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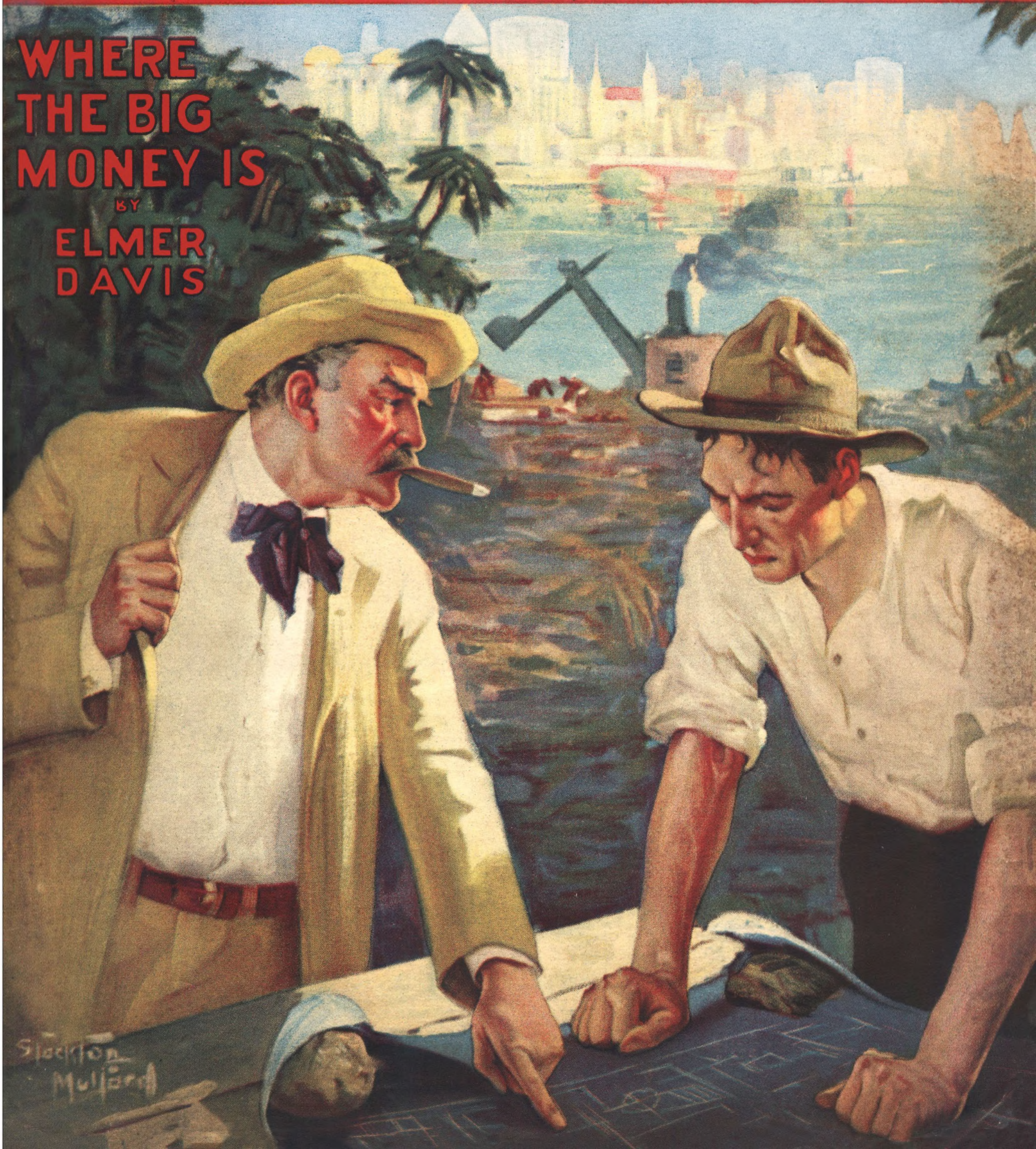

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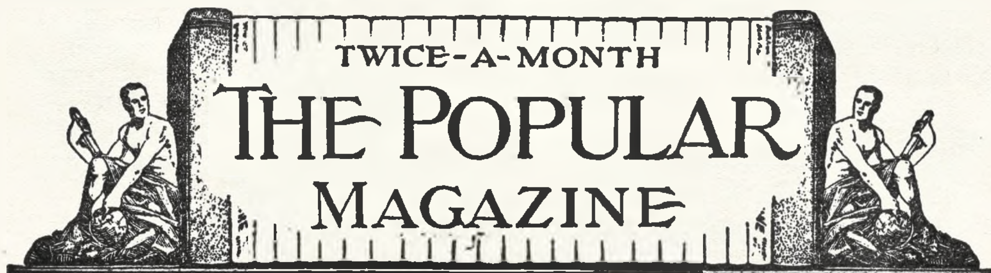

WHERE THE BIG MONEY IS. A Complete Book — **Elmer Davis** — 3
Florida, where all is gold and sunshine.

"I'M GOING NOW." A Short Story — **Frederick Niven** — 98
A man's way of saying good-by.

THE COLT. A Short Story — **Captain Ralph R. Guthrie** — 104
Good blood counts, no matter what colors it runs under.

TIN HATS. A Four-part Story—Part III — **Fred MacIsaac** — 116
Millions and millions of men—all marching.

NO GOOD. A Short Story — **Aimée D. Linton** — 152
Courage that is born of frozen forests.

ONE GOOD TURN, ET CETERA. A Short Story — **Captain A. P. Corcoran** — 155
A boxing champion returns to favor through the back door.

SON OF HIS FATHER. A Short Story — **John Miller Gregory** — 163
The race track has a prodigal son.

MR. SWEENY: TREASURE HUNTER. A Short Story — **Charles R. Barnes** — 172
When safe cracking is a gentle art.

NATURAL METHODS. A Short Story — **Robert McBlair** — 180
Out of the West to Wall Street.

A CHAT WITH YOU. — 191

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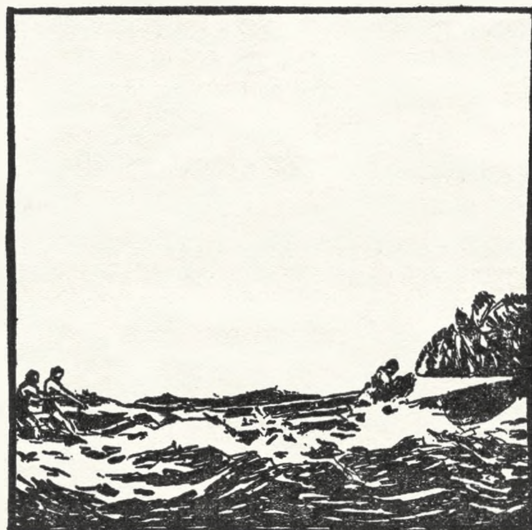


Where the Big Money Is

By Elmer Davis

Author of "The Eastern Front," "The Final Score," Etc.

Florida! the land of sunshine and oranges, of palm-fringed beaches and mile-long hotels, of winter bathing and tarpon fishing—the land of eternal vacation. Florida! where flourished the last and greatest of those mighty land booms which began when Attila the Hun sought homes for his half-fed hordes of barbarians in the fertile valleys of Italy and which have in each century carried waves of adventurers across seas and continents. And near the tip of the pear-shaped State, in Miami, the mushroom metropolis, Myron O'Mara, the czar of promoters, played with the purse strings of a nation.

CHAPTER I.

WALL STREET STUFF.

YES, I knew Myron O'Mara. I can't say I knew him well; nobody ever knew him well but Oscar Satchell. But I was his confidential secretary there at the finish in Miami; and he remembered me in his will, with a legacy of twenty thousand dollars—which is about as if I remembered somebody with a legacy of fifty cents. Did he mean it that way? I don't know; you never could be sure just what the "Old Man" meant. Anyway, I took it. I can't afford to sniff at twenty grand.

What's that? Did I like him? Did Stanton like Lincoln? Did Berthier, who was Napoleon's yes man, like Napoleon? I'm no historian, but I'll bet there were times when Berthier wanted

to shove Napoleon under the guillotine and drop the ax with his own hands. Every headquarters underling feels that way sometimes, about the boss. I'll bet there were times when Berthier thought Napoleon was crazy, as there were times when Stanton thought Lincoln was crazy. For that matter, Napoleon and Lincoln probably were crazy sometimes, though not, perhaps, when Berthier and Stanton thought they were.

All the same, Stanton would have cut his throat for Lincoln, and Berthier would have cut his throat for Napoleon, and I'd have cut my throat for Myron O'Mara. I hated him and I loved him and I thought he was crazy and I worked twenty hours a day for him; and I came about as near understanding him as my Airedale does to understanding me. Probably the Airedale thinks I'm crazy sometimes, but he trusts me and he worships me. That's the way we little fellows feel about a genius. That's the way our whole organization felt about the Old Man.

But beyond that, and despite the grudges I sometimes held against him, I have a special reason for holding Myron O'Mara in kindly remembrance. Everything that I am or ever will be, I owe, in a peculiar sense, to him. And if you say that's not so much, why, I may agree with you; but you'll have to get ready for an argument with my wife, who is a good arguer.

That special obligation goes back to the first time I ever saw the Old Man—not in Miami, at the tail end of the insane real-estate boom of 1925; not in Wall Street when I was a financial reporter and O'Mara was an operator who kept the whole market uneasy; but back, a long way back, to our first meeting, in the panic autumn of 1907, at a place called Synder's Junction.

Never mind where Snyder's Junction was. Somewhere between Pittsburgh and Omaha—that's enough. A little yellow-painted station in the hills, where a branch line from Smallwood, our local metropolis, met one of the great transcontinental roads. There were only two trains a day each way on the branch road, for Smallwood was geared up to a wholly different traffic system and got little freight and less passenger trade from the east-and-west artery; and I, eighteen years old and just out of high school, was station agent, and as proud of myself as if I'd been E. H. Harriman.

My father was a farmer—not a very prosperous farmer at best, in those stony hills; and if you remember, nobody was prosperous in the panic year of 1907. I couldn't go to college, unless I worked my way, and if I had to work I preferred to go on working at the station where I had already helped out of summers, picking up telegraphy and earning a reputation as one who could be trusted with ten dollars in the cash drawer.

Why should I go to college, anyway? Snyder's Junction had been good enough for my ancestors and it was good enough for me. I was getting forty-five a month and due for a raise; in time I'd marry some girl I'd known in high school, and beget sons and daughters, and dwell in that country even unto this day.

Yes, I'd be at Snyder's Junction yet, but for Myron O'Mara.

ONE bright November afternoon the two forty-five passenger train from Smallwood pulled in at our station and half a dozen passengers got off. Some of them were local residents who went their way, but three came up to me as I stood talking to the conductor. The foremost, a fussy little man with a turned-up mustache and a wing collar and a bell-bottomed overcoat, barked peremptorily:

"Station agent! You'll have to flag the three ten eastbound. Two passengers for New York."

Fresh kid that I was, that made me sit up. We'd had passengers for Washington, occasionally, but this was the first time since I'd been there that our station had been honored by customers bound for New York. Moreover, I noticed from the corner of my eye that their baggage was being piled up on the gravel platform, bright-yellow bags of heavy leather, and a couple of boxes that gave me a grand metropolitan thrill when I realized that they must contain silk hats.

"Yes, sir," I said, with more respect than I'd ever shown to anybody in my life. "But the three ten's over an hour late. She'll be worse before she's better, too."

"What's that?" came a resonant voice behind my fussy little man. "Enters, what kind of a transcontinental road is this, anyway?"

I quivered with excitement. So this little man was J. P. Enters, president of the First National Bank of Smallwood! This was the biggest day we'd known at Snyder's Junction since President Roosevelt's special train roared through in a cloud of dust! I looked over Enters' shoulder at the man who had spoken, and ever since that moment Smallwood has looked like a hick town to me.

HE was big and very broad—no wonder; Myron O'Mara's first job was in a rolling mill—he wore a fur-lined overcoat and a pearl scarfpin; his blond hair showed curly under his derby hat; and he had a heavy, flowing blond mustache, and an air of command. Don't forget the air of command! It commanded confidence, among other things. Even in that frantic autumn, when timorous persons were taking their money out of the bank and hiding it under the mattress, he looked like somebody you'd trust with your life savings. And his eyes were bright and blue, the blue Irish eyes that can be liquid and melting and persuasive, and then turn in a second into bright, blazing steel.

"Lad!" he said to me, and I felt myself stiffen like a buck private called out of the ranks by the colonel. "Do you let your trains be as late as this every day?"

"Not every day, sir, but pretty often."

"Hell, Oscar, let's buy this railroad and make it run on time!"

I looked at the man he addressed, and as I thought of Oscar Satchell at that first glance I've thought of him ever since—the American eagle. A big, hooked nose jutted out of a sallow, bony face, a mop of gray hair was roached back from his high forehead. O'Mara's bright-eyed, genial amplitude had given a kind of dignity to Snyder's Junction by the mere fact that he stood on the station platform; but Snyder's Junction shrank back to its proper size when Satchell looked at it. If I ever go to heaven, I hope I won't meet Satchell there; he'll need only to look over the pearly gates and the golden streets with that silent, sardonic depreciation to make me feel that it isn't much of a town.

"You've bought enough, governor," he answered O'Mara. "Enough for a panic year, anyway. Got to leave a few railroads for Hill and Harriman."

O'Mara smiled, shrugged, and looked down the track to the curve where it was lost in the hills; then he turned back with brisk authority.

"Well—if we've got to kill an hour here, let's have a little game."

"Three-handed's no good," Satchell protested, and I could see that J. P. Enters looked relieved. No wonder, it needed only one glance at O'Mara to tell you that any game he sat in was a hard one, and a big one, too.

"So it is," O'Mara assented. "But our station agent doesn't look very busy. Ever play poker, lad?"

"Me?" I gasped. "Why, yes, sir, but not the kind of game you gentlemen play."

O'Mara laughed; something in the benign gaze of his blue eyes promoted me to the rank of temporary gentleman for the duration of the emergency.

"What kind of game do you play around here?" he asked.

"Mostly," I confessed, "a nickel ante and a ten-cent limit."

"All right. Sit down here on this baggage truck where you can hear your sounder, and we'll play for a nickel ante and a ten-cent limit."

Well, if Frank Chance had asked me to fill in at shortstop for the Cubs, I couldn't have been any more overwhelmed. I'd caught J. P. Enters' deep breath of relief when the big man mentioned a ten-cent limit. I didn't know who he was, this big man who talked about buying railroads, but I could see that he looked as godlike and terrifying to Enters, our local Crœsus, as Enters looked to me. All the same, if the big fellow wanted me to sit in his game, I'd sit in for as long as I could stand it. And I suppose that was the moment in which I outgrew Snyder's Junction.

"Oscar, you'll find cards and chips in the smallest bag. Now, lad——" He laid a hand on my arm, and I could feel electric currents shooting into me and jazzing me up. "What's your name?"

"Victor Bentley, sir."

"I'm Myron O'Mara."

I knew the name, as I knew of Morgan and Harriman, Lawson and Gates and Heinze, and with no more discrimination—one of those Wall Street fellows you read about in the muckraking magazines. But this was the first time I'd ever been spoken to by anybody you read about in the magazines, or anywhere else except in the *Hopkins County Herald.* And before I could stammer my "pleased to meet you," he was hypnotizing me into shaking hands with Enters.

"Mr. Enters, Mr. Bentley; and Mr. Oscar Satchell, the smartest lawyer between City Hall Park and the Battery. Drag up a suit case, Oscar; we'll use it for a table and sit on the truck. White chips a nickel, reds and blues and yellows, all a dime."

I had about two dollars and I decided I'd have to play them close to my belt, for with a ten-cent limit these millionaires would call everything. I opened the first pot for a nickel on a pair of queens; Enters and Satchell stayed, and O'Mara lifted it a dime. I saw my forebodings justified; they'd cross-raise me out before the draw, with that ten-cent limit. But after I'd seen his raise, the others merely saw it, too. They drew four cards apiece, O'Mara one.

I caught a third queen and checked it; Enters dropped and Satchell checked. O'Mara tossed his hand away.

"Four diamonds and a spade," he sighed. "That's no sound investment in a panic year."

My three queens were better than Satchell's pair of aces, and I'd won sixty cents. That was money, in Snyder's Junction.

BEFORE the hour was up, I'd won six dollars and learned more about human nature than in all my life before. J. P. Enters showed the caution proper to a country banker—but his judgment was poor; his luck was nothing to brag about; he was behind the game. Satchell was winning, but he didn't pretend to be interested in our puny game—I didn't know then that he never pretended to be interested in anything, and seldom was—he bet them when he had them, threw them away when he didn't, his blank, gray eyes roving restlessly down the track where the eastbound express was to appear.

But Myron O'Mara had been losing

—nine or ten dollars at least—and I felt that he deserved to lose. The man had no enterprise. Gradually, as I diagnosed his play, I dared to take chances. He opened a pot and I raised it on two big pair; and when he checked after a two-card draw, I took a chance and bet a dime, even though I hadn't filled. There was seventy cents of other people's money in that pot; he might have merely held up a kicker; and I didn't believe, after studying the man for an hour, that he had the nerve to call unless he had them.

He ran out—chucked his hand away. It fell face up, and I saw three perfectly good nines as I raked in the money.

Satchell laughed. "First threes you've held in an hour, governor, and a full house against them. Your luck's running bad."

I tried to pull a poker face as O'Mara answered genially:

"It will turn, Oscar. It always has."

Something about that genial certainty made me uneasy, but only for a moment. For here I was playing poker with J. P. Enters, and a Wall Street financier, and a Wall Street lawyer—and I was high man. I was nearly seven dollars ahead, in itself no small event around Snyder's Junction; but more than that, I'd proved myself a better man than Myron O'Mara of Wall Street, New York. I had better judgment, more nerve and more luck.

Why should I stick around here in the hills? My brother Wilbur was to inherit the farm, and I was certainly wasting my talents as station agent at Snyder's Junction. Half the great men of America had started in life as farmer boys like me; and until this triumphant poker game opened my eyes, I had never dreamed that I, too, might be destined to be one of the great men of America. Time to be up and doing, if I could trim Wall Street financiers by sheer superior merit—up and doing great things: making millions, buying yachts and advising presidents——

For the first time in my life I was hearing, still faint and far away, that siren call of the big money.

A nearer call broke in on my musings—my sounder, clicking the SJ that was meant for me; I told them to deal me out and hopped for the station. When I came back, they were laughing.

"My luck's turned, lad," said O'Mara. His full, velvety voice and mellow, velvety eyes made you feel that the whole world—even the big winner—ought to be glad of his good fortune. "My luck's turned—too late to do any good. I had four aces before the draw and won twenty cents; and the train's due in five minutes."

"No, it isn't," I told him. "Just heard that it's twenty minutes later."

Oscar Satchell laughed aloud for the first time—a single, raucous squawk. "Governor, you can get even with the board yet!"

I lifted the next one on two pair and failed to fill, but I was swollen with success and raised anyway, against O'Mara's one-card draw. He promptly raised me back; I called, with kings up, and found that I'd run into an ace-high flush. He let out a deep-chested roar of laughter.

"Thought I didn't have 'em, 'Mister Good Player?' That's what Morgan thought when he tried to take Mohawk Utilities away from me. Let's see what I get this time."

He got three kings and none of us got anything with which to give him an argument.

It was his deal; he delayed the game to take out a cigar case and offer it around. Satchell, like myself, was rolling his own cigarettes; but Enters took a cigar with visible awe. I'd never seen such cigars, so big, or so black, or so perfectly shaped; and when they were lighted a cloud of blue vapor drifted

across the station platform, changing everything like the incense of a sorcerer.

Through that blue drift the landscape around Snyder's Junction seemed distorted and askew; and the aroma lifted me out of everything I'd ever known and gave me a sort of hasheesh vision of a wonder world where cigars like these were smoked by men in silk hats, walking through Peacock Alleys with women in evening gowns and diamond tiaras.

"That must be a Henry Clay," I ventured, mentioning something I'd heard of but never seen.

All three laughed, as O'Mara dealt the cards.

"My private brand, Bentley, made by a friend of mine in Havana," said he. "King Edward the Seventh has begged him to make some up for him, too, but he won't do it. Myron O'Mara's private brand is reserved for Myron O'Mara. However, I send the royal Edward a couple of boxes every Christmas, and he seems glad to get them. Pick up your hand, lad; I'm going to take your money."

He did.

I NEVER saw a man change so much in five minutes as O'Mara did with his luck. At first I'd admired him, and been afraid of him, and liked him—in a respectful way—more than I ever liked any human being at first sight. In his hour of losing play I'd come to despise him as a small-minded man who never took a chance. Now, within five minutes, I hated him.

He won almost every pot, and he not only won but rubbed it in. He laughed and gloated; he accused us each and all of cowardice and stupidity when nothing was the matter, except that we didn't have the cards. He made himself so insufferable that we stayed with him on every pot, and raised him on every draw, just in the hope of being able to silence that resonant, deep-chested mockery. That is, I did and Enters did. Satchell seemed unaffected by O'Mara's abuse, and gradually I perceived that Satchell was used to it, that O'Mara must always be cautious when the cards were running badly and insolently reckless when they were running well.

It took time for something else to percolate—a dawning suspicion that this insolence was calculated, that the man was trying to anger Enters and me into calling everything. It seemed absurd that a man worth millions should work so hard over a few dimes, but growing suspicion finally settled into certainty—too late. By that time my winnings were gone, and even a dime or two of my original patrimony; and already I'd set my flag for the train that was due in three minutes more.

"One more hand," said O'Mara, riffling the cards, "and let's make it a good one. Quarter limit and everybody ante a quarter."

I was never much of a church member, but I think I prayed for four aces as I chucked in my money. I got two of them on the deal and opened. J. P. Enters lifted it, and I figured he must have nothing less than a pat straight flush. Satchell strung along and O'Mara gave it another boost. I parted with half a dollar, feeling rather seasick; but that was all before the draw, when a third ace heartened me considerably.

Satchell and O'Mara had drawn three cards apiece, Enters only one. There was four dollars in the pot and my three aces might take it. I had only seventy cents' worth of chips in front of me, but I could call for as much as that would cover. I checked, and felt sicker still when Enters bet a quarter and O'Mara raised him.

What's that? I ought to have dropped? Certainly I ought to have dropped. But in twenty minutes my fortune had sunk from the dizzy peak

of nine dollars down to seventy cents. If I dropped I'd quit loser, and a dollar and thirty cents was a good deal to lose in those days, around Snyder's Junction. O'Mara had done some bluffing since things began to come his way and he might be bluffing again; after all, my three aces would be hard to beat with a three-card draw. As for Enters, maybe he hadn't bettered his two pair.

YOU see the fallacy of my reasoning, of course; the reasoning of one who has lost more than he can afford and thinks he has a faint chance of rescuing it by spending a little more. But I was only eighteen and I'd never been around. I called, with fifty of my seventy cents, and then my heart trickled right out through the soles of my shoes, for both of them raised.

I laid my hands on my last twenty cents—and paused. Our farm was five miles away. When the night agent relieved me at six o'clock, I'd go home on the trolley—if I had twenty cents. Otherwise I'd walk, and get home two hours late to a cold supper. I paused, and O'Mara grinned at me.

In our casual conversation, I'd told them that I went home on the trolley. It hadn't occurred to me that O'Mara would remember that, even for an hour; but he never forgot anything connected with money—even twenty cents.

"Game lad!" he applauded softly. "You can call for what's there—upward of six dollars—if you don't mind running the risk of walking home. Let's see, now, how much sporting spirit there is around Snyder's Junction?"

I stared into those melting, blue eyes, wickedly derisive, and I saw through his game. Once more he was taunting me into betting foolishly against a sure thing. Twenty cents was less than nothing to Myron O'Mara, but I'd observed him long enough to understand that getting a man's last twenty cents would give him a thrill.

Wall Street stuff, I reflected bitterly; for in that muckraking age we were taught to see Wall Street as the vampire that sucked the lifeblood out of the rest of the country. Wall Street was lying in wait for all the sucker money it could ensnare—even my last twenty cents.

Well, this time Wall Street was going to be fooled. I was too smart for him. He had the rest of it, but he wouldn't make me walk home. I dropped the chips, and dropped my hand. O'Mara forgot me and looked at Enters.

J. P. Enters was showing signs of emotion; he wet his lips, he squirmed.

"Only us left, Mr. O'Mara?" he asked, with unnatural joviality. "Then what do you say we take off the limit?"

O'Mara settled a little, like a cat gathering itself for a spring. "All the way off," he said softly.

Enters pulled out a bill fold and covered the heap of chips with a yellow bill that bore a big C on the back. When I realized that C meant a hundred dollars, I forgot my own losses at the sight of this huge piece of money.

"My, my!" said O'Mara. "Only a banker would have that much cash in a panic year. But let me see——" His wallet was out; he dropped four fifties on top of the century.

Enters looked a little worried, but put down two more hundred-dollar bills. O'Mara sat back and smiled at him—a friendly, kindly smile.

"Enters," he said, "this is getting kind of steep for a friendly game. I don't want to take so much of your money. You know I wouldn't bet them if I didn't have them. You're putting your trolley lines into my syndicate because you trust my business judgment. Do you think I'd be such a fool as to waste hundreds of dollars on a poor hand?"

"If you don't want to waste your money," said Enters—and there was a greedy undertone in his voice—"you can drop."

"I never drop when I have them, Enters. But suppose you take back that last hundred. Just call me, and we'll have a show-down."

"You can have a show-down if you'll see that last hundred."

O'Mara sighed. "I don't like this sort of thing between friends; but if you insist——"

He reached into his wallet; he put down another hundred-dollar bill; and then he took out a piece of green paper that had me gasping and staring, wondering if Snyder's Junction had been moved bodily over into the "Arabian Nights." For the bill bore a figure—1000.

J. P. Enters looked about as appalled as I felt, for that was a good deal of real money for any man to bet on a card game in that panic autumn. He fingered his roll—then, with an awful "good-by-sweetheart-good-by" expression on his face, he thrust it back into his pocket.

"I guess you've got them, Mr. O'Mara."

He dropped his hand, face downward; the eastbound express whistled for the curve and J. P. Enters walked away, to the edge of the platform. O'Mara raked in the money with a whoop; his hand fell face upward and with a fury of chagrin I saw that he had had only three sixes. Satchell turned over Enters' hand—four treys. The two men from Wall Street looked at each other with slow grins, and the curl of O'Mara's lips completed, so far as I was concerned, the eternal damnation of J. P. Enters.

"No wonder he's staying in Smallwood," Satchell observed.

"He's a lightweight." O'Mara dismissed our local deity with a shrug. "What I'm really proud of is making the kid throw away the three aces that would have taken that first six dollars."

For the first time since I'd seen his hand, I found my voice.

"You go to hell!" I said. "That was a dirty trick."

Satchell grinned. "You may call it a dirty trick around Snyder's Junction, boy; but in the great world of business, it's known as applied psychology."

O'Mara laughed like a booming bell and clapped his hand on my shoulder, and somehow his touch drained the bitter hatred out of me.

"Lad, you've got a lot to learn, but you've had some high-class tutoring this afternoon."

"I certainly have," I agreed. "If a man with a thousand dollars in his pocket works that hard to win six——"

The train roared in, slowing to a stop. O'Mara turned, then looked at me.

"Bentley, the baseball season lasts only six months a year; but a good player keeps in condition the year round Take it to heart, lad. Take it to heart." He swung up on the Pullman steps. "Come see me in New York some day and get your money back—if you can."

"I certainly will!" I called after him.

I walked home, even though I had my twenty cents, and got there long after supper, though of course mother had kept something warm for me. In the kitchen Wilbur was cleaning his shotgun. Father was reading the *Hopkins County Herald* by the oil lamp.

"You're good and late!" he snorted.

"Missed the trolley," I evaded. "Didn't want to wait for the next one."

"Huh! You'd better not miss 'em after winter's set in."

"I won't be there when winter's set in," I told him; for I had been thinking, in that long walk across the hills.

"What's that? Why won't you be there?"

"I'm going to enter the State uni-

versity after the Christmas holidays—work my way through."

They stared at me, dumfounded.

"Well, for Pete's sake!" Wilbur grunted. "Why?"

"I discovered this afternoon," I told him, "that I've got a lot to learn. It's time I was getting a start."

But I didn't dare confess that the State university was only the first stop-over on the long journey whose end was in Wall Street.

CHAPTER II.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT.

WE had a professor of history at the State university who held the view, rather novel in those days, that history was not something that had stopped when the textbooks were written. History was something we were all living now, to be studied in the newspapers and the magazines, even the muckraking magazines. And I remember this professor observed, once, that Myron O'Mara was a man who had been born ten years too late.

He was right. By the time I got to New York, in 1912, O'Mara had settled down pretty much to the business of playing the market, but it never quite satisfied him. He was fundamentally an organizer, a promoter; what he loved was taking a dozen separate industries capitalized at ten million dollars—and worth ten million dollars—and melting them into one big corporation capitalized at twenty million; then selling half the stock—enough to pay for the industries—and keeping the rest himself.

It's a great old game, and as everybody knows it was worked a thousand times in the Golden Age between the election of 1896 and the panic of 1907; but O'Mara only got in on the tail end of it. The stuff he did best was beginning to go out of fashion about the time he got money enough and standing enough to do it on the grand scale.

Still, he earned a considerable reputation by hanging on to his Mohawk Utilities Company when old Morgan tried to take it away from him—"to teach the young rooster a lesson," I've heard he said—and selling it to Morgan for twice what it was worth at a later juncture when Morgan really needed it. Also, in that panic of 1907, he merged a lot of trolley lines to the profit of everybody, even the public. In a panic year he got most of them cheap; but even in a panic year, Myron O'Mara could find money to swing his deal.

I'd meant, of course, to go around and ask him for a job when I got to New York; but he and Satchell were in Europe then, so eventually I got a job as a reporter. Notoriously O'Mara hated reporters. The muckraking magazines and newspapers had cut him up about his Anawam Power combination, and the things he'd done to city councils and a legislature or two in putting it over, and somehow the clamor got through to his wife. Satchell told me, years later, that this newspaper denunciation had undoubtedly hastened her death—she died in 1910—and while O'Mara was always something of a philanderer, even in her lifetime, it hurt him to have her think he was a crook.

So when I started to work on the *Morning Record*, I heard so much about O'Mara's hatred of reporters that I never dared even to call on him on my day off. And then one evening, when I'd been on the paper about eight months, I was hustled over to his home on Murray Hill.

This was in 1913, when the Federal Reserve Act and the Democratic tariff bill were hanging fire in Congress, and business all over the country had stopped while people waited to see what would happen. O'Mara always liked to work when other people were afraid to start anything, so he'd seized that moment to combine a string of knitting mills.

There was a grand howl from some radical statesmen who accused him of monopoly—as a matter of fact, his combination lowered prices—and a suit or two by minority interests. One night our paper got a flash from its Washington office that O'Mara had been indicted for conspiracy in restraint of trade, and I was sent over to see what he had to say about it.

YOU may wonder why a cub was sent out on a big story like that. Well, perhaps because O'Mara never talked to reporters and presumably wouldn't now. Satchell, who did his talking when it had to be done, was in Washington trying to head this off. Also the only financial writer in the office at the moment was busy; the stars were tied up on a big police story; and I—well, for a cub I stood pretty high.

Higher than I deserved. I'd written a murder story the week before that had earned me a bonus; but the facts had been easy to get and I happened to have a knack of writing swiftly, and fairly well, that always made my stuff look better than it was. So I was regarded as a coming man around the office; and, naturally, I so regarded myself.

On the steps of O'Mara's brownstone, a group of men were trying to puncture the impervious blandness of a butler who kept repeating that Mr. O'Mara would see no one and had nothing to say. These were the best financial reporters in New York, in the world, but as I lurked at the foot of the steps, getting the lay of the land, I could see they were getting nowhere.

I pushed through the crowd and confronted the butler. "Tell Mr. O'Mara," I said, "that a man from Snyder's Junction has come to get his money back."

For if I made O'Mara talk, when others couldn't, I'd get another bonus.

The butler vanished, leaving me to reflect that of course a man like O'Mara wouldn't remember that card game on a baggage truck, six years ago. The other reporters began to ask me questions—none of them knew me; I stalled, and then the door opened and O'Mara stood there, splendid in evening dress, with a curl of smoke floating from one of those "Arabian Nights" cigars. He was older, heavier; his blond hair was graying; but he was a magnificent figure just the same, and his blue eyes were melting and genial as he came forward and clasped my hand.

"Victor Bentley!" His voice was full-throated, velvety. Then he looked at the group behind me; his face turned icy. "But you've fallen into bad company, lad. Come in and talk to me. We'll let these jackals snap."

I felt a surge of professional pride—yes, I was young. As a reporter he wouldn't admit me, but I couldn't go back on my salt.

"I'm a jackal, too," I said defiantly. "The *Record* sent me over to see what you have to say about this indictment."

He laughed silently. "I never talk to reporters. But come in, lad, and we'll have a chat together as—men of the world."

Of course what I ought to have done, what the others all expected me to do, was to go in with him and wheedle a statement out of him, then come back and pass it around. But I was stubborn, and the irony in his voice had given me the needed stiffening; I felt that I was defending a principle.

"I'm a reporter to-night," I insisted. "I can't come in unless they all come in."

His eyes swept the faces behind me; he was mellowly amused. "What do you think of that, gentlemen of the press? I've given some personal attention to this lad's education, but he's no credit to his teacher yet. He won't come in unless they all come in! You'll never get anywhere that way, lad. Let the others follow if they can; but don't

wait for them. Break in where you see an opening; if you don't see it, make it; but be damn careful who you take in with you. I took some Hartford Yankees in with me on this deal; I'm making money for them, but they can't forgive me for making money for myself, too. That's why I'm in this jam. Take it to heart, lad. Come see me at the office some day when you're off duty, and we'll talk. But if you won't come in to-night unless they all come in—why, you don't come in."

He stepped back; the door began to close. Over my shoulder somebody called:

"But the department of justice says that——"

O'Mara smiled easily. "Let them say what they like. Gentlemen, I ask you a question. When are three sixes better than three aces? Young Bentley here can give you the answer—when I hold the three sixes. Good night!"

We went down the steps; I who had held the spotlight for five minutes was again unnoticed. Behind me I heard somebody mumbling:

"Hartford Yankees. That means the Patchens, of course." And another—"Confidential like hell! He didn't say it was confidential, did he?"

Merry fellows, I thought, to jest so when they had got nothing. With gloom, for I was going to miss an expected bonus, I told the night city editor that O'Mara had nothing to say.

But over breakfast the next morning I saw a headline in the *Herald:*

O'MARA DEFIES GOVERNMENT; SAYS HE HOLDS HIGH HAND; PATCHEN INTERESTS BLAMED FOR PROMOTER'S INDICTMENT.

Under it was a column-long story that began:

Myron O'Mara, indicted for conspiracy in connection with the Telantic Knit Goods merger, last night expressed his scorn for the government's case. "Three sixes beat three aces," said the promoter, "when I hold the three sixes."

Talking to reporters for the first time in years, Mr. O'Mara set forth his philosophy of business with picturesque informality. "Be damn careful whom you take in with you," he said——

Every paper in town had it—even the *Record,* though our story was obviously a mere rehash of what the others had printed in their first editions. I went to the office convinced that I was fired already, but when the city editor heard my story, he saw the funny side of it.

"We were all young once," he told me charitably. "You may learn."

CHAPTER III.

THE BIG BOOM.

I DID learn—to know news when I saw it, to smell it out when it was invisible, to cultivate an acquaintance, not for my own pleasure, but for the interest of my paper. But the more I learned, the harder I worked; and what with one thing and another it was twelve years before I had time to look back and estimate the education of Victor Bentley. The fall of 1925; and I'd never have got around to it, even then, if I hadn't been flat on my back in the hospital, recovering from a nervous collapse.

I was a successful man. They called me that back home in Snyder's Junction; they even called me that in New York. For years I had been financial editor of the *Record,* earning a pretty good salary, as newspaper salaries go, acquainted with most of the big men in Wall Street and half the big politicians in New York—as a newspaper man's acquaintance goes.

Lately I'd decided that it was time to use this acquaintance for my own profit rather than the paper's, so I'd given up my job and opened an office as financial publicity counsel. I knew that within a year I'd be making twice as much as ever before; but it took most of my savings to open the office—and then

twelve years of overwork had their effect and I broke down.

So here I was, thirty-seven years old, and flat on my back in every sense of the word. The office had had to be closed before it was really started and it would take all the money I had left to pay hospital bills; for my salary had been good only as newspaper salaries go. Successful—well, yes, as success goes in New York; I was one of the town's ten thousand successful failures. Anybody would tell you that I was successful, but I was sick and broke, despondent and lonely.

An unhappy love affair, years back, had left me woman shy; I lived alone in a side-street hotel, withdrawing more and more from even such social life as I had time for. I worked; I played a little duffer's golf on Sundays, with bankers or credit men; I went to dinners of the Chamber of Commerce, and the Iron and Steel Institute, and the Investment Bankers' Association; but of the New York you read about, outside of Wall Street, I saw no more than if I'd stayed in Snyder's Junction.

I HAD a large acquaintance; a hundred people had called on me at the hospital, a dozen had called twice; but only one or two men kept coming every fortnight or so during the months I was there, and they were men who would miss me if I died, because they were as lonely as I. As for the bankers and politicians I knew so well, who put their arms about my shoulders and called me "Victor," because they were afraid of me, or thought they could use me—why, dozens of them had written me polite notes of condolence, and a good many had sent me flowers, or wine, or cigars; and one or two, about whom I knew facts unpublished and unpleasant, had even called on me, to see if there was any hope that I might be going to take my secrets to the grave.

But none of the lot really seemed to care whether I left the hospital in a taxi or a hearse, except Myron O'Mara.

And, curiously, I was indebted to O'Mara for the one thing—the two things—I had really learned in those twelve years.

I knew him no better than I knew a dozen other big men in the Street; he still hated reporters, or any kind of publicity except advertising that ran as he had O. K.'d it. But once I'd cajoled him into giving an interview that stirred up a good deal of comment; he pretended to be annoyed at the reverberations, but I knew he really liked it. I saw him and Satchell often downtown; often, for that matter, at his apartment on Park Avenue or Satchell's suite in the Biltmore. Sometimes I went to his parties—opulent affairs of orchids and champagne, emerald bracelets and backless evening gowns and dollar cigars; parties where you met O'Mara's yes men and dependents, with their wives, and world-famous bankers without their wives, and beautiful ladies from the very top of musical comedy and near the top of the pictures. Perfectly respectable parties; still, the world-famous bankers didn't bring their wives.

At one of these parties I met the only girl who ever knocked me headlong and gasping at sight. She was a sister-in-law of one of O'Mara's hangers-on, pretty and penniless, frankly out to marry rich. I wanted her; so did one of O'Mara's associates in the trolley syndicate, a man with about twenty millions. I ran him hard and beat him out; and then O'Mara gave a party to celebrate our engagement, and she met an army aviator from Mitchel Field, and ran off to Greenwich with him and got married that very night.

Was this reckless folly? Well, I dine with them once a year, in Garden City; they may be bluffing, but they look like the happiest married couple I know.

Anyway, that taught me my first limi-

tation. I had no talent for women. After that, I stayed away from them.

The second lesson came harder; it took years. But at last—I mused on my back in the hospital—I had learned the hardest of all lessons for any man who works in Wall Street: to be deaf to the call of the big money.

It's bound to get you, when you see one man after another rocket up into sudden wealth—messenger boys and clerks and ignorant newcomers blossoming out as operators, as plungers, settling down as solid men of fortune, pillars of society. It isn't human to see that happening around you and not hope it will happen to you, not to try just as hard as you can to make it happen to you.

For years I played the market when I had any money—sometimes on the most expert advice, sometimes on hunches of my own. Sometimes I won —but what I won always went back into the bottomless pit and usually took a little more with it. And Myron O'Mara still retained that ironic interest in my education that he'd begun that afternoon at Snyder's Junction.

Once I took a tip of his and lost every nickel I had, perceiving too late that he had given it to me because he knew I'd pass it on to a few choice friends, and they to their friends, and so on, to his great advantage. Again I took a tip of his, and got cold feet eventually, and pulled out four thousand dollars ahead, when if I'd stuck a week longer, I'd have made thirty thousand.

I hated him, often, when I knew he'd deliberately misled me; but I saw at last that he was making me use my own head, do my own thinking. The favors I did for him—big favors, one or two of them—were something he accepted as requiring no return. Perhaps he knew, long before I saw it, that the biggest favor he could do for me was to let me find out for myself if I had that inborn feeling for money, or the equally inborn luck, that makes men rich.

I hadn't. After twelve years I had come to see that money, like kissing, goes by favor—the favor of fortune—that an attraction for unearned wealth is as much a part of a man's chemical constitution as an attraction for women.

MEANWHILE, there was O'Mara's letter, the first I'd received in months; for three years before his health had threatened to give way and he had thrown up all active work and gone off to cruise in his yacht. Oscar Satchell, who might have had one of the three best practices in Wall Street if he hadn't devoted himself solely to O'Mara's law business, deliberately elected to retire with him. They'd been abroad, and come back; I knew that much; yet it was an astounding surprise to get a letter from him with a Miami postmark.

A surprise and a stimulant. For the letter came on a desolate, rainy afternoon in autumn, when the bright days of the football season were giving place to winter. The rain poured down, cold and unending; in a city driven back to soft coal by the anthracite strike, every chimney oozed out masses of sticky, black smoke that blended with the fog and rain to make one heavy, dun mass, cold and wet and foul and dripping. The crystal-bright atmosphere of New York was spoiled for the winter; as I stared out of my hospital window I felt for the first time away from home, a stranger in the town I'd loved and lived in for twelve years. And then this letter from Florida:

CERULEAN ISLES
MYRON O'MARA, President,
Bernard J. McCloskey Building,
Miami, Florida.

November 10, 1925.

DEAR VICTOR BENTLEY: I've just heard that you've been ill, and want you to know that I wish you the happiest and speediest of

recoveries. But when you're well, lad, don't rush back into the grind too soon. Take the winter off. I hear you've given up your office. Come down here, lad, and learn to live under the palms.

I'm back in harness, again, thank God, undertaking the development of Cerulean Isles. You've probably seen our full-page advertising in the New York papers. Unlike some Florida advertising, it's true.

Oscar and I will be kept in town through the winter, I imagine, but my yacht's anchored in the bay. She'll be eating her head off, anyway, and unless I have somebody I can trust on board her, my captain's likely to take her off and enter her in the bootleg trade. I wish, Victor, that you'd come down and make your home aboard her till spring comes back to New York. Take her down in the Keys, come back to Miami and pick up Oscar and me for the week-ends, and you'll be doing me a favor.

Don't turn this down, lad; you don't know what living is till you've tried Florida.

Ever yours, MYRON O'MARA.
MOM/FB

Did it tempt me? Every time I looked out of the window it tempted me more. And Satchell had inclosed a scrawl that added the pull of curiosity:

DEAR VIC: We're back on the treadmill, as you see. I wanted the governor to lay off, but he's half wild after three years of rest, and I guess he might as well do what he likes.

Don't believe anything you hear about Florida, and don't disbelieve anything, either. It's all false and all true. The laws of nature don't apply to this State any more than the Volstead act. Chambermaids and truck drivers and broken-down old ladies are making millions. It is the most amazing spectacle I ever saw, and you'll be the biggest sap in the world if you miss it.

Besides, any man's a fool who spends a winter in the North. Always, OSCAR.

Certainly, I reflected, looking out of the window, any man was a fool to spend a winter in this nauseous cloud of foul gases and cold fog. And O'Mara was back in harness. He had made millions upon millions in the war—honestly, as war profits go—and lost them all in the great export collapse of 1920. He had started again, made more millions, but that great crash had broken his confidence, and when a heart attack frightened him in 1922, he had retired.

I'd been invited to go cruising with him and Satchell and their parties of guests—the Sound, the North Shore, the Norwegian fjords, in the summer; Florida and the Caribbean when the snow began to fly—but I'd never been able to get away. I'd merely envied them; that must be the perfect life. But I could see now that it had been no life for Myron O'Mara. When the Florida boom really began in earnest, he must have been like the war horse that smelleth the battle from afar, and saith "Aha!"

Florida! Amazing, incredible rumors had floated northward, of a boom that had suddenly flamed out again when it seemed to have reached its peak, bursting forth into new and incredibly violent eruption. Half the people everybody knew had gone to Florida and got rich, and the other half wanted to follow them. It was the climactic Gold Rush, the final chapter of the Aryan migrations, the opening up of the last Lost Continent.

IT was epic—but it was also idyllic, if you believed the advertisements. In full pages of the rotogravure supplements, a dozen synthetic paradises shouted their competing charms—Coral Gables, Hollywood, Boca Raton, Floranada Club, Key Largo, Exclusive City, Cerulean Isles. Millions could be made in Florida, by people whose nature it was to make millions. But for a man like me who could never make millions anywhere, there was a better life to be lived in Florida, a life of warmth and sunlight, of quiet and rest; of palm trees and pink stucco houses, bare-limbed bathers in the surf, bare-headed golfers in the sun.

Sick and weak, chilled and discouraged, I needed that. Also, I wanted to see that last great wandering of the

people, with a pure reporter's lust to be on hand when something big was happening. But the third attraction of Florida, the "Big Money," left me cold. My experiments in the stock market had taught me that any boom was sunk the moment I climbed aboard it; if I put down a binder on a single lot, the market would break overnight, break and fall to ruins, all the way from Jacksonville to Key West. It didn't seem fair for me to do that to Florida.

But as a convalescent idler on O'Mara's yacht, I could watch the excitement in quiet and safety; I could look on, and get well. I wired him that I'd come next week; I left the hospital, and decided to get acclimated by seeing a musical comedy about Florida. I went to "Orange Rose," where Eddie Cantor's antics and Flavia Haddon's lyric soprano joined to give me a cheerful evening—and the next day I was in a relapse that kept me helpless for six weeks more.

It was the middle of January before I was out of the hospital again, coming back to my hotel to find it dingy with soot and lonelier than ever. And then came another Florida letter from O'Mara:

DEAR VICTOR: Don't forget the invitation; it's open whenever you're well enough to take it. The yacht if you like—or something else if you'd rather.

Cerulean Isles are moving along nicely; the little fellows are going to be deflated before the winter is over, but the big developments are all in good shape and will carry on. But there isn't the kick in mere development work that I'd hope to find.

I have something else in mind, rather more extensive; and I need, among other things, a confidential secretary whom I can trust and who knows me well enough to get my ideas without having everything spelled out for him. The job fits you and you fit the job; it's yours if you want it.

But if you don't feel like working yet, the yacht is yours for the winter. Do come down as soon as you can. It's silly to waste a winter in the slush and the grime, Ever yours,

M. O'M.

Below, Satchell had scribbled something which was meant, perhaps, to elucidate, but served only to mystify and allure.

Big stuff, boy; big stuff. The boom is dead. Don't whisper it; all Miami would turn out to lynch me if they knew I'd let out the news. But it is, and the citizens are preparing to sit back and count their money, which will take quite a while.

And the governor, as usual, will work while they sleep. He really does need you, Vic, and you'll get a laugh out of it. We've got the whole sixteenth floor here and one telephone; I almost had to pull a gun on somebody to get that. Don't miss it.

OSCAR.

Big stuff, and they needed me! Myron O'Mara needed me. And for all the bad tips he'd given me, and the money he'd won from me at poker, and the atmosphere of ironic mistrust that had pervaded our acquaintance for a dozen years, the fact that he needed me would have taken me down there even if it had been backed by nothing else.

It was, of course, a godsend. My own business had fallen to pieces and I wasn't well enough yet to undertake the hard grind of newspaper work. A confidential secretaryship, with under-secretaries to handle the routine, looked easier and would certainly be better paid. I was sick, and O'Mara offered me a vacation under the palm trees; I was broke, and he offered me a job.

But very likely I'd have gone anyway, just because he needed me. We all felt like that about Myron O'Mara.

CHAPTER IV.

OFF FOR FLORIDA.

NORMALLY I'd have been wondering, of course, why he needed me; and what this "big stuff" was. If I didn't give that more than the slightest passing thought till I reached Miami, lay it to the magic of Florida.

On the map, you'll see the northern boundary of Florida just a little above

Jacksonville. But that's wrong. Florida begins in the railroad station where you climb aboard a Florida train.

I left New York on a morning when the streets were sheeted with ice. On the ice, snow was falling, in soft wet flakes that may have been white when they left the clouds, but were dark-gray by the time they'd penetrated our sooty air and reached the street. And then a Pullman where porters were depositing golf bags along with shiny suit cases, and a club car painted with orange blossoms and palm trees and the red flowers of the hibiscus. Before the train left the Pennsylvania Station, I felt that I was already in Florida; and already I was beginning to think about money.

Money—but not so much money, I gathered, as had flooded Florida a few months earlier. The crazy boom of summer and fall was over, the boom when a lot sold on binder was resold a dozen times before the title could be transferred, to go back, perhaps, to the original owner when the ultimate purchaser was unable to meet his inflated second payment. With ten years of normal growth compressed into six mad months, Florida had killed, for the time being, the goose that laid the golden eggs. There would in time be another goose, the supply of that breed of poultry being inexhaustible; but not just yet.

I DISCUSSED these matters with a new acquaintance on the second day out, when we were already among the pines and palmettos of northern Florida. His name was Bolster; he was one of the six dozen vice presidents of one of the big New York banks, and he was going down to see just what they really had to show for a loan made in all optimism six months before.

"At September prices," he told me sadly, "the property was worth seven million dollars. Luckily we lent only two million, but I'll be surprised if we'd be able to get that much out of it for another two years. Meanwhile, we've got to nurse this development along—can't let it sink."

"A good many of them will sink, I imagine, before the winter's over." This was my contribution, and Bolster was glad to tell me about it.

He didn't identify me with the Bentley whose daily Wall Street column in the *Record* he had read, in all likelihood, with more reverent respect than he ever read the Bible; and I let him take me for any other Bentley he chose. For he flattered me by regarding me, not as a man who wrote about money, but as a man who had money.

"Bound to sink," he assured me. "Why, Mr. Bentley, every swamp and sand barren in Florida has been grabbed up by some optimistic developer who thinks he can make it into another Coral Gables or Exclusive City. Those places got over because they were pushed, and he doesn't see why his development won't go over, too. And some of them will. But! Enough lots have been laid out in Florida to build winter homes for every family in the United States and Canada—fifty lots for every family that can afford a winter home. Forty-nine out of the fifty developers are going to be disappointed. I don't think there'll be much buying this winter; but there's going to be the worst cutthroat competition in selling you ever saw."

"A man ought to be able to pick up property pretty cheap," I ventured.

He shook his head. "Not yet. It's human nature, Mr. Bentley, to keep up the front, to sell one lot at full price rather than two lots, or even three, at half price. They won't cut prices, but they'll cut each other's throats. You'll see. Or perhaps"—he looked at me rather suspiciously—"perhaps you're already interested."

"No," I told him, "I'm probably the only man in the United States that

doesn't own a foot of Florida land. But whether I can make that proud boast when the winter's over, I don't know. Do you happen to know anything about Cerulean Isles?"

"Myron O'Mara's development, isn't that, down below Miami? No, I don't know much about it; but I guess it's safe with O'Mara behind it. He still has money and he still has credit. All the big developments are safe, for that matter—Coral Gables, Hollywood, Exclusive City, everything of that size. Those fellows have standing enough to get what money they need to carry them through. But the little developments, the new developments, the shoe-string developments—whoosh! About the time the income tax comes due, you'll hear them exploding like firecrackers all over Florida. And then somebody who can carry them will buy them up, and hold them, and some day he'll make money by the barrel. There! See that fellow?"

A BIG man was standing in the doorway of the club car, looking us all over as if he suspected we might bite him, and more than half wondered if he hadn't better take command of the situation by biting us first. A big man with a head like a bull's, and a red-brown face; one heavy eyebrow was lifted, cocked, arched on high in a sort of permanent wave; and the other, a brush of stiff bristles, thrust straight out; I noticed, as he glanced around the car, that he could aim this eyebrow wherever he was looking, a sort of hypnotic pointer that marked his prey.

"That," said Bolster, "is Lucas Hydrick."

I stared. Everybody knew about Lucas Hydrick of Exclusive City—a man who ranked with Fisher and Merrick and Young, one of the wonder builders of super-Florida. Already I found myself thinking in the language of real-estate advertisements; it was in the air, even the stuffy air of the club car. And Lucas Hydrick, looking us over, concluded, it seemed, that we were beneath his notice, and went back to his stateroom.

"Saw him at the Bankers' Club last week," Bolster volunteered. "He needed ten million dollars to tide him over the winter—but he got it. They've sold over forty million dollars' worth of property in Exclusive City in the last eight months. Ever been there?"

I shook my head, ashamed to admit that this was my first trip to Florida.

"Five years ago it was only mangrove swamps and palmetto scrub—like most of Florida," went on Bolster. "Worthless waste land that Hydrick's wife inherited from her uncle; and he decided to build a city. The name was an inspiration, of course. Exclusive City! Even if the average customer sees them approaching his little bank roll, and all the other little bank rolls in sight, with all the arts of brass-band high-power salesmanship, trying to catch every fish in the sea—even then, that name Exclusive City convinces him that he's getting in on something that's withheld from the common herd.

"But the name didn't do it all. It took genius—sales genius. Hydrick's got it, beyond doubt. There wasn't a reason on earth why anybody should have lived in this particular spot, why a city should have been built there—except that it had the Florida climate, and that Lucas Hydrick had decided that a city should be built there. And, by golly, he's built a city! A pretty good city, too—a good place to live, better than the places most of its residents lived in before there was any Exclusive City. Incredible place, Florida."

I nodded; I was beginning to see what Oscar Satchell had meant. "But they can't all be Exclusive Cities," I ventured. "All these developments that do full-page advertising."

"They can't—but nothing but experi-

ence can persuade the developers of that, or the investors. Florida, Mr. Bentley—Florida is only raw material. Very raw material. What has been made of any part of it could be made of any other part of it—given the right man. If there's only one Miami Beach, only one Exclusive City, that's because there's only one Fisher, only one Hydrick. Wise men don't put their money in a development, down here—they put it in the man."

I nodded in comfortable silence. There was no man I knew who was a safer investment for money than Myron O'Mara.

Bolster and I parted at West Palm Beach, where our train stopped. He was staying there; I was going on to Miami in the bus.

"Don't let the bird dogs get hold of you," was his parting advice.

"Bird dogs?" On my back for months, I was not up to date in the language of Florida.

He grinned. "The bright ladies who scout for the realtors—smell the money out and point to it; then the realtor gets out the old gun and brings it down, and the lady splits the commission. If bright eyes smile at you in Miami, they aren't smiling at you; they're smiling at the bank account that might be invested in Florida real estate. There's room for only one emotion in Miami."

I laughed it off somehow; after my painful experience with her who was now the aviator's bride, I was pretty sure that any given pair of bright eyes were not smiling at me. And to the other emotion, the ruling passion of Miami, the lust for the big money—to that, too, I was immune.

All the same, I found myself getting more excited as the bus bumped southward over the holes in the Dixie Highway. I wanted to get to Miami. I'd never been there; I was such a tenderfoot that I still called it "Miamy," not "Miamuh." But I seemed to feel the throb of Miami fifty miles off, the pulse of that terrifically whirring life, the furious, eager chase for the money that we had heard about for months in the North.

I was hungry to get into it, even though I didn't want the money. I merely wanted to be where the excitement was going on, seeing it and taking my small part in it. I was glad I hadn't wired O'Mara the exact hour of my arrival. We were due at half past four; I'd go straight to the Bernard J. McCloskey Building, and hang up my hat and do a little work before the office closed for the day.

I HAD no hotel reservation—I'd left that to O'Mara. Some friends had told me of telegrams to Miami hotels asking for rooms that had been left disdainfully unanswered, as if it were an insult to suppose that any Miami hotel could have a vacant room in February. But the Old Man would have attended to all that; I'd get my orders in the office.

But I hadn't counted on the Dixie Highway.

Which one of the Dixie Highways it was, I don't know; the thing splits and forks and subdivides above Miami, like an artery spreading out into capillaries; every real-estate subdivision for miles around is on some kind of Dixie Highway. But so far as I could gather, they were all, at this particular season, equally bad.

Though rough riding, our bus didn't collapse, but it got to Miami an hour late; and I and my suit cases and my trunk check were disembarked at half past five in a strange town, where I knew no address for Myron O'Mara, but his office.

Well, that was enough; there must be some one still at work in the office who could tell me where he lived, and as an old newspaper man, I was sure I could find anybody in half an hour in

the strangest of strange towns. I called a taxi.

"Bernard J. McCloskey Building," I told the driver.

He put down his flag and started off, in a street packed from curb to curb with one-way traffic; and then he leaned back confidentially. "Where was that now, chief?"

"Bernard J. McCloskey Building," I grumbled. Was he deaf?

"Oh, yes. Just where is that?"

"Where is it? Don't you know?"

"I only come here last month from Pittsburgh," he confessed. "And there's so many of these office buildings——"

"This one's sixteen stories high," I told him.

"Yeah. Well, there's plenty of them, too."

So there were, as a glance around told me, tall buildings—and absurdly tiny buildings, too, even on Flagler Street. Miami looked like Chicago growing out of—Smallwood, I decided, remembering our local metropolis, Chicago growing out of any county seat. However——

"Wait a minute," I told the driver. "Here's a traffic cop. Officer, can you tell this man how to find the Bernard J. McCloskey Building?"

He looked at me reproachfully, this mild-eyed bluecoat. "I'm a stranger here myself. You might ask the starter, down there at the hotel."

Before I had a chance to ask the starter anything, he was dragging my suit cases from the taxi, tossing them to a bell boy who was carrying them in. Probably they thought I had a reservation, months in advance. Well, by this time I was tired, tired and dusty; no such luck as to get a hotel room, but I didn't want to drag these bags around with me while I looked for O'Mara's office. I paid the driver, followed my bags on in, and found them in front of a desk where a clerk was shoving a register and a pen at me. What was this in a town where all hotels must be full?

"I have no reservation," I explained.

The clerk was undisturbed. "Single, Mr."—he read my name upside down—"Mr. Bentley? At about eight dollars? Front, boy! Show Mr. Bentley to room 715."

I SUPPOSE the fantastic impression of that first evening of my visit colored all my stay in Miami. I felt, of course, what any normal Northerner feels when he reaches Florida, a terrific sense of liberation, an outburst of pure physical well-being at walking bareheaded in summer clothes in February; a mystical thrill that the mere sight of a palm tree provokes in some of us who have never lost that hunger for the sun, inherited from ancestors who lived in the northern palm forests before the glacial age. And, as I walked the streets after dinner, I felt the excitement, the sense of some tremendous imminent event, that every newcomer must have felt in the San Francisco of 'Forty-nine.

Here was the rush and hurry, the swirling crowds, I had foreseen in my mental pictures of Miami; here were the realtors lurking in every door to pull in the unwary traveler and pluck him. Yet it was true that the themes of the current excitement were not those I had imagined. Conversations overheard in snatches around me had little to do with sales and resales.

I began to perceive, presently, that Bolster had been right; that great rush was over. But I heard much about "Something good on the second race"—"Paid four seventy to show"—"Would have won in a walk if he hadn't been pulled"—"Got a couple of dames, and goin' out to Jimmie Hodges." Shut your eyes to the real-estate signs all around, keep your ears open, and Miami might have been any racing town while the races are on.

But over and above that, there was the pervading strangeness of being unable to find a man like Myron O'Mara.

The hotel clerk knew where to find the Bernard J. McCloskey Building, but by the time I had bathed and changed into Florida clothes, the office was empty. Sallying forth after dinner, I found that nearly every block downtown had a ground-floor sales office of Cerulean Isles, but who were the mere salesmen who were found therein to know the whereabouts of the godlike O'Mara? They seized upon me, these salesmen, with the hunger of wolves in a hard winter; they would have rent me in pieces between them. I could have learned a lot about Cerulean Isles if I had wanted to take the time, but just now I only wanted to find my boss.

The telephone directory was useless; it was three months old, and three months in Miami are as a decade anywhere else. I called a dozen big hotels in vain and began to wonder if he were still on the yacht and, if so, how I could find it. At last—for this was becoming too grotesque—I fell back in the expedient of an old newspaper man, who knows that the best way to find out anything in a strange town is to ask somebody on the local paper.

At the *Herald* office, the ex-financial editor of the New York *Record* was received with respect—somewhat cautious respect, till it was ascertained that I hadn't come to ask for a job; then with an insistence that I must be listed among the arrivals of the day, that there must be a story about me.

I refused; I was working for O'Mara now and I knew his almost morbid hatred of publicity. He must have got over that, of course; Cerulean Isles, like every Florida development, must take all the free publicity it could get; but I'd have to wait and see what he wanted before I let myself get into print. It was my first taste, and a rather unwelcome one, of what it meant to work for any individual—the *Record* was only a great impersonal machine—above all, what it meant to work for Myron O'Mara.

I wasn't my own boss, now.

"Myron O'Mara?" said the assistant managing editor. "Why, he lives on an island out in the bay. Isle of—wait a minute. Isle of Capri. He and Satchell leased a big house out there, just last week. Wait a minute, and I'll get you his telephone number."

And so at last I heard his velvet voice.

"Victor, my lad! Why in the world didn't you let us meet you?"

"I thought," I confessed, "that I could find my way around in any strange town."

"You never saw a town as strange as this one. But go get your baggage; you're coming over here to the Isle of Capri, to live with Oscar and me. No, damn the hotel; I want the inner circle under one roof!"

I nearly fell over; I'd never expected to belong to any inner circle, with him and Satchell. Prudent afterthought told me that probably he was only stringing me along; he liked to do that.

"How do I get to your island? By launch?"

"A taxi's quicker—there's a bridge from the causeway. But you'll like the trip across the bay, Victor—local color, and all. Take a taxi down to pier No. 4, and I'll have my boat meet you."

CHAPTER V.

THE OTHER PASSENGER.

THE speed boat twisted outward past the jungle of masts along the water front, around a long line of tramp steamers at their docks, past a cluster of yachts moored in the bay. Still close behind, the Miami sky line overhung us, towering walls flecked with glowing windows, bright-lit towers shooting upward above them. Lights, riding lights reflected in long, watery beams, all

around us in the bay; inverted searchlights to the left, where shifts of engineers working twenty-four hours a day were widening a bridge; more lights farther out where a dredge still labored.

Our speed boat swerved in, coasting along a low, flat island. The tall rampart of pines gave place to a low wall of green stucco along the water; behind it royal palms flaunted their feather-duster crowns, coco palms slanted outward, with drooping fronds. Then a Spanish palace, its green stucco walls rising straight up from the water, its round-arched windows sending beams of soft golden light that broke into golden ripples far across the bay.

"Got to take out another passenger," my engineer muttered. "The boys will handle your baggage."

Silently we slid along under the palace wall, into a cloistered portico above the water gate, where a great inverted dome in the ceiling shed yellow light on green walls and rippling water. A gong clanged as we came in; white-coated colored boys ran down the flight of steps and seized my bags in laughing hustle. The other passenger was waiting on the steps—a woman in white.

Actually I came near sneezing, she looked so cold. Not cold for herself—cold for other people. Shoulders as white as porcelain against the background of white-satin evening gown, white-cloth coat with white fur collar; silver stockings and silver slippers, sparkling like snow; slippers with rhinestone heels and rhinestone buckles that glittered icily, as icily as the diamond pendant on her breast. Only two bits of color in the ensemble—her golden hair, clipped and waving, and the cold green eyes that seemed to shoot icicles right through me, like the *Snow Queen* in the old fairy tale.

She came down the steps with slow stateliness, like a white peacock, with a splendid, nonchalant grace that I guessed must be her natural manner. Certainly she hadn't put it on for me. She'd wasted only about half a glance on me and evidently had set me down as nobody to be stately for, any more than the servants and the engineer. None the less I watched her as she stepped into the speed boat and sat down——

No, she didn't sit down. Nothing so commonplace as that. She subsided; she sank into her seat; she fluttered down like a white swan. The speed boat backed out, turned, hummed away; though the evening was cool on the water, her white fur collar lay open, thrown back from her bare shoulders. The evening was cool, but she was cooler. Florida had never thawed her.

I went on up the steps, troubled by two trivial but unreasonably persistent curiosities—who she was, and what she was doing here. I'd seen her somewhere, I knew; perhaps I'd met her, but if she remembered seeing me, she wasn't going to let me know it. Still, I wondered. And also what she was doing here. One of the Old Man's girls, I supposed, but I had never known that he liked them cold.

IN the doorway, he and Satchell were awaiting me. You'd go far to find a more effective pair, each complementing the other. O'Mara was pink and portly but still splendid, especially in evening dress, with the black ribbon of his eyeglasses draped across his shirt front. His face was a little lined, a little puffy, but on the whole he looked a good deal healthier after three years of rest than when I had seen him last in Wall Street.

Satchell was the same as ever, except that his long, roached hair was all gray now, his bony face a little gaunter; a homely face, certainly, and a tall, ungainly figure—ugly as the American eagle. But he had the eagle's keen, fierce forcefulness, a sort of crude aris-

tocracy, a rough distinction. Each of them seized me by a hand.

"Well, lad!" O'Mara actually hugged me. "Welcome to the Isle of Capri! Dined? Too bad, but you'll join us in a liqueur and a cigar, anyway."

We sat at a long monastic table in a drawing-room that copied old Spain as closely as historian and architect could manage, with wooden-barred windows, their red-and-blue paint almost worn away, imported from some old palace that must once have looked like this; with grilled-iron Spanish doors that bore in rusty metal the date 1624.

On the table were bottles of chartreuse, an open box of O'Mara's private cigars. Contemptuously, reflecting that this was like the old days on Park Avenue, I admitted to myself that I had missed this opulence. Other opulent homes had been opened to me, but O'Mara's had been the only opulence in which I had ever really felt at ease. I'd missed it, I was happy to be in it again. I had, in short, all the qualifications for a parasite, a little brother of the rich. Still, in Florida, lesser men than I had become rich.

I dragged myself back, shaking, from the brink of that speculation. Hadn't I learned my lesson yet?

"Well!" O'Mara was looking at the light through the golden liquid in his tiny glass. "A pity you were so late, Victor. You've missed Miss Haddon."

