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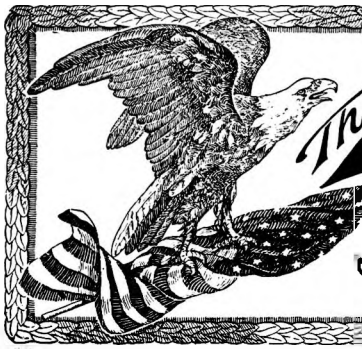
THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

Volume LIV
Number 5

In the Next Issue

TWO NOVELS
By ROWLAND and FIELDING

In the Next Issue



TWICE-A-MONTH
The Popular Magazine

Vol. LIV. No. 5 — November 20, 1919

CONTENTS

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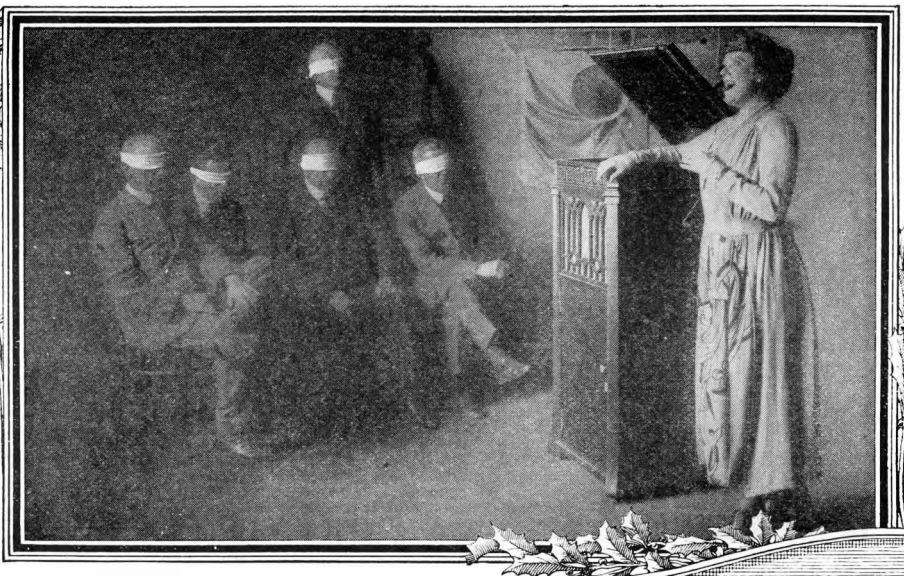

Reproduced from actual photographs taken at Edison Recording Studios, New York

The blindfolded jury hears Hempel sing "Io non sono piu l'Annetta" while she stands beside the New Edison.

No dif

THE BLINDFOLD TEST is the most severe of all musical tests; shutting off a person's sight greatly increases his acuteness of hearing. Yet even the blindfold test has been successfully met by the New Edison.

Frieda Hempel, prima donna soprano of the Metropolitan Opera Company, New York, appeared before five of Thomas A. Edison's musical experts to perform the test. She stood beside the New Edison. The blindfolds were adjusted over the eyes of the five men. As shown in the first photograph, Hempel then started to sing. The selection was "Io non sono piu l'Annetta" from the opera "Crispino e la Comare." Suddenly Hempel stopped singing, but the song continued. The New Edison had taken up the song and was singing alone. The five experts, even though their hearing faculties were at highest concentration, were completely unaware that Hempel had ceased and that they were listening only to the New Edison's RE-CREATION of her voice.

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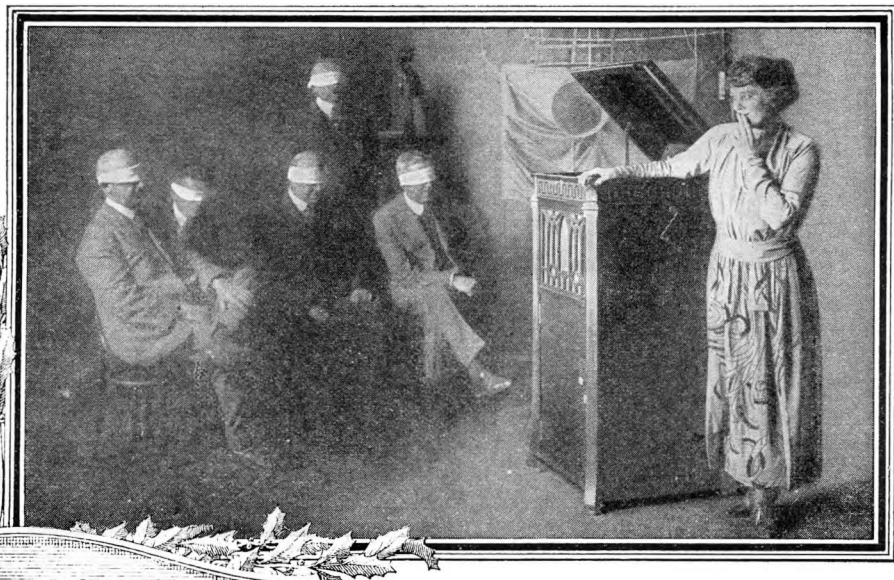
The NEW "The Phonograph



ference!

Thirty seconds later! Hempel has ceased. The blindfolded jury is not aware that the New Edison is singing "Io non sono piu l'Annetta" alone.

FRIEDA HEMPEL is called "Hempel of the Voice Supreme." You might think this is because of her technique —so flawless, so superb! Or because of her notes, pure as the chiming of silver bells.

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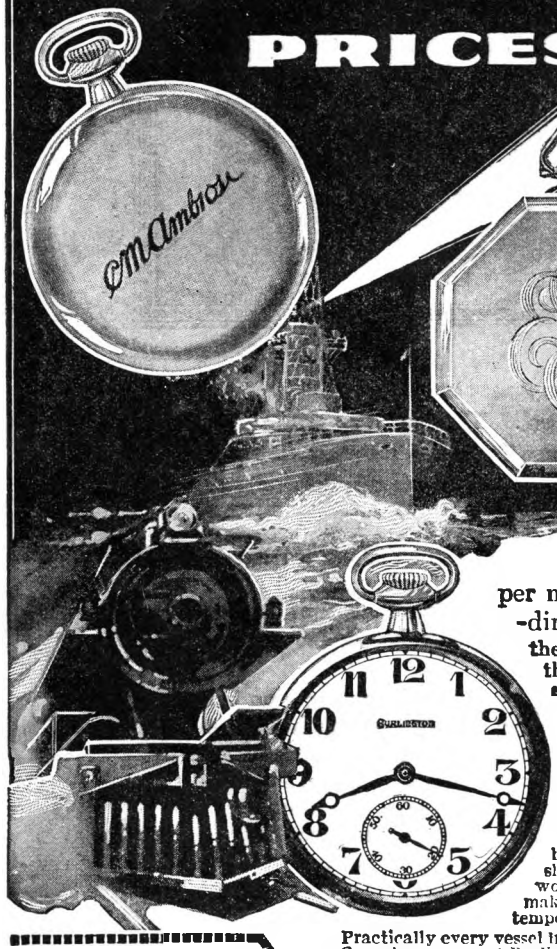

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. LIV. NOVEMBER 20, 1919. No. 5.

The Perfect Crime

By Francis Lynde

Author of "A Girl, a Horse, and a Dog," Etc.

We think that this story is not only one of the best Mr. Lynde has written, but that it takes high rank among those of detective-mystery type. The hero is a new sort for us, too. He is not a professional trapper of criminals, neither is he an amateur sleuth. Vance is an up-to-date psychologist, much ridiculed on account of his belief in the power of his science to analyze character and predict action. But he wishes above all else to devote himself to business psychology. The underworld of vicious impulses and cruel deeds has no attraction for him. Against his own will he is forced to apply his theories to "the perfect crime."

(*A Complete Novel*)

CHAPTER I.

THE PSYCHOLOGIST.

IT was about three o'clock in the afternoon when Vance got up to draw his western window shade. At that hour the declining sun volleyed full upon the worktable at which he was plotting intricate mathematical curves on a sheet of white drawing paper, and the reflection of the sunlight dazzled him. While he was still blinking in the semidarkness which was the optical reaction following the shutting out of the glare, the door opened and Cliffert, whose real-estate office was ten steps farther down the corridor, lounged in.

"Hard at it, as per usual, are you, Bobby?" said the visitor, planting himself in the easiest chair the small office afforded and rolling a cigarette between his fingers preparatory to lighting it. "How goes the new and latest break into the overcrowded field of the learned professions by this time?"

The draftsman, a well-set-up young athlete with fair hair that was inclined to curl, and good gray eyes, took off his green celluloid eye shade and sat back in his chair.

"I can't complain," he returned. "The only doubt I ever had was based upon the size of this thriving and up-to-date little city of yours. I wasn't certain that Middlevale, even with all of its industries, was big enough to support a consulting psychologist."

"Psychology!" snorted the caller, in good-natured contempt; "I wish you could succeed in convincing me that it isn't to laugh, Bobby."

"If I could induce you to look into the practical results a bit, and perhaps take a few more of the tests yourself," Vance began; but the incredulous one interrupted with a gibe.

"Nixie; not for me. When I want my fortune told, I'll go to the old-timers; the sure-enough Egyptian astrologers and that sort. But are you really doing business in Middlevale?"

"I am, for a fact, strange as it may seem. I ran a series of tests for the Hoggie Machine Company last week; and yesterday, Bencrow, the shop manager of the Motors Company, came in to get terms for a complete report on his force."

"Good work!" declared the real-estate man. "A fake is a fake only so long as you can't make people believe in it. After that,

it becomes a Science, and you spell it with a capital."

Vance's smile was perfectly good-tempered. Cliffert was a former classmate, and though there had never been any special intimacy between them in college, and they had completely lost sight of each other during the three years which had elapsed since their joint graduation, the sharp-eyed, hatchet-faced dealer in real estate had been the first to welcome Vance to Middlevale, and had exerted himself generously in the matter of introductions for the newcomer.

"Go on calling it a fake, if it amuses you," Vance retorted. "Of course, there is never anything fakerish about the real-estate business."

"Never in this world!" grinned the drop-in. "I'm platting a new addition now, out beyond Ingerton Heights. If you think it's a fake, come and see it. But you were speaking of the Motors Company: ever met Jassington?"

"No; it was his manager, Bencrow, who came to see me."

"You've missed something—not meeting Jassington: he's a throw-back to the stone age; the kind of man you'd like to kick and kick hard, only you know you'd break your foot if you did."

The psychologist nodded. "Somebody said he belongs to the tribe of the offensively rich. He looks the part."

"Then you've seen him?"

"I've had him pointed out to me; yes."

"You saw something when you looked at him. The common ameliorations were mostly left out when he was made. Take the organization of Maximum Motors: he fairly slaughtered his way to the majority ownership of the stock; daggered friend and foe alike with splendid impartiality and never batted an eye. Then his shops; they're deathtraps. Not a single safety device in the entire plant."

Vance shook his head. "It is surprising that he is progressive enough to authorize a pshychological report on his workmen," he argued.

"Greed, pure and simple," was Cliffert's assertion. "He'll use your report as a club to whack Bencrow over the head. If your science isn't altogether a fake, you'll be able to indicate at least a few misfits. Jassington will jab a fat finger on them and say, 'What have you got these dubs on the pay roll for, Bencrow? What the devil do I hire you for, anyway? Fire 'em—fire 'em, by gad! and get some cheap boys to take their places!' "

It was not the first criticism of the kind that Vance had heard of Grigsby Jassington and his cave-man methods. A man newly rich—ostentatiously and blatantly rich; with money and power, and the disposition to use the power ruthlessly for his own ends; a prominent figure in Middlevale affairs, a director in the principal bank and the president of Maximum Motors, but a man seemingly without friends.

"Wrong; quite wrong—even from a gain-getting point of view," was Vance's comment on the shop conditions. "*Esprit de corps,* the loyalty of the human factor, is the most valuable asset a plant can have; valuable in dollars and cents. Bencrow let me infer that I wouldn't find any great love for the president in his force."

Cliffert's smile was acrid. "Yes; they love him—I don't think. Why, Vance, you can't imagine how Jassington is hated, and what good cause the haters have. I was talking with Apperson, the lawyer, just the other day. He's been for the plaintiffs in half a dozen suits for personal injuries—clear negligence of the most ordinary precautions in the motor works. Could he win them, or any one of them? Not on your life! By hook or by crook Jassington would bully his way out of it, and then the poor workman might just as well pack up and get out of Middlevale. Jassington never lets up on a man who has sued him. He'll keep track of him and blacklist him everywhere he goes."

Again the psychologist shook his head.

"Such men ought to take a few lessons in mental reactions," he offered. "Think of the drag that such a load of enmity must put on the wheels of the motor works!"

"Enmity? I'll venture to say there are dozens of Jassington's men, right now, who wouldn't stop at murder to get even with him—if the chance offered, and they thought they could get away with it."

"The perfect crime," said Vance musingly. "It has never yet been invented, Cliffert. There is always the fatal little slip; the trifle that was overlooked in the planning or in the execution."

"Perhaps it hasn't been invented, but it can be," Cliffert asserted. "And one of these days it will be. Jassington is a good subject; and if the man who wishes to

square accounts with him is sufficiently vindictive—and intelligent—it won't be a simple murder."

"What will it be?"

"Slow torture. Jassington is forty-five, or thereabouts, and he married a woman young enough to be his daughter, and beautiful enough to be a much handsomer man's daughter. It is said that he married to get a plaything and to make his wife a lay figure upon which to show off his looted money. There is a child; a boy just big enough to run around and play—and there you are."

"The Achillean heel?" Vance smiled.

"Exactly. No man is all devil, and Jassington's one soft spot is on the side he turns toward the kiddie. If anything should happen to that boy, something that all the Jassington money couldn't avert or remedy—but speaking of the little Jassington reminds me that I came in to ask a favor of you. I'm going away this afternoon, and may not be back for three or four days or a week I've put a notice on my office door referring callers to you. If you'll just say 'hello' to them, and make scratch-pad notes of the things that ought to be jotted down when——"

"Sure—with pleasure," said Vance, glad of a chance to work off some of the debt of obligation owed to his Middlevale introducer and former college acquaintance. "I'll do more, if there is any business I can attend to."

"There won't be." Cliffert got up and went to stand facing the open window on the street front through which the traffic noises of the busy little city rose in distance-diminished volume. Vance was filling his pipe when the man at the window wheeled and came back.

"How does it come that you've never married, Bobby?" he asked abruptly.

As before, the young psychologist's smile was wholly good-natured.

"Too busy, I guess: that, and the fact that the right girl hasn't happened to break in."

"You're luckier than I was. Did you know that I married in my senior year?"

"I heard something about it—yes."

"I did; and it was a hideous, heart-breaking mistake. We stood it for a little more than a year, and then I quit and went to California to give the woman her chance. She took it and got her decree—and the custody of the child. Then I located here, and sent for my sister to come and keep house for me. Short and sweet, isn't it?"

"There was a child, you say?" said Vance.

"Yes—my boy; and I haven't seen him since he was a baby in arms. I have just had word that the woman is dead. I'm going after my boy, Bobby; that's why I want you to run my office for me." Then: "You don't mind my telling you? It's sort of good to unload, after you've been bottled up for years. And there is one other thing—if you'll do it for me. I haven't told Jane my sister, you know. Of course, she knows about the marriage, but she doesn't know there is a child—I haven't had the heart to tell her. If you'll run out to the Heights this evening and break it to her, Bobby; you see, I'm taking the afternoon train, and I shan't have time to go home."

Vance rose to the occasion like a man and a brother.

"I can readily understand why you haven't told your sister," he rejoined, with friendly sympathy. "I'll see her this evening. And if there is anything else I can do, you have only to ask."

Cliffert had pulled out his watch and appeared to be listening to it as if he expected to hear it strike the hour. A new note had entered the confused medley of street sounds floating in through the open window. It was the call of the newsboys crying the first edition of the afternoon newspaper.

"Train time—and I must be going," said the watch holder, and as he spoke there was a pattering of bare feet in the corridor and a tightly rolled copy of the *Evening Dispatch* was tossed through the transom to fall at Vance's feet.

He was opening the paper and saying good-by to Cliffert at the same moment, and so missed seeing the block-type headlines running all across the front page until Cliffert's "Good God!—look at that, will you?" broke the leave-takings in the midst.

Then he understood why the shrilling cries in the street rose so persistently above the clatter of wheels and the buzzing of autos. The lines to which Cliffert was pointing ran:

NURSEMAID MURDERED: CHILD DISAPPEARS!

MYSTERIOUS KIDNAPING OF LITTLE WILLIE JASSINGTON!

CHAPTER II.

LOOSE ENDS.

Together, and in breath-holding silence, the two men read the account of the double tragedy, Vance with the little chill which a crime, however impersonal to the reader, always brings in its train. Stripped of sensational verbiage, the facts were few, but baldly definite. At two o'clock the nurse had taken the little Jassington for an airing in Richmond Park, a small tree-shaded area in the residential part of the city, and upon which the Jassington house, with others, fronted. At a quarter of three the young woman had been found sitting on one of the iron park benches near the single driveway through the park, dead, and the child had disappeared. There were no marks upon the girl's body to indicate the cause of death, and though many people were in the park or passing through it, there were no witnesses to the crime—or, at least, none had been found when the newspaper went to press.

Cliffert dropped into a chair and wiped the sweat from his forehead.

"Jove!" he gasped; "to think that the very thing we were talking about not five minutes ago—the thing I suggested as the whip that would cut that poor rich dub to the heart—should already have been put over! It's—it's frightful, Vance!"

Vance smiled. "Your mentality is working backward, now. Your speaking of a thing couldn't have had anything to do with a fact which was at that time a completed act."

"Oh, I know; it's only coincidence, you'd say: but when you've said a thing like that—it's like cursing a man in a hot fit of temper and then finding out that the curse has outrun you—beat you to it."

"You're suffering from the reaction now," said Vance, dropping into the professional vein. "It's perfectly natural. A few minutes ago you were scoring Jassington—quite justifiably, I don't doubt; but now I'll venture to say you are almost sorry for him."

"Good Lord! who wouldn't be sorry for him? I don't care how much of a crab he is—he's a father. How would I feel if it were my boy instead of his? That is the first thought that struck me, and it was like a bullet out of a gun. Then, too, there is the child's mother."

Vance shook his head.

"You are losing sight of the major crime. The child will in all probability be held for ransom, to be restored after the Jassington bank account has been properly bled. But the murder of the nursemaid can't be undone."

Cliffert passed his hand over his brow and again it came away wet.

"I can't understand that part of it," he protested. "It couldn't have been necessary to kill the girl. Let's see the paper again: does it say positively that she is dead?"

"There seems to be no question about that part of it," said Vance, passing the paper over with a finger on the paragraph describing the discovery of the nurse.

Cliffert glanced over the lines and then folded the paper absently and thrust it into his pocket.

"The man who wrote that story was rattled—as he had a blessed good chance to be," he commented. "Besides, at three o'clock or thereabouts they must have been holding the forms open for him in the *Dispatch* office—which means hurry. It's highly improbable that the kidnapers, whoever they were or whatever their motive, would add a needless murder to the other crime. Most likely a later edition of the *Dispatch* will say that the girl was only in a dead faint. But it's horrible enough, any way you look at it."

Vance's eyes sought the little paperweight clock ticking off the minutes on his table desk. "You'll be missing your train," he suggested; and at that Cliffert got up and shook himself together.

"By George!" he broke out; "I'd almost forgotten." Then: "If I thought I could be of any possible use in helping to run this thing down, I'd postpone my trip. It seems as if every red-blooded man in town ought to turn out and help find that kiddie. You're not a father, Vance, and, naturally, it doesn't grip you as it does a man with a child of his own. But I——"

"Nonsense!" Vance interrupted good-naturedly. "You couldn't do anything. Go on and get your boy. The police will probably have this Jassington mystery cleared up long before you can go and come."

Cliffert crossed to the door, but with his hand on the knob he paused to say: "Yes, the police: we have a pretty good force here in Middlevale, for bush leaguers, as you might say; detectives, too. And Jassing-

ton will doubtless offer a blood-curdling reward. If it just doesn't happen to be the perfect crime——"

"Go on to your train," said Vance, with his easy-going smile. "There isn't any such thing as the perfect crime, and you know it." And after the door had closed upon Cliffert's retreating figure he turned back to his mathematical job, dismissing, so far as he might, in the interests of business, the extraneous mental distractions all and sundry.

Though he was still comparatively a newcomer in Middlevale, Vance had found a fairly comfortable home in a boarding house of the better class, and when he went to dinner and took his accustomed seat in the dining room he found that there was but one topic of conversation at table; namely the murder and kidnaping.

Grigsby Jassington's wealth and prominence, no less than his hard-bitten methods of climbing the ladder of success over other people's shoulders, had put his name in everybody's mouth. At Mrs. Benchley's table, ringed about by clerks, a young doctor, a lawyer or so, two young women stenographers, and the inevitable absent-eyed second-floor back who was currently reported to be writing the great American novel, there was much talk of the double tragedy and much warm-hearted sympathy for the mother of the stolen child—chiefly, as Vance remarked, for the mother.

"Think of the awful brutality of it!" exclaimed one of the young women. "Why, the child is only a baby! It can't be more than two or two and a half years old. It'll simply *die* without its mother!" And everybody agreed with her.

Listening quietly to the table talk, Vance learned that little or nothing had as yet been added to the bare facts printed in the first edition of the *Dispatch*. All that was known was that at some time between two o'clock and a quarter to three—at which hour the dead nursemaid had been discovered—the double crime had been committed. At this point the known facts stopped short. With the small park well peopled with other nursemaids and children and residents of the neighborhood, with automobiles passing frequently on the bisecting driveway, and with the park policeman on duty, nobody had seen anything unusual.

As to the maid's death, the newspaper report was verified. The young woman was past help when she was discovered. There were no signs of a struggle, and the death—so said one of the lawyers at table, who chanced to be passing through the park shortly after the discovery—might have been mistaken for sleep. The lawyer repeated the few facts that were known about the dead girl. The Jassingtons had procured her from an orphan asylum in a distant part of the State, and she had been with them for less than a month; hence, she was practically unknown in Middlevale.

As a psychologist, Vance was particularly interested in noting the various reactions of his table associates to the shock of the double crime. These were mainly characteristic. The young doctor wondered what the autopsy would reveal; the lawyers fell apart on the question as to whether the criminal or criminals were professional or amateur; the women were volubly sorry for the bereaved young mother; and the book writer speculated upon the mysteries, querying curiously if, after all, it had been left to Middlevale to stage the long-talked-of perfect crime.

