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BY FRED MAC ISAAC

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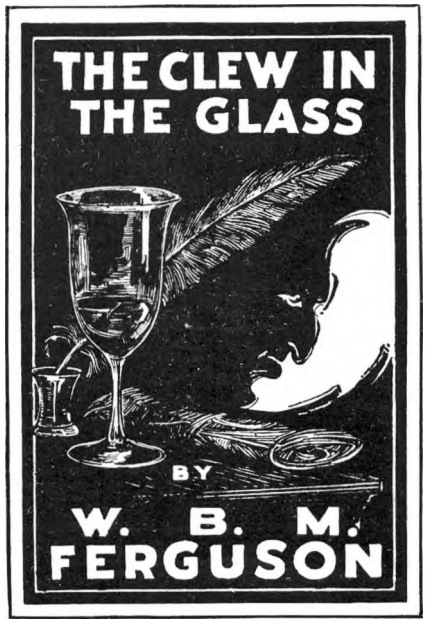

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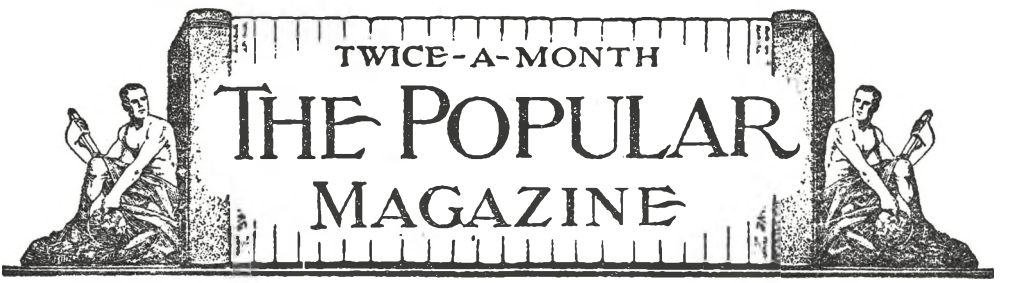

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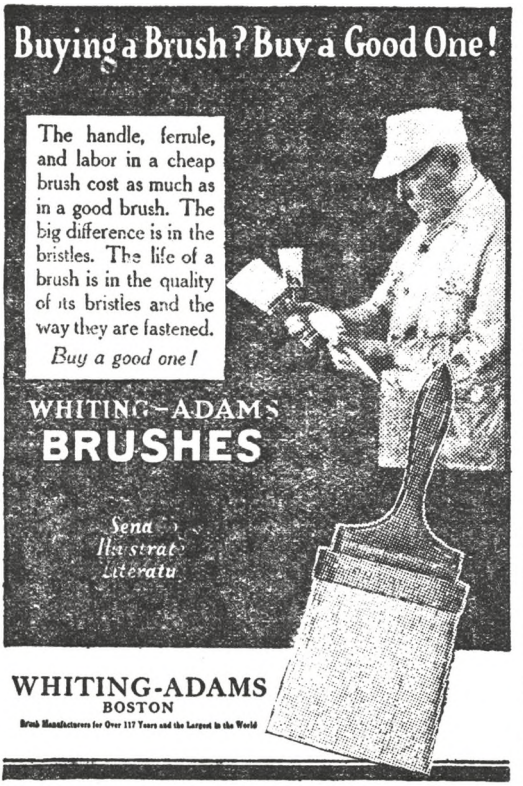

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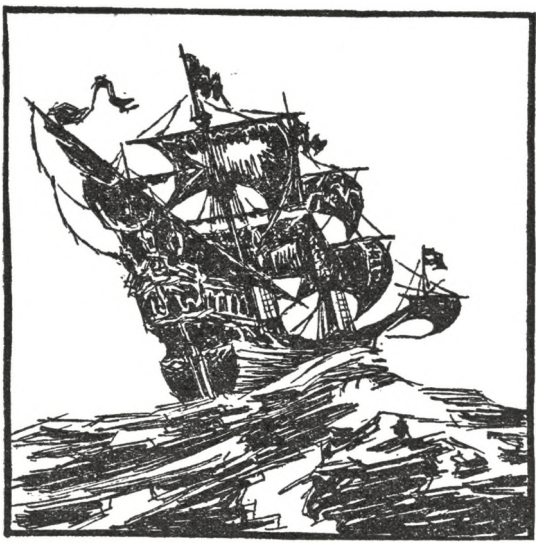

The Lost Galleon

By Ellery H. Clark

Author of "Carib Gold," and Other Stories

Out of the mists of a past that echoed with the raucous shouts of attacking buccaneers, the clash of pirate cutlass with Spanish pike and the creaking cordage of bellying sails, there swam into the hardy, but scarcely romantic, life of young Hal Nickerson, Yankee sailor of the clipper line, a ghostly galleon whose hold was bursting with silver and gold plate and the jewels of an Aztec empire, that the forewarned merchants of doomed Panama had slipped through the clutching hands of Sir Henry Morgan and his wolves of the Main.

"But all these prizes they could willingly have given, and greater labor into the bargain, for one galleon, which miraculously escaped, richly laden with all the king's plate, jewels and other precious goods of the best and richest merchants of Panama. The strength of this galleon was inconsiderable, having only seven guns . . . and very ill-provided of victuals, necessaries and fresh water.

"This only prize would have been of far greater value than all they got at Panama.

"The said galleon fled to places more remote and unbeknown."

Exquemalin: The History of the Bucaniers of America.

CHAPTER I.

THE SCARLET STAIN.

ON an evening in late October, in the year 1809, my father's schooner, the *Albicore,* laden with lumber, was beating into Boston harbor against a light and baffling breeze. A drizzle of rain, cold

and cheerless, fell steadily; and a mist, intensified by the darkness, obscured the lighthouse tower and rendered all but invisible the dim outlines of the adjacent islands.

I stood forward, following, with longing eyes, the shore line of Nantasket Beach and wishing that we had no cargo to deliver to Jonathan Vane and could bear away, with started sheets, for Bayport and home.

In this unhappy mood, I should have welcomed anything which would divert my mind, but I could see small hope of it, for with the exception of my father, who was at the wheel, the only other man on deck was "Long Jim" Colby, tall and lean and lanky. Jim, though great in action, was "no great hand to talk." One could imagine him in a gale off Hatteras, or in a snow squall off Cape Horn, but never as a maker of light and airy conversation.

PRESENTLY, therefore, I strolled aft, and as I neared the wheel I realized, for perhaps the first time in my life, that my father was beginning to show his years. His shoulders were bowed; his hair and beard were streaked with gray. Up to that moment, I had never thought of him as old; we had always been comrades; and I was well aware, as people often told me, that I was a lucky boy to have as good a father as Captain Henry Nickerson.

Evidently he perceived that I was not in a cheerful mood, for he hailed me, "Well, Hal, you look pretty glum for a boy who's almost in port. What's the matter?"

"Oh, nothing much," I answered. "I was just wishing we were home."

"To-morrow we'll unload our lumber, and the old hooker will go tearing down to Bayport with a fair wind and an ebb tide. We'll be home to dinner, and I'll tell your mother to give you a whole apple pie to yourself. So cheer up, son, it might be a great deal worse."

Whether it was his tone, or the thought of the pie, or both, I felt cheered at once and began to be somewhat ashamed of my melancholy. Presently the wind freshened. At length my father pointed into the gloom ahead.

"There's India Wharf," he said, "and there, to the left, is Mr. Vane's office. He's often there as late as this. But not to-night. There are no lights in the counting room."

I strained my eyes in the darkness. "But there is one in the loft," I answered. "What would he be doing up there?"

"He wouldn't be up there," rejoined my father. "There's nothing in the loft but old rubbish. But you are mistaken, Hal. What you see is a reflection from some other building; it isn't a light."

"I think it is," I persisted, then added quickly: "And I'll tell you just who it might be—Ed Stevens, Mr. Vane's clerk. It would be just like him to be sneaking around like that. I hate him."

"Now, now!" my father remonstrated. "That's just like a boy, always going off at half cock. Stevens is a very able young man, intelligent and efficient. I've heard Mr. Vane say more than once that he'd find it hard to replace him."

"That may be," I insisted obstinately, "but I hate him, just the same. For one thing, he has such a mean, sneaking face. And for another, I caught him once in the alley back of Mr. Vane's, with some rats which he had trapped. He had built a fire out of shavings; then he had run a boat hook through the wires of the trap and was holding it over the fire and roasting the rats to death. A man who would do that would do anything."

But my father, loyal to his employers, had no idea of deserting them, and so rejoined: "That was needlessly cruel, of course, and I don't defend it. But still rats are nothing but vermin, and they may have caused so much damage

that Stevens felt more vindictive toward them than he should. But whether he did right or wrong, it doesn't alter the fact that he's a very capable and enterprising young man."

What he said did not in the least affect my opinion of the clerk, for I remembered the expression of positive enjoyment on his face as he tortured his helpless captives. Shortly afterward we docked at India Wharf, and the various members of the crew departed to enjoy a bit of "shore leave." My father and I were the last to leave the schooner.

AS we walked up the wharf I fell into a gloomy mood as I thought of the long trip before us; for though our ultimate destination was the Green Dragon Tavern on India Street, my father had old-fashioned and punctilious ideas regarding the duties of captains toward consignees, and nothing could stop him from first paying his respects to Squire Jonathan Vane, who lived on Sumner Street, on Beacon Hill.

I do not imagine, however, that the idea of walking in the rain appealed to him any more than it did to me, for as we left the wharf he turned to the left to make sure that Mr. Vane's office was actually deserted.

The counting house was a three-story building, overlooking the harbor, with the counting room on the first floor, a private office above, where Jonathan Vane entertained guests of special importance, and a third floor consisting of a garret or loft, filled with the discarded odds and ends which are bound to accumulate in half a century of business life. My father tried the door and found that it was fastened; then, crossing the street, he gazed upward for a moment and observed:

"No light aloft, Hal, just as I told you."

Thereupon I crossed over in my turn, and looking upward as he had done, saw that all was dark. "Well, there was one," I insisted. "I'm sure of it. But evidently whoever was up there has gone home by now."

My father sighed. The rain had begun to fall with renewed vigor, descending in a steady drizzle which made the prospect of our trip to Sumner Street distinctly unpleasant. But my father was a man of system; to Mr. Vane he would report, and forthwith we wended our way up State Street and twenty minutes later were knocking lustily at the door of the squire's home.

As we waited, it seemed to me that the same darkness pervaded the house that we had encountered at the office, for through the panes of glass on either side of the door I could detect no light within. Presently, however, a faint gleam flickered down the hallway. There was the sound of a bolt being cautiously slipped. Through a narrow space a few inches wide, still guarded by a heavy chain within, the face of Mr. Vane's old housekeeper peered out at us, ghostlike in the dim light of the candle which she held above her head.

"Is your master in?" asked my father.

It was evident that she recognized his voice, for without replying directly to his question she cried, in a tone manifestly of relief: "Why, it's Captain Nickerson, and Master Hal. Wait a moment, captain, till I slip the chain."

The door closed, then opened again, this time to a more hospitable extent. We gladly entered, the old woman, shaky and infirm, holding the light in her trembling hand, while she apologized loquaciously for her caution in keeping the door so tightly locked and barred.

"I'm all alone," she quavered, "and there are always bad men about. I've no wish to have the house robbed, and myself murdered."

My father gazed at her clearly somewhat perturbed. "You're alone? Where is Mr. Vane?"

The old lady fumbled in a mysteri-

ously hidden pocket, and at length produced a crumpled envelope, which she held out to us.. "The strangest thing," she answered. "Mr. Vane has been suddenly called away. A boy brought this here this afternoon. To Philadelphia, it says. But you can read it for yourself."

She held the candle closer. My father, his face still puzzled and disturbed, drew the single sheet of paper from the envelope, read it through, once hurriedly, again with greater deliberation, then queried sharply:

"He didn't come home? He packed nothing to take with him?"

The housekeeper shook her head. "You see what it says," she replied. "'Very sudden and of great importance,' and, 'I shall probably be gone some time.' But he didn't need to come home; he always keeps a bag at the office, ready for traveling. Still, it was quite a shock to me when the boy came. I had dinner cooking on the stove."

My father's face was exceedingly grave. "And are you certain," he asked at length, "that this is Mr. Vane's handwriting?"

The old woman, as though the thought had not occurred to her, took back the letter into her skinny hand and peered at it, her short-sighted eyes only a few inches from the page. "Oh, yes!" she answered. "That's Mr. Vane's writing. I'm sure of it."

"I'm glad of that," said my father, in a tone of relief. "I suppose I must see Stevens."

"That's what the master always says," agreed the old woman. "'Tell them to see Stevens,' he'll say. 'Stevens knows more about it than I do.' I've heard him say those words many a time."

"Come, Hal," said my father. "We'll be going."

"But won't you stay for a bite and a cup of tea, captain?" the old woman urged. "'Tis a very bad night out, cold and damp. And your clothes are wet. Come downstairs to the fire and dry yourselves, and I'll have something ready for you in no time."

WOULD that my father had assented, but he was evidently in no mood for eating until his business was off his mind. We tramped in silence to Bulfinch Street, where Stevens lodged. Here the landlady, hard-faced and angular, wasted no words.

"Third floor, front," she said, with acidity, and pointed to the narrow stairs.

There was nothing for it but to toil wearily to the third floor. My father knocked at the door of Stevens' room. Instantly a voice cried sharply:

"Who's there?"

"It's Captain Nickerson." my father answered.

An instant later the door opened, though for a short distance only, and the clerk's pale, unprepossessing face peered out at us through the crack. "Well," he queried, none too cordially, "what do you want of me, captain? I was just going to bed."

"I'm sorry to have disturbed you," my father replied, "but I wanted a word with you about Mr. Vane."

When my father spoke, I thought that a strange expression came over the face of the clerk. He appeared to swallow rapidly once or twice, then said quickly, and in an unnatural voice:

"Well, what is your word about Mr. Vane?"

There was something so unusual, so challenging in the clerk's manner, that even my father, most easy-going of men, apparently noticed it.

"Why, if you have no objection," he said, "we'd like to come in and sit. We've had a long day of it, and we've not had supper yet."

The clerk's expression was the reverse of amiable, yet no one could well refuse so reasonable a request. "Come in then," he said shortly, at the same time throwing back the door.

We crossed the threshold and took the chairs he pushed forward for us. A lamp on the mantelpiece furnished the only light, and the clerk stepped across the room and extended a hand to turn it higher. My eyes were on the clerk, and as he stretched out his arm and his coat sleeve slid back, I could hardly repress a start, for even in the faint light I could see upon his shirt sleeve a vivid, irregular splash of red.

My glimpse was for an instant only. The next moment he had turned up the lamp, placed it on the table and had seated himself so that he was in the shadow and the faces of my father and myself were thrown into relief. Then, without waiting for my father to speak, he himself took the initiative.

"I hope you have news of Mr. Vane," he said, "for I confess I have been worried about him. I have never had a greater surprise in my life than I had to-day. Have you seen or heard from him?"

My father shook his head. "We have just come from his house," he said, "and the news we have is strange news —that he has gone to Philadelphia without warning and may not be back for some time."

The clerk gave a little cry, half of surprise and half of relief. "Then it's true!" he cried. "He left a letter for me to that effect; but I couldn't understand his doing such a thing at such short notice. I feared——" He hesitated a moment, and then added: "Absurd, of course, but I feared he might have met with foul play."

"Heaven forbid!" ejaculated my father. "So he left you a letter also? Have you got it with you?"

Stevens began fumbling in his pocket. "When I went out to lunch," he explained, "I left Mr. Vane alone in the office. I met some friends in the shipping line, was gone longer than I intended, and when I returned I found the door was locked. I always carry a key, of course, and when I entered I found this note on my desk." He extended it to my father as he spoke.

My father took it, searching in his pockets for his spectacles. Then he uttered an exclamation of annoyance. "I remember now," he said. "I left my glasses in the cabin of the schooner. Here, Hal." He handed me the letter. "You read it. Is it like the one we saw at Mr. Vane's?"

I took the missive and scanned it with interest. If Mr. Vane had written the letter which we had seen at his housekeeper's, then Mr. Vane had written the letter I held in my hand. "It's the same, precisely," I said.

My father looked relieved. "Well, then, he hasn't met with foul play," he observed. "And perhaps his sudden departure isn't so curious, after all. He's a quick-thinking man and a quick-acting man, in spite of his years. And he has business interests outside of Boston; every one knows that. Wasn't there something in the wind, Mr. Stevens, that you can think of, which might have caused this hasty decision?"

Stevens, his memory thus stimulated, was silent for a moment, then cried admiringly: "Well, I declare, Captain Nickerson, you've a head on your shoulders worth two of mine! Now that you ask me, I do remember that about a week ago he said to me that he had a huge deal pending with some merchants known the country over. 'And they're not local men, either, Stevens!' I remember his saying that. And then—let me think—yes, he did say so: 'I'll have to act quick when the time comes,' he said. 'Take it or leave it—that's their way.' Those were his very words."

"Why, then," exclaimed my father, "that explains everything! 'Not local men'—that would mean New York or Philadelphia, and of course in this case it was Philadelphia. And then his saying that he would have to act quickly. Why, we have been worrying ourselves

over nothing! Sorry to have troubled you, Mr. Stevens. Let me know when he comes home."

"Indeed I will!" said the clerk, with greater cordiality than he had yet displayed. "And I'm obliged to you for calling, captain. You've stirred up my sleepy brains. I shan't feel worried about Mr. Vane any more."

He escorted us to the door, holding the lamp high to guide us down the stairs. I would have given much for another peep at that crimsoned sleeve, but fortune did not favor me, for this time it was in the other hand that he held the lamp.

NEITHER of us made conversation until we had reached the inn and satisfied our hunger. But when we were alone in our room, my father with a *Gazette* in his hand, I ventured to tell him what I had seen. Yet to my surprise, he refused absolutely to take me seriously.

"What an imagination, Hal!" he said. "Poor Stevens! He spills some red ink on his cuff, and you have to suspect him of doing away with Mr. Vane." He laughed heartily at the idea.

I flushed. "Well, I've told you I don't like Stevens," I insisted. "And I thought he acted very queerly when we came. And it didn't look like ink at all to me."

"Nonsense," returned my father. "Of course it was ink. I can't write a letter without daubing myself all over. And as for his behaving queerly, that was only natural; I observed myself that he seemed to be much disturbed. No wonder. It's unusual for Mr. Vane to act as he did. But you heard his explanation. You heard," he added, with a touch of innocent pride, "the question I asked him, and how he remembered at once what Mr. Vane had said to him. And then there are the two letters. You admit yourself that Mr. Vane wrote both of them."

"No, I don't," I defended promptly. "I only told you they were in the same hand. If Mr. Vane wrote one, he wrote the other, but suppose he didn't write either of them? Suppose they are forgeries, or suppose he wrote them because some one threatened him—made him write them—stood over him with a pistol——" I was conscious myself that my imagination was getting the better of me, and therefore subsided and concluded lamely enough: "Or something like that?"

My father, regarding me with a good-humored smile, made no reply, but the gesture with which he turned to his *Gazette* showed me what he thought of my theories. Then almost immediately he gave vent to an exclamation of annoyance. "Those confounded spectacles!" he cried. "Now my whole evening is spoiled."

"I can read the paper to you," I suggested.

"No, thank you, Hal," he returned. "It wouldn't be the same. I like to get the news with my own eyes; that's the only way it satisfies me."

"Then I'll go down to the wharf and get your glasses," I volunteered; though it cost me an effort to make the offer, for I was delightfully comfortable where I was.

My father hesitated. "There are rough customers around the wharves," he objected, "and it's a dark night. I'll tell you, Hal; if you're not too tired, we'll go together."

We once more put on our coats and caps and made our way down to the wharf. My father descended the companionway first, and I remained on deck, glancing idly here and there until presently my eye fell on the counting house, looming tall and dark amid the shadows. Instantly I felt a tug at my heart, for from the chimney a cloud of smoke poured forth, streaming rapidly to leeward before the brisk westerly breeze which was clearing the heavens.

Though the windows of the loft were dark, I thought I could detect a faint radiance issuing uncertainly into the gloom. Instantly I dived down into the cabin and, going over to my chest, I surreptitiously drew forth that prized possession, my pistol, and slipped it into my pocket, just as my father, who had been vainly groping for his spectacles, suddenly exclaimed:

"There, I have them! Now we'll go back to the inn, Hal."

I followed him on deck without a word, but as he closed the hatch, I took him by the arm and pointed to the smoke. "Now, father," I said firmly, "please listen to me. There is some mystery here. Why should there be smoke pouring out of the loft at this time of night? Either there is some one up there—robbers, perhaps—or else the building is on fire. Surely we ought to investigate."

My father, looking up at the smoke with a perplexed expression on his face, began stroking his chin with his hand, a favorite habit of his when puzzled and distraught.

I hastened to follow up my advantage. "Let's try the door, anyway," I urged. "There can't be any harm in that."

"Very well," he assented. "Let's do it."

We found that the door was tightly closed and that no ray of light came from the somber interior.

"There's the window," I suggested, "that opens on the alley. We might try that. If there are thieves in the building, that's just the way they would have got in."

By this time I think that my father's suspicions, as well as my own, had begun to be thoroughly aroused.

"All right," he agreed. "Let's look."

With a feeling of rising excitement, I led the way around the building and up the dark and narrow alley, which had no outlet to the street, but ended abruptly in a blind wall.

CHAPTER II.

UNDER COVER OF DARKNESS.

MY mind, as I walked along, was in a ferment. It may have been my prejudice against Stevens, but in spite of his statement that he was going to bed, I felt that his attitude toward us had been most peculiar, and that the chances were even that he was in the counting house at this very moment. If so, I reasoned, he would have entered by the door, locking it after him; and therefore I had no real expectation of finding the window open.

If it were closed, this would doubtless put an end to my plans, for I knew that my law-abiding father would never go to the length of breaking and entering by forcing the bolt. When we reached the alley I darted ahead and finding, as I had anticipated, that the window was shut, I pushed up on it with all my strength. After a moment's resistance, there came a sound of rending wood and it shot upward with speed, just as my father appeared at my side.

"Was it open, Hal?" he whispered.

"I'm not quite sure," I answered diplomatically. "It seemed to stick a little. Anyway, it's open now."

"You go in first, then," he said, "and lend me a hand. I'm not as lively as I used to be."

I grasped the sill, gave a spring and wormed my way, headfirst, into the room. Then, regaining my feet, I listened intently, one hand on my pistol, but no sound disturbed the quiet. The old clock in the corner ticked with a surprising loudness, and that was all. I turned to the window again, and not without difficulty managed to half pull, half help my father through the opening. Once inside, he, too, listened for a moment, then said in a low tone:

"Now, Hal, you're to stay here. If there really is danger, your mother would never forgive me for leading you

into it. You stand guard over the window. I'll go up to the loft and investigate. If you hear me call, come as fast as you can. Otherwise, wait here for me."

Evidently he now really surmised that things were not as they should be in the counting house, for he sat down and took the precaution to remove his boots, then tiptoed cautiously in the direction of the hall. No sooner had he left the room than I deliberately disobeyed him, for I could not stay behind and let him go, unarmed, into the face of possible danger.

I slipped off my shoes and stole out after him into the hallway, judging of his progress by an occasional faint creak from the stairs. I was conscious that my heart was beating violently. I went up the stairs with one hand on the banisters for guidance and the other in front of me, on a level with my face, as if to ward off a blow.

At length I reached the top of the stairs and paused. I could still hear my father's cautious tread ascending the next flight; but now, for the first time, it seemed to me that I could distinguish another sound—that of hurrying footsteps in the loft above. Presently this noise ceased. Concluding that it was the effect of an overwrought imagination, I started to continue my journey.

But as I passed the door of the private office, which stood ajar, and saw the faint light which entered through the window, I was all at once moved to investigate. If sinister individuals were abroad in the building, they might cut off my father's retreat, on his advancing to the floor above. With pistol drawn and finger curling on the trigger, I shoved the door still farther back and entered. The quiet office was clearly untenanted. The table and the chairs were all grouped in the center of the room. All was peaceful and serene.

As I stood there, with every faculty on the alert, all at once that faint noise above commenced again—the sound of a quick, nervous tread, stopping, then continuing. With my thoughts reverting to my father, I regained the hallway and began mounting the second flight of stairs.

As I ascended, I could see that there was a light in the loft. This was a faint radiance, not so much an actual light as a diffused and distant glow. I had been in the loft before, and remembered that a flight of stairs led upward to a landing, that from this landing a shorter flight, at right angles, led to the loft itself. Both the landing and the flight above it, I recalled, were encumbered with a mass of rubbish—barrels, boxes, and all kinds of odds and ends.

While my father, whose figure I could now dimly discern, ascended boldly, I slipped cautiously behind a barrel on the upper stairs, where I could both remain unobserved and at the same time obtain an unobstructed view of the loft.

MY first impression was one of utter amazement. The loft was seemingly untenanted, and everywhere there was the same confusion of old furniture, bales and boxes, piled helter-skelter, and completely filling the room. But this was merely the background; what instantly riveted my attention was the stove in the middle of the room, a huge, pot-bellied affair, now heated so hot that its walls glowed a bright cherry-red.

At once I leaped to the conclusion that some one was taking this means of setting fire to the building. I was soon to be undeceived. In the shadows to the left of the room something stirred. An instant later a figure emerged and moved swiftly in the direction of the stove.

There was something hurried and yet furtive in its movements. When it

came within the circle of light, I could see that it was Stevens, and that he apparently carried some dark wrap or garment upon his arm. What it was, I could not distinguish until he took his seat on a box before the fire, drew a knife from his pocket and spread out his burden upon his knees.

Then I saw that it was a long overcoat, with a cape attached, and that Stevens was carefully proceeding to remove the buttons with his knife. A quicker brain would have grasped the situation instantly, but mine did not. I watched him with interest until presently my father's voice broke the silence.

"Stevens!" he cried. "What are you doing?"

With a startled cry of utter terror, Stevens leaped to his feet and stood stock-still, the firelight gleaming on the knife in his hand. Then, as if recovering himself, he came slowly forward, still with that stealthy and crouching gait. Once, twice, he strove to speak before the words would come.

"Captain Nickerson," he half whispered, "you have surprised me."

"So I perceive," my father answered sternly. "I know that coat well. I have seen your master wearing it a hundred times. Stevens, you have murdered Mr. Vane."

The words seemed to galvanize Stevens into life. "No, no!" he cried, "I never laid hand on him. He was killed, captain, but I had no part in it."

He had advanced still farther as he spoke. I stood gazing at the scene before me, until presently I was aware that he was speaking with the terrible earnestness of a man who knows that he is pleading for his life.

"Captain," he cried, "let me explain to you! Yesterday Mr. Vane and I had some words in the counting room. It was nothing, merely a matter of detail; he wished to see certain securities which I could not produce at the moment. He became angry, and I dare say I spoke too freely myself. Unfortunately, also, there were others present who would testify as to what took place. It seems as though Fate were trying to catch me in a net. This happened yesterday; this morning I apologized to Mr. Vane, and he accepted my apology; everything was as before.

"Then came this afternoon. Part of what I told you was true. I did leave the office to get my luncheon; I did meet business friends and stayed away longer than usual; it must have been three o'clock when I returned. I remembered afterward that near the counting house I met three rough-looking men, walking hastily down the street. I told you the counting-house door was locked. That was a lie.

"It was open, and when I entered and found Mr. Vane wasn't in the counting room, I went up to his private office to tell him the news I had heard at luncheon. I opened the door——"

He stopped short in what he was saying, apparently overcome by the recollection of what he had seen. Thus he stood for some moments, gazing vacantly into space, until my father recalled him to himself with a sharp "Well?"

The clerk started; then, passing a hand over his forehead, went on: "There sat Mr. Vane, his body sprawled forward on his desk. I went up to him and found that his head had been crushed in by a fearful blow and that he was dead. At once I thought of the three men I had seen, and started for the door to give the alarm.

"Then I stopped short in my tracks. I remembered my quarrel with Mr. Vane; I realized that I was alone with a murdered man, that the three men I suspected might never be found, that I would be the one to be arrested and to be charged with the crime. Then there would be testimony that we had

differed the day before, and I knew that any jury would convict me. I was nearly out of my head with fear. So I carried Mr. Vane's body up to the loft, forged the two letters, and sent one to the housekeeper and kept the other myself. I hated to do it, but I could see no other way. It was better than death."

My father cast an apprehensive glance at the deep shadows under the eaves. "And where," he cried, "is Mr. Vane's body now?"

"At the bottom of the harbor," the clerk answered. "You remember the covered chute on the floor below, captain, that we used in loading vessels years ago? I tied heavy iron weights to the body, waited till the coast was clear and then sent it down the chute into the harbor. I heard the splash."

My father shuddered, for he had been deeply attached to Mr. Vane. "Man," he cried, "have you no humanity?" And as the clerk did not answer, he asked: "And the coat. You were going to burn that?"

"I thought it safer," Stevens admitted. "It hung in his office. I nearly forgot it."

THERE fell silence, and now, for the first time, it seemed to me I noticed a curious thing. While Stevens had apparently made no motion that I could discern, yet I was sure that while he had been talking he had imperceptibly advanced until the distance between him and my father had appreciably diminished. Also it seemed that he was measuring the space which still intervened.

I knew my father's open and unsuspicious nature, and I slowly raised my pistol until it was on a level with Stevens' breast. He would not, I grimly reflected, add another to his list of victims, for he had already lied to us once, and in my ears this second tale rang as false as the first.

Fortunately my father had noted the clerk's change of position. "Stand where you are, Stevens!" he cried sharply. "Don't come an inch nearer, and drop that knife. My son is on guard below. If you come a step closer, I'll shout for him, and he'll raise the alarm."

Immediately Stevens tossed the knife on the floor. "You misjudge me, captain!" he whined. "I wouldn't harm a person in the world. You make no allowances for what I've been through. I'm telling you the truth, captain! And if you betray me I'm a dead man."

My father stood stock-still, evidently at a loss as to what he should do. "Stevens," he said, at length, "you place me in a hard position. My duty, as a matter of law, is plain enough; I should take you with me to the authorities, and tell them what I have seen. Yet if your story is true, I hesitate, for though you may be the most innocent man in the world, no jury would believe it; you would be hanged without a doubt. But if your story is not true, then I am doing a great wrong, for I am helping a guilty man to escape the consequences of his crime. You have always borne a good reputation, Stevens. That stands you in stead now, for this is a question of your word."

The clerk raised his hands imploringly. "You must believe me, captain!" he cried. "I tell you every word is true. I don't ask this for myself, but I have an old mother who is very ill. If you give me up and she hears of it, as of course she will, it will kill her. You are known far and wide as a just man, captain—prove it now, I beg of you."

Again there was silence. At length my father said slowly: "This is a grave matter; I dare not decide it now. I am going home to-morrow, but I shall return soon. If you will give me your word not to leave Boston, I will keep silence until I have seen you again."

I could imagine what the words meant to Stevens.

"God bless you, captain, for a just man! You'll find me here when you return, and I'll abide by your decision. You're a wiser man than I am; whatever you say, I'll do. Only don't tell of it, captain; not a word, not even to your boy. You know how news spreads. Oh, this is killing me——"

As he spoke, he staggered and, sinking to his knees, began to sob with long-drawn gasps of breath. Somehow the sight affected me with a kind of sickening repulsion, for from earliest boyhood I had been taught to bear things without whimpering. As my father turned away, I queried the genuineness of the clerk's emotion, for the look on his face changed to one of venomous hatred, and I believe that, had he been more of a fighting man, he would have sprung upon my father then and there. He remained motionless, however, and as my father groped for the railing, I felt that it was time for me to depart. Quickly and noiselessly I sped down the stairs and had slipped on my shoes again by the time my father appeared.

He sat down in a chair and began pulling on his boots. "All quiet?" he asked.

"Yes," I answered. "Any news?"

His face was grave and troubled. "I'll tell you about it some time, Hal," he said. "There's nothing to do now."

Slipping through the window, we pulled it down after us, and walked away. Only one event in that long evening remained; and at the time it seemed like an incongruous and ridiculous anticlimax; although in reality it gave me a glimpse of those who were to play a vital part in our subsequent fortunes. While we were still in the shadow of the alley, there rose on the night air a burst of lusty song:

"Reuben Ranzo shipped at Calais,
Ranzo, boys, Ranzo!"

Down the street came four men, all much the worse for liquor and holding to each other for support. One, bareheaded, I noticed for his carroty hair and his face, sharp and thin like that of a ferret. But the outstanding figure was a short, thickset man, immensely broad and powerful looking, and with a stubble of coal-black beard and whiskers which seemed almost to cover his face. As they passed, my father uttered a name which was to mean much to me before many hours had passed. "Jack Palliser," he muttered. "'Dare-devil Jack.' A first-class seaman and a first-class rogue. No better than a pirate, they say. A bad man for an enemy!"

We turned the corner into the now-deserted street. From the far distance there came faintly to our ears:

"And now he's Captain Ranzo, boys,
Ranzo, boys, Ranzo!"

CHAPTER III.

OFF BLACK ROCK BEACH.

BY eleven o'clock on the following morning we had discharged our cargo and had pointed the bow of the *Albicore* toward home. My father kept to himself. I did likewise, for I knew that his thoughts, like my own, must be busied with the grim happenings of the preceding night.

I could not rid my mind of the look on the clerk's face as he had stared after my father's retreating form, and I was heartily thankful that we were each moment lengthening the distance between Boston and Bayport.

Shortly before dusk we crept into Bayport harbor, and I saw again the familiar houses on the shore, and in Tower's shipyard Ed Palmer's new schooner, now almost completed and ready to take the water. We had scarcely anchored and taken in sail when I saw a dory making off toward us. The man at the oars was Dick

Wheatland, my ideal among the Bayport sailormen, for nobody else would have sent the dory along at such a rate, or with strokes at once so easy and rhythmical and yet with such a terrific drive behind them.

A few minutes later he was clambering over the rail, shaking hands, first with my father and then with me, and exchanging jovial greetings with Jim Colby and the rest of the crew. As I watched him, I could not help a thrill of admiration, for Dick, still in his early twenties, was six feet tall, broad-shouldered, but lithe and active, his face tanned by wind and weather to the darkest of browns. I felt that if in another five or six years I could be like him, or indeed anywhere near like him, I should be well content.

Presently he stood alone with me, for in spite of the difference in our ages, we were close friends, partly, I think, because he really liked me, and partly because he was among the admirers of my Sister Rose, who was admittedly the prettiest girl in Bayport.

"How is my mother, Dick?" I asked.

"She's well," he answered. "Never saw her better."

"And how is Rose?"

A sudden change came over his face, and he scowled savagely. "Oh, *she's* well!" he exclaimed, with emphasis. "She was well enough to go driving with that dog, Jim Southard, all yesterday afternoon. They never got back until supper time. You haven't got to worry about Rose."

I tried to look solemn and sympathetic, but it was hard work. Not having arrived at the age of romance, I regarded as highly amusing the desperate rivalry between Dick and Jim Southard for my sister's hand.

We landed at the wharf, where my father stopped to chat with Captain Horatio Tower, with my uncle, Edward Nickerson, and with Caleb Tilden and Elijah Bates. Then, as our house was over a mile up the shore at Black Rock Beach, we trudged away in the dusk, quite ready for a good supper and a comfortable bed. Halfway home we passed the new life-saving station, erected by the humane society at Pleasant Beach, and as my father looked out to sea and felt the wind on his face, he called my attention to the heavy cloudbank in the northeast.

"Looks bad to me," he observed. "If she comes on to blow, there's apt to be a chance for Captain Tower and the life-saving crew before we're twenty-four hours older."

A HALF hour's plodding along the sandy road saw us home. Then followed the greetings from my mother and sister, and the longed-for supper. Just before bedtime, my father and I, according to our custom, strolled down to the beach for a closing observation of the weather. Though there was no wind to speak of, the waves were breaking restlessly along the beach; and to this my father, wise in the lore of the sea, bade me pay heed.

"Sure sign," he observed. "There's a gale at sea, beyond a doubt. If I were a betting man, I'd wager a big red apple that we're in for a nasty blow."

Weary as I was, I remember the sigh of relief with which I nestled down among the blankets, adjusted myself in comfort and dropped off into unconsciousness. Yet after a time, I was dimly aware, even in my sleep, that the storm had come; for through my slumbers penetrated the banging of shutters, the roar of the surf on the beach and the howling of the wind.

At length I was awakened, first by a lively knocking on my door, then to find my father bending over me and shaking me vigorously.

"Get up, Hal!" he cried. "It's blowing a gale, and there's a vessel in trouble off the rock. Near as I can see, she's anchored. But she'll never ride

it out. That's the worst holding ground on the coast. Get your clothes on, run over to town and tell Captain Tower. While he's getting his crew together, find Caleb Tilden and borrow his pair of grays to haul the boat. Tell Captain Tower to hurry; if a lifeboat ever came in handy, it's going to be now."

IN an instant I was out of bed and dressing, taking but one, very hurried glance out of the window, which my father had closed. What a change had come! Everything was feather white, and even in this short time a tremendous sea had formed. Over Black Rock, a dangerous reef a half mile from shore, the waves were breaking with terrific force, and there, directly to windward of the reef, lay a vessel, evidently anchored, and with no sail on her, pitching wildly in the heavy sea. I shook my head, for I knew the bottom there was sandy and treacherous and that no craft of any size could hope to ride out such a blow as this.

I lost little time in getting into my clothes, pulled on my oilskins and sou'wester, and left the house on a double quick. It was a wild and dreary morning. I was glad when I reached Captain Tower's, found him already breakfasting, and made haste to deliver my message. He was prompt to act, and since he had a large family he made good use of them now, sending them scurrying in all directions to rouse the crew, and to tell Caleb Tilden to harness his pair of grays and drive them to the station at Pleasant Beach. I drank a cup of coffee and ate a slice of corn bread; and then, with the fate of the vessel still uppermost in my mind, started back alone for home.

I found my father on the beach in the lee of a projecting boulder, sheltered from the wind and spray, and I informed him that the crew were on the way.

He nodded, then jerked his head in the direction of the reef. "They can't get here any too soon," he shouted back, "but I doubt if they can help much even then. I'm afraid she's done for."

I glanced quickly out through the mist, my heart sank, for even in the murky light I could see that the vessel's anchor was dragging, and that the distance between her and the reef had perceptibly diminished. "Why don't they get sail on her?" I cried. "It's their only chance."

"Yes," my father assented, "but they should have done it before now. They're in a bad box; I don't believe, the way she lies, they can clear the rock. But it's that or nothing, until her anchors take hold."

"Can you make out what she is?" I asked.

"No," he answered, "but I think she's a foreign brig—Spanish or South American. She's full-bowed and clumsy to my eye, which makes her chances worse. No sign of the lifeboat, is there?"

I looked up the beach. "No, not yet," I replied.

My father looked long and earnestly out to sea, noting the height and sweep of the waves. Then he turned again to me. "If they don't come soon, Hal," he said, "you and I will man the dory. The lifeboat is a fine, able craft, but I've always said that where she can go, two men in my dory can go. And if she doesn't come in five minutes, my lad, we'll give it a try."

Any boy brought up to follow the sea will understand the thrill of pride that ran through me at his words. It was in my blood to dare the perils of the ocean, though like all seamen I knew, alas! that only too often this great antagonist, treacherous and remorseless, would be our undoing. So to have my father rate me as a man, to launch the dory with him and to pull her to the reef, sent a glow through my

whole body and made me resolve to do my utmost to deserve his trust.

In another moment, as I looked up again at the ridge at the top of the beach, I saw a splendid sight. Over the crest came first a group of figures in their oilskins, bent low to breast the force of the wind, and behind them Tilden's massive pair of grays, straining every nerve to draw their burden through the clogging sand, as though they knew they were playing a worthy part in this game of life and death. When the top of the slope was once surmounted, they came down the beach at a trot, bringing the truck almost to the water's edge before the lash of the spray and the sight of the foaming breakers brought them to a stand.

My father and Captain Tower conferred briefly, and in the interval I exchanged greetings with the crew. Dick was there, of course, and Jim Southard, and half a dozen others, picked men, drilled again and again in their calling, and now with the chance to put their skill and knowledge into use.

I stood by Dick's side, and together we looked out at the vessel. Suddenly I saw one breaker, higher than its fellows, come towering in half between us and the reef. Up and up it rose, a mighty, menacing wall of water, then broke into a cloud of flying spray.

I turned to Dick. "How about that one?" I shouted.

He grinned noncommittally. "Pretty tough," he shouted back. "But we've got a good boat. I guess we can make it."

From his conference with my father, Captain Tower turned to his crew. "Now then, boys!" he called. "Get on your life belts and out we go."

At once the eight members of the crew stripped off their oilskins and fastened the cork life belts about their waists; then slid the lifeboat from the truck onto the sand, shoved her clear of the beach. While four of the crew held her there, the others clambered aboard and shipped their oars, Captain Tower, wielding the big steering oar, in the stern. There was a wait for a favorable lull; then all at once he roared, "All right, boys! Drive her!"

With a rush the boat started on her errand, the four men at the oars rowing desperately, the others, as soon as she was once fairly afloat, jumping in as best they might and without the loss of an instant joining their comrades at the oars. For a dozen strokes all went well, then a thundering wall of green water swept down on them.

The boat's bow rose to it, but not fast enough, and the whole top of the wave, as it seemed to me, curled and broke over her. Yet when it had passed I could see that she still floated, though less buoyantly than before, and that two men had left their oars and were bailing desperately with buckets to rid her of her unwelcome load. One or two more such waves, not quite as vengeful as their predecessor, and the lifeboat, with the first danger past, was fighting her way toward the reef.

SO busy had I been in watching her that I had not had a moment to spare for the brig. Now I again turned to look for her, and caught my breath with a groan, for the crisis was plainly at hand. The anchors had not caught, as we had hoped against hope that they might. She had dragged, in this brief interval, so near the reef that although, it was all but too late, they were now trying the final expedient of making sail.

We could see the figures of the crew rushing about the decks and swarming up the rigging, but the time was perilously short for them to accomplish their aim. From where we stood it seemed as though she were already on top of the reef when all at once, under courses and jib, we saw her head pay slowly off to the eastward.

"They've cut!" screamed my father. "It's neck or nothing now."

To me it actually seemed as though the ship were alive, and sensed the dreadful peril which lay but a cable's length to leeward. Clumsy my father had called her, but she strove nobly in the crisis, and after one sickening instant before she gathered headway, when she seemed to be drifting broadside to destruction, all at once her sails filled, and she fetched a splendid leap which all but brought her clear of the point of the ledge.

"She'll make it!" cried my father. "She'll make it!" Then, as she seemed to fall away again, I could see his hands working as though he were actually on the deck of the brig.

"Luff!" he shouted, as if, in the intensity of his feelings he really thought that they could hear him. "Hard down your helm! Hard down!"

On such trifles in life does our fate hang. Those on board the brig had fought valiantly; they deserved to win; but just at the critical instant when they hung poised off the point, with the merciless rock boiling under their lee, there reared itself to windward a huge breaker towering for a second above the vessel's decks and then descending with a force and a rush that deadened her headway and spilled the wind from her sails. For an instant she hung, as if dazed by the shock; and then, all too quickly, another wave caught her thus unprepared, and after one tense moment of suspense she was caught up bodily and dashed headlong upon the reef.

I could hardly bear to look at what followed. She was careened at a frightful angle; and stout and able as she was, she seemed like a plaything in the grip of those huge seas, advancing, retreating, grinding her to powder, like some wild beast rending and mutilating its prey. Many of her crew must have been dashed against the reef to destruction in that first mad plunge; but we saw four or five, at least, creep forward as if to jump for it. To remain on the slanting deck with the merciless rock to leeward meant certain death; no man in the world, once swept clear, could live for an instant in that seething maelstrom.

BY this time the rescue squad had drawn as close to the rock as they could come with safety to themselves, and I saw one of the crew standing in the bow, life buoy and line in his hand. For a time, however, it did not seem that there would be a chance to use it. We saw three men in succession plunge into the sea, only to be instantly swept away by the overpowering rush of the waves, dead either before they reached the ledge, or if still living when they were hurled against it, instantly crushed to death by the terrific impact.

Only one figure now remained. We saw him clamber out upon the bowsprit, poise there for a moment, and then, having gained every inch that was possible, he leaped clear and far into the sea. In that whirl of water, we could see no more of him, but it was evident that he was making a gallant fight, for the lifeboat backed down until she seemed to hang suspended on the brink of disaster.

Then Captain Tower, with a mighty effort, hauled something aboard, and the men gave way desperately to escape the reef which lay but the cast of a pebble on their lee. There was no further sign of life on the wreck, and almost at once the lifeboat headed straight for shore, tossing like a chip on the summits of the surges, until finally Captain Tower, timing his effort to perfection, landed her high on the beach in a smother of foam.

As I helped haul her up out of harm's way, I caught a glimpse of the rescued man, lying in the space between the after thwart and the raised plat-

form where the captain took his stand. The man was unconcious, his mouth half open—tall, swarthy, of athletic build.

"Bring him to the house!" shouted my father.

"No," Captain Tower answered, "leave him where he is. We'll get the boat on the truck, and make better time to Doctor Webster's. All hands, now! Lively!"

We worked with a will, and a few minutes later the grays had surmounted the crest of the beach, and my father and I were left alone. Mechanically we both turned again toward the wreck, and suddenly my father gave a sharp cry of amazement, and pointed to the reef with outstretched hand.

"Look, Hal!" he cried. "There's a man on the rock!"

Beyond all question, it was so, though how by any possibility he could have escaped death was a miracle. Whether he had been below decks until the lifeboat had departed, had been washed onto the rock and had somehow escaped serious injury—this we could only conjecture. But there his dark figure lay outstretched on the highest point of the reef, the waves, from time to time, breaking over him as if seeking to tear him from his hold.

"Shall I go after the crew?" I shouted.

My father shook his head. "No use," he answered. "You couldn't catch them in time. He can't last long."

I thought, from the way in which he spoke, that he considered the matter hopeless and that we must stand there and see the man worn down by wind and wave until he was swept from his insecure refuge. It was not until afterward that I learned what was in my father's mind—that he was balancing, on the one hand, the claims of wife and daughter in the cottage on the beach, and on the other the thought of a man's agony as he gazed into the very eyes of death. Then, with no melodramatic speech or gesture, he turned to me.

"Let's try it, boy," he said.

I NEEDED no urging. Shedding our oilskins, we ran the dory down the beach; I took my place forward and my father, waiting with the skill of long experience, seized the opportunity to shove off, then joined me at the oars, and in a twinkling we were beyond the breakers and on our way toward the reef.

It was then that I realized the truth of my father's boast that where the lifeboat went, he could go; for the dory was a beautiful sea boat, built to my father's design by the skillful hand of Isaac Boyd. She was the clipper type, high-bowed and with a graceful, easy sheer, and was light and new. She rose to the waves like a cork, again and again achieving the seemingly impossible as she struggled to the top of some huge wave that threatened to sweep her to destruction.

Halfway to the reef, I had learned, for the first time in my life, respect and dread for the power of the sea. I had been shooting in plenty of stiff blows, but never had I experienced anything like this. All at once a sensation of awe came over me. We were struggling against overwhelming odds, against an adversary who could crush us as easily as a man might crush a worm.

We struggled on. Thanks to my father's seamanship, presently we began to gain the advantage of the rock, for the water, under its lee, grew calmer, and we were able to proceed with less caution. And before long my father called to me:

"Is he still there?"

For the first time since we had left the beach, I turned my head, and found that we were close upon the reef. The figure still lay there, arms clasped about a pinnacle of rock, though without mo-

tion that I could discern. Here arose a difficult problem; if he had had strength enough to leap, we might have saved him, but for me to try to gain the rock in that whirl of white water was next to throwing away my life.

While I hesitated, the question was solved for me. A huge comber crashed upon the reef. When it had passed, the man was no longer visible. While I glanced desperately around for a trace of him, suddenly, almost within arm's length of the dory, a clutching hand emerged, followed by a face with eyes filled with a look of horror and despair.

"One stroke ahead!" I shouted to my father.

The next moment I had the man by the arm and had hauled him over the rail and into the bottom of the dory, where he lay limp with his eyes closed. Whether he was alive or dead was not now our concern; a perilous passage still remained; and we had to keep the dory head to the sea and back her as best we might until we had nearly gained the shore.

The tide by this time was nearly full and conditions for a landing could hardly have been worse; and though we apparently timed our effort correctly, the huge wave which bore us shoreward managed to turn and twist and finally to overwhelm us, so that all I remember of our landing was an ignominious loss of balance and a tumbling into the surf, and then something —either the rail of the dory or the handle of an oar—must have clipped me over the head. I knew nothing more until I opened my eyes to find myself stretched flat on the sand, looking up into the anxious face of my sister.

I contrived to sit up, and saw that my father was working desperately to save the capsized dory and that the man whom we had rescued was lying beside me on the beach. I staggered to my feet and somehow, with Rose's help, we dragged the dory out of harm's way, then picked up the man—gaunt, elderly and foreign looking—and with my mother's aid soon had him in bed, while Rose went for Doctor Webster. Once the man opened his eyes, and my mother forced some brandy between his lips, but almost immediately he lapsed again into unconsciousness.

The blow I had received had been severe; I had quite a cut on my scalp; I felt dizzy; my head ached and throbbed savagely. I kept to my room, stretched flat upon the bed, for the remainder of the day.

Doctor Webster arrived, shook his head dubiously, and after an examination departed, telling us that the man was well gone from exposure and exhaustion and that he feared internal injuries as well. There was little for us to do; later in the day he must either turn the corner and begin to mend or else his flame of life would flicker quietly out.

AT sundown my father came in to see me, to tell me that the wreck was rapidly breaking up, that her timbers were scattered along the beach, and that a huge piece of her stern proved her to be the *Santa Maria* of Pernambuco. The crew, whose bodies had come ashore one by one, were plainly South Americans. In the condition of the man whom we had tried to save there was little change. The doctor had come once more and had said that while a younger man might have rallied, as it was his age was against him.

I rose, and finding that my rest had done me good, decided to go down to supper, and we were about to leave the room when we heard my mother's voice calling:

"Henry! Hal! Come quick!"

Evidently a change had occurred in the sick man's condition; and as we hastily entered the room, we saw that he had suddenly regained conscious-

ness, and half propped upon one elbow, as if completely dazed by his surroundings, was staring blankly about the room. Then all at once his expression changed, and I realized that his face was that of a gentleman, cultured and refined, although at the moment it wore an expression of the utmost anxiety.

As the doctor had told us, the sands of his life were nearly run, and the effort he had made proved too much for his wasted strength. For an instant he strove to maintain his position; then nature gave way, and he fell back, although his eyes still remained half open, as though he fought hard to retain consciousness. That he wished to speak was evident, and I bent over him to catch his faintest whisper.

Though his lips moved spasmodically, no sound came, and I could see that he was near his end. And then suddenly his glance seemed caught by something beyond me; I saw his eyes widen, and an expression of joy and happiness steal into them. Wondering, I turned and saw that my sister, dressed in white, stood in the doorway, a pretty picture with her rosy cheeks and dark curls. Though it was but a delusion, I suppose, due to the dim light and to the fact that by this time his poor eyes themselves were dim, his last moment on earth was a happy one, for in a tone of unspeakable tenderness he uttered one word—"Margarita!"—and fell back dead.

CHAPTER IV.

THE REFUGE.

LATE in the afternoon on the following day, Dick Wheatland and I sat on the runway of the life-saving station, our guns across our knees, watching a handsome black schooner which had just come to anchor under the lee of Round Rock.

The weather, in twenty-four hours, had completely changed. The storm, fierce but brief, had subsided.

In the morning we had gone, with almost the entire village, to the cemetery and had stood with bared heads while the crew of the ill-fated *Santa Maria* were reverently laid to rest.

Dick's dory was hauled up on the beach below us. As I watched the long lines of wild fowl streaming steadily along, I cried impatiently:

"Come on, there's plenty of daylight left! We can row out and set the decoys in the lee of Gull Ledge, and have a dozen birds by dark. What are you waiting for, Dick? Let's get started."

"Oh, I don't know," Dick temporized. "It's pretty rough off there, Hal. Honestly, I'm afraid to try it."

His face was serious, but I could not help laughing at his excuse; for the idea of Dick Wheatland being afraid of anything was utterly absurd. Then I suddenly remembered his devotion to my sister, and felt that I had solved the mystery. And at once I turned on him accusingly.

"I know why you won't go!" I cried. "Pretty soon you're going to propose that we take a walk up the shore, then, when we get near our house, you'll remember that you have to see my father about something very important. You'll hang around, hoping you'll be invited to supper, and when you are, you'll sit staring at Rose as though you had never seen her before, and you'll probably put sugar in your eggs and salt in your tea, and never know the difference. It isn't rough water you're scared of; you're afraid that Jim Southard is getting ahead of you with Rose."

His guilty expression told me that for once I had fairly hit the mark.

"Now look here, Dick," I said, "I'll make you a fair offer. You come shooting with me, and afterward *I'll* invite you to supper." I paused a moment, then added maliciously: "Yes, sir, I'll invite you, whether Rose likes it or not. And then, if you have the courage, which I doubt, you can invite her

to go driving with you instead of with Jim Southard. What do you say? Isn't that fair?"

"All right," he agreed. "That's fair enough, Hal. Come ahead." We had scarcely started for the dory before he gave a sudden exclamation of annoyance, and pointed to a tall figure, gun on shoulder, strolling toward us and headed in the general direction of Black Rock Beach. "Talk of the devil!" he cried. "I'll bet a dollar Jim's on his way to your house now. Confound him! Why can't he mind his own business?"

The tragedy of the situation was lost on me; all I could see was its comic side. "Probably," I suggested cheerfully, "he will stay to supper, too. That will make it nice for every one. And by seeing you both together, Rose can decide which she likes best. If you don't look any pleasanter than you do now, I'll bet my money on Jim."

Dick failed utterly to perceive the humor in the affair, and proceeded toward the dory with frowning brow. By the time we had pushed her down to the water's edge and were ready to embark, Southard was close at hand. As we were directly in his path, neither he nor Dick could well avoid speaking, though their expressions, as they eyed each other, made me think of two bulldogs, circling about each other before coming to grips.

Southard hailed us pleasantly enough. "Hullo, Dick! Hullo, Hal! Going to try the ducks?"

Dick was plainly in a combative mood. Though ordinarily good-tempered, it seemed to require merely his rival's presence to rouse him to fury. As Southard spoke, Dick had been bending over the dory, clearing a refractory kink in the road line, but now he straightened up and gruffly answered: "It's none of your business if we are."

Southard grinned. Evidently Dick's exasperation pleased him. "Well," he observed, "there's no need to be nasty about it. It doesn't cost anything to be civil."

Dick's retort was immediate and uncompromising. "There's no call," he rejoined, "to be civil to a sneak."

The smile left Southard's face, and his eyelids narrowed. "Meaning," he demanded, "that I'm a sneak?"

"Exactly," Dick answered. "You told Hal's sister that I took May Porter out driving. That was a lie."

This was direct enough. Again I was reminded of two bulldogs, for Southard was now as grim as Dick.

"Don't call me a liar," Jim warned. "I saw you with her, driving down Beechwood Street."

"I dare say you did," Dick rejoined. "I was coming back from Greenbush: May was walking home, and naturally I gave her a lift, as I would any one. But that's a very different thing from taking her to drive, and it was none of your business to tell Rose, anyway. It was a sneaking thing to do."

BY now they were worked up to a fine pitch. These fine distinctions between "taking a girl to drive" and "giving her a lift" were lost on me, but to Dick and Jim Southard they were evidently of the greatest importance. Southard assumed the offensive.

"I never told Rose you took May out driving. I told her I saw you out driving together. And that was the truth, and I won't have you calling me a liar. Will you take it back or won't you?"

It appeared to me that strictly on the merits of the argument, Jim had somewhat the best of it; but what they were after was a good excuse for a quarrel. Dick answered Jim's question with staggering directness.

"Of course I won't take it back," he said. "I'll say again that you're a sneak and a liar, and that you always have been a sneak and a liar, and that

you always will be a sneak and a liar. And if you don't like that, you know what you can do."

For answer, Southard laid down his gun and advanced on Dick, evidently with hostile intent, while I held my breath in expectation. A more unsuitable place for a struggle could not have been imagined, for the wet and slippery pebbles furnished a most uncertain foothold, so that luck and not skill might be the deciding factor, to say nothing of the danger of serious injury from a crashing fall upon the stones. But neither of them seemed to think of that, and Southard continued to advance until he was within a few feet of his antagonist.

To my surprise, however, Dick actually gave ground before Southard's determined advance. Dick was retreating nearer and nearer to the water's edge. Then, as if believing that his adversary was afraid of him, Southard suddenly sprang forward. The next second they were grappling fiercely, first on the very edge of the water and then, whether by accident or design I could not tell, knee-deep in the water itself, which their struggle churned to milky whiteness.

No contest on slime-coated stones and between foemen so thoroughly in earnest could be of long duration. All at once I saw both of them, locked in each other's arms, slip, stagger and fall headlong, with a tremendous splash, into the sea. For a second or two they must have vengefully continued their struggle under the surface, but cold water has a soothing effect on hot blood. At the same moment they released their hold and regained the beach, completely sobered and dripping wet.

For an instant Southard glared at Dick, even opened his mouth as if to speak; then, as if mere words were inadequate, he snatched up his gun and walked rapidly away in the direction of the village.

LEFT alone, I turned and looked at Dick, to find his bath had apparently completely restored his good humor, for in spite of his dripping clothing, his face was beaming.

"Did you notice how I did it, Hal?" he chuckled. "I made up my mind right away that he wasn't going to call on Rose this afternoon. So I got him mad on purpose; then I backed away from him; and when he grabbed me, I worked for just one thing, to get him out as far as I could before we fell. I've spoiled that call for him, all right!" At the happy thought his smile became broader than ever.

I felt somewhat aggrieved. "Yes, that's all very well," I admitted, "but how about me? How about our going shooting? And how about *your* call on Rose? I don't see that you're any better off than he is."

Dick's smile persisted. "Oh, yes, I am," he answered. "A whole lot better off. I've got spare clothes in the station, and I've got a key in my pocket, because I'm Captain Tower's No. 1 man. So I'll make a change and in five minutes we'll be ready to start."

He soused drippingly up the beach, leaving me to wait impatiently for his return. It was not much over five minutes before we were rowing briskly out toward Gull Ledge. The afternoon, however, was destined to be one of surprises, and before we had covered half the distance our plans were again altered as the nerve-stirring *"Ah-onk! Ah-onk!"* of Canada geese came to our ears, and we saw a flock of these beautiful birds winging their stately way down from Black Rock.

They passed well out of gunshot as we watched with longing eyes; they faltered for a moment as they caught sight of the reed-fringed pond on Dark Island, turned and swung back in a wide half circle, then disappeared below the reedy margin of the pond.

"What luck!" cried Dick. "The first

flock that's gone in there this fall. And it will soon be dark; they're bound to stay there. We'll have a wonderful shot at them; we might get three or four." And then, to spoil it all, he had to add: "How surprised Rose will be!"

I heaved a sigh of disgust. Here, with the problem of stalking a flock of geese before us—a matter serious enough to drive all else from our minds—how could a youth of Dick's usual good sense think of a girl at such a time? It was too sad; I could only pity him.

We had turned the dory's bow to the southeast, abandoning all thought of a bag of sea ducks in favor of this nobler game. We had scarcely taken a dozen strokes when out of the corner of my eye I saw a man on the deck of the schooner off Round Rock lower a small boat from the davits, get into her and row rapidly in the direction of the island.

I groaned aloud. "Confound the luck!" I cried. "He's seen them, too. And he'll get there ahead of us. He hasn't half the distance to go."

Dick looked over his shoulder. There could be no question that the man would reach the island ahead of us. He rowed as fast as he could lash his oars through the water. I was thoroughly disgusted.

"Let's give it up and go back to Gull Ledge," I proposed. "We'll be sure of two or three good shots before dark; and that fellow can have the geese to himself."

But Dick, with his greater experience, was not to be so easily discouraged. "That's just like a boy," he observed. "I was the same way when I was your age, always ready to jump at conclusions. When you're older, you'll learn to look at things a little longer before you make up your mind. We don't even know that this fellow is after the geese. Did you see him put a gun in the boat?"

I stopped to consider. "No," I confessed, "I can't say that I did."

"Just what I told you," Dick rejoined. "I don't believe he's after the geese at all. He's making for the northerly side of the island; we'll row around to the southerly point, and we may get a crack at the geese after all."

THIS view of the situation restored my courage. We rowed again with a will, but almost immediately were aware of much noise and confusion on the schooner's deck. We heard orders bawled in a stentorian voice, saw men rushing here and there, and presently the longboat took the water with four men at the oars and a fifth, gun in hand, in the stern sheets, and made off in the direction of the island.

"He's a hunter, anyway!" I cried, though I was considerably surprised, for I found it hard to believe that a whole ship's crew could be thrown into such excitement by the chance of a shot at a flock of geese.

But Dick, more experienced than I, was quick to sense the true state of affairs. "Yes, he's a hunter, "he answered significantly, "but not of geese. Don't you see what's up? That first man isn't a gunner; he is trying to get away from the schooner—captain has probably been hazing him too hard. He never meant to stop at the island at all; he was bound straight for the mainland. But he's got to take to the island now, and trust to the darkness. They're traveling two feet to his one."

It was evident that he spoke the truth. The man in the small boat, seeing himself pursued, had increased his efforts and was already close to the rocks. There was a savagery in the air of his pursuers which frightened me more than a little.

"What will they do to him if they catch him?" I asked.

Dick shrugged his shoulders. "I'd hate to be in his boots." he answered.

"They'll half murder him, probably. I hope, for his sake, he gets away."

As he spoke, the fugitive drove his boat up on a narrow beach and leaped out and dashed away up the rocks. A couple of hundred yards from the island, the long boat came swiftly on, the man in the stern encouraging his oarsmen with a flood of oaths. Presently, in his excitement, he whipped his hat from his head and threw it into the bottom of the boat.

At once I recognized, with a start, the ferret face and flaming head of the sailor whom I had last seen in Boston, arm and arm with Captain Palliser, and relating in song the adventures of Reuben Ranzo. I thought of what my father had said of Palliser, reasoned that this must be his schooner, and instinctively took sides with the hunted man. Surely, if captured, his lot would not be an enviable one.

SO interested had I become in this man hunt that for the nonce I had entirely forgotten the wild geese and was resting on my oars, my gaze bent first on the figure of the fugitive as he gained the top of the cliff and disappeared from view, then on the red-headed pursuer in the stern of the long-boat. But Dick still had our original plan in mind, and was all the time working the dory around to the southward of the island, in which direction the geese, if startled into flight, would almost certainly pass.

Before the schooner's boat had reached the shore, we had gained the position we coveted and, paddling in until we were practically concealed from view by a projecting ledge, we kept the dory in place by grasping the rockweed with our hands, and there awaited the outcome of the double event.

Of the fleeing man, we could see no trace; he had apparently vanished from sight. I felt that he had done well to conceal himself so rapidly. In another moment a wild yelling, like that of hounds on a scent, told us that his pursuers had effected their landing and were hot upon his trail. The red-headed mate was the first to appear over the cliff, but the other four members of the crew were close at his heels. We could hear him hellowing his orders:

"Now, then, spread out! And look sharp! We haven't much daylight left. The pond—that's the likeliest place. Myers, Foley—you two try that. The other two come with me; we'll search the briers and then the rocks."

Evidently he did not have to urge on his followers; whatever the reason, they were keen to find the refugee. Then, as the two pursuers who had been told to search the pond neared the reeds, we heard the hoarse warning of the gander, and with a great splashing and commotion as the wings of the geese beat first the water and then the air, the whole flock took wing.

Immediately I realized that Dick had planned our campaign to a nicety, for the great birds were heading straight for us. Although they were striving hard to rise into the air, there was no breeze to speak of, and they ascended so gradually that when they passed us they were not more than forty yards distant—practically a perfect shot for a windstill day.

"Now!" called Dick. "Give it to them, Hal!"

In an instant my piece leaped to my shoulder, for I knew that Dick, being in the stern, would take the after part of the bunch, leaving the birds in front to me. I did not aim at the leader, knowing full well that he was the toughest of the flock—not only the hardest to kill, but even if brought down, the least desirable for the table.