"Miss Haddon? Oh! So that's who that was, eh? Flavia Haddon—the prima donna of 'Orange Rose?' "

"Late the prima donna of 'Orange Rose,' " O'Mara corrected, with a curious look of childish content. "She's singing for the rest of the season at the Clorinda Club, up on the Dixie Highway. You've seen her, then?"

"Across the footlights," I qualified. "I knew her face, of course, but I couldn't place her. I—I thought perhaps I was recalling a picture in Andersen's 'Fairy Tales,' that I used to read when I was a kid. You know—the *Snow Queen.*"

"The *Snow Queen!*" Satchell was squawking in harsh laughter, but O'Mara towered over me, with the blazing eyes and clouded brow of thundering Jove.

"Victor!" cried O'Mara. "Never call her that again!"

"It's what she looks like," Satchell protested. "What I called her."

"Yes, but you don't call her that now. There's a reason, Victor. I—I can see that the name fits her. But don't use it. There's a reason."

"A good reason," Satchell deigned to explain; but I got the impression that he was explaining not so much to enlighten me as to tease O'Mara. "A good reason, Vic. Her husband was a hophead. A worthless ham actor. She supported him till he had the grace to fall out of a ninth-story window. You can see that snow's a rather delicate topic, with her."

"And you'll see a good deal of her," O'Mara added. "She dines with us often—always has to go off to work about this time, but often we go with her. So remember—nothing about snow. But come. Tell me——"

BUT I could give only half my attention to his queries about my trip. Flavia Haddon! Strange that I hadn't recognized her—but on the stage she hadn't looked so cold. She was no flaming popular idol, certainly; her value, in musical comedy, lay chiefly in her voice. Yet when the action called for it, she had managed to display a good deal of abandon. And why not? An actress was an actress; even in musical comedy, she could act. Whereas on the steps this evening, there had been no audience but me and the servants and the engineer—no audience that required playing up.

It rather annoyed me, for I realized

that they must have told her who it was that was coming in the speed boat that would take her away. Her behavior had been a needlessly pointed reminder that I was only a secretary. For one who had lately been an executive in charge of his own office, even though he was executive only over two assistants, two stenographers and an office boy, being a secretary seemed something of a descent.

But I was more or less than a secretary. I learned that when I began to ask about my duties.

"Don't worry about that yet, lad. Your duty, for the first few days, is just to get the lay of the land. Topsy-turvy place, Florida. You'll need a lot of orientation. And it needn't be generally known, just yet, that you're working for me. We told Miss Haddon, but she'll keep the secret. And for a few days it strikes me that you can be most useful as an undercover man."

"Look here, Mr. O'Mara," I protested uneasily. Nobody but Satchell ever called him governor; most people who worked for him called him simply "He." "I—— You didn't tell me just why you wanted me. I'm no lily-white Puritan, but if there's undercover work, I'd like to know a little about it before I take on the job. If that's the big stuff I've heard of——"

O'Mara laughed, a jovial, rippling roar; but I could see that Satchell was not merry.

"The big stuff is marking time for the moment," said O'Mara. "The emergency, in other words, is not quite ready to emerge. We're not making any noise about it—no noise at all. You've never heard of the Florida-For-All Company, have you?"

I shook my head.

He chuckled. "You haven't heard of it, but you're secretary and treasurer. You own, for the moment, ten thousand shares of stock—no par value, no market value, as yet. In all candor, lad, they probably won't stand in your name when they have any great market value. But don't worry—you'll be taken care of. Oscar will tell you all about that, presently—as much as there is to tell now.

"Meanwhile, don't worry about the undercover work. I'm not asking you to put arsenic in coffee, or even to jimmy the drawer and steal the papers. Only to prowl around as a prosperous Northern tourist—on an expense account—and give me your idea of the lay of the land. Oscar and I have had it right before our eyes ever since the lunatic days of August and September. We need a fresh point of view. Flavia's helped us, but I want a sound business judgment. Prowl around, see how you think things stand, and where they'll stand in another six months, another year. Then tell me, and don't be discouraged if I throw your opinion away. I need it, anyhow."

"You want me merely to look things over?" I asked. "With the eye of a newcomer? That's easy; it's the only thing I could do, anyway."

"Right, my lad! The only thing you could do, for the first fortnight. And you couldn't do even that, if you were known to be part of my organization. Sorry you brought your bags over here; I hadn't thought of that when I asked you to stay with us. I'm afraid we'll have to ship you back to the hotel for a week or so. You're only a casual acquaintance of Myron O'Mara."

"Start anywhere I like?" I asked. This looked like the easiest money I would ever earn, but I knew it wouldn't be so easy as it looked. In other words, I knew O'Mara.

"Start anywhere you like—but, before long, get around to Cerulean Isles. Give it a good, hard look, with the cold eye of an outsider, and let me know how it shapes up. We're all inclined to let optimism run away with us, down here. Let one of the salesmen grab you

and show you the layout—you ought to see it anyway, for it's typical of all the developments we're going to deal with. Let him do his damnedest to sell you—but remember, if you buy, you buy at your own risk. That's not on the expense account."

He rose, majestic and serene. "Well, I must leave you now—going out to the Biltmore to see if I can jolly Lucas Hydrick out of some of his old-fashioned ideas. Stick around with Oscar and he'll tell you how things look—to him. Take it with a grain of salt—he's a pessimist; but take it just the same. I've taken his opinion for thirty years, and it's been the making of me."

Halfway to the door he turned. "Oh, by the way, Victor! We haven't talked salary. What was the *Record* paying you?"

I felt a twinge of disappointment; I'd supposed of course he'd go above that. "Two hundred and fifty a week," I told him.

"That's all right—a thousand a month. I'll have you put on my private pay roll, starting this evening."

Satchell must have seen the bitterness in my eyes as they followed O'Mara out of the door. A thousand a month wasn't two fifty a week; the difference was a thousand dollars a year. Still I had an expense account, and before long I'd be living here at his expense; and he had given me a job when I had no job and needed one badly.

I was an expert, but in New York there are apt to be more experts than vacancies for experts; I knew it would have been sheer luck if I could have got as much as a thousand a month on the open market. Yet it was a small trick, shaving that difference—but the kind of trick I had learned to expect from him. It was O'Mara's way.

And then Oscar Satchell leaned across the table, poured another pony of chartreuse, and looked at me with relief breaking through the worry in his sallow face.

"I'm glad you've come, Vic. Damn glad. He needs you. He doesn't know how badly he needs you, but I do. I need somebody to help me stand up against that damn woman."

CHAPTER VI.

A CRAZY SCHEME.

I FELT my arm flinging out in nervous relief. Deep, inexplicable, unquenched, I had felt, from the moment we passed on the steps, a burning irritation against Flavia Haddon. It was good news that somebody else felt it, too.

"Who is she?" I asked. "The Old Man's current girl?"

"Hell, no! It would be easy, if that was all. No, she's wise. She knows exactly the market value of that cold, snowy purity she advertises so well in her clothes and her manner. I don't doubt that she really is cold by nature, but believe me, she knows how to cash in on it. He wants to marry her."

"Well—he looks fairly young, Oscar; and no doubt he feels younger still. It isn't unnatural."

Feeble words, though I had groped desperately to find something that would soothe Satchell's irritation. I knew how he felt—the friend that sticketh closer than a brother, who had given up the great name and great fortune he could have made if he had worked for himself, to devote his life to Myron O'Mara, in good or evil fortune, rich or poor, sick or well.

Yes, Satchell had given up more than that. He had never married because he had never wanted any woman to come between him and Myron O'Mara. The wife of O'Mara's youth didn't count. Till the later years when the Old Man began to run after women, she had been the third partner in the Triple Alliance. But no other woman could fail to be

jealous of Satchell's place, or Satchell of any other woman.

What had Satchell got out of it? Now and then a half-joking tribute to his legal skill; but "I never do anything without Oscar" was more often an alibi, an easy shrugging of the blame off O'Mara's shoulders, than a citation in praise. Satchell was the grand vizier, yes, but he was only a slave, the first and greatest of O'Mara's slaves.

HIS reward—and it was enough for him—was knowing that without his ever-present aid, O'Mara would not have been O'Mara, could not go on being O'Mara. Of course Satchell hated any woman who threatened to displace his influence with her own; and hated her by no means wholly in selfishness, but partly because experience gave him good reason to doubt if any one else in this world could do what he had done for O'Mara.

"No," he growled gloomily, "it isn't unnatural. These old men feel a last stir of life. Especially down here in Florida. Ponce de Leon stuff. Hell!"

"Well, is it all settled? Is she going to marry him?"

"Of course she's going to marry him! He's the only man in Miami that doesn't know it. No, I underrate the lady! Three or four other men don't know it, yet; the men she drags around after her to get him worked up. Queer persons—fine assortment. A racing man from Cincinnati, a dreadful picture magnate from Los Angeles, one or two more—all mature, all rich. She's wise. She knows it might be hard to kid the governor into thinking she was hipped on anybody without a few millions, and you don't often catch them both rich and young. So she puts up these stuffed shirts, these scarecrow rivals, and he runs after her with his tongue hanging out, trying to get close enough to fling himself at her feet. Bah!"

"Maybe one of the others will get her after all," I suggested. "If they've all got money——"

"None of them has fifty million, Vic, and none of them is sixty-three years old, with a weak heart. He'll get her."

"Well——" Again I grasped feverishly for the comfort I knew he wanted me to bring, and again I couldn't find it. "Well, Oscar, we'll have to make the best of it. After all, he's free, white, and sixty-three; if he wants to get married, we can't stop him. And it won't amount to much, perhaps, except to give him some place to leave his money instead of an art museum."

"She can have his money. I wish she'd take twenty million now to get out of town! Not that that would help much; he'd follow her to China. No, but she drives him crazy! Not just crazy about her. She gives him ideas. The governor's always had ideas, of course, and he's turned a lot of them into facts. But down here everything is so crazy and distorted—and on such a terrific scale. Crazy! You haven't heard anything about the Florida-For-All Company—till to-night?"

I shook my head.

"To make you see it," he decided, "I'll have to go back—back to the beginning of Cerulean Isles. He bought five thousand acres of swamp and sand barrens, down below here on the bay, three years ago, when we first came down. Just as a matter of form—like a tourist buying a painted coconut to mail home—the thing that's done when you're in Florida. Twenty dollars an acre. Never expected to do anything with it, unless maybe hold it for twenty years and sell it for thirty dollars an acre.

"Then the crazy boom started last year. Everything was being developed and subdivided, all over the State; all the free money in the North was flowing down here; it seemed a crime not to get in on it when it was to be had for the taking. This land on the bay—in

the bay, some of it, little keys separated from the mainland by creeks—was no worse than the rest; it wasn't too far from Miami; it was farther south, where the climate's better. So he hired a realtor and let me get him a press agent—though the governor keeps him throttled down as much as I'll let him—and set to work to develop Cerulean Isles.

"Well, development was easy last year. All it needed was nerve and suckers. A bountiful nature supplied the suckers and we had the nerve. You understand that when you start a development, you merely sweeten the pot with a little ante and play the rest of the game on other people's money. Cerulean Isles is a seventy-five-million-dollar proposition—any salesman will tell you that. Of which"—he grinned at me, saturnine—"there has been invested in cash money no less than two hundred thousand."

"Where does the seventy-five million come in?" I asked.

"Oh, we're under obligation in the contract to do seventy-five million dollars' worth of development—but little by little. As needed! Which means in practice—or did mean, till this winter—that as fast as the customers buy lots, we spend about half their money on development and salt the rest away as the reward of wisdom and foresight. We've sold a couple of million dollars' worth of lots and we'd have spent a million already if we could have got machinery and equipment enough through the freight embargo. Right now, curiously enough, we're spending as much as we can and only wishing we could spend more. But this winter an all-wise Providence has seen fit to dry up the supply of customers."

"Yes, I'd gathered that. There aren't enough people who can afford winter homes to buy up all Florida."

"Right. Only, there will be more coming along; there are people who bought in the wrong place and will want to sell out and buy right; in course of time—years—we'll sell every lot in Cerulean Isles, and put in our seventy-five million, and clean up about fifty million more. I'm talking now, you understand, as part owner with the governor of the controlling interest. He's got other big men in with him—organized one of his old-style syndicates, pouring out the sales talk in his best manner—the sort of stuff he loves—and getting them all in. But as usual he and I keep the control. Nobody ever lost a nickel in the long run, in an enterprise where he and I kept the control, outside of that big export bust in 1920.

"Well—I'm getting away. We think we'll sell every lot in Cerulean Isles, after the slump has run its course; and every developer in Florida thinks, or pretends to think, the same. And they can't all sell every lot. Nine out of ten are going to get stung. Most of them are going to blow up with a bang—some of them this winter."

"But you won't blow up," I interrupted. "O'Mara's credit is good, and he's got plenty of money behind this new——"

"No, we're safe. Coral Gables is safe, and Hollywood, and Exclusive City and the other big developments. But a lot of the little fellows that have inflated themselves like the frog that tried to be an ox are due to pop—and when that time comes, somebody is going to pick up the pieces."

"So that's the big stuff!" I exclaimed softly.

"That's the big stuff. The governor means to be there with a basket and pick up the pieces, and put them together again, and reopen the sales offices once more when the customers begin to come again, dropping like the gentle rain from heaven. That is the purpose of the Florida-For-All Company—authorized capital, two hundred thousand

dollars, which we're going to increase, when the moment comes, to two hundred million. Or more."

"Big money!" I gasped.

He stared at me gloomily. "Big money. Too damn big. That's the only trouble with the whole idea. The frog blew up trying to inflate himself to the size of an ox. But if the ox had tried to inflate himself to the size of an elephant, he'd have blown up. The governor's getting a little too elephantine.

"It didn't look so bad, at first," he went on. "When the slump first started, people began to worry. Even the big fellows—till they realized that banks were tied up with them so closely that they couldn't be allowed to crash. Well, you know the governor. When everybody worries, he's happy; he works while they shiver. That was when he got the big idea—the Florida-For-All Company, to buy up everything—not just the fly-by-night shoestring subdivisions, but everything—Boca Raton, Hollywood, Coral Gables, Exclusive City, and all—from Palm Beach south to the Keys. Everything! Buy it up, carry it over the depression, then start sales again, with cutthroat competition eliminated, overhead cut down.

"That meant—since he'd have bought at panic prices—that costs would be lower and prices could be lower, too. No more wild land held at two thousand dollars a front foot. Florida for everybody—prices within reach of all. Myron O'Mara, the people's benefactor, the man who took out inflated profits, reduced excessive overhead and opened Florida as the poor man's paradise! Grand idea, eh, Vic?"

"It certainly is," I agreed; and I suppose my eyes were shining. For when you've said all you can say against Florida—I had realized this, even in one evening—there's something there. Something incomparable; climate, sunshine, the Gulf Stream, the palms—the Fountain of Youth. If only so many of them didn't mislead you, and overcharge you, and rob you, when you try to get it—— Still, it's there.

"A grand idea," he repeated despondently. "Just as a flash of inspiration, with champagne bubbling in the glass at the dinner table and the blue smoke of cigars ascending, it sounded good even to me. But the trouble is, that damned woman was there when he got the flash, and she's never let him forget it."

"He'd have dropped it but for her—and she keeps at him?"

"He'd have dropped it but for her—when he saw that the big fellows were going to be able to carry on, that he could buy them out, if he could buy them at all, only at ruinous prices. But she doesn't keep at him—she's too clever. She pretends to be desperately interested in Cerulean Isles. She bought a water-front lot there—with her own money. He wanted to give her a whole block on the Ocean Boulevard and she just retreated back to the interior of the iceberg and had him all but on his knees begging her to forgive him. Then she relented, and made a first payment on a lot, to show she'd forgiven him—and that she trusted his judgment enough to put her own money into it. Clever, that woman. Smart as a whip!

NO, she doesn't keep him; but when she mentions Cerulean Isles you can see her—at any rate, he can see her—thinking about the great, grand idea that is only marking time now. She lets him see that she looks on him as one of the big developers, like Merrick and Young and Mizner and Hydrick; but always he's got it in the back of his mind that there was one glorious inspired moment when she saw him as The Developer, alone above them all, with Merrick and Young and Hydrick only clerks in his office. He never can forget that. He never can forget the

Florida-For-All Company. And if he tries it now, he'll blow up. He's an ox, but he's not an elephant."

Our cigar smoke curled up through the silence.

"But, Oscar," I said presently, "what is there in it for her? If she's going to marry him, it's obviously to her interest to—conserve the assets. Why should she prod him on to go broke?"

"What does she know about business, on the grand scale? She may think he can get away with it. Or for all I know she merely wants to see some excitement and counts on there being enough left for her at the finish. Some women are like that, aren't they?"

"Ask somebody else," I advised him. "I don't know anything about women."

"Nor I. Or maybe——" He rose, stretched himself restlessly. "Maybe it's only Florida. A crazy State, Vic. It drives anybody wild. It's all false and all true. Come here."

HE took me out to a terrace; leaning over the wall, I could look right down into the bay, at the reflected stars. Off to the west the skyscraper wall of Miami, dark now, but the towers thrusting above it, still bright-lit against the night sky.

"Look at this island," he told me. "It's all made land, dredged up from the bottom of the bay and sold at a thousand dollars a front foot. Every bay in Florida has got a bottom, and every bottom might be dredged up and sold at a thousand dollars a front foot. You never can tell. That's why I'm shy about the governor trying his old tricks of promotion and syndicates down here. Making money—money for everybody—in promotion is a hard game; but it can be learned; it's an art, like walking the tight rope. But making money in Florida is no more an art than going over Niagara Falls in a barrel. Plenty of men have made money here because they were smart and because they worked; but plenty of smart men have worked and gone broke, plenty of dumb imbeciles have made millions.

"And yet, Vic, the stuff's here! A crazy State. See that?"

My eyes followed his pointing finger to a dark blur in the bay, shutting off the southern stars.

"That's a wreck," he told me. "A ship that turned over and sank, and blocked the entrance to the harbor. What did they do? Move the wreck? Hell no! They moved the harbor—dredged right around the wreck and carried on.

"Off there's Miami Beach. It used to be a mangrove swamp. They cut down the mangroves and let the brush lie where it fell—piled sand dredged up from the bottom of the bay on top of it, and there's Miami Beach—a thousand dollars a front foot, and up. And a good place to live, too—that's the joker about this State. You get to thinking that no place could be as good as the realtors say, and yet you have to admit that almost any place is pretty good—better, if you want the sunlight, than the place you came from.

"There's not much difference between land and water in this State," he went on. "If the bottom's six inches under, it's mangrove swamp that can be developed like Miami Beach. If it's two feet under with grass growing out of it, it's Everglades, where our army used to get lost chasing the Seminoles. Drain that and you've got Hialeah, with race tracks, road houses, and Lord knows what. Four feet under water and it's a bay, and you can dredge a harbor in it, and take what the dredges scoop up, and pile it in a heap—and there's your Isle of Capri. And if it's four feet above water, it has altitude, and some realtor is going to develop it and call it a Heights.

"This State has everything, and has it all wrong—mangrove swamps on the coast, pine barrens inland, palm trees

lost in remote swamps. But you clear the mangrove swamps, cut down the pines and blow the stumps and replant the barrens, take your palms and move them across country and stick them up where people from New York and Chicago can see them—and there you've got what, despite the realtors, is a fair imitation of the earthly paradise. Or would be if they didn't ballyhoo and lie about it, and sell it for twice what it's worth. What's that old line in the Bible? 'God made men upright, but they have sought out many inventions.' That's Florida—and yet there's something here. Something unique."

I was silent; I could see it; I could feel it. And if I, an average man, a reporter, not a doer, could feel it, certainly Myron O'Mara could never escape it. No wonder he lost himself in grand, cloudy schemes.

"The man has some excuse," I said aloud.

"Of course he has! And yet, if they'd only let this State alone—but there again. If they'd let it alone, it would be a wilderness. Go down to Cerulean Isles, where development has hardly more than begun, and you can see how wild it all was a few years ago. They've cleared that wilderness and changed it into a garden. If only they knew when to stop—— But why should they stop? Look at that." He gestured toward the Miami sky line. "All that, built out of a country village in a few years. No wonder they've gone crazy. It's a new creation—building a new Garden of Eden and getting rich out of it. Anybody might fall for that. Oh, damn Florida!"

I knew why he was so furious.

"Perhaps," I suggested, "the Old Man wouldn't be so keen about amalgamating all the Edens if he got his Eve."

"I wish I could think so, but I'm afraid that glint of admiration in her eyes would drive him on. You've never seen it—when those green eyes take on a kind of golden glow—a flashlight turned on through ice. It would get anybody."

"There may be some hope in these other men." I didn't really believe it, but poor old Oscar needed some shred of encouragement, however thin. "After all, if she has this effect on him, she may have it on others. There may be one in the lot who will go after her hard enough to get her."

"Josiah Quincy's the richest," he mused. "But he hasn't half as much as the governor."

"No name for a *Romeo,* anyhow." I agreed. "A New England Puritan who——"

He laughed raucously. "Puritan? Not that boy—not in any sense of the word. Lord knows what he is—no New Englander, anyway. Probably an Argentine, or a Portuguese, or a Greek. He owns Climaxo Films. I'll give the lady this much; it's a unique tribute to her invincibility that Quincy wants to marry her."

"I must meet this Quincy," I observed. "If I'm going to work as an undercover man, I might as well work hard—for you, if I can, as well as for the chief. No, no, I'm not going to put Quincy up to kidnaping her; but if something might be done to induce him to speed up a little——"

"I'll bet he's on high now," said Oscar. "He couldn't get her, anyway. He isn't sixty-three, and his heart is sound. But more power to you, boy, if you can do it—or do anything else. For thirty years the governor's been the engine and I've been the brakes, but I can't stop him now. And he's certainly headed for a crash unless we can do something about that woman."

I left him, presently, after telephoning back to my hotel to make up the same old room for me. With my suit cases piled about me, the speed boat took me back across the bay, determined, with such determination as I

had never felt since I played football in college, to do something to save O'Mara.

Partly I wanted to do it for Oscar's sake; partly I wanted to thwart that scheming woman whose green-eyed glance had afflicted me with such incurable irritation. But above all I wanted to help the Old Man, keep him from a crash.

Yet through all my good intentions I felt an uneasy shiver of weakness. I was afraid of that woman—and I was afraid of what I was doing. I might be fighting against the stars. The Florida-For-All Company was a crazy scheme, fantastic, impossible; but nothing was too fantastic, too impossible, to come true in Florida.

CHAPTER VII

CERTAINLY DANGEROUS

FOR a week I went around with my eyes and ears open, up and down Flagler Street where three doors out of four were real-estate offices. Ornate offices, overarchitectured, fitted up inside with all the plunder of medieval Spain, bought and imported by the realtors and paid for, as the stupendous rents were paid, by the customers.

In those spacious medieval rooms, hung with ancient tapestries, furnished with chairs and tables, yes, and religious furniture that had been made four hundred years ago for grandees enriched by the profits of America, to come back in the fullness of the cycle to the America which had bought out the impoverished descendants of the grandees—in those gilded parlors it was hard to imagine that you were in a real-estate office.

By the time I had spent four days walking about in the sunlight, under the palms, I wasn't so sure. For behind the gambling and the ballyhoo, Florida had something priceless, something that, like the gold of California, was the gift of nature but that, like the gold of California, had to be developed by the work of man. A horde of parasites had fastened themselves on the workers, but it wasn't all gambling.

Dodging up and down Flagler Street, escaping one realtor's clutch to fall into another's, looking in now and then at some palatial reception room where an orchestra, a singer, a free show had drawn the crowd—a penniless hard-boiled crowd that drifted away when the free show was succeeded by the spellbinder who urged and prayed and exhorted in a frantic effort to draw out the money—I saw many things and many people. People I knew, from New York, from the State university—even from Snyder's Junction. Virgil Overturf, who lived three farms away from us at Snyder's Junction—now, he told me, he had made eighty-five thousand on the Dixie Highway and hoped to make a hundred thousand more on West Flagler Street. Come out to the bungalow some evening and have supper with the wife.

Once Satchell met me, grinning. "Well, stranger—I guess I dare shake hands with you on the street—getting an eyeful?"

"Eyes and ears," I admitted. "Give these realtors a chance and they'd pull a man to pieces—one keeps a foot and another a jawbone."

"Hungry wolves," Satchell admitted. "They're starving, poor devils. We've got a dozen sales offices for Cerulean Isles, a hundred salesmen; and we've sold six lots in the last eight days. That's better than most. Some of the big developments have set the rule lately that the salesmen don't get paid till half the money's in. That means a year after the sale. Naturally a lot of them are quitting and going home, or wherever realtors go when the boom is over. The governor wanted to put that rule in force in Cerulean Isles, but I persuaded him out of it. We ought to

keep our organization together, since we can afford it. Also, the poor devils need the money, when there is any money."

We were standing on a corner, swarming, like any Flagler Street corner, with all kinds of people. Two black-eyed girls in pink edged past us, slowed by the crowd, and turned to glance back.

"Must be you, Vic," said Satchell, with a grin. "Certainly not me."

"But you know me!" I protested. "I haven't any talent for women—don't care for them much—never attract them. But down here——"

"Busted bird dogs," he explained. "It was a good business last fall, but now all the birds that weren't brought down have flown. You and I are only sparrows, Vic, but we look better than no birds at all. What's that line in the Bible—'in that day shall seven women lay hold on one man, saying, ' "Only take away our reproach——" ' There's a lot of the Bible that fits Miami. When do we see you at the house?"

"I'm to report at the end of the week —Tuesday."

"Seen Quincy, or the woman?"

"Not yet. I'm going up to the Clorinda Club to-night with a couple of men I knew in college—I suppose I'll see her there."

"The governor was going out there to-night, but he had to go up to Palm Beach instead, to see some bankers. It worries me, Vic. Cerulean Isles don't need money yet. If he wants money, he wants it for the Florida-For-All Company. Well—anything I can do for you?"

"Yes," I admitted. "I need some collars—but when I go around to try to buy them, I can't find a furnishing store in town."

He laughed. "The arcades are full of them. But only realtors can afford to pay street-front rents downtown."

Our trip to the Clorinda Club that night fell through. My friends, like everybody's friends in Miami, were realtors, and they'd just discovered a prospect who looked as if he might actually buy something, even in this stagnant February of 1926. That finished our party.

THE next day, tired of the gambling halls of Flagler Street, I went over to the North Beach Casino for a swim—it seemed absurd to have spent a week in Florida without undergoing that rite that serves as a king of baptism for the Northern visitor, the first plunge in the warm sea of February. The sands were thick with loungers, in bathing suits, in sports costumes, idling in the sun; and as I picked my way among them, toward the water, a cool voice called beside my knee:

"Oh, Mr. Bentley!"

The *Snow Queen*, Flavia Haddon, on the sand, sheathed in a swimming suit of brocaded white satin that was hardly whiter than her limbs. Yet to-day this amazing whiteness didn't look cold, nor yet anæmic. Dark veins ran faintly under her milky skin, a skin that showed no trace of tan or burn, though she sat full in the blaze of the sun; but the faint pinkness of her cheeks was obviously natural; clad in a bathing suit, her body seemed strong as well as shapely. Even the eyes were icy no longer; politely impersonal, but there was a faint smile in them as she invited me to the sand beside her.

"It's too bad we just missed each other that evening," she told me, as I settled down. "But we can date our acquaintance from that encounter, can't we?"

"I didn't know you recognized it as an encounter," I said, rather wary. For why had she chosen to recognize me now, if not because she suspected me as a potential enemy and was determined to undermine me?

"I was preoccupied," she observed,

POP 3B

with a faint smile. "But my cavalier returns with my cigarettes. Hello, Joe! This is Mr. Victor Bentley, Mr. Josiah Quincy."

Mumbling something inhospitable, Mr. Quincy sat down beside us; and my first vaguely formed plan blew up right there.

I had hoped, somehow, to throw her into the arms of Mr. Quincy; but I simply couldn't think of that after I'd seen Mr. Quincy. On his thick, stubby fingers, diamonds and emeralds glittered; half a dozen, and big ones. He was stout, but muscular; a mat of thick, furry, black hair clung to his big, round head as mangroves cling to a Florida reef; he wore navy-blue trunks and a white jersey, but his arms and legs and shoulders told me that that was a pure concession to convention. Skin him, and you'd have had a perfectly good fur coat. Not very far above the simian, this Mr. Quincy, but far enough to be dangerous.

HE ignored me, talking to Flavia Haddon as she sat blowing smoke rings, staring out across the blue water where half a dozen tramp steamers and half a hundred four-masted schooners lay at anchor, waiting their turn in the crowded harbor of Miami. She said nothing, I said nothing; I only looked at her, with persistent irritation. Why didn't she sunburn, like other blondes? Why didn't she show some human weakness, somewhere?

"A couple of grand on Detroiter in the third race," Mr. Quincy was saying, "and he paid twenty-eight fifty."

I knew that meant for a two-dollar ticket; accordingly, Mr. Quincy had won over twenty-five thousand dollars.

"And then I took it to the roulette table that same evening and it was gone in half an hour," he concluded.

Flavia Haddon laughed faintly. "You ought to have put it in real estate, Joe. Buy on the water front in Cerulean Isles. I understand you're looking that over, too, Mr. Bentley."

"Not very seriously," I countered. She must be letting me know that O'Mara had told her all that I was doing—doubtless to let me see how far O'Mara trusted her. "I've been listening to salesmen, but I haven't gone down there yet."

"Nor I, since development began. I went down with Mr. O'Mara in the yacht one week-end, before the scarifiers were at work. Wonderful climate, glorious situation. Of course it was rather wild then. I'd like to see it now."

"I'll drive you down any day," Mr. Quincy proposed.

"Better not. The so-called Dixie Highway, down there, is even worse than the other Dixie Highways." She tossed away her cigarette and tied a white silk scarf about her hair; pushing off with one hand, she leaped to her feet with steel-springed grace. "Come, Mr. Bentley, let's dive through a few rollers."

I rose; Quincy rose, too.

"You'd better stay here, Joe," she told him. "You might lose your rings in the water."

His brown eyes blazed at her. "I could buy some more, I guess, couldn't I?"

"Millions of them, my dear, all platinum and a yard wide. I concede that. But it would be silly waste to lose these."

Her voice had the good-humored firmness of a wife or a secretary; mumbling, he dropped back on the sand. As the first waves washed about our ankles, she turned to me, faintly smiling.

"Well? How is my enemy Mr. Satchell?"

"Is he your enemy?" I parried.

She shrugged wearily. "Surely you don't think I'm too stupid to see that? Or do you want me to believe that you're too stupid to see it?"

"Satchell is never much interested in women," I observed.

"That's a pity. If he were, he might know more about them. Even if he doesn't like us, here we are; he can't kill us all off. One almost feels it would be more intelligent of him to try to understand us."

"He understands more than you might think," I warned her, irritated.

"Does he? I wonder. How do you like being—an undercover man?"

"Does that matter?" I asked. "I work for a living. I do what the boss tells me."

"So I'm to regard you as the dutiful automaton, am I? 'Yes, Mr. O'Mara.' 'Certainly, Mr. O'Mara.' 'Whatever the All Highest commands will be done.' 'It doesn't seem plausible.'"

I might have tried to answer, but by now we were waist-deep, and a roller was curling over us. We plunged through it, and gave ourselves to the sport.

Later we swam beyond the rollers and floated, face upward, in the gentle swell, eyes closed against the sun.

"This ought to be all of Florida," came her voice beside my shoulder. "Just this. Warmth and sunlight and release—release from clothes and worry, from cold and stuffy rooms. The best medicine in the world. Yet this incomparable paradise has to be poisoned by the insane chase for money. All of us, no matter why we come down here, feel the pull. You've felt it."

"Yes, I've felt it—but I was pretty well vaccinated by my years in Wall Street. Some people have a talent for money and some haven't. I haven't."

"I wonder how long you'll remember that, in Miami? I came down with the best of intentions myself. I was getting four hundred a week in 'Orange Rose.' They give me six hundred a week at the Clorinda Club, for about a third as much work per evening. In other words, I could do my own stuff and make money out of Florida; and that, I told myself, was enough. All I would do. Yet even now, when the resale business is almost dead, I'm tempted."

Did she think I was ass enough to suppose that she could think much about trivial speculations when she could marry Myron O'Mara?

"You've bought in Cerulean Isles, haven't you?" I asked.

"Yes, that was all that saved me. I bought a water-front lot—twenty thousand dollars. The first payment—five thousand—took about all my surplus so I couldn't invest anywhere else. But there have been some resales along the water front in Cerulean Isles, and lately I've been tempted. What can I do with a twenty-thousand-dollar lot? The contract obliges me to build within two years—and to spend at least twenty thousand on the house. But I'm not rich. I can't afford a forty-thousand-dollar winter home in Florida, when most winters I'll have to be working in New York. So the other day, when a man offered me thirty-five thousand for my lot, I almost took it."

"Why didn't you take it?" I asked.

Our eyes were open, now; she flushed faintly as she looked into mine.

"Because I like my lot," she confessed. "It's on the point overlooking the yacht basin, with a view across to another point where they're going to build the country club. It's simply too lovely to give up—yet. You'll see, when you visit Cerulean Isles. And yet the temptation comes back—to take my profit, and reinvest, and found a fortune. I'm thirty and I've been working since I was seventeen. One tires of working, especially after spending a winter in Florida."

AGAIN we were silent. There was food for thought in her remarks, yet of them all the one that overshadowed the others was the fact that she

was thirty. Thirty! Seven years younger than I. Yet in the presence of her controlled smiling serenity, I felt like a sophomore.

"Come!" Her voice broke in. "We must be going back. Heaven help the woman who makes Joe Quincy late for lunch."

He was a dark storm cloud when I brought her back to him, but I left her with no fears for her; she could hold her own.

Very much so, I concluded after reflecting on this puzzling hour I had spent with her—or rather that she had elected to spend with me. The total impression was certainly that she had gone out of her way to be friendly. She admitted that Satchell hated her; she let it be suspected that she believed I hated her; and she had done her discreet best to intimate that there was no reason why she should be hated by either of us. All together, we could be friends and brothers.

But that was impossible and she knew why. So she must have been merely watchfully attempting to secure the neutrality of a prospective enemy, to keep me on the side lines while she and Satchell fought out their duel over Myron O'Mara. And she had done it so well that if Satchell hadn't forewarned me, she might very well have succeeded. Even now I couldn't be quite as hostile as I felt I should; I couldn't dream, any longer, of saving O'Mara by diverting her to Quincy.

Beyond dispute, she was a dangerous woman.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PROPER SPIRIT.

ON Tuesday night I dined with O'Mara and Satchell, and over the cigars the Old Man began to quiz me.

"Well, Victor, how do you succeed in your impersonation of a prosperous Northern tourist?"

I flushed; he meant it just as a pleasantry, but none the less it burned in after that week of encountering old friends and old subordinates who had made money in Miami.

"Nobody seemed to pierce my disguise" I admitted.

He laughed, and as usual his laughter drew out the sting. "It was the hat, lad—that straw hat with the blue-and-white ribbon. That and the stick. Oh, yes, I saw you one day. If I hadn't known you, I'd have stopped the car and tried to interest you for a million or so in the Florida-For-All Company. But when you're ready to settle down to work just take off the hat, throw the stick away, and you'll be perfectly disguised as a resident of Miami. Well—what do you think?"

"About what? Cerulean Isles?"

"About anything. Miami in general."

"What about it?"

"Anything about it. What's your topmost impression of Miami?"

"There are so many Southerners. I'd never expected to find anybody but Northerners in Florida."

They stared at me.

O'Mara laughed. "There Oscar! A new impression for every newcomer. That's the first time I've heard that as the topmost facet of Miami. What else?"

"One wonders how it goes on," I told him, "and when it will stop. It must stop; the supply of customers has dried up, and they can't all live by selling real estate to each other. It must stop—but it ought to have stopped a year ago, five years ago, ten years ago—and it didn't stop. It goes right on. Heaven knows why, but it goes on! It may keep going on."

"That's Florida," said Satchell, after a silence. "Heaven knows why, but it does."

"How about Cerulean Isles?" O'Mara put in. "Been down there?"

"I didn't know you wanted that—I

thought I was supposed just to report on the sales impression to a newcomer."

"You were, but you ought to see the property. It's beautiful."

"Rather far, isn't it?"

"Not too far. Delightful trip, by yacht or speed boat. You ought to make it."

"I will," I promised. "A realtor has been begging me to go down with him—fellow named Bolton in one of the Flagler Street offices."

"Better go Sunday," Satchell advised. "It's a better show, then."

"Sunday by all means," O'Mara agreed. "But how does it size up, as a sales proposition?"

"Very well," I told him. "If I were an investor, there's where I'd invest. But by the way, are all these Cerulean developments yours? There's a place called Cerulean Center——"

They both roared.

"Lad, when you hear of a Florida development named 'Something' Center, you can set it down as pretty certain that it's outside the outskirts. Cerulean Center is four miles away from our boundary. Forget Cerulean Shores and Cerulean Heights, too. They're imitations, started after we began to go big. Cerulean Isles is the only blown-in-the-glass, guaranteed article."

"Well," I told him, "on the basis of sales talks and maps and statistics, it's the best bet in this part of Florida. And I've listened to salesmen for them all—every development from Boca Raton to Matacumbe."

O'Mara sighed with relief. "I'd hoped so, Victor—but I wasn't sure. I knew the financing and the inner organization were all right, but I couldn't tell how the sales force was impressing customers. Anything about it that you didn't understand, that they didn't make clear?"

"One or two things—but that may have been because I'm a tenderfoot."

"Ninety-nine prospects out of a hundred are tenderfeet. What didn't you understand?"

"Why," I said, "they laid so much stress on actual work being under way—actual work——"

Satchell squawked. "That's to distinguish it from theoretical work, Vic. There's a lot of purely theoretical work going on in Florida. Ours is actual, so far as it goes. If we could only get material through——"

"It's moving better," said O'Mara. "I took that up with some big railroad men when I was in Palm Beach. We'll begin to get the stuff now. Anything else lad?"

"One thing," I admitted. "This salesman—Bolton—told me that you'd bought half a million palm trees, to plant in the streets and parks of Cerulean Isles. That's a great many palm trees, Mr. O'Mara—quite a heap of vegetation. Where are these five hundred thousand palm trees?"

O'Mara burst into sudden laughter. "Damned if I know, Victor! I didn't even know there were half a million. The engineers and material men are attending to all that. All I know is that an adequate number of palm trees has been ordered, and will be paid for. Why didn't you ask the salesman where they are?"

"I did ask him," I admitted with a grin. "And he looked shocked for a moment—evidently nobody'd ever asked him that—as if I'd said something foul and obscene. And then he straightened up and said: 'Frankly, Mr. Bentley, I don't know. But I do know this—if a man of the caliber of Myron O'Mara tells me he has bought half a million palm trees, I, for one, am going to believe him.'"

Satchell roared, but O'Mara looked at him reproachfully.

"That's the spirit, Oscar! By Jove! Victor, you give me this salesman's name and address and I'll send him a bonus. That's the spirit that's going to

put Cerulean Isles over, slump or no slump. You've done well, lad, and I guess that ends your career as an undercover man. From to-morrow you start in as my secretary—your office is all ready for you, beside mine, on the sixteenth floor, with a view across the bay and the beach and the ocean. We executives can afford to spend a little of our time looking out of the window—for the next week or two. After that, things may tighten up. Anyway, Oscar's wangled us a few more telephones. And I'll send the boys over to the hotel for your bags to-night, Victor; after this, the inner circle will all live under one roof."

"Any other work to be done now?" I asked, with an excess of zeal.

"Not to-night—unless you want to tell me if there's been any deterioration in the quality of my cigars. There—here's a box of matches. No, we'll have to work hard when the rush starts, but there's no use straining ourselves now. In fact, to-morrow I thought we might all take an afternoon off and do our bit toward improving the breed of the American running horse. I have a box at the races, and I want to take old Jesley out and show him a pleasant afternoon. You know Charles Jesley, of course, of the Tremendous Trust Company?"

I nodded; Jesley, one of the three or four biggest bankers in the country; Jesley who had financed more than one of O'Mara's combinations. No wonder Satchell looked glum; if O'Mara wanted money from Jesley, money on the grand scale, it could only be for the Florida-For-All Company.

"Mrs. Jesley's in Palm Beach," O'Mara went on. "Just as well—she wouldn't add much to the party. But we'll have Lucas Hydrick and his young wife, and the Walter Stanfields, and Flavia, of course—— By the way, Victor, she was telling me she saw you at the beach the other day."

"I hope she gave a good report of me," I muttered, curiously embarrassed.

"She did—two good reports. She says you swim very well for a man just out of hospital, and that Josiah Quincy doesn't like you."

"I can't help wondering," I observed, "why she likes him."

"Simple enough, lad—she's an entertainer. Her income depends on her popularity and her popularity depends on being pleasant to everybody—even the Josiah Quincys. It's a hard life, lad, for a sensitive woman."

If I were a painter, I could have won deathless fame, at that moment, by copying the supreme disgust on Satchell's face. When O'Mara had left us, he glanced at me sardonically.

"It's hell about her, ain't it, Vic? A shy, shrinking creature like that! You haven't got anywhere, have you? Neither have I, though she dined here three times this week. By the way, you may have wondered what became of that yacht you were once invited to use. Well, she's about to be put into service—Sundays, anyway—to take parties of tourists down to Cerulean Isles. It seems a shameful come-down for the old *Vesta.*" He laughed softly. "*Vesta,* did I say? You knew her as the *Vesta,* Vic, in the old days; but she's been renamed lately. Now she's known as the *Orange Rose.*"

CHAPTER IX.

JUST A BIRD DOG.

I DON'T know why I was so gay that next afternoon—gayer than I had ever been since my breakdown six months before. I had only eighty-seven dollars in my pocket, and that was all I had in the world, except the eight days' pay that stood to my credit on the books of the Cerulean Isles Corporation. Eighty-seven dollars; and of the eight other people in our party, every one—except Flavia Haddon—was a multimil-

lionaire. That ought to have made me uncomfortable, but it didn't. Unreasonably, inexplicably, I was happy.

Perhaps it was the setting. I don't know any better framework for gayety than the Miami race track. I've always been curiously susceptible to the influence of climate and scenery, especially warm climate and tropical scenery. I relaxed in thorough contentment when I saw that stucco grand stand that looks as much like a Spanish palace as a grand stand can, and a track encircled by coconut palms, bending and tossing before the wind. On the reception porch of the clubhouse, where we smoked after lunch, the wind was warm but crisp, bracing and soothing at once, like a good cocktail; the sunlight fell in gold as pale and lustrous as Flavia Haddon's hair.

And we were, I conceded comfortably, a good-looking party, a picture suited to the frame. Old Charles Jesley, whom I had known in the Street as a solemn and portentous dignitary, gray-browed and gray-mustached, convinced that he alone was personally responsible for the safety of the country—Charles Jesley, even, unbent astoundingly here in the sunlight.

Perhaps that was because O'Mara had thrown him, unobtrusively, with Flavia Haddon, a sort of polite announcement that they two were the guests of honor. And she looked well enough that day to unbend anybody, in a dress that was only a soft, silken cobweb of hollyhock pink over a slip whose pink was paler still, with peach-colored stockings, and a hollyhock-pink picture hat, her pale gold hair showing dimly through its silken crown.

Then there were the Walter Stanfields, of the old Miami aristocracy—they'd been there seven years; going through the routine of every afternoon in every winter season, being polite to friends from the North—but being polite successfully and looking quite decorative in their summer clothes. And old bull-faced Lucas Hydrick, strutting like the king of the barnyard with his new wife, a slim, dark girl gowned in the new shade that was just becoming fashionable—Florida red; and Oscar and myself, the least considered persons in this assemblage, the tails to O'Mara's kite; but still, whatever else you might have said against us, dressed up to the occasion.

NONE of us bet on that first race, but before the second, we all began to feel that we must make our modest contribution to the improvement of the running horse. The women began to look over their cards, to ask us if we had anything. O'Mara, in the back of the box, was talking with a senator from somewhere who had dropped in on us. When we all decided to buy two-dollar tickets on a horse of which Mrs. Stanfield had heard something vaguely favorable, I was delegated betting commissioner for the party.

I came back from the window presently with a pocketful of tickets—they were all torn up and tossed away before long, for our horse ran eighth out of a possible ten—to find the box crowded with callers come to pay their respects to Mrs. Hydrick, to Mrs. Stanfield, to Flavia Haddon. O'Mara and his senator had moved off somewhere. Satchell and Stanfield were buzzing around the edges of the conversation. But Hydrick and old Charles Jesley, standing together at the entrance to the box, were buried in a conversation of their own.

I attached myself, loosely, to the edges of the crowd; but I sat pretty well back, and I couldn't help hearing snatches of this duologue behind me; snatches, especially, of Lucas Hydrick's end of it, for he didn't seem to be making any particular effort to say his say unheard.

"Why, Mr. Jesley, it's a crack-

brained scheme! He may be able to pick up a lot of worthless acreage from the shoe-string developers who go bankrupt, but he won't get anything worth while."

Jesley muttered something, and then Hydrick's subdued and rolling bellow sounded again.

"Oh, certainly, O'Mara's put over some big things! I'd be the last to deny it. Cerulean Isles, here, is a good development; and so big that anybody else but O'Mara would be satisfied to stick to it. But Florida-For-All——"

Another interlude from Jesley; then Hydrick once more.

"Yes, speaking generally, as you say. But Lucas Hydrick of Exclusive City isn't speaking generally. There's nothing in the scheme for me. I've got my own development, a hundred-million-dollar development, moving along nicely despite the fact that business in general is not quite so active this winter. That's mine. When people think Exclusive City, they think Lucas Hydrick. Why should I bury myself in a syndicate where I'd only play second fiddle to Myron O'Mara, even if it went through just as he thinks it will?"

But a little later, when I had mused upon this fact, discouraging to the Old Man but rather heartening to his friends, that evidently Florida-For-All would not need to inflate itself to swallow Exclusive City, I heard Hydrick again——

"Hell, Mr. Jesley, you don't need to tell me that! Some of your New York bankers take every inch of hide off a man they can get."

Apparently, then, the financing of Exclusive City over the period of depression hadn't been such an easy matter after all.

But money and real estate were secondary matters this afternoon; the business of the moment was amusement. The visitors left. O'Mara came back. The question at issue, now, was the proper horse for the fifth race. Satchell, who knew something about horses, as he knew something about everything, but rarely got interested in them, as he rarely got interested in anything, advised King Bee. But the board, straight across the track, told us that King Bee was the favorite; we'd be lucky to get better than six to five on him.

"There's no fun in that," Flavia protested. "When you're only spending two dollars, you might as well take a chance on a long shot."

"Atta girl!" Satchell grinned. "Leave the sure things to the cautious players, eh, Flavia?"

"When I'm risking two dollars," she shot back at him. "If I were betting everything I had, I'd probably be the most cautious investor in the world."

"I can well believe that."

He inclined his head gravely, a salute of hostile admiration; her flickering smile told me that it was accepted as given. But now old Jesley came to life.

"Come, Miss Haddon, let's see if we can't find a better horse for our money. How about Nicodemus, now? Eight to one at the present showing—not the longest shot, but somehow I like Nicodemus. Will you let me be your betting commissioner?"

He rose, and she rose with him.

"I'm not persuaded, Mr. Jesley—but we'll talk about Nicodemus on the way to the window."

I SAW O'Mara's eyes following them with calm approval, and I was pretty sure I knew why. Jesley, the genial old capitalist on vacation, would have felt it his duty to buy a fifty-dollar ticket for a pretty girl who deferred to his preference in horses. Flavia was going to the window with him to make sure that her investment was her own. Very upright—and very clever. I saw it; O'Mara saw it; Oscar saw it, too, grin-

ning wryly at me as I left the box with a handful of money, to buy two-dollar tickets on King Bee for the crowd.

O'Mara might not have been so happy if he could have seen Flavia and Jesley in the clubhouse, waiting their turn in the long line leading up to the fifty-dollar window. She was looking up at him, under the wide brim of her pink picture hat—I don't believe he was half an inch taller, but she managed to make it clear that she was looking up at him, up to him. Her green eyes were softer than usual, and they were fixed on his. The girl was working. Oh, I supposed, it was the purely automatic and necessary artfulness of the entertainer who lives by her popularity, the actress who can simulate the proper emotions in the presence of a banker who has millions and controls billions. Just the same it sickened me, a little; I suspected it would have sickened O'Mara, too.

Yet I had to give her this much credit—having once decided to make an impression on Jesley, she invested her own money in the good cause. All afternoon she'd been betting two dollars, like the rest of us; but now she marched up, just ahead of him, to the fifty-dollar window, and I saw her take a bill from her own hand bag to buy the ticket. I had to give her three unwilling cheers for that.

I lingered in the clubhouse, I hardly knew why; perhaps, I suspected with annoyance, just because I liked that warm atmosphere of opulence around me—opulence and gayety and subtropical brightness; Panama hats and white trousers, the blue fumes of cigars and the ubiquitous glitter of jewels; bright eyes, alert and challenging, summer frocks and silken knees. Jesley and Flavia were lingering, too, deep in the conversation that had apparently been repressed in the crowded box; and as I watched them with rather peevishly ironic interest, I heard two bluff, important-looking men beside me, in an interchange of comment that upset all the theories I had been building up.

"Sure enough, old Jesley of the Tremendous Trust. And Flavia Haddon. Thought she was playing for O'Mara."

The other man yawned. "Only a bird dog, my boy. A damn good bird dog—the blue-ribbon bird dog of Miami. But that's all."

"Bird dog? Where do you get that?"

"Why, it sticks out. Jesley's down here for a rest, but a man with money can't rest unless he locks himself up in solitary confinement. I don't know just what O'Mara's up to, but you can be sure Cerulean Isles isn't big enough to hold him down. He wants money and Jesley's got it. She flushes the game and O'Mara aims the gun. No puny bird dogging for her, steering pikers up to buy single lots. But if she can get Jesley hooked up with whatever O'Mara's doing, she'll get her cut, never fear. And never doubt that O'Mara's sicked her on."

Well—perhaps they were right! Long after Flavia and Jesley had gone back to the box, I stayed in the clubhouse, finishing one of O'Mara's cigars and wondering. The Old Man was quite capable of it, and I didn't doubt that she was capable of it, too. He wanted to marry her, probably she intended to marry him; the ensnarement of Jesley to their joint advantage was a sort of family enterprise. Just the same, it left rather a bad taste, that he should use her for that.

ALSO, it gave rise to some troubled speculations. Here was still another thread in our tangled pattern. O'Mara and Satchell together—that was an old story, a partnership of thirty years; it was automatic in the minds of both, something that could be altered for the moment by some overpowering stress, but into which both tended to fall back naturally the moment the

stress was decreased. O'Mara and I together; as confidential secretary there were, or would be soon, details, even if only trivial details, that I knew and Satchell didn't. Satchell and I together, in secret conspiracy to defeat this intended marriage.

And now O'Mara and Flavia together, held together not only by his hot eagerness and her cool sense of the advantages of a wealthy marriage, but united, less emotionally and therefore more securely, by this secret commercial understanding. Just as he had used me as undercover man, he was using her as undercover woman; and that alone might set up, in her, its own kind of loyalty.

Altogether it was pretty well tangled up, and I didn't see any way out of it. Two things only I saw with disturbing clearness—that O'Mara had his own direct connection with each of us three; that, in one way or another, whatever any of us could offer, he was going to get; and that in this stress of conflicting forces the weakest piece of the fabric was likely to be the first to snap under the strain.

There was no doubt who was the weakest piece of the fabric. It was Victor Bentley, confidential secretary, standing here in the midst of all the millions of Miami with eighty-seven dollars in his pocket. No—only eighty-one now, for I'd bought three worthless tickets on three worthless horses.

I CAME back to the box in time to see King Bee, our popular favorite, limp home fifth; while Nicodemus tore furiously down the stretch to win by a head, paying thirteen dollars and sixty cents for a two-dollar ticket.

"Good heavens!" said Flavia, when she had done some mathematics with a borrowed pencil—borrowed from Satchell, at that—on the back of her card. "I've won two hundred and ninety dollars."

"Take us all to dinner," chirped young Mrs. Hydrick, whose wealth was still so recent that she seemed to regard any small windfall in her neighborhood from the point of view of free food.

"I would if I could," said Flavia, "but I have to dine at the club to-night. No, no—the Clorinda Club."

"How does that happen?" O'Mara asked, in an undertone.

Only the three or four of us nearest them caught his question, or her light answer.

"An occasion. Some Nebraska farmer who's made a million in home sites is giving a dinner for visiting friends from Nebraska. Dinner for sixteen, my dear—and at the Clorinda Club. Did you ever hear anything like it? Where we never have more than half a dozen people before half past ten. But I suppose he'd heard of the Clorinda Club, and how should he know?"

"But *you're* not going to this fantastic dinner!" said O'Mara.

"Not going to it, no. I'm to be there as an entertainer. I sing. Oh, yes"—her light tone responded to his blank stare—"the gentleman from Nebraska insisted on that. It isn't the Clorinda Club without Flavia Haddon."

"But it's an imposition——" O'Mara began.

Flavia laughed. "Not at all. He pays the management exactly four hundred dollars extra to have me sing two songs during dinner. Four hundred dollars and I get half."

"And you get half!" O'Mara was furious.

Her hollyhock-pink shoulders moved in the shadow of a shrug. "Ladies must live. Of course, if I'd known I was going to win two hundred and ninety on Nicodemus—— Come—who knows anything about the horses in the next race?"

We scanned our cards; young Mrs. Hydrick let out a gleeful yelp.

"Second Bridal! That ought to be a good horse. It's a good name."

"That's an uneven horse," Satchell told us. "Runs beautifully when she's right, but she's liable to blow up for any of a dozen crazy reasons. No, I'm not speaking in metaphor: I'm giving you dope."

"Well, I'm going to put some money on Second Bridal," Mrs. Hydrick announced. "Let me have another century, Lucas, darling?"

"What's the big winner doing?" Jesley asked. "The other big winner, I mean."

"I took your advice before," Flavia told him, with a deferential smile. "I'll take it again."

He grinned, trying to be courtly. "I can't do less than support Mrs. Hydrick's favorite."

"Then I'll do the same," Flavia decided. "Mr. Bentley, will you buy me a fifty-dollar ticket on Second Bridal?"

"Only fifty?" Mrs. Stanfield rallied her. "On a name like that?"

"I'm a cautious investor," said Flavia.

O'Mara's eyes caught hers, and held them; he was troubled above his suppressed excitement; after a moment her eyes dropped with a barely perceptible frown. Evidently she wasn't letting him hope with too much confidence. Not yet!

Second Bridal was fifteen to one when we put our money down, but before they went to the post she had shortened to four to one. We watched that race with an unreasonable intensity of concentration. Too much was in the air. Everybody in the box—everybody in Miami—knew that O'Mara was crazy about Flavia Haddon; everybody supposed he would get her, but nobody knew. I had learned that there were even persons who were betting money on the unappetizing but assiduous Josiah Quincy.

Second Bridal led from the quarter pole to the stretch; and then Valiant nosed her out, and then, one after another, four more horses galloped past her as she misbehaved in the last hundred yards, with all possible varieties of misbehavior. Nobody said a word as our party filed out of the box; if there was any topic on which, for the time being, the last word had been said, it was Second Bridal.

CHAPTER X.

SECRETS TOLD.

SLOWLY we edged our way out, O'Mara and Flavia and I, by sheer accident, in the lead.

"Now, let's see, Flavia." O'Mara looked at his watch. "When are you due at the club?"

"The dinner's supposed to start at seven. I don't imagine it will."

"It's six twenty-five now. It's twenty miles across country and must be twenty-five by road!"

"Never mind. I can make it."

"I thought you'd go back to town with us," he told her. We had all come out together, he and Jesley and Satchell and Flavia and I, in his big French limousine. "And I've got to take Jesley back direct. Jesley's in a very good humor, thanks to you"—I don't know whether he forgot that I was at his shoulder, or didn't care what inference I might draw—"and I want to keep him that way. He's coming over to the house for dinner and I thought——"

"Don't worry about me. Plenty of taxis."

"Don't you have to change?"

"I'll change at the club. I always keep an evening outfit there in case of just something like this."

"I don't like the idea of your going in a taxi," he persisted. "And yet the Stanfields and Hydricks have to go home, and I don't like to take Jesley back to town in a taxi—or twenty-five miles out of his way before dinner."

"Certainly not. I shouldn't let you in any case. I didn't know we'd be so late getting out, but I'd meant to take a taxi to the club. Some of them are comfortable and most of them are safe."

"Yes, but that's a long trip to take across unsettled country; and it's getting dark, too." He swung round on me. "Victor! Take Miss Haddon up to the Clorinda Club."

I inclined my head; I had no enthusiasm for taking this woman over half of Dade County; she had irritated me at first sight, and in a variety of new and obscure, but undeniable ways, she irritated me still. But I could see that she would have to be taken; it wasn't, on the whole, any too safe for a woman alone, with a hand bag full of money won on the races, to drive around over the hinterland of Miami in the dark with a strange taxi driver.

All the same, I'd have liked it a little better if he'd asked me instead of telling me—and telling me as if I were his chauffeur.

But Flavia had still to be heard from. "Oh, that's nonsense!" she protested. "I can go alone."

Her green eyes, softened, were turned on me doubtfully. I knew she didn't want to put me out, didn't want to put anybody out; but I felt, rather than saw, that she really was a little afraid —as she had reason to be—of going alone. And I felt, too, that she had sensed that I was reluctant to go because of some particular hostility to her.

"Nothing of the sort," I said, trying to be casual. "You wouldn't be allowed to do it, even if I hadn't had orders from the commander in chief."

IT occurred to me later that this was a rather clumsy way to notify her that I was taking her under my protection; I might, in ordinary courtesy, have found somewhat more felicitous language. But it was too late now. She was busy with her farewells to the rest of the party—farewells which in the case of Mr. Jesley evidently roused considerable reluctance on both sides. But at last they were over, and she and I were walking together toward the mass of parked taxis. And then a curious, amazing impression began to grow on me.

Though ten thousand people were all about us, though cars were swerving out of their parking spaces on every side, in clouds of choking dust, I was alone with Flavia Haddon. She and I, alone together.

That was her doing, this sensation as if the air were electrically charged around us. Not hypnotism, but literally personal magnetism—something electric. She was working on me as she had lately worked on Jesley, trying to break down my resistance, get me away from Oscar, kill my opposition to the marriage. I stiffened stubbornly; I wouldn't let her overmaster me.

"Oh, there's an open car!" she exclaimed. "Let's take it. Taxi!"

It drew up to us, a gray car driven by an amiably vague-looking Southern lad; as I opened the door for her, another car shot up beside us, with a sputter and a pur and a drifting cloud of white dust. A smart green roadster; against the dusty red sun that was dropping down into the Everglades, I saw a dark, round head outlined—Josiah Quincy.

"Flavia! Going over to the club? I'll take you over."

She smiled at him, gracious and grateful. "Thanks, Joe. Nice of you. But you needn't bother. I'm going with Mr. Bentley."

Motionless at his wheel, Josiah Quincy stared at us as our car backed and turned and finally drew out of the rank, into the roadway. Murder, black murder, was in his face; and my heart thumped with an amazing and novel kind of pride. He wanted to murder

me because I was going off with his girl. And then, with a rush of chagrin, it occurred to me that he wasn't thinking of me at all. He wanted to murder O'Mara. He had guessed that I had been sent off with Flavia as a bodyguard, O'Mara's chief eunuch assigned to the protection of the pride of the harem. And he was right. Personally, I didn't count at all. I was only a slave.

I leaned back wearily against the cushions and prepared to be a good slave, to resist her attempts to corrupt me to her own interest.

But she made no attempts of any sort for the first half dozen miles. She leaned back, weary, too, her picture hat resting on her knees, her golden hair ruffled by the wind.

NOT the *Snow Queen* now—not at all! In that pink frock, with peach-colored ankles crossed in front of her, she looked almost warm. Also, she looked tired; there were shadows under her eyes; she looked thirty, a weary thirty, yet somehow she looked like a tired child, too. I was beginning to be sorry for her, when it occurred to me that all this was part of her method, every effect neatly calculated, to the end of disarming the hostility of Victor Bentley. I ignored her, with resolution, and turned my attention to the landscape flitting past us in the twilight.

Hot-dog stands and filling stations, groves of tall, scrawny pines; a scattering of bungalows, a strip of sand barrens adorned with bright-blue signs—Paradise Heights, Flamingo Manor, W. T. Smith Estates; white posts that marked the streets, a desolate-looking bungalow or two with the puny leaves of a palm poking up through the grassless earth in front; a wilderness of palmetto scrub, more hot-dog stands, more pine barrens——

Flavia stirred and spoke in a dreamy murmur. "Why did you come to Florida?"

"Why not?" I countered, recalled to wariness. "Why shouldn't one come?"

She gave a movement of impatience. "Well, of course—— But why did you?"

"I was tired," I said. "I'd been ill. I needed rest and warmth and sunlight. Also I was broke, absolutely broke, and O'Mara offered me a job."

"Rest!" She laughed lightly. "You won't rest much, on that job. Not if he goes on with his plans. He asked you to come down as his guest—oh, yes, he told me. You could work if you liked; you could loaf if you liked. And you chose to work. Why?"

"I was broke," I repeated.

"You know you could have lived on the yacht—or in the house with them—all winter without spending a nickel."

I flushed, with slow-burning anger. "It happens," I told her, trying hard to control my voice, "that I don't like to be a—charity patient."

"Surely a man you've known well a dozen years might ask you to be his guest without making you feel like that! And if you're so sensitive, I don't see why you'd take a job as secretary. Especially as you must have known how he regards secretaries—how he can't help treating them. Ordering you to take me to the club. I shouldn't have blamed you at all if you'd refused, flat. I'd have rather admired you."

What was this woman trying to do to me?

"It isn't a safe trip, for a woman alone," I reminded her. "This boy who drives the taxi seems all right; but over lonely roads—— Anyway, I do work for him; I'm on his pay roll and I take his orders."

"I gathered as much," she observed dryly. "But why? You've been in business for yourself—your own boss. I should think——"

"I failed in business for myself. Oh, yes, only because I broke down physically; still, I failed."

"But you had a position of—some importance on the paper, didn't you?"

"It looked better than it was. No position is of importance on a paper, except owning it—and that, even, is less fun than it looks."

"Yes, but I should think that at your age, with your experience, you'd try something else—anything else—rather than a secretaryship."

By this time I'd given up any hope of penetrating her motives; whatever they were, she was talking sense, she was striking home.

"Why," I admitted, "I don't think I'd have taken a secretaryship with anybody but O'Mara. There's something about him."

She let out a long sigh; and I looked at her with a new, quick interest. It had never occurred to me till this moment that she might actually be in love with the Old Man—with him, not with his millions. But why not? He was sixty-three, yes, but he seemed a dozen years younger; and he did have that chemical quality of attracting devotion—my devotion, Oscar Satchell's, the devotion of most of the men and women who had ever worked for him. Why not her devotion, too?

"I can see that," she said. "He has a terrific pull, hasn't he? He never does any but big things, and they seem bigger just because he does them with a grand gesture. He has force and grace. A big man. With queer streaks—but we all have them."

The car stopped—at a desolate crossroads, lost in the pines, in the dark. The driver's voice came back to us.

"This road straight ahead, ma'am?"

"Don't you know?" she asked.

"I never been just out here before. I come here from Birmingham last November——"

She laughed. "I don't recognize this particular spot of wilderness myself. But keep going east and you'll strike the Dixie Highway."

"Yes, ma'am." He went on, but I wondered if he knew, any more than I did, which way was east. Night had fallen now, and with the haze of wood smoke drifting across the sky any star might be the North Star.

"Yes," she resumed, after a pause, "I can see how one might feel like working for Myron O'Mara as secretary, or anything else. There's a pull. But I wonder how much of it's personal and how much is—Florida? The gigantic movement and hurry of this crazy State."

"I knew him twelve years before I saw him in Florida," I reminded her.

"So you did. But I had the barest acquaintance with him, till this winter. So I can't help wondering whether—how much, I mean, he attracts me as Myron O'Mara, and how much as the incarnation of the things all the big men are doing in Florida. Doing or going to do."

"He's doing enough," I muttered grimly.

"For him? You know him better than that. Cerulean Isles is a big development—as big as the biggest—but he runs that with just one little compartment of his brain, as you or I might play a game of solitaire. It doesn't satisfy him. What do you think of Florida-For-All?"

"What do you think of it?"

She gestured wrathfully. "Haven't you any opinions of your own, Victor Bentley? I know you have. Possibly they don't concern me, but surely I asked a simple question."

"So did I. Because it doesn't make much difference what I think of it."

"Ah! Well, I don't know what to think of it. I'm a woman. I don't mean there aren't women who understand big business, but I don't. I've never been trained to it and I don't suppose I have that kind of talent. If I had, I'd certainly have more to show for thirteen years of hard work than

an equity in one lot in Cerulean Isles. My talent—if I have any—is personalities; a sort of gift for—well, not always friendships, but understandings. Florida-For-All is outside of my field. That's why I asked you for an expert opinion. Yes, you must be an expert; you were a financial writer for years. And you're new enough to have a fairly impartial opinion."

"I don't like it," I told her. "It's too big. He can't swing it, on the only scale that would seem worth while—to him. These big developments are all going to be able to tide themselves over. He can't get them—and it would be ruinous if he could. It's too big."

"Have you told him that?" she asked sharply.

"He hires me to be told, not to tell."

"The perfect secretary!" Her soft scorn burned into me like a dash of concentrated acid. "You wouldn't tell him—but you hope that I may tell him, eh?"

"Dear Miss Haddon, I assume you'll tell him what you like. I assume you already have."

"About Florida-For-All? Not a word!"

"Not a word, perhaps; but a look and——"

"I haven't!"

If her flaming denial wasn't honest, then I never saw honesty. But maybe she thought she hadn't; and still, unconsciously, her manner had done it.

"No," she said, "if Florida-For-All attracts me, it's for two reasons. It's a big thing—big enough to occupy him—big enough to interest him. And it looks like a good thing for so many little people. Florida-For-All! Cutting down the overhead and the outrageous prices—he really could, couldn't he?"

"Beyond doubt. His combines have always reduced prices, to the consumer—and still made money. He could do it again."

