled his arm. "It's the last ride—of this kind," he told the horse. Then he smiled. "Perhaps it is," he added.

When the three men that rode with Waring came to the river they dismounted. Waring turned in his saddle. "We'll risk fording," he said. The riders mounted, muttering. "Or, if you boys want to rest, I'll just ride over alone," he added, smiling.

"They'll be singin' on the Santa Rosa," said the big puncher who rode close to Waring.

"And over there," retorted Waring.

They rode late, and camped within sight of an adobe ranch house on the Mexican side. "We'll ride in at daybreak," Waring told them. "We've got them corralled. If we don't get them now, we never will. Cut down on the first hombre you see and keep your guns going. We get them—or they get us—that's all."

"Which will be aplenty," commented the big puncher, who rolled in his blankets and munched cold meat and crackers.

"It will be no use to powwow, and there won't be time," said Waring, as he turned in.

Just before dawn they saddled up and rode toward the adobe, Waring in the lead. Halfway there, he reined up. "We catch them sleeping. If they get me, you boys ride for it. I'm paid for just this thing. You're paid for punching cattle. I'm not worrying, but such things happen. They're a hard bunch. Don't let up on one of them."

"We're followin' a good gun," said the big puncher.

Waring smiled. They were following the fastest gun in the Southwest.

Even as he dismounted he felt a chill. Then came the visioned face of Phyllis poised on a rock in the arroyo, the .41 in her hand. Waring saw her mouth; the sweet curve of the short upper lip; the absolute innocence and girlishness of her expression—a smiling indecision, a questioning of the Fates.

The door swung open. Waring's gun jumped and rippled. A Mexican lurched through the doorway and doubled up across the threshold. Behind him crowded a companion. Waring heard his men shooting at the back of the adobe. Then another Mexican, raising on his elbow, threw a shot at Waring. The gunman's hand moved slightly, the gun jumped, and the Mexican relaxed to an inert heap. Behind Waring came the big puncher, his gun held muzzle up. A rustling in an adjoining room—and the puncher's gun came down and splinters flitted from the thin partition. "And that's about all," said the big puncher as the place grew quiet.

"Wait!" And Waring pushed ahead of him. At the doorway of the inner room, he called in Spanish. There came no answer. He kicked the door open; then he leaped to one side. The figure of a young Mexican—a youth—loomed in the doorway, his long black hair tangled, his face white. He was hard hit. In his hand swung a gun. Waring covered him. "Drop it!" he commanded.

The Mexican youth, almost beautiful in his pallor, smiled wanly. Waring knew that he was going fast. "Drop it!" he said more gently.

Waring's own gun was empty. He whipped the .41 from his waistband, not liking the way the youth stared and swung the gun. "Loco!" muttered Waring. "He'll go down in a heap." But Waring could not kill. He knew he ran a mighty risk, facing the dying Mexican, who again smiled. Waring shivered. In the curve of the short upper lip, in the wan smile, Waring saw the mouth of Phyllis; the mouth of a Madonna. Against the dying youth's pallor the red lips glowed softly, questioning the Fates, smiling into the unknown spaces.

"Look out!" cried the big puncher. Through habit Waring's arm came up, but not before the Mexican youth fired blindly. The cowboy back of Waring replied. The Mexican dropped as though his legs had been cut from under him.

They helped Waring to his horse. The gunman fumbled for his watch. "We can make it—just make it," and his eyes glittered. "No—no time to fix me up. Blanco is good for it."

Like a wraith of storm cloud he swept away. They overtook him at the ford. But from there clear to the Rancho Santa Rosa they saw nothing of him.

Phyllis heard the Señor Fernando Verdugo questioning some one. His tone was peculiarly excited. The girl stepped from the patio to the yard.

Her eyes grew big as she saw Blanco standing with reins down, his coat steel gray with sweat. Pushing past Fernando, she stepped to the horse. "Where is he?" she whispered. The big white nuzzled her arm. She gathered up the reins and mounted, wondering why she did so. Señor Fernando seemed stupefied. With head lowered and heaving sides, the horse turned and walked past the corrals. Fernando called to her, but she rode on, stunned, dulled to everything save the burning ache in her heart. Even then she whispered to herself that she did not care for Waring—as he cared for her.

Far out on the levels she found him. He lay on his face. She dropped from Blanco and lifted Waring's head. Slowly his heavy eyes cleared. "Is it you?" he whispered.

"Yes. I was waiting." And she eased him so that his head lay in her lap.

"For me?"

"Yes—for you."

He closed his eyes. Smiling, he opened them again, drinking his last draft of the beauty of her mouth. She was not looking at him. Her eyes were wide as she questioned the silences. Against her pallor the red lips glowed softly, questioning the Fates, smiling into the Unknown Spaces——

"Your mouth," he whispered.

She drew his head to her breast. "Good-by—Madonna——" he murmured as he found her lips.

Señor Fernando came upon them, the girl sitting with Waring's head pillowed in her lap. She would not believe that Waring was dead. He had but said good-by—smiled as he bade her farewell, his last farewell to Romance, to Love, to his heart's desire. Twenty wasted years had melted at the touch of her lips.

CITY HOURS AND COUNTRY HOURS

WHILE J. Frank Davis, the Texas story writer, was a newspaper man in Boston, Winston Churchill, the novelist, was fighting for the Republican nomination for governor of New Hampshire, and Davis went up to Harlekenden House, Churchill's summer home in Cornish, to get a Sunday story.

Cornish is not on the railroad, and Davis went to Windsor, Vermont, where he hired a livery rig and driver to take him over to Churchill's home.

"How far do you call it?" he asked the driver, a typical Vermonter.

"'Bout six miles."

"City miles or country miles?"

"Huh? What d'ye mean?"

"Well, the last time I came up to see Churchill I went to White River Junction, and they told me it was eight miles to Cornish. I rode over there in the evening, wearing a light suit and no overcoat, and nearly froze. If it wasn't *twelve* miles I'll run it in fifteen minutes."

The driver made no comment. They reached Harlekenden House, and Davis alighted. "Shall I blanket the hoss?" asked the liveryman.

"I don't believe it will be necessary. I don't expect to be here more than a half hour—or an hour at the most."

That was at eight o'clock in the evening. Churchill was in a talkative mood, the pair found a lot of interesting things to discuss, and it was eleven-forty-five when Davis came out and approached the livery rig.

The driver unblanketed his horse in silence and started for home. He had driven five or ten minutes when he turned to his passenger and spoke for the first time.

"City hours or country hours?" he asked.

The Green Tree Mystery

By Roman Doubleday

Author of "The Hemlock Avenue Mystery," "The Terrace Inn Tragedy," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

Under a tree beside the main road of Greenville, is found the body of a dead man. In his notebook the deceased had scrawled that after killing John Kersey, he would commit suicide. The dead man is identified as the father of Evelyn Gould, whose closest friend is Patty Kersey, daughter of the rich John. No reason is known for the crime. Singularly enough, two men, at the time of the murder, disappear from Greenville. One of them is Dana Mackenzie, a young graduate physician, the son of the old doctor of the region. The other is Newton Payne, an eccentric and malevolent character, who had always endeavored to make life a burden to John Kersey. Not until there is rumor that the suicide, Gould, might not have killed Kersey, and that another hand might have written in the notebook, is suspicion directed at either Dana Mackenzie or Newton Payne, the missing men. Then the gossip centers about Dana, who is reported by the Kerseys' butler to have quarreled with the father of Patty, the night before the assassination. Dana sought the hand of Patty. Also, she has another suitor, Elijah Kent, a lawyer, who likewise quarreled with old John Kersey. Kent tries to advise and comfort the bereaved girl. But she determines on moves of her own, especially when her heart-broken friend, Evelyn Gould, leaves the town for an unknown destination. Patty finds out from his father where Dana has gone, and telegraphs him to come back at once that he may vindicate himself from the guilt fastening upon him. Then she sends for a private detective, and calls up Jerry Lawton, a New York counselor, who used to conduct some of her father's business affairs. From Lawton, Patty learns much of her father's financial dealings. She also borrows ten thousand dollars from the lawyer, which she sends anonymously to a Miss Pomeroy, who was once engaged to the noxious Newton Payne. Both Dana Mackenzie and Evan Baring, the detective sent for, arrive at Greenville on the same train. The latter quizzes the young doctor to his extreme annoyance. Baring discovers some clews in the Kersey library which later mysteriously vanish. The detective, posing as a book agent, puts Elijah Kent through a course of sprouts. Patty Kersey tells Dana that she wants him to stay in Greenville and prove all the gossip idle and false.

(A Four-Part Story—Part Three)

CHAPTER XIV.

WHEN Baring left Kent he tramped on down the road, turning things over in his mind.

"If I stay here, I shall have to get a wheel," he said to himself, and he reflected that as he might not always care to advertise his presence a bicycle would be better than a motor cycle. Then he heard the rattle of some sort of a trap behind him, and he waited till a light wagon came down the hill. An amiable-looking farmer held the reins, and Baring hailed him.

"If you're going down to the village, d'ye mind giving me a lift?"

"Get in," said the farmer cheerfully, pulling up. "I don't go clear to the village, but you might as well ride until I turn off. You're a stranger here, eh?"

"Yes," said Baring. And as he wished to give as little occasion for speculation about himself and his doings as possible he added: "I'm stopping at the Greenville Hotel; I'm selling books. Name's Baring."

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Baring. My name's Lindley."

"Oh, I say! I read about you in the papers," said Baring, with genuine interest. "You're the man that found the body of the suicide, aren't you? Papers were full of it."

This novel began in the January 20th POPULAR.

"Yep. Reckon I'm the man all right."

"That must have been rather a startling experience. Tell me about it."

Lindley was ready enough to talk. "Well, if you believe me, it made me weak in the knees. Funniest thing in the world. I've read about people's knees giving away when they was scared, but I never knew it was so. But it is! Now, why did my knees get weak, instead of my arms or my back?"

"Give it up," laughed Baring. "I've heard that saying, too. At any rate, you didn't run away."

"Run away! Me? I should say not! I went up to him. And it was lucky I did, for so I found the writing in his notebook saying he had just killed Mr. Kersey, and I could go on right off and give the warning to Mr. Kent. If I hadn't done that, there's no telling when they might have found him."

"To be sure," conceded Baring amiably. "Fortunate you came along. I saw the big oak where you found him when I came up the road."

"Oh, you think you did!" said Lindley, with some bitterness. "Well, maybe you did. It isn't for me to say you didn't. What do I know about it? I'm only the man that found him!"

"Why, is there any doubt about the spot?" Baring asked in surprise.

"I haven't any doubts myself," said Lindley. "Who showed you the spot?"

"Oh—a man walking up the hill today happened to point it out," Baring said. He was watching Lindley closely.

"Under the big oak, I suppose?" sneered Lindley.

"Yes, that's what he called it. The ground looked all trodden down." He looked at Lindley inquiringly. "You are making me very curious, Mr. Lindley."

"Oh, yes, they been going there, empty-headed noodles," Lindley scoffed. "But that ain't the place. I tell you I know. Nobody asked me about it, so I let them fool themselves as much as they liked. They might have known I was the man to ask."

"I'm glad I came to you for information," said Baring. He meant it, too. He saw that it was piqued vanity which had made the farmer allow the villagers to follow a wrong scent. But Dana? How about Dana? He made a mental note to consider Dana's part in it later. "What made people think it was the other place?" he asked.

"Oh, I suppose Orton said it was under the oak, and one fool told another. But I know which oak it was."

"Of course you know."

"Good reason I should, since I was the first to see him. This is the place. That's the tree he was under."

It was a spot about a rod farther up the hill than the spot indicated by Dana, but Baring noted at once that the general look of the two places was alike. It would have been easy to mistake one for the other from a mere description, unless one were a woodsman.

"It was from here that I first saw him," said Lindley, eagerly pointing out the scene to his attentive listener. "You see that white birch just beyond? Standing here, I saw that white line running down to his white face."

"I see," said Baring. "That settles it."

"D'ye want to get out and look around?" Lindley asked obligingly.

"No, thank you. But I'm glad to have the right spot pointed out to me. What sort of soil do you have about here?" And from that point he skillfully piloted the conversation into other channels until they reached the fork of the road where Lindley turned off.

"Sorry I don't go any farther your way," he said, pulling up.

"That's all right; thank you for the lift," Baring answered.

And they parted with mutual greetings.

But Baring hardly waited for Lindley to get out of sight before he swung back and returned to the point which Lindley had pointed out. He was keenly excited over the unexpected good luck which had preserved the spot of Gould's suicide from the trampling of the public. What might he not hope to find?

At first he thought his chance had brought him nothing. The little wild

plants of the wood covered any record of the fatal night which might have been impressed upon the ground. But when he had finished the minute examination which he gave the spot, he held two small objects in the palm of his hand—two half-burned matches. That was absolutely all. Two matches were proof that a human hand had lit them and let them fall. Was it Gould's? Had he lit them in order to write that final message in his notebook? They were not common matches, Baring noted. They were evidently of the variety known as "safety," but they were larger than common, and the upper end was stained a peculiar orange. Baring wrapped them carefully in paper and put them away. Those two burned stubs, he felt, spelled the first syllable of the answer to the mystery. He must find what went before and what followed.

Then, as he turned away, his eye was caught by the glint of something white against the bark of a tree at a little distance. Some folded bits of paper, lodged by the wind under a protecting edge of bark, discolored by the dews of a week, but still recognizable for what they were—five pages torn from a small pocket notebook and crumpled into a ball by a hasty squeeze of the hand. There were a few figures in washed-out ink—expense items and train schedules, Baring guessed. He handled them carefully. That they had been torn from the notebook in which the Gould confession was written seemed entirely probable. But this in itself proved nothing. They might have been torn out by Gould himself, as well as by any one else, or by any one else as well as by Gould. However, he put them carefully away.

The matches were more significant. Did Gould have matches of this sort in his pockets? He must know. Miss Kersey had promised that he should have a chance to examine the confession itself, now held by Orton. Would Orton have the other things from Gould's pockets? Or would he know whether a box of safety matches was among them?

Baring whistled cheerfully to himself as he tramped down the hill. He had found a point at which to begin his study of the case. And he began to see that the case, as a case, held possibilities.

CHAPTER XV.

He lost no time the next morning in reminding Miss Kersey of his urgent desire to examine the Gould notebook, containing the ante-mortem statement of the suicide.

"If we can manage it without exciting too much curiosity as to my purpose, and starting talk," he said warningly.

"Why, of course!" she exclaimed. "Of course. I'll take you down to Mr. Orton's office at once."

"You don't suppose he will raise any objection?" suggested Baring.

Patty opened her eyes with surprise.

"Why, no, of course not. Not if *I* ask," she added, with a grande-dame air. And he realized that he had not made sufficient allowance for the influence exerted in the town of Greenville by Patty Kersey.

And, as a matter of fact, Orton didn't. The idea never occurred to him.

Mr. Orton's office was half of the room which served as the Greenville post office. Mail came in twice a day and went out once, and at those critical hours Mr. Orton was to be found in the post-office half. The long intervals which lay between were spent in the other half of the room, where he discharged the stray duties appertaining to the county clerk, the pound master, and the coroner. It was here that Baring and Patty Kersey found him.

"Mr. Orton, have you got Mr. Gould's notebook here?" Patty asked directly. It had been arranged on the way down that Patty was to do all the talking as far as possible.

"Yes, Miss Kersey, I'm keeping it safely locked up."

"Of course you would. I might have known you would," cried Miss Kersey, appreciation of his Roman steadfastness to duty speaking in her voice and in her sympathetic eyes. "But, do you

know, I have never seen that book myself. Might I have a look at it?"

Orton did not hesitate. "Of course, Miss Kersey," he answered promptly, and unlocked the drawer of the desk —with a key which he left in the keyhole of the open drawer.

Patty opened the much-discussed notebook, and read the few penciled lines which carried so momentous a message. There were tears in her eyes as she finished, and she handed the book to Baring without comment.

A glance showed Baring that the ruling of the pages was the same as the ruling of the crumpled pages he had found in the woods. He, too, read the few lines on the first page with as keen an interest as Patty's and with a more critical eye. To get a better light on the faintly penciled words he moved his position several times, and stood near Orton's desk for a moment. As he moved, the key fell to the floor. Baring stooped down to recover it somewhat awkwardly, and for as much as five seconds the key was in his hand, and his back was turned to Orton. Then the key was restored to its place, and the notebook was returned to Miss Kersey, who closed it and handed it back to Mr. Orton.

"What other articles were found in Gould's packets?" Baring asked, with natural curiosity.

Orton again opened the drawer from which he had taken the notebook, and showed a collection consisting of a worn penknife, a fountain pen, a key ring with two latchkeys, a shabby purse with a small amount of money in it. There was also a letter in an opened envelope addressed to Edgar Gould.

"It was that letter that enabled us to identify him," said Orton. "It was written by his daughter."

"Why don't you return these things to Evelyn Gould?" demanded Patty. "Don't they belong to her?"

"I will when I know her address," Mr. Orton answered defensively. "She didn't leave it here."

"Oh, of course," said Patty. "How stupid of me! In the meantime you are quite right to keep them safely locked up."

"There was nothing else?" asked Baring. "No pipe or tobacco or—matches?"

"Nothing of that sort. Everything is here."

Baring took the knife in his hand. The handle was of gun metal and showed marks of use where the owner's fingers had rested. He shifted it from one hand to the other, and looked at it in various lights. Then he returned it.

There was a question in the raised eyebrows which Patty turned to Baring, and the faintest nod on his part gave an affirmative answer. So Patty rose and thanked Mr. Orton, and that responsible gentleman locked the drawer of his desk, and the interview was over.

"Well, are you satisfied?" Patty asked eagerly the moment they were outside of Mr. Orton's office.

"Yes," said Baring. He did not explain the reason for his secret and supreme satisfaction. "I am going away for a day or two," he added in a moment. "I am going up to Ashfield to look up Gould's past history. Say as little about my comings and goings as possible. I don't want attention directed to them."

"But do you think——" Patty began eagerly.

Baring shook his head. "I don't think for publication," he answered, with an apologetic smile. "Wait until I have something to tell you."

He did not care to discuss his methods. Patty Kersey would have been surprised and perhaps somewhat scandalized if she had known that he had taken a wax impression of Orton's key when he picked it up from the floor. And she would have been more than dubious if she had known that before Baring took the train for Ashfield that evening he had made an unannounced, unnoticed, and wholly unauthorized visit to Orton's office. As it was after business hours, the office was supposed to be locked. But a quite ordinary master key served to open the old-fashioned lock of the door, and a roughly

made but efficient key, which Baring had filed out in his own room in the meantime, opened the drawer of the desk. When Baring took the train, accordingly, he took with him the Gould notebook, which Orton would, at that moment, have sworn with a clear conscience was in the locked drawer of his private desk in a locked office. A few days later Baring returned the notebook as carefully as he had abstracted it, and as it happened that Orton had had no occasion to look at it in the meantime, he never knew nor guessed that it had been on a far journey in the interval.

The scientific study and analysis of handwriting as a means of establishing the authenticity of disputed documents is of comparatively recent date, but for a young branch of science it has shown some remarkable results. The most skillful forgeries and the most painstaking alterations reveal their true character when subjected to the enlarging camera, the side-light photograph, and the chemical test. Baring knew that one of the most reliable of the so-called experts in handwriting, Eastman by name, lived in Ashfield. He had had occasion before this to invoke Mr. Eastman's aid, and he felt sure he could get an answer to one question which looked pretty important—had the writing in the book been made by a left-handed man? For his first glance at the worn knife taken from Gould's pocket had given him the idea that Gould was left-handed. He meant to verify that guess, of course. But if it should prove true, and then if Eastman could show conclusively that the memorandum in the notebook was written right-handedly—well, it would at least corroborate Doctor Mackenzie's wild guess that the confession was a forgery. And that would certainly prove a hidden crime. It might even prove a long step in the direction of a solution.

Whistling in cheerful anticipation of this outcome, Baring took out the notebook in the privacy of his hotel room—the first moment since it came into his unauthorized possession when he had been absolutely alone and safe in making the examination—and made the test as to whether the loose pages which he had found in the wood corresponded with the stubs left in the book. He had felt so sure they would fit that when he found they corresponded exactly he experienced no surprise, although he was vastly pleased.

"Luck's with me," he thought to himself. And he was just superstitious enough to take it for a good omen. Any one who deals with chance is apt to develop a vein of superstition, and there are few professions more chancey than that of the detector of criminal trails. And then he made a significant discovery. There were five loose pages—there were six stubs in the book. The five pages were crunched together when he found them—they would seem to have been torn out with one nervous jerk. They fitted the first five stubs. The sixth stub, for which there was no corresponding page, had been torn at a different margin. It must have been torn out by itself, after the others had been jerked out. But where was it? Baring formulated the question, and left a blank for the answer—to be filled in later.

He noted one further fact: There was a faint smear, as of blood, on the sixth stub in the book, just where the thumb that caught the page to tear it out had rested. There was no such smear on any of the other stubs, nor on the pages which he had found in the wood. To be sure, the dews that had half obliterated the ink would undoubtedly have washed out a faint trace of blood on the paper. That was not especially significant. But the fact that this stain showed only on the stub of the missing sixth page was enough to set Evan Baring's imagination to working. With his chin in his hands, and his eyes fixed in a hypnotized stare upon that faint mark of a stained thumb, he mentally reconstructed the entire scene under the trees at the edge of the Green Tree Road.

All very well—but what one wanted was proof. He replaced the loose pages carefully in his pocketbook, and set out

with the notebook to have Mr. Eastman answer his first question.

Eastman's laboratory was a scientific-looking place, with magnifiers, cameras, and other instruments not so familiar. There were curious and interesting charts on the walls, some of which had played the decisive part in the legal adjudgment of fortunes. Every chart held its story of life, liberty, and the misguided pursuit of happiness. And some of the most dramatic of the stories never came to the public at all. The manipulator in chief of these often amazing revelations was a kind-faced, middle-aged man, with the dreamy look of the scientist or inventor. Each new problem was to him a chess problem —something to be solved. That the solution might have a profound effect on human life was also interesting, when he came to think of it, but it was distinctly incidental.

Eastman knew Baring of old, and welcomed him with genuine pleasure.

"Well, Evan, what mischief are you up to now?" he asked genially.

"On the contrary," laughed Baring, "mischief and I are sworn enemies. That's why I come to you for help."

"All right. What can I do for you?"

For answer Evan handed him the notebook, open at the page containing Gould's confession. Eastman read it with curiosity, and then looked up in quick surprise.

"John Kersey! Why, this is the confession left by the man who killed John Kersey and then committed suicide! I read about it in the papers. The local papers made something of it because the man—Gould, wasn't that the name? —used to live here. What's the question about this, Evan?"

"The question is whether that is Gould's writing or not."

"Oh, is there any doubt about the case?" Eastman tossed the question over his shoulder, but he was already examining the writing with a microscope. "I got the impression that it was all clear cut and settled."

"It is settled officially, but I am making a private investigation at the request of one of the parties concerned."

"Have you any other samples of Gould's writing?"

"Not yet, but I hope to get them. But as I must return this original script as soon as possible I brought it to you first of all so that you could photograph it. You can work from the photographs afterward, can't you?"

Eastman nodded absently. He was still examining the script, and he looked grim. "You know very well that I am no clairvoyant or necromancer," he said abruptly, looking up under his shaggy gray eyebrows to fix Baring with a reproachful glance.

"Meaning by that——" asked Baring.

"Meaning that you have brought me a peculiarly hard problem, my dear boy. And I don't guarantee results. This sample was written under great agitation. It is characterized by one long tremor, which very likely covers up and distorts the writer's personal traits of penmanship to such an extent as to leave a good margin of doubt about any analysis. Being written in pencil, too, modifies it." He frowned over it with devotion and annoyance. "Well, bring on your admitted writing as soon as you can. I shan't rest now until I see what I can make of it."

"At any rate, perhaps you can tell whether it was written by a left-handed man or not," suggested Baring.

Eastman looked up sharply. "Is that an issue?"

"I think that Gould was left-handed, but I haven't yet had time to verify that. If he was, it will be an issue, certainly."

"Well, come back at three this afternoon, and I'll let you answer that question for yourself," said Eastman. "That's easy. I think I could tell you now, but I'll wait until I get this enlarged. You will see the lines of direction for yourself. And if Gould didn't write it—what then?" He looked up with a "tell-me-a-story" expression.

"That opens up a very much larger question," said Baring seriously. "I shall perhaps send you samples of writing from time to time for comparison, in that case. But—one step at a time."

"Yes. Quite right. Quite right,"

said Eastman thoughtfully. But he was looking at Baring with an abstracted regard. And suddenly he seemed to take a resolution. "See here, Evan, in the interests of justice—and I take it that your work in this case is in the interests of justice and innocence?"

"Certainly."

"In the interests of justice, then, and because I believe that you ought to have all the help I can give you in that direction, I am going to show you something. It is no breach of confidence, my boy, for others know as well as I. Now, look at this."

He took a mounted slide from a drawer and slipped it into a magic lantern, and threw upon a white screen an address:

MISS RUTH POMEROY,
1111 Waterton Ave.,
Ashfield, N. Y.

"I've heard that name," murmured Baring.