Directly behind him three birds flew close together and, swinging a couple of feet in advance of them, I let drive,

and saw the long neck of one of them double backward as he came crashing down into the water, stone-dead. Dick fired only an instant later, and a second bird lay beside the first. The survivors, with a terrific honking, seemed to rise straight into the air, and resumed their flight toward the south. A half dozen strokes of the oars and we had recovered our game; then, moved by a common impulse, we turned our eyes to the island to see whether the chase had ended.

IT was still in progress. The odds had shifted in favor of the fugitive, for the brief autumn twilight had ended and darkness was settling down on land and sea. The mate by this time was in a towering rage, and we could hear him urging on the hunt until one of the men answered:

"We want to lay a hand on the damn swab as much as you do, but what's the use of looking for him when you can't see your hand before your face?"

The question was a fair one, for we could barely distinguish the figures of the sailors, dimly outlined against the sky, as they stood on the topmost point of the island, loath to relinquish the chase, but aware of the impossibility of finding their man.

After securing our game, we had rested quietly on our oars, letting the dory drift. The light breeze had carried our boat gradually toward the easterly point of the island. We could hear the voices of the hunters in consultation; then a louder hail from the mate:

"Dory ahoy! Seen anything of a man skulking among the rocks?"

"No, sir," Dick called back, very respectfully. "We haven't seen any one at all."

We heard a grunt of discomfiture from the mate. Then from one of the men:

"We could build a fire and camp here all night; then in the morning we'll get him and beat hell out of him."

A second voice spoke up: "No, let's not do that. We don't want to lose our sleep for a white-livered hound like Marling. We'll get him, anyway; he's no swimmer; he couldn't make land to save his life. Let's go back to the schooner and tow the gig with us. There will be plenty of time to get him in the morning."

Then came the mate's voice: "No, that won't do. We can't let this man slip through our fingers. You know Jack Palliser; if he felt like it, he'd cut the hearts out of the lot of us and not think twice about it either. Foley is right. We'll build a rousing big bonfire on the southerly beach. That will give us light enough so that even if he ran a chance of making land, we could see him when he took to the water. And in the morning we'll hunt him down at our leisure. You, Myers, take the gig, go back to the schooner and report to the captain. Get plenty to eat and drink, and hurry back again. The rest of you get a pile of driftwood and some dry seaweed. Come on, lively now! We mustn't give him a chance to swim for it before we have a blaze going."

I heard him with a sinking at my heart; surely things looked dark for the fugitive. I could not help thinking what a chance we had to help him, and I whispered to Dick: "If we only knew where he was!"

Immediately and most unexpectedly my wish was answered. Out of the very face of the rocks, as it seemed, a ghostly whisper echoed mine.

"On board the dory! Back in here and take me aboard!"

We were not more than twenty feet from the shore. Instantly Dick's oars were in the water and he was backing cautiously toward the island, straining his eyes in the last vestige of light that remained. As we neared the land, we could perceive a cleft in the rock, form-

ing what was in reality a miniature cave, and here his body, wholly submerged, lay a man, his head a dark blur amid the rockweed.

As the stern of the dory came within his reach, we saw his hand reach out for the rail and silently, with the utmost caution, he drew himself aboard, and instantly dropped prostrate in the bottom of the boat. I could see that the chill of the water had been severe, for he was shaking from head to foot.

"Get me ashore, mates!" he whispered. "If they ever catch me, I'm done for. Help me now, and I'll never forget it."

There was a tragic earnestness in his tone which struck even deeper than the words themselves. I heard Dick answer reassuringly:

"All right! All right!" Then he turned to me. "Where shall we take him, Hal?"

"My house?" I suggested.

Dick shook his head. "Too far," he answered. "He's in a bad way now. We don't want him to die of pneumonia. We must get him warm as soon as we can."

"Your house, then," I hazarded.

"No," Dick answered again. "Nowhere in the village is safe. Suppose Jim Southard saw us. He'd be so glad to do us a mean turn that he'd row out to the schooner and blab the whole thing. Even a good man like Captain Tower would probably say to turn the man over to his captain. Old skippers haven't much sympathy with deserters."

This seemed true enough. And then a sudden thought came to me. "Why not the humane station?" I asked. "You've got a key. And he's a shipwrecked mariner, all right."

"You've hit it," Dick said, and an instant later we were skirting the channel between Dark Island and Dark Island Ledge, and then headed straight to the westward.

The year before, Dick and I had rowed together in a dory race and had won; but I think for the next five minutes we made the best time of our lives. I could hear the gasping, irregular breaths of the man in the bottom of the dory, and knew that the cold water had chilled him to the bone.

Meanwhile we watched the shore of the island eagerly, thanking Fate for every second that carried us farther and farther away, before the ill-omened light of their beacon should tell us that they were on the watch. Fortunately for us, by the time a broad flare of orange shot up on the southerly beach, we were passing Sea Ledge, with the station only a minute away.

THE instant our bow grated on the beach, we were over the rail and encouraging the man to get on his feet. He was hard put to it to stand. With one of us on either hand, however, we managed to get him up the beach, and a minute later had him in the upper room of the station, where Dick, darkening the window with a blanket, lit a lantern and soon had a fire going, and the man stripped of his wet clothing.

For the first time, we had a chance to see that he was a pleasant-faced man of middle age, evidently of greater refinement than the average seaman, fair-haired, blue-eyed, clean-shaven, and generally prepossessing in his appearance. He seemed, however, to be only half conscious of what was going on; and as I pulled the coarse shirt over his head, he groaned with pain, and I started in horror as I saw the great red weals on his back. The reason for his weakness was now plain enough; the man had been but recently flogged, and had lain all this time submerged, with the sting of the salt water biting into his lacerated flesh.

By the time we had him tucked away in one of the bunks, where he lay with his eyes closed, Dick had made up his mind as to the course we should pur-

sue. "Go home, Hal," he counseled, "and tell your father the story. I think you can persuade him that it would be a shame to give this man up. And as early as you can in the morning, before it's light, hitch up and drive down here and, if your folks are willing, we'll move him to your house. I had better stay here with him to-night. Palliser might make some move to look for him, though I don't think that's likely. But I am afraid that he may be going to be pretty sick. I never saw an uglier-looking back. I'll expect you here the first thing in the morning."

We hauled up the dory. Taking my gun and slinging the two geese over my shoulder, I trudged up the beach. But even with all the excitement we had undergone, Dick was still mindful of my sister.

"Give my bird to Rose," he said, "with my——"

"Love?" I suggested.

He heaved a sigh. "No," he said, "she might not like that. Compliments—that's the word."

I took my departure, stopping on the next bit of rising ground to look back at Dark Island. A wonderful bonfire blazed brightly on the south beach, and I could even distinguish the figures of the crew passing and repassing in front of the flames. At the thought of their fruitless search in the morning I could not repress a smile.

CHAPTER V.

CAPTAIN PALLISER APPEARS.

WHEN I reached home, I found that my mother and Rose were calling on Mrs. Webster, and that my father was alone in the kitchen, smoking his pipe in comfort before the stove. I told him my story, and to my relief he agreed that Dick and I had done right and gave his consent to my bringing Marling to the house. With this on my mind, I passed part of a troubled night. Through my slumbers the mate and his crowd of cutthroats were at my heels. I could not sleep. About three o'clock in the morning, therefore, I dressed, crept out to the barn and, harnessing the wondering but good-natured bay to the light wagon, I made off down the shore.

As I neared the station I became more and more anxious about the invalid. I fastened the horse to the fence outside, thrust open the door and saw at once that a light still burned in the room above. At once I drew the inference that matters were going badly. As I reached the stairway and began to ascend, my fears increased as I heard the sound of a voice, talking rapidly and earnestly, but in a strange monotone.

As I reached the top of the stairs, I saw Dick, still fully dressed, sitting by the side of the bunk, as if guarding the fugitive and afraid to leave his side. When my glance passed to the man himself, I understood. Little as I knew of illness, it was evident that he was delirious with fever. He lay on his back, tossing and shifting from side to side.

"James Edward Marling," he was saying, "was my father—bos'n's mate on the brig *Adventure*, Captain Furneaux, consort to Captain Cook in the *Resolution*, in his second voyage around the world. It was February, 1774, and the *Adventure* was far to the south'ard of the Horn, bound from New Zealand, after the massacre at East Bay. Calm it was, said James Edward Marling, and there lay the island, right to the north'ard. So he asks Captain Furneaux for leave to explore, and the captain, being a kind and benevolent man, says yes. So my father and one of the hands—Tom Baldwin was his name—lowers a boat and paddles off to the island.

"On the south'ard beach they lands, and finds the place desolate and bar-

ren enough, except for the seals and the great sea elephants, roaring like bulls. But they hadn't taken twenty steps before they comes to an anchor—all rusted it was, and falling apart—but an anchor for all that. And the very next step my father, James Edward Marling, happens to look down at the sand and there, right before his eyes, is a coin—a gold doubloon of Spain."

His voice ceased abruptly. Thinking that exhaustion had seized him, I was about to step forward into the room, but stopped again as it became evident that even in his delirium he had made the pause intentionally, for its effect on the unseen listeners of his dream. For now he went on, connectedly enough:

"You mark that—a gold doubloon of Spain! And then my father casts his eyes across the bay, and first he sees a volcano like, with smoke coming out of the cracks in its sides, then he looks to the east'ard of that and gives a start, for there, sticking up over a little bit of rising ground, he sees the masts of a stranded ship. My father and Tom Baldwin looks at each other and starts off at the double quick, and then, all in a minute, breaks a squall from the east, icy-cold and the air full of snow.

"Captain Furneaux, fires a gun from the ship, and my father and Baldwin makes a dash for the boat, and makes the brig in time to save their lives. For three days they're driven straight to the west'ard, and as luck will have it, on the third day Tom Baldwin slips off a yard and is drowned."

Again he paused, but this time I made no move to advance, for I had the feeling that I was listening to a true story and not to the ravings of a man temporarily deranged. And presently he went on:

"So what does J. E. Marling do? Does he tell the captain and the crew what he saw? No, he does not. But he gets a peep at the log, and he finds the latitude and the longitude of the brig *Adventure* on the day of the squall, and he writes it down, and keeps it most carefully, together with the gold doubloon of Spain. And there the treasure lies to this day, and James Edward Marling lies in the churchyard in Bristol, England. But William Marling knows—and all he wants is a stout craft, and some good shipmates—and then—and then——" He gave a deep sigh, as if at last exhausted, and lay quiet.

I stepped forward. "Has he been like this long?" I asked.

Dick turned, and I saw that his face was haggard from his long vigil. "He went to sleep," he answered, "and then, in about half an hour, he began this talk. So it's been all night—over and over again—and more of it, too. Something about Morgan the pirate and the sack of Panama and a lost galleon. But mostly this talk you've just heard. It seems to be fixed in his brain. He hardly varies a word."

"Do you think," I ventured, "that it would be true?"

Dick shrugged his shoulders. "No telling," he answered. "You know, as well as I do, that every sailor on the coast believes there are islands, somewhere south of the Horn, where you can pick up gold and diamonds for the asking. Captain Tower will yarn by the hour about it; and I guess you've heard your father do the same."

I nodded. "Yes," I answered, "but it was nothing but yarning; you could never put your finger on anything. It was always that somebody told some one else that another man told him—and then a long story on top of that. But this sounds different; he talks about latitude and longitude and a gold doubloon. I wish it were true."

Dick rose wearily to his feet. "Well, I'm afraid," he said soberly, "that his secret is apt to die with him. And I dare say Doctor Webster wouldn't want

him moved in the state he's in. But we can't leave him here. So let's get him away before it grows light enough for others to see what we are doing at the station."

The man rose from his bunk willingly enough, and indeed the false strength that comes with fever made him appear stronger than on the preceding night. We dressed him in his own clothes, now thoroughly dry, wrapped a couple of blankets about him and made our way to the waiting team. It was still night; we could discern dimly the outlines of the ledges, could see the riding lights of the schooner and the fire still blazing on Dark Island. We got Marling into the wagon and started for home. He was quiet enough now, rambling no more in his talk; but presently the cold fit succeeded to the hot one, and he shook and shivered alarmingly in the crisp morning air. At length the house was reached, and in a twinkling we had him in the spare room, tucked away in the same bed in which the Brazilian had lately breathed his last.

DICK, worn out by his long vigil with Marling, turned in for a couple of hours' sleep; I waked my mother and sister, and then started off to rouse Doctor Webster from his warm bed. In due time he came, told us, as we had feared, that Marling had pneumonia, and that we could do little until the disease had run its course and reached its crisis. There was a chance, he said; there was always a chance. And with directions to my good mother, he left us.

Presently, after Dick had regained a little of his lost sleep and we had breakfasted, we started back for the station to put things there in order again. As we neared it, we could see the schooner's longboat putting off from the island, and smiled at each other at the sight.

"There's one comfort," Dick observed. "Whatever may happen to Marling now, he could be much worse off; he would have been a dead man if we hadn't taken him aboard. Imagine a night on the island, in the cold! Those brutes have had their trouble for nothing."

The longboat reached the schooner, and after a few moments the gig, with two men at the oars, came heading straight for the beach below us. I was somewhat alarmed at the sight, but Dick, although he hastened the "tidying" process a little, was in nowise disturbed.

"They won't suspect anything," he said. "They couldn't have seen who we were in the dark, and they would never imagine that we found Marling as we did. They are either coming ashore on the chance of getting some track of their man, or else for some other purpose altogether. Better not do too much talking."

Five minutes later the gig grounded on the beach and the two men got out. Beyond question, they were Palliser and the mate, and I gained some idea of the captain's strength as he laid a hand on the rail of the gig and nonchalantly drew her two or three boat lengths up the slope as though she had been a toy. They ascended the beach and stood before us: The captain short, immensely thickset, incredibly broad of shoulder, with the scrub of black beard and whisker that I remembered, and with the general appearance of a man of power, daring and self-possession—one who would be at his best when the danger that threatened him was at its worst. An unprepossessing customer, I thought, but emphatically one to be respected.

The mate, with his freckled ferret face and carroty hair gleaming under his tattered cap, was more of the shifty, hang-dog type, though from what we had seen the day previous he could

clearly be savage enough when roused. All in all, they made a pretty pair.

"Morning, lads!" hailed the captain, pleasantly enough. "Have you seen a sailorman passing this way?"

The manner in which he asked the question was fortunate, for Dick, without uttering an untruth, was able to answer that no one had passed us.

The captain turned to the mate. "What did I tell you?" he observed. "We'll never see him again. He must have tried to make land, after all. And he never was a swimmer. I never would have dreamed that he had the nerve to steal the gig and run for it."

I confess that this speech gave me a better idea of Palliser, for he spoke as though his sorrow for Marling were genuine. He and the mate appeared to be in no hurry to rejoin the schooner. They proceeded to sit down beside us on the station runway, and looked out in silence over the blue waters of the bay.

"Lose one of your men?" asked Dick.

"Yes," the captain answered. "A new man and a poor enough swab, too. He disobeyed an order; I laid the cat across his back—maybe a little harder than I meant to—and he up and ran for it. We thought we had him cornered on Dark Island, but he must have tried to make the land in the night, and drowned. I know for a fact he was a poor swimmer as well as a poor seaman. However, no ill of the dead. I never wished him harm; what I did was all in the way of discipline. If you don't have that on board a ship, you're done."

The way in which he stated his case, and his whole manner of speaking, continued to impress me. When he dismissed the topic of Marling and went on to speak of our life-saving station, my favorable impressions were strengthened. It happened to be low water, and Captain Palliser, with a sweep of his brawny arm, called our attention to the score of jagged reefs at varying distances from the shore, rearing their dark bulk from the sparkling blue of the sea.

"I know the Atlantic coast well," he said. "Especially the coast of Massachusetts, and I've always said that there's no worse stretch of shore than right here in Bayport. No, sir, there's no better place for a life-saving station anywhere on the Massachusetts coast."

We agreed with him that this was so, and he went on to pay our town a handsome compliment when he added: "And I'll say another thing. There's no place where they could find a smarter crew than they have in Bayport. You've got good men here, some of the old deep-water breed. There's Horatio Tower—he's not as spry as he was once, but no better man ever cruised out of a Massachusetts port. And Abner Litchfield of Beechwoods is another. And you've got good coasters, too. There's Henry Nickerson of the *Albicore;* he's a man that keeps up the good name of Bayport, a smart and able sailorman."

This bit of praise completely won me, and I thrilled with pride as I volunteered the information that Henry Nickerson was my father. At this, Captain Palliser looked at me with flattering interest.

"You don't say so!" he cried. "And I'll bet a dollar, from the look of you, that you're not going to spend your life in a potato patch. You've got an air of salt water about you already. So Henry Nickerson is your dad! Well, the world is a small place, after all. I'd like to see your father, too. I've got a message for him from an old shipmate of his. Is he ashore now?"

"No," I answered. "He's off lobstering this morning. But you could see him this afternoon, if you could be at Tower's wharf about four o'clock. We're going after black ducks at Porter's Island."

And at this he was to rise still higher

in my estimation. "Porter's Island!" he roared. "Don't talk to me of Porter's Island. Many's the night I've lain out there, flat on my back in the moonlight, with the ducks dropping in all around me, with their *'qua-ack, qua-ack'* in the dark. No sport like it, I always said. So you're going there to-night after black ducks." He studied the weather with a knowing eye; then continued: "I think it will be a good night for them, too; especially if it breezes a bit toward sundown, as I expect it will. Well, I wish you luck. Come on, Bill, we must get back to the schooner."

He rose to his feet, and the rest of us followed suit.

"Shall I tell my father you will be at the wharf?" I queried.

"No, I'm afraid I can't make it," he answered. "It was nothing important, anyway, just a friendly message. And we've got to be moving along; we've wasted time enough over Marling."

Dick, who had been observantly quiet throughout, now asked: "Where are you bound?"

"To the south'ard," Palliser answered, "after mackerel. Well, good-by, boys! See you again." He strode off down the beach, with the mate at his heels.

As they pulled off toward the schooner, I turned to Dick. "What do you think of him?" I asked.

"I don't know what to think," Dick rejoined. "Quite a character, I should say. I know he's an A-1 seaman; I've heard that everywhere. But they tell some ugly stories about him; I guess he's the kind who stops at nothing to gain his point. He's knifed more than one man, I understand, and they say he's money-mad besides, that he would do anything for gold. If he had lived in the good old days, I imagine he would have made a first-class pirate."

I started, for the same thought had been in my mind. Perhaps it was the black stubble on his face, but he had made me think of the grim tales of Blackbeard, who went down fighting off Ocrakoke Inlet, with a score of wounds in his massive body.

"No, I wouldn't like to run afoul of him," Dick continued, "and I wouldn't like to have him grab me, either. If he did, there wouldn't be a whole rib left; he must have a grip in those arms like a grizzly bear."

For some moments longer we watched the gig as it made out for the schooner; then separated, Dick to go mossing, and I to row off to Sea Ledge to catch a mess of cod, and to look forward with keen anticipation to my evening's duck shooting.

AT dinner time I learned that Marling was better. A message had come from Squire Pratt of Greenbush, and it would take my father the entire afternoon to go there and return, so he could not go with me to Porter's Island that night.

"Get your Uncle Edward to take you," he suggested. "He will enjoy it as much as you will."

My uncle, Edward Nickerson, who dwelt alone on the outskirts of the village, was some years older than my father, but so like him in appearance that at a distance it was difficult to tell them apart. There was, however, in other ways a marked difference between the brothers, for my uncle was distinctly the "odd one" of the family. A serious brain fever in his boyhood had left its mark on him for life. Although he was not exactly simple-minded, yet he scarcely possessed the intellect of a full-grown man.

After dinner I walked over to see him and found him only too ready to join me. Mindful, however, of Captain Jack Palliser, I stopped at Tower's wharf at four, in case he might have changed his mind; but there was no sign of him and I learned that the black schooner had been seen standing to the south-

ward some hours ago. Forthwith we left for the pond.

My uncle's tiny cottage was on the very outskirts of the town, at its eastern extremity. Beyond it for perhaps half a mile stretched a patch of woods; then a long expanse of sand and marsh grass, and finally, beyond a slope of rising ground, the body of water known as Porter's Pond. It was not really a pond, for a narrow, sinuous inlet wound into it from the sea, and the water was brackish instead of fresh. But so hidden was this inlet by the waving marsh grass that the ordinary passer-by would never have suspected its existence, and from the early days of the village the sheet of water had been known as Porter's Pond.

MY heart beat high as we walked along—our guns over our shoulders. I liked to fish, to sail, to cruise with my father, to gather moss, to go lobstering—but my real passion was shooting. Of all gunning places, I always had a special affection for the pond, for from the little island in the center, where we set our decoys, you could look inland at the gorgeous reds and yellows and greens of the autumn foliage, and could behold on the seaward side the tawny marsh grass and beyond it the ocean, gleaming blue in the fading sunlight, with here and there the brown of the ledges, and far up to the westward the outlines of Dark Island.

Presently we neared the pond, and as we topped the summit of the rising ground and exposed ourselves to view, a dozen ducks leaped from different parts of the pond and went wheeling upward into the air, some flying straight out to sea, the others, sweeping around in broad circles, apparently loath to leave the shelter of the pond which had served them as a home.

"A good sign!" cried my uncle. "They'll be back later, and plenty more, too. Come on, now, let's get set out as quick as we can."

We found the little, flat-bottomed skiff where we had left it, snugly concealed in the reeds. Five minutes later we had landed on the island, again concealed our boat, and had set out our little flock of a dozen, black-duck decoys, whittled and painted by my uncle in the long winter evenings with the most patient skill. Last of all, we concealed ourselves in our blind, a huge wooden packing case sunk flush with the sand, with the reeds growing all around it. When we had taken our places, we were so effectually concealed that only the wary duck flying directly overhead could tell that his enemies were there below him, stealthily lurking in ambush.

Presently our first chance came at a flock of three mallards. My uncle saw them first, and pointed them out to me, far away but heading in directly from the eastward. For a time it seemed as though they were taking a course which would not bring them into the pond at all, then they caught a glimpse of the decoys and instantly altered their flight, coming toward us until we could distinguish the gaudy plumage of the drake, with his green head and breast of chestnut, contrasting beautifully with the quieter, softer plumage of the two ducks.

Without a suspicion they swept on, quacking a note of greeting, then set their wings and came gliding down straight for the decoys. Now they were seventy yards away, fifty, forty—and still coming on. "All right!" whispered uncle. "Give it to 'em, Hal!"

With beating heart I sprang to my feet. What a change! On the instant the peaceful security of the mallards changed to wild alarm and, more quickly than any one could imagine, they shot straight up into the air in a mad effort to escape. My barrel covered the drake, followed him for a sec-

ond until bird and gun moved as one, then I pressed the trigger.

I held fair and true, and saw the drake's neck double backward and his wings drop to his sides as he fell, stone dead, into the darkening waters of the pond. Just as I fired, I was conscious of the roar of my uncle's gun in my ear, setting my head to buzzing. Looking to see the result of his shot, I found that he had bettered mine and had brought down the two ducks at one discharge. Naturally he was elated.

"By cricky!" he exclaimed, his favorite exclamation. "I got 'em both. Fired just as they drawed together in the air. And you got the drake, Hal! Three mallards, by cricky! Won't your father be surprised!"

CHAPTER VI.

A SHOT IN THE DARK.

MY uncle had half risen to his feet, preparatory to leaving the blind to retrieve the birds; but I laid a restraining hand on his arm.

"Let's wait a while before we get them," I suggested. "We'll lose a shot if we go now; there will be more ducks along any minute."

He hesitated, but finally replied: "I don't dare risk it, Hal. It's almost dark now, and the breeze is taking them right out toward the inlet. If we wait, we won't be able to find them in the dark, and by morning either they will have gone out to sea or, if they lodge in the reeds, the foxes will get them. No, better make sure of what we have; we don't get mallards every day."

Reluctantly I concluded that he was right, for darkness was closing in rapidly over the pond, and only a few moments of twilight remained. "All right," I agreed.

He put his foot on the edge of the blind, and gained the sand, stood there for an instant erect, then, either catching his foot in something or overbalancing himself, he pitched forward and almost fell.

On such slight chances do our lives depend. For now, all in an instant, there happened something which gave me the greatest shock of my life. In the second that my uncle tripped forward, there sounded from the woods to the south of us the sharp, whiplike report of a rifle. My uncle's old felt hat, which he always wore on gunning trips, was shot clean from his head and whirled downward into the sand.

For an instant, so utterly unexpected, so undreamed of was this murderous onslaught, that we were both paralyzed into inaction. I can still see my uncle as he stood there, a look of absolute bewilderment on his kindly old face, as though he were wholly unable to realize what had occurred. Then I sprang to my feet, seized him about the knees as I would have seized an adversary in a wrestling bout, and fairly dragged him toward the box. Naturally, he again pitched forward, and at the instant there sounded from the shore a second report and the bullet swept by us with a venomous hum.

The next second I had him in the shelter of the blind, perturbed and considerably shaken up, but safe. Yet the suddenness of the attack had been too much for his poor old brains, for he looked up at me as a child might have looked, asking anxiously:

"What was it, Hal? What happened to me?"

"What happened?" I cried. "Some one was trying to murder you. That's all!"

He still regarded me as if trying painfully to reason the matter out. "Murder me?" he repeated, as though unable to comprehend. "Nobody would murder me, Hal; I haven't got an enemy in the world."

As far as I know, he spoke the truth. Indeed the whole occurrence had been so startling, so utterly unbelievable, that

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I found myself shaking from head to foot with the shock of it. Yet it was not explanations that now concerned me.

One thing was certain. As long as we remained in the blind, we were safe. No one could row out and take us by surprise, for in the shelter of the box even our shotguns would be enough to protect us. We reloaded our weapons at once.

By this time it was actually dark; all around us ducks splashed, quacking, into the pond; a dozen were swimming among our decoys. But we paid no heed. From being the hunters we had become the hunted.

TO spend the night where we were was out of the question. To say nothing of the chill of the evening and of the discomfort of our cramped quarters, we would gain nothing, for our enemies could stay as long as we did, and some time or other we must make a move for home. Moreover, if we waited until morning, and my father or Dick, becoming alarmed, should set out to find us. We might expose them to the fire of these lurking assassins.

We discussed this in low tones and decided to try to regain the village. I raised my head a little above the blind and looked around me. Very cautiously I slipped over the edge of the box, wormed my way to the skiff and pulled it as close to the blind as possible.

Then I gave a low call to my uncle, and with similar caution he joined me. While I crouched in the bow with my gun at full cock in my hands, my uncle sat in the bottom of the skiff, and sculled her patiently and without noise toward the westerly shore of the pond.

Whether we were visible in the darkness I did not know, though I feared that the skiff would at least make a moving blur on the quiet surface. But the woods ceased at some distance from the spot where we would land, and no matter how skillful with a rifle our adversaries might be, I felt sure that even if they could distinguish us they could no longer fire with certain aim. If they followed us, in the gloom of the night we would be more on an equality; in fact, I was inclined to believe that our heavy charges of buckshot would be more effective than a rifle ball.

Presently we landed among the reeds, hauled up the skiff and, straining our eyes through the darkness, we made our way across the broad expanse of marsh which separated us from the woods beyond which lay the village and safety.

As we neared the trees, I regarded their black shadow with apprehension, for what the movements of our pursuers had been we could only guess. For all we knew, they might be far behind us, might never have even stirred from their ambush. Or they might have kept pace with us; or might even —and here was the terrorizing thought —have headed us and be lying in wait, knowing that it was only by way of the woods that we could regain our homes.

It was therefore almost with the feeling of advancing on a fortified position that we drew near to the woods. Yet no flash of flame burst from their depths; and as we entered their shade I felt, for the first time, a wave of relief sweep over me. Now at last I believed that we were safe.

The strain, however, had left its marks upon us. My uncle had become by this time thoroughly panic-stricken, and would not have proved of the slightest service if an actual struggle had occurred. And as for me—I was nearly frightened to death. A score of wild thoughts and conjectures whirled through my brain, but uppermost was the notion that we had been mistaken for some one else.

That seemed the only theory that would fit the facts. There was, for instance, the Whitely gang, who lived

away up beyond Beechwoods—thoroughly disreputable and suspected of many crimes, ranging from robbery to murder. That they would maliciously shoot my uncle I could not believe, but that they might have mistaken him for some enemy of theirs seemed at least possible. If this was the case and they were still following us with the idea of continuing their attempt, there was no way of making our identity known to them before we were again attacked.

WE had been making good progress, when my uncle suddenly staggered. If I had not thrown my arm around him, he would have fallen. Clearly the shock had completely unnerved him, for he muttered:

"I'm feeling light-headed and queer, Hal; I guess I'm pretty scared, being shot at like that. Seems so kind of mean."

His words went to my heart. Realizing that he must have at least a moment's rest, I managed to get him seated with his back against a tree, and tried to reassure him, though my own heart was pounding like a hammer and my mouth was parched and dry. Then, as though we were not badly enough off already, above the night wind rustling in the treetops I became aware of another sound—and I could have sworn that it was the breaking of a twig, near at hand.

A more experienced fighter, I suppose, would have remained motionless, and allowed his pursuers to walk straight into this ambush; but since I was only a desperately frightened boy, I began rousing my uncle to further efforts. I did not care to add to his alarm, so told him merely that it was growing late, that we were almost home, that we must hurry on. He struggled to his feet, and we continued our flight.

As at last we neared the margin of the woods, I realized that when we left their shadow to cross the open country to my uncle's house, we should be outlined against the clear western sky. Any one shooting at us from the shelter of the trees would have every chance in the world to make good his escape.

The dividing line between woods and plain did not come abruptly. The main mass of the forest ended in a well-defined line, but thereafter, for perhaps thirty yards, there were scattered trees and underbrush. At the edge of the main body of woods I cast a final glance behind me and could have taken my oath that I saw a shadowy form close at our heels. As we reached the last tree of any size before we would be forced actually to take to the open, I pushed my uncle behind its shelter and, turning, made one last survey in the darkness behind me.

The starlight and a crescent moon had tempered the absolute blackness. As I wheeled I felt positive that I could see a dark form standing beside a large tree and, aided by my heightened imagination, I could see a rifle pointing directly at the spot where I stood. What I did was absolutely without thought; it was purely automatic. In a flash my gun leaped to my shoulder and the woods were filled with noise and flame as it went off.

Somehow the very fact of the report, after the ghostly silence of the place, gave me new courage. Again seizing my uncle's arm, I hurried him onward and did not stop until we had reached his house. Strangely enough, by the time we had entered, had lighted the lamp and had passed out of the shadow of the forest into the familiar surroundings of home, the events of the past hour seemed suddenly to dissolve and vanish like something fantastic and unreal.

My uncle, blinking a little, like a man awakening from slumber, actually put the question to me. "Hal," he said, "I remember shooting at those mallards and getting up to bring them in. And

everything since then seems like a bad dream. Did it all really happen, lad?"

Sitting there in his kitchen in the pleasant lamplight, it was not easy to know how to answer him, for my sensations were much like his own. Could we, I wondered, have been the victims of some cruel hoax? But my common sense told me that I had not dreamed the spiteful swish of those passing bullets.

"Come home with me," I urged, "and let's tell my father about it."

He smiled at the idea.

"Nonsense, Hal," he answered, "it was all a mistake. Nobody's going to hurt me."

Deciding to tell my father the story, I set out for home.

At the gate of my uncle's cottage, I turned and took one last look at the woods. All was quiet and peaceful; not a sound broke the stillness. If only other houses had been nearer, I should have felt easy in my mind. I had never, until now, realized the loneliness of my uncle's home. However, the sooner I reached Black Rock Beach, the better it would be for every one. I covered the distance as fast as I could walk.

I found my father tired and sleepy, and on the point of retiring for the night. He heard my story with interest. Now our adventure was ended, without any great alarm, he inclined to my theory that we had had to do with the Whitely gang.

"Nobody would shoot your uncle, Hal," he asserted. "Folks know he isn't quite like the rest of us. But the Whitelys must have mistaken you for some one they had a grudge against. It's lucky you escaped as you did."

This relieved me greatly. "Then you think," I asked, "it's safe now to leave things as they are?"

"Surely," he answered, and indeed, with a twinkle in his eye: "If you did have some one on your trail, you probably gave them a good scare with that charge of buckshot. I wish, though, you had brought me home those mallards; they're nice eating, especially at this time of year."

"I'll go back to the pond in the morning and look for them," I promised, and with my mind at ease, went off to bed.

AS a rule, I was a heavy sleeper, but the evening's experience had sorely shaken me, and my slumbers were broken by fantastic nightmares of struggles and killings. It was a relief to waken in the gray of the morning and to hear in the silence outside the cheery song of a belated song sparrow. Without waiting for breakfast, I made my way to Dick's house, and while he rose and dressed himself, I told him the story of our adventure. Then we set out to fetch the ducks.

On the way to the pond, to try to recover the mallards, we passed my uncle's house. No smoke curled upward from the chimney, but I reasoned that he would be sleeping heavily after the excitement and that there was no reason for arousing him. As we neared the woods and everything came back to me with vividness, I began to explain and point out to Dick.

"Here," I said, "is the tree where I stopped. And there, as nearly as I can recall it, is the tree where I thought I I saw a man aiming at me with a rifle."

"That was imagination, without doubt," was Dick's comment. "But I don't blame you. It's easy to imagine anything in the woods at night, and you had a lot to frighten you. Let's go over there and take a look, anyway."

We crossed the intervening space between the path and the tree I had indicated, but could see nothing unusual to indicate that my vision of a man had been correct. And then, quite suddenly, I heard Dick cry out, a muffled exclamation. Stooping, he picked up a brown and withered leaf from the ground at

his feet. On it was a stain which there was no mistaking—a great red splash!

I felt as if my face had gone suddenly white; I had never dreamed of this. But Dick, whose eyes were keen as those of a lynx, began searching rapidly here and there. Picking up the trail from other drops of scarlet, he came at length to the channel of a dried-up brook, partly filled with a tangle of vines and drifted leaves. Then he stopped short and gripped me by the arm.

I looked, and there, seated in the gully, and seemingly gazing directly at us with the ghastly semblance of a grin, was the red-headed mate of the schooner. So natural, indeed, was his posture that I was sure, for a moment, that he was alive. But no living man could have remained so motionless, without stirring a muscle; no living man would have had a face of such a dreadful pallor.

Dick, more courageous than I, stepped forward, placed his hand against the man's cheek, then lifted an arm and felt of the wrist. The man was dead as a stone. His face was without a mark, but Dick, with a sudden gesture, tore away the coarse shirt from his throat, and showed his chest, riddled like a target with buckshot.

A horrible feeling stole over me; I could hardly realize what I had done. "Dick," I managed to whisper, "I am a—murderer! Will they hang me?"

But Dick was quick to reassure me. "Murder nothing!" he cried. "It's this man who would have been the murderer, if you hadn't been in time. You saw straight, after all, though I couldn't believe it. But what could he have had against your uncle?"

I could only shake my head helplessly. I felt weak and dazed, and had to keep from bursting into tears. But Dick was thinking hard, and all at once he exclaimed:

"I have it! Don't you remember? Palliser? He asked about your father. And you said you were going shooting with him. And your father and your uncle look a lot alike, anyway. There's the clew. This red-headed rascal thought he was shooting at your father. I'm sure of it!"

I GASPED. There flashed upon me the memory of the night in Boston. Stevens supposed my father to be the only man who knew of what he had done. Supposing, next, that the clerk were guilty, as I had small doubt that he was. Palliser and the mate were in Boston that night, had gone roaring past the counting house while Stevens still labored in the loft. What if the clerk, some time the next morning, had offered Palliser money to put my father out of the way? That would account for the schooner's stopping off Bayport. That would explain Palliser's coming ashore, and his efforts to locate my father.

He had voyaged to the southward, just to allay suspicion, while he and the mate landed somewhere below Bayport and sneaked back to the pond, with which Palliser had said he was familiar. And there had been two shots, close together.

Where, then, was Palliser now? Alarmed, I gazed about me. But no sound or movement was in evidence. If Palliser had lost track of the mate in the darkness, he would scarcely have lingered in such a dangerous locality, but would have fled to save his skin. I breathed a great sigh of thankfulness at our escape.

"We'd better find Captain Tower," said Dick, "and let him know. They will want to view the body just as it is, I suppose. And then they will hold the inquest. And I expect you and your uncle will both have to testify."

I shuddered. Nothing like this had ever come into my life before. "All right," I agreed. "Come along."

Once more, on our way to the village, we passed my uncle's cottage. Still all was quiet, although the sun now shone down gloriously on the asters and zinnias in the garden.

"He's sleeping late," I said.

Moved by a sudden impulse, I unlatched the gate, walked up the path and tried the handle of the kitchen door. It opened, and I took one step over the threshold, then paused in horror. In the middle of the room, face downward, lay my uncle, still and cold. The world swung around me in huge circles; I clutched at the air for support; then fell, in a dead faint, on the floor.

CHAPTER VII.

AT MULVEY'S TAVERN.

MY uncle was laid to rest in the family plot in the churchyard. Later that same day, in an obscure corner of the ground, the body of the red-headed mate was unceremoniously thrust under ground. Whether he had followed and killed my uncle and crept back to the woods to die, or whether some other hand had struck the blow, would never be known, probably. There were of course numberless theories, but it was wholly impossible to determine the actual facts. In a few days, the village took up its daily routine as placidly as before.

My father and I, discussing the whole tragedy from the beginning, felt that we knew the murderer; and my father, blaming himself bitterly, spent many a wretched hour lamenting his decision in the matter of the clerk. On his next trip to town, he learned that Stevens had fled, leaving the affairs of Squire Vane in huge confusion, and with many thousands of dollars unaccounted for.

My father went straight to the police and told his story. He was severely criticized for the course he had taken, but his honesty and his good intentions were so apparent that I think the officials felt that he had suffered enough for his lapse in judgment. They took his solemn deposition as to all that happened in the loft and warned him to be on his guard against further treachery. After this they allowed him to depart and did not involve him further in the whole affair.

While two men—my uncle and the red-headed mate—each apparently with many years of life still before him, had so suddenly and tragically made an end, two other men, seemingly little better than dead, had struggled back to life. The first of these was Will Marling; for in spite of his grave illness and his seemingly frail physique, he fought his fight in the very shadow, conquered, and came back to health with astonishing speed. A most likable man he proved to me; not overbright intellectually but absolutely frank and open. He was a welcome addition to our household, a pleasant, kindly and helpful man.

The second mariner to cheat death was Philip Avery, the man who had leaped from the bowsprit of the *Santa Maria* and been brought ashore in the lifeboat. Within a day or two he was able to leave Doctor Webster's house and to take up his abode at Mulvey's Tavern, the most disreputable resort in town. He was of the flashy, self-confident type, tall and swarthy, and with a manner that seemed to indicate the born adventurer, looking to the world to supply him with a living.

Almost at once dubious stories came to us of the way in which he made this living; we heard tales of drinking bouts at the tavern and of gambling. Also, Avery matched himself against a professional runner from Boston, and in a race at two hundred yards defeated him and became an idol in the eyes of the Bayport youths who had dared to bet money on the result. Of all his admirers Jim Southard was the most

faithful. He was constantly in the stranger's company, nor could he deliver himself of three sentences in a row without bringing in, "Philip Avery says ——" or, "I was talking about that with Avery," or, "Once, when Phil Avery was in Brazil——" It was through this same Avery that an event was now to happen which was to widen the breach, already broad enough, between Dick and Jim Southard.

IT happened one Saturday. My father was in Boston. Dick and I were to drive down that evening to Squire Pratt's in Greenbush, with some papers of importance which my father had promised him. I had come in from mossing about four o'clock, and on the wharf fell into talk with Johnny Litchfield of Beechwoods, a gawky, overgrown boy of fourteen.

Johnny's father was off on a long cruise; his mother was a confirmed and crabbed scold, and Johnny, in spite of his youth, was already in the habit of hanging around at Mulvey's, trying to imitate the talk and actions of the sporting gentry who frequented the place.

On this special evening, Johnny had a secret that he simply had to tell some one. Presently he confided: "Say, Hal, you better come up to Mulvey's about nine to-night. There's going to be a lot of fun."

"Well," I naturally inquired, "what's up?"

After swearing me to secrecy, he whispered: "You know my dog Grip?"

I nodded. Every one in town knew Grip, a brindled bull who would let no other dog set foot on the Litchfield land. Without question, Grip was the local champion in the dog world.

"Well," Johnny went on, "there's going to be a regular fight at the tavern to-night. Mr. Avery has made a match between Grip and a bulldog from Scituate; there's a crowd coming up from there, and there's going to be a judge and everything. There's a pit all made out in the barn; and don't tell," he added, "but if Grip wins—and Mr. Avery says he's bound to win—he's going to give me ten dollars for letting him fight! Ten dollars! How's that?"

I heard him with loathing. I have always had a tender heart for animals, and the idea of a brutal encounter like this filled me with compassion for the participants. So I did all I could to discourage him. But in vain. He said that I was merely envious of his good fortune.

I left for home with a great feeling of distaste for the coming fight, and with even greater distaste for men who would influence boys toward evil in such ways as this. And so sorely did the matter rankle in my mind that on the way to Greenbush I told Dick of the proposed diversion at the inn. He was as indignant as I, but to decide on any plan of action was not easy.

As it happened, however, our discussion of what we might or might not do was wasted time. On the way home from Greenbush our horse, in the darkness, stepped into a hole, wrenched his leg, and went so dead lame that we had to leave him in Scituate and trudge home on foot. By the time we drew near to the tavern, it was long after ten o'clock.

While we were still some distance away, we were aware of a muffled sound, as though some one were in distress. Presently, seated in the darkness on the bank by the side of the road, we came on the tragic figure of Johnny, sobbing bitterly, while stretched beside him on the grass lay the body of poor Grip, with his throat torn to ribbons. Between his sobs, as we knelt on the ground beside him, Johnny faltered out the story of the fight.

"Grip," he told us, "didn't seem to be angry at all; I guess he's only fierce at home. He didn't seem to know what he was in the pit for. And the other

dog was bigger and heavier and made one rush for Grip and grabbed him by the throat. And when I saw he was killing Grip, I tried to get in and stop it, and Avery and Jim held on to me and told me not to be a fool. He's dead now, and I killed him!"

We tried in vain to comfort him. At last Dick persuaded him that he must go home, and very sadly, with the bedraggled body of Grip in his arms, he made off down the road. Dick stood gazing after him, his mouth set in one firm line; then caught up with Johnny to ask if any of the crowd of "sporting men" were still at the tavern.

Johnny did not know, but the question seemed to recall something to his mind. The Scituate men, he told us, had gone home at once, and Avery and Southard had sworn at Johnny, and had told him to go home too, and to keep his mouth shut. Later, however, Johnny, crouched miserably behind a stone wall, had seen Avery and Southard strike off, across lots, toward the church, had seen them stop at a clump of bushes and then go on again with what looked like poles in their hands.

We watched him depart once more toward his home; then Dick turned thoughtfully to me. "Across lots," he said meaningly. "And toward the church. Does that make you think of anything, Hal?"

The answer was obvious. "The burying ground," I replied.

"And something like poles in their hands," he continued. "Does that make you think of anything?"

I knew what was in his mind, for ghastly stories had lately been going the rounds of cemeteries robbed of bodies for use in the dissecting room. "Spades?" I guessed.

He came closer to me. "Hal," he said, "do you wonder I get angry when Jim Southard comes courting your sister? I've never liked Jim, and I never will like him; he's what they call a 'wrong un' through and through. And yet Rose really seems to enjoy having him come to see her. Girls are mighty funny—even Rose. But if Jim is so low-down that he's turned body snatcher, we ought to know it; that's going beyond the limit. I vote we trail them and see."

I was only too ready to do so.

WE soon neared the cemetery. It was inclosed by a stone wall of moderate height, making it an easy matter to leave the shelter of the woods, crawl on our knees across the intervening space, and then to peer cautiously over the top of the wall. Our first glance told us that our suspicions were correct. Not over fifty feet away, in that portion of the cemetery where the victims of the wreck had been buried, we saw a lantern on the ground and in its dim and ghostly light two figures busily at work.

Evidently they had been engaged in their task for some time, for we could make out a pile of earth and, on the farther side of an opened grave, what appeared to be the outlines of a coffin. These vandals were apparently calm and self-possessed, for in the still night air we presently heard a voice, which I took to be Avery's, saying briskly:

"Now the chisel, Jim, and let's hope your memory is good. It would be no joke if we had dug up the wrong man."

Then came another voice, which I had no difficulty in recognizing as Southard's: "This is the grave, Phil. I remember it perfectly. They buried him by himself, because he was clearly of a different rank from the rest."

"Well," replied Avery callously, "they're all of the same rank now." Then came a noise, as of splitting and rending wood. "Now the lantern, Jim. Let's get this over as quick as we can."

We saw Southard stoop and lift the lantern, so that its rays fell directly into the coffin at their feet.

The next instant we heard Avery exclaim, in a tone of the sharpest disappointment: "These aren't the clothes he had on, Jim! We've done all this for nothing."

Southard seemed to interpret the remark as reflecting upon him, for he answered sulkily: "Well, don't blame me. How was I to know——"

"I'm not blaming you, Jim; I blame myself," Avery interrupted him. "But I never thought of it. I supposed of course they would bury a man in his own clothes. This looks like a cheap suit from the undertaker's. And I suppose everything he had on was thrown away. Oh, the fools! the fools!"

By this time I was growing excited, and my fears were giving place to a lively curiosity. It was evident, to my great relief, that this was not a ghastly body-snatching expedition, but an adventure of a very different sort. I remembered the day when the Brazilians had been buried and, judging from the talk I had already heard, I felt sure that this was the grave of the man whom my father and I had vainly sought to save. Evidently, it was for something on his person that they were searching, and I began to wonder anxiously what had become of the clothes which he had on when we had brought him in from the sea.

"How about a belt?" Avery asked. "Let's look carefully while we've got him here; we won't be digging him up twice, you can bet. And boots. Has he got boots on? No?"

There was a pause, and then, in tones of the utmost disgust and disappointment, Avery said sullenly: "Not even a belt. Well, there's no help for it. Let's get him back under ground again. And then we'll go back to the tavern. I own that a drink will make me feel better. This is spooky work."

Dick nudged me, and we crept cautiously away until we had regained the shelter of the woods.

"Well," I said, when we were safely out of earshot, "here's a mystery. But I'm glad they weren't on a worse errand. Another minute, and I might have keeled over."

Dick nodded. "I felt a bit queer myself," he owned. "However, that's all over with. And it isn't their doings with the dead that I care about; I'm still thinking about Johnny Litchfield and his dog. That was a despicable piece of business, Hal. And I'm going back to the tavern, to wait there until they come. Are you with me?"

"Of course," I answered, though I did not relish the prospect of Dick and Jim Southard coming together, knowing full well that the sparks would fly.

Back we went and appeared in the tap room, somewhat to Mulvey's surprise, for we were by no means frequent visitors at the place. Dick at once called the half a dozen loafers to the bar, and stood them a glass of ale all round. Then we felt free to sit down at one of the small tables and await the return of Avery and Jim.

CHAPTER VIII.

SPARKLING STONES.

DICK made no pretense at conversation, but sat in silence. If there was one thing in the world which he hated, it was cruelty or imposition on those unable to take their own part. And I felt sure that for good or ill, the moment Jim and Avery appeared, there would be action of some sort.

Presently the door was thrust open, and Avery and Jim entered and walked to a table and called for drinks. Instantly Dick was on his feet and on his way over to their table, while I followed at his heels.

Avery, who had the easy manners of a man of the world, greeted him politely enough. But Dick was in no mood to care for politeness.

"I want to tell you both," he began,

his voice carrying clearly throughout the room, "that you have done, in my opinion, a brutal and cruel thing. It was brutal to set two dogs to fight each other, and to have one of them killed; and it was cruel to the boy who owned that dog. You have caused him suffering to-night that he will remember as long as he lives. It was a blackguardly thing to do, and both of you ought to feel ashamed of yourselves."

Jim Southard had listened with a contemptuous smile; but Avery rose in my estimation, for he did not lose his temper at Dick's plain speaking, and now made answer courteously enough.

"I'm sorry you feel as you do, Wheatland. Sit down and have a drink, and we'll talk it over."

Dick was too angry for these amenities. A gesture of dissent was his only answer, and Avery went on:

"Very well, if you won't join us, we can talk just the same. I think you make too much of this. Dog fighting is a recognized sport. I've been to dog fights in Boston and New York, and in South America; I imagine they have them all over the world. After all, a dog is only a dog; and a good bulldog would rather fight than eat." And after an instant's pause he added, a trifle mockingly: "I appreciate your kind heart, Wheatland, but I consider that you're mistaken in your views. Whether a man likes a dog fight or not is simply a matter of taste. You don't like them; I do."

Southard remarked, in his most offensive and patronizing tone: "If you would only mind your own business, Dick," he said, "it would be better for everybody, including yourself. And," he added, with deliberation, "there's one good thing about dogs. They're not afraid to fight. They don't just stand around and bark."

I heard a snicker from the other tables; there was, indeed, no mistaking the point of Southard's remark. Dick regarded him with a look of hostility equal to Southard's own.

"You mean," he said, "that I don't dare fight you?"

Southard shrugged his shoulders. "Do you?" he asked.

"Do I?" Dick echoed. "Only too glad to accommodate. Any place, any time."

Southard leaped briskly to his feet. "All right," he cried. "I'll fight you here and now."

"In this room?" Dick asked.

"No, no!" Avery interposed. "This is no place for a fight. But we can make a ring in the barn, after a fashion. We can rope off a space at the end. And we can get light enough from the lanterns. And I have a set of gloves in my room."

"We don't want gloves," said Southard quickly.

Avery glanced inquiringly at Dick.

"No," Dick agreed, with equal promptness, "we don't want gloves."

Mulvey had come out from behind the bar, his broad, ruddy face gleaming with pleasure. "But you will want a timekeeper!" he exclaimed, and displayed a fat gold watch. "What will it be, Phil, three-minute rounds?"

Again Southard exclaimed, "We don't want any rounds," and Dick nodded his agreement.

Avery looked a trifle disturbed. He was a genuine lover of all athletic sports, and liked to see them conducted according to rule. But it was easy to perceive, from the expression of the combatants, that their minds were made up.

"All right," he said, "let's have it over with." And to the loafers he added: "Bring out the lanterns, boys."

As we entered the barn, I was conscious of a thrill of anxiety; for while it is bad enough to face a test yourself, it is even worse to have to sit powerless and watch the fortunes of a friend. The light of the lantern in Mulvey's

hand cast only a faint radiance in the shadows of the big barn. It did not take long to arrange matters. A stout rope was stretched across the barn some twenty feet from the big door, making at least the semblance of a ring, while four of the loafers took a corner each, lantern in hand.

Dick and Southard stood in the center of the inclosure, while Avery, who seemed by general consent to be given the powers of referee and manager, explained to them, in language which was Greek to my ears, the rules which they must observe. After which they retreated to opposite corners, stripped to the waist, and at a word from Avery again advanced, shook hands in most perfunctory fashion, and the fight was on.

THERE was no time wasted in sparring or feinting for an opening. They went for each other at once with a vigor which took the place of science. From the very outset, I could see, to my surprise and discomfiture, that the advantage lay with our enemy; for Avery, who had been coaching Jim, had drilled into his mind at least one point in boxing—namely, the ability to land a straight, swift jab with the left hand to your adversary's face. Since Southard's reach was exceptionally long, and he was quick as lightning with his hands, he made good use of his newly acquired skill. Though Dick was strong and sturdy as an ox, he knew little of the art of boxing, and held his guard too low to stop Southard's swift and repeated jolts to his face.

Thus I could not help seeing that the battle was going against us. Presently, after one particularly vicious smash on his jaw, Dick actually went down on one knee. Avery, in the most approved manner, began counting off the seconds, while Southard danced around, eager to finish his opponent as soon as he regained his feet.

Luckily for Dick, however, it had not been a clean knockdown, but half a slip. Before Avery had counted three, Dick was on his legs again, with a glare in his eye which was little short of murderous. Realizing that the fight was going against him, he now changed his tactics altogether and lowered his head and charged like a bull, smashing right and left at Southard's stomach and ribs.

For the next half minute the struggle was terrific. They stood toe to toe and traded blows with all the force of which they were capable. Here was where Dick's strength told, for presently Southard's wearied arms sagged a trifle, and for perhaps the first time since the fight had started, he left his face entirely unprotected.

For an instant Dick seemed to measure his man, and then the right-hand blow that landed on Southard's chin was enough. Jim went down as if struck by lightning, so completely and utterly out that Avery did not even go through the formality of starting to count. The fight was over. I walked home with Dick and was glad enough when I had crept into my soft bed.

My thoughts kept reverting to the strange scene in the churchyard. Clearly, there was some mystery connected with the Brazilian, some clew which Avery earnestly desired to find. I thought of all the stories I had ever heard of pirates, of manuscripts in mysterious cipher, of maps of desert islands and buried gold. Could it be something of this sort? I determined to make a search on the morrow, but even as I debated the matter sleep claimed me, and I knew no more until I awakened with the sunshine falling on my face.

After breakfast, I asked my mother what she had done with the Brazilian's clothing. She told me that she had dried and pressed it, and then packed it away in a chest in the attic. This was good news, but I was busy with other

matters all the morning, and it was not until after dinner that I had an opportunity to make my way stealthily to the attic.

I found the clothing readily enough, laid away, as my mother had told me, in a chest which smelled strongly of camphor. But I could detect no traces of a mystery. There was a belt, to be sure, but it was a simple strap of leather; no gold could possibly be hidden there. The clothes, badly torn and ripped by contact with the reef, yielded nothing. The boots, stoutly made, stood beside the trunk, and I even examined these, thrusting my hand into them with a smile at the folly of expecting to find anything there.

I COULD not help suspecting, however, that all too soon we should have a call from Avery. Sure enough, a night or so afterward, there came a knock at the door and Avery appeared. I do not think my father was overpleased, for his views of life were of the strict and old-fashioned kind; yet his standards of hospitality were high, and he bade Avery welcome, first in the kitchen, where all the family were assembled, and then, after our visitor had explained that his business was of a private nature, in the front room.

Although Avery had emphasized his desire for privacy, my father motioned to me to come with him, saying to Avery: "You won't mind my son; I have no secrets from him."

Once seated, Avery began at once. "Captain, how much do you know of the man whom you tried to save from the wreck?"

"Absolutely nothing," my father replied.

"Well," Avery answered, "I know more than that, and with your permission I've come to tell it to you.

"Before I took passage on the *Santa Maria*, I had been in Pernambuco for some time and naturally had picked up something of the gossip of the place," he went on. "The old man whom you tried to rescue was Señor Manuel Altara, member of an old Brazilian family, a widower with one young daughter, as pretty a girl as you would see in a long day's journey."

For the first time my father interrupted. "Could you tell me her name?" he asked.

"I could and I will," Avery answered, without hesitation. "Her name is Margarita."

My father gave a quick nod of the head, and I knew that this was a point in Avery's favor, for that was the name that the Brazilian had uttered with such emphasis as his dying eyes saw his sister entering the room.

"The señor's fortunes were at a low ebb," Avery continued. "He owned a big sugar plantation, gone to rack and ruin, and a house tumbling to pieces for lack of repairs. Also, he was a confirmed gambler and tried again and again, without success, to mend his fortunes at cards and dice. Finally he came to his last resource. Brazil, as you doubtless know, is famous for its diamonds, and the señor had some stones which had been in his family for years. He decided to sell the jewels. He thought first of Rio, but heard later that there was a far better market in the States, and decided to make the trip himself."

He paused for a moment, then went on: "Now you know as much as I do. My actual knowledge ends there; all the rest is conjecture. But I leave it to your judgment; suppose you were going on shipboard, with diamonds worth many thousands of dollars in your possession and knew that you would be surrounded by strangers of whom you knew nothing. How would you prefer to carry them? If they were set, as I conjecture, in rings, brooches and the like, would you not prefer to take them from their settings so that

they would use up the smallest possible amount of space?"

My father reflected. "Yes," he assented. "I think that is a fair supposition."

"I believe so." Avery concurred. "And furthermore, how would you carry these stones? Surely not in a trunk or bag, which may always be stolen, opened, or mislaid by the merest accident. No, I take it you would not feel easy to have the stones out of your sight. You would want them as near your person as possible."

Again my father agreed.

"Now, then," Avery continued, "on the day of the storm, what would have been the señor's first care? Remember, it wasn't a blow that burst on us like a typhoon; it came on gradually; we had plenty of time to look ahead. So I maintained that when the vessel lay off Black Rock, just before she struck, the señor must have had the diamonds on his person!"

Once more my father concurred, and Avery went on, though visibly with greater hesitation than before:

"But the señor wasn't buried in the clothes he wore when he left the wreck."

"How do you know that?" asked my father quickly.

"I'm not ashamed to answer that question," Avery replied, "but I would rather not. If you insist on knowing, I'll tell you."

My father shrugged his shoulders. "I don't insist," he said briefly.

"Thank you. Now, then, the point is this. Have you those clothes, and, if so, have you any objection to my examining them? You may say that it's none of my business, but I think in a way that it is; for since you would never have known of all this without my telling you, I believe I am making a proper request."

My father turned to me and asked: "Do you know, Hal, where your mother put the clothes?"

I jumped up with alacrity. "I know the very place," I answered, and a minute or so later I had groped my way to the chest in the attic and had pulled out the clothing. I brought the boots along also.

AVERY took the bundle from my arms and was examining garment after garment much more thoroughly than I had done. Yet he found nothing. He glanced at my father with a meditative eye.

"I can't understand it," he said. "I *must* be right. The señor was no fool; he was a clever man." Then, turning to me, "You brought down everything, Hal?"

"Everything," I answered.

Then, remembering that I had not given him the boots, I picked them up and handed them to him. As I had done, he thrust a hand into them, shook them, examined them carefully, then asked:

"Have you such a thing as a chisel, captain?"

"There's one in the kitchen," my father answered. "Get it, Hal."

On my return Avery pried the upper portion of one of the shoes from the sole, without result; and then, exerting considerable strength, he laid the sole on the table and wrenched off the heel. Instantly, before our astonished eyes, there dropped from a carefully hollowed cavity a dozen tiny pellets of tissue paper.

With an exclamation, Avery seized the nearest, deftly unrolled it. Suddenly, in the lamplight, there gleamed and sparkled in his fingers a magnificent diamond worth, I imagined, not less than a thousand dollars. I fairly gasped, and even my father's placid countenance wore an expression of the keenest interest. Altogether there were ten stones.

Avery regarded them thoughtfully. "Not enough," he decided. "I'll wager

we find as many more in the other boot."

He was correct. A thrust from the chisel revealed a similar cavity in the second shoe, and the store of stones was increased to an even score.

Avery shot a quick glance at my father. "Well, captain," he queried, "to whom do they belong?"

"Why," my father answered, "I know little of law in Brazil, but unless otherwise bequeathed by will, I suppose that they belong to the daughter."

I thought that an expression of disappointment showed for an instant on Avery's face. If so, it was gone again in a twinkling. "Yes," he agreed, "I presume so. But it's a long journey to make. You've never voyaged to Brazil, have you, captain?"

My father shook his head. "No," he answered, "I never have. But I should hate to trust the stones to any one else. I don't know what to say."

"I'll tell you what we might do," Avery suggested. "I've got to return to Pernambuco anyway on other business. If you would like to have me take the stones, I'll gladly turn them over to the girl."

The audacity of the proposal almost deprived me of breath, and for an instant I feared lest my father, with his kindly and unsuspicious nature, might consent. But I did not do him justice.

He shook his head decidedly. "No," he answered. "Doubtless you are an honest man, Mr. Avery, but for me to intrust you, or any one I do not know well, with a treasure like this, would hardly be acting fairly toward the girl."

Avery apparently took no offense at this plain speaking. "I dare say you are right," he agreed, "although you could trust me perfectly. But consider this, captain. We wish to be fair, of course, but on the other hand we don't want to stand up so straight, as the saying is, that we'll fall over backward. What's the common sense of it?

"You risked your life to save this man. That gives you some claim. And if I had been so disposed, I could have gotten these clothes away from you somehow, by hook or crook. Or if not, I could have kept my mouth shut about the stones. But instead of that I come to you openly with the story. And that gives *me* some claim. I'll tell you what we will do, captain. Let's divide the stones, half to each; and we'll get them to the girl, each in our own way. What do you say to that?"

Again my father shook his head. "No," he replied.

I knew that, coming from him, the monosyllable was as emphatic as all kinds of fervid language in the mouths of other men. Avery evidently reached the same conclusion and so followed another fact.

"Then what *shall* we do?" he asked; and I admired his cleverness in using the word "we," which seemed to give him a partnership, as it were, in the disposal of the stones.

My father pondered for a moment before he answered: "Mr. Avery, we can't decide that now. This is a most unusual affair. But of course both of us are actuated by the same idea; these diamonds don't belong to us, and we must get them back in safety to the rightful owner. That is clear enough, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes!" Avery answered carelessly. "That's clear. We must get them back to her. So for the present you will keep the stones?"

"Yes," my father answered steadily. "Since Providence seems to have placed them in my hands, for the present I shall keep them."

Avery, I am sure, was none too well pleased, but even with his resourcefulness I do not think he knew just how to proceed against my father's honesty. And therefore he concluded lamely enough, "Well, we'll talk it over again, captain," and took his leave.

CHAPTER IX.

WILL MARLING'S STORY.

THE more I thought about him, the more I found Philip Avery a mysterious and interesting study. I quite agreed with my father as to the distance to which I would trust him, yet at the same time the man had many attractive qualities. His interest in sport, made an impression not only on me, but on all the other boys and young men of the village. He could run and jump like a deer; he took Dick's measure at putting the weight, could box, wrestle, row, shoot.

One thing regarding him would have given me a shock, if I had believed. One day Johnny Litchfield, who had been a firm friend to Dick and to me since the night at the tavern, confided to me that he had been on a trip after squirrels beyond Porter's Pond, had heard voices and, creeping up, had seen through a tangle of vines and underbrush two men talking together amid a clump of pines. One he thought was Avery; the other he described as short and stocky, and with the appearance of being "awful strong." With uneasy thoughts of Palliser, I asked him if the man had a black and stubbly growth upon his face, but as to that Johnny could not say.

When I came to reflect on the matter, it seemed highly improbable that Palliser should be in the vicinity. Later, when the opportunity served, I took occasion to ask Avery if he knew the captain, but he merely repeated the name thoughtfully, and added:

"It seems as though I'd heard of him somewhere, but I can't seem to place him." His air of sincerity put my fears to rest.

It was the thirteenth of November that Marling went gunning off Gull Ledge. There was a good easterly breeze at daylight, but no more than that; nothing to indicate the coming of a storm. But by ten o'clock the breeze had freshened steadily, and by dinner time had kicked up a nasty sea, so much so that landing on our beach would have been difficult, if not impossible.

Dick, who had come to make one of his interminable calls upon my sister, had left his dory by the humane station at Pleasant Beach. Through the forenoon the report of Marling's gun came at intervals to our ears, and the flight of ducks, steadily increasing, seemed another indication that there would be more wind before there was less. After dinner, I asked Dick if I might borrow his dory to go as far as Sea Ledge to get some of the inshore shooting, and he assented.

As I followed the path toward Pleasant Beach, it was impressed upon me that this was really quite a storm, for the wind had backed out due northeast, the whole sky was covered with low, sullen clouds, and the seas were white on the ledges and crashing on the headlands into showers of spray. Presently I came to the beach, and saw Marling's dory rising and falling in the huge seas, a half mile offshore. There was sea enough everywhere, but between him and Gull Ledge, where the water shallowed to form Gull Ledge Bar, the waves were breaking with a force that no craft could have withstood.

However, Marling knew enough to keep away from the bar, and I gave myself no uneasiness on that score, my mind being all on the prospect of the afternoon's sport. The flocks of wild fowl continued to pour steadily along. As I stood watching, I saw a flock of surf scooters swing to Marling's decoys, saw the leveled gun, the spurt of smoke, and a bird whirling down from the center of the bunch. That spurred me on; in another moment I had gained Dick's dory and was about to shove her down the beach when I was aware of a voice hailing me. Turning, I saw Jim Southard coming down the beach.

My relations with Jim were somewhat out of the ordinary. I did not like him. Since he and Dick were bitter rivals, and Dick was my best friend, this naturally increased my dislike. At the same time, he came to call regularly upon my sister, and out of loyalty to her wishes I was obliged to treat Jim at least with outward politeness.

Jim pointed toward Gull Ledge and asked: "Who's out there? Your father?"

"No," I answered. "Will Marling."

He looked disturbed. "He's in too close to the bar," he said. "He's a good seaman, of course, but no one but a Bayporter knows what a treacherous place that bar is. I'd feel easier if he were ashore this minute."