"And it's so beautiful here! So many tired, cold, hard-working people in the North who would be happy here, if they could afford it, if their last savings weren't out in the purchase of a lot. If he could bring a hundred thousand people to Florida who couldn't afford it without him, wouldn't it be worth doing?"

"If he could."

"If he could," she agreed. Then—"Ah, but you and I don't understand him, Victor Bentley—what he can do and what he can't do. Not even Satchell understands all that, though Satchell comes nearest—— Perhaps he can!"

"Perhaps—but perhaps he can't! And failure would hurt him, Miss Haddon. Failure, at his age, might break him. He's never known failure except once, in 1920. That almost broke him—and since then his heart has weakened. Another failure might be too much for him."

"So that——" she was beginning softly. Then, "Good heavens, is this driver lost again?"

THE car had stopped before a low shack of pine boards, soft-lit beyond a counter with colored paper lanterns; over the door hung a gallant sign, "Café de Paris." The driver was talking to a man in the doorway; then he ran out and jumped into the car.

"All right, ma'am," he called reassuringly. "Second to the right brings us to the Dixie Highway."

"I hope so," said Flavia, glancing at her wrist watch. "It's past seven now. I'll never have time to change before dinner; I'll have to sing in these, dust and all. So you're afraid, you and Oscar, to see him go into this?"

"Yes," I said sullenly. "He—he doesn't look it; he doesn't feel it; but physically he's an old man. He ought to rest—take his ease in Florida; let Cerulean Isles be enough."

"Every one ought to rest, in Florida," said Flavia grimly. "But who can? You ought to rest in Florida, but you don't. I ought to be content with my singing—it's a vacation, compared with the work I did in 'Orange Rose.' Yet I'm tempted all the time to go into speculation. We can't help it—none of us. Who could be content to be just a bystander at the creation of a new world—especially when it seems that other people are creating so much of it wrong? We're bound to take a hand, if we have any life left in us."

Her fiery vigor infected me, too—the more because she had put into words exactly what I had been feeling since my first day in Florida.

"And yet," I said, "the creation is a temporary phase, in Florida. What this State has, and always will have, is what attracted Ponce de Leon. The Fountain of Youth! It revives us all, and we use our new strength to work, rush, scramble for money——"

"We certainly do." The scorn in her voice was not for me alone; it was for herself and all of us, the human race at large. "Ponce de Leon is out of date, my friend. Florida needs a new symbol—the mechanical rabbit."

"The mechanical rabbit?" I gasped.

"Haven't you seen the dog races, at Hialeah? No? In England, or wherever the dog races started, they turn loose a rabbit and let the dogs chase him. They won't run unless they see a rabbit. Here it's more humane. They've invented a fictitious rabbit, an alleged rabbit, a mechanical rabbit that looks real but runs around the track on a third rail—just like a subway train. The dogs see him, in their wire cages and take him for a real rabbit.

"They run their heads off trying to catch him—and then at the end of the course he slips into a pocket in the ground, the current is turned off, and the dogs stop and look around and wonder what all the excitement was about. That's all of us, in Florida—chasing a mechanical rabbit that runs into the ground. And yet a few of us catch it—just often enough to keep the others hoping, scraping up money for the second payment, sure of reselling at a profit—— Lost again!"

ANOTHER forgotten crossroads in the bush; the driver had turned his searchlight up to a signboard, nailed against a pine; but all we learned from it was "No Heavy Trucking Allowed on this Road."

"This must be the one, ma'am," he assured us optimistically, as he started again.

"God grant he may be right," said Flavia piously. "I can use that two hundred dollars. Well?"

"Myron O'Mara," I told her, "has chased and caught enough rabbits, mechanical or otherwise. He's earned a rest."

"If he'll take it."

"If he's allowed to take it," I said.

She sighed. "You don't like me at all, do you? I'm sorry. I want people to like me. I've about despaired of ever winning Oscar over, but I did have hopes of you. I tell you again and again I'm not trying to influence him to do anything."

"You don't have to try."

"Oh! But he knows I like him just as well as president of Cerulean Isles as I might like him as president of Florida-For-All."

"But you don't admire him so much." I wondered at my own candor. Steadily, persistently, this woman had wormed all my secrets out of me, had learned why Oscar and I were fighting her—she knew everything, now. Clever! But since she knew everything there was no longer much point in pretending and holding back. "You can do anything with him, Miss Haddon."

"I?" She was unhappily amused. "You don't know him so very well,

after all. So that's why you hate me, you and Oscar."

"Why shouldn't we? You're driving him—up into the tower——"

"*Hilda Wangel* and the *Master Builder?* Thanks. Hasn't it occurred to you, and to Oscar, that I might have a considerably stronger influence if I tried? It certainly is no secret that he wants to marry me. Surely if I were sure I wanted to marry him, it would be all over by this time."

"You can take your time," I observed. "To tie him tighter."

"Oh, you are abominable!" she gasped. "As if I—— But I suppose it's natural enough, the way you see it. And I don't deny that if I marry again, I mean to marry rich. Not marry for money, but marry, for a complex of reasons, where money is. Only there has to be the complex of reasons. Joe Quincy has money, so far as that goes—more millions than anybody imagines. But I don't want Joe Quincy. I'm not sure I want Myron O'Mara."

It sounded reasonable; it sounded plausible, as she said it. I knew it was only dust in my eyes, mine and Oscar's, yet it sounded true. And then the car bumped over a rut or two and out in a wide, well-lighted road.

"The Dixie Highway at last!" she exclaimed, in relief. "And it's only a mile or two below the club, now. You'll stay and have dinner with me, of course. Now don't be absurd. There isn't another place to dine in miles, and you must be starving. I am. Anyway, I'd rather dine in company—even the company of an enemy. You see, I haven't given you up yet."

CHAPTER XI.

A SLAVE.

AHEAD, up the road, a blur of lights marked the Clorinda Club; they were rushing nearer. Abruptly I determined to say something.

"Look here, Flavia Haddon! If you want to do the best thing you can for Myron O'Mara, you'd better marry him now—and take him off on the yacht for a round-the-world honeymoon."

She looked at me with faint amusement. "Is this a message from Mr. Satchell?"

"It's a message from Mr. Bentley."

"Oh! But I thought Mr. Bentley was a person who was told, not a person who did the telling."

"Mr. Bentley has an idea now and then," I said, my face burning. "This idea, probably, wouldn't suit Satchell at all. But what Satchell wants, ultimately, is the welfare of O'Mara. He could stand seeing O'Mara married—so far as a woman coming between them is concerned, you've come between them now. But he couldn't stand seeing him pushed off the edge——"

I felt that there was more to say, but I couldn't quite phrase it; I stopped. There was a silence. Our car turned into the driveway.

In the door stood a large, blond man who looked as if in his early life he had made a good living as a half back.

"Flavia!" he exploded. "Where the devil have you been?"

"Why don't you ask the Burns Detective Agency?" she suggested sweetly. "Mr. Meiss, this is Mr. Bentley. Mr. Meiss is manager of the Clorinda Club."

Mr. Meiss, evidently, was totally uninterested in Mr. Bentley.

"Flavia, do you know they're halfway through that dinner? They insisted on starting on time. Why the devil you should choose this evening to——"

We had moved into the lobby. Now she stopped, again the *Snow Queen.*

"Well, I'm here, Willie. I'm going to sing—if you like it. But if you say one more word, I walk out, now and forever. Make good on one of your bluffs—hire Elsie Janis, or Paul White-

man. But one more word and I'm through."

"I'm sorry, Flavia. I didn't mean anything——"

"Well! Then get me a table for two, in a corner, away from the orchestra. Will you order dinner, Victor, while I powder my nose?"

I ordered dinner, at my remote and solitary table, the only table, in a room full of lounging waiters, where there was a customer—except the long table at the edge of the dancing floor, where sat the sixteen visitors from Nebraska. For them the waiters scurried; for them the orchestra played; for them bottles of sparkling gold cooled in buckets of ice. For them, presently, came Flavia Haddon, still in her hollyhock-pink gown and her picture hat, with barely time enough in the dressing room to freshen up her face—Flavia Haddon singing as I never heard her sing before or since. She was paid for two songs, but she sang three in a row before finishing with the inevitable encore of "Orange Rose."

They applauded frantically, as well they might even if they hadn't been full of champagne; two or three of them tried to drag her to their table. Cool, smiling, she evaded them as Red Grange evades tacklers in a broken field, and came to me in the corner.

"You know what a hungry lady needs," she told me, with approval. "Dry Martinis, and canapé of anchovies—it starts well. I feel sure you've done well all down the list. Well?"

"You were glorious! Incomparable! You didn't do that well in 'Orange Rose' the night I heard you."

"I didn't dare," she laughed. "If I'd sung that well, I'd have stopped the show, and Cantor'd have had me fired for incompatibility. Besides, it's only now and then that one gets these inspirations. I'll give them another song when I've had something to eat. Did you order champagne? Oh, we must have it. Nothing like it when you're tired. No, I'll order it. You're my guest, Victor."

Something about my face disturbed her when she had dismissed the waiter.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"Don't call me Victor!" I burst out. "Not like that."

"Like what?"

"As if you were calling me Cheeves, or Parker, or Jevons, or Fido."

"Oh!" She laughed silently. "So it gets under your skin at last! I'm calling you Victor as he calls you Victor."

"He can't help it," I said. "It's O'Mara's way. I take it from him."

"Yes," she said bitterly, "we all take things from him. But you were in a frame of mind to take them from everybody. A secretary. A slave. Oscar's slave enough for him—too much. Oscar has pampered him. He wouldn't be just what he is if Oscar hadn't taken orders for thirty years."

She was right; I saw it now, as I had never seen it till she told me.

"Also, my friend"—her eyes were good-humored—"it wasn't very good for you. I had to jab you a little to get you out of it. But you're out of it now. Aren't you?"

I nodded.

"And you'll stay out?" she persisted. "Promise me, Victor? There! Did I say it right that time?"

"You said it right. As Oscar says it."

"Then you and I can be friends, anyway. I only wish you and I and Oscar —— But I suppose that's too much to hope."

WHEN soup and fish had fed her hunger, she sang again; with an encore, given, I knew, in a purely professional spirit, that was rather naughty. They roared and howled, men and women both; again they wanted to drag her to their table and again she escaped them.

"There—I've done my duty for the evening, earned my two hundred dollars," she said to me. "Do you see why I sometimes tire of this sort of thing?"

"Is that a threat, Flavia?" I could smile, now, as I asked it.

"I don't threaten, my friend. When I've made up my mind, you'll know it."

The lights went out, suddenly, all over the house. There came a chorus of squeals and laughter from the long table; waiters scurried about.

"Don't mind it," Flavia's voice came through the darkness. "It often happens around Miami. Sometimes four or five times during a meal. We're prepared for it."

They were indeed prepared; presently two candles burned on our table, other candles illumined the big party. I was rather glad of the change; her pink-and-gold blondness was amazingly effective in that faint light. By the candles we finished dinner; we smoked.

"I'm not such a dreadful person after all—now, am I?" she asked. "Oh, don't deny it. Oscar hates me, and you were getting all trained to hate me. And I know it sounds cold and hard to say I wouldn't marry a poor man again. But I married once for romance, when I was nineteen; and I certainly got it. Six months of heaven, six years of hell. Excuse me if I sound theatrical. That's a plain statement of fact. Precisely what it was. Hell! You've heard about it?"

"Perhaps not correctly."

"At least you know why it makes me furious to be called the *Snow Queen.* Oh, yes, that's an old line; it occurs to everybody who sees me in white. But that was only part of it. Harold—my husband—was a good actor once, with quite a promising start. And then he let go. I don't know why; I never did know why. My fault, perhaps. The—snow came afterward, as an anodyne. I supported him for years—gave him money to buy dope—gave him money that I knew he spent on other women. I don't quite know the why of that, either. Not that I loved him, except as one might love a crippled child. But when I see another man letting go as he did—taking what was handed to him, smilingly acquiescent—as you were doing, Victor Bentley——"

"You've cured me," I told her. "If you ever doubt it, just call me Victor, in that tone you used at first."

She smiled. "I don't think I'll need to."

IN a sudden glare the lights came on again. I shook myself and felt a tremendous relief. As I had felt when we found the road at last after we had been lost in the wilderness.

We danced, presently, the only couple on the floor except a staggering pair from the big party around whom we steered as a liner steers round an iceberg. She danced with willowy grace, with heaven-born lightness. Time passed; the reveling Nebraskans moved on; stragglers began to drift in, forerunners of the crowd.

"Time to be changing," said Flavia. "The regulars would ask for their cover charge back if they didn't see me in an evening gown. Will you stay?"

"I—— May I take you home?"

"I always go home in one of the club cars. I know the chauffeur—he got a medal of honor in the war. I'm perfectly safe—from him or from hijackers."

"Then I'd better go back now," I decided. "The Old Man will wonder what I've done with you."

But I was wondering what she had done, what she might be going to do, with me.

"I suppose I'll see you soon," she said. "I'll be dining at the house on the island. What are you doing Sunday? We usually play golf, or something—swim in the pool in the garden, sometimes——"

"I'm going down to Cerulean Isles Sunday. Promised a realtor."

"That isn't a bad idea. Maybe I'll go down, too. I ought to look over my investment. It was awfully nice of you to bring me over here—and to stay. Good night, Victor! There—did I say that right?"

She had; entirely too right, if anything. Natural enough, I mused morosely in the taxi that took me back to town, that she should make an effort to be agreeable to the secretary of the man she was probably going to marry. But she needn't have been so damn agreeable.

Frankly, I was afraid of her. And yet that feeling was overshadowed by another rather comforting conviction. If she did marry the Old Man, when it was all settled, we could be good friends, she and I.

CHAPTER XII.

WHEN THE WORM TURNED.

IT was nearly midnight when I drove up to the house on the island, but there was a light in the big drawing-room. O'Mara's voice rolled out.

"That you, Victor? Come in here."

He and Satchell were seated at a long table, strewn with scribbled sheets of paper. I could see that they were both excited.

"Where have you been all this time?"

"At the Clorinda Club. We were lost—got there late, and I stayed for a late dinner."

"I hope you were too late for her to sing for that—special party."

"No, we were on time. I imagine she makes a point of keeping engagements, doesn't she? It's part of her job."

"Don't like to see her keeping that kind," he rumbled. "For two hundred dollars. Petty! But you've missed the grand excitement, lad. We're just reorganizing the Florida-For-All Company. It's going over!"

"Is it?" I asked, and told him what I had overheard between Hydrick and Jesley in the afternoon.

He seemed unruffled. "Never mind. That didn't persuade Jesley. And Hydrick will come around. He's bound to. He hasn't got his money yet. He knows he can get it—but he knows the price he'll have to pay. It's outrageous. Nobody would ever ask terms like that of Myron O'Mara."

"What's the reorganization?" I asked.

"A new syndicate. Here's the list, as we've got it so far."

I looked at a sheet of paper on which names and figures had been written down. I looked and gasped. It read:

Myron O'Mara	$25,000,000
Charles Jesley	5,000,000
Oscar Satchell	5,000,000
Flavia Haddon	1,000,000
Victor Bentley	1,000,000

There were more names, but at this I looked up.

He roared with laughter. "Don't be alarmed, lad. You're a straw man, a dummy. So are some of the others down below. I'm in for thirty million, but it seemed wise to spread it around a bit."

"Flavia Haddon——" I began.

Satchell frowned. Leaning across the table, he struck her name off with a pencil. "She'd do it if I didn't, governor. You know that. She won't let you carry her. No, and she won't be a dummy, either. Looks nice, doesn't it, for a girl you're running around with, a girl you aren't engaged to yet, a girl who's known to have no money in particular, to be set down for a million in one of your promotions? She'd be sore as a boil."

O'Mara looked like a child who has just been told he can't have a second slice of cake. I knew he got a purely childish pleasure at seeing her name and a million dollars down on his list. I cleared my throat.

"Strike me off, too," I said. "Most

of the men you'll want on that list—the New Yorkers, anyway—knew me. They know I never saw a million dollars."

"What of it? This list will be seen by some people who won't know that. For them, you'll add dignity to my list—my associates coming in with me. The others will only take it as a little joke."

"They would," I agreed, "but they won't have the chance. I've been an undercover man, but I won't be a straw man. If that's part of the job, an inescapable part of the job, tell me now, and I'll go across the bay and see if the Miami *Herald* couldn't use a man with twelve years' newspaper experience in New York."

He looked at me, stupefied. Satchell's eyes were glittering, and it seemed to me they showed an almost envious admiration.

"What? You won't?" asked O'Mara.

"I won't." I was shaking inwardly, but I hoped he didn't see it. "If you need me for that sort of thing, tell me now. I won't do it."

"Oh, damn you all!" he grumbled, and tore up the list. "Have it your own way if you're so particular. Here—Myron O'Mara, thirty million; Oscar Satchell, five million; Charles Jesley, five million. That's all we've got, for a start."

"Enough to look big," Satchell told him. "That's a lot of money. Too much money, for you and me. You know that you can't spare thirty million, and I can't spare five million, with what we're obligated to do in the next two years at Cerulean Isles. We haven't got it."

"Dear, dear, Oscar, such conservatism! And you with all the money you're going to make on that tip of Jesley's, too."

"I've only sunk fifty grand in that. I wouldn't trust old Jesley too far. On a tip, or on this deal either. The bankers skinned you in 1920. If they get a chance, they'll skin you again."

"Oscar, my boy, I haven't lived sixty-three years without learning the ways of bankers. Go swimming with a banker, and he'll sneak back to the shore at the first chance and steal your clothes. But handcuff him to you and he can't sneak back. He's got to swim."

"Five million isn't much of a handcuff for Jesley. Oh, I grant you it's a lot of money. But if we want the Tremendous Trust behind us, they'll have to deal in bigger sums than that. That won't be Jesley's money, but he'll control it. He'll control it—and he'll be right on the inside where he can see what to do and where to do it."

"Don't worry about that. The first thing to do is to get some of these other fellows either to come in or name a figure. Young, Merrick, Hydrick and——"

"Which do you want?" Satchell demanded. "Take 'em in or buy 'em out?"

The Old Man's brow clouded; he mused for a time in silence. "Oh—I guess we'll have to take them in, Oscar. Jesley would have us by the scruff of the neck if we tried to buy them all. After all, get each of those big fellows in for about ten million and we could handle his share in this development all right. Exclusive City's a hundred-million-dollar development, for example, but ten million flat is a good price for what Hydrick has left—not to mention the profit he stands to make from this.

"And whether they like this idea or not, they all see that it means lower overhead, reduced expenses—and without loss of face. To close up sales offices, let your salesmen drift away, or let people see them starving on the curb, which is just as bad—that's a confession. Not of defeat, maybe, but of hard times. But to go into the one big, grand superdevelopment, to cut prices and eliminate waste and bring Florida

within reach of all—that's another matter. They'll come in."

He looked at us, with genial perfection of confidence. "Some day, my friends, this moment will go into the histories of Florida—one of the turning points in the history of the State. The moment when Florida was taken out of the gambling era and put on a business basis, to the profit of the purchaser and the seller as well. They'll put up a monument, maybe, with our names on it, and Jesley's." He was jovial, but I could see he wasn't altogether speaking in fancy; in the back of his mind, he more than suspected that this might actually come true. "Our names and Jesley's—a historic moment. Well, boys, we'd better turn in. There's work to be done to-morrow."

"Lots of it," said Satchell gloomily.

"Lots of it. You'd better start drawing a bomb-proof option first thing, Oscar, while I go around sounding out the best prospects. We can get everybody in this, Oscar. I'll even let Josiah Quincy in, damn his shaggy hide. The man has money—more money than you'd think. No reason why we shouldn't use some of it. Yes, I'll go after him. And Victor—you'll tell Perkins to see the renting agent about taking up our option on the floor below—the fifteenth; get Seibel busy on office furniture——"

For the better part of ten minutes, he was busy giving me orders—the multitudinous duties of a confidential secretary and temporary grand vizier. For I could see that I was to be the *Pooh-Bah* of the outfit till Satchell got some of the legal work out of the way.

I didn't mind that. It made me feel that I, too, was one of the builders of Florida.

SATCHELL came into my bedroom as I was undressing, pausing as I took off my clothes to stare out over the starlit bay with a curious languor. "Well," he said gloomily, "the curtain is up; the button has been pressed; the flag has fallen; the toboggan has started. We're off! Damn the woman."

"You don't blame her for this, do you?"

"She's at the back of it. Why? You talked to her this evening, I suppose. Did she try to alibi herself out?"

"She made a pretty good job of it," I confessed. "She didn't seem altogether sold on Florida-For-All."

"She's sold him, anyway. So she can have a few more millions to spend after his heart has finally gone back on him—the *Merry Widow*."

"Oscar, you aren't fair. I'm not positive she'll marry him. I'm inclined to doubt if she is. And even if she does—she has her side of it, you know."

He looked at me in long, contemptuous silence, over which finally a kind of forgiveness crept. "I might have known it," he said, at last. "She talked to you and she got you. Clever woman. No use fighting against her, I guess. I might have known she'd talk you around, given an hour alone in a taxi."

"I think you're mistaken, Oscar."

"Of course you think so, boy. If she'd had an hour alone with me at the start, before I saw what she was up to, I'd probably have thought I was mistaken, too. Can't be helped, I guess. Blooie! Up the river. All out! Anyway——" His innate gentleness moved him to try to smoothe over the idea that I had offended too deeply. "Anyway, Vic, I was proud of you for standing up to him to-night. Damn good job."

"I suppose it sounded like an absurd scruple——"

"No—it was good sense. Good for you—and good for him. He's always had things too much his own way. This is the first time I've heard anybody on the pay roll talk back to him in twenty years—first time I ever heard anybody talk back to him and stay on the pay

roll. We've pampered him. I guess. I've pampered him. I used to jolly him along, and let him have his way, or think he was having it; and I've got so now I can't do anything else. Can't stand up to him and tell him what I really think of this woman. Can't stand up and tell him anything. Thank Heaven somebody can."

I didn't have the heart to tell him that I owed my new-found courage to Flavia Haddon.

CHAPTER XIII.

SHOE-STRING STUFF.

THEN began the scramble—a scramble that lasted, almost without interruption even for sleep, for ten days. I didn't go to Cerulean Isles that Sunday, nor did anybody else of my acquaintance; some hundreds of unconsidered customers did, no doubt, though I don't suppose they bought anything; but we all stayed in the office, working.

Flavia didn't go, I know, for about five o'clock Sunday afternoon she came in and dragged O'Mara away from his desk by main force.

"Come, Myron—no use driving yourself crazy. You'll do better work tomorrow if you take the evening off. You, too, Oscar, and Victor. I want a swim and the ocean won't do. Nothing will do but your pool in the garden, on the Isle of Capri. And I need at least three life guards to stand by me."

That was only irony, for she swam better than I, and I swam better than Satchell and O'Mara, but from the moment the Old Man shoved aside his pencil and his sheet of paper to look up at her, I knew she'd have her way. We left the office; we swam, in the marble pool in the garden; and after dinner she sang selections from the lighter operas.

That was a wonderful evening, the four of us, even Oscar, talking together like the best of friends; but it was the only light spot in those ten wild days.

What did we find, to keep us so busy? I don't quite know; the million details of a big business, unnecessary, most of them, if you take them one at a time, but all weaving together into a patterned whole. Satchell was working out options, contracts—when he had finished them they were as clear and simple as the "Gettysburg Address," but we all knew they were lawsuit-proof; I was doing the seven thousand things that have to be done by the man who sees people too big to be put off by underlings, but not big enough to get in to the boss; and the Old Man was——

Well, it shook my faith in the universe to perceive, toward the end of the second week, that the Old Man was working harder than any of us, and accomplishing less.

"It's the stubborn pride of these fellows," he complained one evening, over the dinner table. "Every big developer is so personally identified with his development that neither ordinary business sense nor a look into the future will persuade him to pool with the rest of them. They act as if I'd proposed a pooling of wives. Yes, Oscar, I knew you'd look cynical. No doubt some of them would be glad enough to throw their wives into the hands of a corporation and get rid of the worry. But you don't see old Lucas Hydrick giving up that dark young devil who's got her clutches on him, do you? No, and you don't see him throwing Exclusive City into the pool either."

"That cooks it," said Satchell, with poorly concealed relief. "If we can't get Exclusive City, we might as well never try it at all."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that, Oscar. We've got options on nine million dollars' worth already."

"Nine million dollars' worth of what? Chicken feed, shoe-string stuff—half of it would have been sold for taxes if you hadn't come along."

"Just the same, Oscar, it's a good buy at nine million." He looked comfortable and I didn't doubt he was right. "But, as you say, not worth going on with if that were all. We need Exclusive City. It's the keystone. Once get Hydrick in and the other big fellows will tumble over themselves to follow the parade."

"Yes, but you've spent the better part of four days with Hydrick. If you can't get him in four days, governor, nobody can ever get him."

"Well—he's expressed a guarded willingness to sell."

"Yes, but at what a price? Thirty million. Ten million—twelve at most—is every nickel his interest in Exclusive City is worth."

"He's a good business man, Oscar," said O'Mara reproachfully. "He knows that if I need him so badly, he's worth thirty million to me."

"Granted—and I don't grant it at all—that he'd be worth thirty million if we had it—we haven't got it. Great Lord, governor! Has the Miami mania caught you that bad? Thirty million for Hydrick? Blah!"

"Oscar, we could buy him out for that and make money."

"How could we buy him out for that? You can't put thirty million into this; I can't put five million, without giving somebody a strangle hold on Cerulean Isles. You know, damn well, old Jesley would like to get it, too."

"We can manage Jesley."

"You haven't managed him much yet," I put in, for my new-found courage still lasted, though it was beginning to wear thin. "Hammond—that son-in-law that he put in as operating vice president at fifty thousand a year—if he knows his way to the water cooler, he knows more than I suspect. And a second cousin in the material department, a hanger-on of some sort among the engineers—— All right, I know this is none of my business. But you've been obliging enough to make me a director of Florida-For-All. I'm a dummy when I vote, but I talk for myself. I may not be much of a director, but I'm not asking you to put all my family on the company's pay roll—like Jesley."

"Lad——" O'Mara was unimpressed, except with a faint amusement. "Lad, if you had put in five million dollars, and controlled a hundred million that might be used if needed, you could load the pay roll with your relatives, if you had as many as the grandchildren of Brigham Young."

"Maybe the pay roll can stand it," I persisted, "but you're giving those fellows jobs that call for work. Real work that somebody has to do. They're only in the way."

"We'll survive them, lad. We couldn't survive, at the moment, the loss of Jesley. Well, Oscar, if we can't get the big developers, there's plenty of other money in Miami, resident and transient. This Josiah Quincy, for example. Yes, he's a loathsome creature, and he hates me. We all know why. But he isn't averse to making a few millions more, I imagine, and his money will work as well as anybody's money. Over at the Fleetwood, isn't he?"

"When he's at home," Satchell answered. "He's out of town now—went to Tallahassee yesterday. Maybe he's in dutch about some shipment of rum that somebody mislaid. But, governor, if my advice has been worth anything to you over thirty years, take it just this once more. Drop now, before you're cross-raised out of the pot."

"They can't whipsaw me, Oscar."

"No, but you want to be damn sure you've got 'em if they call you."

O'Mara, smiling, turned to me. "Victor, what's the first lesson in the school arithmetic? When do three sixes beat three aces? When I hold the three sixes. Remember that, Oscar. Remember that!"

ALL the same, at the end of ten days we had not progressed. Options on nine million dollars' worth of assorted developments and demidevelopments here, there, and elsewhere—mostly elsewhere—were ours; options that ran for three weeks longer. In that three weeks something must happen, and nothing was happening yet, nor were the prospects for the future bright.

"Governor," said Satchell one evening, "do you know what you ought to do if you're bound to put this over? Mind, I still say don't do it—but if you do it, do you know what you ought to do?"

"Throw out some dog biscuit for that old mastiff, Hydrick?"

"No, sir. You want to hire the damn best press agent in the world. Not merely the best press agent—he wouldn't be good enough. The damn best press agent. I know who he is. He'd stand you a hundred and fifty thousand a year, but he'd be worth it. Hire him, and sell the public on Florida-For-All."

"Oscar, Oscar, you know I don't like that!"

"I know you don't like it, and I know you've got to do it. What's the matter with Florida now? That nobody tells the truth—all trying to keep up boom prices, nobody admitting that the boom's dead when a million Northern visitors have seen it with their own eyes, and carried the news back home. That's foolishness—ostrich stuff. But it's all to the good—for us.

"Now you come out—Myron O'Mara, nobody who's just tied up to one single development in Florida, but a promoter known the country over for the last twenty-five years. Myron O'Mara takes the public into his confidence. Florida has overexpanded. Florida has got to retrench. Florida has got to reorganize, get itself back on a sound business basis. Above all, *Florida has got to cut prices to the margin of profit,* and Myron O'Mara leads the way.

"Beat that into them, pound it into them, drum it into them, all over the country—in advertisements, in interviews, in free publicity—this bird can get you that—and you've got some chance. It will sink what's left of the sales campaigns of these other fellows. It will drive them right back into your arms—maybe. At any rate it will mean that if there's any business, you get it—if there's any money left that yearns for Florida, it flies to your arms. That's the way, and the only way."

It was the kind of idea O'Mara himself often had and Satchell never had; the kind the Old Man admired immensely when he produced them himself, that he admired, as a rule, when anybody else produced them. But he wasn't used to this sort of thing from Satchell. It rather upset him.

And that idea of publicity upset him, too; he'd never got over his old complex about that. Whenever he thought of the newspapers and magazines, he thought of the wife who had trusted him—long after he ceased to deserve it—and had seen the spots on him at last.

"Not yet, Oscar," he decided. "We haven't come down to such a desperate resort. There's money in Miami still, and we can get it."

But we hadn't got it when the second Sunday came. We all decided to sit back and take a rest. I had made another engagement with my young salesman to go down and look over Cerulean Isles, and this time I knew I could keep it. As for the Old Man and Oscar, they had made a date with Jesley for the day. That eminent pillar of world finance was about to start back to New York, his alleged vacation ended; and they wanted to do something to give him a good send-off. Naturally, they had dragged Flavia into the party. Naturally, but it disgusted me all the same. That she should still be a bird dog!

However, it didn't concern me; I hadn't seen her, since that previous Sunday when she came over for a swim; the Old Man had dropped in at the club on one or two evenings of the past week, but she hadn't been over to dinner. I had other things to think about, anyway—my work, and a mild form of prosperity.

I OWED that to Oscar. When the Old Man had left us two at the breakfast table, the morning after our trip to the races, Oscar tossed a paper over to me.

"Mind reading that, Vic, and signing it? If I die, it will be found in an envelope marked 'Burn these papers,' but so long as I don't expect to die, we might as well do things in order."

I read a note acknowledging my indebtedness to Oscar Satchell in the sum of five thousand dollars. Well, I'd known him for twelve years, not counting that afternoon at Snyder's Junction; I signed first and then asked him what it was about.

"Old Jesley gave us a tip last night," he told me, "at the conclusion of the happy transaction that got him into Florida-For-All. Just as any lesser business man might hand around the cigars at the close of a business deal, he gave us a tip, in sheer good feeling. Under the circumstances, I feel pretty sure it's right. Buy American Carbide, says Mr. Jesley. Just to show we appreciated it, the governor and I went in for fifty grand apiece; and I thought there was no reason why you should be out of it just because you were looking after the governor's girl, so I put you in, too. Bought you two hundred and fifty shares, on a twenty-point margin. Big melon about to be cut, says Jesley, and he certainly ought to know, the old money bags!"

"But, Oscar, you're carrying me——I've got about seventy dollars in the world, just now. If anything slipped now——"

"It won't. You wouldn't give a man a trick cigar that would blow up in his face, when you'd just done business. If it should slip, you can pay me back out of your salary—fifty dollars a month, or what you like. But it won't slip. Now don't thank me! What the hell, damn it! I know how you must feel in this Miami atmosphere. I know it because even I feel it, and my balance sheet would show me seven or eight millions above the board.

"This town is dripping with money. You'll feel better with a few thousand on top of what you've got coming to you in salary. Never hurt any man to have money in his pocket. Thanks be damned! What's five thousand to me when the governor's just ruined my better judgment to the extent of five million? It's other people's money, anyway—I won it all on roulette the other night. As long as everybody else has got it around Miami you might as well have it, too."

On the day before I went to Cerulean Isles I sold out—we all sold out—at a forty-four-point profit. Thanks to Oscar, I had eleven thousand unearned dollars, the largest amount of money, earned or unearned, I'd ever had at one time in my life.

I ought to have felt pretty well protected against the stormy winds that blow, with that in the bank; but eleven thousand dollars isn't much money, in Miami.

"Hang on to it," Oscar advised me, when we settled up. "You're going down to Cerulean Isles to-morrow, with a realtor. If you go and buy lots with this, I'll be ashamed of you."

"Oscar, as part owner of the controlling interest of Cerulean Isles, do you mean to tell me it isn't a good buy?"

"It's a good buy while we've got it. But if the governor keeps on with his

crazy notions, there's no telling who it will belong to this time next month."

CHAPTER XIV.

ON THE DOTTED LINE.

WHEN young Mr. Bolton asked me to go down to Cerulean Isles with him, I'd never dreamed we'd be part of such a formidable armada as left the Miami water front on Sunday morning. Its flagship was O'Mara's yacht, the *Orange Rose,* turned over to the sales force and thronged with sightseers, crowding the cabins, swarming on the decks, seated even in the lifeboats. Then there were fishing boats, excursion boats, four or five speed boats, boats of heaven knows what eccentric build and dubious purpose; altogether there must have been three or four hundred customers who made the long trip down the bay and through the keys to Cerulean Isles.

Not yet customers, to be sure; mere prospects, remote and dubious prospects, people who were willing to sate their curiosity by getting a free trip at the firm's expense. But just as the pack of wolves hanging around the buffalo herd can count on pulling down and devouring one or two of the weakest buffaloes, so the embattled realtors could count on turning one or two of the weakest-willed prospects into customers, before the day was over.

As for me, being the confidential secretary of the president of Cerulean Isles, I traveled in some state and splendor. O'Mara had lent me his own speed boat, with his own conch engineer who knew all the multitudinous reefs and bars and shallows of Biscayne Bay.

Bolton? Yes, Bolton went with us. I suppose he was disappointed when he learned that I wasn't the curiously interested prospect that he had supposed, but merely a sleuth for the boss. But after all he still believed that Cerulean Isles were a good buy, and he had pretty well persuaded me, and I had promised him that if I ever did buy a lot, he and I would split the commission which, as a member of the organization, I might have kept for myself. I thought he had earned that.

I couldn't help reflecting that the prospects were in luck this day—all but the weak sisters who would be dragged down by the wolves. Here they were getting, at the expense of the organization, a trip for which most people would have been willing to pay a tourist agency quite a fair sum of money. Bright sunlight on the blue water, the warm sunlight of a Florida February that grew actually hot as we went on southward; and a trip down the bay whose waters shifted from blue to pale green and then to purple, with the long, low-lying, dark-green masses of the Keys all around us, and the crisp wind rushing past—it was work for the realtors, but it was an outing for the prospects.

At last Bolton gestured toward a group of dark-green mangrove clumps ahead.

"Cerulean Isles," he told me. "Our property runs for miles on the mainland, but the islands are the best part of the development, of course. I suppose Mr. O'Mara and Mr. Satchell have shown you, on the map, the sites of the winter homes they're going to build on the Gold Coast."

I nodded.

"Well, Mr. Bentley," he went on, "I don't suppose even Mr. O'Mara could buy a lot on the Gold Coast now; they're all held by people who mean to build there. But there's still some water-front property left, with a view out across the open sea that stretches on without an interruption till you reach the coast of Africa. If you buy, Mr. Bentley, don't buy inland. The water front costs more, but it's worth it."

I believed him.

It was, at that, an astounding place. The main island was quite a big affair, a mile wide and several miles long, thick-grown with a tangle of mangroves all the way around at the water's edge, rising a little inland and covered with dense thickets and copses twenty or thirty feet high—buttonwood, neglected lime groves, trees and shrubs of a dozen varieties I'd never seen before, even in Miami.

It was a jungle you'd have had to hack your way through with an ax, taking your time. And then all at once the jungle stopped in a perpendicular wall of foliage, and for two miles that island was razed bare, the jungle swept away, every blade of vegetation swept away, bared down to the dusty-white soil strewn with white lumps of coral rock.

"That's the less desirable end of the development," Bolton explained. "All that will be cut up into small lots and replanted for the benefit of small purchasers. The part you'll see—around Cerulean harbor, where we land—isn't being stripped so clean. That will be sold to wealthy purchasers who'll probably want their own landscape gardeners to do the work, subject to the approval of our architects. Still we've done a good deal of clearing even there, for streets and so on."

WE rode into Cerulean harbor, an oblong basin encircled by mangrove thickets, threading our way along a stake-marked channel. This was going to be a good harbor when it was dredged out; meanwhile you could walk across it almost anywhere. Half a mile out, the *Orange Rose* anchored, the lesser craft gradually clustering around her while their passengers were lightered off and brought in by the hard-working speed boats. There was a tiny dock with a house boat alongside it, home and headquarters of Weatherford, the resident engineer. He stood on the dock as we landed, a tall, brown man in khaki and laced boots, politely trying to answer the curious questions of the customers, hampered by the reticence of the man who prefers to work rather than talk about his work.

It was a work to be proud of, at that. Another half-mile swath had been cut straight across the island, from the dock on the ocean side to the bridge that brought in the local version of the Dixie Highway. That was the business district, represented as yet by nothing but a few hastily built shacks of raw pine and a wide, unwalled pavilion which served as dining room and assembly hall. North and south was the jungle, but wide breaks had been cut through it, crisscrossing this way and that; white-painted signboards blazoned their names—Florida Boulevard; O'Mara Avenue; Jesley Terrace, which had been Satchell Terrace till week before last; Orange Rose Driveway.

I walked about in the hot sun, Bolton beside me, crisscrossing with other groups of customers in tow of their salesman captors, picking a lime from one of the gray trees at the jungle's edge, getting fresh relaxation, a new endowment of energy, from the hot stillness of the thickets. Then a gong boomed at the pavilion and Bolton told me it was time for lunch.

"After lunch," he added, "we all stay to hear the lecturer. No hurry about your getting back, I suppose? And you ought to hear our lecturer, if only as a member of the organization. We salesmen make the artillery preparation and he's the shock troops, the spearhead of the final offensive. Great man, Doctor Harper!"

"I've heard of him," I admitted, "but nothing in particular—I've been busy with other matters this past week. So he's a doctor?"

"A reverend doctor. The Reverend Doctor J. Broadus Harper."

"Broadus Harper, the ex-evangelist?" I cried.

"That's the man," said Bolton. "I guess you've heard of him."

"Heard of him? I've heard him! Every winter I was dragged down to Smallwood, the big town of our part of the world—every winter when I was a kid and he came through to harangue the sinners. Telling them to—— No, he didn't call it hitting the sawdust trail, but something like that. Set their feet on the golden path—that was it! So that's what's become of him. I hadn't heard of that man for ten years, except vaguely that his health had broken down——"

Bolton laughed. "Wait till you see him now—a walking advertisement for Florida."

EVERYBODY was trooping toward the pavilion, where long tables were heaped with steaming dishes. I noticed a group of automobiles farther inland—prospects who preferred it had been brought down by motor, though in view of the present state of the roads, this was discouraged; and now the motor visitors, too, were swarming toward the food. One group was nearer than the rest, but I paid no special attention to it till we came together at the plank steps and Oscar Satchell's dry voice hailed me.

"Well, Vic? Still got your money?"

They were all there—O'Mara and Satchell; Charles Jesley, trying to look patronizing, but unable to conceal a delighted amazement at the climate of Cerulean Isles; and Flavia, shimmering in apricot silks. A table had been reserved for them—no better than any other table, with a backless bench along either side, but it had distinction merely because it was the seat of the mighty, to which only the three or four chief realtors were invited. They gathered me in, and would have gathered Bolton, too, but that he seemed uncomfortable on the steps of the throne. We sat down, O'Mara on a nail keg at the head with Jesley and Flavia on one side of him, Satchell and me on the other.

"Oh, yes, I'll say a few words to them," O'Mara was observing. "Just a general welcome to Cerulean Isles. Don't want to take any time away from Harper. My virtue as a sales talker lies where two or three are gathered together; he's the boy that turns on the mass hypnotism."

"You're still going on with that water-front sale, then?" Flavia asked him.

Behind his genial mask, I could see the mounting anger. "Certainly we're going on with it! Why not? If you think Joe Quincy is going to be able to hold up this development—bah! A shyster trick. He'll get nowhere. Oscar will attend to him."

"It sounds easy, to hear him tell it," Oscar muttered in my ear. "But if he had to do it, it wouldn't look like such a cinch."

"What's the matter?"

"Our anthropoid friend, Joe Quincy. Now we know what he's been doing up State. He's bought the whole damn bottom of the ocean along our water front, and he's going to scoop it up and make islands out of it—cut off our view and turn Cerulean Isles into an inland development."

"Bought the bottom of the ocean—why, how can he?"

"Don't you worry—he's done it. Wild land—bought from the State at about two dollars an acre—sixty-five thousand for a strip half a mile wide and ten miles long. Submerged lands capable of development—a perfectly legal sale. All the same, as it says in the Bible, an enemy hath done this; and a bigger enemy than Joe Quincy, unless I miss my guess."

"But haven't we any riparian rights or anything, Oscar?"

"Riparian rights run out to the channel. Unfortunately there's a channel pretty close in, along this key. Not much of a channel; I hope to persuade

the courts that it's not *the* channel, within the meaning of the law. But it certainly is *a* channel, and if the courts disagree with me, the people that bought along out water front on the ground that they'd have a view across the boundless ocean, with nothing in front of them till you get to Morocco—why, those birds are going to have a come-back at us, when Joe Quincy's islands rise up two hundred yards away. A good hot come-back, too."

"Good heavens, Oscar! What's behind this?"

He gave an imperceptible nod toward Flavia, across the table, smiling up at Jesley. "There's one thing that's behind it, obviously. It's a smart trick for a man that wants to hold us up—sell us back his sixty-five-thousand-dollars' worth of submerged land for a million or so. But he'd never have thought of it if she hadn't turned him down and made him sit up nights thinking up some way of getting even with the governor. He has certainly done it."

"But you think somebody else——"

His voice sank to a whisper. "Mere suspicion, Vic, mere suspicion. I've always been lacking in charity to my fellow men. Hydrick may be behind it, of course. Or our great and good friend across the way."

"Jesley?" I breathed. "But why should he—when he's in Florida-For-All——"

Oscar grimaced. "He's not in very deep, for Jesley. If Florida-For-All goes bust, if we never put it through and don't take up those options, he's not in it at all, except for a few trivial thousands to cover his share of expenses. But if we do put it through —— Why, in that case the bulk of the thirty million the governor is ready to sink in it, the bulk of my five million, is going to be borrowed money. We haven't got that much in our breeches pockets; we'll have to raise it by hocking our interests in Cerulean Isles."

"Which are not worth so much"—I completed the mathematical demonstration—"if Quincy builds other isles in front of them."

"Not worth so much, on the face of it. Not by any means. But actually worth as much, if Joe Quincy can be persuaded to step out. We've sold Jesley on Cerulean Isles—no doubt about that. I've known him long enough to read the signs. In fact I suspect we've sold him entirely too damn well. He could afford to sink five million in Florida-For-All if he thereby gets his fingers on interests in Cerulean Isles worth thirty or forty million. He gets Cerulean Isles; he gives Joe Quincy a good, healthy cut to step out; the islands do not rise from the bottom of the ocean; the water-front view is still unimpeded—and Charles Jesley banks the profit."

"Good Lord, Oscar, that's pretty Machiavellian!"

"It's the way the national pastime is played, my boy, and old Jesley comes pretty near holding the world's indoor record at playing it."

I stared across the table at the banker, smiling down gruffly into Flavia's eyes.

"Oscar, you may not like her—but Jesley likes her, and she may be able to head this off."

He laughed in a single squawk that brought people's heads up a dozen tables away. Jesley and Flavia and O'Mara stared a moment; then, when they had turned back to their own concerns, Satchell whispered gloomily:

"There never was a woman that could turn Jesley away from the pursuit of money. I wish I could say as much for the governor."

The tables were being cleared. Watchfully lurking about the edges of the pavilion, like guards in a prison dining room, the salesmen were making sure that nobody escaped before the hearty inspirational talk that was to

break down the customer's will to economy. O'Mara stood up; he mounted the little platform at the end of the pavilion; he stood there, in creamy flannels, a Windsor tie of soft purple silk fluttering down across the creamy silk shirt, his blue eyes glowing, calm, radiant, magnificent. His mere appearance stilled the chatter; his resonant voice welcomed them to Cerulean Isles.

Just a few words—words that would have been conventional, if anybody else had spoken them, but words that, coming from O'Mara, managed to convince you that he was really glad, disinterestedly glad, that you had come to Cerulean Isles. He hoped you would buy and build, not for his sake, but for your own; he counted it a privilege to introduce you to the matchless climate, the unequaled pluperfection of living conditions, of Florida.

"And now, friends, I want to introduce a man who can tell you more than I, who can say it better than I—a man many of you doubtless know, for you have heard him delivering the most sacred of all messages. It is—I say it in reverence—in furtherance of the same sublime task, calling men to a better life here below in preparation for a better life above, that he has associated himself with us, and with you, our partners, in the development of Cerulean Isles. The Reverend Doctor J. Broadus Harper."

"Now for the exhorter," Satchell whispered. "When he holds out the hope of salvation, watch 'em dive for the mourners' bench."

A LIVE advertisement for Florida—the Reverend Doctor J. Broadus Harper certainly was that. It was fifteen years since I had seen him, a tall thin man, pale, ascetic, with the hell fire he talked about forever gleaming in his eyes. He looked, then, as if he had one foot in the grave. Now, visibly, he had both feet in Florida.

He was tall and slender—not thin; wiry and muscular; his long, white hair waved back from a face that was pink over olive, the face of a healthy man, of a contented man. No hell fire gleamed in his eyes now; they glowed softly with the geniality of one who has found the way of salvation. His flannel trousers were snowy and speckless; a handkerchief of lavender silk peeped from the pocket of his smartly cut gray coat; his shirt was soft brocade, his scarf tied with the careful carelessness of a man of the world.

From the neck down, he was the trim, clean-cut business man; but his face was the face of the evangelist, the bringer of good news; the face of a prophet, leading his people out of bondage to the Northern winter, into the promised land.

A jocose, cheerful, here-we-are-all-friends-together beginning; a reference to one or two incidents of the voyage down in the *Orange Rose* that brought crackles of laughter from the benches behind us; then he began to tell about Florida, deprecatory, as if there was no need to mention the merits of Florida to those who were in Florida already, and yet as if he was so overflowing with the glad tidings that he simply couldn't keep them to himself.

"This isn't my testimony, friends—it's the testimony of all who know Florida. This is not the voice of Harper; it's the voice of Carl Fisher, of George Merrick, of Roney and Young and Mizner, of Lucas Hydrick and Myron O'Mara and every great developer who has made money in Florida. It's the voice of the nation's greatest economists, writing with no conceivable personal bias, telling the truth about Florida because truthtelling is their life work; the voice of Clarence Barron, of Roger Babson. What does Babson say?"

He told us, briefly, clearly, convincingly, what Babson said.

"What did President Harding say, that great Christian statesman stricken down in the midst of his labors? President Harding said that within fifty years Florida would be the wealthiest and the most densely populated State in the Union." A pause; three seconds of strained silence. "He was wrong—in his dates! Not in fifty years, but in ten! Harding said——"

He paused, broke off, smiling.

"But let's not talk about Harding, friends. Harding's dead. Florida—Florida lives!" In two hundred words he took us all over Florida, from northern rivers where trees hung draped with Spanish moss, down through the orange groves of the interior, East Coast, West Coast, all around the State, to come down, in inevitable cogency of mounting climax, to Miami, to Cerulean Isles.

"My friends, up and down the East Coast you'll meet men—well-meaning men, who have your interest as well as theirs at heart, men who simply don't know—who will try to sell you lots in this development or that on the ground that it's only two miles, or three miles, or four miles, from the Atlantic Ocean." A pause. "Think of it! Only three miles from the Atlantic Ocean! My friends, you'll never hear that in Cerulean Isles. We're *on* the Atlantic Ocean! There it is! Turn your heads and you see it!"

"You see it now," Satchell whispered in my ear. "But wait till Joe Quincy scoops up his islands!"

"We have the ocean, we have, as I have shown you, a climate unmatched in Florida—Cerulean Isles, since time began, have never known the touch of frost—and we have something else that you may forget, something the developers farther up the coast never mention because they dare not mention it, because they haven't got it; but something that is vitally important to your health—and we have got it!" A pause; we leaned forward uneasily. "We have the altitude! Yes! Not altitude as you know it who come from mountain States, but altitude that takes us out of the miasmatic vapors of the lowland, into the clean, cool purifying breezes—altitude——"

"All the way from eight to twelve feet above sea level," Satchell whispered. "But that's more altitude than anybody else can show, in these parts."

AND why have we the altitude, friends?" the doctor was pursuing. "Do you know how this part of Florida, how these keys, came into being? Bear with me just an instant while I delve into the secrets of science. There is a little insect, a tiny insect of bony structure—the polyp. Ever hear of the polyp? Well, friends, you owe him the tribute of a kindly thought, for to him you are indebted for Cerulean Isles. The polyp, this little insect, lives his tiny life and dies; and where he dies, his bony structure rests for all time, the remains of thousands of other polyps about him, the remains of millions of other polyps, heaping up, slowly rising, slowly hardening into this matchless rock above which we sit at this moment, this rock of which you will build your homes in Cerulean Isles; rising slowly, gradually, above sea level, until it becomes the foundations for your city, a city founded on a rock. All built up by the slow, the blind, the infinitesimal labors of millions and billions of tiny polyps, working on through the countless æons of unrecorded time.

"For twelve thousand years, my friends, the polyps have been building up Cerulean Isles—for you! You get the benefit. You reap where the polyp has sown. He lived his tiny, trivial life, rooted to one spot, blindly working, dying and leaving no memory behind him; leaving nothing but his one tiny contribution to this structure whose fruition was thousands of years in the future, spending his life that others

might be happy, working for you, a blind hopeless drudge, building for others——

"Don't be a polyp!"

His long, bony finger shot out; and it was as if a thousand fingers were thrusting down from that platform, a private, individual finger poking his message into the face of every one of us, driving from our minds the craven aspiration to be a polyp. His voice rolled out, that ringing, golden voice that I had so often heard painting the glories of mansions in the skies.

NOW, that he was off in his peroration, it all came back to me, word for word. I had heard it in childhood, a dozen times, the smashing blows of soul-shaking evangelism that led up to what we called the giving of the invitation. Only, from Broadus Harper, it was less an invitation than a command. The old story, but with new elements. For he had turned aside for the moment from purely selfish appeals, to picture the duty, the downright and imperative duty, that every man owed to his children and grandchildren yet unborn. Must they be left to slave and sweat as their ancestors had done? Dare we leave them to this life of grubbing misery, this polyp life, when the opportunity lay before us to make them independently wealthy by buying, and reselling, in Cerulean Isles?

"Oh, my friends, consider it earnestly, consider it in all solemnity! Can you face your children in after life if you do not take advantage of this opportunity?"

And bachelor that I was, I shook with shame at the thought of the reproachful eyes of my improbable children, my tenuously hypothetical grandchildren, when they learned that grandfather had made the Great Refusal, that he had bought no lot in Cerulean Isles.

Harper's voice had sunk to a throaty whisper. "Here lies my humble part in this great task of development in which you, too, are partners. I serve as the expounder of the opportunity. My friends, here is your chance!"

A pause.

"Who will be the first, friends?" Honey dripped in his voice. "I call you to a golden path, the golden path of the good life. Who will be the first—— Ah, you, my brother!"

A gray-haired, collarless man, with pink suspenders over his blue shirt, was stumbling down the aisle, a watchful realtor beside him, clasping his arm. That realtor needed his commission. The man came forward to the table; he sat down; he signed on the dotted line. This collarless person had heard that Cerulean Isles was more exclusive than Exclusive City, that the leaders of the nation's finance and society, the leaders of the nation's art, were to be the nucleus of this new and carefully chosen community, and had he not seen Charles Jesley, the capitalist, Flavia Haddon, the artist, in proof? He had been told that he was recognized by the developers as the sort of man who should associate with these leaders in the development which would set the social tone of Florida; and last of all, most convincing of all, he had been made to realize his duty to his grandchildren.

"Name, please?" Briskly, Harper bent over him. "Mr. Ewald F. Merkel of Big Pine, Wisconsin—all of you who come from Wisconsin will have heard of Mr. Merkel—is the first to take advantage of this unparalleled opportunity which will be open to you, in the form which I have outlined, for only one week more. After that, prices are automatically lifted twenty-five per cent. Mr. Merkel buys at the corner of Florida Boulevard and De Soto Street. Who is the next? Ah, my friend, you will never regret this step——"

Not till a dozen of them had stumbled over each other, up the golden

path, did I perceive that Satchell had my arm in a grip of iron. I looked around at him, with a shamefaced grin.

"Boy," he whispered, "I had to do it. Your duty to your grandchildren would have overpowered you if I hadn't held you down. Come, let's get out. We're in the organization; we may be supposed to have done our duty to our grandchildren. I need a smoke."

We edged our way out, pursued by reproachful glances; at the table, they were waiting in a growing line to sign up; the salesmen looked as if after long abstinence they smelled raw meat.

"Great stuff!" said Oscar, when we had emerged into the sunlight and lit our cigars. "I never heard him go better. I dropped a gentle hint the other day that what with the slump in sales there was some need of retrenchment, and we might have to start on his salary of a thousand a week. I guess that pepped him up. Our lots cost money and he'll get it."

"And they're worth money," I appended. "When all is said and done, despite everything that's said and done, Cerulean Isles is a good place to live. It's even a good place to buy as an investment, if any place in Florida is that now."

"Yes," he admitted, "underneath the blah there's a value. That's Florida."

CHAPTER XV.

A TREMENDOUS SURPRISE.

SATCHELL and I drifted away from the pavilion. Gradually the hard-hearted persons who had failed to take pity on their grandchildren began to drift out, too. The party was approaching its end. O'Mara came up to us, shepherding Jesley and Flavia.

"Time for us to be going back," he announced. "Even with the best springs in the world, I don't want to risk the Dixie Highway in the dark. But Flavia wants to make the water trip. Victor, have you anybody else in the speed boat?"

"Only Bolton, the salesman who brought me down."

"Then if you'll see that she gets back safely. You can put Bolton in front with the engineer. It's the best way to make the trip, my dear, in any case; and the *Orange Rose* is impossible to-day with that mob. Victor will look after you."

He had said it as he might have said, "Ring for the maid if you need her," but I didn't mind it now. Especially when Flavia smiled.

She wasn't smiling, however, when we finally started for the dock, her gray-silk cape over my arm.

"I hadn't expected such luck as this," she admitted. "I was prepared to be sent back with total strangers."

"Sent back? I thought you wanted ——" It was an amazing disappointment.

"Oh, I did. I said something about the water trip on the way down—before I knew you were going to be free to go back with me. But he wanted me out of the way anyhow."

"Wanted you—you—out of the way?"

She shrugged. "He wanted to talk to Jesley. What about, I don't know. But I've done my duty with Jesley on the way down—put him in a pleasant frame of mind. So now we clear the women out of the way so that we men can talk business. It annoys me, to be packed off like that when I've served my purpose. Orders to me, orders to you. 'Victor, take care of Flavia;' 'Flavia, go with Victor.'"

"Victor doesn't mind," I told her.

She laughed. "Neither does Flavia. Come, there's plenty of time yet, even if we are supposed to report at the house on the island for dinner. Let's look at my lot; I've never seen it."

We never actually reached her lot; the mangroves that had grown over it a

week ago now lay cut in brushwood at the water's edge, and it seemed all too probable that the previous tenants, a family of moccasins, had not yet been dispossessed. But we came near enough to see that in due time it would command the best view in Cerulean Isles, and all the breezes.

"And this is real," she said. "This is what lies under all the nonsense about Florida. I'm ashamed of myself for even thinking of reselling this. But I can't afford to build on it; frankly, I need the money. Oh, it seems such a shame that they can't let things stay simple! If only we could stay here—live like that engineer in his house boat; doing honest work, hot work, dirty work, but work that actually does something, clearing the wilderness——"

"But we can't stay here," I reminded her, with an amazing effort of will. "Everybody's trooping down to the dock; we'll have to go along."

We went back, picking our way over half-cleared ground where I took her hand as she stepped over logs and tangles of brushwood. We couldn't stay there. I worked for Myron O'Mara and she was going to marry Myron O'Mara; we both had business back in Miami. There was no place to stay there, anyway. Still——

THE customers were gathered at the dock, in a noisy swarm. While we listened to the exhortation not to defraud our grandchildren, a deplorable thing had happened; the tide had run out, and the speed boats that were to ferry the bulk of this crowd out to the yacht were unable to cross the bar. I'd have had no qualms about commanding O'Mara's speed boat to be off with me and Flavia, and the all-but-forgotten Bolton; but it was outside the harbor and couldn't get in. Meanwhile the sun was sinking and Miami was far away.

"So we'll have to stay here," said Flavia, with a smile, when she had grasped the situation. "Well, who cares? Ouch!"

She leaned over and slapped a mosquito; it stayed, a crimson blotch, on the apricot sheen of her stocking.

"It might not be so agreeable, after all," she admitted.

Nevertheless I found it agreeable enough. She sat on the dock; we smoked and talked idly, indifferent to the peevish mob around us; mosquitoes or no mosquitoes, I'd have been willing to stay there till midnight.

However, we presently grew hungry; I went back to the dining hall and as Myron O'Mara's secretary was able to get a few sandwiches; but when I came back she was talking to Weatherford, the engineer. From that moment I was merely around the edges; an absent phrase now and then admitted that I was there—after all, I mused bitterly as the darkness fell around us, I had to be acknowledged that far; I had brought her her supper.

But she gave Weatherford that same rapt attention that she had given Charles Jesley in the clubhouse at the race track, that she had given me, on that trip to the club, when it suited her purpose. The attention of an entertainer who knows that her prosperity depends on her popularity, and that her popularity with any given man depends on her persuading him, for the moment, that he is the only man in the world.

Also, astute and experienced woman that she was, she talked to Weatherford about nothing but Weatherford—his work, his life on the development. A curiously primitive life, I gathered, yet curiously satisfactory—if you had Weatherford's temperament; he lived on the house boat with three or four of his assistants; they worked all day, in turns they worked at night—as we talked, a gigantic shovel, puffing and grunting under a searchlight, was gouging up new fragments of the jungle;

they played cards of evenings; they listened to their radio. Forty miles from Miami, and he hadn't been there in six months.

It was night; faint haze hung on the ocean, a distant light winking through it; they talked on, Flavia softly questioning, Weatherford answering in a monotonous murmur; I smoked morosely while the tide rose higher, inch by inch, on the piling of the dock, and the waiting customers behind us amused themselves by fishing with tin cans on poles for a compact and lip stick that a ten-year-old girl had dropped in the water. A precocious generation, I mused; reflecting on the premature sophistication that my theoretical grandchildren might display, I was downright glad that I hadn't laid the foundations of their fortune by buying a lot in Cerulean Isles. They didn't deserve it.

A STIR behind us; a hum, out on the water; black in the haze, a speed boat was crossing the bar. I jumped up, relieved.

"All right, Flavia! We can go now."

"Can we?" she asked, reaching up a hand to be helped to her feet. "Well, it's rather nice to be definitely, hopelessly too late for dinner, anyway. It frees our consciences. Good-by, Mr. Weatherford! It's been so nice to have known you and seen your work. I don't blame you for not coming to Miami; but if you ever do come, you must be sure to come see me at the McAllister."

What more she said to him, I don't know; I was busy fending off realtors, captains and colonels of our sales army, who failed to perceive that Myron O'Mara's speed boat was something special, who wanted to use it, too, as a ferry to take the belated passengers out to the waiting yacht. But as for me, the sooner we got away from here, the sooner we got home, the better.

I shoved them off; I packed Bolton up forward beside the engineer; I put Flavia's gray-silk cape about her shoulders and helped her down into the back seat beside me, sheltered by the build of the boat from flying spray, Bolton and the engineer lost ahead of us, only the tops of their heads visible.

And then we were off, twisting out through the channel, slowing down to drift in decreasing momentum over the still thinly covered bar; out and around in a great roaring half circle, toward the channel dimly visible to the northward, a dark opening in darker mangrove masses, that would take us in from the seaward side of the island, back to Biscayne Bay.

Again, for a long time, we said nothing, feeling the rush of air on our faces as the speed boat bored through the misty dark, then slowed to twist its way through the tortuous creek that took us away from the ocean. We reached the bay, another expanse of mist; the stars shone faintly through above us, one or two points of yellow light, on anchored yachts, glowed dimly on the water, miles away.

Hatless, her hair tossed in the wind, she leaned back against the cushions, looking out at the mist, down at the phosphorescent water.

"That's the real thing," she said at last. "What Weatherford's doing. He's a real maker of Florida."

"You seemed rather—absorbed," I observed peevishly.

"I'd been listening to talk of money all day. Oh, yes, I know without money nothing can be done—that you have to have it to make possible a work like Weatherford's. But when I see these men who pretend to be working together all jockeying for position, trying to put each other in a hole, out for as much money as they can get, each of them, away from the other—— Oh, it sickens me! And then they seem to think they're doing it all—that their little schemes and tricks and clevernesses are making Florida."

"Have you let him see that you feel that way about it?" There was no need to explain whom I meant, or whom she meant, when we said "He."

"I don't think he was seeing me very hard to-day," she said, faintly smiling. "He was too busy with Jesley."

"He always sees you," I growled. "Every moment, even when you're in the background. Seeing you as he hopes you're seeing him. If you let him see that you weren't much impressed with tricks of finance——"

"Yes?" she asked dryly, as I paused.

"Why—that's his business; he's not an engineer; you only spur him on to more tricks, bigger tricks, to try to win your admiration."

"My dear boy, he knows he has that now."

"Not enough. And if he'd seen you talking to Weatherford, with a sort of green-golden glow in your eyes—a flash light blazing through ice——"

"Oh, don't be silly!"

"I saw you," I told her sullenly. "I don't know what you were up to——"

She stirred, then slumped back helplessly. "Victor, I don't know why you try to read all these strange undertones into everything I do and say. I've never said anything to you that wasn't simple and direct, just as I meant it; but you're always turning it over, and picking it to pieces, and looking for something I never meant and never dreamed of—— Why is it? Why won't you take me just as I am?"

"Just as you are?" I laughed skeptically. "And just how is that, Flavia? I know the Old Man fascinates you. Yet you hold him off! you keep him dragging after you; and the admiration, the intimacy, the warmth that he'd give his eyes for, you give to—Weatherford. If he'd seen you——"

"I'd been wishing he had seen me," she said dully. "It might have simplified—several things. But I suppose if he had seen me he'd have begun reading all sorts of nonsense into what he saw—like you. I've tried my best to be simple and natural and straightforward with you, Victor; but you always suspect me. Still!"

We were side by side on the leather-cushioned seat, our shoulders touching; her head, thrown back on the cushion, was turned toward me; through the misty dusk, her eyes gleamed faintly in the white blur of her face.

"When I see you with Weatherford," I began wearily; but she broke in with soft rage:

"Oh, damn Weatherford! I don't care anything about him—not one bit! I don't feel the tiniest speck of emotional attraction for him. Only admiration, because he's doing a big, hard job and doing it modestly and well; because he's a real developer, when these money men think they're doing it all. That's all I feel about Weatherford—every bit! Won't you let me give him that much—only that much, my dear?"

Her hands found mine, and caressed them gently; I was dumb, before the dawn of a stupendous amazement. The speed boat drove on up the mist-shrouded bay, a great falling fan of white water on either side; before us, with a dozen feet of deck between, were two black blurs, tops of heads—all we could see of Bolton and the engineer. We were alone, rushing through the mist, under the stars. Flavia and I.

"Now don't you see you were silly?" she murmured. "Spoiling this——"

What this was that I had almost spoiled I hardly knew, even yet; what it seemed to me was so utterly incredible. But when she lifted her lips, simply, in perfect confidence, I kissed her; she lay limp, contented, in my arms. And, curiously, my uppermost feeling just then was a sheer surprise that she was so warm. The *Snow Queen* had melted at last.

"Did you know this was going to happen?" she whispered.

I shook my head, silent. I wasn't sure it had happened, still less just what had happened.

I'm slow-witted, I know; but beyond that, for years I had taken it as one of the accepted laws of nature that no woman could ever care for me. The lady who dropped me for the aviator had done that. So, now, it was utterly incredible that the woman my boss wanted to marry, the woman we had all supposed he would marry, when she was ready, was in my arms, kissing me as if she enjoyed it. It was highly improbable behavior for any woman—utterly beyond the boundaries of the possible, for her. Yet here she was.

Think what you like about me, but for the first few minutes I didn't have time to wonder what was happening, at all. What she obviously felt was so amazing that there was no room to consider anything else. The Old Man's girl—and she had fallen in love with me!

If I felt anything beyond boundless astonishment, at first, it was a sort of flattery. She led the love-making—at first—and I responded half automatically, as one ought to respond to the wish of a gracious and beautiful woman. Stunned with surprise, delighted beyond measure, grateful to her—and frightened, for I couldn't see where this might lead.

And then it came to me, all of a sudden, like the first rush of a gale through the windless night. I knew now why that first glance at her had jabbed me with such an obscure, incurable irritation, why I had been uneasy in her company ever since. It was so long since the thing had happened to me that I had forgotten the process, the symptoms, the forewarning; but now I knew it was true, that it had been true since the moment I saw her on the stairs at O'Mara's boat landing. My arms tightened about her.

"Flavia! I love you!"

Softly she laughed and pressed her mouth to mine.

A bump, a grinding jar; the speed boat, which had been running slowly through the silver mist, stopped suddenly, almost tumbling us off the seat. We were aground. Forward we heard stifled curses as the engineer rose up, peering ahead over the wind shield, looking all around. What his keen eyes may have seen, I don't know; I saw nothing but the mist, and black water streaked with phosphorescent gold. Bolton called back to us cheerily:

"Nothing to worry about! We'll be off in a moment! Are you all right back there?"

Laughing silently, her head on my shoulder, Flavia reassured him: "Thanks, Mr. Bolton. We're perfectly happy."