Eastman glanced from the name to Baring and back to the name. "That address was written on a wrapper," he said. "The wrapper contained a New York paper with the account of John Kersey's death heavily marked. Miss Pomeroy happens to be a friend of my wife's. She brought me the wrapper to get my opinion as to whether the address was written by the same hand that had written her name repeatedly on letters some ten years ago. The writing was a good deal changed, either by time or by a conscious effort to disguise it, but I was unable to give her my professional opinion that it had the same authorship."

"Wait a minute," said Baring. "I remember now—I knew I had heard the name recently. She's the girl who broke her engagement with Newton Payne because he didn't shoot John Kersey at the time of the strike in some mine where he was hurt. Oh, I say!" He stopped short. The implication hit him hard.

Eastman rubbed his chin and frowned. "She certainly broke her engagement with him years ago," he said dryly, "but whether from the bloodthirsty reason you give, or some more feminine and creditable reason, I shall not undertake to say. I like her myself, in spite of her views on the labor question. But that wrapper was undoubtedly written by Payne. However, I call your attention to the fact that it is a New York paper, and it was mailed from New York. It reached Miss Pomeroy two days after the tragedy."

"Yes, Payne has been away, I understand, ever since that time." Baring spoke absently, for his mind was busily engaged fitting things together, but Eastman caught up his remark as though it were for some reason specially significant.

"He has been away all the time? You are sure of that?"

"I am sure that it is the general impression. If he has been back, it has been surreptitiously. Why—if I may ask? You are exciting my curiosity."

Eastman drummed with his fingers on the table, while he considered Baring with a troubled eye. At last he spoke: "See here, Evan, what I am going to tell you now is in strict confidence."

"You mean that I must not act upon it in pursuing my investigations?" parried Baring dubiously.

"No, I don't mean that. I give you the information for what it may be worth to you—and in the interests of justice. But it is for *your* information. You may act on it, but you must not repeat it."

"I understand. Yes, certainly I can promise that."

"Well, then, listen. As I say, this notice was mailed to her from New York, and was undoubtedly sent by Payne, with whom she has not been in correspondence since their engagement was broken off some seven years ago. Now, a few days ago she received a notification from her bank here that ten thousand dollars had been deposited to the credit of her account. Naturally she went to the bank to find out what it meant, not being accustomed to receive souvenirs of that sort.

The bank could tell her nothing except that the draft had come from the Bank of Greenville—Greenville, mind you—with instructions to have it placed to her credit. She came to me about it then, and I wrote the Greenville Bank. They have just answered that the remittance was made in accordance with instructions received from one of their customers, that there was no mistake about it, but that they are not at liberty to give any further information, and they remained very respectfully. And there you are. Except that Miss Pomeroy has not yet drawn against this mysterious and unexplained deposit."

"Is Miss Pomeroy wealthy?"

"Very far from it. But she is not yet prepared to accept a donation of ten thousand dollars from—well, from any unexplained source."

"You mean—from Newton Payne," said Baring. His eyes were dancing with what he thought a momentous discovery.

"Well, that idea naturally occurred to her as a possibility. Especially as she has no associations with Greenville beyond the fact that Payne is supposed to spend a part of his time there. But you say he has been away since the Kersey tragedy."

"Yes, but instructions to a bank may be given by mail."

"Of course I thought of that. But —Payne is not a man of wealth, I understand. Is it at all likely that he would be able to send his old sweetheart a bequest of that amount, assuming that he might wish to?"

Baring jumped up and paced the room. He stopped suddenly before Eastman. "Suppose that Payne got possession of a large amount of money which he could not publicly account for —which perhaps he might have some belated scruples about using himself ——".

"You mean, was this supposed confession written by Newton Payne instead of by Edgar Gould?" said Eastman.

"Yes, that's exactly what I mean." Baring had gone white with excitement.

"Come back at three this afternoon, and I'll tell you," said Eastman. "What was the other matter you were going to look up before three?"

"Gould's left-handedness," Baring answered, pulling himself back to his foundations of hard facts. "But, I say—if this turns out to be true——"

"Go away, and don't talk to me," said Eastman. "I'm busy. Come back at three." In his own way he was as excited as Baring, and he wanted to get to the special rites and ceremonies of his own strange work. Baring understood, and set off to make the best use possible of the interval for his own purposes.

He had no difficulty in gathering local information about Edgar Gould. The Kersey tragedy had already directed attention to him, and for weeks the town had been full of conjecture and incident. Baring, however, avoided the police and the press and other public purveyors of news—he had already skimmed the papers, and knew all they had to tell—and sought instead the neighbors who had lived beside Edgar Gould before he left the town for New York. Posing as a magazine writer on a hunt for material, he asked questions and took notes, and soon had an extensive record of Edgar Gould's quiet life and undramatic fortunes. At no time did he come upon any authenticated record of a connection, friendly or otherwise, with John Kersey. The story which a reporter at his wits' end had telegraphed to his paper, claiming an old enmity based on romantic jealousy, was declared to be pure fabrication by those who seemed to know Gould best.

"Gould was left-handed, wasn't he?" was the final question he put in each case, after listening to all the voluntary reminiscences which were offered. The question always surprised them. One man hadn't noticed, and another thought not, and a third appealed to his wife. Womanlike, she not only knew, but could give numerous instances, which completely satisfied Baring that the guess which he had based upon the marks of use on the handle

of Gould's knife was correct. He was a bit pleased with himself over that, Evan was!

He had the good luck, also, to secure a specimen of Gould's handwriting. One of the old neighbors had received a letter from him only a few weeks before, and the tragic events which had so soon followed had made him preserve it as a souvenir of the most lurid incident in his life of humdrum respectability. The unco good often seem to have a dull time of it! Baring read the letter, and was touched by it. It was the rather plaintive wail of a man who knew himself old and lonely and ill, who looked forward without hope and back with fruitless longing. Baring knew well enough that the weak are not infrequently driven by their very weakness into crime, but this letter spoke not as much of a weak man as of a man who had lost spirit. That, however, was his psychological interpretation of the letter. What would be of more immediate and practical importance was Eastman's scientific interpretation of the handwriting. He had no difficulty in borrowing the letter for the day, and, with these various fruits of his inquiries, he returned at three o'clock to Eastman.

That enthusiast had been equally busy. He had made several photographs of the notebook script from various angles. Enlarged and thrown on the screen, these had a curiously ominous effect. He glanced at Baring, but made no comment as he threw on the screen one view, made with side lighting, which showed where the fibers of the paper had been pushed up by the pencil.

"Written with the right hand!" Baring exclaimed in triumph. It was a tremendous gain.

"Not a doubt about that," Eastman conceded.

"And Gould was left-handed!"

"Then he didn't write this. But——"

"I've got a specimen of Gould's writing here," Baring added.

Eastman took the letter, glanced at it, and nodded. "Yes, that is left-handed work, of course. I say, Evan, how does it happen that the police overlooked so very obvious a point?"

"The police made no investigation. There are no police in Greenville, for that matter. There is a coroner, and he accepted that notebook confession as authentic, and closed the affair up."

"Who influenced him to do that?" Eastman asked significantly.

Baring caught the point deftly. "I'll find out," he said thoughtfully. "But now—how about the Payne handwriting? Have you made the comparison?"

Eastman frowned dubiously. "Of course I have. But the analysis of handwriting is not merely a matter of measurement. It isn't as exact as geometry. Human emotion is a tremendous factor in it. Now, that notebook confession, whoever wrote it, was written under great mental stress. The nerves of the hand that held the pencil were shaken and jumpy, and the result is a handwriting that is disguised as it could never have been disguised by any deliberate attempt. I can't give you a positive opinion on it, Evan; I can only give you my impression. I do not think it was written by Newton Payne."

"But still—it might be?"

"It might be," he admitted hesitatingly.

Baring tapped his foot on the floor and stared at the legend of "Miss Ruth Pomeroy" which Eastman again threw on the screen. "You say she knows no one else in Greenville?" he asked abruptly.

"No one but Payne."

"There are three common motives for crime," he mused aloud; "jealousy, revenge, and money. In Kersey's case we can eliminate jealousy. Revenge points to Payne. If money also points to Payne——" He shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"Do you know Payne?" Eastman asked thoughtfully.

"No. Haven't even seen him. Why?"

Eastman gave an embarrassed laugh. "Well, his handwriting doesn't look generous. It looks narrow, petty, stingy."

Baring stared with exaggerated

amazement. "And this is the scientist, the cold, accurate photographer, who hates to be called a necromancer or a clairvoyant," he remarked to the camera in a confidential aside.

"That's all right," protested Eastman. "But I can't help getting an impression."

Baring laughed and clapped his friend on the shoulder, but for all his pretended scorn he did not disregard Eastman's suggestion. When the strongest clew was but a cobweb he couldn't afford to dismiss lightly anything so definite as an intuition. He filed it for consideration.

"Better send me some samples of the writing of your other suspects," said Eastman, putting away his slides.

"That's what I'm going to do. And if Miss Pomeroy receives any further communications from the Great Unknown, you will let me know?" He picked up his hat and glanced at his watch.

"Yes. Going now?"

"Yes," grinned Evan. "I've got to return this notebook. I told you I borrowed it, and I'm afraid the worthy coroner may discover the fact."

CHAPTER XVI.

The day after Baring left Greenville, Payne returned to his cottage—returned as quietly and as inconspicuously as he had departed. Probably no one in the village could have told when he came. He had simply appeared. There was one person, however, who always knew when Newton Payne was at home and when he was not, and that was Miss Kersey's pretty maid, Nita Keene. Romance will blossom on the most arid wastes, as well as in fruitful gardens. It was, indeed, a strange, one-sided, twisted sort of romance which kept Nita watchfully alert as to Payne's comings and goings, but one must do the best one can with the materials life affords. To Nita, Newton Payne was a romantic figure. To Payne, Nita was a spy within the lines, who could give him useful information. If she would rather work for love than for money, so much the better. He could save the coin.

Shortly after the first signs of movement in Payne's little shack, therefore, a white curtain fluttered on the breeze from the opened window in Nita's room under the roof. And somewhat later in the day, when Miss Kersey's departure for the village left Nita free from observation, she found no difficulty in slipping away from the house and following a footpath which led to a sheltered spot on the wooded hillside below Payne's cottage and entirely out of sight from the Green Tree houses. Here she found Payne awaiting her, in accordance with the curtain code which had long been established between them.

"Hello, Nita," said Payne casually, but with a sharp glance at the girl. "What's up now?"

"You've been gone a long time," was Nita's indirect reply.

"Yes, I've been busy." He paused a moment, and then added with deliberate intention: "When I read in the papers what had happened here at Greenville I thought it was just as well to stay away a bit. My well-known friendship for John Kersey might make me unpleasantly conspicuous."

"When you read it in the papers!" Nita echoed, with surprise and incredulity in her voice.

"Yes," said Payne. "I left here the day before it happened."

Nita dropped her eyes, and the interlaced fingers which hung before her were suddenly clasped hard upon each other. She did not look at Payne when she spoke next. "I wanted to tell you—I thought maybe you might want to know—Miss Kersey has got a detective up there."

"A detective!" Payne echoed sharply. "What makes you think so?"

"I know it," the girl answered, with the same downcast look. "I heard them talking when they didn't know. It's that young man that calls himself a book agent—Mr. Baring."

"Well, what's he after?" Payne asked impatiently. "What's a detective for,

when there isn't any question about who killed the old man?"

"I thought I ought to tell you," said Nita. "That's why I signaled that I would be here."

"I don't see that it makes any difference if she has a detective or a dozen detectives," said Payne. "Anyhow, I am going away. Now that John Kersey is dead, I wouldn't have any reason to stay here longer. I just came back to get my things and clear out." He spoke with a sharp impatience that seemed somewhat directed against the girl who had brought him the information.

Nita pressed her lips hard together. Her breast heaved.

"You didn't go away the day before Mr. Kersey was killed," she said in a very low voice, and without raising her eyes. "You went away—afterward."

"I tell you I went away the day before," said Payne sharply. "What makes you say I didn't?"

"I saw you that evening," said Nita. "I saw you in the shrubbery on the west side of the house. I saw you go in through the porch to the library. I couldn't see from my window when you came out, but I know when you went in. It was half past eleven."

Payne was biting his lip with nervous indecision. "You've mixed up the days, Nita," he said at last, with a laugh of impatience.

Nita shook her head. She was not disposed ordinarily to maintain an opinion in opposition to Payne, but this matter she considered too important on his own account.

"I am not mistaken. I couldn't be mistaken," she said in a low tone.

"Have you told any one else that you saw me there that evening?" demanded Payne.

"You know I haven't."

Payne walked away impatiently a short distance and then came back.

"See here, Nita, you have been very useful to me——"

"Useful!" Nita interrupted, stung by the word. "I didn't understand that you were merely making use of me. I thought it was because, because we were—friends." Her hesitation over the final word would have been a sufficient indication to any one else that mere friendship was not what was in Nita's mind.

"Of course we are friends," said Payne, watching the girl with amused understanding. "It's because we were such good friends that you have kept me posted as to Kersey's comings and goings. It wasn't out of friendship for any one else that you signaled me from your window every day, was it?"

"No," said Nita.

"And so," said Payne, "since we are such good friends"—and here he carelessly placed his arm about her shoulders—"you mustn't think of repeating to any one else your story about seeing me in the Kersey grounds on *that* night."

Nita drew herself away from his casual embrace with a look of annoyance. "I haven't told any one, and I don't intend to," she said, "but I thought you might like to have this paper back." She drew from her apron pocket a folded sheet of paper. "That Mr. Baring found this in the library and was going to follow it up, so I took it away when he wasn't looking." And she handed him the drawing of the maimed hand which Baring has missed.

Payne merely glanced at it and thrust it into his coat pocket. "Good girl, Nita," he said, and attempted again to draw her to him.

But she evaded his caress with a swift movement. "I don't want to be paid," she said pettishly. "You don't need to put your arm around me because I brought you that paper or this one." She handed him Kersey's letter to Lawton which had disappeared from the drawer in the library at the same time as the drawing.

Payne read the letter carefully, and glanced through the pamphlet inclosed. "Where did you get this?" he asked, with interest.

"Mr. Baring found it on Mr. Kersey's desk, and he thinks that Mr. Kersey was writing it just before he was killed. I happened to hear him speaking to Miss Patty about it," she added

in hasty explanation. Payne read the letter again, and then folded it carefully and placed it in his pocketbook. "It may be useful some time," he said, with a smile. "At any rate, I'll keep it until I see how the cat jumps. You are a good little girl, Nita." And here without repulse he placed his arm about her waist. "You really are—the prettiest, nicest, kindest, little girl that ever was a good friend to a lonely man."

CHAPTER XVII.

Baring returned from Ashfield in a very different mood from that in which he had gone there. He had learned one thing definitely—the so-called notebook confession had not been written by Gould. It was a forgery. He knew now that he actually had a crime to consider. It was no longer a mere suspicion, a guess, a matter of gossip. Miss Kersey had had very little exterior justification for calling him into the case, but the justification was there. Cobwebby, he had called it; now he saw the spider at work. It was with a serious mind that he set himself to considering what he could do now to advance his meager but important knowledge another step.

Matches—money—lost page—penmanship; so he tabulated in his mind the points for consideration.

The matches which he had found in the wood, and which had not come from Gould's pocket, were, so far, the only clew of a positive character which he had in his fingers. They were long, slow-burning matches. One might have served to light the page while the brief confession was written.

Money. The safe had been open, Miss Kersey said. The possibility that the crime sprang out of a robbery must be considered. Miss Kersey had had no knowledge of any loss. Kent was antagonistic, and would certainly give him no assistance. Baring had made a note of the name of Lawton. Possibly the lawyer might know by this time if anything was missing from the safe.

The lost page—ah, if he knew where to find that! It must be somewhere, entangled in the cobweb, unless it had been purposely destroyed.

The penmanship test was perhaps the easiest point at which to begin, with a hope of attaining practical results. And here his assumed profession of book agent gave him an immediate advantage. He would have a plausible reason for asking his customers to sign their orders, and he could easily manage it so that they should fill in a blank form incorporating one of more words that appeared in the confession. This would give Eastman an opportunity for a direct comparison. His first care when he reached Greenville was to have some forms printed which would serve this purpose.

Equipped with these, he acquired an interesting collection of Greenville penmanship the first day, for he made a point of offering a standard subscription publication at a price that would have surprised the publishers. The difference between the amount he collected of his subscribers and the amount he remitted to the publishers was merely an expense item in his work. By this means he obtained the signatures of Jensen, Dana Mackenzie, and the doctor, various regular boarders at the hotel, and even of Roberts, the butler. Kent he could not approach, but he easily secured a specimen of his writing from Miss Kersey without giving her any occasion to suspect his ulterior purpose. He sent these off by registered mail to Eastman. And then he had the inspiration to get Lindley's signature added to the collection. Lindley was the man who had found Gould in the woods—the first man on the scene. Certainly Lindley was not to be neglected.

Lindley's market garden lay on the high ground beyond the range of hills of which Green Tree Hill formed a part. It was enough of a tramp over there to make Baring tell himself he was a fool to take so much trouble for what was, after all, more a theory of thoroughness than an obvious necessity. But he was going to take no chances in this case. Besides, he wanted to talk

to Lindley again. He knew more about the situation now than he had when he saw the farmer before.

Lindley was at home, and glad to see him. Baring talked farm publications with him, and had no difficulty in getting his signed order for a certain journal which he mentioned. The special, half-price offer which Baring was able to make for a few days only was too alluring to be disregarded. And then, business being finished, the real business began.

"Smoke?" suggested Baring, extending a cigar.

Lindley took it, though he preferred his pipe, because an opportunity to get something for nothing did not often come his way. And then Baring discovered that he had no matches. He appealed to Lindley, but neither had he any matches. The cigars were pocketed, unsmoked.

"I usually carry a box of safeties," said Baring. "You know them, don't you? The kind you have to strike on their own box. Won't light on anything else."

Yes, Lindley had seen them, but never used them. He didn't hold with newfangled notions. Baring expatiated on their convenience until he was satisfied that Lindley was really unfamiliar with that brand of matches as he professed to be. Well, he must expect to draw blank more than once.

"I've thought a good deal about what you told me the other day—about discovering Gould's body in the woods," he said in gossippy fashion. "It isn't often that sort of a thing happens to a man. I wish you would tell me more about it—just what you did. You saw him first from the road, I think you said."

Lindley was more than willing to talk. It had been his grievance that he was ignored.

"Well, first off, I thought it was a drunk, and then something about the way the arms were thrown out made me feel queer. I wanted to get away, and I wanted to see more. So I went up, and then I saw."

"And then you read the confession in the notebook," said Baring. "That was what sent you up the hill to the Kerseys. Where was the notebook? In his pocket? Which pocket?"

"It was in open sight, beside him. Slipped out of his pocket, I suppose. I looked to see if his name was in it. But when I saw what he had written I didn't wait for anything else. And then I met Mr. Kent, and he went on to the Kersey house with me."

Baring had every appearance of listening, but as a matter of fact he hardly heard. He was following a thought that had suddenly started up in his mind.

"There was a page torn out of the notebook," he said abruptly. "Did you see that?"

Lindley gave an embarrassed laugh, and looked abashed. "I didn't hear any one saying anything about that. 'Tain't of any importance, is it?"

Baring's heart leaped. "In a murder case everything is of importance," he said severely. "You haven't destroyed that piece of paper, have you?"

Lindley was fumbling with his pocketbook. "Nobody asked for anything like that, and I didn't know—I thought I'd keep it as a souvenir," he added lamely. "It wasn't as though it was of any use. He must ha' changed his mind and torn it out before he wrote the other." And he produced a folded bit of paper, with the identical blue ruling with which Baring was now familiar.

Baring's mind stood still as he unfolded it. He had confidently expected to find it somewhere, some time, and yet, now that it was in his hand, it seemed incredible. Yet here was that missing sixth page, and on it, written in ink, not pencil, were the words:

Life holds nothing for me but suffering. Forget and forgive.

This was the authentic message written by Gould before he shot himself. It needed no Eastman analysis of the writing to satisfy Baring of this, though that, too, he meant to have. He shut his eyes for a moment.

"Where did you find this?" he demanded.

"Well, that is one of the queer things. I found it in the road, down quite a bit. That's one reason why I never thought until afterward that it was anything to do with—him. I was walking a bit to ease the horse, and I saw this bit of paper fluttering at the edge of the road. I picked it up out of idleness and couldn't make nothing of it. I was going to throw it away, and then it struck me sort of queer, and I put it in my pocket. Then when I came on *that* in the woods, if you will believe me, I never thought of this paper. I was that excited it went out of my mind. Afterward, when I came across it again, I saw it was like the notebook, and so I kept it, just as a curiosity, you might say. I didn't suppose it was any good to anybody."

Baring reflected. He could easily frighten Lindley into giving it up, but in that case the farmer would naturally expect to turn it over to Orton, not to a casual stranger. He spoke accordingly:

"Oh, it is of no importance in one way. The case is settled, you know. But I collect curious letters and things like this, and if you don't mind I'd like to buy it of you. It's nobody's business what you do with it—you found it. But wouldn't you rather have a ten-dollar bill in your pocketbook than this? It would buy more."

Lindley accepted in suppressed excitement. It had been a lucky find for him.

And Baring was no less satisfied as he walked back to the village. Here was the missing page which showed that Gould had indeed committed suicide. It was not difficult to imagine the situation. Some one had come upon him in the night, had lit two matches in an examination, and, finding that the man was dead, had torn out the true message in the notebook and written in the forged confession which should account for the murder of Kersey. Probably it was the notebook, with the first pages torn out and the confession on the open page, which had suggested the form of the spurious confession. This was guesswork, of course. But the page was a genuine bit of reality to add to what facts he had so far collected, and it was an important bit.

When he returned to the village he went at once to every store in the place, and tried to buy safety matches. He sampled the entire stock in Greenville, and, though he was supplied with various brands, he could not find anything like the extra-long, orange-colored matches he had in mind. He then grew chronically forgetful about supplying himself, and was obliged to ask the favor of a match for his cigarette from every man with whom he talked. He received various samples, but none had the orange tip for which he was looking. This was a matter occupying several days, but though his quest was fruitless he was in the meanwhile making progress in other directions.

For instance, on the theory of a robbery. He had raised that question with Miss Kersey in their first conversation, but now, remembering the ten thousand dollars sent to Miss Pomeroy from Greenville, he returned to the consideration of that possibility with greater care. This, of course, involved the question of Payne. As a matter of fact, it was the undisguised payment through the Greenville bank that left the strongest doubt in Baring's mind. Payne, he felt, would have been too shrewd to leave so obvious a clew, if he had wished to make an anonymous donation to Miss Pomeroy. It indicated either that he wished to be identified, in which case the anonymity was absurd, or that he had nothing to do with the matter. Besides, such haste would have been crude. However, Baring went to the bank, and, explaining confidentially that Miss Pomeroy's friends had delegated him to look into the mysterious remittance, he appealed to the banker for any information he could legitimately give.

Mr. Browne was fully aware of the responsibility of his position as president of the Greenville Bank, and little inclined to be communicative.

"You must understand that I cannot

discuss the business of my clients with any one," he said stiffly.

"Of course. I am not asking you to betray a confidence. But it is reasonable to assume that the person who sent that large sum of money to Miss Pomeroy wished her to enjoy the use of it."

"Naturally." The banker admitted this.

"And, as it happens, Miss Pomeroy refuses to take the money as a gift unless she knows who sent it."

"That is unfortunate. I may say also that is very foolish," said Mr. Browne.

"Perhaps. But a young woman is entitled to protect her dignity in her own way." He fixed his eyes on the banker a moment, and then asked abruptly: "Was it Newton Payne?"

"Good heavens, no! Newton Payne never had ten thousand dollars to bless himself with."

"Was it Mr. Kent?" asked Baring at a venture.

But Mr. Browne was not to be further drawn. "I cannot agree to answer any more questions, Mr. Baring. You must see that for yourself. You might soon narrow the circle down to a point where my silence would be an answer."

"Oh, might I?" thought Baring. And then the banker, with the guilelessness of the innocent-minded, added:

"You can assure Miss Pomeroy that there is not the slightest reason why she should not accept the money and use it as designed by the donor. The donor, I may say, is a woman," and he shut his lips firmly to keep the secret within.

"And her name is Patty Kersey," said Baring to himself. Of course. How obvious! He was no more in doubt than if the banker had spoken the name aloud instead of holding it in his mind. He made his farewell and got away without further attempt to make a breach in the wall of Mr. Browne's professional reserve. How exactly like her, he said to himself, with a smile—impulsive, generous, and unpractical. Well, that removed all mystery from the ten-thousand-dollar payment.

And Baring would have been disposed to dismiss altogether the idea of robbery as a motive for the crime if it had not been for the fact of the open safe. He had held that item in the background from the beginning, waiting for whatever facts might offer an explanation. He was testing everything by his formula—"jealousy, money, revenge." Until he should receive Eastman's report on the samples of handwriting sent him, he had no reason to consider one lead more promising than another. He therefore decided to thresh out this qustion with Miss Kersey.

"You told me that you found the safe open, but that you had no reason to suppose anything had been stolen," he said to her in the course of conversation later in the day. "You have thought of nothing since then—missed nothing?"