After dinner Vance set out upon the errand he had promised Cliffert to undertake, boarding a street car for Ingerton Heights, a suburb well out beyond the steel mills. It was not his first visit to the rather showy, villa-built house put up in the day of the suburb's beginnings to induce others to buy and build. Shortly after his arrival in Middlevale Cliffert had had him out to dinner and he had met the sister housekeeper, a thin-lipped, austere, and plain-spoken person apparently much her brother's senior. On the present occasion he was rather relieved to find the house dark, and the house mistress enjoying the cool of the evening on the porch. What he had to say to Miss Cliffert did not ask for the formalities of a stuffed-furniture drawing-room and brilliant electrics.

"Yes, Jamie phoned me he had to go away unexpectedly," said the sister, after Vance had been invited to take the porch rocking-chair and Cliffert's sudden departure had been spoken of. "It was just like him—to give me less than an hour to pack his bag and send it downtown to him."

"Yes; he left on a wire notice, I believe," said Vance; but before he could go on and lead up to the revelation he had promised Cliffert to make, the tragic sensation of the afternoon got in the way.

"Any more news of that dreadful crime before you left town?" queried Miss Jane.

"Nothing definite; nothing more than the evening paper told us. I understand that the police are at work, and that Mr. Jassington has offered a huge reward."

"I don't know what we're coming to when a dreadful thing like that can be done in broad daylight, and with half of the town, as you might say, looking on," protested the spinster lady. "It is too frightfully shocking for words!"

"Perhaps the daylight and the publicity were duly considered by the criminal or criminals," Vance suggested. "The very unlikelihood of the thing, you know. Apart from the murder of the young woman—which apparently leaves no clew as to the manner of it—the abduction would be comparatively easy."

"I haven't got over the shock of it yet. Ever since I read the account in the paper I've been thinking of that poor young mother. I can't get her out of my mind."

"Every one seems to feel that way about Mrs. Jassington," Vance put in quietly. "But I haven't heard much sympathy expressed for the father."

"You wouldn't," was the tart reply. "Grigsby Jassington isn't the kind of man to get much sympathy for anything that might happen to him."

"Yet, as your brother remarked, he is the child's father, and every father in Middlevale ought to feel for him."

"Jamie? Did the news come out before he left town?"

"Yes; at the moment of his leaving. He was in my office when the first edition of the *Dispatch* was put on the streets, and we had just been speaking of Jassington. And that brings me to a small duty that your brother laid upon me. You knew we were together in the university, didn't you?"

"Of course."

"Then it won't surprise you when I say that I know what happened to Jamie in his senior year."

"It was dreadful!" "Dreadful" appeared to be Miss Jane Cliffert's one word descriptive of things objectionable.

"It was most unfortunate, to say the least of it," ventured the go-between. Then: "You knew that the woman ultimately obtained a divorce?"

"I couldn't very well help knowing it."

"But Jamie tells me that you didn't know there was a child."

At this the austere lady sat up very straight. "A child?" she echoed in scandalized tones; "Jamie's child?"

"Yes."

"What became of it? And why hasn't Jamie told me about it?"

"The decree of divorce gave the mother the custody of the child. And Jamie hasn't told you about it because he didn't wish to harrow your feelings any more than they had already been harrowed by the fact of his unhappy marriage."

"Humph! That is the first time I ever knew him to be so considerate as all that!" was the crisp retort. "It is much more likely that he was ashamed to tell me."

Vance meant to be as loyal as possible to the man who had confided in him.

"I shouldn't put it quite that way, if I were you," he temporized. "I think I can understand why he might be reluctant to speak about the child, even to you. And as long as the mother was living——"

"Is the woman dead?"

"Yes. Jamie has just had the news—today, as I understood him. And he has gone East to get his child."

For a surcharged minute or so there was a profound silence on the porch of the suburban villa. The only light came from a street electric at the corner, and it was not strong enough to enable Vance to see the face of his hostess and the emotions which were doubtless advertising themselves thereon. When she spoke, there was no trace of the latent mother—said to reside in every woman—apparent in her voice.

"How old is the child?" she demanded raspingly.

"Jamie didn't say. But since he and his wife were separated within a year of their marriage, you can judge for yourself."

Silence again, and still the universal motherhood failed to exhibit itself.

"Merciful heavens!—a mere *baby!* A nice thing to expect of me; to bring up some other woman's child—*that* woman's child! —at my time of life! But that is Jamie, all over. He can pass anything on to somebody else and never miss drawing a breath. He passed it on to you to come out here and tell me; didn't he now?"

"He asked me to come—yes. But I was quite willing to do it."

"Well; I suppose what can't be cured must be endured. When will he be back?"

"That I cannot say, definitely. He spoke of three or four days, or possibly a week."

"Did he happen to tell you whether it is a boy, or a girl?"

"It is a boy."

"Goodness gracious!—worse and more of it! But there: it doesn't do any good to scold at you, Mr. Vance. I suppose I ought to thank you for coming to tell me—and I do. But I can't help feeling terribly vexed at Jamie. A *baby* for me to take care of and raise; and a boy baby, at that! I shall never get over it—never!"

Since he had done his full duty, and had found mighty little pleasure in the doing of it, Vance presently took his leave, harboring much sympathy for the child who would have to be dependent upon the tender mercies of Miss Jane Cliffert.

"I certainly do pity that poor little motherless kid," he was saying to himself as he dropped from the street car in front of the building where he had his office. And his abstraction was so great that he ran blindly into a luxurious limousine parked at the curb and nearly fell into its open door. Oddly enough, as he thought, the limousine's chauffeur recognized him.

"Mr. Vance, isn't it?" said the man. And then: "Mr. Jassington is looking for you. He has been to your boarding house, and has just now gone up to your office."

CHAPTER III.

BULLY JASSINGTON.

Ascending to his office floor in the Corona Building, Vance found the president of Maximum Motors about to turn away from the locked door next to Cliffert's in evident disappointment. Vance introduced himself, opened his office and switched on the lights. The electrics showed him a moving spectacle; a big and hitherto unconquered prize fighter of a man beaten to the ropes by a sudden blow, dazed, blinded, and unstrung. The evening was comfortably cool, but the perspiration was standing in little beads on Jassington's forehead when he sat down and glared at Vance.

"So you're the college nut Bencrow's been telling me about," he began thickly. Then: "This psychology fad: what is there to it, anyhow?"

Vance passed over the affront to his profession, wisely considering the source.

"Perhaps it will be sufficient to say that psychology is an applied science, so far as it goes," he returned. "I have convinced Mr. Bencrow that it will save money for your company, and he, I take it, has convinced you."

"He'll hear from me if it doesn't," was the growling threat. "But that's neither here nor there. Marian—she's been to college—she's got the bug, too. She sent me here."

"Marian?" queried Vance.

"My wife's sister. She's the only one in the house with any sense left. She told me to come to you."

"About the kidnaping?"

Jassington nodded and mopped his large-featured face.

"Its hell's own spite work," he grated. "I know. Some fiend of a mechanic with a grudge. There's lots of 'em. Marian says maybe you can help find him—and my boy."

Vance began to understand.

"Your sister-in-law knows that I am to examine the men in your plant?"

"That's it. She says if you're on the lookout, may be you can spot the devil—or devils."

Vance shook his head. "That is quite unlikely. I can measure the mentality of the men and their adaptability to the work they are doing, but beyond that—well, psychology hasn't yet entered the detective field to any considerable extent."

"Marian thinks there's a chance—and I'm not missing any of the chances." Then, in a sweating outburst: "My God, man! you don't know what this thing means to me! Think of that baby snatched away from its mother, and God only knows what's happenin' to it this minute! And there's Lucy—goin' out of one fainting fit into another!"

"I'd willingly help if I could," Vance hastened to say. "But I don't see the slightest chance in my line. Your best hope is in the police or the detectives. I understand that there are no clews at present, but there will be. The child will doubtless be held for ransom."

"Not a chance. It might have turned out that way if they hadn't killed the nurse. But now they won't dare show up in any way—even to hold me up for a ransom. It'll mean the rope if they're caught, and they know it. That's the hot hell of it for me:

since there's a murder out against them, they're more than likely to kill my baby to cover the thing up!"

Vance saw the logic in this; couldn't help seeing it.

"You think the murder of the nurse wasn't intentional?"

"The hospital doctors think so, though they can't tell how she was killed—no marks or anything—just heart failure. Maybe the autopsy will show; and maybe it won't."

Again Vance shook his head, admitting to himself that the circumstances looked dubious for the safety of the child. He knew that in coming to him Jassington was merely catching at straws, and he was unwilling to raise false hopes.

"I'm sorry I can't offer you any encouragement in my own field," he said gravely. "I might be able to pick out a few possible criminals among your men in the course of the examinations, but that wouldn't mean anything. Again, it is highly improbable that the criminal or criminals are men at present on your pay rolls. They are much more likely to be discharged employees, I should say."

"That's about where I thought we'd land," gritted the big man, releasing himself from the arms of the chair that was too small for his shapeless bulk. "But before I go, I'll put the powder behind the bullet. I've told Chief Lurby that it's ten thousand cold dollars to the man that can put me on the track of my baby, and I'm sayin' the same to you. Money don't cut any ice with me in this thing."

Robert Vance was no anarchist, either of the parlor or the soap-box variety; yet he could not quite smother an uprising of commiserative contempt for the man who, after having ridden roughshod over all the humanities in his business dealings, had nothing better than his ill-gotten wealth to fall back upon in his hour of need.

"If I thought I could be of any service, I'd help willingly," he offered; adding: "But I shouldn't want your reward."

"Huh! too proud to take money, are you?" frowned the tyrant. "Well, since you say you can't do anything, I suppose it don't make any difference. Just the same, if you should happen to have another think comin', let me know."

For three full days the murder and kidnaping made exciting copy for Middlevale's newspapers, and over breakfast, luncheon, and dinner tables the mysterious double crime was discussed with morbid interest. But even the most stirring sensation must have sustenance of some kind if it is to be kept alive, and of revelations to feed upon in the Jassington kidnaping there were practically none. On the fourth day the most that the newspapers could say was that the police, aided by some of the most skillful detectives in the country, were still working on the mystery, and that there would probably be startling developments a little later.

During this interval Vance had gone to work on his new assignment in Maximum Motors, and in the process of examining the men he was encouraging them to talk freely about the calamity which had befallen the president. Here, as elsewhere, there was little sympathy expressed for Grigsby Jassington, though most of the men were careful not to let their enmity take a form that could be handed on to the president and come back to them in reprisals. But one man, Bragdon, a helper in the assembling shop, was less cautious.

"Naw; th' big boss'll never see that kid again, and here's one man that ain't carin' a damn," said this beetle-browed helper when Vance had skillfully brought the examination-room talk around to the kidnaping.

"Think not?—not even for the big reward he is offering?"

"There's some things that money won't buy—n'r pay for. Th' big boss is roastin' in hell, right now, and I'll bet the man that put him there ain't goin' to pull him out—not f'r no money he can offer."

At this, Vance opened upon the man frankly. "What has Mr. Jassington ever done to you, Bragdon?" he asked.

Tht big helper leaned over the table and showed a multitude of little scars around his eyes.

"See them?" he rasped. "One o' the hundreds of grindin' wheels in the shops that ain't got no guards on 'em. I was a fitter and adjuster, and gettin' the scale pay f'r it. Now I'm a helper, an' Jassington says I'm in dam' big luck to have any kind of a job."

"They look like burn scars," said Vance.

"That's what they are; soft spot in the emery wheel I was grindin' on, an' I got the dose in my face. I can read print, if it's big enough; but that's all I can do."

"Why didn't you sue for damages?"

"I seen too many of 'em try that; an' come out with no damages an' no job. I got a woman an' four kids, an' I couldn't take no chances. The comp'ny lawyer knowed his business, all right. 'If you sue,' says he, 'you'll get nothin', an' have no job. Your carelessness'—that's what he says—'your carelessness has cost you about half your eyesight, an' you'll have a hard time findin' work. You better sign this paper an' take what the comp'ny will give you.' I done it, but I ain't cryin' none about Jassington's kid."

Skilled in reading mental conditions, Vance saw that the man's mind was like an overburdened pack animal; ready to cast its load at another flick of the whip.

"Listen, Bragdon," he said accusingly; "you know who took that child."

"Do I?" retorted the victim of the unguarded emery wheel, with a savage grin. "If I do, I can keep my mouth shut; don't you forget that!"

"You think Mr. Jassington has earned what he's getting?"

"A dozen times over. If you'd seen what I have in this shop, you could put your finger on the man that stole the Jassington kid in just about one minute; leastwise, you could get it down to one of three 'r four. But you ain't no detective."

"No," said Vance, "I am not. But you're only guessing?"

"A guess is as good as a sure shot if you know where to point the gun. I don't want none of Jassington's rotten reward money, but if I did——"

"I see," Vance nodded, and dismissed his man. But taking the clew Bragdon had given he followed it industriously through the day, with the result that the half-blind helper's hint received ample confirmation. Right or wrong, the shopmen who were brave enough to express an opinion held but one view, namely, that some one of the former employees of the motors works, discharged, blacklisted, and smarting under a sense of injury, had stolen the Jassington child.

When Vance returned to his office in the afternoon he found a visitor awaiting him; no less a personage than Michael Lurby, the Middlevale chief of police; a ruddy-faced smiling Irishman who had once been a ward boss in one of the factory districts.

" 'Tis a new thing to me, this psychology shop," was the Irishman's greeting. And then: "Is it bottled goods, or do ye be keeping it on tap, Misther Vance?"

Vance matched the chief's good-natured grin and got out his box of cigars. He was well used to having his profession taken as a joke. Everybody did it.

"Have your laugh, chief," he returned; "and some day when you can take a couple of hours off, come up and let me run you through the mill. Perhaps I can tell you how far you've missed it by putting on a uniform. I've often thought I'd like to have a look into your mind."

"Ye'll not have it, then," laughed the red-faced one. "There might be something in the back part of me head that I'd not care to be putting on the billboards, d'ye see? But about this kidnapin' snarl: Misther Jassington has a cramp in his mind that ye might maybe be putting us on the right thrack."

Vance shook his head. "It doesn't come in my way, I'm afraid. My work in the Jassington plant is merely to try to find out how many square pegs there are in the round holes. I haven't made any special study of criminology, and don't care to."

"Still an' all," said Lurby, "there's a chance, and from what Misther Jassington says, you're the man that has it. You can 'sweat-box' these fellies in th' shops in ways that I couldn't."

Vance swung around to face his caller.

"That is a wrong lead, chief," he declared definitely. "It is dead against the probabilities that any man at present on the motors works pay rolls is concerned in the kidnaping. If you suspect any of Jassington's men, it's an easy matter to find out whether or no the suspected ones were out of the shops on that day."

"We've gone that far, and I'm thinking you're right. But it's an amachoor job, just the same."

"Suppose you tell me just where you stand at the present moment," Vance suggested.

"Just between the two of us, we stand nowhere. That's not for publication in the newspapers, mind ye, but it's the sthraight goods. There's on'y the wan big page in the book—and it's blank."

"What is the heading of that page, if I may ask?"

"Grudges—a thousand of thim. The big boss of the motors shops has gone out of his way to make enemies—and by all the

saints in hiven he's made 'em. There's a many of his men that's chucklin' to themselves this minute over what's come to him, and—this is between us, again—'tis small blame to the lads."

"You say that the murder and kidnaping were amateur jobs, and you lean to the idea that the man or men who did the work were at some time on the Jassington pay rolls. Why do you say they were amateurs?"

"You could lay your life on it. That's why the big page is blank, d'ye see?"

"No, I don't see."

"Ye don't—and you a psycholygist? I'll tell ye. The pr'fessional crook, dip, cracksman, yeggman, porch climber—whatever he might be—always runs true to form. 'Tis like a mole's burrow; once ye find the thrack ye've on'y to follow it; ye'll know the divvle'll never get out of his rut; never, as ye might say, do annything different or original."

Vance smiled. "You are something of a psychologist, yourself, chief. Go on!"

"This job has all the earmarks of the amachoor. Look at it for yourself: in broad day, and the time of day whin the most people would be sunnin' themselves in the park; in fair sight of the windows of the Jassington house; with people going and coming, and autymobiles chasin' t'rough the driveway wan every five minutes or less. Holy smoke! the pr'fessional crook would have been scared shtiff!"

"I get you," said Vance.

"Then look at the smooth get-away; 'twas planned long before, and by somebody who knew all the ins and outs of the town. Ye'll remember; within wan hour the news of it was on the streets, with everybody leppin to look for clews. No strange crook could have got away with a t'ree-year-old baby in that time. But somebody who knows the town and lives in it—d'ye see?"

Vance saw, and his estimate of Chief Michael Lurby's reasoning powers rose in just proportion.

"Your argument is good," he conceded. "Where do you go from here?"

"That's the divvle of it; we don't go. 'Tis like looking for a needle in a hay pile to go pawing over Misther Jassington's enemies in this town, though I'm saying it that shouldn't. But 'tis the God's truth."

Vance was eying his day's work, the thick sheaf of papers to be gone over and graded.

"I'd be glad to help if I could," he said. "But, frankly, chief, I don't see how I can. You've got the job pretty well covered, haven't you—by your own men and the out-of-town specials?"

"Covered is the wurrud; 'tis the uncovering I'd like to see begin."

"I've understood there are no clews at all: is that right?"

Lurby drew a soiled handkerchief from an inner pocket of his uniform and passed it to Vance.

"That was found under the bench where the girl was sitting," he said shortly.

Vance unfolded the handkerchief and examined it carefully. It was a man's handkerchief, but there was nothing to distinguish it from millions of others, unless a few grease-spot smudges could be said to distinguish it.

"Of course, that proves nothing at all," he remarked, returning the handkerchief. "For that matter, it's an even chance that it wasn't dropped by the kidnapers. Have the doctors found out how the girl was killed?"

"That's just as far in the dark as anny of the rest of it. 'Heart failure,' they say, and that's as far as they can go."

Vance cut in to bring the bootless interview to an end.

"I don't see that we're getting anywhere, chief. Of course, if I can do anything, I'll be glad to come in, but I don't just see the opening."

"You're not intherested, and 'tis small blame to you," said the ex-ward boss, rising to go. "But Misther Jassington thought I might pull ye in. 'Tis a gr-reat idea he has of your brains, Misther Vance."

Vance laughed.

"The idea was planted in Mr. Jassington's mind by somebody else," he asserted. "Personally, Mr. Jassington thinks I'm a 'nut;' in fact, he said so to my face. But that is all right. Call on me if there is anything I can do."

When he was left alone Vance plunged into the paper grading, and was still only in the midst of it when dinner time came. Not wishing to take the time to go out to Mrs. Benchley's, he went to the hotel café for his dinner, and by half past seven was back in his office and at work.

It might have been half an hour after he had squared himself at the table desk that he looked up to find a woman standing

in the open doorway, and heard a low, sweet-toned voice saying, "Pardon me, but is this Mr. Robert Vance?"

CHAPTER IV.

THE EXPERIMENTAL METHOD.

Vance sprang up and hastily resumed his coat, which he had taken off in deference to the closeness of the summer evening.

"I am Robert Vance," he said. "Won't you come in?"

If he was a bit impatient at the interruption to his work he was too good-natured to let it show itself in his tone; and when the woman stepped into the lighted room and he had a fair sight of her he was glad to his finger tips that the good nature had saved him from making a bad beginning. Before he has been broken to the matrimonial saddle and bridle, every man cherishes, consciously or unconsciously, an idealized picture of the woman he means some day to marry. Vance found himself looking into a pair of frank, fearless gray eyes set in the faultless oval of the most attractive face he had ever seen; a face high-bred, intelligent, and strong, without losing a line of its womanly appeal.

"I am Marian Hallowell—Mrs. Jassington's sister," she began, taking the chair Vance made haste to place for her. "You'll forgive me for breaking in upon you in the evening, won't you? I've called twice before, during the day, and you were not in."

"It's perfectly all right," Vance protested, still reveling in the superb beauty of the appealing face. "I'm sorry you've had to try so many times. But in the nature of my work I can't keep very regular office hours."

"I understand," she returned quickly. "I had a friend in college whose brother was an industrial psychologist." Then: "I am sure you must know why I have come, Mr. Vance?"

"It is about the frightful thing which has befallen your sister?"

"And me," she amended. "Willie was only a little less dear to me than he was to his mother."

"I can believe that," he rejoined. "But you shouldn't permit yourself to speak of the child in the past tense, Miss Hallowell. The baby will be found—it must be found and restored to you."

"That is what I've been trying to tell myself," she faltered. "There would be more reason to hope if only the nurse hadn't been killed. But now——"

If Vance had been able to plead disinterest to the chief of police, and, in some measure, to Grigsby Jassington, he was rapidly losing the ability to hold himself aloof; to preserve the attitude of a casual observer and onlooker.

"You had something to suggest?" he prompted.

"Yes; we want your help—*I* want it, Mr. Vance. It is simply maddening, the way they are doing—or not doing—things. This isn't like the ordinary crime; it is something entirely different and in a class by itself. They can't make even a beginning."

"The police, you mean?"

"The police, and the private detectives Mr. Jassington telegraphed for at once. They are all completely and totally at fault: sometimes they will admit it, and sometimes they won't; but it is true."

"I wish I could help in some way," said Vance; and this time he meant it from the bottom of his heart.

"I believe you can; that is why I am here. As I have said, this isn't the ordinary crime, and it is not going to be traced in any ordinary way. There must be study; deep and intelligent study. And the men who are working on it are not capable of going into it on this higher plane. It's their misfortune, of course, and not their fault."

"But I am not a criminologist," Vance deprecated, for the second time that day.

"I know; but you have made a study of the human mentality; it is your profession. If I could only succeed in interesting you!"

"You have done it!" he returned quickly. "It is a new field for me, but you shall have the best that I can give you. Where do we begin?"

"With the motive," she rejoined instantly. "It was either mercenary, or revengeful, or possibly a combination of both. You know the facts: what is your opinion?"

"Your brother-in-law thinks the motive was revengeful. He is best qualified to say whether or not he has earned any such fearful enmity."

"I am afraid he has," the young woman admitted. "But you are only quoting him now. What I want is your own conclusion."

"I am not sure that I have formed one. Of the two passions, revenge is somewhat

stronger than avarice, in the average human make-up. But you are quite right in placing a definition of the motive as the entering wedge. The answer to that question must direct the first step in any reasonable investigation."