We were.

GETTING off that shoal was not so easy as we thought. We stayed there—I don't know how long, and didn't care. The engineer was worried. So was Bolton, who felt it his duty to call back now and then some vague words of comfort. The only persons aboard who weren't worried were Myron O'Mara's secretary, and the woman Myron O'Mara expected to marry, who had both been looked for at Myron O'Mara's dinner table for the last two hours.

She was warm—that, in all this tangle of sudden and incredible happenings, was the most amazing and incredible of all. Not the *Snow Queen*—never again. Warm and melting and human, and in love. When Bolton called back with desperate cheerfulness, "Looks as if we're stuck for a while," she laughed in my arms.

"Do we care, dearest? I could stay here forever."

"Not forever," I told her. "Most of this bay is waist-deep. If we stay here much longer, I'll take you in my

arms and carry you ashore—I don't care how many miles it is."

"I wish you would," she murmured. "And then we'd never worry about the Florida-For-All Company, or the Clorinda Club, or anything else—till we build our house, on my water-front lot in Cerulean Isles."

But as she spoke, the speed boat, with a groan and a deepening hum, slid off the shoal at last and rushed homeward.

"Did you know?" she asked again, after a silence.

"I knew you'd done something to me," I confessed, "from the moment I first saw you—on the stairs, by the water gate. But I didn't dare hope it was this."

"Nor I," she whispered. "I couldn't believe it—but I knew! From the first."

"Not from the first," I reminded her. "You didn't even see me, that night on the stairs."

"Oh, yes, I did. That was the trouble. I'd heard about you. They expected a secretary. And then I saw you, and I said to myself: 'Why, this isn't a secretary. This is somebody special. Very special!' But I couldn't dream, then, how very and particularly special you were going to be."

The speed boat rushed on through the night, sure of its course at last. The mist had lifted, now; yellow-lighted yachts lay anchored about; the stars were bright above, their reflected images bounced and swung in the rippling water, phosphorescent sparks gleamed golden in the white waves that fell away beside us; warm, amorous, caressing, the wind rushed past.

Vaguely, I saw the lighted sky line of Miami rise up from the northern horizon, I saw it grow and rise, define itself, loom at last above the masts of the water front, shutting off the western sky. But I couldn't feel that we were coming home, Flavia and I, back to the world of other people—people who had money, and made money, and needed money—till we glided between two arches of the bridge and saw the tall, Australian pines that walled the Isle of Capri towering over us.

She gave a long, weary sigh and freed herself from my arms; like a waking sleeper, she sat up and looked around her, with dulled eyes.

"I think," she said tonelessly, "you and I must have gone crazy."

It was the most plausible explanation of our behavior, at that, now that we had come back to Myron O'Mara's door.

CHAPTER XVI.

WHEN SIXES BEAT ACES.

IT measures the power of Myron O'Mara, the spell he cast on all who came nearer, as if an actual field of electromagnetic attraction hung about him, that neither of us had thought of going anywhere but to the house where he waited for us. What we ought to have done—I can see that now—would have been to go straight back to Miami and let O'Mara wait in vain while we talked things out, got our affairs settled under the influence of no electromagnetic attraction but our own. That would have saved a great deal of trouble.

But we didn't. I helped her out at the water gate, and as we mounted the stairs the speed boat backed out, carrying Bolton and the engineer away—carrying, as I realized, our only means of retreat. For here we were on O'Mara's threshold, I and O'Mara's girl—O'Mara's girl till an hour ago. My girl now! I stopped.

"Flavia!" I said sharply. "Shall I tell him, or will you?"

"Tell him what?" she murmured dully.

I felt a fury that strove powerlessly to express itself; it was choked, stifled, paralyzed by something stronger, the emanation of Myron O'Mara.

"Tell him what?" I repeated. "Why—— Why—— That we're in love with——"

"Must we tell him that?"

"Certainly we must," I insisted, gathering my energy. "We—— You're going to marry me, aren't you?"

We had paused, three steps below the door; behind its barred grille a white-coated servant was watching us.

"Marry you? I don't know. An hour ago, on the water, in the mist—everything seemed so simple. There was nobody in the world but you. But marriage is something more serious. Much more serious. I've tried it, you see. I know."

"I don't see how anything could be more serious than—what we felt an hour ago, in the mist."

"Oh—so far as feeling goes! But there's so much more than that in marriage. I know I take everything too seriously, Victor, but I can't help it. I'd take marriage hard. I'd mean it—a hundred per cent. I meant my first marriage that way. Some women would have got out of it, years before the end. I wanted to, but I couldn't. I had to stay with it—but I couldn't stand another disaster like that."

"I hope I'd hardly——" I began, when she interrupted:

"I didn't mean you'd be like that—you couldn't! But, you see, I hardly know you. This thing hit me—hit us both—so suddenly, so unexpectedly. And you know what I've said——"

"That you wouldn't marry anybody but a rich man," I filled in. "Yes, I remember that perfectly."

I was bitter—too bitter. I ought to have seen that she was fighting with herself, trying to get rid of that fixed intention that had lived in her mind for years; I ought to have helped her. But I was furious by now.

"Yes, I did say that," she recalled. "I meant it. What I was thinking of, though, was what I said to Oscar that day at the races—that if I was betting everything I had, I'd be a cautious investor. And marriage means betting all you have and all you are. It's nothing to jump into, my dear. Take the word of one who has tried it!"

"I don't suppose I'm a very inviting prospect," I observed, "for a lady who's looking them over."

She gave a helpless gesture. "Victor! Please! When I said that—— You see, I really am—cold; or was till I met you. I didn't think I'd ever fall in love again. I didn't want to! I expected to marry, but marry some man I liked and admired and esteemed—after I'd told him frankly just why I was marrying him. A good bargain on both sides. To be knocked off my feet like this——"

"Oh, I see that," I told her, more calmly. "I was rather knocked off my feet, too. I haven't very much to offer a woman like you. Yes, we might as well be sensible, when we're talking about marriage. I'm thirty-seven and you're thirty; you're used to luxury and I'm used at least to a degree of comfort that I couldn't provide for two, on any salary I've ever made. It's not as if we were two children fresh from school."

"I wish we were!" she said fiercely. "But we're not and we can't pretend! Come—we're expected inside. We can wait—and think things over."

THE white-coated boy swung the grille open for us; and as we went in, as she gave him her cape, I knew I had missed another opportunity.

For I had fretted like a spoiled child, and then I had given in. And now, by the mere fact that we had put things off, it had been established that money did count, that we were cool, middle-aged persons who had to think things over, instead of plunging headlong and betting everything on their emotions, like sensible children fresh from school.

Money counted. And that meant that to get Flavia, I'd have to get money.

Well, then—I would.

That obsession with the need of money grew stronger as we walked through the entrance hall and the music room to the drawing-room, where O'Mara was waiting. Slender, erect, drifting with incomparable grace in her bright silks through these opulent rooms, she was so obviously one who belonged in luxury. And not the trivial luxury she was able to afford on her earnings—she lived, in New York, in a three-room apartment in a side-street hotel, not very much more luxurious than my own—but real luxury. She belonged—I mused in the first excited admiration of realizing how much I was in love with her—she belonged in a palace like this, a palace whose furnishings had been imported bit by bit from Spain, whose site had been dredged up from the bottom of a bay and sold at a thousand dollars a front foot; in a palace like Myron O'Mara's—but with me.

Oh, yes—in that effervescent moment, I felt that I belonged there, too. For the Miami atmosphere was getting hold of me. Surrounded by money for weeks, I was beginning to feel that outside of that warm, golden bath, I'd be like a fish out of water. I had had enough of being a little brother of the rich, of pampering my taste for opulence by what little I could get at secondhand, by going to rich men's parties. I wanted my own money; I must have it now, for myself and for Flavia.

And I could get it, for I was in Florida, where everybody made it.

I followed her into the drawing-room where O'Mara sat beside the long table, alone, a curl of blue smoke ascending from his cigar. He rose, bowed to her in courtly greeting; but I'd caught that first quick, almost furtive glance of his blue eyes, and I knew he was wondering what had kept us. She explained—the delay because the tide had run out, the mishap of grounding on the shoal; explained with gay insouciance as she sat down beside him and lit a cigarette; and he seemed to be satisfied.

"Too bad," he said. "About the tide, I mean—it may have discouraged a few prospects. Of course we'll have the harbor deepened within three months. A dredge will be on hand and at work before the end of next week. But you can't expect a customer to think of that. However, that's trivial; Cerulean Isles can't be hurt by one little mishap like this."

"Of course not," Flavia agreed. "Where's Oscar?"

"He's taken Jesley home. Old Charles has decided to extend his vacation and spend a few more days in Miami. I don't know whether that's your doing, my dear, or mine. But it comes to the same thing. He's going to stick around till we've decided what to do with Florida-For-All."

"But what can you do with it?" she protested. "If Hydrick won't come in with you, if he won't sell Exclusive City except at that ruinous price, Florida-For-All's out of the question, isn't it?"

She was staring at him, with a sort of helpless, desperate intensity. I couldn't quite understand what it meant, but evidently he thought *he* did. For the man seemed to grow in stature, in importance, as I looked at him; once more he radiated that immense, majestic certainty that came to him at critical moments, and was worth millions every time.

"Not for me, my dear!" He chuckled. "Not for me! Hydrick's price is outrageous—but not ruinous. Flavia, people are going to realize before long that Miami is at the northern end of the part of Florida that's worth having. If you want to grow oranges or play golf or live near Mrs. Stotesbury, the upper part of the State is all right.

But if you want to keep warm, you've got to settle below Miami.

"And that's what brings people to Florida—most people, at any rate. They want to keep warm, and they want to make money. They'll be able to do both, below Miami, when Florida-For-All is under way. I've got an option on Hesperid Shores—got it last night. Eight million dollars—three million more than it's worth. Never mind. I can swing it. With that, and Exclusive City, and Cerulean Isles, and the little developments I can pick up, we've got the cream of Florida, the best of everything between Coral Gables and the Keys!

"The big fellows farther up may come in—Coral Gables, Hollywood, Boca Raton, and the rest; and they may not. Let them do as they like—I don't need them. With Exclusive City and Hesperid Shores, I've got the best of Florida."

"But, my dear! At what a price!"

"Exorbitant," he admitted. "Outrageous. Nobody else could do it. But this is Myron O'Mara's game."

HIS calm conviction filled that room—yes, literally an electric flood. I believed him, as thoroughly as he believed himself. Nobody else could do it, but he could. Not that he cared whether I believed him or not. I was only a secretary. He'd forgotten I was there, while he talked to Flavia.

Indeed, I surmised that she had forgotten I was there; now, she was concentrated on him, with amazing desperation.

"Myron—please don't do it."

He stared at her. "Why not?"

She flung out her hands. "Oh—there's no need! You've done enough. Nobody else could do it—you admit that. You could—I admit that. But it will be a desperate strain——"

He bristled; she had made a tactical mistake of the worst sort; the one thing he couldn't endure was the notion that she thought he was an old man.

"I've stood worse strains, my dear." His voice was cool and velvety, but I knew he was angry.

"Oh, of course you could stand it!" She tried to retreat, but rather unsuccessfully. "But why should you? To cut prices, put Florida within reach of poor people? You can't cut prices very much if you have to carry this terribly inflated overvaluation of Exclusive City. As you first planned it, it looked like public service, but it won't be that now."

"Not so much," he admitted. "But I can cut prices and make money. Why shouldn't I?"

"Because you've done enough. Why must everybody go crazy to make money—in Florida, of all places? You're a rich man; you don't need any more. You'll make millions out of Cerulean Isles. Let that be enough for you, Myron. God made Florida to be enjoyed—the Fountain of Youth! Why can't we be simple, and enjoy it?"

"We?" he asked, with soft-voiced intentness.

I didn't count; I was only a secretary. He could make a proposal of marriage before me with no more embarrassment than if I had been a waiter.

"We, Flavia? Will you help me enjoy it, if I give this up?"

She gasped; her troubled eyes looked up; just for one instant they crossed mine. He caught that glance; and in that moment I felt as if by telepathy he knew everything that had happened on that trip homeward through the mist. Superstition, of course, but that was the way Myron O'Mara affected people.

Anyway, he knew enough to count. He had asked her to marry him, and she had looked at me as if I had something to say about it.

"I can't promise," she said, in a choking undertone. "I don't know."

"Ah!" He sat up a little straighter;

his eyes flashed, like the blue steel of a bare knife. His soft voice filled the room like the pur of a great cat. Never in all my life was I so much afraid of him.

"Very well, Flavia. Take your time and think it over. Meanwhile, I'll put it over—Florida-For-All."

"Myron, are you going to do this out of a—a silly pique?"

"I'm going to do it because it's my business, my stuff. A job that needs doing and that only Myron O'Mara can do."

"Please don't," she begged him. "It isn't worth the trouble. You'll have a hard time getting the money——"

Another mistake; he laughed, with the amusement of a man of great affairs at an ignorant woman's foolish ideas.

"Not I, my dear. Oscar's in; Jesley's in; there are three or four men around Miami who can be counted on for a million apiece; and when we invite subscriptions from the public, you'll find that plenty of people are still willing to invest in Florida, if it means investing in Myron O'Mara."

"Oh! The public can come in, then?" Her green eyes rested on him, with something of that famous golden glow. "Can I come in?"

"You?" He was amazed. "You haven't any money."

"I've been offered thirty-five thousand for my lot in Cerulean Isles. I can get forty."

"But that's all you have. Why should you come in?"

"To show you that I believe in you," said Flavia. "To show you that I'm not afraid you can't put this over, that I've asked you not to do it only because it seems so foolish to work hard for money when Florida's here to enjoy. Surely if I put all my money into it, that proves my faith?"

"I won't take your money, my dear. I'm flattered at this proof of confidence, and I know you'd make a big profit. But I won't let you in on this, my dear. Not now." And then, as she stared at him angrily, wondering if this meant that he was sure enough of getting her to give her an interest, later on, as Mrs. O'Mara, he added genially: "Florida has taken enough money out of widows and orphans, Flavia. Stick to Cerulean Isles."

With a terrific effort, I gathered the courage to break in. If she was a widow, I was an orphan; none the less we——

"Can I buy into Florida-For-All?" I asked him.

He swung round on me, dumfounded. "You?"

"Why not?"

"What have you to buy in with?"

"Not much," I conceded. "Eleven thousand dollars. But if you sell this thing to the public, you'll be taking less than that from other people."

"Why should you buy in, lad?" It was the fatherly voice of a man of the world, talking to an ignorant boy from Snyder's Junction.

Yes, I suppose that subconsciously he wanted to get that idea over to Flavia; but beyond that it was the way he really thought of me. That I was Victor Bentley, of some repute in London and Paris as well as New York as a writer on finance and economics, had never registered on him at all; I was still the lad with whom he'd played cards on a baggage truck for a ten-cent limit.

"To make money," I said. "You think there's money in this. So do I, if it goes over."

"Well, Flavia—here's another person who has faith in me."

"Yes," I said wearily, "I have faith in you—and also in the scheme. I've seen it from the inside. I think it's something that can be put over—if you do it. Well, can I buy?"

"Of course you can buy, lad. Go down to the office to-morrow morning

and sell yourself a hundred and ten shares. No reason why you should be kept out of the big money."

But I read the irony behind that smile of benevolence. The profit that could be made now on eleven thousand dollars was only small change in Florida.

Flavia read it, too; she rose, trying unsuccessfully to control a nervous irritation. "I'm going home, Myron. Have you a car for me? All right—then Victor will take me over to the McAllister."

I thought for a moment that the Old Man was going to offer to take her home himself. If he had, we'd have had a show-down right there—which, also, would have saved some trouble. But he gave way with a gesture which only emphasized my insignificance; I was the secretary; taking her home was part of my job.

WE sat in silence as his big limousine rolled down the palm-bordered roads of the island, over the short bridge, and then westward on the causeway across the bay. She was smoking, nervously tossing away cigarettes half burned and lighting new ones; a perilous business for a singer on a raw, misty evening. It annoyed me, particularly as I guessed that she was smoking so ostentatiously to make sure that I wouldn't try to kiss her.

As if I could try that argument now. Our affairs had gone beyond that.

But in the jam at the narrow one-way bridge at the end of the causeway, our car halted, in a long close-packed triple column, halted for the long wait till the traffic moved the other way. On Sunday night, we both knew we might wait there half an hour; she tossed her last cigarette away and gave up the pretense.

"Victor! Why did you do it?"

"Invest in Florida-For-All? Why not? I've got to make money."

"Why must you do that?"

I stared at her, silent.

"For me?" she demanded.

"Yes, for you—and for myself. I'm thirty-seven—and what have I done?"

She sighed helplessly. "Do you have to do it, Victor? Does everybody? You're a writer. That's your job. You're good at it. Oscar says so. *He* says so, too. Why must you, too, go wild about making money? Just because you're in Florida?"

"Partly—but for a better reason than that."

"For me? Oh, Victor, you don't have to!"

"But an hour ago," I reminded her, "you admitted—we both admitted—that money was important."

"Oh, it counts—but not for so very much. Don't you see that?"

"I see that you love me—more or less—but you're not decided whether to marry me or O'Mara. No, Flavia, I know you're not balancing us up, poor man against rich man; but it's—— What shall I say? Little man against big man. He's done something. I've only written about what other people have done. You deserve a first-rate man; and when you have a chance at one, I don't blame you for hesitating over a second-rate man. But if I can show you that I have something in me, too—that I can help him put this thing over——"

Her despairing gesture silenced me. "You don't understand me at all, my dear—even yet!"

"No," I conceded sullenly, "I probably don't. I haven't any—talent for women."

"Talent for women?" The green eyes blazed icily. "Am I women?"

"Yes," I told her in utter desperation, "you are. I don't know much about women—I've never been interested in them, for years—till you came along. You're all women, for me—all women, and just Flavia, too, your own self. All and one!"

"My dear! That's the nicest thing that's ever been said to me."

Her arm slipped about my neck; she kissed me and neither of us cared that our car was mostly glass and that fifty people, in the ranks of automobiles waiting around us, must have been looking on with enthusiastic interest. After this long hour of suspense and alienation, she was once more mine.

"All the same," she murmured presently, "it's true. You haven't any talent for women. And you make me begin to think I haven't any talent for —— No, not for men—for you! And I do so want to have a talent for you, Victor, a very special talent. If I could make you see—— It isn't because you're poor and he's rich that I hesitate. It's none of this utter nonsense about first-rate men and second-rate men. You and he are in two different lines; you can't be compared any more than a violinist and a ball player. And when you try to compete in his field it's like —like Kreisler playing ball."

"If Kreisler were in love with you," I told her, "and had to play ball to get you, he'd be out at morning practice before 'Babe' Ruth sat down to breakfast."

"How can I be sensible," she complained, her arms clinging to me, "when you say things like that? No, Victor, please understand! I've been thinking of marrying him for months. I admire him immensely, and I like him a great deal—— Oh, yes, I see his faults, but I like him just the same. He's just the kind of man I've wanted to marry and intended to marry if I ever married again. I was just on the point of saying "Yes" when you came along and swept me off my feet. Think, Victor—we've talked to each other just four times—on the beach, that day at the races and afterward at the club, the evening I came over to the island for a swim in the pool, and to-day. That's all. And I'm crazily in love with you! Yes, yes—that's the trouble. I'm crazy about you—and I don't want to make another crazy marriage."

"It's a chance, for both of us," I conceded. "But so is any marriage. I'm willing to risk it."

"You've never been married. If you'd had a ghastly failure, like mine —— Oh, I want to be sure—not to plunge headlong on a physical attraction that might burn out. I'm afraid. I'd told myself I wouldn't let you make love to me again till I'd made up my mind—and here we are, a spectacle for half of Miami! There—thank Heaven the traffic's moving at last! But money —it would be nice if you had it, or if I had it; but it really doesn't count.

"Victor," she said, "you could get a job as a writer—newspapers or magazines or something—that would make you a little money, couldn't you? Eight or ten thousand a year? And I can make more than that for the next few years. Not more than three or four, I'm afraid; my voice is giving out."

I looked at her in horror; she flushed.

"You think that was why I'd been thinking over a rich marriage?" she asked. "Not altogether, I could make a living as an actress without a singing voice—though not so much of a living. I know my voice is most of my value. I'm only a so-so actress. Just the same, it did count—I might as well admit it. The difference between the good living I make now and the ragged-edge living I'll make when the voice is gone. Think as badly of me as you like——"

"I don't," I told her. "It's only common sense."

"So it was—till I met you. But listen! For three or four years to come, I can make money. We could save that and live simply—oh, very simply—on what you make. Eight or ten thousand a year. And we could take this eleven thousand you want to invest in Florida-For-All and build a house on my lot in Cerulean Isles. We'd have to leave

a mortgage, but we could let that run forever. You know that's the perfect place to live—the water front at Cerulean Isles—the best in Florida. Down there at the edge of the Keys, the climate is pretty much the same all the year; we could live there all the year, if it came to that—with three or four thousand a year income on what I'd have been able to save before the voice gave out, and I suppose a few thousand a year more that you could make writing.

"We wouldn't be rich, Victor—we'd never be rich. There's no guarantee that we'd be happy; like every other pair who get married, we'd have to take the chance. But we might be happy; and we'd live the good life that Florida can give you, better than any other place in the world. We're both beginning to feel a little tired, a little old. Silly, at our age, but we've worked hard. Here's our chance for the Fountain of Youth. Will you try it?"

WHY didn't I say yes? Why, because we were rolling along the shore of the Magic City, with the oppressive sense of money all around us; because we were turning the corner, stopping in front of her hotels; because I saw a bare, gray head dipping into an automobile ahead of us, Oscar Satchell, who had just said good night to Charles Jesley.

"No," I said stubbornly, "I can't. It would seem too much like—retiring, like any other elderly couple that had given up and quit, up North. We're not ready to retire yet, Flavia. You ought to have—everything——"

"Granted, my friend." Her laugh was cold. "But I don't expect it. Come—we mustn't block the entrance."

We got out; we mounted the steps into the lobby; before the desk, we paused.

"Victor," she said desperately, "you think I want money. I don't. To-night I want you. But to-morrow I may want money—you can't tell! I want you—God knows why, except that I'm in love with you. As you are—or at any rate as I see you. As Victor Bentley, not as an imitation of Myron O'Mara. But if this Miami madness catches you as it's caught him, if you, too, go crazy about money—— Why, then you're Kreisler playing ball against Babe Ruth. If you insist that I must choose, not between a man I admire and a man I'm in love with, but between Myron O'Mara and a copy of Myron——"

"Oh," I groaned, "I know that nobody but a crazy fool could refuse you! But I haven't the right to take you now. I've been working for other people all my life. Yes, I'm still working for O'Mara; but if I have an investment in this thing, I can feel that I'm more or less making an independent play, working for myself. Not just the money, but an effort at achievement. It may be all wrong to measure achievement by money, but that's the way it's measured in Florida. Call me crazy if you like, but I've got to prove that I'm good—yes, good in his field as well as my own!—that I can play against him on his own ground—before I'd dare try it. You're a treasure beyond price, Flavia; but I've got to earn you."

And now, once more, she was all the *Snow Queen*. "I'm not to be earned, my friend. I offer myself as a free gift, or not at all. But if you prefer to chase the mechanical rabbit——"

She turned her back on me; she got her key at the desk; without another glance toward me, she disappeared in the elevator. I knew then that if I followed her it was not yet too late; I could see how it must seem to her—but also I saw how it seemed to me. She was unique and unapproachable among all the women I had known. I'd made a poor choice of words when I spoke of earning her, but I had to do it in my eyes if not in hers; before I could take her away from Myron

O'Mara, I had to show myself that I could sit in on Myron O'Mara's game and hold my own.

As I stood there, immovable, seething with frustration and chagrin and a furious determination that gradually rose above them and fought them down, a bull voice boomed behind me.

"What's the number of Mr. Jesley's room?"

"No. 1214," said the room clerk.

A burly figure jostled me aside; I saw Lucas Hydrick hurrying toward the elevator.

Lucas Hydrick! What he had to do with Jesley, I didn't know; but it was a bad omen that he had anything to do with Jesley now.

And I encountered another bad omen when I returned to the house on the island. Oscar was nowhere in sight, but O'Mara still sat in the drawing-room, wreathed in blue cigar smoke. As I came in, he looked up; his eyes shone with that steely, brisk alertness that I had seen in them often when he was dealing with a man who had to be beaten.

"You got Flavia home safely?" he asked, with suspicious good humor.

"The traffic held us up," I told him uneasily. "But in due time we got there."

"A good many things have held you two up to-day," he observed. "You've been lucky; she's a fascinating woman. You're sitting in a big game, lad, and you'll need all the education I've given you before it's over. But remember that sixes beat aces when I hold the sixes. Good night, Victor."

There was nothing more to be said.

CHAPTER XVII.

READY TO GAMBLE.

I FOUND Oscar waiting in my room, with a furious scowl.

"Heard the news, Vic? We're going ahead—buy out Hydrick for the thirty million, buy Hesperid Shores for eight——downright lunacy? I thought he was out of the notion, at dinner; Jesley seemed just a little too eager to finance us. Say what you like against the governor, he's always known when to quit—except in 1919, when nobody did. He was ready to quit this time—and then that damn woman shoved him into it."

"She didn't!" I exploded. "She did her best to keep him out."

"Aggh! What do you or I know about what a woman like that is up to? All evening he was half crazy, when you and she didn't show up for dinner. Half the time he thought you'd been drowned, and half the time he seemed to think you'd eloped with her. I wish you had."

"So do I," I muttered. "While I had the chance."

"What?"

I told him—not all of it, but the high points, glad of a chance to get it off my chest; but appalled, as I sketched what had happened, by an increasing perception that I had been a supreme idiot. It seemed incredible that any man who could have got Flavia Haddon on any terms should not have taken her. I knew Oscar would think I was crazy—but he didn't.

"Poor old Vic!" he murmured, when I had finished my recital. "She must be happy now—got you both on the string. Boy, you're goofy to blow that eleven grand in this damn-fool gambling game!"

"You're putting in five million," I reminded him.

He shrugged. "Oh, I'm bound to string along with the governor. But you're not. She's got you floundering like a fish out of water; she's got him crazy—the ox trying to inflate himself to the size of the elephant——"

"Oscar! She did her best to stop us both."

"Of course she did! Because she

knows you—knows you're a pair of stubborn damn fools who only need to be told they can't do a thing to break their necks trying. Ten minutes ago I thought the governor was the biggest lunatic on earth, but now I know there's another just as bad. Damn her—and damn Florida! Between them, they've driven you both crazy."

In love with her though I was, I could have laughed at his raging disgust—but I didn't. For Oscar had always liked me; in this winter at Miami, he had come to like me still better, to confide in me, to feel that I was his one ally, the one man to whom he could blow off steam when he was driven wild by the godlike vagaries of Myron O'Mara.

"Does she want money, Vic?" he implored me. "Because if she does, I'll give you a million and you can marry her and go off and live in style. I'd save money at that, if it would persuade him to give up, for good and all, Florida-For-All."

"No, Oscar," I told him gently, "that wouldn't do. We've got to play the hand as it's dealt."

"And a hell of a hand it is!" he muttered. "All sixes and seven-spots, with Jesley holding all the aces. Well, I'll let you go to bed, Vic; we've all got to work to-morrow."

I went to bed, but I didn't sleep. For a while I worried about the chance—the successive chances—I'd missed that evening. I could have had Flavia; but I had let her go and I might never get her back. Well, there remained one chance of getting her back—to help the Old Man put this over, to earn my modest place, even in the back row, as one of the makers of Florida. The lesson I thought I had learned in Wall Street had been thrown away—but in Wall Street I had never had any such temptations as Florida and Flavia. I went to sleep at last, listening to the remote music of the call of the big money.

AND the call rang louder when we all met at breakfast. The Old Man looked at me over his grapefruit, mellow and amused.

"Victor, you were starting in the publicity business last fall, weren't you? Well, you're in it again. I can't see paying three thousand a week for Oscar's friend, the damn best press agent in the world. But I concede that we need some publicity and you'll have to provide as much as you think we need of it."

"I'll provide it," I promised. "On top of my other duties?"

"On top of your other duties—but at the same salary. Can't have too high an overhead, you know, lad—especially as we're carrying all of Mr. Jesley's worthless relatives on the pay roll. If you feel that you're being overworked or——"

"You go to hell," I said, feeling exactly as I had felt the first time I said that to him, on the platform at Snyder's Junction. "What money I'm putting into this isn't much, but it's all I've got I'm going to stay with it and do my best to help it along."

He laughed. "That's the spirit, lad—the old all-together-one-two-three-for-dear-old-Florida-For-All. There's nothing like having an organization that's all working well together—for its own money."

I grinned back at him, but the grin must have been sickly. I felt as Kreisler might feel on the diamond, with a hot grounder trickling through the fingers that are trained to a more delicate kind of work. Flavia was right—at this game I could never beat him. Not only was I playing thousands where he played millions, but his innate deftness made my efforts to show off display me as the butter-fingered lout that, in his game, I was.

But I had elected to make it my game, too; I had to stay with it to the finish, now.

CHAPTER XVIII.

TWO CRAZY FOOLS.

WE got ourselves organized—O'Mara in for thirty millions, Jesley for five, Satchell for five, and scattering contributions that made up three or four millions more. Most of this money was not in yet, you understand; it was to be put in if, as, and when it was needed. Hydrick had given us an option on his holdings in Exclusive City, at thirty million—Oscar almost cried, literal salt tears dripping on the paper, as he watched the signing of that document; but it suited neither Hydrick's convenience nor ours to close too soon. For Cerulean Isles, which O'Mara would have to hock to raise most of his contribution, would be worth more money if we could get rid of Joe Quincy and the islands he was going to dredge up from the bottom of the sea in front of us.

What reasons Hydrick gave, I don't remember—they were mere excuses, anyway. We took up our smaller options; we took over Hesperid Shores, the worst gold brick Myron O'Mara ever bought in his life, for its developers, facing the utter collapse of their sales campaign, would have had to let it go for three million, two million, anything they could get, if we'd waited a month longer—and we paid eight. We announced ourselves discreetly, in the Miami papers, the New York papers; but the big publicity was to wait for the front-page stuff, the taking over of Exclusive City.

The Old Man was crazy—there was no doubt of that now. Or perhaps—if the wise men who call genius a form of insanity are right—he had always been crazy, and it was just breaking out on him. For thirty years he had been held in check by Oscar Satchell, but Oscar could do nothing with him now. We were in too deep to get out; and Oscar could have done nothing anyway. For O'Mara knew Oscar hated Flavia, and it was Flavia who had driven him crazy.

In his right mind, he would never have paid eight million for Hesperid Isles or thirty million for Exclusive City. He had got away with a good many inflated capitalizations in his time, but nothing like that; nor had he ever attempted to float such a dropsically watered enterprise on a market as dead as the current market for Florida. But he was absolutely intolerant of opposition, insanely confident that he could get away with anything; he had to put this over, on the wildest possible scale, as a final proof of his superiority. He had to show Flavia.

It was pathetic—the last outburst of an old man's desperate grasp for youth and vigor. He had always been something of a dandy, but now he outdid himself, coming down to the office every morning spruce and smart and smiling, freshly clad in clothes that were almost on the edge of flamboyance, a flower in his buttonhole—an old man pathetically trying to be young. Yet the astounding thing was that he got away with it so well. His step was light, his face pink —dangerously pink, for he was in bed only six hours a night, and often he didn't sleep more than three or four; he was overworking himself, overstraining himself, and worrying frantically on top of it all, yet for three or four weeks he threw the most magnificent bluff I have ever seen in my life, a man of sixty-three looking twenty years younger.

And all in vain, except as he impressed the staff and the men he was buying in—for he hardly ever saw Flavia.

I didn't see her either; I was almost crazy myself, in those days. But somehow O'Mara's insanity was on a scale so much grander than mine that even to me it seemed far more important.

He asked her to dinner at the house on the island, again and again, but she refused. Once or twice he saw her

at the races, in other people's parties, in a crowd, where she treated him with the same light, affectionate friendliness that she used toward a dozen other men in Miami. And now and then, driven wild, he went off by himself in the evening—to the Clorinda Club as Oscar and I would learn in due time from other people, where he could dance with her, and drink champagne at her table, and talk to her—but always in a crowd. Always she managed to have somebody else there; he could say nothing to her in private except when they danced.

THERE was a story of an evening that Joe Quincy was with her when O'Mara arrived. The Old Man bristled up, for that suit over Quincy's purchase of the bottom of the ocean was moving toward trial; but Joe rose with a glad smile and an outstretched hand.

"No hard feelings, I hope, Mr. O'Mara. We are both business men; we don't need to bring these little differences into our social life."

With a growl and a snarl, the Old Man turned away from him and Flavia and went back to his car. It was told around town as an instance of O'Mara's vindictiveness, or even of his fear that Quincy would beat him in court. But to Satchell and me it meant something different; if Quincy were with her, and in good humor, it meant that Quincy didn't think she would marry O'Mara.

It was too late for that to cheer either of us. If she had married O'Mara, now, at least he would have been restored to nervous normalcy, and Oscar would have been measurably happy. I felt a gloomy certainty that whether or not she ever married the Old Man, she wouldn't marry me.

For I wasn't seeing her at all. I had called her up a dozen times, begging her to see me, only to be turned off with a curt "I don't feel like it;" I'd written her letters—quite insane letters, I'm afraid, for my nerves were shot to pieces with the strain of a job that kept me busy all day and half the night, and naturally this uncertainty didn't help me much. Finally she sent me this brief answer:

DEAR VICTOR: Don't be so intense. It doesn't help you or amuse me. We all have things we might be intense about, but what's the use?

Yes, as you keep reminding me, I was in love with you, that evening we came home from Cerulean Isles. You had your chance then, but you preferred to chase the mechanical rabbit. I wouldn't think of taking your time while you're running around the track. When you've caught the rabbit, or failed to catch it, we may both know our own minds better than I know mine now. F.

There was not much consolation in that.

And then one day I met her on Flagler Street. The usual hurrying crowd was all about us, swarming, jostling; but we stopped dead and she looked at me with the amused lightness that she used to turn on—Joe Quincy.

"Well?" she asked. "How are we men of affairs?"

"Crazy," I said sourly. "Not merely about you, but you make us worse. I wish you'd marry me, but if you won't, I wish you'd marry him so as to relieve somebody's mind."

"The faithful secretary! Oh, you make me sick—you and Myron both. You wonder why I don't see you—why I don't see him except when I can't help it. Why should I see you? You're just silly boys, children, showing off to impress a little girl—trying to jump higher than anybody else—— Oh, you're absurd! Joe Quincy, whatever you may say against him, behaves like a grown man. He's better company, these days, than you and Myron."

"Flavia," I admitted, "I've been all kinds of a fool, but I'm learning. And if you care for me——"

"Ah, but I warned you things might not look the same the next morning. Since you—turned me down, I've been

feeling a little more like the *Snow Queen*. That's my normal state, you know. Let's wait, Victor."

"How about the Old Man?" I asked. "He doesn't want to wait, I take it. And he may suspect that you and I have——"

"Oh, he knows all about that. I knew he saw something so I told him everything. Pretty nearly everything."

"You did!" I gasped. "What did he say?"

She laughed unhappily. "I'm sorry to say, my dear, that he didn't take it at all seriously. It's quite inconceivable to him that he could have dangerous competition from—a secretary. What's the matter with you? Doesn't that get under your skin?"

I shook my head. "No, Flavia. He's that way; we have to take him as he is. I'm not worried about what he thinks—only what you think."

"I think you're a pair of imbeciles!" she flared. "I don't feel at all inspired to marry either of you, just now. What a pity Oscar hates me! Of you three, he's the best man."

"I've always known that," I told her.

She looked at me searchingly. "You look tired, Victor. Not a bit well. Overworking?"

"Probably," I admitted. "So are we all. But in a month or so the strain will be over."

"The strain," she said, "and the season. I'll be going back to New York. And you?"

"We'll all be making trips to New York, off and on. But we'll probably stay in Miami till June at least, in order to take care of the new purchases."

"Then I can compose my thoughts at a safe distance," she mused. "But, Victor! Don't let him work you to death. You were ill last fall; you're not exactly a well man yet. And I know he's capable of wearing you down, breaking you to pieces, grinding you to bits out of sheer cruelty——"

"Don't worry about me," I told her. "I can stand the gaff."

She stamped her foot. "Bound to show me that you're a big, strong man, aren't you? As if that mattered."

"It does matter," I returned grimly. "You don't love O'Mara, half the time you don't even like him, yet you're still playing with the notion of marrying him. Why? Because he's—a big, strong man. I've got to beat him, or at least give him a good race, on his own ground."

She smiled at me wearily. "Poor Victor! You certainly haven't any—talent for women."

With that she left me. I knew she was troubled, more deeply than her pride would let her show; but I didn't know how to help her.

I HAD no time to help her, anyway, just then, for we were about to close with Hydrick and take over Exclusive City. The Old Man had made a last effort to drag Hydrick into Florida-For-All—it would have been a good deal easier to carry his thirty-million-dollar valuation of Exclusive City on the books than to give him that much money—but he held out stubbornly. His young wife, said old Lucas, wanted to see the world—she'd never been farther away from home than Atlanta. He was having a yacht built, the finest yacht that money would buy, and all he wanted was to clean up and get out as soon as possible and cruise in foreign parts.

So the big deal was put through and I made a hurry trip to New York to handle the publicity. It was a jolt to come back to the fog and soot, gray ice packed on the sidewalks and dirty snow melting in the gutters. For the first time, as I sat in O'Mara's office twenty stories above Wall Street and prepared a statement for the papers, I really appreciated Florida. It restored my optimism, which had begun to flag. Who

wouldn't buy in Florida, if they really knew what Florida had to offer?

Various matters restored my optimism. I had to confer with Jesley, as a matter of courtesy and prudence, and Jesley, who had known me for years but only as a reporter, was quite ready to defer to my judgment in all things. His son-in-law, Hammond, our alleged vice president, had come to town a few days earlier—we never missed him, in the Miami office—and Hammond was at my side when I called in the newspapermen to make the announcement. Hammond was the front, but I was the works and they all knew it. Smoking a dollar cigar—I'd bought it myself—after they left me, I felt like one of the financial leaders of the nation; and when I saw the really excellent publicity we got in the next day's papers, I saw the big money already in sight.

ANY financial publicity adviser, or public relations counsel, or whatever you call them, would have charged twenty thousand dollars for the work I had done in those three weeks, for a salary of a little over seven hundred. All the same, I knew O'Mara; he had his meanness and his generosities. He might grind me down now, but if this thing went over, he'd very likely give me a million-dollar interest. Especially, I mused with a return of bitter foreboding, if in the meantime he had got Flavia.

Foreboding was intensified by something that happened that evening. Merriman, who had succeeded me as financial editor of the *Record*, asked me to dinner at his club, and when we had been mellowed by a couple of high balls, he leaned toward me confidentially.

"Now look here, Vic. We ran that story just as you gave it out, without trying to go behind it. That's journalism, in these times—the only thing the copy desk won't touch is a canned statement. I don't blame you for getting out of the trade. But now between you and me, off the *Record*, in perfect confidence, isn't O'Mara headed for a bust?"

"Between you and me, in perfect confidence, I don't think so. I believe he's going to put this over. Why not?"

"Well—there are rumors, Vic, that he's inflated himself till he's about to explode."

"He's paying too high for Exclusive City and Hesperid Shores, in the abstract," I admitted. "But he can finance them and come out ahead. Where do these rumors come from?"

"Well—don't tell anybody I told you—but I hear that old Jesley is getting a little leery. Hammond is Jesley's man on your board, isn't he?"

"Jesley's on the board himself. But of course Hammond is his lookout in Miami, or would be if he had brains enough."

"Well, Hammond told a friend of mine that he wasn't at the meeting when they voted that purchase of Hesperid Shores."

"Neither was the office boy," I said. "He has about as much to do with running the business as Hammond. Hammond knew all about it beforehand; we never heard a yelp, from him or Jesley."

"Well, somebody's yelping now," said Merriman. "They're wondering why you should pay thirty million for Exclusive City. Wondering if somebody isn't getting his cut in it."

This was news. It was what anybody might legitimately have said beforehand—though Myron O'Mara had never been reduced to making his money by getting a cut out of a purchase made for one of his own organizations—but to have it come popping up now—— Well, as Oscar would have said, an enemy hath done this. And I began to suspect that Oscar was correct in his identification of the enemy.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MONEY MARKET.

IT was a dreadful temptation to go to Jesley myself and have a show-down, in my new character of one of the financial leaders of the nation; but after all this was Myron O'Mara's enterprise, not mine, and Myron O'Mara could probably do more with Jesley than I could. So I took a train back to Miami that night.

The season was nearing its end, the racing season, the night-club season, the tourist season; the northward swarming had begun. People were leaving the East Coast, as usual, just about the time the East Coast is at its best, when the approach of spring puts an end to the cold days and chilly nights that occasionally disfigure the winter season at Miami. But as for me, fresh from the soot and snow, I was glad to come back to Florida. I appreciated it, now.

I went straight from the train to the house on the island—it was evening—and told the Old Man and Oscar what I had heard. And the way he took it worried me far more than the news itself; he was uncertain, hesitant—he was old. For the first time he actually looked to me for advice, but now I got no gratification out of that.

"Well, Victor—you've been on the ground; what would you do about it?"

"Kick Jesley and Hammond out," I advised promptly. "Hammond's only a spy. He's a brainless spy, but he's probably got some clever office workers on his private pay roll. I'll do a little sleuthing into that to-morrow. Meanwhile, get them out before they get you out."

"That's what I say," Oscar muttered. "If they're gunning for you, make them shoot you from in front, anyway."

The Old Man mused; his face was still mottled with something of that hectic pinkness, but in spots it was gray. "No, boys," he decided, "we can't afford it. Jesley is a tower of strength. His name counts."

"Go swimming with a banker and he'll steal your clothes," Oscar reminded him. "And you haven't got that bird handcuffed."

"It takes a good man to steal my clothes, Oscar. None the less, we're going to be in trouble unless this thing is straightened out."

"We certainly are! Before long we've got to meet the balance of that first payment to Hydrick. Six million dollars. Where is it?"

O'Mara smiled, more naturally. "We can meet that, Oscar. I haven't sunk all my money in Florida-For-All and Cerulean Isles. I've been aboard a rising market for months and it's about time to sell out and take my profit. With that, I can cover that payment. And after that—— Well, there's money in New York, begging for employment, and I can get it."

This left us somewhat more cheerful, though Oscar grumbled later:

"Now, darn him, isn't that just like him? I thought he'd got out of everything he was in—the market can't keep on rising forever; I'm out of it. I'm almost sure he told me he wasn't playing anything, now. And here he's evidently in for millions that we didn't know about, all the time! Queer man, Vic, queer man! Still, it's lucky he's got that money."

He had it that night, but twenty-four hours later it was a different story. For then came the great break of March, 1926, when a market which had been climbing upward for a year and a half, far beyond all reason, suddenly blew up and came back to its proper level; and that day, by the most abominable of all possible luck, the Old Man happened to be out with Hydrick looking over the still-undeveloped portions of Exclusive City.

It was hours before we found him; and though he did his best to extricate

himself with the minimum of loss, he was too far in, and in too many things, to beat anything like a successful retreat. That curious secretiveness that had led him to hide his extensive involvements, even from Oscar, cost him a lot of money, cost him, when the smoke had blown away and we could figure out the damage, not less than three million dollars.

"No help for it," he murmured gloomily. "I'll have to go to New York and get some money. Well, I'll get it from Jesley and make him like it. Yes, sir! I'm due for a show-down with that old cattawampus anyway, and here's where we have it. I'll go to New York to-morrow——"

"To-morrow?" Satchell put in. "And cut the Baradells' costume ball? Baradell's in with us for a million, and he's got more that we might get hold of. We can't afford to offend a million dollars just now, governor."

"Right," said O'Mara, after a moment's reflection. "Day after to-morrow, then, I go to New York. And you go with me, Victor; I suppose I'll have to give the newspapers something and you'll have to cook it up. Oscar——"

"I can't go," Satchell protested, "with this suit against Joe Quincy coming to trial. Yes, I know it's only the application for injunction and I've got plenty of strings to my bow if he happens to beat us on that; but the sooner we can stop him, the better. I want to be on hand to attend to that personally. You won't need me in New York, governor. When it comes to getting money, you're a whole army in yourself."

That was true, and Oscar was a whole army, or at any rate the most competent of high commands, in a lawsuit. So I went to the Baradells' costume ball, the last big affair of the local season, with a fairly light heart, though my eyelids were heavy with accumulated loss of sleep. Anyway, I woke up at the party, for Flavia was there. This was a grand affair; it got three columns in the Miami papers and three quarters of a column in New York; but about all I saw of it was Flavia.

THERE was no restriction on costume except that we were supposed to be dressed as something that might have some connection with Florida—the Old Man was a Spanish governor in cocked hat and powdered wig, Oscar and I were pirates, and a mean-looking pair, too; but Flavia had elected to disguise herself as a flamingo, in fluttering pink draperies. I danced with her; I walked with her afterward under the palms in the garden; in the starlit dusk, I kissed her, and felt her heart fluttering against me as she responded for an instant—and then tore herself from my arms.

"Victor! That isn't fair."

"Why not? If you like it, that seems to be an argument in point."

"Oh, if you'd kept on this way, instead of turning proud and dropping me after that first evening—— But it's too late now. I'm trying to be sensible."

"Meaning you will marry O'Mara?"

"I don't know," she said. "But I'm going to marry under orders from my brain and not my silly, excitable nerves. Marry a man I can have some hope of living with happily! I didn't know you when I fell in love with you, but you seemed the sort of person I'd like to live with; a calm person who knows his limitations, as I know mine, and accepts them, who wouldn't go crazy chasing after the big money. But evidently you're not that kind of person."

"Certainly *he's* not," I observed.

She flung out her hand. "Oh—he's different."

"He undoubtedly is. Flavia, we've made about all possible mistakes in handling this affair—but can't we go back to the beginning and start again?"

"We can't get ourselves back on a

shoal in the bay, lost in the mist," she said wearily. "That was our moment and we let it slip. I don't seem to be able to recapture the mood, ashore."

We said more, but we got no farther; I left her with a pretty strong impression that though she hadn't decided to take O'Mara, she was more inclined that way—and inclined, largely, through pity. The strain was visibly telling on him and she wanted to comfort him, to tell him that nothing mattered.

Yet, when he and I went to New York the next day, he was more like his old self than I had seen him all winter; suddenly interested in the sporting news, in the beginning of baseball training; interested in cards, which he hadn't touched for a month. He found three millionaires whom he knew on that train and brought them into his stateroom; and I sat in with them at a table-stakes game that had me on the verge of bankruptcy more than once, but eventually left me twelve hundred dollars ahead when we cashed in at Manhattan Transfer. Much of it I had won from him; it was a triumph I appreciated, and all the more because I knew he had an unwilling respect for anybody who sat in with him at any game and took his money.

I'd have given a good deal if he could have respected me as a rival for Flavia.

We got to New York; we lunched with Jesley, genial and optimistic, at one of the downtown clubs; and then the Old Man went into executive session with him while I went out, overcoat and muffler protecting me against the raw cold of the streets where frozen, grimy snow still lingered, and walked around nervously for the hour that must intervene before I was to meet O'Mara at his Wall Street office.

TWENTY minutes ahead of time I went up to headquarters with an evening paper in my overcoat pocket. When I read it in the office, I found a brief story buried inside under a Miami date line that turned me colder than ever. The court had refused to grant Cerulean Isles an injunction against Joe Quincy.

From that moment, I knew we were licked. It was unreasonable; Oscar could drag that litigation on through court after court, and there was a good chance that we could win it; even if we didn't win it, a million dollars, in all likelihood, would buy Joe Quincy out. But this, coming on top of the break in the market that had sent the Old Man to New York for money before he expected, seemed a warning from destiny, a notice of eviction. The luck that had always attended Myron O'Mara, that had been at his command when he needed it, had deserted him at last.

Presently he came in, gray-faced, stooping, sixty-three years old. "You've seen the paper, Victor? Jesley had it by private wire. Hammond, of course. He had his excuse—that reduced the value of Cerulean Isles. A month ago we could have raised twenty-five million on it—more, if we needed it. Now he's practically told me I can't get more than ten million for my interest and Oscar's, too. It's a choice—either we turn Cerulean Isles over to Jesley—at half price—or bang goes Florida-For-All! We can't go through with the deal for Exclusive City; Hydrick pockets the million and a half we've paid him already—he needs it, too, to carry over this depression—and keeps his development. What does that leave us? Hesperid Shores and the chicken feed—worthless for the next five years, without Exclusive City. We can carry them, for more than they're worth, or take a loss of more millions."

"Part of that loss would be Jesley's, wouldn't it?"

"Not much, lad, not much. Jesley appears as interested for five million, but four million of that is only window

dressing. Jesley wouldn't lose much if we closed out now; but the damn rascal actually hinted at taking all this acreage over, if I didn't want to carry it! Stole my clothes while I was in deep water."

"Let the thing go, then!" I exploded. "It isn't worth it, Mr. O'Mara. Let Florida-For-All go to the devil, take your loss, and go on with Cerulean Isles. That's a good development; you'll make more out of that than you'd lose here. You can stand five or six millions——"

"I can stand that, lad, but I can't stand having them say that Myron O'Mara is licked. I've never been licked except in 1920 when everybody was licked. It takes a better man than Jesley to lick me now." He straightened up; something of the color came back to his face. "Jesley hasn't got all the money in New York. I'll see Morgan, see Warburg—— Have you fixed up that statement for the morning papers? All right. I'll see the boys at five o'clock. And then I'll go out after some of the money that Mr. Jesley hasn't got. Cerulean Isles is worth twenty-five million——"

He was out all evening. From our suite in the Biltmore, I called Oscar at Miami and told him the news. And Oscar, so depressed in advance, was curiously cheerful in the face of catastrophe.

"If there's a loose dollar in New York, the governor can get it," he predicted. "Even if he can't raise more than ten million, he may take that and still pull through. I'd hate to say that bird can't do anything, Vic, considering what I've seen him get away with."

BUT O'Mara accomplished nothing that night; he had the same luck the next day, coming back toward evening, an old man once more.

"We're licked," he admitted. "Jesley may be a crook, but he knows the money market. They only laugh at you when you talk about Florida—as if you were trying to sell them Confederate money. You and I know what Cerulean Isles can do, is going to do; but all these fellows see is what it's done so far. It's jungle and they can't see that jungle, in Florida, is only something to be swept aside and burned as brushwood. They haven't got the Florida spirit. Hydrick can raise twice the money on Exclusive City at this moment that I can raise on Cerulean Isles, just because Exclusive City's there, where you can see it. They can't see that what is still an unrealized possibility is greater than any actuality, in Florida.

"Well, lad, there we are! Mortgage Cerulean Isles to Jesley or give up Florida-For-All." With something of their old gleam, his blue eyes looked at me quizzically. "Which would you do?"

Which would I do? Eleven thousand dollars—all the money I had, except the few hundreds I had won in the card game, and the few more hundreds due me as salary—was tied up in Florida-For-All. I had done all I could for it; Oscar had done all he could; Myron O'Mara, on whom I had bet my last nickel, had done all he could, and it wasn't enough.

Once more—for the last time, I hoped—I had learned my lesson. The big money was not for me. When I had gone to Florida, I had felt that if I bought into any development the whole State would crash. Well, the whole State had slumped before I got there; the one development I had bought into was crashing around me now. It was O'Mara's insane overconfidence that had done it; still, I couldn't help thinking that in a way the fault was mine. Call me superstitious if you like, but I felt that I was the hoodoo.

At the price of eleven thousand dollars, I had completed my education, got

my diploma. No, at a higher price than that; in losing my money, in losing my last play for the big money I had always wanted and never had the talent to acquire, I had lost Flavia, too. At the moment I felt as tired, and as old, as O'Mara.

"Well?" he asked again.

"Let's quit chasing the mechanical rabbit," I told him. And then, as he stared without comprehension, I explained: "Forget Florida-For-All. Keep Cerulean Isles—it's the best bet in Florida, if you nurse it along for three or four years. Let Jesley crow, if he likes. Florida was made to live in. Why don't you do it?"

"Well, well!" He drummed on his knees. "I thought you'd say that, Victor. But we'll see. Go home and talk things over. I never do anything without Oscar."

That was true—he never did. Just the same, I began to glow with a sullen resentment, for I thought I knew what that phrase forebode. He was going to pass the buck to Oscar, make him take the blame of the decision. Oh, yes, it was like him, O'Mara's way, familiar to us all. But I think that was the moment when the resentful, reluctant affection that I'd felt for him ever since that afternoon at Snyder's Junction began to drain away. It was just a little too much; considering that if he'd taken Oscar's advice in the first place, he'd never have been in the hole.

CHAPTER XX.

THE UNCONQUERABLE HERO.

NO poker was played on that return trip to Miami; in fact, we slept most of the way, he in his stateroom and I in my compartment, making up a little of what we had lost in the past weeks. Whether it was the rest, or the return to the sunshine, I felt a good deal better when we got off the train at Miami; and he looked, once more, almost young.

Oscar had gone up to Palm Beach for something or other and wasn't coming back till dinner time; but the Old Man went to the office, and received Hammond's rather nervous greetings with the most admirable composure. It was perfectly clear that Hammond rather wondered if the Old Man was going to kick him out of that sixteenth-story window; when O'Mara shook hands with him and told him how well Jesley was looking, and how relieved Jesley had been to hear that Mrs. Hammond's attack of grippe hadn't been serious, Hammond actually shook with relief.

But he didn't dare ask anything about the business. Even Hammond, thick-wit that he was, knew the Old Man well enough to know that there was dynamite inside him waiting for the detonator.

O'Mara left the office about five. I stayed an hour later, for a hundred details of my assorted jobs needed clearing up. Just as I was ready to leave, the telephone rang and I heard Oscar's voice.

"Vic—I'm at the house. The governor's dressing for dinner—he hasn't told me more than the bare facts. What's he going to do?"

"I don't think he's made up his mind. He wants to talk it over with you before taking further steps."

"Oh, he does, does he?" I surmised from his tone that Oscar, too, foresaw that the buck was going to be passed. "Well—we'll take care of that when it comes. What I wanted to tell you, Vic—Flavia called up this morning and asked for you."

"For me?" My hands shook as they held the phone.

"I told her you'd be back this evening and she said she wanted to see you."

"At the club?"

"No, her season closed Saturday—night before last. At the McAllister."

I called her up and her voice was as excited as mine.

"Victor—I've found out something you ought to know. About the business."

"Oh!" I said. "About the business, eh?"

"Now don't be stupid. This is something—— Well, maybe it doesn't mean as much as I think, but you ought to know it. Can you come down for dinner—now?"

IN her dinner gown of green silk, she waited in the lobby, her eyes aglow with some strange excitement. She asked me, as we went in, about the trip to New York; and because I knew by now that any secret was safe with her, I told her everything.

"So you advised him to take the loss," she commented, as we sat at dinner. "The third-rail current is turned off; the rabbit runs into the hole in the ground, and we tear up our tickets and hope for better luck next time."

"There isn't any next time for me," I told her. "At the age of thirty-seven, I've learned my lesson. I can always make a living—a fairly comfortable living, most people would call it. If ever again I get money enough to start up in the publicity business, I can probably make a good living. But the big money's out of my reach. I'm resigned to that at last."

I had been hoping that that news would turn her back to such ideas as she had had that last time we talked at the McAllister, that night I brought her back from Cerulean Isles. But something else was on her mind.

"But is *he* resigned?" she asked. "Is he ready to take his loss?"

"I don't know. He's talking that over with Oscar, now."

"Oh, it's a crime!" she cried softly. "Listen—I'll tell you what I've heard, and what I guess. It's a low trick, Victor—the first time I've ever betrayed another person's secret. But—Joe Quincy came to me the other night and told me he'd heard I was thinking of taking thirty-eight thousand for my water-front lot in Cerulean Isles. I told him that I was and he said: 'Don't let them gyp you. I'll give you fifty for it.'

"I was surprised, of course. I told him that the only reason I was selling was because he was getting ready to build an island right in front of my view; the man who'd offered me thirty-eight thousand thought he couldn't get away with it, but I was afraid he could. He smiled a little, and then he said: 'Flavia, that's all the apple sauce. I'll never build those islands. Why should I spoil a view, why should I spoil a development where my friends are going to make money?'

"Well, that amazed me. 'Your friends?' I said. 'Since when are you so friendly with O'Mara?'

He looked secretive and then mumbled something about O'Mara wouldn't have it for so very long, and when his friends were in, he'd be taken care of.

"I'm no business woman, Victor, but that looks to me as if he and Jesley—yes, and perhaps Hydrick, too—have had something planned all along. They saw that Myron was going crazy—ready to buy anything at any price in this insane attempt to show off—and they were waiting for him. And I thought if that was true—even if it was only possible—you ought to know it."

"I ought to know it? Good Lord, Flavia! The Old Man ought to know it. Why didn't you tell him?"

She flushed. "Why, Victor, I thought perhaps it would—would give you a better standing with him, if you brought in the news. You seem to set so much importance on showing him that you're good at his game——"

"Not enough to steal the credit for your work," I told her grimly. "Thanks, my dear—it was generous of

you. But you tell him. We'll go over to the Isle of Capri as soon as we've finished dinner, and you can tell him—if you want to."

"If I want to? Why shouldn't I?"

"Because," I said, "it's about an even chance that he'll drop this now and take his loss. Better than an even chance, after he's talked to Oscar. But if he finds out that there's a conspiracy, it will stir his fighting blood and he'll never quit! You wanted him to quit—rather, you wanted him not to start. If he quits now, he's licked, but he'll take things easy, he'll sail off on the yacht somewhere, he'll rest—as you wanted him to. Tell him this and he's in the fight to a finish—which may be a quick one. Do you want to tell him?"

She pondered, a long time. "Oh, I don't know. It doesn't seem that you and I have any right to hold out something that he ought to know, no matter what he may do when he hears it. But I'm not sure. It's queer, isn't it, that his affairs, his well-being, are so much more important to all of us than our own? But we can't help it—he's a genius and we're not. Victor! If I don't tell him, if he gives up and goes away, he'll want me to go away with him."

"Well?" I asked. "Are you—would you go?"

Her eyes were tortured. "I don't know," she admitted. "Even yet."

"Will you marry me?" I demanded.

She drew back; her eyes avoided mine. "I don't seem to feel like it, Victor. I don't just know why. I'm not sorry for that emotional explosion, that night in the speed boat—not ashamed of it; but I've never quite got back in the mood. You could have had me if you'd played me right, for a week or so—but I suppose the mere fact that I had to be played right is a proof that it wouldn't have worked. I don't know. It seems like something that might have been, but couldn't be now.

"But I'd have married him before this if I hadn't had that queer infatuation for you. If I hadn't had that—if he hadn't seen it, that night we came back from Cerulean Isles—he'd never have gone into this. Queer, isn't it, that a personal emotion could tangle up so many things? I did my best to stop him, but I know that was what drove him into it—he wanted to show off. And I feel in a way that since I did the damage, I ought to do what I can to repair it. If he wants to rest and relax and be happy, perhaps I can help him—do some good——"

"You could do me good," I growled.

"I wish I could think so. But if it's just a question of doing good, my dear—let's be honest about it—he *is* a bigger man than you are. If I marry only to—to help somebody who needs me, that's the more important job. If I married you, it would be for a different reason than that—a much more urgent reason—because I couldn't imagine doing without you. And since that night I've never quite recaptured that conviction. Oh, what's the use of talking? Come—let's go and see him."

Well, I reflected dully as a taxi took us over to the island, it was what I might have expected. I had no talent for women; the only other woman I'd ever really cared for had forgotten me when the aviator came in sight; and lacking the decision to take Flavia at the one moment when I could have had her, I had no right to expect anything more. As a matter of pure weighing and measuring, no woman would take me if she could have O'Mara. And on that silent trip the conviction grew on me that at last she had decided; that, whatever happened, she would take O'Mara now.

HE and Oscar were still at table, smoking over their cordial glasses. When he saw us, he rose slowly, staring; it shouted from his eyes that the

sight of us together convinced him that I had won her at last. But the cool serenity of her greeting seemed to reassure him. She sat down, across the table from us all, and lit a cigarette; and never had she looked so utterly desirable to me as now when I had lost her. Snowy shoulders and green-gold gown; golden hair, and green eyes softly smiling——

"Victor's been telling me the news," she said. "Oh, never mind—surely there are no secrets any longer between us four. What are you going to do?"

"Oscar thinks," said O'Mara, "we ought to take our loss and quit."

"You'd still have Cerulean Isles," said Satchell moodily. "In five years we'll make as much out of that as you lose on this deal."

"True. On the other hand, I might carry through, even if I could raise only ten million on Cerulean Isles. I'm not licked yet."

He was licked; I saw it; we all saw it. He was licked, but he couldn't bear to admit it before Flavia.

"Myron!" she said. "There's something I must tell you. Joe Quincy——"

Swiftly she told him what she had heard from Joe Quincy, and as she talked, the man's face grew pink, then red, then purple. It wasn't merely anger; partly it was chagrin that they had put this over on him and he hadn't been smart enough to see it—while Oscar, as he must have remembered, had guessed close to the truth. She finished; there was a silence.

"So that's it," he purred. "Well, we'll fix that. Oscar, surely a conspiracy like that calls for criminal action——"

"There was a case decided in Massachusetts year before last," said Oscar, in a colorless voice. "A bunch of highbinders, bankers and so on, gypped somebody out of his shoe business. That's a precedent, if we can get the goods——"

"If!" O'Mara exploded.

Flavia leaned forward; her hands, clasped on the table, were clenched and knotted; the tips of her fingers were as bloodless as her cheeks on which two pink dabs stood out.

"Please, Myron!" she said softly. "You can beat the conspiracy just by giving up. What they want is Cerulean Isles. Give up Florida-For-All and they can't get that. They'll beat you out of a few millions, but you'll get them back. Don't fight them. Let Florida-For-All go, keep Cerulean Isles; take the yacht and cruise around the world and rest."

His blue eyes faced her with clear, steady questioning. "Rest? Is this advice—purely impersonal?"

"No," she said, in a choked murmur. "I'll go with you."

He didn't move, yet you could see an electric current shooting through him, rejuvenating him. "But if I stay," he said, "and fight these pretty conspirators——"

"I'll marry you either way. But I wish you'd give up and go away on the yacht. They aren't worth a fight."

He considered, this man whom Flavia Haddon had just promised to marry; he looked at her, bland and blue-eyed; and I thought I could read the workings of his mind. He was going to fight them. But Oscar could read his mind, too, more swiftly than I; he had been doing it for thirty years. Suddenly he jumped up, knocking his chair over; he leaned across the table, a bony hand thrusting at her, his face a livid mask of rage.

"Damn you, Flavia! Why did you tell him this? He was ready to give up—but you won't let him. You're bound to kill him——"

She was standing, too, frozen marble. "Why did I tell him?" she asked harshly. "Because it's his business. He has a right to know. He's old enough—yes, and young enough—to make up

his own mind. Don't be foolish, Oscar! I want him to give up as much as you do."

O'Mara shivered; he sagged a little, then straightened up and threw back his head. "Very well, my dear. I'll give up; we'll go away. But you have a right to know why I must give up. My credit was ruined by Joe Quincy. But we'd have got an injunction against Joe Quincy if Oscar had prepared his case right. Why didn't he? Because he's been against this scheme from the first. He laid down."

Oscar stared at him, utterly dumfounded. So was I. If the Old Man had snarled out his accusation in the fury of chagrin and baffled resentment, we could have understood. But he was cool, poised, deliberate, calculating every word.

"Oscar didn't want me to go into Florida-For-All; he tried his best to get me out. And when he couldn't get me out in any other way, he double crossed me—all with the best intentions in the world——"

"Myron!" Flavia's voice cracked like a pistol shot; her eyes glittered like polar ice. "Myron, you know that's a lie."

It took O'Mara aback like a blow; he looked like a train derailed. I don't suppose he'd been called a liar to his face for thirty years. "A lie?" he croaked. Then, recovering—— "I wish it were, my dear. But Jesley and Hydrick and Joe Quincy couldn't have licked me without help from inside. That is a necessary explanation, to the woman who's going to marry me."

Flavia looked at him, long and gravely; in the silence I saw the color coming back into her face; suddenly she smiled. "Yes," she said softly, "it *is* a necessary explanation, to the woman who thought she was going to marry you. But you explained in time! Still showing off, like a little boy, unable to endure the idea that I should know you're beaten. Silly, but I could stand that! But when you alibi yourself by turning on Oscar—Oscar who's stood by you, who's done your work, dirty work and all, for thirty years—— Oh, no, I can't. I can't. I was going to marry you because I thought you needed me. But I need something, too. Self-respect—for myself and for my husband. I won't marry a man who could do what you've done—and to Oscar! You beast!"

He stared at her, his hands shaking. Oh, she had read him right! I knew him. It was just that slippery streak in him that had seized on Oscar's attack on Flavia as a Heaven-sent opportunity; he was convinced that she'd believe anything against Oscar now, that she could be made to see Myron O'Mara as the unconquerable hero, betrayed but never beaten. Oscar, he knew, could have been coaxed and bullied into forgiveness, later on; he had forgiven affronts as cruel in the past thirty years. It had all looked so easy —and it had been wrecked by the one thing he had forgotten, that Flavia Haddon was an honest woman.

"You won't marry me?" he mumbled.

She was quiet, relaxed, absolutely at her ease for the first time in this tense evening. "No, I won't marry you, now or ever, whether you fight or give up. I won't marry you even if you apologize to Oscar. Not even if I thought you were really sorry! I'd never respect myself if I married a man who had had it in him, ever to do a thing like that. Victor, will you take me home?"

The Old Man leaned forward, his shaking hands propping him over the table; his eyes popped out of his head. "Victor, eh? Are you going to marry Victor?"

"I don't know. Whether I do or not, that's between me and Victor. You're out."

Now he was shaking, jabbering, in helpless, senile rage. "Out, am I? Vic-

tor, you're out, too! Traitors all around me! Snakes in the grass! You're fired! You're out of my house! The boys will pack your things and send them over to the hotel. A check for your services will be mailed to you in the morning. Out—— Out, both of you——"

He staggered, dropped back—by luck he fell into his chair and leaned back, breathing hoarsely; he tugged at his collar; his face was purple. Oscar snatched up a napkin, poured a glass of water over it, and began to wipe his face.