I was frankly surprised at this anxiety over some one else, for Southard was seldom disturbed over the fortunes of any one but himself. And why he should be worried over Marling, whom he scarcely knew, was a puzzle. But still more to my surprise he went on:

"Look here, Hal, I'll tell you what we'll do. Let's row out there and take the berth inshore of Marling. We'll get some good shooting, and we can keep an eye on him. Honestly, I don't feel easy to have him out there alone."

THIS, indeed, suited me perfectly, for I knew that I should have a hard row of it by myself. In another five minutes we had launched the dory and had cleared the point of Sea Ledge. About then we saw a splendid flock of brant swooping toward the surface of the water, making a wonderful target for Marling should he see them.

Clearly Marling had perceived his opportunity, for he crouched so low in his dory that not even the tip of his head was visible above the rail. Now the birds, almost within shot of us, suddenly rose higher into the air with their guttural cry, *"Kru-uk! Kru-uk!"* and made out to sea. Then, as some of the younger birds in the flock turned to the lure of Marling's decoys, the whole bunch, closely massed, swept by him.

I was beside myself with excitement. "He'll give them the devil!" I cried excitedly to Southard.

The next instant Will rose to his knees and leveled his gun. At the report, two birds dropped dead, while, as the flock made off to the eastward, a third broke company with his fellows, stopped in mid-flight, and with folded wings fell at the very edge of the breaker.

I saw Marling leap excitedly to his feet, cast off the buoy of his road line and pick up the two birds nearest at hand. Then, with a quick glance over his shoulder he made for the third.

Southard, watching him, frowned. "He's a fool to do that!" he cried. "Yell to him, Hal! Tell him to keep off!"

I shouted at the top of my lungs, but perceiving at once that my voice was borne away to leeward by the force of the wind, I rose to my feet and began waving at him. He did not see me, however. Even if he had, I think he was too intent on retrieving the brant to have paid the slightest heed.

Marling reached a position only a few boat lengths away from his game. I saw him pause and watch two or three big seas thunder past; then, in what appeared to be a momentary lull, he drove the dory ahead full speed and quickly and with precision reached for the brant and with one hand flipped it into the stern; then again grasped his oars and began to pull desperately for safety.

Then a great wall of water, higher than any wave I had seen that day, rose to the northeast of him. He saw it also, and did his best to head the dory up. But too late! For a second the whole scene was etched on my brain, that green mountain rushing on, with the curl of white above, the dory as if at the bottom of a huge valley. I held my breath; my nails gripped my flesh.

I heard an oath from Southard, and the words:

"He's gone!"

Then came the moment of impact. The dory, as if actually alive, seemed to strive bravely to surmount the wave. But in vain and, hanging motionless for a second, with her bow pointed toward the sky, she gave way before that mighty flood and was swept violently along in its path. In one dreadful second I saw oars, thwarts, gun and Marling himself hurled bodily through the air, then disappear under the avalanche of water. Then the wave, thundering shoreward, passed on its way and in the succeeding hollow appeared the dory, level with the water. An instant later we saw Marling's head emerge, saw him look wildly about him and, catching sight of the boat, he swam to her and passed an arm over her rail.

IN my excitement, I imagined he was saved, but I had forgotten that he now lay directly in the path of the breakers. Presently another great sea came roaring down, burying man and dory beneath it; and this time, when it passed, the dory was bottom up, and I knew, though Marling still maintained a precarious hold on her stem, that he could not last long in that wild whirl of waters. Nor could we go in after him; that would mean throwing away three lives instead of one.

I turned helplessly to Southard. "What shall we do, Jim?" I cried.

He had lost no time, but had drawn his knife and cut the line from the decoys in the stern. Yet I did not see what good that would do, for he could never get the line to Marling; the strength of the wind would sweep it to leeward in a twinkling. It was a desperate situation. Though Marling might retain his grip on the dory for a time, those great rollers, smashing down, would finally overwhelm him.

In my helplessness, I scarcely realized what Southard was doing. Now I saw that he was making one end of the decoy line fast about his waist.

"Come aft, Hal," he cried, "and let me come for'ard! Then get her in as close to the breaker as you can. Quick, now! Don't lose a second!"

I did as commanded. When I had gained the position indicated, I turned again, to find that Southard had stripped off coat and shirt and had made the other end of the line fast to the cleat on the forward thwart. Then I realized his desperate purpose, for the line he had tied about him was old and worn and never intended to stand a strain. There was no time, however, for heroics or for any address of farewell; this was a practical affair.

"If I get him," he shouted, "haul us back as fast as you can; but go easy on the line; it won't stand much. And if you see I'm done for before I get to him, try to pull me out anyway." Then he slipped over the side into the chilling water and struck out.

Southard swam easily, husbanding his strength, to the edge of the breaker, waited until the next roller crashed by and then, without losing a second, made straight for the dory at the top of his speed. Halfway on his journey another wave broke over him, but he emerged in safety, shaking his head like a dog, and to my inexpressible joy I saw him reach the dory, pass the line around Marling and then wave an arm to me as a signal, just as another wave closed over them.

Now it was my turn. I rowed steadily, straight away from the breaker and danger, but so heavy was their weight upon the line that I saw I was not making speed enough. Therefore, pulling in my oars, I hauled in on the line precisely as though I were trying to land some giant fish. Marling, as I learned afterward, was almost gone by this time, and if Southard had not been able to help me out by exhausting the

last remnants of his own strength, I think both men would have drowned before I could have pulled them in. As it was, however, Southard and his burden were within reach of the rail and somehow, an instant later, I had them both aboard. Marling collapsed in the bottom of the dory; Southard leaned limply against the forward thwart, completely spent, but still conscious. And realizing the vital need of haste, I was forced to take a chance of disaster from a following sea. Heading the dory for shore, I drove her full speed for the beach, thankful that the humane station, with its warmth and shelter, lay close at hand.

By good luck, both rescuer and rescued came through their ducking without ill effects. Jim Southard became the hero of Bayport, for every man in the town knew the dangers of Gull Ledge Bar in a storm and could realize the risk that Southard had run. Jim, moreover, did not spoil his deed by bragging about it, but had the good sense to bear his honors modestly; and I could see that my sister was hugely flattered by having such a hero in her train. Even Dick could not do otherwise than admire.

"I can't understand it," he confessed to me. "It's not like Jim Southard in the least. But the fact remains that he did it, and he deserves all the credit in the world."

IT was three or four days later, on a clear, sunny afternoon, with a big sea running. No birds were flying; it was far too rough for fishing or lobstering; and after dinner Marling asked my father and myself to walk down to the beach with him, adding that he had something on his mind which he wished to tell us. And under the lee of a huge boulder, in the warmth of the afternoon sunshine, he began his tale.

"Captain Nickerson," he asked, "have you ever read a book by one Exquemalin, entitled 'The History of the Bucaniers of America?'"

"No," my father answered, "I have never read it, nor even seen it, but I have heard it spoken of by others."

Marling heaved a deep sigh. "It is a wonderful book," he said, "and nothing but fear of my life made me leave my copy of it aboard Palliser's schooner, the *Red Cloud*, on that day when Dick Wheatland and your boy here fished me out of the water on Dark Island and saved my life. However, I know the book almost by heart, so in one way it is no great loss. And it is with the book that my story begins.

"You have heard, of course, of Morgan the pirate and of how he sacked Panama in the year 1670 and committed crimes and persecutions so horrible that even to read of them makes your flesh creep. Well, in Exquemalin's story of the sack of Panama there is mention of a great galleon which escaped. You may form some idea of what a prize she would have been, for it is estimated that, as it was, Morgan took treasure from Panama to the amount of a million and a half of dollars.

"But, says Exquemalin, this one prize would have been of greater value than all the rest of the treasure put together; for it was on her that they had placed all the royal plate and jewels, and the goods of the richest merchants in Panama. Moreover, she was undermanned, ill provided with food and water, and with sails and rigging in bad condition. More than once the pirates must have regretted that they were reveling and carousing when they might easily have pursued and captured her. But they chose to take their pleasure, and she escaped. And all that Exquemalin says is that she fled to places more remote and unknown."

Then he paused as if to rearrange his thoughts; then went on: "That was in 1670. Over a hundred years later my father, James Edward Marling, of

Bristol, sailed with Captain Furneaux in the brig *Adventure,* consort to Captain Cook in the *Resolution,* on his second voyage around the world."

AT these words I started, for they recalled the night in the humane station, and the story Marling had told us in his delirium. I had felt at the time that I was listening not to disordered ravings, but to actual truth; and now I paid close heed as Marling went on to repeat the story, almost word for word: That in February, 1774, the *Adventure* was south of the Horn, that they had sighted an island lying to the northward, that Marling's father and a shipmate had been given leave to land, that they had found, on a beach swarming with seals and sea elephants, a rusted anchor and a gold doubloon, had sighted the masts of a vessel across the island, and that a sudden furious squall had then driven them back to the brig for their lives. And he ended with the tale of the shipmate's death and of his father's noting the bearings of the island from the *Adventure's* log.

"For years," he concluded, "I've dreamed of making a voyage to the Antarctic, but the chance has never come. Now here in Bayport I've had my life saved twice; and I think that's a sign that it is from Bayport I should make the trip. So here's my offer, captain: If I give you the bearings of the island, will you fit out the *Albicore* and make the voyage, and we'll share half and half in all we find?"

My father pondered in silence. Presently he asked:

"Does any one else know the bearings?"

"No," Marling answered, "but one man nearly did. I'm a close-mouthed man except when I'm in liquor, and one night on the *Red Cloud* I got extra drunk and must have said a lot more than I meant to, for the next day Palliser got me into the cabin and he and the mate went for me hot and heavy. I must have blabbed more than I thought, for they questioned me stiff and sharp—all about a galleon wrecked in the Antarctic, and about my father finding her and coming home with his pockets full of gold. And when I wouldn't talk they knocked me down, gagged and bound me and triced me up and then, right there in the cabin, Palliser flogged me till I fainted.

"Then they sent me for'ard, and told me to think it over for an hour, and that if I wouldn't talk then they would give me another dose. What did they suppose? That I was going to tell a secret worth maybe a million dollars to swine like them? Not much! So I got desperate and took a chance of getting away in the gig. You know the rest."

"So you're sure that they haven't the bearings?" my father persisted.

"Certain!" Marling answered. "I might as well tell you now as any time, captain. I have the bearings, right here." As he spoke he raised his hands to his neck, and drew forth, attached to a stout cord, a small leather case which I remembered that I had seen on the night in the station, but to which I had paid no attention at the time.

"Here," said Marling, extracting a tiny packet of oiled silk, "is the paper, old and yellow and crumbling by now, that my father gave me when he lay dying. And here——" He fumbled for a moment at the case, then drew forth something which flashed and gleamed in the sunlight and handed it to my father. "That," he said, "is the coin that he found."

My father took it, examined it with care, then turned it over and looked at the other side, while I peered eagerly over his shoulder. It was a large, handsome coin of gold, clearly a Spanish doubloon; on one side the date—1667—and the head of Charles the Second, on the other side the arms of Spain. My father handed it back to Marling.

"And you say," he queried, "that you have the bearings, also?"

Marling tapped his head with his finger. "Right here," he answered. "They're on the paper, too, of course, though the ink is fading. But the figures are easy to remember; I couldn't forget them if I tried. And the minute you say you will go, I'll tell them to you, and to any one else you say, in case something should happen both to you and to me."

"Will," said my father to Marling, "it's a long ways to go. And it would cost money—probably more than I could afford. Yet there's one thing that tempts me to consider it, after all. And that you may not have thought of. You say your father spoke of the seals and sea elephants?"

"Yes," Marling assented, "more than once. The island was alive with them, he said, and so were the outlying reefs."

My father nodded. "As you doubtless know," he said, "many of our New England skippers have made large profits in sealing at the Falklands. They have had the cream of it there, but I dare say, even if we don't find your island, we could still take skins enough at the Falklands on our way home to pay expenses and a profit. And if your island really does exist, as I'm inclined to think it does, and there are seals there in the quantities you say, then, regardless of galleons and treasure, we might make a very handsome thing of the voyage."

"Then you doubt if the galleon is there?" Marling asked.

"No, I don't say that," my father answered. "But we have so little to go by. One coin picked up on a beach. I admit it's not likely, but some one might have dropped the coin there a year before, or a month before, or a day before. Still, the date is good evidence of your father's theory. But again there is the fact that he saw only the masts of a vessel; if he could have seen the vessel herself, could have made sure that she was a galleon, that would be one thing. But simply a vessel's masts; she might have been a sealer, or a whaler, with nothing but dead men aboard. It's a long chance, at best."

Marling sighed. "Then you won't go, captain?" he said sadly.

"I don't say that," my father answered. "I say it's not a matter to decide here and now, in five minutes; it takes thought. I'll give it my serious consideration."

CHAPTER X.

THE DUEL.

THE next day my father, with Marling's permission, sent for Dick Wheatland, and all that afternoon and evening we debated, from every angle, the project of the voyage. Dick, although his entire library did not contain more than a score of books, possessed a copy of Exquemalin, a neat, two-volume edition published in London in 1771; and this he brought with him and gave to us to read. Thus my father could see confirmed, in black and white, all that Marling had told him about the galleon; and as to the story of Will's father, to confirm that there was the coin and the scrap of crumbling paper. As to Will himself, there was no doubt that he believed every word of his story. On the whole, it seemed to all of us that there was at least a reasonable chance that a treasure ship lay stranded on an unknown island in the southern seas.

But there were the questions of danger and expense. The latter was offset by the prospect of rich returns in seals; and this combined with the probability of locating treasure decided my father to chance the trip.

Two matters of prime importance now remained to be considered: first, the make-up of the crew; second, the fitting out of the vessel. As far as numbers went, we naturally desired to

sail with as few men as possible. My father, of course, would be in command; Dick was given the billet of mate; and I was to be allowed to bunk aft with them.

Long Jim Colby and Sam Bates, old cronies and shipmates of my father's, were added next, as well as stolid Sol Eldridge, the best cook who ever sailed from Bayport. And lastly, after many protracted conferences and much discussion pro and con, it was decided to include Philip Avery and Jim Southard.

When my father first told me of this, I was surprised, but as far as Avery was concerned, it was easy to see the logic of his choice. My father had the matter of the diamonds greatly on his mind, and it was only through Avery that we could be guided straight to the home of Margarita and could deliver the stones directly into her hands.

As for Southard, though he was a first-class seaman, and though his bravery off Gull Ledge Bar had wiped out whatever black marks might stand against him in Bayport, I do not think my father would have taken him; but did so purely as a concession to Will Marling. For Will was filled with gratitude toward Southard and insisted that if it had not been for Jim, we would not be making the trip at all.

AS for the object of the trip, my father made no attempt at secrecy. And indeed there was no need for it, since ships without number, sealers and whalers both, had been voyaging south of the Horn for years, seeking to locate those mysterious islands where pearls and diamonds took the place of pebbles on the shore.

There followed the hauling out of the *Albicore* at Tower's shipyard, the overhauling of masts and rigging and the copper sheathing of her hull. Later followed the bringing aboard of our provisions and supplies. Then came the morning in late November when we said our good-bys and went aboard, and with a brisk westerly wind to put us on our way, set sail for the unknown.

For seven weeks we drove to the south, with winds for the most part favorable, but none too strong; and in due course passed the equator and realized that our first stopping place was not far away. So far, we had had an ideal voyage. Avery and Southard had never murmured, never sulked; and Avery, we soon discovered, was the life of the forecastle, liked by every one. Yet it was at about this period of our trip that Dick took occasion to remind me to keep an eye out for squalls.

"Hal," he began, "what is going to happen when we reach Pernambuco? How are these diamonds going to be handed over to their rightful owner?"

"I don't know," I admitted. "I suppose it will all be easy enough. My father will find the girl at her home, and will give her the diamonds."

Dick smiled. "That does sound simple," he rejoined. "But I don't think it will work out quite that way. I have had some talk with Avery, and I find that the young lady lives a long day's ride from the port where we land. Do you imagine, Hal, that you and I are going to let Avery start off with your father and with twenty thousand dollars' worth of diamonds? I'm not a betting man, but I would wager all I have in the world that we should never see Avery or the diamonds again."

"You still distrust Avery?" I asked.

"My opinion of Avery to-day is just about what it has been from the first—that he's not what you would call an out-and-out villain, but that he plays for his own hand first, last and all the time. So let's convince your father that the captain's place is on the schooner while we're in port, and that if there's traveling to be done, you and I are young, and the ones to go with Avery."

I agreed readily to this.

"Now, how would Avery calculate?"

Dick continued. "Would he figure that your father would give the diamonds to you, or to me?"

"To you, of course," I answered promptly. "You're mate of the vessel, and older and more experienced in every way. Of course he would give them to you."

"I think so," Dick agreed. "So here is my scheme. I'm going to let you carry the jewels. I'm going to carry a packet—and I'm going to take care that Avery knows about it—but in it will be twenty pieces of gravel, each the size of a diamond, that I have brought with me from Pleasant Beach. If Avery is honest and brings us straight to the señorita, well and good. But if there's any underhand work, Avery's attention will be on me, and if the stones are in danger, you may have a chance to get clear."

We experienced no difficulty in convincing my father that Dick should be intrusted with the stones, and the voyage continued without incident until on a bright and beautiful morning in early February we sighted the the coast of Brazil. Our first landmark was the city of Olinda, at a distance a mere blur arising from the sea, but revealing, as we approached, a hill of considerable height, with white-walled houses nestled amid the beautiful green of trees and gardens. To the south stretched a barren waste of sand, and then our port, the town of Saint Antonio de Recife.

Presently a boat put off from the beach: a pilot boarded us, and steered the *Albicore* to an anchorage abreast of the town. Then we went ashore—Avery to hire horses for our trip, the rest of us eager for a look about us.

At noon we went aboard again, and Avery reported to my father that he had hired three good horses and that, since there happened to be a full moon, he advised starting in the afternoon, riding until midnight, then snatching a few hours' sleep, and continuing at dawn. By so doing, he explained, we would waste no time, and would not suffer, on our outward journey, from having to travel in the heat of the day. To this Dick and I willingly agreed. About four in the afternoon, we mounted our horses—thin, wiry beasts, with the high-pommeled Portuguese saddles—and started on our trip.

AT night we halted, built a fire and made our meal of dried beef and fruit, after which Avery lay down and to all appearances was asleep in five minutes. We took no chances, however, and Dick and I stood watch alternately until the first gray light filtered through the branches of the trees. Then on again until we reached the River Goiana and caught a glimpse of the town beyond. Here Avery swung sharp to the left, and told us that the Altara plantation was now only a few miles away.

At the end of another half hour we came in sight of an extensive plantation and caught a glimpse of numerous houses, blacks on their way to work, or driving bullocks afield. Everywhere we could feel the stir of awakening life.

"I thought you told us," observed Dick, "that the plantation was going to ruin. This looks prosperous enough."

"Yes," Avery answered readily, "but this isn't the señor's plantation. This is Margarita's cousin's, Rafael Altara. I thought we would stop and see him first. Margarita's property adjoins this on the south."

"I see," Dick rejoined, without a trace of suspicion in his manner; but a moment later he threw me a look of deep meaning.

As we came presently to a cross-road, I suddenly reined in my horse. "I've got a frightful cramp in my leg," I said. "I'm afraid I'm not much of a rider. I've got to get off a minute. I can't stand the pain. You needn't wait for me; I can catch up with you."

Dick played his part perfectly.

"Nonsense!" he cried. "We're almost there, Hal. You can stand it a little longer. We don't want to get separated now."

But I was already on the ground, limping about and then sitting down to rub my leg vigorously. In turn, I did a bit of acting. "What difference does being separate make?" I asked illnaturedly. "I don't count on this trip. You've got the stones, haven't you?"

Dick thrust one hand inside his shirt. "Yes, I've got the stones."

At the words I thought a look of anticipation passed for an instant over Avery's face. He suggested, "Let's ride ahead. Hal can't miss the way; it's a quarter of a mile, straight ahead."

"All right," assented Dick.

They cantered off, leaving me still nursing my injured leg until they had disapppeared behind the first turn in the road. Then I leaped into the saddle again and made off to the left as fast as I could go, keeping a sharp lookout for any signs of a house.

SOON I met three stalwart blacks, hoes on shoulder, walking leisurely along in the direction of the Rafael plantation. I reined in my horse, and inquired: "Señorita Altara? Domicilia? Residencia?"

They grinned, but evidently understood what I wanted, and pointed through the trees to a white-walled house, set back some distance from the road. Thanking them heartily, I dismounted, tied my nag to a tree, and walked up the path. Upon the veranda I met a dark, slender maiden, lovely to behold, and my joy was great when she spoke to me in English.

Forthwith I came straight to the point, for I did not know how much time remained to me. And as gently as possible I told her that her father was dead. The tears sprang to her eyes, but it was not, after all, the shock I had feared, for she told me at once what I never guessed—that he suffered from an incurable ailment of the heart and that when he left Pernambuco on his ill-fated voyage, the doctors had given him but a few months to live. I went on with my tale, telling her of the wreck, the rescue, of how her father's last thought had been of her; and then of Avery, and of the finding of the stones, and of our journey from Recife. At Avery's name she had interrupted me to cry: "Intolerable man!"

When I had finished she told me of the friendship between Avery and her cousin, both of whom she detested, and of her suspicions that Rafael would gladly have had the señor parted from his treasure in order that utter poverty might drive her to his arms.

"But I would never marry him!" she declared vehemently, then, with an archglance, she added: "Rather than that, I would even marry some one from America."

Then I asked her to whom she could intrust the stones, and found that her guardian was with her, her father's oldest friend, that he was a magistrate, and that in his hands the diamonds would be absolutely safe. Once relieved of the precious packet, I rose to go. When she began to thank me and to press me to stay, I was hard put to it to remember that Dick might yet find himself in trouble, and that I should be leaving at once.

She gave me her hand at parting, and I took it—and held it—and I, who had never been smitten before in my life, knew that some time, somewhere, in ages past, I had done what I was doing now. Without a word and quite as a matter of course, I drew Margarita to me and kissed her on the lips. Having done so, nothing but the thought of my duty could have torn me away. I had only time to whisper, "I love you. May I come back some day?" and to hear her answer that I might, and the next

moment I was running down the path and, mounting my horse, was hurrying as fast as I could to rejoin Dick and Avery.

I found them seated together at a table in Rafael's garden; of the owner himself there was no sign.

"Late riser," Avery explained. "You know—sits up late with sick friends."

I knew enough of the world to understand that this meant cards and wine. As I took my seat, I managed to whisper to Dick, "All right; her guardian's got them," and I saw his face brighten at the words.

The next moment a dark, slim and supercilious young coxcomb came down the steps of the house and patronizingly bade us welcome.

Avery told the story, then suggested, "I thought perhaps, Señor Rafael, it would be as well for you to take charge of the stones and give them to Margarita yourself."

"A good idea!" assented Margarita's cousin languidly. And to Dick he added: "Have you the stones with you?" and extended his hand.

Dick looked puzzled. "But why to you, señor?" he asked. "Why not to the lady herself?"

Rafael raised his brows. "A family affair," he responded vaguely. "It is all the same. To me, please."

Dick hesitated, then appealed to Avery. "You think I had better?" he asked.

Avery looked at him steadily. "Dick," he said, with a world of meaning in his tone, "we are on Señor Rafael's property. We are in a strange country. You wouldn't want anything to happen to yourself or to Hal. I think, as a friend, you had better hand over the stones."

I drew a long breath. So Dick had been right, all along. This was the game, and a clever one. If Dick did not give up the diamonds, they meant him harm was as plain as day. How thankful I felt that the real diamonds were safely where they belonged.

Dick took the packet from his shirt. "Señor Rafael, I say once more that I should much prefer to give them to your cousin."

The young Brazilian extended his hand; it was his moment of triumph. "And I should much prefer," he said, in a tone there could be no mistaking, "that you give them to me."

Dick handed the packet across the table. There was a moment's silence while Rafael undid the wrappings, then the innocent brown gravel lay revealed. For an instant the shock rendered the young man speechless, then he glared at Dick.

"What does this mean?" he cried angrily. "You thief! You have stolen the diamonds."

Dick turned to me. "Tell him, Hal," he said.

In the fewest possible words I told my tale.

Rafael, realizing that he had been outwitted, leaned forward, his face livid with rage. "You are a pig of an American, a clown, a buffoon!" he said to Dick, and with the glove that he held in his hand, he flicked him across the face.

Dick had his weak points, and quick temper was one of them. There was more than a flick to the straight right-hander that caught the Brazilian under the chin and sent him sprawling on the grass.

"You're a liar!" Dick exclaimed.

The young señor picked himself up; if ever a man's face spelled murder, his did at that moment. He motioned Avery to one side and talked to him in a torrent of Spanish, while Dick and I stood watchfully, hands on our pistol butts. Then Avery came over to Dick. The matter of the diamonds settled, he was once more the diplomat, the friend to every one.

"He wants a duel," Avery said.

"Back to back, walk away ten paces; I give the word; you both wheel and fire. What do you say?"

"I say yes," Dick responded, "but no delay. Here and now; we've no time to waste."

I heard him with anguish, but though twenty years later the senseless custom of dueling was to lose favor, at that time it was at its height and to refuse a challenge was to be branded as a coward. The two men examined their pistols, removed their coats and stood back to back with murder in their hearts.

I heard Avery give the preliminary word, saw them striding away, come to a halt, then the quick word, "Fire!" and in a flash they had wheeled and the two reports rang out like one. To my joy, Dick stood erect; the next second he came walking toward me, evidently unhurt. The Brazilian also took a step forward, then reeled, clutched at the air and fell prostrate to the ground.

And now Avery was our man again. True politician that he was, it was with the winner that he loved to stand. "Quick!" he cried.

"Run before a crowd comes! There are his servants now."

Men were coming down the steps of the house. As fast as we could travel, we were in our saddles and spurring off down the road. At the turn we looked back. Figures knelt beside Rafael on the ground, but there was no sign of pursuit.

"What will happen?" Dick cried. "Will they chase us?"

Avery shook his head. "No," he answered. "No one there with any initiative. They will know it was a duel, anyway; he's had others. But this may be his last."

It was like Dick not to indulge in conventional sympathy. "He's a bad lot," he said tersely. "I guess he's better out of the way."

We rode onward into the bright Brazilian sunshine to regain the *Albicore*.

CHAPTER XI.

STRUCK DOWN.

ON a morning some ten days later, under cloudy skies and with a stiff breeze from the west, we sighted the Falklands. As the morning passed, the land rose clearer and clearer to our view; two large islands, with a broad strait between them. Stretching away on all sides were innumerable smaller rocks and islets, and huge stretches of brown kelp, giving warning of still other reefs and ledges, wholly submerged from view, and making any approach to the islands, except by daylight, a matter of almost certain disaster.

Early in the afternoon, we made our way up the channel. Porpoises were playing about us on every hand; seals lined the rocks in hundreds, splashing into the water at our approach, or gazing at us incuriously, with calm and impassive eyes. Everywhere, in the water and in the air, were sea birds beyond counting, gulls, shags, gannets, albatrosses, ducks.

Impatient enough before, I could now hardly wait to reach the land, and at once went aft to lay out my gun and a supply of powder and shot. Then, coming on deck again, I went forward to find that Will had gone below, doubtless on an errand similar to my own. Avery and Southard were standing together near the rail, and I went over to them, openly enough, and without the slightest thought of eavesdropping.

As it chanced their backs were toward me. They were gazing at the island with such intentness that they neither saw nor heard me until I was directly behind them and had heard Avery say, "Just as he told us," and Southard's answer: "It's perfect, Phil; we'll have every chance in the world."

As the words left his lips, I joined them, asking idly: "A chance for what, Jim? And who told you about it?"

Southard started visibly, and Avery turned on me abruptly, then, quickly recovering himself, exclaimed:

"You startled us, Hal. Why, a chance to kill some wild cattle, of course. That's going to be our job, and your father has been telling us how to go about it." And again casting his eyes toward the island, he added quickly: "There are some of them now. Look at them, on that ridge!"

Directly after this, my father called all hands aft and outlined the division of labor during our stay. Dick, Jim Colby and Sam Bates were to attend to the job of filling the water casks; Avery and Southard were to shoot wild cattle; while Marling and I were first to gather a supply of fresh eggs and could then try our hands at the geese.

ONCE anchored, and with all snug on board, we left in haste. Avery and Southard, in the gig, were the first to start, then Marling and myself in the dory, and finally the others in the longboat. At first we all made for the same point, a sandy beach to the east of the schooner's anchorage. Presently Avery shouted something to us that we could not catch and, pointing first to the island and then to the south, altered his course as if to skirt along the shore.

"What did he say?" I asked.

"Couldn't hear, with this surf running," Marling answered. "Probably something about the cattle. Never mind them. It's the geese I'm thinking of. Just look at that! There comes another flock, and another behind them! This place is a Paradise."

Indeed, the sight of these magnificent wild fowl had set both of us nearly crazy with excitement. Avery and Southard might go to the ends of the earth, for all I cared; the geese were the only things in my thoughts. Soon we drove the bow of the dory high in the yielding sand, and jumped out. But just as we were starting, Dick shouted to me to wait, and when they landed, he called me to one side.

"Keep your eyes open," he said.

"Of course, of course!" I answered, "we'll take care of ourselves. What do you think is going to happen to us?"

Dick made a gesture which might have meant anything. "I'm only asking you to be careful. We've had a good voyage so far; let's have no accidents to spoil it now. This is new country to all of us. Keep your eyes open, and don't get separated. That's all."

I only half heard him, for my mind was filled with being in this new country, with a hundred new sights on every hand. The next moment Will and I were off on our trip.

To the south of us stretched a shore line of solid rocks, with the sea foaming and boiling over them, but a short distance inland this rock formation gave place to a high, sloping hill, edged with bogs of coarse tussock grass. The side of this hill was the home of thousands of sea birds, one huge rookery, covered, from base to summit, with innumerable nests and eggs. Up the hill we toiled and soon were in the midst of the rookery. It was not an easy matter to dislodge the huge albatrosses from their nests. Accordingly we filled our baskets almost entirely with penguin eggs, a trifle larger than a duck's egg in size, and protected by a strong white shell.

All this time, whenever we had spared a glance from our task of gathering eggs, we had seen that the flight of geese was continuing. Now, having fairly loaded our baskets, we lost no time in setting them down and in hastening to try our luck with our guns. First of all, we gained the upland to the east of the hill, and from a height of rising ground surveyed the country about us and proceeded to lay our plans.

Close at hand was a large expanse of level pasturage, where a consider-

able number of birds were feeding. Beyond that, from the west a narrow inlet made in from the sea, forming a deep chasm, and from the acclivity on which we stood we could see a similar inlet cutting in from the east, almost dividing the island in two. Between these chasms there stretched in a continuous line a natural wall of the high tussock grass which is a characteristic of the Falklands; and on either side of this grass, to north and south, was a belt of stony ground.

To the southwest of us, beyond the gorge, was another expanse of level pasture land, and this was evidently their main feeding ground, for we could see the geese walking about in hundreds. There were apparently two varieties, one pure white and the other grayish in color, and I yearned, not merely to obtain them for food, but to add the skins of two or three of the finest to my collection.

"I have an idea!" said Marling eagerly. "I'll crawl through that high grass and find a place somewhere near where they are feeding, where I can hide. There are clumps of grass enough, and probably the geese will be tame. When I shoot, they will cross the gorge to you, and when you shoot, that will drive them back to me. We'll keep them on the wing, and we'll kill a lot of them. Isn't that a good plan?"

As this expedition was primarily to furnish us with meat for the voyage, I readily assented. Marling lost no time in hastening away. I saw him reach the belt of grass, which must have been eight or nine feet high, saw the tall stalks close after him, and then, turning my attention to my own plans, I cautiously made my way toward the birds which were feeding on the upland between me and the sea. The ground, however, was too flat to afford me much cover. Before I got within a hundred yards of them they rose with a great honking in a perfect cloud, and made slowly off, as Marling had predicted, for the land across the gulch. Yet they seemed to take flight unwillingly, as if loath to leave their feeding ground, and I felt more certain than ever that when Marling opened fire they would return.

The clumps of tussock made ideal hiding places, and I lost no time in secreting myself in one of these and stood waiting for the next flock to come winging in from sea, in the meantime watching the new arrivals as they joined their friends across the chasm.

Then, turning my gaze out to sea, I felt a thrill as I saw a flock of a dozen birds headed straight for me, and noted at the same time a curious phenomenon, for while some of the birds were white, and some were gray, in the center of the flock was one bird, like the others in every particular, but with plumage of a jetty blackness. I saw it was a specimen of great rarity, and determined to do my utmost to secure it. On came the flock, without swerving a hand's breadth from their course until they were perhaps a hundred yards away; then, turning, they began to descend, passing me too far distant for a shot, and settled down on the level ground and began feeding on the berry bushes.

I CALCULATED that they were about eighty yards away, too far for anything but a stray pellet to take effect. Then, as the light began to fade, I suddenly realized that I must not place my own wishes ahead of my duty. We had been sent out to kill geese. What had become of Marling? Not a sign of him was to be seen; the birds beyond the gully were feeding as peacefully as ever. I wondered whether that belt of grass held any treacherous morass, or if the wild cattle frequented it.

If Marling were in danger from the latter, I should have heard a call or the report of his gun; and surely, I rea-

soned, he was wise enough not to go blundering into a swamp. Accordingly I transferred my attention once more to the flock of geese, saw that they were no nearer, and determined to try a bold stroke—to dash at full speed from my hiding place, gain a few yards in this way. When they took wing, I would come to a stand at once and let drive.

Stepping out from behind my cover, I ran as fast as I could in the direction of the flock. Instantly they caught sight of me and rose into the air, forcing me to take such a hurried shot as they leaped that I doubt if I really gained much by my stratagem. As they made off, the black goose was again in the middle of the flock, making a wonderful target against the background of white and gray, and I held my gun as straight as I was able.

At the report, the whole flock kept on their way, rising higher and higher and then making off before the wind for the easterly side of the island. I stood watching them longingly, and then all at once, the black goose began to lag behind its companions; instead of holding its place in the middle of the flock it became the last bird; then dropped still farther behind, started to scale lower and lower, and finally alighted on the upland, perhaps a quarter of a mile away. Pausing only to reload my gun, I ran as I had never run before, my heart bent upon the capture of my game.

Soon I could perceive that it was headed for the chasm on the easterly side of the island. I did my utmost to increase my speed. I could see that the crisis in the chase had arrived. The bird was little more than a hundred yards from the chasm and safety, and before I could catch up, it flopped over the rim and down into the water.

Suddenly I realized that I was wasting time. I was supposed to be shooting geese for our larder, and had promised to do my part in aiding Marling to keep the birds in motion. Now I had given all this time to my selfish pursuit of a single bird. Still breathing heavily after my unaccustomed exertions, I made haste to retrace my steps.

As I hurried along, I listened for the report of Marling's gun. But all was silence, and I began to feel a trifle uneasy. Dusk was falling. A familiar odor unexpectedly came to my nostrils —the smell of something burning— and as I topped the next rise I gasped to see that the whole belt of tussock grass between the gullies was a mass of roaring flame.

Had Marling fired his gun while still within the shelter of the grass? It seemed only too probable, and I thanked Heaven for the broad expanse of stony ground on either side of the grass, for if the fire had once spread, it would be impossible to say where it might end.

AS I regained my original station, I saw Dick racing toward me.

"Where's Marling?" were his first words.

I could only point to the promontory beyond the wall of flame. "He went that way," I said.

"I told you to keep together!" he cried. "Have you seen Avery and Southard?"

"No," I answered. And since the purport of his question did not dawn upon me, I pointed to the fire. "How did it start?" I asked.

"I don't like to think," he answered shortly. And more to himself than to me he added: "What a mess! Almost dark, too. What a fool I was not to come!"

Suddenly the gravity of his manner seemed to tell me what was in his mind. "Dick!" I cried, "You don't think Avery and Southard——"

He cut me short. "It's no time now for thinking, Hal. We've got to get across that grass as soon as we can."

Luckily the force of the wind, sweeping straight from west to east, made the blaze, though violent, of short duration. Presently at the extreme western limit of the burning area we were able to gain the farther side with eyes and throats smarting with the acrid smoke.

In the interval I had found time to reflect with horror on what was evidently in Dick's mind—that Avery and Southard had turned traitors and had attacked and perhaps killed Marling. If they had left his body in that furnace it would be burned to a crisp.

Dick like a hound on the scent was running here and there bending close to the ground for the daylight was almost spent and the huge column of flame, though still blazing fiercely to the eastward, had passed too far to light the spot where we stood. Suddenly he gave an exclamation, and I saw that he held Marling's gun in his hand. Instantly he cocked it, threw it to his shoulder and pressed the trigger. A bright stream of flame shot into the dark, and at the report the startled geese rose in hundreds against the dusky sky.

"You see!" Dick cried. "He never set fire to the grass. I'm afraid there's been foul play. We must work fast, while we have any light left at all. Strike to the east, Hal; I'll take the west. Keep your eyes open."

IN growing horror I obeyed, covering the ground ahead of me as quickly as possible and keeping my eyes strained for any sign of the missing man. All at once a piece of cloth fluttered on a thorny bush ahead of me; that and the abandoned gun gave me a possible line to work on; and directly ahead of me I beheld a tall circle of tussock grass, dark and sinister in the last remaining gleams of light. I pushed toward it, thrust aside the tough stalks and came on the body of Marling, face downward and with a gaping wound in the back of his head.

A cry brought Dick hastening to my side. Marling was of course unconscious, but Dick, with a hat full of water from the marsh, took time to bathe and examine the wound and pronounced it bad enough, but not a fracture of the skull. With the aid of the two guns and my coat we improvised a stretcher and managed to transfer the injured man to the schooner. In our anxiety for his life, we thought of nothing else, but when, after many hours he opened his eyes and stared around him, both hands leaped instantly to his throat and with a groan he muttered:

"No use. They've got it. I knew they had."

It was later still before he could tell us what had happened. He had no sooner entered the belt of tussock than he had encountered Southard, who told him that he was lying in wait for a herd of wild cattle. Marling stood talking with him until, hearing a noise behind him, he started to turn, when something hit him a terrific blow on the head, and that was the last he remembered until he returned to consciousness in the cabin, to find his precious packet missing from his neck.

It was clear now that somehow or other there had been communication between Palliser and Avery, and that I should have paid more heed to Johnny Litchfield's story of what he had seen in Porter's woods. Secondly, a great light was thrown on Jim Southard's rescue of Marling off Gull Ledge Bar, for if Marling had a precious secret and Palliser, Avery and Southard all knew of it, the last thing Southard wanted was to see Marling drowned before his eyes. In the third place, where were Avery and Southard now, and where was Palliser?

Every vessel, southward bound, stopped as a matter of course at the Falklands. Palliser must have left home ahead of us, and the *Red Cloud* must have been concealed in some bay

or harbor awaiting our arrival. By this time, she must have picked up Avery and Southard and now was doubtless headed for the Horn.

"The *Albicore*," said my father, at last, "is a faster vessel than the *Red Cloud*. Water and fresh meat we must have. We'll be up at daylight; we'll give half a day to getting in stores; and then we'll be after them, and we'll be up with them by the time we reach the Horn."

CHAPTER XII.

FROM THE VOLCANO.

FROM the Falklands we voyaged to the southward and westward; then bade good-by to the last grim outposts of Cape Horn, and entered the unknown Antarctic, that region of gloom and desolation; and here the vista of endless gray sea disheartened all of us and made our quest appear futile.

And yet, in spite of everything—head winds, gales, ice and heavy seas—we went lurching steadily on toward the southward and westward, until at last there came a day when my father, working out our position on the chart, summoned Marling aft, and the four of us gathered in the cabin. My father pointed quietly to the map.

Marling studied it and turned pale. "You m-mean," he stammered, "that we're here?"

My father nodded. "We'll never be any closer," he answered. "If your island is still above water and the weather is clear to-morrow, we ought to stand a chance of sighting it."

That night we were all excited and only the setting in of thick fog dampened our spirits any.

Next morning I found that the weather had not improved, but presently the vapor began to thin and lighten until all at once the sun burst through and a lively breeze from the north swept the sea clear of fog. Then, so plainly that all on deck saw it at once, behold! to the north of us lay the dreamed-of island, for the most part a wall of rocks set low to the sea, but on its westerly side a circular elevation, from which smoke was rising on the morning air. Never did a more excited group of men stand upon a vessel's deck.

To cover the remaining distance, however, was to take us longer than we anticipated. The breeze soon died away, and we were compelled to beat slowly up against it, so that it was midafternoon before we were fairly in the lee of the rocky shore. The island was a small one, probably not over three-quarters of a mile in width, and except for the volcanic elevation to the westward, it was low and rocky and everywhere flanked by outlying reefs of varying size. On these and on the island itself, seals, sea leopards and sea elephants by the hundred played about in the water or lay basking in the sun. At the sight of them Long Jim Colby's eyes glistened.

"Give me the seals," he chuckled, "and the rest of you can have the gold! There's two good dollars swimming around here inside every one of those skins."

As we came nearer, my father pointed to the shore and we saw that the rocks ahead of us, slightly overlapping, formed a narrow entrance, and that the entire interior of the island was a landlocked bay. Apparently, perhaps centuries before, the whole island had been a huge volcano, and the portion now submerged had been a crater. But however that might have been, there was no doubt of our good fortune now; no finer chance for a safe anchorage could be imagined.

At once we took in sail, and Jim Colby, Sam Bates, Dick and Sol Eldridge manned the longboat and towed the schooner straight for the opening. As we entered, I stood gazing down over the rail, and started as I saw through the clear water, perhaps thirty

feet below the surface, a huge gray shape swimming slowly about as if guarding the channel—the largest shark I had ever seen or dreamed of seeing.

A few minutes more and we were fairly within the bay. To find a haven like this, after the constant menace of the storm-swept Antarctic, seemed little less than a miracle. The sun was by this time low but still high enough to cast a golden light on the waters of the bay; sea birds in myriads wheeled, screaming, about our heads. Across the bay to the northeast, a natural cove seemed to invite us, and here we arrived just as dusk was falling and dropped anchor in about six fathoms of water.

All of us, by this time, except my father and Sol Eldridge, were in a state of intense excitement, Marling was like a man possessed, and could hardly wait for permission to land.

"Sol and I will look after the schooner," said my father. "All the rest of you ashore. And I'll be glad to be rid of you. It's too dark to pick up the gold; I shall get mine in the morning."

We piled into the longboat and an instant later had landed on a beach of broken stone and were actually upon the mysterious island. We were surrounded by rock on every hand with only the scantiest signs of vegetation and at intervals, a narrow beach of stones.

Marling's eyes were burning. "Let's go around to the south," he said. "That's where my father landed. Perhaps from there we can see the vessel's masts."

Accordingly we made our way amid the screaming birds to the south. Presently we came to what must evidently have been the spot where James Edward Marling had made his brief but eventful visit so many years ago.

"Here's where he stood," cried Will, "and looked to the north'ard, and over a bit of rising ground he saw the masts of a vessel! And they had started on their way when the squall broke."

As he spoke, he shaded his eyes with his hand and peered toward the north. The rest of us followed suit. No masts met our eye, nothing but the higher cliffs to the northwest, marking the sloping descent from the crater, and then the low line of rocks extending in an unbroken sweep to the northeast corner of the island. Marling sighed.

"Oh, well," said Dick, "what can you expect? That was over thirty years ago. A ship wouldn't stay in the same position all that time. Let's go around there. We may find her hull, and what do we care for her masts, if she's got the gold aboard?"

In silence we followed his suggestion, retracing our steps to the point where we had landed, and then breaking into new ground toward the west. Our hopes sank steadily lower and lower; I did not dare to look at Marling's face. Finally, after passing one beach larger than the rest, covered with boulders and smaller stones, without a sign of even so much as a timber, we came to the base of a hill which led upward to the crater.

OUR thoughts had been so intent upon finding the wreck that I do not think we had had room in our minds for anything else. Now Dick's practical mind turned to other things, for as I stood by his side I saw that he was gazing intently up the rocky slope.

"I'll bet," he said to me, "that the volcano kicks up every so often. And I'll bet there are lively times while it lasts. Look at the slopes of the rocks; you can see where the lava has come pouring down like a waterfall. And here"—he indicated the ground on which we stood—"is where it brings up. Lots more of it, I suppose, has gone rushing on and has tumbled into the sea, but a huge bank of it has collected

right here where we are standing. Isn't that the way it looks to you?"

I studied the lay of the ground and then nodded assent. The spot where we stood, whatever it might have been originally, was now nothing more nor less than an immense field of solid lava, extending for a long distance to east and west and completely filling the space between the cliffs and the sea. I agreed also with Dick's theory that this could hardly have been the result of one eruption, but was more in the nature of a gradual accretion.

A sound, muffled and plaintive, broke in upon my thoughts, and I turned to find that Marling had seated himself and buried his face in his hands, while the convulsive shaking of his shoulders made me realize all that the voyage had meant to him and that here, in one brief moment, the hopes of a lifetime had vanished, leaving him utterly prostrated and forlorn.

Jim Colby went up to him and laid a hand on his shoulder. "Now, now, Will," he soothed him, "cheer up, old lad! You can't lose what you never had. Never mind the treasure. We'll make a good profit from the seals. Don't take it so to heart."

BUT Will, though presently he rallied, remained a picture of despair. I imagine that he was thinking not only of the failure of his dreams, but that through his representations he had practically induced my father to take the trip. Knowing his volatile nature, I had the feeling that he was probably quite ready at that moment to hurl himself headlong into the sea. I decided to keep close to him when Dick, who had wandered off by himself, called suddenly:

"Come here a minute, Will."

Marling listlessly obeyed, the rest of us following at his heels. As we approached, Dick pointed to his feet. There, projecting upward at an angle of perhaps sixty degrees, was a round piece of wood, suggesting the tapering end of a spar.

"There, Will," said Dick quietly, "is your galleon."

Marling stared at him uncomprehendingly. The strain he had undergone had been so terrific that by this time I do not believe his mind was capable of connected thought, or of reasoning of any kind. But the rest of us instantly grasped Dick's meaning.

He pointed up the hill. "Don't you see?" he asked. "Here, right where we are standing now, was originally low rock, with a beach in the foreground. Here's where the galleon landed, broadside on; that spar shows the angle at which she lay. Here is where she was, Will, on the day when your father looked across from the southerly beach and saw her masts against the sky. Gradually through the years there have been eruptions without number—floods of lava pouring down the cliffs and building up a solid heap here at their base. Right under where we stand now, fathoms deep, are the beach and the galleon and the gold. But for all that we can do, they might as well be a million miles away."

With one accord we gazed downward, as though we would penetrate the solid mass that stood between us and our desires. The idea was tantalizing, and presently Jim Colby expressed the thought that was in the minds of all of us when he observed.

"Well, so near and yet so far."

"Couldn't we—isn't there some way?" Will appealed to Dick.

Dick shrugged his shoulders. "I'm not a geologist," he answered, "nor an engineer. Gunpowder, perhaps—lots of it. But not this trip, anyway. This stuff is as hard as flint."

Marling heaved a despairing sigh. "To think of it!" he cried. "All these miles and all these dangers—to have it almost within reach of us—and then to find this!"

Darkness brooded over us. We stood there in the shadows, a dejected group.

"Well," Dick observed cheerily, "it's something to have a safe anchorage, and to be sure of one good night's sleep. And there are the seals. And when you start treasure hunting, you can't expect to find your treasure waiting for you, all boxed up with your name and address on the outside.

"Now think of Palliser and his crowd. If the *Red Cloud* ever makes the island, their luck is as bad as ours. Come on back to the schooner, lads, and we'll tell the skipper that Will's story was true, anyway. And as for the treasure, why we've simply got to make the best of it."

CHAPTER XIII.

NOTHING VENTURE, NOTHING GAIN.

SAFE in the shelter of the harbor, we slept that night long and peacefully.

The next day, in the afternoon, Jim Colby and Sam Bates decided to take the dory and make a reconnoitering expedition to the big reefs to the eastward. Sol Eldridge and my father, as usual, decided to stick by the vessel; while Dick and I were eager to make a further investigation of the island.

It was about three o'clock when we got Sol to set us ashore in the gig, I with my gun, Dick with a pistol in his belt and a coil of rope wound around his waist. From the beach we climbed to the top of the rocks and stood looking out toward the east, watching the dory grow smaller and smaller in the distance.

We had not the slightest fear for their safety, for the day for these latitudes was unusually mild and not a gleam of white flecked the somber gray of the sea.

"Well," I presently inquired, "where shall we go?"

"To the west'ard," Dick promptly answered. "We went over this part of the island pretty thoroughly yesterday, but over beyond the volcano we haven't explored at all. You can't tell what we might find."

Accordingly we followed the route we had taken on the previous evening, again stopped for a moment at the protruding topmast, then skirted the lower slope of the cliffs until we had gained the westerly side of the island, and seated ourselves in comfort on a projecting ledge.

Far in the west, I could detect what looked to me like gathering clouds, and I was about to call Dick's attention to them when my attention was distracted by a sound which I had heard before since we had taken our seats upon the ledge—a familiar booming, as of breakers crashing on a beach—but strangely muffled, as though coming from a distance. Instinctively I found myself gazing out over the trackless sea as if to find there a solution of the mystery. But nothing met my eye, and I should have put it down to fancy if I had not noticed that Dick was also listening.

"Hear that?" he asked, and when I assented he added, tapping with his foot on the rock: "It's down inside of here somewhere. This is a queer old island, Hal; I hope the volcano isn't getting ready to explode."

"Nonsense!" I answered. "This is a gentle sort of a sound. If there was going to be an eruption, we'd have more notice than that."

While we had been talking, I had watched a number of seals swimming about beneath us, their sleek, doglike heads constantly appearing and disappearing.

Dick exclaimed: "I don't understand it, Hal! There are more seals gathering every moment. Where do they come from, and why do we see them here, and nowhere else on this side of the island?"

"They're after fish, probably."

"If it was fish, we'd see them breaking water. Anyway, these seals aren't

feeding; they are just playing around and enjoying themselves."

"All right," I answered lazily, "let them play; I don't mind."

Dick refused to be satisfied and began clambering down toward the edge of the water. At length, only a short distance above the sea, I saw him peering over a ledge of rock. Almost at once he straightened up, shouting something that I could not catch and making unmistakable gestures for me to join him. I descended.

"A cave!" he cried. "That's where the seals come from. Put your head over and when the sea flows back you can see the opening, as plain as day."

I obeyed him. There was a wide, irregular orifice in the solid rock, through which the waves rushed turbulently in and then withdrew again, leaving the entrance almost dry. As I looked, several more seals emerged, half swimming, half crawling, through the mouth of the cave and joined their companions in the water. As I drew back, Dick turned to me with sparkling eyes. "I'm going to investigate," he announced. "I'll bet it's a big place. Perhaps there are hundreds of seals in there."

"Too dangerous," I objected, as I surveyed the precipitous descent. "Suppose you slip. Those waves would crush you against the island and knock your brains out in no time."

Dick laughed. "Thanks for the compliment," he answered. He began to unwind the line from around his waist. "You keep hold of the end of this, Hal, and I'll go down. If everything is all right and I get inside the cave, I'll give a jerk for a signal and then you tie the end around your waist and come down, too."

I watched his lithe figure descend and then disappear from view. A few moments passed, then came a sharp, decisive tug at the rope. Without further delay I began my descent and soon found that Dick had been right in his calculations, for though the rocks were slippery with seaweeds, there were plenty of jagged projections which afforded a grip both for hands and feet. Waiting until an outgoing wave left the entrance nearly dry, I hastened in.

The place was literally alive with seals. With a terrific bellowing they made madly for the entrance, fairly jamming the narrow orifice in their efforts to escape these invaders of their domain. We were glad when the last of them had disappeared and left us in full possession of the cave.

Now we were at liberty to look around us. Dick, with flint and steel, lit a candle end, and we saw that the rock sloped rapidly upward at an angle of about thirty degrees. Impelled by curiosity, we clambered along, and presently Dick called my attention to the fact that instead of being damp and cold, as one might have expected, the cave was the reverse.

"Queer!" he commented. "This place is dry and warm, really fit to live in. I suppose the volcano has something to do with it; probably the heat comes through subterranean passages of some kind."

A MOMENT later we found that such passages did actually exist; for from a sort of junction in the cave two low-studded tunnels led to the south and a third to the north. Choosing the southerly ones, we went down each in turn for a bit, until they branched in several different directions, and we feared to run the risk of losing our path. The northerly passage, however, ran straight and true for some distance, then abruptly narrowed to a space hardly large enough to admit a man's body. As we stood peering into its depths it seemed to me that a faint current of air struck against my face.

"Well," Dick asked, "what shall we do? Want to go on?"

I shook my head. "No," I answered. "We've been in here a long time, anyway. Let's go back."

"All right," Dick agreed.

We retraced our steps to the entrance of the larger cave. But to our surprise the light did not seem to grow brighter as we neared the corner. When we had regained the cave itself our ears were met with a terrific roaring of water and a startling sight met our eyes. The cave was a mass of seething, bubbling foam; only in faint occasional gleams did a bar of light show the location of the entrance.

Dick put his mouth close to my ear. "It's come on to blow like the devil," he shouted. "Kicked up an awful sea. What fools we were. Now we're trapped."

"What on earth shall we do?" I shouted back.

Dick stood irresolute; then he clambered down into the cave to make a further investigation. But the impossibility of escape was self-evident; to try to depart as we had come would be almost certain death. And presently he rejoined me, his face grave.

"No use staying here," he shouted, above the uproar. "We can't get out till the sea goes down. So we might as well go back. There might be another entrance somewhere. It's worth trying, anyway."

WE turned and retraced our steps and soon reached the tunnellike entrance to the north where we had paused before. This time, however, we did not hesitate, but managed to squeeze through without mishap. I felt certain of the air current which I had noticed before, giving me hope that it drew down from some other entrance, perhaps far above.

There was now room to walk again, and Dick relighted the candle and we made our way along the passage, which sloped constantly upward until all at once it became level and broadened abruptly into a space so large that we instinctively came to a halt. We were unable to perceive, even when Dick held the light above his head, where the actual boundaries of the cavern ended and where the brooding shadows began.

When our eyes, however, became a little accustomed to our new surroundings, I thought I could detect faint light ahead and with greater caution than ever we again slowly advanced. Soon the hall we were traversing came to an end, and we could see before us what looked precisely like a small room, leading, through a passageway, directly from the main cavern.

We stepped across what served as a threshold, and the next instant stopped short in our tracks, petrified with amazement. By the flickering gleam of the candle we saw that the room was already occupied. In the center of the floor, lying cheek by jowl, were two skeletons.

We stared at each other without a word; then, from somewhere beyond these white and placid men, a gleam caught my eye. Dick must have seen it at the same instant, for he raised the candle still higher and we stepped forward to behold a sight which I shall never forget. There against the wall, strangely preserving their original luster in the dry air of the cave, were great heaps of golden coins, golden cups and flagons and plate of all descriptions, and a glittering mass of jewels which even in the faint light of the candle seemed to welcome its rays and flashed them back again in all the hues of the spectrum.

Here was a horde of which no treasure seeker could have dreamed. The tale of the lost galleon was true. Somehow these two men must have survived the wreck and, finding this ghostly refuge from the cold, had clung, with man's primal instincts, both to the treasure and to the hope of sustaining life.

Dick had dropped on his knees, had placed the candle on a projecting shelf of rock and had picked up a great double handful of the gems, gazing at them as if spellbound by their beauty. But to me, for the moment, all else was forgotten in this strange record of fate.

As I watched Dick handling the gems, the thought came to me that I had better consider our own mishap.

"What next?" I asked.

He sprang to his feet. "What chance, Hal," he queried, "that these men entered as we did, through the cave from the sea?"

"One in a thousand," I answered promptly. "I can't imagine their finding it, or their entering, if they did find it. The odds are all against it."

Dick nodded. "Precisely," he agreed. "And if they didn't enter that way——"

"There's another entrance," I said.

"Exactly. It's very much our business to find it. For if we don't——"

There was no necessity of finishing the sentence. In this region of storms and gales, the sea might roar into the mouth of the cave for days, making escape in that direction impossible.

Before we started onward, I stooped and thrust a handful of the coins into my pocket, noting, as I did so, that the image and the superscription were the same as those upon the coin which the elder Marling had found so many years before. I straightened up and was ready.

Dick again raised the light above his head. At first, we could see no outlet from the room in which we stood, save the one through which we had entered; but when we began methodically to make the circuit of the walls, we found an alcove in the rock, at the farther end of which the passage curved and broadened into another space. Hither we made our way, to find it another room, somewhat smaller than the one we had just quitted. Then we gave an exclamation of surprise, for at its farther end there filtered in to us through a narrow crevice what was undeniably the light of day.

With the utmost eagerness we hastened across the uneven floor, and found that through this narrow fissure we were gazing out to the east and north and commanded a view of nearly half the island and the sea beyond. There lay the placid bay; there was the schooner snugly at her anchorage, with no sign of life aboard. As I looked beyond for some sign of Jim Colby and Sam Bates, I could see neither the dory nor the outlying ledges toward which they had gone, for another of the fogs so common in these latitudes had risen by now and was closing in on all sides.

Then, as I looked toward the north, I gasped and actually rubbed my eyes to make sure I was not dreaming, for there, on the very edge of the fog bank, was the most unwelcome sight I could possibly have beheld. It was the *Red Cloud,* apparently anchored, but with sail still set. Just leaving her quarter and headed straight for the island was her longboat with half a dozen men aboard. At that distance, of course, there was no distinguishing them, but I felt that beyond all question Jim Southard was there and Philip Avery and the hairy Palliser. A great dread took possession of my soul.

Neither of us spoke a word. The need of action was too imperative. With six fully armed men, once landed on the island, the result would be only too easy to foresee. In this wild region there were no judges or magistrates, almost no laws of any kind. That Palliser's attitude would be war to the knife there was no question. To find our way out —to warn our party on the *Albicore*— that must be done instantly.

IN a frenzy of haste we reconnoitered the room, trusting not merely to our eyes but feeling of the walls as well, but found no outlet of any kind. Then,

as Dick desperately held the light lower, there came suddenly into view a narrow orifice, little more than the mouth of a tunnel and perhaps two feet from the ground. I fell on my knees and looked —at first nothing but blackness, then I saw light. I cast a glance at Dick's broad shoulders, then at the opening. Clearly he could never make it. I, with my slighter build, might do so. There was no time for words, nor for plans or consultation of any kind.

"Good luck!" said Dick.

I nodded and an instant later was worming my way along the passage. I made good headway, but after I had proceeded perhaps twenty feet, to my horror the tunnel began to narrow until there was barely room for me to advance.

Instantly I turned on my side as a swimmer might do in changing from the breast to the side stroke. This for a moment relieved the pressure on my shoulders and enabled me to advance a few feet more, until further contact, this time from above, warned me that not only the width of the passage had diminished, but the height as well. I must have been in a frenzy, for I gave one more desperate effort, and then, to my horror, found that I had wedged myself fast.

One thing only saved my reason; for as I stretched forward as far as I could, I realized that there was light ahead of me, apparently close at hand, and clearer than any I had seen since we had first entered the cave. I realized that the men who had found this passage must have somehow contrived to penetrate it safely. If its height was against me, I would try its width again. After a wild struggle I finally regained my former position, found, that the passage had broadened again and, a few seconds later, to my unspeakable relief, my head emerged, not into another cavern, but into the open air. An instant afterward, still trembling with terror, I stood upon the slope of the cliff.

Instantly I was aware that the situation was well-nigh as precarious as ever. In the time which had intervened since I had first looked from the crevice in the rock, the fog had thickened. The whole island was shrouded in an impenetrable blanket of gray, and I could not see ten feet in any direction. Whether this was a handicap or a blessing I could not determine, but I was inclined to think the latter. For I knew of the presence of Palliser and his crew, while I was confident they could have seen no signs of our party. If I could successfully avoid them, I could regain the schooner and give the alarm. I felt my spirits rise.

Any one, however, who has ever navigated in a fog knows the difficulties of the enterprise. Though I started with all the caution at my command, I found the utmost difficulty, not only in steering a straight course, but even in keeping my footing on the jagged and slippery cliffs.

I was making good progress, with all my senses on the alert, and had covered perhaps half the distance between the cave and the schooner, when I suddenly found myself, where I expected a solid ledge, confronted with nothing but yawning space. As I made an instinctive effort to avoid the danger, my foot caught in a crevice, the sudden and unlooked-for check was just enough to disturb my equilibrium, and I tumbled headlong over the brink, to rebound once from a sharp projection which damaged my shoulder but broke my fall. Then I found myself lying among the rocks and boulders of the northerly beach. My first impulse was to climb up the face of the cliff; but this I soon found to be an impossibility, for it was slippery with moisture and stretched above me, smooth and unscalable.

Therefore, I started to make my way along the base of the rocks. But I had

not stopped to consider the noise of my fall. All at once, looming suddenly through the fog, I found myself face to face with the man of all others I wished to avoid—the burly, thickset form of Captain Palliser.

Before I could move, one huge hand gripped my arm. Then, terrified into life, I turned, trying to wrench myself free—felt my sleeve rip, and thought that I had succeeded—and then the whole world seemed to drop upon me and I knew no more.

CHAPTER XIV.

TOUCH AND GO.

WHEN I came once more to my senses, I found myself propped against a boulder, with arms and legs securely bound, and with an ache in my head which almost enabled me to forget the pain in my shoulder. The fog was even thicker than before, but my captors had lighted a fire on the beach, close against the easterly rocks, and were sitting around it in obvious enjoyment of its warmth.

Palliser was quick to notice that I had regained consciousness and began to question me.

"Now then," he asked, "when did you get here?"

"Yesterday," I answered.

"Have you found the galleon?"

"Yes, and no," I rejoined.

"What do you mean by that?" cried Palliser. "That's no answer—'Yes and no.' Tell us the truth!"

"All right," I answered. "We found the topmast of a vessel—whether she's a galleon or not I haven't an idea—and the rest of her is buried under tons of lava. You're welcome to dig, if you want the job."

There was a murmur from the group around the fire. Palliser reflected for a moment; than abruptly changed his tactics.

"Where is your schooner?" he asked.

This was a question I had no wish to answer. Accordingly I kept silence.

"Did you hear me?" repeated Palliser. "Where is your schooner?"

I did not wish to tell a senseless lie, and I did not wish to tell the truth. So I muttered: "I won't tell you."

Palliser's face was within a foot of mine. His eyes had the look of a wild beast. He raised his hands until they were on a level with my throat. "Once more, and for the last time!" he said thickly. "Where is your schooner?"

I closed my mouth tightly. The next instant I found myself dashed to the beach, with Palliser's grim face over mine and his two huge hands around my neck, squeezing the life out of me. The pain was excruciating, but nothing compared to the agony of suffocation. I gasped, gagged, choked, strove desperately for air; but all to no avail. Those fingers pressed into my flesh like iron and, bound fast as I was, I was completely at my assailant's mercy. I could feel a throbbing in my throat, a roaring in my ears; my eyeballs seemed starting from their sockets——

Then his grip relaxed and for some seconds I inhaled air in great sobbing gasps before I really regained my senses, for he had nearly done for me. When he saw from the expression in my eyes that I had come back to life, he shook his fist in my face.

"If you want to die, young fellow," he said grimly, "you can have your wish. I've no liking for you, anyway; you finished my mate for me, though I guess I squared accounts that same night. But you'll answer me when I speak, and you'll tell me the truth, or I'll gag you and stake you out here over this fire and roast you to death. I've done it to blacks in the West Indies, and I'll do it to you. Now that's enough. Where's your schooner?"

He was speaking in solemn earnest, and I knew it. With one hand I motioned toward the south. "There's a

bay inside the island," I muttered. "The schooner is there."

"That's better," he said. "If you'd told me that the first time, your neck wouldn't be black and blue now. And the rest of your crowd is on the schooner?"

Whatever happened, I must make them think that the schooner was well defended. "Yes," I answered.

"And what were you doing when you fell off the rocks?"

"Exploring."

"Find anything?"

"A cave."

"Anything in it?"

"Two dead men."

Again I felt the eager stare of the faces around the fire. But Palliser evidently did not believe me.

"I tell you," I cried, "it's the truth! Two dead men—only their bones. They must have been there for years."

I could see that he believed me. "Anything else?" he asked.