"Please don't run away from me," she said. "I didn't major in psychology, you know."

He smiled. "You must pull me up if I get too technical. It is hard not to talk 'shop' on what is strictly a 'shop' problem. But it's this way: if the motive was purely mercenary, the inference is strong that the kidnaping was done by a professional criminal. If, on the other hand, it was purely revengeful, the inference is equally strong that the kidnaper was an amateur."

"Now I understand what you mean. Can you go on?"

"For a short distance, yes. Chief Lurby was here this afternoon, and he gave good reasons for assuming that the criminal or criminals were amateurs; the time of day, the publicity of the place, and all the deterring conditions which—as he expressed it—would have scared a professional criminal stiff. Add to this the unquestionable fact that Mr. Jassington has enemies enough in Middlevale to throw the weight of supposition over into the revengeful side of the scale, and we have the second inference, namely, that the motive wasn't mercenary, primarily, and that the double crime wasn't committed by professionals."

The young woman was leaning forward with her lips parted and her eyes alight.

"You don't know what a relief it is to talk with somebody who has a—a usable mind!" she breathed.

"It is not so difficult, when you take it a step at a time," he went on. "The next step is to try to determine the number of the criminals concerned. Was there one? —or more than one? Here, again, we have only inference to guide us, but it is pretty strong. There might easily have been two or more men in it if they were professionals, since it is the common practice of such people to work in pairs or trios. But our amateur would be much more likely to work alone. If he were a man of ordinary intelligence—as he must be to have left no clews behind him—he would argue that his secret was safe so long as he did not share it with anybody else. This is logical. Professional criminals are bound together by a common bond of culpability; they are all outlaws. But the amateur would find great difficulty in enlisting a confederate whom he could trust. Am I making it clear?"

"So clear that I am already beginning to grow hopeful."

"Very good; we'll go on. The next thing is to try to visualize as best we can the kind of man who would, first, be able to conceive the double crime, and afterward to carry it out to the apparent successful conclusion. By merely listening to what people have been saying, I gather that Mr. Jassington has been industriously making two different sorts of enemies; people of means who have suffered losses in his various financial transactions; and workingmen who have suffered injustice in the shops."

"It is only too true, both ways, I'm afraid," said the young woman sorrowfully.

"That seems to be the general verdict. But to go on with the visualizing. Since we must look for a man with considerable intelligence and initiative, you'd say that the investor class would be most likely to furnish him. But that isn't altogether a safe assumption. There are many men working in the shops who could both plan the crime and carry it out. The majority of the men I have been examining at the plant are firmly of the opinion that the criminal is some one of their number who has been in the employ of the company and has suffered the injustice I speak of."

"Have you formed any conclusion of your own?"

"Not yet. We must be guided by further developments. Now we come to the murder of the nurse. In the light of the conclusions already reached it is highly improbable that a murder was intended. Don't you think so?"

"I want to think so."

"Consider for a moment. Whatever the motive of the kidnaper might have been, the murder would immeasurably increase his risk, without any corresponding advantage. Indeed, this has impressed me so strongly that I have been led to wonder if there *was* a murder. The doctors have been saying that it was a case of heart failure caused by a physical shock of some kind which left no visible mark on the body. But might it not have been mental shock? You knew the girl: did she impress you as a person who could be easily excited?"

"Not at all," was the ready answer. "On

the contrary, she was rather stolid—very unimpressionable."

"Had you ever seen her tried?"

"Yes. Once, just after she came to us, Willie fell downstairs—all the way from the top to the bottom. Sister and I were both frantic; it didn't seem possible that the child wouldn't have been smashed to bits. But Sadie merely walked downstairs quietly and picked him up; and she was laughing."

Vance nodded soberly. "I guess we'll have to fall back upon the theory of physical violence, after that," he conceded. "Which brings us to the ways and means. This afternoon Lurby showed me a man's handkerchief which was found under the park bench where the nurse was sitting. Assuming that this handkerchief was dropped by our criminal—which is only an assumption, of course—it suggests a possible means: the use of an anæsthetic."

"But anæsthetized people don't die!"

"Occasionally there is one who does, and this girl might have been the exception. But in that case, it is remarkable that the autopsy didn't reveal the fact. We'll let that go, and risk another assumption—that ether or some other anæsthetic was used, and that the use of it proved fatal. Is the visualizing process developing a bit?"

"A little. Could a person be etherized in a public place like that without attracting attention?"

"That question helps somewhat in the deliminating experiment we're trying to conduct. Can't you see the man slipping up behind the girl as she sits on the bench and clapping the saturated handkerchief over her mouth and nose?"

The young woman shuddered. "You make it seem very real," she admitted.

"One more step, then. Did you come down in a car?"

"Yes; it's at the curb in front of the building."

"Good! I'd like to see the park: I've never been there, you know."

"I'll take you," she offered; and together they descended to the street.

At the curb Vance expected to see the big limousine with its chauffeur. But instead there was only a small runabout with a single seat.

"Do you drive yourself?" he asked.

"Usually; when sister doesn't insist upon the big car and the social dignities. I hope you are not afraid of women drivers?"

"It depends upon the woman," Vance ventured, adding: "This is one of my brave evenings, however."

It was a little less than a mile from the business center to the exclusive residence district with the little park for its heart, and the streets, as well as the park itself, were well lighted. When the small car turned the last of the corners, Vance gave his first direction.

"Please drive through the parkway where the nurse was found," he said, and a few seconds later the car was brought to a stand under the trees and they both got out.

"That is the bench where Sadie was sitting," said the young woman, indicating an ornamental cast-iron settee placed not more than six feet back from the edge of the graveled drive. And pointing in the direction toward which the bench faced: "Those lights you can see through the trees are the windows of our house. If we had been looking we might actually have seen what was happening."

Vance nodded and asked his companion to sit on the iron bench as nearly as possible in the attitude in which the dead nurse had been discovered. With the stage thus set—the automobile standing in the driveway, as the kidnaper's vehicle doubtless had stood, and Marian Hallowell sitting in the nurse's place—he tried to reconstruct the details of the crime.

To a trained mind, specialized in the art of fitting together the separate parts of the complicated human puzzle, this was not difficult. As the mental concentration grew more abstracted he fancied he was witnessing each step in the crime; the child most probably playing on the sward at the nurse's feet, the stopped car with the motor noiselessly idling, the man afoot and apparently starting to walk away, but wheeling suddenly when he had passed out of the nurse's zone of vision to approach stealthily from behind.

If the etherizing guess were the right one, it was all very simple; a quick clutch of the handkerchief-holding hand, a little struggle which might easily have been mistaken for a bit of rough flirtation by any chance onlooker. Afterward the man might even have sat beside the sleeping woman for the few moments necessary to make the bit of rough play seem natural, and to gain the attention and confidence of the child.

A slight movement on the part of the lay

figure sitting on the bench brought the investigator out of the concentrative trance with a start.

"This—this is rather trying, you know," said the figure in a shaky voice. "I—I feel——"

"Forgive me," said Vance quickly. "In trying to hypnotize myself I forgot that I might be unconsciously hypnotizing you."

"It was rather dreadful," she confessed, rising to stand beside him. "I could almost fancy that I was Sadie, and that the murderer was creeping—creeping——"

"It was thoughtless of me," he hastened to say. "I am so used to going directly to the end sought; but we have gained a little something, I think."

"Can you tell me?"

"Certainly. There were quite a number of plausible inferences. I was trying to put myself in the criminal's place; to feel as he felt, to see out of his eyes, to reason as he did. The first of the inferences is that there was nothing incongruous about the man's appearance; nothing that would make him especially remarkable in this place at such a time. That is proved by the fact that though doubtless a dozen people saw both the murder and the kidnaping, both were made so much a part of the *mise en scène* that nobody retains a memory picture of them."

"And to what does that lead?"

"To a confirmation, in my mind, of the amateur theory. The amateur could carry it off successfully, where the professional criminal couldn't. Also, all of the circumstances point to a rather high degree of intelligence on the part of the man; a mind quick to perceive that the average human being sees only what habit and environment have taught him to expect to see. None of the people in the park that afternoon was expecting to see a murder and a kidnaping; hence, no one saw either—with the understanding eye."

Marian Hallowell drew a long breath.

"I wish you could know how much you are doing for me. I am really beginning to see a faint little ray of hope."

"We mustn't go too fast," he cautioned. "Thus far we have only a beginning—a thread to which we may be able to tie other threads. Now I'd like to have you help me make a small demonstration of the possibilities, if you will. We'll take the car again, if you please." And when they were seated in the runabout: "First, I'll ask you to drive on through and turn around so that we can come in from the opposite direction."

"Why?" she asked, after she had executed the maneuver and the car was again brought to a stand in its former position, only it was on the iron-bench side of the driveway now and headed west instead of east.

"To conform as closely as we may to the hypothetical postulates," he replied. "The doubt that the kidnaper used a car is so slight as to be negligible. If so, he would approach as we did just now, so that his stop could be made on that side of the driveway which would bring him nearest to his objective. Now I'm going to ask you to imagine that you are this kidnaper. You do not yet know that a murder has been committed, we'll say, but you have the child in the car and you are anxious to make the get-away. Remember that the man was perfectly sane and cool, that it is broad daylight, that there were many people in the streets, some of whom probably knew him, by sight, at least. Under those conditions let us see how long it will take us to get out of town by the shortest route."

Instantly the young woman caught the spirit of the thing. With the letting in of the clutch the small car ambled to the nearest street and turned the corner to the left. Followed a quick snap of the shift lever and the amble became a smart but entirely safe town speed. As the suburbs were reached the speed gradually increased, and in the final outlying "addition" the runabout was working up to a fair racing clip.

At the passing of the last of the city truck farms, Vance called a halt and held his watch under the tiny cowled dash-electric. Then he said:

"Now we'll go back, carefully reversing the process as to the speeds made."

The thing was done, exactly as he directed, and at the park entrance Vance once more consulted his watch.

"Thank you," he said quietly; "I have proved my point and disproved Chief Lurby's. He holds that there wasn't time for the man to get out of town with the child before the alarm was given. You have just shown that he might have gotten out, *and got back,* in less than twenty minutes. Now if you will be good enough to repeat the experiment in two or three other directions we——"

East, south, and north, each in its turn, was made to serve as the hypothetical line of escape, and in each trial the result was practically the same. Twenty to twenty-five minutes would have sufficed to take an auto out of town in any of the four directions—without haste until a zone was reached in which speeding might have gone without remark—and to bring it back in the same manner if its driver had so desired.

On the return from the final experiment, which had taken them through the suburb to the north known as Ingerton Heights, Vance summed up the various assumptions.

"Probably one man, and he an amateur actuated by motives of revenge; a man of more than ordinary readiness of mind, and one with a good working knowledge of human nature, and of the things that can be safely inferred—that is, of the mental factors common to the average group of persons. This leads us up to the dead wall of actual identity—his identity; a wall which we must scale or overthrow. How would you go about it, Miss Hallowell?"

His companion shook her head. "I'm good at obeying orders," she said. "But beyond that, I'm afraid I'm only a blind bystander."

"Not at all," he objected. "You have a mind; a functioning mind, as you have already shown. Think back to our talk in my office and see if you can't find the new starting point."

She was silently thoughtful for the passing of a slowly driven square. Then she said, "I can't find it."

He gave her the needed hint.

"Didn't we agree that your brother-in-law had made two different kinds of enemies?"

"I'm stupid!" she declared. "I see now what you mean. You are trying to place the man in his proper class. Can you take this step?"

"Not with any degree of assurance," he admitted. "Thus far all we may safely assume is that the man is probably a resident of Middlevale measurably well known in the city."

"How can you prove that?"

"I can't prove it; I merely assume it upon good and sufficient reasoning. How many people do you know in Middlevale?"

"Goodness! I couldn't possibly say. Quite a lot of them, though."

"You mean that there are a good many to whom you speak or bow as acquaintances. But have you ever considered how very much wider the circle is than that? There are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of faces here that are perfectly familiar to you, though you don't know the names of the people who wear them. Isn't that true?"

This time her mentality leaped to meet his.

"I believe you can almost look into a person's mind," she asserted. "Dozens of times when I've been in strange cities I have noticed how totally unfamiliar all the faces appear. But I never thought to ask myself the reason for it."

"The reason is plain; the faces are strange because you've never seen them before. Now, then, we may fairly reason this way: a man, even casually well known here in town, might have driven through the streets last Monday afternoon with a child on the seat beside him, and no one would have remarked the fact sufficiently to have remembered it. But if a total stranger had done it, or even a town resident whose face was not familiar to the hundreds of people who must have seen it on that occasion, there would have been plenty to remark it; at least, it would have made an impression that they would afterward be able to recall. This conclusion may seem pretty far-fetched, but I can assure you that it is based upon many actual experiments."

"I am accepting everything you say," she assented soberly, "though maybe it is only because I simply *must* have something to cling to if I'm not to go mad." Then, as the runabout turned into the main street: "Shall I take you to the Corona Building, or is there something else to be tried tonight?"

"I'll let you drop me at the office," he said. "I want a chance to think." And at the curb, after he had gotten out: "You mustn't let this thing unnerve you, Miss Hallowell. It is evident that you haven't, so far. Keep your courage up, and count upon hearing from me the moment I have anything to communicate."

"Have you told me all there is to tell now?"

"All but one small circumstance—which may mean much or nothing. When he was with me this afternoon, Chief Lurby showed me a man's handkerchief which had been found under the bench, as I told you. It wasn't initialed, and even the laundry mark

was undecipherable; yet it did have marks of a sort"—and at her start—"yes; finger prints; greasy finger prints; not readable ones, but unmistakably grease smudges, machine-oil smudges."

"Doesn't that put the murderer in his proper class?" she demanded eagerly.

"In anything but this automobile age it might. But a man who runs a car needn't be a working mechanic to have soiled hands. Good night. Come to me when you wish, or call me on the wire. But don't tell any one what we've been doing this evening—or that I am doing anything; not even your sister. In that way, I shall have a free hand."

CHAPTER V.

BY THE ALIBI ROUTE.

On the morning after his enlistment as Marian Hallowell's strategist, Vance dropped everything else, rolled up figurative sleeves, and flung himself into the strategic job with all the enthusiasm of a trained solver of puzzles. Knowing nothing of the methods of the professional detective, he was obliged to strike out a new line which naturally took the philosophical slant. He had been given a problem, and he set about working it out much as he would have attacked an "original" in the college laboratory.

Sending word to Bencrow that the work of examining the men in the motors plant would be suspended for a time, he began by making a carefully masked but widespread search for Jassington enemies, or, at least, for those whose woundings at the hands of the predatory magnate were mortal enough to account for the crime motive. Since the double crime and its mystery were still fresh in the public mind, he found everybody willing to talk; and from talk of the crime to comment upon the Jassington career was but a step.

Guilford Apperson, an attorney whose office was in the same corridor of the Corona Building with his own, was utilized as one of the principal sources of information. Vance had met the shrewd-eyed, quick-speaking little lawyer quite early in his Middlevale experience, and the acquaintance had ripened genially and easily on both sides.

"What's your game, Vance—what the mischief are you driving at?" queried Apperson, on an evening when Vance, dining with the lawyer in the University Club, had pursued his table companion to the smoking room with further questionings about the Jassington career. "You seem to have a most unholy curiosity in the Jassington quarter."

"I have," Vance admitted. "It is a part of my job to study types, and Jassington is enough of an original to interest me greatly. I have never found a man with so many ill-wishers. If the old notion of the 'evil eye' still held good, he'd shrivel up and die."

"He deserves to," snapped the lawyer. "I could tell you stories of his iniquities from now to midnight. A man totally without a sense of responsibility toward his fellow men; a cave man in business, and in the industries."

"If you have nothing better to do, go on and tell me some of the stories," Vance suggested; and the result was a goodly number of additions to the "enemy" list he was compiling. Maximum Motors had been the defendant in many "personal-injury" suits in which Apperson had fought for the plaintiffs; and the attorney was also familiar with the Jassington kite flying in the financial field. Maimed workmen unable to obtain redress were plentiful, as were also maimed investors left to whistle for their money.

Late that night in the privacy of his office Vance worked studiously upon his growing list, culling and rearranging the names and giving precedence to those whose losses, either through Jassington's industrial injustice, or the Jassington financial chicaneries, had been the greatest. It was after midnight when he finished, but the result was gratifying. He was now ready to put his problem upon the blackboard for demonstration, preparatory to simplifying it and casting out the fractions and the common factors.

The blackboard work was begun the following day, and in it the patience of the "original research" student, as contrasted with that of the average investigator, shone at its brightest. Once, in his post-graduate course, Vance had made long and exhaustive tests upon no less than one hundred and seventy-two different materials in the laboratory in search of the one best adapted to serve an exacting purpose in a measuring instrument he was designing; and applying the same calculated, methodical persistence, he undertook a task which would have appalled anybody but a laboratory experi-

mentalist—namely, an attempt to prove the whereabouts, on the afternoon of the kidnaping, of every man on his list.

It was on the day after this establishing of alibis was begun that Cliffert returned and proved himself a friend in need. The real-estate man had a small car which he seldom used, and when Vance spoke of having certain work which required a good bit of running about, Cliffert immediately offered the use of his second car.

Vance was grateful and said so, though he did not explain the precise purpose for which he needed a car. So far from it he adroitly turned the talk upon Cliffert's late journey and its results.

"I hope you found the boy well and not too inconsolable for the loss of his mother," was the turn he gave to the talk.

Cliffert shook his head. "It's a rather sad case. The poor little chap isn't wholly consolable—not yet. You see, I'm only a strange man to him, like other strange men; and, in a way, I'm able to appreciate how Jassington must feel over the loss of his baby. My boy has fairly cried himself sick; 'fact, we've had to put him to bed. But he'll come around all right, after a bit."

Vance thanked the car lender again, and started out once more upon the apparently endless task of rounding up the alibis. Like most of the things he undertook, however, the job proved to be something less than impossible, and after a week of unremitting and clever investigation he was able to call a halt long enough to visit the Jassington house and lay his results before Miss Hallowell.

CHAPTER VI.

X PLUS Y EQUALS FIVE.

Marian Hallowell received Vance in the darkened parlor, and his first glance told him that she had been purchasing self-control at the highest possible price.

"Another week gone!" she shuddered; "and every day makes success just that much less hopeful—or doesn't it?"

"No, I shouldn't say that," Vance returned; and then: "We are quite alone here?—I mean there is no danger of our being overheard?"

"None at all. The servants are all in the other part of the house, and my sister is upstairs."

He took a few minutes to explain his plan, and, as he talked, the young woman listened, leaning forward in her chair with beautiful eyes alight.

"It is all so different—and so sensible!" she exclaimed, when he had outlined the course he was pursuing.

"Different from the police methods, you mean?"

"Yes. The detectives are still blundering around, harrowing us by sending telegrams describing strange children found here and there and everywhere; of a suspicious criminal arrested in Chicago, or of another held in St. Louis—you know how they do it. And all the time they are accomplishing just nothing at all."

"You mustn't be too hard on them," Vance deprecated. "There is no such thing as the perfect crime, of course, but this one is a wonderfully close approach to it. You must remember there were no clews—not one."

"You are making a clew—as I knew you would," she returned. "May I know the results, as far as you have gone?"

"Assuredly; that is why I am here. By the process of elimination just explained, I have cleaned up fairly well; which means that the 'local enemy' list of possibles has been reduced to a few names. Incredible as it may appear, I have succeeded in establishing alibis for all the others."

"I can't begin to understand how you have done it."

"It seems as if chance were helping out. Ordinarily, the average person would be totally unable to recall where he was or what he was doing at a given time two weeks in the past—much less to prove it. But a series of fortunate circumstances or accidents—call them what you please—has enabled me to cull the list down to five names."

"Who are the five?"

"Three of them are discharged shopmen, each with a grievance big enough to account for a crime in reprisal. Oddly enough, they all happen to own automobiles, though that isn't so singular, nowadays, when everybody drives. We'll consider these shopmen first. Of the three, one is a truck farmer in the southern outskirts of the town. He was crippled in the shops a year ago, and he swore then, and has boasted since, that he would one day even things up with Mr. Jassington."

"And he can't prove an alibi?"

"I can't prove it," Vance amended; "or,

at least, I haven't, thus far. He is still unaccounted for on the Monday afternoon of the crime. He left home in his auto—a small car worked over into a truck—with a load of green stuff for the market, and didn't return until after six o'clock in the evening. Inquiry has developed the fact that this man—Larsen is his name—disposed of his farm produce to a commission merchant between eleven and twelve o'clock. I have yet to ascertain where he was and what he was doing the remainder of the day."

"Do you suspect him?"

"The chief incriminating circumstance is his bitter vindictiveness toward Mr. Jassington; which, as I have taken pains to find out, is still alive and active. Aside from this, he doesn't answer the requirements very well. For one thing, I should say he hasn't the needful intelligence to plan anything so clever as the crime; and for another, the appearance of his home-made truck in Richmond Park, and its stoppage there, would in all human probability have been noticed and recalled by somebody. So I am merely holding him in suspension."

"And the next one?"

"Is a man named Ficke, also an ex-employee of the motors works. Like Larsen, he got out about a year ago—trouble with one of the foremen—and opened a small gunsmith's shop in Sixth Street. His grievance is mortal. Mr. Jassington's car ran over one of Ficke's children, making it a cripple for life."

Miss Hallowell covered her face with her hands. "Don't I know?" she faltered.

"You probably know the outcome," Vance went on. "Ficke tried to recover damages through the courts—and failed. Like Larsen, he has threatened to get square; and on the Monday afternoon in question his shop was closed and locked from midday to five o'clock."

"Does he answer the requirements?"

"Not very fully. I have seen him and talked with him. He is a black little German of the anarchistic type, sullen and morose. He may have the needed degree of intelligence; I believe he has. But he doesn't fit the hypothesis—*our* hypothesis. A man of his type could not ingratiate himself with a strange child at a moment's notice; and common sense tells us that force could not have been employed without raising a betraying outcry."

"You have one more ex-employee, haven't you?"

"Yes; a time-keeper and office clerk named Freeman who was discharged for alleged dishonesty in the discounting of time checks at the works. He is now conducting a collecting agency of his own. He has never made open threats against Mr. Jassington, but the motors company attorneys tell me that one or two important financial deals have fallen through lately, the failures being due to betrayals of some of the company's business secrets. These betrayals have been traced directly to Freeman."

"This man is also unaccounted for on the afternoon of the kidnaping?"