She shook her head. "No. But I told you that I knew very little about such matters."

"Would you know whether your father was in the habit of keeping money in the safe?"

"Oh, I am sure he was not."

"Your lawyer, Mr. Lawton, has said nothing about anything being lost?"

She turned an arrested look toward him. "Oh!"

"You have remembered something?"

"It was nothing positive, and I don't suppose it means anything, but when you asked, it made me remember—Mr. Lawton seemed to think there should have been some bonds here that we didn't find. Paint Pot bonds, he said. But afterward he thought they were probably in the safety-deposit box in town."

"And are they?"

"Why, I never thought to mention them to Ely. He is going to look after things for me now."

"Would you mind asking him? You might tell him what Mr. Lawton said, and see if he has come across any such bonds. I am wondering, you see, whether there was a robbery that night."

"Very well, I'll ask him. But—Mr. Lawton was not certain about it, you know. He only thought they might be here."

"He must have had some reason for raising the question. Please ask Mr. Kent and let me know."

Patty nodded in acquiescence, but she wasn't enthusiastic. She knew too well Ely's attitude toward Baring's investigation.

As Baring was leaving, his eye was caught by signs of habitation in the Newton Payne shack across the way.

"Has your neighbor returned?" he asked quickly.

"Mr. Payne? Yes."

"When did he come back?"

"A day or two ago, I think."

"Guess I'll go over and make his acquaintance," said Baring, with profound satisfaction.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Baring had to admit to himself that he anticipated the meeting with Newton Payne with a sense of excitement. Payne had been constantly in the background of the story ever since Baring came to Greenville. Though absent, in fact, he had been always present in the village gossip. Evan's nerves were aquiver when he rapped a tattoo upon the jamb of Payne's hut—by courtesy cottage.

"Well?" said an abrupt voice. And within the room, which seemed shadowy in comparison with the brilliant sunshine outside, Baring was aware of a tall man who stood half turned toward him, as if arrested in a movement to retreat.

"May I come in?" Baring asked cheerfully, and entered without waiting for a reply. "You are Mr. Payne, I believe. You are about the only man here who hasn't given me an order for books, so I've come to look you up. My name's Baring."

"Yes?" said Payne, with a drawling interrogation in his tone. It was only one word, but there was something satirical and sly in the way it was spoken which made Baring feel that he would have to look alive in dealing with this man. He was no fool.

"Down at the village you have a great reputation as a man of letters," said Baring, with an ingratiating grin.

"And down at the village I suppose you have a reputation as—a book agent," said Payne. His little pause before the last words was again slyly satirical, and Baring looked sharply at the man.

Payne was a man of about thirty-five, tall but ungraceful. At first sight, people were apt to get the impression that he was in some way deformed, but a second look showed this to be a mistake. His head was striking, with a heavy fall of hair over his forehead, piercing eyes, and a frontal development of the skull which would have been fitting for a philosopher, but which, in this man, gave somehow the same sense of unbalance or deformity which was suggested by his ungainly body. A little more of something indefinable, and he would have been a strikingly handsome man. A little less, and he would have been commonplace and unnoticed. As it was, people were always aware of him and unconsciously uncomfortable in his presence. Baring pulled his wits sharply together, subconsciously warned to be on his guard.

"Well, we have to try to live up to our reputations, however little we deserve them," he said carelessly. "That being the case, as a man of letters you will give me a large order for the books which I, as a salesman, must sell. You have been away for some time, or else I should have been here before."

"Yes," said Payne. His voice had a ponderous quality that gave curious weight to a single word. He came forward now, and for the first time seemed to indicate a willingness to meet his visitor, for he pushed a chair forward with his foot, and himself found a seat on the edge of his table. "I have been away. I left Greenville the day before old man Kersey—was killed."

There is a law maxim in Latin to the effect that if testimony is found false in one thing, it is false in everything. Payne's unnecessary particular-

ity as to the day he had left Greenville instantly called up in Baring's mind a recollection of a remark made by Orton, the postmaster. "Payne was in here for his mail that day, same as usual," Orton had said, in answer to some laughing comment on Payne's supposed glee over Kersey's death. "I haven't seen him since, but he was here that day. There was a registered letter here for him. He didn't come around the next day, and he must have gone on to New York before he heard the good news. Missed all the excitement!" Baring's useful memory had registered the speech, without knowing that it would ever prove important. Now, face to face with Payne, and his careful statement that he had left the town the day before Kersey was killed, it rang a sudden warning in his consciousness. If Payne had left for New York the day before, he could not have received his mail that day "as usual," since the mail did not come in until after the train for New York had been some hours on its way. Baring knew the local time-table well enough to be in no doubt in regard to the matter.

"Then you missed all the excitement," he said carelessly.

"Missed everything. Never knew what had happened until I saw it in the New York papers. Then a fellow at the *Challenge* office called my attention to it, because of the Greenville date line. I am a contributor to the *Challenge*, and I was doing some special work in the office there. Reading proof. Kept me busy for a week and more." He kept his eyes upon Baring as he talked, with a fixed stare, as though he were trying to force his words home or watching to see if his listener accepted them.

"I wasn't here at the time, either," Baring commented conversationally. "Didn't strike Greenville till a week or more later, but I haven't heard much of anything else since I did get here. That man Gould must have had a vindictive spirit, nursing some trifling grudge all these years and satisfied with nothing in the end but the old man's death. Vicious, I call it."

A surge of dull color crept up Payne's neck. His eyes looked angry and bloodshot. For the first time he spoke with spontaneous vehemence. "It needn't surprise anybody who knew John Kersey to find that he had enemies—bitter and vindictive enemies—on all sides. He made enemies all his life long, because all his life long he wronged people. Don't I know? He made a cripple of me with no more regret or hesitation than if I had been a wooden man that got in his way. You have probably heard my story—I know what Greenville gossip is. But stop and ask yourself—why am I a cripple, a half man? Because of John Kersey. And I am not the only one. It is the same story, with variations, wherever you go. Ask here in Greenville. Ask James Mackenzie. They say that Kersey forbade young Dana Mackenzie the house, but they don't say that Doctor Mackenzie was just as bitter against that match as old man Kersey, and with better reason. Better reason, believe me! It was Kersey's trickery and sharp practice that ruined Mackenzie—just as he ruined others that trusted him."

"I hadn't heard that," said Baring.

"Well, it's true. It was years ago, when Kersey was just beginning to pile up his fortune and Greenville thought he was a great man and a credit to the place. He promoted a mining scheme out West somewhere, and on his personal recommendation his old friends and neighbors bought stock, Mackenzie among them. He mortgaged his place and everything he owned, to put his money in the mine. Of course, John Kersey had the golden touch and would bring good luck to his friends! Well, of course the mine was nothing but a scheme of Kersey's. He got the only money that was ever made out of it, and he got it from the sale of the stock, not from the ore. Mackenzie never got out from under. He has spent his whole life paying off the debts he got tied around his neck by that scheme of his rich and generous and honest friend, John Kersey. His wife died in poverty—died because of the poverty and worry, if the truth

were known. And her death isn't the only one that can be laid directly at the door of John Kersey."

"All this must have been a long time ago," said Baring, with a deprecating shrug.

"What difference does that make? There may be a statute of limitations for the outlawing of a debt, but that is an artificial arrangement. There is no statute of limitations where human rights are concerned and a moral debt is never outlawed in the courts of God!"

Payne's voice and face glowed with fanatic fervor, and Baring thought he detected the professional eloquence of the socialist writer in his speech. At the same time there was no questioning his intense earnestness.

"Look here!" Payne said suddenly, and, going to a shelf on the wall, he took down a large scrapbook. "A long time ago, you say, and you think maybe it has all been forgotten. But I have made it a business to see that John Kersey's little eccentricities in the way of financial dealings are not overlooked or forgotten. I've got them all down here—a current ledger of Kersey meanness. Wait till I find the record of that Paint Pot Mine affair." He turned the pages backward.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Baring. "You are worse than the angel Gabriel, or whoever the chap is that writes down all our peccadillos in his book. You actually do it!"

Payne paid no attention to the feeble pleasantry. He continued to turn the pages until he found what he wanted.

"Here—look at this. Here's the prospectus of the Paint Pot Mine. Notice the gold lettering. Rich effect, isn't it? Probably there isn't another copy of that prospectus in existence; they were not meant to be put on record. They were meant to impress the simple-minded natives—friends and neighbors of John Kersey who were lost in admiration of his financial success and were ready to hang on to his coat tails when he set out for a new flight. Only, in this case, they were fooled. He never even started flying. He just flapped his wings. But they fell for it. They mortgaged their homes to buy stock. Mackenzie, Davis, Jensen, Perkins—I could name a dozen. Mackenzie put in twenty thousand dollars. The stock certificates he got in exchange were worth, say sixteen cents a pound—about two cents for his allotment."

"Couldn't they recover?" asked Baring. But he was not taking Payne's story without reservation. He recalled that Miss Kersey had spoken of Paint Pot bonds—Lawton had been surprised not to find them. They could not, then, be wholly without value.

Payne sneered, in answer to his last question: "Recover a bone from the jaws of a hungry dog! Mackenzie went to him, as I heard the story, and begged him to take the stock back at half or a quarter or ten per cent of what he had paid cash for it, and when Kersey laughed at him for playing the baby act he threw his certificates in Kersey's face and walked off. Oh, no, there would be no marrying between those families if James Mackenzie had anything to say about it."

"How do you know all this?" Baring asked curiously.

"I have made it my business to know. There was nothing mysterious or secret about it for that matter. Everybody knew all about it at the time, but people forget. I made it my business to remember, and to put my memory into cold storage for the future. Look over these clippings for yourself." With some impatience he pushed the book toward Baring, and walked restlessly up and down the room.

Baring saw at once that this book held material which might be of the utmost importance to him. A scrapbook collection of all of Kersey's transgressions—of course that would give him the clew he needed! How could he get hold of it for the close, watchful reading that would be necessary?

"I find this interesting," he said, with a deprecatory shrug. "Would you mind letting me take it for a day? I'll return it in good condition all right."

Payne shook his head, and then gave Baring a satiric smile.

"In your capacity as book agent, or——"

"Oh, just to satisfy an unworthy curiosity about a celebrity." But, though Baring spoke lightly, he could not help noting Payne's challenging expression. Why should he grin at the book-agent idea? It made Baring vaguely uncomfortable.

Payne was filling his pipe and giving the matter close attention. But at last he spoke slowly: "No, I can't let you take the book away. It's too valuable to risk out of my sight."

"But Kersey is dead. Your vengeance cannot follow him beyond the grave."

"Perhaps. But I may need it for all that. 'You may sit by my fire and read,' as the old song said." And having adjusted the tobacco to his satisfaction, he picked up a box of safety matches from the table and struck one. It burned strong and steadily. It seemed longer than the ordinary safety match, and the end of the wood was stained a peculiar orange. Baring restrained an impulse to put out his hand.

"Your box of matches makes me think of my vain hunt for safeties in this burg," he said casually, turning over the pages of the scrapbook slowly. "They don't seem to carry them at the store."

"These are some I got in New York. Take a box, if you like." He pulled open the table drawer and tossed a box across to Baring.

Baring slipped it into his pocket with a murmured "Thanks." Then he got up. He was too eager to make the comparison with his carefully preserved stubs to take time for much finesse about his departure. "I will come around, if I may, and look that book over again."

"All right," said Payne carelessly. He seemed to indicate that it was a matter of indifference to him.

As Baring passed through the door his eye was caught by a small but curious domestic item. On a rough shelf near the door, which served to hold books, pipes, and other miscellany, there was a fine china bowl, and folded in it was an embroidered napkin. It was conspicuously different from the rest of the equipment of Mr. Payne's house. It looked unmistakably transient. The embroidered initial on the napkin was a large K, and the bowl was of the same pattern that had adorned the table when Miss Kersey had invited Baring to her tea table. As Baring lifted his eyes from this surprising exhibit in Newton Payne's shanty to the owner's face, he caught an arrested look of chagrin. Payne had noted his glance—and was embarrassed. Well, how the deuce *did* table furniture from the Kersey house come to be on Payne's shelf?

That, however, was not a matter of immediate importance, however curious it might be. The thing to do was to compare Payne's safety matches with the stubs he had found on the spot where Gould lay dead under the trees. As soon as he was out of sight of Payne's windows he sat down beside the road and opened the pocketbook in which he had folded away the half-burned stubs he had carefully preserved. There was no question about their common origin. They were identical. Baring whistled softly and meditatively as he laid them side by side on his palm.

He had also brought another "exhibit" from Payne's house. Warned by Payne's manner, he had not ventured to ask his signature to an order blank, but he had done better. He had picked up from the floor a page of discarded manuscript covered with Payne's writing. True, Eastman had already expressed the opinion that the handwriting of the confession was not Payne's, but his samples of Payne's writing were the old ones furnished by Miss Pomeroy, or the one address from the newspaper wrapper. This manuscript should furnish a better basis for judgment. He stopped at the post office to send it off, and there he found a letter from Eastman waiting him:

Not one of the specimens you sent me is on all fours with the confession. Two of them, signed Dana Mackenzie and James Mackenzie, have points of similarity. They also resemble each other. I want to make a further study before I commit myself.

"Humph!" muttered Baring. "I have put another string to my bow!"

CHAPTER XIX.

The brief examination which Baring had been able to make of the Paint Pot Mine prospectus in Newton Payne's scrapbook had shown him the name of Elijah Kent as legal counsel for the company, and he made an early opportunity to approach Kent.

"What can you tell me about the Paint Pot Mine, Mr. Kent?" he asked bluntly. He knew well enough that Kent regarded him and his activities with disfavor, and that anything in the way of indirect "pumping" would be worse than useless.

"What do you want to know?" Kent asked. His manner could not have been called encouraging.

"Newton Payne mentioned it in such a way that I was interested," Baring said. The name seemed a lucky hit, for Kent promptly lost his temper.

"Payne is a pest. Because he lost money in that venture, he carried a grudge against Kersey. If he had held on to his stock, he would be drawing dividends to-day and would flatter himself on his business sagacity. Payne makes me tired."

"Oh, is the stock paying dividends?" Baring asked. "I understood Payne to say that it never paid anything—that the money all went the other way."

"It has come back. As a matter of fact," Kent condescended to explain, habitually fair even when irritated, "that mining venture was a perfectly straight affair on Kersey's part. There was a mine there, with ore in it, which had been practically abandoned because it was not paying. Kersey bought it up, reorganized the company, and started it going. He expected it to be a money-maker, and he didn't hesitate to say so. As a consequence, a lot of people hereabout were crazy to buy stock. They went into it blindly and recklessly—just because Kersey was getting a reputation as a money wizard, and they wanted to be 'in' with him. It was a gamble all around, but Kersey could afford to gamble and they couldn't—that's all."

"But now——"

"Now it's making good money. But most of the original stockholders gave up their holdings when they found they were getting nothing out of it, and never might. The title was assailed, and Kersey had to fight it through the courts for years practically alone. All that time the operation was tied up. Then the old machinery was obsolete, and it took a fortune to replace it. But finally things were straightened out, new methods and machinery put in use, and I understand that a new vein was opened up. I haven't been in touch with the later developments of the business, but I know that a few weeks ago a thumping big dividend was paid——"

"Only a few weeks ago?" Baring interrupted, with sudden interest.

"Yes. Why?"

"Nothing. Go on."

"Well, that's all. The mine has made good, and justified Kersey's faith in it, and the people who lost out were the people who should never have gone in—the gamblers who couldn't afford to gamble. I don't suppose Payne told you about the second chapter, did he?"

"No, he didn't," said Baring thoughtfully.

And the next opportunity he had for speaking to Miss Kersey he pressed the point he had raised before. Had she found the Paint Pot bonds which Mr. Lawton had expected to discover?

"No, I haven't, Mr. Baring. And I asked Mr. Kent if he found any in the safety-deposit vault, and he said no. Not bonds. He said father held some stock in the Paint Pot, but no bonds. I suppose there is a difference?"

"Yes. Mr. Lawton said bonds, didn't he?"

"Yes. He said he could sell them for me, if I wanted him to. But we didn't find any. Does it make any difference?" she asked.

"It may make a difference to your balance at the bank," he laughed.

But as he walked on, ruminating over the information he had received, he did not laugh. The hunger for wealth

is one of the most powerful of human motives. It drives men into great enterprises, to a self-forgetfulness that may even be heroic; but also it may give rise to envy and bitterness and—revenge. Baring decided suddenly that he would have to go to New York, the headquarters for financial information, and learn what he could not only about the Paint Pot Mine, but about Kersey's other business affairs. Somewhere, somewhere, there must be a chink in the wall of circumstance which would correspond to the facts he possessed. Every act leaves its record—that was the theory on which Baring worked. If he couldn't find it, it was because he didn't know how to look or didn't recognize it when he saw it.

And then, by one of those chances which happen so often, in spite of the incredulous, putting within reach of the man who is searching for something—be it arrowheads or clews to a crime—the very thing he is looking for, Baring got what he wanted through Jerry Lawton. And Lawton came to him, instead of making it necessary for Baring to seek him out, which was so much to the good.

Jerry Lawton was a politic person. He had hoped to establish himself definitely in Miss Patty Kersey's good graces by the accommodation which he had extended to her in the matter of that ten-thousand-dollar loan, and he was not a little chagrined when Kent shortly notified him that, at Miss Kersey's request, he was going to take over the management of the estate. His only comfort was in the reflection that Kent was certainly not in Miss Kersey's confidence as to that loan, and that after the estate was settled Miss Kersey would undoubtedly be her own mistress. It behooved him to keep Miss Kersey from forgetting him. So, before the impression of his first service should have worn off, he took advantage of a disengaged day to run up to Greenville. He went unannounced, because he thought it would emphasize the informal and friendly character of his visit. But one of the unforeseen results of that course was that he failed to find Miss Kersey at home. He was received, instead, by Miss Kersey's aunt, Mrs. Appleby. At first he was savagely disposed to swear at his ill luck and the wasted day, but before the call was finished he changed his mind about that.

"So you've come way from New York, Mr. Lawton? Well, now, Patty will be sorry to miss you," said Mrs. Appleby, with great cordiality. The name of New York was enough to glorify any visitor in her eyes. She was, moreover, a social soul, and counted no day lost which gave her an opportunity for what she called a chat. Secretly she did not altogether regret Patty's absence. "There hasn't been a soul here since I came from outside the village except Mr. Baring. And if she didn't see quite so much of him, I'd be just as well pleased."

"Poor Mr. Baring! He doesn't seem to have found favor in your sight," said Lawton, with a careless smile. He was wondering how soon he could get away.

"Well, then, he hasn't," said Mrs. Appleby vigorously. "Why Patty should be so taken up with a strange young man like him I can't for the life of me see."

A strange young man with whom his prospective client was greatly taken up! This required looking into.

"Who is Mr. Baring?" he asked, with a curiosity which he took no pains to conceal.

"Well, I call him a snooper," said Mrs. Appleby energetically. "Didn't he talk to me on the train and find out all about Patty from me. Snooping round and finding things out! And Nita thinks so, too. She agrees with me."

"Who is Nita?" asked Lawton, trying to get his bearings.

"Oh, Nita is one of the maids," said the democratic Mrs. Appleby. "Patty calls them maids, though I'm used to calling them help. Nita's a bright girl, too, and she knows what's what better than some people I could mention. She says Mr. Baring is always snooping around and asking questions, and she has no use for him. I can't see myself

that he spends very much time on his job. He stays down at the hotel, and he isn't at work here one day in three. If it was me, I wouldn't put up with it."

"What work is he supposed to do?"

"Patty says she got him to make a catalogue of the books in the library, though what she wants with a catalogue, when she can look at the books themselves, I don't see."

Lawton's interest and curiosity were both excited. Accustomed to considering everything from the standpoint of his own advantage, he wanted a clear understanding of Mr. Baring's relation to Miss Kersey. If there were matrimonial prospects in the air, for instance, it might interfere seriously with his golden anticipations in regard to handling the fortune of a young and unsupervised woman.

"Perhaps he's more interested in wedding bells than in catalogues," he suggested significantly.

Mrs. Appleby responded to the bait, but repudiated the idea vigorously. "Oh, no, nothing of that sort," she assured him. "He's nothing but a hired man, and a pretty poor one at that. And I know Mr. Kent hasn't any more opinion of Mr. Baring than I have. And Nita says he is probably no better than a thief."

Lawton shook his head disapprovingly. "Tut, tut! Nita shouldn't say such things unless she can prove them. I'm sure she hasn't any real reason for thinking Mr. Baring a thief, has she?" His doubting tone was a challenge to Mrs. Appleby to justify her statement.

"Well, I don't say he is a thief, only that it's not fair for him to accuse other people of stealing when it might be himself so far as any one can tell. There was a letter that has disappeared. At least, Mr. Baring claims that it was on the desk in the library the first day he was here, and now it can't be found. It seems that it was a very important letter that Mr. Kersey wrote, and it might do Mr. Kent a lot of harm if it got into the wrong hands. But, as Nita told Patty, if there was anything to be got out of the letter, why wasn't Mr. Baring just as likely to steal it as any one in the house? Who knows anything about him? Nita was crying about it, and I'm sure she's as innocent as I am. What would she want with a letter that would hurt Mr. Kent? Nonsense!"

"I don't suppose you know to whom the letter was written?" Lawton said thoughtfully.

"No, that I don't. Some lawyer, Nita said. But it wasn't mailed, you see, and after John was dead there wasn't any reason for sending it, I suppose. But I wish it had been burned up before they had to make such a fuss about it."

"I wonder if Nita would remember the name," Lawton persisted. If Kersey was writing a letter to some lawyer about Kent's affairs, Lawton had a shrewd guess that he had an interest in that letter. "Do you suppose you could ask her?"

Mrs. Appleby was flattered by the unmistakable interest which Lawton evidenced in her conversation. Aside from that, the spreading of news of any kind was to her a natural and legitimate occupation, and she had no scruples about giving Mr. Lawton the information he wanted.

"I'll send for Nita, and she can tell you all about it herself," she said promptly. So she rang the bell for Nita.

But here, very much to her surprise, she met with an entire blockade. Nita, neat and respectful as ever, answered the summons, but answered nothing else. When Mrs. Appleby began by asking her to tell Mr. Lawton about the letter Mr. Baring had made such a fuss about, Nita could offer nothing but respectful and impenetrable ignorance. She had apparently never heard of the letter, knew nothing about its contents, might have heard Miss Kersey speak of it, but couldn't remember, and when Mr. Lawton asked her to refresh her memory as to the address she was entirely oblivious to his suggestion that it might be worth something to her financially. No corporation official on the witness stand could have had a more complete and baffling lapse of memory than Nita. Mrs. Appleby was

annoyed and embarrassed, and Lawton was more than ever convinced that the letter was significant.

"Are you sure that letter was not addressed to me?" he said severely. "You must have noticed the address—a bright girl like you. Wasn't it addressed to Jerry Lawton?"

"I'm sure I can't say, Mr. Lawton," Nita persisted, without raising her eyes.

Lawton had had enough experience with women in the witness stand to know when he was opposed by impenetrable mendacity. There was no use trying to get what he wanted by direct attack, but he did not propose to give up yet. He rose and glanced at his watch with a murmured apology.

"I must tear myself away. Please tell Miss Kersey how sorry I am to miss her. Not that I had anything special to see her about—no business at all. Just a friendly call. But if she should want any legal help in regard to that stolen letter, I hope she will call upon me. It is a very serious matter to meddle with the mails—penitentiary offense. If you should ever happen to come across it, Nita, you'd better send it off as addressed by the first mail. It would be a bad thing to have it found among your things—ha, ha! That's a joke, of course. But it's no joke that it would be a very serious matter for the person who really did steal it. Very serious. Mrs. Appleby, I'm happy to have made your acquaintance."

Lawton wondered a little, as he left the house, how Nita would justify herself to Mrs. Appleby. He was in no doubt, however, as to what he meant to do himself. He went at once to the Greenville Hotel and asked for Mr. Baring. Baring was in, and Lawton sent up his card.

Baring knew very well who Lawton was, but he was not a little puzzled as to why he should call. At first he feared that Miss Kersey had disclosed his business to the New York lawyer, but Lawton's first words reassured him.

"Mr. Baring, I have come on a rather peculiar and personal errand. I have just been up to call on Mrs. Appleby, and she told me about that letter which Kersey wrote to me before he died, and which never was mailed to me. What can you tell me about it?" And he felt that he had been justified in assuming a knowledge that the letter was addressed to him when Baring did not deny it. Neither did he admit it, however. He merely looked blank.

"I'm afraid I don't understand," he said.

"Oh, yes, you do," insisted Lawton. "I tell you I have just come from Mrs. Appleby, and she had Nita in to confirm her story. I know that you saw on Kersey's desk a letter addressed to me which has been suppressed. Now I have a right to that letter——"

Baring shrugged his shoulders. "If there was such a letter, unmailed at the time of Kersey's death, I understand it would belong to the estate, not to the addressee."

"Oh, if you are dealing in legal technicalities! But you will certainly admit that I have a moral right to it."

Baring had been rapidly considering the various bearings of the question, and he now decided to utilize the occasion for his own ends.

"Suppose we drop the morals of it," he said, with a meaning look.

Lawton took this in.

"Oh, you mean you have the letter?"