IT was horrible, this sudden belated descent of age, twenty years dropping on the man in a moment, crushing him. I felt a twinge of pity that would have been more than a twinge, if it had not been buried under sheer horror at the disintegration of a magnificent organism, but there was no pity in Flavia's eyes. She was justice, immovable, implacable.

Slowly O'Mara recovered; he stared up at us, glassy-eyed, then with a grimace turned away, leaning his head on his hand. Flavia stirred at last; she turned to the door; I moved away, toward her.

Oscar left the Old Man and came up to me. "Stay here, Vic," he whispered. "I don't know how sick he is, but he's licked, he's broken. He needs us."

"He's just fired me," I reminded him.

"Oh, what the hell? He'll forget that. Even if he doesn't, he needs you. Look what he did to me, but I'm staying."

My eyes turned to Flavia. "No, Oscar," I said. "I'm through. I'll take Flavia home."

He looked at me; he knew and I knew that something was snapping, the best friendship I had ever had, the best he had ever had but one—if you could call that a friendship.

"If you must," he assented at last. "Go with your gang, Vic. I'll stay with mine."

For the last time, O'Mara's big French limousine took us across the bridge, across the causeway; side by side we sat in silence, our eyes straight ahead. She wasn't going to marry the Old Man, but I wasn't thinking—much—about whether she might be going to marry me. I wasn't even thinking—much—about the final, the catastrophic collapse of Myron O'Mara. One thing only held my thoughts in black depression, from the depths of which I broke the silence at last, when the car stopped in front of her hotel.

"Poor old Oscar!" I sighed.

She smiled; lightly, for an instant, she laid her hand on mine. "Thank you, dear. You have some—talent for women, after all. No, not that either. It's a talent for something else—much more important."

CHAPTER XXI.

PLAYING A LONG SHOT.

I NEVER saw O'Mara again. He was in the office for the next two or three days, pretending to be handling the liquidation of Florida-For-All; but aside from personally firing Hammond, I don't think he did much. And then he retired to the house on the island, to an armchair where he sat for hours, blankly staring ahead of him, while Oscar cleaned up the ruins.

Oscar liquidated Florida-For-All. Weeks later, I got a check for seventeen hundred dollars, all that was left of the eleven thousand I had sunk in it. Oscar got Cerulean Isles in shape to run on its own momentum while he was away. Joe Quincy was glad enough to take four hundred thousand dollars for the sea bottom that had cost him sixty-five thousand, and get out of the way. And then Oscar closed up the offices, gave up the house on the island, and

took O'Mara off in the yacht for a cruise around the world.

I had a note from him just before they sailed. I was back in New York by that time. The note read:

DEAR VIC: We're off to-morrow. The governor seems a good deal better, and I have hopes that a sea trip will bring him back to something like normal. He'll never be able to work again, of course, but then I don't believe he'll ever want to. What the hell? We all have to get old some time. Even I will probably do it one of these days, whenever I get time to put my mind on it.

He wants to see you, when we come back. Don't take his explosion that last night too hard; he was a sick man then and he had plenty of excuse. He's always liked you, Vic, in his way; and if it doesn't suit you, why, it's the only way he's got. Always, OSCAR.

But O'Mara had a stroke at sea—a real stroke, this time. Oscar rushed the yacht toward the nearest land, which happened to be Madeira, but too late. They had a doctor aboard, a costly doctor, and a couple of nurses; but O'Mara died on April 10th, as the yacht was approaching Funchal harbor.

Oscar didn't come back; he was executor, but he let his office settle up the estate. He's knocking around Europe alone. Some day he'll come back to New York, and when he does, I hope I'll see him. But I don't know. I don't suppose, even yet, he'll want to see my wife.

Oh, yes. That happened, more or less of its own accord. Curious, after all the worrying we'd done about it, whether we could or couldn't, should or shouldn't. When I left Flavia that night, it had been understood that we weren't to see each other again, in Miami. She was going to New York in a few days; and there, when everybody had cooled off, when I had some sort of job and she was working again and we had both had time to think things over, I meant to see her and explain, in full detail, why I thought she ought to marry me.

Meanwhile—the next day was my last in Miami. Nothing left to stay for; I was through; I had no job; the season was over—all but the racing season which would close at the end of the week. At any rate, I was a little better off financially than when I had come down in January; I had, with the remnant of my poker winnings and the salary check that had been delivered at my hotel that morning, some sixteen hundred dollars.

Not much. Not enough to reopen that publicity office which had been my best chance of making a more than comfortable living. So I bought my ticket back to New York, gave the hotel clerk enough money to cover my bill and a little over to get me started when I got back home, and took the rest of it out to the track.

Not the clubhouse this time, and a box seat under the wire; that opulence had gone from my life with the passing of Myron O'Mara. I bought a grandstand ticket, like any of the common herd, and went in to sink my surplus on a few long shots in a last despairing grab for the big money.

And then—as I looked out at the palm-fringed track in the golden sunlight, looked around me at bright frocks and snowy trousers, while the ice still lay on New York streets—I changed my mind. The lesson, at last, had soaked in; the big money was not for me. On my last day in Florida, was I to waste time worrying about money? Not while the sun shone and the palm fronds rustled in the wind. A two-dollar ticket, maybe; but I was going to put that afternoon to the best of all possible uses, by merely living in Florida.

I MOVED through the crowd, absent-minded, peering at my card. I heard a gasp. I looked up. Flavia was beside me, all in white—but not the *Snow Queen*. Her eyes were soft; her hand that took my arm was warm; she

was my girl, the girl I wanted, the girl who wanted me—and that was all there was to it.

"Weren't we silly?" she murmured, when we had wandered out, arm in arm, to stare blindly out at the track, at the board where the odds were going up for the second race. "Making such a fuss about it, and wondering, when all the time there was nothing else to do! I knew that last night, after you'd left me. It came back—all I felt that night we came back in the speed boat. I don't know why I could ever have been so crazy as even to dream of marrying him. Not the money—but I was carried away by his magnetism, or whatever you call it. He never seemed exactly like a person to me; he was a force of nature, superhuman. That's why I was so cold last night when he broke down. I know you thought I was dreadful, but it seemed to me just some grand natural cataclysm, like a landslide. Nothing human at all.

"And to think how near I came—— Victor, it must have been the atmosphere—the megalomania that's epidemic in Florida. The same Miami madness that drove you into that crazy effort to make money. As if money mattered!"

"How did you know I'd be out here at the track?" I asked her.

"I didn't. I called your hotel and they said you'd checked out. So I supposed I wouldn't see you again till we got to New York; and I thought that as this was my last day here, I might as well spend it at the races. You'll think it's superstition, but I felt that I ought to buy a two-dollar ticket on something as a sort of—last sacrifice to the local gods."

"Then we'll both buy two-dollar tickets on—something, for this race," I suggested. "And then we could go back to town and—— Flavia, is it really true?"

"Absolutely, my dear. We'll go back to town and get married right away."

"And," I said, "for the last time I'll use Myron O'Mara's name, even if he has fired me. I'll need his name, to change our two lowers for a stateroom. Have you got anything for this race?"

She looked at the board across the track; her fingers tightened on my arm; she laughed. "Victor! Look! Second Bridal!"

"They don't think much of her last performance," I observed. "Approximate odds, one hundred to one."

"Huh!" said Flavia. "Who's afraid? Anyway, it's a hundred to two. That makes all the difference in the world."

We bought our separate two-dollar tickets; and then, as we got out of the crowd at the windows, I was reminded of finances.

"Flavia, you probably know I'm broke. But I can always get a newspaper job till we can find something better. I'm sorry I threw away my money in Florida-For-All; we can't build on your lot in Cerulean Isles, now. But if——"

"We couldn't build on it anyway," she said. "I sold it this morning for thirty-eight thousand. And you're not going back to a newspaper job. We'll take that thirty-eight thousand and reopen your office as financial publicity counsel. Now, now—you can incorporate, if you like, and let me take half the stock. But you're not going back to work for other men. You don't have to. I won't let you. So now!"

Second Bridal did her old tricks, all of them, and was fourth by a length. And Flavia and I, arm in arm, laughed at each other in pure derision.

"But who's afraid?" she said, at last. "We don't believe in signs."

WE surely don't. My publicity business has gone so well it scares me, every time I think of it; the money I make isn't big money in Wall Street, but it looks like big money to me. She's rehearsing now in a Shubert show that

opens in September—five hundred a week; but she's served notice that she won't go on the road and in any event won't stay in the cast after New Year's. For we're going to be able to afford a good vacation—January, February and March; and if they get it finished in time, we'll spend our vacation in the new water-front hotel in Cerulean Isles.

What's that? Am I going to take any of my newly acquired profits and buy Florida real estate? I am not. I know Florida may still be a good investment, but nothing more precarious than Liberty Bonds is a good investment for me. Flavia and I are doing well enough, but we aren't going to crowd our luck; I know I haven't any talent for money.

No, I'm not sure that I have a talent for women either, though she says I have. What she means, I suppose—I hope, at any rate—is that I have a kind of special talent for Flavia. That's enough.

The long, complete story in the next issue of THE POPULAR *is called "Waters of Healing," and is by Frederick Niven. It is about men who decided to obtain what they considered justice, even if it meant breaking the law. See the news stands August 7th.*

WHY IS A POPULAR SONG POPULAR?

WHAT makes a popular song popular is something that is still to be discovered. Good guesses can be made, but they remain guesses. After a melody has hit the public's fancy, after it is sung and whistled on the street, the reason for its appeal can be deduced, but before the song is published, opinions frequently differ.

It is likewise true that a man who has put over a big success is not always able to repeat. It may be that he is a "one-song" man, just as there are "one-story" writers—authors who can turn out one yarn that is worth printing and reading, but who never seem able to duplicate the feat. One well-known lyric writer, who made a success with his first venture in the popular-song field, found the going very tough for the next four or five years. Then he had a number of big sellers; he became so successful, in fact, that he could take his pick of the melodies for which he would agree to write words.

Even this shrewd guesser, however, blundered in his last two undertakings, in a way. One song of the two he did not think much of, but the other seemed so certain of popularity that he became unusually enthusiastic. He taught it to a number of vaudeville performers, had song pluggers sing it in cabarets and night clubs, advertised it extensively. And all of the performers raved about it almost as much as he did. No one seemed to care much about the other song, however. It was just "pretty good."

The two songs were published. The one that the lyric writer and his friends liked immensely was a "flop"—it did not appeal to the public at all. But the other song, the one that was thought "pretty good," sold eight hundred thousand copies.

So the lyric writer is still doubtful as to what makes a popular song popular. And he is not alone in wondering.

"I'm Going Now"

By Frederick Niven

Author of "That Little Sawed-off Cuss," "Two Dogs," Etc.

He was staging a one-man show. And he was doing it extremely well. There was nothing lacking. The stage props: a prairie shack, a pair of Colt guns, a table in a corner of the room. He even made his audience part of the drama. And of the things he did, it is that last one that folks will remember.

IT is not as far back as the covered-wagon days. Covered wagons were still to be seen—we called them prairie schooners—but the railway had come. No bullock teams creaked up from Fort Benton. And the buffaloes had gone. I arrived just in time to see their wallows clearly enough dimpling the plains, and their bleaching bones and skulls. Even then these were being gathered up and shipped east on the trains, to be converted into something or other; I forget what.

Not in towns, but out on the ranges, everybody "packed a gun." People who dislike wild-West stories say there never was such a time outside of fiction. That can't be helped. There was. The guns were packed chiefly for shooting wolves and coyotes that were a pest to the cattle and sheepmen. There were also lots of outlaw bulls in the foothills, and if a man happened to be unmounted, he was their prey, if sighted. Even if you were on horseback, these fighting outlaws could be very nasty. Hence, again, the gun packing. And, the gun being there, handy on the hip, it was sometimes used for other purposes. All that was demanded by law was that it should not be concealed—concealed weapons were barred. When in town, the courtesy was to leave your armament in charge of the hotel clerk. That gives you the period of this story.

It was in these days that Warren Waterman arrived. His gray eyes had a dancing light in them. He was about

five-ten. Age—somewhere in the late twenties. He was not a remittance man, but had some money behind him. Frankly, he was rather a wild youth; but he did it all in a very genial fashion. The West had a phrase when people were discussed, "He's *not* a man you could sleep under the one blanket with," or, "He *is* a man you could sleep under the one blanket with;" and Warren Waterman was, when he arrived, a man you could sleep under the one blanket with.

He did not have much luck, either with women or cattle. He fell in love, really in love, honestly in love, with a little, lissome, full-blood Piegan Indian girl. There were ranchers in there with Indian wives. Most of them did not try to educate them. If they showed need of education at times, it was done, cave-man fashion, with an ax handle, a method found most satisfactory. But Waterman sent his girl back East to be educated. She returned to him, very happy to sniff the plains again, and they were married.

Now she was not the kind that, after all, could settle down as an imitation white woman; and he was not the kind to resort to ax handles. She went back to the reserve on frequent visits and eventually never came to him again, discarded white schools and white frocks. They used to wear kirtles then, the Indian women, of tanned deerskin, and leggings with porcupine-quill fringes. She went back to that, and the smell of wood smoke, and for her scent she had a little bag of wild mint instead of a little bottle of essence of Parma violets from the drug stores.

Waterman couldn't go to her. He was not at all in the nature of what was called a squaw man. He changed somewhat after that episode in his life. He took to drink. It was a prohibition country then; but nevertheless he took to drink. They had it in the drug stores under different names. He used to dust into town, swing from his horse, in the pink of condition physically, strut into the druggist's and say: "I don't feel very good to-day. What can you advise?"

The clerk would turn to the shelf of alleged tonics, read out their names, and one would be selected. It depended on your temperature, or the weather, or goodness knows what, how a tonic acted. You usually drank it by the glass, leaning up against the counter, instead of buying it by the bottle. Sometimes a man had one glass and felt good. But once I saw Warren, looking perfectly fit, take one glass, stand and discuss local gossip for two minutes, and then make a sudden nose dive, slam on the floor.

I remember that well. It was on a Tuesday he struck town, and the floor. He came back to consciousness on Friday, lying on the bed to which we had carried him, and he had much to tell us about where he had been, what he had seen, and what manner of headache he had returned with. So, when he could not get whisky, he got that sort of tonic.

A CHANGE came over him. Most of us thought it was a sorrow over his flutter in marriage that was the cause of the change. We were sorry for him. He was still, you see, the sort of man with whom you could sleep under the one blanket.

He had a sensitive side. There came a cold and terrible winter. His cattle froze to death, and he had to watch them freeze. In the spring he found four of his range horses hobbling about without hoofs, the hoofs frozen off. He shot them, of course, and then went into town and celebrated. Drinking for woe, as well as drinking in a bonhomous way, was called "celebrating."

"What are you celebrating?" we would ask a gay drunk, and he would reply that he had made a good deal on

something or other. "What are you celebrating?" we would ask a dolorous one, and he would inform us it was the death of his best friend—or his dog.

Waterman had, however, as the year wore on, a brain wave. He decided that, on such exposed ranges as he had unhappily selected, he should have a specially hardy breed of cattle. They should be wooly-coated as the old buffaloes. He decided to send to Scotland, all the way, for a herd of Highland cattle. Certainly, he was told, these would thrive, even in a hard winter, but they were too small. Buyers considered weight not of herd, but of individual animal. All right. He listened to that. He decided not to invest in Highland cattle but to send off for a herd of Galloways, heavier, larger, and also sturdy, if not so thickly coated.

They could not for some reason, be shipped to him that summer. They came out in the next February—February, mark you. That might have been none too bad had it not happened that a locomotive got derailed and held up the cattle train.

The string of cars stood a day and a night on a flat bit of plains. A steady thin wind was blowing from the north, with snow in it, crisp, fine snow. It filled the cars. It banked between the standing cattle. The trainmen kept warm in the caboose; but the cattle were slowly packed in. Then the wind blew icy. There were the cattle, like olives in a bottle of oil, or like flies in amber, or whatever simile you like. And Warren got them—packed in ice, all dead.

That finished him for cattle raising. And soon we realized that he had spent all his funds. He was broke. But he was a great poker player; and the plain fact is that in the end he was part a cow-puncher working for other people more successful in their business than he, and part a gambler.

It all took about ten years, this that I'm telling you. And at the end of the ten years, though that dancing light was still in his gray eyes, it had a wilder glint. His chin had a grimness, too, under the mouth that still showed twists of jollity. Crack shot, fine horseman, hard as nails, he was the sort of man that the police might be inclined to inquire for if there came a holdup some day, just to be sure that he had not "gone bad," was not the man they were looking for.

You could still sleep under the same blanket with him, however. You felt that he would stay with you in an emergency. But there was that about him that also made you feel that he might suggest some little escapade that you would not care to accompany him in.

That impression, apparently, was not merely fanciful. At the time of the evidence of it, I was visiting a friend of mine in the rolling country back toward the mountains, a friend known as "Bah-Bah" Bates. He was so called partly because that or thereabouts was how the English ranchers pronounced his name—Barber—Barber Bates—partly because he was a sheepman. He was running sheep on a stretch of country there that the cattlemen had overcrowded and then left. Generally he was alone, his three herders out, each with a dog, in shifting camps. All that he did, except at lambing and shearing time, was to pack their grub out to them; his life was as lonesome as theirs, and he welcomed visitors.

IT was a fine day. The big doors of the main room were open and hooked back, the mosquito door was in place. Thus it was that, loafing in big chairs in the living room, chatting, we heard an arrival outside, the quick, flirting sound of hoof-spurned sand, the froufrou of leather and creak of saddle as some one dismounted. At once there came a lithe step on the veranda,

a couple of quick pads across it, and there was Warren Waterman in the room, the screen door swinging back in place with a smack behind him. He had a Colt in his right hand and the black butt of another showed on his left hip.

"I'm hungry," he said.

That was his salutation. We both stared at him, I am sure. Hospitality was not lacking in the country. There was no need for a man to brange into any house and announce that he was hungry in that tone of voice.

"Sit in to the table, then," Bah-Bah said. "Sit in and we'll feed you."

Warren sat down, laid the Colt he had held on entering to the right of him on the table and, drawing the other, laid it to the left of him, then thrust his hat back on his head and looked up at us sullenly. Those gray eyes of his that used to be full of gayety and grit now glittered like a cougar's. The thing that looked out of them would not make any one feel he could sleep under the same blanket with that man.

Bates, looking at him sidelong, walked away to the kitchen. Then Waterman turned to me.

"Get busy," said he. "I'm hungry. I'm devilish hungry. Help him rustle some grub."

"All right, all right," I replied.

No, there was no merriment in those gray eyes that day. I went into the kitchen to help Bates, and out there we exchanged a look. Bah-Bah wagged his head, elevated his eyebrows, and made a grimace with his mouth as he ladled out some stew from a pot.

"Come on!" shouted Waterman. "Shake a leg!"

I poked my head in to ask him if he didn't want his food hot.

"Any old way! Give me some chuck. And get the coffeepot on."

Bah-Bah carried in a plateful of stew and half-warmed potatoes to him, and I put on the coffeepot. Then Bates came back to the kitchen to open a can of peaches.

"It's a case of feed the brute, all right," he murmured to me. "He's pretty well keyed up. I wonder what's come to him?"

What had come to him, we heard later, after he had gone. The police arrived, looking for him. It seemed that he had shot a man over a card game and then shot the policeman who tried to arrest him. Perhaps he had had some jolts of tonic afterward to "make him act so mean to us against whom he had no complaints," as Barber said.

WELL, Bates and I—I won't say *danced* attendance on him, but we walked attendance on him. Bah-Bah, who was an old-timer in the West, moved very slowly and in deep, grim thought. Later we went out of the room with dishes, and to prepare more coffee that Waterman had ordered; and from the living room there came a scuffling sound.

"What's he doing now?" whispered Bates.

We saw when we got back. He had lifted the table, carried it to a corner of the room, and placed himself behind it. Bates put the coffeepot before him with no comment. On the wall there hung a six-gun in its holster, and I saw my friend's eye glance that way. So did Waterman.

"Now, you fellows," he said, "if either of you step to that gun on the wall, I'll plug you. As it is, I am going to give you an exhibition in shooting."

He took up the gun at his right side and looked round. Barber Bates was a bit of an art lover. He had some fine etchings, in little, slender black frames. Waterman pointed to half a dozen in quick succession and smashed a bullet through each.

"Plumb center, you observe," said he, when that little exhibition was finished.

Then he put the empty Colt to his left-hand side and set the loaded one on the right, a movement that did not escape our notice. He was not a "two-gun" man. He was no shot at all with his left hand, though expert with the right.

As well as the etchings, there were various pieces of porcelain on a ledge that ran round the walls. Waterman proceeded to use these for targets with the second loaded gun. One—two—three—four, he sent to smithereens. Barber and I sat watching the display, both thinking the same thought, that when this second revolver was empty we would have him, wedged in his corner—have him, and truss him up. It would be a struggle, but we were ready for it. Bates had another thought also, he told me afterward. He was considering that Waterman was not utterly crazy and that, instead of trying to overpower him and tie him up when he had expended his second charge of shots, the revolver on the wall might be used to intimidate him and make him our captive without a fight.

Bates was wondering just what proportion of craziness and sanity was in this man, wondering if, his last shot gone, and he was ordered to throw up his hands with that gun from the wall leveled at him, he would obey or call the bluff and proceed to reload his own Colts. Had Waterman done that, there would have been nothing for it but to shoot; so, as Barber was averse to that end of the matter, his musings led him to vote, inside his head, for the wrestling contest.

IN the event, we had not the choice made us, for Waterman did not expend all the shells in the second gun. After the fourth, he stopped. Then, laying down the revolver, he opened his coat and we saw that he had on a heavy ammunition belt, one of those double-deckers in which the cartridges sit two by two, one above the other. With a leer at us, he broke the Colt to left of him, dropped the shell cases out, and reloaded.

Then he sat back and began to talk. It was interesting enough talk, but queer to hear at that time. We were not exactly in a receptive condition for his causeries. They went on and on in an unabated stream by the hour, the subjects being Indian lore, history of the West, possibilities for the future of the West—very black, according to Waterman, for men like himself, very bright for men "with their heads screwed on differently."

Suddenly he was again hungry, looked at the clock and informed us it was supper time.

"One of you stay in the room with me," he said. "If I hear the other go out of the house, I'll shoot the man who is here."

Bates gave me a look which I interpreted as a voiceless offer from my host to absent myself for a breathing space, if I cared, from that room. However, the house was his and he knew his own larder.

"All right," I said, and remained sitting there.

By then Bates was taking it all very philosophically. He brought in supper fqr himself and for me as well as for Waterman.

One might expect our visitor, in this queer condition he was in, the cause of which was, at the time, mystery to us, to eat in a disgusting or bestial way. But he did not. His table manners were perfect. His table conversation, for he continued to talk, was sane enough. Dinner over, he ordered a fresh preparation of coffee. Dusk came and I suggested that his horse should be seen to. He gazed in my eyes with great keenness.

"All right," he said. "You can go and give him a feed and unsaddle him. I guess I'll stop here till morning."

And stop he did, keeping himself refreshed with coffee about every two hours and talking, talking, talking. The philosophical Barber Bates eventually seemed to accept him merely as a slightly temperamental raconteur, sat rolling his wheat-paper cigarettes, blowing smoke leisurely and, when Waterman stopped for a short rest, setting him going again.

A little while after the dawn, stealing into the room in its eerie way, had made the lamplight pallid, Waterman said he guessed it was breakfast time and ordered bacon and eggs—"eggs done both sides."

"You sure know what you want," remarked Bah-Bah, and rising with a little laugh he departed to prepare the meal. He even turned back nonchalantly to ask me if I would have breakfast, too. "I'm going to have mine now," he said. "You might as well."

"Yes, you might as well," agreed Waterman. "I'll be going after breakfast. Let us all have it together."

SO we all had breakfast together. He had come at two o'clock the previous day and we had had a weird time with him. The news that he was soon to go was welcome, but we did not look too pleased to hear it lest, in cussedness, he might decide to stay on to lunch. It was just an ordinary, average, slightly glum breakfast, with nothing apparently odd about it apart from those two six-guns, one to the right, one to the left of Waterman's plate.

The bacon and eggs dispatched, he asked in an easy voice if there was any sirup.

"Yes," said Bates.

"Then I'll have four hot cakes. Brown 'em a bit. Brown 'em almost into black in spots."

Bates gave a laughing "Huh!" in his chest as he rose and went off to make the hot cakes.

"How's that?" he inquired, returning with a plateful.

"Just right," Waterman told him.

Then the meal over, and instead of gray-and-gold-shot dawn out in the world, the full blaze of morning light, Waterman turned to Bates.

"Well, thank you for your hospitality," he said.

"Don't mention it," replied Bates, and eyed him curiously a moment.

"I won't need the coffeepot again," said Waterman, and up with one of his guns and smashed a bullet through it.

This was an action that astonished us both after his apparent return to calm.

"I've made rather a mess of things," he said then, casually, as if shooting a coffeepot while sitting at table with two other people was as trivial as crumbling bread or toying with a spoon. "Yes, rather a mess of things. I haven't had much luck. Well, thank you for the hospitality," he said again to Bates, and bowed.

Bah-Bah returned the bow, and then Waterman looked at me.

"And thank you, too," he said, and bowed.

I bowed also.

Then he rolled a cigarette, took two draws, set it carefully on the edge of a plate. The smoke from it went up in a twisting spiral.

"Oh—aye!" he sighed. "Well, I'm going now."

And lifting the revolver that lay to right of him, he put the muzzle smartly to his temple and pressed the trigger.

The slam of that report, so utterly unexpected, in a quick movement made before we could grasp its meaning, seemed to us the deepest in detonation of all. It made a terrible thud to our ears in that room. But Waterman had truly gone, the mere shell of his unfortunate spirit fallen forward across the table.

The Colt

By Captain Ralph R. Guthrie

Author of "Spreadeagle and the Black Art," "The Congressional Guard," Etc

He was old but not broken. For Colonel Pembleton was a soldier of that gray Confederate line which held for so long the battlements of Vicksburg; in his blue veins coursed the blood of the cavaliers of Stuart England. And at the great Kentucky Derby the colonel was prepared to play his last, desperate stake against fortune. Lover of horses, he knew which starter would win; but he scarcely guessed the unusual manner of its victory.

WE all have our mental pictures of the wealthy Southern home of ante-bellum days—white-pillared, many-chimneyed, "galleries" instead of porches—a stately, snow-white structure rearing its head proudly among the poplars and weeping willows. There is a lane of ancient shade trees, sheltering a gravel path, which leads up to the broad steps, and down to the highway. Life there is easy, indifferent to the sordid fluctuations of market values, and exquisitely cultured.

Sitting in the "front room" is a colonel, old, gray-mustached and goateed, sipping a mint julep. There is a hunting dog or two curled up on the hand-hooked rug at his feet. There are also a brunet daughter—beautiful, of course!—with spit curls and flounces and crinolines; a quick-tempered son with a penchant for dueling; a colored butler with a "crick" in his back; a fat black mammy in flaming calico.

Rockyview Hill was the same sort of a domicile you have imagined, and its master, Henry Clay Pembleton, the Kentucky colonel of your dreams. And he did have a daughter who was beautiful enough not to spoil your pet ideas of the Southern belle, and a son who possessed a volatile temperament, if not a penchant for fighting with pistols; and there were dogs and thoroughbred horses all over the place. However, the

setting is modern, beginning shortly before the World War and ending not so many months ago.

I am writing this from the east gallery of Rockyview Hill, which I have occupied with my family since the recent death of my father-in-law, Colonel Pembleton. My informants are my wife, the beautiful Ann Pembleton of bygone days, "Mammy" Buck, my colored housekeeper emeritus, now going on ninety years old, and her ne'er-do-well, dissolute son, who, notwithstanding his faults, will remain in my employ as hostler to the end of his reprobate days.

"Yasser," says Buck, "de ol' kunnel he and diss yere Kunnel Curwood what runs de Kotton & Terbacker Bank, dey wuz puss'nal frien' long time ago when de Civil Wah, hit close, and dem both busted flat like pancakes. Den dey built up big fochunes along different lines, and dey don't hab nothing to do wif each other any mo', becus each he try ter be de king bee in diss yere town ob Mennonville. Yasser!"

Then Mammy puts in: "Yer ain't tellin' hit right, Tom! Yo' go clean back ter de Civil Wah, like I tol' yo and bring in how hit come de kunnel, den a yossifer in de rebel ahmy, rid twenty miles on ol' Brown Bashful to bring yo' daddy to see yo' befo' yo had yore li'l' eyes open almos', and how yo' daddy dide ob a wound he'd gotten down in a horrible place called de Wilderness."

"Ya-a-as," grudgingly admits her son. "dats sorter wheah de yarn hit springs frum, all right. But I'se tellin' de story in ma own way."

"If Mammy had the words, she'd be a born novelist," whispers my wife teasingly, in my ear. "You see she knows all about exciting force, and everything. I am sure she could do quite as well by the story as you will."

"Nonsense! What has this ride with Tom Buck's dad got to do with it?"

"Everything," she informs me. "He rode old Brown Bashful, the stallion that was the founder of the present Pembleton strain of race horses. And he brought Tom's daddy to see his first child, which was a great piece of heroic sacrifice, and has everything to do with what follows. Tom's dad was father's body servant all through the fighting. You'll see."

"All right!" I tell Mammy. "You give us your version, first."

"Well," recounts Mammy, "dere is dis act ob Kunnel Pembleton which make me allus lub him fur de gran' old man he wuz. And den, le's see! He fin' all ob his fochune shot ter pieces and den he go right ahead and build it up again. Dass on account ob der wah."

"Yes?"

"And den he mah-reed Mis' Anne Runnels from Paducah. And den aftah dey had been mah-reed a long, long time, and all ob us we done gib up hopes, long cum Rodgah and den Ann, heah. She wuz purty as a li'l' flower, lak she is now, and she go straight off and mah-ree a French count, and go ter lib in France. Rodgah he run plum' wil'.

"Dat's de bottom ob de hull t'ing!" she concluded. "And now, Tom, you tell what happen frum dere."

I write and they dictate, Ann setting them right, or filling with details, from the arm of my chair. It is hard sometimes for a Northerner to follow their dialect, so I've decided not to use it, except when absolutely necessary to give color to the account.

Let's see! Where did I leave off? Yes! "Rodgah run plum' wil'." He was not at all like Ann, this Rodger Pembleton. We will make a life cast of Tom, first, for Rodger, about this time, was working during the daytime at Colonel Curwood's bank, as assistant cashier, and at night——

Tom then!

HE had been with the Pembleton stables all his life. Although reprobate in every other way, he had a way with horses, and a thoroughbred was his god. He could pick a winner, too, and it was nothing for the colonel to toss him a great roll of greenbacks and say:

"Here, Tom! Put this money where it belongs—on the best animal in the field!"

Tom, who would "pinch" the rosettes off a work bridle, was utterly incapable of being dishonest on a big scale. If he had set out to steal Cheops, the only equipment he would take would be a horse file and a tin cup.

His faithfulness in the stables was a byword around Mennonville. When Nancy Belle Duckling, a wind-broken brood mare, took sick, the negro stayed with her constantly for seventy-two hours, until he brought her through. She was dead timber then, so the colonel made him a present of her and, as a further reward, put him in charge of Pembleton Pride Boy, the great-great-grandson of Brown Bashful. A year or two later, Pembleton Pride Boy broke all existing track records and, amid a hurricane of applause, was retired to the stud.

When Pembleton Pride Boy won the Louisville Derby, in 1916, hands down, with daylight showing, it was a superlative moment in the old man's life. The celebration of it lasted for days, the humblest stableboy being fêted like a king. Bonuses were distributed and, as a special mark of distinction, the colonel added to Tom Buck's portion a handsome gold watch of the best obtainable manufacture.

Soon after this, sporting circles were thrilled to learn that Pembleton had purchased from a certain Lord Throckmorton, of England, a peerless racing mare, whose lineage went back through a hundred generations of equine royalty to pure Arabian stock. It cost twelve thousand dollars to deliver the mare, and all the colonel professed to ask of her was the production of one colt from his retired record breaker.

Special veterinarians were employed, padded stalls arranged, the most beneficial of high efficiency menus concocted, all for the achievement of this result. And over this mass of detail, the thieving, unscrupulous Tom Buck held absolute sway, like the genius that he was.

About this time, Tom Buck's success as a stableman became so pronounced that he was enabled to make no end of evil acquaintances, both white and black. His nights, for the most part, were his own, and he used them to his personal advantage. He hung around the back rooms of bootlegging joints, gambling, drinking and consorting with knaves of the track—hatching up all sorts of devilment. Sometimes he was locked up for fighting or petty theft, but the colonel, using his vast influence, readily got him out and back on the job.

TOM took great pride, he says, in his own mare, mating her surreptitiously with the colonel's champion. The colts were expected about a month apart, but nature sometimes can't be depended upon to run true to schedule in such matters. A great storm broke one night, with lightning and heavy thunder. When dawn came, there were two awkward, leggy youngsters, alike as peas of the same pod, swinging their curly tails joyously at their morning meal.

"Diss all happen' putty soon befo' de hull worl' hit broke out in war," says Buck.

"An' den Mistah Rodgah he hab a row wif de ol' Kunnel," puts in Mammy, puffing at the clay pipe she constantly refills from a pocket in her apron.

"Yo' tell him, Mammy!" invites Tom. "Yo' gal Lizzie was dustin' all de time an' hearn jus' what dey said."

"Well," continues Mammy, "de ol' genman said ter Rodgah what about diss heah paradin' an' carryin' on dat bin goin' on in de city, and why doan he enlis' ter fight fo' his country; an' Rodgah he say he kaint."

"Yes?"

"De ol' genman ask why he kaint, an' Rodgah look down and stuttah an' say he kaint jus' tell why. Dey hab many words like diss and Kunnel Pembleton become all het up. He say 'Yo' mus'!' an' Rodgah say 'I jus' kaint!'

"Byemby de kunnel get madder'n a settin' hen an' say: 'If yo' doan enlis', den yo're no son ob mine.' An' Rodgah bust out cryin' an' say, 'All right, dad,' an' so he enlist in de yarmy. Least foah or five days arter dat he done hit an'—now Tom, yo' tell him from heah on. Lizzie doan tell me no mo'."

"De ol' kunnel allus say de Pembletons pay deyre obligations," declared Tom reminiscently. "Dat wuz his 'ligun."

"And so Rodgah went to war against his will, because the old man thought he owed it to his country?" I remarked.

"Yasser! Dat's how it wuz. Rodgah j'ined an outfit which won mo' battles den all de yudders putten togedder, Kunnel Pembleton say—de ol' Rainbow Division. An' ob all de brave men in diss yere division, Rodgah he wus de bravest. Ah've hearn dat many de time. Yasser!"

There are a lot of details here, thrown in by Mammy and her son, which I shall not take time to repeat. Ann helps out.

Rodger was a pretty good soldier, from all accounts. From the day he landed in France, a corporal in the 167th Infantry, the home folks had two channels through which they heard of his deeds, past and present. One was through the war department, telling of his meritorious conduct under fire, his frequent promotions and almost as frequent decorations. The other was through a host of creditors, dupes, holders of bad checks, blackmailers, sad-faced girls, outraged and angry fathers, and then—the cap-sheaf—Colonel Curwood's bank where Rodger had been assistant cashier.

It developed that the good old Cotton & Tobacco National had been gutted by his cleverly concealed peculations.

They don't know, in Mennonville today, how close they came to having a financial catastrophe in their midst.

ABOUT a month after the boy had sailed, Colonel Curwood's big car purred away the miles to Rockyview Hill, bent on a soul-harrowing mission.

As you may have gathered, the banker was almost a total stranger at Rockyview Hill. Business and social ambitions had kept the two men apart, although they saw much of each other in the lists of the cotton-and-tobacco market. This was the case, in face of the fact that in their boyhood they had been chums, and all the time after they were wont to meet a common enemy with a deep mutual respect concerting their movements.

Yet there was not a single trace of surprise evidenced in the manner of Colonel Pembleton as he welcomed his old rival to his domicile. He was too well bred for that. The two entered the library together, arm in arm, and plunged at once into reminiscences of more sprightly days. Mint juleps were made and drunk. Conversation drifted along down the decades, reached the World War and our participation therein, dwelt upon the chances of it ending soon and the probable effect on the cotton market.

About the urgent matter which had brought Curwood to the mansion, nothing had been said. As midnight arrived, the banker's face became taut and white with suppressed pain. Finally he arose to go, trembling at the knees, his teeth set completely through the butt of his

cigar. Colonel Pembleton, arising to take his hand, swayed against the table, as if he had taken too much liquor.

Curwood broke out falteringly, fumbling at his watch fob. "Colonel Pembleton," he said, "do—do you know that the war has played the very devil with my bank? The very devil, sir!"

"I am sorry to hear that," replied the other, caressing his goatee nervously with a white, blue-veined hand. "I have always known the Cotton & Tobacco as one of the most sterling, rock-bottomed financial institutions of the South. I am very sorry to hear it, indeed!"

There passed a moment of tense silence. Colonel Pembleton chose to take the lead.

"Colonel Curwood," he said, gently, "is it possible that there has been some irregularity—let us say—in the accounts, or something of that nature? I know such things sometimes happen, in the best regulated institutions. That's—that's the reason I ask, suh!"

Still there was no reply, but the banker raised his eyes slowly to those of his chum of other days, and they were filled with the most abject misery.

"If I may ask," pursued the colonel, still more gently, "to what extent is your embarrassment, because of—h-m-m!— this, whatever it is?"

"I must go now," returned the broken voice of Colonel Curwood. "You will appreciate the reason for my tearing away, before usual, sir. There is an hour or more of work to be done at the bank to-night—discussing shortages of an urgent nature with my auditor. A matter, I am sorry to say, that embarrasses me to the extent of two or three hundred thousand dollars above what the bank can meet. The exact figures you may ascertain, if you care to inquire further, by calling any time soon at my office. God bless you, sir! I pity you from the bottom of my heart."

"Good night," said the colonel, with dignity, though his hand sought the back of his chair for support. "My boy will bless you if this matter can be adjusted without undue notoriety. The Pembletons are proud, as you know."

When war first visited the Pembleton estates in 1863, it came as a great wind, uprooting and destroying everything in its path, with an accompaniment of bellowing thunder and crackling bolts, that thrilled and uplifted the souls of men, even as it laid waste the land. An apocalypse rode in that gale; but there came out of it, too, a still small voice which bade the lion-hearted to rebuild on better foundations and to be of good cheer. Living on the battleground, one had a personal interest in peace!

But the second visit of war was different. This time it came insidiously, like a myriad of tiny borers, eating away at the woody tissues beneath the bark of a stately, old tree, until one day it toppled over and fell crashing to the earth. It was the fate of Colonel Pembleton that twice, within his allotted span of life, he should strike the very bottom of misfortune—and strike dishearteningly hard.

THE first hint that people of his acquaintance had of a change in fortune up on the hill was when, six months after the conversation alluded to above, the mansion was put up for sale, together with all chattels whatsoever; and the simultaneous appearance of Colonel Pembleton in a court of bankruptcy. Blooded horses and other live stock went to the highest bidder. The last animal to be led to the auction block—and this nearly broke the old man's heart—was the filly that had been sired by Pembleton Pride Boy. It was now a yearling, but was known to its owner only as "The Colt."

Though the Pembleton collapse was a nine days' wonder, and a limitless source of gossip, the financial status of

the Cotton & Tobacco National Bank never was questioned. People went right on saying that it was one of the strongest institutions in the South, which it was. No wonder! Colonel Pembleton had revivified it with his life-blood. And this was not the full extent of his sacrifice, either.

News had come a few days before the auction that Rodger Pembleton had been killed, after performing one of the heroic acts of the war. Single-handed, he had captured a German machine-gun nest from twenty defenders, only to be buried, with it locked in his arms, by an avenging "ash can."

There were tears in the colonel's eyes, the morning of the sale, but there was a song in his gallant heart which had acknowledged no defeat when surrounded by Michigan cavalry in the Valley of the Ohio. His boy, at last, had run true to form and met his obligations like a gentleman.

Colonel Curwood's offer of a position in the bank was gently but proudly refused.

"No, suh!" declared the bankrupt. "I may be financially down, but by gad, suh! don't count me out until the full ten seconds! Besides, I shall not ask you to take another Pembleton into a position of trust and responsibility, in which one has made a slight mistake, owing to the natural wildness of youth. I shall go back to the warehouse, where I made my fortune. And if the new owner ever puts The Colt into a race, I'm going to bet my wages on him to go in and win. That's me, all over, by gad, suh!"

THE Pembleton warehouses and mills had fallen into the hands of a big corporation, and the management to a cold-blooded exponent of system and high efficiency by the name of Kimbley Jones, who grudgingly gave the colonel a petty position, superintending a gin crew, but later removed him to a sitting-down position as night watchman of warehouse No. 23. To outsiders, he was sometimes pointed out, as a pensioner of the company—"Colonel Pembleton, who used to own the mansion on Rockyview Hill."

Three years later the old man was nearly forgotten except by a few old-timers who dropped down by the mill on Saturday nights to share a clandestine mixture and reminiscence about better days. They usually found the colonel tilted far back in his chair, fondly smiling as he gazed down on his son's Distinguished Service Cross which he turned slowly in his white, blue-veined hands.

Letters from Ann—now the Countess de Montpellier—were few and far between, but always welcomed until of late, when they had begun to take on a somber tone. The war was over. France had not demobilized. André, her husband, was still in the army, of course. The De Montpellier wealth, too, had vanished after three tides of invasion had swept over it. They were trying to make out a livelihood on a captain's salary, which isn't much in the French army. Ann was making lace of Lunéville point, like a peasant woman, to buy dresses for an expected baby. She was somewhat worried by her husband's inability to throw off a Flanders cough, incurred in the trenches during the last year of the war.

Like the Pembleton she was, she refrained from actual complaint, and anything that could be construed as an appeal for assistance. Nevertheless, the colonel felt that worse news would come soon, and that he must do something then, and do it quickly.

At such times, he took from an old locker a tiny chamois-skin bag and checked over the glittering contents, on his lap. They were the remnants of his dead wife's jewels, including their engagement ring, and his present to the bride.

It would never do to sell these, he thought. No, the good Lord would not condone such a treason. They represented, in all, about five thousand dollars, but they were too sacred to be considered coldly and unsentimentally in dollars and cents.

With a deep-drawn sigh that tingled every heartstring, he would put them back into the pouch, after pressing them first to his heart and then to his lips.

News of The Colt came to him occasionally from the various turf and field papers he bought at the news stands. The Colt was developing, evidently, into a great race horse. Once a cynic of a newspaper man essayed to put the animal in the forlorn-hope class, which aspersion brought an oath of resentment from the colonel.

"That blatherskite don't know what he's talking about!" he thundered. "The Colt a second-rater, by gad! It's an insult, and a personal one. Why, the best blood in Kentucky is in that animal, and blood will tell every time. Blood and training! And they took along with her all my trainers except old Buck, and he was no finisher. That horse will sweep the field, the day he's turned out of the stables."

Louisville newspapers had made frequent mention, of late, of the coming Derby. The new owner of The Colt, a Northerner named Dillington, had seen to it that there was glowing mention of his own entry.

The colonel never read such articles without a thrill. After all, they couldn't foreclose on either his own heritage or The Colt's. Blood would tell; thoroughbreds will win every time!

And the man who "had blood" and who could breed thoroughbreds had something to his credit, no matter how poor he was. Dillington might own The Colt, but he had been obliged to buy it with his dollars.

Shortly before the opening of the Derby, the colonel got a short letter from Ann, which urged him to a great decision. De Montpellier had died of pneumonia, and Ann was very ill and in want. There were only a few words but they cried out pathetically for "Daddy." Could he spare a few hundreds for the baby's sake?

For three days running, the old man could not sleep on account of worry. On the fourth, age and exhaustion demanded their ancient rights and sleep came to him stealthily while he was on duty as night watchman. The following morning he lost his job at the warehouse.

He could have gone to Colonel Curwood's bank, no doubt, and obtained a temporary loan, but pride intervened. What he did do was to abandon his familiar haunts, shunning his old friends and associates as though they were infected by a plague. No one, hardly, saw him, until he showed up at the Derby, on the afternoon of the race in which The Colt was entered.

THERE was a seething mob at the track that day. Automobiles were parked in blocks of five hundred to a thousand, with little lanes between which it took a combination of science and audacity to negotiate. It seemed as though every adult in Kentucky, black or white, had forgathered for this sterling event—the maiden race of the country's best four-footed creatures in the three-year-old class.

Hours before the jockeys began checking over their highly polished accouterments, the grand stand was filled and overflowing into the unsheltered seating area on either side, along the course and inside the ellipse itself. Through a surging mass of keen, expectant faces, agape at the least distraction, shuffling, nudging and exuding cigarette smoke, the narrow width of the track cut a clean path as though another Moses had waved his wand from the judges' stand and bade the living seas

stand back for the favored children of the turf.

The stand, somewhat ornamental in a new coat of paint, projected forth like the pagodas the Japanese erect on the tiniest islands of their lakes. The two officials, arguing their "straight tips" therein, were targets for thousands of binoculars, not because they were particularly attractive, but on account of their prominence in the monotonous foreground.

The colonel had been at the trackside since dawn. Anywhere else he would have presented a terribly pathetic figure; but at a race course, rags and ermine jostle each other, nor is dignity lost, or humility edified. There is no greater democracy. He had attired himself in his best, which was appallingly seedy and forlorn.

Long continued sitting on a swivel chair in front of the cotton warehouse had left a permanent glaze on his trouser seat, which no amount of sponging could take out. An off-colored patch was visible near his right knee, but one would have to look a second time to notice that his sleeves had been trimmed unevenly by shaky, unaccustomed fingers, wielding dull shears in the cause of sartorial nicety.

But the colonel, in worn clothes, waiting hungrily for the great race, was far from being without funds and without pride. A boutonnière of violets, cropped from the paddock, was worn jauntily on his left lapel, and reposing in his breast pocket was a wallet containing five thousand dollars, in cash, and various pawn tickets. The courage that had sat a sturdy saddle first in J. E. B. Stuart's and then in one of Morgan's troops was not dead at threescore and ten.

SAUNTERING close to one of the booths, he fished in his clothes, found a nickel and bought a ham sandwich. He would have liked to buy a cup of coffee, too, but—there was just the one coin left for personal use. He had to get along with that—or pass up renting a pair of binoculars.

He had not taken more than three or four mouthfuls when he was forced to put the sandwich away furtively in his pocket. Some one had called him by name.

"Kunnel Pembleton! Kunnel Pembleton!"

He turned abruptly, his blue eyes dilated with surprise and mortification, while his pale, blue-lined hand crept to his goatee in a nervous caress.

"This is Colonel Pembleton," he replied, with something of his old dignity.

A middle-aged negro had disentangled himself from the throng and was coming forward. The colonel did not recognize his former stableman at first. Tom Buck was dressed in a checkered suit of English cut and cloth, and wore a fashionable cloth hat, of like pattern, slanting over one ear.

"Kunnel Pembleton!"

"Well, Lor' bless me, if it ain't Buck!" exclaimed the old man. "You ol' scoundrel, you, how come you to be up heah at these races? If it ain't good to see some one I used to know! How's The Colt's condition to-day?

"I thought I'd lay a little mite, of a few thousand on it, if it happened to be all right, you know," he added nonchalantly.

Buck's eyes dropped, but his shoulders shook in a silent chuckle. "Ah don't know, kunnel," he replied, with the faintest touch of patronage. "Fac' is, Ah been interested in another hoss, that don't figgah much in the to-day's bettin'.

"Ah don't know though," he added craftily, "that hit has much show 'longside o' The Colt, nohow. Hit's just an onery twenty-to-one shot, which Ah raised frum a foal. Some yuther fellers they's got an interest in her now, but Ah kinah trails along. You know

how Ah is, kunnel; Ah sho' lobes hosses!"

The colonel was only casually interested. He had a grim purpose in his heart, and a great hope. Besides, he knew what blood was in that race, and to him knowledge was power. It was The Colt or nothing.

Meanwhile his starved old heart craved companionship in that mighty gathering of strangers with which, ten years ago, his appearance at the trackside would have been a social event. For this reason he was inclined to overlook the despicable fact that Tom Buck had been the very first of his servants to abandon the shelter of his mansion when bad luck came there to make its indefinite stay.

"Buck," he drawled, "I've just been looking at the face of that woman who was standing near you when you spoke to me, a few moments ago. Is that your mother?"

"Yasser. That theah's her," declared the negro indifferently, although he was taking a huge delight in the reversal of their positions. "Sho' is! Ah done brung her to see mah colt Belle Dandy run in diss heah race."

"Well," said the colonel heartily, "Buck, you old villain, bring her up heah, this minute! I ain't seen her since a certain big battle of the Civil War—on the day you were born."

Buck presented his mother, and for a time the two old people gazed into each other's eyes.

"Kunnel Pembleton!" she crooned. "Gawd bless yo', sah! Lookin' jus' de same as yo' did when yo' brung my dyin' man home to see his chil'. Twenty miles—— Yessah! Twenty miles yo' rode dat ol' stallion, and yo' wuz done wore out wi' the deed. Gawd bless yo', sah!"

"Gawd bless you, too—for honoring me with the remembrance of such an insignificant trifle, Mammy. It was nothing but the horse, you see. The ancestor of The Colt I am betting every sou on to-day. Times have changed, Mammy Buck, and I ain't got the money I used to have, but blood runs the same one day as another. And blood will tell. My last penny is going to be put, slap-dab on The Colt to win!"

"Gawd bless De Colt den!" murmured Mammy Buck, while her scapegrace son shuffled his ungainly shoulders under the English tweed, and laughed silently in his sleeve.

A great shout cut short their conversation at this point. They were preparing for the opening of the day's program. It was only a preliminary event, but a horse owner has his duties. Buck made a motion as if to saunter off.

"Wait a minute, Buck," commanded his old employer. "I see a big line of betters jamming around those windows. How'd you like to run up there and put a few thousands on The Colt to win? Tell George Rumbaugh, at window No. 4, that Colonel Pembleton's last dollar backs the Pembleton stable, no matter who owns it."

Buck took the money and stood for a moment turning the pretentious-looking roll in his hands, as if speculating upon its potential value.

"Jest lak ol' times, kunnel," he observed. "Kunnel used ter trust ol' Buck a heap." And with another silent chuckle, he pocketed the bank notes and walked away.

"Heah, you Tom!" called out his mother. "Kunnel Pembleton don' want ter be seen standin' 'round' talkin' wid me. Ah want ter go long and see yo' put ebery cent on dat dere colt. Yeah me?"

But Buck, truculent old reprobate that he was, had gradually formulated other notions regarding that money. Mammy was still arguing with him earnestly, when the crowd swallowed them up.

OF course you understand that the colonel had pawned his dead wife's jewels to bet on his favorite. Only the sad plight of Ann, in distant France, could have induced him to do such a thing, which in the traditions of his family amounted well-nigh to treason. Every dollar he had extracted from the chamois-skin bag was sacred with noble purpose, and placed in jeopardy only after prayer and torment of soul.

That being the case, he could not afford to purchase a ticket to the grand stand, although the day was hot. He worked his way through the gesticulating, excited crowd, from one point of vantage to another, which he was doomed always to lose, because of the interposition of men of taller stature, or women with high hats. To a man who was used to being a personage at such gatherings of humanity, this was a bit irksome, but he kept eternally at it, until a roar from the grand stand told him the main race was on. Then, for the first time in his life perhaps, the colonel forgot all about the social and ethical codes, and went wild.

He pushed himself madly through the tense masses, until he came to an empty automobile, parked only a little way back from the track. People were standing on its running boards with ruthless disregard for the sacred privileges of ownership, but these he brushed aside with an outraged air.

"I don't mind you all standing on the mud guards," he snorted angrily, when they started a protest. "But you mustn't put your feet on the hood. That there is the owner's prerogative, and not yours."

Thereupon he climbed gayly to the hood, and stayed there.

THE main event was about to be run, and the colonel could see the blankets torn off the glossy backs of the horses as they were led from the stables.

He saw Carefree, a bay gelding, bred by the Underwood stables of Tennessee, and swept that formidable entry from forelock to hoof with an appraising eye. He decided that it would take about third or second money—probably third.

"Let's see," he pondered. "His dam was Pinch Footer Priestess, who was the colt of Lunar Bright and Forthling, and her sire was Cheshire Arabic. I wonder if old Sam Saunders hasn't given him a shot of black coffee? Looks like it, by gad!"

There were lots of equine notables all over the lot. At least their parents were notables. It was going to be a prime good event.

"Hello! There's Tillotson's Squire of Dames, with Tony Martinella riding him. Easy second money at a maiden race, providing nothing is fixed and Tony has his heart in the job. Squire of Dames is out of Fanciful and Trigger Squeeze. Second money, maybe.

"Ha! There's The Colt!"

It was The Colt indeed, sleek and trained to a hair evidently, but somehow lacking in mettle. A thin, cold film of doubt swept through the colonel's mind, like the shadow of a distant and swiftly fleeing cloud passing over the moon.

"No, there must be some mistake," he declared hotly, to himself. "It's The Colt, all right; but I'm just dog-goned cowardly to-day. I reckon it's because all my money is on the animal. Yes, I reckon that's the reason. But it did look for an instant that she might be in better form."

Another horse came into view that looked very much like The Colt, but there was a strange jockey close beside it. He got the number and compared it with his program.

"Belle Dandy; rider, Tim Beresford. Owner, Steve O'Dowd and Tom Buck," he read. "By gad! That's the dark horse and a regular thorough-

bred!" he exclaimed. "I hear there's twenty-to-one against her, but I'll be damned if she isn't a dead match for old Brown Bashful. Twenty-to-one, against that stranger, is fair odds. I wish I had a dollar! Belle Dandy! I'll bet she's the offspring of that mare I gave Buck. If it is, she's got poor wind from both sides of her family tree."

The horses, a mob of them, were scoring for the word while all Louisville held its breath. The colonel's heart was beating so fast that it seemed it would burst through his faded cambric shirt.

They were off!

The pistol shot came to the colonel faintly, but the thunder of hoofs instantly filled his ears with the divine music of the race. In a riot of color, the jockeys rocketed across his vision and disappeared around the scimitar curve of the track into a cloud of dust. Half a mile away they came into view again, Peach Blossom, the property of Morgan Selig, in the lead. Grim Child was a full length behind and The Colt third, but gaining. The fourth horse in the procession the colonel recognized as Belle Dandy, and it seemed to him that her rider was holding her in and sparring for the fence.

Then they were out of sight for an instant as they hurtled along the side of the course toward the home stretch, with only a few straining forms visible in the van. The rest was a potpourri of brilliant blouses, reeking withers and flashing whips. Peach Blossom and Carefree were running neck and neck, with the unknown leading by a head in the center and crowding toward the wall, with the obvious intention of forcing the inside jockey into third place.

At first the colonel could not find The Colt and sought for it in the indiscriminate mass of horseflesh, with despair clutching at his heart. Then he saw The Colt and hope left him. The Colt was losing ingloriously, falling back into the chaos of competing animals, as surely into oblivion as the sparks fly upward. He emitted a tragical gasp, almost losing his footing. Then, with an effort, he reassumed mastery over himself.

Very well! He knew the risk when he laid his money. He could swallow his medicine with the best. There was enough sporting blood in the last of the Pembletons for that, at any rate. Providence must take care of Ann in some other manner. Her father had tried and failed.

The roar of hoofs was reaching him again. All he could see now were the three leaders and, of course, his attention was focused on the filly that looked so much like Brown Bashful. She was half a length to the good and going like a whirlwind. She was approaching the wire. Peach Blossom's head was slipping gradually away from her pulsing flank; now there was daylight between them. The colonel, forgetting his troubles, threw his battered brown hat toward the track, and split the throaty acclaim of the multitude with a rebel yell. It was a clean victory for the unknown.

THE colonel was slowly pushing his way out of the throng when he met Buck, wriggling his way back with Mammy, his truculent old face split fairly in two with a happy grin.

"Kunnel Pembleton!" he chuckled. "Yo' sho' should be a happy man. Yo' sho' plays in great luck, an' nobody's mo' tickled dan ol' Buck."

The old man gave him a stricken look, but his stableman of other days gathered his stumbling form into arms that shook with elation.

"Boss, yo' don't onderstan'!" he cried. "Yo' tol' me to put yo' money on yore colt. Dat's her ober yan wif de red saddle on. Does yo' onderstan'? Ah's a bad aig, but ma mammy heah, she won't let me do yo' dirt, kunnel.

De hoss Ah put yore money on, hit wuz yore own colt, Belle Dandy, born frum de mare yo' all brought frum ober de ocean. Ma colt an' yo'rn dey wuz bo'n de same night, and diss heah no 'count niggah swapped wif yo'. Does yo' onderstan' now, kunnel?"

But the colonel did not understand—then. He had slipped away into a dead faint, and all around people were crowding forward shouting for more air while they effectually shut it off. And they were telling everybody else that a man of his age had no business being out in that blistering sun. And an old colored woman was holding his head in her arms, and making over him as if she was the only person in the world capable of helping him in his trouble.

More stories by Captain Guthrie will be published in subsequent issues of THE POPULAR.

A NEW OCCUPATION

WITH changing conditions, odd and interesting ways of making a living develop. It seems that some prohibition-law violators, busy with the duties connected with their establishments, find that they cannot spare the time necessary to appear in court when they are to be brought to trial. Therefore they hire substitutes to plead guilty for them, the understanding being that the substitute will serve the jail sentence, if one is inflicted, while the actual lawbreaker will come to the rescue and pay the fine, if that is the judge's decision. This new custom was discovered by accident.

When arraigned one Monday morning, an alleged violator of the prohibition amendment proved to be a young, well-dressed, well-groomed man, with dark hair, who spoke excellent English. His case was set for trial on the following Thursday. When the case was called, on Thursday, a man appeared who was middle-aged, with gray hair, and he spoke with a decided accent. His speech was so far from flawless that it aroused the suspicions of those who remembered the original alleged violator.

Being taxed with the deception, the gray-haired man reluctantly admitted that he was substituting, and said that he had been provided with a room and meals, upon his agreeing to take the other man's place, plead guilty, and go to jail if necessary.

Shortly afterward, a judge in another court made public a letter he had received from a prisoner, which proved that this practice of substitution had been done at least once before. The prisoner complained that he had not been treated fairly, and he wanted to get out of jail. It seems that, for a lump sum, he had agreed to substitute in court for a prohibition-law violator, the understanding being that the judge would levy a fine, which the actually guilty man would pay, and the substitute would go free. It so happened, however, that a jail sentence, instead of a fine, was inflicted by the judge.

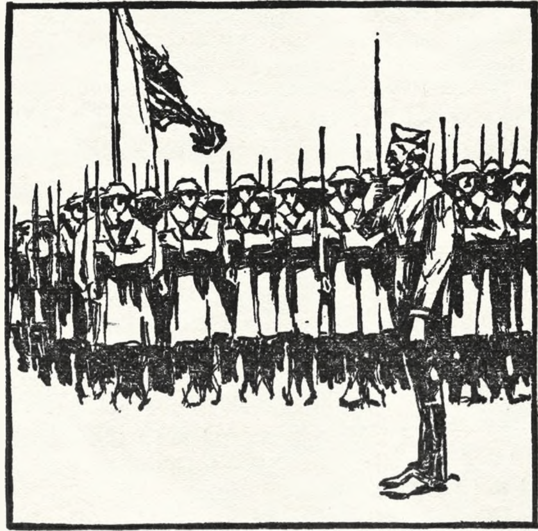
"I agreed to be fined, judge," wrote the prisoner, "not to be sent to jail. I don't like it here at all. Please let me out, and put the other fellow in jail!"

By

Fred MacIsaac

Author of

"Ice," "Breakfast at the Plaza," Etc.



Tin Hats

THE STORY.

The entry of America into the World War jolted Chris Graham out of the rut into which he had fallen because of a family misfortune. Although well educated he was working at a poorly paid clerkship in the city of Benton and had lost both ambition and initiative. The girl to whom Chris was engaged, Marion Stacy, was quite his opposite. With all her feminine charm Marion was militant, strong-willed, and an ardent pacifist. She had chosen Chris in preference to her other suitors because he seemed to need taking care of. And, now, for the first time Chris acted contrary to Marion's wishes. He enlisted, not because of patriotic zeal, but because he preferred to volunteer rather than be drafted. Out of respect to Marion's fear for his safety, Chris joined a noncombatant regiment of railroad engineers who were being sent Over There to operate supply trains behind the front. The first of a series of surprises came with the discovery that this unit was composed of the roughest elements in American society. Then Chris was made first sergeant of his company and, before he had recovered from his consternation, orders for sailing were received at camp. A hurried good-by to Marion, an unpleasant, if uneventful, trip across the Atlantic, and Chris found himself behind the front lines in France.

But all this while changes were taking place in Chris. His muscles were hardening and he was developing a talent for leadership and initiative. The job which Chris and his buddies were given was peril itself. They brought up trainloads of high explosives to the big guns; Yet the war spirit had taken hold of them all and they welcomed the danger and even yearned to get into the fighting trenches. One day while Chris was standing outside his railroad shack, a charming and beautiful Englishwoman, strangely, of dark complexion, introduced herself by asking for a cigarette. She was a "Wark," a member of the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps, and Chris soon came to feel that he loved her, without, however, losing his affection for Marion. No sooner had Chris been surprised with the knowledge that his Wark was Lady Mary Yorkley than orders came for him to report at a school for officers in Langres, there to prepare himself for a commission, which news he welcomed the more because Lady Mary had been urging him to win his shoulder straps. Chris passed through Paris and saw Lady Mary dining with a prominent English general. She cut Chris, but later apologized and was forgiven, Chris even agreeing to carry a message to Langres for her. After a grueling term at Langres, Chris, a lieutenant now, was taken up to a French front-line sector to receive his baptism of fire. He had no sooner proved his courage to the Frenchmen than the enemy started a drive. Chris, sickened by poison gas, but fighting gamely, was ordered to the rear.

The zero hour had come. A gray host was relentlessly sweeping everything before it, faster and faster as it gathered momentum, driving its bayonet-fringed wedge into the heart of the weary defenders. And in the path of this steel-clad, fire-spitting horde stood the little division of American Engineers. Could these inexperienced noncombatants hold an entire army?

In Four Parts—Part III. :: ::

CHAPTER XXI.

BEHIND THE LINE.

AS Chris Graham leaned against the side of the trench, waiting for the Frenchman to dig out the unexploded enemy shell, he realized he was leaning against something that was not earth.

Looking around, he found that he had hold of a leg, clad in gray with a trench boot protruding from the end of it. Something told him to remove it from the path of other returning wounded, and he tried to bend it down so that the earth would cover it again. With a hollow snap and crackle it broke and rolled along the loosened earth, and a little shower of sand and earth fell upon it.

Chris almost fainted. Then he saw the runner, with the three-inch, unexploded shell under his arm, waiting to resume their journey.

Progress was slow. It was after dark when they reached the entrance to the gallery that went down sixty feet in solid chalk, to a spacious dugout of half a dozen rooms, which was regimental headquarters.

The colonel and his staff were sitting down to dinner and warmly urged the American to join them. Chris had not had a bite to eat for twenty-four hours and he accepted gratefully, but the first mouthful of hot soup made him sick and they carried him from the table.

The next he remembered was being in a springless wagon, moving over a rough road en route to an improvised hospital. They carried him into a tent where he saw a line of stretchers and a man with sleeves rolled up, as if at hard manual labor. He closed his eyes for a moment. When he woke, his back was bared and the shirt-sleeved man stood over him with a huge syringe about to shoot into him a dose of antitetanic serum.

He had just wit enough to say: *"Pas blessé; asphyxié par gaz obus."* Darkness fell upon him again.

When he was conscious once more, he was in a motor ambulance under an

overhead-railroad crossing. The sky was lighted by antiaircraft shells, firing at planes en route to bomb Paris. The driver had stopped under the bridge to avoid the falling shell fragments.

The next recollection of the young officer was the sonorous notes of an organ. He looked around, found himself in a long hospital ward, with a Frenchwoman nurse bending over him.

"What is that music?" he asked.

"It is the Mass. It is Sunday morning," she told him.

Holy Mass! After the inferno, religion. In this land of France, torn and shattered and fighting so desperately, they still said Mass and sang Latin hymns.

Everything was dark, for his eyes were covered with a bandage. A terrible fear shot through him. Had he been blinded by gas shells? Had he lost his sight? But in a few hours they took off the bandages and he could see. His joy was so great that he wept. Then the nurse, a kindly soul, hurried up in a flutter.

General Gourand was about to visit Chris.

THE general came, a kindly man with a brilliant staff. He shook his hand, then bent over the bed and kissed him on both cheeks. He unpinned from his own chest a little cross with a green ribbon with red stripes, and pinned it upon the nightshirt of the American.

"The croix de guerre, mon ami," he said. "You have been recommended by the colonel of the —th Infantry for surpassing heroism in action!"

Then the general stood up straight and saluted, while the dozen members of his staff snapped into salute. Chris, with tears streaming down his cheeks, returned the salute. They left him, while the boy lay there tingling with happiness. The croix de guerre! He had won it. The great French badge of courage had been given to a poor, frightened, confused, almost helpless youth who had joined the army to be safe!

And that decoration on his white nightshirt—— Why, it was worth everything! The hell he had gone through was nothing at all! Chris had been decorated by one of the greatest of French commanders for his bearing on the field of battle. He felt in his heart he didn't deserve it, but he had it. What would his mother say? What would Marion say? What would Lady Mary say? Now, he was grateful to Lady Mary. She had inspired him to plunge into the fighting, to be an officer, to win the croix de guerre. He could see her dark, beautiful face light up as her eyes fell upon the ribbon and the little war cross. He wanted to show the proud decoration he had so justly won.

Chris, most fortunately, had been stricken only by rarified poison gas, and by breathing the fumes from the explosives contained in the shells. In three days, he was out of bed, though still pale and weak from lack of nourishment, sickness and the reaction from war in its most terrible aspect. And he found that the American authorities had followed his experiences, sent him three months' back pay and granted him a leave of ten days. At the end of that time, he had to report in Chaumont, the new G. H. Q., for assignment to a fighting unit.