Now I determined on a bold stroke, for I felt that I must keep them from the vicinity of the schooner. Like a boy gone suddenly hysterical with fear, I began to sob. "Oh, I won't tell you!" I cried wildly. "It's not fair. We get here first and do all the work and then you come and expect to take everything away from us. It's not fair. I'm not going to tell."

There was an instant's tense silence. I could see that I had my audience wound to the last pitch of expectancy.

"Out with it!" cried Palliser. "Give us the truth, or it will be the worse for you."

I determined on a dramatic display. "Untie my arms, then," I replied. "Untie my arms, and I'll tell you everything."

ONE boy against six armed men, and that boy with his legs bound, could not have seemed a terrifying object. With a stroke of his knife Palliser cut the rope, and instantly I thrust my right hand in my pocket, drew out a handful of doubloons and tossed them at Palliser's feet. Again I heard the hoarse murmur from the seamen.

Palliser picked up the coins, glanced at them with care, then thrust the lot into his pocket. "I thought," he observed, "the galleon was buried deep."

"She is," I retorted, "but the treasure isn't. These dead men must have taken the treasure out of her before they died."

"Where is it?" he cried.

"In a cave in the rocks."

"Lots of it?"

"Lots."

"Easy to get in?"

"No, the entrance is narrow. If your shoulders are broad, you can't get in. *You* couldn't get in."

He gave a quick glance around the circle, as if appraising his men. Then he queried: "But Southard could?"

I looked at the traitor. "Yes," I admitted, "easily."

"Any one else?"

Again I looked around the circle. "I don't think so."

He paused to consider. "And if you and Southard go into the cave, you'll show him the treasure and help him bring it out?"

I pretended to hesitate; then sighed and answered with assumed despondency: "I suppose so—yes."

Again he pondered. Finally he asked: "When you show us the entrance to the cave, why can't Southard go in alone and bring the treasure out to us? Then we can hold you as a hostage, if the treasure isn't there."

"Yes, that's the very idea. By all means, let Southard go in alone," I cried.

Palliser glared at me with suspicion written in every line of his sullen face. "So he could find the treasure without trouble?" he asked. "Mind now, the truth!"

I made a show of reluctance. "Yes-es, I think he could," I rejoined. "There are a lot of different turns and passages, of course; and there's one place where you have to keep close to the wall, or you'll tumble into a pit I don't know how deep. But," I went on eagerly, "I don't think he would have much trouble. He's a good climber. I don't think he would come to any harm."

To my delight, my acting, however crude, was enough to decide the captain. "No, you don't think he would!" he retorted. "Well, we'll take no chances. You'll guide Southard into that cave and you'll keep ahead of him. And if you try any tricks he'll blow the top of your head off. Do you understand?"

I simulated extreme dejection. "All right," I muttered. "You have the upper hand. It's just as you say."

Drawing his knife from his belt, he slashed the ropes which bound my legs, and after a few moments I was able to limp onward toward the cave, closely surrounded by Captain Palliser and his band.

As we walked along, I was conscious of something that gave me uneasiness on another score. For some little time I had been dimly aware that something strange was taking place around us, but what with the rough treatment I had received and the battle of wits I had been waging, I had had no chance to realize what it was. Now I knew that the volcano was acting as it had never done before.

AFTER struggling up the steep, slippery rocks, we arrived at the opening in the cliff. From the outside and in this unearthly murky glare, the black entrance was not an inviting prospect. Southard regarded it with disfavor. He gazed at the gloomy orifice and I could have sworn that he shuddered.

Palliser's face was thoughtful as he stroked the black stubble of his beard. "You've got a candle?" he asked.

For answer, I pulled it from my pocket.

He thought again; then addressed himself to Southard. "Might have been a good thing for you," he observed, "if you had been born with broader shoulders."

Southard did not brighten at the remark, but looked more solemn than before. Even the sailors appeared strangely downcast, considering the fact that a huge treasure was almost in their hands.

I felt no surprise when one of the crew, whom I had heard Palliser address as Karlson, suddenly cried out, as though the words were wrenched from him in spite of himself: "The place is cursed!"

Then, as if to bear out the truth of his words, from somewhere in the surrounding fog there fell on our startled ears a most ghastly and awful shriek, as of a being in mortal agony. And while we listened, with blanched faces, it began and then abruptly ceased in a silence more terrifying than sound. To our overwrought nerves, the cry brought different meanings.

"A demon!" shouted Karlson.

"On the schooner!" cried Palliser. "Phil has murdered the cook, or the cook has done for him!"

There fell silence, and I felt surprise that the skipper, usually so resolute and determined, now appeared momentarily at a loss. Yet the situation was undeniably puzzling. His desire was to get the treasure as quickly as possible, and avoid a fight which might spell disaster to them. Yet, as far as the treasure went, they had to rely on my most improbable story and on this gloomy-looking opening in the face of the cliff.

Added to these perplexities was the presence of the volcano. For a few moments it had been on its good behavior; but now, as if to make up for

lost time, there followed a series of most violent reports; loose rocks came hurtling through the air, falling both into the sea and into the landlocked bay with a tremendous hissing.

"Damn this place!" cried Palliser.

Then he drew forth from his pocket a handful of the glittering doubloons. His eyes sparkled as he gazed, and beyond him I could note the sudden pressing in of the circle of brutal faces, alive with greed. And in that second, for good or ill, Captain John Palliser was himself again. He thrust the coins back into his pocket, withdrew a little from the group and with a gesture bade Southard follow him.

It was not hard for me to guess at what he was saying. I could guess that he was now telling Southard that the instant I had revealed the secret, my reward was to be a bullet through my head or a knife thrust in the heart.

While I pondered, the skipper and Southard rejoined the group.

Palliser came directly up to me. "Once again," he said, "fair warning, No tricks! Into the cave you go, and Southard after you. But try once to harm him in any way and you're done for. If he doesn't come out"—he pulled his watch from his pocket—"in twenty minutes, in good health, mind you, and with his pockets full of gold, then you'll wish you had never been born. Do you hear?"

I nodded. "Of course I hear."

Then I made for the mouth of the cave, Southard reluctantly following.

"If you stick a little," I said to Southard, "don't be frightened. Wriggle around, and you'll get through." I extended my arms in front of me and reentered the opening. As I crept along, my brain was whirling. What to expect I had not the faintest idea. If Dick had left the treasure room and had gone back to the seal cave, I felt that I was doomed. But before I could decide upon a plan of action we had reached the first of the caves and thence through the passage we gained the cave of the skeletons. Here I thought to give Dick warning by crying out loudly:

"Here's your treasure, Jim Southard. And I know what you mean to do—to shoot me down like a dog. But you couldn't do it if Dick Wheatland were only here. He beat you in Bayport, and he could beat you again!"

His expression, in the dim light of the candle, was not pleasant to look upon. There was nothing there but selfish triumph—that and greed for gold. "Well, Dick isn't here," he scoffed, "and if I get a chance before we leave, I'll pay my respects to him, too."

Then with a cry of delight he had fallen on his knees by the heap of jewels. He picked them up in both hands as though he would grasp them all at once. "Diamonds!" I heard him exclaim. "Rubies! Sapphires!"

Then suddenly a shadow fell upon the floor of the cave.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SEA BEAST.

SOUTHARD perceived the coming of the shadow, or heard a sound, or else some strange sixth sense warned him of his danger. In a flash he had wheeled about and sprung to his feet, his pistol once more in his hand. In my excitement, I forgot that Dick was also armed. Determined to save him at any cost, I hurled down my candle and leaped for Southard's arm.

Everything happened at once; as the light went out, two reports sounded almost like one; the cave was filled with smoke. Though I did reach Southard, it was to find him flat on the floor and the arm I grasped inert under my hold.

"Dick!" I cried. "Are you safe?"

A cautious whisper came back to me through the darkness. "All right, Hal. Where is Southard?"

"He's here," I quavered, for by this time I was in a desperate fright. "He's either dead or shamming; I can't tell which."

"Hold on to him," Dick said.

The next instant the faint light of his candle again lit up the cave. I could behold my prisoner now. He was not shamming. The hole in his forehead told the story.

Dick advanced quite coolly through the thinning smoke.

"You're not hurt?" I gasped.

"Not a bit," he answered, "but tell me, Hal, what's happened. I've been in torment."

I told him as quickly as I could. He thought for a moment.

"So this entrance is closed to you," he commented. "Your father is the next problem. Hal, we've got to get word to him, or they'll kill him, sure as fate."

I shuddered at the thought. "The other entrance?" I hazarded.

Dick nodded. "It's a long chance, but I think it would come to that, anyway. I believe we'd roast alive here. Don't you notice the change?"

I had been too excited to think of anything but the danger. Now I could observe that the cave was intensely hot.

"All right," said Dick. "Come on!"

I took one last look at the scene we were leaving; the gold, the plate, the gems, the placid skeletons and their newly arrived companion. I dare say that more solemn thoughts should have filled my mind, but as it was, the gleam of the jewels had bewitched me as it had the others.

"We may as well take a chance!" I cried. "We may never have it again."

Stooping, I hastily thrust a great handful of the gems into my handkerchief, knotted it securely and replaced it in my pocket. Dick, with a shrug of his shoulders, did likewise.

We hastened down the tunnel and had soon regained the outer cavern. It may have been fancy, but it did not seem to me that the tumult of waters was quite as terrific as before. I should have said that the blow had been a squall that had passed. But the heavy sea, once aroused, still remained.

For a moment we stood watching. A great wave would come plunging in, completely filling the entrance and send a flood of foaming water surging through the cave. Then would follow a lull; the water would begin to recede and for a moment we could see a strip of light between the wave crest and the rock at the entrance of our prison. Then another sea would seek to enter and the receding waves would struggle until another torrent would come bursting in.

Dick made a splendid figure as he stood there, his face stern and resolute, calculating, like a soldier, our best plan of attack. Then he bent his head close to my ear, to make himself heard above the turmoil. "We must wade out as far as we can," he shouted. "As far as we can, and still keep our feet. Then, when the wave sweeps back, we must dive and swim for it; we'll have the current with us at first. We must swim as fast as we can; if we can get through before the next wave drives us back, we'll make it. If we don't——" A gesture completed the sentence.

A great wave entered; carefully, as it flooded the cave, we advanced, bodies bent forward to withstand its rush. There was no more time to think of each other; it was each for himself. The instant the pressure relaxed, I threw myself forward, followed the wave until the water deepened; then, drawing a long, deep breath, I plunged under and struck out with all my force.

Never before had I realized that the swimming I had done at Bayport would serve me in such stead. For half a dozen strokes I made great progress and could feel the rush of the outgoing wave bearing me along. I even im-

agined that the water above me was changing to a lighter hue, and I thought, with a thrill of hope, that I had passed the entrance. Then all at once it seemed as though an impassable barrier opposed me, checked me, even started to sweep me back.

With desperation I put all that I had into three mighty strokes; and then, win or lose, I knew that I had given my all. Come what might, I must breathe or drown, and pointing upward for the surface, I shot forward. The next instant, with throbbing temples and bursting lungs, was breathing in great drafts of the fresh ocean air. I had won my fight; I was outside the cave.

MY next thought was for Dick. That moment his head emerged, a dozen feet away. There was no time now to waste in congratulations, for the situation was still precarious. The sea was rough; the water cold; and our strength, for the time being, had been severely taxed. To add to our discomfiture we found that the uproar in the crater had immensely increased and that stones, large and small, were dropping around us in a shower. A short distance down the shore, we saw a cove between projecting cliffs, and five minutes later had dragged ourselves ashore. Our own difficulties for the moment solved, our thoughts turned swiftly to our comrades. The fog still persisted, but the constantly increasing glare from the crater now rendered visible over half of the island and the bay, although the whole easterly shore, where the *Albicore* lay anchored, was still shrouded in darkness. Thankful that the volcano intervened between us and Palliser, we scrambled toward the entrance to the bay and reached it without further mishap. Cliffs were on either side and before us the narrow channel, not over sixty feet wide.

"Now, then," said Dick encouragingly, "one more swim, and we're on the right road again! Once across, and we'll reach the *Albicore* in five minutes. Come on, Hal! Our troubles are almost over!"

IT seemed that he was right. Yet the words had but left his lips when they proved themselves false; for as I glanced down into the clear waters of the channel I saw, not twenty feet beneath the surface, the huge bulk of an enormous shark. Instantly I thought of the day we had landed and of the fish I had then seen.

"We can't make it!" I gasped.

For an instant, Dick hesitated. But like a flash he made up his mind. "We've *got* to make it!" he cried desperately. "We've got to reach your father, Hal. When Palliser finds that Southard doesn't appear, he's bound to have revenge on the rest of us. He may be creeping down on the *Albicore* this minute. And there's one thing, Hal; the shark won't get us both."

It was true, but a dark enough prospect; the survivor would purchase his life by the death of his best friend. Dick drew his knife from its sheath and gripped it between his teeth. "Native divers," he said, "can fight a shark and kill him. But I don't know how it's done. We might fight him off, though, for all his size."

His words gave me a sudden inspiration. "I've always heard," I said, "that they hate a commotion in the water. Let's heave a big rock at him, and then swim for it as fast as we can."

"Good idea," Dick assented. At once each of us picked up a rock as large as we could throw with accuracy, and made our way out to the very edge of the cliff. There lay the guardian of the strait, as if waiting for his prey, a forbidding spectacle, sinister and menacing.

"We'll throw them just this side of him," whispered Dick, unconsciously lowering his voice as though the great fish were actually listening, "and we

may scare him for good and all. Only —don't waste a second. The minute your stone hits the water, jump and swim for all you're worth. There mustn't be any holding back for the other fellow. And we must separate a little, Hal." He pointed to a projecting ledge on the seaward side. "You start from there; I'll start from here."

I obediently took my station at the point which Dick had indicated.

"Now, then," he shouted, "one, two, three!"

At the word we hurled the stones, which struck the water with a splash, dashing up a fountain of spray. Then I leaped. The vision of being gripped in those remorseless jaws lent me the strength of desperate fear and I cut through the water at my topmost speed.

At the start, I had picked out a spot to aim for, a natural platform extending back into a gully in the rocks and perhaps two feet above the level of the sea. On this spot I kept my eyes and made for it as straight as I could. Never shall I forget the agonizing moment when I reached it, the fear that I might slip, or that I should not be able to climb quickly enough to escape the grip of those ruthless jaws. With one last mighty scramble I emerged, panting, heedless of cuts to knees and elbows, my heart beating as though it would burst —but safe.

Like a flash I turned to look for Dick. He had purposely lagged behind a little to protect me. Though he was swimming strongly, he was some little distance from the rocks. My lips had parted to shout to him words of encouragement, and then, all at once, I saw to my horror the sight which has brought terror to so many hearts since men first voyaged upon the seas—the black, triangular fin sheering through the water like a knife. In desperation, I looked about me for something to throw, but nothing was in sight; only the bare, bleak rock on every hand. At the same moment I noticed that Dick's course was leading him away from the ledge where I stood, and that he was headed for an inaccessible cliff. At once, therefore, I screamed at the top of my lungs:

"This way, Dick, and faster!"

Instantly he shifted his course and came on at increased speed. Stooping, I stood ready to seize his hand the instant he came within reach; then glanced again for that terrifying fin and could not see it. From what I had read of the habits of sharks I suspected that the monster had turned upon its side to bite. I cannot put into words the agony of those next few seconds; now Dick's hand was within my grasp; I seized it and pulled with all my strength. With his free hand, he aided my efforts, at the same time lashing about him with his legs.

The next second he was on the ledge beside me. Like an evil nightmare, the shark's huge body, with that frightful head and that wide, grinning mouth, shot half out of water in a last effort to seize its prey, then, disappointed, fell back with a sullen plunge into the sea.

For a moment we gazed at each other. Then, we hastened on our way toward the *Albicore*. So hard was the going and so necessary was it for us to maintain our footing that I could not look around me; but all the time I was conscious of a terrific roaring from the volcano, knew that the fog was retreating out to sea, and was aware that the heat was fast becoming unbearable. But I kept my eyes on the rocks before me and toiled on until presently I heard Dick cry:

"There they are! They're still on the schooner. But who's that in the dory, off the rocks?"

Then I looked about me. Never shall I forget the sight that met my eyes. From the crater, as from some gigantic furnace, a seething mass of flame shot toward the sky, so that the whole island

and the surrounding sea were bathed in this intense, unearthly crimson light. Just below the cave Palliser and his crew were still standing, huddled together, black splashes against the lighter background of the cliff. Why they lingered, I cannot say; loyalty to Southard, greed for the treasure—perhaps a mingling of both.

TO the north, her spars black against the red sky, Palliser's schooner lay at anchor, no sign of life upon her decks. To the eastward, heading in for the island, was the *Albicore's* dory. I knew the two men who rowed her, could have told their stroke among a thousand, and at once I realized the meaning of the scream in the fog, from the decks of the *Red Cloud*, for the two men were Long Jim Colby and Sam Bates.

In the next minute everything seemed to happen at once. Somehow, I scarcely remember how, I found all of our party grouped at the edge of the island around the dory.

"Quick!" Long Jim was urging. "Get aboard! Don't stop for anything. This heat will kill us. Leave the schooner. We must get to the *Red Cloud* before the others, or we're dead men!"

"Where's Avery?" I found time to gasp, as we piled aboard, and Jim and Sam lashed the oars through the water with every ounce of power in their muscular frames.

"Shark meat," was Jim's laconic answer.

Now the meaning of what was taking place seemed to convey itself to Palliser and his crew. We could see them pointing, gesticulating, then start to descend the cliff toward the beach.

"They're after us!" shouted Sam Bates.

Then came the catastrophe. No one of us, afterward, agreed as to just what happened; I seemed to see the whole side of the volcano split wide open, and a flood of liquid fire issue forth. So intense, indeed, was the glare that I was for the moment blinded and instinctively threw my hand before my eyes.

The others must have done the same, and that is why I cannot set down lucidly and clearly all that took place. But this much I can say: at one moment, the last scene etched on my brain was this torrent of fire, with the tiny figures of Palliser and his men stumbling and falling down the cliff in a hopeless effort to escape, while the whole island seemed to reel and whirl before my eyes.

Then, before I could look again, and while I still sat with my hand before my face, I heard my father shouting: "Head her up, boys. Tidal wave!" Before I could adjust myself to this new peril, we were borne up and up and up and then plunged down again as if headed for the very bottom of the sea. Before us the *Red Cloud* pitched dizzily. Lesser waves succeeded, and then my father, wise in the lore of the sea, turned his gaze toward the island and cried:

"I thought so. Earthquake, boys. That's the end of her!"

I did not understand. Indeed, I had been through so much in the past day that my brain seemed incapable of thought. I could only gaze to the south of us, and then I understood. There was no *Albicore;* there was no longboat on the beach; there was no Palliser; no crew; there was no volcano. In the faint gray light of the Antarctic dawn there was nothing but a waste of water and of churning waves. Island and galleon and treasure—all had gone plunging together into the unfathomable depths of the sea.

IT was a sorry ship's company that now boarded the *Red Cloud*, and got sail on her and pointed her bow toward the northeast and home. And it was not

till later that same day that all hands gathered in the cabin, and Dick and I produced the jewels that we had snatched from the very jaws of destruction. Outside the dim gloom of the cave, we could see that they were far finer than we had imagined—diamonds, rubies, sapphires, emeralds, amethysts—jewels that at their lowest value would make us rich for life. Yet we were still under the influence of that tremendous cataclysm we had witnessed; in the face of that mighty upheaval of nature, and at the thought of the fate we had just evaded, money seemed of little value.

Late that night, with a southerly wind humming through the rigging, I stood my trick at the wheel. The skies were clear; above me the stars burned like gold. I thought of a white-walled house at Pernambuco, and the scent of jasmine seemed once again to perfume the air. There we would stop on our journey home; and I meant to win for myself the most precious jewel of all. Yet beyond all else it came to my mind that our voyage had been a mirror of life itself. For it is through life that we chart our way, with perils around us on every hand. And it is for treasure that we seek—treasure which goes by many names: Wealth, Fame, Love, Friendship, Sacrifice. We would fain grasp it; but it is not to be gained for the asking. Fortunate are we, if it is not with empty hands that we end the voyage.

You'll enjoy "Gentlemen of Chance," a mystery-adventure yarn that will be published complete in the next issue of THE POPULAR. *It is by W. R. Hoefer, a writer of charm and skill, and this story is one of the most interesting we have ever printed.*

WHAT A WORLD!

FOR years, astronomers have been puzzled by the antics of the moon, that well-known satellite of the earth which adds to the magic of romantic summer evenings. With eyes glued to the ends of long telescopes, or in later days by means of photographs of the moon, these learned gentlemen have studied its movements and been baffled because the moon did not behave according to the schedule they had figured out for it.

After taking into consideration every known force that would affect the satellite's speed, they discovered that it seemed to be retarded or accelerated in a most mysterious fashion, running slowly for a time, then leaping forward as if aware that it had its obligations to the men of science and was trying to live up to their expectations.

Doctor E. W. Brown, professor of astronomy at Yale, has hit upon what he thinks is the explanation of this strange behavior. It is his theory that the trouble is not with the moon, but with the earth, that the earth swells and shrinks rhythmically, thus causing the astronomer to make mistakes, and to conclude that the moon is behaving badly.

This hypothesis was arrived at after a careful investigation of records extending back over two hundred years, during which the movements of the moon had been written down. He could find no possible disturbances of the crust of the earth which would so uniformly affect astronomers' figures. Therefore, he assumes that the core of the earth must swell and shrink, very gently, of course.

That Little Sawed-off Cuss

By Frederick Niven

Author of "Two Dogs," "The Blackmailer," Etc.

Things are often won by a gesture. Armies are certainly commanded by one. For a gesture carries with it the ghostly prestige of established tradition, of authority. And Roy Matthews knew the full force a gestures carries, especially the gesture of a red-tunicked policeman of the Northwest Territories reading the law to forest toughs.

SEE what that little sawed-off cuss over there wants."

That was how he got his sobriquet—"The Sawed-off Cuss." It was Inspector Ryerson who made the remark. And what the little sawed-off cuss wanted is part of the history of the R. N. W. M. P., now superseded by the R. C. M. P., which, however, contains many of its old members.

What The Sawed-off Cuss wanted was to join the force! He had wanted to do so for years, but had known that he could never do so, because of his lack of inches. A certain outlaw was scouring the plains from the foothills to Manitoba, north of the line, and to Dakota, south. On either side he was being hunted. And so adroit was he in his raids for food and horses—also, as it happened, so many friends had he as well as enemies—that the catching of him was a hard matter. Thus it was that the proclamation was issued that a certain number of lightweight men, who could be all of two inches shorter than the old minimum, would be enrolled.

Roy Matthews, seeing the placard announcing that fact at a little cow town of southern Saskatchewan—called Assiniboia then—stared, unbelieving. His chance had come. The thing he had known to be beyond hope might yet be realized. If he got into the force, he would never despair of anything thereafter, however impossible its attainment might seem. And he got in. The

rookie period of these lightweights was to be as short as possible. What they were wanted for was to ride jockeylike after that swift outlaw—and the sooner the better. So stubbiness, Regina had declared, was not to be their only qualification. The stubs among the applicants who could already ride and shoot were what they wanted.

Thus did Roy Matthews, The Sawed-off Cuss, at last don the red tunic. To his joy, he realized, listening to a little official speech being made to the bantams, that there was no intention, when the main object of the temporary decrease of height standard was attained, to say to any of them: "Thank you, now you may go." They were in for keeps, if they behaved themselves.

Matthews listened, and his eyes were full of joy. But suddenly they clouded. He thought far ahead, away beyond all the potential valorous deeds he was to do in his red coat; he looked into the days when he would be ex-R. N. W. M. P. He would want to tell his stories to the kids. And he thought most of them would listen and look him up and down and then, going away, remark one to another. "It was a bully enough yarn, but he was never in the force. He's too short!" and they would giggle at him.

He would always have to preface the story of his deeds yet to be done with the account of how he got in, tell them of that footnote to the history of the force when what the facetious called "The Jockey Club" was organized.

The hard-riding, elusive outlaw, as it happened, his final crowded hour palling upon him, was captured by neither policeman north nor trooper south of the line. He grew bored and blew his brains out. Those light riders who had sifted the dust of the prairies along the border of their linked patrols, with stations of spare horses dotting the scene, were scattered, one here, another there, to go on with the routine of the force among other men inches taller than they.

And before long the little brief, buzzing "city" of Gold Dust, that mushroomed up where the flat plains become rolling hills and one can see the Rockies stamped along the selvage of the western sky, opened its eyes and stared at sawed-off Matthews. It didn't believe him. It thought he must be a crook pretending to be a policeman, and a crazy crook, till one of the citizens said:

"Oh, I guess he's one of these lightweight riders they enlisted to pursue that mad outlaw of the borders. Well, I've heard that what they lack in inches, they make up for in gall."

Matthews certainly had gall. He wasn't a perfect little disciplined police boy. He had been known to test upon his own person confiscated whisky, to make entirely sure it was so. He was prone to the unwonted donning of mufti when the fancy took him for a change. His gall even took the form of what might, by a court-martial, be considered truancies or dereliction of duty.

He found it difficult to resist a dance, even when he should have been elsewhere. It was just after he had been sent to keep the peace at Gold Dust, and patrol the railway-construction line, that he was dancing when he should have been on duty.

THERE were new "excitements" in that section then. There were mining men and engineers, and lumbermen scattered broadcast, and railway-construction men. And at Gold Dust they had rushed up houses as a center; and there were their womenfolk. So they had dances. Blue-serge lounge suits were the evening clothes of more than half of the men certainly, but some had the real articles and wore them, too. Gold Dust liked to see them worn. They were part of the evidence that they might be wild, but were not woolly and full of fleas.

There was a lovely lady at Gold Dust. Her hair was the color of corn and her eyes were the most adorable blue. And she had, in excelsis, the thing called charm, as well as grace. But she was tall. And here was Matthews looking comic as he circled round the floor of the dance hall, stretching up to her —the beauty that they called the "Queen of Sheba."

"That's the long and the short of it," he heard some one say, and frowned briefly.

And the Queen of Sheba heard, and smiled lightly. "Well, you may be short," she said, knowing he had caught the words, "but you can surely dance."

It was just then that Roy heard a double knock on the outer door. It had a peremptory sound. It had something of the import of the knocking on the door in "Macbeth" that Shakespeare smote into his play, and De Quincey got all worked up over. Matthews did not get worked up over this one, but he thought:

"That's for me!"

And it was. He had just convoyed the Queen of Sheba to a chair when the master of the ceremonies stepped up and drew him aside.

"Say, there's a fellow just come in down the grade," he whispered. "He says there's all kinds of trouble on, up at that camp they call Muskeg. Guess they've got in some wood alcohol by the way they are behaving." These were the days of prohibition in the "Nor'west Territories," as they called that land then. "They are all mad, and half of them dead drunk, if they ain't dead. He says he took a sneak down through the bush because he knew the boss there—Wainwright. And Wainwright and the time clerk are getting ready for a siege. Guess you'll have to go up."

The master of ceremonies frowned as he said that; Roy looked such a hopeless trifle against this news from the front. The dress suit he wore accentuated the impression that he would meet his Waterloo. But Roy just chanted "Right!" and cheerily he quick-stepped away to the men's dressing room, where he had his uniform, and other necessities for a surprise call, in a suit case.

The master of ceremonies following him hither, watched Roy put on his disguise. That was how the uniform seemed to him, looking on with puckering lips—a disguise or a bluff. The news brought in was bad. The camp, Muskeg, where the fracas was in progress, was composed of a gang of six-footers almost to a man, brawny, foreign giants from some obscure European region of muscle and stolidity—except when liquor flowed. Then the stolidity went.

"How would it be," suggested the master of ceremonies, "if you slipped over to the j. p. and swore in some assistants?"

"What for?"

"To make your arrests at Muskeg. To quell the disturbers."

"Oh, tut!" said Matthews. "This is not a job for civilians."

Civilians! The way that sawed-off cuss said it put up the back of this master of ceremonies.

"All right," he said, "if you think you can tackle them. There are about two hundred in the camp."

"That's my job," replied Matthews, and tucked a silk handkerchief into his sleeve.

IT was a chill night he went out into, and full of stars. The music of violins died behind him as he rode out of Gold Dust, and there were only the sigh of night winds in the grass tufts and in the tops of the scattered pines, the plug of his horse's hoofs, and the froufrou of saddle leather. No—there was another sound, and he knew what

it was though others might have wondered if there had been any to hear.

It was metallic, an occasional jingle; and it did not come from his spurs. It came from under his tunic. *Click-click!* it went now and then, as if he wore chain mail, and every time he heard it his lips pursed grimly. What that metallic click was, time might tell—or again might not. For he was a small cuss.

He was handicapped because of that. These bantams had to make good. They had to establish a reputation, seeing that the Powers That Be at Regina had been good enough to let them remain in the force after the cause of their speedy enlistment was over.

The grade led through closer woods. In the star glow, Matthews could see the road ahead of him; he looked up where it wound, by the serrated tips of the black silhouette of woods on either side, and a ribbon of star-flecked sky before him. The effect was eventually as if he rode in a cañon, the walls of which were ghostly, unsubstantial, not of rock, just of darkness full of sighings and whisperings.

For small winds kept passing and ruffling, subdued, subdued in the treetops. It seemed queer to be here after that lighted hall, the violins, the dancing, after circling in the radiance so recently with the charming Queen. In years to come, he would remember her, when he was a staid, elderly member of Eastern society perhaps, if Muskeg was not to be the end of him, and sigh and think over her.

"Gosh! She's a stunner!" he murmured. "She's a woman and a half!"

Then came a sound, difficult to place, that distracted his mind from the golden glamour of the Queen of Sheba. Strange noises one heard in the old nights of the Nor'west—from pipe of frogs to the pulsing, the throbbing, of Indian tomtoms. This was different. It rose and fell, its volume apparently decreed by the rising and falling of the light wind gusts.

As he rode on, even in the lulls between the wind, he could hear it. It was, he thought once, like the roaring from a zoo as feeding time draws near. All the wild cats of the hills and coyotes of the plains seemed to have gone mad, and to be giving voice. Matthews realized that what he heard was not due to any trick of the wind in the trees, allied with the roaring of any creek. He was drawing near his goal, near the job.

"Some job!" he thought, as the clamor became constant, a clamor as out of bedlam. He chucked his chest in the red tunic and, as he did so, there came that metallic click as if he wore chain mail underneath.

"Pandemonium!" he said to himself.

THE trees to the left thinned out and he saw the camp fires in a hollow ahead and below him. The horse snorted and quickened its step. Matthews loosened the holster flap even though, at the same moment, he was considering how the force treated its wards with great deference. Every chance, he thought, was with the people to be arrested. Was not the force full of stories of policemen who were sent out to capture toughs *alive,* not *dead or alive?*

Time after time a redcoat had had to be potted at, then go back and report fully and convincingly before the *dead or alive,* could be authorized. Round the fires that danced their radiance in the hollow ahead, he could see leaping, demented figures. Then came the thud, thud of revolver shots.

"Shucks!" he broke out, and gloomily he fell to comparison between the duties of a police boy on one side of the line, and a sheriff south.

He would quit this darned country, where a man had to go and get riddled full of shot as proof that it was neces-

sary to pull his own gun! Bunk! And all this so that a policeman might not even run the chance of being suspect of stealing up on a wanted man, plugging him and then coming back with a story of how he had been forced to shoot. Bunk!

There arose again the screaming, maniacal. Then came once more the thud of a revolver, a heavy one, a Colt by the slam of it.

"Oh, well, beezness—is—beezness!" he jested, to his horse, and turned down from the grade, sitting back in his saddle, heading directly to the camp where the tents were all visible in the glow of the fires.

The acrimonious international comparisons, the disparagement of the flag he served, must still have been in his mind as he rode nearer to duty's field, for he said to his horse:

"Well, after all they give me a red tunic. A sheriff has only a star to flash. There's a lot in the red coat. I'm alone, but they know there are others behind. The thin red line!"

With that thought, he came to the bottom of the embankment and rode on straight into the camp. The light of the leaping flames glittered on his scarlet tunic. The dancing maniacs saw, but still yelled and danced and fought among themselves, and fell. Matthews rode on heedless and calm, to all appearances, as when he had come past that way, patrolling the construction line.

HE should have been there that noon, but had "given it a miss" in his haste to get straight down to Gold Dust and be ready for the dance. Dereliction of duty! It had its punishment. If he had arrived earlier, he might have nipped this jamboree in the bud—if one may use such a flowery simile about it.

Group after group saw him, but paid no attention. He must have seemed as a wraith to them in their cups—of diluted wood alcohol. He came to the rows of construction-camp tents, steered his horse past prone bodies suggestive of a battlefield, and arrived at the big dining tent, a great cooking stove to the rear of it under an open shed. In a smaller tent, beside the big one, aloof from the others, he thought the foreman and timekeeper were to be found, if they were still alive. They were! As he drew near, a revolver crashed.

"Quit!" he growled. "Who are you trying to shoot?"

"Nobody," a voice replied, the boss' voice, Wainwright's. "I'm shooting up in the air. I thought it was them come to rush us again. Say, I'm glad to see you!"

Matthews slipped from his horse, dropped the lines and stepped into the tent, between barricades of boxes that had been stacked around inside. The lamp was turned low, but the glow of the bonfires outside illumined the interior.

"Well," said he, and looked at the two men—Wainwright standing there on the qui vive with blazing, angry eyes; the other, the timekeeper, sitting on a packing case, smoking his pipe as one resigned, "I suppose I have to wait till sunup to make some arrests. They're pretty well crazy just now and wouldn't even understand."

"They'll be worse by sunup. They've a lot more stuff to consume."

"That so?" said Matthews thoughtfully, and there came to him a flamboyant hope regarding something beyond the quieting of this disturbance. The Sawed-off Cuss had a turn for drama. He liked to do things with a gesture, a final nonchalant flaunt, a kiss of the finger tips, so to speak.

"Oh, well, then," he said, "we may as well tackle them half crazy as whole crazy. Would you come and point out the ringleaders?"

"You bet your life," replied the boss.

So out they went, Matthews speedily swinging into the saddle.

"I look more important up here," said he. "There was a fellow once said I looked like two small squares, the lower one cut in the middle for legs; but the top square is bigger than the lower one. Yep! I look more in authority, elevated in a saddle."

"Sure," agreed the boss, and walked along beside him toward the hullabaloo, among the flicker of the bonfires.

The top part of Matthews was certainly one vigorous square. Very erect he sat in his saddle, as he rode straight toward one of the groups of giants.

"Now, then," he said. "What's all this?"

They came gibbering round him. The scene might have been out of nightmare, instead of life.

"Any of the ringleaders here?" asked Matthews.

"Yep," replied Wainwright. "These two big fellows together there have led three rushes on our tent. I only drove them off by firing up in the air."

Then the metallic little noise under Matthews' tunic explained itself. He thrust in a hand, brought out a pair of handcuffs, and tossed them into the crowd.

"Put those on that man!" Matthews snapped.

No one acted.

"Put them on that man!" he repeated. "Here—you!" He indicated one of them with a pointed finger. "You put *them* on *him*. Hands behind his back, I want!"

The man stood irresolute.

"I'll put 'em on," volunteered the boss.

"No, no," replied Matthews quietly. "This is the better way." Then he rasped: "Come on! Do you want to have me tell you again? Put them on him!"

The man lifted them, stepped to the giant—and the boss' eyes goggled. For the giant stood staring as one stupefied, while the handcuffs were snapped in place.

"Gee!" sighed Wainwright.

Matthews tossed another pair into the crowd. "And put *these* on *him!*" he said, pointing to the second ringleader. "Come on. You put 'em on." He selected another assistant this time, in a design to spread the impression of his authority. "I'm going to share out this job, and if anybody doesn't like it, he can come along, too. Got that?"

"Gosh!" muttered the boss, standing pat beside Roy. "You ain't a policeman. You're a mesmerist!"

"I'll tell you the secret," muttered Roy, but he did not tell it then, for Wainwright warned:

"Here comes another one. This is the toughest of the fellows that have been egging them on to rush us."

"Which one?"

"That. Right here. Here he comes."

Sawed-off Matthews saw which man was meant. There could be no doubt. He came with a shovel, carrying it in the manner of a rifle with a fixed bayonet. The redcoat had not mesmerized him. It had affected him as if he were a bull.

"Now, now," said Matthews. "Drop that, or you'll make it worse for yourself."

Even as he spoke, he surmised that the man was so greatly demented with his potations as to be unaware of what he was doing. Better might it have been to wait till the wood-alcohol concoction had either operated to the full and stretched them all out, or evaporated from their systems. And yet—he had his dramatic notion, a little flaunting plan at the back of his mind that might yet be realized.

"Grab him, you!" he ordered. "Go on. I don't want to have to shoot him."

But this hefty newcomer was evidently feared by his own fellows. They

fell back; and he rushed on toward the policeman. Roy did not shoot. There were always those appalling inquiries if one had to shoot. The man swung the shovel and Roy made a quick movement, out and downward, with his riding crop.

In the handle of it there had been poured, against such emergencies, a little ladle full of lead. *Tap!* it came on the maniac's head. He crashed, while Roy, with his knees and a tightening of the rein hand, steadied the horse that had sidled away from the descending shovel.

"Put *these* on *him!*" said Matthews.

At once two men stepped to the fallen one, and with a yank got his arms behind his back. There came the click as the handcuffs Roy tossed down were affixed.

"Gosh!" exclaimed Wainwright. "They seem to be acquainted with the 'come-alongs,' some of these fellows."

"Well, I brought five pairs. We may as well donate them all while we're about it," said Roy. "Any other particular bad ones?"

"No. These were the three who were doing the leading."

"We'll take the two biggest we can pick, then, just to show," said Matthews. "Here, you—you put *them* on *him,*" he told a man, and the thing was done with no more than a sort of long sigh from the boss.

Suddenly one of the onlookers went berserk and rushed upon the policeman.

"My brother!" he yelled. "You not take him!"

He made a leap and grabbed Matthews about the waist, then clapped a hand on the butt of the redcoat's six-gun. The man never knew what happened to him, but The Sawed-off Cuss flicked him also with the weighted end of his riding crop. Down he went.

"That's the last pair," said Roy. "Put them on him. When he comes round, he can accompany his brother. I'd hate to part them, anyhow, seeing he felt that way about it."

He was beginning to be perky. This might yet be "a little bit of fun I had the other night here" to write home about. He turned to Wainwright.

"How about you and the timekeeper?" he asked. "Would you want to come to Gold Dust with me, or stay here?"

"Oh, if you can handle the bunch you've taken, we'll stay, I guess. The fellows here have had a lesson."

"All right. You'd better get the last of their hooch, or whatever it is that you told me you thought they had, and empty it out."

IT was easy to find and, that done, with no revolt, with only low complainings and disconnected grumblings round them, Matthews ordered his prisoners to fall in line. The first man to be stunned had by then come round and was able to step, or at least lurch, into the line.

Roy rode along behind them, bending from his saddle and running his rope through the handcuffs. By the time he reached the end, the one who had been moved to assault him, actuated by brotherly devotion, was sitting up, gulping.

"Fall in, you there!" said Matthews. "Your brother wants to be stepping."

Cackles of idiotic laughter from the least demented and befuddled of the crowd answered that sally, as evidence that they understood.

"Well, by gosh!" said the boss, standing at the horse's head, after that man also was in the string and the ends of the rope, passed through the handcuffs, were securely twisted round the policeman's saddle horn. "Well, by gosh, you're sure a mesmerist."

"The mesmerism is the redcoat," returned Matthews quietly. "That's the secret of this trick."

"Maybe," agreed Wainwright, "but

you've got to be ready if they call the bluff."

"Now, you!" The Sawed-off Cuss raised his voice for all to hear. "I'm going off for a while. But I'll be back. If I hear of any more trouble when I get back, you'll know what to expect." Then he told his queue to move. "Shake a leg!" he said. "Move up onto the grade," and he flicked out his revolver.

At once they moved on as ordered, climbing ahead of him, a sullen and lurching row. On the grade they paused and looked round, and what they saw, by the light from the fires below, was the police boy's eyes upon them, and in the police boy's right hand, his service revolver.

"All right," said he. "Walk!"

Away they walked, lurching in the star sheen, their eyes not yet accustomed to the shadows and their brains foggy besides. But soon, perhaps because of the surrounding quiet and the darkness, the string of staggering giants failed to see cause why they should continue. They halted, "talking a language," as Matthews phrased it.

"Get a move on," he said, and put his horse, as much trained as he in military drill, broadside to them.

Oaths, by the sound, and angry shouts were their answers to that, but still he sidled his mount upon them. Then, realizing that he must be much more clear to them, aloft on his saddle against the sweep of the starry sky, than they were to him, he raised his revolver with a sweeping gesture.

"Get—a—move—on!" he commanded, in a warning tone.

They had seen that movement of his silhouette, it seemed, for at once they went plunging on. And so they continued, trailing fumes of alcohol to Roy's nostrils, till there came into the sigh of the little night winds another sound. It was of violins, and a drum beating rhythms.

They were still dancing at Gold Dust. Thither Roy brought his prisoners intact, right to the door of the lockup, a mere temporary cell, too small to allow of any of them lying down.

"They'll be good and weary by the time I get the patrol wagon for them," he thought.

Dismounting, he opened the door and ushered them in with his six-gun; then he locked the door and shouted till he attracted the attention of some one over at the dance hall. A lean, lined, bony, knuckly old man—of a type that some highbrows would make out did never exist, but that surely did, and does still—quick on the draw, and a sure shot, was willing to guard the prisoners. He had been sitting on the sidewalk by the dance hall, listening to the music, too rheumaticky to dance, dreaming his dreams, to this music, of his own old days.

"You wait till I get my rifle!" said he.

He hobbled smartly off for his trusty rifle, returning with it and a stool, and sat him down on guard.

"Sure, sure you can leave them to me. If they break the door down and try to get out I'll shell them as they come," quoth he as though he talked of peas.

So Matthews dashed off to phone to his headquarters for a patrol wagon to remove his captives. Then he sat down and filled in the report that was to go with them.

AND then—then he made his gesture, that kiss of the hand he had looked forward to making. A sleep would have been welcome, but it pleased him to step into the hall, find his grip, and quick change again from his mesmeric uniform into his evening suit. And there he was on the floor; there he was, and all the room whispering: "There's the police boy back!" For the news of the job he had set off upon had gone the rounds.

He was dancing with the Queen of Sheba.

As they went round he told her: five men—five giants—and all in the lockup, and the patrol wagon phoned for and already on the way from the post, to arrive, surely, by breakfast time.

"My! You're small, but you're surely a marvel!" exclaimed the Queen of Sheba.

"Say!" said Matthews. He was full of elation at what he had done. It was as if he had stepped outside, imagined it all, and stepped in again. But he knew it was true. "Say——"

"Say on. What is it?"

"Will you——" he began.

The music ended. They moved to the chairs that stood round the edge of the hall.

"Will you mar——" he began again.

She stopped him by raising a hand and patting him, gently but firmly, on the mouth.

"No," she said, "I will not *mar* you. What you want is a sleep. It would be a shame to take advantage of you, kid, while you're all foozy with this David and Goliath stuff you pulled. You don't want to go and get married just because you arrested five men all on your little lonesome!"

He opened his eyes wide, and stared at her. And, it may not have been very flattering, but on his innocent face was evident his realization that she spoke for his good, and that she gave him wise advice.

"My dance, I think," said some one, advancing.

She rose.

"You go and have a sleep," she said to Roy, and gave him a little clap on the shoulder, a consolatory little clap. In fact it seemed almost maternal. "You're a marvel," she added, with one of those sidelong glints from her turquoise-blue eyes.

"And you're a woman and a half!" he muttered.

She fluttered away with her partner, for what must have been the home dance. For when The Sawed-off Cuss, following her advice, hied him away out, it was into the faint beginning of the dawn on the roofs, the walls and the pretentious, aspiring, eastward gables of Gold Dust. Suit case in hand, he crossed the way to ask old Abe, who sat by the lockup door, rifle on knee, if he'd mind staying on guard till he had forty winks.

"That's fine," said the old man. "I'll ride herd for you."

This yarn is all true, with a change of a name or two, out of those old days in the Nor'west. They are all from the life; and the dress suit, too, of the quick-change act, is factual. There must still be others of these sawed-off cusses around, retired for sure, but surely not all gone from these glimpses of the moon, who got into the force by the same fluke as Sawed-off Matthews and, once in, mostly made their mark.

Look for more of Mr. Niven's stories in subsequent issues of THE POPULAR.

It takes all sorts of people to make the world—even the sort of the woman who pulled a New York theater fire-alarm box under the slightly mistaken impression that it was a machine for distributing paper drinking cups.

By

Fred MacIsaac

Author of "Ice," "Breakfast at the Plaza," Etc.

Tin Hats

CHAPTER I.

TRUMPETS AND DRUMS.

SITTING at a small desk near one of the big windows of the assessing department in the city hall of Benton, Christopher Graham finished adding a very long column of figures in the ledger of valuations, laid down his pen, then looked casually out of the window. He gazed across the public square toward the office of the Benton *Tribune,* about the entrance of which a multitude of small boys were surging. At that instant it happened that a number of boys fought their way out of the mob eagerly trying to secure bundles of papers wet from the press, and these were already lifting shrill, penetrating voices.

Their cries were at first incomprehensible as they came faintly through the closed window, but in a moment Graham grasped the meaning of what they were shouting. Pushing back his chair, he jumped to his feet, faced the long rows of workers and shouted:

"It's war! War has been declared!"

"War!" bellowed big Harrison Otis.

"War!" repeated Mike Sullivan.

"War!" echoed Jimmy Curley. "War. Then to hell with this! Me for the army."

And now the newsboys were scattered all over the square, waving newspapers with great red blotches on the front page, and the red blotches spelled: "War Declared."

In the assessor's office work was over. Some thirty clerks were milling around; some had lifted windows and were imploring the boys to throw up papers; others shouted excitedly; humdrum yielded to hysteria.

Jimmy Curley, Mike Sullivan and Tom Hennessy proclaimed loudly that they were through at this city hall. If there was war, they wanted to be in it. Were they not Irish, and were not the Irish always first at the front? Two or three others were carried away by their enthusiasm; they, too, would join the army. One of the girl stenographers hurled herself at Curley, threw her

Over the deep somnolence of an America drenched in the languors of peace sounded the clarion-shrill notes of the bugle of war. And out of the factories and offices of the city, in from the farms and lumber camps of the West, poured a host of white men, brown men, black men; came a swarm of strong men, fat men, weak men—but all men whose souls were ablaze with a single, indelible purpose—to protect the security of their hearthsides. And none were more valiant than the railroad engineers who were first to respond with their mighty efforts to knit together with bands of steel rail a countryside made desolate by a deluge of shells.

In Four Parts—
Part I. :: ::

arms around his neck, kissed him soundly and called for three cheers for the hero. In the past she had referred to him as "a big roughneck."

Most of the clerks were out of the office and in the street in five minutes. A few of the older men, sighing a bit heavily, sat down again at their books. Christopher Graham had gone back to his seat and was looking out through the window, but he saw nothing. He was lost in rather bitter reflections.

That war would be declared was a foregone conclusion. Everybody had been expecting it for some time. Nevertheless, the accomplishment of the fact on the sixth of April, 1917, was the most exciting event these United States had experienced since the days of 1898.

Christopher Graham had done a lot of thinking during the past few weeks about this war which was coming, and about what he should do if it came; and he was no nearer a decision now than he had been before. He did not know what he was going to do, except that he was not going to rush out and enlist joyously like Curley and Hennessy and Sullivan. There were too many things to be weighed. There were his father and mother and sister, and there was Marion to be considered, and he did not yearn to be a soldier anyway.

He sat there stolidly, while patriotic fervor charged the room with electricity. He was young, not more than twenty-six; he was slight, rather pale, and not in the least athletic. Upon his long, clean-cut, narrow face there was an expression of discontent, which marred what was ordinarily a pleasant, winning countenance.

It was a scholarly face, the face of a thinker rather than an actor, the impression of the student being increased by the rimless glasses upon his long, but well-shaped, nose. He was neat in appearance; his clothes were skillfully cut and fitted perfectly; his collar was rather high; his necktie effective and in the best of taste. As a matter of fact, such a youth was out of place in

this city-hall office, where most of the clerks were political henchmen, a rough, good-natured, boisterous, rollicking lot, who did no more work than was necessary and who relied upon pull to keep them in their jobs.

His desk was as neat as its occupant; his papers were well arranged; his blotter was spotless; there was no dust on it. His was the only clean desk in the office. Resting on the blotter were a pair of celluloid overcuffs to keep his linen cuffs clean, and he was sitting on a felt pad warranted to prevent the seat of his trousers from becoming shiny.

IN those days they still employed the word "dude," and the boys in the office used it in reference to Graham, both in his hearing and out of it. Not only that, but they picked on him, put work on his desk that he was not supposed to do, took advantage of his courtesy and good nature and presumed on his meekness. Fights were not unknown in that office, but Chris Graham had never been mixed up in one. It takes two to make a quarrel and he was never the other one.

He carefully completed his day's work and, at five o'clock exactly, he laid away his ledgers, locked up his celluloid cuffs in a drawer, cleaned off the top of his desk, then went to his locker. From it he drew a blue overcoat, slightly threadbare, and a derby hat, not new, donned them and started for his home.

He squared his shoulders when he left the building. How he hated that city hall and everything connected with it! Once in the fresh, cold air, he felt more of a man and less of an automaton. A short walk took him to the subway entrance, where he descended and stood on the platform to await his train. There was a rough crowd here, which shouldered and elbowed its way along; men disregarded women, and women did not hesitate to push in front of men.

They fought their way into the cars like a mob of football players, and woe to the person who did not mingle with them enthusiastically. Graham was unable to get into two trains, because he did not forget to be courteous; but he was accustomed to missing trains, and in the end entered a car. Once inside, a pert young girl turned upon him and snarled:

"Quit your shoving, you!"

"I beg your pardon! I was not shoving."

"Scuse me, 'Clarence.' It must 'a' been some other feller," she said, with a grin, as she noticed his mild, apologetic manner.

After half an hour of clinging to a strap, being stepped upon and having sharp elbows stab him, he reached his destination and walked briskly to the little gray house where he lived with his family. He kissed his mother, a frail, weary little woman, shook hands with his father, a drab, life-scarred man, old before his time, and said "Hello!" to his sister, a pretty little blonde who smiled cheerfully at him.

"War's declared!" he announced, as they seated themselves at the dinner table.

"Isn't it wonderful!" exclaimed the girl. "I'd love to be a man and be able to fight!"

"Mary, be still," said the mother, with an uneasy glance at her son.

"Pooh! Chris won't enlist, not him!" she retorted.

"I hope he won't do anything so silly," said the mother.

"This is nothing but a gesture," remarked the father. "We have no army, and if we had we could not transport it to Europe. Our part will be to supply the Allies with funds and food."

"Not so heroic," commented Chris. "Personally, it is my opinion that we

will send an army over. They are talking about conscription."

Silence fell as they ate. It was not a talkative family, and this night neither Chris nor his parents were in the mood to chatter. Mary prattled on, without much attention being paid to her.

The young man was thinking, even if he was not talking, and his thoughts were not very pleasant. He loved this family of his. They were fine and decent, but they had ruined his life and they did not understand. Everything he had hoped to be, all his ambitions, his expectations, his dreams, had gone so they should continue to eat.

WHEN he was young they had been well to do, and he had graduated from a good high school and entered college with honors and high intentions.

He wanted to be an engineer, to build bridges or great buildings, to do big things. And at the end of his second year his father had failed in business. Nothing was left; debts were smothering them. So Christopher Graham withdrew from college and looked for a job, any job.

The job came through the good will of the alderman of the district, a clerkship in the assessor's office at twenty-five dollars a week. Christopher had grasped it gladly, and he was still there, after six years, at twenty-five dollars a week. A hundred applicants were ready to take his place. if he did not like it. The family hung like a dead weight on his shoulders, absorbing his slender income. For years his father was unable to secure employment that would pay him anything, and his sister was too young to go to work. And it was only within the year that things had improved, that Mary had got a job and John Graham had bucked up and began to bring in a substantial income.

And Chris was beaten; his youth was going; he was in a rut; and he was the kind of fellow who would probably remain in it unless an earthquake removed the rut, which was exactly what was about to happen. He was too old to go back to school. All he knew was plain bookkeeping, therefore he clung to his job as a man clings to an overcoat in zero weather. If the earthquake had not happened. probably he would have grown old and gray, adding up columns of figures at twenty-five dollars per week.

His inertia and humility infuriated Marion. He had found time to fall in love, and the girl was impatient for him to amount to something.

Chris had first encountered Marion Stacy upon the occasion of her class day at Wellesley. If you have never seen class day at Wellesley you have missed one of the most charming events imaginable. The ceremonies are not in a stuffy hall, in balmy June, but are in the open, in a fairylike dell, with green trees and lovely lawns, and many delightful young women, the seniors in caps and gowns, perhaps the most incongruous costume in the world for fair maidens—yet one which they wear with pride.

Marion Stacy was extremely important in that particular class. She led in scholarship; she had delivered an oration and taken the leading rôle in the class play. She was tall, as tall as Chris, a slender, golden girl who held her head high, despite about ten pounds of lovely yellow hair; whose eyes were wide and a deep blue; whose smile was radiant; who was a living refutation of the charge that only homely girls are intelligent.

Like a moth around a flame, Chris buzzed about Marion Stacy. Her popularity was so great that she had no need of the wonder-struck, light-haired youth with spectacles. She was dominating, dazzling and brimming with assurance. He lacked all these qualities.

Just the same, she stopped her chariot long enough to tie him fast to the wheel.

She was a pacifist, with profound convictions, had written a thesis upon the wickedness of the war which won her a prize. She became an ardent suffragist as soon as she left college. Upon the occasion of a big suffrage parade in Benton, she forced six men admirers, including Christopher Graham, to march in the men's division. They marched, much to their sorrow and humiliation, for the crowds on the sidewalks, who were respectful enough to the serried ranks of women, jeered and gibed and gibbered and hooted at the downtrodden males who trailed them.

DURING the three years since her graduation, Marion had gradually eliminated her other suitors and concentrated upon the management of Chris Graham. Although he had never spoken a word of love to her, he thought she loved him, and he was deep, deep in her toils. On this evening, after supper, he left the house as quickly as he could and hastened to the apartment of Marion Stacy.

Marion was waiting for him. On the table were copies of all the evening newspapers, top-heavy with the headlines which flaunted the declaration of war.

She was sitting in a big chair, her cheeks flaming, her eyes blazing, and her pretty mouth set in a straight line. For a girl of such force, she looked deliciously feminine, as her chin was small and rounded and her smile was childlike and bland. Also, she had a dimple in the middle of her chin and another in her left cheek. These, with her big blue eyes and her fluffy yellow hair, made her look like a lovely doll, rather than a militant feminist.

"I've been waiting for you," she began. "Isn't this the most abominable outrage that was ever perpetrated by a pack of demagogues?"

"I don't know," he returned hesitatingly. "We couldn't take that last insult lying down."

"If they are mad dogs, shall we also become mad dogs?" she demanded. "If Europe is insane enough to destroy itself, shall this country, whose every interest demands neutrality, rush into the mêlée and add to the slaughter?"

"I suppose you are right." He sighed. "Marion, what do you think I ought to do?"

"Do? You? Nothing! What should you do?"

"I don't know."

"Do you want to go to war?"

"I certainly do not! I've read enough about the way they kill each other Over There not to stick my nose into it, if I can help it."

"I forbid you even to think about it!"

"Oh, come now, Marion! I've got to think about it. I'm a man of military age."

"You are a fool," she retorted. "I am going to join a society which is being formed to oppose the war. I heard about it to-day. You must join it with me."

"I'll be hanged if I do!" he protested. "I may get out of fighting, for which I'm not proud of myself, but coming out in opposition to the government when it has declared war—nothing doing!"

Marion's indignation which had been impersonal up to now, centered upon her admirer. He squirmed indignantly in his chair.

"Do you believe in this war, by any chance?" she demanded.

"Well, I think it has to be won! The Allies can't do it alone, and it's up to us to help them."

"Christopher Graham, I've a good mind never to speak to you again!"

"Why should we quarrel about a national policy?"

"Because it is dupes like you who are responsible for this policy. If the intelligent men in America rose in their might, they could force Congress to rescind this mad act."

"Anyway," he said doggedly, "maybe I won't have a chance to decide. Suppose they have conscription? I am of military age. I have nobody depending upon me now. They'll grab me first shot off the bat."

"I suppose they would," she said. Curiously enough, that angle had not presented itself to her, and it required a measure of reflection. She knit her brows.

"I'll tell you what," she suggested. "We'll get married. I know you love me—you needn't bother about a declaration of affection; there have been too many of those to-day. That's it! I'll marry you right away, and then let them dare to take my husband!"

"Marion, do you mean it?" he asked incredulously, unable to understand his good fortune.

"I intended to do it some time. Why not now?" she asked in a matter-of-fact tone.

"But I can't support you. We'll have to wait until I make more money."

"Oh, I'll go on teaching. You go on working, though why you stick to that miserable position has always been a mystery to me."

"Because I have never been able to get another. No, it won't do."

"Of course it will!"

"No," he declared. "I may be a sort of coward, for I am afraid to go into the trenches, but I won't marry a girl to get out of being drafted. I could never look you or myself in the eye again."

"Nonsense! You are a silly sentimentalist."

"I won't do it! But—I'll be engaged. You have to be engaged to me, because you have agreed to marry me. May—may I kiss you, Marion?"

She considered. "'Um, yes, I suppose so. Here, on the cheek."

But Chris had his arms around her, and he pressed his lips to hers with zest. She felt herself being inexpressibly thrilled; her eyes softened; finally she pulled herself away with a laugh of girlish confusion.

"Goodness, Chris, I didn't say that you might eat me!"

"I've always wanted to."

"And you promise not to enlist?"

"Not now. You bet I won't go away from you until they drag me away."

International affairs were no longer discussed. The haughty young woman had ceased being so aloof. At midnight Chris floated home on air. He was engaged and happy, and the war was a long way off.

THOSE were brave days that followed. Patriotism was in the air; the recruiting officers were on every corner; meetings were being held; various causes were screaming for contributions; bands were playing; drums were beating; the war delirium was at its peak. In the assessor's offices there were already vacant desks. A dozen men rushed off to the marines and the navy and the regular army, and the national guard was filling up its ranks.

The ex-assessor's clerks who had uniforms came in to be admired.

Congress passed the conscription act and authorized the drafting of men between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-one. We were to have an army of several millions of men.

In the meantime, Christopher Graham had come to a decision. That he would be drafted was obvious; he was unmarried and his age was well within the draft limits. Since he must go to war, and because he had a good education and some scientific training, he might as well become an officer. In that way he would be of more use to

his country, and he would earn more money.

Christopher Graham was so constituted, it so happened, that he hated the idea of soldiering. He was delicately nurtured; he was fastidious in his tastes; he loved good food well cooked. Worse than the enemy's bullets, he dreaded the life of the camp and the fare of the doughboy. Probably the officers would live under better conditions than the men, would get better food and have more opportunities to take a bath. Without consulting Marion, he applied for the Plattsburg officers' training camp.

Even a pacifist like Marion Stacy could not but be affected by the general "hip-hip-hurrah!" Everybody in the world cannot go mad with patriotism and not shake the convictions of a young girl not lost to impressions. Besides, Chris had convinced her that his fate was certain. Womanlike, she preferred shoulder straps to the costume of a private.

SO, when the appointment to Plattsburg came, she did not make his last moments with her miserable. Instead, she busied herself about his comfort in camp and began to knit. And the day came when Chris Graham said good-by to his family and his sweetheart and the crowd at the office and took his train. As he was one of the last to depart from the assessor's office, they did not make a fuss over him, but his family and Marion made up for that.

If Christopher was not a hero, at least he did not give himself credit for false motives, as he made the first move which would eventually land him in the trenches to be a target of bullets and shells, of air bombs and poison gas. In his secret heart he knew he was going to officers' training camp because it would be less unpleasant to be an officer than a private soldier, because he would draw more pay, wear better clothes and perhaps eat better food.

So far as going to war was concerned, he didn't want to go. If it had been a question of volunteering, he did not think he would have become a soldier. In that, however, he did not give himself sufficient credit; he had a fair share of self-respect, and he could not have endured the looks of mothers and wives and sisters whose men had already gone. In time, the cheers for departing soldiers, the bands playing, the flying flags and the patriotic speeches would have made him enlist. Graham would have gone as a soldier, all right, though he might not have been among the first to be recruited.

But he did not look forward to his coming experience in the training camp, with its ceaseless drilling, its long marches, its hard, grinding labor, its drive, drive, drive. He knew he was soft. He shrank from manual work. He was not social. He dreaded association with the other young soldiers. Nowhere, perhaps, in the country was there any one more unsuited, apparently, to be an officer in the army and lead soldiers against the muzzles of enemy guns, not to mention two or three rows of enemy trenches. Yet he had something the government needed very badly, a brain developed so that it could think clearly, a sufficient technical training to read a map or a blue print, a latent, unsuspected courage which would compel him to accomplish things that a less sensitive individual would have been unable to perform.

He was not intoxicated with the war spirit, like several other youths in the same car, yet he was on his way, and this was rather in his favor than against it. A couple of months at Plattsburg would have turned him into a pretty good young officer, but he was not destined to remain there. A much-

more-variegated experience was being arranged for him. If anybody had told him, that day on the train, that he would be one of the first American officers to go over the top in France—he might have jumped off the train.

CHAPTER II.

THE GIRL WHO INTERFERED.

MARION STACY occupied a small apartment in an attractive residential quarter of Benton, sharing it with a fellow teacher at Miss Finley's Finishing and Preparatory School for Young Ladies. It was always referred to as Marion's apartment, and it would never have occurred to Helena Warren, who was a small, meek, mouselike little woman, ten years older than Marion but completely dominated by her, to assert equal importance in the establishment.

If nothing happened to halt Marion's progress, it was possible that she would grow into a commanding personality, perhaps she might even be a congresswoman or a governor, for she brooked no opposition, settled all affairs relating to those around her with assurance and did not dream that her authority might ever be questioned. This was rather a pity, because she was so delightfully feminine to look at, and she had a bewitching impulsiveness and an enthusiasm that was almost irresistible. She possessed her share of wiles and graces and did not hesitate to use them to assist her ends.

It took a big war to throw in her way an obstacle which she could not overcome. Even the pliant Christopher had revolted against becoming a slacker and draft dodger at her behest. Actually, Marion did not realize just how odious a creature she wanted her fiancé to become. Being entirely convinced that war was a crime, that killing was unthinkable, and a government which would order its citizens to learn the trade of slaughter a nefarious tyranny which deserved overthrow, she simply did not see what sort of man was most apt to resort to subterfuge or evasion rather than be a soldier.

Yet, so inconsistent the most intelligent and masculine-minded woman is apt to be, Marion admired Chris more when he risked her displeasure than she had ever before in her life. He had asserted himself; he was evidently brave and determined and doubly dear to her.

Being Marion, she shifted her point of view slightly. Evidently he was going to the war; undoubtedly he would be slain—for she believed that the best men are always shot down and the useless ones survive—unless she found a way to prevent it.

For a week she discussed the matter with Helena Warren, who had no other home and was compelled to hear her. It was a one-sided discussion. Miss Warren knitted sweaters placidly while Marion raved.

About the second day after the departure of Chris Graham for the training camp, Marion was reading the evening paper, and reading the war news, something she hitherto had sedulously refrained from doing.

There was a long article by an alleged expert. In those days every newspaper which did not have one military strategist had two or three. This particular genius, in describing the horrors of the trenches, made the statement that the life of a second lieutenant was only twenty-four hours.

A shriek from Marion drew Helena to her side.

"Look! Look!" she moaned. "Read that line."

Helena read it with wide eyes. "It must be an exaggeration," she protested.

"What if it is? What if it happens to be thirty-six or forty-eight hours? Do you realize that my Chris is going

to be a lieutenant, and that when he gets to the front he won't live a week, at the most?"

"I am sure it is all a mistake," asserted Helena stoutly. "There wouldn't be any officers at all, if that were true."

"I won't have it!" Marion screamed. "I won't permit it! Do you hear? I won't!" Then she stamped her foot like a naughty little girl. She rose and ran about the room, occasionally stopping to beat her fists against the wall. Then she aimed a vicious kick at a chair and missed it with her slipper, but hit it with her ankle. She began to howl with pain.

"Control yourself, my dear," said Helena, who had seen Marion in a rage before. "There isn't anything you can do."

"Is that so? I'll show you. I'll show this government. I'll make Chris resign from Plattsburg."