"No."

"You read it?"

"Yes."

"And it was addressed to me?"

"Yes."

"Well, can you put your hand on it?"

"Not at this moment. I may be able to in time. I have an idea where it is."

"How soon do you suppose you can get it?" Lawton asked. He could not be sure whether this young man was playing for a price or was simply innocent. Baring seemed to answer his doubt by his next remark.

"What do I get out of this, Mr. Lawton?" he asked, with a lift of his eyebrows.

"Oh, you're in the market!" said Lawton in disgust. "Well, what's your price?"

"It isn't money," said Baring, without taking offense. "It's merely a reciprocal accommodation. I want some information, Mr. Lawton, which I think you can give me easily. I can get it through other channels, if necessary. But in consideration of my getting you that letter, or, failing to do that, giving you the substance of it from memory —which is fairly accurate, Mr. Lawton —will you save me the trouble of pursuing my inquiries elsewhere and tell me the history of the Paint Pot bonds?"

Lawton was distinctly surprised. Nothing could have been farther from his anticipations. "What do you want to know about them for?" he asked.

"A friend of mine is a bondholder," said Baring, again pouring in a small modicum of truth to flavor his speech. "And I don't mind telling you there is a question of tracing a bond, though I can't go into details, of course. But I need to learn all I can about that issue. You can tell me a good deal, I suppose."

"Why, yes, I suppose I can. You know about the Paint Pot Mine business?"

"Something."

"The bonds were issued as a bonus to the original stockholders. The idea was that they would put up money for the stock more readily if they got a bond thrown in. But as the mine never paid anything, the bondholders were no better off than the stockholders. The whole business was tied up—not abandoned, but tied up—until this year, when they got enough ahead to begin taking up the overdue coupons on the bonds. The stockholders have got nothing as yet."

"Would there be any record to show who the original bondholders were?"

"Oh, yes, the company's records would show. But bonds are not like stock, you know. They could change hands a dozen times without the company's knowing anything about it until the coupons were sent in for payment."

Baring nodded. "Yes, I understand. But I'd like to get the list of the original bondholders, if possible, with a description of the bonds held by each. Is that too high a price to pay for the letter?"

"I don't know whether it is or not," laughed Lawton. "It may happen to be worth a good deal to you. However, I'll have to trade sight unseen, I suppose. I'll give you a letter to a broker in New York who knows the Paint Pot business inside and out—knows it as nobody else does. Or, wait a minute. I'll see him myself when I get back, and tell him to answer your questions. He'll do it for me, and he won't do it for you unless I tell him to. Will that satisfy you?"

"Yes," said Baring carelessly. "Provided he does answer."

"Oh, he will. His name's Lathrop." He scribbled the name and address on the back of his own card. "Now about that letter——"

"I'll let you hear from me as soon as I can try my luck at getting the letter itself," Baring assured him. "In a day or two," he added, noting Lawton's dubious look.

Lawton may not have been entirely satisfied, but there was nothing for him to do. He certainly could not get the letter by himself. There was a chance that he might get it through the efforts of this young man, who appeared to be some sort of a clerk. At any rate, he had to take the chance.

The next day Baring gave Miss Kersey a New York address where she could reach him if necessary, and went off "for a day or two," he told her.

The Paint Pot inquriy was not his only business. He went, first of all, to the office of the *Challenge,* the socialistic paper with which Payne was identified. Here, by a series of adroit questions, he satisfied himself that Payne had actually been in New York and at the *Challenge* office the week following Kersey's death, but that there was an interval of a day between the date of his actual appearance there and the date he claimed for that event.

"The alibi that failed," he murmured to himself. Yes, it was interesting.

Then he hunted up Lathrop, and here he found that Lawton had been as good as his word. Lathrop looked at him

curiously, but made no scruple about giving up all the information he had. He even had prepared a transcript of the minutes of the Paint Pot Mining Company, showing the authorization of the bond issue, and a list of the names of the stockholders who had received the bonds.

"John Kersey's name is not in the list," Baring commented in surprise.

"No, there were no bonds issued to the promoters. Only to outside cash purchasers. It was in the nature of a chromo for subscribers."

"But he owned some bonds later, didn't he?"

"He bought up a lot of the stock when the thing went temporarily to pieces. Got all he wanted for a song. I dare say he bought up bonds as well. As a gamble."

"You don't know, then, what he may have held at the time of his death?"

Lathrop hesitated. "Well, Lawton said I was to tell you everything you wanted to know. I know that he held at least ten of those bonds a week before he died, because he sent me the coupons. Wait a minute." He beckoned to a clerk in the outer office. "Bring me the file of John Kersey's correspondence."

When he got the file he ran through the letters in silence, and then nodded. "Yes, here it is. I see that I wrote him on the twenty-eighth, calling his attention to the fact that the Paint Pot Company was now in position to pay up the accrued interest on the old bonds, and he sent down the coupons of the ten bonds by return mail. He must have had them right at hand. Yes, sir, he must have had those ten-thousand-dollar bonds in that biscuit-box safe of his in his country house that any burglar's apprentice could open with a hairpin. See, here he writes on the twenty-ninth, 'So the old Paint Pot won't serve for a wastebasket any longer. Good for the fellows who held on.' He was always a little sore about the bad name that affair gave him."

Baring felt that his visit had prospered. He had gathered information which fitted admirably to what he had already in hand. He saw the shadowy pattern coming out with a completeness that was, to him, a guarantee of its basis in fact. But—this was not proof.

At the hotel he found a telegram from Miss Kersey. It provoked wonder and some anxiety:

> Please come back. Hate to trouble you, and hope it won't upset things very much, but I don't know what to do about something important, so please come as soon as you can conveniently. P. K.

TO BE CONCLUDED IN THE MARCH 7TH ISSUE.

JUDICIAL SARCASM

WHEN Judge Walter S. Cox presided over a District of Columbia court, the routine of legal procedure was lightened by frequent flashes of humor.

On one occasion, the department of justice, to which Judge Cox was responsible, sent a pompous assistant attorney general to argue against a suspended sentence on a prisoner. The arrogance and haughty attitude of the department official became more pronounced as evidence in favor of the defendant was piled up. Finally, the government representative rose majestically and addressed the court.

"Your honor," he declared, "the department of justice thinks this man should go to the penitentiary!"

"Indeed," commented Judge Cox. "Well, what does the department of agriculture think about it?"

And, without awaiting further remarks from the assistant attorney general, he announced a suspended sentence.

The Triple Alliance

By Herman Whitaker

Author of "The Planter," "The Settler," Etc.

The story of an extraordinary Scotch-Irish-Franco combination in Mexico that was threatened with disruption while Macdonald, Mahoney, and Charpentier were operating machine guns and dynamiting bridges on behalf of the Constitutionalist forces

DO not jump to conclusions! It was not the "Triple Alliance" between Germany, Italy, and Austria, nor the *entente cordiale* of England, France, and Russia that was at hazard. The possibility of a mistake thus guarded against, it may be stated that the three soldiers of fortune who formed the "Alliance" in question were equally cosmopolitan in their ancestry. Macdonald and Mahoney, as certified by their cognomens, were respectively Scotch and Irish by blood, though American born. If pure French by both birth and blood, Charpentier, Villa's chief artilleryman, spoke better English than either. Remains now to add that in northern Mexico this Scotch-Irish-Franco combination was far better known than its European prototypes. Was it not at Ojinga that Charpentier outshot and silenced the Federal gunners? Besides their superior skill with the machine guns, Macdonald and Mahoney it was who dynamited every bridge between Chihuahua and Juarez during the first Madero revolution, and it was while duplicating the feat—with Charpentier's able assistance—on behalf of the Constitutionalist forces that events shaped themselves in a way that threatened their union.

It all began with the troop of *Colorados*—Pascual Orezco's bloodthirsty irregulars—that hove in sight just after Mahoney had lit the fuse under the last bridge to be destroyed under their contract with the revolutionary junta in El Paso. Seen from a distance, it appeared the next moment as though a large whirlwind were in wild chase of a zephyr across the vast amphitheater of sage-strewn desert with a ring of savage mountains. One saw only silver flashes through the gold of the larger dust cloud where the sun struck sudden sparks from the sabers and guns of the *Colorados*. The khaki of the three riders that formed the core of the smaller was too much on the color of the dust to be readily discernible. The railroad, which came spinning out of the golden distance, lay at first between them, and just before the *Colorados* crossed it there came a thunderous explosion. Out of a saffron cloud of smoke and dust black fragments of the bridge flew high in the air.

"Hurray for us!" As they flew onward the voice of big Dan Mahoney rose above the clatter of hoofs. "That finished the job. Nothing to do but go back to El Paso and blow in a thousand apiece."

"Ninety miles as the crow flies!" Macdonald's comment was flavored with the natural pessimism of his race.

"Not to mention the *Colorados*," Charpentier added. "You'll be lucky, Dan, if they don't stretch your hide to dry on a cactus."

"Take it off while you're alive, too," Macdonald continued his jeremiad. "And when we get to El Paso we'll likely find that the junta has gone out of business."

"Sure!" Charpentier's knowledge of English compassed even slang. "Next

to the weather there's nothing so uncertain as a Mexican junta."

"Aw, get out!" Mahoney spat it through the thick dust. "Did you think I'd move a peg before the money was banked? It's all there, lying to our names, ready to be drawn when we prove up on the job. As for those ginks"—he threw a scornful thumb backward over his shoulder—"they couldn't catch these horses in a thousand years."

Picked for just such an emergency, their horses *were* rapidly gaining. Had the pusuers not suddenly halted and loosed a volley from their carbines, they would soon have been dropped from sight. "They can't shoot," Dan commented on the leaden flight that knocked up the dust in small fountains or whined overhead.

The sequel justified Charpentier's answer: "Not when they're under fire themselves, but they're death on running rabbits." For the next second the single shot that bespoke a more careful aim brought down Macdonald's horse with a broken leg. Though he fell heavily after looping the loop over the animal's head, he was up in a second, and had pulled his short Mauser from the saddle sheath before the others could stop.

"Keep going!" he roared after them. "I'll hold them till you make your getaway!"

But Dan was already coming back. Springing down, he snatched the Mauser while issuing his commands: "Jump up behind Char! I'll hold them till you get a good start! Follow that dry watercourse! It will pull your heads down below the sage."

Yelling at the success of the shot, the *Colorados* were again coming on. But it was not for long. As cool as though they had been so many quail, Dan fired into the thick, and, attesting his aim, a riderless horse flew out from under the cloud. Shooting as quickly as he could pump, he stopped them with the next three shots. When the dust finally settled, only their horses' heads appeared above the sage, by which time Dan was galloping hard after the others.

"We'll make a mile before they get going again," he said, catching up.

They gained, indeed, the cover of a rocky ridge miles toward the foothills before the menacing cloud drew up once more astern, and, crouched behind a huge bowlder, Dan held them longer this time. Moving on at a steady jog, Charpentier and Macdonald rode miles before he overtook them again. And while they moved thus, from stand to stand, the friendly mountains moved forward to meet them. Midway of the afternoon they towered above against the brazen desert sky. An hour later they reached the foot of a barranco that split the sheer face of precipitous cliffs. There Dan made his last stand. All through their progress had been far from uneventful. As he lay and fired from insufficient cover answering shots cut the sage at his side, threw dust in his face. Thrice over he had earned his death, and now, though not in his own person, the law of averages prevailed. Gathering in a volley, as it were like a huge funnel, the ravine walls concentrated it upon the horses. Both dropped at once.

"We would have had to abandon them, anyway."

Charpentier gasped this bit of cold comfort as they ran on up the barranco, tripping and stumbling over the stones and bowlders of a dry watercourse. Broken with ledges that crossed from wall to wall, it rose as it fell back into the heart of the mountain of gradients that grew ever steeper. It was the heaviest kind of going. Half an hour of it brought the sweat streaming out of them. Yet when they paused to rest a bullet fired from behind the angle of the wall at the turn below reminded them that the pursuit was close on their heels.

"Look out!" Macdonald, who was in the lead, yelled it as a huge bowlder which had been undermined by last season's rains loosened and rolled from under his feet.

Leaping aside, the other two watched it go, increasing its momentum at every

bound down the watercourse, which here ran for a hundred yards like a chute between narrow, flanking walls. Rebounding at the turn, it burst and flew on in a shower of stone shrapnel.

"Good shot!" Dan greeted with a defiant yell a sudden outbreak of curses below. "Get busy, you fellows!"

During the ten minutes that elapsed before the available supply of ammunition was used up the cañon roared and bellowed with the thunder and reverberations of leaping bowlders. At first wild cries and curses punctuated the din. But these grew rapidly fainter as the enemy fled before this cave man's fire. When the dust and noise finally subsided Dan's comment fell on perfect silence:

"That ought to hold them for a while!" He wiped the sweat and dust from his brow.

"They'll wait for us below." The objection proceeded, of course, out from Macdonald's pessimism.

"Well, let 'em wait. We're going the other way."

"If the cañon doesn't peter out—they usually do. If it does, we're trapped."

It did seem probable, for as they climbed on up the sheer walls approached till they could reach out and touch both at the stretch of their arms. Finally it stopped suddenly at the mouth of a small cave. "Told you!" Macdonald exclaimed. "We'll have to go back and fight."

"Not so fast." Charpentier, who had dropped on his knees, was peering into the cave. "I can see light at the other end. This is no cave. It's a tunnel."

And a tunnel it was—bored by water pressure through a natural dam of rock and clay thrown by some earth convulsion into the ravine. About a hundred yards in length, it was so small that they had to crawl on hands and knees and wiggle the last few feet on their bellies. Emerging, they saw that the ravine ran on up in a second long chute, and as they climbed its steep the movement of a loose bowlder gave Dan his second brilliant thought.

"Wish it was—with beer on the side." Answering Macdonald's peevish inquiry if he took the chute for a bowling alley, he sent a string of bowlders bounding in succession after the first. "If you'll get down to business instead of shooting off your fool mouth, we'll plug that hole in very few minutes."

Twenty minutes, indeed, saw it buried under tons of rock that could be moved only by dynamite, and with the assurance that pursuit was completely cut off they resumed their climbing. From the top of the chute the cañon swung almost at right angles off to the southward. Decreasing also in steepness, it presently ran almost on the level. Always, however, it did more or less winding, and after describing a double convolution it emptied them toward sundown—so suddenly that they stood, open-mouthed, staring—out on the flat, grassy floor of a lovely interior valley.

About a mile in width, perhaps two in length, its sunburned reaches were dotted with live oak that stretched dark-green umbrellas over small knots of cattle. Beyond, at the upper end of the valley, the pink walls of a small hacienda gleamed the more brightly by contrast with the vivid green of shading cottonwoods. Even at the distance they caught the flash of a peon's white blouse moving among the buildings and —the cause of their staring wonder— a white man and woman sat their horses, backs turned, just where they had reined in to look at the prospect less than a hundred feet away.

"How strange, dad, that such a beautiful valley should be hidden in the heart of these barren mountains!" They heard the girl's comment quite plainly, also the man's answer:

"Not when you know the cause. At one time this was a lake. For ages the wash of the hills settled in its waters, forming this rich, alluvial bottom. Then, one day, an earthquake opened this gorge so that the water drained—— Hello!" Turning, he had spied the three. "Where did you spring from?"

As he pulled his beast around there had come into full view a gray-streaked beard that fell almost to his waist. Even on horseback he sat, tall, with

the gaunt build tradition assigns to the Texan. But more remarkable than either his stature or beard were the gray eyes that looked out from under a high, straight forehead. Level and cold, they were utterly devoid of feeling or imagination.

In the woman—girl, rather; she lacked a few months of twenty-two—the same eyes, warm and very soft, were helped out by a red, curved mouth and pretty nose. Like him she was tall, but in her the erect figure swelled and receded in gentle woman contours. A fair white skin and masses of brown hair finished her portrait—and two of the three adventurers. By contrast with the greasy, brown women of the revolutionary camps she was a raving beauty. Even in Macdonald, usually something of a misogynist, she raised memories of the clean, healthy womanhood of their own land.

"Out of the cañon," answered Dan, flinging a nod backward over his shoulder.

"Through the bore?" The old man looked surprised. "I wouldn't have thought you could wiggle through it. But it was widened, perhaps, by last season's rains. I was figuring a couple of years ago to dig it out so that a pack mule could pass through. It would have saved us a thirty-mile trip around going out to the railroad. But when the revolution cut loose I thought it was just as well to leave it alone."

"You don't mean to say that you people have lived here steadily for the last two years?"

"Of course we have. I bought this place from Terrazas six years ago, and have lived here ever since. My daughter used to come and go between here and El Paso, but even she hasn't been off this place for over a year."

In asking the question Dan had in mind the locust swarming of rebel and Federal armies over the face of the land that had involved American settlers and Mexican *hacendados* in common ruin. The girl's presence rendered it still more unbelievable, bringing flashing into his mind a long list of outrages perpetrated upon helpless women. In the past no one of the three had failed to vigorously denounce Americans who had failed to send their women out of the country. Their glances at each other now conveyed the common thought:

"He must be crazy."

Dan voiced it more politely. "Well, all I have to say, friend, is that your luck has outrun the average. But you had better not shove it too hard. So far as I am aware you are the one American in the state of Chihuahua who has not been held up for all that he had. Why not beat them to it and get out while you can?"

"I think that I am capable of managing my own affairs, young man."

The look that accompanied the words was colder than gray marble. But if Dan reddened, it was because he saw the girl smile. He answered with Irish heat: "You'll pardon me. Nevertheless, if we hadn't plugged up the tunnel back there, you'd have had a band of *Colorados* loose around here tonight. In any case, a band of *revueltosos* is due to run in here and clean you out."

The marble eyes, however, abated not a whit of their ice. Absolutely unimaginative, they reflected none of the foreboding which filled all of their minds; were untroubled as those of the beast he rode. "Nonsense!" He waved away the idea. "The path in here is unknown to any but my own peones. If you blocked the hole, there is nothing more to be said. Come! You are hungry and tired. You can tell me all about it on the way to the house."

So far the girl had said nothing, and as her father now led off, with Macdonald walking at his side, she lingered, adjusting the folds of her riding skirt, till the others had gained fully fifty yards, then followed on with Dan and Charpentier.

"You thought I was laughing at *you* just now?" Her smile healed Dan's injured pride. "I was not. It was merely because I knew what you would get. You see, I've told him the same thing a dozen times."

"Then why don't you go out?"

She shook her head at Charpentier. "We have not seen a soul from the outside for over a year, and I couldn't very well go out by myself. But if there had been a chance," she hastily added, "I wouldn't have liked to leave him here by himself. You'll understand?"

As a matter of fact, they did not. Put in the plain terms of their feeling, they saw no reason why such pleasing youth should be offered up as a sacrifice to the foolish obstinacy of bearded age. But as ordinary politeness forbade the saying of it, they listened while she went on:

"At first I was puzzled by his obstinacy, and, being a girl, a little bit hurt at his apparent indifference to possible danger for me. But now I know. He is without imagination; cannot think the thing he does not see. If you spent days telling him of the horrible things that are constantly happening outside, it would have no effect on his mind. Though a Texan born, his mind is Missourian—dyed-in-the-wool Missourian; he's got to be shown."

"Well, he will be shown!" Charpentier and Dan voiced it together, and if the remark be considered rather premature for such short acquaintance, it should be remembered that not only was she unusually pretty, but, as aforesaid, they had hardly set eyes on a white woman during the last two years. Moreover, she, the person most concerned, appeared quite pleased.

"Oh, I hope so! I'm just *crazy* to get back to El Paso."

They were to recall the wording later. But just then—well, the warm smile she returned to Charpentier's assurance, "Don't worry, miss, we'll get him out of here," caused the first crack to appear in a friendship that had been cemented by blood and wounds and baked to a fine, hard finish by the fires of a hundred camps.

"You bet we will!"

A bellicose tone flavored Dan's hasty addition. So rapidly, indeed, did the crack widen there was some suggestion of the bristling bulldog in their covert glances from her to each other by the time they reached the house. When, dismounting, she permitted Dan to lift her from the saddle, Charpentier stood by and chewed his neat mustache. But he regained his equanimity, and Dan relapsed into the sulks when, walking through the patio, she gave him a monopoly of her conversation.

On one point, however, they joined forces. Both vigorously opposed Macdonald when he proposed to go on that night after they had been shown into a wide, cool bedroom that opened out, Mexican fashion, on a flowering patio. "I had a talk with pa while you fellows were buzzing the girl. He'll lend us horses and a guide, and there'll be a bright moon."

"Aw, you make me tired!" Dan grumbled. "Can't you take a rest?"

"Yes, here we've been chasing and getting chased for the last two weeks," Charpentier backed him. "I'm plumb tired. Settle down, old man. You can't beat this."

"Settle nothing!" Macdonald looked his surprise. "Have you chaps forgotten the thousand dollars apiece that's waiting to be spent in El Paso?"

"Tut, tut, tut!" Charpentier clucked his disgust. "You make me sick. Always hankering after debauchery."

"Regular animal," Dan agreed. "Nothing suits him but swinish drunkenness."

Ignorant, as yet, of the motive behind this sudden virtue, Macdonald stared, open-mouthed. "Why, confound your cheek! You punish more booze, Dan, than I do. And if *you* don't"—he turned wrathfully on Charpentier—"it's only because you're not big enough to hold it."

"You mean that I *did*." Dan emphasized the change of tense. "No more for me."

"Or me," Charpentier echoed.

"Might—might I ask the cause of this sudden conversion?" Macdonald broke a silence during which they had feigned ignorance of his wrathful gaze.

But they now added insult to injury. "Your nose would be warning enough."

"Sure!" Dan added. "It beats a rail-

road semaphore. It will turn blue green pretty soon, Mac, if you don't let up."

Befogged and amazed, Macdonald could only stare while, after pouring water into the crockery basins that stood by each bed, they began the most careful ablutions of years. In fact, it was the time consumed and the sight of Dan carefully cleaning his nails that gave the first clew. Full knowledge burst upon him when Charpentier intermitted his vigorous sluicing and Dan his manicuring to watch Ethel Talbot cross the patio outside.

"So that's how the cat jumps, is it?" he growled. "Silly calves!" Then as he realized the consequences which usually follow the interjection of the feminine influence into masculine friendships, he offered an earnest protest. "Oh, come now! Don't let a little pussyface get the best of you. Think of the fun that is ahead of us with this new revolution just sprung. Don't you know——"

Their rabid denials cut him off. "As though a fellow couldn't be ordinarily polite to a pretty girl."

"Your own manners are beastly," Charpentier reproved. "You didn't even tip your hat when she went indoors."

Thus silenced, Macdonald was unconvinced. While performing his own ablutions he brooded over this sudden madness which had seized at one fell swoop upon the best machine-gun man and finest artillery officer in all of Villa's army. It kept him silent at supper, and when thereafter they moved out to the *corredor* and watched the sun drop like a flaming shell behind the purple mountains, his worst fears were confirmed by their ready acceptance of Talbot's invitation to stay and rest up for a few days.

As one watches the creep, creep of a mortal disease upon a loved one, so he observed their skirmishings for her favor, and just as a conscientious physician might deplore the noon heat that aggravated a patient's fever, so he inwardly cursed the moonlight which lent its tender romance to the scene. His sole comfort lay in the fact that the young lady played no favorites. If Charpentier sat biting his nails while she led Dan off to show him a favorite flower, she reversed the terms by plunging, on her return, into a lively discussion of famous French novels with Charpentier. With flashing interplay of small smiles, leanings, sudden reserves, she chilled or warmed, drew them on, or repelled them at will with the natural coquetry of the young feminine animal. When, retiring, she finally left them blinking like moths dazzled at her flame, Macdonald's fears found expression in his secret thought:

"She can take her pick from the two of them."

Adding insult to injury again, he was kept awake by peaceful plannings that crazed him by their tame unlikeness to the soldierly past. "Sure!" Dan confided to the darkness. "I'll take that thousand and put it into a bunch of calves that I know of up on the Pecos. In ten years, the way beef is selling, I'll be a millionaire."

"Me for the mines," Charpentier followed suit. "A thousand put into that claim Carranza promised me ought to bring results."

When, moreover, after an hour of it, Macdonald put in a plea for the old, adventurous life they distinctly reproved him. "Killing folks is all you know," Dan said in severe tones. "It's me for something better."

"Something that is useful instead of destructive," Charpentier added. "We believe in brains rather than muscle."

"Heugh! A little bit of muscle wouldn't do *you* any harm!" With this parting shot Macdonald turned over and went to sleep, leaving them still at it, debating ways and means to persuade her father to move over the American line. Whether their counsels consumed the entire night he never knew for certain, though the remark that fell on his opening ears next morning favored the idea.

"Anyway, she's going to get out of here," Dan was saying, "if—if I have to elope with her."

"Two's company in these affairs." Macdonald offered it from under the

bedclothes. "She can't elope with both. Better toss up a coin—or let her do it."

Perhaps the silent disdain they accorded to the suggestion was born of the firm belief which each held concerning his own chances. It would have been quite natural, for both the preceding evening and during the ensuing day she managed to give each some small evidence of her favor without the other's knowledge. For instance, the rose she gave to Charpentier after inhaling its perfume was offset by a look dropped right into Dan's eyes as he restored her fallen handkerchief.