The doctor assured Chris that he could travel if he took care of himself. Armed with his document of leave, he determined to go to Paris in search of Lady Mary. If he did not find her, he would return to the railroad unit for a few days. He discovered he was longing to see the crowd again, and he took a childish delight in thinking of the sensation he would create in his officer's uniform, with the croix de guerre pinned to the breast of his jacket.

As it happened, the hospital was only about twenty-five miles north of Paris and a railroad station was less than half a mile away. He made his way to it carefully, aided by a cane. He coughed a little and breathing was a trifle painful, but he had been assured that the effects of the gas would quickly wear off as his lungs repaired their strength with fresh air.

CHAPTER XXII.

"THE GANG'S ALL HERE."

DURING the whole inferno of Turenne, Chris had received no word from Marion and none from Lady Mary. As for the girl at home, he knew that she was writing almost daily, her letters were probably still going to the engineer regiment despite instructions to forward to Langres. Lady Mary was a different proposition; in all probability it was "out of sight, out of mind" with her. A girl so beautiful and popular might enjoy the company of an insignificant American noncom, but she would not waste much thought on him when he wasn't about. Her negligence did not lessen her attractions for Chris. He had to see her, and if she only thought of him in his presence, then he wanted to be present as much as possible.

He knew well enough that he would keep his word to Marion, that his love for her was something fundamental, and he was not so fascinated by Mary that he did not realize that she lacked the solid worth of the American girl. Yet she was brave and hard working, cheerful and patriotic, and she knew how to make a fellow feel big and powerful.

With Marion, Chris was always conscious of inferiority. She was brilliant and beautiful and her mentality was greater than his own, and she would always guide their ship of matrimony. With Mary, he was the fine, strong, masculine soldier to whom she looked up, or at least she acted that way.

So he arrived in Paris brimming with eagerness. As soon as he had reported, he went to the Corona Hotel to get news of her. Once more he was disappointed. Not only was Mary not there, but her friend, Madame Touchet, had left the hotel and given no forwarding address. Now he had really lost Mary!

It took him two days to get permission to visit Albert, and it was only granted to allow him to recover personal effects left in charge of the regimental quartermaster. He spent the evenings peering into cafés in hope of seeing the English girl dining with a general or a field marshal, but Lady Mary was not to be found in any café. On the third day he departed for Amiens.

Chris had spent four months in the desolated Somme country and he now found himself recognizing familiar landmarks with a little thrill. Amiens, as usual, was filled with British troops on leave, and he saw many women in the blue-gray uniform of the Waacs. He did not hesitate to stop young women in this uniform to ask news of Mary Yorkley, but he failed to find a single person who knew her.

Regimental headquarters of the engineers had been transferred from Albert to Amiens. He discovered upon inquiry that the battalion which included Company F was now in camp about five miles outside the city, at a village called Démuin, near the River Somme.

He reached camp about six in the evening, and found the men quartered in the usual group of corrugated-iron huts. A sentinel challenged him, then recognized him and gave an unsoldierly whoop of joy. Chris shook his hand warmly and proceeded to company headquarters, where he found Captain Spayde in the equally unprofessional act of cleaning his own boots.

Spayde leaped to his feet with a

shout of welcome, grasped his hand, then looked him over from head to foot, taking in the details of the nice new uniform. His eye lit upon the little cross and piece of greenish ribbon.

"What's that?" Spayde demanded.

"You mean to say you don't recognize the croix de guerre?" said Chris, with an embarrassed laugh.

"How the hell would I know what it looks like? What chance have we got down here? How did you get it, boy? Tell me all about it."

"It's a long story, captain. Tell me how things are going."

"Pretty bad. We've had twenty men in the company killed and half a dozen wounded. We may not be a fighting outfit, but the way we get ours, there isn't enough left to bury. One of my lieutenants was blown to bits by a bomb. We came out here with a hundred men and now I have only sixty-eight. Some of the other companies are worse off. Listen, will you?"

A stentorian voice outside the hut bellowed: "Now, altogether, boys!"

Half a dozen out-of-tune harmonicas, jew's-harps and combs struck into a melody, and then several score of rough voices joined in. They were singing:

"Hail, hail, the gang's all here!
What the hell do we care!
What the hell do we care!"

"It's a serenade," the captain grinned. "They missed you, Chris."

"Three cheers for Leftenant Graham!" shouted a raucous voice that Chris knew belonged to the husky Luke Manning.

The cheers were given with gusto. Then Chris, tears in his eyes, opened the door and stepped out to be swamped by the reception committee.

"Hurroo!" shouted Luke, as he crashed a heavy hand on Chris' silver bar. "Whee-oo! The darn kid has got the krox de gerry."

CHAPTER XXIII.

AN UNEXPECTED DRIVE.

WHILE Chris was entertaining a circle which included not only the members of F Company, but the officers as well, with the story of his experiences in training camp and with the French, some thirty miles to the north and east there was preparing the most gigantic drive in the whole history of the war. It was the eve of March 21, 1918, an eventful date in the history of the British army.

While activity had been observed behind the lines by the English airplanes, the British general staff hadn't the faintest conception of the magnitude of the storm which was about to burst, for the preparations against them had been made with the greatest skill and the Allied news sources, for once, were completely uninforming.

Down from the eastern front had come a great army. Behind the enemy lines in the Somme country had been assembled the astounding force of five hundred thousand men to be used in an assault, with additional reserves, fast coming up, of three hundred thousand more.

This vast array was concealed most skillfully. Facing it were something like three hundred thousand men and they were holding a line fifty miles long. Just two British armies they made, each went with its own commander.

Thirty miles behind the junction of the two armies was Amiens, the great supply center, the hub of the system.

What happened on March 21st is history. Never did men fight more bravely, never did men lay down their lives more heroically than the English soldiers. The blame rests on the high command that could not reënforce a section of its lines outnumbered five to one.

The fact remains that one army

fought for eight days, that it contested every foot of the ground, that the enemy only drove it back from twenty-five to thirty miles in that period and that every dead soldier accounted for from two to three enemies before he passed in his checks.

However, the retreat completely disorganized all system. The victors were hot on the heels of the retreating forces and organizations began to be scrambled. The Allied generals ordered their liaison to be maintained at all hazards, but they didn't know where their different units were from moment to moment. Their troops were fighting pretty much as individuals.

NOW it happened that the enemy's objective was Amiens. If it were captured, the Allies would have been cut in two. Eight or nine hundred thousand men were prepared to die to preserve Amiens, yet this is the strange thing which happened.

As the great gaps came in the lines of the retreating armies, they did the most natural thing in the world, closed up, and this process caused a breach to occur between the two armies, a gap which widened each day, without either general being aware of it.

By March 25th, one of the Allied generals, to his horror, made the discovery that there was a hole a mile wide between his left and the right of the next army. He didn't have a soldier to thrust in the breach. All his reserves had gone in; none others had come up, and every man in what was left of his army was holding off from two to five of the enemy.

Amiens was the object of the drive. The gap was directly in front of it; the whole invading army could plunge through and take the city.

Strangely enough, the enemy had not yet made the discovery. They were driving the Allies before them, and their own system of communication was all askew, because of the rapid movement of their troops.

In camp at Démuin, three or four miles northeast of Amiens, was a battalion of American railroad engineers completely unconscious that the army had disappeared from in front of them and there was nothing in the world to prevent the enemy from swooping through.

The engineers were not working, because their railroad system was smashed to flinders. Albert had fallen; a dozen other points in the narrow-gauge network had been taken; and for days no orders had come to them. The major in command, who didn't know much more about soldiering than the day he left Eppington, was uneasily conscious that his outfit ought to move but as he didn't know where to go, he hung on for orders.

The Americans had seen something of the retreat; a horde of stragglers had passed by, assuring them that the world had come to an end. However, they would not retreat until the army backed up on them, and that army had side-stepped, instead of backed, and wasn't in front of them any more.

On the morning of March 25th, a colonel, followed by a single aid, mounted upon foaming horses, galloped up.

"For God's sake, major!" exclaimed the colonel. "Will your men fight?"

"Certainly," said the bewildered railroad major. "Who? What with?"

"The army is gone! We've got to stop the enemy here or they'll take Amiens. There's an old French trench running from the Somme to Démuin, about a quarter of a mile north. Get your outfit into it as quickly as you know how and dig it out!"

"You mean we have got to stop them? Man alive, we have no weapons!"

"I see rifles."

The major laughed ruefully. "They're

Krags. Spanish-American War. We have no cartridges for them."

"I'll get you rifles. Get your men over there and start digging."

"Haven't you any troops? Any reserves?"

"Everything is gone. This is a forlorn hope. You are noncombatant troops, and you don't have to do this. Will you do it?"

"You bet your boots we will!" shouted the major. "Wait till I tell the boys. Don't we get any help?"

"Brigadier General Carey is in command here, and he's scouring the district for men to throw into the gap. You have authority to stop any stragglers that come along and sick them into the trench and Carey will be up with what he can gather in a few hours at the most. I warn you, major, you're all dead men!"

"We'll get one crack at them!" exclaimed the American railroad division superintendent, who wore the leaf of a major on his shoulder.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ODDS AGAINST THEM.

THE colonel and his aid jumped on their horses and dashed away. The camp bugler brought the men into line in a moment. The major beckoned to Chris as the battalion was forming.

"Thank Heaven you're here!" said the major. "Tell me what to do."

Briefly he explained the facts and Chris grew pale with appreciation of the dreadful situation. He had come down here on a holiday and stepped into annihilation.

The major now addressed the men. His address was Napoleonic in its brevity. "Boys, the Allies have been wiped off the face of the earth. About a million men are coming down, and if we don't stop them, they'll take Amiens and end the war. This colonel who was just here asks us to step into the breach. Anybody who don't want to get murdered in the next twenty-four hours has my permission to beat it. Do you go or do you stick?"

A burst of cheering was the answer. Whereupon the battalion was ordered to march immediately. In half an hour they were digging out a half-filled trench, relic of the first battle of the Somme.

The Carey volunteers soon began to arrive. The first batch were several hundred recently wounded men from the hospital of Amiens, some of them hobbling along on canes or crutches. Then came flocks of orderlies, men from staff headquarters, runners, elderly men who drove ambulances, a few companies of regular soldiers who had been stationed in Amiens, and scores and scores of stragglers, turned about by the galloping staff officers and responding to the plea to save the army.

General Carey came finally. He had scoured the entire district and the result was a couple of thousand men of all kinds and descriptions. Some trucks came up with rifles and ammunition, which were served to the weaponless Americans, leaving at least fifty of them with no other weapons than picks and shovels.

There were scores of officers serving as privates; there were medical men and chaplains; they were of different nationalities and every one of them was doomed and knew it.

In all the annals of war there was never a stranger situation. Some seven or eight hundred thousand troops were along that front and the defense of the key of their position, their great base, was left to the camp followers, the wounded, the noncombatants and stragglers.

Nearly a million men bent on taking Amiens, and to oppose them were a couple of thousand nondescripts. Here was no system of trenches, no barbed wire, no entanglements—nothing but a

single trench, and no line of retreat. Behind it, was a big, teeming city, with supplies enough to support the whole enemy army for a year.

Talk about the thin red line of Balaklava! Was there ever such a situation as this?

"Mother Carey's Chickens," the army called the devoted band ever afterward.

And what shall be said of the enemy high command?

What was the matter with their airplanes, their spies, their observers, their system of information that they did not seize their opportunity and swarm over the single line of trenches that alone separated them from their goal? Had they taken Amiens, how different the course of the war must have been!

As Carey's Chickens crouched in their trench, they saw Allied soldiers coming singly and in groups, men who had become separated from their units and were wandering about. These were welcomed with cheers and added to their forces.

Along a road from the north came a group of horsemen. As they drew near it was seen that they were enemy troops. A heavy fire opened on the cavalry, which immediately wheeled and galloped off.

A HIGH road toward Albert crossed the sapper's trench and down this road, from the rear, came a motor cycle, whose rider seemed surprised to find a trench cutting the road, and so dismounted.

Chris gave a shout as he recognized the rider. It was a girl and he knew her. He was out of the trench and at her side in a moment.

"Lady Mary!" he exclaimed. "Where are you going? Don't you know you are in danger?"

The girl looked tired and wan; her face was coated with dust, but her big, dark eyes flashed with pleasure and surprise.

"My Americans, and a lieutenant!" she remarked. "Congratulations!"

"No time for them," he said curtly. "What do you want here?"

"I am on my way to Albert," she replied. "I must get through."

"Impossible. Albert is in enemy hands."

"But let me pass to the front. I'll find a way of slipping through."

"This is the front."

The girl looked at the single trench in astonishment. "What do you mean?" she demanded. "Where's the army?"

"Gobbled up!" Chris grinned. "We are the defenders of Amiens."

"Well, I have got to reach Albert," the girl insisted. "There are most important reasons. I'll slip up close and lie hid until night, then I'll get through."

"I tell you the country is enemy territory!"

"I am not afraid of them. I can speak the language."

"You wouldn't get a chance to talk to them," he said grimly. "Go back!"

Mary grasped his arm. "Listen, Chris! My uniform is enough like theirs, so they will think I am carrying dispatches. They won't shoot at me. It's a matter of life or death for me to get through."

"No," he returned stubbornly.

"How dare you!" she flashed. "Who is in command here?"

"General Carey."

"Take me to him."

Chris summoned a soldier and ordered him to conduct the lady to the commander. The general was in the front-line trench, smoking a pipe and cleaning a rifle like any private.

As soon as the girl had gone, Chris drew his revolver and sent a bullet through the gasoline tank of the motor cycle. Then he opened the engine casing, disconnected several wires and unscrewed a piece of metal, which he put in his pocket.

"In case she persuades the general," he said to himself grimly.

Mary was back in five minutes, with a smile of triumph on her face. "I have explained matters and he says I may go," she declared. "Please carry my machine across the trench."

"You'll never ride that machine again," he informed her. "I have put it out of commission."

A glance told the girl of the damage. She turned on him and the fury in her eyes was terrible. "You damn Yankee cad!" she exclaimed. Then she lifted her right hand and brought it with a crack against his cheek.

"Why have you done this?" she demanded, a second later, as she saw him grow white and recognized the humiliation in his eyes.

"Military necessity," he returned coldly. "You may have convinced the general of the importance of your errand, but you do not understand. No human being must cross our front. They would torture you, and you would have to betray the weakness of our position. Besides, I thought I loved you."

Mary regarded him silently. Her anger was unappeased, but she realized her helplessness. Without her motor cycle, it would be suicide to attempt to cover the ten or twelve miles to Albert, across a territory swept by shells. The situation was saved by a young officer, who came from the commander.

"Pardon, miss," he said hurriedly. "The general sends word that you must not cross our lines. He is sorry about your mission, but the situation here makes it impossible to let you go on You are to return at once to Amiens."

"This person has made that impossible," she told the officer. "He has wrecked my motor cycle."

"Sorry," said the young officer, with an appreciative glance at Chris. "You can walk back to Amiens in an hour or so, and your corps will provide you with another motor cycle. The general says to go now, as we expect an attack at any moment."

Mary turned about, without a nod of farewell, and Chris watched her go with a sad heart. He had tried to save her and had saved her. The result was that she hated him. If he had only waited a few minutes, the general himself would have settled the matter. But if the motor cycle had not been out of commission, Mary might have been a mile up the road toward Albert before the messenger arrived to withdraw her permission.

What an astonishing girl she was, to be willing to penetrate this country for the sake of her mission! What could be her mission in a city held by the enemy? Perhaps important plans were hidden there, and she had been told to rescue them. A woman could succeed where a man would fail. He knew already that she was not an ordinary Wark; she had the confidence of generals.

HOWEVER, he did not have time for musing. The enemy was coming into view, following their new tactics of sending machine gunners, creeping with their weapons, ahead of the infantry.

Even now the attackers did not have an inkling of the situation. Ahead of them was a line of trenches and a heavy fire came from the troops under cover. The enemy did not appear to understand that they had broken through the lines. An airplane came into view from behind their lines and immediately a dozen Allied machines appeared and drove it back.

The thinness of Carey's line was known to the Allied generals by this time, and they had determined to keep their opponents from discovering this. Scores of Allied planes came in sight. When the enemy waves of infantry came on, the planes flew so low that their operators were able to sweep the lines with machine-gun fire.

Six separate charges were repulsed by the determined troops during the course of the afternoon. Fortunately the forces were not enough to overwhelm this scratch army. Besides, these troops had been fighting for four or five days, always advancing. They were probably without food and very tired. Nevertheless, they outnumbered the Chickens three or four to one and could have taken the trench with a little more nerve.

Night found the outfit still holding the trench. A third of its members were dead or dying, but the spirit of determination was not in the least weakened.

That there was no field artillery behind them to lay down a barrage, no heavy artillery to disrupt the rear ranks of the advancing troops—these things should have told the enemy that they had no opposition worthy of the name. Yet apparently the general in command at that spot could not believe that the direct road to Amiens was not properly defended. He seemed to believe he would find a stiffer resistance here than anywhere along the line. He was cautious, probably feared a dreadful trap, and he delayed for reënforcements and orders from the high command. That was all that saved Mother Carey's Chickens.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE BATTLE OF BUNKER HILL.

ONE would suppose that these devoted men, these sublime heroes, representing all sections of the Anglo-Saxon race, whose thin line represented the last gasp of their side in the struggle, would be filled with a spirit of sacrifice and would stand shoulder to shoulder in noble emulation, casting aside all petty difference, realizing that they were brothers. But the various branches of the Anglo-Saxon race are not built like that.

During the interval between repulsing attacks, they bickered. The officers were busy during the lulls keeping the peace, for the men were suffering from intense strain and their racial antagonisms were sharpened thereby.

Chris had great difficulty in pulling Luke Manning off a big Canadian. The pair were rolling around in the bottom of the trench in a clinch.

He got Luke by the collar and dragged him to his feet, not before the brakeman had landed several heavy blows.

"What was this about?" Chris demanded.

"Do you know what that limey had the gall to claim?" Luke demanded indignantly. "He says the blithering British won the Battle of Bunker Hill."

Chris broke into a laugh and two or three other officers of various nationalities joined him.

"The British did win the Battle of Bunker Hill," Chris assured Luke.

"Do you hear that, you dock walloper?" jeered the Canadian.

Luke's dirt-stained and hideous countenance exhibited dismay. He knew Chris too well to doubt him.

"But we got the hill! I seen it. It's in Charlestown."

"Yes," said Chris. "But they won the battle."

"Then for the love of Moses, what do they celebrate it for in Massachusetts?"

"If the British won that battle, we won the war," Chris explained.

"You lie!" exclaimed the Canadian, forgetful of the rank of the speaker. As a matter of fact, rank in that outfit that day was generally disregarded.

Further hostilities were stopped by the appearance of another surge of gray. And thus the day passed more or less pleasantly.

The great opportunity was lost in the night. A regiment of field artillery was moved to support the Carey indescribables; a regiment of cavalry re-

mained in reserve. Runners brought the news that a great army was moving up to relieve the trench in front of Amiens, but it would take another day for this army to come in.

During the night, General Carey succeeded in getting water and cold rations. He passed along the whole line, patting privates on the back, chatting with officers and assuring them that if they could hold out one day more, they would have done their job. The wounded were evacuated, the dead taken out of the trench and laid behind the lines. Several hundred fresh men, collected from the open country toward Amiens, drifted in and were welcomed. They faced the second day in a much better situation than the first, for now they would have an artillery barrage to disrupt the solid wall of advancing infantry.

On the other hand, they knew that the enemy must have brought up vast reserves during the night.

So far as can be discovered, the enemy command absurdly overestimated the force in front of it. Allied planes had kept their scouts out of the sky at this point. Having driven through the system of trenches thirty miles north and east and having been fighting for four days in the open, the enemy had come upon an entrenched position before Amiens and presumed that it was a carefully prepared fortress, adequately manned.

That the presence of a trench was accidental, Carey having occupied an old French excavation of 1915 or '16, they didn't understand. One of the humorous features of the first day's fighting was the fact that a barrage had been laid behind the trench all day, to prevent reserves coming up to help the front line; of reserves there were none.

So the attackers sent to the rear for heavy artillery, concentrated several brigades of field artillery and asked for fresh divisions of infantry—all of these were slow arriving because of the confusion at the end of the fifth day of the drive across open country.

All the Americans had rifles by the morning. During the previous day, the several score of engineers who were loafing in the trench, without any weapons except pickaxes, were annoyed because of their enforced inactivity.

To be sure a pickax in the hands of a six-foot engine driver was a far more dangerous weapon at close quarters than a bayonet, as many paid with their lives to discover, but it was irksome to see soldiers coming at you without being able to take a shot at them.

"For Heaven's sakes get killed, will you? I need your gun," Jack Cunniff had observed to a Tommy who was pumping away at the enemy. The wickedness and heartlessness of this remark disconcerting the soldier's aim considerably.

But the death toll during the first day enabled the engineers to get arms, and they were ready to use them with enthusiasm, if not with accuracy.

AT dawn came the first charge; it was beaten back successfully. Then two or three Americans jumped out of the trench to run forward and grasp the helmets from the heads of fallen men. It was their first chance at front-line souvenirs.

All day the gray lines kept sweeping down on them; all day they plugged away at them like hunters lying in a duck stand. All day the shells fell to the rear, obstructing the phantom reserves. Again and again the foe got near enough to hurl hand grenades into the trench. The thin line grew thinner. No longer were the defenders close together on the firing step. They were six or eight feet apart. To their right and left the Allied troops had rallied, heartened by the news of the approach of reënforcements.

Toward night the discovery was

made that there were no reserves behind the line from Démuin to the river, and the attackers hurled successive surges without intermission. Some of these advances actually secured a foothold in the trench and were driven out with difficulty.

When night came, however, Carey's Chickens still held their ground, though more of them were lying dead or wounded than were left standing upright in the trench.

Luke Manning had three flesh wounds, and one in the head made him a fear-inspiring spectacle. Jack Cunniff lay groaning with a bullet through the bone of his right leg. Captain Spayde, who had declared he never would learn to be a soldier, was no more; he had died like a soldier, even if he never had learned the words of command. Chris was the only officer of F Company and he was not detailed to it, but the men obeyed him as a matter of course.

When the last charge had been repulsed, he called F Company together and found only eighteen unwounded men out of sixty-eight who had entered the trench.

But the battle was won. During the night, an Allied division moved into the sector and Carey's Chickens were clucked together and marched to the rear; that is, the small percentage who were able to march.

All night the fresh troops worked to make ready for the new assaults on the morrow, confident in numbers, assured of holding the ground.

It was nothing but a picturesque incident in the history of the long war, but its importance at the moment was paramount. All England rang with the exploit and all over the Allied lines darted the news that an important part of Carey's brigade was a force of American railroad engineers.

The American divisions in France had been in training in quiet sectors and as yet the Allied commanders had no means of knowing their quality.

Shortly before the great drive, an American division had been sent into the line with the French. Within a few hours their front line was raided and a hundred and fifty prisoners captured. Of course this was due to the inexperience of the Americans, but the news caused great chagrin to the American general staff, and for that reason they welcomed the report of the gallantry of the railroad soldiers the more.

Chris came through the affair of the old trench without a scratch, but he was still in poor physical shape as a result of his taste of gas. His leave of absence had been given him for purposes of recuperation, but he had spent part of it in one of the most desperate actions of the entire war.

The remnant of the battalion hardly formed a company. Its reception at Amiens demonstrated that the British knew what these noncombatants had done. During the rest of the war, no Tommy ever ventured a jibe at the railroad men.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AN ARRIVAL IN FRANCE.

ONE of the most attractive features of the home front during the days of 1917 and 1918 was the enlarged circle of friends and acquaintances of those wives and sweethearts and mothers whose men were "Over There."

It came about in this way. A soldier would write home about the men he had come to like and admire in his company. In the rest camps and in the trenches, they talked about their womenfolk and read passages from their letters from home to one another. Thus Chris came to learn something about the mother and sisters of Bert Leslie, and the families of Captain Spayde and Lieutenant Jones and Sergeant Smith, and they knew about Mar-

ion and Chris' sister and mother. It was natural for him to write to Marion to call on Mrs. Leslie and the Misses Leslie and upon Mrs. Spayde and Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Smith, and for their men to write them to get acquainted with Marion Stacy.

So these women, who had never known one another, got into the habit of calling up or dropping in when any of them received a letter, and reading it to the whole circle. To Marion, Chris cabled the news of the death of Captain Spayde on the field of battle, so that she might prepare his wife before she saw it in cold type in the government list of casualties.

It happened that Bert Leslie, to justify his resignation from the officers' school, wrote a very complete account of the dreadful and unnecessary suffering which he had undergone there. He included in the letter a description of Chris, standing in snow and icy water with his bare feet through his shoes. As Chris had been careful not to send any such information to Marion, her indignation upon hearing it from Mrs. Leslie was great. Marion was not one to submit tamely to injustice; she was a born crusader and a better fighter than many draftees. She borrowed the letter containing the information, and took a train for Washington, as quickly as she could arrange a leave of absence from her classes.

Congress had little to do with the war except vote funds, and some congressmen were just sitting around waiting for a chance to howl. Every day some lawmakers would rise to read a letter from a soldier, complaining about everything from war policies to cooties. Marion had no trouble awakening indignation among the representatives and senators upon whom she called.

A delegation of congressmen called upon the war department and nearly took off the roof, and the secretary of war sent stinging rebukes along the line. Things would be fixed immediately, the statesmen were assured, and so far as Washington was concerned, they were fixed. But the war front was more than three thousand miles away and the submarines had objections that interfered.

The service of supplies was being constructed about the way a man lifts himself by his boot straps. It was pretty bad, but considering the conditions under which it was functioning, it was marvelous that it was accomplishing anything. Marion's energy was a lot of help to the future classes in the officers' training schools, but long before things were right at Langres, Chris was a commissioned officer at the front.

THE important result of Marion's visit was that she made such a showing of efficiency and executive ability that she was offered the post of secretary of a commission appointed by Congress to investigate something in France.

The offer came to Marion after she had returned home and had resumed her school work. It astonished and delighted her, and the possible peril of a journey through a submarine-infested ocean did not deter her. She wired immediate acceptance. Immediately word came that the commission would sail in a week. At once she got off a cablegram to Chris, which was delivered at the school at Langres, forwarded to the French infantry regiment and was lost en route, as were so many letters and cablegrams at that time.

When Chris' cablegram announcing the death of Captain Spayde arrived at Marion's apartment, she was already in France, and Miss Warren went forth to break the dreadful news.

Marion made many friends among the officers on the transport which carried the commission to Bordeaux. The ship traveled in a convoy which did not sight a single submarine and made the

journey in thirteen days, an excellent passage under war-time conditions. There were three congressmen and two civilians in the commission. Its purpose was to observe the workings of prohibition in the army. All of the members were very earnest until they landed in France.

Commissions for investigation or betterment of all sorts of things were being organized, and the government was letting them go to Paris, possibly reasoning that the injury done to the cause by sending congressmen to Europe on ships that needed every inch of space for troops was offset by the removal of critics and objectors from the legislative halls.

In Paris, the general staff assigned offices to the commission, extended courtesies, and pigeonholed their recommendations until the armistice brought a breathing space.

It happened that at the moment when Chris was wandering through the streets of Amiens, looking for a glimpse of Lady Mary Yorkley, Marion Stacy was wandering about Paris, trying to find Chris.

Marion became popular in Paris immediately. Her job was a sinecure; the members of the commission were to all intents and purposes tourists; they didn't know how to secure the information they were supposed to get; and they were much more interested in having a peek at the war from a safe place than in getting this information anyway. She arrived at her office in the Place de la Bourse every day at ten, read books, filled the pages of a diary, and tried to master that infernal machine, the Paris telephone in war time, with no success whatever.

Her late afternoons and evenings were free. She had most of the American army and officialdom in Paris to select from as her escorts. Marion was a beauty; so blond that no Frenchwoman would consider her hair undyed; so fresh and sweet and wholesome and delightful that there were few gray-haired generals who wouldn't make use of their rank to elbow lieutenants out of the way to her side.

She had no difficulty whatever in discovering that Chris was not at Langres, for official wires were used to secure that information, but where he was, she could not discover. The records only stated that he had been given ten days' leave after a slight gassing, which had been treated at a French hospital, and the presumption was that he was spending the time in Paris, like every other intelligent soldier.

So Marion accepted many invitations purely in the hope of encountering her fiancé. If she was distrait during dinners and parties, it passed unnoticed, because her escorts were so busy telling her of their exploits and their importance in the service that she had no chance to talk.

SHE consented to attend a dinner party given by a colonel in the service of supplies at an expensive café one evening, and found on arriving that covers had been laid for eight.

It was one of the few famous cafés which still maintained its standards of service and cuisine despite the restrictions of the government as to food. Here one could secure white bread, if one paid enough, and sugar, and other delicacies.

The guests of Colonel Wolmouth arrived within a few minutes of his arrival with Marion. There was a United States senator who escorted a French duchess of the old régime; a fascinating, middle-aged Frenchwoman, not beautiful, but with much charm and great vivacity; a staff brigadier general, who brought the head of an American hospital unit; a New York society woman who had organized and paid all the expenses of her band of trained nurses; a British major, accom-

POP 9B

panied by his wife, who had managed to get permission to visit him in Paris for a few days; and an American general of division, whose outfit was in training quarters. He escorted a dazzling, brunet young woman, not more than twenty-two or three, a girl whose beauty was so striking that she immediately became the center of attention.

Marion wore a neat, gray dinner dress, becoming but not eye-compelling. The brunette was clad in a yellow-and-red-sheathed evening gown which was gorgeously becoming.

With much chatter and laughter, the party settled down and dinner commenced. During the introductions, Marion had failed to catch the name of the dark girl. She whispered a question to her escort, who whispered back:

"Lady Mary Yorkley."

CHAPTER XXVII.

WHEN RIVALS MEET.

WOMEN are supposed to have some instinct which warns them of the presence of enemies or rivals, and Marion had already experienced a dart of distaste for the lovely Englishwoman. Still, she was far from suspecting that the brilliant girl with a title to her name might have made Chris Graham's allegiance to herself falter.

She thought she disliked Lady Yorkley on general principles, or because her laugh, though musical, was too loud, because her eyes roamed too boldly, because she made no secret of her desire to appeal to all the men in the party, because she talked too much, because her remarks won too much applause. Mary had favored Marion with a glance of reluctant admiration, then dismissed her as unimportant.

At that moment things were darker in Paris than they had been since the great advance to the Marne by the enemy in 1914. Using with great success entirely new tactics, the foe had crashed through the Allied army for nearly thirty miles; the reserves had stopped them and there was no assurance that the check would be permanent.

So far, comparatively few American divisions had reached France; there was an undercurrent of opinion that the war would be over before our strength could make itself felt. The appointment of Foch as commander in chief was an act of desperation; never before had the British consented to serve under a foreign general. The emergency had forced the American commander in chief to offer his troops for replacement purposes; it was the dream of the staff to put a complete American army in the field and that dream seemed to have been shattered forever.

While regulations forbade the discussion of war conditions and plans, and mention of divisions by name and their locations was taboo, nevertheless this little circle had to talk, and the good wine loosened their tongues. Whatever they said would go no further, was the understanding, and there was nothing in the world of interest save the war.

"Lady Mary, you are just from Amiens," said the host. "Just what is the situation there? Will Amiens fall?"

"I doubt it," she replied. "The stupidity of the enemy high command is so great that they can be depended upon to throw away advantages."

"I'm hanged if I know why they didn't take Amiens!" said the British major. "From what I hear, there wasn't anybody except a brigadier named Carey with a few hundred odds and ends to stop them for a couple of days. A lot of wounded men and kitchen police and some American sappers and what stragglers he could collect. Held up the whole demmed army

for a couple of days. Some cheek, what?"

"Didn't know there were any troops of ours in that area!" exclaimed the American general. "Who were they?"

"Just some Johnnies that were working on the railroad. I understand they were armed with picks and shovels and a few rifles from your Spanish-American War. Heard about it in the intelligence. Put up a great fight."

"And the strangest thing," said Lady Mary, "was that they seem to have been commanded by a youngster from your officers' training school at Langres, who happened to be on leave and paid them a visit. I was on my way to Albert with important dispatches and got the general's permission to pass through. This cub put my motor cycle out of commission, while my back was turned, and forced me to go back to Amiens. I slapped Mr. Graham's face for him."

No one noticed Marion, who was as pale as death, and who grasped the edge of the table with both hands to keep from falling out of her chair. All eyes were on the English girl, as eyes always were when she was speaking.

"Lucky thing for you he did," commented the general. "Albert was in other hands at the time, wasn't it?"

"Lady Mary," said the Englishman, "you are about the most mysterious thing in this war. You go everywhere, see everything, don't seem to have any direction. What the deuce did you want in Albert and who would be cad enough to send a woman on such a mission?"

She laughed. "My dear man, there is a lot going on in our army that they don't confide to majors or even major generals."

Marion moistened her lips, then spoke for the first time. "Did you say the officer's name was Graham?" she managed to ask.

"Hello!" said Lady Mary. "Do you know him? Chris Graham. He used to be a sergeant in the Yankee engineers. He did me a service once, and I suppose I am responsible for his going up for a commission. I told him I could not be seen with enlisted men, and he is really very handsome."

"Oh!" ejaculated Marion. "Do you know if he is all right? Was he wounded?"

"I saw him on the street in Amiens two nights ago. He's all right."

"And did you slap his face again?" asked the major.

"I should have kissed him instead. He saved my life, of course, although I didn't appreciate it at the time. Tell me, general, when do you go to war?"

"Never, I'm afraid, unless I take a gun and go as a private. They've taken my division and split it into brigades. That's Foch's work."

"A jolly good thing, too!" asserted the major. "You can't expect to win the war with an army commanded by generals who have no experience."

"Your British generals have experience enough, and see what has happened," said the American general tartly. "You lay supinely in trenches, allow the enemy to mass troops at any point along your front he likes and crash through. You always yield the initiative to him and the result is disaster."

"Oh," said the Englishman, with a smile, "we're rotten, all right, but you'd be worse. Give us plenty of men, and our commanders will take the initiative. You can't win charges with half the troops the other fellow has got."

"I understand, that while you are demanding American soldiers to be sent three thousand miles to be butchered," said the senator heavily, "you are keeping a million troops in England, which is in no danger of invasion. Why not rush them over?"

"We have to protect England," retorted the major. "And I don't know where you get your figures, senator. I

don't know that there are a million troops in England."

"Gentlemen," said the host uneasily, "we are on forbidden subjects."

"Pooh!" said the general. "We are all friends here."

"Miss Stacy," asked Lady Mary, who sat on the other side of the colonel, "what is your interest in this Lieutenant Graham, if I am not impertinent?"

"Not a-tall," Marion returned. "He is my fiancé."

Her escort bent a look upon her which was almost comical. The other men immediately lost interest in her.

Lady Mary laughed shortly. "Congratulations," she said dryly. "I rather liked him myself, even if he did make me walk five miles by destroying my motor cycle."

"Seems to be a smart young fellow," commented the general. "I wish I had his luck. Two beautiful women interested in him; he gets leave of absence and steps into a prominent place in the most spectacular incident of the war. I'd like to see this Lieutenant Graham. I could use him."

"He bears a charmed life if he came out of that mess without a wound," said the major. "My congratulations, Miss Stacy. Considerable of a fiancé, you've got."

The colonel recovered his sang-froid. "Friends," he said, "let us drink to Lieutenant Graham, doubly fortunate!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WAR-TIME TALK.

WITH a creaking of chairs pushed back the party rose and lifted glasses. Marion blushed and smiled her thanks. Then they resumed their chairs and conversation.

The American girl sat like one in a dream. Her Chris! The mild, irresolute youth whom she was accustomed to order about, whose presence in France at this time was due to her initiative, not his own—— Could it be possible that it was to Chris that these great people—a senator, a general, a British officer, a colonel in our army—had drunk a toast?

For the first time in her life she was proud of Chris; she loved him, of course, but he had never been a person of whom she could be proud. At the thought that he had been so near death in Carey's forlorn hope she had paled, but now she knew he was safe and a hero.

And this vampish creature had her eyes on Chris, called him by his first name, spoke of him with admiration—now Marion knew why she had hated the woman as soon as she had laid eyes on her. This dark-haired beauty had designs on Chris, perhaps dazzled him by her loveliness and her title, but she wouldn't get him. Not with Marion Stacy in France and on the job! Feeling as she did, Marion threw a smile of singular sweetness upon Lady Mary, which was returned in kind. Meanwhile, the subject was changed.

General Bitherington was addressing Colonel Wolmouth.

"Now that you chaps have changed your name from quartermasters to service of supplies, does it make you function better?"

The colonel made a helpless gesture. "You have no idea of what we are up against, general. It would be hard enough to supply an army in our own country, but when everything has to come three thousand miles and be transported across a country where the language is different and conditions are chaotic, it becomes almost impossible."

"From what I hear, you aren't doing so well, taking care of a hundred thousand men. What will you do when you get a million, or two million?"

Lady Mary laughed incredulously. "You don't mean to say you expect to land Americans by the million?"

"We certainly do," declared the general. "We'll have a million troops by midsummer."

"But such a thing was never heard of!" she protested.

"Neither was the Panama Canal, airplanes, telephones or flivvers. You don't know the American people."

"Those I have met are charming," she smiled. "But if you can land a million troops by midsummer, it will win the war."

"If it doesn't, we'll bring over two millions or four millions or eight millions."

"But the submarines!" she objected.

"We'll take care of the submarines!"

"You can't feed them, and we haven't got the food for them," remarked the British officer.

"Our plans for the service of supplies," said the colonel, "will take care of as many troops as can be landed. We have the assistance of the greatest transportation men in America, in and out of the army, and we'll bring the food for our troops as well as *the* troops."

"Big talk!" said Lady Mary, with a smile.

"Is that so?" returned the colonel. "Now let me show you just how——"

"Ahem!" grunted the general.

The colonel flushed, then nodded. "Quite so," he agreed.

"Oh, why did you stop him?" lamented Lady Mary. "It was so interesting!"

"Against regulations to discuss army projects," said the general curtly.

"But we are all earnest Allies," said the Frenchwoman. "Women are much more interested in feeding than fighting. It's like housekeeping."

"But a million men, or two million!" said Mary. "You can't raise them, general. You forget your big population of foreigners."

The general laughed heartily. "My dear girl, there are representatives of every nation in our regular army. Don't you worry about the foreigners. They're the least of our troubles, hey, senator?"

"True," agreed the lawmaker.

"I suppose there are spies everywhere," observed the colonel, "although, in my opinion, the spy's usefulness is vastly overrated."

"In matters of national importance, they have been wrong," said the American staff officer, who had taken no part in the general talk up to this time, as he had been in earnest conversation with the American society woman. "We know to our cost that the enemy system of military information is admirable. I bet at this moment their general staff knows how many men are in our training camps at home and what they have for breakfast."

"But what good does that do them?"

"They're all over France," asserted the Frenchwoman. "They come in by airplanes and speak our language perfectly. They wear our uniforms and travel our roads and supply the enemy with accurate information of our movements. They have women agents, like that actress whom we had to execute a few weeks ago. There even may be a spy at this table."

There was general laughter at this, but then the lady nodded earnestly.

"I may be a spy, how do you know?" she asked. "Or Miss Stacy there, who is so blond. Or Lady Marie, who is dark."

"You have spy mania," the British officer assured her. "I have known Lady Mary's family for years. Miss Stacy is vouched for by an American congressional commission. And you, madame, have given two sons to France. As for this noble lady here, she is internationally renowned."

"Yes," agreed Mary, with a laugh, "I think we women are above suspicion, but I am not so sure about you men. General, I believe you to be a

spy because of your fondness for sausage."

"Guilty on all counts," he confessed. "One of my ancestors owned a dachshund, additional evidence."

"A spy would learn little around this table," asserted the colonel. "We have been talking more nonsense than anything else."

"Well," remarked the American hospital head, "I have to be up at five in the morning. I have enjoyed your dinner, colonel, and have been much amused by the conversation and I am sure it has done us all lots of good to get together like this. It has been a pleasure to meet these ladies. Now I must go."

THAT was the signal for the party to end. Everybody rose and good-bys were said. As they were leaving, Lady Mary approached Marion.

"I think you are charming," she said. "And I am sure you are just the woman for Chris Graham. I'd like to come to see you some day. Will you give me your address?"

"I should be delighted to see you," said Marion. "I am staying at a service house for American women on Rue Royat, near Etoile, No. 42."

"I shall not forget. I can't give you my address, because I have none. Usually it is a billet of the Women's Auxiliary Army Corp, but I am frequently called on for special service."

"So pleased to have met you! Shall we say 'Au revoir?'"

"By all means. And if I should encounter your lieutenant, shall I give him a message?"

"Please give him my address," replied Marion. "I hope to find him soon."

On the way home in a taxi, Marion cut short compliments by her escort to ask:

"Who is this Lady Mary Yorkley? Have you met her before?"

"Oh, yes," he said, with enthusiasm. "Several times. She is wonderful, isn't she?"

"Very beautiful, but I mean what do you know about her?"

"Well, I understand she comes of a noble English family, has high connections in the army and is seen about in Paris considerably."

"But if she is a member of the W. A. A. C., how can she be here enjoying herself?"

"I have an idea that her Waac service is more or less of a blind," he answered thoughtfully. "An English officer told me that he understood she was a useful member of the British secret service. You heard what she said about carrying dispatches to Albert when she encountered your young friend, your fiancé?"

"I don't like her," said Marion frankly. "I don't trust her."

"You are sure you aren't a trifle jealous?"

"Perhaps," Marion agreed, smiling, "but I didn't like her before she said a word. A woman's reason, I suppose."

"She has done splendid service for England," he told her. "It's a hard life for a well-brought-up girl. You know the Waacs do everything; they even dig ditches. When she shook hands with me, I noticed that her palms were as calloused as a soldier's."

"They were red," Marion remarked, "and chapped. I should think she would be ashamed to wear an evening dress."

"Honest toil. And to be personal, Miss Stacy, I was very sorry to learn you were engaged. I was beginning to hope—you know."

"It's a friendship of long standing," she said hurriedly. "I have been sort of a mother as well as fiancée to Chris."

"Well, here is your home, Miss Stacy. It has been a delightful evening."

Marion hastened the next day to the general staff, and after much inquiry and long delay eventually reached a uniformed clerk who was supposed to be able to tell her where she could find Chris upon the expiration of his leave. The young man consulted many papers before he found the information.

"Here it is," he said. "Cadet Christopher Graham, graduated from Langres Training School, assigned to service with —th French infantry at Chemin-des-Dames until further orders."

"And where is that regiment?"

"Probably in the front-line trenches."

"Can I get a letter to him?"

"Certainly."

He supplied her with the postal address of the regiment, whereupon the girl hurried to her office and typewrote a three-page letter, telling of her experience since leaving home, but refraining from any mention of Lady Mary Yorkley, although the dark girl's name was still present in her thoughts.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A CAVE MAN.

WHEN a man has performed heroic deeds in a spectacular way he rather likes some recognition, though he may publicly deny any such desire. Chris would have appreciated a testimonial to his share in holding Carey's line after he had emerged from the battle, but there wasn't any official authority to pin medals upon him or his fellow heroes.

Although the drive had been stopped, the attackers did not know it yet, and they were still smashing away at the lines. There was altogether too much confusion to pay attention at the time to Mother Carey's Chickens. The outfit broke up; its various ingredients returning to their regular jobs; and that was the end of that.

Chris, in a physical condition that would have made a peace-time physician put him in a hospital for a fortnight, found his leave drawing to a close and began to make his way toward Paris, where he expected to be assigned as an officer to some combat organization.

His search for personal effects and mail directed to the engineer regiment revealed that they had been left in Albert, now so full of invading troops that it bulged. Therefore, he never saw a score of letters from Marion, and started for Paris completely unaware that she was in the city trying to locate him.

He was destined not to reach Paris on this occasion. All traffic was forbidden to enter for the time being and at a junction point he encountered six fellow officers from the school, returning from the French front. They had been ordered to report directly to Langres and he presumed he should report with them. Accordingly he continued in their company while they regarded enviously his croix de guerre and listened in wonder to the story of how Carey stopped the big drive at Amiens.

Chris was young enough to enjoy the sensation he created, but his complacency was punctured upon arriving at the school, for he found that his commission had not yet arrived. Officially he was not an officer, although he had been wearing the uniform for weeks, and that uniform, by the way, as a result of Carey's trench was in a condition of complete dilapidation.

At the school, too, nothing was known of the details of the big drive. His part in the defense was not noticed. Officially he had never been there. He was ordered to take classes in the specialty school.

Feeling no right to his uniform, he went to the quartermaster and asked to be issued a noncom outfit. This request was refused. As a graduate of the school and successful candidate for a commission, he couldn't get supplies

from the quartermaster, as he was no longer an enlisted man.

The problem was solved by the colonel in command, who appointed him a lieutenant on the field, an appointment which enabled him to join the officers' mess and wear an officer's uniform. But by this time the boy had taken to his bed, sick, disgusted, disillusioned and suffering from the after effects of gas.

Conditions at the school were better now. The service of supplies had discovered it and was sending up plenty of stuff. The medical officers studied Chris' case. It was the first gas case in the school.

In a couple of weeks, he recovered his strength and got out of his bed. They excused him from drills for another week, but he was able to attend lectures by officers, some of whom had less actual war experience than himself.

A NONCOM approached him as he was leaving a classroom one day and saluted.

"Leftenant," he said, "you know this pastry shop in town kept by the old woman and her daughter?"

"Yes. I used to go there frequently."

"The old lady asked me if you were at the school and, if so, to tell you to drop in there the first chance you got."

"Really? I can go now. I don't have to attend drill. What do you suppose she wants?"

"Search me. She told us fellows one day how you gave a lieutenant the bum's rush when you was a sergeant, because he was drunk and busting up the place. She's for you strong and so is the young one."

Chris laughed. It seemed so long ago, the day he found the fledgling officer breaking the irreplaceable crockery. He would be glad to see the pretty Madame Govert, whose Raoul must have recovered from his wound and be in the trenches once more.

When he entered the pastry shop—there were few and miserable pastries on display nowadays—he was immediately recognized by the proprietress and the niece rushed to him with outstretched hands.

"Monsieur Graham, you are welcome!" she exclaimed. "For you I have a great surprise. Come with me."

Leading him through the swinging door of the pantry, she conducted him to the entrance to the kitchen, then gave him a slight push forward and retreated with an amused laugh.

Standing at the kitchen table busily mixing a mess of black bread in a huge pan, her hands buried above the wrists in the sticky-brown flour and water was a woman in a servant's smock. When the bread maker, hearing a noise, turned around, he looked into the merry black eyes of Lady Mary Yorkley.

"My hero!" said the girl mockingly. "My gallant friend who smashed my motor cycle! Are you glad to see me?"

"Mary!" exclaimed the boy.

With two strides he was close to her. His arms went round her. Unable, or unwilling to extricate her hands from the dough, she permitted him to lift her face and kiss her.

"Brute! Cave man!" she exclaimed, with a smile. "Don't you see that I can't protect myself?"

"I'm lucky!" he cried, smiling, and kissed her again.

"Wait a minute until I wash my hands, then we can talk," she said. "You look pale, Yankee. Have you been ill?"

"Down and out for a couple of weeks, but it is worth all the medicine in the world to see you!"

Mary had taken a pail of water and some soap and was removing the sticky dough from her hands. Then she leaned against the sink in the little kitchen and looked him over very carefully.

"When you get all your strength back I am sure you will make a splendid sweetheart—for some one," she observed. "Are you still a scholar in this funny school, and only that after winning the croix de guerre and fighting on the Somme?"

"They don't think anything of that up here," he told her. "I doubt if they've heard of the Somme affair. But what I can't understand is what you are doing here. This is not the British front and you are out of uniform."

"Even Waacs can get leave once in a while. I came to spend a few days with my dear friend, Lucille Govert. Perhaps I even thought I might see a certain impudent American."

"But how did you know I was back again?"

"I didn't. Madame Govert made inquiries and finally found a student who knew you."

"How long are you going to stay?" he asked delightedly. "This is Thursday; I have Saturday night off, Sunday afternoon and evening. Can you—shall we—wouldn't it be fun——"

"I think it possible," she agreed, understanding his meaning perfectly. "We'll have dinner and go to a picture theater and talk. You may tell me all about your funny school, what you study and why—all your experiences. I could dine with you to-night."

"I haven't permission," he said regretfully. "I must be at mess and spend the evening with my lessons."

"Schoolboy!" she taunted. "Tell me, do you study French or English tactics?"

"A mixture of both, with some American improvements."

"Are there English officers among your instructors?"

"Several."

"Do me a favor. Don't mention to anybody that I am here."

"You bet I won't!" he assured her. "I don't want to come after you and find three or four superior officers hanging about."

"I have little time and I want it all for you," she told him, in a voice which carried more meaning than her words. She swayed a little toward him as she spoke.

"Do you love me?" she whispered.

"You know I do."

"And you don't love anybody else?"

"Of course not!"

"There isn't a girl in America to whom you have said the same thing?"

"Well—er—— That is——"

"Never mind. You love me, now."

"Yes," he assured her. Who wouldn't? Her face was within two inches of his; her dark eyes were drowning him with their lustrousness; and it was such a long time since he had seen Marion, America was another world to which he probably would never return.

"You want to marry me—not now, after the war?"

"Y-es. Of course."

"Then we are engaged. Wait, you must give me a ring."

She ran to a drawer in the kitchen table, drew out of it a few inches of gold string, cut off enough to circle her finger, then made him tie it on.

The bargain was sealed with a kiss, then Chris, discovering he was going to be late for mess, hastened out of the room.

Mary looked after him with a smile which expressed tenderness and pity. Tears came into her eyes; she brushed them away with the back of her hand. Then she sighed, tossed her head, went to the table drawer once more and took out a little notebook, in which she wrote steadily for five minutes.

These events took place nearly three weeks after the dinner party in Paris at which Mary had encountered Marion Stacy and where she had learned that Chris Graham had a fiancée in France.

Why had she not informed Chris of this fact? Was it that she was in love with Chris and would give him no information which would send him to another woman, or was it that she secured pleasure from the theft of another woman's man? It was evident to her that Chris did not know of the American girl's presence in Paris. If he found it out, it would not be Mary's fault.

Chris, walking back to the barracks, was quivering with various emotions. That he had won Lady Mary gave him a thrill of ecstasy. Mingled with it was a pang of remorse. He had taken a fatal step; he was now engaged to two girls, both loyal and lovely, and no honorable man was ever guilty of such a thing.

Marion's face came before him; her blue eyes looked at him with reproach and pain. How could he explain such a thing to her? Did he wish to explain? Could he give up Marion, who for three years had been to him the most wonderful woman in the world?

It had been eight months since he left America. During that time Marion might have fallen in love with somebody else as he had done; that would solve the problem. Still, he didn't like the idea of Marion falling in love with some one else.

CHAPTER XXX.

TOO MANY FIANCEES.

SATURDAY night arrived and Lady Mary and Chris had dinner in a dusky corner of a little restaurant in Langres. It could not have been called a good dinner. Great as is the craft of French cooks, they must have some sort of material upon which to build. Good meat was scarce, fresh vegetables hard to get, sugar almost prohibitive in price, eggs and chickens rare. There was a nondescript soup, a ragout of what had probably been a pretty poor specimen of horse, a little cheese and black bread. But the wine was good and the conversation was absorbing. Young and healthy and loving, what mattered food. Anyway, it was an improvement upon the officers' mess at Langres, and probably upon what Madame Govert could offer her guest at the pastry shop, where pastry now was little except a memory.

It was an inn reserved for officers and several officers were dining there with young women. The French girls of the small towns whom Chris had seen had never appealed to him. Their faces were heavy, their figures heavier; their taste in costumes abominable; their smiles were attractive, however, and their laughter was musical. Had he not encountered Mary so early in his experience in France, he might have been more lenient in his judgment of the girls of the barrack towns, but Mary was so lovely she made all others seem insignificant.

He had seen her in the uniform of a Waac, and in a gorgeous evening gown. On this evening she was dressed exactly like the other girls in the café and, with her dark eyes, black hair and piquancy of expression, she looked more like a French girl than a British rose. He observed that the other men in the room looked at her more often than they did at their companions. Most likely they assumed that she was also a maid of Langres and were wondering where she had been until now and how Chris Graham happened to have discovered her.

Chris was doing most of the talking. Mary had a way of drawing a man out; she was intensely interested in his experiences and she made him tell her in detail of the life he had led in the training school and in the trenches. She was particularly interested in the fact that the American officers were being trained in open-field and offensive warfare, that they had discarded the Brit-

ish system of throwing hand grenades and were permitting the men to toss them as they would baseballs.

"You see, the English play cricket and we play baseball," he explained. "Their method of hurling the grenades came from cricket practice, while we can throw a missile farther and straighter than they can, because of our baseball experiences at home. We have astounded the British instructors by the accuracy with which we can land a hand grenade, if we are allowed to do it our way. Their system was impossible to us."

"I suppose that is so, but what makes you think you are going to fight in the open?"

"We are not going to stay in France forever. When we get enough men, we'll force the enemy out of the trenches and settle it by a war of maneuver."

"You are confident, you Americans! You may find those who are more skillful at maneuver than you are. Trench warfare was the most fortunate thing in the world for our generals, because they didn't know how to handle large bodies of men in the open field. The war would have been over long ago, if the Allies had not been shrewd enough to dig in."

"Well, that is the way our officers are being trained," returned Chris. "I suppose I shouldn't talk about it. Mary, you take a remarkable interest in military matters, for a girl."

She shrugged her shoulders. "Why not? For three years it has been my life. If I had been a man, I should have been a soldier. I joined the Waacs because I couldn't do any better."

"Tell me, why did you want to go to Albert? How did it happen that you were bound on a motor cycle for a town held by the enemy?"

"Can't you guess?" She smiled. "You've seen me in Paris; you've seen me roaming around independently; now you find me here pretending to be a French girl."

"You're in the intelligence!" he exclaimed. "That's it."

"You are becoming intelligent yourself. I happen to be well educated, alert, and willing to take chances for the cause, and I have many friends and relatives in high places. They have asked me to do important things for them and I have tried to do them. For more than a year I have had no duties in the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps, but I wear the uniform because it saves explanations."

"I understand a lot now. But you are risking your life, Mary! I can't permit it."

"Suppose I told you that I wouldn't permit you to risk yours?"

"That's different."

"Not at all. Modern war is a war of nations, not armies. There are no noncombatants. Men are the combat troops; women are the reserves; without us you could not fight; therefore, women are nearly as dangerous to the enemy as men. If you have no ammunition, you cannot fire your rifles and cannons. When the enemy destroys an ammunition factory, he saves the lives of his soldiers, and he must destroy such factories if he can, even though all the munition workers are women and children."

"You talk like the enemy!" he protested.

"I talk sense. My life is worth no more than yours, and if I lose it and help the cause, it's worth losing."

"My heavens, but you are a brave girl!" he declared, the respect in his eyes so great that her lids drooped modestly. "I certainly admire you, Mary."

"But isn't what I say sensible?"

"I suppose so, but I hate to admit it."

"The enemy bombs London and Paris, killing women and children.

Would not our air forces bomb their towns if they were able to do it and for the same reason?"

"In America, we don't understand these things," he told her. "We still think that women and children must be protected."

"If the war ever gets over there, you'll discover it is different. Talk of something pleasant. How long are you going to be in this school?"

"Only a few weeks longer, I hope."

"How many American troops are in France, do you know?"

"Oh, we must have three or four hundred thousand by this time," he replied carelessly. "Of course we aren't told—it's part of the game to keep our strength a secret—but I have heard of twelve or fourteen divisions, and we have about twenty-seven thousand men to a division."

"If it's a secret, you shouldn't tell me," she reproved.

"I suppose I shouldn't," he admitted, "but you are one of us. You have proved yourself."

"Thanks, Chris!" she smiled. "I see the others are leaving. Must you go, too?"

"I'm afraid so," he answered regretfully. "I'll have time to walk with you to Madame Govert's, and then I'll have to leg it as fast as I can."

"We never seem to have any time together," she lamented.

"To-morrow afternoon we can walk in the country," he proposed.

"I have from three o'clock until ten."

"It will be wonderful."

She nestled her little hand in his as they walked along the darkened streets to the pastry shop, and she kissed him tenderly as they said good night. That was the last he saw of Lady Mary for a long time. When he called for her the next afternoon, Madame Govert met him with a long face.

"She has departed," she said. "A telegram came this morning. She went down on the cogwheel railroad at ten o'clock. She left for you a little billet."

The note read:

> MY DEAR: You know what I told you last night? I have been summoned. Write your regiment, when you are assigned to it, to me care Hotel Corona, Paris. How I hate to go! MARY.

Deep as was his disappointment, he could not blame Mary, since she had admitted her connection with the intelligence department of the British army. Was she not under orders like any soldier? So he sighed to think of the perfect holiday they were to have had together, and returned dispiritedly to the barracks. There he learned news that should have made him happy, but which alarmed and dismayed him.

THE letter Marion had written, following the cablegram that announced her coming, after some six or seven weeks of wandering along the whole Allied front finally had reached the training school. The girl whom he supposed to be following her prosaic profession on the other side of the ocean must now be in Paris, within fifty miles of him. He would be sure to encounter her sooner or later. How could he face her.

In her letter, Marion was naturally unable to tell him just where she would be located in Paris. Chris, as a soldier, could not get leave to go to the capital to hunt her up. In all probability he had recently enjoyed the only leave that would be given him in France. Marion, however, was so efficient that she would soon discover where he was stationed and, unless she had lost her gift for doing what she wanted, would pounce upon him at the school almost any time now. Chris had a tremendous respect for her ability.

She had always made him feel like her little boy. It was nine months since he had set eyes upon her face or

experienced the magnetism of her smile. These pictures had faded and only his knowledge of her grim determination remained clear and distinct. He had loved her, yes—but he had always been afraid of her, and now he felt like a child caught by its mother in the closet with an opened pot of jam.

He resented Marion's coming to France. He knew why she had come. It was to protect him. The hero of the French trenches and the Carey forlorn hope, the wearer of the croix de guerre, had cut loose from apron strings. He didn't need protection. Lady Mary had captivated him because her attitude was the proper one for a weak woman to observe toward a strong man. She looked up to him, admired him, appealed to his masculine pride. Of course, Lady Mary was not weak. He had evidence of her dauntless courage, and he had tasted of her temper. Just the same, hers was the proper attitude.

Look at what the two girls were doing—the confident, dominating Marion, puttering around in a sinecure in Paris, writing half a dozen letters for some foolish commission and considering she was doing her bit, while Mary darted along the front, daring shell fire, penetrating the trenches, willing, even, to enter the enemy's lines!

What the devil was he going to do? If he told Marion that he didn't love her any more, that he loved somebody else, she would probably pat him on the head, tell him he didn't know his own mind, drag him to some chaplain and marry him out of hand, the way she had tried to do at home to keep him out of the army. She might even be pulling strings in Paris to get him assigned to some hospital contingent in Nice or Mentone or send him as a legation guard to Spain or Brazil.

The new Chris didn't want any more of Marion's soft jobs. He had the croix de guerre; he wanted the Victoria Cross and the distinguished-service medal of Congress. He wanted to collect medals. He had a taste of battle and he liked it; he wouldn't be shunted off on any sidetracks.

TO show just how he felt, Chris immediately made application to be assigned as a pioneer officer. In the specialty school, they followed elective courses and he had already been studying the system of pioneering, together with machine gun and grenadier work.

Of all the risky jobs in the combat divisions, the pioneer comes closest to being the most dangerous. They go in first; their habitat is No Man's Land; their attitude is usually horizontal, crawling in the mud, peering into enemy trenches, slipping out ahead of raiding parties to cut wire and remove obstructions preceding advances, to all intents and purposes being an aggregation with suicidal mania.

The daring features of the job had already fascinated Chris the way the idea of jumping off a high building fascinates light-headed people. Goaded by the knowledge that Marion was on his trail, Chris jumped off his high building. Let her follow him into No Man's Land.

He got his wish. A fortnight later he was graduated as a pioneer and informed that he would probably be assigned to a division of regulars, just arrived, who were going up to the front for training.

During this time he waited for letters from Mary and received none. He haunted the pastry shop, but Madame Govert had received no news from her friend. Neither did Marion put in an appearance, nor did any more letters from her trickle in.

It occurred to him to write to Marion the story of his faithlessness. It would be easier to write her than face her. Besides, by the time she got the

letter, he would be lying in a shell hole a few score of yards from the enemy's lines, where even she could not follow him. As he did not know her Paris address, he could not send the letter, but he wrote it—a note which he tore up immediately.

CHAPTER XXXI.

MARION MEETS A SOLDIER.

MAY in France is an exquisite time. Even the clouds of war had no effect upon the blue, smiling sky, the spring flowers, the dark-green of the grass and the trees. The air was sweet and fragrant. Even the grim, stone barracks became a pleasant place, and the mountain upon which Langres rested grew unbelievably beautiful.

On a day in early May, Chris Graham was sent away from the paradise which had been a hell in winter. He was a highly trained, exceptionally efficient officer, capable of leading a dare-devil band of pioneers, and it was about time the American army availed itself of his services. He was to go to Chaumont, in company with a score of other new officers, there to be assigned to his regiment, and then through Paris to the divisions to which he would be appointed.

The trip, despite railroad congestion and irritating delays, was one of many delights. This country untouched by war was smiling like a young girl at her first sweetheart. So drab and dull under gray skies and winter sleets and snows, now it was a vast garden, dotted here and there by sleek little villages nestling picturesquely amid green trees and shrubs. In time, the party of American officers came to Paris in midday, a Paris which in sunlight, despite its war barricades and evidences of bombing from the sky, displayed its loveliness as a merchant dresses his shop window.

Chris was uncomfortable as they emerged from the station. He knew his duty and he had to do it. Only in the event of his being immediately ordered out of the city could he fail to seek out Marion and tell her his story.

Chaumont had sent the assignments to headquarters in Paris. Chris was craven enough to hope that he would be assigned immediately; but at headquarters he was told to report in the morning, as nothing could be done that day. Thereupon he squared his shoulders and began making inquiries as to the office of the commission upon the workings of army prohibition.

From pillar to post he wandered before he found a clerk who knew something about the quarters assigned to various commissions.

"That one?" The clerk laughed. "We are overrun by commissions that got over here with a pull, gangs of four-flushers studying every darn thing you can think of—but that one! Oh, boy, how popular that commission is in this man's army! Believe me, if the secretary wasn't the prettiest thing that ever landed in France, we would have tipped the enemy off where the office is located. They are away down at the Place de la Bourse, as far away as we can get them. No. 14, I think it is."

Chris secured a taxi and, with more trepidation than he had experienced in facing the enemy from Carey's trench, he descended in front of No. 14. It was an ancient building, probably older than the oldest house standing in New England, and still occupied by various French business concerns. On the third floor, he found the prohibition commission and, pausing outside to collect his courage, he pushed in the door.

Directly facing him was a flat, ancient, mahogany desk, upon it a vase filled with beautiful roses, and behind the desk sat Marion Stacy, looking up with an expression of interest at her visitor. A book lying face downward betrayed what had been her occupation,

and the light from a big window illuminated her countenance.

Her beauty struck the young officer with a crash. Never had she looked so young and fresh and lovely, as now—her prim, black dress, the dust-specked sunlight making a halo about her yellow hair, her big, blue eyes shining like tropic lagoons in summer, her red lips half parted, showing the glittering snow of her teeth. She was so beautiful that she stunned him. That he could ever have forgotten how lovely she was!

And into the girl's eyes came astonished recognition, and an expression of sheer delight and wondering admiration.

"Chris!" she breathed. "Chris! Oh, Chris, can this possibly be you?"

When she had last seen him, he was pale and thin and shy, with a clerical stoop and glasses behind which timid, blue eyes peered nervously at a hostile world. She had loved him, half pitying, protectingly, maternally, and now she saw a stranger.

This Chris was as straight as an arrow, hard and brown and strong. His chest swelled under his jacket; his shoulders were broad and square; his chin jutted out; he had no glasses—long ago they had broken and been discarded—his eyes were steellike in their sternness; his hands were big and strong; his uniform was designed for such a man and such a man filled that uniform.

Nine months of hard labor in hell, months under nerve-shattering air bombs, weeks of exposure to heavy artillery, many days of dodging hand grenades and returning rifle fire, privations, suffering, contact with primitive forces—these things had taken the old Chris and melted him, alloyed him with bronze and iron, strengthened his blood with gunpowder, cast the molten mass into another mold and turned out a veteran soldier.

For a moment they gazed at each other without speech. Then he saw in Marion's eyes what every man always yearns to see, the look of submission, the acknowledgment of mastery, the worship that the cave woman gave to her lord.

Marion was out of her chair. They moved toward each other without consciousness of motion. Suddenly she was in his arms, her golden head on his shoulder, sobbing out the relief of finding him after months of search, of finding him alive and actually well and strong.

AS for Chris, he was trembling with emotion. He was joyous, thrilled, conscious of the tightness of her grip. She was his. He was not hers. Their attitude toward each other was reversed. He had seen it all in her eyes, as she approached him. He was exultant; he had completely forgotten that he had sought her out to tell her something. What was it? Oh, Lady Mary! Well, he couldn't tell her now; he didn't want to.

She led him to a chair, sat him down, climbed on his knee. Marion had never sat on his knee before; he never would have dreamed of taking a goddess on his knee; even in the sweet days when he was at camp at Eppington, and she came to the farmhouse to be near him.

"Somebody might come in," he protested feebly.

"Let them," declared Marion. "I don't care. Besides, nobody ever comes, not even the commission. Oh, Chris, tell me everything from the very beginning!"

"You got my letters?"

"Censored. You would get a commission. You would become a real soldier. Oh, my dear, I'm so proud of you! I heard all about you and how wonderful you were on the Somme."

"You flatter me!" he laughed.

"You and General Carey and the railroad boys. I know all about it."

"I'd like to know how! Evidently the general staff doesn't know about it, because they have never mentioned it to me. How did you hear it?"

"From a woman. A hateful woman, a bold, shameless woman. Chris, have you ever kissed her?"

From her expression, as she began to speak, he sensed that all was not well. When she finished, he was frightened. He didn't need to ask whom she meant.

"What woman?" he asked, to gain time. "What do you mean?"

"An Englishwoman. Lady Mary Yorkley, I think her name is."

"Oh, y-yes," he stammered. "Lady Mary Yorkley."