"But he couldn't do that. They wouldn't let him."

"He will, if I tell him to! He will do anything for me! And the government can't keep him against his will."

"Do you want him pointed out as a coward?" Helena sniffed. "Chris is a fine boy and a brave one, and you are a silly girl. I'm surprised at you for behaving so, on account of a foolish, lying statement."

"Hum!" snorted Marion, recovering most of her composure. "Evidently officers get killed because of their uniforms. It was a mistake for Chris to want to be an officer. He should be a private soldier. It doesn't say anything about all the privates being killed in twenty-four hours."

"It's too late now," said Helena. "I advise you to go to bed. It is nearly midnight."

Marion took her advice, but Helena heard her weeping in her room for a long time. She said no more about making Chris resign from Plattsburg, but her determination was none the less powerful. And as Fate fights for determined people, she found the way.

FROM abroad came a cry for workers. Over There men were in the trenches; they needed men to run machinery, particularly to operate railroads. There were women conductors on the trains already, but only men could run the engines and most of the engine drivers were at the front. Could America help?

The war department determined to organize several regiments of railroad men, and send them over at once, since they needed little military training.

The vice president of Benton's chief railroad was appointed colonel of one of these regiments. He issued a call for a thousand practical railroad men—engineers, firemen, brakemen, mechanics and trouble men. The papers carried the call, and immediately the huskies began to respond. The night the appeal went out, Marion came home with a glad light in her eye.

"Did you see this?" she demanded. "Isn't it wonderful? These men will operate the railroads Over There; they will be far behind the firing line; they will be safe, do you hear? Safe! Chris is a scientific-college man; he understands a lot about engineering; he can qualify without any difficulty. This is what I want him to do, and this is what he is going to do!"

"But you can't, my dear!"

"Can't I? You watch me."

She seated herself at the telephone and called for long distance.

"Give me headquarters of the Plattsburg Officers' Training Camp," she demanded when she got the operator.

"Oh!" breathed Helena Warren. "Oh, how can you dare?"

"I dare anything."

Marion sat at the phone for half an hour until the call came in, and then she demanded that Christopher Graham be summoned to the line.

"Sorry," said the camp operator. "You can't get any of the men in camp, unless it is a matter of life or death."

"This is a matter of life or death," she asserted. Aside she declared: "It certainly is. His life or death!"

"Wait and I'll give you his company headquarters," said the camp operator.

There was another argument with that operator, but eventually perseverance won, and Graham came on the line.

"What is it?" he demanded in wonder. "That you, Marion? Has anything happened to my mother?"

"No. Chris, do you love me?"

"Of course, darling. Did you call me for that?"

"Will you do something for me that is the most important thing in the world?"

"Y-yes, if I can."

"I want you to join the railroad regiment which is forming here. Enlist as a private. It will make me very happy. I shall be reconciled to your going to war, if you will do it."

"But I am here, in Plattsburg! I can't get away."

"You are not drafted. They will release you when you tell them what you want to do. They need technical men for this railroad regiment more than they do officers."

"That's true," he admitted. "But why do you want me to join that regiment?"

"Because I love you. Because it is the thing I wish most in the world."

"Well, I'll talk to the authorities here. If they are willing to let me go, if there is no objection, if they don't think I am shirking, I'll do it for you, dear."

"Wire me to-morrow as soon as you know. I shall be here all day. I won't go to school."

"All right, Marion. It is good to hear your voice."

"Good night, dear."

She hung up, triumphant. Helena was regarding her with a white, set face.

"You are a wicked girl!" she exclaimed. "You are interfering in the affairs of Providence. Some evil will come of it."

Marion rose and began to dance around the room. Her long hair worked loose and fell in a golden shower over her shoulders as she twirled.

"He won't be a lieutenant! He won't be killed! He'll be safe!" she was chanting.

"He might be killed in a railroad wreck, and survive in the trenches," asserted Helena. "You are wicked. No woman ought to interfere like this."

Marion ran to her, grasped her by the shoulders, and shook her violently. "Don't you dare talk like that! It's you who are wicked!" she exclaimed. "I tell you he will be safe."

AND so Chris Graham came home from Plattsburg, a bit ashamed, a bit defiant, but eager to embrace his fiancée. Chris also had read of the supposed functions of the engineer regiment. In his secret heart he was not sorry to get into an outfit which would be behind the lines. Yet he did not understand the attitude of the commandant of Plattsburg, who had sent for him personally, granted him his request, shaken him by the hand and congratulated him upon his splendid spirit.

"You'll be in it, my boy, a year before the rest of us," he said. "I wish there were more men like you."

Marion met Chris at the train, a shy Marion, a loving girl who laid her head on his shoulder. He still wore his uniform. She wept a trifle, to the edification of all observers. It was a time when beautiful girls were embracing and crying over soldiers in public, and the sentimental public loved it.

"Chris," she said, when they were in

a taxi, "we shall be married to-morrow."

"What!" he exclaimed in amazement.

"I have thought it all out. It is the only way."

"Marion," he demanded sternly, "is this a scheme to marry me and force me to claim exemption? It won't work. They won't allow it. You know how I love you, but I couldn't do that."

"No," she said in a still, small voice. "You can enlist and go, but I shall be your wife."

"But as an officer I might marry and have something to support you. A private only gets thirty dollars a month."

"I shall keep on with my teaching. I want to. I have engaged the minister and we'll have a quiet wedding in my apartment."

"You seem to have thought of everything," he murmured in admiration, looking tenderly at the flowerlike face now gazing so trustfully at him.

LOVE is blind, without question. It had never entered his mind that this sweet young girl had a will of iron and proposed to govern him as a mother would a child. All that he could think of was the sublime affection she had for him, and how happy he would be when she was his wife.

Marion chattered on about her plans for the wedding. She had engaged the minister, invited a few friends, planned a few days' honeymoon and had left no loophole for escape, if he had been reluctant.

Yet, before they reached her apartment, Chris had made a decision. He hesitated to put it into words. Perhaps he would not be able to stand firm, for with Marion he was always weak as water.

In a pause in her flow of excited talk he delivered the blow.

"I won't marry you to-morrow, Marion."

Her expression of happiness suddenly hardened, and her little chin thrust itself forward. Into her blue eyes came a glitter.

"And why, pray?" she asked with sinister softness.

"Because it is unfair to you. I may lose an arm or a leg, or my sight. I may be a hopeless cripple, and I won't condemn you to existence with me under such conditions."

"You are absurd! It's arranged for you to join the engineers. You will never be under fire."

"We can't be sure about it. I am not going to marry you to-morrow!"

The ring of determination in his voice made her change her tactics. Her lip quivered; ready tears filled her eyes. "You d-don't love me!" she said in a half-choked voice.

For answer he embraced her, but she avoided his lips.

"It's all arranged," she declared. "The invitations are out."

"This time you must change your arrangements, dear. It would be a rotten thing for me to do. I love you for wanting to marry me; I'd be wildly happy to do so; but it just isn't possible."

"You have got to!" she told him.

"No, no, no!"

"Then go home to your family. Drop me at the apartment. I don't want to see you any more."

"Marion, you don't mean it!"

"Will you comply with my arrangements?"

"I can't!" he protested, almost weeping himself.

The cab drew up at the apartment. Marion sprang out, slammed the door before he could follow, then gave the driver Graham's address. In a condition bordering on frenzy, he returned to his own house and was fallen upon by his father, mother and sister. In five minutes the telephone rang. Marion was on the wire.

"Will you come over after supper?" she asked meekly.

"Will you forgive me, and call off the wedding?" he inquired.

He heard a little sniffle, then she said:

"I can't force you to marry me, but I don't know if I can really forgive you."

"I'll be over." He hung up, but he was not triumphant over his victory. Chris understood Marion so slightly he did not realize what a victory he had won.

Marion was very sweet to him that evening, and spent part of it explaining over the telephone, to her little group of friends, why the ceremony had been canceled. She gave the information in a manner which did credit to her tact and ingenuity. Then, in a burst of confidence, she showed Chris the paragraph which had so alarmed her that she had dragged him from the officers' training camp. When he burst into loud and impolite laughter, she was furious.

"My dear child," he told her, "you don't suppose we would enter the trenches with swords and epaulets and cocked hats? Our officers will be dressed exactly like the men, save that they will not carry rifles. They will have no distinguishing marks of rank, and they will go over the top behind their companies, not in front of them, as was done during the first year of the war. It is true that the enemy picked off officers at a terrible rate until they learned not to swank, but at present an officer has as good a chance as a private—perhaps, in many cases, better."

"Maybe. I don't propose to have you in the trenches at all," she asserted.

"If I can honorably keep out of them, I won't complain. Really, I think I am more afraid of the dirt than the bullets. It gives me the creeps to think of wallowing in the mud and getting cooties."

"Then you are glad I am making you join the engineers?"

"I'm rather sorry not to have a commission, but perhaps it's for the best!"

CHAPTER III.

A FINE BODY OF MEN.

"GOOD heavens!" exclaimed a farmer's wife in Eppington, when she saw what was coming down the road from the railroad station, bound for the race track beyond. She slammed her door, hastened to pull down all the curtains and, being alone in the house, probably went to hide in the cellar, for the engineers were coming.

Straggling down the road was a mob of men, as raw and rough a throng as ever responded to the call of patriotism and the battle cry of freedom. In all the war stories you read how the clerk and the rich man's son, the grocer and the carpenter, the lawyer and the professor, the fisherman and the librarian, were lined up together in a heterogeneous mass, wearing the costumes of their classes and an expression of high determination to do or die for dear old democracy.

It happened that the engineers were selected. They seemed to be all one kind, and it was not the kind which inspires confidence in lone women in the country.

These men were boilermakers, ironworkers, machinists, blacksmiths, firemen, track walkers, freight brakemen, oilers, wipers, donkey-engine operators, lumpers around railroad yards, stokers, riveters, teamsters, truck chauffeurs, and there was a certain percentage of persons who had experience in some of these professions but for a period of years had been what are usually classified as "bums."

The call which had brought them to the colors was not the ringing trumpet

that makes soldiers. They were asked to drop their well-paid employments and accept thirty dollars a month to do the same kind of work they had always done, for the sake of a lot of "frogs." It wasn't so much the spirit of patriotism which appealed to many of them as the spirit of adventure, and the great majority of railroad workers had not been able to respond to it. Of course, there were patriots aplenty in this multitude, but there were many who didn't know why they were there—perhaps could charge it up to emotion induced by too many drinks.

Anyway, they slouched along the country road in their working clothes—big men, strong men, tough men, dirty men, rough men, savage men, battered men, pugnacious men and profane men. Their hands were large and hard; their feet were enormous; they chewed tobacco, and mostly they grumbled and growled.

AND in this unruly mob was Christopher Graham, the victim of a species of stage fright, a prey to emotions in which disgust predominated. If you have imagined a picture of Graham from what has already been told about him, you don't know the half of it. He was a Christian young man; he had taught Sunday school; the sound of an oath revolted him; he detested dirt as he hated the devil; he had never had a fight in his life; he suffered from an inferiority complex; and he was scared to death of his new buddies.

In Plattsburg it had not been so bad. Though he had not cottoned to a great many of the aspirants to be officers, they were nearly all men of some education, with a penchant for cleanliness and from the same sort of occupations as those to which he was accustomed.

But he walked in this throng in a condition of funk. He dreaded to bump against a neighbor lest a big fist knock him unconscious. He did not think there was a single man in the crowd who could not murder him as easily as one might choke a milk-fed chicken.

To tell the truth, he was not much more alarmed than the commissioned officers of the regiment. These were mostly from the clerical end of the railroad business—train dispatchers, assistants to high officials, a vice president or two, the foremen of various departments—men who could manage the rank and file of a railroad through the highly specialized organizations, but who had not come into contact with such men in bulk.

And the two or three regular-army lieutenants the government had assigned to whipping this outfit into line regarded the various contingents as they arrived with dismay. Their solace was that there was no need of making these men into trained and disciplined soldiers, but only cause to teach them enough of such few fundamentals as would enable the regiment to march and know something of military matters.

Several hundred tents had been pitched in the paddock of the race track. The space under the grand stand had been turned into army kitchens. The small clubhouse was reserved for the commanding officers. A supply of army uniforms was on hand. Quartermasters were already at work fitting out the first arrivals in clothes that came somewhere near their requirements. At the close of the day the engineer regiment was in existence, at least it was in uniform.

Fortunately, the new soldiers were taking the affair as a lark. They sported their brown uniforms proudly. They pulled and hauled and frequently fought over a shirt or a pair of pants or boots and settled many moot questions by the dice.

Chris Graham reported to the cap-

tain of his company, who authorized him to secure sergeant's chevrons and informed him that he had been appointed second sergeant of the company, on the strength of his ten days at Plattsburg.

One of the regular-army lieutenants strolled over to Captain Spayde, of Graham's company, while the new sergeant was still within hearing. With his West Point carriage, his perfectly fitting uniform and his soldierly bearing, the regular-army man was a striking contrast to the civilian captain, whose shoulders were stooped, who wore spectacles and whose manner was vague and uncertain.

"Biggest mistake the government ever made, sending these fellows to run railroads," said the regular-army man. "Give me six months to make soldiers out of them and I could take them over and win this war myself. It is, without exception, the toughest, hardest, nerviest, most devil-may-care aggregation that I ever saw assembled in one place, and they would go through the enemy like a hot knife through cheese. Why, bullets would bounce off of them, and shrapnel wouldn't even tickle them!"

"Men are needed to run the railroads," said the captain, "and that's what my men are going to do."

"Rats! These fellows are fighters, and all hell couldn't frighten them. And I'll bet you a dollar to a doughnut that they are heard from Over There."

Chris Graham didn't hear any more because he was on his way to secure his chevrons. Privately he would have preferred not to have it. He was afraid his tongue would stick to the roof of his mouth when he tried to give orders. He felt like a green animal trainer who is asked to enter a cage and beat up a dozen furious lions. Suppose they refused to do what he told them—what then?

MARION had escorted her fiancé to the railroad station in Benton, but they had agreed that the parting should be brief. She might visit camp on Sundays. The young woman, however, less than two hours after he had departed, exercising the reasoning power of which she was proud, decided that there was no reason why she should not go at once to Eppington to find a place to board. Even in such a small town there must be houses where a soldier's fiancée would be taken in as a paying guest. As she usually acted as soon as she had a thought, often in advance of it, late that afternoon she piled into a train with two suit cases and descended upon Eppington in the twilight.

She was determined to board as near the race track as possible. Chance directed her to the farmhouse whose mistress had fled to the cellar when she caught her first sight of the gallant engineer-rookies. Mrs. Martin, being patriotic and believing that she might be safer from patriots with another woman in the house, showed Marion the best room, even offered to take her in without payment, since she was the affianced bride of a soldier.

Marion was bubbling with glee to think that she had accomplished her purpose. After a delicious supper, she started for camp to find Chris.

In the gathering dark she walked briskly down the road, passing, here and there, a soldier or two and observing that there were several girls who had already made friends with recruits. In time she came to a place where two soldiers sat idly on a stone wall.

ONE of these soldiers was a brakeman named Luke Manning, who boasted that he had thrown more bums off moving freight trains than any two brakemen on the New York, New Haven & Hartford. He was about six

feet tall, a burly, bushy-haired, snub-nosed, bull-headed young man, with a body like a barrel and the gentle disposition of a wild boar.

He had struck up a friendship that afternoon with his companion of the evening, because he stood next to him in line and because they were the same kind of folks. Jack Cunniff was a puddler in a steel mill, who could work twelve hours a day pouring molten iron into a fiery furnace and drink steadily for six hours after that, pouring fiery liquid into his own furnace. They had been sitting on this stone wall for half an hour, and nothing in the least interesting had occurred up to this time. Now Jack jabbed Luke with his elbow.

"Hey, bo!" he said. "Do you see wot I see?"

Luke took a look. "Do my eyes deceive me?" he said, with a wide smile which showed a lot of crooked fangs and much gum above and below them. "Can it be a girl that ain't got no friend?"

"And she's out looking for a soldier."

"Yah."

"Well, ain't we soldiers?"

"Yah. Sure we are. We got uniforms."

"How about us being her gen'men friends."

"Maybe she's got a friend."

"Yah. Anyway, one's better than nothing."

Thus it happened that Marion, as she passed under an arc lamp in the road, was suddenly confronted by two of the roughest-looking specimens who ever wore the uniform of Uncle Sam.

She looked up brightly. They were soldiers and comrades of her sweetheart.

"Good evening, gentlemen," she said. "Am I on the right road to the camp?"

"Oh, sure," said Luke, bobbing his head politely. "What you want to go to the camp for? Looking for a soldier?"

"Yes, I am."

"You don't have to go no farther, kid," declared Jack. "We're a couple of honest-to-Gawd soldiers. Got our uniforms this afternoon."

"I happen to be looking for a particular soldier—Sergeant Graham," she said with a rather glassy smile.

"Don't know him, but what say take a walk with us? We're good guys and we'll treat you right, hey, Jack?"

"Sure. We know how to treat a lady."

"Will you men kindly let me pass?" demanded Marion.

"Wot's yer hurry?" protested Luke. "We ain't got a thing to do, and maybe this guy you're looking for's got another dame on his hands. Fact, I think that's the sergeant we saw walking along with the fat blonde. Hey, Jack?"

"Sure, that must 'a' been him."

"If you don't step aside out of the road, I'll scream," said Marion, now thoroughly alarmed.

Luke laughed, as though he heard something enjoyable. "Did ye hear that, Jack? She's going to scream."

"'Sall right with me. Go ahead, kid. Wot do I care?"

"Give her something to scream about," proposed Luke. "We ain't done nothing 'cept be polite. How about a kiss, hey?" He leaned his head toward Marion with what he hoped was a fascinating smile.

Marion had enough. She uttered a piercing shriek, followed by a second and a third. And it happened that around a bend in the road was Sergeant Christopher Graham, who had started for a stroll to meditate upon his hard fate. That Marion was in the vicinity was farthest from his thoughts, but there was something about the cry which jolted him into activity. He broke into a run and came into view

of the trio under the arc light, just as Luke was reaching out a huge paw to lay it upon Marion's arm, with no fell intent, just a pleasant caress. And the sergeant recognized his sweetheart.

THEN and there Sergeant Christopher Graham, the pensive, the considerate, the meek and the timid, went wild. With a roar he flew over the ground and hurled himself upon the unexpectant Luke Manning as a tiger leaps upon an elephant.

"You beast, get away from her!" Graham bellowed, as he slammed a hard right into the chilled-steel chest of the brakeman.

Luke regarded him with the surprise that a tomcat would feel for a mouse that became belligerent. "What's chewing you, kid?" he growled. "This ain't none of your business."

"You get away from my fiancée! I'm going to kill you," sputtered Graham, delivering a second ineffective blow.

Luke raised one of his eyebrows and cocked his head toward Jack Cunniff as he considered this. Meanwhile he caught Chris by the throat and held him at arm's length.

"His financier," he remarked in his bull bass.

"His girl. That's different," said Jack Cunniff.

"Let go o' me! Put up your hands, you big stiff!" shouted Chris Graham.

"You don't want to fight me, kid," protested Luke. "You're going out of yer class."

"Chris, I forbid you to fight this brute!" exclaimed Marion.

"You be still," he snarled at her. "What are you doing here?"

"Take yer spectacles off. It's ag'inst the law to hit a man with goggles," said Luke.

"Wait a minute, Luke," cut in Jack. "This guy is a sergeant."

"What the hell is a sergeant? He passes me a couple of wallops and wants more. I don't care if he's a general. I got to hit him once."

Chris, whose rage was unabated, took off his glasses and squared off. "Come on," he requested. "Come on. I'll show you—insulting a young girl."

Luke regarded him rather kindly, now that he saw that the sergeant was fifty pounds lighter and three inches shorter than himself.

"Little boy, where wuz you brought up?" he demanded. "Don't you know that gents don't fight in the presence of ladies? As a matter of fact, me and my friend didn't mean no harm. We seen a good looker and tried to get acquainted, and we didn't lay a finger on her. She just got scared. Did I touch you, lady? Wasn't I perlite?"

Marion bit her lip to keep from laughing. "I don't like your manners, but perhaps they were the best you have," she said. "Chris, please don't fight. I don't think these boys meant any real harm."

"He's a regular bantam," admired Jack. "Look at him! That ain't the way to hold yer fists, feller. Put yer thumbs outside or, you'll break 'em."

"Please, Chris!" pleaded Marion.

"All right," said Chris, coming to his senses. "Attention, you two. I'm your superior officer. Heels together, toes apart, head back, eyes front. Right face! Now march to the camp and go to your quarters. You won't scare any more girls to-night."

The rookies wavered, then obeyed his command. After all, he was a sergeant, and something vague and terrible might happen if they refused to obey military commands.

They began to walk campward, but as they passed, Luke turned, with another of his horrible grins, and one big hand slapped the sergeant on the back.

"You're all right, sarge," he declared. "And that jane of yours is a strawberry sundae."

Alone in the path, the young couple's hands met. The man who gazed at the earnest feminist, however, was not the man who had been sauntering down the road a few minutes before. In his soul had entered a strange peace. His heart was a stout heart; his timidity had vanished. It was Sergeant Graham of the United States army who then kissed a half-hysterical young bride-to-be.

He had given his first commands and they had been obeyed. Even these hulking half savages knew better than to defy the chevron on his arm. He was fully aware that he would have been beaten half to death by the burly brakeman, if the dim shadow of authority had not halted Luke Manning.

When Chris had given the military commands, he had little hope they would be obeyed. These men were one-day soldiers, ignorant of discipline, by nature rebellious, accustomed to strike first and think afterward—perhaps. Yet they had straightened up instinctively. They had come to a slouchy attention, and they had marched forward toward camp with some appreciation of their situation. Perhaps they might even go to their quarters, though that was too much to expect.

But the important thing for Chris Graham was that the apparent peril of the woman he adored had given him power to command. And he now knew that he could command the unruly soldiers with whom he had placed himself. If he was under a hundred and fifty pounds in weight, with a clerical stoop and nearsighted eyes, if he did not know how to use his fists and if he still feared he would cut and run at the first whine of a bullet, he was a sergeant, and behind him was the whole army and the government of the United States and the president and all organized authority, and it would enable him to knock the spots out of mutinous morons who had put on the uniform.

So Sergeant Graham kissed Marion. Then he chided her gently for her boldness in approaching camp after dark, and he blessed her for the affection which had brought her to Eppington and sent her in search of him. He walked home with her and sat on the stoop until he heard in the distance the first notes of a trumpet blowing "Tattoo." Then he ran all the way back to camp.

The next morning early, when F Company was assembled, the captain turned the company over to the second sergeant for instruction. The assessor's clerk began to knock that hopeless outfit into shape with a speed and precision that awakened the admiration of the commissioned officers and the other sergeants, none of whom had ever done a day's drill.

CHAPTER IV.

"HAY FOOT, STRAW FOOT."

IN the meantime, things were happening in regiment headquarters. The colonel and his staff had taken count of stock with the regular-army inspectors and, with unusual self-abnegation, the commanding officer proposed that he be dropped to lieutenant colonel and a regular-army colonel be given command of an outfit that needed iron discipline. His suggestion was accepted, and a West Point captain, promoted to wear the eagles, was sent hastily to take over the job.

Chris Graham looked over his noncoms and found them to be bright railroad boys, one of them the nephew of the president of a big road, enthusiastic, anxious and entirely ununiformed. Although Chris had been less than a fortnight under the intensive training at Plattsburg, he found himself a reservoir of military knowledge for the whole outfit.

As drillmaster of the company, he told the officers and men where to stand

and what to do, and they obeyed his orders meekly. Even the enlisted men wanted to know something about the business of soldiering, and he found himself barking out orders and watching them being followed in sad but earnest fashion. He was fortunate in owning a penetrating baritone voice; until this time he had never heard himself shout. After three solid hours of hard work, he had taught the company how to stand and how to accomplish simple marching movements.

WHEN work with the company was halted for a few hours, Graham held school for officers, the captain and lieutenants poring over their drill regulations, asking strange questions and endeavoring to memorize the words of command.

"Gosh darn it!" burst out Captain Spayde, after an hour with the I. D. R. "I came into this man's army to run railroad trains, not to be a tin soldier. I don't see why we have to get this stuff up, just like the infantry or the cavalry. Why can't I say, 'Come on, fellers!' and let it go at that?"

"We've got to train these men to obey orders, and we have to get them from place to place in military formations, because those are the quickest and most efficient ways to move a large body of men," explained Sergeant Graham.

"Oh, sure, I suppose so!" retorted the queer captain. "But it sounds like a lot of nonsense to me."

Chris was sitting on the steps of the grand stand, munching a corned-beef sandwich and drinking from a tin cup of very hot and dreadful coffee, when two shadows on the ground in front of him made him glance up. There stood the villains of the night before, Luke Manning and Jack Cunniff, two sheepish-looking monsters, with placating grins on their rough-hewn faces.

"Say, sarge," began Luke almost shyly, "me and Jack, we was watching you to-day, and we want to tell you yer all right, see? Darned if you ain't there! The captain is a fathead and those lieutenants are all wet, but you're reg'lar. Ain't that so, boys?"

"Why," said Chris, flushing with pleasure, "thank you, boys."

"Sure!" continued Luke, pawing the ground with one big foot in the manner of an army mule. "And we thought we ought ter tell you that we're darn sorry 'bout last night, getting fresh with your girl. We didn't mean no harm. She was awful pretty, and we was lonesome and we thought maybe she wanted to meet some soldiers. See?"

Chris got up and put out his hand. "Forget it, fellows. She told me you hadn't done anything very raw. But you must admit you don't look like a couple of *Romeos*."

"It's this way, cul," declared Jack. "We want to learn how to be soldiers, see? We only joined this gang because we heard it was going right over. When we get there, we're going to desert and join up with the frogs or somebody that is in the fighting. We ain't going to run no railroads. To hell with that!"

Chris regarded them with new interest. These two big roughnecks were patriotic. They wanted to do something that he had not wanted to do, get into the fray, and they were in the outfit simply because it would land them overseas sooner than any other. And they had a lot of decency down under their thick hides.

"You mustn't tell me your plans," he said, with a smile. "It's my duty to report you, and see that you get no chance to desert. But you have the right spirit and I'm glad to know you. When my fiancée comes to camp, I'll bring you up and introduce you properly."

"Aw," protested Luke, "she don't

want to see us any more! But we're for you, kid, because you know something, and so's all the guys in the company. And if anybody picks on you, just tip us off, see? We'll fix him! Guess you could manage anybody yer size all right, but there're a lot of huskies in this outfit."

They slouched off, leaving the young sergeant beaming with pleasure. The men of whom he had been afraid were his friends. And the company wasn't going to be mutinous; they wanted to learn, darn it! They were all good Americans and fine fellows and he would have to hump himself to be as good as they were.

AS he mingled with the regiment, he found a number of young men in the ranks who seemed as out of place as he had supposed himself to be. There were half a dozen college undergraduates who had lied themselves into the regiment. There was one young South American who had been educated at Oxford and who didn't know there was anything but first class in European trains.

Perhaps the queerest member of the regiment was a physician who had been a society doctor in Benton, who had earned a big income by curing imaginary ailments of rich women and who had been appointed a medical captain. While the regiment remained at Eppington, these patients continued to call on him, coming down to the track in their limousines and making pained grimaces as they encountered the various wrought-iron countenances of the enlisted men.

Chris gradually acquired a little group of friends from different companies. While he enjoyed his good standing with the roughneck element, he could not yet fraternize with them or get any fun out of what he considered their rather terrible sports.

The thing which irked him most was their indifference to dirt. In civil life, many of the men had considered a bath as something to be postponed as long as possible, and a pair of socks was not dirty so long as it didn't have too many holes in it.

The new colonel quickly established a system of shower baths and enforced washing, but he couldn't keep many men from sleeping with their clothes and boots on.

As drillmaster of the company, Chris had no difficulty in securing special privileges from his captain; thus he was able to spend nearly every evening in the company of Marion on the porch of the farmhouse. At the end of a fortnight, he got permission to accompany her to Benton for twenty-four hours. They heard a symphony concert in the afternoon, went to the theater in the evening and sat up talking until after two in the morning in the pretty living room of her apartment.

Marion had been affected by the regiment as it had affected many of the officers when they first looked it over; she didn't think its members fit associates for her future husband, and she was full of the subject of transferring; by this time, however, Chris felt that he had transferred enough.

"I joined this outfit because you pleaded with me to do it," he told her. "I can't shift now, and if I could, I wouldn't. I don't consider my conduct so far as highly creditable, and if I've made a mistake, I'll make the best of it."

"But you're going to be sent to France soon! If you had stayed in Plattsburg, you would have been there two months and then go to a training camp and stay there six months—and —and the war may be over by that time!" she wailed.

"It's too late now, darling. You put your oar in, and this is the result. Much as I hate to leave you, I want

to go to France now. After all, it's the first adventure of my life."

"You don't love me!" she protested.

"You became engaged to a soldier," he returned, smiling. "Now you've got to make the best of it."

"When do you think you'll have to go?" she asked, wiping her eyes.

"Search me."

As she escorted him to the train—it having been decided that she was not to go back to Eppington to live—a gawky youth who was selling souvenirs approached them.

"You in the engineers?" he demanded.

"Yes," replied Chris.

"Wot you doing up here? You guys pull out to-night."

"How do you know?"

"I know."

"Just one of those unfounded rumors," Chris assured Marion, whose blue eyes had widened with alarm at the thought of embarkation.

But it turned out not to be the ordinary rumor. When Chris got back to camp, nobody had heard that the regiment was moving, yet in the morning the orders came. They were to take special trains for an unknown destination, and that meant that they were going to sail.

Meanwhile, Marion had rushed home, borrowed money from the janitor and other occupants of the apartment house, succeeded in getting the loan of an automobile from a friend, and started at top speed for the camp. She arrived to find no orders, but in the morning they came, and she saw her Chris with his regiment go on board the train.

There was nothing to do but return to Benton by automobile. As she passed the railroad yards at Benton, she saw the troop trains stalled in the yard. Evidently the regiment would sail derect from Benton, instead of New York, as they had supposed.

THAT night they sailed. At two a. m. they marched quietly to the steamship pier, going through the streets of the sleeping city and being conducted to the dock with as much secrecy as possible. They found a big transatlantic liner lying alongside, with all lights out. By the aid of lanterns, the lines of soldiers went up the various gangplanks. In the midst of this secrecy, suddenly a burst of martial music rang out. A brass band was playing "Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean."

Officers cursed and steamship officials wrung their hands. The colonel, in person, tore the baton from the band leader and brought the music to an abrupt stop.

"Who the hell told you to play?" he demanded.

"The commandant of the port," was the reply from the leader of the band, which belonged to a regiment encamped in the city.

There was a hurried search for the commandant of the port.

"Did you order that music?" demanded the colonel.

The officer smiled benignly. "I thought it would cheer the boys up a bit," he replied.

This official was an ex-regular-army captain who had been promoted to be a major and given command of the port. An examination next day proved that he was crazy. And that was that!

One of the commandant's last official acts had been to give Marion a pass to the pier. Armed with it, she managed to get on board the boat. The astonished colonel allowed her to find her fiancé, and there was time for a last embrace before the lowering of one gangplank after another warned her to go ashore.

"You'll take care of yourself!" she pleaded.

That moment the towering Luke Manning touched her on the shoulder. "We'll take care of him, miss," he as-

sured her. "We're for him, Jack and me. You 'member Jack—he was with us the night I got fresh? We'll take care of the sarge."

Then Marion was standing on the pier while the big black ship moved slowly, almost imperceptibly at first, then more rapidly until she seemed to be slipping by at express-train speed. And Marion saw the vacant slip where the boat had been, while out in the stream the vessel was swinging around and pointing her nose to sea.

THIS was the middle of July, 1917; these were the first Yankees to start, except the regular-army first division. Two million more men were to go during the next year, but the slim, blond, weeping woman on the pier, pacifist, antimilitarist, suffragist, manager, by her own contriving had sent her pliant young sweetheart in the first handful overseas.

Even now she did not know what she had done. She supposed it was for the best, that war-jaded foreigners were going to interpose their own men in front of these strong, fresh young Americans and put them in a place of safety.

Somehow Marion got home, entered her little apartment, woke up the sleeping Helena Warren, and sobbed for an hour in her arms.

Marion had always considered Chris a weak man. His futileness, his helplessness, his honesty and his sweetness had awakened in her an affection that was three quarters motherly. She had accepted him in preference to more stalwart individuals who had pursued her, because she thought he needed her more than the others. She had the directing instinct, and she believed that he had good stuff in him and that she would make something of him.

Marion had always managed people. In her own home, at an early age, she had dictated to her parents. At school, she had ruled an adoring throng of classmates. In the teaching profession, she conducted her classes with admirable discipline. She was confident, assured of her superior knowledge, and she plunged ahead at whatever she thought she should accomplish with a marvelous lack of the uncertainty and doubts which beset ordinary people.

Her mind was of the single-track variety; her vision had blinders on it, like those on a horse, so that she saw only in one direction. At present all that she could see was that a senseless government had intruded into her life and stolen her man. Unless she did something about it, she was in danger of losing him forever. And, for the first time in her life, she didn't know what to do. The Atlantic Ocean was rushing between them, and the gap was widening every minute.

As the days went on, her energetic nature found an outlet in the activity against able citizens who had decided to stay at home. She wrote letters to the papers railing against young men who took commissions in the quartermaster's department, young married men of means who sought exemption from the draft, young men who went into the Y. M. C. A. and the other helpful organizations, when they were of an age to volunteer in army or naval units.

By this time she had forgotten the reasons which had induced her to pitchfork Chris into the engineers. All that she appreciated was that her sweetheart had gone to France ahead of almost everybody else, and there were millions of men around who ought to hurry up and go over to help him.

Marion was so pretty and so earnest that she got attention where iron-jawed women of uncertain age were disregarded. She succeeded in creating quite a disturbance in Benton until somebody organized a women's motor

corps for service in the city. She joined it among the first, and received a very attractive blue uniform, which set off her fair hair and big blue eyes most effectively. Then her energy was utilized to the full.

There was a colonel of the regular army, in charge of a department with headquarters in the city, who approved of her very much. When he needed an automobile, he would telephone to the women's motor corps, and when a dashing chauffeur would drive up to the front of the building, he would look out the window to see who she was. If it happened to be an ordinary member of the corps, he sent an aid on some errand and phoned for another car. Sometimes he had to do this five or six times before Marion rolled up to his door. Then he would descend, smiling, and take a long ride. Several generals and colonels acquired the same habit, and Marion became so influential that she could have arranged for Chris to be assigned to home service for the entire length of the war, if she could have laid her hands on him. But he was somewhere overseas. However, she was so physically tired from dashing madly through the streets regardless of traffic that she fell into bed every night and dropped off to sleep before she had a chance to start worrying about Chris, which was a blessing after all.

CHAPTER V.

DODGING THE SUBS.

IN the meantime, Chris Graham was on the ocean. The steamer upon which the engineers had sailed carried, in her first and second cabins, several hundred staff officers going to Pershing's headquarters in Paris. The enlisted men of the regiment had been assigned to the steerage. Not only the steerage, but the cargo space had been turned over to troops, and a large number of temporary bunks had been placed away down in the depths of the ship, where there was little air and no ventilation, because bales of cotton and grain in bulk had not needed such trifles.

It happened that F Company had been quartered right down on the flat bottom, with its bunks against the sloping steel sides of the refrigerating plant, always dripping with dew. The dampness, the heat, the odor of human beings and other things, combined with the rolling of a ship which happened to have little cargo in her holds and too much upon the various decks, made the entire company sick the first night. Chris got no sleep and went on deck for setting-up exercises, determined that no human power would force him below during the remainder of the voyage.

There happened to be a deck cargo aft of automobile trucks, and in the chassis of one he and a young sergeant from another company, who happened to be a college man, fixed up mattresses and blankets and made use of their rank to shoo enlisted men away. During the entire voyage they slept on deck. Even when it rained and they got soaking wet, they were happier and more comfortable than if they had been buried in the depths of the liner.

As the days passed, more and more men shrank from going into the depths of the ship to sleep. They were approaching the part of the ocean believed to be infested by submarines. From the bottom of the vessel, where F Company was berthed, to the top deck was about the height of a ten-story building on shore. The ascent from the lower decks was made by a series of steep ladders. Even the most unimaginative of the engineers could appreciate that if a torpedo did hit the ship below the water line, they stood a better chance of rescue if they were on the top deck than if they had to make the climb from the hold, with the prospect of a Niagara of sea water pouring

in through the side of the ship and tearing them off the ladders.

To the landsman, even more than to the mariner, the submarine peril was too dreadful to contemplate. They tried not to think about it, and during the daytime they banished it pretty well from their minds. At night, however, when it was forbidden even to light a cigarette on deck or to talk above a whisper, when there was nothing to do but watch the stars and wait until sleep came, they thought about it a-plenty. It was the awful unexpectedness of the shot from the unseen that terrified them.

More than these green soldiers were terrified. Veteran captains of liners grew old in a few months; from hale, hearty sailors they became shivering bundles of nerves, their faces heavily lined and their hair prematurely gray.

One night the lieutenant in charge of one of the destroyers which was escorting the flotilla of liners of which the *Ardenia,* carrying the engineers, was one, saw a whale spout, and he immediately opened upon the beast. Whereupon all the other destroyers began to fire, and the naval-reserve crews in charge of light batteries on the liners cut loose.

Chris was sleeping soundly, but the first shot woke him, as it did everybody else in the fleet. The terrific crashes of the guns on the silent sea must have alarmed old Davy Jones, far below in his locker, and its effect upon the Americans and the equally untried Canadian troops on the other vessels was indescribable. Every moment they expected to feel the quiver of their own ship as the torpedo struck her.

But most of the daring submarine captains of 1915 and 1916 had found watery graves Those who now commanded the subs had a healthy regard for their own welfare. They avoided convoys and sought victims in solitary merchant ships. No submarine attempted to attack this fleet, though there were two or three scares before they reached Liverpool.

THE food served to the A. E. F. soldiers was so bad that Chris, with his delicate stomach, could not eat it at all. He and several others lived during the voyage upon crackers and chocolate, purchased from steamship stewards at high prices. The time was coming when he would be able to relish the crude dinners that the incompetent army cooks manufactured out of good supplies, but he was still far from being a real soldier.

F Company contained a number of expert crap shooters and large quantities of amateurs at that fascinating sport. Luke Manning told Chris that two out of every three men had a set of dice and half of all the dice were loaded.

Those who didn't roll the bones played cards. They staked their ready cash, their coming pay envelopes, their presents, their baskets from home and even parts of their uniforms. The dining room which was used as a lounge for the men during the early evening resembled one of Bret Harte's mining-camp saloons, the resemblance being heightened by the stewards rushing about with foaming tumblers of beer and glasses of stronger drinks.

The officers of the regiment suspected what was going on, but they didn't want to know, so they kept aloft in the airy salons of the first cabin. Chris managed to avoid the saturnalia without getting in bad with his men. As a matter of fact, the air of the steerage dining room was so thick with tobacco smoke, the floor so slippery with overturned beer, and the oaths were so appalling and hair raising that he much preferred the clean, salt-air-swept deck, even when it was a trifle cold.

A Y. M. C. A. official who was trav-

eling first class on the steamer ventured down one night and received such an abusive welcome that he fled to the colonel of the regiment with a threat to notify the American authorities ashore of what was going on.

Colonel Grant smiled and asked him what he suggested.

"I understand the rules of the United States army require abstinence from intoxicating liquor!"

"Do you mean to inform me that my men are drinking?" asked the colonel in mock surprise.

"No question about it, sir."

"Don't you think it wrong for this steamer to serve them with alcohol?"

"It most certainly is."

"Very well; please make a complaint to the owners of the line. When I get my regiment ashore I'll speak to them about it."

So that was the end of complaints. The regular-army colonel, who knew his men and understood their frame of mind, had no intention of starting something he was doubtful he could finish.

And in time the regiment arrived off the Mersey, to meet with a new submarine scare. An enemy sub was reported to have entered the river. The entire fleet turned and steamed out to sea, until a squadron of sub chasers had time to sweep the river and assure them by wireless that all was well.

Now this curious organization of Americans made an astonishing and gratifying discovery: In the eyes of the people of Liverpool they were something extraordinary. The city was en fête. Though there were ten thousand Canadians in the fleet, it thought only of the Americans. When the outfit was put ashore, they found a multitude assembled to see them. As the Canadians had been sending over troops for three years, they were an old story. The Americans had come in; they were actually landing troops, and the war would soon be over! And war-weary England was thrilled.

WHILE the regiment had drilled on the boat, there had been no opportunity to march. It was more like a mob than a military organization as it passed through the streets, headed by a magnificent, kilted band sent down by a Scottish regiment. Their passage to the trains was a triumphal progress. Luke Manning was hit in the face by a huge bouquet of roses, the thorns of which cut his chin, and the pretty, red-cheeked English girls patted Jack Cunniff, who was No. 1 private in the front rank of F Company, as he stepped it along the gutters.

They camped at Oxney, at Hagest on the Mount, a famous training camp where they were introduced to tents. In Eppington they had slept in and under the grand stand and in huts.

Chris had lost five pounds during the voyage as a result of his diet. That night they ate food from British kitchens, and he did not get half enough. He sat on a bucket outside the tent to which he had been assigned. His mind was busy, not with thoughts of Marion, but with a juicy porterhouse steak with mushrooms. He noticed two shadows slipping by him.

"Who's that?" he demanded sharply. "Attention, you men!"

The shadows resolved into a couple of soldiers. As he peered into their faces, he recognized Luke Manning and Jack Cunniff.

"What are you fellows up to do?" he demanded.

"Say, sarge, you hungry?" whispered Luke.

"I'll say I am!"

"Jack and me spotted a British chuck wagon, see? There's only one Tommy on sentry between here and it, see? We're going to try to get by him and raid it. You ain't going to stop us are yer?"

Hunger conquered the sergeant's scruples. "I'll go with you," he said.

Crawling on their stomachs, the three men wiggled past the sentry, who thought no evil, not being aware of the lack of principles among hungry Americans. When they sought the chuck wagon, they were dismayed to find it gone, but by this time hunger had made them desperate. They passed another British sentry and reached a small hut known as a "mess shack," the door of which was unlocked.

All through the war the English fed their soldiers well. Inside the shack they found a side of beef and large quantities of milk, sugar, jams and fresh bread.

With their jackknives they hacked huge chunks from the beef and, laden with spoil, began a cautious return to their own camp. It was achieved in safety. Some distance behind their tents, they built a camp fire and proceeded to cook their meat.

They set their delicious steaks upon pieces of board and were beginning the joyous labor of eating when Colonel Grant suddenly strode into the light of the fire.

"What are you men about?" he demanded. "What have you got there?"

The three culprits stood at attention. Chris felt the chevrons already being stripped from his arm.

The colonel sniffed delightedly. "Steak!" he exclaimed. "Sugar, milk, jam, bread! For Heaven's sake, where did you get it? No, don't tell me. I hereby declare myself in."

So the colonel of the regiment sat down on the thick English grass and ate the stolen feast with his sergeant and two privates.

When the last morsel was gone he said: "Men, I suppose you stole this grub from the English. Don't do it again, but, if you do, remember that the old colonel likes good things, too!"

"Say, colonel, I'll go over and swipe some more right now, if you ain't had enough," said Luke delightedly.

"No. You might get caught. Imagine them giving these Tommies jam," Colonel Grant remarked thoughtfully. "And our men get little sugar, butter or canned milk. Holy Moses!"

With this he faded out of the light of the camp fire, and the men contentedly sought their tents. It had been a big night.

CHAPTER VI.

BEFORE THE KING.

THE regiment had expected to spend several weeks at camp, getting into condition to go to France, but things were happening in old England which changed the plans.

The British people were fed up on the war. They had come to the conclusion that it was going to last forever or end in defeat. Confidence was at a low ebb. Few thought that America would be able to send over an army. The news sent out by the censor that Americans were already in England, only a few months after the United States entered the war, was generally disbelieved.

It happened that the British public had been lied to before. The previous year the war department had allowed a report to go forth that a big Russian army had been landed in England to help defend the island. The nation had gone wild with enthusiasm until it discovered that it was a phantom army.

This time the authorities had the goods, and they wanted to show it. They asked that the regiment go to London and parade, to prove to the doubtful that Americans were actually in England.

The colonel refused. "These men are just railroad workers. They are not trained soldiers. They will make a holy show of themselves in a parade, and I won't permit it!" he declared.

But the British war office had influence. It cabled to America. It called on the American ambassador and the general who had been sent to England to establish relations with the British army, and the word came back to bring up the regiment.

The King of England in person would review the troops. Queen Alexandra would also be present to review them, and so would the lord mayor and the British commander in chief and everybody else. Down came a squad of British drill sergeants, and the engineers were given three days in which to learn how to march.

The captain of F Company was in a state of terror. He never could remember commands. Once he had marched his company into the rear wall of the grand stand at Eppington, the only word to stop them that he could think of being "Whoa!" He immediately promoted Chris Graham to be his right guide, so that the sergeant could prompt him when he needed it.

Unaccustomed to rifles, they had to carry heavy Krags. They worried over the length of the regulation step. They had to think of soldierly bearing and a score of other things which they had seldom considered.

The psychological effect upon the English of the American uniform had outweighed all the arguments against the review. With a heavy heart, Colonel Grant took his regiment to the trains and descended in London at Waterloo Station.

CHRIS had feared the effect upon the men of the great, strange city. He was alarmed lest their lack of discipline would cause them to break ranks to beat up any spectators who might make disparaging remarks. National pride was called upon to persuade the men that for once they must behave.

It happened that these troops had plenty of national pride. They might be what they were, but the reputation of America hung heavy upon their souls. Even the irrepressible Luke Manning threatened to lick anybody in the squad that cut loose. The pseudo-soldiers drew up in London with the determination of the corps of West Point cadets to astonish the natives with their soldierly qualities.

That parade! Chris got a confused idea of Buckingham Palace, Trafalgar Square, the American embassy and Waterloo Station. He saw multitudes of people lining the sidewalks, but they were all blurred. He watched his captain with anxiety, and the captain clung close to him with even more anxiety.

A magnificent British army band swung into the head of the line, playing "Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit Bag," and the regiment was off.

There were plenty of gibes to be overheard. One urchin shrilled from a side street:

"Come on, Jem, and see the soldiers!"

"These oin't soldiers; they're Amuricans!" retorted another, which convulsed a multitude, but the engineers were too worried to smile.

As the parade approached Waterloo Station, what seemed a thousand little forms in black smocks were perched on poles and trees and other points of vantage, like huge flocks of English sparrows, and they raised piercing little voices in the song the band was playing. They were war orphans from a near-by asylum.

At that moment the tragedy of war struck home to Chris, perhaps for the first time. The pathos in those voices penetrated the gruff exterior of Colonel Grant, who, straight as a ramrod, with the stride of the old soldier, marched ahead, tears coursing down his bronzed cheeks. Seeing this, in a moment the crowds on the sidewalk understood. Everybody wept, including

the roughest of the American engineers, and for a block or two all that was heard were sniffles and choked sobs.

The Americans had arrived! They were going to hurl themselves against the foe. It was hands across the sea at that moment.

Then they passed out of the zone of sorrow, walked amid cheering crowds.

The men, intent upon their step and alignment, never turned an eye to see what was happening on the sidewalks, never cracked a smile. And this caused an Englishman in the crowd to remark in a loud tone:

"They're solemn-looking blokes, wot?"

Farther on, a woman cried shrilly:

"Smile! Why don't you smile? Don't Americans ever smile?"

But these standard bearers of the American nation could not smile; they were watching their step. Most of them did not even dare to look at the king when they passed the royal reviewing stand. At the conclusion of the short parade, the entire outfit was nervously exhausted.

Unaware of the character of the troops, some of the London newspapers next day commented upon the slouchy appearance and poor marching of several of the companies, but others extolled the magnificent physique and obvious determination of the men. As a matter of fact, not even the Guards regiments possessed so many tall and powerfully built fellows as these railroad workers.

AND thus ended the glorious side of war, the applause of multitudes, the music and the parades. Two days later they were slipped across the Channel and landed in France through the port of Boulogne. The grim, gray, stupid, weary, deadly, monotonous grind had begun.

Back in Plattsburg, the classmates of Chris Graham were still plugging away at the "School of the Soldier." He was in France, within hearing of the big guns.

That march through London had put unusual emotions in the mind of Chris Graham. At first he had been thrilled beyond imagination. After all, it was a marvelous privilege to be a member of the first American regiment that ever marched through the great capital in wartime. It was a joy to see that the American flag was everywhere, flying on flagstaffs with the Union Jack, entwined with it upon monuments and public buildings, thrust out of the windows of homes and offices. It was wonderful to see vast multitudes of eager Londoners with tears of hope and affection in their eyes; to be the bearer of good tiding to a brave and kindred race fighting a great fight, almost beaten to its knees by a remorseless foe, yet struggling still; to be the visual assurance that mighty aid was coming.

To the credit of Chris Graham, it must be admitted that the conditions preceding America's entrance into the contest were not such as to attract intelligent youths. For three years we had been regaled with details of the conditions of modern warfare, its horrors and atrocities. Romance and chivalry were dead. Men did not fight hand to hand; they lurked in holes in the ground and were occasionally blown to bits by shells fired by unseen gunners shooting at unseen objects, the cannon three or four miles from the places where the shells exploded. And we knew all about poison gas in America. Probably large numbers of young American soldiers were thoroughly scared at the thought of what was in store for them, just as terrified as Chris Graham had been.

Now these things counted for nothing. War enthusiasm had him in its grasp and, like a race horse at the post, he was impatient to start a sprint.

He talked it over with Bert Leslie, another college man, who was a sergeant in Company B, and found Bert was also fired by the experience of the review. They decided to get out of the outfit, if they could manage it, into the first fighting regiment that came to France. The bland satisfaction of the rank and file was incomprehensible to them, for the majority of the men took the reception as a personal and well-deserved tribute. Luke Manning did say that he hoped some of the enemy would get on the railroad track, so he could run over them with his locomotive, but that was about the extent of the impression the sights of London seemed to have made on the average enlisted man.

Chris Graham's first feeling of exultation faded quickly, however, and was succeeded by a sort of shame and humiliation. What right had he to the applause of multitudes? He was accepting it under false pretenses. He was no valiant American, dashing, at the first toot of the trumpet, to defend his flag and theirs. The valiant Americans who had volunteered and joined the regulars and the national guard upon the declaration of war were still in camp in America, champing and fretting at their inactivity. Through no will of his was he leading a company—or practically leading it, because the captain was so stupid—through the streets of London. Chris had been pushed into these ranks because his sweetheart wanted to keep him out of the trenches. He was a fraud, a sham.

As he looked back, he marveled now at the tranquillity with which he had learned of the declaration of war, and he blushed at the cowardice which had caused him to hope that he need not enter it. So far as he could see, he had exhibited no merit whatever in going to Plattsburg; it was merely bowing to the inevitable and seeking the least unpleasant path.

And he was burning with shame, because he had been that kind of a young man. For some time the militant spirit had been creeping into his soul; perhaps it had begun the night he had overawed Luke and Jack and learned that he could command men. Now it was crystallized, and he recognized that he wanted to be a soldier. He was anxious to exchange buffets with the enemy. He didn't want to operate railroads in the south of France; he yearned to get into the front-line trenches and lay down his life for his country and those pitiful war orphans who had sung, "Pack Up Your Troubles." And somehow he was going to do it.

CHAPTER VII.

"YOU'RE IN THE ARMY NOW!"

"SO this is France!" said Jack Cunniff, as they marched through the streets of Boulogne Sur Mer on the way to the camp outside the city. "It ain't so much."

"These frogs ain't so much," agreed Luke Manning, as his eyes swept along the throng on the sidewalks. "And yer can't understand anything they say."

"Might be a lot of wops," agreed Jack. "The little kids is just as bad. They jabber the funny lingo, too."

"Yeh," commented Luke. "How the hell we going to get along? How d'yer say, 'Gimme a drink?'"

"I dunno. Maybe some of them talk United States."

"They don't look as though they knew enough. This is a hell of a note!"

The pair were silent as they trudged along. With fifty-six pounds on the back and a heavy rifle on the shoulder, even the two young Hercules were not in a merry mood, and the horrible tragedy of being in a country where they were just the same as deaf and dumb had burst upon them suddenly.

"I s'pose somebody can talk our

lingo," Jack observed, after a little. "They have frog officers to tell us what to do."

"To hell with them! How we going to talk to the girls?" groaned Luke.

"Ain't seen any worth talking to yet. I thought French girls was peaches; these are all prunes."

"Yeh. Wish I was back in Eppington. 'Member that red-haired one that we met on the road near the camp, and her friend, the Murphy girl?"

"Yeh. These French janes are the bunk."

So two disillusioned doughboys plodded on their way. In truth, the bourgeoises and ouvrières of Boulogne who crowded the sidewalks and shrilled welcome to the stalwart Yankees were not well-selected samples of the women of France. They were poor; their clothes were old and worn; they were not in the least like the dashing French demoiselles of the burlesque shows in America, who spoke a fascinating broken English and who threw wicked eyes at the patrons of the front rows.

Like the English, these people were urging the soldiers to smile, but the engineers were weary, and they didn't see anything at which to smile. They were as solemn as a lot of work horses and much more fatigued, and the drab inhabitants of the town did not perk them up a bit.

THE ordinary American is a serious-minded person. He will smile when he is pleased and laugh loudly when he is amused, but the continuous cheerfulness, the irrepressible gayety, the quick laughter of the French, even the curious waggishness of the cockney, is not a gift that has crossed the Atlantic.

Did you ever see a plumber smile, or a carpenter, or was there ever a merry bricklayer except an Irishman recently arrived? Yet the American workman is the best paid, best fed, best treated and ought to be the most contented individual in the world. His sense of humor is unsurpassed, but he just isn't given to foolish mirth. What laughing the boys indulged in was not complimentary to the French. The Americans saw a squad of little French poilus in their ill-fitting uniforms of light blue, and they jeered among themselves. They noticed an elderly woman who kept a delicatessen shop and who had black hairs on her upper lip and chin.

"Pipe the bearded lady!" said Jack Cunniff out of the side of his mouth.

"Throw us a kiss, sweetheart!" called Luke, with a leer, whereupon the whole column relaxed into grim grins, but they were not smiles.

What could the French expect? Here was a regiment prepared to be received by rows of girls as beautiful as Irene Bordoni, in comic-opera costumes, and they saw what looked like the foreign colony of Benton. Dour and disappointed, the regiment marched on to its camp.

"What an oil can Boulogny turned out to be!" growled Luke Manning, as the column emerged from the city and hit a dusty dirt road.

In his secret heart, every man in the regiment had expected to pass his spare time in the company of several dizzy French blondes, and they had met disillusion. After that, nothing mattered very much.

A French military band had accompanied them through the city; now it fell out, and the regiment marched without music. The dust was white and penetrating. It got into their mouths, noses and eyes. They felt it creeping down their throats. The companies ahead raised a cloud of it, and those behind plunged into the cloud. Soon their uniforms were covered with a fine powder. It created an overpowering thirst which they could not slake. The road led upward, always upward, and the packs grew heavier and heavier.

Somebody started to sing "The Last Long Mile."

This, however, was not a singing aggregation. American soldiers do not, as a general thing, sing as they march; they don't feel that way, and music doesn't fascinate them, anyway. A score of voices snarled, "Aw, shut up!" "Close yer trap!" "Listen to the blithering nightingale!" and the song bird was quickly silenced.

MOST of the men had sore feet. They had raised blisters in their tramping over London pavements, and they hadn't learned yet how to coddle blisters. Oaths began to be heard. If the men were not songsters, if they were not gifted with Gallic gayety, they possessed a variety, elasticity, and most astounding proficiency in profanity. In innumerable and brilliantly picturesque ways they cursed. They cursed the war, the officers of the regiment, the commissary department, the camping arrangements, their packs and everything else they could think of, including the leading companies which raised the dust.

Later, when they were better acquainted with army ways, they learned to throw away their packs, assured that they would soon acquire others without too many questions being asked, but they did not dare ease themselves in this manner at present. In the end they arrived at the camp, exhausted, footsore, weary and disgusted, already forgetful of the glory that had been theirs in London town.

Chris Graham was as tired as anybody else. He had not learned how to march twenty miles in a day and think he was getting off easily. Profanity sickened him. He hated the men; he hated the army; he hated the war; his high resolves of the day before could not stand the strain. He thought of Marion, cool and sweet and smiling. He thought of a hotel bathroom, gleaming white, of hot water and soap and soft, fresh Turkish towels. He even regretted the comparative ease and comfort of the assessor's office, whose inhabitants were models of elegance and refinement beside his present comrades.

What a colossal joke the army was! You were led into it by flags and music and pretty girls and flowers, and you thought only of the heroism of it, and all it turned out to be was dull, stupid, dirty monotony. What a fool he had been!

More than anything else the barbarity of equipping a noncombatant regiment with Krag rifles exasperated him. From the time they had been issued, not a single lesson in their use had been given, which, perhaps, was fortunate, since the blamed things had been reposing in arsenals since the Battle of San Juan Hill, in 1898, and they might have exploded. They weighed eleven pounds, two pounds more than the Springfield rifles which were being used at American training camps. To all intents and purposes they were dummy guns, and there wasn't a cartridge in the regiment to go with them.

The regiment lay that night in tents and slept like exhausted dogs, to discover in the morning that they were to be trained in the use of gas masks by foreign officers.

Gas masks! Over the regiment swept a queer smell; it was a rat they smelled. Gas masks for railroad engineers—where in hell were the railroads? In no-man's land?

Whatever had been the original intention of the French in asking for railroad operatives, this regiment would never be of any use to them. The British had transported it to England, had landed it in their own zone of France and had coolly appropriated it for their own use. And as the men thrust over their faces, pulled off and put on again the instruments of torture, they heard

a low, faint rumbling, like Hendrick Hudson playing at bowls in the Catskills. It was not thunder; it was distant artillery. The war wasn't very far away.

In the afternoon, word came that a British general was coming to inspect the regiment, and consternation reigned. It does not seem possible that the outfit could have reached France still shy important items of apparel, but that was exactly the situation. In London, they had saved themselves by excusing a number of men from the parade. But before this argus-eyed martinet, what chance did they have?

There was "Fat" Clark, who from the waist up looked like a soldier, but still wore blue serge trousers because there wasn't a pair of pants to fit him. "Skinny" Sawyer had lost the entire seat of the trousers and had been traveling for days with his poncho draped over him from his belt down. And there was "Big Bill" O'Brien, who still wore a gray suède suit and pearl-buttoned shoes. They had not been able to find army shoes that would go on his No. 14 feet. "Swede" Johnson wore a blue shirt instead of regulation khaki, and Tom Blanchard had putties that wouldn't meet around his giant calves.

The regimental quartermaster appealed to the British near by, and they kindly came to his assistance. In the end they repaired the most glaring defects, but the result was bad enough. Colonel Grant lined up his men with a pale, humiliated face. The British general came and inspected—his expression was quizzical, then astonished, in the end he was laughing.

"Kindly understand these men are not supposed to be soldiers," said the colonel.

"They do not travel under false pretenses," the general returned, smiling. "In my time I have seen many queer and fantastic aggregations, but this is the damnedest-looking regiment I ever saw! But they are a wonderful lot of men, just the same, and I am sure they will deliver the goods, as you Americans say."

"Thanks for so much," grumbled the colonel. "Do you know what we are supposed to do?"

"Don't you?"

"Haven't the slightest idea."

"Well, you go to the Arras sector. We are connecting all the camps and towns in that district with narrow-gauge railroads, running as close to the front as we dare. Your men are to operate these roads."

The colonel's face grew bright. "Why, we are to see service!" he exclaimed. "We'll be under fire!"

"If you have half your men in six months, I shall congratulate you," said the British general.

CHAPTER VIII.

FORTY MEN, OR EIGHT HORSES.

IN half an hour the word percolated through the regiment, and the effect was marvelous. If there was a man in the outfit who was not delighted that he was going to be exposed to danger, he managed to conceal it.

"We're not such a lot of false alarms after all!" Chris exclaimed. "All the time I supposed we were fooling the people of London, but we were being fooled."

"Yeh," grumbled Bert Leslie. "We are to be targets all right, but where's the fun for us? We can't shoot back."

"Our self-respect, man! We can go home and face the folks."

"If we ever get home. I suppose the enemy is going to love to see railroad trains running just back of the third-line trenches. I suppose their artillery isn't going to get the range of our tracks."

All over the regiment they were talking excitedly. They even forgot to grumble at the usual bad grub.

The following day, orders came to entrain for their work sector, and the regiment marched down the hill to Boulogne, through the city to the railroad yards.

When they left Eppington, they had traveled in Pullmans and day coaches, in England in comfortable third-class carriages. Now they got their introduction to troop trains in France. Awaiting them was a long train of queer-looking box cars on high wheels, and on the side of each car was inscribed: "Forty men, Eight Horses."

The word passed down the line: "Get your men into the cars, forty to a car."

For a moment it looked like mutiny. The men regarded the freight cars with indignation and disgust.

"Travel in them things? What do they think we are? Pigs?" demanded Jack Cunniff. "To hell with this war!"

"Into the cars, boys," shouted Chris, whose astonishment was as great as the privates, but who remembered that he was a sergeant. "Step lively now; forty men in this car. Hip, hip, hip! Help each other up."

Grumblingly they obeyed, grunting and swearing, but climbing obediently through the side door.

NOW it happened that the legend "forty men" applied to Frenchmen; forty of these particular Yanks required at least thirty per cent more room. Besides, their kits were the old-fashioned army knapsacks of 1898, not the more scientific kits of later expeditionary troops, and they took up a lot of room. Chris was the last of the forty men to scramble in, and he could hardly wedge himself through the door. Then a French trainman slammed the door shut and locked it on the outside, with a small brass padlock.

The roar from the mob inside was like the bellowing of a herd of indignant bulls. They kicked at the sides of the car, pounded on the door and received no attention whatever. The same thing was happening all along the line, and presently a sound like the whistle of a peanut stand was heard and the train began to move slowly.

It was hot inside the car. There was little air. The men were packed together like sardines, and they found it impossible for more than half of them to be seated on the floor at one time. Chris invented a game of choose-up sides, and they threw dice to see which side would sit down first. When the standees demanded their turn, the squatees refused to budge. In the heated interior began a rough-and-tumble battle royal which had no serious results, because there wasn't really room to swing fists.

Hours went by as the train moved like a snail. The suffering became almost unbearable. Then the car slowly bumped to a halt and the side door opened. Those nearest attempted to leap out, but several French soldiers with bayonets deterred them. Two French crippled soldiers then approached with two baskets. In one were forty apples; in the other were forty onions. An apple and an onion for each man—lunch!

Suddenly the peanut whistle blew and the train started, with the side door still open, an oversight which saved many from being asphyxiated from the fumes of forty onions.

Half an hour later the train stopped again. Word was passed along that the men might get out and stretch for a short time. Chris, who was at the door, was hurled headlong to the ground in the mad push for fresh air and elbow room. And once on terra firma, the regiment cursed long and loudly.

Only a few rods away was a wire-inclosed stockade, and Luke Manning was the first to observe something unusual.

"What are them things?" he demanded.

Chris looked and saw tall black and brown men, with huge white turbans and gleaming white teeth, grinning at them through the wires.

"They must be Sikhs!" he exclaimed. "Lets have a look at them."

A flock of doughboys sauntered to the wire, and a mob of Sikhs came out of huts and returned the scrutiny with equal amusement.

They were a regiment of Indian lancers, Sikhs, who wore long knives in their belts and who had managed to brighten up their khaki costumes with bits of color. And they were covered with barbaric ornaments. They had earrings, bracelets by the dozen and even nose rings.

One very big man with a square, black beard appealed to Luke Manning. Luke tried to converse with him and was answered in a curious jargon.

"Oh!" exclaimed Luke, in deep commiseration. "The poor guy! Do you know what he said to me? He said he didn't have any nose ring. He's got the holes and nothing to put in 'em."

"Poor fellow! Ain't that a shame? Oh, oh, oh!" groaned half a dozen, in mock sorrow.

"Ain't got a nose ring?" asked Jack Cunniff, hustling up. "Well, now, ain't that too bad? I'll give you a nose ring. Jocko. Here you are, old boy. Put it on, like this, see."

And he passed through the bar a shining little brass padlock which the delighted Sikh immediately placed in his nose. Jack thrust in his hand and snapped the padlock shut.