"He is. I have learned that he left his office in the Jonquille Building at noon, telling his stenographer that he would drive to Millville after luncheon to collect an account. He didn't go to Millville. On the contrary, I have found one person who saw him about four o'clock returning to the city over the road which comes in from the south: and Millville is northeast."

The eager listener gave a quick little sigh.

"Jackson Freeman knew Willie!" she breathed. "He used to come to the house now and then on errands from the motors offices. *And once that I know of, he took Willie in his car for a turn around the park!*"

"Circumstantial evidence, you'd say," Vance conceded; "he knew the child, and therefore would have no difficulty in getting it to go with him. I don't like to take away what I'm trying my best to give you, but I can't accept Freeman until I'm obliged to. He doesn't measure up mentally. I can imagine him taking the child, but I can't see him chloroforming the nurse. He hasn't the nerve."

"You say you have two others?"

"I have. One of them is an old resident and a respectable citizen of Middlevale; no less a person than Mr. Jasper Wycombe, manufacturer and capitalist."

"Oh, dear, no—not Mr. Wycombe!" protested the young woman. "Surely he must be absolutely above suspicion!"

"You'd say so, wouldn't you? But in working out our problem we must take nothing for granted. Wycombe has suffered twice at Mr. Jassington's hands; once in the reorganization of Maximum Motors, in which the original stock, for which he paid par, was 'frozen' down to ten cents on the

dollar; and more recently in a land deal by which Mr. Jassington's lawyers were able to prove a flaw in titles causing Wycombe to lose upward of two hundred thousand dollars. The culmination of this second loss, or its announcement, occurred on the day of the kidnaping—in the forenoon of that day."

"This is dreadful and incredible, Mr. Vance!" said the listener, shaking her head. "I simply can't believe that that dear old man could——"

"I know; I don't say that I can: I am merely reciting the facts. Your brother-in-law and Wycombe had a meeting that Monday morning in the directors' room of the Security National. It was pretty warlike. As Wycombe was leaving, he returned and shook his fist at Mr. Jassington, cursing him and telling him that some day he would be hit, and hit hard, in the only way that he could be made to suffer. A customer of the bank overheard him, and it was he who told me."

"But that doesn't prove anything. You can find dozens of people who have sworn at Grigsby—and not without cause, I'm afraid."

"True; but the sequel is rather ominous. From the bank I have traced Wycombe to the house of a man named Bragdon, an employee in the motors works, and one who himself has a grudge against your brother-in-law; he is half blind from an accident which might have been prevented if Mr. Jassington had installed safety devices in his shops. Bragdon himself has a perfectly sound alibi; he was in the shops all day. One of his children takes his noon meal to him so that he may have it warm. On that day there was a note in his dinner bucket, and before he ate, he took a gate check and went out for a few minutes. And the only man he spoke to outside of the gates was the gunsmith, Ficke."

"You mean that the note was from Mr. Wycombe, making the appointment?"

"That I do not know. But it seems to involve Wycombe. He drove to Bragdon's house at about eleven, and the note was sent at twelve. It was the only way he could communicate quickly with Bragdon, because the shopmen are not allowed to answer telephone calls. This is one incriminating circumstance, and another is that Wycombe disappears for the remainder of the day. I have traced him to luncheon at the Commercial Club, between one and two o'clock. After that, he got into his car—which he drives himself—and was not seen again, so far as I have yet ascertained, until evening."

"Still I can't believe he had anything to do with the horrible crime!" protested the young woman warmly. "It is so completely and utterly incredible. It so happens that sister and I know the Wycombes quite intimately; we knew them in Indianapoils before we came here. Whatever Mr. Wycombe might do to avenge himself upon Grigsby, he wouldn't strike a blow that would break my sister's heart, as well."

Vance shook his head.

"I'm trying not to be influenced by what the lawyers call 'inferential evidence;' I'm seeking the truth—and the lost baby. Mr. Wycombe may be the genial, quick-tempered, quick-over-it person that everybody seems to know and think well of; or he may be a revengeful devil. This remains to be proved. But I have one other man on my list."

"Who is he?"

"A person who is as far above suspicion as you believe Mr. Jasper Wycombe to be." Vance got up and went softly to close the door into the reception hall: "Just for safety's sake," he explained, and then: "You have a butler by the name of Jarvis: what do you know about him?"

"Jarvis? Why—everything, I should say!"

"What I am about to say now is of an extremely personal nature, and you must stop me if you think I am going too far. How long have you known Mr. Jassington?"

"Something over four years."

"He is much older than your sister: am I right in supposing that neither you nor she knew much about him before her marriage to him?"

The answer was low but quite distinct. "You are."

"It's an unthankful thing to rake over the ashes of dead fires," he went on, matching her low tone, "but I have been obliged to—that is, I couldn't consistently ignore anything that seemed to have a bearing upon the problem. I needn't go into details; let it be enough to say that the fifth man on my list was once married—and had a daughter. Some years ago that daughter was lost to him."

"Good heavens!" came from the depths of the chair opposite.

"I'm sorry," he made haste to say, "but you must remember that I'm only reporting facts as I find them. If this fifth man has been nursing his wrongs and brooding over a possible revenge, he has been very secret about it. But here is the connection: on the Monday forenoon of the tragedy he had himself driven out to Larsen's truck farm and was closeted with Larsen for over an hour. And on the day following the kidnaping, Jarvis drew out a full half of his savings—some six hundred dollars—from the Provident Savings Bank. What did he do with the money? I don't know; but exactly one day later Larsen bought a new auto truck, making a first payment in cash of exactly six hundred dollars."

Again the young woman hid her face. After a long minute she asked in the same hushed tone: "Is that all?"

"Not quite all," he rejoined soberly. "Last night I was in my office until quite late, trying to piece all these odds and ends together. The street cars had stopped running and I was obliged to walk out to the suburb where I live. As I was crossing Maple Street an auto was coming up the block at a pretty fast clip. There was only one man in it, and I distinctly saw him hold out his hand, signaling that he was going to turn the corner to the right. Just before he got to the crossing he switched his lights off and came as straight for me as he could aim the car. I barely had time to jump and let him miss me."

"Was it intentional, do you think?"

"I've been wondering. I have tried to keep my investigations as quiet as possible, but it is more than likely that I haven't been entirely successful in this. And I have no personal enemies, in Middlevale, or elsewhere, so far as I know."

"You couldn't identify the car?"

"Naturally not. It was a big car; a 'Six' I should say. But I couldn't identify it even as to the make of it."

For a little time Marian Hallowell kept silence. When she spoke it was to say: "I—I don't want you to take any risks—for yourself. The thought that has come to you comes to me, too; that the kidnaper lives here in Middlevale, and that he knows what you are trying to do. He is guilty of one murder, and he will be guilty of another if he thinks there is danger of discovery."

Vance had risen to take his leave, and she stood up with him.

"I was afraid you might say something like that," he said. "The personal risk, if there be any, is the least of my troubles. In fact, it's merely a bit of added interest. But so far as that goes, I'd gladly take any risk for the privilege of serving you—and your sister. I want you to believe this."

"I do believe it. And you think there is hope?"

"It is more than hope. No problem that was ever devised could be made unsolvable, because what the human brain can invent, another human brain can unravel. Whatever else he may be, the kidnaper is not a superman."

"I don't know how we can ever repay you," she murmured, going with him to the door. But when he would have replied, he caught a vanishing glimpse of the butler, Jarvis, wooden-faced, noiseless, and unobtrusive, withdrawing into the shadows at the farther end of the long reception hall.

"Do you suppose he was listening?" whispered the young woman, who had also had her glimpse of the disappearing Jarvis.

"It looks a bit suspicious," Vance admitted; and with that he bade the young woman be of good courage and left the house, walking to the corner to wait for an electric car.

It was after the car had come in sight a block away that a newsboy ran up, offering the first edition of the *Dispatch*. Vance bought a copy. A glance at the headlines, snatched as the car was stopping to take him on, gave him a little shock. The twenty-one-point streamer and its underline announced the arrest of Jackson Freeman, charged with the murder of Nurse Gibbs and the abduction of little Willie Jassington.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SQUEALER.

Vance, reaching his office at something past five o'clock, found a note on the floor, lying where it had fallen upon being thrust through the letter slot in the door. It was from Guilford Apperson, asking him to come to the lawyer's rooms at the other end of the corridor. Wondering what new development was about to unfold itself, he obeyed the summons.

"Hello," said Apperson, at his entrance into the stuffy book-lined den at the end of the suite. "I've been hoping you'd put in an appearance before it was time for me to lock up and go home. Have you seen the *Dispatch?*"

Vance nodded.

"Then we needn't go back of the record," the attorney cut in briskly. "Freeman's in for it, and he wants to see you."

"Wants to see me?"

"That's what I said. I don't know why or what for. But he's in a white sweat about it."

"You are to act as his counsel?"

"Yes."

"I thought you didn't take criminal cases."

"I don't, as a rule. But this is persecution, pure and simple. Brinton and Blanton—Maximum Motors attorneys—have it in for Freeman for squealing on some of their crooked deals, and I'd be willing to bet fifty dollars against a mongrel dog that they've been giving the detectives a tip."

"Then you think Freeman isn't the right man?"

"I know he doesn't need to be to get Brinton after him."

"Can he prove an alibi?"

"I hope so. I have just been with him, but he refuses to talk until after he's seen you. What's the answer, Vance? How do you figure in it?"

"I don't figure in it," said Vance shortly.

The lawyer whirled his chair to face his caller.

"Don't fight off with me," he snapped; "you've no reason to. I want to know why Freeman insisted, like a man scared plumb yellow, upon seeing you at the earliest possible moment."

The psychologist spread his hands as one helpless to explain. He was fairly good at keeping his own counsel when the need for reticence was apparent.

"How can I tell?" he protested mildly. "I don't know your man, save by sight; never spoke to him in my life."

"He evidently knows you, and, as I say, he's in a wet sweat to see you. Will you go to him?"

"If you ask it, yes. Where is he?"

"In the city jail."

"You'll have to get me past the sergeant. I don't know any one on the force excepting Mike Lurby."

"That will be all right; I'll give you a note." He wrote it hurriedly and thrust it at Vance. "There you are; that will get you locked in with Freeman. Suppose you come back here after you've seen him. I'll wait for you."

Vance smiled and shook his head.

"Not quite so fast as all that," he amended. "Remember, I'm only a rank outsider in this. I don't know what Freeman wants of me, but whatever it is, it will be up to him to tell you about it."

Apperson grinned morosely. "Have it your own way—only I didn't know you could be such a darned clam. Go on and see the boy and cheer him up a bit if you can. He's needing it."

Reaching the jail, Vance found that Apperson's note was as good as an order from the court, and he was promptly admitted to Freeman's cell. He found the ex-time clerk of the motors works sitting on the edge of his cell bed, his thin, haggard face a picture of nerve-shaken collapse, Vance drew up the single stool and sat down.

"My name is Vance," he announced. "You told Mr. Apperson that you wanted to see me."

The man on the cot swallowed hard, as if he had been holding a choking mouthful in readiness.

"I—I'm in a hole; a hell of a hole!" he gurgled. Then: "You're the only man that can help me out. That's why I sent for you."

Vance sat back and put his hands in his pockets.

"They'll probably give you the 'third' and try to make you tell what you did with the child," he remarked coolly.

The sweat started out thickly on Freeman's face and he gasped as one choking. Vance sat motionless, with his eyes fixed upon the accused man, studying, searching, probing. Freeman licked his lips and burst out with a shrill oath.

"You've said it! That's what's giving me the cramps, right now!"

"A yellow streak is a pretty bad thing to have," Vance observed.

"Yellow? By cripes, you'd be yellow, too! They've got me, I tell you! They know how I hate Jassington, and how I've snitched on him. But that isn't the worst of it. I—I drove through Richmond Park that afternoon and saw the kid and its nurse. Still that isn't the worst. I stopped the

car and got out to play with the baby for a minute or so, as I've done I don't know how many other times."

"You were driving through the park on your way to Millville?" Vance cut in.

"I didn't go to Millville—you know I didn't. That's why I sent for you."

"Where did you go?"

The gulping, perspiring special pleader used the same phrase that Apperson had used.

"For God's sake, don't fight off with me!" he begged. "You know where I went, and what I did."

"Well—and if I do?"

"You can go before the grand jury and tell 'em I didn't kill that girl or steal the baby."

At the moment Vance was more deeply interested in the psychological aspect of the case than he was in the criminal. Here was a man who was self-hypnotized by terror into a condition which was both supernormal and subnormal, and Vance was asking himself if by any possibility this condition could be voluntarily simulated; if the man before him could be only acting a part. Hastily his mind galloped over the list of recorded cases—and found no parallel.

"You'll have to go a bit farther into details if you want me to help you," he said.

"What's the use, when you know 'em all? You've been keeping cases on me for a week. Maybe you thought I didn't know it, but I did."

"If you didn't commit the double crime yourself, who did? You must have a theory of your own."

"It's easy, so far as I'm concerned. I could have taken the baby as easy as rolling off a log. The nurse was talking to some man when I stopped, and neither one of 'em looked at me or the kid. And if I could 'a' done it, somebody else could and did."

"Tell me just what you did."

"I got my car out about two o'clock that afternoon; I don't know the exact time, but it was about that. I drove out by the park and through it, as I've just told you."

"But after you left the park. Surely you must have witnesses who can testify as to where you went and what you did."

"That's it—that's exactly it. I haven't any witnesses. But you've got 'em."

Vance made the next move cautiously and with due regard for the evident mental condition of the man into whose innermost secrecies he was endeavoring to probe. As a matter of fact, he knew no more about Freeman's movements during the afternoon of the tragedy than the two facts he had given Marian Hallowell; namely, that Freeman hadn't gone to Millville, and that he had been seen returning to Middlevale from the southward.

"Suppose you tell me precisely what you wish to prove," he suggested.

"I want to prove that I put the child down after a minute or so and drove out of the park into Park Avenue, and out the avenue to the country beyond on the Bickford road. I want to prove that I was alone in the flivver; that I didn't have the Jassington kid, or anybody else, with me."

"All right; go on."

"That's enough, isn't it?"

"I hardly think it will be enough for the grand jury."

"Then you can go on and tell 'em the rest of it, if you have to; how I turned out of the main road at Hicks' fork, fourteen miles south of town, and took the old mill road to the west."

"That still leaves it pretty indefinite, don't you think?—for an investigating body like a grand jury."

"You can't make me convict myself!" Freeman broke out, snapping like a cornered animal. "How do I know there isn't somebody listening out there in the corridor? You know where I went and what I did; and you know just how much you can tell and prove without letting me in for a job on the stone pile. If I'd killed that girl and stolen the baby, you might want to see me hanged. But you don't want to smash me for what I *did* do."

Vance smiled. The psychological method was winning out, slowly. It was apparent that whatever the degree of Freeman's guilt might be, the man was a self-confessed criminal in some sort. But it was also an easily drawn conclusion that Freeman was only a lesser criminal and not a greater.

"You've put yourself in Apperson's hands," he said; "why don't you tell him the whole story? You shouldn't have any secrets from your lawyer."

"Apperson would drop me like a hot nail if he knew where I went on that old mill road, and what I did. And I can't afford to lose him because he is the best lawyer in Middlevale to make a fight for me in court on the other thing. That's why."

Vance smiled again. "Doesn't it occur to you that you are asking a good bit of me, a stranger, to suggest that I help you to cover up the felony you did commit—the one that you've practically admitted and won't define?"

"No. For some reason of your own that I don't pretend to understand, you're trying to run the kidnaping down. You know perfectly well that I'm not the man you're after. And the murder and kidnaping are what I'm arrested for. You don't want to see me hanged for a crime that I didn't commit. If you don't wish to mix up in it personally, just give Apperson the names of the people who spotted me for you that afternoon. I'll take my chances on what they tell, if they'll only tell enough to break me loose from this charge that I'm jugged on."

"Very well; we'll see what can be done," was Vance's answer; and he rose and shook the door as a signal for the turnkey to come and let him out.

"I'm banking on you," said Freeman chokingly for his final word. "For God's sake, don't throw me down—either way—Mr. Vance! If I can get out of here there's a chance—just a bare chance—that I might be able to help you to do the thing you're trying to do. And as bad as I hate Grigsby Jassington, I'll do it!"

If Vance had been the ordinary detective he might have left the Municipal Building with two halves of a puzzle rather neatly balancing in his mind. In the light of what had just transpired, Freeman might have figured as *the* criminal or only as *a* criminal. Though by all the psychological deductions he was not the man who had killed the nurse and stolen the child, Vance saw at once that if the facts were as Freeman was so anxious to have them accepted, they must be buttressed by some substantial and matter-of-fact proofs. It was too late to go back to Apperson, and, anyway, he was not ready for another conference with Freeman's counsel. Further probing seemed to be the next thing on the program, and he resolved not to postpone it.

Not wishing to take the time to go out to Mrs. Benchley's, he had his dinner in a downtown café, and afterward went to the garage where Cliffert kept his cars. It was here, just after he had asked to have the little runabout made ready, that Cliffert turned up, driving the big car which he ordinarily used in his real-estate business.

"Hello, Bobby," was the incomer's greeting as he slipped from behind the steering wheel; "just in, or just going somewhere?"

"Just getting ready to take a little drive to the country."

Cliffert grinned. "That's right; spin the little wheels all you want to. You're doing me a favor to keep the Lizzie limbered up. How are you getting along in the big chase? But I suppose that's all up, now that they've got Freeman."

It was a sufficient proof of Vance's newness in the detective rôle that he gave a little gasp of astonishment. Thus far, with the exception of the confidences with Miss Hallowell, he had been working, as he thought, judiciously under cover.

"Who told you anything about the big chase?" he demanded, and Cliffert laughed.

"I didn't need to be told. You've been advertising it aplenty. Good gosh! haven't you learned yet that this town is a mere country village so far as everybody knowing everybody else's business is concerned? I suppose a dozen people, first and last, have told me what you've been doing; and a good half of them have been wondering if, after all, you weren't really a private detective masquerading as this psychologist thing. I might even go a step further and give a keen little guess at your motive."

"I'll come down," laughed Vance, whose sense of humor was still in good working order. "I *have* been digging into the Jassington case a bit, partly because it has interested me as a psychological problem—a close approach to the 'perfect crime' about which so much has been written and said."

"And partly because you are sorry for the child's mother, and a lot sorrier for the child's pretty aunt," Cliffert cut in jocosely. Then, with a sudden shift: "What do you think about Freeman? Have they found the right man?"

"One can't tell, certainly. But I mean to find out."

"It's likely to go pretty hard with him, isn't it?"

"I judge so; yes."

"I might say that I'm sure of it," Cliffert asserted. "I've just had Larkin, the assistant prosecuting attorney, out with me to look at some of those new addition lots. He told me about it. The State seems to have an open-and-shut case. Freeman can't—or

won't—account for himself on that Monday afternoon; and Larkin says they have evidence enough to hang him. I'm sorry."

"Why?"

"Because I know Freeman pretty well, and I can't believe, offhand, that he did it. I grant you that he's all kinds of a petty rascal, but there's lots of good in him, too. He's fond of little children, and they're fond of him. And when you find a man in that boat——"

"I know," Vance agreed. "It's the corollary of the old proverb—which is based upon a sound psychological axiom: 'When you find a man of whom dogs and children are afraid, beware of him.' I have a notion that I may be able to do something toward clearing Freeman. What are you doing this evening?"

"I'm staying downtown to meet a man who is coming in on the eleven-o'clock train. I had meant to go to the office and do some work on the new addition plats. But if you have any scheme afoot that will help Freeman out, I'm with you."

"All right; climb into the bug and we'll see if we can't turn a trick or two for him. I have a small hunch, and I'd like to see how it works out. Will you go?"

"Sure; on the single condition that you'll get me back by eleven."

"It's a bargain," said Vance; and together, with Vance at the wheel of the runabout, they drove out of the garage and began threading the streets in a southward direction.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ABANDONED FARM.

It was still only in the edge of the summer evening when the borrowed runabout sped through the southern suburb and came into the concreted highway known as the Bickford road. But since Vance was no speed maniac, the stars were coming out one by one and the dusk was settling when the small car reached the branch road turning to the right fourteen miles beyond the city limits.

"This is the turn-out you spoke of?" Cliffert inquired, as Vance stopped the car and tried to read the half obliterated legend on the roadside guide board.

"We have come fourteen miles—so the speedometer says—and this is the road leading to Hicks' Mill, where Freeman claims he left the main road."

"I know this side road," Cliffert returned. "It doesn't go anywhere in particular, except up into the hills beyond Hicks'."

"We'll find out where it goes," said Vance, and he set the car in motion again.

For a full mile the branch road led in and out through a sparse growth of woodland, emerging finally at the old sawmill site in a creek bottom. The sawmill had been long disused and given over to decay. The car's headlights illumined the tumble-down shed, great heaps of sawdust and rotting waste, and the rusting remains of a boiler and engine, or such parts of both as were too heavy to be carried off.

At the stream crossing, which was through a ford with a gravel bottom, they had some difficulty in rediscovering the road. When they found it, it was nothing more than a cart track wandering away toward the hills, and the roadway under the headlamps showed no signs of recent use, though the hard soil, unmoistened by rain for a fortnight or more, would scarcely have recorded the track of a light auto.

"I can tell you where you'll come out, if you want to know," Cliffert volunteered, after the little car had lurched and grunted over a half mile of the cart track.

"Say it," Vance jerked out.

"This part of the county is next door to a desert; yellow clay and marl—not an acre of good farming land this side of the Putney Hills. One man thought he could make it go, but it killed him off. His name was Dixon. and this road leads to what was once his farm. The place has been abandoned for years, so Hicks tells me. I wonder what Freeman was doing out here—if he really came this far."

"That is the thing he seemed most anxious not to tell. How much farther is it to the old farm?"

"It can't be a great way; the hills are just ahead."

Cliffert's prediction was verified at the end of the next quarter mile. At its finish the road ran up to the abandoned farm and stopped abruptly. It was fully dark, now, and there was no moon. Vance snapped off the motor switch and the car lights, and after their eyes became accustomed to the gloom they made out the shadowy bulk of a house half buried in what appeared to be a neglected fruit orchard. Beyond the house there was the still fainter mass of a barn.

It was at this conjuncture that Vance had

another small struggle with his convictions. Arguing as a scientist whose specialty was the accurate weighing and measuring of mental reactions, he was absolutely certain that Freeman was not the man he was searching for. Yet the further the investigation was carried, the more the indications seemed to point to him. There appeared to be no promise of any developments in the deserted farmhouse; still, having come thus far, Vance was not willing to leave any stone unturned.