If they were blind, Macdonald was not. He gave these and other favors his own jaundiced interpretation while they were retiring the second evening. "She's hog-tying you both till she makes up her mind which is fattest for the killing. Tell her about the calves, Dan. And don't forget the mine, Char. A gold mine is always a winning card with a woman."

Ignoring him, the two continued their counsels. "I told her that we would be delighted to escort her to El Paso," Charpentier said. "But she won't stir without her father."

"And he's stubborn as ever." Dan shook his head. "I wasted an hour trying to convince him."

"In the meantime, time flies," the cynic put in. "Do you intend to live on him forever? Why don't you hire with him for the next six months while daughter is making up her mind? I noticed to-day that his corn needs hoeing."

"Fine idea!" Charpentier's ready acceptance left him gasping with dismay and rage. "Let's speak about it to-morrow."

"All right," Dan agreed.

Perhaps they meant it. If so, the spectacle of two soldiers of fortune serving like Jacob seven years for the hand of Ethel Talbot was not destined to be staged. Unseen, the law of averages was still at work. The coincidence which is laughed to scorn in fiction, though so common in real life, brought a troop of rebel cavalry into the valley while they sat at lunch next day.

From the table, which gave a view of the upper end of the valley across the patio, they saw a mounted peon come galloping in. Even at a distance his fear somehow communicated itself. They were all standing in the *corredor* when he clattered into the court.

"There are hundreds of them, señor!" His report, however, was quadrupled by his fears. Looking through Talbot's glasses, Dan made out about sixty wild horsemen at work rounding up the cattle. He was studying them closely, trying to establish a fancied resemblance, when his host's voice interrupted:

"This won't do! I'll go right out and order them off. I'm an American subject; they can't do that."

If the situation were not really so dangerous, his sudden change from his previous stony calm to fussy indignation would have been ludicrous. As he made to move the girl stepped to stop him, but Macdonald forestalled her by seizing his arm. "They've done it to dozens of others. If you want the top of your head blown off, just try to interfere."

"But am I to stand by and see my cattle driven off?"

"Don't be in a hurry." Dan looked up from the glasses. "If I'm not mistaken, I know those fellows. Take a look, Char."

"It's Alvarez—Major Alvarez," Charpentier confirmed. "Of Villa's own brigade."

"I was sure of it. Just leave him to us." He was already on his way to the patio gate; he called back going out: "By the way, we may have to bribe him. Have you any money?"

"Just a few hundred—perhaps five," Talbot called back. "It is so long since I've been out or sold any cattle. In any case, I never kept much on the place."

"Good enough."

The horses they had used that morning were still tied to the hitching bars outside, and, mounting, they rode off, leaving Macdonald in charge of the father and girl. Out of earshot, they

looked meaningly at each other. Charpentier put their jubilant feeling into words: "For a brigand Alvarez is a real good sort. What luck! It will be our own fault if we don't get everything we want."

Watching them through the glasses, the others saw the rebel chief straighten in his saddle and hitch forward his pistol as the two approached. But they could not, of course, hear the effusive greeting that followed his recognition: "Amigos, amigos! I am glad to see you! We heard that the *Colorados* had gotten you! They were seen by a scout pursuing you toward the hills. Where is he, your *compañero,* Señor Macdonald?"

Also, without understanding, they saw the series of nods that signified his understanding as Dan explained the situation. "As you say, amigo, this is no place for a white woman with the country overrun with *Colorados* the moment our backs are turned. So the father is stubborn? *Bueno,* but"—he tapped the butt of his gun—"a little whisper from this will set him on the run."

"But we don't want him hurt," Dan warned.

"A threat to hold him for ransom ought to be sufficient," Charpentier suggested.

"And remember," Dan added, "I'll knock your block off, amigo, if you try to get fresh with the girl."

"Ai, ai!" The man's brown eyes twinkled. "I have not forgotten the day, amigo, that you two held back the *Federales* with your fire till Villa came to our aid. I shall play you no tricks."

"Then call your men away from those cattle. Neither must they be touched."

But here the brown smile faded. "That I cannot do, señor. Villa heard of them from a peon, a new recruit that once worked for this man. Really, señor, he is hard pushed for supplies."

"With a hundred thousand head stolen from Terrazas wandering loose? Aw, come off!" Grinning, he slapped the rebel familiarly upon the back. "You know well enough, amigo mine, that this was a little private excursion for thy own benefit. And who would blame you? Only—this is our amigo, and his cattle must not be touched."

"Señor!" He threw up his hands in protest. *"De verdad!* 'Twas Villa that sent me here. If I take not the cattle, it will be as much as my throat is worth."

"Ah, now we are coming to it!" Dan slapped him again. "Just how much *is* your throat worth, Torrobio?"

For a moment he looked foolish. Then he returned the grin. "A thousand pesos, señor."

"Carambara!" He whistled. "It must be made of gold. I'm not buying necks by the gross. Now if five hundred——"

"Oro?"

"Sure—gold!"

"Very well, señor. I am at your orders. My hombres, too, will do whatever you say."

Skipping vicissitudes of travel that embraced the attack and defeat of a band of *Colorados* during the driving of Talbot's cattle up to the border, and his own transparent escape from fictitious imprisonment with Dan while his guards slept with the dead earnestness inculcated by their instructions, this authentic history may very well proceed from a conversation between Dan and Charpentier in the lobby of the Sheldon at El Paso a few days later.

"Looks as if we both had a chance; at least, we seem to think so?" Dan's putting of the case testified to the skill with which they had been handled during the interim. "Well, we'll have to put it up to her."

"All right," Charpentier agreed, adding: "We've run too long together to try any tricks. What do you say if we flip a coin for first chance?"

Perhaps his audacity in proposing it tickled the fancy of the great god, Blind Chance. At least he won. Sitting on the opposite side of the lobby, Macdonald, whose fears for the continuance of the "Triple Alliance" had sharpened his intuitions, tried to forestall fate by proposing a drink as Charpentier passed

him going out. His expression, when the other refused, betrayed his belief that the uttermost had now arrived, and when, from his seat opposite, Dan refused a similar invitation he fell into the bottom deeps of dejection. Too depressed to attempt individual slaking of the thirst bred by three weeks' abstinence, he sat there while the thousand dollars collected that morning from the junta burned like fire in his pocket.

Thus it was that he came to be witness, not only of Dan's gloomy reverie, fitful starts, fidgetings, restless pacings, but also of Charpentier's return. Though the house where the Talbots had taken up temporary residence lay fully seven minutes' walk from the Sheldon, he was back again in exactly fifteen minutes.

"Your turn." But taking his cue from the gloom that rode high on Charpentier's brow, Dan was already halfway to the door.

"It's a shame, a burning shame!" Macdonald apostrophized his back going out. "Who'd have thought that a chit of a girl like that could knock over two good soldiers? Aw, thunder!"

So deep was his disgust and dejection that he failed to notice certain tentative and familiar glances barward that Charpentier was sending his way. Thus again it came about that they were both still sitting there when Dan returned exactly sixteen and a quarter minutes later by the clock. That certain sheepishness which ruled his big, open face turned to wrath as he set eyes on Charpentier.

"You"—there were ladies about, so he finished mildly—"little shrimp! Why didn't you tell me?"

Charpentier grinned. "You had as much right to make a fool of yourself as I had. Did you—see him?"

"*See him?* Did I? Oh, lordy, lordy! A pale-gilled store clerk!"

By this time Macdonald had joined them, and, with imperceptible sidlings, they were all edging barward.

"You will remember"—Charpentier nudged Dan as they ranged along the brass rail in the old, familiar formation—"she said that she was crazy to get to El Paso."

So far deep thankfulness had impeded Macdonald's utterance. But now, as they raised the glasses that were to recement the "Triple Alliance," he gave tongue: "Here's to him!"

But sentiment still lingered with the others. "To *her!*"

COMPLETING THE RECORD

DISSENTING opinions from Secretary Daniels' ideas on prohibition in the service are not confined to the officers of the American navy. They are shared by various members of their households.

One of these opponents to a dry navy, the daughter of a distinguished rear admiral now residing in Washington, invariably drinks a cold bottle of beer each night before retiring. As a matter of precaution, she places a bottle alongside the ice in the refrigerator in the afternoon to insure its chilliness when she returns from her social activities late at night. Recently she has been annoyed by the mysterious disappearance of her "cached" beverage.

After several enforced diets of warm beer, she placed behind the ice a bottle on which was pasted this inscription:

"Property of Miss ——."

Late that night she sought her treasure, and found it. The bottle was empty, but the label remained. Just below her declaration of ownership she discovered this appended statement:

"And consumed by your dad!"

Pony Express

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

THE moon was drawing pictures of the mesquite on the sand
Round the old adobe station, the last of the long relay,
When I slid from a bronc of Fargo's—the wave of a friendly hand,
And I lit in another saddle and headed for Santa Fe.

That ride I carried some papers that didn't have time to wait;
Government stamp was on 'em, so the Company turned us loose,
Picked from our relay riders, and started us two hours late;
It was up to me and the pony to make it—and no excuse.

The moon was riding the mountains, and Toby was in his stride
When we came to the ford—like silver with the black of the rocks between—
He nosed his hocks for a minute; splashed water to cool his hide,
Then he laid to work like a major, running it strong and clean.

The stars grew dim on the sky line, for the morning was taking toll,
Calling 'em back to heaven, counting 'em one by one,
When sudden and blind, like thunder, we lunged in a gopher hole. . . .
Leg snapped short at the ankle . . .. I tried . . . but the job was done.

It was one of my own, not Toby's—and for that I was mighty glad;
His luck, it had turned him over, but he trotted to where I lay.
And his eyes were big as he sniffed me; I grinned, for he sure looked sad.
"And now, what's next on this program?" that Toby hoss seemed to say.

I got a grip on the stirrup; hung the reins on the horn, and took
That packet of government papers and tied 'em where folks could see;
I opened a saddle pocket and slipped in my record book,
While Toby, with head turned sideways, was staring surprise at me.

The desert whirled for a minute, then stopped, and my head grew clear,
For I cinched to that one idea, and I put it to Toby straight:
"You got to carry the papers, and maybe you think it's queer;
But *vamose!* and don't be forgetting they started us two hours late."

I knew him. Now, lots of hosses would have trailed to the brush and grazed,
Left me to chew the bullet, for I sure wasn't feeling strong,
But Toby and I were pardners, the both of us being raised
In the high, dry mesa country where quitters don't last for long.

I swung my hat and I hit him; the muscles along his flank
Rippled and bunched . . . and the raw, red sun came over the eastern range;
I drew in a breath of morning, then down on the sand I sank. . . .
I heard him crossing a coulee; then—everything still and strange.

* * * *

They told me they tried to catch him 'way out on the edge of town,
How he kept on a-going steady, like a lone night herder's rhyme,
Till he stopped himself at the stable. They wondered where I was down.
He couldn't talk or he'd told 'em; but the papers arrived on time.

'Twas a pardon for some poor hombre—I don't recollect his name. . . .
Me? Oh, my leg it mended, and the Company gave me pay
For the time I was off. And Toby? That little hoss, wise and game?
Why, he's doing his regular running—from this station to Santa Fe.

The Avenger of the Blood

By Henry C. Rowland

Author of "Dicky," "The Central-Office Man," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF FIRST PART

Reverend Crowther, a rich and zealous Massachusetts missionary, has his soul-saving station on the little South Sea Island of Mauee. A righteous but hard and unrelenting man he is, his only softness being his great love for his son, Saul. Following his father's example, Saul is ordained, and goes to Mauee to help the elder Crowther. Saul is different in character from his sire, being gentle, forgiving, and winning the natives' regard through his saintliness. Comes the time when the elder Crowther makes a voyage home, leaving Saul to care alone for their flock. On the journey the father meets with an accident which necessitates the amputation of a leg. This casualty would seem to indicate that the old man would never again undertake any return to Mauee. Meanwhile, Saul conducts the mission with unexpected success. One day he is sent for from a distant isle to attend upon a dying man, whose name is Livingstone. He had been an old-time trader. Saul comforts his last moments, and promises to care for his orphan daughter, Helen, a beautiful girl. Though of white blood, Helen has the viewpoint of the natives, their freedom from morals and modesty. She proves a troublesome charge, especially as she falls in violent love with Saul. In time, he reciprocates. They marry. All is well save that Helen is capricious, fretful for the civilized world. Fate, at this juncture, sends to Mauee a fascinating scoundrel, Eric Hughes, who throws himself on Saul's hospitality; and while enjoying it, devotes his plentiful leisure and talents to playing on the discontent of Helen, charming her with his flattery and promises of social glory for herself should she ever get into the far-away world of fashion.

(*A Two-Part Story—Part Two*)

CHAPTER VI.

THAT which makes Hughes' treachery more abominable is the fact that he had been sponging on the mission for all his needs from the day of his arrival. He was nearing the end of his resources, and to Saul he had deplored the fact that he was a constitutional gambler who had met with heavy reverses of fortune and would have to sail mighty close to the wind for some months in order to catch up. He did not try to borrow any money, but reluctantly permitted Saul to find him in food and labor and a score of minor necessities. Nobody can ever know what hypocrisies he may have showered on Saul; his realization of a misspent life; the desire to compensate in some measure while there was still time; his motives and reasons for past behavior—a man misunderstood and all that sort of swill—his delayed appreciation of the worthlessness of things merely material—we have all been through that sort of "con game." And these homilies so skillfully advanced, not raw and overdone, but rather cynical and scathing and at times bitter, but with the brand of a proud nature convinced though not humbled. Saul swallowed them with a sort of trustful eagerness. He was not a fool, but the chances are that he had never had to do with a really wicked man.

All of this time Hughes' intention was probably to get his schooner shipshape, then entice Helen to run off with him, and after sailing about for a while to leave her on some beach, make a long run to some distant port, South

This story began in the February 7th POPULAR.

American, perhaps, sell the schooner for what she would bring, and quit the Pacific for good. He was arriving at an age where the wild, reckless life no longer made any great appeal to him, and the chances are that while he may have gambled away a year's income there was no lack of money ahead. Hughes was too cold-blooded a proposition to beggar himself. Besides, his source of revenue was probably a trust fund. He was merely temporarily hard up and making enforced economies. No doubt also the cruel, criminal nature of the man found much diabolic pleasure in victimizing the gentle soul which it was his purpose to mutilate.

Jimmy McCann would have seen through him in a second. So would have done the Reverend Crowther. But Saul was blind as Saul of Tarsus until his vision was restored by his wife's laugh and Hughes' creese dagger. It came about so suddenly that Saul was spared much suffering.

The work on the *Proserpine* had been finished, and she was riding to a short scope in the peaceful waters of the lagoon just off the mission. Hughes had dined with Saul and Helen, and been earnest in his well-worded expressions of thanks for the hospitality which he had received. He made his affectionate farewells at ten o'clock, and Saul walked down with him to the beach in the vivid moonlight to see him off and wish him Godspeed. Then he went back to bed. Helen had already retired.

At midnight Saul suddenly awoke bathed in clammy perspiration, filled with a sense of undefinable danger. Something was awfully wrong. Some dire calamity threatened him and his. He swung his feet to the floor and sat for a moment shivering nervously and wondering if this violent sense of shock could be due to an evanescent nightmare, the result perhaps of sun and liver. It had never happened him before to be thus rudely roused, but his father had described such symptoms, throwing the blame on climatic conditions—and sparing the true cause, which was old New England rum. Saul was conscious of an abysmal loneliness, and, lurching to his feet, sought Helen. He had an imperative desire to be with Helen, and at once. Poor lad! He needed the reassuring material contact of those cool, round arms.

So he groped his way to Helen's room, assisted by the bands of moonlight which filtered through the jalousies.

"Helen——" he whispered, and then, raising his voice: "Helen, dear——"

There was no answer. Saul glanced at the bed, and saw that it was vacant. He stood for a moment, listening. The long windows, with their shell mullions, were wide open, and the night breeze was whispering in the pandanus tops. Saul, barefooted and in pajamas, stepped outside. He did not think that Helen could be very far. But the slashing lights and shadows of the vivid moonlight made it impossible to look deeply into the grove, and he was on the verge of calling again when he heard at a considerable distance her low, trilling laugh.

That laugh fetched him up all standing. It brought back their power to his arms and legs, and from being flaccid as a medusa he found himself tense as the weather shrouds. He knew the significance of its seductive cadence, which was not that of mirth or amusement, but a sort of purring, rippling expression of pleasure. Often when he had taken her on his knee and fondled her she had given that soft little laugh.

"Whom could she be with?" he wondered, and slipped out. His bare feet made no sound as he stole swiftly and silently along in the black shadows of the palms. Then a noise from the lagoon attracted his attention, and, looking, he saw the *Proserpine* with fore and mainsails hoisted and heard the clank and rattle of the windlass as the chain cable was hove in. Apparently Hughes intended to slip out with the last of the ebb and the new night breeze off the land. But Saul gave scant heed to the schooner, for Helen's low, soft laugh rippled out again not far ahead. He increased his pace, the heart within him hot with anger. It was one thing

for Helen to step out of the bungalow for a breath of cool night air and another for her to stroll, laughing, under the palms with some unknown person or persons in the small hours of the morning. Indiscreet conduct this for the wife of a missionary, and Saul's anger increased as he strode rapidly along the edge of the pandanus grove.

And then he reached its limits, where a spectacle presented which turned his heart suddenly to ice. For there, in the vivid moonlight, walked Hughes and Helen, their arms entwined; and the man was carrying on his shoulder Helen's big valise, and they were making their way to a distant dark object on the water's edge which was easily identified as the schooner's gig.

The cruel callousness of the elopement must have smitten Saul with the force of a physical blow and staggered him as one who rushes upon the point of a bayonet. Here was Helen, his bride of three short months, walking laughingly away in the encircling arm of a man whom he had befriended and rendered valued service and had been his trusted and honored guest as coolly and indifferently as a girl carrying a basket of eggs to market. She had not so much as bidden him a masked farewell; had not, when they parted for the night, shown so much as a twinge of conscience or the slightest evidence of emotion at the suffering which she had known her act would cause him. He recalled her perfunctory good-night kiss and the casual wish that he might sleep well. Yes, no doubt she was sincere in that, but she should have remembered that the night was very still and her cooing laugh had deceptive-carrying qualities.

And Hughes—that smooth, sleek serpent from the sea, whom he had nourished at his table and provided with material and stores and labor at his own expense, and to whose lying utterances he had listened with sympathy and pleasure! Saul had really believed that he had effected a work of reformation, and it had been the source of infinite gratification to him and compensated tenfold for his friendly assistance. How the treacherous blackguard must have inwardly laughed! For all that Saul knew, he might have been carrying on his intrigue with Helen from the hour of his arrival. It was this which accounted for the girl's change of manner and the cooling of her sentiment toward himself.

As these conceptions swept through Saul something within him seemed to swell and snap. Perhaps it was the severance of his moral sense from the savage instincts which are latent in the heart of every man and gain a short ascendancy at times through rage or fear or hunger or the injection of certain poisons either of food or drink, or the absorption of the products of disease. At any rate, Saul, the gentle, Saul, the kind and humble servant of Christ, was transformed in the twinkling of an eye to an avenging fury whose one consuming passion was to get the lying throat of Hughes in his two strong hands and squeeze and squeeze until he had wrung out the black soul as one would wring dirty water from a sponge. Barefooted, unarmed, and in his pajamas, he sprang forward, and possibly in that instant of madness he may have given a hoarse, inhuman cry, for the pair heard him and turned about. Hughes, seeing with whom he had affair, flung down the valise, loosed his hold of Helen, and stood tense and braced to meet the shock.

Saul struck no blow. Without slackening his pace, he flung himself on Hughes. "You hound!" he gasped as they went down together.

Hughes was a sufficiently powerful man, but his muscular strength was unavailing against Saul's frenzied rage. For a moment they lashed about like tigers, while Helen stood with hands clasped across her mouth to stifle her screams. Then Saul's clasp shifted quickly, and his grip fell on Hughes' throat. He did not strike a blow, but, writhing atop of his enemy, tightened and tightened until his thumbs sank deep and Hughes' breath began to come in short, rattling gasps. Saul might have loosed one hand and stunned him

with a drive on jaw or temple, but the very primordial instinct of his rage and hatred drove him to the most primitive method of dealing death by strangling.

Hughes' breath came now in shallow gasps, and, feeling consciousness hanging by a hair, he gave up his vain effort to tear loose Saul's relentless hold. With the last of his waning strength his hand went to his hip, drew the creese dagger from its sheath, and thrust it deep into the laboring heart of the missionary.

CHAPTER VII.

Jimmy McCann, bringing the *Nazareth* into the lagoon on the brim of the flood the following morning, heard the wailing, and knew that something was grievous wrong even before the canoes were within hail. Saul's body had been found awash on the beach at low water. Hughes' boat crew had not been near enough to see the fight, and he, wishing to keep his people in ignorance, had dragged the corpse down to the sea and sent it adrift, trusting to the ebb tide and the multitude of sharks which swarmed about the bar to serve him in the matter. This I got from Helen, who protested, as she said, and desired to remain on Mauee. The tragedy had rather upset her, and she asked no better than to see the last of Hughes. But he had frightened her into blind obedience, telling her that she was an accessory to Saul's death and would certainly be hanged if caught.

Jimmy McCann acted with his characteristic decision and good sense. His first step was to dispose of Saul's remains with due reverence, but no protracted ceremonies, he being impatient to get to the nearest cable station which was a ten days' sail. Here was a criminal affair and a family affair, and Jimmy rightly argued that the Reverend Crowther, sick or well, ought, as head of the family, to be the first one cognizant of the foul business. So he drove the little *Nazareth* until she groaned alow and aloft, cracking on night and day with every variation of the wind's velocity, and, getting at length in communication with the civilized world, he sent the following dispatch to Crowther:

> During my absence, Eric Hughes, aboard *Proserpine*, went to Mauee, where he murdered Saul and carried Helen away. Whereabouts unknown. Saul buried in mission cemetery. Await your orders here before taking any action. McCann.

"Av coorse I knew well that such a wurrud might be his death, sor," said Jimmy, "but that was nayther here nor there. He had the right to know, even if it killed him, av which I had no fear, though him a bedridden invalid and old and maimed. I was t'inkin', too, a bit av Hughes"—here Jimmy's sea-green eyes glared like those of a captive gull—"and that the master had there in Boston City the policin' av the seven seas at the finger tips av the lad operatin' the keys. I knew his tough fiber, and c'u'd figure on the devastin' wrath which w'u'd give him stren'th where a weaker vessel might be foundered. And I knew his love for his little boy and that he w'u'd not snap a rope yarn av him till justice had been dealt."

Jimmy's thesis was apparently a sound one, for some hours later he received the following orders from the Reverend Crowther:

> Leave all action in matter to me. Vengeance is mine, and I will repay, saith the Lord, and I, Samuel Crowther, am his chosen instrument. Have taken all necessary steps. Come immediately to San Francisco, where I shall await you.
>
> Crowther.

So Jimmy, in accordance with orders, took on stores and sailed for San Francisco, where he arrived at the end of a six weeks' voyage and reported to the Reverend Crowther at the Occidental Hotel. And the Reverend Crowther had not been idle nor spending his time in a wheel chair biting his nails and fretting. It was immediately apparent to Jimmy McCann that his employer was not en route for Mauee to lay a wreath on the grave of his only child nor to reëngage himself in the work of the mission.

"He was like to an ould timber wolf that has gnawed off a leg to be quit of

the trap, sor," said Jimmy—in his youth he had been a trapper in the employ of the Hudson's Bay Company—"and though failin' of body stren'th, was more than supported be ferocity and hate. In his sunken eyes deep fires burrned. He was withered to the bony crust av a man, wit' a shriveled neck and the shoulders av him poked up like the humped wing j'ints av an Andes condor. He had a cork leg which fitted ill and fevered the stump and must have pained him something cruel, but the writhin' of his face when we met was not from that. He was thinkin' av his little boy. But never a moisture in the pale, bleak eye av him, nor anny sign of tender recollection. Thinks I: 'Divil help Hughes if ivir he falls into the hands of the master, for God will not.'

"He questioned me a bit, and I told him all I knew av the black deed, which was scant enough in substance, but wit' the facts provin' but wan conclusion; namely, that Saul had waked in the night, missed his wife, and, suspectin' what was afoot, had followed after and come on her elopin' wit' Hughes. The two men had fought wit' their bare hands till Saul, gittin' the scoundrel to rights, Hughes had drawn knife and stabbed him to the hearrt; then drug the body to the watter's edge and flung it to the tide. The signs in the sand showed this, though Hughes had made an effort to conceal thim. But the trut' was quick read be the natives and the blood-caked sand where Saul met his death.

"The face av the master as he listened might ha' been the trophy av a Papuan head-hunter barrin' only the fires burnin' deep in his sunken eyes and the swellin' and flatt'nin' av the muscles at the angle av his big jaw.

"'Then she wint wit' him av her own accord,' says he.

"'She did, sor,' says I, 'for was not her valise missin' wit' the best av her wardrobe and the trinkets given her be Saul? Had Hughes taken her be force he w'u'd not have waited to pack her bag.'

"He nodded. 'Y'have said no word av the crime to anny man?' he asked in his harsh, raspin' voice.