"Chris, you do know her! Did she make love to you?"

As a matter of fact, Lady Mary had, but Chris did not know it; he supposed he had made love to her. Therefore he could honestly answer:

"No, of course not."

Why on earth had these two girls met, when there were so many millions of people in France? What had possessed Lady Mary to intimate to Marion that she was especially friendly, and how had they discovered that he was a mutual acquaintance?

"When did you meet her?" he asked. "How did you meet her?"

"I went to a dinner party five or six weeks ago, soon after I arrived in Paris."

Chris did some mental figuring. That was before Lady Mary had come to Langres—she had met Marion, knew that she was a friend of Chris' and had not told him.

But Marion was telling about the dinner party, how they had been talking about the defeat on the Somme and how Lady Mary had described Carey's brigade and mentioned Chris as leading the railroad men.

"And I told them all that I was your fiancée," she finished, with a nod of satisfaction, "and then everybody toasted you, Chris—two generals, a United States senator, a colonel and a British major."

Chris reddened with pride, but he realized that Lady Mary must have known he was already engaged when she produced the piece of gold string and made him tie it upon her engagement finger. She had deliberately stolen him away from Marion. How she must love him! Since literature is full of descriptions of the pretty hesitation of a maiden between two lovers, her charming indecision, the impulses which sway her first one way then the other, is there any reason why odium should descend upon a man placed in a similar predicament?

A man who loves two women is a poor creature, a mutt, a butt; usually he is represented as a cad, yet why should a man, in such an important matter, be gifted with greater perspicacity than a woman? Is not love rather more woman's business than man's, since it is her whole existence? And why should she not be equipped with clearer judgment?

AT that moment Chris would have chosen Marion, but a few weeks ago he had wanted Mary. What kind of a changeable, weak creature was he, anyway? It was a good thing there was a war going on; it might settle his problem for him very definitely.

But Marion was relating the story of the dinner party, and then she went on about her experiences in Paris. She also expressed strong views about the conduct of the war and especially the behavior of the soldiers on leave in Paris.

"Paris is no place for you," he informed her. "You had no business coming; you are in danger while you stay here. Haven't you heard the air bombs nearly every night?"

"I'm glad I came," she declared. "I am afraid of those terrible bombs, but so is everybody else, including the soldiers. I quiver and shudder every time I hear one explode, but I won't leave. Supposing you were wounded and I was here? I could go to you in the hospital. I could be near you, Chris, darling."

He could not tell a girl who loved him as she did that he didn't want her any more. It wouldn't be true, anyway. And perhaps he would never see Lady Mary again. Perhaps Mary would not meet Marion; if she did, the fact that he was engaged to both of them would not come out. He had not given Marion a ring to sport, and Mary only had a piece of string, which she might wear around her neck but she certainly would not keep it on her finger.

So he took Marion out to lunch and wisely confined himself to his war experiences. She left the office vacant all the afternoon and they wandered in the gardens of the Tuilleries and up the Champs Elysées. That night they dined at a little café they discovered on the Avenue Grande Armée, and he saw her to her door at eleven o'clock.

CHRIS got his orders, at nine the next morning, to leave at once and join a division consisting of regular-army remnants and national guardsmen, mostly from the mountains of Tennessee, Kentucky and North Carolina.

His train left at ten. He had barely time to rush to the Place de la Bourse for a moment's visit with Marion. When he entered the office, to his indignation he found a regular-army colonel lolling in a chair, much at home. Chris drew himself to attention and saluted. The officer rose and returned the salute rather ungraciously. There was a second of painful silence, then Marion solved the situation.

"Colonel Wolmouth, this is my fiancé, Lieutenant Graham," she said. "I wonder if you will leave us for a few minutes? I know he is ordered to his regiment immediately."

The colonel's set face relaxed. "Oh, yes, under the circumstances, certainly," he mumbled. "I've heard of you, young man. You were with Carey. And you are very fortunate in having the friendship of Miss Stacy. I'll call again, Miss Stacy."

With a smile he took himself off.

"What the deuce is that big stiff doing around you?" Chris demanded jealously.

"The colonel is very charming, Chris, and has been very nice to me."

"Making love to you?"

"Not at all. He knows I am engaged."

"It's a wonder he didn't rank me out," he grumbled. "A lot of them would."

"Don't be silly, Chris; you know how I feel about you. If you have been as circumspect as I, you have done well. I am not at all convinced that you don't know this Yorkley woman better than you admit."

"Oh, come now, Marion! Don't let's quarrel; I only have a minute. I'm leaving at ten."

"What are your orders?" she asked.

"I'm going with an outfit into training in some quiet sector, so you won't have to worry about me for a month or two."

"I'll go to the station with you."

"But the commission! Your office!"

"Bother the commission and my office!" She was putting on her hat and a light coat as she spoke.

In five minutes they were whirling through the city on their way to the railroad station.

Half a dozen other Langres officers were bound to the same outfit. Chris introduced his fiancée with pride. They crowded around until train time. Then he was off to new adventures.

CHAPTER XXXII

SITTING PRETTY.

IN Porlaine, a tiny town in northeastern France, Chris discovered his regiment was quartered, European-fashion, on the inhabitants. This was his first experience of this sort of camp.

Whenever possible the French avoided camps and pitched tents by making use of the habitations of towns and villages, and both Americans and English were privileged to do the same. In the devastated area behind the British front, quartering was impossible, but this section of northeastern France was, as yet, untouched by war.

Chris found himself allotted a large, clean, airy, but bare room in a corner of a house facing the town square. Across the square was a barracklike building occupied by about thirty French soldiers, who constituted a demonstration platoon used in instruction of the green American regiment.

His first job was to lay out, with two French engineer officers, a battalion center of resistance, meaning a trench system for training purposes, although the village was fully sixty miles behind the battle line.

Returning in the early evening he was astonished to hear a brass band burst forth, and, as he reached the central square, he was astonished to see guard mount taking place. The last time Chris had heard a band was ten months before in Boulogne, and it was the first American formal guard mount he had ever seen. Everywhere else he had been in France, flags and music were taboo and this seemed most incongruous.

He was destined to find many unusual things in this outfit. It was an old regular regiment which had been filled up with recruits and fragments of national-guard outfits. Most of the officers were West Pointers, and the lieutenant colonel was a crusty old martinet, who held over from the ancient régime.

Apparently unaware of practical warfare, he bedeviled the young officers about details of parade-ground appearance, drill and such things; he was a button warrior; he could detect a speck of dust upon a putty a rod away.

However, the colonel of the regiment was of a different stripe. Finding that Chris had seen service both on the French and British fronts, he ordered him to prepare a series of lectures for regimental officers upon the two systems of trench warfare.

The lectures were given in the village schoolroom for an hour every afternoon. Chris had the embarrassment of talking to the old lieutenant colonel, as well as the captains and majors, while the colonel presided.

Chris made use of the school blackboard for sketches and, having carefully prepared his lectures, began the course. He was much surprised when a French brigadier general and his staff entered during his third lecture and seated themselves. In Chris' opinion, the French system was the more efficient; it saved lives and accomplished just as much as the British. He explained his reasons, whereupon the French general, who understood English, nodded his approval.

After the lecture, the French officer asked that the young officer be introduced and complimented him upon his talk.

If the officers of the regiment were alert and intelligent young West Pointers, many of the rank and file of the regiment were enough to fill Chris with despair. They were ignorant, illiterate, dopey and lazy. A queerer lot of enlisted men it would have been hard to find. To set down these mountaineers, some of whom had never seen an American city until they were taken into the army, in a village of France

was like bringing beings from Mars or Saturn to earth. Most of them could not comprehend how these French people were able to understand one another, since they could not understand them.

Nevertheless, they were surpassing marksmen. Many of them could hit the bull's-eye of a target without even bringing the rifle to the shoulder. They were uniformly good-natured. Most of them could not read or write.

Half a dozen men in each company wrote the letters home for the others and usually wrote exactly the same message, substituting the names of the individuals.

IN a week they moved up toward the line. Many hours in trains, more hours waiting, eventually they arrived in a village on enemy ground.

When the American troops entered Coblenz after the armistice, they flattered themselves that they were the first Americans on enemy soil, but they were wrong. Away up in the eastern corner of France, the French troops in 1914 crossed the frontier and occupied this little triangle of foreign soil, from which they were never ejected. The new division of Americans went into that quiet sector.

This little frontier village was inhabited by a frowsy set of folk who spoke French with a strong accent, when they spoke it at all. Having been in the hands of the French for years and having been excellently treated, there was no animosity, but they regarded the Americans in about the way the Eskimos would look at a giraffe.

Chris' billet was a comfortable little room with a four-poster bed, a big, black-walnut clothes closet, and a comfortable mattress. It was next to the kitchen, through which he had to pass to enter or exit.

The town was hopeless from a sanitary standpoint. The pioneer platoon had to clean up the place. After having put the village in such spick-and-span condition that the inhabitants were unhappy, the regiment suddenly got orders to move, and departed amid cheers, not too complimentary, from the hoarse throats of the towns' folk.

On the march, with heavily loaded knapsacks, the American uniform, buttoning tight under the neck, proved a pest of the worst description. Our soldiers solved the problem by unbuttoning the top buttons. "Old Fuss and Feathers," as they called the lieutenant colonel, came riding along the line, sternly rebuking the officers who permitted their men this comfort upon the long march, and compelled the unfortunate troops to fasten their jackets, whereupon their packs slowly strangled them.

Chris gave the order, but, as soon as the martinet had passed, winked at the top sergeant and was careful not to turn his head again. Of course the outfit resumed its original comfortable condition.

For some time they marched up an incline, then reached the top of a ridge, when even the most stolid soldier exclaimed at the view. Smiling below them lay a delectable green valley in the center of which was a lake which glistened like polished ebony. On nearly every side it was shadowed by high hills, which made its rippleless surface jet black. Its name was Lac Noir.

Beautiful woods came down to the edge of the lake on the farther side, and pretty chalets nestled among the trees. The song of birds filled the air; every now and then a trout leaped out of the water. The noise of the approaching troops caused a covey of pheasants to rise directly ahead of the column.

A French officer who awaited them told them where they were. They were about to occupy a fishing and hunting

preserve from which all peasantry were excluded until the French slipped over the border in 1914.

The regiment would be quartered on the farther side of the lake. Beyond the hills, on that side, was the French front line. There had been a tacit truce here for years. No one wished to injure the hunting preserve. The French were content to live in an earthly paradise.

To their delight the officers were quartered in the various chalets. Imagine their astonishment to find hot and cold running water, bathrooms and electric lights in these cottages, which were built to house the guests of the owner of the estate. On the entire line of the Allied armies, there were no quarters like these.

With what gusto the Yankees fished in the lake and shot the game birds that abounded, even after three years of war! How joyously they bathed in the cool waters! A silver waterfall dropped several hundred feet and gave power to a hydraulic generator, that was responsible for the electric lighting of the chalets which brought such poignant memories of home to the Yankees.

While certain companies occupied the trenches over the hills, the remainder of the regiment reveled in the beauty and the luxury of the preserve, but the eagerness of the Americans to get a little excitement stirred up the enemy, quiescent during the French occupation, and their artillery now began to speak.

The angle of fall of the projectile necessary to clear the ridge was a bit too much for the artillerists, however, and their shells invariably fell into the lake. As soon as the bombardment would cease, the dugouts alongside the lake where the men retired would give up their contents and with shouts of delight the soldiers would plunge into the lake, seizing in their bare hands dead or stunned fish sent to the surface by the explosions of the shells on the bottom. And the soldiers fed every day on these precious lake trout.

There were drawbacks to this paradise. Guided by the ex-game keepers and wardens, the enemy sent in raiding parties, and snipers sneaked in and perched in trees. They would have done serious damage had it not been for the uncanny marksmanship of the mountaineers in the regiment, who could pot a squirrel in a tree from afar and made short work of the snipers, who presumed they were dealing with ordinary troops.

FROM a French artillery officer, Chris heard an engaging tale which shed a light upon the French character.

On the highest point of the ridge back of the American officers' quarters, the French found a natural cave in the solid rocks. There they built a solid table and mounted a strong telescope which pivoted upon the center of a graduated circle. Chris looked through this instrument and was able to discern people in the streets of Colmar twenty miles away. The observer in charge showed him, through the telescope, some ruins on a prominent hill and told him their story.

These ruins had been a beautiful château owned by a Frenchman who, when the war came, reëntered the French army and became a captain of artillery. Very soon the site of this château was just inside the French line, in exactly the right place to offer the opposing artillery an excellent ranging mark and registration point.

Therefore it became necessary for the French to abolish it, a regrettable affair and a sad return for the patriotism of its owner. The general of artillery ordered the owner from another part of the line and gave him temporary command of a French battery.

The general and his staff rode to the

scene. The captain saluted, whereupon his commander said:

"My friend, *La Patrie* makes stern demands upon her sons. Your ancestral home has become a menace to her, has already been responsible for many lives of her sons. To you has been given the honor of removing this danger point. Will you consent?"

With tears streaming down his face, the captain thanked his general for the great privilege granted him. Then he coolly pointed his guns and blasted away the home he loved.

When the last wall had fallen and only a few fragments of the once beautiful residence remained, the general kissed him on both cheeks. The captain thanked his artillerymen for their excellent marksmanship and returned to his own command.

In this comparatively quiet post Chris came nearer to death than he had in the bombardment of the French lines where he won the croix de guerre.

Because of the prevalence of snipers and raiders, the Americans posted their sentries back to back, with instructions not to patrol but to listen intently for any of the foe's prowling gangs. As officer of the day, Chris went out one night on a stealthy round to be sure all sentries were on the job. When he approached a post where two mountaineers were stationed, he stopped near enough to be heard and lightly rapped his pistol holster four times, which was the prearranged officer-of-the-day signal. There was no answer. Repeating the signal, he got no reply. He took two steps, when a rifle barked and a bullet ripped his coat under his arm and seared his ribs.

Then the sentry called hoarsely: "Who goes there?"

Forgetting the rule of silence, Chris opened up with a line of railroad-engineer profanity, whereupon the unrepentant sentry retorted:

"I ain't takin' no chances, a-tall, a-tall, lootenant. And I think we're takin' chances now, a-talkin'."

Satisfied of the alertness of the sentry who fired first and then challenged, Chris continued his round, but his ribs were very sore. If the man who had fired at the sound of a step had aimed an inch to the right, he would have put his bullet into the heart of the young officer.

This same sentry came to Chris one day for some writing paper, stating that the chaplain was "all out." He said he wanted one sheet of paper only for his mother and each of his brothers and sisters.

"How many sheets?" asked Chris.

"Twenty-three."

"I thought you said just one for your brothers and sisters."

"Yes, suh. But there's twenty-three of us, all livin', an' the ole woman's livin', too."

While Chris vegetated in the game preserve, all Hades had broken loose in the west. The invaders had struck the French between Soissons and Rheims, just as they had crashed at the British at the Somme and broken through. Little news filtered up to Chris, but what came was exciting.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

DODGING SHELLS.

FROM Rheims to Soissons the French were in full retreat and a million invaders were driving them posthaste for the Marne. Nothing seemed likely to stop the advance. The Allies were demoralized; that Paris would fall was inevitable.

Every day what news dribbled in was bad. Enemy sentries shouted triumphant messages from their trenches. The reports that came from brigade headquarters were despondent. Chafing in this out-of-the-way corner, the American officers grew irritable and then frenzied.

"Why don't they send for us? Give us a chance at them. We'll stop them," was the plaint and the boast of the mess.

On the first of June, an American division went into the line at Château Thierry, and on the fourth another American division went into the line and held fast. Then the great drive stood still for a while, and the Allies girded their loins for the next test.

Suddenly action came again to Chris. A number of untried officers joined to his regiment with instructions to replace experienced officers who were needed in the defense of Paris. Half a dozen were chosen to go; among them was Lieutenant Chris Graham. The lucky men who had been selected to lose their lives, in all probability, were jubilant. The remaining officers were crestfallen. And then all were sent out immediately, except Chris, who was held to take out a wagon train at night.

The troops had marched into this position through the woods, but there was only one way out for the wagon train, over the road. They were old-fashioned army wagons, twelve in all, drawn by mules, driven by American mule skinners.

The road ran along the side of a ridge, was visible for seven miles in daylight from the hostile lines across the valley. The enemy was never more than three miles away during the whole distance and much nearer over the greater part of the seven miles.

At the end of this distance was an elbow turn, which took the road out of the enemy's sight. The only chance for the safety of the wagon train was for it to be around that turn by daylight.

CHRIS marshaled his dozen wagons at two in the morning and ran them lickety-split along the road. Never had he realized what a racket a rapidly moving wagon can make on a still night.

The enemy let the train get well started, then opened up. They knew just where the road was and it was by no means their first bag on that particular path. The French had lost several trains.

The men and animals took the first round in pretty good shape, with the enemy shells exploding about two hundred yards ahead. After a while the bombardment stopped, and they made half a mile in peace, then the uproar of the mules and wheels told the enemy that the outfit had not been destroyed, so they tried again. First they dropped shells ahead of the train, then behind. When the first shell would come close, Chris double-timed the outfit, then slowed them to a crawl, thus making it difficult for the artillerymen to gauge the speed at which the wagon train was traveling.

Once Chris guessed wrong. If the range had been a little greater the train would have been smeared, for the deflection was perfect. It happened, however, that these particular shells were short, falling off the road down on the hillside below.

Panic struck the drivers, however. They broke, jumped from their seats and crouched in the deep drainage ditch which paralleled the uphill side of the road.

Chris drove them back to their charges with curses, while the mules stamped and champed at their bits. One man was missing. Chris found that he had crawled into a box culvert under the road, and he crawled in after the fellow and dragged him out by the collar of his coat.

As it was evident that the artillery would soon make a clean hit, Chris ran to the head wagon to give orders to increase the distance between wagons, and found that driver gone. Fearing the team would bolt and scatter the load, and that the other teams would tear after them, he grasped the animals and turned them so that the team

blocked the road. He assumed that the following teams would be compelled to stop, if they found the road blocked.

All this happened in the confusion of artillery fire, and in the utter blackness of a moonless night.

Chris now had all his drivers back on the job, except the lead, and he guessed that he would find that man in the ditch. He ran along it, kicking out, and his foot struck the thigh of the hiding driver.

Finally the train moved on, but there had been a delay of nearly an hour and daylight caught it with a mile to go before it reached the elbow turn.

Now the train was in view of the artillerymen. There was no more need of groping for it in the dark. The drivers did not need to be told to beat their animals. The whole outfit rumbled and roared and swayed and bounced along at top speed, and the shells came plopping ahead and behind.

To be concluded in the next issue of THE POPULAR, *on the news stands August 7th.*

ABSOLUTE PROOF OF IDENTITY

EVEN though no one objects to having his fingerprints taken when he enlists in the army or navy, to be fingerprinted at any other time is associated, in the public mind, with disgrace. This is unfortunate, for no one who is not a crook need ever fear that such an absolute proof of identity will work to his harm.

In fact, there are cases when such an identification will be incontrovertible evidence of innocence of wrongdoing, and the time probably will come when every one will have their fingerprints on file in some government bureau. So far, of course, only lawbreakers can be compelled to leave these telltale prints with the authorities.

The State of New York now has a law which provides that no criminal can secure bail and freedom until he has been fingerprinted and his prints compared with the official records. Formerly a man arrested on suspicion could go free on bail, without the formality of having his prints taken. Often a man who was wanted by the police has been released, because there was no way of knowing that he was implicated in another crime.

It so happens that most habitual offenders have their own methods of work—some safe blowers using "soap" in certain ways; some knock off the safe combinations; and some thieves almost always enter houses by windows, others by jimmying doors, while some are "transom workers"—therefore an examination of the scene will narrow down the men under suspicion to a comparatively small number. Checking up the fingerprints that may be found becomes easy. And the next time the guilty man falls into the clutches of the law, even though it may be for such a minor matter as parking a car too near a fire plug, he can be held for the more serious offense, now that this new law has gone into effect.

A great advantage of universal fingerprinting is that it would eliminate from suspicion those who are actually innocent of crime, but who are implicated by purely circumstantial evidence. There would never be any doubt in the minds of the police as to who had left incriminating fingerprints; the correct man could be identified at once; and the guiltless, who sometimes lead officers of the law on a wild-goose chase, would not be pursued and subjected to great inconveniences.

No Good

By Aimée D. Linton

All that there is in courage.

FROM the moment they set their critical eyes upon him, the sixty-odd men of the lumber camp proclaimed him "no good." For he wasn't big enough to pull one end of a lance-tooth, crosscut saw in green timber for ten consecutive hours. He wasn't heavy enough to swing a six-pound ax all day on the trail, nor was he strong enough to handle the lines behind a team of leather-mouthed horses on a tote wagon. He looked about as negative as an ironstone plate —and far more breakable.

"A mangy rat, with brains about the size and heft of a peanut." "A rain-soaked turkey chick what had left the shell too soon." Thus wise they catalogued him.

The boss kicked him into the cook shack and yelled to the cook.

"Here's a bunch o' spare ribs for yuh to cook with!" and the men roared.

Next day, when they brought in one of the logrollers with half his larrigan and three toes missing, and the poor creature with the many nicknames promptly fainted, the men gave him a final name. They christened him "Lizzy," for only a woman would faint at a sight like that.

They knew they had named him appropriately when the cook—called the "Belly Cheat" behind his great, broad back—entered the bunk shack one night to broadcast the news that Lizzy was afraid of the dark.

Severally and collectively they expressed themselves in a manner becoming sixty-odd men who worked outdoors all winter in a temperature ranging from zero to mercury exit, and who individually could tip the beam from one hundred and sixty pounds to two hundred. There was no doubt in the minds of those sixty or more men that Lizzy was no good.

Lizzy confirmed their opinion when

he quit work at the camp and married a squaw.

Thus Lizzy severed the last tie which bound him to white men and his remaining microscopic claim to decency. For when a white man marries a squaw legally and "with benefit of clergy," he's done! White men refuse to talk about him. "No good" doesn't adequately express their opinion of such a man.

So Lizzy was soon forgotten. A thing of no value isn't worth remembering. Besides, spring was coming. When the ice went out, the tug would start down the river with the gang, and each man of that gang would carry out with him a comfortable wad of bills—if he hadn't gambled it away in the winter.

Who remembered Lizzy?

Lizzy was living with the Indians. Twenty miles north of the pine camp, a handful of Indians eked out a narrow existence with trap and rifle and fishing line. Lizzy stayed with them because he had "married into the tribe." But in a white man's world there was really nothing for Lizzy. There, even the fit sometimes get under aggressive, trampling feet.

IT was winter again. The resumption of work, the return of the sixty men to the pine camp, biting, blighting cold and storm. In the midst of which Lizzy came back.

Down, and ever down, dropped the mercury. It touched forty below on Saturday, the last day in dark December. Which means a few degrees below endurance for ordinary flesh and blood. The foreman suspended work; the men hugged the fire.

Lizzy closed the door of his small log shack carefully and noiselessly banked the snow up against the gaping crack at the bottom. With a last glance up at the rusty stovepipe to see if the smoke were issuing freely and of the right color, Lizzy faced south. Ahead of him were forty miles in the snow, on foot.

The most charitable and hopeful of humans, looking at Lizzy as he started out, would have pronounced against his fitness to give battle to over seventy degrees of frost. Forty miles through deep snow, with the biting cold congealing his thin blood, overworking his weak heart. How could he make it?

For the first few miles his footprints showed a fair buoyancy. His Mackinaw—the lumber camp had soaked him a month's wages for it the previous winter—was of fair quality. The heavy walking kept his weak heart stoking strength to his feeble frame. But after that——

After that he built many fires. His heart slowed down; the frost bit in. He reasoned it out that a little fire would really save time—thaw him out every few miles. For he had to get to the pine camp before dark. Three miles an hour in that deep snow was the best he could do. The pine camp before dark——

At the end of two hours his nose was frozen and his left foot was numb, his teeth chattered like roller skates on pavement. He built his first fire at the end of his sixth mile.

Fires—more fires, like black smudges on a wasted life. At first they were real fires, of dried sticks and bark. After ten miles they left traces of charred green sticks; finally, at the end of every mile, of handfuls of wet leaves, of stones even. But no sign of a fire. Dead, wet leaves, cold stones—black pictures of a failing mind, a losing battle, a body stone cold against stone. But in his brain was the spark of an undying purpose.

Twelve hours from the time he left his shack, he reached the pine camp which had once been his home.

When he had entered, he closed the door of the bunk shack and leaned back

against it. He had left—somewhere—some time—a long time ago—to get to some place. For a breath the dying spark in his brain flared up, as a lamp wick flares before a gust of wind.

What had he come for? His head wabbled from side to side; his eyes blinked feebly.

A heavy voice from the half-lighted room broke the silence.

"Well, I'll be damned if here ain't Lizzy back again!"

"Who?" There was bewilderment in the second voice, the voice of a man not of the previous winter's gang.

"Lizzy!" The first voice repeated the name derisively, but in a little lower tone. "Useto work here—married a squaw—a white no-good——"

Lizzy steadied himself on his crumpling legs. Squaw—yes, that was it. His squaw——

"Where's Macdonald?" Lizzy heard his own, husky voice from an infinite distance.

"Here!" a voice sang out.

Lizzy peered into the gloom before him, but the room was only a smoky blur of light. But he did not need to see; sound to the dying is ever stronger than sight. The voice of the man who had answered was not that of the man he wanted. He began slowly to crumple to the floor.

"My woman——" He jerked himself erect and tried again to speak.

"My—woman——" He pitched forward, face downward to the floor.

A half-smothered laugh came from those who did not comprehend that "finis" was almost written to the tragedy before them. The laugh ceased when the door was flung open from the outside and a man stepped in.

"Hello, doc!" "Doctor!" "Doctor Macdonald!" Several voices greeted the newcomer.

Doctor Macdonald almost fell over the fallen man at his feet. He bent down over the huddled form, peered closely into the face, then picked him up and carried him to the nearest bunk. Without taking off his heavy fur coat, the doctor made a swift examination of the still body. After which he straightened up and took off his fur cap.

"Dying!" he answered every one's question briefly. "Face and feet frozen—both arms to the elbows, heart on its last beat. Who——" He broke off suddenly and bent down again.

Lizzy's lips were moving. "My woman——" In the tense silence Lizzy's whisper could be plainly heard. "My woman—says—if—you don't—come quick—baby—she die!"

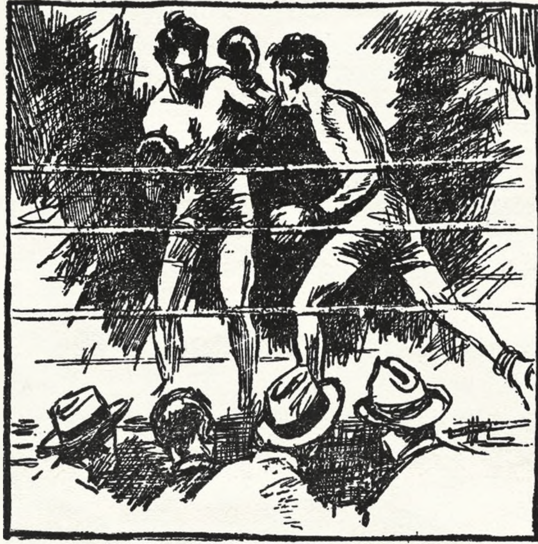
The spark went out; the weak heart beat its last.

Doctor Macdonald reached across the body for a blanket.

AWAY up in the North, in front of a cluster of abandoned lumber-camp shacks, stands a huge cedar slab. Sixty-odd men took regular turns at hewing that slab into shape. Deeply cut into that slab is this epitaph—the epitaph of sixty-odd men, five full juries—the finest they had to give:

HERE LIES
A REAL MAN.

"PUTTING chains on tires prevents automobile accidents in bad weather," remarked Litt Mallory, the Virginia philosopher, "but more automobile accidents in all weathers can be prevented by putting chains on the ankles of reckless drivers."



One Good Turn, Et Cetera

By Captain A. P. Corcoran

Down from his shelf of retirement, out of the deep shade of that part of oblivion kindly reserved for ex-prize fighters, stepped Matty Maher. And though the former champion's hair was gray, his punch was great. Yet it is hard to say what might have happened to Matty, had he not come to his great decision before that climactic eighth round.

THE preliminary bouts were over. The semifinalists had retired to make way for the stars, and the vast hall buzzed like a summer garden, suddenly invaded by a swarm of bees.

Maher and Hackett!

"Say, Bill, got that story?" boomed one sport writer to another who had boasted his ability to get the "low-down" on this night's great event.

The other only scowled.

"Six to four on the challenger!"

A florid-faced man, moving between the chairs, interrupted them in an undertone. Naturally, the odds were on Hackett, though as naturally the interest was centered in Maher.

Matty Maher, the retired undefeated champion, the most popular champion who had ever entered a ring, was returning inexplicably to battle this night. Two years before he had deserted it, at the age of thirty-six, leaving his followers sullen at his defection.

"There's no one for me to fight," he had defended himself against their charges, "and why should I stay to have all the good punched out of me?"

And, though the papers had pleaded and "Vox Populi" had vociferated, out he had stayed—until now, when as unaccountably as he had gone, he had come back.

Six livid arc lights poured their light on the canvas. From the dim upper regions of the hall came a rustle as when a sudden wind sweeps through dry autumn leaves. The serried ranks of the spectators were growing impa-

tient. Abruptly they broke into a wild cheer.

Merely the master of ceremonies had appeared, but he augured the advent of the antagonists.

Hackett pushed his way into the ring. He received a few handclaps. The present champion was not a popular fighter. His was the unenviable reputation of a bully not above showing a streak, the color of which many mentioned openly. He had never beaten any one worth a button, from the fan's point of view. His greatest achievement, the defeat of "Battling" McGhooley, a man who had seen the ring before Hackett had seen the sun, had taken him a stiff twenty rounds of fighting.

"The biggest thing about Hackett," had said one writer daringly, "is the purse he demands." He had added, apropos of this fight: "Hackett's nightly prayer at last has been answered: 'Lord, send me a has-been who can draw a crowd.' "

For Matty, the great old man, could only be classed in that category now. True, he had a boxing school and kept himself in trim, but—— The "but" was a big one. Nevertheless, the crowd was there.

AS Hackett stood on the resin, scowling, one could see why he had earned the name of "Pug." There was nothing of the Greek athlete about this fellow with the close-cropped, round head, the thick shoulders, the almost invisible neck. There was no length to these beefy arms, no litheness in the legs that supported his heavy torso. He stumped away on them now, as a deafening roar told him the hero of the evening had come in view.

Like thunder the cheering rolled over the house, echoing and reëchoing. Almost lathlike Matty looked, when compared to Hackett. He had a deep chest, long, smooth arms, long, slender legs. His was the grace of a dancing master. Only the gray in the hair crowning his intelligent head indicated his greater age. Light as a faun, he showed no sign of having indulged in enervating luxury during his leisure. A faintly wistful smile crossed his face, as he shook hands with himself now in appreciation of the prolonged roar of reception.

"Show us the real thing to-night, Matty," some one shouted to him from the ringside.

Abruptly his face clouded, and he glanced toward the press seats with a slightly furtive eagerness, as if he detected a wrong note in the prevalent harmony. For almost a year the faithful boxing writers had alternately cajoled and cursed him in an effort to draw him out of his den. They said he owed it to the public. They pointed out that he had a patriotic duty to perform.

"No, I've retired. That's that," he would say.

But "that" was twelve months ago, and here he was now. What did it mean? Why the hurry with which the arrangements for this match had been made? Those questions did not bother the fans, but the writers "wanted to know." As they looked at Matty now, sitting stern and set in his corner, one remarked:

"Old man doesn't seem to enjoy it as he used. If it was any one but Matty, I'd say there was something phony about this show."

This man might have doubted even Matty, if he had caught the wink flashed by Hackett now through his army of seconds. But all the writer saw was Maher rise hurriedly from his seat and then subside into it like a burst bladder.

The photographers came into the ring.

"Give us the old smile, Matty!"

It came mechanically, made to order,

and died quickly, as the old champion retired to his corner.

"Must get used to it," said Matty Maher to himself, as he sat waiting for the gong and eying the house with wistful sadness. "Must get used to the idea that I'm no better than the rest."

AND once again he rehearsed to himself, as if seeking an excuse for his conduct, the events of the awful evening that, he felt, had ruined his life.

He had been closing his school, when Hackett's backers came to him, offering him large sums to meet their man—and lie down.

"You've got nothing to lose," they urged. "You've retired, anyway, and we'll fix you so you won't have to worry for the rest of your life. They're hounding Hackett—that's the truth of the matter. He's got to put up a show some time."

"Nothing to lose!" That was the first remark that registered with Matty. "You call my reputation nothing?"

"But who'll know?"

Matty had simply stared a moment, then kicked the nearest man down the front steps. The others retired unaided by his boot, and Matty walked home in a fury. So furious was he that he failed to notice his son's silence during supper, and the young man's lack of appetite. Usually such things would have disquieted Matty, for wasn't Bob the apple of his eye, the core of his being? Nothing that suggested that Bob was not up to the mark escaped Matty.

"He's got the brains, and I've got the brawn," was the way in which Matty always excused, to his old pal, Paddy Doyle, his disappointment in Bob's lack of physical force.

Married at twenty, widowed at twenty-five, Matty had centered all his hopes in Bob. The kid would never make a fighter as had his father, so he had been put in a bank.

"He's a gentleman, Paddy," Matty would say. "Not just a pug, like you and me."

And then had come that letter from Griffith, the bank manager, the morning after Hackett's overtures, inviting Matty to visit him at his office. It had seemed incredible, the story Griffith told. Bob several thousands short in his accounts!

"But how could he spend so much, Mr. Griffith?" was all the boxer could say.

Griffith muttered something about youth and wild oats to be sown. Matty had not tied Bob to any apron strings. He had never questioned the kid about how he spent his leisure. He had to admit as much, adding a "but."

"But the money's gone, Maher!" insisted the manager. "If he was any one but your boy, I'd clap him in jail without any hesitation. As it is, I'll give him a month to replace it. A clean man like you—couldn't but give you a chance——"

Replace several thousand dollars! Matty's school was prosperous, as schools go, but—— He reeled into the street. There were people he could borrow from, but what reason could he give when asking for a loan? He would have to explain. He could say he had never been careful, which was true, but then neither had he ever been a spendthrift. He cast about for some way of settling matters, and sent for Hackett's men.

Without apology or explanation, Matty said he had decided to accept the spurned offer of the previous afternoon. They wasted no time in haggling. Why should they? They had accomplished what they desired.

"MATTY MAHER TO MEET THE CHAMPION!"

Every sporting page in the country was featuring the news next day. It was characteristic of Matty Maher that

he said no word to his son, until the news appeared. Then he handed Bob the paper across the breakfast table.

"I'll cover you in the bank," Matty said simply, and rose from the food he was unable to eat.

Then, meeting with his own stern eye the shamed one of his boy and catching a quiver of those lips inherited from a beloved wife, Matty had walked heavily from the room. Never, he thought, would he be able to discuss the disgrace that now divided him from his erring son.

Three weeks of nightmare followed, warding off inquisitive questions. Three weeks of trying to look old friends squarely in the face. Three weeks, trying to visualize a future in which he could not feel any man his intimate, not even that remote ally, the public, in which he had relied before, knowing he deserved confidence. He had had moments of rebellion, of course, in which he had almost cursed the weakling who had brought him to this pass.

"If it wasn't for her, I'd let him serve his time—serve him right!"

But Matty couldn't do it, not with Mary's face before him.

Like a doomed man seeing the sun, he looked over the house now.

"Honest Matty Maher!" he muttered, sarcastically to himself. "If they only knew!"

Well, anyway, he would never don a glove again. He would pay that tribute at least to his profession—the removal from its ranks of a traitor.

THE gong cut short his reflections about the future.

There was silence in the house, as the two tipped gloves. Matty sidestepped a bull rush, clipped Hackett behind the ear. As the champion floundered, the fans roared:

"Atta boy, Matty! Same old footwork!"

A straight left brought Hackett up in another rush, but he got in a couple of rights and lefts to the body. They sparred, Matty stern-faced, the champion slyly sneering. A right cross to the ear removed the grin, and they fell into a clinch.

"Soften them blows of yours, cully, or I'll finish you sooner," growled Hackett.

The answer was an uppercut. The round ended with the men in a clinch, and the crowd still cheering Matty.

"That's the stuff! Show the big stiff how to fight!"

But, back in his corner, the has-been was submitting gloomily to his seconds, smiling deprecatingly, when Paddy Doyle declared:

"Doing fine, Matty! You could lick him any day, like I told you. Knew my money was safe on you."

"You don't mean, Paddy——" Matty Maher's mouth dropped open, and he stared horror-stricken at his friend. "Now, listen, Paddy. He's young. Don't be foolish."

"I'm not."

Matty, who had straightened up, sat back. With a wave of his hand he dismissed his seconds, still officious about their duties. He wanted to think. Though they couldn't know, thinking was much more important to-night to the recently retired champion than being sponged and flapped with towels. But he had not the time for reflection, for the gong summoned him to the second round.

Mechanically he flicked a long left to the champion's face, and mechanically heard the roar from the house. Once it would have thrilled him, this recognition of his skill. To-night it made him physically ill. He had to lie down in the eighth. That was the arrangement, by which he was to save his boy from the feel of handcuffs about his wrists. At this juncture, Hackett chose to smile. It was a significant

smile, approving in its way, but Maher knew its meaning.

It meant that his antagonist was approving his maneuvers, and for the first time a hatred, personal and penetrating, was born in Matty's heart. Hitherto he had thought of Hackett only as a means to an end. Now he saw himself as an ally of the despised bluffer. Matty saw the disgust with which such association would fill his own backers, the gentlemen sitting there by the ringside.

A sickening right to the heart nearly knocked the breath from his body. He felt as if his blood had been suddenly frozen and could not flow. He was nauseated—a new sensation. Automatically he rolled his head to miss a murderous right to the jaw.

The gong sounded, and he staggered to his corner.

"Come on, old champ! Wake up! You ain't done yet!"

The fans were doing their best to cheer him up, and Doyle was saying:

"Box him, Matty. You let him get you easy that time. You're not going to make me walk home, are you? Not a cent in the world, if you don't knock him out!"

But Matty shook even Paddy Doyle off. He must think. It was imperative that he should get this thing clear in his head. His boy had defaulted, and must go to jail, unless his father lay down in this fight. But if he did lie down, there was Paddy Doyle losing his money, as the bank would lose its and other people's. Matty had never considered this aspect of the case before. He had never imagined people backing him—him, a has-been. How stupid of them! Didn't they know a man out of the ring for years, past his prime, hasn't much of a chance against a young champion, however yellow? Sporting—that's what they were being, he supposed. Gosh! how tired he was already.

He managed to weather the next three rounds by hanging on, but Hackett's blows and his own mental confusion were beginning to tell. If he hadn't to think like this, he might put up a better fight.

IN the sixth round, a left to the face and a right to the heart set Hackett with his back to the ropes. He tried hard to get out, but Matty, irritated by his problem, simply cuffed the present champion's ears as an angry mother might those of a naughty son.

"Out him, Matty! Out him." "Show the imitation champ his business." "Up, up, up, Matty!"

Advice was hurled at Matty from all sides. But he was dead tired, and the man in front of him was young and vigorous, and his own mind was a welter. What in time was it that he was trying to think out, anyway?

His son had stolen money, and Matty, to save him, was to trick other men out of theirs.

"Why, I'd be the robber then!" Suddenly the position was clear to Matty. "I'd be doing my best to rob even Paddy Doyle."

What a hell of a fix!

A flurry of gloves ended the round.

"That's better, Matt. Keep away from him and you'll get him. Knew you would."

Get Hackett? But if he did, Bob would go to jail. Lie down in the eighth—that was Matty's job. Hadn't he thought it all out, when his head was clear? His head wasn't clear now. It was buzzing. Blows to the body; he couldn't stand them at his age. If they backed him, they were idiots. Lie down in the eighth! 'Twould be easy enough, Lord knows.

Again Doyle's voice sounded at his ear. "Matty, the senator said for me to tell you he had put his shirt on you."

Tormenting him—that's what Doyle was. Matty blinked up at his backer

pitifully. Senator Davis! A good old pal! Why had Paddy mentioned him now?

Suddenly Matty sat up and looked out on the ringside seats. He saw people smiling at him approvingly. Some one put a hand up in a mock military salute. A lady fluttered a handkerchief. How kind they were! How loyal!

"Damned if I'll do it after all." Unconsciously Matty spoke aloud.

"What is it, Matty man?" Paddy bent to him, thinking the boxer was going dippy.

"Never mind now. Tell you later, mebbe. But I'm going to lick this hound, if I can." He nodded his head heavily.

"Course ye are!" said Doyle, puzzled but relieved.

"Leave me alone now," was the next remark.

WITH his decision, a great peace came to Matty. He must put the boy out of his mind. Maybe some other way would be found to save Bob. If not, he must take his medicine like a man. It was no help to Bob to have his father turn crook.

Alertly Matty rose at the sound of the gong, and shuffled to the center of the ring. Blocking a left lead, he sent a stiff right to the face that made Hackett snort. Stinging blows landed on his own face and ribs. He parried, blocked, countered. He couldn't see the figure in front of him clearly. A snarl issued at times from the thick, sneering lips.

"What's the big idea?" Matty heard a voice ask from a great distance.

He couldn't answer. His lips were numb. At the bell he staggered to his corner. Would he be able to get on his feet again? They threw water in his face, sponged his body, massaged his limbs. Paddy kept whispering encouragement and instructions, but the dulled brain refused to absorb either.

"I'm not going to sell the fight! Not going to sell the fight!" The phrase ran through Matty's head like the refrain of a song, comforting somehow.

"Which round is it next, Paddy?" He had completely lost count.

"Eighth, your lucky round."

So it was, by gum! Matty had never thought of that coincidence before. And he had been going to lie down in it, this round, the round in which he had won the championship from "Butch" Wilson. Stiff going that had been, too, he recalled, but he had managed to sling over a half overarm right, and Butch had gone down. There had been no talking of quitting then. Men, both of them were, playing a man's game. Well, Matty Maher was going to play it to-night.

They gave him a shot of brandy and pushed him to his feet. He was almost all in. That smile on his face looked silly to his seconds. What had the old fellow to smile about? Still, Hackett was not in much better trim. The pace had been fast, unsuited to his style, from the first.

There was a film before Matty's eyes as he reeled out for the eighth. He could sense a huge form before him, but he could distinguish no more than its outline. He must rely on his boxing instinct.

He sidestepped, banged home a swinging right to the back of a thick neck. Surprisingly, the looming form dropped to the floor. Matty blinked. There was a noise in his ears, vague and remote as the reverberation in a sea shell. The house, of course, was yelling itself hoarse.

The form again was coming toward Matty. He must steady those legs of his. He couldn't! The bulk was bearing him back to the ropes. He knew that, because he could feel the hemp cutting into his flesh. Thuds landed on his chest, his ribs. The film over his eyes was turning into a curtain

growing thicker every second. And his legs? There was only an aching helplessness where support should have been.

Automatically he rolled his head, avoiding blows. When would this senseless pummeling end? He felt a dim resentment at its continuance. This was a painful and useless performance. The shadow before him was growing bigger. It was over him, around him, suffocating him one moment, smiting him the next.

He moved his arms, which had turned into leaden weights. He was making motions with them, the sort of motions a blind or drunken man might make in shooing away a fly.

Then abruptly came a jolt in his right shoulder. The shadow vanished. Of course, it would come again. He waited. It didn't reappear. There was a deafening noise all about him—and silence. Again sounds came, soft, spaced and sure as the drip of water on a stone. What did they mean? They were vaguely familiar. They ceased, and some one was holding up his utterly useless right arm in the air.

THE house howled, shouted, screamed thunderously. Some one thumped Matty on the back. It was Paddy Doyle, then Senator Davis. Then the curtain closed before Matty's eyes. He awoke to find himself lying on a table, with people rubbing him. He kept his eyes closed for a time, giving his brain a chance to clear.

"Matty man!" Something hot and moist dropped on his body. "Matty, it was the fight of your life!"

He remembered.

"That you, Paddy? I want to talk to you—alone."

They cleared the room. Matty was limp, but he could recollect it all. He told Paddy the truth, slumping in a chair, staring down at the floor. He caught one gasp, but there was no other interruption to his narrative. He wondered what Doyle would say at the finish. There was a second's silence, and then two hot hands grasping his.

"Sure you couldn't be crooked, even when you tried!"

"But I meant to be!" Matty was intent on the full confession that clears the soul.

"Isn't that what I'm saying?"

"Och, man, you don't understand."

Paddy couldn't understand and take it like that, but what more could he, Matty, say to convince him of his intended perfidy?

There came a sharp knock at the door, and a voice calling:

"Must come in. Only for a minute."

It was Senator Davis. Doyle cautiously opened the door, and the big, burly man who had come bursting with congratulations stopped short at sight of the empty and extremely gloomy room before him.

"Say, what is this? A coroner's inquest? Thought I'd be busting in on a celebration."

Doyle looked awkward, but Matty raised a saddened face.

"Tell him, Paddy," he ordered.

"Ah-h, now!" objected Doyle.

"Tell him! I'm too tired to go over it all again."

So Doyle, with much head scratching and many hiatuses in his tale, repeated the story. It was a very different version from Maher's, and the boxer interposed often to emphasize a point. The senator acknowledged each interruption with a nod, his face severe. Doyle's eyes besought him several times for mercy, but the senator's gaze was on Maher's bowed head.

"Well!" he said at last, as the narrator paused, perspiring. "Well, stuck by his backers instead of his own blood, eh? Stuck by his backers! Say, Doyle, got any idea how much I made on this show to-night? Collected, too, by gosh! Here, you count the kale.

POP
UB

The old chap is only fit to hit the hay, eh, Matty? But you can give an old friend a hand?"

He put out both of his and took Matty's. The tears were streaming down the boxer's face.

"Don't know whether that's enough to save the kid," the senator continued. "Morning will be time enough to talk business. In a hurry now. Supper waiting for me."

He turned to leave the room, and changed his mind, halfway to the door.

"What do you think a man deserves who wouldn't trust his friends?" he asked. "A hiding, Matty! That's what you need! We'll see whether we can't find another fake champ to give it to you. Got an idea to-night for a bout that will bring all Broadway running."

He left with a hand wave, and the seconds, seeing the door opened, rushed in.

"Good night, boys," said Doyle significantly. "I'll see the new champ home. Tired he is."

"Happy dreams, Matty!"

He could only nod in reply.

"Give us a hand, Paddy," Matty said, some minutes later. "Must get home, and tell the kid the good news."

TOO MUCH WEIGHT

AT a well-known seaside resort on the Atlantic coast, there are seaplanes engaged in the business of taking visitors for a short jaunt in the air above the waves. During holidays, there is a line of thrill-seeking souls who are anxious to "see what it's like to ride in a plane."

Last summer, on a dull day, an enormously stout man appeared at the starting point of these jaunts. He frankly admitted being the "world's heavyweight," saying that he tipped the scales at the surprising total of five hundred and eighty-six pounds He wanted a thrill.

"Can you take me up?" he asked.

"Well, we carry three passengers ordinarily," replied the pilot, "but"—he paused and tried to calculate how much three people would weigh and if that was more than one very fat man—"Get in! We'll see."

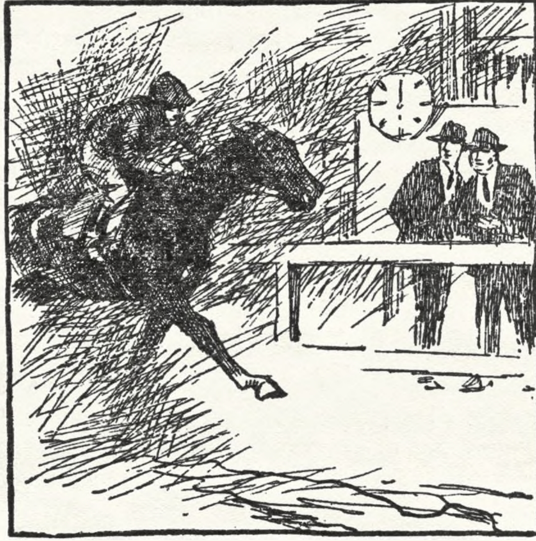
From nowhere and with astonishing swiftness, a large gallery had gathered. Some of the spectators were frankly unwilling to believe that the world's heavyweight could wedge himself into the machine, and there were cheers when this was actually accomplished. There was very little room left for the pilot, but he at last managed to squeeze in.

Off they started, the seaplane maneuvering for a favorable position in regard to the wind. With the engine wide open, the plane skimmed along the surface of the water for a quarter of a mile, but it didn't rise into the air. A second attempt was equally unsuccessful.

In explanation it was said that a light wind was blowing, and the machine was also forced against a strong tide and an unusually heavy ground swell.

The world's heavyweight was much disappointed. He had anticipated the thrill of a lifetime. After he was brought back to shore and was out of the machine, he snorted:

"And they call that a 'passenger' seaplane!"



Son of His Father

By John Miller Gregory

It was not the ordinary horse race that the youthful, red-headed Mike Ryan was pointing all his racing skill for. Not at all! There was a question of family honor to be decided, and—well there was something about the black horse Mike was riding that would have surprised, of all people, its owner.

IT was early morning, and the race track at New Orleans, still wet with the mist, lay like brown velvet in the cool whip of the air. Around its soft circle the stableboys were cantering slim shadows of thoroughbreds, which seemed like ghosts in the first gray streamers fluttering from the sky.

A tiny fellow with keen, sparkling eyes and bristly, red hair, attired in bright-scarlet sweater and gray-checked trousers, approached the two men lounging near the judges' stand.

One of them was a huge, ponderous person, with hanging red jowls and small, watery eyes like an overfed porker. He wheezed asthmatically through a flat, red nose, and squinted his eyes expectantly down the track. Rushing upon them was a big, heavy-shouldered black horse, a stableboy on his back, ears flattened, burly quarters working with pistonlike regularity, small feet hammering the wet dust.

The man's companion, a tall, lanky individual in a gray cap and khaki coat, snapped shut a time watch in his hand, and pulled a long, drooping mustache meditatively.

"Quarter in twenty-seven," he mused. "Runs like cold sirup."

The little fellow in the sweater pushed his way forward, his eyes alight, his small, square chin aggressive. "That horse is game and strong, sir. Maybe the boy can't work him. Let me take him for a half, sir?"

The tall man let his eyes rest on the eager young face, and on down to the broad shoulders, the thin, brown, girllike hands, now gripped and showing strength, and chuckled.

"You want to take him for a half, do you? Why, son, you don't look no bigger'n a quart of oats."

"That's all right, sir. I'll ride him for a half."

The tall man winked good-naturedly at his fat companion, and again addressed the boy. "Why not a mile, son?"

"He ain't no good for the long distance, sir. His shoulders are too big, and his feet too small. He's a quarter horse."

"You talk like you know something about horses."

"Yes, sir, a little."

"Who taught you?"

"My father, sir. He was a jockey."

The two men stepped aside and conversed in low tones, while the little fellow's eyes looked them over speculatively, and slowly grew hard at the thoughts which filled his head.

"So this fat man is Hawkins," he said to himself, "the man who ruined my dad."

Into his mind flashed a picture of his little home near the Belmont track long ago, when his father, the famous Larry Ryan, came back in the middle of the season, broken and mystified at an unfair blow of fate. The boy did not know at that time why his father had suddenly stopped riding. But he recalled the hurt look that grew and stayed in Larry's eyes. It was very odd to the little boy.

As time went on, his father appeared to forget his trouble. At least he talked it over no longer with Mike's mother. He secured a string of horses to train, and, in time, took young Mike to the track, where the boy learned all that his father knew about riding. In addition he was taught the best traditions of a profession which the clean-hearted young Irishman had always regarded as an upright and honest one.

But one night, rummaging in the attic, Mike found a batch of old newspaper clippings, and suddenly the whole story was laid before him. He read of a noisome race-track scandal which suddenly burst upon the sporting world; of the charge made against his father by Hawkins, an owner, for whom Larry had brought in many a winner; and the horrifying fact that Larry Ryan, his father and America's premier rider, had been set down for life and driven from the tracks disgraced.

Mike's faithful young heart flamed at the injustice against a man whom he knew to be brave, truthful and square, and whom he had seen grow old before his time at the realization of his disgrace, the knowledge of which he had labored so hard to keep from his son. In the black dimness of the attic, to the light of his flickering candle, the boy swore he would find Hawkins and in some way clear his father's name. And he clinched it with the strongest vow he knew. "So help me, God!"

TWO days later he came to New Orleans, and the morning after his arrival he stood in the cold mist of a graying day, waiting expectantly for Hawkins' permission to take the big black horse around the track.

The boy on the horse had brought him up and, turning, cantered back to the men at the stand. Mike reached toward the horse's muzzle, but the beast stepped back nervously, snapped at the boy's hand and reared in the air. Mike jumped for the bridle, and tried to quiet him with soothing words.

Hawkins wheezed a question. "Can you hold him, boy?"

"Yes, sir, we'll get along all right."

The fat man turned to his trainer and nodded. The boy on the horse slid to the ground and, without waiting for further permission, Mike vaulted to the saddle. Then, at a nod from the tall man, he knotted the reins, whirled the horse and went swiftly around the track to the half-mile post.

It was light enough now for him to see the men at the judges' stand, as he peered through the lifting mist, struggling with his horse to keep him quiet and waiting for the signal to start. It came suddenly, a whisk of a white handkerchief through the air.

The boy's knees pressed against the horse's withers automatically, and the big black leaped forward. Mike saw at once that the animal was a fighter. The pounding hoofs cut into the track with driving force, around the three-quarter turn and into the stretch. Then suddenly the horse lagged a little, and the next instant Mike's whip rattled against his ribs. They tore past the men in a shower of wet dirt.

WITH ease the boy pulled up and cantered back to the men at the finish line. Harry Dunn, the trainer, still had his watch in his hand. He was smiling.

"About fifty-one, wasn't it, sir?" asked the boy.

"And two thirds," the man replied. He turned to Hawkins. "I reckon he's all right, Mr. Hawkins; just about the horse you want, and a dead ringer for Black Thorn."

"Shut up!" Hawkins snorted, and turned angrily to the boy. "Got a license, kid?"

"No, sir, not yet."

"I'll attend to that for you. What's your name?"

For a moment Mike hesitated. He had come to ride for Hawkins, believing that sooner or later the man would ask him to do something crooked, and his boyish mind believed that at that time he would be able to show the judges what kind of a man Hawkins was. But suddenly he wondered if Hawkins would employ Larry Ryan's son. As the thought put a pressure on his tongue, the last words of his father, standing at the train to tell him good-by, came back to him.

"Don't ever be ashamed of your dad, no matter what you hear. I always played square."

The boy's face came up suddenly; his head went back proudly. "My name's Michael Ryan, sir. They call me 'Mike.'"

"Mike Ryan!" The big man heaved forward, and thrust a wet, wondering face toward the boy's. "You don't happen to be Larry Ryan's brother, do you?"

"No, sir, I'm his son."

The burly man let out a snort of derision, which in one not so huge might have been taken for a laugh. "Listen to that, Harry! He's Larry Ryan's son. Remember Larry Ryan? Rode for me ten years and got ruled off for life." His wet eyes came back to Mike's face. "Did you know that, boy?"

Mike's eyes snapped. "I'm proud to be his son," he said simply. "He taught me all I know about horses."

"Larry was a mighty good jockey in his day," put in Dunn. "Too bad he went wrong."

The boy started to protest, but thought better of it. He had learned from his father to keep his thoughts to himself. He waited anxiously.

"If the kid's got one half what his old man had, he'll do," Dunn went on. "Lord knows we need a good boy."

"All right," wheezed the fat man, after a minute's reflection. His eyes rested on Mike's upturned face, as his dull mind wrestled with a thought. Finally the words for its expression came to him. "You might as well understand right now, boy, when you ride for me, you ride under orders. Do you get that?"

Mike's face was inscrutable. "Yes, sir, I understand."

Slowly the big man's eyes left him. He turned and started heavily toward the stable. Mike trudged along behind, his heart pounding with joy.

"Yes, sir, I ride to orders," he repeated to himself, then added, with a strange uplifting of spirit: "My dad's orders."

IT did not take Mike long to find out that Hawkins was as twisted as an auger. But his work was always sinister, with a scapegoat constantly at hand to put the blame on, when it became necessary, just as he had put it on Larry. Evidently the judges had given up trying to land him. They must have thought that some day Hawkins' luck would turn. In the meantime, the fat man went on his devious ways unmolested.

Mike wrote his father that he was riding for Hawkins. Larry's reply was brief and to the point:

Keep your chin up and your heart clean.

The boy grinned when he read it. It was like his father to say that.

But a few weeks with Hawkins made Mike hate his huge employer with all the intensity of his boyish heart. He hated the owner's personality—his piggish eyes always water-sogged, his wheezing, asthmatic efforts to breathe, the ever-present, half-chewed cigar, which the big man was constantly gnawing in the corner of his mouth. Most of all, he hated Hawkins because he was cruel to his horses and vile in his expressions to his employees. All of these things, added to the fact that this man had ruined his father and put into his eyes indelibly that sad and whipped expression, made the boy revengeful to a depth far beyond his age. Watchful and silent, he waited for his chance.

One day Black Thorn was entered in a race, and Mike was called on to ride him. But when the boy approached the horse in the paddock, instead of the prancing, spiteful, vicious beast he had ridden on his first morning at the track, the horse put his muzzle down on Mike's shoulder. The little jockey ran his hand up the strong black neck.

When the stableboys took off the blanket, Mike examined the horse carefully. He was equally as large and black as the other horse he had ridden, but this animal's eyes were soft and gentle, instead of the red and angry eyes of the first. Besides, the race was for seven furlongs, and the boy knew that the horse he had ridden could not hold up that distance. That would be the test, Mike thought.

However, he said nothing, and was away with a rush at the start. They passed the quarter like a flying arrow, and on around the course. Mike finished two lengths ahead of the nearest contender.

Flushed with victory, he turned over to a small, white-haired old colored man, who grinned confidentially at him as he took the reins.

"What ails you, boy?" The man's mouth parted on a row of white teeth, as brilliant as a splotch of white paint on a black fence. "Whyn't yo' hol' back dis yere hoss? Yo' let him breeze in lak dat, en fus' thing yo' know, Marse Hawkins gwine turn yo' upperside down right offen dis yere track."

Mike's face went white with anger. "I don't ride races like that," he said pointedly.

"Lord's mussy, white boy! Lemme look at yo'!" He grasped the jockey by the arm and turned his face to the light. Then into his eyes came an expression of joy. "Ef yo' ain't Marse Larry Ryan's son, I'se sho' a los' ball," he exclaimed joyfully.

Mike grinned with delight. "Did you know my father?"

The old colored man looked around suspiciously. "White boy, I ain't sayin' ef I did er ef I didn't. All I'm sayin' is I'm mighty pleased to meet yo'. Yo' sho' looks lak Marse Larry, en talks lak him, too—sorter proud en upstandin'."

Mike laughed at the old man's praise.

"Look here, what do you know about this horse?"

"Me? I don't know nuffin' 'bout nuffin'." The old man rubbed the horse's legs carefully for a few moments, then added: "W'at yo' mean by dat?"

Mike glanced at the judges' stand, where the time for the race was posted. It had been run in one twenty-eight. "Do you see that time?" he asked. "Well, the other day I ran this horse half a mile in fifty-one and two thirds. He did the quarter in about twenty-four, and I thought he'd die before I got him home. Now, to-day, he runs away for seven furlongs."

The black man walled his eyes at Mike, and over the rolling white of one of them descended a black and impenetrable mask of dark skin. "Boy, yo' ax me 'bout dis yere hoss, en I ain't sayin' nuffin', but 'cepen dis yere 'ticular hoss ain't nebber passed dat air qua'tah pos' in more'n twenty-three."

"You don't know what you're talking about!" exclaimed Mike positively. "I tell you I rode him, and I ought to know."

"Mebbe yo' did, white boy, en mebbe yo' didn't. I ain't 'sputin' yo'. All I'm tellin' yo' is dat dis yere hoss eats up dat air qua'tah in twenty-three or less. Heah me? I'm sayin' *less.* Mebbe I could tell yo' mo'. But I ain't. Dese is mighty pinchin' times, en dis yere colored boy likes his meat en bread offen' en plenty."

Once more his wall eye went shut. Then he turned the blanketed horse and led him out of the entrance toward the stable. Mike followed, his face set in thought.

The little jockey had heard, of course, of owners racing "ringers," which means, in race parlance, substituting a good horse with the same markings for a bad one. But this was always done for the purpose of winning races, by sending in the poor horse to lose, then substituting the good one when an attractive price was offered in the betting ring. Mike was practically assured that the two horses he had ridden were different, but if this were true, he could not understand why Hawkins was going out to win races with his best horse. It was a problem in equine craft much too deep for his novice mind.

At the stable Mike tried to find the surly brute he had ridden the first day. But his search was unrewarded. There was no horse in the entire string that had markings any way similar to the horse which had just won his race so easily.

A FEW days later Black Thorn raced again, this time for a mile and a sixteenth. And once more Mike was nonplussed. For the horse he mounted in the paddock was the vicious, biting, rearing black he had ridden on his first day at the track. He went out from the bunch when the barrier was sprung like a wild beast, leading the other four horses in the race in a desperate rush. But at the half, Mike felt him quitting. The boy went to his whip, and forced him in a winner by the breadth of his red and indignant nostrils.

Immensely pleased with himself, Mike went to the stable, but there he found a raging, swearing owner, his face almost apoplectic, his cigar chewed to a nasty pulp. Harry Dunn, the trainer, was getting the full force of Hawkins' anger. He came back at him, when the fat man paused for breath.

"Why don't you say what you want done? I didn't think the horse would last. If the kid took him over, what're you blaming me for?"

Hawkins met the protest with a bitter oath. "I sent you a message by Sam telling you exactly what I wanted done," he exploded, "and if you can't follow my orders, you can get out."

"I did what Sam told me you wanted," said Dunn.

Then the vials of Hawkins' wrath descended, with all the vileness of a bitter and savage nature, on the little old colored stableboy. Sam took it silently, his black eyes smoldering, until the fire of the big man's rage was quenched.

THAT night, Mike sat on the porch of his boarding house, breathing in the warm New Orleans night air and trying to solve the mystery of the two black horses. But his reveries were interrupted by a disturbance in the gravel walk, and the gradual approach of two shuffling and hesitating feet. The jockey got up from his rocker and went down the steps as the old black stableboy suddenly materialized in the waning moonlight.

"Howdy, Marse 'White Boy.' Is yo' all by yo'se'f?"

Mike greeted him, and said he was.

"Then ef yo' don't min', I'll set a while," went on the old man, letting himself slowly down on the steps. "I takes me a long walk to git heah," he went on, "en ma dogs is barkin' liken ef dey's 'bout to fall offen me." Gravely he reached into his back pocket and took out a bandanna handkerchief, with which he proceeded to wipe the shine from his black face. When he finished, he went on.

"Reckon yo' heah'd th' ol' man lambas'in' me, didn't yo'?" he asked. "I don't 'speck hit'll be gwine so mighty fur outen de fambly ef I tells yo' 'bout hit."

Then for an hour he talked in low tones to the eager young jockey, who hung breathlessly on his words. And as the old man talked, to his understanding mind, in a blast of white light, came a full realization of the depths of perfidy to which Hawkins had fallen, and a keen appreciation of his father's injunction to "keep your chin up and your heart clean."

When the old man got up to go, the little jockey reached for his hand in the darkness, and gave it a squeeze which showed his joy at the news brought to him. Then the old black man went down the walk and the boy heard the gate clash behind him.

Old Sam had told Mike about the ringer which Hawkins was keeping at a farm not far away. He was holding the ringer for "get-away" week, the vicious, rearing, biting horse which Mike had ridden the first time. It was Hawkins' idea to enter the real Black Thorn from then on to win. Then, in the final race, when Black Thorn would go in as the favorite, to substitute the ringer, who would die at the half and allow an outsider, with Hawkins' money backing him heavily, to come home the winner.

THE race came on Saturday, the end of the meet, and Black Thorn was the heavily played favorite. Six other horses were in the race, with Lady Mable, a real contender. But the surprise of the betting ring was Ironclad, a heavily built, powerful horse who had failed repeatedly, but who, when he went to the post, had been bet down from heavy odds to almost even money.

With his pockets filled with tickets calling for thousands, Hawkins waddled to the rail and rested his huge bulk upon it, his heavy mind cleared for action, his crooked soul waiting anxiously to gather his spoils. For it was Hawkins' money that the commissioners had scattered around the ring.

In the paddock, where the jockeys were waiting for the call to the post, old Sam, the stableboy, came up to Mike.

"Marse White Boy, yo' day's done got heah. Now's de time to do yo' stuff."

"You mean Hawkins doesn't want Black Thorn to win to-day?" asked Mike anxiously.

"No, sah. In de fust place, yo' ain't supposed to ride Black Thorn. En in de secon', Marse Hawkins done laid eve'ything he's got on Ironclad. He don't want Black Thorn to win no more'n he wants me to ride Ironclad. Marse White Boy, ef us ain't actin' to-day, us is gwine to be total losses."

Mike's face was serious. "Are you sure, Sam? We can't afford to make any mistake."

"Marse White Boy, I'se jest as positive ez lasses is good eatin', en nuthin' can be no sho'uh dan dat. Hawkins gwine put yo' in de race on dat villyun, 'kase he don't want no charge of pullin' his hoss made agin' him. En he knows dat hoss is gwine lie right in de track en go to sleep ez soon ez he fin's he's got to go a mile er mo'."

Mike's gray eyes were hard. "All right, Sam, let's go!"

One of Hawkins' stableboys came up with a blanketed horse, prancing and rearing, while the boy cursed it feelingly. Harry Dunn followed, and beckoned to Mike.

"Now, kid, you've got to be careful to-day. You take this horse right out at the start and keep him there, understand?"

Mike's face was noncommittal. "It's a long way to go, Mr. Dunn."

"Don't you worry about that. You do what I tell you, and if I catch you holding him back, I'll whale the life out of you."

"Yes, sir," replied Mike.

It was almost time for the bugle, when a little negro boy came up panting to Dunn. "Marse Dunn, Marse Hawkins wants to see yo' at de jedges' stand. He say fo' yo' to hurry."