"We'll go up and have a look at that old place," he told his companion, and Cliffert concurred readily enough.

"Sure! We can hardly do less. Wait a minute"— and he drew from the small car's door pocket two necessary adjuncts to the search; an electric flash light and a serviceable revolver. "You didn't know they were there, did you?" he went on, chuckling softly, "and I forgot to tell you. The flash is always handy, and the gun—well, I've had to do a good bit of night driving, and I like to have a peace persuader where I can get at it. I keep one in the other car, too."

Together they made their way across the broken-down fence and entered the orchard. Within the inclosure there had once been a stone-flagged path leading up to the house, but this was now weed-grown and all but obliterated. In the edge of the wood formed by the neglected fruit trees they paused to get a better view of the house and its surroundings. It was a one-storied structure with an L and a door porch. In the gable facing the orchard the roof made a sagged curve against the sky line and seemed about ready to collapse, and a pillar of the small porch was gone, leaving the roof to hang upon one support.

In this momentary halt they first heard the strange noise; a low, half-strangled wail that cut into the night silence like a faint cry of distress.

"Good Lord!" gasped Cliffert; "did you hear that?"

"I heard it," Vance returned quietly. "It was not the cry of a child, as you are thinking it was."

"Don't tell me!" was the whispered retort. "I—I've got a baby at home, and I *know!*"

Once more Vance was checking up the mental reactions. Since the drive from Middlevale concerned itself wholly with the Jassington kidnaping, it was only natural that any unexpected occurrence should translate itself instantly in terms of the crime or its correlated incidents. Hence, the mental suggestion that the noise was the cry of a child was entirely normal. Vance had had the reaction himself, and what interested him was the fact that Cliffert seemed to be unable to let his ears and his common sense counteract it. Dark as it was, he could see that his companion was still trembling and shaken.

"What's got hold of you, Jamie?" he asked. And then: "Get a grip on yourself: there's somebody in that house—that was the squeaking of a door that you heard."

As if to confirm the assertion, a faint light like that from a flickering candle showed through one of the sashless windows, wavered for a few seconds and then disappeared. Following this came the sound of muffled footsteps dying away into silence which was presently broken in a startling fashion by the sudden neighing of a horse.

Cliffert jerked as if he had been shot. "Where was that?" he chattered.

Again Vance became deeply interested in mental phenomena. The James Cliffert he had known in college had been a man wholly without nerves. But his condition now was singularly abnormal.

"What's the matter with you, Jamie?" he asked. "There's a man in that house, and the horse probably brought him here. But neither man nor horse will bite you."

"I don't care; there's something queer going on here, and whatever it is, it's no business of ours. Let's take the back track and get out of this!"

"Not at all," returned Vance coolly; "I'm not going until I find out what the queer thing is."

After another minute or so of silence the muffled footsteps were heard again, coming in the measured cadence of one ascending or descending a stair. Then the choking wail was repeated, and Cliffert shrank and cowered again.

"Say! this is something awful!" he shivered. "You can't tell me—that *was* a baby!"

Vance held his peace until the scraping of a cut wagon or buggy wheel was followed by hoof poundings slowly dying away in the distance. Then he took matters into his own hands.

"I'm going to find out what's in that house," he said shortly. "Give me the flash-

light and the gun. You may stay here if you want to."

But Cliffert elected to go along, and they made the approach across the little open space separating the house from the orchard. Everything was dark and still. Cautiously they made a complete circuit of the place, and at the back, where there had once been a vegetable garden, a momentary flick of the flash lamp showed fresh wheel tracks and hoofprints.

In the farmhouse itself, to which they gained an easy entrance through one of the windows, there was nothing but dilapidation. The plastering had fallen in many places and the floors were thickly covered with the dust of years. Passing from room to room they found only emptiness and desolation. There was no furniture, and in the kitchen even the sink had been removed. Vance had been examining the floors as they went along, and in the kitchen the first signs of the intruder or intruders appeared. There were candle drippings and many tracks, some of these made by muddy boots.

A very cursory examination of the tracks showed that the kitchen had been used merely for a passage away from the outside door to a door behind the pantry. Vance opened the inner door and flashed the light into the space beyond. There was a square landing, and to the right a flight of wooden steps leading downward. At this discovery Cliffert began to protest again.

"Don't go down there!" he urged. "It's a trap!"

Vance smiled. "You needn't go, if you don't want to. I'll leave you the gun," and with the flash lamp to point the way he descended into the dank, ill-smelling cellar.

Like all the other portions of the house the cellar proved to be perfectly harmless—and empty, so far as Vance could see. It was a mere pit in the hard clay, with shelving earth walls and no visible provision for ventilation. At one end a bin had been partitioned off with rough boards, as if for the storing of vegetables. The bin door was only hasp-fastened, and Vance pulled it open.

At first sight there appeared to be nothing suspicious in the inclosed bin. Like the adjoining cellar, it was empty save for a pile of musty straw in one corner. Vance kicked the straw heap and his foot struck something hidden in it. Further exploration uncovered two square five-gallon cans, of the size and shape of those in which engine oil is sold to the garages. Vance knelt to unscrew the stoppers and to sniff at the contents of the cans. Whereupon the mystery involving Freeman's movements on the day of the kidnaping vanished like the light of a blown-out candle.

Vance found his car companion waiting at the stair head, and apparently yielding to a sudden impulse, he said nothing of his find in the vegetable bin, leaving Cliffert to infer, if he chose, that nothing had been found. Cliffert asked no questions; he seemed only anxious to be gone.

"If you're satisfied, let's get out of this spooky hole," he gurgled, and Vance saw that he was still shuddering.

"Yes; I'm satisfied," was the quiet reply; "only I'd like to find the door that cries like a lost child."

"Damn the door!" snapped the shaken one. "Let's go."

Ignoring the plea for haste, Vance started to walk across the kitchen to try the outer door. But at the first step Cliffert grasped his arm and stopped him. "What's that?" he whispered, pointing to the floor at Vance's feet.

Vance turned the flash light upon the tiny bright object at which the shaking finger was pointed, stooped and picked it up. It was a gold baby pin.

"My God!" said Cliffert. "Didn't I tell you so?"

Vance did not reply. There were scratches on the polished surface of the gold and he was trying to decipher them; did decipher them. Under the closer scrutiny they resolved themselves into a word, and the word was "Willie."

Cliffert had apparently made out the word at the same instant.

"Great Cæsar!" he exclaimed; "that settles Freeman! Don't you believe now that there was a baby here a few minutes ago?"

"No," said Vance briefly. "You're forgetting that the kidnaping was nearly three weeks ago."

"That's all right. I'll bet if you take that pin to Mrs. Jassington she'll recognize it. And if she does, it means that her baby has been here, some time."

"What's your idea?"

"Freeman must have brought the child here and turned it over to somebody else. I don't pretend to explain anything we've

seen or heard to-night. That pin settles it for me."

"I'll see if Mrs. Jassington or Miss Hallowell can identify it," said Vance. "'Willie' isn't an uncommon name. We'll go, now."

It was when he opened the outer kitchen door that the wailing cry was repeated and a rusty hinge sufficiently accounted for it. Notwithstanding, Cliffert was still starting at shadows as they made their way back to the auto.

"I'm rattled, Bobby; I don't deny it," he admitted, when Vance rallied him mildly upon his nervousness. "The place got on my nerves the minute we got there, and that yelling door hinge finished me. Then, finding that pin and all——"

Vance had contrived to get the small car turned in the narrow roadway and the place of spookiness was soon left behind. With the increasing distance Cliffert regained his self-possession, and when the car was speeding townward over the smooth pike he was led to talk freely upon a matter about which Vance was just then anxious for information.

"Oh, yes; Middlevale has been a dry town almost from the beginning! in fact, the county is dry. Bootlegging? Oh, sure; there's bound to be some little rum-running; especially with a wet county just south of us. They work all sorts of tricks. One man used to fill his auto tires with whisky and bring it through that way."

True to his habit of chasing a subject through all of its ramifications, Vance kept his companion telling stories of the bootleggers all the way to town. And when he set Cliffert down at the railway station, in good time for his train, the adventure of the evening was dismissed in a single sentence of Cliffert's at the leave-taking.

"Glad you took me along with you, Bobby: if that pin should be identified, and has to be produced in evidence, you may call on me to prove that I saw you find it. Good night."

CHAPTER IX.

MENTAL BACK STAIRS.

Upon leaving Cliffert at the railway station Vance drove to the garage where Freeman kept his car. Ordering a supply of oil and gas, he strolled into the storage room while the night mechanic was busy filling the order. Quickly identifying Freeman's car by its number, he stepped behind it and opened the deck box. In the locker, under the spare wheel carried there and strapped in place, he found a concealed filling plug, and a swift bit of investigation revealed the presence of a flat tank installed under the false bottom of the locker. A sniff at the removed plug quickly dispelled all doubt as to the purpose for which the tank had been used. It was a bootlegging contrivance.

This step taken, he put his car up for the night and walked uptown to the Municipal Building, counting it a piece of good luck that, late as the hour was, he found the chief of police still in his office.

"How's the psychology man t'night?" rumbled the big Irishman jocosely. Then: "Isn't the daytime long enough f'r ye to be tanglin' up with other folks' brains?"

"Not always. Some brains are easier to sort in the night, you know. You have a set in one of the cells downstairs that I'd like to pry into a bit, if such things are ever allowable after dark."

"'Tis the lad Freeman ye're talking about?"

"It is."

"Faith, then, there's others besides yerself as'd like to do a bit of that same prying."

"Then you are not sure you have the right man?"

"Ye've said it."

"Did your own men bring Freeman in?"

"No; it was a couple of thim 'specials.' Between us, Misther Vance, I'm misthrustin' either wan 'r both of thim'd be swearin' a man's life away to make a case."

"Are you at liberty to tell me the evidence?"

"They're saying he gave up to thim—gave himself away; confessed that he stopped his car in th' park and had the baby in his arms; carried it to the car and took it for a ride."

"Is that all?"

"'Twould be, a plinty, you'd say—'r wouldn't you?"

"I shouldn't," Vance replied promptly. "I know where he went and what he did after leaving the park that afternoon."

"The divvle ye say! Did yer psycholygy tell ye that?"

"Not exactly. I have a witness to part of it, and Freeman, himself, corroborates the witness. I was with him this afternoon."

"So Sergeant Murphy was tellin' me. What's the answer?"

"That Freeman isn't the kidnaper. If I might have another chance at him I could prove it for you."

The big chief took his feet from the desk and stood up.

"Ye've said it," he grunted. "Come on down to the cage and I'll put ye next. I'm knowing this lad manny years. 'Tis a little crook he is, all right, but he hasn't the nerve to be a big wan."

Five minutes later Vance found himself again admitted to Freeman's cell. The ex-clerk had been lying on his cot, but he was not asleep, and he sprang up with a shrill oath as the cell door was swung. But when he saw who his visitor was, he sat down on the bed and held his head in his hands, shivering like a man with an ague.

"I've come to finish the talk that was left up in the air this afternoon," Vance began abruptly. "I know where you went on the afternoon of Monday the ninth. Who was the man you met at the old Dixon house?"

"I didn't meet anybody!"

"It isn't worth while to lie to me, Freeman."

"So help me God, I'm not lying! I didn't meet anybody; it's—it's part of the game—for safety. I don't know who comes to that house from the other side, and they don't know who goes from this end. If it wasn't worked that way, somebody might snitch!"

Vance shot in the next blow swiftly and without warning.

"So you took Jassington's child out there and left it to be taken away by somebody whom you did not know. Was that the way of it?"

"I knew that was coming!" gasped the prisoner. "You—you've been there, *and you've found the pin!*"

Vance smiled. "Why did you leave the pin on the kitchen floor?"

"If I tell you the God's truth you'll never believe it. I wouldn't believe it myself if another man told it."

"Try, and see if you can't make me believe it," Vance suggested.

"It was this way; and I hope to drop dead this minute if I'm not giving it to you straight. I stopped in the park a minute or so to play with that baby; just as I told you. That's my weakness; I'm a nut about children, and I'd have had some of my own if the girl I was going to marry hadn't died."

"Go on."

"The kiddie ran up and climbed into my arms, as he always did when he saw me, and I held him and jollied him for a bit. After I had driven away I found a little gold pin sticking in my coat, and I knew it must have come off while I had the baby in my arms. I pinned it to my vest, meaning to give it back to him the next time I saw him. It had his name on it."

"You are going to tell me that it came unfastened again?"

"It must have. I remember seeing it just before I went into the old house, and I didn't miss it until I was climbing into the car to come back to town. I lost a good half hour looking for it, but I couldn't find it."

Vance drew the pin from his pocket and handed it to Freeman.

"Is that the pin you were looking for?"

The man on the cot merely glanced at it. "Sure; that's the one," he said.

"No mistake about it?"

"How could there be? Hasn't it got the kiddie's name on it?"

Vance dropped this part of the inquiry as if he had no further interest in it.

"You are in a bad way, Freeman. Though the evidence against you is mainly circumstantial, it is strong enough to convince the average jury. I'll cut it short by saying that I believe your story—in spite of the finding of this pin. But the story has got to be proved. The detectives who arrested you say that you confess to having taken the child into the car with you. You've got to be able to prove that you didn't."

"My God! they're trying to hang me!" said the victim huskily. "I told them exactly what I've told you, and they've added the rest of it."

Vance did not comment upon this phase of it. "You must be able to prove that you didn't take the child into the car," he repeated. "I'm going to help you to prove it. Fix your mind steadily upon the events of that afternoon. Look up at that electric light so that you won't be distracted. Now remember that the memory processes are largely subconscious. There were many people in the park: you know many people in Middlevale: there were familiar faces that——"

He had let his voice trail off into a mono-

tone and he stopped when Freeman's unblinking gaze at the hanging incandescent became a fixed and apparently unseeing stare. Then he began again:

"You stopped your car and got out to play with the child: you are taking the baby in your arms and talking to it: now you have put the child down, and——"

The man sitting on the edge of the cot bed was still staring wide-eyed at the glowing electric. His lips were moving automatically, and when he began to speak his voice was flat and colorless. What he said seemed totally irrelevant: "Gee! Mr. Rockwell—excuse *me!* Some kid must have come along and cut my wheels when I wasn't looking. I——"

Vance stood up suddenly, interposing himself between Freeman and the hanging electric globe. The man on the cot started and rubbed his eyes.

"Gosh!" he exclaimed, "I believe I lost myself for a minute. That light, you know; it seemed to sort of hypnotize me. I guess I missed what you were saying."

Vance smiled. "It wasn't anything important, and I'm going now. I think you may set your mind at rest on the murder and kidnaping charge, but you'd better make a clean breast of the bootlegging and take your medicine. That's all for tonight."

Released from the cage, Vance went directly upstairs to Lurby's office.

"Well?" inquired the chief.

"In just a moment. First, I'd like to have a look at your city directory."

The big Irishman pointed to the book and lighted a fresh cigar. Vance spent but a moment over the directory. When he looked up it was to say, "Who is P. G. Rockwell?"

Lurby's heavy eyebrows were lifted. "'Tis a coal dealer, he is on the North Side."

"Where does he live?"

"Up on th' hill, beyond Richmond Park."

"It's pretty late; but would you mind calling his house on the phone?"

"For what, then?"

"If he is still up, I'd like to have you ask him to come down here."

"Holy Smoke! in the middle of the night? Won't it kape till to-morrow?"

"Quite probably. But there is no time like the present. Men have been known to die between midnight and morning."

"'Tis a psychologistic mysthery ye're putting over on me now!" grumbled the Irishman, but he put in the telephone call.

It was while Lurby was arguing with the coal merchant and putting the request finally into the form of a demand that Vance saw the door of the chief's office opening noiselessly as under the steady pressure of an invisible hand. Crossing the large room silently he jerked the door wide. The office opened directly upon the great central rotunda of the building which was well lighted. There was no one in sight, but a cool night breeze was sweeping through the building. Vance closed the door and went back to his chair beside Lurby's desk.

"Peter G.'s hot enough to boil petaties, but he's coming," Lurby announced. And then: "It'll be about the Freeman job?"

Vance nodded.

"If things turn out as I expect them to, Freeman will plead guilty to a charge of bootlegging, and you'll cancel the other charge against him."

"Humph! Yer psychologistic t'eory works backward, does it? 'Tis good at getting a man off. But what we'd be wanting is to get the right man on, d'ye see?"

"Maybe even that will come, in time," Vance put in quietly. And then, for Lurby's enlightenment, he briefed the interview with Freeman, giving enough of it to account for the summoning of the coal merchant.

It was a full half hour before Rockwell, a big, burly man whiskered like an anarchist, put in an appearance. He was chewing an extinct cigar, and one hand was wrapped in a bloodstained handkerchief.

"I've got it in for you, all right, Mike," he flung out bluffly. "You came darned near getting me killed, hauling me down here at this time of night."

"And how was that?" queried Lurby.

"Your fool traffic rules that you don't enforce. Fellow ran into me full tilt up at the corner of Ohio Avenue: bent my fenders, smashed my wind shield and knocked me silly.

The chief reached for pad and pencil. "Ye got his number?"

"Not me. By the time I'd got my breath he'd backed out and was gone like a shot. It'll cost me a cold hundred dollars to put my car in shape again."

"'Tis bad," said Lurby; and then he introduced Vance as an investigator in the kidnaping case.

"That is strictly among us three, Mr.

Rockwell," Vance hastened to say. "I am only an amateur in the case, and at the present time I am chiefly interested in clearing a man of a charge of which I am satisfied he is not guilty. Do you know Jackson Freeman personally?"

"Sure I do. He's been deviling me for six months to pay a bill that I don't owe."

"Did you ever meet him in Richmond Park?"

At first Rockwell said "No," but a moment later he qualified it. "Yes, I did, too —once, two or three weeks ago. I was driving through the park and he ran into me with his flivver; said somebody had cut his wheels when he wasn't looking."

"Can you recall the occurrence clearly?"

"Why, yes. His car was stopped on the right-hand side of the driveway, and as I came along he was just climbing in to start it. He got it going in good time to slide up and lock wheels with me. I remember I cussed him out for his awkwardness, and he gave me that josh about somebody cutting his wheels."

"Was he alone in his car?"

"Yes."

"You are certain of that?"

"As certain as I am of anything."

"Didn't have a baby on the seat with him?"

"Didn't have anybody or anything on the seat with him."

Vance drew a long breath. "One thing more, Mr. Rockwell. Is there any possible way in which you can fix the date of that incident?"

"Let me see," he said reflectively. "That was the day Mrs. Rockwell and the boy went to Cleveland; I was going home to take them to the train in the car. I ought to have the date somewhere." He fished a notebook out of his pocket and turned the pages: "Yep; here it is: two tickets and parlor car seats to Cleveland on Monday, the ninth."

"Th' hell you say!" ejaculated Lurby; but Vance went on calmly.

"After you got the two cars disentangled; what happened then, Mr. Rockwell?"

"Freeman drove out of the park ahead of me and turned south in Park Avenue. When I stopped at my house he was still going in that direction, heading for the Bickford pike, I guess."

Vance nodded. "I shan't apologize to you for asking the chief to bring you down here at this time of night, Mr. Rockwell. You've saved a man's life by coming. You'll be willing to repeat this statement for the grand jury?"

"Sure! I don't hate Freeman badly enough to want to see him killed. But I'd never have remembered the date if you hadn't dug it out of me. Is that all you wanted of me, Mike? If it is, I'll go home and go to bed."

"I think I'll go, too," said Vance; but after Rockwell had gone he turned back to Lurby. "There was one other little thing, chief: what time does the *Morning Telegram* go to press?"

"I dunno; about two o'clock, I'm thinking."

"It is now five minutes past twelve: I'm sure the night editor would be thankful if you'd tip him off on this thing, chief—and it might help you a bit politically, maybe?"

"Ye mean that I'm to take the credit of digging the thing out?"

"Precisely. I don't wish to be known in it at all."

The big Irishman winked solemnly. "But you do want to see the thing in the morning paper?"

"For a purpose of my own, I do wish that very thing," said Vance, and with that he took his leave.

CHAPTER X.

SIX HUNDRED DOLLARS.

On his way downtown the following morning Vance stopped in at Middlevale's principal jewelry store.

"Baby pins?" he inquired; and when the clerk obligingly took two trays of the conveniences from the show case: "Do they always come in sets of three?"

The clerk said they usually did, and asked if he wished to replace one that was lost. "Something of that sort," the customer replied, half absently; but after he had looked over the display he went away without buying.

At his office in the Corona Building he had scarcely gathered his mail before Cliffert drifted in, newspaper in hand.

"Say—wouldn't this jar you!" he exclaimed. "Freeman goes scot-free on the murder and kidnaping! What do you know about that?"

Vance found his pipe and began to fill it.

"So I see; I've read the paper. Lucky

for Freeman that this coal dealer turned up. If Rockwell will say as much to the grand jury as he has apparently said to the police about——"

"Sure," Cliffert broke in. "But see here—there's that baby pin you found. Oughtn't that to cut some figure?"

"You'd think it ought, wouldn't you? Yet it's only a vague sort of clew, after all. There are myriads of baby pins in the world, and doubtless a good many with the very common name of 'Willie' engraved on them."

The plunger in real estate frowned thoughtfully. "In the face of this I suppose you cross Freeman off your list?"

"Looks as if I'd have to."

"Well, who's next—or is there any next?"

Vance smiled. "I guess I'll have to try again and see if I can't find somebody to take Freeman's place."

"Then you haven't quit?"

"Oh, no; that's one thing I don't know how to do."

"They say all you psychology people are 'nuts,' and I'm beginning to believe it," laughed the platter of new additions, and with that he went back to his own rooms.

Left to himself, Vance picked up the paper Cliffert had left and glanced through it. One of the items on the society page reported the continued illness—owing to the shock of her late bereavement—of Mrs. Grigsby Jassington. Taking up his phone the psychologist called for the Jassington house number. The low voice that answered was one that thrilled him every time he heard it.

"This is Robert Vance," he said. "How is your sister this morning? No better? I'm sorry; but you mustn't let her lose hope. No, nothing conclusive. Yes, I've just been reading the paper—you mustn't let that discourage you. I've known all along that he wasn't the man. How did I know? I can't explain over the phone. If you are to be at home this afternoon between three and four—you will be? Thank you. Good-by."