"'Not wan word, sor,' I answered, 'barrin' only what I handed in at the cable office, and I made it plain to the operator that in the interests av justice and accordin' to the rules av the company he was to hould his tongue, as you would be takin' the needful measures from the other end. I even wint so far as to promise him a store av trrouble were he to abuse the confidential char*ac*ter av his job, and I finished me remarks by sayin' that were he to locate Hughes at anny time he w'u'd be no loser by communicatin' the information to you here.'

"The ould man plucked at his bristlin' mustache. 'Y'are no fool, McCann,' says he. 'Now l'ave me tell ye what I have been doin' to further the Lord's retribution on the murderer and harlot.'" It must be comforting to have so lived that one feels at liberty to assume a divine power of attorney in the regulation of one's private affairs. "'I have purchased from Lord Edistone his three-masted steam auxiliary yacht *Lilith*, which is now lying at the Folsom Street wharf and should be ready for sea in ten days' time,' says he. 'I have mustered a crew, mostly Portuguese, that will do my bidding with no question,' says he. 'It is generally supposed that I am fittin' out a treasure-huntin' expedition, but that has no importance. Our actual mission is, of course, to seek out these evildoers that they may reap as they have sown.'

"I made bold to say that the sea was wide, and asked how he had outlawed Hughes in the manny porrts av the worrld.

"'I have not,' says he, and grinned. 'I have sent him wurrud that so long as he does not try to quit the Pacific he is safe from all—but me.'

"'Save us, sor,' says I, and for the firrst time it crossed me mind that he was mad, 'but how c'u'd ye sind him wurrud?'

"He grinned agen. 'Through Von Bulow,' says he, and I saw at once that there was a deal of method in his mad-

ness. This same Von Bulow was, as you may know, sor, a Chinese comprador av Suva, who took the name for business reasons. A fat, yellow spider av a millionaire marine contractor, and all fish that came to his net. Belike when walkin' in your garden of a summer marning wit' the dew still glistenin' ye may have remarked the extensive operations av the simple spider—a guy line to the plum tree yonder, a backstay to the cabbage stalk beyant, a runner to the rosebush, wit' a small, outstandin' web where the fly traffic is full, a vang to the tip av the holly bush fornist the well, swayin' the whole when the wind blows as the tide sways the free end av a drift net—and ould Charlie Spider squattin' halfway down his funnel takin' peaceful note of outside happenin's as transmitted be the quivers in his mesh. And there ye have this same chink, Von Bulow, sor. He was, as ye might say, the eardrum av the Pacific, and knew what happened there—sometimes before it had.

"'And do ye trrust Von Bulow, sor?' I asked.

"'I do,' says he. 'Von Bulow is a pagan and bound to suffer chastisement for his unbelief in the Gospel preached. But he feels himself under obligation to me for a slight service once rendered, and he pays his debts, whether of good or ill. He is an honest man, even though he lives in error——' And he told me in brief wurruds how wanst Von Bulow had sent for him to go to Fiji in hot haste, and he had made two days av open sea in Von Bulow's big launch at the break av the monsoon t'rough broken water, arrivin' in time to save the life av his last wife, a Manchu gurrul. Hearin' the tale, I had no more doubts. That is to say, sor, I had no doubt av Von Bulow's help. But Hughes was not the silly fly to walk into Von Bulow's parlor, and I said as much to the master. He hunched his shoulders and spread his hands to the fire on the heart', though the day was not cold.

"'We shall find him, McCann,' he answered. 'The Lord will deliver him into our hands.'"

CHAPTER VIII.

A few days later the *Lilith* sailed with Crowther, Jimmy McCann, and a young missionary whom Crowther had secured to carry on Saul's work. It would seem, on the face of it, that Crowther had in his rôle of avenging angel set himself to an almost hopeless task and one which he might hardly have expected to live long enough to accomplish. Even supposing that Hughes did not attempt to quit the Pacific, his location and capture appears, at first sight, to have limped most uncertainly on the crutch of circumstance, considering the vast area of deep sea and countless, wide-flung archipelagoes. There was also the possibility that Hughes might dispose of the *Proserpine*, sink her for that matter, and decamp for the other side of the globe.

Nevertheless, I am convinced that Crowther had carefully considered the problem and picked out his course with due deliberation. There was no dead reckoning about his method of procedure, nor was it based on blind fanaticism and the belief that the Lord would deliver his enemy into his hands, though of course such confidence must have played a considerable part in his undertaking. But, according to Jimmy McCann, he went about the business with logic and system and an apparent indifference as to the time consumed in its accomplishment. There was also an infusion of esoteric philosophy in his belief of ultimate success, as is shown by a remark he made to Jimmy McCann, with whom he frequently took council.

"When the mind of the seeker is fixed constantly and unwaveringly upon the object of its quest," said he, "certain occult forces are put in action which tend toward cohesion, especially when the quantity sought is sentient and mobile. Even though Hughes is trying to evade me, the mere fact that I am constantly in his thoughts is bound to set in motion a psychic attraction between us, on his part, of course, perverse. It is an inverted fascination which impels the murderer to revisit

the scene of his crime, which certainly can be no source of relief to his uneasy conscience, but criminal history proves that such a stimulus certainly exists."

I would give a good deal for the text of the letter which Crowther sent Hughes through the agency of Von Bulow. From what I learned from Jimmy McCann the gist of it must have been something like this:

I have every reason to believe that you foully murdered my son Saul after having led his young wife astray. The blood thus spilled in hatred and lust calls from the ground that justice be rendered. But I consider this a matter to be regulated between you and me, and not one which I desire to have exploited in courts of law for the entertainment of the world at large and the possible evasion of the penalty due you for your crime. Therefore I am coming to seek you out myself, to try you and to assay in the balance of my own hands, under God's direction, the measure of your iniquity and its lawful punishment, according to the decrees of God and man.

For, so long as you do not try to quit the Pacific, your apprehension shall be undertaken by no man but me. But I shall seek you out to demand of you by what right you still breathe God's free air, having done this thing. Cowardly assassin that you are, you will of course attempt to escape me, but I warn you that if you try to flee from the vast region which I have granted you in which to dodge and hide that your flight will be of short duration. I am, by the grace of God, a very rich man in this world's goods, and I have placed a great price upon your wicked head. The organized police services of the entire globe, as well as certain private agencies in my own pay, are on the lookout for you.

Wherefore you may take your choice; whether to score your reckoning with me, God's appointed emissary, or to be dragged like the slinking rat you are from some sewer by the minions of the law——

The above is, of course, merely my own idea of the message which Crowther may have sent him, but in the light of subsequent testimony I am inclined to the belief that it is not so far wrong. It must have cheered Hughes up when he received it, as I have proof that he did. One asks, of course, how Von Bulow managed to be so efficient a forwarding agency, Hughes naturally esteeming himself proscribed. And if Von Bulow, through the many ramifications of his Pacific intercourse, knew where to send the letter, why, then, acting as he was through disinterested friendliness for Crowther, did he not immediately acquaint the latter as to Hughes' whereabouts?

My own personal solution, which in the end appears to have been correct, was this: Von Bulow had not the slightest idea in the world as to what part of the Pacific Hughes happened at that moment to infest, or if he were in the Pacific at all. There had been time enough to enable him to make a run to some Continental port, thence to plunge into almost any burrow. But Von Bulow figured that Hughes would not have tried to do this—just as Crowther had likewise divined—because Hughes knew that Jimmy McCann was due to arrive at Mauee in a day or two and had counted on Jimmy's flaming tocsins at all conspicuous points. Von Bulow, wisely weighing these values, after having unsealed and read Crowther's letter to Hughes, waited patiently until the vibration of one of his many arachnoids told him that the *Proserpine* was at a certain obscure place, and then dispatched the letter by his swift launch —an old torpedo boat which he had bought. He knew that after receiving this missive Hughes would not linger until Crowther's arrival, and so did not put himself to any pains to acquaint Crowther of Hughes' location at that particular time. Perhaps he regarded the whole affair as a mad performance —and perhaps again he did not. The latter is more probable, as Orientals understand the various emotions which swamp men's thoughts and actions, and respect them.

And how much money did Crowther pay Von Bulow for his extensive efforts? Not one cent. He knew better than to try to buy Von Bulow to his service. He had read his man aright. The Oriental is avaricious up to a certain value, and beyond that he is the most careless of spenders. Moreover, once having given his confidence, it becomes an unalterable quantity. Chinamen do not often attach themselves by lines of friendship to Occidentals, but once the knot is tied it becomes Gor-

dian in its character. Von Bulow, feeling that Crowther was a sincere and honest man, who had rendered him a great service, would have been good for any claim. The chances are that if the need had arisen he would have honored Crowther's note of hand for practically any amount.

A good many years later I met Von Bulow at Fiji, and he talked to me with charming frankness about the whole tragic affair, speaking in perfect English.

"Doctor Crowther had proved himself to be my good friend," said he, "and in his extremity I could do no less than to put myself entirely at his disposition. What I may have thought about the matter had no importance whatever. I tried simply to serve him to the best of my ability. When he arrived at Suva I had nothing to report beyond the fact that his letter to Hughes had been duly delivered, and he was quite satisfied with that, and thanked me very warmly."

In answer to my inquiry regarding Crowther's general aspect, he answered:

"He looked very fit, considering his trials. He told me that he had discarded his artificial limb during the voyage and that by spending a good part of the day with the stump in a bucket of sea water, continually replenished, the callous had lost its tenderness and gave him no more pain." Surgeons please take notice. "Jimmy McCann had constructed him a wooden leg with which he got about amazingly well and found preferable to the complicated apparatus which he had previously worn. McCann confided in me that the voyage had done him a tremendous amount of good, and that he hoped that catching Hughes might effect a complete cure of his previously enfeebled condition.

"Quite a character, McCann, is he not, doctor? After talking a while with the two I came to the conclusion that Hughes would be a rotten poor risk for a life-insurance company."

Von Bulow twinkled as he made this last observation, and the braided silk which pieced out the end of his splendid cue twitched up and down. A very smooth proposition and a quantity to be reckoned with, this millionaire Chinese comprador. He had made his start in Hankau as a ship chandler, but quickly enlarged his sphere of action by supplying coal and boiler tubes and boats and gear principally to ships of the German merchant marine, hence the name which he had adopted as a sort of mark of appreciation. I have reason to suppose that he was a secret agent of the German government, which may have had something to do with his removing later to Viti Levu. He traded extensively and owned large plantations in several of the more important islands belonging to Great Britain, and he had a habit of turning up quickly and unexpectedly in distant places, making the run always in his swift steam yacht. All in all, Crowther could not have had a more efficient auxiliary, nor Hughes a more dangerous enemy. There had been at one time, I believe, some disagreement between Hughes and the Chinaman in the matter of a store bill.

Crowther, realizing, of course, the tremendous value of Von Bulow's assistance in his quest, proceeded immediately to Viti Levu, where, after a conference with the Chinaman, he set sail for parts unknown. And thus at large we shall leave him for the moment and return to Hughes and Helen, who were at this time in and about the Solomons.

CHAPTER IX.

This part of the narrative I got from Helen herself, though I shall tell it in my own way. I made her acquaintance in Yokohama, where she was stopping as the guest of an Italian silk merchant who had installed her in a very nice bungalow on the road to Kamakura.

When Hughes stabbed Saul to the heart he was himself on the verge of unconsciousness, and his evil soul might have slipped out then and there had it not been for Helen. She did not see the fatal thrust, nor could she realize what had happened, as her husband was lying prone atop of Hughes. When,

after a few convulsive movements, neither man stirred, Helen leaned down and tore Saul's fingers from Hughes' throat, and, finding him senseless, dragged him clear of his unconscious assassin; then, seeing her lover's chest a welter of blood, she jumped to the conclusion that it was his own. She thought that Saul must have snatched up a knife as he rushed from the bungalow, and, getting Hughes to rights, had in his fury made use of it with deadly purpose.

With trembling hands she tore aside his clothes to find and, if possible, to stanch the wound. But no wound was apparent, and as she was vainly trying to discover it Hughes gave a few gasps, got some air in his lungs, and sat up. His oblivion had been but momentary, and consciousness returned with full realization of the situation. For a moment he sat there gasping for breath and staring at the body of Saul.

"Eric——" Helen murmured, "where are you hurt?"

"I'm all right," he muttered.

"But he stabbed you!"

Hughes' ready wit did not fail him. "No," he answered slowly, "I turned the knife in his hand, and it went into his own chest. Is he dead?"

Helen, too agitated to perceive the bald improbability of this statement, turned to Saul's body and rolled it on its back. It did not need a coroner's jury to find a verdict of death from a penetrating wound caused by some sharp weapon. She recoiled in horror, staring at Hughes with wide, terror-stricken eyes.

"Here's the devil to pay!" he croaked. "I couldn't help it. I did it blindly in self-defense. Now they'll claim we murdered him—and if they catch us, we'll hang as high as Haman." He groped for his deadly little creese dagger, which the spasmodic movements of Saul's death agony had dislodged, and found it in the sand at his side. Unobserved by Helen, he slipped it back into its sheath, then rose.

"It ain't my fault," he growled, staring at his victim with venomous hate. "A man naturally defends himself."

Helen, crouching on the sand, covered her face with her hands and began to rock back and forth, stifling her sobs. It is doubtful that she felt any actual grief at her husband's fate. She was merely shocked and badly frightened at the prospect of what might happen her. She was conscious also of a violent revulsion of feeling against Hughes, who had got her into all this coil. She no longer desired to elope with him, but wanted him to go his way, leaving her to tell her own story and plead for such extenuation as might be granted in consideration of her youth and willful folly. She was only eighteen at the time.

But Hughes had no such intention. He realized that he was now engaged in a hanging business and that Helen was the only actual eyewitness of his crime. The struggle had taken place in the black shadow of the palm grove, and, glancing down the beach to where his boat was lying, nearly half a mile away, he saw that no alarm had reached her crew, for had the men heard sounds of strife they would have come swarming up the beach.

It is probable also that Hughes desired Helen greatly, and, as is apt to be the case in natures criminally perverse, the violence had whetted rather than diminished his passion. Besides, the deed was done, and if he was destined to suffer the penalty there seemed no reason for not reaping such benefits as lay within his power. But the main thing was no doubt the conviction that he would be safer with Helen in his possession than if he were to leave her on Mauee to give fatal testimony against him, so when she checked her sobs and implored him to go and leave her there he answered in his cool, gentle voice:

"That is out of the question, my dear girl. They would claim that you had connived at his murder, and they would put a rope around your pretty, white neck and hang you by it until you were dead. Old man Crowther would never rest until he had got his revenge. No, the only thing for us to do is to stick together and hide out somewhere until

the business blows over a bit and people think that I have quit the Pacific for good. Then we'll make a run clear around to Buenos Aires, sell the schooner for what she'll bring, and go to Europe. But first let's get rid of *this*"—he jerked his head toward the still form on the ground. "I don't want even my hands to suspect what's happened. I'll set it adrift and the ebb tide will carry it out and the sharks do the rest."

Regardless of Helen's protests—which, I imagine, were half-hearted—he carried the body of the young missionary out to the end of a sand spit around which the tide swirled rapidly to sea, and committed it to the deep with a silent request to John Shark, undertaker, and his assistants. He little guessed that a few hundred yards farther out it would be caught by a strong back eddy and swirled along the sandy floor back to the beach. Hughes then rinsed his clothes and returned to Helen, who was huddled, limp and frightened, on the beach. Her reasoning faculties had in some measure returned by this time, and she no longer believed what Hughes had told her as to Saul's having attacked him with a knife. She realized that in the first place if Saul had wished to arm himself, which was most unlikely, he would have taken a rifle or revolver, not a knife, and that in the second place, even if he had had a knife, he would have made the attempt to use it immediately, and not have waited until he had got his enemy on his back and at his mercy.

No, it was evident enough that Hughes, finding himself overpowered and on the verge of strangulation, had drawn a knife and driven it through Saul's heart. As this was borne in upon her all of Helen's love for Hughes turned into loathing, hatred, and fear. Instead of the polished and fascinating man of the world who had promised to show her the life of which she had always dreamed, she now saw him as a furtive, bloodthirsty creature, cowardly, treacherous, and ruthless; a *bête féroce* who would probably maltreat and might even kill her if she roused his anger at any time. Helen was no coward, but shudder after shudder swept through her at Hughes' approach. She might have sprung to her feet and fled back screaming to the village but for the fear that he might overtake and knife her. So she had resource to guile.

"Come on," said he briefly; "let's get out of this."

"Listen, Eric," said she, trying to steady her voice and hide the dread which consumed her, "if I go with you, everybody will know what has happened, and we will be hunted down and caught. The *Nazareth* may come in any day, and Jimmy McCann will not lose a minute in raising the alarm and they will search us out no matter where we try to hide. But if I stay here and pretend to know nothing about what has happened and say that I never saw Saul again after saying good night to him, what can they prove? He always went down to the lagoon to bathe early in the morning, and for all that anybody can say he might have swam out too far and been taken by a shark."

Hughes stared hard at her for a moment, then shook his head. Whether it was because he did not trust her and was convinced that under McCann's searching examination she might break down and confess, or because his passion for her would not brook denial, or both, her plea was of no avail.

"They can't prove anything as it is," he growled, and began to efface the signs of strife in the loose sand, carefully covering the bloodstains and smoothing over the spot where the struggle had occurred. The tracks which he had left in carrying Saul's body out on the sand spit would be erased by the tide before daylight, as it was then the last of the ebb and about half past one of the morning. "They're naturally going to suspect us, anyhow, and I don't intend to risk trial and stretching hemp for nothing. It's all your fault, anyway, my dear. If you had been true to your husband, it never would have happened, but now that it has you've got to see the thing through with me. Come—let's go."

"But I don't want to go," Helen protested. "I was mad. I don't love you. I never did love you."

"Then you'd better learn to," Hughes answered curtly. "You are apt to get a full ration of my society for some time to come. Don't lose your nerve, my dear; I've been through lots of worse scrapes than this. Come now, pull yourself together and trust to me. In the first place, they're not going to catch us, and in the second they've got no proof against us if they do, think what they may. For all they'll ever know, Saul might have gone and drowned himself when he found that you had run off with me. Come—we've wasted time enough." And he offered his hands to help her to her feet.

But Helen shrank away with a shudder. The mere idea of any physical contact with Saul's red-handed murderer filled her with loathing.

"No—no!" she gasped. "Go away; I hate you!" She scrambled back, filling her lungs to scream. The next instant Hughes had plunged down beside her, and his hand flashed up to the soft throat, ready to suppress the slightest sound that might issue therefrom.

"None o' that, my little girl," said he. "Either you come with me, and quietly, or you follow your fool husband out to sea. Which is it " And he gently compressed his grip, looking into her wild, despairing eyes. "Speak quick, sweetheart," he murmured. "We've got to look sharp if we want to get out before the tide turns."

Helen drooped, helpless and inert. It must be remembered that she was very young, utterly untutored, the foster sister of a primitive people, loving life and with not only a physical but a vague moral fear of death and the punishment of her sin which might await her beyond. She was also under the mental ascendancy of a real deputy of Satan and one whom his infernal majesty had protected in the past. Hers was, to say the least, a mistaken soul, and one cannot help but feel rather sorry for her.

Hughes did not waste much time in reassuring her. "Well," said he harshly, "which is it to be? The *Proserpine*—or the ebb tide?" And he tightened his grip.

"Don't!" gasped Helen. "I'll go."

CHAPTER X.

Daylight found them, hull down, over the horizon, invisible from Mauee. Three days later Hughes put into some island port unknown to Helen and took on a vast consignment of stores—perhaps he had lied to Saul about his dearth of ready cash, or perhaps his credit was still good, for he was a widely reputed millionaire. Here also he paid off and discharged four of his mongrel white crew, which left him short-handed, very, but with less mouths to feed in the following months of inactive exile which he had apparently anticipated. Helen was not permitted to go ashore, nor had she any particular wish to do so. She was already Hughes' crushed and abject slave—what a change it must have been from the saintly, self-abnegating Saul!—but after his sinister threat upon the beach at Mauee he was not unkind to her and neglected nothing which might lend to her greater comfort. His attitude in her regard appears to have been that of the Oriental toward the latest favorite; the Turk or Persian or East Indian who asks no more of the houri than her agreeable acquiescence to his will. This achieved, he is happy to load her with favors.

There seems to have been a good deal of the Oriental about Hughes, and in searching his genealogy I was not surprised to find a pure Romany or Romanichel strain. His great grandmother had been a gypsy fortune teller, a girl famed for her beauty and mystic talents, and his great grandfather, a wild and hairy Welshman of the lesser nobility, had become infatuated with her and married her with due Christian and pagan rites. So Hughes, whatever else may be said of him, came honestly by his nomadic tendencies, his soft, subtle, and treacherous traits, and his oily evasiveness, all combined with a

certain stiffness of the spine when circumstance required and the cold common sense inherited from his hirsute Gallic ancestor.

It would be interesting to trace the psychology of the gradual change in Helen's sentiments toward Hughes as the weeks passed. He had dragged her aboard his schooner practically by force when her feeling for him was only that of horror and loathing, and had conducted her to his own large and luxurious quarters. "This is probably destined to be our habitation for a good while, my dear," said he tersely, "so you might as well make yourself entirely at home and as soon as possible."

Helen told me quite frankly, and, as I believe, truthfully that although she had frequently met Hughes clandestinely during his sojourn on Mauee these rendezvous had been for a few brief minutes, and he had made no advances to her beyond persuading her to elope with him and dazzling her with promises of the brilliant life which he meant to show her in the big outer world. He had convinced her that Saul would obtain a divorce, when they would be married and spend future happy years in the gay capitals of Europe and other continents. He had assured her that he had got his fill of the vast, empty places with their semi-civilized surroundings and craved the centers of culture and high, social intercourse which his wealth permitted him to enjoy. These projects, subtly described, had completely dazzled the girl.

It is possible that Hughes actually contemplated some such *modus vivendi*. He was in his fortieth year, and a life of reckless adventure was losing its attraction for him. No doubt he felt also that the warm blue waters of the Pacific were gradually rising in temperature and might soon become too hot to hold him. Helen was very young, utterly plastic, uncommonly lovely, and with a mind which, though absolutely uncultivated, was bright and vivid and with potential sources of which the development promised a fund of interest, which, as Hughes may have figured, should last even longer than himself. Her morale did not matter; being himself what might be phrased as a congenital moral paralytic, the abstract qualities of good and bad were to him mere figures of speech, and as such totally unconvincing.

To be concise, Hughes probably struck his balance in some such way as this: "I have had a good run for my money, and now I should like to pipe down for a bit of repose. By taking Helen I shall not only have a charming little companion to educate according to my own ideas, but I shall be paying off old Crowther for the bad times he has given me."

But as things had fallen out she became necessary to his safety, and instead of her going with him of her own desire he had been obliged to threaten her life when she refused. A bad start for an elopement, one would say, yet the chances are that this was the very least of Hughes' cares. He bent the girl to his will, and she accepted the situation first with resignation and later with the growing devotion of a primitive creature to the master. Hughes must have inherited a certain dominant force from his Welsh ancestry, and also he had inherited what few would have suspected—a half-cringing, half-defiant dread of hellfire, which he tried vainly to overcome as a superstitious weakness unworthy a philosophic mind. But it was bred in the bone of the man, and gave him many evil hours. His paternal grandfather had been a Wesleyan minister and rather similar in his precepts to the Reverend Crowther, and Hughes' own father had also been a strict religionist and enforced full measure of church attendance on his son, and at times the irrepressible influence of these early teachings blazed before his eyes to make his soul quake. At such moments he could not endure to be alone. Helen's pagan lack of reverence—for her father had been a rank old infidel and scoffer, and his blasphemies not without a certain intellectual argument—was comforting to Hughes' uneasy conscience, and she

was quick to discover this and turn the power to gain her own ends.

Hughes did not dare make for any port of consequence, being sure that Jimmy McCann's first act would be to get him outlawed far and wide. He determined to spend a year at least in hiding, so he dived into the mesh of the New Hebrides like a rabbit into the whins, and there Von Bulow managed to locate him and sent him Crowther's letter. In one way this must have been something of a relief to Hughes, who, no doubt, considered it as bordering on senile dementia for one man in one vessel to undertake the combing of the whole Pacific with its countless isles for an enemy in hiding. On the other hand, he was probably terrified to learn that the body of his victim, with its accusing evidence, should have washed ashore, for now he felt convinced that if taken he would surely hang. He thought it quite possible that Crowther himself meant to officiate as executioner, and in this surmise he was entirely correct, though little guessing the singular means which his enemy meant to pursue in his self-appointed title as the Lord's deputy sheriff and avenger of the blood.

CHAPTER XI.

For twenty-seven months the chase continued, and never once during that time was the *Lilith*—to the knowledge of those aboard—within a thousand miles of her quarry. She searched the different archipelagoes as a patient hound searches for the scent. Natives and traders and passing vessels were questioned, and once or twice in every three months they put into some cable station and sent their inquiries flashing to many scattered ports. On several occasions they got news of the *Proserpine* in some region remote. Hughes spent the most of the time lying in obscure lagoons; though at intervals, feeling that he had the freedom of those seas from all but Crowther, he would visit an island port for stores and supplies. No doubt also he managed to get money sent him by his bankers, for they did not lack for comforts. A good deal had leaked out concerning the affair, but as no charges had been made through official circles, and as it was known that Crowther himself was directing the hands of justice, I cannot learn that any effort was made by the several governmental authorities for Hughes' apprehension. Others minded their own business. Hughes was far from being the only criminal at large in the Pacific.