A bellow of wild laughter arose as they recognized that Jack had kindly contributed the padlock of their box car. The trainman could not lock the door on them any more.

The rest of the trip was less terrible, because they kept the door open. The train moved so slowly that men jumped off every now and then and ran alongside.

IT was nearly dusk when their destination was reached. Arras was a town which had been fought over a dozen times, and so damaged by shell fire that few houses were standing. Just now it was in British hands. Who would possess it on the morrow, nobody knew.

There were very few inhabitants visible, and the men had no chance to inspect their first ruined town. They were formed into line and marched some distance to the rear of the town, where they found a rest camp already occupied by a couple of British regiments, recuperating from a tour of duty at the front. The brief glimpse of Arras had sharpened the curiosity of the Americans and made unbearable the standing order which defined the much-restricted limits of camp, prohibited anybody from going beyond the limits and established a chain guard to see that nobody disobeyed.

Up front, as Luke Manning put it, only a few miles away was being given a performance of the greatest show on earth. The long rolls of thunder, the occasional bursts of spiteful crackling and the kettledrum pandemonium affected them as the blatting of a circus band inside the tent excites the small, penniless children outside. They wanted to see. It was penance to be within five miles of the theater of action and not get a peep at it.

Their anxiety was aggravated by the behavior of the veterans, who swaggered around and patronized the Yankees, told them tall tales of adventures in the trenches, and jeered at them for a lot of laborers instead of first-class fighting men.

The attitude of the Tommies and the Yanks already being dubbed doughboys, although the word technically

means infantry as opposed to cavalry, resembled that of strange dogs who regarded one another with mutual interest and contempt. These Americans were ready to resent a sneer with a quick fist. Therefore, a few two-person battles began. So long as individual fights did not grow into riots, little attention was paid to them.

The engineers were supersensitive about their old-fashioned, useless rifles and their funny campaign hats, unchanged in style from the Spanish-American War. The others, with their steel helmets and their comfortable uniforms, had a lot of fun about these trifles.

On the other hand, the Yankees found a subject of mirth in the British trousers, which came halfway up the stomach and were held in place by suspenders. The Tommies, therefore, had to wear coats. The Americans, though, with their neat belts, were able to wander around coatless. The argument of suspenders versus belt was never settled. The war did not last long enough.

CHAPTER IX.

A FRONT-LINE TRENCH.

CHRIS struck up an acquaintance with three British noncoms, which grew into ardent friendship over a bottle of Scotch. Chris had never taken a drink of strong liquor in his life, until he joined the army, but the drinking water in France was so heavily impregnated with chlorine that it made him sick. Therefore, he had been forced to wet his whistle with French wine, beer, and even stronger beverages, like many another ex-white-ribbon youth.

Upon one particular afternoon, the Tommies volunteered to take him and Bert Leslie on a tour of the frone-line trenches, provided they could run the guard.

Since the day that hunger drove him to raid the British mess hut in England, Chris had lost any scruples he might have had about slipping by sentries. He yearned to be able to say he had actually been at the front. He and Bert accepted the kind invitation, which meant the guardhouse for hosts and guests if discovered. They slipped out of their quarters shortly after four o'clock and edged over to the spot where they were to meet the three Tommies.

They discussed ways and means for a few moments before beginning the enterprise, then were alarmed by the appearance of two figures from behind a splintered oak tree beneath which they had assembled. Chris laughed as he recognized the pair; they were Luke and Jack, who had become his shadows.

"Going up to the front, sarge?" asked Luke ingratiatingly. "We're going with you."

"Who are these blighters?" demanded one of the English sergeants indignantly.

"A couple of fellows in my company."

"Well, we can't take the whole blithering Yankee outfit up, you know!" he protested.

"You can't go, boys," said Chris severely.

"Oh, sure, we can go!" declared Jack. "You can't stop us."

"I blooming well can!" declared the Englishman.

"We go or we tip the guard off, you fathead!" Jack assured him.

"Oh, let them come!" laughed Chris. "They'll behave and we can sneak by all right."

"No more. If another blasted Yankee shows up, it's all off."

"Us four and no more," promised Bert Leslie. "Now, you big stiffs, we're all under orders to these chaps and don't you go calling them names or starting any fight."

"Why do you think we can make the front line?" Chris inquired.

The English sergeant grinned. "It will be tea time. All the officers will be in their dugouts for an hour and the men won't say anything when they see us."

"The sentries?"

"Give them some of your Yankee cigarettes."

AS it fell out, it was very easy. The camp guard was bribed with cigarettes, and they walked briskly toward the front. Presently they descended into a muddy ditch which was a communicating trench, and in which they didn't meet a soul.

They passed a ditch at right angles, where they saw some soldiers squatting who paid no attention to them. Presently they emerged into a deep trench where all was calm and serene. A sentry there accepted a handful of cigarettes and asked them if they were a parcel of blasted tourists. Another asked where they got their hats.

"Do you mean to say this is the front-line trench," asked Chris incredulously.

"You're right it is!" said the chief guide. "And if you stick yer ugly Yankee mug above that parapet you'll soon get a peep hole through yer brains, if you got any."

Chris had been in a state of intense excitement at the prospect of being actually at the front, and the placidity and serenity of this resting place let him down. The potent liquor inside of him was doing its work, too, and he had a sense of unfairness that he had come to see the war and there was no war.

"Aw, there ain't nobody over there at all! Yer stringing us," declared Luke Manning. "Watch me call this bluff." He stepped upon the firing step and pushed his hat above the parapet.

They waited breathlessly—nothing happened.

"What the hell!" exclaimed Jack Cunniff. Whereupon he thrust his headpiece into plain sight.

Chris and Bert Leslie caught the fever and there were four American campaign hats in full view. Then came a crack and a spat. A bullet hole appeared in Chris' hat. A handful of dirt fell into the trench on the other side, where the lead imbedded itself, and, laughing or swearing, half a dozen Tommies pulled the quartet off the firing step.

"You blasted jackasses!" exclaimed the sergeant who had guided them. "Do you want to start a new war? Get out of here as fast as yer legs will carry you."

"Aw, what's the harm?" protested Luke. "He didn't hit us."

"To hell with you! The whole damn army will be over here to find out what kind of troops are holding this trench. They never saw any hats like that before. Beat it quick, before we get arrested."

They legged it into a communicating trench just in time, for men were tumbling out of the dugouts, and behind them they heard a rattle and crackle and zip and snap as a whole section opened fire on that particular front-line trench.

It took them an hour to get back to camp and then they realized that they had to run the guard to get in, as well as out. But these sentries were ready to be bribed, and they escaped punishment.

Chris was already a very different man from the shy, timid youth who had gone to Plattsburg. He weighed six or seven pounds more; his cheeks were tanned and his eyes clear; he had lost his clerkly stoop; and he had learned to eat about everything that was set before him, for there is a limit to the length of time a fastidious man can fast.

More important than these things

there was a striking change in his mental attitude. Marion might have said that he had coarsened. He had certainly toughened. He could sleep in a closed tent with nine roughnecks and sleep hard and long. He had no fear whatever of the huskies around him. Although they were physically superior to him, they rather admired him, and it was not entirely the sergeant's chevrons which had won their respect. The feat of getting under fire that day awakened envy. Luke and Jack gave Chris full credit of responsibility for the affair and elevated him to the position of a new hero.

And now the regiment was split up and assigned to different sections of the network of railroads. Chris' battalion was marched to a long line of freight cars of the gondola type, not unlike our railroad coal cars. The men packed themselves in as they had done before, with the advantage that they were in the open air and could observe the landscape, and the disadvantage that they were covered with soot and half blinded by coal dust from the engine.

HOWEVER, it was not so had a ride compared to their first one. On the other hand, the narrow-gauge road ran parallel to the front, over ground which the British had recently won from the enemy. It was a ghastly landscape, not a blade of grass or a tree, the earth shell torn and death ridden, dotted with bodies yet unburied, and others which had a mere sprinking of dirt over them, so that a gnarled hand or a tuft of hair, a boot or a coat tail spoke mutely of the end of a Tommy, a Canadian, an Aussie or an enemy. It was a stark, chaotic country, with, here and there, splintered, shattered tree trunks.

Even the most exuberant of the men grew somber at the terrible picture which reminded Chris of some of the drawings of hell in Doré's illustrations of Dante's "Inferno."

As a fitting climax to the mood engendered by the day's desolation, they rolled, at dusk, through the ruined city of Bapaume, as bleak and desolate as the ruins of Pompeii. A couple of miles farther on, they descended from the train to camp for the night upon a dust heap which had been the pretty village of Pozières. Nothing had remained standing in this village. Every house had been completely leveled. Only a bit of bare flagging here and there told that the main street had been paved.

Tents had been erected and fires were lit, which were carefully screened from enemy airplanes, which were always flying and spying. Chris sat with a little group which included Fat Clarke, Luke Manning and Jack Cunniff, and they ate the chow from the cook wagon without complaint because, after what they had seen, they were glad to be alive.

Luke was extremely serious, his long grotesque countenance twisted with thought. He had taken off his shoes and was toasting his stockinged feet at the fire.

"Listen, fellers," the brakeman said solemnly. "I been thinking, and it suddenly come to me that this outfit is the biggest collection of suckers in the army."

"You said it," agreed several.

"Yah, but why? We come over to run trains, but we didn't have brains enough to ask what was going to be in the trains. I kind of thought it would be pretty girls."

"There ain't none over here," declared Jack. " 'Member the crows we saw in Boulogny?"

"Stead of that, what are we going to carry? Shells, that's what's going to be in the trains, big shells for the guns. And suppose one of these enemy planes drops a bomb on a train? Hey? What becomes of us? Hey? They can mail

what's left of us home to the folks in an envelope."

Chris laughed. "Has that only just dawned on you? Why, I suspected it when we landed at Boulogne, as soon as I heard about these light railroads."

"Yah," continued Luke, "this is the worst job in the army. They can hit these trains with heavy artillery. If the train is half a mile long, just one hit and there'll be a hole where it was, halfway down to China. That's why they give us the hullaballoo in London. They wanted to make us feel good before we blew up."

"The boy is right," Jack Cunniff nodded. "Why, these Tommies are safe enough in the trenches! We was there, and it wasn't nothing. But riding on a train load of ammunition—mother of Moses, I wish I was home!"

"'I want to go home, now, away from here,'" somebody began to chant mockingly.

"We're a gang of heroes; that's what we are," continued Luke, "a lot of boob heroes. No wonder they sent to America for guys to run these trains! Everybody else was scared of 'em."

"I'm glad of it," declared Chris. "I've been ashamed of myself for ever enlisting in an outfit that wasn't going to see any real service."

"Oh, sure!" agreed Luke. "I ain't complaining—much. Only they had ought to told us. They should have given us a chance to get into some nice safe outfits like the navy or the infantry."

"The cavalry, they're the boys that have the snap."

"Don't you believe it," Chris grinned. "They take the cavalry off the horses and make foot soldiers out of them, and they eat the horses. It's the horses that come over here under false pretenses."

"Sssh!" cautioned somebody. "A plane."

"Kick those fires out, damn you!" shouted a lieutenant, as he ran along the line. "They're against regulations. You'll get us bombed."

"If they drop a bomb, I bet you I don't get hit. Two to one, I don't get hit," offered Jack Cunniff.

"I'll take you," said Luke. "Two dollars to one. Hold the money for us, sarge."

Chris took the money, then they listened to the rumble of an airplane propeller of a low-flying plane. Suddenly there came a heavy thump on the ground not far away. The men threw themselves on their faces—after a moment, cautiously raised their heads.

"It's a dud," exclaimed Jack. "Give me the money, Graham."

A swinging fist caught him on the side of the face, as he was climbing to his feet, and knocked him over.

"Gimme me the money, sarge!" demanded Luke. "I bet him he would get hit if they dropped a bomb, and he did. I hit him."

"It's yours," said Chris. "Let's find that bomb."

They approached it cautiously, then discovered it was a square block of wood and to it was attached a note. Chris tore it from the string that fastened it, opened it and read it in wonder. It read:

Welcome to the American engineers.

"We only just got here!" exclaimed Luke. "How did they know?"

"I've got to take this to the captain. We'll probably have to change our camp," declared Chris, and hastened off with the missive.

"That guy in the plane could have murdered us just as well as not," remarked Jack Cunniff. "Say, those birds ain't such bad scouts."

"Wait a minute," said Luke. "The bet is off; that wasn't a bomb. I'll throw you whether I owe you two dollars or four."

Ten minutes later the order came

to shift camp. The outfit settled for the night in an open space about a quarter of a mile away, being careful this time not to display a light of any sort. A healthy respect for enemy aviators who could drop a missile so truly had arisen in the hearts of the battalion.

IN the morning they got down to work. They found that the Allies had built a network of light, narrow-gauge railways which radiated from Albert, the hub, to Arras, Bapaume and Peronne—not far from the front, which at that time ran along the line of those towns, only a few miles to the eastward. Military organization was abandoned during working hours; a brakeman became a brakeman again; a conductor took up his old job; an engineer went into the cab, and so on down the line of occupations. Captain Spayde immediately became important.

"When running a rattler, the conductor is the boss, fellers, whether he's a sergeant or an enlisted man. This ain't the army now; it's railroading!" he declared."

Chris had been a clerk, so he became a clerk again. His headquarters were in a hut near Albert, and he took his orders from a lieutenant who had been a train dispatcher. All train crews had to turn in reports and this office became the statistical department of the whole outfit.

The little trains chugged about, performing all sorts of service. Sometimes they carried British soldiers, sometimes neatly packed shells which they ran as close to the lines as the rails permitted and then waited while motor lorries carried away their freight. Often they went by with groaning Tommies, wounded at the front.

The battalion knew there were other American troops in France. The whole first division of regulars were somewhere in the line. There were five or six other regiments of engineers, like themselves, operating trains for the English and French, but for weeks they did not see an American, and they learned to greet Canadians like long-lost brothers.

Luke Manning, as brakeman, had a very pleasant duty to perform. He closed the doors of the box cars on the British and Canadians impartially, snapped the padlocks and then reviled them to his heart's content, secure in his knowledge that they couldn't get out. On the other hand, he looked up one day and saw an enemy plane just in the act of dropping a bomb on twenty gondolas laden with high explosives. Luke was sitting on a big shell at the time and was so paralyzed with fright that he wasn't able to move. But he began the first prayer that he had said since he was a child at his mother's knee.

"Now I lay me down to sleep.
I pray the——"

At that moment the bomb landed in a big shell hole a hundred feet from the track and exploded. As the force of the explosion went downward, nothing happened, except an eruption of dirt and gravel.

"Yah, you big stiff, you couldn't hit a barn door with a cannon ten feet away!" he bellowed, shaking his fist at the unhearing aviator, who was making for his own lines, pursued by two Allied planes.

One fine day, a train stopped because the engine had broken down just in front of headquarters shack. From it descended a variegated lot of Tommies —and a girl!

To be continued in the next issue of THE POPULAR, *on the news stands July 7th.*

Down Widow Hill

By James Parker Long

Author of "Barking Dogs Never Bite?" and other Stories.

It takes a hot fire to temper a sword that has been dulled by disuse. It took a wild ride through hedges of death to resurrect the courage and skill that had once been the inviolable possessions of the jockey, Jack Malone.

DON'T b-bet on him," sputtered Jack Malone, as he was hoisted onto the leggy black horse with the rolling eye and the rogue's hood. "I'm a fool to be taking the mount. It ain't as if this was an ordinary race. A horse is lucky if he even finishes, and when he's in the temper this beast is in—— All right, judge, I'm coming."

When the barrier snapped up, the twenty steeplechasers bounded forward on the five miles of turf, ditch and wicked fences which are known to racegoers as The Ellington Cup and to the jockeys as "The Undertakers' Delight." Last horse away was Jack's mount, a company horse ridden as a favor to the owners by the top jockey of the meeting. For a dozen jumps he ate quirt before he began to reach out, but by the time the field had crossed the first three brush fences and a Liverpool he was in the pack, ears back, teeth bared, but racing.

If ever a race should have been abandoned for the good of the sport, it was this same Ellington Cup. Its five miles of heavy turf and tricky jumps are a test even for a cross-country hunter who can take his time on the jumps. When speeding thoroughbreds are hurled over the barriers by jockeys racing for the money, jostling, cutting corners, taking chances, small wonder that it is an exceptional running when a third of the starters finish. Nor was this to be an exceptional year.

Three miles from the start, clear across the broad center paddock, is a

natural water. Here the course is narrowed by white wings to the one passable spot. Room for six horses there is and ten were coming almost abreast, gallantly using the energy which should have been saved for the final heartbreaking two miles, but was called for in hopes of being first at the bank and over before the crush came tumbling down, pell-mell.

First came the black, with Jack handriding him, as he had before each jump, in order to keep the sulky beast to his work. A momentary check, an unwilling effort and the black's front feet landed on the turf while the hind quarters splashed into the water.

A convulsive effort and Webster's bay landed, overreached, caromed into the half-balanced black and both horses and riders were down, while the rest of the pack strove to swerve already leaping horses or to stop in a stride animals traveling with the speed of an express train. One moment there was green turf stretching down to placid, unrippled water. The next there was an inferno of struggling, kicking horses and stricken men. Somewhere in that tangle was Jack.

THAT was in August. In April, Jack Malone left the hospital a well man. That is to say, the breaks had been properly set and the necessary operations had restored to serviceable condition the injured internal workings. All had been done for the physical man that could be done, and how were even the most skillful doctors to know that a part of Jack was injured which knife or splint could not reach? Pale, uncertain of step, but with an eager eye on newly returned birds and the flash of tulip and hyacinth in the parks, Jack reported at Henderson's, to thank him for the expense the company had been to and the sympathy they had expressed in their effort to make things right with the man who had been injured riding their horse. Then he bought a ticket to Chicago.

Mollie—Mollie with the pert, uptilted nose and the provocative eyes—had gone to visit her mother, pending the time when her husband could again be with her. He could not ride for several months, and Mollie and he could take that vacation and see some of the world while he was getting fit. The Twentieth Century is highly spoken of by many as a speedy method of travel, but Jack would not have been a good person from whom to solicit a testimonial. The miles seemed to crawl past.

Mollie was gone. His cold-eyed old mother-in-law shrugged, waved her hands and denied all knowledge.

"How should I know?" she expostulated heatedly. "Working, I suppose. What would she do when you don't send her enough to go with the other girls? Serves her right for marrying a jockey, says I."

A knowing smile and a too-casual question from the proprietor of the corner cigar store started a train of thought. A little inquiry among former friends and that evening Jack found himself pressing the bell in an entry way under a card which read: "Mr. and Mrs. Ben Dornan." When the latch clicked, he went in and up to the door, in a daze at the confirmation of his suspicion that his wife had divorced him and remarried.

He knocked and, when it opened, there was Mollie. At her scream a chair overturned in the other room and a young fellow dressed in the too-modern clothes that Mollie had never persuaded Jack to adopt shouldered her back and stuck his face down toward Jack's.

"Well, and what do you want?" he demanded.

"I want a word with my wife. But first I want you to go back in there."

"So you are Malone, are you? I had an idea that you would be poking

in here pretty soon. No, you shut up, Mollie! I'm running this—— You get out of here now, you little squirt. No one is entitled to a pretty little girl like Mollie here unless he can hold her, and I'm the boy that can do that little thing. On your way now!"

The sentence was punctuated by the impact of Jack's fist on the fellow's chin, but hospital training does not lead to a knock-out punch. Ben Dornan was no moose, but it does not take one to be bigger than a hundred-pound jockey, nor does it take a Dempsey to knock down a man who three months before did not know whether he was going to live through any specified day. Jack lit in the corner of the hall; the door slammed; and the episode was closed.

When Jack had got himself into the street, nursing his jaw and feeling as if all the old breaks had come undone, he started for a sporting-goods store to buy one of Mr. Colt's new-fangled equalizers, so that he might go back and argue on a more even footing. He never finished the errand. Whether it was the half-heard chuckle from Mollie or whether he had just discovered that other things than bones can be broken, at any rate he walked past the store, stopped a taxi and started for the station, muttering something to himself about getting strong and coming back. All the while he knew that he was only trying to deceive himself, knew that he would not come back.

It was a new Jack who faced the barrier at Sheepshead for his first race that fall. The Jack who had flung the surly, stubborn black into the turmoil of The Ellington Cup the year before was gone. Expensive medical attention had failed to repair something intangible, but something that made life worth living for him who had it and hopeless for him who, having had it, had it no longer.

The race was a simple little handicap. The half dozen horses had been over the route so many times that they needed a rider as little as they needed ear muffs. In spite of that and the kindly greetings of the boys on the other horses, Jack's hands were sweaty before the barrier went up. At the beginning of the race he had an opportunity to take a chance and preëmpt a spot next the rail that the careless pole rider had neglected to close. In the very act of booting his rangy hound into it, the thought of possible accident leaped up and choked him.

After he had taken back, the race was hopelessly lost, but not so hopelessly that the old Jack would not have treated his mount to a thrilling hand ride and tried every step of the way till he flashed under the wire. This Jack made the preliminary motions.

He laid his horse up against the pole, hit him a bat or two with the whip and felt his heart check and almost stop as he passed one of the other trailers, who had objected to the gad and was trying to shed his rider. The thought he could not lose was: "What if he swerved this way and pinned me against the rail?"

His next race was to be over hurdles. Jack had not thought anything about it before, but while the horse was being saddled he was thinking:

"What if I get bumped while taking off? What if he stumbles? What if —— What if——" Dozens of things!

He was sweating all over now and his mouth tasted as dry as a powder puff. His knees felt weak when he tried to mount, and he called the owner over and pleaded sickness.

That night he got drunk as a fool, and the next day he was hundreds of miles away and going farther.

LOOK lively, big boy!" bawled "Red" Jennifer, foreman of Ellis & Smithson's Camp 2, on the headwaters of the Norway River. "Hop to it! Heaven only knows why they sent us

a half portion, when there is a man-size job waiting for you, cleaning out those horse stables!"

The biweekly stage that snailed in over the wearisome road—it was mud or corduroy in the tamarack swamps, spruce roots over the knolls and unmentionable over the rocky ridges, but was the only connecting link between the partners' camps except the river, which was used only in the spring, when the year's cut went out—had just disgorged the long-looked-for stableboy who must do the dirty work around the horses, which those aristocrats of the woods, the teamsters, disdained. The little fellow, staggering under the load of the turkey on his back, started for the barn. At the door, he stopped. Red had hailed him.

"Hey, you! What name'll I put on the book?"

"Jack Malone."

"All right, Jack. Don't let Jonah eat you."

As the door slid open, there came a squeal and thud. In the last stall stood a cream horse with a white mane and tail. At the whine of the door rollers, he had announced that he was ready for all comers and now stood scowling over the partitions, his lean, bony head turned to the light, lower lip hanging, ears flat on snaky neck, hate shining from his eyes. He was the only horse in the barn. All the drafters were at work.

"So you're Jonah? All right, old snake, I'll not let you eat me."

Jack dumped his turkey on a feed box and eased his tired body, muscle-wracked by the painful ride in, over toward the horse. Jonah weaved from side to side and, as Jack approached, swung his head pendulumlike and took tiny dancing steps, tapping the side of the stall with shod hoofs.

Jack stopped and looked at him. He knew he should be exulting in the sight of such perfection of horseflesh. Sixteen and a half hands of lean, hard flesh, flat, straight legs, deep, well-sprung ribs and powerful loins. Speed incarnate from lean, bony withers to small, deeply cupped hoofs and from gleaming teeth to foully matted tail.

"There is your first job." Red had followed Jack into the barn and grinned maliciously at the picture. "Take Jonah out and give him a drink. He hasn't been watered since yesterday."

Jack stepped forward. The cream kicked and squealed and again Jack felt that something catch at his throat and interfere with his breathing which had so often come to him since those times in the hallway of the Chicago apartment house and the race at Sheepshead. He turned to plead with the heavy-shouldered foreman behind him and caught the tag-end of the malice in the grin.

"How'd it be if I toted it in a pail?"

"Just as well, maybe. I'd kind of hate to lose a new stableboy so soon."

THAT was all right for that day. But other days came—days when Jack, his mind dwelling in the past, went to the end stall to groom the beautiful horse with the crimson-lined nostrils and broad, Arabian head and turned away at the last moment with thumping heart and trembling hands, days when he despised himself as he cautiously slid the water pail over the head board, days when he wondered why it was worth while to go on living without self-respect.

But he held down his job. Not for years had Jack performed any of the more unpleasant rites of a horse's toilet. That had been the task of the colored swipes. He found speedily that the man who can direct a job properly knows how to do it properly. The barn, rough, slab-sided shell that it was, speedily took on an air of neat and homy comfort.

The bulky shire and Percheron buf-

faloes who did the work found that clean dry beds and intelligent care for their needs agreed with them and promptly became even larger and more efficient. The well-tended barn, filled with its contented, munching tenants, became a favorite lounging place for the men, and every evening found a company of them sprawled on bales of hay, telling windy tales of what they or some favorite hero had done or would do.

Jack was silent. How could he talk? How could he tell the story of the downward steps of the jockey who had once drawn down five thousand dollars for winning a single race and who now performed the lowliest task in the whole camp? When his turn came to speak, a turn which did not come often because he was ranked with the lowly cookee and had the last word on anything, he asked questions instead.

"Where did the cream come from? How was he bred? Were there any more like him in the country?"

In answer to his questions, he was told the epic history of the junior partner, Smithson's, struggle to make a saddle horse out of the obviously thoroughbred stallion, which he had bought from a band of wandering gypsies, of the wild runaway through the twisting, uneven wood road, which had resulted not two weeks before Jack's arrival in a smashed body for the man and enforced inactivity for the horse.

IT wasn't such a bad life, one way. The partners set a good table. Their system of separate camps had built up a camp spirit and loyalty which was bred of rivalry and resulted in an honest striving for results that welded the men into a shouting, joking, roystering unit. Of that unit the foreman was king. Red Jennifer had fought his way to the top because he could outbawl, outpunch, outchop and outsaw any other man in the outfit.

Force was Red's fetish, not brains. If a man was not working his best, the first thing to try was a knockdown. If a log truck stuck in the woods, hitch on another team and then another and then another before looking to see if the logs weren't hooked on a stub. What wonder that the day came when he decided to try force on the cream?

One of the drafters had blundered in attempting to crowd into the cream's stall with him. The teamsters, the foreman and the scaler were gathered in a knot, while Jack was snipping off the torn flaps of skin and dusting antiseptic powder on the various abrasions.

"That horse needs a beating!" said Red suddenly. "Smithy will be mad if I mark him up, but he will be madder if we get all these other horses cut to pieces. A good licking never did a horse any harm and it may do this one some good."

He strode over to the corner where lay a heavy, rawhide mule skinner and came back down the alleyway. Before he reached the horse, Jack confronted him.

"Don't you do it!" Jack shrilled. "That horse has desert blood in him. A whipping will make him worse. You could kill him without breaking his spirit. He's not like one of your cold-blooded drafters."

"Out of my way!" roared Red.

Jack ducked and cringed like a whipped cur and slunk into a stall, while the foreman strode past, swung the whip and struck. The swish and crack of the whip was answered by the thud and squeal of the fighting stallion tied helplessly in his stall.

Once Jack started down the alley, but before he could speak that something which was broken within him gripped him once more, and he hurried out into the open, while behind him rose the tumult of oaths and thuds which told of the one-sided battle which was going on. Straight down the road Jack went,

in the direction of the railroad, fifty miles away. After he had gone two or three miles, he stopped and swore at himself. He wasn't even man enough to run away. The thought of facing the world without money or luggage brought him back, mentally groveling, and the agony of it was that he knew just what he was.

Even the knowledge that the cream had broken loose and cracked Red's wrist with a lucky flail of his hoof did not cheer Jack up. He crowded the wild-eyed animal over into the side of the stall with a pole and put a throwing harness on him, so that he might touch up the wounds with salve. All the while, Jack took the precautions he sneered at himself for a coward and his heart jumped at every motion of the beast.

WORD was sent for the camp doctor to come in and fix Red's wrist and take a look at one of the men, who had a fever. The next day the doctor arrived, swinging through the trail with his medicine case on his back—wise men walked on that road, only newcomers used the stage and only the proprietors could afford the renewals necessary for horseback riding.

When the wrist was pulled into shape and tied in its splint, the doctor went into the bunk house and took a look at the sick man. When he came out, his face was grave and he beckoned the foreman and scaler and led the way into the barn.

"Smallpox," he announced, "and well into the contagious stage! I know for a fact that there aren't five vaccinated men in the camp. I checked it up last spring. And you are to blame! You kept me from vaccinating the gang and then insisted on hiring that half-breed, when you knew he would sneak off home every week or two and pick up every disease that was going. Every death we get here will be chargeable to you and I'll see that you get the credit!" He shook his fist accusingly under Red's nose and then broke off to demand: "What's the matter with you? You feeling sick?"

"Yeh. Guess I better go over to the shanty."

"Just like one of those big vegetables!" the doctor snorted. "Lets me set and bandage his fractured wrist and never even catches his breath, and then gets all white and nearly faints when I tell him there's smallpox in the camp. You had better keep an eye on him, Stanley, or he'll be sneaking out and walking to town. First, though, we must lay out our program."

"But what can we do?"

"Get that big red-headed hound back here first. He may have calmed down enough to talk business. And bring in what men you can depend on. We must post some trustworthy guards to make sure the gang doesn't split and carry this infection everywhere through these hills."

When the scaler came back, he had three of the teamsters with him and word that Red had disappeared.

"Let him go," said the doctor. "This other business is more important. After we have picked the guards, the next thing'll be to send for some vaccine. There is none this side of the city. The nearest telephone is down in the company barn at the railroad. That's fifty miles! One train a day down and that leaves at three o'clock. If we could get word to the hospital so that they could get it on that train, the letter'd get in to-night and they could send it out here by to-morrow morning. I could vaccinate every one and if it didn't keep you from catching it, you'd have it easy.

"As it is a man couldn't walk in or ride one of these drafters short of fifteen hours, and we have five. That means that the stuff can't get here till midnight to-morrow at the earliest, and

by that time half the camp will be down. There are seven in the bunk house now with fevers. The way the Indians have been having it over beyond the lakes, I'd say it was a mighty bad form of it, too. We are facing a nasty prospect."

Talk swung over to the selection of the men who should serve as guards, who should go to the railroad, and the methods of care for the stricken. Before more than a dozen sentences had been spoken, Jack came up the alleyway behind the horses. He was white, whiter even than Red had turned; his hands were clenching and squirming and drops of sweat stood on his forehead.

"I overheard what you said," he announced. "I'll make the trip. If I can stay on the cream, he can get there in time for to-day's train."

"Nonsense, man! You're scared out of your wits."

"Don't I know it! But not of the smallpox. I had that down to Tia Juana. It's the horse. Do you think I want to ride that murdering beast? But I'm no use to myself as it is, and if I go out, at least it's a decent way. Don't stand there fussing. Tell me where to telephone for the dope and let me get going. It'll be close enough anyway."

Five minutes later the big cream was in the open, dragging the three teamsters around the yard, but with Smithson's McClelland strapped to his back. Jack was stripped to shirt, pants and boots, ready to mount. The moment had come. His Adam's apple flickered up and down as he attempted to swallow that lump that was trying to choke him.

The doctor was saying: "And when you get about a mile past Camp 1, get your horse in hand, for Heaven's sake. That hill down there is a bad one. There have been three stage accidents there and five people killed. If you start down that on the run it's 'good night, nurse!' You'll know the place. There's a board nailed there that says 'Widow Hill—Don't Crowd.'"

"Boost me!" said Jack. He knew he could never climb on alone. His muscles would refuse.

He was boosted. The lines were thrust in his hands; the cream's head was released; and with a yell the two tore down the road, Jack a most ungallant figure as he pulled leather with one hand and tugged helplessly at the reins like some hysterical woman.

FOR a mile the cream just ran, ran as he had wanted to do in all the weeks of his imprisoning—ran with all the crazy wildness that had crippled his owner. At the first bend the road dipped, curving into the creek bottom and writhed up again, after dancing over the rocks in the channel. Jack was clinging instinctively with his knees, as they leaned in and swept around the corner, and it was fortunate.

Red was before them, and as they swept past him, the cream swerved till Jack's knee brushed a tall, straight tree bole, and his heart almost stopped beating. His wrench on the lines checked the horse an instant. He bucked three times. Again Jack's seat saved him and again the stallion was running, down around the winding road, clattering across the stones in the creek bed, swooping to the level like a bird.

Here the ground was moist and interlaced with the surface roots of the spruce. The dainty hoofs of the stallion punched fetlock deep in the soft ground or stopped with a jar on roots as he tore over the treacherous ground with unslackened speed. And then Camp 1! Six miles and Jack was still clinging by instinct, but his mind had begun to work.

"A mile beyond Camp 1—Widow Hill—Good night, nurse!"

He sawed on the lines, but with no more effect than to make the stallion's

bounds grow uneven and unbalance him, so that he stumbled on a root and for twenty yards his struggles to keep his feet shook the rider till something better than instinct was all that kept him in the saddle. Once leveled, Jack looked ahead. There was a roar of water in his ears.

He must be near the upper falls and beside them was Widow Hill, where the road, dug into the side of a cliff, wound down, down, with death on the side and a tamarack marsh with knee-deep ooze at the bottom to trip the cream's flying feet. If he could live to the bottom! Yes, there was the sign. "Widow Hill—Don't Crowd." Before Jack could breathe again the thudding hoofs were over the top and crunching in loose, slide shale. The cut bank towered above him on one side and on the other, deep down, was the white water of the falls, punctuated with black rocks.

One curve! They made it. Another! But what if they met the stage? It was due any time now. Another curve! They swung out to the very edge. Gravity was pulling on the horse now. His speed seemed to have doubled and there was a hitch, a slight uncertainty, on each recovery, as though the effort to get his front feet up in time to care for the rapidly rushing body were almost too much. Another curve, and before them was a mass of earth, trees and stone that had slid from the bank above—one of those frequent landslips that made the hill what it was. Thirty yards, a couple of seconds!

But in that breathless instant the man on the horse was changed. Imaginary terrors were forgotten in the face of certain death, and the man who stood in his stirrups and swept the barrier with his eyes for a weak spot was the old Jack, the man whose instincts worked just enough faster than the other man's to enable him to see the chance first, to act on it and so ride in the winner. But this time more than victory was at stake. As fear fell from him, self-respect swept back and life seemed very dear, but nothing to worry about.

At the very edge of the cliff, a single tree trunk obstructed the way. A three-foot jump! Nothing! But in the circumstances, clearing it would be a miracle. It would be a miracle if the madly racing horse could rise at all. It would be a greater one if he could land on the edge and recover without sliding down over the cliff. With aiding knee and wrists and voice, Jack helped his horse, and he was over with a swishing of branches. Under madly struggling hoofs, the bank caved and slid, but the cream and his rider were away!

AGAIN it was a struggle to retain footing, but now a born rider was helping. Around the next turn the horse was leveled, and his head was higher than since he had started. Moreover, the hands that held that struggling head under some semblance of control were not the hands that had tugged so unavailingly. Now they were firm, yielding only what was needed, and the message that was telegraphed over them was that of the absolute confidence of the rider.

There were occasional benches now, where the steepness of the grade slackened and on each the fiercely thrusting head and rigid neck met more and more pressure, the neck bent more and more, and the chin came nearer and nearer the chest.

One more bend and the final drop. Around it they raced and faced the stage, crawling slowly up its slippery surface. Jack settled himself and really pulled. The chin came back and the far-reaching strides became a high, prancing lunge. A swerve to the right! Back into the road! The wagon with its white-faced driver was passed.

Slipping, bounding, throwing in an occasional buck for good measure, the

cream reached the bottom, splashed into the mud, was given his head and wallowed out through the untidy, straggly tamaracks. For the first time, Jack pulled his watch. Ten miles in thirty minutes! Not fast for flat going and trained horses, but it spelled success, considering what had been and what was to come.

Forty miles to go, but forty miles ridden by a born and trained rider who could ease the horse where easing was possible and feared not to urge where urging would pay. Still, the ride was not over. At the first ford, the cream refused and refused so suddenly that Jack went onto his neck and the ensuing bucking exhibition almost shook him to the ground. Once solidly in the saddle again, a swift shift of his weight and a jerk of the reins threw the horse into the water and a kick on the ribs sent him splashing on his way across the stream.

AT the halfway house a too helpful hand pointed out a short cut which proved to be full of wind blows that needed all the spring of the horse and the skill of the man to clear. However, by the time the first of the farms was reached, the cream had lost his edge and was simply a gallant horse that had had a long gallop without training. Though his muscles were tiring, he was giving his best at the urging of the rider on whom he had come to depend for guidance in each of the emergencies of the road.

Two o'clock, and the little town by the railroad was in sight from the top of the last range of hills. Two thirty, and it was just across a valley, but the sturdy stride of the cream was labored, and there was perceptible dwelling after each recovery. Five minutes of three, and a tired horse stood, head down, on the cinder walk as a staggering man pounded on the telegrapher's window and howled:

"Have them hold the southbound three o'clock!"

A minute of arguing, then the message was sent with the explanation. Another minute, and the O. K. came back. Another message to the hospital, and then word that a fast ambulance was taking the vaccine to the train.

Jack led the tired horse across the road to the company's stable and demanded care, and good care, for him. Then, and not till then, he ordered relay horses to be sent out along the road. The train was due at seven; if five relay horses could do what the cream had done alone, the vaccine would be at the camp by midnight.

The cream was perking up; a swearing groom came out to have a kicked spot tended to. That cheered Jack. He got on the telephone and had a long talk with his distant friend Henderson. Then he went out and bought some clothes, then to the harness store and paid seven dollars and a half for a six-foot, wire-centered, braided whip that suited his fancy. Then he went back to the company office and to sleep on the bunk.

He was still sleeping when the train came in and the first horse of the relay pounded across the station yard and flashed across the valley. He was still sleeping when daylight came. He was still sleeping when Red, tired and footsore, aching with the pain of carrying a hurt wrist on an all-night walk, came to the office. The first word he spoke, and Jack was on his feet, rubbing sleep out of his eyes and swinging the long whip.

"Why, look who's here!" said Red.

"Whish! Crack!" said the whip.

"Damn you! You licked that horse —(crack!) when he couldn't help himself! Now I'll lick you, when you can't help yourself—(crack!) and any man that—(crack!) is in charge of a camp and sneaks off when trouble comes—(crack!) is nothing more than a dog

—(crack!) and ought to be flogged—(crack!) to within an inch of his life!"

Red fled, arm over his head, after a vain attempt to close with the nimble, dancing figure who was always beyond his reach, but always so near that the flailing lash could reach and tear.

Jack turned back toward his couch and faced a gray-haired giant whose heavy arms and weathered face contrasted with his metropolitan attire.

"M'name's Ellis," he said. "Glad you trimmed him. Saved me th' job. Need men that'll make good. How about it? Wan'a train for a good job wi' us?"

"No, sir. I'm not a lumberman; I'm a jockey. Thanks just the same. I'm going back. But first there is a man in Chicago I want to see the worst way." The whip quivered in his hand. "There is one thing I wish you'd do. Get a price on that cream stallion from your partner. I have arranged for money to buy him. I'll be back here as soon as I can."

"He's your horse now. I'll fix it with Smithy."

"Good enough! Then I'll give you a tip. You plan to get to The Ellington Cup race next year and you'll see a real horse race!"

Others of Mr. Long's fascinating stories will be published in THE POPULAR.

A TEAR-COMPELLING CONTEST

SOME people get their thrills out of watching desperately straining thoroughbreds, responding gamely to the urgings of jockeys, come thundering into the home stretch, while the race-track grand stand becomes a mass of roaring, shrieking maniacs; others raise onions and ship them to the New York market. Strangely enough, the onion raisers have a tremendously exciting race each year, one with sufficient interest and a big enough prize to command the attention of the most blasé race-track hanger-on.

Texas raises enough of the tear-compelling vegetable to satisfy the onion appetite of the metropolis, and more. And over in Egypt, in the Valley of the Nile, a sufficient quantity is produced to soothe the cravings of an equal number of onion consumers. The crop in Egypt matures a little earlier than the one in Texas, due to the climate there, but on account of the distance from the market, this handicap is about evened by the comparative nearness of Texas to New York.

Each year, thousands of bushels of the Egyptian crop are loaded on swift vessels and are upon the ocean, en route to the market, before the Texas shipping begins. When the news of the foreign shipment is received in the Rio Grande Valley, there is excitement, haste, hurry, for if the Egyptian onions arrive first, the market will react immediately.

So freight cars are loaded and sent off; the probable location of the ships is estimated; the weather reports and forecasts are watched—the race is on! And the movement of the Texas crop is watched as keenly as ever a better on a thoroughbred peers at the flying horses as they speed along the back stretch. And the shipper whose crop arrives in the big city before his rivals' gets a thrill equal, in its way, to that of the man who sees a horse he has backed become the winner by a nose

The Sweeny Motor Car

By Charles R. Barnes

Author of "Mr. Sweeny: Financier," "Einstein, Fine Gentleman," Etc.

The lights of Broadway, the gay chatter of a fashionable restaurant at the dinner hour, the presence upon the white napery of the table of a guinea hen cooked brown in the best manner of a French chef, arouse within Mrs. Sweeny memories of a day in her life when wildly squawking guinea hens had a sinister relation to a none-too-efficient motor car.

THE Boarder had taken Mrs. Sweeny out to dinner. Occasionally he did this, for continued absence from her old Broadway haunts produced periods of gloom from which the ordinary routine of life could not rescue her. A glimpse of the Great White Way, however, was a tonic that usually worked; and the Boarder prescribed and administered it whenever he considered it necessary. The sight of those merry ones, with whom her defunct gambler husband had once associated, and sniffs of the roistering atmosphere of New York's playground, were more than medicine to Mrs. Sweeny. They were life, and they refreshed her like a week in the country. And the Boarder, even as all Samaritan-hearted persons, keenly enjoyed the effect his excursions into the night life produced.

Even before they had seated themselves in the internationally famous restaurant, Mrs. Sweeny's eyes took unto themselves a glitter that boded good for the cure. Her glance swept over the room, and she nodded cheerily toward several tables at which the old-timers had forgathered.

"They don't die off very fast," she commented, as she seated herself. "I guess it's because they all come from the country and have got chore-made constitutions. This here's a' awful fast life, mister."

The Boarder opined that there might be something in that. Mrs. Sweeny,

temporarily satisfied with her survey of the place and its people, turned her attention to the menu card. She read it attentively for a moment, then suddenly she cried, so loudly that people at nearby tables glanced up:

"Broiled guinea hen! Oh, you guinea hen!"

The Boarder looked his surprise.

"Mister," she went on, with an electric sparkle in her eyes, "I know what I want, this here night—I know what I want!"

"Guinea hen?" he asked.

"Oh," she affirmed, "ain't them the true words, though! It's guinea hen for mine, if it busts you. I won't take no dessert if I can have guinea hen. Yes?"

He laughed.

"I'm glad that you are willing to express a preference," he said, "for of course you're to have whatever you wish."

She suddenly became serious.

"It ain't that guinea hen makes such a hit with me as just somethin' to spoil a' appetite with," she told him. "It's what they're associated with. Oh, gee! Ain't they the big noise!" She chuckled as if the name of the fowl conjured up pleasant memories. The lingering waiter, impatient for the order, quieted her, though, and she maintained a more or less serious demeanor while the Boarder chose the dinner. At length, after the flunky had disappeared, she grew vivacious of countenance again, and delved into the past.

"Danny and me knowed a party named Curran oncet—'Bull' Curran and his wife," she began; "Bull run a book at the races, same as Danny, and they was so fr'en'ly that they wouldn't borrow no money from each other, fearin' to bust up the situation. I tell you, mister, them two thought a lot of each other; and me and Mrs. Curran was throwed together so much that we got to be reg'lar playmates—we sure did! It was me to her flat every day or her to mine. And her husban' and my Danny could most alwus be found hangin' out, real affectionate in some swell joint, downtown. Ain't it lovely when folks gets along so good together?"

The Boarder found himself agreeing, and bade her continue.

"WELL," she went on, "that was the time I learned that fr'en's that stick closer than a brother is apt to stick you, with the rest of it left out. You see, them Currans had a' auto—this happened quite a while ago, when them little Greenwold machines was touted as the best bets—and it was that there auto that spoilt all that lovely fr'en'ship. Gee! Whenever I think of it and all them harsh words it made my Danny say, I hate to spec'late on where he is now. No, I'll take that back. Danny could talk hisself past theater doorkeepers, and I guess that gift was along when he needed it—but he did take awful chances with his future, utterin' all them turrible words.

"The auto-mo-beel come into it this way. When they first got it, them Currans was in it all the time, drivin' out to the tracks in it, and now and then shootin' me or Danny somewheres, just for a ride. Then they didn't seem to care nothin' about it no more, and hiked round in taxis and on the elevated. It didn't interest 'em as much as prayer-meetin' night, and of course me and Danny thought it was funny. So we asked 'em about it one night when there was a party to their flat.

"'Well,' says Curran, 'to tell the truth, that car's too small for to go tourin' in. And you know that when a real auto-mo-beelist graduates from the city streets, he gets bugs for fair about tourin' out in the green country. We're gettin' a tourin' car.'

"I seen him look hard at his wife

when he said this; but I didn't know till afterward that he was givin' her a cue to follow them lines of hisn with more. Danny kicks in here with:

"'You mean one of them foreign cars?' he says.

"'You're on, Mister Sweeny,' says Mrs. Curran. 'Me and Bull has got the idee that there ain't no class to them small oil cans,' she says, 'though they're just the cars for beginners at the game to learn with,' she says.

"'You ain't goin' to keep two of them there wagons?' I says.

"'We sure ain't,' Bull says. 'We're goin' to sell the little feller. A guy offered us six fifty for it day before yestiddy, but he went and dropped his bank roll on Oscar Second yestiddy, so the deal's off,' he says. 'But I won't have no trouble sellin' it,' he says, 'for it's a good car.'

"Danny glanced at me just then, and I seen by the way his mouth was open that he had a' idee.

"'Bull,' he says, 'but, 'tween fr'en's, what would you take for that there cart?' he says.

"Well, Mister Curran looked down at the floor and tapped it with his foot, kinda meditatin' like.

"'Sweeny,' says he, after the deep-think thing had been long enough at bat. 'Sweeny,' says he, 'that guy offered me six fifty, but, seein' you're a fr'en' o' mine, and nobody wants to make no profit offen his fr'en's, you can take her along for five hundred, and I'll learn you to run her to boot,' he says.

"Danny turned to me.

"'Belle,' he says, 'do we have a' auto-mo-beel, or don't we have a' auto-mo-beel?' he says. 'I got the money with me,' he says.

"Gee! Mister, I was pleaseder than a plumber durin' a hard winter, I was. When my Danny spoke them happy words, I wanted to jump right up and smash somethin', I was that happy. In a jiffy I seen myself rollin' through the park, dressed in my circus-wagon clothes, guidin' that red chugger along and listenin' to folks say: 'Pipe her swell nibs. She sure comes from one of the first Standard Oil fam'lies.' I tell you, my 'magination was workin' harder than a dog diggin' a hole.

"'Danny,' I says, 'five hundred ain't nothin' to us. Leave Mister Curran have your bank roll,' I says, 'and we'll take the buggy,' I says.

"'You're on,' says Danny. Then him and Bull Curran fixed up the deal, and in about two minutes we was auto-mo-beelists.

"'You bring it around to-morruh, Bull,' says Danny, 'and learn me how to run it, and then Belle and me will take a trip,' he says. 'Mebby we'll run out in the country and see "Piker" Smith and them guinea chickens he's took to raisin' since he blowed his wad at the track,' he says. And so we lets things go at that and leaves them premises, me and Danny, all kinda fussed up about the swell times that was in store for the two of us."

AT this point in the narrative, the waiter arrived with the dinner, and Mrs. Sweeny waited until it had been served before going on. When the more-or-less-attentive menial had finished his duties, she proceeded:

"It didn't take Danny more than a hour to learn all about that car. All you done to it was to step on a pedal till it begun to grind and growl and sputter. Then you got in and shoved a little lever forward and pressed down on another pedal. When the machine got to goin', you pressed a button with your foot when you wanted to speed up.

"After Danny had got wised up to everything, he rented a garage for our new auto-mo-beel round the corner, and there we was, real motorists. And I tell you, mister, we didn't do nothin' at

all but feel how umportant we was. I catched myself sniffin' at my upstairs neighbor when I passed her in the hall, and, though I knowed it was bum comedy, I just went and done it, anyhow, to see what it felt like to be uppish.

"Well, the first day we had it, me and Danny run three blocks along Central Park West, in that car, and back again. Then Danny got nervous, and we put it away and went home and thought about it. Danny says we would take a long trip next day—mebby to where Mrs. 'Gold Dollar' Cohen was spendin' the summer in the mountings, or out to Piker Smith's farm, or somewheres like that. But, take it from me, mister, we didn't do them long-distance stunts right away, like we planned.

"The next day we started out and run to Fifty-ninth Street—Fifty-ninth Street, that's all. Somethin' went wrong. We left a wet streak from our house to Fifty-ninth Street, and the men that come to tow us home said our radiator leaked and the motor had got almost red-hot, there bein' no water to cool it.

"When we told Mister Curran about it, he said:

"'Oh, them little things will happen, Sweeny. They're part of the auto-mobeel game,' he says. 'Don't worry none,' he says.

"And Danny, bein' a sport, says all right, he wouldn't worry; and he paid for bein' towed in and for stickin' up the leak in the radiator and got ready to try all over again. Did you ever have a secondhand auto-mo-beel, mister?"

"No," replied the Boarder.

"Well," said Mrs. Sweeny, "we never had but the one. We was off all them machines. Whenever I mentioned 'em, after what we went through, Danny usta crawl under the table and whine like a sick dog. Take it from me, we had more grief over ourn than you could find in the cases of ptomaine poisinin' you get in the New York restaurants in a whole winter.

"That machine was the limit! Every time we went out in it, we broke down. Once we got halfway to Coney Island before a tire blew up. Danny was so proud of it then that he jumped up on the seat and hollered 'Hooray!' three times, and called me to witness that Bull Curran was honest at heart and a good feller. He even went so far as to call Curran his fr'en' again. But the next day he was all over that nonsense. From then on, he didn't think of nothin' much but schemes to sell the auto back to them Curran folks—or somethin' else that was as gold a brick.

ONE aft'noon, mister, Danny says we'll go out to the Piker's chicken raisery, which was somewheres on Long Island; and we'd get there or know why. He says if the machine begun to cut up he'd get out and kick it in the face.

"Really, he was kinda mean dispositioned when we started—so much that way that I fell to wishin' the races would start up again and fill in his idle time. Men ain't good comp'ny when they're layin' off and have got nothin' on their minds but trouble, like Danny had with our auto-mo-beel. They're apt to make such vi'lent love to a grouch that it gets stuck on 'em and won't leave.

"Danny had been fussin' hisself into such a state of mind; and that aft'noon we'd got clear over to Prospect Park in Brooklyn before he begun to say pleasant words. The machine was behavin' good, though, and I seen that my husban's mind was gettin' gentle and sweet oncet more; and you can bet I was glad of the change.

"We skimmed along pretty good for quite a ways, our little engine talkin' away to itself as industrious as a madhouse guest countin' his fingers; and after while we come to where the

houses wasn't so thick, and it begun to look lonesome.

"'I guess we must be gettin' close to the Piker's place,' says Danny. And so the next time we come to one of them outlander Brooklynites leanin' over his front fence, we asks him does he know where it is that Piker Smith lives.

"'I heard somethin' about a man of that name,' says the feller, lookin' at us queerlike. 'He lives about a mile and a half farther on, but he don't stand well hereabouts.'

"'Piker's all right,' says Danny, gettin' mad. 'You, yaps probably don't like him b'cause he wears a clean collar now and then.' And with that we ups and leaves the feller to his own thoughts.

"Danny never could bear to hear his fr'en's gettin' knocked. And what the man said put him in a temper again, so's he speeded up harder than he ought and the clutch got to slippin' and we had to stop till my husban' could get it tight and catchin'.

"Well, we went on and on, toward Piker's place, askin' people where he lived and gettin' the most unsocial answers. The nearer we got to where he lived, the scowlier was them people we talked to. And after a while, when we was about a quarter of a mile away, we began hearin' funny noises in the air—sounds like somebody with a high voice was in trouble and was a-lookin' for help.

"When we brought our car to a stop in front of the Piker's ten-acre patch of farm, we see that all the racket come from somewheres on the premises. Oh, you guinea hen!" Mrs. Sweeny laughed and prodded the broiled dainty on her plate with her fork.

The Boarder looked up, expectant.

"Mrs. Piker come runnin' out," resumed Mrs. Sweeny, "and there was that in her face I'll never forget. She had a wild look, like as if it was the installment man's day to come and only money enough in the house for a couple of matinée tickets. She'd recognized us from the upstairs window, and we must 'a' looked good to her, judgin' by the way she talked.

"'Mrs. Sweeny,' she says, in a holler voice, 'take me away from here!'

"'Why, dearie?' I says, not gettin' out of the machine.

"She looked to me like me and Danny was stoppin' at the overflow annex of a asylum for the nutty folks. Just as she begun to explain, somethin' set up a turrible screamin' in the back yard.

"'Mercy!' says I. 'Has your child fell down the well, dearie? Mebbe you better go look,' I says.

"'No,' she says, 'it ain't nothin' like that. In the first place I ain't got no child, and in the second place, if I had one, and it made a racket like that, I'd chuck it in the well myself. It's them dog-gone guinea hens, Mrs. Sweeny,' she says, 'that's what it is. And be-leeve me, Mrs. Sweeny, them guinea hens is puttin' me and the Piker on the bum,' she says. 'We're wrecks,' she says. 'The Piker is already beginnin' to talk to hisself,' she says.

AND then she went on to tell us that since they'd come to the island to raise them fool chickens, the business had almost drove 'em crazy and had got 'em in wrong with all the neighbors. Them hens screeched cruel loud all the time, and there wasn't no rest for nobody. And to make it worse, the neighbors was so mad that they throwed stones at the coops at night, wakin' up the birds so's they'd sing and keep Mr. and Mrs. Piker from their rightful sleep.

"'Be-leeve me,' Mrs. Piker says, 'we're so distracted that we'd kill all them chickens. We make up our minds to do it, but our minds is so affected that we're all the time forgettin'. And so we just live on and on, from day to day, the Piker a-cursin' and me pullin'

out my hair and both of us a-hopin' that some one will come along and buy the place. Gee! If we ever get away from here, we'll buy a couple of sound-proof telephone booths and lock ourselves in 'em,' she says.

"Just then the Piker come out, all haggard and wore and tremblin' with nervousness, and asks us to come in and watch the happy children playin'. You can see from what he said, mister, that he was pretty far gone.

"Me and Danny didn't stop long. We thought it was too pathetic to linger and watch. And so we started back toward town, with the shrillin' of them birds and a strange howlin' from the Piker in our ears. It's awful the ends some of them race-track followers comes to. We skimmed along in that machine pretty well for quite a distance, and was just congratulatin' ourselfs on the probabilities of gettin' clear home, when the engine kinda coughed *'Ugh-ug-h-ugh-h-hhh!'* and quit.

"Danny got out and found that a gasket in the cylinder head was lettin' the coolin' water leak in. There wasn't no more ride that day. Me and Danny walked to the nearest trolley and got home. And Danny was so mad with thinkin' about the bill for towin' the machine in that he insisted on goin' to the Currans' after dinner and tellin' Bull what he thought of him. He was ready for a fight, too, Danny was.

WHEN they let us in, we seen that they had been real taken by somethin'. Their settin' room was littered up with catalogues, and there was a paper covered with figures there, too. Mrs. Curran told us where to set at, then she says:

"'Me and Bull is goin' to move into the country,' she says, 'and raise chickens,' she says. 'Bull, he's tired out with all this hurry and hubbub in the city,' she says, 'and we're goin' in for the simple life,' she says.

"'You can make two thousand six hundred and eighteen dollars a year and all the hens you can eat,' Bull cuts in.

"'Them Piker Smiths is doin' it,' says Mrs. Curran, as if to prove that the stunt's a good one. And the next minute I seen Danny's mouth go open with a' idee. Somethin' just told me to lean forward and listen—somehow I felt that this here idee was a peach.

"'Curran,' says Danny, kinda slow and deliberate, 'what kind of chickens you going to raise?' he says.

"'Just chickens,' says Bull Curran. 'Them that scratches and squawks.'

"'Well,' says Danny, 'that's just about what to expect from a town-fed guy like you. Why, every farmer in the world has got a thousand of them kind of chickens,' he says. 'It's the wise guy that studies the situation, like Piker Smith,' he says, 'that wins out. The Piker's got a money-makin' farm, because he had sense enough to raise the kind of hens that is scarce and brings fancy prices. I ask you, Bull Curran,' he says, 'what fetches the most on a hotel-menu card,' he says, 'plain chicken or guinea chicken?' he says.

"Bull Curran seen what Danny was drivin' at.

"'You're right,' he says, 'guinea chickens is the dearest,' he says. 'And the Piker was wise to raise 'em. How's he doin', did you say?'

"'He's makin' a barrel of money,' says Danny, 'and he tells me he hasn't only just started. He's goin' to sell the place he has, now that he's learned how to raise them guinea chickens, and get a bigger place. I wisht I had the money—I'd buy it.'

"'H'm!' coughs Bull, sorta reflectin'.

"His wife's eyes was growin' bright.

"'Mrs. Sweeny,' she says to me, 'they sure do soak you somethin' fierce for them guinea chickens in a restaurant,' she says.

"'Don't they, though!' I says. 'But they do say them there birds is get-

tin' real stylish, bein' et, as they is, by our very best people,' I says.

"Of course Bull had heard what we was sayin', and he turns to Danny.

" 'Sweeny,' he says, 'what is the Piker askin' for his farm?' he says.

" 'I ain't so sure,' says Danny, 'but I guess you could get it cheap. He wants to move real bad; and as I remember the deal when he made it, there was only about fifteen hundred cash and the rest was a moggige,' he says. 'I'll tell you this, though, Bull; if you're thinkin' of buyin', you better hurry. The Piker was a-tellin' me that some feller was dickerin' with him about it.'

" 'Well,' says Bull, 'that thing looks pretty good to me,' he says. 'We're sure goin' to get some sort of a hen farm,' he says, 'for the town and the race track is in bad with me. I'm one of them back-to-nature guys now,' he says, 'and the books here tells me that there's a barrel of money in chickens. If you got a million chickens, you make a million dollars.' He takes up his pencil and gets busy figgerin' on his sheet of paper. 'On fifty chickens,' he says, in a little bit, 'you make in a year——'

"But his wife interrupts.

" 'Tie a can on that dope, Bull,' she says, 'and let's get down to business,' she says. Then, to Danny: 'Where'd you say the Piker lives?'

" 'Out on Long Island,' says Danny, 'and I'll tell you what I'll do; me and the missus was goin' out there again to-morruh,' he says, 'in our auto-mobeel,' he says. 'But s'posin' I hire a big machine and we'll all go? I'd kinda like to see you get that place, Bull, for I know you'll like it and make a lot of money,' he says.

"Well, mister, that arrangement made a big hit with them two. Me and Danny went home later on, him chucklin' all the way; and he sits up till almost two o'clock a. m., writin' the Piker a night letter. He says in it that he's fetchin' out a buyer the next afternoon and for the Piker to have the yard raked up and them hens chloroformed or a muffler put on 'em, so's they wouldn't make so much noise; and for the Piker's wife to make up like the bommy country air agreed with her; and for the Piker to quit talkin' nutty while we was there. Then he goes out to a district telegraph office and pays about eighteen dollars for a promise to get that letter out to the farm by ten in the mornin'. After that he went to bed and slept like a' innocent babe for the first time since we bought that dreadful auto-mo-beel.

WE had a lovely ride out to that farm the next afternoon; and the minute we come in sight of it I knowed that Danny's letter had got there in time. The Piker was all dressed up in white duck, spick and span as could be, a-rakin' the lawn with a nice new wooden rake. His wife was there with a yachtin' suit and a Maud Muller bonnet, gatherin' roseys off of some bushes; and there was a red cow, tied to a tree, and eatin' a late lunch as peaceful as could be. There wasn't no noise at all.

"The Piker come to meet us, smilin' like he didn't have a care in the world. Him and his wife took us in the house, and began to pour refreshments in us, paying puttic'lar attention to Bull Curran, and, I tell you, we had the nice time. Them people didn't seem like the same ones we had saw the day before. Mrs. Piker's face was decorated like a glowin' sunset, and the worry lines was puttied up so's you couldn't notice 'em at all.

"After while, the Piker took us over the place. I was all curious to know how he'd muzzled them hen and kept lookin' at him for signs of worry lest some of 'em might break loose and sing. But he was just as cheerful and unconcerned as you please. By and by he

took us to them little sheds where the stalls, or whatever you call 'em, for the hens was. He opened a door a little, and we seen about a dozen of them birds hangin', head down, from roosts. It was so dark you couldn't see farther back along the line.

"'They're sleepin', he says, in a hushed voice, closin' the door real soft. 'They alwus sleep in the daytime, clingin' to the poles in that there way——'

"'Ain't they the cute things!' puts in Mrs. Piker.

"'The little dears!' says Mrs. Curran.

"The Piker goes on to say that he's got five hundred of 'em and he'll throw 'em in with the farm. He makes a turrible lot of money off of 'em, he says, and he's all ready to buy a fifty-acre place when this one is sold. Fifty acres, he says, will make him independent in two years, and then him and his wife is going to Europe to live and never come back no more.

"Mister, be-leeve me, that there Bull Curran was completely ravished with the idee, and right there and then he gets in a dicker for that farm and paid five hundred down.

"The Piker and his wife locks up the house and goes into town with us, to stay all night and get the rest of the deal fixed up the next day. That evenin' we all had dinner downtown.

"The Piker was sittin' next to me, and when he got a chance he says:

"'Belle Sweeny,' he says, 'Gawd forgive me if I've did any man a wrong,' he says, 'but I had to lose that farm in self-defense,' he says. 'When I got Dan's letter,' he says, 'I murdered twelve of them hens,' he says, 'and I wired 'em to the roosts. They wouldn't stand up, so I took a chance on Bull's not knowin' anything about 'em and let 'em hang. Then I and my wife and the neighbor on the right, that's deef and likes me, we packed the rest of them birds in wagons and hauled 'em to his barn. They're there yet,' he says, 'and Bull will get 'em when he moves out. You see, they make the most noise toward sunset, and I wasn't sure how late you'd be,' he says."

Mrs. Sweeny picked up the card to decide on dessert. Finally she suggested:

"Let's be real common, mister, and have apple pie. What?"

The Boarder laughingly assented, and Mrs. Sweeny went on with her story.

"ABOUT three weeks later," she said, "me and Danny got our auto-mobeel and took a run, by installments, out to Bull Curran's guinea hennery. We had all the kinds of motor trouble that there was goin', and it took us a long time to get there. But we done it at last, and stood out in front of the place and honked our horn till Bull heard us. He and his wife come runnin' out—and my! how them poor folks was changed! They looked fretted to death and hollow-eyed and shaky. When Bull seen who it was, he scowled.

"'Oh,' he says, 'it's you, is it?'

"'Yep,' says Danny, grinnin', 'we come to see how is the hens.'

"Mrs. Curran begins to cry.

"'Mrs. Sweeny,' she sobbed, 'me and Bull thought you and Dan was fr'en's of ourn.'

"Danny kinda looked her over.

"'Mrs. Curran,' he says, 'me and Belle thought you and Bull was fr'en's of ourn,' he says. Then he pushes down on his throttle pedal and turns round. 'Giddap, *Old Bust-up*,' he says to the auto-mo-beel, 'I'd ruther listen to you goin' to pieces and pay your repair bills,' he says, 'than to stick around here where all this horrid noise is,' he says.

"And with them meanin' words we rolled away, a whole lot chirked up by the thought that we'd showed certain parties that they couldn't put nothin' acrost on us and get away with it."

The Tunnel

By Arthur H. Little

Author of "Steam," and other stories.

Thirty feet below the wave-rippled surface of the water two divers met. Clad in rubber, snod in lead, they grappled—and the outcome of their octopuslike struggle determined the validity of a marine contract.

MARINE contracting, like politics and water-front lodging houses, makes strange bedfellows.

"In business," I overheard our bearded little chief, "Old Man" Strang, say to our general foreman, John Bartlett, "a man must be scrupulous. But mostly he can't afford to be squeamish. I think I'll bid on that contract."