It was perhaps an hour beyond this brief telephone talk, after an interval spent in poring over a thick volume labeled "Psychoneurotics and Their Mental Reactions," that Vance refilled his pipe and strolled into the office next door.

"Busy?" he inquired; and when Cliffert denied the charge: "I've another notion now, Jamie, and I thought perhaps you, with your wide acquaintance here in Middlevale, might be able to give me a few short cuts. Do you happen to know a man named Larsen, out on the Bickford pike?"

"Know him like a book. I sold him his truck farm."

"What sort of man is he?"

"Between us two, he's a pretty tough customer. Used to be a mechanic in the motors works, and got crippled there. Drinks alcohol like the Swedes in the fiction stories, and is a member of some sort of anarchists' club. Why?"

"I'll tell you presently. But first let me ask if you know anything about the Jassingtons' butler, Jarvis."

Cliffert's thin face grew dark and his eyes narrowed.

"I know the story about Grigsby Jassington and Jarvis' daughter."

"Do you believe the story?"

For a flitting instant the face of the man sitting in the desk chair underwent a curious metamorphosis; the lips were drawn, the frown deepened, and the eyes blazed. "Believe it?" he rasped; then the change flicked aside and he became the suave, easy-smiling man of the world again. "My dear Bobby, you are safe in believing anything this side of hell that you ever hear of Grigsby Jassington—and at that he'll disappoint you. But what are you driving at?"

Briefly Vance gave the few facts which might, or might not, implicate the butler and Larsen.

"H'm; plenty of motive, on both sides, you'd say," was Cliffert's comment. "Jarvis has good cause, Heaven knows; and Larsen has made no secret of his intention to get square with Jassington for the crippled knee that he'll carry to his grave. What have you done about it?"

"Nothing, thus far. But I'd like to know what connection there is—if any—between the six hundred dollars that Jarvis drew out of his savings account, and the same amount that Larsen paid in on a new auto truck the following day."

Cliffert's eyes sought the floor at his feet and he was silent for a moment. Then he said: "I guess this is where I come in. I know the Provident Bank people, and maybe I can find out for you. Hold your breath a minute or so and I'll go across the street and sink the hook into Brewster."

The volunteer investigator was gone only a few minutes. When he came back he nodded and said, "Tally: those two fellows must be solid bone from the neck up—if they had anything to hide. Jarvis didn't draw currency; he took a cashier's check, payable to his own order."

"Well?"

"The check has been returned and Brewster got it out and showed it to me. Jarvis indorsed it over to Larsen, and Larsen turned it in on the auto-truck purchase. It came back to the bank through the auto agency and the clearing house."

"Still, that doesn't prove anything," Vance offered.

"No; but it looks mighty suggestive," was Cliffert's assertion. "You have two men with motive enough to account for anything. One of them pays the other six hundred dollars—apparently without value received—and the payee isn't able to prove an alibi on the afternoon of the child-stealing."

"I didn't say that. I merely said that *I* hadn't proved it," Vance amended.

"It amounts to the same thing. I know your thoroughness of old, Bobby. I more than half believe you're on the right track now."

"It does seem to look more or less encouraging," Vance conceded. "But I mustn't waste any more of your time. If you run across anything that promises to help out, let me know. Stick a note through my door if I don't happen to be in."

If the amateur trailer had himself been trailed through the remainder of the forenoon his movements might have been set down to the indirection which is popularly supposed to be the highest refinement of the art of criminal chasing. After a short interview with a rather obscure young lawyer whose office was on the top floor of the Jonquille Building, the gist of which related to the present whereabouts of a woman and certain private and personal facts concerning her, he spent some time in the court record room at the courthouse, taking down volume after volume and going painstakingly through the trial indexes.

At two o'clock he left the courthouse, ate a late luncheon at the club, and returned to his office to make notes on his work of the morning. Shortly after he had squared himself at his desk, Cliffert came in and dropped into a chair.

"Just ran in to apologize," he began. "I hope you haven't been needing the little car. I've been using it myself, and I couldn't find you to let you know."

"You needn't apologize to anybody for having used your own property. Besides, I haven't needed it. Big car in the shop?"

"It sure is. Hadn't I told you? Last night I met my customer at the eleven-o'clock train, as per schedule, and had the touring car sent down so I could drive him to the hotel. At the Washington we went in for a smoke and a business talk, and I left the car at the curb. While my back was turned somebody swiped it."

"You've lost it?"

"I thought I had; but it was found this morning—in the ditch at the side of the Millville road. The thief had run into something and disabled the car—which was lucky for me. If the car had been able to keep going I should probably have lost it. As it is, I'm out only the bill for repairs. Which is all beside the mark, and doesn't interest you a little bit. What have you done about the Jarvis-Larsen clew?"

"Little enough, as yet."

"All right: then I've beat you to it! Listen to this: For a month or more I've had a deal on for the sale of a farm out on the Millville road about a mile this side of Millville village. I drove out there this morning, and by the nearest fluke stumbled into the big thing. Brinkley, the man who owns the farm, is an old miser who lives in Millville. He was to meet me at this place I'm speaking of, but I got there first and went into the farmhouse to wait.

"There was nobody at home but the tenant farmer's wife, a good-natured, gadding soul, who got me a glass of milk and sat down to gossip with me until the owner should come. I don't remember just how we came to mention babies; perhaps I'd spoken of my own kiddie; but, anyway, she got started and told me a story that ought to be worth about ten thousand dollars to somebody."

"Will the story bear repeating?"

"You bet it will! Some time early in the month—she wasn't certain of the exact date—an elderly man, a stranger, drove up in a buggy with a baby, a boy about two years old. She was alone at the time; her husband was out in the field. She says the man in the buggy was a nice-appearing old fellow, smooth-spoken, and all that, and he

told her the baby was tired and sleepy and he was afraid it would fall off the buggy seat—asked if he mightn't leave it to take its nap while he drove on to a farm he was going to look at, and promising to come back or send for it in an hour or so.

"Naturally the woman was a bit suspicious at first, but the old fellow was plausible and she was soft-hearted. She took the baby, which was either very sleepy or sick—she coudln't tell which—and put it on the bed in her bedroom. Inside of an hour another man—also a stranger—came for it and took it away while it was still asleep, giving the woman half a dollar for the care of it. This second man was lame, and spoke with an accent that made her call him a German. And he was driving a flivver that had been changed over into a small truck. How does that look to you?"

"Mighty interesting, of course," Vance admitted. "But there are discrepancies, as you've probably noticed. If it was the Jassington child, the old man of the woman's story must have been Jarvis. It's ten miles to Millville, isn't it?"

"Yes; a little more than that."

"The distance, and the horse and buggy, are obstacles, though they are not insurmountable. I haven't learned that Jarvis was absent during the afternoon of the ninth, as well as in the forenoon, but he might have been. I understand from Miss Hallowell that he has his afternoons free, or most of them. But why the roundabout route? This farm you went to is nine miles away in one direction, and Larsen's place is five miles in the opposite."

"I know; it's tangled to beat the band. But there are the facts. You can go and interview the woman for yourself."

"That would seem to be merely a loss of time, since you've done it. What would you suggest?"

"I'm not much of a hand to theorize. If I were you, I'd go straight out to Larsen's place, drop on him like a thousand of brick, and make him produce the child."

Vance looked up quickly. "Will you go along?"

"Sure Mike! I'll get the car and come by for you if you'll wait."

The waiting asked but for a few minutes, and Vance put in the time adding a fresh page to the already voluminous notes he had been making. Oddly enough, the blank notebook in which he wrote bore the legend, "Symptomatic Præcognitions." When Cliffert phoned up from the ground floor he went down and they drove off together.

"There is one place where our present theory doesn't hang together very well," Vance suggested, after Middlevale had been left behind and the car was trundling out over the Bickford pike. "It presupposes Jarvis as the murderer of the nurse, and I can't seem to figure the old butler in any such cold-blooded rôle as that."

"Nobody knows yet, for certain, that the nurse was murdered," Cliffert objected. "The doctors are still disagreeing about it. I should say that if Jarvis was the one who stole the child it is perfectly safe to assume that the nurse died a natural death. If there were any killing blood in the old butler, he would have massacred Jassington long ago."

At a point five miles from town Cliffert turned the car into a side road, stopping it shortly afterward at the gate of a truck farm. Just inside of the gate a big, yellow-haired man in shop overalls was tinkering the motor of a new auto truck. He looked up and recognized Cliffert.

"Hallo, Mester Cliffert," he said, with a broad Scandinavian accent, "you comin' hare to buy back may place? She ain't for sale."

"Nothing so easy as that, this time," Cliffert struck back briskly. "We've come to ask what you've done with that baby you picked up over on the Millville road some three weeks ago."

In a flash the loose-lipped, good-natured smile faded from the broad face of the transplanted Swede.

"W'at de hal you t'enk you bane talkin' about, Mester Cliffert?" he rasped.

"You know perfectly well what I'm talking about. One afternoon about three weeks ago you called at a certain farmhouse on the Millville road and took a child that had been left there for you an hour or so earlier. We want that child."

"Well, bay gollies, you ken't have it!"

At this Vance struck in.

"It will be well to be reasonable, Larsen. I know your record, and it isn't a very good one. Three years ago a bomb was found in a certain public building in Middlevale. The making of that bomb wasn't exactly traced to you; at least, the police were not able to fasten it upon you at the time. But now——"

"W'at you wantin' out o' me?" growled the man on the other side of the gate, and now there was murder in the hard blue eyes.

"We want to see that child!" snapped Cliffert.

"It ent hare."

"Where is it?"

"Aye ken't tell. It get sick, en' de people it belong to take it avay."

Cliffert snapped again: "You'd better come clean, Larsen."

"Ent nothin' to come clean on, so halp me, Mester Cliffert."

"If we have to come back here it will be with the sheriff and a search warrant."

"You ent bane need no sheriff or no papers. You come een en' look 'round all you want. May sester she tal you de sem w'at Aye tal you. Ve couldn' keep dat baby ven it got sick!"

"Yet you get six hundred dollars to pay you for keeping it," Cliffert retorted.

"You t'enk so?" said the Swede, and now he was able to recall the good-natured grin. "Maybe so you ent know I got pardner in dis farm beesiness, Mester Cliffert. Vait meenit, en' I show you de papers," and he turned and limped away toward the house.

"What do you think?" Cliffert asked, when the man was out of hearing.

"I'm waiting for further developments," said Vance. "Aren't you?"

"Good Lord! you've got 'em both dead to rights, man! They've merely made away with the child because the search was getting a bit too warm!"

"In that case, I suppose there's only one thing to do."

"That's it. We'll hike back to Middlevale and turn the whole business over to the authorities. They'll know what to do, and they'll do it, mighty quick!"

"What do you suppose Larsen is going to try to prove by the papers he's gone after?"

"Some sort of partnership with Jarvis, of course—to account for the passing of the six-hundred-dollar check. They'd be sharp enough to look out for that."

"And yet, as you pointed out this morning, they were not sharp enough to make the transaction in cash, which couldn't have been traced. But the best of us make a slip now and then. Do you think your tenant farmer's wife would testify, if she were called upon?"

"I'll gamble she would; and I'll bet all the money I expect to make in the next year that she'll identify both Jarvis and Larsen."

Further talk was interdicted by the return of the Swede with a paper which he handed to his accusers. It was a formal partnership agreement, legally drawn, witnessed, and sworn to, by and between John Jarvis and Jan Larsen; and it antedated the kidnaping by a full half year. It was Vance who returned the paper to Larsen.

"You say you don't know what Jarvis has done with the child?" he asked.

"Jarvis, he ent got dat child."

"Who did get it?"

"Aye ent know who she bane; maybe hees mudder. She say ve kent keep dat baby ven it gone got sick."

"That'll do for now," Cliffert broke in brusquely. "Perhaps you'll have a better memory when you're hauled into court." And with that he backed the car for its turn and drove away.

"You've struck it right, this time," was Cliffert's summing-up, as the small car was racing to town. "That talk about a woman coming for the child was pure invention. Between them they've hid the baby somewhere. If I were you I'd push this thing quick and hard, before they have a chance to break and run for it."

"In that view of the case, perhaps you'd better set me down at the courthouse," Vance suggested; and a few minutes later this was done, Vance leaving the car at the courthouse steps, and Cliffert driving on to his garage which was a few blocks farther downtown.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BOMBER.

Apparently Vance changed his mind about reporting the new clew to the authorities with singular and unaccountable abruptness, if, indeed, he had had any intention of carrying out Cliffert's suggestion. Passing through the courthouse vestibule without stopping anywhere, he slipped out by way of the side entrance, ran down the steps, and signaled a passing eastbound electric car. Twenty minutes beyond the boarding of the car he was pressing the bell push at the door of the Jassington mansion in Park Place.

As upon a former occasion it was Marian Hallowell who admitted him, and again she led the way to the darkened parlor. In the glimpse he had of her before the closing front door shut out the sunlight he

saw that she was pale and visibly worn, and that some vitalizing quality of the fine, resolute courage had gone out of the straight-seeing, honest eyes.

"You are letting down," he said accusingly, taking both of her hands in his, "and that won't do at all. I know this thing is grinding you fearfully hard, but you mustn't let it break you."

"I'm not letting down," she denied.

"You may not know it, but you are. I can see it and feel it. The reaction is perfectly natural, but you must fight it or it will smash you."

"You don't know how horrible it is: just waiting, waiting, with nothing that I can do!" she pleaded in extenuation. "And it is killing sister by inches. She hasn't left her bed since that dreadful afternoon."

"Mr. Jassington is out of town?"

"Yes; the Chicago detectives telegraphed him again last night. Nothing will come of it, of course. He has traveled thousands of miles on those telegrams. The descriptions all seem to fit Willie when they come; blue eyes, flaxen hair, fair skin—all those generalities; but they are all misleading."

She had taken a chair beside one of the shaded windows, and Vance drew his up to face her.

"You have led up to one of the questions that I've been wanting to ask," he said. "Has the child any mark or peculiarity by which it could be positively identified?"

She shook her head. "Not that I know of; though sister may know of something. But why do you ask? Surely Grigsby would know his own child."

"That is exactly the point I was getting at. I can easily conceive of conditions under which he might not."

"I can't imagine such a thing! And, besides, Willie would recognize his daddy at once!"

"Would he? You must remember that the mind of a child of two and a half years, while it is exceedingly impressionable, retains impressions only as they are repeated from day to day. It is like a slate that can be washed clean by a complete and sweeping change of environment and the channels through which the impressions are received. This is not a theory; it is a demonstrated fact."

"But I'm sure Willie couldn't forget us in three short weeks!"

"Possibly not; quite probably he wouldn't. I am merely pointing out a condition which may arise. You will remember that we agreed upon the assumption that we have no ordinary criminal to deal with. That, to my mind, is the reason why the police and the detectives are thus far entirely at fault. Such a kidnaper as the one we have been trying to visualize would bring his intelligence to bear upon every point of concealment, and the first step in that direction would lead to the obscuring of the child's memories."

"You are making it harder than ever now!" she sighed.

"I don't mean to do that," he cut in quickly. "But we gain nothing by not facing all the possible facts. I'm trying not to let anything escape me."

She leaned toward him and the pretty lips were trembling. "You've been very, very good—in all this terrible trouble. I don't know what I—what we should have done without something really tangible to cling to. But I feel miserably conscience-stricken. You are neglecting all of your own affairs to try to help us—I know you must be."

"No," he denied, with the smile that made him look ten years younger than he really was; "on the contrary, I am devoting myself to the one purely personal affair which seems to me to be at all worth while, just at present. But I'm forgetting my principal errand. Is there any one with your sister?"

"Oh, yes; she has a trained nurse all the time."

"Then I'd like to take you out for a little while. I've a lot to tell you, and we can talk better in the open air. May we have your little car?"

She agreed at once and went away to make herself ready. When she came down to him in a neatly fitting tan driving coat and a boyish little hat to match, the strained look had gone out of the pretty eyes and she was smiling.

"Do you know, I haven't driven once since that evening three weeks ago when we were out together," she said, as they passed through the house to reach the garage in the rear.

"And you are not going to drive now," he announced lightly. "I've been pushing a tin Lizzie all over the lot lately, and I'm fairly aching to get a chance at a real auto. I can drive, after a fashion."

She gave the required permission readily enough, and when they were in the streets he turned the nose of the smart little roadster to the south, held it there until the city limits were passed, and then swerved into the first cross road leading to the west.

"Where are you taking me?" she asked, some few minutes after the smooth concrete pike had been left behind.

"That, if you don't mind, is to be a profound secret for the present. For the time being you are just to sit back and listen and take things easy—if my driving doesn't make you too nervous."

"You are driving much better than I do. But you haven't picked a very good road."

"I know; but we'll get a better one by and by. Now that we are fairly started, I'll tell you what happened after I left you yesterday," and thereupon he gave her a full and circumstantial account of Apperson's appeal, of his visit to Freeman in the city jail, and of the subsequent flight to the abandoned farm in the Putney Hills. Lastly, he spoke of the finding of the baby pin.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, when he came to that part of his narrative, "have you got it with you?—may I see it?"

He produced the trinket, wrapped carefully in a bit of tissue paper.

"It's one of Willie's pins!" she quavered. "I'm certain of it—I bought them for him myself!"

"I think you are probably right; but wait," he cautioned. Then he went on to tell of his second visit to Freeman, of the ex-clerk's explanation about the pin, which became entirely plausible in view of his admission that he had stopped to play with the child in the park and had taken it in his arms. Beyond this, he spoke of the manner in which Freeman had been cleared of the major charge.

"How wonderful!" she breathed, when he described the scene in Freeman's cell.

"Oh, no; it was merely a bit of self-hypnotism. You've doubtless studied the memory processes; many of them are strictly subconscious. I have been convinced of Freeman's innocence all along; his mental reactions have all been those of the small criminal—not of a man who had committed a great crime. I was merely trying to put him into a frame of mind in which he might be able to recall some saving detail—which he did. The moment he said 'Rockwell,' I knew that he was safe."

"It's too bad you had all that trouble when you were quite certain in your own mind that Freeman wasn't guilty."

"I was hoping that something helpful might come out of it; and something did—though it's only a hint. On his way down to the Municipal Building last night this man Rockwell was run into by some reckless autoist and stood a good chance of getting killed."

"Where is the hint?" she asked.

"Just here: Rockwell was the one man who could clear Freeman. If the real criminal is still in Middlevale, and knew that he——"

"I see," the young woman shuddered. "Are you setting this down for a fact?"

"Only conditionally; the auto smash might have been a sheer accident, of course. So it's only a hint."

By this time the roadster had made a half circuit of the town and was headed northwestward over a good turnpike. And the half circuit had been made over very indifferent roads indeed.

"Didn't you take a long way around to get into the Millville pike?" asked the pretty car owner, with a teasing smile that Vance was glad to see.

"I did; and there were reasons. I'm not ashamed of my company, and I'm sure I hope you're not. Still and all, as my Irish grandmother would say, there might be reasons why we shouldn't have been seen driving through the city at this particular time."

"More mysteries?" she protested.

"Just a little one, this time. But to go on with my story: I'm barely half through, you know," and with this for an introduction he recounted Cliffert's discovery of the forenoon and its outcome in the visit to Jan Larsen.

"I can't believe it of Jarvis!" was his companion's firm decision, after the tale was told. "I just simply *can't!*"

"Neither can I," he returned evenly, easing the car around a break in the road surface. "But Cliffert can't be persuaded that we are not on the right track, at last."

"This Mr. Cliffert: is he the real-estate man?"

"Yes; do you know him?"

"I have met him once or twice, socially. You know him well?"

"Very well, indeed; we were classmates in the university."

A little past this the church spires of

the village of Millville came in sight, and Vance stopped the car at a roadside farm. "We'll go in and see if we can't get a glass of milk," he said, as if it were part of a prearranged plan. And on the way up to the house: "This is the place where the baby was left. We'll ask the woman to tell us the story and describe the child."

The simple program was carried out in detail. The farmer's wife proved entirely willing to talk, and her description clearly identified the elderly man in the buggy as Jarvis; and Larsen was described quite as faithfully. But when she came to speak of the child the chain of incrimination was instantly broken. She was positive that the baby that had been left with her could not have been more than two years old at the most; and it was small and thin and wasted. It had dark hair and big brown eyes, and its dress was a figured gingham. She said it was very pale, with dark rings around its eyes, and it had slept nearly all of the time she had had it.

"There is no possibility that it could have been Willie," was Marian Hallowell's confident assertion, after they had reëntered their car, and Vance had turned and headed it back toward Middlevale.

"Not the slightest," was Vance's rejoinder. "I had no idea that there would be."

"Then why did you bring me out here?"

"I wanted you to hear the woman's story for yourself—as against the possibility of its reaching you from some other source and disturbing you needlessly."

She looked up at him gratefully. "I believe you think of everything," she said.

"I want to think of everything that concerns your comfort and well-being."

Short as their acquaintance had been, he was hoping that she might read his real reason into this loverlike reply; but she merely looked straight ahead for a moment and then went back to the unsolved problem.

"Of course, after this, you can't consider Jarvis or Larsen any more?"

"No; as a matter of fact, I have never considered either of them very pointedly; and this forenoon I was enabled to cross them off definitely and finally."

"How was that?"

"Through a few inquiries that I made. We have spoken before of Jarvis' daughter. I learned that he has been keeping in communication with her and sending her money from time to time. Also, that he has been urging her to let him have her child, to be brought up in—er—better surroundings. That's all there is to it. Jarvis is a silent partner in the Larsen farm. From some motive of his own—foolish pride, perhaps—he didn't want to be seen taking the child there himself; hence the rather clumsy expedient to which he resorted."

For a mile or so of the leisurely speeding Marian Hallowell was silent. When she spoke again it was to say: "So you have finally come down to Mr. Wycombe and the gunsmith, Ficke?"

"They would seem to be all that I have left in my original list of the five 'suspects.' "

"Have you found out anything more about them?"

"A little; yes. I told you that Mr. Wycombe was unaccounted for on the afternoon of the ninth. That is no longer true. You will remember that my tracing of him stopped between one and two o'clock of the afternoon of the kidnaping. He had been lunching at the Commercial Club, and got into his car at the club entrance and drove away. I have now learned that he went directly home and to bed. He had an attack of acute indigestion, brought on, perhaps, by the quarrel with Mr. Jassington in the forenoon. He was confined to the house for the next three days. So that eliminates him."

"Then we are just where we were when we began? The list is exhausted?"

"No; you are forgetting the gunsmith."