Dunn looked annoyed as he turned to Mike. "Reckon I've got to go, kid. But you understand what to do. Now go do it." He walked quickly away, and was lost in the shuffling crowd.

But as his tall form mingled with the milling mass, Sam motioned to a boy standing near a stall, holding a quiet horse covered by a blanket. The boy led the horse over, and Sam whipped off the covering. Mike noticed that the black, silky skin was moist from a recent work-out. The old negro put the bridle of the other horse into the boy's hand.

"Now git outen heah so fas' yo' shoes'll burn," he admonished the boy, then turned with a widespread grin to Mike. "Marse White Boy, heah's yo' hoss. Now go do yo' stuff, en when yo' comes home, dey'll be somebody heah yo'll want to see."

The bugles sounded for the starting post, and the boy vaulted from the negro's hand to the horse's back. Then he took up his place in the line of horses, and filed slowly into the track. But the horse he rode went easily, his slick black body glistening in the sun, his ears back listening to the words the boy whispered.

"It's for dad, old pal! It's up to you and me. So let's step!"

AS Mike sat his horse at the post, his imagination took him back to that day in the attic of his home, when he had found the clippings telling of his father's disgrace. Something in his heart told him that his time had come to clear his father's name. The heat rising in the track seemed to take on the fat, wabbly form of Hawkins, his mouth drooling from his half-chewed cigar, his wheezy breath laboring out, his pig's eyes dropping water. Mike grinned at the picture.

The barrier cut through the air like a writhing snake, and Black Thorn was away like the wind. The six other horses in the race stretched across the track, their silks a mass of streaming colors in the sunlight as they passed the second flag swishing for the start.

The sound of the cheering cry, "They're off!" came to Mike over the pounding of horses' hoofs, as Black

Thorn swerved in toward the rail. And all at once, the boy knew that the horse felt what was expected of him. Then the spirits of the two, the jockey and the horse, fused together as one, and a living, rushing tornado of justice swept like a storm around the track.

Ironclad went to the front like a flash, the evil-faced jockey on his back flogging him unmercifully in an effort to steal the race. They passed the quarter in a desperate rush of speed, and on toward the half.

Two lengths behind the horse which carried Hawkins' money came Frost Bite, running neck and neck with Lady Mable. A length behind, Mike Ryan sat motionless on Black Thorn, reins knotted in his hands, rating him like a veteran, his eyes fixed on the leader, his heart rising and falling to every beat of the horses' hoofs. Back of Mike came the field, enveloped in a cloud of golden dust.

They flashed past the half, and Mike saw that the boy on Ironclad knew how to ride. Evidently he had been brought to the track particularly for the race, as Mike did not know him. But the way he took his horse out front, and kept him there, showed that he was riding to orders and knew how to do it. Mike had seen him in the jockey's room, a cruel, malevolent smile on his lips, an evil cast in his eye. One of the boys whispered to Mike:

"Lay off that guy; he's a mean un. Don't give him no chance to get you."

They came around the three-quarter turn and into the long back stretch, a rushing turbulence of speed. Ironclad was still out front, holding his own with ease. Behind. Lady Mable, her head up, her eyes wide with effort, strove to get on. Dropping back slowly was Frost Bite, his sides already cringing from the blows of the boy's bat.

From the grand stand the burst of sound came again to Mike's ears. "Ironclad! Ironclad! Come on, Black Thorn!"

With the sound, Mike went to work. His arms, rising and falling like two well-oiled pieces of machinery, moved to every lunge of his horse. He spoke a word to Black Thorn and gave him his head. The gallant mount went into the fight.

With head up, his legs stretching farther and farther, he overtook the tiring Frost Bite, and set out after Lady Mable. But the boy on that driving little chestnut mare went to his bat, and with another wrench of her heart, she pushed on.

FOR over a mile, Black Thorn had been trying to get that slender bit of steel in his mouth between his teeth, and now that he felt another slackening of the tug on it, he settled to his final effort, every nerve and urge rising in a desperate drive to go out ahead. Helping him on came Mike's voice, soft and urgent, breaking through the tumult around them.

"Go on, old pal, go on! Just a little more. You've got to win. You've got to win!"

Black Thorn went on. He passed the tiring Lady Mable like a wisp of black smoke, rushing and crashing down on Ironclad.

The boy ahead heard the smashing in his rear and went to his whip. But the big horse he was on, startled at the onslaught, gave a little, and through the slowly widening space at the rail charged a black avalanche. Into the stretch they came, Black Thorn's nose to Ironclad's bridle, his shoulder to Ironclad's flank.

The vast crowd in the stand was on its feet, their cheers rising in one long wave of sound to the heavens. Mike could hear them calling to him. But clear over all the rest, he thought, he heard the voice of Larry Ryan.

"Come on, kid! Come on, kid!

You're riding for all I've got in the world!"

The boy on Ironclad turned. Out of the din his strident voice hurled: "Get back there, damn you, or I'll crack your skull!"

Mike's reply was to say to Black Thorn: "We've got him, old pal! We've got him! A couple more jumps, just a couple more!"

Then Mike saw a flash of searing light and felt the sting of a burning pain as the bat of the boy on Ironclad crashed across his face. Then another and another! Something warm gushed into his eyes. His eyeballs screamed from a racking, splitting flash of agony, and the track was shut out by a sudden curtain of black. He felt himself falling and cried aloud, struggling desperately to hold himself on his horse's back.

Then, as if from a great distance, came two voices. One of them was his father's, like a soothing plea out of the darkness. "Stick to it, kid! You've got him! You've got him!"

The other, shrill and high-pitched, almost at his elbow, shrieking in his ear, pounding its message in and in and in.

"Come on, you White Boy! Come on! Yo's doin' yo' stuff! White Boy, yo's doin' yo' stuff!"

Half fainting, half mad, plunging along helplessly, the boy let his reins go and grasped at the mane of Black Thorn. But Black Thorn went on that last fifty yards, slipping up inch by inch, until he nailed the leader ten feet from the wire and plunged under, a winner by an inch of his red and flaring nostrils and the timely help of the Lord.

Then Black Thorn, as if he knew what was happening, stopped of his own accord—stopped softly, with scarcely a jar, and trotted to the rail. And like a sack of flour, Mike slipped off his back and fell senseless in the dust.

SOME time later he came to himself in the jockey's room. He roused to the sound of a voice which he loved, the voice of Larry Ryan, who called him out of the darkness.

"Come on back, kid!"

The plea was husky with tears. Mike heard and came back. He felt his head against a muscular shoulder. He opened his eyes to look up into his father's face, still grimy where he had wiped away the tears. He felt the pulse of Larry's heart against his cheek.

"Is it all right, dad? Did I win?"

"By a nose," said Larry, a curious little choke in his throat. "God bless you for it."

Painfully the boy sat up, and turned his bandaged face toward his father. "Did they get Hawkins?"

"Not yet, but they will," said Larry, "as soon as I get a chance to see the judges. I've been waiting ten years for this, son."

"And they'll know you never faked, dad?"

For a long time Larry Ryan was silent. Then in a low voice he asked: "Then you knew about that?"

"That's why I came to ride for Hawkins," replied the boy. "I knew my time would come to show him up."

Then, through the bandages, came the light of Mike's smile—his smile of victory and happiness.

"We had to do this for you, dad; Black Thorn and old Sam—who used to valet you—and I."

Larry Ryan gathered him in his arms, and his voice came stumbling and broken and twisted. "You're my kid, Mike! You're Larry Ryan's kid!"

Mr. Sweeny: Treasure Hunter

By Charles R. Barnes

Author of "On the Sweeny Wire," "The Sweeny Motor Car," Etc.

Treasure hunts are now in vogue throughout the length and breadth of America. It is a new game which society is playing, a diversion. The Sweenys, gambler and wife, took part in a rather different kind of treasure hunt. They were in dead earnest, and the loot they sought was hidden away in a modern, up-to-date, iron safe, buried, however, in all the tradition of seventeenth-century buccaneers.

DISAPPOINTMENT came into Mrs. Sweeny's face. In a burst of temper, she pitched the magazine she had been reading into a far corner of the room. At that instant the Boarder tapped at the door.

"Come in," she called, and he entered. And, noting her look, he inquired its cause.

"Nobody never makes good," she exclaimed, eying the magazine in disgust. "The money alwus gets by, in them stories."

"What stories?"

"Buried-treasure stories," she explained. "Here I get all fussed up because a bunch of sailors has located a million dollars at the bottom of the ocean. But they's alwus a curse on pirate gold, and just as they get their mitts on it, *bing!*—stick in another film, Maurice!"

The Boarder laughed.

"The conventional treasure story," said he. "They are always written that way."

"But I don't like it," she protested. "I like to be slammed up against a winner—everybody loves a winner. You dig me up a pirate-gold story where the hicks get away with it, and I'll give you a week free in the rooms you're rentin' of me. What?"

Again the Boarder laughed.

"You like sure-thing propositions, don't you?" he taunted.

"Oh, I don't know," she came back; "I don't know. Would you wish for

to hear a story with treasure in it that's some out of the ordinary?"

The Boarder seated himself. He knew that he would be more or less entertained for the next half hour or so; and he told this bookmaker's widow that he was in a mood to be attentive. So she began:

"One summer, about a year before my poor dead Danny was shot, me and him and 'Three-fingered' Kelly and Mrs. Three Fingers had a seven-room bungaloo out on the Coney Island shore. You know where the wireless tower is—the Seagate station?"

No, the Boarder was not familiar with the place.

"Well," Mrs. Sweeny resumed, "it don' matter. Plenty of people do, and if you get curious, you can ask somebody. I ain't got time to stop and teach g'og'aphy when I'm tellin' a story. So, just remember that we was on the ocean shore, close up toward the Narrows. Us four was chaperoons for a feller named Waite, that was city editor of some newspaper, and for 'Big Mike' Stevens' daughter, Nadine. Ain't that a swell name, mister?"

"It has a nice sound," he agreed.

"Sure it has," she echoed. "And the girl was as nice as her name. She was about twenty and as pretty as them pitchers of ladies on cigar-box lids. Her hair was a kinda real dark red, and her skin was white like a soda clerk's coat, fresh back from the laundry. Then there was them pretty blue eyes of hern. Believe me, mister, I didn't blame that young Waite none for actin' like he did. Why, w'en that girl would pour herself into her bathin' suit, it was time for the feller that first thought up the word 'beauty' to think up a fresh one. She was a dream come true—a song canned, as you might say. Big Mike had sent her out to us because she wasn't very well. But after a week of the salt water she was as healthy as a cop.

"Young Waite went in to work every day, but I guess what city editin' he done wasn't no good example to the force. He was flitty in his wit cabinet about that girl. And he wasn't no fool, neither. The feller was tall and strong and real quick in his head. Folks has got to be brainy to run them big newspapers, I guess; and Tommy Waite was. But all them brains of his might as well of been pickled tripe, for all the good they done when he was walkin' or swimmin' with Nadine. W'y, she had him so hypnotized that he'd of tried to walk on the water, if she'd told him to. Then, too, he had his worries.

"'Mis Sweeny,' he says to me one time, 'I'd put the marry gag up to her in a minute,' he says, 'but I feel like a soiled deuce.'

"'Che-ild,' I says, 'w'isper it to Aunt Lizzie,' I says.

"'It's the money part of it,' he says, lookin' troubleder than a heathen in clothes. You see, mister, Big Mike owned as many horses as there is beads on a string, and they'd galloped home a lot of money to him. And he liked to plaster it on that lovely doll of his. Miss Nadine had just about everything she wanted.

"'And me,' Tommy went on, 'I ain't saved a cent. My salary would keep that dame in powder puffs,' he said, 'if she was careful spendin' it and only went out bargain days,' he says, 'and where am I at, anyway?'"

MRS. SWEENY paused for the Boarder to get the situation. In a moment she was at her story again.

"Of course, me and Danny and Three Fingers and the Mrs. was sorry. This here Three Fingers was oncet a burglar, but even them people has got feelin's. And he let the case get on his chest so hard that he stopped tellin' us yarns of safes he'd broke before he turned honest and took up race-track gamblin'; and he talks of nothin' all

the time, but what about them two young folks? You see, as the days went on, anybody could see that Nadine wasn't thinkin' of herself altogether, like girls does. When it came time for Tommy Waite to show up, she'd kinda stroll out toward Surf Avenoo and be real supprised when he come along. We all seen this, and we knew the little mutt with the repeatin' bow gun was a-shootin' in bull's-eye form."

The Boarder ventured to ask:

"Who?"

"Coopid," she serenely replied. "The little feller's got desk room on every beach you ever heard of; and he stirred up about the only excitement we had, playin' them young people against each other. There was a burglary and murder in a millionaire's summer home, but we soon forgot it. Some fellers broke in, hit the watchman over the head, and run off with a little safe full of money. And, gee! it got Three Fingers excited, for the men was caught. It was all we could do to keep him from pullin' off a real classy job, just to prove to the public that his old profession was still to be respected. But we persuaded him that, bein' a' alumni, or alum somethin', it wouldn't be playin' the game fair. So he stayed in the evenin' pinochle game with us, and took it out in longin'.

ONE day, at the end of the summer, Tommy come out from town all fussed up. He kept lookin' at Nadine in a kinda hopeful way, and then he'd set and figger. We knew that there was somethin' the matter; but it didn't come out till after dinner, when we was all loafin' round on the veranda, that give a fine view off over the ocean. Then, all at once, Tommy speaks up and breaks a silence.

" 'Folks,' he says, 'I got a new record for the machine. Want to hear it?' he says.

"We sure did, and told him so.

" 'Well,' he says, 'they sentenced "Red" Waters to the chair to-day.'

"Red was one of the men that had jimmied into the millionaire's house. He had been on trial for killin' the watchman. Tommy went on to tell us that after the judge had let go of his idees about what was comin' to the pris'ner, Red had sent for Tommy.

" 'I knew the feller,' says Tommy, 'when I was a police reporter. Once I got him out of jail where he was put for somethin' he didn't do. And several times he helped me on slum stories. But I've told you all this before,' he says. 'Red said he sent for me because he guessed I was the only man in New York,' he says, 'that he could trust.'

"While Tommy was talkin', he kept fingerin' a piece of paper like it was a real important thing.

" 'I talked with the man in his cell,' says he, 'and he told me to get a' envelope that a barkeep in Ninth Avenoo was holdin' for him. This was in it.' Tommy held up the paper. 'After I finished talkin' to him, I went round and got the paper. And I want all of you to help me work out what it stands for,' he says.

"I tell you, mister," Mrs. Sweeny observed, with great solemnity, "we was as excited as a lady that means to throw somethin'. Here was a paper from a real robber and man-killer, and we was all in on somethin' of some kind that was meant by it. And while Tommy went on with his story, we had a look at it; but there was just a few lines and some words I couldn't quite make out, the writin' was so scrawly, so it didn't tell me nothin'.

" 'Red gave me the story of the crime,' says the young feller. 'There were three of them in it and a girl what worked at the millionaire's as hired help. She was in love with one of the gang; and it was through her that they learned that money was goin' to

be in the house—a hundred thousand—all in stuff that you could spend. Not stocks or tradin' stamps nor nothin' like that. It was real money. And the funny part of it was that they was goin' to bribe a crooked judge with it.'"

Mrs. Sweeny waited until she felt that the full import of this information had sunk home before resuming.

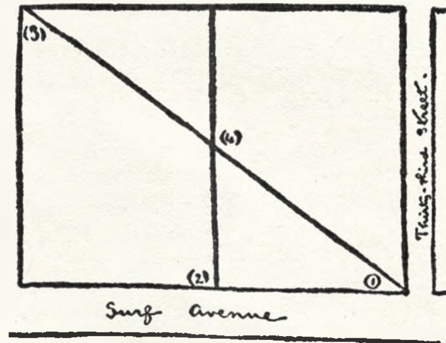
"Tommy goes on to tell us," she said, "that the girl had been out late one night, down to Coney Island, and was tryin' to sneak in through a get-away window she had left open, when she heard two men talkin', and crowded herself in a dark corner till they should quit and go away. It was her boss and a feller that had come that day to visit. They talked a long time, and the girl's boss finally says that the money will be there to-morrow night, and she heard 'em sayin' things about some decision. She didn't understand it. All she knew was that money was comin', and she knew how much.

"The next day she let her feller know. She left a window open for the gang, and they got in, banged a special watchman over the head, and heaved the safe out of a window. It was a little one, like express companies use. They got it to a wagon that was waitin', and started away. But lights flashed up all over the house, folks run out, and they was seen. So, when they'd lammed their horse along for about half a mile, they dumped the safe out, sent the horse gallopin' away with a empty wagon, and carried the iron box into a big vacant lot.

"When he got this far, Tommy stood up, and walked to the corner of the veranda.

"'There's the place,' he says, pointin' to what was almost a field, with a big 'Lots for Sale' sign on it. 'They managed to find a shovel by huntin' back of some cottages, and they buried the safe there, meanin' to come back when times wasn't so ticklish and get it. Then they sighted here and there, takin' such things as they could see in the dark, made maps, and lit out. They was caught later.'

"The paper Tommy had was beginnin' to look like sense to us, mister, and you can bet that none of us was takin' after-dinner naps. As near as I can remember, the thing had this on it." She procured paper and pencil, and soon had evolved her illustration, which is here given:



IT meant," Mrs. Sweeny went on, "that the little safe was planted in a vacant lot at Thirty-third Street and Surf Avenue. You had to take sights from a post to the Ocean Yacht Club tower, and from a trolley pole to a house. Where they crossed was it."

"H'm!" muttered the Boarder. Mrs. Sweeny looked at him, annoyed.

"Is that the best you can do?" she asked. "If it is, I'm glad you wasn't along. W'y, my Danny says—well, I won't tell you what he said, bein' a lady. Nadine sinks back in her chair. I says: 'My gosh!' and Three Fingers hollers to the smoke lady that done the cookin' for to go steal a spade, us not havin' one. Tommy just stood there, lookin' at Nadine, and her a-lookin' back at him, funnylike. I guess the same bunch of thinks was on the job in both of their heads. A hundred

thousand dollars is a lot of money to a poor skate that has the marry bug and nothing for fodder.

"After we'd got cooled down a bit, Tommy tells us that Red had offered him all that money, if he would dig it up and give Red's wife a fourth of it. And it was here that he trusted Tommy, for there wasn't nothin' to keep him from gettin' it and keepin' it all."

"How about the other men?" asked the Boarder. "Hadn't they tried to get it?"

"They wasn't supposed to," Mrs. Sweeny answered. "You see, the three of 'em had went into a' agreement to wait till after their trials before takin' any action. And this here case is a good example of honor among thieves. The party that said such a thing must of been charged up with hop. My Danny usta say that if them thieves has got any honor they stole it and are leadin' it to the nearest 'fence,' which is a place where swiped stuff is sold. But let me get this story off my chest.

"Tommy says: 'Le's all go there now,' he says, 'and look the place over.' And so we make a get-away and walks over to the avenoo and across it, where the big, vacant lot was. It didn't look like a party was goin' to find anything there but tin cans and pieces of stovepipe. The ground was dug up in places, where they had been gradin' it, and there was a good deal of rubbish layin' loose. The first thing Tommy done was to stand by that post and sight at the yacht-club steeple. Then he turns to Three Fingers.

" 'Go down there to that trolley pole,' he says, 'and get the sight on the house,' he says. 'Then I'll walk out along this line, and you holler when you get me between you and the house,' he says.

" 'You're on,' says Three Fingers, and Tommy starts.

"The rest of us stood there, holdin' our breaths like a couple of horses was neck-and-neckin' it home. Tommy walks slow, my Danny sightin' over the post and hollerin' when the young feller gets off the line.

"Pretty soon Three Fingers lets out a yell. Tommy stopped and looked at the ground. By and by he begun walkin' round in circles that got wider and wider. At last he stopped. We seen him bendin' over for mebby a minute, and then he stood up, turned toward us, and held up one hand. I heard Miss Nadine catch her breath quick.

" 'He's found it!' she whispers, grabbin' my arm. Nobody moved, for we didn't want to attract any more attention than we could help. Tommy hunted round till he found a stick, which he pushed into the ground. Then he come back to us.

" 'Somethin' is planted there, all right,' he says, lookin' at Nadine. He talked low, and you could tell that he was kinda tensed.

" 'Then we'll dig it up,' says Three Fingers.

" 'We will,' says Danny, 'to-night,' he says.

" 'Yes,' says Tommy, 'to-night.'

"And so we all marched back to the bungaloo, solemn as a pusson drowndin' a dog, and we sits up, watchin' each other's faces, kinda awed. Danny was so excited he near run our smoke lady off her feet, fetchin' him iced drinks. And w'en I warned him, he says: 'Belle, I don't care if I do get gastritis. This here is a' occasion, and it must be ushered in proper and befittin',' he says. And, as Three Fingers doped it out that Danny had the right idea, I didn't have nothin' more to say. I s'pose you never went diggin' for treasure, mister?"

"No," the Boarder answered, "I never had that pleasure."

"Pleasure!" Mrs. Sweeny exclaimed, "it ain't what you'd call pleasure. It's like fallin' downstairs, and goin' to be hung to-morruh, and sittin' up nights for your husban' all rolled into one.

There's more sensation in diggin' for treasure than there is in watchin' a race or a baseball game or holdin' four aces. You keep askin' yourself: 'Is it there or is the bunch stung?'

"And in this case, it was putticilar tickly, because there wasn't one of us that wasn't dead sure that Red's partners had told their fr'en's to get busy, same as he'd done. If one crook would double cross his pals, it was good reasonin' to figger that the pals wasn't no better. But Tommy was real hopeful. He said that the ground didn't look like it had been disturbed lately. Grass had grew there, Tommy says, and if Red's pals' fr'en's had been there for to rescue the money, then they'd did it a long time ago.

WELL, we all set round till it was midnight, and everything was still. Then we gets a rope, and Three Fingers digs up one of them winkin' flash lights that so many s'ciety men carries with 'em to find the keyhole at night. Our smoke lady had borried us a spade from a gen'm'n fr'en' of hers that was night porter to a little hotel near our bungaloo; and, bein' fixed for the night's work, we sets out for that vacant lot. W'e-e-e! It makes me shiver yet, w'en I think of it. Day work for mine, mister. Don't you never take no night jobs."

The Boarder promised, in all good faith, to abide by her advice which agreed with his own sentiments.

"We waited out there on the corner of the lot," she went on, "with the spade and rope hid down beneath Mrs. Three Fingers' coat and mine, till the policeman on post went by. Then we went along slow, as if we was just cross-cuttin' through that lot; and by the time we got to the stick that Tommy had set up, the cop feets was beatin' the sidewalk 'way up the avenoo. My Danny lit a match, and we all looked down at the ground. Sure enough, mister, there was a kinda bumpy place there. Tommy grabbed the spade.

" 'This is the place,' he says, and he begins to dig quick and hopeful, like a city man makin' a garden. The rest of us gathers up around him.

" 'Tommy,' I says, 'for the love of Mike——'

" 'W'at?' says he, stoppin'.

" 'Nothin',' I says, 'but if you don't make good, I'll have the smoke lady put paris green in your soup,' I says, bein' so excited I could of swallered my gum.

"Nadine put in. 'This isn't a joke?' she ast.

"Tommy didn't say nothin' to that, but went back workin' like he was ten wops bein' driv' by a gang boss. Three Fingers flashed his light every little bit, and him and Danny set up a line of argument, Three Fingers offerin' five to four that Tommy wouldn't dig up nothin'. And they kep' it up till Danny had six hundred on that safe comin' out of the hole. He'd of went to a thousand, if I wouldn't of w'ispered that the smoke lady had trotted a good many heats buttween the ice box and him. That made him cautious, and he was makin' hedge bets, w'en, all at once Tommy's spade made a kinda screechy noise on somethin'. I jumps forward.

" 'W'at is it?' I says.

"Tommy is breathin' hard, but it wasn't all from the work. He straightened up and looked from one to the other of us, slow and funny.

" 'I've struck the safe,' he says. 'It's here, all right!'

"Nobody said nothin'. We just stood there and stared at the hole, Three Fingers holdin' his winker down close in it. There sure was iron there, all right; and it was all gleamy in strips, where the spade had scratched it. In a minnit Danny whispers, hoarse and excited:

" 'Go on, kid; dig it out!'

"Tommy went to work again, this time diggin' round the sides of the thing. The winkin' light showed him

where to jab the spade, and he was goin' to it like a hungry tramp to a hand-out. Mrs. Three Fingers was breathin' like the original wheeze.

" 'Go to it, hon!' she gasps. 'If this turns out to be bunk, I do a flop right here!' she says.

"Miss Nadine had catched me by the shoulder and was just hangin' on. Believe me, mister, the whole police force, and all the Coney Island bally-hoo men announcin' them, wouldn't of disturbed us. We couldn't hear nothin' but the gratin' of that spade, and we couldn't see nothin' 'cept the iron box that, by this time, was all uncovered. It sure was there. So far, Red's information had came true, but we didn't know yet whether they was anything in it or not."

"Was there?" asked the Boarder, who showed deep interest.

"That," said Mrs. Sweeny, "is what I'm comin' to. You see, the whole business was gettin' interestiner than a movin'-pitcher show. The safe was there, all right, but what was inside it couldn't of been told by the best clairvoyant in New York. Them pals of Red's might of came some time and took everything, leavin' the safe. We didn't know; and we was mighty worked up about it, I can tell you. And when the thing was clear dug up, them men was pretty quick about slippin' the rope round it. Then everybody catched hold of that line, and we drug the safe out of the lot and across the street. In a few minutes we had it the rest of the distance to the bungaloo and inside where it was safe from sight.

" 'Pull down all the curtings,' orders Danny, 'and stop up the keyhole. We can't have this spoiled by some one rammin' in now,' he says.

"We done that, mister, and then we all draws back, and up steps Three Fingers, with a proud look on his face. For here was a chance for him to show off his class as a safe opener. You see, none of us knowed how to work the combination knob, so we'd of been as helpless as them babies in the tall timber. But Three Fingers was on the job; and so we stood there admirin'ly, as he goes confident at the little iron box with a 'I-got-your-number-kid' look in his eyes.

" 'Ladies and gents,' says he, 'this is a happy time for me. The t'rills of my dangerous former callin',' he says, 'is ripplin' in my blood. If they was a' 'lectric-light wire handy,' he says, 'I'd show you some classy work, burnin' off the combinash. But they ain't none,' he says, 'and likewise I ain't got no stethoscope for a dem'nstration of up-to-date listinin' for them tumblers to drop. But,' he says, 'watch me go to it!'

"And with them words, mister, he gets down beside the safe and puts his ear against the front of it. Then he begins, slow and careful, to turn the combination knob. We're all standin' over him. breathless as a dead hen. He worked there mebby two or three minutes, and we was tore with anxiety for fear he wouldn't make good, when all of a sudden he give a quick turn of the knob and it wouldn't go no farther. Then he turned the handle and the door swinged open."

MRS. SWEENY'S expression suddenly pictured annoyance.

"Mister," she said, "all day long I'll be sorry for them folks in the story I just read. They almost got that treasure, and then was stung. Why couldn't they of made good? W'at would you think of me if I had set here and turned loose a faceful of language, with nothin' doin' at the end——"

The Boarder put up his hand.

"Mrs. Sweeny," he sternly asked, "what was in that safe?"

"W'y," she replied, in surprise, "a hundred thousand dollars was in it. What did you s'pose was in it? I'll

have you know, mister, that I ain't a lady to take up your time with a line of yip that you'd wish I'd kept in storage."

She rocked back and forth for a moment, while the Boarder sank back in his chair and proceeded to appear relieved. Then she put the finishing touches to her story.

"Tommy," she concluded, "bein' a' editor, was on the inside of a lot of things. He knew what the deal was about that the judge was to get that hundred thousand for—it was somethin' about a railroad suit over some sort of a special priv'lege, but I never could get it through my head right. But Tommy put two and two together, and he calls on that Mr. Thomas, the millionaire whose house was robbed, and offered to return the money.

"At first Thomas was scared that it would get in the papers—about the bribery and the judge, you know, and he said he didn't lose no money. But after a while he admitted that the safe and what was in it was took from his house. And the end of it was that Red's widow lady got what Red wanted her to. And Tommy got ten thousand for bein' honest. And old Thomas got to thinkin' so much of him that he offered ten thousand a year for Tommy to quit the newspaper business and be head of the publicity department of that railroad. That wasn't such a bad turnin' out for a night's work, was it?"

"No," replied the Boarder.

For a moment there was silence. Then Mrs. Sweeny asked: "Why don't you ask me what's Nadine's name now?"

The Boarder laughed.

"Because," he answered, "I don't consider it necessary."

"Well," she commented, "once in a while you're almost intelligent."

THE NAP OF THE TOWEL

TRAVEL and business for that day were over, and the tired drummer of Good Nap Towels, Inc., was looking forward to a refreshing laving with soap and hot water, to be followed by the satisfying dry-up with a soft, clean towel. The one-story hotel in which he was spending the night gave him the soap and hot water, as much as his heart could possibly wish for, but the washroom had but one towel—and, sadly, it was a roller towel and no longer an advertised white. The irate salesman rushed out to the lobby and up to the desk where the manager himself was entering the day's arrivals in his guest ledger.

"This is a joint and you're liable to prosecution under State law for having that damned roller towel in your washroom! Don't you know the sanitary act passed last year forbids roller towels?"

The manager-owner drew himself up with judicial severity, and eying his guest who was dripping soap and water over his best lobby rug, answered:

"I know it does. But you see in this State we don't have no ex-post facto laws, and that towel was put up before the law was passed."

Natural Methods

By Robert McBlair

Author of "The Holdup at Elbow Bend," "April Fool," Etc.

Pete had made his fortune in the oil gushers of Oklahoma. And it was in Oklahoma, too, that he learned his code of business ethics; and what is more important, learned how to enforce the code and to keep the money. Wall Street methods were a bit different, but Pete didn't bother learning them. He knew that a Colt gun has a way with it, even in the Street.

LINDY LOU hadn't wanted to come to New York, but Pete had insisted. She had remembered the past; she had wanted to invest their money in good, safe Texas land before they did anything else. But the Oklahoma gusher which had blown Pete into affluence and matrimony had left him with a craving to soar still higher on their honeymoon.

"We got fifty thousan' dollars," he explained, "an' nowhere else to go. I'm plumb sick of oil derricks thicker than willows along a crick. I've et mush with sorghum till my hair's most turned to corn silk. What I mean, I want a change! You got Milly Catlett's address in New York, haven't you? Lem Halley was sayin' she married a broker who's makin' a pile of money in stocks. Lem he tried to do the same when he was in New York last spring, but lost his shirt. Said he had a good system, but it didn't work that time. That's Lem. Too highfalutin'. Natural methods not good enough for him. What I mean, you can visit with Milly Catlett when you get tired of lookin' at this here cactus pa gave me for a face. Milly's been North for quite a spell, but I don't reckon she's too high-toned for me an' you."

So they had traveled two days and two nights, then emerged from the marble-vaulted beauty of the Pennsylvania Station into the blare and glare of a

Seventh Avenue afternoon in spring. The driver of a cruising taxicab spied them—Lindy Lou, in a snuff-colored, mail-order suit and black, low-heeled shoes, a blue hat with red-and-yellow cherries flopping about a glowing young face with lips delicately shaped and as red as the cherries, but more natural. Beside her was Pete, who had left behind as inappropriate his two-gallon hat, but whose new black Stetson would have held at least a gallon and a quarter. His long, thin legs were bowed a bit; the stiff collar, the white "wash" tie, and the cut of his black store suit made a perfect picture of what the Prince of Wales will not wear this season. The taxicab driver throttled down so abruptly that his engine backfired.

"You got a bus that's some quick on the draw, partner," said Pete, as he withdrew the gun hand which automatically had flown inside his coat. He helped Lindy Lou into the open cab door, and climbed in beside her, caching their suit case of varnished canvas between his bony knees. "Ride 'em, cowboy!" he directed cheerfully. "Carry us to the best hotel."

The taxi driver dropped his meter flag and started for a nice expensive drive around Central Park. Lindy Lou clung to Pete's muscular forearm and gazed at the welter of traffic flowing down the cañon of the street.

"Look at all those folks, Lindy!" said Pete. "Thicker than fleas on a piny-wood sow. You know why they come here? Gold! Men here have made twenty, forty, a hundred millions, I reckon. But a man hasn't got no call to play the New York game when he don't know much about it. That's what Lem Halley done. The natural method is to get close to somebody who can give you the inside on something good. What did you say was the name of the man Milly Catlett married?"

Lindy Lou told him, but with a sinking heart. Four years before, Pete had owned a small but flourishing ranch in Texas. She had lived on her uncle's ranch near by, and Pete had come a-visiting. Then the oil boom had started. Pete had swapped his land and cattle for wildcat stock, and when that had proven worthless, had set out grimly for the oil fields. Pete hardly had known why he was going. But Lindy Lou had known it was because he wouldn't let anything lick him. And he didn't ask Lindy Lou to marry him before he left, which Lindy Lou also understood. Pete would let a girl or a friend share his fortune, but not his misfortune. That was Pete.

HE had journeyed to the oil fields of Oklahoma, his own State, and had worked up from day laborer to driller by the time he ran into Lindy Lou on the springy-board sidewalk of the muddy, shack-lined road which the mushroom town called Main Street. Pete didn't know it, but Lindy Lou had followed him. He accepted her explanation of a job and a cousin and was unfeignedly glad to see her. Then, a little later, the well which he had been drilling struck oil.

He had believed that it would, and had bought shares in adjoining options. And as soon as he had cashed in on the rise, and had put the money in the bank, he hurried down the board walk to the short-order restaurant where Lindy Lou was cashier, and asked her to marry him. Of course he had loved her ever since he had met her way back there in Texas. Pete didn't realize this, but Lindy Lou did. That was Lindy Lou.

The taxi driver decided he had detoured long enough and skidded to a stop before a grandiloquent hotel. Pete got out with their suit case and helped out Lindy Lou. The taxi driver had planned to charge them double the meter rate, but when Pete leaned in and asked "How much?" he swallowed and

changed his mind. That was nothing to the driver's discredit. Better men than he had hesitated to quibble when confronted by Pete's good eye.

He had lost the other eye in a hand-to-hand with the three Jones boys, who were bound they would lynch Pete's cook. The shot had spattered his left cheek bone, the lower eyelid, and the straight bridge of his narrow nose with a blue veil of powder pits. The Jones boys had paid for this, and ever since the three funerals Pete had had to walk with a loose holster, for a relative Jones, filled with corn liquor and a thirst for revenge, was apt to come around almost any corner. This sort of thing shows on a man.

After a glance at Pete's jimberjaw and straight, thin mouth, the driver became pinioned on the cold-gray steel of Pete's stare, and charged what the meter called for. By way of a mild revenge, however, he watched until the over-a-gallon hat and the hat with the bobbing cherries had entered the dressy marble lobby, followed by an enormous uniformed doorman who bore, between thumb and forefinger, the handle of a black, varnished suit case.

THAT night Pete and Lindy Lou went to a show, but it had scenes and conversation which embarrassed them both. So the next night, after supper in the homelike short-order restaurant they had found three blocks away, they strolled back to their room, and Pete had Lindy call up Milly Catlett.

"Milly sounded mighty kind of fidgety over the phone, Pete," Lindy said, after hanging up. "Almost like she was tryin' to get out of seein' us. But her husband took the 'phone away from her. He sounds like a right nice man. Said he'd heard what a success you'd been, and wanted to meet you. I told him we'd et, and he said they was just settin' down to dinner an' wouldn't we drop over after."

"Sure we'll come!" said Pete. "Reckon we'll have to dress ourselves up. Whyn't you put on that pink-silk dress you bought this mornin', honey? An' I'll put me on a right clean collar."

They taxied to the stately apartment house on Park Avenue where Milly herself opened the polished-walnut door at their ring and dropped her head on Lindy's shoulder and began frankly to cry. This surprising welcome was alleviated by a hearty, "Well, well, well!" followed by a plump gentleman in dinner clothes who waddled toward them down the dim hall. Milly dried her eyes and said:

"This is Asop, you know. This is the first time I've seen any real home folks for ages. And lately I've been kind of run down, I reckon."

In the drawing-room, Pete stood with his back to the log fire and looked about him at the grand piano, the polished center table with its bowl of yellow roses, the high ceiling and the dark-blue carpet into which the foot sank without a sound. It was a room that cast a dignity, the dignity of wealth, about the shoulders of those who possessed it.

Milly and Lindy had departed, talking, to an adjoining room, and Pete turned with the curiosity of respect toward the host, who had ceased for the moment his rather regular sounds of laughter. His retreating brow was furrowed in concentration over the exact equalization of the yellow liquid with which he was filling two cocktail glasses. His gray hair, parted on the side, slanted thickly upward and backward on top of his oval head, like the crest of a kingfisher. His long, fleshy nose, curving downward over a small mouth and a chin lost in three folds of flesh, the lifted wing of an elbow, carried out further the suggestion of a hunting bird. A soft man physically, Pete thought, and yet not mentally, or he

would not be the host in this apartment.

"Well! Well! Well!" said Asop Kent. "Glad to see you aboard, Pete, old man." There was something of the charm of an actor, Pete concluded, in Asop's resonant, rounded voice and varnished manner. He handed Pete a glass, himself dipped for a sip and lifted his head to swallow. "Sit down, Pete." Mr. Kent nested gradually into a blue-plush chair. "Tell me all about Colorado."

"Oklahoma," Pete corrected. "Nice place you got, Mr. Kent."

"Call me Asop. No formality among home folks. Yes, Pete. Twenty thousand a year is all this place costs. Of course I couldn't afford it out of my brokerage business alone. But a little flyer now and then——"

"But ain't that risky?" asked Pete. "In New York, I mean. There are lots of flimflams in this here town, I've heard."

"Ah!" Asop Kent beamed. "I see you've cut your wisdom teeth, Pete. But people like you and me don't go into a thing unless we are in absolutely solid with the pool that's operating it."

"I don't get you," said Pete.

"Why," explained Mr. Kent, dipping for a sip and throwing back his head, "I mean a crowd of fellows with money will know something about the inside workings of a corporation, say, like Continental Petroleum. They will maybe know that it has struck signs of oil and has stopped drilling so as to give the insiders time to accumulate its stock. Do you see?"

"Yeah," said Pete.

"So they form a pool to buy all the floating stock; then they give out the news, and sell the stock to the public at its new valuation. Now," went on Mr. Kent, "I got in touch with a little thing like that this morning. A friend of mine—if I told you his name you would recognize it at once; it's a household word wherever money or oil is mentioned—well, he wanted to let me in on a stock selling at twenty, but just now I'm a little tied up on some other good things and I thought it best to turn it down."

"Would that stock go up much?" asked Pete, moistening his lips.

"Bound for a hundred, he said," answered Mr. Kent, and raised his voice. "Milly!" he called. The rich man was probably getting bored.

"Listen, Mr. Kent," said Pete hurriedly. "I'll go fifty-fifty with you if you want to buy that stock."

"Pete," said Mr. Kent, "I like you. But I hoe my own row; then there are no hard feelings if things go wrong. Suppose I put you in this to the tune of twenty thousand dollars, then they dropped the price down to shake out a few weak holders, and you had to let go because you couldn't put up ten or twenty thousand dollars more for margin? You'd blame me!"

"Oh, no, I wouldn't!" Pete asserted. "Besides, I could put up another twenty, if necessary."

"Here are the girls at last!" said Asop, turning away. "Well, well, well! So this is Lindy Lou!"

The conversation became general, but Pete took little part in it. On the third finger of Milly Catlett's left hand was a platinum wedding ring studded with diamonds, a large solitaire, and an emerald surrounded by rubies; she also wore a triple strand of pearls. Only a plain gold band relieved the berry brown of Lindy Lou's finger, and around her slender neck hung only a necklace of bright-red beads.

"But I ain't the man," thought Pete resentfully, as Lindy Lou at last rose to go, "to use friendship by marriage to get a man to do something he don't want to do."

At the door, while Lindy and Milly were planning a shopping tour, Asop pinched him on the arm.

"Drop in at the office to-morrow," Asop murmured. "Maybe we can work out something in that matter."

THE next day Lindy Lou went shopping with Milly Kent. Pete went downtown to Exchange Place and found Kent & Grange, Investment Securities, inscribed on the frosted glass of the door which he opened upon a scene of activity. On one wall was a green board with vertical white lines dividing it into columns containing chalked figures. A boy was running to and fro along a platform in front of this board, changing the figures at the direction of a coatless young man in a derby hat, who sat over an endless tape which fell from the glass bowl of the ticker down to a tall wastebasket overflowing with its coils. At each of two other tickers a group of intent men clustered, while in the rows of mahogany chairs facing the green board other men lounged, eating sandwiches, or sat silent and watched the boy with the chalk. The smoke-laden air was filled with talk, with laughter, with an occasional shout.

"Well, well, well, Pete, my boy! I'm glad to see you!"

Mr. Kent, looking, in a black cutaway, very much like a penguin, put an arm about Pete's shoulder, drew him to a corner. "I've got good news," he whispered. "That stock opened at twenty this morning and jumped to twenty and three quarters. As a special favor to me, my friend held out two thousand five hundred shares which you can have at twenty and one half. There's a profit of six hundred dollars, right off the bat. But of course you'll have to take it or leave it right away."

"I can give you a check," said Pete.

"Pete, my boy, your check is as good with me as J. P. Morgan's. Let's see, ten points on two thousand five hundred shares is twenty-five thousand dollars."

Pete made out his check on the counter of the order window, near which a thickset customer in black gave him and the check a cold, appraising glance from under the brim of a black fedora hat.

"Pete, meet Mr. Stone," said Asop Kent, patting the thickset man on the shoulder. "Mr. Stone is one of our very good friends, and he's from Colorado, too. What's Continental Petroleum doing, Mr. Stone? Ah! Twenty and seven eighths already! Well, Pete!" Mr. Kent winked. "I've got to call up a friend."

Pete picked up the tape. As it edged in little jumps over his palm, he experienced a wave of exultation. This was a good deal better than spudding in, and drilling, in fair weather and foul, through invisible boulders and sand strata, becoming stalled in gumbo, bucking flint, or boring steadily downward through oozy gravel that showed no trace of promising sands or the prayed-for scum of seepage. Already he had a profit. He glanced gratefully at the beaked and tufted profile of Asop Kent, who at the water cooler dipped to a paper cup and threw back his head to swallow.

"Another tape worm, eh?" inquired Mr. Stone.

"Yep," assented Pete, smiling into the man's pug-nosed, square face. "Cleaned up in oil in Oklahoma, and up here on my honeymoon. Thought I might take a little flyer."

"Cleaned up and came to get cleaned up, eh?"

"Mebbe so." Pete laughed.

The tape showed that five hundred shares of Continental Petroleum had just changed hands at twenty-two and seven eighths, and he could afford to be tolerant of a man who was probably losing money because he was going the thing blind. Pete stood by the ticker till the market closed at three o'clock, with Continental Petroleum at twenty and seven eighths bid, twenty-one asked.

ON the way home he bought Lindy Lou a huge diamond. It cost two thousand dollars, but with Continental at twenty-one, he would have over one thousand dollars profit, and each point advance would bring him two thousand five hundred dollars more.

She was in when he reached their hotel room, and he gave her the ring. She flushed with delight and threw her arms about his neck. "Oh, Pete! You are so *extravagant,* darling!"

"That's nothin' to what I aim to do, honey. Just wait till I finish makin' my killin'. I'm goin' to load you down with jewels till you'll have to walk with a cane."

But the next day Continental Petroleum acted badly. From ten o'clock till three Pete watched the stock fluctuate from twenty-one and one eighth to nineteen and seven eighths; it closed at twenty and a quarter. The next day it spurted to twenty-one and three quarters, but dropped back to close at nineteen and one half. The third day it sank gradually but persistently to seventeen and one half, although the rest of the market was very bullish.

Asop Kent had assured Pete that he would be protected by his margin for the full ten points. But Pete felt worried. Rumors appeared on the news ticker. Salt water had been found in some of the Continental's Mexican wells. The Mexican government had imposed a confiscatory export tax. But near three o'clock, Asop Kent smilingly drew Pete aside.

"The pool is encouraging short sales. Just catching them in a basket before breaking the big news."

The following day, however, Continental Petroleum dropped by two o'clock to fifteen and one half. This was serious. Five points, not counting the expense of interest and commissions, meant a loss of twelve thousand five hundred dollars, a quarter of his whole pile. This didn't look right, and he stalked without knocking into Asop Kent's private office.

"Hello, Pete, old man!" In the north light of the tall window, Asop Kent's aquiline face seemed thinner, grayer, and more deeply lined than before. "By Jove, I was just about to come out and speak to you. My friend left word with Mr. Grange, the office man, to tell me to sell Continental at twenty and buy back heavily at fifteen and one half. He wrote it on a slip of paper and put it on my desk. Some other papers got on top of it, and I just found it a minute ago."

Asop Kent reached for the waste-basket, then paused, his small mouth pursed as in thought.

"Listen, Pete, it was my fault you missed that turn. I'm going to make it up to you. Buy five thousand more of Continental and I'll let you carry it on a five-point margin and put up the balance myself. That's Asop Kent. When she jumps back to twenty and one half you can sell out this lot, take your twenty-five thousand dollars profit, and let the other lot ride."

"Lemme see," said Pete, rubbing his jimberjaw. "That'u'd be twenty-five thousand dollars more for margin. Right much money. Tell you the truth, Asop, that's the rest of my pile."

Asop Kent struck the desk. "We are going to talk to these pool managers together, and take no chances on relayed information. I'll tell them we are coming." He rose in paunchy dignity and disappeared into a sound-proof telephone booth in the corner of the room; shortly he emerged smiling.

MR. STONE was just opening the door of the office as they came out, but said his business would wait. Asop led Pete around the corner to a row of offices on the sixth floor of No. 25 Broad Street.

Pete was impressed as the office boy, at sight of Asop, led them immediately

through the richly furnished anteroom. After all, these pool managers were the men who were doing big things—wire pullers behind the huge and powerful Wall Street machine which, in a day, could absorb his tiny fortune as the ocean a drop of water.

"It must be their brains," he considered, with a sense of disappointment as Asop Kent introduced him to the two pool managers.

One was small, humped and swarthy, with a flat, bald head, deep-set black eyes and high cheek bones. The other was fat and sallow, with a thick lower lip and small, pale eyes. Both were kind, smiling, polite and watchful.

"My friend," Asop Kent waved a graceful gesture through the disturbed layers of cigar smoke, "can be perfectly trusted. The big chief sent me word that fifteen and one half was the bottom, but I dropped in to make sure you hadn't changed your plans."

The swarthy man glanced at his partner, then smiled with one side of his mouth as he leaned forward to shave the ash from his cigar on the ash tray.

"We haven't changed our plans," murmured the swarthy man softly.

Pete felt a rush of exultation and excitement.

"Thank you," said Asop Kent, "I'll act on that!"

He waddled from the room. Pete, at his heels, already was drawing forth a check book. Asop accepted the twenty-five-thousand-dollar check in the elevator, stopped at a phone booth in the lobby just in time to get in Pete's order before the market closed.

"I DON'T say Asop isn't all right," remarked Lindy that night, when Pete confided the news of his good luck. "But I wisht you'd sell out now and take your loss, Petey."

"Shucks, honey, if those birds crooked me I'd take this here .44 and fill 'em full of daylight."

"And then you'd get hung."

"Shucks, Bill Shivers and Lem Halley would get the gov'ner to get the New York gov'ner to pardon me."

"But s'pose he wouldn't?"

"Shucks!" Pete closed the discussion. "If that New York gov'ner let me get electrocuted after he had been ast not to, them boys will come up here and ride him down Broadway on a rail."

The next day was Saturday, a half holiday on the Exchange, and Continental Petroleum held its own. On Monday, however, the opening jump of the paper tape across Pete's horny palm showed a succession of Continental sales: Fifteen and one half, fifteen and three eighths, fifteen and one quarter, fifteen, fourteen and one half, fourteen, thirteen and one half. Here it held for a while, but Pete was carrying seven thousand five hundred shares and the two-point drop in less than an hour had cost him fifteen thousand dollars. A look of fright flickered across Mr. Grange's florid countenance as Pete's powder-pitted face confronted him.

"Where's Asop Kent?"

"I—I don't—— He said he'd be out of town till to-morrow, sir."

Pete phoned Kent's apartment, but got no answer. He phoned the apartment-house switchboard; the operator told him Mr. and Mrs. Kent had left the day before. Yes, they had taken bags and trunks.

"That's funny," Pete thought. "He wouldn't be runnin', of course, just because I'd lost money speculatin' on his tips."

He returned to the ticker and examined the latest six feet of tape. There had been a bull market for over two months and to-day the general list was as strong as ever. Continental had rallied for a bit and run up to fourteen and one eighth. It had slipped rapidly then, however, down to twelve.

After paying commissions, Pete would have about eleven thousand dol-

lars or thereabouts left; if the stock dropped one and one half points more he and Lindy would be wiped out clean. When he had lost his ranch by speculating, he hadn't minded; then he had been alone. But Lindy was in it now. He decided not to tell her the bad news yet. Asop Kent would be back to-morrow. No doubt the pool merely had dropped the stock two or three points further than they at first had intended. The next day or so would see it shooting up again.

Lindy Lou said nothing when he came home, but he saw in the wicker wastebasket in their room a newspaper with the one thirty p. m. stock quotations, and on the margin laborious calculations in pencil. And the evening papers reported additional salt water in the Mexican wells.

THE next day Continental Petroleum fell farther and closed at eleven, only half a point above Pete's margin limit. Asop Kent had not shown up all day. Pete didn't bother to ask the florid Mr. Grange for news; he had heard that gentleman explaining in a worried way to the cold and thickset Mr. Stone why he could not give him a check for his winnings; Mr. Kent made out all the checks, and wasn't expected back until to-morrow.

That night Pete telephoned Asop Kent's apartment, but received no answer. Neither he nor Lindy Lou mentioned to each other the Continental Petroleum investment. She was cheery and affectionate, but there was a pinched look to her straight little nose. The hotel bill which had been handed him with his room key contained charges for two hats and two dresses which Lindy Lou had sent up "collect," and he realized for the first time he hadn't money enough in the bank to pay them.

The next morning he was up early, dressed quietly so as not to waken Lindy Lou, and after breakfast walked all the way downtown so as to kill the time before the market opened. He had a strange feeling that something was wrong when he went up in the elevator. It scarcely surprised him to find a group of customers standing in the hall before the locked door of Kent & Grange.

"What's the matter?" he asked; and one man, with a bitter laugh, gave him a newspaper.

CUSTOMERS LOSE AS BROKER VANISHES

Books and papers also gone. District attorney seeks Asop Kent, ex-actor and bucketeer. Customers' losses over a half million.

Pete read the article through to the end, gave the newspaper back to the man and turned away. He noticed that the people in the elevator regarded him curiously. Something in his breast was alternately boiling and turning to ice. Asop Kent had never purchased the stock for him at all. Had merely kept the money. Would they give him his job as driller again, or would he have to do odd jobs to get food and lodging until something turned up?

It wouldn't have made any difference if Continental Petroleum *had* gone up. That's why Asop Kent had run; the other customers had made paper profits in this bull market and had been after him for them. Lindy wouldn't have even a little ranch now. Would she ever? These New York streets were always so dusty and narrow, the buildings so tall that the people were like insects hurrying blindly down a chute, bumping and hurtling each other.

Pete slapped the gun in his hip pocket. Rangy, black-garbed and impassive, he stood at the windy corner of Broad and Exchange Place, oblivious of the hurrying crowd brushing past him. It would be some satisfaction to let daylight into Asop Kent. Or into those two slick customers, the "pool

managers." But there were six million people in New York City. Asop need only walk around the corner and be lost forever to sight. Probably those "pool managers" had disappeared, too, until things had blown over, even though they weren't directly connected with Kent & Grange. It wouldn't do any harm, however, to shag over to their offices and see if they were there.

He made his way through the crowd to No. 25 Broad Street, up in the elevator to the sixth floor. The pool's row of offices took up both sides and the end of a short corridor. On the locked entrance door was pasted a sheet of yellow paper with the typed legend:

CLOSED FOR TWO WEEKS. LEAVE MAIL UNDER DOOR.

PETE was turning away when he thought he saw the blurred and distant silhouette of a moving figure in the light that filtered through the frosted glass of the door. He put his ear to the crack, heard nothing, but detected the scent of cigar smoke. He looked over his shoulder. The short corridor was empty.

He took out the blue-steel .44 and crashed the butt of it against a lower corner of the glass. Peering through the six-inch opening, he saw the door of the private office open half an inch and softly close. He put his hand between the jagged glass edges, opened the door and tiptoed in. From the private office, as he listened for a moment outside its door, came not a sound. He threw this inner door open.

The pool manager of the flat, bald head was staring across the mahogany desk at the gun in Pete's hand. His swarthy skin had turned to a creamy yellow with blotches of white on the high cheek bones. The other pool manager's pale eyes ran from Pete's gun to his face and back again; his fat face seemed suddenly shapeless. There was a third man, a stranger, with curling, long, black hair beneath a wide soft hat and a curling, square beard. Two bottles of milk and three cracker boxes sat on the window sill. The water cooler, formerly in the outer office, now stood beside the desk.

"Hidin' out, eh?" remarked Pete. "You two gentlemen advised me to buy Continental Petroleum. I've come to get my money back. Fifty thousand dollars."

The swarthy, bald man cleared his throat. "Excuse me," he said huskily. "I remember the only conversation we ever had with you, my dear sir. Mr. Kent asked us if we had changed our plans, and we said, 'No.' I remember it distinctly, sir, if you will pardon me. Our plans had nothing to do with Continental Petroleum."

Pete was thinking of Lindy Lou, waiting at the hotel, and began to see through a red mist. He kicked the door shut behind him. "You two varmints helped Kent clean me. I can't find him, to shoot him like a dog, but I've got you."

The swarthy man licked his lips and looked over his shoulder at the bearded man. The pale man regarded the bearded man, too. The backfire from an automobile below burst jumpily into the silence.

"Well, Meyer?" asked the swarthy man sharply.

The bearded man waddled to the cooler and nervously filled a paper cup with water. As he dipped to sip, his long hair fell forward to obscure the silhouette of his fleshy down-curved nose. He threw back his head to swallow. Pete felt a thrill of shock; that gesture was unmistakable. He smiled grimly and shot at the stockbroker from the hip.

Water spurted for a moment through the hole in the paper cup, wetting the white hand and cuff. The bearded drinker let the cup fall; out of a rim of suddenly white cheek bone and brow he

goggled at the smoking revolver with Asop Kent's frightened eyes.

"When we ketch a cattle thief down my way," said Pete, "we make him swing. You ain't got a rope handy, have you, Asop?"

"Before Heaven, Pete," began Asop Kent, speaking rapidly through the false beard, "I couldn't help it. I lost, too. Any man is liable to go bankrupt in the Street!"

Pete's gun spoke thunderously in the small room. The lobe of Kent's left ear showed red abruptly.

"Fifty thousand," said Pete, smiling icily at the trembling bucketeer crouching by the water cooler with a hand to the side of his head.

"All right, Pete!" Asop Kent rose, swung a satchel from the chair to the desk and opened its brass catch with shaking fingers. "Here's ten thousand, Pete. Before Heaven, it's every cent I've got." Pete's gun rose, but its drop was stopped by Asop Kent's cry. "Wait! I'll get it!"

He dropped the sheaf of bills back in the bag and wheeled on the two pool managers, his face quivering.

"This is your fault, you stupid swine! I told you we should have taken that boat yesterday. This fifty grand will come out of your share of the swag, or by Heaven, I'll give the whole game away to the cops! You wait here!"

Followed close by Pete, he waddled two blocks around the corner to a safe-deposit company, where he took twenty thousand dollars in cash and twenty-five thousand dollars in Liberty Bonds from a capacious deposit box and handed them to Pete.

"I'll have to give you the other five grand at the office," said Kent.

NO other word was spoken as they returned and went up in the elevator. A sheet of paper had been pasted over the hole in the frosted glass and the office door was locked. Kent had a key, and Pete followed him to the door marked "Private."

"If they've beat it!" Kent ejaculated threateningly. He threw open the door, then stopped.

Mr. Stone, the thickset and black-clad customer of Kent & Grange, stepped forward, threw back his coat to disclose a badge on his vest, and put his hand on Asop Kent's shoulder.

"You are under arrest, Kent," he said. "Those two partners of yours didn't want to wear the bracelets alone, and tipped me off to wait for you. Just step in here while I call the wagon, will you?"

"I'm sure glad you got these crooks," remarked Pete, after they had entered the office, "if you are the sheriff or something. I was just to his strong box where he gave me back all but five thousand of my money, and he is going to give me the rest out of that there bag."

"Safe-deposit box!" exclaimed the detective. "Can you tell me whereabouts? Oh, right around on Beaver Street? I know that one. Gosh, that'll be worth a lot of money to the poor devils this bird has been cheating. I'll take that key from him now. Listen, partner—— You handed this crook some pretty hefty checks. I saw the first one, and I heard him talking you into the second one. That's how I located these pals of his—followed you and him when he was taking you round to talk to the 'pool.' If you got back all but five thousand, you better take my advice and beat it and be thankful you got the experience so cheap. I can't let him give you anything out of that bag. Put in your claim with the district attorney next week. Hello, Central!"

Pete left the place, walking on air, and made his way uptown. He had recovered forty-five thousand dollars out of what an hour earlier had seemed a total loss. And he had learned some-

thing. It would be a long time, he felt, before he gambled again. It wasn't fair to Lindy.

As he entered their hotel room, she threw aside a newspaper and came toward him. She was pale, under the mass of auburn hair, but when she caught the lapels of his coat there was nothing of hurt or fear in her dark eyes.

"Petey, darlin'!" she said. "Don't you bother about losin' that measly fifty thousand. You've got me, and I've got you. There's seven hundred dollars to my account at the bank. We can return those things I bought, pay what we owe the hotel and have plenty left over."

Pete drew the batch of crisp green bills from his pocket and pressed them into her hands.

"I got it back, honey!" His heart expanded almost painfully at her so-obvious bewilderment and delight. "All except five thousand, and I'm willin' to pay that to learn how much grief there is in gamblin'. There—you keep it for us, and don't you never let me tetch it."

"Oh, Petey! But, *how* in the *world?*"

"Well," explained Pete, as he took the gun from his hip and dropped it into the holster hanging in the closet, "they skinned me pretty as long as I played their game. But, finally, I jes' got back to natural methods."

THE REASON WHY

THERE is a story told of a moderately priced car which, when assembled at the factory, is taken out and given a road test before fuel has been poured into its tank.

"Oh, it runs on its reputation," is the airy explanation given.

This, of course, is merely a jest, but many machines would have been loitering in garages during the past year, if it had not been for the improvement in methods of securing gasoline from crude oil. For the increase in the number of vehicles would have skyrocketed the price of fuel to a prohibitive height had old-fashioned ways continued.

Formerly only about twenty per cent of gasoline was obtained from a barrel of crude oil; now seventy-five per cent more gasoline is secured. Had refining methods not been brought nearer perfection by scientists, the crude oil treated last year would have yielded four billion gallons less gasoline than the amount consumed in 1925. With less of it on the market, the demand would have made the usual Sunday-afternoon auto ride an impossibility to some people.

Most of the increase was due to improvements in the "cracking" process of recovering the gasoline, but other factors also entered. There has been, in the big units, an improvement in the efficiency of the refineries; also, those plants which could not be operated economically and profitably have been closed down.

A Chat With You

EVERY man who can read should have a library. No matter how small the shack or how big the place, if it is to be a home in any human and civilized sense, there should be a place for books—and magazines. The formation of a library for the individual or the family should be a process of slow accretion. Buying the books wholesale in lengths to fit the shelves will never do. One book, or one set at a time, chosen after due deliberation, after one knows the taste of the thing—they ought to be picked up piecemeal. All really good shopping is done this way. Look back over the things you prize and that have given you most comfort, whether it be furniture, dress or books, and you will find that it was a strong impulse, well resisted but finally triumphant, that made you get the thing.

* * * *

NO man's house in these modern days is big enough to hold all the books he may read or acquire. A good library cannot be so large as a public library. There you have to fill in a card and wait for your book—but in your own library—and you should have one—every book must have its place and there must not be so many books that you cannot remember the place. So, given so many shelves and so much wall space, the ability to throw away the worthless or worn-out book is equally important with the judgment that picks the new book to take its place.

* * * *

NO matter how scholarly and matter of fact a man may be, if he be fond of reading at all, the real tang and zest of his reading will come from fiction. *Hamlet, Romeo, Mercutio,* these humans of the Rennaissance, D'Artagnan, Cyrano—and our own heroes of the tales of Cooper, Owen Wister, B. M. Bower and Ferguson are more alive than most of the folks in the formal histories. More than half of any good bookshelf or library will be filled with the books that do not pretend to improve the mind, that simply claim entertainment as their ticket of admission. And yet these unpretentious volumes become, after acquaintance, the most welcome guests.

* * * *

THERE are two or three tests by which a story may be valued. One of them is the test of rereading. Many a story may be read once and enjoyed—but to be read twice or three times and still enjoyed—and enjoyed even more than at the first reading—this calls for exceptional qualities in story and author, this gives it a permanent place on the bookshelf.

We have just been rereading a set of stories. The original reading of them was scattered over a period of ten or fifteen years. They came in one at a time, and at tolerably long intervals. They were always welcome and eagerly read, but we never quite realized how good they were till we got them all together, bound up in one book, and making, after their fashion, a complete and rounded long narrative. The book is published by Chelsea House. It is called "Yellow Horse." It is the work of A. M. Chisholm. It may be ordered from any bookseller—and it is worth ordering.

* * * *

ALL the stories that combine themselves magically to make the complete book, "Yellow Horse," have appeared in THE POPULAR. To describe

them to our old readers is superfluous. All we can say to the old familiars of the Yellow Horse tales is that it is impossible to supply back numbers of the magazines containing them and that the only way to get them is in book form. The book is not a collection of short stories. It is the saga of a Western town. If your book dealer cannot supply it to you, write to Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York.

* * * *

TO the younger readers of this magazine, who have not had an opportunity to read, in its far-strung serial form, this work of Mr. Chisholm, it might be well to say a word about it. Yellow Horse was, and is, a mining camp in the Northwest—the old West, not the moving-picture West, but the real West. We can see it just by closing our eyes. Remington has painted it—but no one, not even Bret Harte or Alfred Henry Lewis, has ever described it quite so well as Chisholm. The row of shacks, some of them with false fronts, straggling along the beginning of a street, the saloon and the dance hall, the gambling house—all silent, but sending out radiance into the dark night. The gambler, the gunfighter, the bearded miner, the painted Indian brave, the Amazonian lady who runs the restaurant—they all come into being and live again when you turn the pages of the book. "Bad Bill" Stevens of deadly aim; old Zeb Bowerman, wise and just; Uncle Billy, the cantankerous old mule skinner; Mr. Soames, the contentious and quarrelsome—we remember them all from years ago as they appeared in this magazine, but we had not realized how much we had missed them till we got them all together in this book.

* * * *

WE don't know how you figure out your bookshelf or library or what your taste is, or what you have room for and what not. But this book has a place on ours, and, if need be, some other book must step aside to give it place. It belongs. It has the spirit of the old, whole-hearted, humorous, outdoor West. Besides this, it can really make any one laugh hard. We are glad to think that it appeared in THE POPULAR. We are glad also to know that Chisholm is still writing for us and going strong. He has a genuine Chisholm story in the next number. "Larry" is the title. Read it. And if you have not already read "Yellow Horse" try to get a copy. It is a book you will not want to part with.

In the August 7th issue of The Popular

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By A. M. Chisholm

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Author of "The Shadow of Silver Tip," "Wooden Guns," etc.

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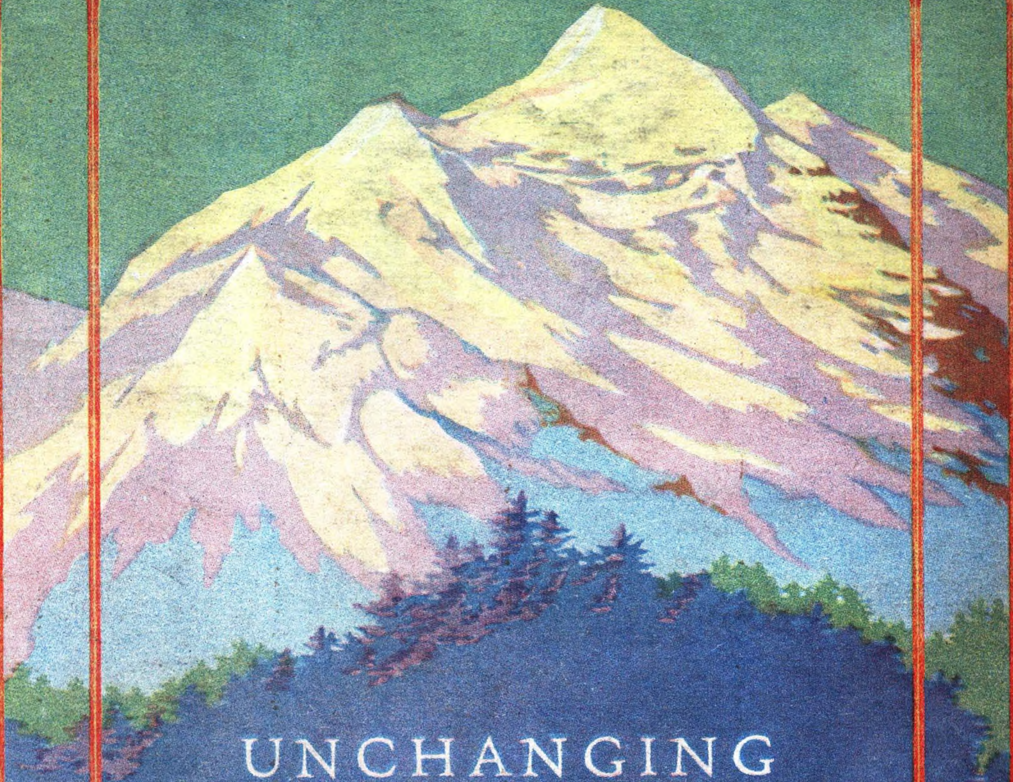

UNCHANGING

Constant insistence on the highest standards of manufacture — and as a constant result, unchanging quality

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