Bartlett shook his head and fumbled thoughtfully at his scraggly, gray mustache. "Doesn't it strike you, chief," he asked, "that there might be something off-color about that job? Why should Filmore & Briggs pass up that anchorage work? It's submarine, of course; but then, submarine stuff is as much in their line as it is in ours. Why should they pass it up and sublet it to somebody else?"

"Because," the Old Man explained, "as I understand it, some of their equipment—what they'd need, anyway, for pile pulling—is tied up on other jobs. On that anchorage work, pile pulling will be the first operation. The river bottom in that slip is fairly floored with the tops of oak piling, driven there years ago as the subfoundation for a bridge that never was built. The piling will have to come out before the anchorage can go in."

That sounded plausible enough. But Bartlett shook his head, and even I began to wonder.

But bid on that subcontract the Old Man did; and, because our outfit was the only one within four hundred miles that could undertake the job—it was right in our home port on Lake Erie—he was low man. And that was how it

came about that we locked horns, for the first time at close range, with our ancient enemies, the firm of Filmore & Briggs, of Detroit. That was how it came about, also, that our own "Bud" Moody, six-footer, redhead and diver, came to grips, under twenty feet or so of water in Southport harbor, with his own ancient enemy, Fred Stanton.

IT was this way. The Southport Steel Company, under the influence of a new chief engineer, was about to build a conveyor for slag—a vast, long-legged, steel-towered contraption that, so this chief engineer figured, would sling slag around in ten-ton chunks. Of the two whopping towers, one was to rise at the water's edge at the inner end of an abandoned slip, the other an eighth of a mile or so away, back across the bleak expanse of industrial lava that was the slag dump. It was with the outer tower, the one at the water's edge, that our outfit was to be concerned.

Filmore & Briggs were to build the towers, excavate inside a cofferdam for the outer one, then, with the cofferdam still in place, pour in a solid block of concrete of about the bulk of six box cars and then, when the concrete had set, shoot up the steel.

From the top of the waterside tower, a sheaf of steel cables was to leap across the slag dump to the top of the inland tower—these to carry clamshell buckets. For security's sake the outer ends of the cables were to be carried across the top of the outer tower, as the strings of a violin are carried across the violin bridge, and led down into the slip and locked in an anchorage of concrete and steel. The anchorage was to be imbedded in the bottom, thirty feet or so below the water's surface. That anchorage—that was to be our job.

Well, we waded in. On the day that Filmore & Briggs pulled into Southport from Detroit, with their big, blue tug *Conqueror* convoying a floating pile driver and a clamshell dredge and a whole flotilla of smaller craft, we moved into the steel company's slip behind them with an A-frame, set up on the head end of a derrick scow. From the apex of the A-frame, which leaned outboard a few feet, hung a three-sheave tackle, strung with cable. The cable ran back to the drum of a big Mundy engine.

It was with this simple rig, so Old Man Strang had reckoned when he figured his bid, that we'd pull the submerged piling. He'd compiled his figure, you see, from daily costs—so much a day for the pile pulling with the A-frame rig for so many days, then so much dredging with the dredge *Continental* for so many days and finally so much a day for the concrete-and-steel work for so many days. All these items added together gave the total estimated cost, then a margin tacked on for contingencies and another margin for profit, and the resulting total was his bid—a lump-sum figure for the whole job. That was his story; and he'd stick to it.

"And now," the Old Man said to Bud Moody, "out comes the piling."

On his ever-present, stout little three-legged stool and harnessed in his diving armor with his helmet on the deck beside him, Bud sat waiting at the edge of the derrick scow's deck while we maneuvered the scow into place. He nodded.

"You'll go down," the Old Man went on, "and make the tackle fast. We'll pull them one at a time, starting at the edges and working inward toward the center of the mass."

Bud nodded again. I screwed on his helmet. Then he dragged his lead-shod shoes to the rim of the deck, turned and backed down the diver's ladder, deliberately and heavily as divers do, until he was waist-deep in water. There he paused to say to me:

"'Blackie,' you gonna run the hoist-

ing engine? All right. When I'm ready for you to pull, I'll give the tender, here, three yanks on my life line."

Then on went his face plate and, amid a welter of bubbles from his escape valve, down went Bud—down and out of sight in the murky slip.

BELOW there, he fussed about for a time, reconnoitering. I lowered the hoisting tackle to him gently, a length of chain dangling from its lower hook. He swished about with the chain, stopped at one spot and busied himself there, then moved away from that spot to be in the clear and yanked three times on his life line.

"All right!" Bud's tender called back to me, to where I stood at the throttle of the hoisting engine. "Give 'er a pull!"

I opened the throttle just a bit, and the cable drum of the big Mundy rolled slowly, taking up the slack. The cable tautened and the tackle blocks swayed, quivered, then hung rigid.

Old Man Strang, watchful at a vantage point forward under the A-frame, turned, caught my eye and nodded. I opened the throttle wider.

R-r-ror-ror-row-r-r! growled the big Mundy's gearing.

The drum rolled on, eating cable. And the forward end of the derrick scow began to settle. The A-frame groaned. Down went the derrick scow's bow and up came her stern—a foot—a foot and a half—I thought. "Something's got to come!"—two feet—and then *zing!* Up shot the tackle blocks and up surged the forward end of the scow. That length of chain down there at the slip bottom, gripping the upper end of one of those infernal piling, had parted.

"Catch hold again, Blackie," the Old Man said.

I routed out another chain—a heavier one, this time, with bar links—and with the groping coöperation of Bud Moody, feeling his way about below us, we gripped that pile again. Again that big Mundy engine leaned on the cable; again the forward end of the derrick scow went down—down, this time, until the rim of her deck kissed the water. And then Old Man Strang motioned to me to slack off.

"Let's bring up the diver to get him in the clear," Bartlett suggested to the chief, "and then rassle her a little."

Up came Moody, to doff his helmet and perch on his stool on the deck while we "rassled" her. With two of our mooring lines—they ran from the sides of the slip to two steam capstans on deck—we swung that derrick scow from side to side, while I crammed steam into the cylinders of that hoisting engine until I thought her heads would blow. Side to side we swung, down at the head and up at the stern, tugging at that oaken pile, worrying at it, shaking it after the fashion of a bulldog.

Snap—snap—snap—snap!—the creak of timber and steel under strain; and then—*zing!* Up shot the tackle blocks again and up surged the scow. The chain, this time, had slipped off. I snapped shut the throttle, and Old Man Strang beckoned me forward for a conference with Bartlett.

"Odd!" the Old Man said to us. "I've pulled many a pile, but I've never seen one withstand a strain like that. Have either of you any suggestions?"

Bartlett, tugging at his mustache, his eyes troubled, spoke hesitantly. "Of course," he said, "I may be mistaken. But right from the start I've had an idea that something about this job was wrong. Chief, I think we've tackled something we can't finish!"

"We haven't!" the Old Man snapped—he was worried and his nerves may have been a little raw. "I've signed my name to a contract and posted my bond to complete this job. We're going to finish it!"

Then he turned to our diver.

"Moody," he said, "go below again and shift that chain to another pile. We'll find one that we *can* pull! And if we pull one, likely it will loosen the others."

"Yes, sir," said Bud. He bent forward to receive his helmet, rose from his stool and shuffled again to the upper end of his ladder. At the edge of the deck he paused, turned and beckoned to me. I stepped to his side. Peering out through the face plate opening, he asked me:

"Blackie, who's that bird sitting over there on the fantail of the *Conqueror?*"

A hundred feet away from us, and moored to the far side of the slip, lay the big, blue tug of Filmore & Briggs. On her after deck, his back to us, slouched a burly gorilla of a man in a faded blue sweater.

"That?" I said, taking a good look. "Why, that's your little playmate of other days, Fred Stanton!"

"Huh!" remarked the redhead. "Thought so. Been watching him. All right—face plate!"

I screwed on the face plate and then, with the air pump wheezing, Moody backed down his ladder and, in a swirl of bubbles, disappeared.

Stanton, eh? Stanton, the erstwhile salt-water diver with a water-front reputation all up and down the Lakes; Stanton, the not-too-honest; Stanton, who, on a former occasion, had come face to face with Bud Moody and, as a result of that encounter, had served a term in jail; Stanton, the punishing bruiser who—with reason—hated our whole outfit in general and in particular our young Mr. Moody; Stanton on the job for Filmore & Briggs! This was interesting.

"Anyway," I said to myself, "we've good company!"

And then Moody's tender called to me, "Slack away on that tackle!" and I trotted back to the levers of the hoisting engine.

Moody, fumbling in the silt twenty feet below us, shifted the chain to another pile, and I gave her the steam. Down went the head of the scow and up the stern; then, with the mooring lines, we swung from side to side and bulldogged again until Old Man Strang motioned me to shut off.

Moody tried another. Again we bulldogged, and again we let go. A whole day of that—and then a second day—and a third! And not a pile would budge.

IN the forenoon of the fourth day, the A-frame split—leaped loose at the top where the pressure was greatest.

On the Strang tug *Cascade*—she was convoying us on the job—the Old Man and Bartlett went upriver to our headquarters for some steel, and we shut down temporarily.

Moody, looking queer without his armor and obviously ill at ease, paced the derrick scow's deck.

"Blackie," he said, turning on me suddenly, "I smell fish!"

"Eh?" I inquired.

"Fish! That's what I smell—fish!"

"Uh-huh?" said I. "Well, have it your own way. But now that your mind is at ease on that point, suppose you sit down and rest yourself for a short while."

Obediently he sat down, on a coil of line. But his mind obviously wasn't at all at ease. For he scrubbed the side of his jaw with the knuckles of his right fist, then looked up at me and demanded:

"While I've been down there, playing tag with the piling, what have Filmore & Briggs been up to?" He jerked his head toward the inner end of the slip where the Detroit outfit's steam pile driver was banging away.

"Them?" I said. "Well, as nearly as I can tell, they've been monkeying with their cofferdam. Seems to be bothering them some, especially where they're pile driving it along the water's edge.

They send Stanton down pretty often to help ease in the sheath piling."

"Stanton, eh?" remarked the redhead. He scrubbed his jaw again.

"Yeh—Stanton," said I. Then I asked him: "What's on your mind?"

He shook his head. "Dunno, yet," he told me. "All that I know is that I smell fish."

Then something else took our attention—a visitor—a lean bird in a gray suit and Panama hat. He climbed the gangplank.

"Good day, sir," I said to him. "Are you looking for somebody?"

Our caller opened his mouth a crack and said: "No. No one in particular. I'm chief engineer of the Southport Steel Company. Inspecting."

With that he turned and sauntered aft, poking about here and there for maybe five minutes, then came forward again and, without another word, sauntered down the gangplank and climbed the river bank. Bud Moody's eyes followed him out of sight.

The lean bird had been gone maybe twenty minutes when the *Cascade* came back with the steel and brought along a couple of our riggers. The riggers patched the A-frame, and we were once more ready for action.

Moody, harnessed into his gear again, backed down the ladder, found him another oaken piling, and back we went, hammer and tongs, Mundy and capstans, to the business of bulldogging.

"All right!" Moody's tender would call to me. "Give 'er steam!"

I'd give her steam. Down would go her bow and up her stern; I'd lean on that Mundy's throttle and she'd heave until timber and steel would squeal on the knife edge of breaking point. And then we'd let go, and Moody, down there, would try another.

Four times we tried it that afternoon. And on the fifth, I stripped the Mundy's gears.

I watched Old Man Strang. Forward under the A-frame he stood. He opened his hands, looked at the palms of them as if he'd never seen them before, rubbed them together slowly, then turned and walked aft to where I stood.

"All right, Blackie," he said. "It's quite all right. To-morrow morning we'll bring down the *Continental*. She'll pull that piling!"

The *Continental* was the Old Man's biggest dredge. A big, steel brute of a dipper dredge, she was, with the lifting power of dynamite and legs on the corners of her—legs, whose massive, square feet she could plant in shale or clay or sand and then dig her methodical way through a mountain of rock.

"Boy!" I thought. "We're going to see action!"

We did.

AT six the next morning, the *Cascade* herded the squat *Continental* into the steel company's slip, and the *Continental*, in her businesslike way, went to work. With the steam ratchet jacks in her anchor columns, we planted her weight on the bottom. Then I rigged a chain from her dipper arm, and Moody went below and grappled a pile. As chief engineer of our outfit, I stood at the *Continental's* throttle.

"All right!" Moody's tender called. "Give 'er steam!"

Steam? If you want to see power in the raw, if you want to see cylinders and pistons that command a thinking man's respect, if you want to see gearing that can carry a load, if you want to see gleaming, well-oiled steel cable coiled on a drum so that it looks like black, silk thread on a spool—if you want to see these things, step down into the engine room of a dipper dredge.

I gave her steam.

Round went the drum—one revolution—two—two and a half—then slower—slower. Out forward her dipper arm rose and with it rose the chain

whose lower end Bud Moody had twined around the upper end of an oaken pile. The chain straightened, shivered, grew taut—and hung there, motionless in agony.

I opened the throttle another half inch, and—*zing!*—the chain parted.

When we'd pried loose the six-foot fragment that hung from the dipper arm and laid it on the *Continental's* deck, it lay as stiff as a solid bar, its links flattened and bitten into each other as if they'd passed across the anvil of a trip hammer.

"Bar chain, Blackie," said the Old Man. "Rig a bar chain."

I rigged a bar chain. And the *Continental* stiffened her mighty frame and lifted again—lifted until her laboring pistons stopped dead in their tracks in her steam-filled, straining cylinders.

At a signal from the chief, I slacked off. And we grappled another—and heaved—and slacked off.

THE Old Man looked worn. Working a dredge is expensive; every hour, every minute, runs into money. And when you're racking her as we were, pulling her heart out and accomplishing nothing except to convince yourself and your men that you've undertaken the impossible—well, then you would agree that marine contracting is not so good.

Bud Moody had come up for a rest. I saw him watching the Old Man, saw their eyes meet. Behind his beard the Old Man smiled a little, shook his head, then said to Bud:

"Boy, it's a tough one! But let's try another."

Down went Bud. Above water, the chain hanging from the *Continental's* dipper arm swayed a little as he groped about. Then "All right!" called his tender. "Give 'er steam!"

I opened the throttle. The Old Man, standing well forward and watching the chain, motioned for more. I swung back the lever. More? I swung it farther—farther—and *smash!*

Out forward there was the sound of rending steel. The dipper arm had crumpled.

Forward, Old Man Strang bowed his head; his shoulders sagged. Then he straightened, and called to me: "All right, Blackie. That's all!"

"He takes it standing up!" I thought.

I went straight to him. He turned and beckoned to Bartlett.

"I guess," he said to the general foreman, "I guess you were right."

Right there, Bud Moody, the redhead, stepped in. "Mr. Strang," he said, "I'm going ashore—for about a half an hour. I don't know—but maybe —— Well, I'm going!"

Our diver was clawing at his gear, wriggling out of it. I lent him a hand.

"Where you going?" I asked him.

"Up over the bank," he told me. "Up to call on the Southport Steel."

"What for?"

"Because I smell fish—something fishy!"

And he stepped clear of his armor, reached for his battered hat and was gone.

Twenty minutes, maybe half an hour later, he returned, down the bank, hat in hand, eyes alight—up the gangplank to the *Continental's* deck and straight to where his armor lay. With a jerk of his head he summoned me.

"Diving again," he said. "Dress me up!"

Why argue or ask questions? I picked up his gear.

"Been up to the engineering department," he volunteered, while I was adjusting the waist weights. "Yeh, Southport Steel's. Know a guy up there—draftsman—played football with 'im in high school. Yeh. Well, I found him up there just now and kind o' cornered him and talked with him a little, and then had an argument with a couple of other guys—and you know what,

Blackie? No, not so tight: I'll likely need plenty of room. You know what? Well, the original blue prints o' this slip where we're trying to pull piling have disappeared! I tell you, I smell fish!"

His helmet on, he shuffled to the ladder. There, just before I screwed home his face plate, he said to me quietly: "Blackie, you tend me yourself. Gimme plenty o' life line and air hose, for I'm going to take quite a little stroll."

Then, his face plate screwed tight, he turned and backed down his ladder. Mystified, standing there by his ladder with his life line and air hose sliding out through my hands, I watched the bubbles from his helmet—those telltale bubbles that, rising from the escape valve on a diver's helmet, reveal to those above water a diver's whereabouts.

He reached the bottom of the ladder. Then his bubbles moved away from the dredge, moved inward toward the inner end of the slip, toward the outfit of Filmore & Briggs.

Wondering, I watched them go. On they went. As I paid out life line and air hose, they kept going. On and on —endlessly.

THEN, aboard the Filmore & Briggs pile-driver scow, up at the end of the slip, arose a bustle.

Fred Stanton, he of the salt-water reputation and the long, gorilla arms, was getting into his helmet—in a hurry.

Bud Moody's bubbles had crossed half the intervening space between our outfit and the other when Stanton, armored, stamped to the ladder that ran down the side of the pile-driver scow. At the ladder top he paused. Watching his every move, I saw him reach to his belt as if to assure himself that something he wanted to be there actually was there.

It wasn't until later that I realized that it's in his belt, on the right-hand side, that a diver carries his sheath knife. Then Stanton turned and, step by step, backed down his ladder, and his helmet disappeared.

On went the bubbles of Bud Moody, straight ahead, a hundred feet, a hundred and fifty, straight on. Tramp—tramp—tramp—I imagined I could see him striding ahead down there, driving himself forward through the resisting water, marching, left, right, left, right, like a soldier going into battle.

It was near the foot of Stanton's ladder—so Moody told me later—that the two of them met. All about them a world of half-luminous fog.

Hands outstretched before him, as if he were trying to see through his finger tips, Moody, intent on reaching the inner end of the slip, touched a shadowy thing that moved. An air hose!

It ran to his right and to the rear. Thinking fast, Moody paused. As he paused, an arm, a long, left arm, bulky in canvas and rubber, closed about his waist and a helmet, monstrously staring out of its bulbous glassy eyes loomed before his face plate.

That arm, as long, so it seemed, as if it belonged to an octupus, folded itself about Moody's middle; and its fingers twined themselves, with a steely, deliberate grip, into the gearing of his waist weights. And the other hand, the right one, went exploring along a canvas belt for something that hung in a scabbard.

Under water, there are no such rules as those laid down by the late Marquis of Queensbury; but the element imposes certain conditions of its own. Under water, a man can't strike; for even if the water didn't deaden his blow —which it would do—what is there for him to hit? A metal helmet? But there are compensations. Under water a man can lift—lift his own weight, or the weight of another man with amazing ease.

Bud Moody caught that exploring right wrist. With his left hand he gripped it at the spot where the long,

rubber gauntlet of the armor tapers down, and he closed his fingers and set his jaw.

Then up came Moody's right knee—up sidewise, then inward until it caught the other man amidships—and then out, outward with every ounce of strength in Moody's big, young frame.

Stanton, surprised by the maneuver, felt himself rising, rising and tilting forward. With that long, left arm he clutched for another, a surer, hold. His fingers slipped.

Moody, crouching low, spoke to himself inside his helmet: "Gotta put this bird out of the way!"

Then he twirled his man, spun him as you'd spin a sinker on a fish line under water and, pinning his arms to his sides, gripped him from the rear. Moody's own life line, fallen slack, had looped itself under Stanton's arms. Now, the sheath knife! And Moody's own right hand went exploring for that scabbard.

ON the deck of the *Continental* I, watching two lines of bubbles close together, felt Moody's life line leap into life in my hands. Two peremptory jerks—— "Pull up!"

And I hauled away, hand over hand. "Funny," I thought, "the way he walks! And what's that gang yelling about, over there on the pile driver?"

The approaching column of bubbles reached the ladder that ran down the dredge's side. There it stopped.

"Come here!" I called to Bartlett. "He's hurt, I guess! Lend a hand!"

Heaving together, we brought a dead weight to the surface. Then up out of water and to the deck we dragged three hundred pounds or so of man and diving suit and slumped it down.

"Hands tied behind him with his own life line!" I said to Bartlett. "Life line cut and lashed around his waist!"

I peered in through the glass of the face plate. And the face behind it wasn't Bud Moody's, but Stanton's. And Mr. Stanton, I could see by his lips, was swearing.

"Look!" said Bartlett. "Up there by the pile-driver scow—Moody's bubbles!"

From under the outfit of Filmore & Briggs, from under the edge of their scow, the column was coming toward us—tramp—tramp—tramp — tramp — like a soldier. No life line. Just an air hose in a world of fog.

On the column came. It marched to the ladder, then, one slow step at a time, it climbed, and a dripping helmet came into sight and a dripping diver came on deck and sank on his three-legged stool. I twisted off his helmet; and the redhead blinked at the light, then said to Old Man Strang:

"Chief, somebody's been crossing you! There's something down there under that oak piling that these birds didn't tell you about. It has clinched that piling—clinched the points and turned them back, all wedged in together. It's a——"

Just then a voice spoke behind us. It belonged to a visitor who had called on us before, a bird in a gray suit and a Panama hat, the Southport Steel's chief engineer, and the chief engineer was mad. Ignoring the rest of us, he strode straight to Old Man Strang and said:

"You in charge here? Well, not a half hour ago, one of your men, in my absence, entered the Southport Steel Company's engineering department and, when two of my subordinates ordered him out, assaulted them!"

From his stool near the edge of the deck, Bud Moody rose. "Yeh," he said. "That was me. And you're just in time to talk it over, mister. I've just found that tunnel—found the end of it where it turns up, back there, under the Filmore & Briggs pile driver."

Right there, that chief engineer deflated.

The tunnel? It was an old one, planted there so far back that only Neptune could remember when and the reason for it, and then abandoned. The general idea, as it later came out in criminal court, was this: After Old Man Strang had broken his heart on that piling, Filmore & Briggs, at a good, stiff premium, were to take over the anchorage job, leave the piling untouched and hook the anchorage cables to steel set into the sides of the tunnel—and then split the premium with the engineer.

That, under the approval of a new chief engineer, is just what we did. Only we didn't split.

"But what I can't understand," I said to Bud Moody, "is where you got the hunch!"

"I told you, didn't I," he demanded, "that I smelled fish? And did you ever see a guy that looked more like a carp than that chief engineer?"

AFTER A "HAPPY ENDING"

SOMETIMES the creation or assembling of material for a story by an author is as strange and unusual as the finished yarn. Over forty years after meeting a man, talking with him and securing material for a story, a famous novelist discovered that he was impelled to write it. Naturally, after that length of time, some of the details were blurred in his mind.

None of the author's plots and ideas seemed as interesting as the half-forgotten one. He could not remember the name of the chance acquaintance; no one he knew was acquainted with this man. He could not go on with the story until he had secured these details. There seemed nothing to do but find this particular person, wherever he might be.

This situation was as great a problem to the author as any he had ever constructed in fiction. It was important to him; the questions had to be answered; he desired a "happy ending" to the situation as keenly as any reader of his stories had wished success to his fiction heroes.

After many fruitless efforts, the author put an advertisement in a widely read newspaper, something to this effect:

"Botony Bay wishes to meet Frank H., whom he met on the way to Los Angeles and later in the Sandwich Islands, New Zealand, London and Paris, in the mid-eighties."

A number of people answered—some jokingly; while some answers were palpable frauds. Then, one morning, he received a letter from the real chance acquaintance, now a man seventy-three years old, with snow-white hair. When the two met, the author was convinced within five minutes that this was the right person, for he gave convincing details of their first and subsequent meetings. And within a short time, the author got the details he needed for his story.

Luck, chance, or fate certainly aided this novelist; good fortune surely smiled upon him. Suppose this particular man had not looked at that one newspaper on the morning of that day? Then there would have been no "happy ending" to the story.

No Identification Whatever

By Victor Lauriston

Author of "The Tender Conscience," "Smoke Up!" Etc.

D. M. Halsey was a clever crook, so clever, in fact, that not a shred of evidence could be placed in the hands of the police in the event of his arrest. But he had overlooked one thing: Where the law requires evidence of a substantial nature, a mere man will punish on the strength of a healthy suspicion.

WHEN the telephone rang, Druggist Eddie Tyler of Hicksville was busy with the Saturday-night rush. Feminine accents, acutely distressed, came over the wire.

"Oh, Mr. Tyler, this is Mrs. Lingan speaking! I don't know what to do—I can't leave Mr. Lingan. We just moved into the Washington Apartments to-day, and I guess Mr. Lingan overworked himself. He's got an awful attack of the cramps. The doctor says to get a hot-water bottle. Could you send us one—the one-dollar-and-thirty-nine-cent kind?"

"Right away."

"C. O. D." Mrs. Lingan, momentarily calmer, was punctilious. Then, in an evident aside to her agonized husband: "Just a moment, dear. . . . Mr. Tyler, are you there yet? Please send change for a ten-dollar bill. It's the smallest I have, and I can't leave Mr. Lingan alone."

On Monday morning, the druggist made up his bank deposit. "What's this?" he exclaimed. He held up a Mexican ten-peso note.

"Why, Mr. Tyler," exclaimed the errand boy, "I'll bet that's the bill that dame at the Washington Apartments handed me! I couldn't see in that dark entry, except that it was a ten-spot."

Tyler telephoned the owner of the Washington Apartments. No Lingan lived there. No Lingan had moved in on Saturday.

Tyler explained what had happened, according to what information he had.

"Sure!" returned the landlord. "I found a hot-water bottle, all slashed to ribbons, in the vestibule. Sunday morning, that was, when I came down. The vestibule door is unlocked, of course—any one could step inside."

As a matter of perfunctory formality, Tyler telephoned the police. Two other Mexican ten-peso notes had been passed Saturday night in identically the same way—and in each case the article purchased had been spitefully demolished. Nor could the errand boy in any case identify the culprit.

"It's dog-gone mean, I'll say," philosophized Tyler, "to mess up a perfectly good hot-water bottle."

IN Milltown, T. F. Glassco handles radio supplies. Early Monday evening he had a telephone call.

"F. J. Girvan speaking. Say, Glassco, could you send up an A battery right away? Mine has just gone on the blink. C. O. D. Yes, right away, please. I want to get that concert at Cleveland. . . . And—oh, say! Send change for a ten-dollar bill."

"Right-o!" carelessly rejoined Glassco.

F. J. Girvan, a cripple, had found in radio a hobby to fill the long, blank hours of an otherwise empty life.

When the messenger boy returned, Glassco mechanically rang up the sale.

"How's Fred Girvan to-night?" he asked.

"I didn't see Mr. Girvan. A friend of his was waiting at the gate for me."

Glassco nodded. Then, on an impulse, he glanced at the note in the cash drawer. Reaching for the telephone, he called Girvan. Nothing had ever been wrong with the radio set.

"Jump in my car, sonny," briskly commanded Glassco.

While the car whirled them toward the Girvan place, the radio dealer detailed his suspicions.

The boy suddenly shrilled: "There's the man now, Mr. Glassco!"

Glassco stopped his car with a celerity that almost stripped his gears. He jumped down and unceremoniously collared the stranger.

"See here, my friend——"

Turning, the man thus addressed confronted Glassco with an imperturbable glance. He bit off a chew of tobacco.

"Shell out that money!" commanded Glassco.

Composedly the man chewed. "I don't understand," he mumbled.

Glassco, taken aback, explained.

The man smiled, almost apologetically. "The Girvan place? I don't know where it is. You see, I'm a stranger—a motor tourist—D. M. Halsey's my name. From Dowagiac. I just got into Milltown a few hours ago. If you think I'm a criminal"—his smile was decidedly friendly—"suppose you come along with me to the police station?"

He went on chewing. Glassco hesitated. While he wrangled with this man, the real criminal might be getting away.

"Oh, come along," the radio dealer growled.

At the police station, Halsey coolly gave his name and address, explained that he was a motor tourist passing through Milltown and had just stopped off for a few hours, and insisted he knew nothing whatever of the affair.

"No Mexican money on you? Like this?" challenged Glassco.

"Why not search?" invited Halsey.

The search disclosed ample funds, but no Mexican currency whatever.

"Well?" challenged Halsey.

The messenger boy tugged anxiously at Glassco's sleeve. He whispered. Glassco frowned.

"Is this the man you met at Girvan's

gate, sonny?" demanded the police chief.

"No, sir. That man had a little mustache."

An awkward silence followed.

"No identification whatever," grumbled the police chief. "Of course, if you insist on following this up, Mr. Glassco——"

Glassco frowned at the thought of throwing good time after bad money; and at further thought of what an innocent and outraged motor tourist from Dowagiac might do to him in a legal way.

"I guess it's up to me to apologize," he ungraciously grumbled.

On an afterthought, he took time to search the shrubbery in front of the Girvan place. He found the A battery, hammered out of all possibility of usefulness.

"Well, what do you think of that for meanness?" he vengefully demanded of the encircling night.

AT Pottersburg next morning, Mr. D. M. Halsey descended from his modest flivver and sauntered into the lobby of the Clayton Hotel. He registered with an easy flourish.

"Any letters?"

The clerk handed him a long, Manila envelope. Opened in the seclusion of Halsey's room, the envelope disclosed a thick wad of Mexican ten-peso notes.

Halsey extracted three. The rest he placed in a fresh envelope, which he addressed, "D. M. Halsey, care Commercial Hotel, Manton," and marked, "To be held till called for." This he mailed without delay. The three ten-peso notes he pocketed.

Three Pottersburg merchants that night sent out small C. O. D. packages to customers they knew, each with change for a ten-dollar bill. In each case a careless errand boy, meeting the supposed customer in a dark entry or on a heavily shaded porch, brought back a Mexican ten-peso note. And in each case the article delivered was, next morning, found smashed almost beyond recognition.

As, day by day, D. M. Halsey's modest flivver purred and rattled through the territory surrounding Milltown, he continued to take toll of trustful merchants, till the taste of continued winnings eradicated the less pleasant taste of those two ten-peso notes he had chewed and swallowed during the anxious moments he confronted the irate Glassco.

It was lucky Halsey had studied the rules of evidence. Every man who closely skirted the fringes of the criminal law should, Halsey felt, know just what evidence was necessary to convict. Where another man, in a tight corner, would have sent out an S O S call for a lawyer, D. M. Halsey, knowing what constituted evidence, merely chewed, swallowed, protested his innocence, kept cool—and got away with it.

Before he could be convicted, he must be positively identified. Even then, so long as it was merely his accuser's word against his, the accused had the benefit of the doubt. And the errand boys from whom he received C. O. D. packages and change in unlit vestibules, shadowy porches and other dark corners, could furnish no identification whatever. Particularly when a woman's coat lifted from a hall rack, or a false mustache, added confusion to dull wits.

REACHING Avonmore early, Halsey spent a monotonous day driving through the country. Nightfall overtook the modest flivver still rattling over the west pike, many miles from the village.

Studying the isolated farmhouses, Halsey had a flash of inspiration. He selected a farmhouse well back from the road. He halted his car just past the culvert spanning the roadside ditch.

Then, though the night was intensely black, he turned out the lights.

From the door of the farmhouse kitchen, an old woman, holding a lamp, peered at him with short-sighted eyes. Halsey kept himself discreetly in a shadow.

"Could you make us up a lunch?" he asked. "We expected to reach Avonmore before this, but took the wrong turn." Then, as the woman hospitably urged him to come in and sit down: "No, I've got to hurry. My wife will be frightened if I don't get right back. A bit of cold meat and some bread and butter will do."

Though the woman perversely urged him to come in, Halsey won his point. While he sat on the step, the garrulous farm wife hobbled about the kitchen preparing the lunch.

"I'm seventy-three," she chirped, "but I'm spry as most women at fifty! Nat, he's my boy, he got awful excited when I fell down this afternoon. He was sure I'd fainted, but lawsy!—my foot just slipped. That was all. Nobody ever comes out of a faint so quick, I told Nat."

Her interminable chirping irritated Halsey. Now he became conscious, too, of a curiously high-pitched voice from one of the front rooms. It went on and on in a sort of monotone, like a man talking to himself. Halsey could not distinguish the words.

He took the lunch, and tossed the woman a ten-peso note.

"Take a dollar out of that. Yes, you must! My wife would never forgive me if I let you go to all this trouble for nothing."

He had a long, anxious argument before the woman, surrendering to his insistence, counted out nine dollars from the tea caddy.

In the darkness of the lane, Halsey flung the carefully prepared lunch in the mud. Then, spitefully, he trampled it.

"I hope the old fool will find it there," he chuckled.

As Halsey reached the road, a burly figure climbed from the ditch and stepped between him and the waiting flivver.

Halsey, with a flash of apprehension, wondered whence this man had come. Not from the farmhouse, surely. The monotonous voice in the front room was still talking when he left. Yet while he argued with the perverse woman in the kitchen, a man might easily have slipped out and anticipated him.

"You stop right thar," commanded a hostile voice.

A swift, unobserved movement of his hand from pocket to mouth and Halsey began to chew industriously.

"Are you the bum that's peddlin' worthless Mexican money?"

Halsey, gulping down the macerated paper, eyed the man with imperturbable satisfaction. That much evidence against him was gone.

IN the darkness, he could distinguish nothing of his antagonist's features; but, more important still, his antagonist could distinguished nothing of his.

Once in the car, his finger on the self-starter, he could leap away in a moment—but that would be tantamount to a confession of guilt. And D. M. Halsey was innocent till the evidence proved him guilty; and no evidence would ever prove *him* guilty.

"What do you mean?" he coolly challenged.

The shadowy figure kept between Halsey and the car. "Mexican money," he growled. "You've been passing it in all the towns around here."

His certitude was ominous. But D. M. Halsey had before this got the better of men even more certain.

"I don't know who you are, stranger," Halsey said. "I'm a motor tourist from Dowagiac—name's D. M.

Halsey. My lights went bad, and I got down to see if this was a turn in the road, or just a lane. If I've done anything wrong, we can go together to the nearest police officer. But first, how'd you like to search me for Mexican money?"

The grim figure, silently accepting the invitation, went through first one pocket, then another. He struck a match to study the wad of bills he found.

Halsey, as though the light dazzled his eyes, discreetly averted his face. So he saw nothing of the stranger's.

"All good money," commented the man.

"Sure!" cheerily agreed Halsey. "Now, if you like, I'll drive you to Avonmore, and we'll call on the police. Only, remember"—his tone grew steely —"if you're to convict me of this crime, whatever it is, you must positively identify me as the criminal!"

The fellow, halted by his positive tone, puzzled a moment, with head sunk forward. Then he looked up. "You mean, even if you did pass Mexican money, I've got to prove it was you done it? And if I can't identify you as the crook, the police will let you go?"

"What else could they do?" returned Halsey, still urbane.

The big man seemed to stare at the bills still clutched in his hand. "I s'pose —nothin' else. And even if I *could* swear you done it, your oath's as good as mine. Eh?"

"That's the situation."

"And the man accused gets the benefit of the doubt?"

"Correct."

Halsey turned toward the car, then halted. "My money, if you please?"

The big man pocketed the bills.

"See here," demanded Halsey, "what are you doing with that money?"

"I'll give it to some charity—but here's good exchange for it."

His fist shot out.

Halsey mechanically got to his feet. One eye was closed already. A second blow that again sent him reeling closed the other. His head struck the flivver. He staggered to his feet and with feeble fists fanned the air. His antagonist seemed to have a dozen huge fists, and as many hobnailed, heavy-soled, vicious boots.

After a few feeble efforts, Halsey lay on the ground, whimpering. So the big man gripped his collar with one strong fist, and with the other methodically punched him.

Then, meditatively, he regarded the whining, cringing wreck. "Well, friend, my home's on the next concession—and I've got to get back in time for the milkin'."

He flung Halsey violently from him. The dealer in Mexican pesos, floundering in the stagnant slime of the roadside ditch, heard the mingled sounds of bursting tires, shattered glass and dented tin. Then the striking of a match—but even with the flames of the gasoline tank illumining the landscape, Halsey crept out of the ditch too late to get any clear picture of the swiftly retreating figure of the avenger.

AT the Avonmore police station in the chill dawn, a pitiably human wreck, wet, chilled to the bone, painted with yellow mud, bruised and sore beyond description, clamored incoherently for justice.

"A dirty crook," whined Halsey, "held me up and took my money and wrecked my car!"

He sputtered forth as much of his story as he dared disclose. The police chief gazed at him oddly before making any comment.

"Perhaps," he said, "the fellow who held you up is the same crook that's been passing Mexican bills on the country merchants. If we had an amateur broadcasting outfit like Glassco's got over at Milltown, we might catch him.

Glassco's been broadcasting warnings over the radio for two weeks, night after night—but rats! What's the use? He hasn't any description of the fellow. It's lucky *you* saw him. What did he look like, this fellow who beat you up?"

Halsey plunged into description. A big man, dressed—— How *was* the fellow dressed? Looking like—— What *did* he look like? He floundered to a despairing halt, and stood chewing, not Mexican pesos, but the cud of bitter reflection.

"Huh!" grunted the police chief. "What's the use? If we did catch any one, it's plain you couldn't identify him; and even if you did, it's just your word against his."

BEFORE THE CAMERA

THERE are some screen actors, strange as it may seem, who are not at all interested in having their pictures printed in the picture-play magazines; neither do they care particularly whether the public likes them. In fact, so unconcerned are they that they have never even betrayed the tiniest inclination toward watching a film in which they appear. And these actors, incidentally, though paid as much as a hundred dollars a day for participating in the activities which are photographed, have never discussed the salary question with a producer.

One of them, an actor considered by the film magnates as being worth a seven-figure salary—if he worked every day—per year, is a boa constrictor who is in demand. When it comes to jungle stuff, he is in his element and very much in the picture. Of him it is said, however, that he has never received a fan letter.

Also among the topnotchers in earning power is a leopard. According to the pay roll of a motion-picture firm, this leopard's earning power was over eighteen thousand dollars every year. If he could be persuaded to change his spots, he'd be worth more to his owner.

It is because of the rarity of the boa constrictor that he draws down a century note for a working day. Alligators, the kind that come to a useful end as suit cases and hand bags, are only worth fifty dollars before the lens per day, and only those alligators who are sweet-tempered and of a calm nature are hired. For when an alligator has a peevish disposition, he is likely to bite the hand and arm that feeds him.

Of course, the greatest money-makers of them all are the well-trained police dogs who are featured stars, appearing in stories specially written for them. Due to their popularity with the public, these animals are kept busy practically all the year round.

A colored chauffeur, who had been listening to studio gossip about the worth of one of these police dogs, was once heard to remark: "He leads a dawg's life, but he sure does get man-size wages!"

The Goddess from the Shades

By John Buchan

Author of "Mr. Standfast," "Huntingtower," Etc.

An adventure upon an island of mystery in the Greek archipelago.

IN FOUR PARTS—PART IV.

CHAPTER XX.

ANOTHER PRISONER.

FROM his trousers pocket, Vernon drew his electric torch and flashed it round the room in which he found himself. It was the extreme opposite of the empty stone hall, for it was heavily decorated and crowded with furniture, Clearly no one had used it lately, for dust lay on everything and the shutters of the windows had not been unbarred for months.

It had the air, indeed, of a lumber room, into which furniture had been casually shot. The pieces were for the most part fine and costly. There were several Spanish cabinets, a wonderful red-lacquer couch, quantities of Oriental rugs which looked good, and a number of Chinese vases and antique silver lamps.

But it was not the junk which filled it that caught Vernon's eye. It was the walls, which had been painted and frescoed in one continuous picture. At first, he thought it was a Procession of the Hours or the Seasons, but when he brought his torch to bear on it, he saw that it was something very different. The background was a mountain glade and on the lawns, and beside the pools of a stream, figures were engaged in wild dances.

Pan and his satyrs were there, and a bevy of nymphs, and strange figures half animal, half human. The thing was done with immense skill—the slanted eyes of the fauns, the leer in a contorted satyr face, the terror of the nymphs.

There were other things which Vernon noted in the jumble of the room —a head of Aphrodite, for instance— Pandemia, not Urania; a broken statuette of a boy; a group of little figures which were a miracle in the imagina-

tive degradation of the human form. And all this in a shuttered room stifling with mold and disuse.

THERE was a door at the farther end which he found ajar. The room beyond was like a mortuary—the walls painted black, and undecorated save for one small picture. There was a crack in the shutters here, and perhaps a broken window, for a breath of the clean sea air met him. There was no furniture, except an oblong piece of yellow marble which seemed, from the ram's heads and cornucopias, to be an old altar. He turned his torch on the solitary picture.

It represented the stock scene of Salome with the head of John the Baptist, a subject which bad artists have made play with for the last five hundred years. But this was none of the customary daubs, but the work of a master —a perverted, perhaps a crazy, genius. The woman's gloating face, the stare of the dead eyes, were wonderful and awful.

He opened another door and found himself in a little closet, lined to the ceiling with books. He knew what he would find on the shelves. The volumes were finely bound, chiefly in vellum, and among them were a certain number of reputable classics. But most belonged to the backstairs of literature.

Vernon went back to the first room, nauseated and angry. He must get out of this damned place, which was, or had been, the habitation of devils. What kind of owner could such a house possess? The woman had said that it was a young girl. But how could virtue dwell in such an environment?

He had opened the door to begin his retreat when a lantern appeared in the corridor. It was the woman and, with a finger on her lip, she motioned him back into the room.

"My mistress is asleep," she said, "and it would not be well to wake her. Monsieur will stay here to-night and speak with her in the morning?"

"I'll do nothing of the kind," said Vernon. "I'm going back to my boat."

The woman caught his involuntary glance at the wall paintings and clutched his arm. "But that is not her doing!" she cried. "That was the work of her father, who was beyond belief wicked. It is his sins that the child is about to expiate. The people have condemned her, but you surely would not join in their unjust judgment of an innocent young woman?"

"I tell you I will have nothing to do with the place. Will you kindly show me the way back?"

Her face hardened. "I cannot. Mitri has the key."

"Well, where the devil is Mitri?"

"I will not tell! Monsieur, I beseech you, do not forsake us! There has been evil in this house enough to sink it to hell, but my mistress is innocent. I ask only that you speak with her. After that, if you so decide, you can go away."

The woman was plainly honest and in earnest, and Vernon was a just man. He suddenly felt that he was behaving badly. There could be no harm in sleeping a night in the house and, in the morning, interviewing its owner. If it was a case of real necessity, he could take her and her maid off in his boat. After all, there might be serious trouble afoot. The sight of those hideous rooms had given him a sharp realization of the ugly things that life can offer.

He was taken to a clean, bare little attic at the top of the house, which had once no doubt been a servant's quarters. Having been up all the previous night, his head had scarcely touched the rough pillow before he was asleep. He slept for ten hours, till he was awakened by Mitri, who brought him hot water and soap and a venerable razor with which he made some attempt at a toilet. He

noticed that the fog was still thick, and from the garret window he looked into an opaque blanket.

He had wakened with a different attitude toward the adventure in which he found himself. The sense of a wasted youth and defrauded hopes had left him; he felt more tightly strung, more vigorous, younger; he also felt a certain curiosity about this Greek girl who in an abominable house was defying the lightnings.

Mitri conducted him to the first floor, where he was taken charge of by the Frenchwoman.

"Do not be afraid of her," she whispered. "Deal with her as a man with a woman and make her do your bidding. She is stiff-necked toward me, but she may listen to a young man, especially if he be English."

The woman ushered Vernon into a room which was very different from the hideous chambers he had explored the night before. It was poorly and sparsely furnished; the chairs were chiefly wicker; the walls had recently been distempered by an amateur hand; the floor was bare, scrubbed board. But a bright fire burned on the hearth; there was a big bunch of narcissus on a table set for breakfast; and flowering branches had been stuck in the tall vases beside the chimney. Through the open window came a drift of fog which intensified the comfort of the fire.

It was a woman's room, for on a table lay some knitting and a piece of embroidery, and a small ivory housewife's case, bearing the initials "K. A." There were one or two books, also, and Vernon looked at them curiously. One was a book of poems which had been published in London a month before. This Greek girl must know English; perhaps she had recently been in England.

He took up another volume, and to his amazement it was a reprint of Peter Beckford's "Thoughts on Hunting." He could not have been more surprised if he had found a copy of the Eton *Chronicle* What on earth was the mistress of a lonely Ægean island doing with Peter Beckford?

The fire crackled cheerfully; the raw morning air flowed through the window. Vernon cast longing eyes on the simple preparations for breakfast. He was ferociously hungry, and he wished he were now on the boat where the Epirote would be frying bacon.

THERE was another door besides that by which he had come, and curiously enough it was in the same position as the door in the room of his dream. He angrily dismissed the memory of that preposterous hallucination, but he kept his eye on the door. By it no doubt the mistress of the house would enter, and he wished she would make haste. He was beginning to be very curious about this girl. Probably she would be indignant and send him about his business, but she could scarcely refuse to give him breakfast first. In any case there was the yacht.

There was a mirror above the mantelpiece in which he caught a glimpse of himself. The glimpse was not reassuring. His face was as dark as an Indian's, his hair needed cutting; and his blue jersey was bleached and discolored with salt water. He looked like a deck hand on a cargo boat. But perhaps a girl who read Beckford would not be pedantic about appearances. He put his trust in Peter——

The door had opened. A voice sharp pitched and startled was speaking and, to his surprise, it spoke in English.

"Who the devil are you?" it said.

He saw a slim girl, who stood in the entrance poised like a runner, every line of her figure an expression of amazement. He had seen her before, but his memory was wretched for women's faces. But the odd thing was that,

after the first second, there was recognition in her face.

"Colonel Milburne!" said the voice. "What in the name of goodness are you doing here?"

She knew him, and he knew her, but where—when—had they met? He must have stared blankly, for the girl laughed.

"You have forgotten," she said. "But I have seen you out with the Mivern, and we met at luncheon at Wirlesdon in the winter."

He remembered now, and what he remembered chiefly were the last words he had spoken to me on the subject of this girl. The adventure was becoming farcical.

"I—I beg your pardon," he stammered. "You are Miss Arabin? I didn't know——"

"I am Miss Arabin. But why the honor of an early-morning call from Colonel Milburne?"

"I came here last night in a yacht." Vernon was making a lame business of his explanation, for the startled, angry eyes of his hostess scattered his wits. "I anchored below in the fog, and an old man came out in a boat and asked me to come ashore. There was a woman on the beach—your maid—and she implored my help, told a story I didn't quite follow——"

"The fog!" the girl repeated. "That of course explains why you were allowed to anchor. In clear weather, you would certainly have been driven out to sea.

She spoke in so assured a tone that Vernon was piqued.

"The seas are free," he said. "Who would have interfered with me? Your servants?"

She laughed again, mirthlessly. "My people. Not my servants. Continue. You came ashore and listened to Elise's chatter. After that?"

"She said you were asleep and must not be wakened, but that I should speak to you in the morning. She put me up for the night."

"Where?" Kore asked sharply.

"In a little room on the top floor."

"I see. 'Where you sleeps, you breakfasts.' Well, we'd better have some food."

SHE rang a silver hand bell, and the maid, who must have been waiting close at hand, appeared with coffee and boiled eggs. She cast an anxious glance at Vernon, as if to inquire how he had fared at her mistress' hands.

"Sit down," said the girl, when Elise had gone. "I can't give you much to eat, for these days we are on short rations. I'm sorry, but there's no sugar. I can recommend the honey. It's the only good thing in Plakos."

"Is this Plakos? I came here once before—in 1914, in a steam yacht. I suppose I am in the big white house which looks down upon the jetty. I could see nothing last night in the fog. I remember a long causeway and steps cut in the rock. That must have been the road I came."

She nodded. "What kind of sailor are you to be so ignorant of your whereabouts? Oh, I see, the storm! What's the size of your boat?"

When he told her, she exclaimed: "You must have had the devil of a time, for it was a first-class gale! And now on your arrival in port, you are plunged into melodrama. You don't look as if you had much taste for melodrama, Colonel Milburne."

"I haven't. But is it really melodrama? Your maid told me a rather alarming tale."

Her eyes had the hard-agate gleam, which he remembered from Wirlesdon. Then he had detested her, but now, as he looked at her, he saw that which made him alter his judgment. The small face was very pale, and there were dark lines under the hard eyes. This girl was undergoing some heavy

strain, and her casual manner was in the nature of a shield which protects some festering wound.

"Is it true?" he asked.

"So-so. In parts, no doubt. I am having trouble with my tenants, which I am told is a thing that happens even in England. But that is my own concern, and I don't ask for help. After breakfast, I would suggest that you go back to your yacht."

"I think you had better come with me. You and your maid. I take it that the old man Mitri can fend for himself."

"How kind of you!" she cried in a falsetto, mimicking voice. "How extraordinarily kind! But you see I haven't asked your help, and I don't propose to accept it. You're sure you won't have any more coffee? I wonder if you could give me a cigarette? I've been out of them for three days."

She lay back in a wicker chair, rocking herself and lazily blowing smoke clouds. Vernon stood with his back to the fire and filled a pipe.

"I don't see how I can go away," he said, "unless I can convince myself that you're in no danger. You're English, and a woman, and I'm bound to help you whether you want it or not." He spoke with assurance now, perhaps with a certain priggishness. The tone may have offended the girl, for when she spoke, it was with a touch of the insolence which he remembered at Wirlesdon.

"I'm curious to know what Elise told you last night."

"Simply that you were imprisoned here by the people of Plakos—that they thought you a witch and might very likely treat you in the savage way that people used to treat witches."

She nodded. "That's about the size of it. But what if I refuse to let any one interfere in a fight between me and my own people? Supposing this is something which I must stick out for the sake of my own credit? What then, Colonel Milburne? You have been a soldier. You wouldn't advise me to run away."

"That depends," replied Vernon. "There are fights where there can be no victory—where the right course is to run away. Your maid told me something else. She said that the evil reputation you had among the peasants was not your own doing—that, of course, I knew—but a legacy from your family, who for very good reasons were unpopular. Does that make no difference?"

"How?"

"Why, there's surely no obligation in honor to make yourself a vicarious sacrifice for other people's misdeeds!"

"I—don't—think I agree. One must pay for one's race as well as for oneself."

"Oh, nonsense! Not the kind of thing your family seem to have amused themselves with."

"What do you mean?"

"I was put into a room last night" —Vernon spoke hesitatingly—"and I saw some books and paintings. They were horrible. I understood—— Well, that the peasants might have a good deal of reason—something to say for themselves, you know. Why should you suffer?"

The morning sun had broken through the fog and was shining full on the girl's face. She sprang to her feet, and Vernon saw that she had blushed deeply.

"You entered those rooms!" she cried. "That fool Elise! I will have her beaten. Oh, I am shamed! Get off with you! You are only making me wretched. Get off while there's time!"

The sight of her crimson face and neck moved Vernon to a deep compassion.

"I refuse to leave without you, Miss Arabin," he said. "I do not know much, but I know enough to see that

you are in deadly danger. I can no more leave you here than I could leave a drowning child in the sea. Quick! Get your maid and pack some things and we'll be gone."

She stood before him, an abashed, obstinate child. "I won't go. I hate you! You have seen—— Oh, leave me, if you have any pity!"

"You come with me."

"I won't!" Her lips were a thin line, and the shut jaws made a square of the resolute little face.

"Then I shall carry you off. I'm very sorry, Miss Arabin, but I'm going to save you in spite of yourself."

Vernon had his hand stretched out to the silver hand bell to summon Elise, when he found himself looking at a small pistol. He caught her wrist, expecting it to go off, but nothing happened. It dropped into his hand and he saw that it was unloaded.

He rang the bell. "All the more reason why you should come with me, if you are so badly armed."

The girl stood stiff and silent, her eyes and cheeks burning, as Elise entered.

"Pack for your mistress," he told the maid. "Bring as little baggage as possible, for there isn't much room."

The woman hurried off gladly to do his bidding.

"Please don't make a scene," he said. "You will have to come in the end and some day you will forgive me."

"I will not come," she said, "but I will show you something."

Life seemed to have been restored to her tense body, as she hurried him out of the room, along a corridor, and up a flight of stairs to a window which looked seaward.

The last wreath of fog had disappeared, and the half moon of bay lay blue and sparkling. Down at the jetty were men and boats, but out on the water there was no sign of the anchored yacht.

"What does that mean!" Vernon cried.

"It means that your boat has gone. When the air cleared, the people saw it, and have driven your man away. It means that you, like me, are a prisoner!"

CHAPTER XXI.

A DARING SCHEME.

AS Vernon looked at the flushed girl, whose voice as she spoke had surely as much consternation in it as triumph, he experienced a sudden dislocation of mind. Something fell from him—the elderliness, the preoccupation, the stiff dogma of his recent years. He felt again the enterprise of youth, which has open arms for novelty. He felt an eagerness to be up and doing—what, he was not clear, but something difficult and high-handed. The vanishing of his dream had left the chambers of his mind swept and garnished, and youth does not tolerate empty rooms under any circumstances.

Also, though I do not think that he had yet begun to fall in love with Kore, he understood the quality of one whom aforetimes he had disliked both as individual and type. This pale girl, dressed like a young woman in a Scotch shooting lodge, was facing terror with a stiff lip. There was nothing second-rate about her now. She might make light of her danger in her words, but her eyes betrayed her.

It was about this danger that he was still undecided. You see, he had not, like me, seen the people of the island, felt the strain of their expectancy, or looked on the secret spaces of the Dancing Floor. He had come out of the storm to hear a tale told in the fog and darkness by an excited woman. That was all—that and the hideous rooms at which he had had a passing glance. The atmosphere of the Dancing Floor, which I had found so unnerving, had not yet begun to affect him

"My fellow will come back," he said, after scanning the empty seas. "He has his faults, but he is plucky and faithful."

"You do not understand," the girl returned. "He would be one against a thousand. He may be as brave as a lion, but they won't let him anchor, and if they did, they would never let you and me join him. I have told you we are prisoners—close prisoners."

"You must tell me a great deal more. You see, you can't refuse my help now, for we are in the same boat. Do you mind if we go back to where we breakfasted, for I left my pipe there?"

She turned without a word and led him back to her sitting room, passing a woebegone Elise who, with her arms full of clothes, was told that her services were now needless. The windows of the room looked on a garden which had been suffered to run wild, but which still showed a wealth of spring blossoms. Beyond was a shallow terrace and then the darkness of trees. A man's head seemed to move behind a cypress hedge. The girl nodded toward it.

"One of my jailers," she said.

She stood looking out of the window with her eyes averted from Vernon and seemed to be forcing herself to speak.

"You have guessed right about my family," she said. "And about this house. I am cleaning it slowly—I must do it myself, Elise and I, for I do not want strangers to know. This room was as bad as the other two till I whitewashed the walls. The old furniture I am storing in certain rooms till I have time to destroy it. I think I will burn it, for it has hideous associations for me. I would have had the whole house in order this spring, if my foolish people had not lost their heads."

A "tawdry girl," that was how Vernon had spoken of her to me. He withdrew that word now. "Tawdry" was the last adjective he would use about this strange child, fighting alone to get rid of a burden of ancient evil. He had thought her a modish, artificial being, a moth hatched out of the latest freak of fashion. Now she seemed to him a thousand years removed from the feverish world which he had thought her natural setting. Her appeal was her extreme candor and simplicity, her utter, savage, unconsidering courage—a lioness at bay.

"Let us take the family for granted," Vernon said gently. "I can't expect you to talk about that. I assume that there was that in your predecessor's doings which gave these islanders a legitimate grievance. What I want to know is what they are up to now. Tell me very carefully everything that has happened since you came here a week ago."

SHE had little to tell him. She had been let enter the house by the ordinary road from the village, and after that the gates had been barred. When she had attempted to go for a walk, she had been turned back by men with rifles—she did not tell Vernon how those rifles had been procured. The hillmen had joined with the people of the coast—you could always tell a hillman by his dress—though the two used to be hereditary enemies.

That made her angry and also uneasy; so did the curious methodical ways of the siege. They were not attempting to enter the house—she doubted if any one of them would dare to cross the threshold—they were only there to prevent her leaving it. She herself, not the looting of the house, must be their object. Mitri was permitted to go to the village, but he did not go often, for he came back terrified and could not or would not explain his terrors.

No communication had been held with the watchers, and no message had come from them. She had tried repeatedly to find out their intentions, but

the sentinels would not speak, and she could make nothing of Mitri. No, she was not allowed into the demesne. There were sentries there right up to the house wall—sentries night and day.

Vernon asked her about supplies. She had brought a store with her which was not yet exhausted, but the people sent up food every morning. Mitri found it laid on the threshold of the main door. Curious food—barley cakes and honey and cheese and eggs and dried figs. She couldn't imagine where they got it from, for the people had been starving in the winter. Milk, too—plenty of milk, which was another unexpected thing.

Water—that was the oddest business of all. The house had a fine well in the stable yard on the east side. This had been sealed up and its use forbidden to Mitri. But morning and night buckets of fresh water were brought to the door—whence, she did not know.

"It rather restricts our bathing arrangements," she said.

She told the story lightly, with a ready laugh, as if she were once more mistress of herself. Mistress of herself she certainly was, but she could not command her eyes. It was these that counteracted the debonair voice and kept tragedy in the atmosphere.

Vernon, as I have said, had not the reason which I had for feeling the gravity of the business. But he was a scholar, and there were details in Kore's account which startled him.

"Tell me about the food again. Cheese and honey and barley cakes, dried figs and eggs—nothing more?"

"Nothing more. And not a great deal of that. Not more than enough to feed one person for twenty-four hours. We have to supplement it from the stores we brought."

"I see. It is meant for you personally—not for your household. And the water? You don't know what spring it comes from?"

She shook her head. "There are many springs in Plakos. But why does our commissariat interest you?"

"Because it reminds me of something I have read somewhere. Cheese and honey and barley cakes—that is ritual food. Sacramental, if you like. And the water. Probably brought from some sacred well. I don't like it much. Tell me about the people here, Miss Arabin. Are they very backward and superstitious?"

"I suppose you might call them that. They are a fine race to look at, and claim to be pure Greek—at least the coast folk. The hillmen are said to be mongrels, but they are handsome mongrels and fought bravely in the war. But I don't know them well, for I left when I was a child, and since my father died, I have only seen the people of Kynætho."

"Kynætho?" Vernon cried out sharply, for the word was like a bell to ring up the curtain of memory.

"Yes, Kynætho. That is the village at the gate."

NOW he had the clew. Kynætho had been mentioned in the manuscript fragment which he had translated for me. It was at Kynætho that the strange rite was performed of the Kore and the Kouros. The details were engraven on his memory, for they had profoundly impressed him and he had turned them over repeatedly in his mind. He had thought he had discovered the record of a new ritual form; rather it appeared that he had stumbled upon the living rite itself.

"I begin—to understand," he said slowly. "I want you to let me speak to Mitri. Alone, if you please. I have done this work before in the war, and I can get more out of that kind of fellow if I am alone with him. Then I shall prospect the land."

He found Mitri in his lair in the ancient kitchen. With the old man there

was no trouble, for when he found that his interlocutor spoke Greek fluently, he overflowed in confidences.

"They will burn this house," Mitri said finally. "They have piled fagots on the north and east sides, where the wind blows. And the time will be Easter eve."

"And your mistress?"

Mitri shrugged his shoulders. "There is no hope for her, I tell you. She had a chance of flight and missed it, though I pleaded with her. She will burn with the house unless——"

He looked at Vernon timidly, as if he feared to reveal something.

"Unless?" said Vernon.

"There is a rumor in Kynætho of something else. In that accursed village they have preserved tales of the old days, and they say that on the night of Good Friday there will be a panegyris on the Dancing Floor. There will be a race with torches, and he who wins will be called king. To him it will fall to slay my mistress in order that the ancient ones may appear and bless the people."

"I see," said Vernon. "Do you believe in that rubbish?"

Mitri crossed himself and declared that he was a Christian and, after God and the saints, loved his mistress.

"That is well. I trust you, Mitri; and I will show you how you can save her. You are allowed to leave the house?"

"Every second day only. I went yesterday, and cannot go again till to-morrow. I have a daughter married in the village, whom I am permitted to visit."

"Very well. We are still two days from Good Friday. Go down to the village to-morrow and find out all about the plans for Good Friday evening. Lie as much as you like. Say you hate your mistress and will desert her whenever you are bidden. Pretend you're on the other side. Get their confidence. A madness has afflicted this island and you are the only sane Christian left in it. If these ruffians hurt your mistress, the government—both in Athens and in London—will send soldiers and hang many. After that, there will be no more Kynætho. We have got to prevent the people making fools of themselves. Your mistress is English and I am English, and that is why I stay here. You do exactly as I tell you and we'll win through."

IT was essential to encourage Mitri, for the old man was now torn between superstitious fear and fidelity to Kore, and only a robust skepticism and a lively hope would enable him to do his part. Vernon accordingly protested a confidence which he was very far from feeling. It was arranged that Mitri should go to Kynætho next morning and spend the day there.

After that, guided by the old man, Vernon made a circuit of the house. From the top windows he was able to follow the lie of the land—the postern gate to the shore, the nest of stables and outbuildings on the east, with access to the shallow glen running up from the jetty, the main entrance and the drive from Kynætho, the wooded demesne ending at the cliffs, and the orchards and olive yards between the cliffs and the causeway.

The patrols came right up to the house wall, and on various sides Vernon had a glimpse of them. But he failed to get what he specially sought, a prospect of any part of the adjoining coast line beyond the little bay. He believed that his yacht was somewhere hidden there, out of sight of the peasants. He was convinced that the Epirote would obey orders and wait for him, and would not go one yard farther away than was strictly necessary. But he was at a loss to know how to find the man, if he were penned up in that shuttered mausoleum.

VERNON returned to find Kore sewing by the window of her little room. He entered quietly and had a momentary glimpse of her before she was conscious of his presence. She was looking straight before her with vacant eyes, her face in profile against the window, a figure of infinite appeal. Vernon had a moment of acute compunction.

What he had once thought and spoken of this poor child seemed to him now to have been senseless brutality. He had called her tawdry and vulgar and shrill, he had thought her the ugly product of the ugly after-the-war world. But there she sat like a muse of meditation, as fine and delicate as a sword blade. And she had a sword's steel, too, for had she not faced unknown peril for a scruple?

"What does Mitri say?" she asked, in a voice which had a forced briskness in it.

"I shall know more to-morrow night, but I have learned something. You are safe for the better part of three days —till some time on Good Friday evening. That is one thing. The other is that your scheme of wearing down the hostility of your people has failed. Your people have gone stark mad. The business is far too solemn for me to speak smooth things. They have resurrected an old pagan rite of sacrifice. *Sacrifice,* do you understand? This house will be burned, and if they have their will, you will die."

"I was beginning to guess as much. I don't want to die, for it means defeat. But I don't think I am afraid to die. You see—life is rather difficult—and not very satisfactory. But tell me more."

Vernon gave her a sketch of the ritual of Kynætho. "It was your mentioning the name that brought it back to me. I have always been interested in Greek religion, and by an amazing chance I came on this only a month or so ago. Leithen, the lawyer—you know him, I think—gave me a bit of medieval Greek manuscript to translate, and part of it had this rite."

"Leithen," she cried. "Sir Edward? Then he found it among the papers I lent him. Why didn't he tell me about it?"

"I can't imagine."

"Perhaps he thought I wouldn't have believed it. I wouldn't, a month ago. Perhaps he thought he could prevent me coming here. I think he did his best. I had to go off without saying good-by to him, and he was my greatest friend."

"He happens to be also my closest friend. If you had known about this —this crazy ritual, would you have come?"

She smiled. "I don't know. I'm very obstinate, and I can't bear to be bullied. These people are trying to bully me. But of course I didn't know how bad it was. And I didn't know that I was going to land you in this mess. That is what weighs on my mind."

"But you didn't invite me here. You told me to clear out."

"My servants invited you and therefore I am responsible. Oh, Colonel Milburne, you must understand what I feel! I haven't had an easy life, for I seem to have been always fighting, but I didn't mind it as long as it was my own fight. I felt I had to stick it out, for it was the penalty I paid for being an Arabin. But whatever paying was to be done, I wanted to do it myself. Otherwise, don't you see, it makes the guilt of my family so much heavier. And now I have let you in for some of it, and that is hell—simply hell!"

Vernon had suddenly an emotion which he had never known before—the exhilaration with which he had for years anticipated the culmination of his dream, but different in kind, nobler,

less self-regarding. He felt keyed up to any enterprise, and singularly confident. There was tenderness in his mood, too, which was a thing he had rarely felt—tenderness toward this gallant child.

"Listen to me, Miss Arabin. I have two things to say to you. One is that I glory in being here. I wouldn't be elsewhere for the world. It is a delight and a privilege. The other is that we are going to win out."

"But how?"

"I don't know yet. We will find a way. I am as certain of it as that I am standing here. God doesn't mean a thing like this to be a blind cul-de-sac."