According to Jimmy McCann, the Reverend Crowther never lost for a minute his patience or his conviction that one day his enemy would be delivered into his hands. His health improved, and much of his former strength returned, but the deep, slumbering fire never left his cavernous eyes, and often when a white sail appeared over the horizon this would kindle and glow in a dull flame, while a tinge of color appeared in his shrunken, yellow cheeks. Then, on discovering the stranger to be other than the *Proserpine,* this would die down again, but of discouragement he never showed the slightest symptom. "'Be strong—fear not,'" he would mutter; "'behold your God will come with vengeance."

Much of his time was spent in searching the Old Testament for all pertaining to justice and retribution and vengeance on the shedder of innocent blood, and it is probable that he conned over these passages until they were as familiar to him as the Lord's Prayer and the Decalogue. He took no part in the navigation of the vessel, but he spent long hours in the studying of charts and sailing directions for the Pacific. They never tarried in a port any longer than was necessary to take coal and water and stores, and the log book shows that they covered over one hundred and fifty thousand knots. Such scant tidings as they got of the *Proserpine* located her always as in and about Oceania; and Crowther and Jimmy McCann, taking counsel, came to the conclusion that Hughes' fear of capture would not be great enough to induce him to face the rigors of extreme latitudes and their attendant discomforts.

The *Lilith* was a fine vessel, swift and able and having auxiliary steam power, and they had little fear of the *Proserpine* giving her the slip, once sighted, smart sailer though she might be. At most times they were under sail, but let the wind fall the engines were immediately started. There was a standing reward of five hundred dollars for the member of the crew first to sight the *Proserpine.*

At last one day as they were heeled to the strong draft of the trades in the Society group the cry of "Sail-o!" came from the masthead lookout which was always kept. Oddly enough it was on the monthly anniversary of Saul's death and it may have been this fact, or possibly some inward prescience, which roused the Reverend Crowther to unusual activity. They were cutting the course of the stranger with a strong, reaching breeze, but in spite of this he gave orders to get up steam with all haste. When, a little later, they were themselves sighted, and the distant vessel was seen to alter her course for the one they themselves were on, the excitement became intense. Jimmy McCann set his big maintopmast staysail, and it was soon evident that they were rapidly overhauling. Hughes, discovering that he was being outfooted, and having no longer any doubt regarding the character of the pursuer, hauled on the wind, and for a while increased his lead. But it was the middle of the forenoon, and with the strong head draft the *Lilith* soon had steam, when she drew steadily in on the fugitive.

"The face av the master was that av a destroyin' angel," said Jimmy McCann. "When there was no longer anny doubt but that we had the divil by the tail, says he: 'McCann, let this be a lesson to strengthen your faith in the retribution av the Lord,' says he. 'Work up to windward and put a shot across his bows to heave him to.' The *Lilith* carried two six-pounders in the waist. "So we pinched her up a mite, and wit' the aid of our power had no trouble to outpoint him. T'rough our glasses we c'u'd see Hughes himself at the wheel and Helen in the stern sheets. The hands was grouped by the main riggin', very still and watchful.

"So we hauled up abeam, and at a wurrud from the master I sent a shot plowin' the watter under his bows, wonderin' to meself what w'u'd happen sh'u'd he fail to obey, for there was too big a swell to lay him alongside wit' safety, and might have opened up the seams av both the vessels, which were not built for such wurruk. But divvle a bit av notice did Hughes take, barrin' only to ease her off a trifle. I looked at the master.

"'The fool hath said in his hearrt there is no God,' says he, between his big yellow teeth, which at that minute were bared to the gums. 'For God shall cast upon him and not spare; he w'u'd fain flee out av his hand,' says he—I mind the wurruds like I had heard them yesterday. 'Put one into him forrard, McCann,' says he, 'between wind and water if ye can.'

"High-handed doin's, doctor, even for thim days. Yet it never entered me mind to question him. You must know that by this time I was no more than a scythe in the hands av the harvester. From listenin' long months to thim words of Gospel they had soaked into the marrow av me bones, and I thought wit' the master, and felt wit' him. There was two verses of Holy Writ he repeated constant: 'He hath said in his hearrt, God hath forgotten; he hideth his face; he will never see it.' And the other: 'God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof. For he looketh to the ends of the earth and he seeth under the whole heaven.' The first av thim verses had reference to Hughes' way av thinkin', I take it, and the second to his own conviction that he was actin' under orders from aloft and c'u'd not fail.

"Lookin' back some twoscore years, doctor, I am av the mind that the blind obedience to orders has been the cause av many a catastrophe in which the righteous have grabbed at the hot ind av the poker. Had I been less obedient and more watchful, I w'u'd have

piped off Hughes' trick in the bakin'. Y' have raced yachts, so you will understand. When I fired the shot across her bows here we were, the two av us, close-hauled on the port tack, we not a quarter av a mile to windward, squarely abeam and doin' two feet to her one, and all the time edgin' in agen her.

"So we stud when I fired across her bow. Hughes at that moment c'u'd not have luffed into us had he tried. He w'u'd have tossed her into the wind well astern. Instead, he paid her off, and that gave us the big arc av the circle as we swung in after him, puttin' our bow on his quarter, and we swingin' down. And then, me busy wit' the gun, what does the crafty divvle do but jam his hellum hard down to round up and ram us broadside on.

"No power under heaven c'u'd have saved us both from goin' to the bottom then and there had his crew stud fast. He w'u'd have struck us fair amidships wit' his sharp stem and cut us half in two before iver we c'u'd have luffed, nor c'u'd we have up hellum and gybed clear av him. The *Proserpine* had won cups in her day and c'u'd spin like a dancer, while the *Lilith* had forty feet more len'th on her water line and was heavy by reason of her coal bunkers, which had been filled three days before and just then trimmed a bit be the head. The chances are that had he struck us both vessels w'u'd have gone down like cracked pots, for our weight and way w'u'd have torn the bows offen him. Hughes, av course, knew this, but he was desprit, and chose rather to drown wit' his enemies than to hang alone.

"Busy wit' the gun, the first heed I had av the danger was the master's shout to let go the jib and forestaysail sheets, and, lookin' up, I saw the doom that threatened and rushed for the wheel. And then a quare thing happened. As Hughes was clawin' at the spokes to jam his hellum harrd down there came a cry from the hands clustered in the waist av the *Proserpine*, and the next second they was pourin' aft, led by the big bos'n. They saw what was afoot and had no mind to die like rats in a trap. Hughes loosed one hand from the wheel and snatched a revolver from his hip. There was two faint reports, and the bos'n went down. Then the rest av thim fell on him like a pack of wolves and down they wint, rollin' out of sight in the lee scuppers. One hand av thim grabbed for the wheel and put up the hellum when the *Proserpine* paid off agen, and the danger was past.

"'Hold on, McCann,' says the master. "L'ave us see what they mean to do. His own servants have risen to bind and deliver the slayer of innocent blood.'

"And so it was, sor, and we had not long to wait. Down came the jib av the *Proserpine*, as, givin' us a wide bert', she swung up to meet the wind. Then over went her whaleboat, and came foamin' up, wit' Hughes bound hand and foot and Helen at his side. Very white and frightened she was, and more beautiful than iver, and I c'u'd not help but pity her in me heart, and she so young. But there was no sign av compassion in the face av the master as his burnin' eyes examined the pair av thim. Hughes c'u'd not meet that awful look, but slumped down upon the deck, the blood tricklin' from beneath a kerchief knotted round his head. Belike he had been roughly handled by thim scourin's av the beach."

CHAPTER XII.

The Reverend Crowther then held a sort of summary court-martial, examining each individual separately, and, finally convinced that the crew of the *Proserpine* had taken no part in the murder of Saul, and in recognition of their service at the last moment, he bade them go back aboard their vessel and depart, to Gehenna, for all he cared. The bos'n was dead as a herring, but Crowther did not find it incumbent on him to undertake his obsequies.

Hughes and Helen he cross-examined in a cold, judicial, and dispassionate way which sent shivers down the spine of Jimmy McCann. Hughes

pulled himself together to some extent, and in a manner which alternated sullenness and passionate protest at not being given an official trial—he was convinced that Crowther meant to hang him *ex cathedra* of his own self-invested authority, and so was Jimmy McCann—he pleaded self-defense, but was too clever to assert that Saul had attacked him with a knife. He knew that Crowther would never admit the truth of this, and no doubt he was convinced that under the soul-withering glare of those searching eyes and the concentrated moral ascendancy of the terrible old man Helen would surely be pinned down to the truth. So he described the affair precisely as it had occurred, stating that Saul overpowered him in their struggle and that it was only when he had felt his consciousness leaving him and knew that Saul meant to strangle him to death that he had drawn his knife and struck blindly with no intent to kill. He protested all assumption that he wished ill to Saul, and pleaded in his defense an admittedly wrong but irresistible passion for Helen, with whom he claimed to have fallen in love on Tiapu when she was scarcely more than a child.

To all of this, as well as to Helen's tearful testimony, the Reverend Crowther listened with such a granite face as might have been worn by one of his Puritan ancestors sitting in judgment upon a Salem witch. Jimmy McCann admitted frankly that he himself had never passed through such a trying ordeal; that he went hot and cold and was bathed in copious perspiration throughout the whole of the nerve-racking business.

"Had the master said: 'Take the scoundrel and hang him from the crosstrees, McCann, I w'u'd have done so gladly,' said he. "The black-hearted, bloody-handed divil needed it. Had he not knifed our little boy and then tried to send us all to Davy Jones' locker, to say nothin' av killin' his bos'n, who tried to prevent? But for Helen 'twas another matter, and she so young. Sinned she had, and done a foul wrong to Saul, her kind and lovin' husband, but what c'u'd one expect av a gurrul reared like she? 'Twas in me mind that the master meant to hang thim both, and though by this time I was wax in his hands that deed I c'u'd not have done."

Wherefore, one may imagine his surprise and relief when, the trial finished, Crowther ordered Hughes to be double-ironed and confined in a stateroom, while Helen was locked up in another, where she was made as comfortable as the limited space allowed. All of this done dispassionately and with no evidence of personal hate or animosity. In fact, the mood of the Reverend Crowther appeared to have undergone a change. He became gentle and contemplative, and the low fires in his eyes grew dim. And yet there seemed about him, according to Jimmy McCann, a sort of purposeful intensity as of one who has still some great trial to undergo; some great task to achieve. Jimmy began to believe that he was struggling in his bleak soul to achieve a Christian forgiveness, praying for strength to forego the revenge which now he held in the hollow of his hand.

Therefore, Jimmy must have been sorely puzzled when Crowther ordered him to lay his course for a remote and uninhabited island, where, according to the sailing directions, no vessel ever called, owing to wide, outlying reefs, but where there were fruit and water in abundance. Jimmy jumped naturally to the conclusion that it was Crowther's intention to maroon the guilty pair on this desolate spot and leave them to work out their atonement as best they might. This fate appealed to the warm-hearted Celt as rather worse than the hangman's knot.

Consequently he was not surprised when, after working slowly and cautiously into the lagoon under slow steam, and with many a close shave of rock and reef, they came finally to anchor, and the Reverend Crowther, after being set ashore and spending some hours in an examination of the place, directed that a small bungalow be constructed near the spring and

stores enough to last two people for six months be landed. The little island was like thousands of others of similar formation, a mere atoll which no man, white or native, could possibly have any object in visiting. Jimmy shuddered at thought of such an exile. The limited resources, the utter monotony, the crushing desolation seemed worse to him than a sentence of death.

But he held his peace, being, after these long past months of close association, entirely under the moral domination of the rough-hewn soul of the master, as was indeed the whole ship's company, which regarded him with an awe which, if not superstitious, was closely akin to such a sentiment. Crowther's unwavering faith in the accomplishment of his quest and its singular achievement had profoundly impressed all minds aboard, and the Catholic members of the crew were apt to cross themselves furtively when his pale glare rested upon any one of them for more than a passing scrutiny. His very conviction that he was the deputy of Almighty God and acting in accordance with divine instructions received from a spiritual source had accomplished its work of erosion on those in daily contact with him. No man aboard would any more have thought of questioning his orders than of attempting to dictate to wind or tide. So it was in pity, but without protest, that Jimmy McCann completed the shore accommodations for the exiles, telling himself the while that the master could not last many more years and that at his decease he would himself return and free the exiles.

One may therefore figure his astonishment when, on going to the owner's cabin to report all in readiness for occupancy ashore, he found the reverend gentleman directing the packing of his final piece of luggage.

"Save us, sor," said Jimmy McCann, "and whativer is this?"

"I intend to remain here with the shedder of blood, McCann," Crowther answered quietly. "It is my purpose to wrestle with Satan for the soul of this misguided man."

Jimmy stared at him wildly. For the first time he realized—or thought he realized—the character of the punishment which he intended to mete out to the hapless Hughes. To have left him on the island with his companion in sin seemed sufficiently severe. But for Hughes to be obliged to share an exile of indefinite length with the father of the man whom he had done to death and listen daily to his reproaches and exhortations was a refinement of vengeance on which one would never have counted.

"Why not, McCann?" Crowther continued. "Life holds no more for me, and if I can cheat the devil of this mistaken soul I shall feel that I have accomplished a final duty to the Lord. Here also I shall be able to meditate in peace, unvexed by the strife and passions of a vain world. 'I am an old man and very tired; what better can I do than pray to God?'" (Is this quotation Holy Writ or Shakespeare?)

He turned to his desk and took a long envelope, which he handed to the dazed mariner. "Here are my written instructions to you, my good and faithful servant. You will find also therein a full statement and justification of the way in which I have acted in this matter. The position of this island is known only to myself and you of those aboard, and it is my wish that you shall not reveal it. On leaving here, I desire you to accompany Helen Crowther to Boston, there to place her under the care of my sister-in-law, Mrs. Abigail Crowther. Helen has sinned, but she is very young, and there are extenuating circumstances due to her upbringing and the wiles of the evil one. As long as she remains docile and obedient she will suffer no want. At the end of four months you are to return here with fresh supplies——"

Jimmy McCann attempted to dissuade him, of course, but it was of no avail. The Reverend Crowther silenced his protestations. So Hughes was brought up, his irons removed, and he and his captor landed in the gig, which returned immediately to the yacht, when Jimmy, in obedience to his

orders, put to sea. The last he saw of captor and captive they were standing at the water's edge, Hughes gesticulating violently and the Reverend Crowther with folded arms, erect, immovable, looking after the departing vessel.

Jimmy McCann conducted Helen to Boston, where he left her, as directed, in the care of the Widow Crowther.

"Wance clear av the island, I gave her the freedom av the vessel," said Jimmy. "'Twas not in the orders, but I made bold to stretch a p'int. Whin I told her the plans for her future she was delighted as a child at promise av a picnic. 'Then I am not to be sint to prison, Jimmy?' she asks. 'Divvle a bit,' I answered. 'Y' are to be sint to Boston, which is worse. But if y' are a good girl and mind the paint the sentence may be commuted for good behavior.' She grabs me fist and begins to cry. 'I love you, Jimmy,' says she. 'Y' are me only friend.' I was blinkin' meself, doctor, at thought av the poor ould master alone on that strip av sand wit' no company but the sea birds and the murderer av his little boy——"

So he took her to Boston, where she remained for about eighteen months very much interested in the strangeness of her surroundings and sufficiently docile under the argus eye of the Widow Crowther. Then, the novelty wearing off, she began to get bored, made a runaway marriage with a rich and dissipated Harvard undergraduate, who took her to Paris, where they lived quite happily for three or four years, until she met an Argentine millionaire who was more to her taste and accepted an invitation to go with him to Buenos Aires. She was quite a traveled and world-wise woman when I made her acquaintance in Yokohama.

Jimmy McCann, that good and faithful servant, who now, according to sailing and other orders, found himself Crowther's trusted steward over many things—and incidentally, as was hinted to him in his instructions, extremely well provided for in Crowther's will—returned to Mauee, where, having as-

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was that the place could be approached with prudence only in fixed, fair weather, and the needle nailed to the disk of the glass. Far be it from him to take the slightest risk of losing his ship on those gnawing fangs of coral reef rinsed in briny slaver when the wind blew hard or masked in flat calm, like the teeth of a dog which bites before the warning snarl revealing them. Jimmy's plausible excuse for getting there ahead of time was that he did not know how long he might have to hang on and off the place before the conditions might be such as to enable him to enter with prudence.

As it happened, however, he fell on perfect weather, and threaded his way in with no particular danger. Edging up to the lagoon, he discovered the bungalow while still at some distance. But no sign of life revealed itself beyond the sea birds circling about the crescent of gleaming beach. Filled with the presage of ill, he called away the gig and landed. A few chickens scurried off into the brush at his approach.

Jimmy McCann hurried up to the bungalow, and when within fifty yards of it something caught his eye, something which hung motionless by a hempen cord attached to a pole lashed between two adjacent palms. Drawing near with sickened heart, he discovered it to be the desiccated corpse of Hughes. The hands and feet were untrammeled, and from the condition of the remains Jimmy estimated that the body must have been thus suspended for at least a month.

Much shaken at this spectacle, he turned to the bungalow and looked within. There, by the window, reclining in a wicker deck chair, reposed all that was mortal of the Reverend Crowther. Fully clothed, chin sunk on the

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How had this come to pass? Had Hughes' guilty conscience, goaded by the utterances of the stricken father, driven him to self-destruction, possibly at Crowther's exhortations to expiation? Or had Crowther's stern soul been garnered first, and Hughes, unable to support his dark memories in solitude, and with the fear of God's vengeance before his tortured eyes, desired to end the suspense and face his eternal doom? Who shall ever know?

THE END

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING KNOWN

CAPTAIN SHERBURNE G. HOPKINS, international lawyer and specialist on Latin-American affairs, was in Mexico City during the occupation of that capital by the Carranza forces. Incident upon the occupation, the streets were lined with soldiers doing police duty, and their vigilance left nothing to be complained of—so far as Carranza was concerned. They were on the job every minute with challenges, guns, commands, and salutes.

Just at this time there arrived in Mexico City and repaired to the hotel at which Captain Hopkins was stopping, a curly-haired diplomatic clerk, who had been sent there by the then secretary of state, William Jennings Bryan. By the time he saw the captain, the clerk was flustered. Some of the curl had been taken out of his lovely locks. In fact, they were standing on end.

"By George!" he said to Hopkins. "The city's gone mad. It's full of soldiers. And I've got an engagement six blocks up the street to have dinner. I wonder how I'll get there."

"Walk up the street," suggested the captain.

"But those ruffians are liable to assault me!" exploded the embryo diplomat. "I just came in, and I believe I narrowly escaped with my life. Every one of them stopped me and ran his hands over me and searched me and was as rough as could be. Really, I don't know what I'm to do."

Hopkins, who had been giving cigarettes to the privates of the regiment detailed to that particular thoroughfare, and who knew the officers well, finally took pity on the frightened clerk.

"Come along with me," he reassured him. "I'm going in that direction myself."

A few yards from the hotel they were challenged by a sentry. The captain walked into the circle of light given by a street lamp, and the Mexican saluted and allowed the two to pass on. A block higher up they were challenged again, and this time proceeded after the captain had given the countersign. This sort of thing happened during the entire six blocks, the clerk huddling and shivering behind Hopkins at each challenge.

"There you are," said the captain, when they had reached the diplomat's destination. "They didn't bother us, did they?"

"No," replied the curly-haired one, now all self-assurance and confidence —as becomes every diplomat. "By George, they must have known who I was!"

A Man of Des

By John Fleming Wilson

Author of "The Return of the 108th Regiment," "His Splendid Enemy," Etc.

This skipper believed in himself, despite the bludgeonings of chance—holding on to a high optimism in the face of a series of calamities that would have crushed anybody else. You will not guess the amazing climax to his life that Fate had in store for him

THOSE who knew Captain Luke Harrison best thought him a weak, amiable, easy-going man without what we are pleased to call "bottom." He was, besides, not born to the sea, which means that his being master of a vessel was the result of haphazard chance. Right here Captain Harrison and his best friends disagreed.

"You call it luck and chance," he would say when he had retrieved his fortunes by some incredible stroke. "I call it destiny."

So, in writing the biography of this man, I find I must choose between the two descriptions of his marvelous achievements. I may say, with most of those who knew him, that his life was a series of unlucky and lucky vicissitudes, an illogical and inexplicable tangle of ridiculous misadventures and preposterous feats, or I can accept Captain Luke's own solemn statement that he was a child of destiny.

Privately I have my own opinion. But I am prejudiced. Therefore I leave the decision to those who listen to my tale.

I made acquaintance with Captain Luke Harrison when he was up before the United States inspectors to explain how and why he lost the whaleback *Cyrus Dodd,* off an obscure reef on the central Oregon coast. The trial was faintly interesting to us water-front reporters because the *Dodd* had been brought around from the Great Lakes as a new kind of vessel which would solve many tough problems. Her kind had succeeded marvelously in the grain and ore trade in fresh water, their cost was small compared with that of regular-cargo steamers, and it was conceded that if the *Dodd* made good the Pacific coast shipping business would have to change its ways.

And here was the *Cyrus Dodd* piled up on the rocks on her first voyage!

The question ran: Was the whaleback unfitted for ocean trade?

Had anybody else than Luke Harrison piled her up, no one would have doubted that the *Cyrus Dodd* and her freakish construction was a failure. But it was universally felt that Luke Harrison was not the man to give a new vessel a square deal. He had lost other vessels in other ways. Like as not he had run the whaleback on that reef merely as Captain Nolan put it, "in the routine of his business."

Nolan despised Harrison, and never lost an opportunity to mark his man.

But Luke Harrison proved more than a match for his disparagers in the matter of the *Cyrus Dodd.* He admitted the reef, the fact that he had no business within twenty miles of it, that his reckonings were wrong, and that—crime of crimes!—he had neglected to take a cast of the lead when doubt became pretty nearly a certainty.

"Harrison will lose his ticket for good this time," Nolan predicted during noon recess of the court.

Captain Nolan told me that same

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satisfaction of the inspectors that the *Cyrus Dodd* neither steamed nor steered, that her compasses divagated to poles unheard of by mortal navigators, and that her construction prevented utterly any such business as heaving the lead, except when she was in dead water and the leadsman could pitch his implement fifty feet beyond the outthrust of her high bilges.

"Harrison is saved and the whalebacks are damned," was the gist of the decision.

I interviewed Harrison after the investigation, and found him flushed with victory.

"They can't put me down," he said, his eyes sparkling with happiness. "I have been the goat on this coast for ten years. They gave me the *Dodd* because nobody else would trust themselves to her. My enemies thought they had seen the last of me. Well, destiny balked 'em."

"And whither, captain," I inquired, "does your proud destiny call you now?"

Harrison grinned at the gibe in my tones, and tucked his fat chin into the collar of his coat. "To the *Madeline* —Hyson & Tullock's big boat."

Now Hyson & Tullock are great shipowners, and their flag flies in every sea, and their skippers constitute a proud association all their own, flying an exceedingly ornate pennant on holidays. I bowed before Harrison, and secretly set Nolan down as a curmudgeon. If Harrison were going up six notches on the strength of losing the *Cyrus Dodd*, it was a sign. It is my business to believe in signs. I kept my eyes on Luke Harrison.

I confess that I saw little in the next three years to make me think Hyson & Tullock were supernaturally wise when they picked Harrison to command one of their ships. He bumped the *Madeline* on a rocky islet in the Persian Gulf his first voyage, knocked twenty thousand dollars' worth of plates out of her while berthing her in San Francisco, and lost her entirely by fire eight months afterward. He was called home, reinvestigated—with Nolan grinning in the courtroom—let off with a hesitating reprimand, and instantly discharged from the service of Hyson & Tullock. He spent two months ashore, and took the steam schooner *Lady B.* to sea. For some time he managed to keep out of the papers. But a storm caught him in ballast off the Columbia River, put him to it to save his crew, and dumped him at last on shore minus his ship and his reputation.

This time the inspectors suspended his license for six months.

"My son," Harrison told me, "they think they'll get me. They won't. I have had more hard knocks than any other man could stand. Look at me! Have they put me down? Not a bit of it. You'll see me yet the biggest captain afloat, respected and honored." He bowed his head solemnly. "I believe in my destiny."

Dear me, thought I, Luke Harrison will go the way of other men who begin by blaming their own mistakes on Providence. He will shortly stop boasting about his destiny and curse it instead. *Then* Captain Harrison will be a tale that is told.

Incidentally I reflected that very few skippers ever recover from the blow of having a license suspended for six months.

Seven months later I saw in the shipping news that Harrison had been appointed master of the barkentine *Major Prince,* an ancient tub relegated to the hardwood trade with Australia. I spent a moment in wondering what the man thought of his destiny now, and proceeded about my business which recently was the outside work for the shipping firm of Latimer Brothers.

For two years I toiled and spun and rose in the office till I was among those present when big affairs were discussed by the brothers. Then one fine morning I woke up to find that the senior

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As quickly as possible I withdrew from the presence and sought the junior partner.