"Oh, yes; but when you spoke of him yesterday I thought you didn't consider him very seriously."

"I didn't, and still do not. Ficke is the bitter, harsh type out of which bomb-throwers and social disturbers of all kinds are made; but, like Freeman, he has one redeeming quality: he is tenderly fond of children. For the crippling of his own child I think he would be perfectly willing to murder your brother-in-law, if the chance offered together with a reasonable chance of escaping the penalty. At least, that would be in harmony with his type. But unless I am greatly mistaken, he would not wreak his vengeance upon a child—not even upon the child of his enemy."

"Then we have come quite to the end, haven't we?"

However much he may have been encour-

aged by her use of the plural pronoun—her continued bracketing of herself with him—Vance made his reply carefully guarded.

"I don't want to raise hopes that may not be fulfilled, but I haven't given the problem up yet, by any manner of means."

"But now you haven't anything to work upon."

"Nothing definite enough to talk about—yet—perhaps. But I do not consider that the time has been wholly wasted. Perhaps you will understand what I mean when I say that I have been gathering up odds and ends all along the way. Every problem has its side-lights. Naturally, I have had a chance to observe a good many persons besides those on the list of 'suspects.' And I haven't wasted the opportunity."

"Isn't it a bit cruel to tell me that much without telling me more?"

"It may seem cruel; but, really, you know, it's necessary."

"Why is it necessary?" she persisted.

He laughed. "If you must know, it's because I can't trust myself with you."

"You mean that I'd hinder?" she asked quickly.

"Maybe I can illustrate what I mean by citing an example. I have a friend who writes stories. He tells me he has to fight desperately for his plots; and that if he talks them over, even with his wife, he loses all the fine nuances. He laughs at me when I tell him that it is a psychological condition over which he has no control; but that is what it is. In its more intricate workings the human mind is like a delicately balanced piece of machinery. It—but, pshaw! I'm only making a botch of my explanation!"

"You're not," she denied promptly. "I know just what you mean; that the intrusion of another mind, no matter how sympathetic, might destroy the balance, sway you, make you draw conclusions that were not warranted."

"You've said it," he returned briefly. Then, after a moment's silence: "You're not blaming me for something that I can't help?"

She seemed to be intently studying the dials on the dash as the small car trundled along. "No, I'm not blaming you: I'm only wishing I were big enough to be worthy."

As a thoughtful and patient student of an abstruse science, Vance was far enough from being a man of impulse. But it was impulse, sudden and uncontrollable, that made him put his free arm around her, draw her up to him and kiss her. "You are the one woman in all the world, Marian," he burst out, much more like a passionate boy than a book-worm. "I meant to wait and be decently conventional, but I can't. Now you know why I can't take you wholly into anything but my heart until your sister's child has been found and restored to her. If you should get into my mental machinery there wouldn't be room for anything else."

For a little while after he released her she sat speechless, and he was torn with the fear that he had made a hopeless mess of things. And it didn't help matters when he stole a glance aside and saw that she was apparently struggling to smother an explosion of some sort.

"Say it!" he blurted out. "I've traded upon your sympathy; broken all the rules of the game; smashed all the nice little formalities; written myself down as a——"

"Oh, no," she interrupted with a clear little laugh. Then: "It's—it's rather refreshing, you know—so different—please be careful—you'll have the car in the ditch."

"You—you're not angry?" he stammered.

"How could I be angry? Hadn't I just said that I wished I were big enough to be worthy? Mentally, I meant, of course, and you took it the other way. But I'll forgive you, really, I will—if you'll only drive a bit more carefully."

Vance set his teeth and drove—did nothing else but drive. Like a small green whirlwind the little roadster swept over the remaining mile or so of the pike, and even in the city streets the pace was exciting. In the home garage, which was reached just as the sun was setting, Vance did all the little car chores in silence and was stiffly formal when he helped his seatmate down from the running board. In silence again they walked together to the side door of the house, and the young woman's hand was on the door-knob when she said:

"I have one more thing to thank you for, at any rate; for a little while you've made me forget the horrible trouble into which this house has fallen. You won't stop trying to help just because I laughed, will you?"

"You don't understand," he said gloomily; and with that he went away and left her standing before the unopened door.

The darkness had fully come when he had walked the mile or more of streets to

bring him to his office in the downtown building; had entered and thumbed on the lights to see if the afternoon delivery had brought him any mail.

There were a few business letters, and after he had read them without in the least knowing what was in them, he did an absent-minded thing that he had never been guilty of before: went out, locked his door, and went to supper, leaving the office lights still on.

Later, after he had walked back from Mrs. Benchley's for the better thinking opportunity that walking gave, he came out of a fit of morose abstraction at the turn into the main street to realize that a dense crowd had gathered in front of the Corona Building.

"What is it?" he demanded of the man whose ear was nearest.

"Anarchists, I reckon," was the reply jerked back over a shoulder. "Somebody's office blown up on the fourth floor—ripped it all to pieces, they say—with a bomb. P'lice are up there now."

"Whose office was it?"

"H'ain't heard anybody say, yet. Yip! here they come, and they've got their man!"

The crowd craned its multiplied neck to see, and Vance stepped aside. Shoving their way through the jam came two of Lurby's men, dragging between them a dark little man whose face was a mask of mingled hate and terror. The man was Ficke, the gunsmith.

There was a roar from the mob as the two policemen came out with their capture. "Hang him!" "String him up to the nearest pole!" "Hi, there—get him, some of you fellows up in front!" yelled the crowd. But the two officers drew their clubs and thrust their way to the curb, a patrol auto dashed up and off, and the lynching danger was over for the time.

When he could make it understood that he was a tenant of the building and had a right to enter, Vance had himself lifted to the fourth floor. The scene of devastation, which was disastrously complete, was his own office. The windows were blown out, his desk was a wreck, the chairs were broken, and the light fixtures were smashed. But a groping touch of the wall switch told him that the current was still on; in other words, the lights had been burning when the explosion occurred. Briefly, an attempt had been made to murder him.

CHAPTER XII.

A STAY OF PROCEEDINGS.

"What do you make of this rip-up of yours, anyway, Bobby?"

The time was the morning after the explosion, and Vance, collecting the scattered and disfigured remains of his office contents and equipment, had accepted Cliffert's pressing invitation to share the real-estate headquarters until such time as he could reestablish himself.

Vance shrugged. "Suppose you give me your notion of what you make of it."

"Looks middling plain to me. You've been barking up the wrong tree all along—in this Jassington business; several wrong trees. Ficke's your man. Didn't they catch him red-handed?"

"But yesterday you thought it was Jarvis and Larsen."

"It sure did look that way; you must admit it yourself. I thought you were going to have them arrested when I put you down at the courthouse. Why didn't you?"

"Call it a hunch," said Vance half absently. "You know how those things go. I knew about Jarvis' daughter, and it occurred to me that she might have a child. Then I remembered that the entire case against the pair turned upon the identity of the baby that Jarvis took to the Millville farm and Larsen carried away. So I went out there and had the woman describe the child that was left with her."

Cliffert frowned and looked out of the window. "Of course," he said. "Curious I never thought of asking her to do that. The description didn't fit?"

"Not at all; not in a single particular."

"Lucky you had that hunch—lucky for Jarvis and Larsen; though, of course, they'd have produced the child when it came to a show-down. Did you have anything on Ficke?"

"Nothing; except the fact that he was unaccounted for on the afternoon of the murder and kidnaping."

"Well, he's given himself away good and plenty now. He believed you were after him, and he wanted to destroy whatever evidence you might have accumulated."

"You're not going deep enough," said Vance with a grim smile. "The man who chucked the bomb through my office transom wasn't gunning for evidence alone. He meant to kill me."

"Suffering Scott—you don't mean that! How do you figure it out?"

"Very simply. My office lights were on —which was a reasonably good indication that I was inside and at work."

"Good Lord, what a wicked world this is! I suppose they'll thumb screw it all out of Ficke—or will they? Mike Lurby brags that he's never taken a crook that he couldn't make talk. But I don't know about Ficke. Just judging from his looks, I'd guess that he might prove to be a pretty hard nut to crack, even in Mike Lurby's pincers. What do you think?"

Vance shook his head.

"You'd say that nothing short of the thumb screws would make a man confess—in his position. But, of course, there's no telling."

"Have you seen the charge marked up against him?"

"No."

"I have. I dropped around by the police station as I came down. It's plain sabotage; no connection with the Jassington affair. But they'll put you on the stand, and that will bring out the motive."

"I'll testify, when the proper time comes," the psychologist promised.

Cliffert found a cigar and lighted it, and when he spoke again it was of pleasanter things.

"Saw you driving Miss Hallowell yesterday afternoon," he threw out, with a thin-lipped grin. Then: "I don't blame you a particle. She's pretty enough to start a stopped clock."

"Yes; I had her out for a little spin," Vance admitted. "Took her with me to the Millville farm. She's been shut up too closely with the sick sister."

"I'm on," said Cliffert, with a knowing wink. "At first, I wondered how you could afford to drop your psychologizing to go and dig into this Jassington affair; but I understand it now—you're just a human being, like the rest of us. It's all right; I was young, once, myself. Making an impression, I take it? Otherwise, she wouldn't go driving with you."

Vance knitted his brows and busied himself over the explosion-mixed office records. Owning a healthy contempt for anything like priggishness or false dignity, he still had his reticences, and it had always been one of Cliffert's failings to ignore them. When he failed to answer, Cliffert went on.

"I've met Miss Hallowell a few times, and she's as fine as they make 'em. Just the same, she's the kind to take a thing like this kidnaping horror mighty hard. You ought to drag her out oftener—make her get away from it. Next time you're in the little green car, aim it for Ingerton Heights and give Jane and me a call."

Vance looked up quickly. "You mean that?" he asked.

"Sure I mean it. Choose your own time, only make it after 'eats' in the evening—so I'll be at home."

It was just at this conjuncture that one of Cliffert's clients came in, and the real-estate dealer took his caller into the private office. Vance finished the rearranging of his mutilated office records and went out. Crossing the street to the telephone exchange he shut himself into a booth and called for Lancaster, a near town not far away. When the call was answered the interchange of talk was prolonged and ran into money. He talked of a woman named Dietrich. A full half hour had elapsed when he finally left the exchange and walked around the block to the Municipal Building, where he was presently closeted with Michael Lurby in the chief's private sanctum.

"I been waiting f'r ye," said the big Irishman briefly. "Sit down and shpit it out. Why did the Dutchman want to blow your office to smithereens? Can ye tell me that?"

"You've guessed it, haven't you?"

"See if I've guessed it sthraight. Is he the Jassington kidnaper bird?—and did he know you're afther him?"

"That is the natural inference, isn't it?"

" 'Tis the wan I'm making. What did ye have on him?"

"Nothing much, excepting the fact that his shop was closed on the afternoon of the kidnaping, and that, for a time, I couldn't account for him during that interval."

"F'r a time, ye say: can ye do it now?"

"I think so; partially, at least."

"Let's have it, then."

"A little after noon on that day he met a man named Bragdon by appointment just outside of the gates of the Maximum Motors shops. I'm guessing at the appointment, but that is a thing that can be proved, if necessary."

"Aw' right; gwan, then."

"After this meeting he drove in his car to some place in the country southwest of the city—I don't know just where—and when

he came back there was a woman with him; or, rather, she was a passenger in the tonneau of the car. As he was passing Richmond Park something happened to the car's machinery, and he stopped and got out to fix it."

"What time was this?" Lurby questioned.

"I can't say precisely; but some time between two and three o'clock. After this there's an hour or more of a gap that I can't fill. But beyond the gap he was seen driving on the Lancaster road, still with the woman in the tonneau."

"'Tis clear as mud," was Lurby's sarcastic comment. "What time would he be coming home? D'ye happen to know that?"

"It was late in the evening; ten o'clock or such a matter."

"Just where was this park stop made?"

"Opposite the eastern end of the park driveway; within a hundred feet or so of where the Jassington child was playing."

"So? Then he might've dodged in, clapped a handkerchief to the girl's nose, and walked off with the baby?—wid the woman to quiet the child down afther he'd got it into the car?"

"All those things might have been done; yes."

"Good! Now how much or how little would he be knowing about your sleuthing of him? Can ye tell me that?"

"He may know it all. Naturally, I haven't advertised it on the billboards; but, on the other hand, neither have I been taking any special precautions to keep it from spreading."

"Would he be thinking you might have it down in writing in your office?"

"I don't profess to be able to read his thoughts. But we needn't base the bomb-throwing upon any such slender assumption as that. The man who tossed the infernal machine through my office transom was gunning for me; not for my records."

"Ye have the proof of that?"

"Fairly conclusive proof, yes. When I went to dinner last night I absent-mindedly left my office lights on. They were on at the time of the explosion, and the inference, for the man who heaved the bomb, was that I was still in the room and at my desk."

The big-bodied chief of police was nodding slowly.

"We'll have it all out of him—never you fear, Misther Vance. When I get t'rough wid him——"

"You mean you'll give him the third degree?"

"We'd not be calling it that: but we'll make him talk."

Vance left his chair and took a turn up and down the room with his head down and his hands thrust into his pockets.

"I'm going to ask you not to do that, chief; at least, not until I give the word."

"More of the psycholygy shtuff?" grunted the Irishman.

"Call it that, if you like: a little experiment I want to try before you go to extremes with Ficke. Maybe—well, it's just barely possible that it will make the—er—inquisition you speak of unnecessary."

"'Tis not for long I could be shtanding things off. People are that sthirred up there'd likely be throuble. Not that they're caring so much about Jassington, 'r what he be losing, but f'r the anarchy business. We've had riots about these bomb planters before this, and this man Ficke was mixed up in 'em—on the wrong side."

"I see. But I'll not ask for much time; only a day or so. You can delay things for a bit, can't you?"

"Oh, as f'r that, we'll do it annyhow."

"And possibly, in the meantime, maybe you might even let the public believe that you've got your man, and are trying to make him tell what he has done with the child?"

Lurby grinned as one perfectly willing to oblige.

"And maybe I will be doing that very same, identical thing!" he chuckled.

"But not with any of the strong-arm stuff," Vance protested quickly. "That's in the bargain, you know—your part of the bargain. My part of it is to see to it that you get all the credit when the thing breaks—if it does break our way."

The big chief laughed. "You, wid your high-brow shtuff!" he derided good-naturedly. "But go to it and have it out in yer own ways; we'll hold Ficke, and we won't be hanging him up by the t'umbs."

Whether it came about in the ordinary run of things, or owed its origin to sundry leakages from police headquarters, the convincement that the Corona bomber, and the murderer and kidnaper of the Richmond Park tragedy, had been found in one and the same person, quickly spread abroad through the city. Excited little groups and knots were discussing the latest developments on the street corners, and the early edition of

the afternoon paper gave the developments flaring headlines and much valuable space.

Ficke's past, and his probable motive for revenging himself upon Grigsby Jassington, were turned up to the light, and it was remembered that he had been implicated in a past-and-gone anarchist outbreak. This last had more weight with the public than the Richmond Park crime, recent and horrifying as that had been. Some years before, Middlevale had suffered a reign of terror, growing first out of a bitter strike in which a small coterie of nihilists had found their opportunity. Nine of these men were now serving terms in the penitentiary; but it had been hotly asserted at the time that more of them, Ficke and Larsen among the number, ought to have been convicted and punished.

To add to the boiling of the pot of public excitement and indignation, Jassington, himself, homing from one of his fruitless identification journeys, came in on the noon train, and, unpopular as he was, there were sympathetic crowds to follow him as he had himself driven to police headquarters, there to demand that he be admitted instantly to the accused man's cell, and to rave like a madman when Lurby, good-naturedly stubborn, refused the demand.

Of all these public symptoms Vance apparently took no note. As on the day previous, he spent much time in the record room at the courthouse, and it was quite late in the afternoon when he broke off abruptly, put away the thick volumes through which he had been searching, and begged the use of the recorder's telephone.

The call he put in was for the Jassington house number, and his attitude was that of a man braced to take the shock of a cold-water bucketing as he waited for a reply.

CHAPTER XIII.

JUDGE LYNCH.

"Well?" came the answer, in tones as cool and crisp as a fresh lettuce leaf, when he had given his name.

"I—I'd like to borrow your car, if I may," he began, trying to make his own tone suggest the drippings of honey from a crystal jar.

"You may," was the granting of the request, and still the voice at the other end of the wire refused to respond to the honey-dripping influences.

"But that isn't all; I'd like to borrow you to go with it. You ought to get out, you know, even if only for a little while, every day."

"The car isn't big enough to hold a chaperon; and, besides, I haven't any," came back over the wire.

"Please! I've been punished enough, as it is."

"Who punished you?"

"I don't mind telling you; but, for all I know, this is a party line, and I'm sure you wouldn't want me to tell other folks."

"No; I don't believe I can go out to-day. But you may have June-bug, and welcome."

"I'll be up, on the next electric," he answered, and went at once to catch the designated trolley.

There was a surprise awaiting him when he dropped from the trolley at the corner nearest to the Jassington house. The green roadster—the June-bug—he was on his way to borrow was drawn up at the curb, and its pretty owner was sitting calmly in the mechanician's half of the single seat.

"I thought I'd save you the trouble of running it out of the garage," she said as he crossed to her.

"Thank you," he returned rather grimly, and opened the door for her to get out. But instead of making any move, she misunderstood the door-opening purpose, or pretended to.

"Where are your car manners? You shouldn't get in on this side—over my feet."

Obediently he went around to the other side and climbed in behind the wheel. But his ears were warm.

"You've changed your mind?" he ventured, snapping the switch and putting a foot on the starting button. And before she could reply: "What made you?"

"Curiosity, of course. I wanted to know who punished you."

He let the clutch in. "The little old gentleman who always punishes the headlong and the impulsive. Is your curiosity satisfied?"

"Only partly. I want to know what happened last evening."

"The newspaper told it all."

"I'm sure it didn't. Where were you when the explosion occurred?"

"As nearly as I can judge, I must have been about halfway downtown from Mrs. Benchley's boarding house."

"Going back to the office?"

The green car had reached the business district and the traffic stream asked for careful driving. But Vance seemed to have none of the difficulties of the nervous. "I was on my way there," he answered, missing a loaded truck by the traditional hand's-breadth. "If the bomb-thrower had only waited another five minutes he wouldn't have been disappointed."

"What do you mean by 'disappointed?'"

"I am assuming that he thought I *was* there. I'd left the lights on, you know, when I went to dinner."

As before, the traffic was rather distracting, and Vance did not permit himself the glance aside. But it was a very small and shaken voice that said:

"Horrors! he—he meant to murder you?"

"It looks very pointedly that way—to an impulsive person."

"But why!"

"Because he was afraid. Fear will make a man do almost anything, you know. It is the motive, or the motive spring, of the greatest crimes of history."

He had gotten the car out of the traffic streams and was heading it toward the pike which ran northeasterly to the neighboring county seat of Lancaster. After a minute or so of the motor-purring silence the young woman spoke again.

"It seems that psychology isn't always to be depended upon. Yesterday you seemed fairly certain that Ludwig Ficke couldn't be the man."

"I know; I believe I said so in so many words, didn't I?"

"But you are not saying it now?"

"No; I'm not saying anything. I'm just waiting."

"Until Ficke confesses? Grigsby has been like a madman all afternoon. I've had all I could do to keep him away from Lucy. She hasn't been told anything, you know. Grigsby was simply furious because the police wouldn't let him go to Ficke's cell and choke the truth out of him; make him tell what he had done with Willie."

"I doubt if choking Ficke would have accomplished the purpose; in fact, I'm quite sure it wouldn't have."

"You mean that the gunsmith has a chance to get off if he refuses to confess?"

"A very good chance, I should say. The evidence against him in the bomb-throwing is pretty convincing, you'd say; but it is purely circumstantial. If he can explain what he was doing on the fourth floor of the Corona Building last evening and make it stick——"

"I know; but they're talking it all over town that he blew your office up to destroy some evidence you had against him in the murder and kidnaping."

"But I had no such evidence, and I think he must have known it."

"Then why—but you're making it more of a mystery than ever! One minute you tell me that Ficke was trying to kill you, and the next——"

He looked around at her and smiled.

"It is getting more and more tangled every minute, isn't it? Suppose we let it rest for the present and talk of something else. Have you really forgiven me for what I did yesterday—or is this only a little business truce?"

"Perhaps we'd better call it business," she answered coolly. Then she repeated a question she had asked the day before. "Where are you taking me?"

"If we had the chaperon you spoke of I wouldn't hesitate a moment. As it is——"

"You might pretend that the chaperon is here and listening."

"All right, I will: we are driving to the charming little near-city of Lancaster, where, I am told, there is at least one fairly good hotel. I have taken the liberty of ordering an early dinner for two, but I shall be delighted to make it include the chaperon."

She looked up at him, but he could not—or did not—take his eyes from the road over which the little roadster was now purring along at racing speed.

"You—you are very bold, don't you think?"

"I have to be," he said simply. "The mid-Victorian gallantries don't get a man anywhere nowadays."

"I'm no more mid-Victorian than you are," she retorted.

"No; we both belong to our own generation. That is why I—but here is Lancaster. You'll be good and sit across the table from me—with the imaginary chaperon in between?"

She didn't say she wouldn't, so he drove to the hotel and they were presently sitting down to the early dinner in the café. It was not until after the ices had been served that an alert-looking young man made his way among the tables to their corner and bent to speak in low tones to Vance.

Miss Hallowell told herself she had no business to overhear, but she could scarcely have helped doing so if she had tried.

"It's all right," the young man said. "I took the matter up as soon as you phoned and chased it out to the last detail. We can account fully for every moment of the time spent here and show the object of the visit. The woman's name is Dietrich, and she is well known in Lancaster. Was there anything else?"

"Nothing, except that I may want you to come to Middlevale on short notice," was the reply; and the young man vanished.

"How long are you going to keep me in the dark?" asked Vance's table companion when he turned to face her again.

He smiled. Things were going much better than he had dared to hope.

"I told you the simple truth yesterday. Do you want me to repeat it?"

"No: and if you should, I should tell you that I positively refuse to clutter up anybody's mind; especially a mind that seems to clutter as easily as yours does."

"Touche!" said Vance under his breath; and then: "I can't fence with you; you carry too keen a blade. Shall we be going back?"

On the return run Vance seemed to be trying to find out the uttermost speed capacity of the little green car, and the thirty-odd-mile dash was made for the greater part in what remained of the daylight, and at a rate of speed which entirely precluded conversation. But as they were approaching the suburbs of Middlevale he throttled the motor and switched the car lights on.