"You believe in God? I wish I did. I think I only believe in the devil."

"Then you believe in God. If evil is a living thing, good must be living as well, and more indeed, or the world would smash. Look here, we've two days to put in together. There is nothing we can do for the present, so we must find some way to keep our nerves quiet. Let's pretend we're in an ordinary English country house and kept indoors by rain."

So the two of them made plans to pass the time, while the clear spring sunlight outside made foolishness of Vernon's pretense. They played piquet, and sometimes he read to her—chiefly Peter Beckford. The florid eighteenth-century prose, the tags of Augustan poetry, the high stilts, the gusto, carried their thoughts to the orderly world of home. I have no wish to speculate about the secrets of a friend, but I fancy that the slow hours spent together brought understanding.

Kore must have told him things which she had kept back from me, for the near prospect of death breaks down many barriers. I think, too, that he may have told her the story of his boyish dream—he must have, for it bore directly on the case. With his sense of predestination he would draw from it a special confidence, and she would be made to share it. He had undergone a long preparation for something which had ended in mist, but the preparation might point to a measure of success in a great reality.

LATE the next afternoon, old Mitri returned. Vernon saw him first alone, and got from him the details of the next evening's ceremonial. There was to be a race among the young men on the Dancing Floor as soon as the moon rose, and the victor would be called the king. Some of the news which Mitri had gathered was unexpected, some incomprehensible, but in the main it agreed with his own version.

The victor would choose a victim—a male victim, clearly, for the female victim was already chosen. The two would enter the house, and on the next night—the eve of this unhallowed Easter—the sacrifice would be accomplished. Beyond that, Mitri could not say, except that the people looked for a mighty miracle; but the manuscript had told Vernon what the miracle would be.

"Who will be the runners?" Vernon asked.

"The fleetest among the young men, both of the village and the hills."

It was characteristic of Vernon's fatalism that he had not troubled to make even the rudiments of a plan till he had heard Mitri's tidings. Now the thing began to unfold itself. The next step at any rate was clearly ordained.

"Will everybody be known to each other?" he said.

"No! Kynætho till now has had little dealings with the hill folk, and the villages in the hills are generally at strife with each other. To-morrow night there will be many strangers, and no questions will be asked, for all will be allies in this devilry."

"Do I speak like a Greek?"

"You speak like a Greek, but like one from another island."

"And I look like an islander?"

Mitri grinned. "There are few as well looking. But if your face were darkened, you would pass. There is a place, a little remote place in the hills, Akte by name, where the folk are said to have white skins the same as yours, signor."

"Well, attend, Mitri! I am a man from Akte who has been at the war, and has just returned. That will account for my foreign speech."

"The signor jests. He has a stout heart that can jest——"

"I'm not jesting. I'm going to compete in the race to-morrow night. What is more, I'm going to win. I've been a bit of a runner in my time, and I'm in hard training."

A faint spark appeared in the old man's eye.

"The signor will no doubt win, if he runs. And if he ever reaches the Dancing Floor, he will not be troubled with questions. But how will he reach the Dancing Floor?"

"I intend to get out of the house early to-morrow morning. There are several things I want to do before the race. Have you any rags with which I can imitate the dress of a hillman?"

Mitri considered. Shirt and breeches he had, but no boots. A cap might be improvised, but what could be done about boots?

"Remember I have only just returned to Akte, and have brought the fashion of the war with me. So I can make shift with homemade putties. Anything else?"

"The men around the house will not let you pass."

"They'll have to. I'm one of themselves, and you've got to coach me in local customs. You have twelve hours before you in which to turn me into a respectable citizen of Akte. If any awkward questions are asked, I propose to be truculent. A soldier is going to stand no nonsense from civilians, you know."

Mitri considered again. "It will be best to go by the main road to Kynætho."

"No, I'm going by the causeway. I want to see what lies beyond it to the west."

"The cliffs are there and there is no road."

"I will find one."

Mitri shook his head. He had apparently little belief in the scheme, but an hour later, after Vernon had given Kore a sketch of his intentions, he arrived with an armful of strange garments. Elise, at her mistress' request, had collected oddments of fabrics, and brought part of the contents of the linen cupboard.

"We are about," Vernon told a mystified Kore, "to prepare for private theatricals. Putties are my most urgent need, and that thin skirt of yours will be the very thing. To-morrow when I'm engaged elsewhere, I want you to do an ambitious bit of tailoring for me. And some time, with the help of Elise, I'd like to go through your wardrobe."

Since Kore still looked puzzled, he added: "We're cast for parts in a rather sensational drama. I'm beginning to think that the only way to prevent it being a tragedy is to turn it into a costume play."

CHAPTER XXII.

IN DISGUISE.

VERY early next morning, before the blue darkness had paled into dawn, Vernon swung his legs out of an upper window of the house, crawled along the broad parapet and began to descend by a water pipe in an angle between the main building and the eastern wing. This brought him to the roof of one of the outbuildings, from which it was

possible for an active man to reach the little road which ran upward from the jetty.

He had been carefully prepared by Mitri for his part. The loose white shirt and the short mountain tunic were in order. Mitri's breeches had proved too scanty, but Elise had widened them, and the vacant space about his middle was filled with a dirty red cummerbund, made of one of Mitri's sashes, in which were stuck a long knife and his pistol.

A pair of Mitri's homemade shoes of soft untanned hide were supplemented with homemade putties. Vernon had no hat; he had stained his face, hands and arms beyond their natural brown with juice from Mitri's store of pickled walnuts, and—under the critical eye of Kore—had rubbed dirt under his eyes and into his finger nails till he looked the image of a handsome, swaggering, half-washed soldier. More important, he had been coached by Mitri in the speech of the hills, the gossip which might have penetrated to the remote Akte, and the mannerisms of the hillmen, which were unpleasingly familiar to the dwellers in the lowlands and along the coast.

All this care would have been useless had Vernon not been in the mood to carry off any enterprise. He felt the reckless audacity of a boy, an exhilaration which was almost intoxication, and the source of which he did not pause to consider. Above all, he felt complete confidence. Somehow, somewhere, he would break the malign spell and set Kore in triumph above her enemies.

He reached ground fifty yards south of the jetty and turned at once in the direction of the sea. At the beginning of the causeway, he met a man.

"Whither away, brother?" came the question, accompanied by the lift of a rifle.

Vernon gave the hillman's greeting. He loomed up tall and formidable in the half darkness.

"I go beyond the causeway to the olive yards," he said carelessly, as if he condescended in answering.

"By whose orders?"

"We of Akte do not take orders. I go at the request of the elders."

"You are of Akte?" asked the man enviously. He was very willing to talk, being bored with his long night watch. "There are none of Akte among us, so far as I have seen. The men of Akte live in the moon, says the proverb. But"—this after peering at Vernon's garb—"those clothes were never made in the hills."

"I am new back from the war, and have not seen Akte these three years. But I cannot linger, friend."

"Nay, bide a little. It is not yet day. Let us talk of Akte. My father once went there for cattle. Or let us speak of the war. My uncle was in the old war and my young nephew was—— If you will not bide, give me tobacco."

Vernon gave him a cigarette. "These are what we smoked in Smyrna," he said. "They are noble stuff."

Halfway along the causeway, a second guard proved more truculent. He questioned the orders of the elders, till Vernon played the man from Akte and the old soldier, and threatened to fling him into the sea. The last sentry was fortunately asleep. Vernon scrambled over the fence of the olive yards, and as the sun rose above the horizon was striding with long steps through the weedy undergrowth.

His object was not like mine when I traveled that road—to get inside the demesne. He wanted to keep out of it and to explore the bit of coast under it, since it seemed from the map to be the likeliest place to find the boat. The Epirote, Vernon was convinced, would obey his instructions faithfully, and when driven away from his old anchorage, would not go a yard more than was

necessary. So, after being stopped as I had been by the wall which ran to the cliffs, he stuck to the shore.

HE picked his way under the skirts of the headland till the rock sank sheer into deep water. There was nothing for it now but to swim, so he made a bundle of his shirt and jacket and bound them with the cummerbund on his shoulders, took his pistol in his teeth and slipped into the cold green sea. Mitri's breeches were a nuisance, but he was a strong swimmer, and in five minutes was at the point of the headland.

He found a ledge of rock which enabled him to pull up his shoulders and reconnoiter the hidden bay. There to his joy was the yacht, snugly anchored halfway across. There was no sign of life on board, for doubtless the Epirote would be below, cooking his breakfast. Vernon had no desire to make himself conspicuous by shouting, for the demesne and the watchers were too near, so he dropped back into the water and struck out for the boat. Ten minutes later he was standing dripping on the deck, and the Epirote was welcoming him with maledictions on Plakos.

Vernon stripped off his wet clothes, and put them to dry. Then he breakfasted heartily, while Black George gave an account of his stewardship. When Vernon did not return he had not concerned himself greatly, for the affairs of his master were no business of his. But in the morning, when the fog began to lift, men had put off from shore in a boat and had demanded the reason of his presence.

The interview had been stormy, for he had declined to explain, holding that if his master chose to land secretly by night, and rude fellows appeared with the daylight, it would be wise to tell the latter nothing. His interviewers had been more communicative. They had been very excited and had tried to alarm him with foolish tales of witches.

It was clear, however, that they had meant mischief, for all were armed, and when, at the point of several rifle barrels, they had ordered him to depart, it seemed to him the part of a wise man to obey. He had feigned fear and deep stupidity and had done their bidding. Then, looking for a refuge, he had seen the great curtain of cliff and had found this little bay. Here he hoped he was secure, for there was no passage along the shore, and the people of Plakos did not seem during these days to be sailing the seas. He could be observed, of course, from the cliff tops, but these were shrouded in wood and looked unfrequented.

"Did I not well, signor?" he asked anxiously.

"You did well. Have you seen no one?"

"No islander. Last night two men came about midnight. One was a crippled Greek and the other man, I judge, English."

Vernon woke to the liveliest interest, but Black George told a halting tale. "He swam out and wakened me, and at first, fearing trouble, I would have brained him. Since he could not speak my tongue, I rowed ashore with him and saw the Greek. He was an Englishman, beyond doubt, and a signor, so I gave him food and drink and cigarettes."

"What did he want with you?"

"Simply that I should stay here. He had a story of some lady to whom the devils of this island meant mischief, and he begged me to wait here in case the lady should seek to escape."

No cross-examination of Vernon's could make Black George amplify the tale. He had not understood clearly, he said, for the English signor could not speak his tongue and the Greek who interpreted was obviously a fool. But he had promised to remain, which was indeed his duty to his master. No, he had spoken no single word of his mas-

ter. He had not said he was an Englishman. He had said nothing.

Vernon puzzled over the matter, but could make nothing of it. He did not credit the story of an Englishman in Plakos who knew of Kore's plight, and came to the conclusion that Black George had misunderstood his visitor's talk. Vernon had the day before him, and his first act was to row ashore to the other point of the bay—the place from which Janni and I had first espied the yacht.

There he sat for a little and smoked, and it was one of his cigarette ends that I found the same afternoon. A scramble round the headland showed him the strip of beach below the Dancing Floor, but it occurred to him that there was no need to go pioneering along the coast—that he had a yacht and could be landed wherever he pleased. So he returned to Black George, and the two hoisted sail and made for the open sea.

THE day was spent running with the light north wind behind them well to the south of Plakos, and then tacking back till about sunset they stood off the northeast shore. It was a day of brilliant sun, tempered by cool airs, with the hills of the island rising sharp and blue into the pale spring sky. Vernon found to his delight that he had no trepidation about the work of the coming night.

He had brought with him the copy he had made of his translation of Kore's manuscript, and studied it as a man studies a map, without any sense of its strangeness. The madmen of Plakos were about to revive an ancient ritual, where the victor in a race would be intrusted with certain barbarous duties. He preposed to be the victor, and so to defeat the folly.

The house would be burned, and in the confusion he would escape with Kore to the yacht, and leave the unhallowed isle forever. The girl would be contented, for she would have stuck it out to the last. Once he had convinced himself that she would be safe, he let his mind lie fallow. He dreamed and smoked on the hot deck in the bright weather, as much at his ease as if the evening were to bring no more than supper and sleep.

In the early twilight, the yacht's dinghy put him ashore on a lonely bit of coast, east of the village. Black George was ordered to return to his former anchorage and wait there; if on the following night he saw a lantern raised three times on the cliff above, he was to come round to the olive yards at the far end of the causeway.

At this stage, Vernon's plan was for a simple escape in the confusion of the fire. He hoped that the postern gate at the jetty would be practicable; if not, he would find some way of reaching the olive yards from the demesne. The whole affair was viewed by him as a straightforward enterprise—provided he could win the confounded race that night.

But with his landing on Plakos in the spring gloaming, his mood began to change. I have failed in my portrayal of Vernon if I have made you think of him as unimaginative and insensitive. He had unexpected blind patches in his vision and odd callosities in his skin, but for all that he was highly strung and had an immense capacity for emotion, though he chose mostly to sit on the safety valve. Above all, he was a scholar. All his life he had been creating imaginative pictures of things, or living among the creations of other men. He had not walked a mile in that twilight till he felt the solemnity of it oppressing his mind.

I think it was chiefly the sight of the multitude moving toward the Dancing Floor, all silent, so that the only sound was the tread of their feet. He had been in doubt before as to where ex-

actly the place was, but the road was blazed for him like the roads to Epsom on Derby Day. Men, women, children, babes in arms—they were streaming past the closes at the foot of the glade, past the graveyard, up the aisle of the Dancing Floor.

IT was his first sight of it—not as I had seen it, solitary under the moon. but surging with a stream of hushed humanity. It had another kind of magic, but one as potent as that which had laid its spell on me. I had seen the temple in its loneliness, he saw it thronged with worshipers, at the hour when ceremony claimed it.

No one greeted him or even noticed him; he would probably have passed unregarded if he had been wearing his ordinary clothes. The heavy preoccupation of the people made them utterly incurious. He saw men dressed as he was, and he noted that the multitude moved to left and right as if by instinct, leaving the central arena vacant. Dusk had fallen, and on the crown of the ridge on his right he saw dimly what he knew to be the trees of the doomed demesne.

He saw, too, that a cluster seemed to be forming at the lower end of the arena, apart from the others, and he guessed that these were the competitors in the race. He made his way toward them, and found that he had guessed rightly. It was a knot of young men, who were now stripping their clothes, till they stood naked except for the sashes twisted around their middle. Most were barefoot, but one or two had rawhide brogues.

Vernon followed their example, till he stood up in his short linen drawers. He retained Mitri's shoes, for he feared the flints of the hillside. There were others in the group, older men whom he took to be the elders of whom Mitri had spoken, and there was one man who seemed to be in special authority and who wore a loose robe like a cassock.

It was now nearly dark, and suddenly, like the marks delimiting a course, torches broke into flame. These points of angry light in the crowded silence seemed to complete the spell. Vernon's assurance had fled and left behind it an unwilling awe and an acute nervousness. All his learning, all his laborious scholarship quickened from mere mental furniture into heat and light. His imagination as well as his nerves were on fire.

I can only guess at the thoughts which must have crowded his mind. He saw the ritual, which, so far, had been for him an antiquarian remnant, leap into a living passion. He saw what he had regarded coolly as a barbaric survival, a matter for brutish peasants, become suddenly a vital concern of his own.

Above all, he felt the formidableness of the peril to Kore. She had dared far more than she knew, far more than he had guessed; she was facing the heavy menace of a thousand ages, the devils not of a few thousand peasants, but of a whole forgotten world. And in that moment he has told me that another thing became clear to him—she had become for him something altogether rare and precious.

The old man in the white ephod was speaking. It was a tale which obviously had been told before to the same audience, for he reminded them of former instructions. Vernon forced himself to concentrate on it an attention which was half paralyzed by that mood of novel emotion which had come upon him. Some of it he failed to grasp, but the main points were clear—the race twice round the arena inside the ring of torches, the duty of the victor to take the last torch and plunge it in the sacred spring.

The man spoke as if reciting a lesson, and Vernon heard it like a lesson

once known and forgotten. Reminiscences of what he had found in classical byways hammered on his mind, and with recollection came a greater awe. It was only the thought of Kore that enabled him to keep his wits. Without that, he told me, he would have sunk into the lethargy of the worshipers, obedient, absorbed in expectancy.

THEN came the start of the race that Janni and I watched from our hiding place in the shadows under the wall. He got off the mark clumsily, and at first his limbs seemed heavy as lead. But the movement revived him and woke his old racing instinct. Though he had not run a race for years, he was in hard training and toward the close of the first round his skill had come back to him and he was in the third place, going well within his powers.

In the second round he felt that the thing was in his hands. He lay close to the first man, passed him before the final straight, and then forged ahead so that in the last hundred yards he was gaining ground with every stride. He seized the torch at the winning post and raced to where, in the center of the upper glade, a white figure stood alone. With the tossing of the flame in the well, he straightened his body and looked round, a man restored to his old vigor and ready for swift action.

His account of the next stage was confused, for his mind was on Kore and he was going through a violent transformation of outlook. The old man was no longer repeating a rehearsed lesson, but speaking violently like one in a moment of crisis. He addressed Vernon as "You of the hills," and told him that God had placed the Fate of Kynætho in his hands—what god he did not particularize. But from his excited stammering, something emerged which chilled Vernon's blood.

He was to wait in the house till moonrise of the next night. The signal was to be the firing of the place. With the first flames he was to perform the deed to which he had been called.

"Choose which way you please," said the old man, "provided that they die."

Then Vernon was to leave the house by the main door and join the young men without.

"They will be gathered there, till they come who will come."

The door would be closed behind him till it was opened by the fire. "They who will come are immortals!"

The man's voice was high-pitched with passion and his figure, solitary in the bright moonshine in that ring of silent folk, had something in it of the awful and the sacramental. But Vernon's thoughts were not on it, but on the news which meant the downfall of his plans. His mind worked now normally and sanely; he was again a man of the modern world.

The young men—of course they would be there—the Curetes to greet the Kouros. He might have known it, if he had only thought. But how was Kore to escape from these frenzied guardians? He had imagined that, with the fire, the vigilance of the watch would be relaxed and that it would be easy to join Black George and the boat. But with the fire there was to be a thronging of the hierophants toward the house, and what was inside would be kept inside till the place was in ashes.

The man was speaking again. He had made some signal, for three figures had approached the well.

"The woman is within," he said, "and it is for you to choose the man. Your choice is free among the people of Plakos, but we have one here, a young man, a Greek, but a stranger. He would doubtless be acceptable."

The half-clad Maris cut an odd figure as, in the grip of two stalwart peasants, he was led forward for inspection. His face was white and set, and his eyes were furious.

"No willing victim this," thought Vernon, "but so much the better, for he and I are in the same boat and I must make him an ally." From the way he carried himself, he saw that Maris had been drilled, and he considered that a soldier might be useful. "I choose the man," he said.

A jar was given him, and he filled it from the spring and emptied it on Maris' head and shoulders. His own clothes were also brought, but he contented himself with Mitri's sash, of which he made a girdle and into which he stuck his own pistol and Mitri's knife.

"I have no need of the rest," he said, for he was beginning to enter into the spirit of the part, though the outlook was dark enough. Then he knelt while the old man laid a hand on his head and pronounced some consecration.

"Come," Vernon said to Maris, and the two moved up the slope of the Dancing Floor toward the breach in the wall.

He had almost forgotten his anxiety in the wonder of the scene. He seemed to be set on the stage in a great golden amphitheater, and Maris and the guards who accompanied him were no more than stage properties. All human life had for the moment gone, and he was faced with primordial elements—the scented shell of earth, the immense arch of the sky and the riding moon, and, as he climbed the slope, an infinity of shining waters. The magic weighed on him, a new magic, for the ruthlessness of man was submerged in the deeper ruthlessness of nature.

Then, as he passed the fringe of the spectators and caught a glimpse of pallid, strained faces, he got his bearings again. It was man he had to cope with —crazy, fallible, tormented man. He felt the pity and innocence of it behind the guilt, and in an instant he regained confidence. Maris was stumbling along, walking painfully like one unaccustomed to going on bare feet, casting fierce, startled glances about him. As they approached the breach in the wall, Vernon managed to whisper to him to cheer up, for no ill would befall him.

"I am your friend," he said. "Together we will make an end of this folly."

The man's face lightened.

It was this look on Maris' face which I saw from my hiding place and which made me forbid Janni's pistol shot.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A MIGHTY GAMBLE.

THE great doors clanged behind them, and Vernon, who had been given the key by the guards, turned it in the lock. In spite of the reassuring word he had spoken to Maris, he thought that his companion might attack him, so he steered wide of him and in the inky darkness fell over the basket of logs. The mishap wrung from him a very English expletive. Then he shouted on Mitri to bring a light.

He heard Maris' excited voice. "Who are you? Are you English?"

"Of course I am English. Confound it, I believe I have cracked my shin. Mitri, you idiot, where are you?"

The old man appeared from a corridor, with a lantern shaking in his hand. He had no words, but stared at the two as if he were looking on men risen from the dead.

"Where's your mistress? In her sitting room? Get me some clothes—my old ones—and bring something for this gentleman to put on. Any old thing will do. Get us some food, too, for we're starving. Quick, man! Leave the lantern here."

By the slender light, set on a table in the great stone hall, the two men regarded each other.

"You want to know who I am," said Vernon. "I'm an Englishman who

came here three nights ago in a yacht. I happened to have met Miss Arabin before. I found out what the people of Plakos were up to, and it seemed to me that the best thing I could do was to win the race to-night. I needn't tell you about that, for you saw it. Now for yourself. I gather that you also are unpopular with the people of this strange island?"

Maris gave a short sketch of his career, and Vernon convinced himself by a few questions that he spoke the truth, for the Greek had served alongside the British at Salonika.

"I came here to protect the lady," Maris concluded.

"Who sent you?"

"Mr. Ertzberger. I had a companion, an English colonel who is also in your parliament, and a great milord. Leithen is his name."

"God bless my soul! Leithen! Oh, impossible! Quick! Tell me more. Where is he now?"

"That I do not know. Yesterday evening we separated, each seeking to find some way of entering this house. I blundered badly, and was taken by the guards on the seaward front. My friend must also have failed, or he would be here, but I do not think he has been taken."

The knowledge that I was somewhere in the island gave Vernon, as he told me, a sudden acute sense of comfort. I must have been the visitor to the yacht. He cross-examined Maris, who knew nothing of the boat's existence, and Maris agreed that the stranger who had gone aboard must have been myself.

"The Greek who was with him," he said, "was doubtless my corporal, Janni, the one man in my batch of fools who kept his head."

Mitri returned with Vernon's clothes, and an ancient dressing gown for Maris. He also brought a bowl of milk and some cakes and cheese. Questions trembled on his lips, but Vernon waved him off.

"Go and tell your mistress that we will come to her in a quarter of an hour. And have a bed made ready for this gentleman."

AS Vernon dressed, he had a look at his companion, now bizarrely robed in a gown too large for him, and dirty and scratched from his adventures. It was the mercy of Providence that had given him such a colleague, for he liked the man's bold, hard-bitten face and honest eyes. Here was a practical fellow, and Vernon wanted something exceedingly prosaic and practical to counteract the awe which still hovered about his mind. Vernon fought to keep at a distance the memory of the silence and the torches and the shining spaces of the Dancing Floor. This man did not look susceptible.

"I need not tell you that we are in the devil of a tight place, Captain Maris. Do you realize precisely the meaning of that performance?"

Maris nodded. "Since yesterday. It has been most pointedly explained to me. I am one victim for the sacrifice, and the lady of this house is the other, and you are the priest."

"We have the better part of twenty-four hours' grace."

"After that, this house will be burned. You may go forth, if you have the nerve to play the part. The lady and I—no. We are supposed to die when the fire begins, but if we do not die by your hand, we will die in the flames."

"There is no way of escape?"

"None," replied Maris cheerfully. "But with your help I think I will do some mischief first!"

"And the lady?"

Maris shrugged his shoulders.

"Till this evening," said Vernon, "I thought I had a plan. I was pretty certain I could win the race, and I pro-

posed to reason with the male victim who came back with me, or club him on the head. I thought that when the fire began, there would be confusion and that the people would keep outside the wall. My boat is lying below the cliffs and I hoped to carry the lady there. But now I know that that is impossible. There will be a concourse of the young men outside the door at the moment of the burning, and the house will be watched more closely than ever. Do you know what the people expect?"

Maris spat contemptuously. "I heard some talk of the coming of gods. The devils take all priests and their lying tales!"

"They await the coming of gods. You are not a classical scholar, Captain Maris, so you cannot realize, perhaps, just what this means. We are dealing with stark madness. These peasants are keyed up to a tremendous expectation. A belief has come to life, a belief far older than Christianity. They expect salvation from the coming of two gods, a youth and a maiden. If their hope is disappointed, they will be worse madmen than before. To-morrow night nothing will go out from this place, unless it be gods."

"That is true. The lady and I will without doubt die at the threshold, and you also, my friend. What arms have we?"

"I have this revolver with six cartridges. The lady has a toy pistol, but, I think, no ammunition. The men without are armed with rifles."

"Ugly odds. It is infamous that honest folk and soldiers should perish at the hands of the half-witted."

"What about Leithen? He is outside and has come here expressly to save the lady."

Maris shook his head. "He can do nothing. They have set up a cordon, a barrage, which he cannot penetrate. There is no hope in the island, for every man and woman is under a devilish spell. Also the telegraph has been cut these three days."

"Do you see any chance?"

Maris cogitated. "We have twenty-four hours. Some way of escape might be found by an active man at the risk of a bullet or two. We might reach your boat."

"But the lady?"

"Why, no. Things look dark for the poor lady. We came here to protect her, and it seems as if we could do no more than die with her. I would like to speak with that old man about clothes. A soldier does not feel at his bravest when he is barefoot and unclad save for pants and a ragged shirt. I refuse to go to Paradise in this dressing gown."

Maris' cheerful fortitude was balm to Vernon's mind, for it seemed to strip the aura of mystery from the situation, and leave it a straight gamble of life and death. If Kore was to be saved, it must be through Maris, for he himself was cast for another part.

"Come and let me present you to the lady," he said. "We must have some plan to sleep on."

Kore was in her sitting room, and as she rose to meet them, he saw that her face was very white.

"I heard nothing," she said hoarsely, "but Mitri says that there are thousands in the glade beyond the wall. But I saw a red glow from the upper window."

"Those were the torches which lined the stadium. I have been running a race, Miss Arabin, and have been lucky enough to win. Therefore we have still twenty-four hours of peace. May I present Captain Maris of the Greek army? He asks me to apologize for his clothes."

The Greek bowed gallantly and kissed her hand.

"Captain Maris came here to protect you," Vernon continued. "He came

with a friend of ours, Sir Edward Leithen."

"Sir Edward Leithen?" the girl cried. "He is here?"

"He is in the island, but he is unable to join us in the house. Captain Maris tried, and was unfortunately captured. He was handed over to me as the victor of the race, and that is why he is here. But Sir Edward must be still scouting around the outposts, and it is pretty certain that he won't find a way in. I'm afraid we must leave him out of account. Now I want you to listen to me very carefully, for I've a good deal to say to you. I'm going to be perfectly candid, for you're brave enough to hear the worst."

VERNON rolled three cigarettes out of his pipe tobacco and tissue paper from the illustrations in Peter Beckford. Kore did not light hers, but sat waiting with her hands on her knees.

"They think you a witch," said Vernon, "because of the habits of your family. That you have long known. In the past they have burned witches in these islands, and Plakos remembers it. But it remembers another thing—the ancient ritual I told you of, and that memory which has been sleeping for centuries has come to violent life. Perhaps it would not have mastered them if the mind of the people had not been full of witch burning. That, you see, gave them one victim already chosen, and in Captain Maris, who is of their own race and also a stranger, they have found the other."

"I see all that," the girl said slowly. "Of course I did not know when I left London—I couldn't have guessed—I thought it was a simple business which only needed a bold front and I was too vain to take advice. Oh, forgive me! My vanity has brought two innocent people into my miserable troubles——"

"I told you yesterday that we were going to win. You must trust me, Miss Arabin. And, for Heaven's sake, don't imagine that I blame you. I think you are the bravest thing God ever made. I wouldn't be elsewhere for worlds."

Her eyes searched his face closely, and then turned to Maris, who instantly adopted an air of bold insouciance.

"You are good men," she said. "But what can you do? They will watch us like rats till the fire begins and then—if we are not dead—they will kill us. They will let no one go from this house—except their gods."

These were the very words Vernon had used to Maris, and since they so wholly expressed his own belief, he had to repudiate them with a vehement confidence.

"No," he said. "You forget that there are two things on our side. One is that, as the winner of the race, I am one of the people of Plakos. I can safely go out at the last moment and join their young men. I speak their tongue and I understand this ritual better than they do themselves. Surely I can find some way of driving them farther from the house, so that in the confusion Maris can get you and your maid off unobserved. Mitri, too——"

"Mitri," she broke in, "has permission from our enemies to go when he pleases. But he refuses to leave us."

"Well, Mitri also. The second thing is that I have found my boat and got in touch with my man. He is lying in the bay under the cliffs, and I have arranged that on a certain signal he will meet you under the olive yards. There is a gate in the wall there of which Mitri no doubt has the key. Once aboard, you are as safe as in London."

"And you?"

"Oh, I will take my chance. I am a hillman from Akte and can keep up the part till I find some way of getting off."

"Impossible!" she cried. "When they find that their gods have failed them, they will certainly kill you. Per-

haps it is because I was born here, but though I only heard of this ritual from you, I feel somehow as if I had always known it. And I know that if the one sacrifice fails, there will beyond doubt be another."

She rang the little silver bell for Mitri. "Show this gentleman his room," she looked toward Maris. "You have already had food? Good night, Captain Maris. You must have had a wearing day, and I order you to bed."

When they were alone, she turned to Vernon. "Your plan will not work. I can make a picture of what will happen to-morrow night—I seem to see every detail clear, as if I had been through it all before—and your plan is hopeless. You cannot draw them away from the house. They will be watching like demented wolves. And if you did, and we escaped, what on earth would become of you?"

"I should be one of them—a sharer in their disappointment—probably forgotten."

"Not you. You are their high priest, and an angry people always turns on their priest."

"There might be a bit of scrap, but I dare say I could hold my own."

"Against thousands—mad thousands! You would be torn to pieces, even though they still believed you were a hillman from Akte."

"I'll take the risk. It is no good making difficulties, Miss Arabin. I admit that the case is pretty desperate, but my plan has at any rate a chance."

"The case is utterly desperate, and that is why your plan is no good. Desperate cases need more desperate remedies."

"Well, what do you suggest?"

She smiled. "You are very tired and so am I. We have a day and a night left us and we can talk in the morning. I told you when you first came here that I refused to run away. Well, I—don't—think I have changed my mind."

THE difficulty of telling this part of the story—said Leithen—is that it must be largely guesswork. The main facts I know, but the affair had become so strange and intricate that neither Kore nor Vernon would speak of it, while Maris was only vaguely aware of what was happening. It must have been some time on the Friday morning that the two met again.

I can picture Vernon racking his brains to supplement his fragile plan, turning sleeplessly in his bed, hunting out Maris in the early morn to go over wearily the slender chances. Kore, I imagine, slept dreamlessly. She had reached her decision, and to her strong and simple soul to be resolved was to be at peace. Vernon was a fine fellow—I have known few finer—but there were lumpish elements in him, while the girl was all pure steel and fire.

But I can reconstruct the meeting of the two in the bare little sitting room—without Maris—for that much Vernon has told me. I can see Vernon's anxious face, and the girl's eyes bright with that innocent arrogance which once in my haste I had thought ill breeding.

"I am not going to run away from my people," she said. "I am going to meet them."

Vernon asked her meaning, and she replied:

"I said yesterday that no one would be permitted to leave the house, unless in the eyes of the watchers they were gods. Well, the gods will not fail them. Listen to me! I have tried to purify this place, but there can be only one purification and that is by fire. It had to come, and it seems to me right that it should come from the hands of those who have suffered. After that I go out as a free woman—and to a free woman nothing is impossible."

I think that for a little he may not have understood her. His mind, you see, had been busy among small particulars, and the simplicity of her plan

would not at once be comprehended. Then there came for him that moment of liberation when the world clarifies, and what have been barrier mountains become only details in a wide prospect. The extreme of boldness is seen to be the true discretion, and with that mood comes a sharp uplift of spirit.

"You are right!" he cried. "We will give them their gods."

"Gods?" She stopped him. "But I must go alone. You have no part in this trial. But if I win, all this household will be safe. Most of these people have never seen me, and Kynætho knows me only as a girl in old-country clothes from whom they kept their eyes averted. I can dress for a different part, and they will see some one who will be as new to them as if the Panagia had come down from Heaven. But you——"

"They will not be content with one divinity," he broke in. "They await a double epiphany, remember—the Kore and the Kouros. That is the point of the occasion. We must be faithful to the letter of the rite. After all, they know less of me than of you. They saw me win a race, a figure very much like the others in the moonlight. To those who may recognize me, I am an unknown hillman of Akte. Why should not the Kouros have revealed himself the day before, and be also the Basilem?"

She looked at him curiously, as if seeing him for the first time as a bodily presence. I can fancy that for the first time she may have recognized his beauty and strength.

"But you are not like me," she urged. "You have not an old burden to get rid of. I am shaking off the incubus of my youth, and going free like the gods. What you call the epiphany is not only for Plakos but for myself, and nothing matters, not even death. I can play the part, but can you? To me it is going to be the beginning of life, but to you it can only be an adventure. Chivalry is not enough."

"To me also it is the beginning of life," he answered. Then he told her the tale of his boyhood's dream. "When it vanished in the storm a few nights ago, I hated it, for I felt that it had stolen years from my life. But now I know that nothing is wasted. The door of the last of the dream rooms has opened and you have come in. And we are going to begin life—together."

A strange pair of lovers, between whom no word of love had ever been spoken! By very different roads both had reached a complete assurance, and with it came exhilaration and ease of mind.

MARIS, during the long spring day, might roam about restlessly; Mitri and Elise fall to their several prayers, but Vernon and Kore had no doubts. While I, outside the wall, was at the mercy of old magics, a mere piece of driftwood tossed upon undreamed-of tides, the two in the house had almost forgotten Plakos. It had become to them no more than a background for their own overmastering private concerns.

The only problem was for their own hearts—for Kore to shake off for good the burden of her past and vindicate her fiery purity, that virginity of the spirit which could not be smirched by man or matter; for Vernon to open the door at which he had waited all his life and redeem the long preparation of his youth. They had followed each their own paths of destiny, and now these paths had met and must run together.

That was the kind of thing that could not be questioned, could not even be thought about; it had to be accepted like the rising sun. I do not think that they appreciated their danger as I did, for they had not been, like me, down in the shadows. They were happy in their half knowledge, and in that blessed

preoccupation which casts out fear from the human mind.

But some time in the afternoon he drew for the girl a picture of the ancient rite, and he must have been inspired, for, as she once recounted it to me, he seems to have made his hook learning like the tale of an eyewitness.

"Why do you tell me this?" she asked.

"Because if we are to play our part, we must understand that there is beauty as well as terror in this worship."

"You speak as if you were a believer."

He laughed. "There is truth in every religion that the heart of man ever conceived. It is because of that that we may win."

But I think his confidence was less complete than hers. I judge from what Maris told me that, though Vernon was what the Scotch call "fey" during those last hours, he retained something of his old careful prevision. As the twilight fell, he took Maris aside and gave him his pistol.

"Mitri has orders, as soon as he gets out of the house," said Vernon, "to take a lantern to the cliffs and make the signal for my boat. He has a key and will open the door in the olive-yard wall. Miss Arabin and I are staking everything on a mighty gamble. If it succeeds, I think that the people will be in a stupor and we shall have an opportunity to join you. But if it fails—— Well, they will tear us to pieces. You must be close to us and await events. If the worst happens, one of these bullets is for the lady. Swear to me on your honor as a soldier!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

ON THE DANCING FLOOR.

I TAKE up the tale now—said Leithen—at the point where I fell in with Maris in the avenue which led to the gap in the wall. As I have told you, I had stumbled through the undergrowth with the blazing house making the place an inferno of crimson aisles and purple thickets. Above the roar of the flames, I heard the noise of panic-driven feet, of men plunging in haste—two indeed I had met, who seemed to be in the extremity of fear.

For myself, I was pretty nearly at the end of my tether. I was doddering with fatigue, and desperate with anxiety, and the only notion in my head was to use the dregs of my strength to do something violent. I was utterly in the dark, too. I did not know but that Kore might be already beyond my help, for that crimson grove seemed to reek of death.

And then I blundered into Maris, saw something in his face which gave me a surge of hope, and with his hand on my arm turned my eyes up the avenue.

The back part of the house and the outbuildings were by this time one roaring gust of flame, but the front was still untouched, and the fan of fire behind it gave it the concave darkness of a shell—a purple dark which might at any moment burst into light. The glow beyond the façade was reflected in the avenue, which was as bright as day, but the house end was shadowed and the two figures which I saw seemed to be emerging, from a belt of blackness between two zones of raw gold. I therefore saw them first as two dim white forms, which, as they moved, caught tints of flame.

Put it down to fatigue, if you like, or to natural stupidity, but I did not recognize them. Besides, you see, I knew nothing of Vernon's presence there. My breath stopped and I felt my heart leap to my throat. What I saw seemed not of the earth—immortals, whether from heaven or hell, coming out of the shadows and the fire in white garments, beings that no elements could destroy. In that moment the most panicky of the guards now fleeing

from the demesne was no more abject believer than I.

And then another fugitive charged into me, and I saw Maris catch the fellow by the arm and cuff his ears. I saw that it was Janni, but the sight meant nothing to me. The corporal seemed to be whimpering with terror, and Maris talked fiercely to him, but I did not listen. He quieted Janni, and then took us both by an arm and hurried us with him toward the gap. It was what I wanted to do. I dared not look again on that burning pageant.

The next I knew, I was beyond the wall on the edge of the Dancing Floor. I do not know how I got there, for my legs seemed to have no power in them, and I fancy that Maris dragged us both. The scared guards must have preceded us, for behind was emptiness, save for the presences in the avenue.

The thick trees blanketed the fire, but the light from the burning roof fell beyond them and lit up redly the scrap on which we stood. A rival light was coming into being. The rising moon had already flooded the far hills, and its calm radiance was sweeping over the hollow packed with the waiting multitude.

At first, I saw only the near fringes of the people—upturned faces in the uncanny light of the fire. But suddenly, as I looked, the unfeatured darkness beyond changed also into faces, spectral in the soft moonshine. I seemed to be standing between two worlds, one crimson with terror and the other golden with a stranger spell, but both far removed from the kindly works of men.

Maris had pulled us aside out of the line of the breach in the wall, where the avenue made a path for the glow of the fire. We were in full view of the people, but they had no eyes for us, for their gaze was concentrated on the breach. The fugitive guards had by this time been absorbed, and their panic had not communicated itself to the great multitude. For a second I forgot my own fears in the amazing sight before me.

THE crowded Dancing Floor was silent; in face of that deep quiet the crackle and roar of the fire seemed no more than the beating of waves on a far-away coast. Though the moon made the hills yellow as corn, it left the upturned faces pale. I was looking down on a sea of white faces—featureless to me, masks of strained expectation.

I felt the influence from them beat upon me like a wind. The fierce concentration of mingled hope and fear—wild hope, wilder fear—surged up to me, and clutched at my nerves and fired my brain. For a second I was as exalted as the craziest of them. Fragments of the dithyramb which Vernon had translated came unbidden to my lips—"Io Kouros, most great! Come, O come, and bring with thee—holy hours of thy most holy spring."

The spell of the waiting people made me turn as they had turned to the gap in the wall. Through it, to the point where the glow of the conflagration mingled with the yellow moonlight, came the two figures.

I think I would have dropped on my knees, but that Maris fetched me a clout on the back, and his exultant voice cried in my ear:

"Bravo!" he cried. "They win! That is a great little lady!"

There was something in the familiarity, the friendly roughness of the voice which broke the spell. I suddenly looked with seeing eyes, and I saw Kore.

She was dressed in white, the very gown which had roused Vernon's ire at my cousin's dance the summer before. A preposterous garment I had thought it, the vagary of an indecent fashion. But now—ah, now! It

seemed the fitting robe for youth and innocence—divine youth, heavenly innocence—clothing but scarcely veiling the young Grace who walked like Persephone among the spring meadows. *Vera incessu patuit Dea.* It was not Kore I was looking at, but *the* Kore, the immortal maiden, who brings to the earth its annual redemption.

I was a sane man once more, and filled with another kind of exaltation. I have never felt so sharp a sense of joy. God had not failed us. I knew that Kore was now not only safe but triumphant; she had found her own epiphany.

And then I recognized Vernon.

I did not trouble to think by what wild chance he had come there. It seemed wholly right that he should be there. He was dressed like the runner of the day before, but at the moment I did not connect the two. What I was looking at was an incarnation of something that mankind has always worshiped—youth rejoicing to run its race, youth in its purity and its celestial confidence, the youth which is the security of this world's continuance and the earnest of Paradise.

I recognized my friends and yet I did not recognize them, for they were transfigured. In a flash of insight I understood that it was not the Kore and the Vernon that I had known, but new creations. They were not acting a part, but living it. They, too, were believers; they had found their own epiphany for they had found themselves and each other. Each other! How I knew it I do not know, but I realized that it was two lovers that stood on the brink of the Dancing Floor. And at that I felt suddenly a great sense of peace and happiness.

With that I could face the multitude once more. And then I saw the supreme miracle.

People talk about the psychology of a crowd, how it is different in kind from the moods of the men who compose it. I dare say that is true, but if you have each individual strained to the extreme of tension with a single hope, the mood of the whole is the same as that of the parts, only multiplied a thousandfold. And if the nerve of a crowd goes there is a vast cracking, just as the rending of a tree trunk is greater than the breaking of a twig.

FOR an only second the two figures stood on the edge of the Dancing Floor in the sight of the upturned eyes. I do not think that Kore and Vernon saw anything—they had their own inward vision. I do not know what the people saw in the presences that moved out of the darkness above them.

But this I saw—over the multitude passed a tremor like a wind in a field of wheat. Instead of a shout of triumph there was a low murmur as of a thousand sighs. And then there came a surge, men and women stumbling in terror. First the fringes opened and thinned, and in another second, as it seemed to me, the whole mass was in precipitate movement. And then it became headlong panic—naked, veritable panic.

The silence was broken by hoarse cries of fear. I saw men running like hares on the slopes of the Dancing Floor. I saw women dragging their children as if fleeing from the pestilence. In a twinkling I was looking down on an empty glade with the Spring of the White Cypress black and solitary in the moonlight.

I did not doubt what had happened. The people of Plakos had gone after strange gods, but it was only for a short season that they could shake themselves free from the bonds of a creed which they had held for a thousand years. The resurgence of ancient faiths had obsessed, but had not destroyed the religion into which they had been born. Their spells had been too successful.

They had raised the devil and now fled from him in the blindest terror. They had sought the outlands, had felt their biting winds, had had a glimpse of their awful denizens, and they longed with the passion of children for their old homely shelters. The priest of Kynætho would presently have his fill of stricken penitents.

Maris was laughing. I dare say it was only a relief from nervous strain, but it seemed to me an impiety. I turned on him angrily.

"There's a boat somewhere," I said. "See that everybody is aboard—the whole household. And bring it round to the little harbor where we first landed."

"Not to the olive yards?" he asked.

"No, you fool! To the harbor. Plakos is now as safe for us as the streets of Athens."

Kore and Vernon stood hand in hand like people in a dream. I think they were dimly aware of what had happened, and were slowly coming back to the ordinary world. The virtue was going out of them, and with the ebbing of their strange exaltation came an immense fatigue. I never saw human faces so pale.

Vernon was the first to recover. He put his arm round Kore's waist, for without it she would have fallen, but he himself was none too steady on his feet. He recognized me.

"N-Ned," he said, in a stammering voice, like a sleepwalker's, "I heard you were here. It was good of you, old man. What do you think—now? The boat——"

"Come along," I cried, and I took an arm of each. "The sooner you are on board, the better. You want to sleep for a week." I started them off along the edge of the Dancing Floor.

"Not that way," he gasped. "Too risky!"

"There is no danger anywhere in this blessed island. Come along. You want food and clothes. It's getting on for midnight."

They were like two children pulled out of bed and too drowsy to walk, and I had my work cut out getting them along the ridge. The Dancing Floor was empty, and when we entered the road which led from Kynætho to the main gate of the house, there was also solitude. Indeed, we had to pass through a segment of the village itself and the place was silent as the grave. I knew where the people were—in and around the church, groveling in the dust for their sins.

Our going was so slow that by the time we looked down on the harbor the boat was already there. I stopped for a moment and looked back, for far behind me I heard voices. There was a glow as from torches to the south where the church stood, and a murmur which presently swelled into an excited clamor. Suddenly a bell began to ring, and it seemed as if the noise became antiphonal, voices speaking and others replying. At that distance I could make out nothing, but I knew what the voices said. It was "Christ is risen—He is risen indeed."

THE moon had set before we put to sea. My last recollection of Plakos is looking back and seeing the house flaming like a pharos on its headland. Then, as we beat westward with the wind, the fire became a mere point of brightness seen at a great distance in the vault of night.

I had no wish or power to sleep. Kore and Vernon, wrapped each in a motley of cloaks, lay in the bows. It was the quietest place, but there was no need of precautions, for they slept like the drugged. Elise, whose nerves had broken down, was in Vernon's berth, Black George had the helm, and old Mitri and Janni snored beside him.

I sat amidships and smoked. When the moon went down, a host of stars

came out, pale and very remote as they always seem in a spring sky. The wind was light and the water slid smoothly by; I knew roughly our bearings, but I had a sense of being in another world and on vast seas never before sailed by man.

The last week had been for me a time of acute anxiety and violent bodily exertion, but a sponge seemed to have passed over the memory of it. Something altogether different filled my mind. I had with my own eyes seen Fate take a hand in the game and move the pieces on the board. The two sleepers in the bows had trusted their destiny and had not been betrayed.

I THOUGHT with regret of my cynicism about Vernon's dream. No doubt it had been a will-o'-the-wisp, but it had been true in purpose, for it had made him wait, alert and aware, on something which had been prepared for him, and if that something was far different from his forecast, the long expectation had made him ready to seize it. How otherwise could he, with his decorous ancestry and his prudent soul, have become an adventurer?

And Kore? She had stood grimly to the duty which she believed Fate to have laid upon her, and Fate, after piling the odds against her, had relented. Perhaps that is the meaning of courage. It wrestles with circumstance, like Jacob with the angel, till it compels its antagonist to bless it.

I remember a phrase which Vernon had once used about "the mailed virgin." It fitted this girl and I began to realize the meaning of virginity. True purity, whether in woman or man, is something far more than the narrow sex thing which is the common notion of it. It means keeping oneself, as the Bible says, unspotted from the world, free from all tyranny and stain, whether of flesh or spirit, defying the universe to touch even the outworks of the sanctuary which is one's soul.

It must be defiant, not the inert fragile crystal, but the supple shining sword. Virginity meant nothing less it was mailed, and I wonder whether we were not coming to a better understanding of it. The modern girl, with all her harshness, had the gallantry of a free woman. She was a crude Artemis, but her feet were on the hills.

These were queer reflections, I know, for a man like me, but they gave me an odd contentment, as if I had somehow made my peace with life. For a long time I listened to the ripple of the water and watched the sky lighten to dim gray and the east flush with sunrise. It had become very cold and I was getting sleepy, so I hunted about for a mattress to make myself a bed upon the after deck.

But a thought made me pause. How would these two, who had come together out of the night, shake down on the conventional roads of marriage? To the end of time the desire of a woman should be for her husband. Would Kore's eyes, accustomed to look so masterfully at life, ever turn to Vernon in the surrender of wifely affection? As I looked at the two in the bows, I wondered.

Then something happened which reassured me. The girl stirred uneasily as if in a bad dream, turned to where Vernon lay and flung out her hand. Both were sound asleep, but in some secret way the impulse must have been communicated to Vernon, for he moved on his side, and brought an arm, which had been lying loosely on the rug which covered him, athwart Kore's as if in a gesture of protection. After that both seemed to be at peace, while the yawl ran toward the mainland hills, now green as a fern in the spring dawn.

THE END.

With Gaff and Gillie on Loch Kielbrawlich

By Percy Waxman

Author of "Hunting the Giant Bildik," "Stalking the Mountain Skrim," Etc.

Every summer brings its cargoes of fish stories which are unloaded at sundry clubs and taverns throughout the length and breadth of the land, while the autumn logs crackle on the hearths and dusty bottles of Scotch are fetched from the cellars. Here's one from Scotland that will be remembered whenever the name of Bobby Burns is broached.

EVERY year I pay a visit to England in the interests of the well-known knit-goods house I have the honor to represent. Last summer, on my annual business trip, I happened to find myself on the same steamer as the Shakespeare Society of Ottumwa, Iowa, on the way to Stratford-on-Avon to help celebrate the three hundred and twenty-seventh anniversary of "the Bard"—a slang term for the poet used by the society's members.

By one of those uncanny coincidences that fairly take your breath away, one of the members of this society, who chanced to be my cabinmate, actually turned out to be in the retail undergarment business in Iowa, so you can imagine the sort of old-time get-together we indulged in all the way across "the pond"—a traveler's familiar expression for the Atlantic—and the various snappy chats we had on "teasled fleeces," "smulling," "combings," and other purely technical processes known only to those interested in the knit-goods industry.

Well, the upshot of the whole business was that Mr. Fleischlauser—my cabinmate—insisted that I should join him and the other members of the society at Shakespeare's home town on June 23d to witness the pageant they were going to pull off in honor of "the Bard"—see definition above. And the weird part of it all is that it was on account of my accepting Mr. Fleischlauser's invitation that I afterward took

the trip to Kielbrawlich and succeeded in taking the biggest kelpie ever "killed" in a Scottish loch.

No doubt by now you are wondering what possible connection there can be between visiting one of Shakespeare's tombs and kelpie fishing, and I don't blame you. But just the same, I can and will explain the connection without further delay. Well, then, on June 23d, as per schedule, I was standing in the rain at Stratford listening to the Reverend Asa Sweffle's address on "The Day We Celebrate" when my eye chanced to light on a queer inscription on a near-by gravestone that didn't happen to be Shakespeare's. It contained this quotation:

Whae's mair sae snootie an' frae as guid gulin' 'i the Hielan's?—OLD GAELIC PROVERB.

I read these words over and over several times, but not being of a literary turn of mind, I couldn't make head or tail out of them. I asked my friend Fleischlauser to translate for me, which the kindly old fellow immediately proceeded to do. It turned out that that headstone belonged to a member of an ancient county family and that the inscription meant, freely translated, that "gulin' "—fishing—for kelpie in a Scottish loch was an experience no red-blooded man should ever miss.

Try as I would to keep my mind on Mr. Sweffle's speech, my attention would keep wandering to that Gaelic quotation. The more I thought of it, the more a fascinating idea kept intruding into my consciousness. Kelpie, I thought. Why not? The wool sales were still three weeks off. My wife wasn't with me. I had my rubber coat. There was nothing to stop me. Why not try it?

I decided that I would, so, to cut a long story short, I returned to London that evening and began negotiations through our Mr. Smedley—our resident buyer—to rent Loch Kielbrawlich from the estate of Laird Ranbreekie of Hootabreeks, with all fishing, trolling, riparian, victualing, and other licenses for a term of three calendar weeks as thereinafter described. Luckily for me, sterling exchange was at such a low ebb at the time that I succeeded in getting the whole thing—exclusive of gillie and gaffers' fees—for little more than the cost of two good seats for the Ziegfeld "Follies" during Buyers' Week. The lease was most generous. I could do almost anything I liked with that loch, except drain it.

My next step was to visit the Army and Navy Stores, where I picked up a few items that I didn't think I could secure up in the Highlands. With the aid of several obliging saleswomen I quickly secured one flask—gillies' delight—another flask—pocket size—six collapsible cups, nail scissors, baking-powder capsules, one pair of mittens, one dozen candles and lots of Hankow gut.

NEXT day in a comfortable first-class *wagon-lit* I was really speeding northward to Kielbrawlich in the very heart of Loshmanshire, just thirty-two miles from Micklecairn Station. There, it was arranged, I was to pick up my gillie, select my rods, dickles, spoors, debbies and flies, and proceed by pony cart to the loch itself.

My gillie's name turned out to be Angus McEcclefechan, but, to put him instantly at his ease, I called him "George," much to the good fellow's astonishment, and let it go at that. At George's suggestion, I purchased two spliced, interlocking Weissmullers, eighteen feet long when strained, each weighing ten ounces, including the culms. I got a secondhand Ulse reel with automatic stops that George highly recommended, while my "flies" were either Soda Fountain Sultanas, Red Mikes, or Feathery Berthas.

In Scotland all gillies supply their

own gaffs, but, not knowing that at the time I had brought two No. 3 Butchers with me, which I subsequently gave to George for his little girl. The first morning we reached the loch, George said to me:

"Wull ye mauna gang a wee bittee loch mocchan?"

Not wishing to let a mere Scotch gillie put anything over on an American, I smiled and said: "Yes—if you like, George," and pretty soon we were in the *aulich*—Highland rowboat—pulling for the *tukes*—feeding grounds.

On our arrival at the spot where "the spotted denizens of the finny tribe"—see Chap. IV, "Life of Izaak Walton"—were accustomed to feed, my gillie advised me to "troch the bylie." This was just his rough Highland way of explaining the old salmon fisher's trick of throwing out small pieces of heavy dough to attract the kelpie schools.

IN spite of taking his advice and trolling for three solid hours, the only fish we caught that day were a few cromarties and one or two snichers although, just as we were drifting leeward back to camp in the evening, I must confess I did get one or two genuine kelpie strikes. But, of course, I may have been mistaken. They might have been just gorse snags.

We fished that loch for three days and nights before the big event which I am about to describe happened. On the auspicious morning at breakfast I noticed my gillie mixing a queer, grayish, mealy paste over a slow furze fire, and I said:

"George, what is that you're making?"

"A wee mickle snoddie o' grawl," he replied.

"Which means——" I said, to give him a chance to continue his garrulous remarks.

"It means, your honor," continued George, "that whinna' the mense gey grae an' a', a wee mickle snoddie be guid tae licht."

Not wishing to continue the conversation after this, I went on eating in silence when suddenly an idea struck me. If a six-foot Scotch gillie with a full beard could eat that pasty mess *and thrive on it*, why wouldn't loch kelpie jump at it? To think with me is to act, and I soon set to work dipping my Red Mikes—flies attached to hooks to catch fish with—into whatever it was my gillie had called his dish.

In a moment or two we were on our way again, light-hearted and carefree as all knights of the rod and line seem to be—in the magazine articles. Well, George hadn't been pulling that *aulich* more than three hours, when *zip!* something tugged at my lure—a fishing term for bait—with enough force to jerk me into George's lap.

"Senna kelpie! Senna kelpie!" cried the jovial gillie. "Gie him the spey! Gie him the spey!" which I had already decided to do before he spoke.

Knowing that it is never a safe rule even to attempt to haul in a kelpie hand over hand, I did not do so, which somehow seemed to win George's admiration as I distinctly saw him smile at me, something very rare for a Scottish gillie, I am told. As I struck, the kelpie saltated, describing a perfect aërial arc, and as he curved and pirouetted in the gleaming sunlight, I roughly estimated that he couldn't possibly weigh an ounce less than, say one hundred and ten pounds, but George thought that he could.

The whir of my Ulse reel as the Estrado silk line whistled through the mist was music to my ears. As my bonny *ferox* darted hither and back, I experienced that thrill that only comes to a man when he sells a carload of goods, marries the first time, or gets his income tax accepted by the government. Well, as I say, that's how it felt. With my rod bent double, in fact almost

treble, I played that plucky fighter hour after hour.

Sometimes he dragged our boat through the water at a pace that made us dizzy; then he would rest and pant a while before making further *loshes*. To give you some idea of the bitter struggle through which I passed, I need only say that when I started out on the loch, its waters were as smooth as a duck hunter's narrative, but that one hour after my "strike," the entire body of water was whipped to a creamy froth. Strange as it seemed to me, George confided in me that he had seen an even worse exhibition of pool whipping and that was in 1904, when Lord Esh killed his record Grilse after an all-night battle, when a two-hour truce on both sides had to be arranged.

But I must not digress. Several times during the plunging and pivoting of my spotted beauty, George tried to gaff him, but, as the jibbling motion of the *aulich* prevented him from getting the kelpie in the *rear lug*, all the honest fellow's efforts were in vain. Indeed, on one occasion in his eager earnestness, George almost severed my carotid artery as he shot his steel home.

At last, however, after what seemed to me a period long enough for an office boy to find a letter in a file, I enticed my "kill" to a pebbly ledge by a series of short, but shrill crooning sounds, such as the female makes in the mating season. Utterly deceived by this device, the kelpie ventured into shoal waters and was captured with George's more or less bare hands. As I gazed at the elongated loveliness of that scaly monster, it looked to me as long as Brooklyn Bridge and when measured from *cauda*—tail—to *caput*—head—it proved to be three and one-quarter fish inches greater than Sir Mackintosh Coate's catch of 1893.

It weighed at first almost forty-two pounds, a fact which made me very gleeful, but after George had removed about a *spote* of loch water from its crop, it shrank to much less. In any case, it was a magnificent specimen. Its vomer was flat though slightly convex at the gill. The stegus fin showed that it had not long arrived from the sea, the nomadic habits of the kelpie being evidenced by the presence of mucous membrane on the gill rakers. Although Professor Hendrick disputes it, it is now generally conceded that Wiedfelt is right in his contention that the kelpie does migrate as soon as it reaches a condition of spawnability.

HOWEVER, I digress again. After George and I had wholly stippled my "kill," and before osmosis had begun to set in, I had my kelpie crated and shipped immediately to the Black and Yellow Taxidermist Company of Glasgow for mounting. These good people later on informed me that when my catch arrived, they thought at first it was a tarpon and that only after a minute examination of its dorsal climmer, which showed lateral strands, would they believe that it was indeed a kelpie.

That unique fish may be seen at any time behind the door of the coat room in the Downtown Knitters' Club. In conclusion, let me say that in a pure spirit of friendly rivalry the British government has offered a reward of five pounds to the first Englishman who beats my kelpie record. And, while I don't think it will happen, may the best man win, say I.

You will find in the next issue of THE POPULAR

Gentlemen of Chance

A COMPLETE BOOK

By W. R. HOEFER

A Chat With You

THE big gun has lain there for six months and there has been no chance to fire it. It is not the biggest gun of all, being but twelve inches in the bore while there are some sixteen inches and perhaps bigger. But when one looks at it, it is big enough and one realizes that it cannot be discharged casually like a .22 rifle. In the first place, to fire it once costs six or seven hundred dollars. The shell it throws weighs over half a ton and it can throw this missile to a maximum range of twenty-five miles—somewhere over the rim of the far horizon. It is a part of the far-flung coast defense of the U. S. A., and half the time there is a haze nine or ten miles offshore and most of the time there are vessels passing on their peaceful business. Shooting this firearm at a range of anything less than twelve miles or so is a waste of ammunition. It is intended for long-range work. If it is to defend the great city lying fifteen or twenty miles inshore, it must slay the attackers far at sea. For if they ever come, they will come armed with weapons that shoot as far.

* * * *

BUT now it is a clear day. Some twelve miles off, far beyond sight of unaided eyes on terra firma, a tug is pulling after it a target of red cloth at the end of a long cable. In towers, miles apart, keen eyes are spotting it through field glasses and their owners are able to talk with the commanders of the tug by wireless. This modern fortification looks as little like the preconceived idea of a fort as any one could imagine. It is a sand spit two or three miles wide and perhaps fifteen long, grown over with scrubby pine trees, hemlock and cedar. Fish hawks wheel slowly about toward their nests in the pines, there are pheasants couching in the underbrush and rabbits have made the place their home. One would think that a man with a dog and a gun might have a good morning here undisturbed. Yet far underground in concrete shelters are tons of stored-up energy, and folk who keep daily watch and ward, and rooms in which they calculate range, elevation and windage with the meticulous accuracy of laboratory workers. The gun itself lies in the open, disdaining camouflage. Its carriage is set in concrete, there is a concrete floor about it for about a hundred feet, it is painted a greenish-gray and seems about thirty-five feet long. There are several odd-looking cylinders about its breech. These are filled with oil of some sort to check and take up the recoil. Altogether, however, the gun looks a part of the landscape; the rolling sand dunes, the pines and cedars, the arid grasses and the gun all fit in together.

* * * *

PEACEFUL enough—yes, peaceful enough and quiet, a desert place with a sea wind blowing over it, a lonely spot—till an officer, booted and spurred, immaculate in uniform, thin-waisted, chin in and chest out, steps out on the concrete, raises a gloved hand and calls out an order. Some twenty figures have been lying sunning themselves in the brush. They are dressed in blue overalls, this gun crew. A moment ago they were lazy, joshing young fellows. Now they have dashed to their appointed places and snapped to attention. Everything about them—their eyes, the poise of their young, fit bodies—is intent on one task and doing it properly. These are no tin soldiers. This is the U. S. A.

IN a wooden tower is a lieutenant who has command of this battery. The sergeant beside him raises a little red flag. Evidently the target, far at sea, is clear and safe and they are going to shoot. And now watch the gun crew! This is the moment they have been waiting for, this is what they have been training for. No football game, no boxing match, no mimic combat can give one the thrill that comes from real soldiers engaged with their own deadly business. On a truck they rush the great shell into the breech of the gun and ram it home. On another truck arrives the five-foot pillowcase of superexplosive. They charge to the breech of the gun with this and ram it home. Then one tall lad, possibly a sergeant, closes the great breech and spins the levers, locking it like the door of a safe. Now, watch! Somewhere down below there is some one who is to aim this gun. He does it by the calculations of trigonometry—there is no sighting down the barrel, he cannot see his mark—it is far away in the hazy distance. Slowly but with a definite purpose evident in its heavy sway, the nose of the gun swings upward, checks and pauses. Then it moves heavily and relentlessly to one side. Then it is still. The men of the gun crew are stiff and rigid in their appointed places. The officers are spurred figures of knighthood—one feels in looking at them that the profession of arms is the only one worthy of a gentleman and that one should be ashamed of being a civilian. What gives the thing its especially dramatic touch is that all those concerned with firing the gun are—not afraid—but keyed up and tense. Suppose the breech block should blow out. This is a big gun with a full charge. This is the next thing to real battle. Anything might happen. Peering down into the pit below the gun is a slim, blue, overalled figure. Suddenly he raises his hands, turns his back on the gun, and runs off to an appointed position. "Fire!" he cries. Beneath the snap and precision that the army has given him there is a vibrating excitement—more beautiful and interesting because sternly controlled.

* * * *

AND now the gun speaks. Our ears are stuffed with cotton and we are expecting it, but always there will be surprise when such a voice roars out. Flame—dark red, diffuse, dense—spurts from its muzzle. Wisps of black smoke roll up and are carried off by the sea wind. The gun rocks back two or three feet in its carriage and spurts of oily steam come from the cylinders about its breech. The shell is on its way. In spite of the cotton in one's ears, the screaming of it is plain and distinct, terrible and rather splendid. Twelve miles off in the ocean it hits. It is twenty-seven seconds in the air and you can hear it scream for about five seconds. The gun crew run up, open the smoking breech of the great weapon and run a long swab through it. Then once more they are at stiff attention.

In the meantime the fish hawks have apparently neither heard nor noticed the gun, but swoop about in graceful curves, minding their own business and tending to their own young though half a ton of death and destruction has passed over their heads within twenty feet or so.

Five shots in a long afternoon and the nearest they came to the target was one hundred feet over. Considering a range of twelve miles and a small target this is nearly perfect.

Not much, perhaps, unless you see it for yourself. The gun is not perhaps so wonderful. It is the men who man it and the officers who command it and the spectacle of seeing men keyed up to do a thing right and make a good job of it.

The Cruise of the Colleen Bawn

By Frank Carruthers

Author of "Terror Island."

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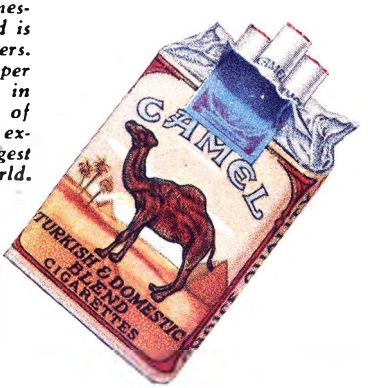

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