"Man alive!" I protested. "The beach is littered with broken skippers and luckless master mariners. Why pick Harrison?"

Latimer, junior, closed the door of his room and sat down. "Now, look here!" he said. "I had it out with my brother; said the same thing you've just said. But it's settled—Harrison goes master of the *Hyderabad*."

"Why?" I cried.

Latimer, junior, is a philosopher. He is quite willing, even in office hours, to discuss first principles.

"I'll tell you," he said. "I went out into the room where Harrison sat. I intended to shoo him off. But the man sat there as calm as an oyster at high tide. He was seedy and dwindling and unbrushed. But he looked up at me and smiled. It was the smile of a man who has been unavoidably detained, but has managed to arrive in time to save the day. He was the pure optimist. He radiated self-confidence. When I tried to remind him of all that had happened to him and his owners he was a rock. He gave me to understand that he had been born to better things than worrying over petty accidents—'underwriters' little worries,' he called 'em—and inside of five minutes I knew my brother was right. Harrison is our man. Nobody can resist him. Skillful, experienced, alert, and self-confident. Excellent endowments for any man! We need such a man in our business."

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mer steamer and you in my cabin to thank."

I sidetracked the thanks for reasons I did not explain, and demanded to know of Harrison what had happened to him in the lately past years.

He dropped into his swing chair with a sigh, turning his lively face to me.

"I hate to think of 'em all," he said. "Man, I was down and out. I got job after job, and they petered out on me. Hard luck was no name for it. I tell you, there were times when I was ready to give up. But when it was darkest I would take myself in hand and say, 'Luke, you fool! Destiny is looking after you!' And here I am!"

But Harrison wasn't by any means superhuman, after all. In an hour he had opened up his heart to me, bluntly and without any vain recriminations.

"So, you see, they nearly got me," he finished. "When I lost my wife and my home, and my letters came back all marked up with addresses and labeled 'Not found,' I was sick. I truly believe I would have given up and gone to the devil if it hadn't been that a dirty son of a tinker who owned the schooner I was sailing tried to do me out of thirty-five pounds. It made me mad. 'I can stand the hard knocks of fortune,' I said to myself, "but I'm blamed if I don't get my rights out of *this* blackguard before I quit. You see, my real troubles were out of my reach. They took place in foreign lands, and

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Harrison entered those doors like a man coming back from a successful mission. Inside of an hour he had made Latimer, senior, receive him. Together they talked of the *Hyderabad* till the senior partner's dry whisper became almost inaudible.

Naturally it was out of the question to give the man another ship. The underwriters had a say. But Captain Harrison got a job on the dock and seemed contented.

With the man under my eyes I had a chance to study the child of destiny, and found him a really commonplace, awkward, and not too capable chap. He didn't stand out by reason of any wondrous ability or shrewdness. "If you are a man of destiny," thought I to myself, "destiny uses ordinary human clay in the making of her pots."

And yet!

One evening Latimer, senior, summoned me into the sanctum and put a dozen questions relative to Luke Harrison.

"The sum of the matter is," he whispered, "I have been looking about for a man who is the exact person to put up against Mitchell, of the Oriental & Eastern, and Harrison——"

I fled to the junior. "Sir," I implored him, "think quickly. Your brother dreams of putting Luke Harrison back on the bridge of a ship to handle that cutthroat Mitchell; who has been stealing our lighters, bribing our tally men, and doctoring our bunker coal over in Vladivostok. My small savings are invested with you. Harrison may be a man of destiny; is he destined to ruin me?"

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..... you are a religious man at bottom," I remarked.

Harrison didn't think so. "Religion is mostly in the air," he said, with astounding dogmatism. "All right for people who can work things at a distance. I can't. I'm helpless if I'm not right on the spot with my difficulties. Of course I'm a reasonable man. Years ago I learned that every man has a destiny. Look at Napoleon. He didn't hold to his destiny long enough, did he? Look at the Emperor of China. He quit his destiny, didn't he? And they shooed him out of the palace and set up a republic. So I say to myself, 'No matter what happens, I'll stick to my destiny. I'll be knocked about and have hard things said about me, but I'll land somewhere some time!' And the time will come, my son!"

A delicate business! But I made my next question as gently insinuating as possible:

"I fancy you know pretty well where you'll land?"

Harrison laughed genially. "I'll be a big man some day," he answered. Then a cloud darkened his face. "For a minute, anyway," he ended.

That's the way I recall Luke Harrison—in the big, fine cabin of the splendid *Hyderabad,* telling me that his destined years would end in his being a great figure—for a minute, anyway.

He lost the *Hyderabad* in a typhoon.

Latimer Brothers, like all men who have thrown business carefulness to the

"He swears you are his best friend," said Latimer, junior, sourly. "It seems you wished him on us. What do you expect me to do?"

"Get him a job instantly that will remove him from his deadly sphere of influence on the dock. The man has the evil eye. He bewitches us all."

Latimer stared at me dreamily. "He does," he acknowledged. "I never heard of an unluckier dog nor one more bruised by hard misadventure. And every time I go out on the dock I look at him in pity, and he looks back at me with as much serene confidence as a high priest, and seems to say: "You must keep your eye on me. I shall do big things."

"He lost the *Hyderabad* when reinsurance went up to sixty per cent, and I gambled on her turning up," I retorted.

"He did," Latimer, junior, admitted. "And yet the man is somebody. He has never suffered a stroke of bad fortune that wasn't somebody else's fault. His reputation may be bad, but his conduct has been faultless. That is a big thing. I rather admire a man who holds his head up and defies the world to down him."

"So do I—in reason," I replied. "But this is no time to dally with Harrison. Think up something for him to do a world away and send him to do it."

Latimer has his brilliant moments.

"Man, I get you!" he told me. "Let us unspell the spell of Luke Harrison. Heretofore we've banked on his seamanship, his sobriety, his respectability, and his brains. We've never staked our money on his being a man destined to pull through spite of the devil and high water. Call Harrison!"

I summoned Luke, and he came smilingly; neat, taciturn, and ready to save a day—any day.

"Your brother spoke to me about taking the *Tonquin?*" he suggested promptly.

Latimer, junior, closed the door. "Captain," he said quietly, "I must persuade you to accept another position a good deal more burdensome and very dangerous. To tell the truth, we had about given up hopes of doing anything in the matter. But in thinking of you and your abilities I really am convinced that Latimer Brothers will make another trial in this case. I needn't say that I know of no other man on the Pacific whom I would trust a moment. It is what men call a crazy chance."

We both waited, Harrison and I. Could it be possible that Latimer, junior, was going to—insanity? I turned to Luke. It would be the final blow to him. He would think suddenly, "Good Lord! This man Latimer *is* destiny"—and run away. And Luke Harrison must know what this was that was on the carpet.

Harrison merely nodded gravely and with a certain expression of triumph. "I make a guess at what you're driving at, sir," he said.

Latimer never winked an eyelash. He handed the poor fellow his death warrant as smoothly as though it were a medal for good conduct.

"As you know, the United States government has given up any further attempts to relieve the crew of the steamer *Ho-nan,* which was caught in the ice four years ago and disappeared, crew and all. We have made two trials ourselves. In the first we lost the *Sea Gull* and her complement. The second cost us the *Flying Fish* and half her crew. The government vessels report their inability to reach even the lowest latitude where the *Ho-nan* was last reported. But the subject has never been dropped by myself and my brother. The steamer was provisioned for three full years. It is quite possible that the vessel is still frozen in the ice and that her crew still lives. It is really a matter of honor to settle the question. It is now June. I'll give you the *Arno.* Find the *Ho-nan.*"

Luke Harrison nodded—merely nodded! Then he showed us both a new side to his character.

"Certainly," he said. "But I'm getting along in years, sir. I've pulled off a good many hard jobs without getting thanked. I want you to understand

that if I succeed and bring the *Ho-nan's* people back I get credit. Others have tried it and failed. The matter isn't simple. The ship has been lost for four years, isn't it? She may have drifted thousands of miles into the arctic or gone down long ago. Her crew may have got to shore any place in three thousand miles. I have to buck ice and storms and know that I must succeed or not get back myself. It may take me two years. All I want to know is that we three right here understand what I'm up against."

"It is understood," Latimer, junior, said quietly.

Thus did Luke Harrison vanish, he and his destiny. Inside of three months everybody had forgotten the wild expedition into the North and recalled it only occasionally to wag the head and murmur: "Too bad!"

I think that within a whole year I never overheard so much as a hope that Harrison and his devoted crew would succeed. The thing was so utterly hopeless and so completely and incredibly foolhardy that nobody ventured even to utter a prayer.

I fancy we all got free of the old spell and thought ourselves pretty smart, after all. Harrison had imposed on us, but he had fallen a victim to his own overweening conceit. Now he was forever out of the way.

A second year passed, and at its chill close, a rainy afternoon when San Francisco Bay was a mere smudge between the soaked hills, Latimer, junior, called me into his office and said bluntly: "I believe we had better charge both the *Ho-nan* and the *Arno* off the books."

"And Luke Harrison," I added.

"I wonder what he thinks of destiny now, eh?" Latimer mused. "I reckon he found out up there in the ice. Like better men."

"Do you feel guilty?" I demanded.

"I?" echoed Latimer, junior. "I'm sorry for the men who went with him. They were a sorry lot, to be sure, but they trusted Harrison. They must have known his record, too. Their own fault."

"And not a word?" I suggested.

"Not a single, solitary, whispered syllable."

The closed door opened to the thump of a boot, and a man swathed in torn clothes stumbled in. Behind him crowded the office men, gaping, buzzing like flies.

We stared at the visitor, Latimer, junior, and I. A scarecrow, with a maimed face out of which shone overbright eyes. He thrust out a two-fingered hand and flapped a greasy packet on the desk.

"Cap'n Harrison's comp'iments," he croaked.

Latimer, junior, rose, and closed the door. Then he came back and examined the man carefully.

"You aren't Harrison," he said.

"Me? No. I'm off the *Ho-nan*."

Latimer sat down. "Where is the *Ho-nan?*" he asked.

The uncouth and barbaric figure seemed crushed by the tone. "I don't rightly know, sir," he mumbled. "Ice, somewhere. North. Harrison knew—Cap'n Harrison found us."

"How the devil do *you* come here?" demanded Latimer.

"Japanese schooner picked us up off the Kuriles," the man went on in his curiously muffled voice. "Me and Cap'n Harrison, after he got me out of the ice."

"How did he get you out of the ice?" Latimer continued, his dry tones utterly without feeling.

"How?" cried the man. "We were on the *Ho-nan* for three years, frozen solid in the floe. Then the grub and the coal gave out. They died. All but me. And the ship drifted through the wind and snow—always north. I gave up. Then one dark night I crept on deck and saw a light—the first light in two long years. It was Cap'n Harrison. He come aboard the next day all froze up. 'Nd he poked me in the ribs and croaked at me to come along o' him. 'Nd him and I traveled months and months, dragging his sledge after us till we struck open water between

the floes. Pretty soon we came to a cache under a rock on an island where he had a whaleboat. We got in, and he steered south. A schooner beating up along the ice hailed us, and Harrison set me aboard. Sh—sh—shoved me right aboard, sir."

Latimer rose and peered at the man. "Scurvy!" he murmured.

The man nodded. "They died, all of 'em but me. I was on deck and saw Cap'n Harrison's light in the darkness. But the rest was gone."

"Ah," said Latimer, "so they were gone? And did Captain Harrison die, too?"

The man stared at us dumbly, as if that question were beyond his answering.

Then the inflexible Latimer faced me above the inarticulate creature.

"This fellow comes back after being dead for years. And he knows nothing —except that Harrison was the master of his destiny. Where is Harrison? I have my doubts whether this messenger can tell."

"The package, man!" I urged.

And together, while the messenger from the *Ho-nan* blinked at the ceiling, we cut the thick cords that bound the greasy, stained, final word of Luke Harrison. There fell out before us only a chart, thumbed, red-inked, marked here and there with the brief and cabalistic figures used by mariners. Not a scrap of writing! Merely a chart of the Northern seas.

Latimer and I spread it out, closing the door on the curious, and deciphered the story of Luke Harrison's search for the *Ho-nan*. It was a plain, easily read tale: the voyage of the *Arno* up the far seas, her wintering in the arctic circle, her next summer's attempt to penetrate still farther into the upper bays, and her final loss in latitude 81 degrees north. So far a plain narrative. But thence the dull-red line wavered on to other reaches, skirting a nameless cape, and threaded unknown regions till it stopped. That ending was marked by the fair representation of an anchorage.

"Impossible!" Latimer muttered.

I turned on the messenger. "Where is Captain Harrison?" I demanded of him.

The fellow twisted his swollen lips. "Cap'n Harrison says to me: 'You'll go on to San Francisco and tell my owners I found the *Ho-nan*,' says Cap'n Harrison. 'Nd he set me aboard the schooner and tacked and began to beat back to the nor'ard. His compliments, sir, and he found the *Ho-nan*."

"Did he?" rasps Latimer.

So we hustled the poor man away to the hospital, where he lay a month staring at the invisible, quite comfortable and contented, till he closed his eyes for good.

"There goes our last hope of finding out what happened," Latimer, senior, whispered in the office when the news came. "Or, of Harrison's having a witness."

But the skipper of the schooner that had rescued our single survivor and messenger turned up presently to enlarge the account which he had seen in the papers.

"There was a man out in a whaleboat," he told us, smiling and bowing, "and three times I tacked ship and hauled up to him and hailed him. The third time he put the fellow you saw aboard. He was lying in the bilges of the small boat, half dead. Then he refused to be taken off himself. I understood him to say he must go back to find his other ship—the *Arno?*"

"The *Arno*," Latimer answered.

The Japanese bowed civilly. "So far as I could make out he was nearly blind, and his hands and feet were maimed. But he steered north. The last time I saw him he was running before a white squall with the sheet between his teeth and the tiller hugged to his breast."

"That was Captain Harrison," Latimer, junior, remarked. "Why didn't you put a boat over and drag the man aboard your own schooner?"

The Japanese skipper bowed again. "I respected his wish. I did not interfere with his—his destiny."

"He had achieved his destiny," Latimer, senior, whispered in his dry voice.

"But why?" our puzzled caller inquired.

We opened the stained chart that had arrived by that messenger. Latimer, senior, pointed to the dull-red lines that marked the vicissitudes of the *Ho-nan* and the *Arno*. He laid the tip of his finger on the ultimate spot marked by an anchor.

The Japanese skipper bent over, his black eyes glistening. When he had gazed his fill he threw his head and shoulders back.

"The north pole!" he whispered.

Vingie Roe's second story of the "The Thoroughbred"—the Airedale terrier whose start in life was told in the last issue—will appear in the March 7th POPULAR.

THE AMIABLE MR. SATO

WHEN the Russo-Japanese Peace Conference was held at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, in 1905, each set of foreign ambassadors had an official spokesman, or press representative, who gave out to the eighty or more newspaper correspondents from all over the world the daily official statements, and replied—more or less freely—to such questions as the reporters desired to ask. The Japanese press representative was Aimio Sato, who has just been appointed ambassador to the United States. The correspondents got in the habit, before the conference was over, of referring to him as "the amiable Mr. Sato."

On the second or third day of the meeting, when Mr. Sato, resplendent in frock coat and high hat—a Japanese diplomat would not think of giving out even the most informal statement without dressing for the part—was making his usual afternoon announcement to the assembled correspondents, a rather complicated question was put to him by the reporters which he seemed quite unable to understand. The impression he conveyed to the newspaper men was that his English was not quite up to so involved an inquiry; they took turns trying to make him comprehend it, but without avail. He could not seem to make head nor tail of it.

That evening one of the correspondents was sitting on the veranda of the Hotel Wentworth, which was the headquarters of the embassies, when Mr. Sato took a seat beside him, bowing a pleasant good evening.

"It is a beautiful evening," the reporter said, taking pains to speak slowly and simply, so the Japanese could understand him.

"Yes," said Mr. Sato.

"We have had some unusual weather since you came," remarked the correspondent. "A cold day, and a hot day, and a heavy fog, and a terrific thunderstorm, and now this beautiful moonlight night. What do you think of this New England climate?"

Solemnly Mr. Sato replied: "You do not have climate in New England; you have weather."

The correspondent gasped. "That's a good one!" he said.

"Not original," remarked Mr. Sato carelessly. "Mark Twain said it first."

"Say, Mr. Sato!" the reporter exclaimed. "For a man who couldn't understand a fairly simple question this afternoon, you seem to have a pretty fair idea of idiomatic English."

"Perhaps," agreed Sato. "Perhaps. You see, I had to speak English at college. They don't speak Japanese at American universities."

A Chat With You

RECENTLY we noticed that another magazine had made the announcement that it had "cornered" the literary talent of to-day. Announcements of that sort have no terrors for us. We know it isn't so. More than that, we know it is simply nonsense. The magazine has signed up a number of authors, some of whom have done good work and made a name in other publications. All these writers are working at present under a handicap. They must turn out a certain amount of fiction in a certain space of time. It must meet the requirements of one magazine. It is sure to be machine-made fiction. Setting aside the fact that many of the writers may have already done their best work, and that a man who has written one good story is by no means sure of writing nothing but good stories, the whole scheme is false, artificial, and sure to disappoint the expectations aroused.

IT is possible to corner the wheat or the cotton in the United States. These are cultivated crops. They grow where they are planted, and nowhere else. Stories are something entirely different, and so are the men who make them. You can't cultivate a crop of authors. The best you can do for an author is to give him a chance to show what he can do, to encourage his good work, to decline his bad, to give him an opportunity to work out his own destiny. Originality, true observation, dramatic and literary power—neither Burbank nor any other man has ever discovered the seeds from which these plants spring. To corner the literary market is no easier than to corner the winds.

COMMERCIALISM is a good thing in its way. We believe in it. We know, however, that it is the greatest danger that can threaten the work of a writer of real parts and attainment. Whether an author is a good business man or not has nothing to do with it. Some great authors were and more were not. What surely kills an author's literary power is to have him do his writing with an eye to business alone. The more earnest, the more absorbed you are in the story you have to tell, the more interesting you will be. Earnestness, simple straightforward absorption in the tale itself will bring a charm, a power, a taking quality that no considered artifice will ever supply. The difference between the story told by the man who tells it because he feels it is so interesting that others must hear it, and the fabric of the hack, no matter how well-paid, who is writing for the money alone is so great that it needs no trained critical faculty to see it.

WHEN you ask us why we don't give you more stories by this writer or that you will find our answer in what we have just said. What we do for an author is to introduce him to his public and let him speak for himself. We consider this about the best possible gift. We refuse absolutely to coax him to say things he doesn't want to say, or to tell stories that do not interest him. If he

shows that he is of POPULAR caliber, his place is always open to him. We might, it is conceivable, have tied H. C. Rowland to an office with a contract to supply us with a certain amount of fiction a year, so that we could have him in every number. Even if this were good policy for us, would it be good policy for *YOU?* Do *you* want to keep a man talking all the time, whether he wants to or not? We think it much better for Rowland to go abroad and cure wounded soldiers in France and do a number of other interesting things. We think you will agree with us when you read his novel "Cross Bearings," which appears complete in the next issue of the magazine.

ANOTHER thing about the effort to corner the market in literature is the discouraging door that it shuts in the face of the new man. You go on the assumption that there are just so many good writers, and that you have them all. Men and women who can write good fiction are not born every minute, we regret to say. They are born every year or so, and there are always new stars rising in the literary sky. What THE POPULAR has offered, and will continue to offer, is the best possible field for the new author. We confess frankly that we are overloaded with offerings from people of all degrees of education who think they can write but can't. We wish we knew some way of attracting the clever ones and shooing off the others. We don't, and as matters stand we rest content, for the more manuscripts that come to us the better our chance is of getting the real writer. We have a record of picking one or two good ones at least every year. This year we are going to do better. We are preparing to introduce you to several new writers, destined to be well known in a year or so. We have the stories now. We will tell you the names later. If any man has a good story to tell, this is his best market. He needs no introduction. He needn't write us a letter. All we want is the story and the man's name and address. We will attend to all the other details.

YOU had never heard of Buck Connor in all probability a year ago. And now you will look forward to his story, "A Kinsman of Cain," in the March 20th number, knowing that it will be worth while. Witwer stands for something definite in fiction—and his story in the next issue is up to his best mark. Yet it is not so long ago that his first manuscript arrived in our mail. J. Frank Davis, who also has a story in the next issue, had never been heard of as a writer till last summer. We could multiply instances. As for cornering the literary market, we can cheerfully admit that we have no ambitions that way. There are lots of widely advertised wares on the literary market that we would not have at any price. Advertising and talk may make a reputation, but it won't make a good story. We don't want nine-tenths of the things on the literary market at present. All we want is the best. And we are getting it.

Field, Trap, and Target

AGE LIMITS FOR HUNTING

WITH the general adoption of the license system has come the necessity of fixing a minimum age at which licenses may be issued. The practice is by no means uniform, but about half of the States have restrictions of some sort. These restrictions are of three general kinds:

(1) Exemption from the hunting license requirement for children;

(2) Refusal to issue licenses to children; and

(3) Requirement that children must have the written consent of the parent or guardian to obtain a license.

Children under 12 are not required to have a license in Idaho or Utah; under 14 in Montana, Nevada, Oklahoma or Oregon; under 17 (hunting small game) in Michigan; under 21 (hunting small game) in Minnesota. Children under 13 in New Hampshire and Nebraska and under 17 in Arizona do not require a license when hunting with a licensed adult.

New Jersey prohibits children under 10 from hunting with firearms, but upon application of parent or guardian issues a $1 license to citizens of the United States between the ages of 10 and 14, provided they hunt in company with a licensed adult.

Pennsylvania also prohibits children under 14 from hunting, but issues licenses to minors between the ages of 14 and 16 upon application of parent or guardian.

Licenses are not issued to children under certain ages, or only upon written consent of the parent or guardian, in the following States:

	Age
New Jersey	10
Pennsylvania	14
Wyoming (for birds)	14
Wyoming (big game)	15
Rhode Island	15
Wisconsin	15
Connecticut	16
New Brunswick (big game)	16

Written consent required:	Age
Indiana	14
West Virginia	15
Pennsylvania	14 to 16
Ohio	16
Vermont	16
British Columbia	16
Saskatchewan	18
Iowa	18
New Hampshire	18

TRUE GUN FITS

WOULD you woo success at the traps or in the field? Get a gun that fits.

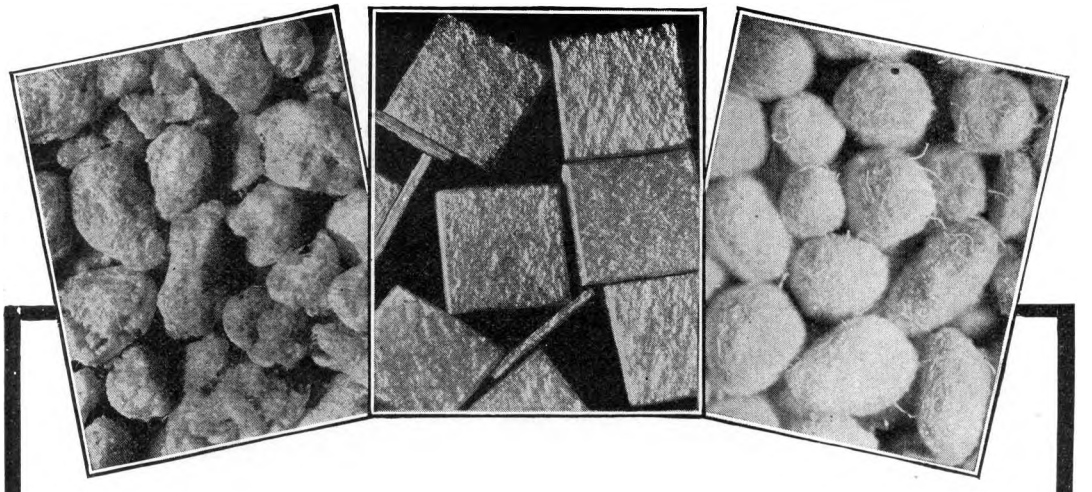
This may seem like a very common remark, inasmuch as most guns are built to standard measurements and are purchased on the same principle. It is, however, almost an axiom that the cause of most exhibits of poor marksmanship rests usually in the fact that the gun used does not fit the shooter.

It is said that Speaker, Wagner, Lajoie, and scores of other "swatters" in the big baseball leagues are partial to their own specific style, shape, and weight of bat. They even go so far as to have their own big sticks made to order.

The same custom holds good in almost every other form of sport. The tennis cracks have their own specific make of racket. The golf champions favor their own particular style of clubs. Even the star billiardists insist upon cues made to certain measure and weight.

True, some folks call it eccentricity, and some call it psychology, while others name it superstition, but as a matter of fact it is just plain common sense. For instance, imagine a runner trying for a world's record in shoes about six sizes too large.

It isn't merely a gun and the ability to shoot that make a first-class shooter. Practice, of course, will help, but no man can expect to reach any point near proficiency until his gun actually becomes part of himself. The mere detail of a half-inch excess rise or fall in the gunstock may be just the thing that throws your shooting off. A stock too long or too short—a comb too straight or too crooked—a grip too large or too small—may be just the detail that causes the loss of the bird or the target.



The Three Standard Powders

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