"You have a most delightful little wagon in the June-bug," he remarked, speaking for the first time since the return race had been begun. "I don't know when I've heard a six-motor run any sweeter." Then, quite without preface: "I owe a call out here in Ingerton Heights. I wonder if you'd consent to make it with me?"

"Why not?" she said; adding with a touch of malice: "If you're quite sure I won't get in the way of your mind."

The stop was made in front of a house which had once figured in the real-estate advertisements as "One of the charming villa homes recently built in Ingerton Heights." Cliffert, smoking his after-dinner cigar on the porch, evidently recognized the green roadster and hastened to the sidewalk, bubbling hospitality.

"Mighty good of both of you, to look in on us informally, this way," he declared. Then to the young woman: "I hope I don't have to recall myself to you, Miss Hallowell. Come up and meet my sister—we're all out on the porch; the evening is so warm indoors."

On the porch, which was lighted only by a green-shaded ceiling globe, a child in rompers was playing listlessly with a toy automobile, and a tall, severe-faced lady of rather more than middle age rose to welcome the callers.

"My sister, Jane—Miss Hallowell," said Cliffert; "and this is my little kiddie. Get up, Buster, and shake hands with the pretty lady."

The child looked up with a slow frown. "Don' *yike* be call 'Buster,'" he protested.

Marian Hallowell, mourning for the lost baby, yearned over all babies. Kneeling on the porch rug she gathered the child into her arms and kissed it, burying a tear-wet face in its dark curls.

"My muvver used to do vat," said the infant solemnly; and Cliffert hastened to explain that the child had been with them but a short time and was still missing the mother it had lost.

Miss Hallowell, promptly inferring a domestic tragedy of a sort that would not bear the light, talked commonplaces with the thin-lipped sister, but gave most of her attention to the baby. In some indefinable sense the little one seemed under a cloud. When she put it down it began playing listlessly, as before, withdrawing into itself in a way that struck her as being strangely old and almost uncanny.

Vance sat a little apart, and refused the cigar that Cliffert offered. In the exchange of light talk he said little, and Marian Hallowell could not rid herself of the impression that he was silently watching every movement and weighing every word that was said. Also, she remarked that he did not wait until the end of the conventional twenty minutes before he rose, borrowed Cliffert's office key, and said he must get back to work.

Miss Hallowell was the first to speak after the green roadster was once more headed for the city.

"That child of Mr. Cliffert's," she said; "it's sick."

"Yes?" said Vance, speaking as one coming out of a profound fit of abstraction.

Then he remembered. "It has been sick; Cliffert told me it had."

"It doesn't act naturally at all. I thought at first maybe it was just sleepy; but that isn't it. It plays as if its little brain had been benumbed in some way. Didn't you notice it?"

"No; I was busy noticing something else —a very remarkable thing. Some day I'll tell you about it." And with that he stepped on the foot throttle and the car shot into the business district and the brightly lighted streets. At the first corner turning the bell of a near-by fire hall clanged out clamorously, and as if by magic the street filled instantly with racing vehicles and hurrying pedestrians, all going in one direction. In the distance the white-columned front of the Municipal Building stood out in stately isolation, and around it a mad mob was surging like a tempest-tossed sea.

"Mercy! What is happening?" gasped the young woman at Vance's side; and the answer was fairly jerked out of him as he wrenched the car aside into the first cross street and headed it for the Richmond Park neighborhood.

"They're lynchers!" he barked, "and they're after Ficke! I must get back there. *If they hang the gunsmith, they'll hang an innocent man!*"

In a flash the young woman had reached over and turned the switch, and her foot displaced Vance's on the brake pedal. The roadster came to a squealing stop, and she snapped the door latch and almost pushed him out.

"Go!" she panted; "I can get home all right—oh, go quickly!"

And a half-second later he was sprinting through the nearest short-cut to the city square.

CHAPTER XIV.

COLD CHISEL AND SLEDGE.

Vance kept his head well enough not to try to approach the Municipal Building from the street front, where the crowd was massed in impenetrable wedgings. There was an entrance from the parked space in the rear, and through this he gained access to the interior.

On the main floor where the city offices were, he found a workman mob from the steel mills and shops already in clamorous possession. The mayor, an elderly ex-college professor and a political accident, mounted upon the top of a steam radiator, was wildly gesticulating and appealing for law and order. What few policemen of the night force had been able to fight their way into the building were struggling manfully with the mob, and having failed to stop it at the stair-head leading to the basement and the jail below, were now trying to keep it from jamming itself to suffocation on the stair.

From below came rhythmic crashes of steel upon steel; the blows of the sledge-hammers breaking into Ficke's cell. In vain the weak-voiced mayor strove to make himself heard. Yells and cat calls; shouts of "Bring out the girl-killer!" "Yah! Hang the Dutch devil!" made a din that no single human voice could dominate. With all his patient study of the human puzzle in the large, Vance was amazed. That some such blood-mad outburst might have followed quickly upon a capture of the nurse girl's murderer caught at the time of the crime's commission was conceivable. But that the human mine should explode with such fury three weeks after the fact, with nothing worse than a futile and possibly unrelated bomb-throwing to apply the match, was out of all reason.

As to this, however, there was no time for curious speculations. Fighting his way to the stair head, Vance ducked the clubs of the outnumbered blue coats, swung himself over the stair rail and dropped into the jail corridor. Another battling rush carried him into the space cleared by the swinging sledges, and he darted in to put his back against the bent and battered door grating of Ficke's cell.

Luckily, somebody in the corridor mob recognized him, and a cry went up to the two bare-armed steel workers who were battering at the grating: "Don't be braining him! 'Tis the crazy college guy—him the Dutchman was tryin' to blow up!"

The shout and pause gave Vance his opportunity.

"Hold on, men!" he gasped. "We don't want to make a bad matter worse! Night and day for three weeks I've been looking for the man who killed the nurse and stole the baby in Richmond Park—the same man who tried to kill me in my office last night. I wouldn't say a word if the man behind this door were the guilty one. But he isn't. I can prove it!"

"You have wan minut'!" gritted a red-

faced lyncher with a coil of new rope over his shoulder.

"It's all I need!" Vance shot back. "Get this first: I'm only trying to save you fellows from hanging an innocent man. I know exactly where this gunsmith was on the afternoon of the murder; where he went, and what he did. I can prove by half a dozen witnesses that you'll all believe that at the time the crime was committed he was halfway to Lancaster."

"Go on," commanded the mob leader. "What was he doin'?"

"He was driving a woman named Dietrich to Lancaster to have her testimony taken before a court officer about a land title. You've read in the papers that Maximum Motors was buying land in Lancaster on which to build a branch factory. Ficke was trying to make that piece of land cost Grigsby Jassington a lot more money than the option called for—and he did it!"

"But 'twas him as was blowin' yer office up las' night!" yelped a voice in the crowd.

"You've got to give him the benefit of the doubt on that!" Vance shouted. "Nobody saw him do it, and you wouldn't hang a man because he happened to be the first one the police laid hands on. Suppose one of you fellows had happened to be in that building last night. Any one of you might have been—and with a perfectly good reason to account for it."

The biggest of the two sledge swingers threw down his hammer. "Hell," he spat out, "I'm for anny man that'll get the best of Bully Jassin'ton in a money deal. 'Twasn't the bomb shootin' started this thing; 'twas the girl killin' we wouldn't stand f'r."

The crisis was safely past, but Vance held his ground before the battered door grating until the corridor section of the mob began surging back to the floor above. At the tail of the retreating lynchers the red-faced rope carrier lingered.

"Ye made the riffle," he grinned at Vance, "but I'm tellin' ye, right now, 'twas as much as yer life was worth."

"But why?" Vance demanded. "What started you fellows on this man hunt? Don't you think Jassington is able to fight his own battles?"

" 'Tis little we'd care for Bully Jassington. But when the word was passed in th' shops that the felly that blew your office was the same one that popped off th' little nurse girl in th' park——"

"I see," Vance nodded. "Who passed the word?"

"Young felly named Haskell—checker in th' steel mill."

"Thanks," said Vance; whereupon he followed the rope bearer up the stair and proceeded to lose himself purposefully in the outgoing crowd.

A few minutes after his escape from the dissolving mob, the psychologist, hurrying rapidly eastward, passed through the little park of the tragedy and mounted the steps of the Jassington mansion. Before he could press the bell push the door opened quickly and Marian Hallowell came out to him.

"I was watching for you and hoping you'd come!" she exclaimed. "I couldn't get anything over the phone; the lines seem to be all dead. What happened downtown?"

He told her succinctly what had happened, and that Ficke was safe for the time being.

"But I don't understand!" she protested. "You say you cleared him from the charge of the murder and kidnaping: but wasn't he the one who blew up your office and tried to kill you?"

"No; he wasn't the one."

"But I thought—the paper said the police caught him almost in the very act! How did he happen to be in your corridor at that time in the evening? Surely he couldn't have had any business there."

"That is something I'm going to find out before I sleep. I ran up here merely to tell you that the riot is over—with nobody hurt; for that, and for one other thing."

"What was the other thing?"

"This," he said; and once more became a victim of the primal impulses.

"You—cave man!" she gasped, struggling out of his arms. "Whatever possesses you!"

He smiled down upon her. "You do—completely. Besides, I've just been through a fight—a pretty stiff fight, for a man's life, and perhaps I'm not wholly responsible."

"Is that what I'm to think?" she asked.

"You're to think I'm a little mad, if you like. A great alienist has said that ninety-eight out of every hundred of us are paranoiacs. My pet delusion is that one day I'm going to make you love me. Another, which I'm hoping isn't a delusion at all, is that I'm going to be able to restore

your sister's child—within a few days, or perhaps hours."

"Don't—oh, don't say that unless you mean it!" she faltered.

"I do mean it. We are nearing the end—if I can only be clever enough. But I mustn't keep you standing here; you'll take cold in that thin thing. Good night." And he was gone.

The street throngs had vanished compete ly and the wonted evening quiet of the town had been restored when he ran up the steps of the Municipal Building and tried the door marked "Chief of Police." The knob turned in his hand, and he entered to find Lurby sitting with his feet on the desk and a cigar clamped between his teeth.

"I was thinking maybe ye'd turn up," grunted the smoker. "Was it you sthirred up all this hell-muddle whilst me back was turned?"

"Not guilty," Vance asserted. "On the contrary, I broke in just in time to save the gunsmith's neck."

"So they'd be telling me. I was over at Collinsville at the prim'ry when the word came, and I'm just this minute back."

"I was out of town myself," Vance explained; "getting a bit more evidence in the kidnaping case. I can say definitely now—say it and prove it—that Ficke isn't the man."

"Then why was he thrying to kill you last night?"

"I'm not at all sure that he was. Have you questioned him?"

Lurby nodded. "I did that same—this afthernoon. 'Tis wild wid scare he is, but this is what I'd be getting out of him: he says a man named Bragdon would be sending him a note, telling him you'd got the psychology hook out f'r him, and he'd better be seeing you quick. He says he saw the lights in your office from the sthreet and went up. He swears he was no nearer than the stairhead when there came the smash of glass and then hell was let loose."

As once before in the same room, Vance took a pacing turn up and down behind the chief's desk. When he faced about it was to say: "I believe he was telling you the simple truth, chief. Did he show you the note from Bragdon?"

"He'd be saying he lit his pipe wid it—or the fear it might get him into more throuble."

"A natural reaction," was Vance's comment; then: "Have you ever made a study of reactions, chief?"

The big-bodied ex-ward boss grinned. "Don't yous be thrying to tangle me up wid your high-brow shtuff!—whin I'd not be knowing aven the name of it."

"It's a great little study," said Vance, sitting on the end of the desk with a leg to swing. And then: "You've practically given up all hope of finding the Richmond Park murderer and kidnaper, haven't you?"

Lurby grunted. "And if I have, I'm not printing it in the newspapers," he parried.

"Naturally not: but if the man should turn up now you'd call it a pure fluke—as it would be, under your methods. And these out-of-town private detectives who are taking Mr. Jassington's money; they're out of it, too?"

"Huh! They'll never be admitting it whilst he's paying the bills—and whilst there's an unclaimed kiddie to be found in the forty-eight States!"

"Still, they're out of it—and your men are out of it. That is why I say you ought to make a study of reactions and mental attitudes."

"Could you give thim things a name that a plain man c'd be understanding?"

"I can explain them—yes. Suppose I should reach out and hand you one on the flat of your jaw; what would happen?"

Once more the big man grinned broadly. "Being full Irish on me mother's side—to say nothing of the ould man—I'm a thrifle quick-timpered. 'Tis more than likely I'd be hitting back before I c'd get a grip on me common sinse to know t'was on'y a love tap you'd be giving me."

"Exactly. That would be your reaction to the blow. We needn't go into the philosophy of it—to trace out just what nerve-centers would be stimulated, and how the stimulus would translate itself into action. That is a matter for the textbooks and the fellows who, like myself, make a study of them. But on that simple example we can lay down a broad working principle, namely, that every time certain nerve centers in the human brain are stimulated in certain ways, they will come back at you; not haphazard, but along certain well-defined lines that never vary. Do you get that?"

"Maybe I do, and then ag'in, maybe I don't. But where is all this nervousness getting us in the Jassington business?"

"That still remains to be seen. But I

have the clew, at last, and it's one that I can hand over to you. Will you put yourself and one good man of your force under my orders for the next hour or so, chief?"

"Annything to make the town forget this hullaballoo that's been kicked up to-night by the b'ys fr'm the shops. Shpit it out."

"Very well. You've been in my office in the Corona Building. In one corner of it there is a coat closet, built between my room and the next, with two doors, so that it can be used either for my room or the one adjoining. Temporarily, until I can find other quarters, I'm working in that adjoining room; which is one of a suite of two occupied by Cliffert, the real-estate man. I'm going over there now; and, basing the notion upon my theory of reactions, I have a hunch that the man who tried to get me last night will come again—to finish what he failed to finish with his infernal machine twenty-four hours ago."

"You and your hunches!" grumbled the big Irishman. "But 'tis a bet: what'll ye want me to be doing?"

"This: if the man should come back, and you and one of your men should be concealed in that coat closet——"

Lurby glanced up at the clock on the wall. "'Tis half past nine this minute. Nobody would be looking f'r you to be in your office at this time of night."

"Possibly not. It's only a chance, I'll admit. But it's a good chance. If you'll humor me, I'll ask only one thing, and that is that you don't break in and interrupt until I give you the signal."

"Oh, well; I'll try annything—once," growled Lurby, rising and buttoning his coat. "Go on over there, and I'll be wid you in a couple of shakes." And so the matter was settled.

CHAPTER XV.

CAUSE AND EFFECT.

Vance found an extra night watchman on guard in the ground-floor corridor of the big office building, but he was admitted upon making himself known as a tenant. The elevators had stopped running, and he climbed the three flights to the fourth-floor corridor. The offices on that floor were all dark, including the wrecked room which had been his own.

Fitting Cliffert's key which he had borrowed to the lock of the real-estate office he let himself in and turned on the lights. It was in the outer room of the suite that he had established himself temporarily, with a cheap writing table, and a filing case in which to reassemble his scattered and confused records.

Seating himself at the table he filled and lighted his pipe and waited, twisting his pivot-chair so that he sat facing the door opening into the corridor. In a few minutes he heard guarded footsteps passing the door; a sufficient indication that Lurby and his man had passed on to enter the wrecked room beyond. A little later the momentary gleam of a flash light showing through the explosion-shattered door of the coat closet at his elbow assured him that the ambush had been established.

Thereafter the silence of the tomb fell upon the great building. At intervals the pur of a passing auto or the heel clickings of some late pedestrian drifted up through the window which Vance had opened; but the city, so lately the scene of mob turmoil and clamor, seemed now to have swung to the opposite extreme of a too-early midnight quiet.

A full half hour had ticked itself off on the little clock perched upon the stenographer's desk, and there were faint stirrings as of watchers wearied and impatient in the adjoining coat closet, before other footsteps coming in quick, nervous treadings, made themselves audible in the corridor. Vance's teeth clamped down upon the stem of his short pipe and his hands gripped the arms of the pivot-chair as if he were poising himself for a spring. Then the door opened and Cliffert walked in with a cheerful greeting for the pipe smoker.

"Hello, Bobby! Hard at it, as per usual, are you? How long do you think you're going to stand it—working night and day this way?"

Vance swung his chair so that his back was to the coat closet and answered in kind.

"Since you're here, too, there would seem to be a couple of us in the same boat."

"Oh, no; I didn't come down to work—not at this time of night." Cliffert cast himself into the stenographer's chair and relighted his half-burned cigar. "Somebody phoned out to the house about the riot, and I thought I'd run in town and see what had happened."

"Well," said Vance in the same even tone; "do you know what has happened?"

"Most of it, I guess. They were going to lynch Ficke and you butted in. That was bad medicine, Bobby. You ought to have let them hang him and save the expense of a trial."

"Why should I have let them hang him?"

"Why? Good Lord! is there a shadow of doubt in your mind that he's the man?"

There was a dead silence in the room for possibly ten seconds, and then Vance looked up quickly to say:

"Cliffert, how long are you going to try to keep this thing up?"

The man in the stenographer's chair shifted the relighted cigar stub from one corner of the thin-lipped mouth to the other and the eyes that were too close together became pin points of cold-blooded determination.

"Not any longer, now, with you—since you've deliberately killed your last chance by meddling once more and establishing Ficke's alibi."

"He was your last hope, wasn't he?" said Vance, grimly cool. "You tried first to fasten it upon Freeman, and when that failed, upon Jarvis and Larsen, planning for it straight through without a slip or a stumble. Then it came down to Ficke, and you thought you'd make sure of him. You nearly did it, too, with the forged note purporting to come from the man Bragdon. But we'll pass that up. What I want to know is what you've been doing to Jassington's child."

The cigar stub had gone out again and Cliffert flung it away. When he spoke he ignored Vance's demand.

"You say Ficke was my last hope? You've got it wrong; he was your last hope, Bobby. If you had let that mob hang him—but you wouldn't, and now you'll have to pay."

"I asked you what you've been doing to Jassington's child," Vance persisted quietly.

A curious, high-pitched laugh greeted the repetition of the demand.

"The perfect crime! You said there wasn't any such thing, but there is. I've proved it! That child will never be found. It has disappeared—gone—vanished!"

"It has already been found," was the low-toned reply.

"No!" came the denial, shotlike. "Not when its own mother's sister doesn't recognize it! I set the trap and you fell for it. I meant to prove to you—and to myself—that it was the perfect crime. That's why I asked you to bring Marian Hallowell out to the house. You've played the game and lost, Bobby. I'm letting you live a few minutes longer so that you can tell me how you did it. You're the only one, you know; nobody else has come within a mile of it—and never would or will. Take your time, but don't be too long about it." And with that, he took a pistol from his coat pocket and laid it across his knees.

Vance made no move save to tilt to an easier position in the pivot-chair.

"You first, Jamie," he said calmly. "Tell me how you did it, and then I'll tell you how I found you out."

Again Cliffert's explosive laugh crackled upon the silence.

"I don't mind telling you now. It won't go any further; and you've got that much coming to you. It's a short horse—my part of it. I did what Freeman, or any of the others, might have done; drove into the park, stopped, gave the girl a sniff at the anæsthetic from behind—it was merely a bit of bad luck that she happened to be one of the few nonimmunes—and then coaxed the child to go riding with me in the car. It was all done in the hollow half of a minute. I suppose dozens of people saw every crook and turn of it, but there was nothing sufficiently unusual about it to make them remember. I figured on that; I'd planned it just so a thousand times in advance."

"And then—after you had the child?"

"It took but a few minutes to drive to one of my empty houses in the Cliffton suburb; to put the baby to sleep with a hypodermic, and to get back here so that you, yourself, could prove an alibi for me, since I was in your office when the news of the kidnaping broke. After that, I had only to disappear for a few days—not on the train to the East, as you and others believed, but to the empty bungalow in the Cliffton fields where I'd made preparations for the hibernation. In those few days the child lost about a third of its weight, and its hair changed from flaxen to a dark brown. Then I took it home, and a bit of dope now and then has done the rest. You'll have to admit it was a bright thought—keeping the child openly right here in Middlevale where anybody and everybody could see it. It proves that the thing that is most safely hidden is the one that isn't hidden at all."

"Good!" said Vance. "You've cleared it all up beautifully—all but one thing—the motive."

"I'm going to put you to sleep presently, Bobby, but that is no reason why I shouldn't wish to justify myself to the only man who knows—or ever will know. There was motive enough. I've told you something about how my marriage blew up; something, but not all. Jassington was the man who made a devil of me—because, you see, I loved the woman. He was East, financing one of his cutthroat corporations. That was how he came to meet her. He didn't know my name; the woman kept that much from him; so when I came back from California I settled down here, where he was, to wait for my chance."

Again a tense silence settled upon the room and still Vance made no sign. Presently Cliffert took up the automatic and slipped the safety catch.

"I'm sorry I have to efface you, Bobby," he said, with what seemed to be sincere regret for a disagreeable duty, "but you see how the thing has shaped itself up. It's your life or mine. I saw how the cat was jumping while you were working your way through the various alternatives; saw, and tried to give you a hint or two as you went along. But you wouldn't quit."

"I know," Vance acceded. "One of the hints was given when you tried to run me down one night in Maple Street with your car. Another, of a different sort, was when you dropped one of the baby's pins for me to find on the floor of the kitchen in the Dixon farmhouse. Still a third was based upon your overhearing of a talk between Chief Lurby and me, and the chief's calling of the coal dealer, Rockwell, over the telephone. You knew that Rockwell was the only witness who could clear Freeman, and you got into your auto and tried to fix him so that he wouldn't be able to testify. All you've needed at any stage of the game was rope enough to hang yourself with."

Cliffert was nodding slowly. "I'll admit that there is something in the psychology fad, after all," he conceded. "But still I can't figure out how you got your start."

"Reactions," said Vance tersely; "and I've been jotting them down from the first day. The 'alternatives,' as you call them, have never meant anything to me; they were staged wholly for your benefit—to give you a chance to betray yourself."

"But I don't get the 'reaction' part of it."

"That was the whole thing. In every step that has been taken you have reacted, involuntarily and quite probably unconsciously, in precisely the manner that the criminal I was trying to find would react. You have run true to form in every crook and turning of the course, Jamie; even to the heaving of the bomb through my office transom last night after you had worked upon Ficke's fears and got him up here by means of the forged note; to the inciting of to-night's mob by having your former clerk, Haskell, and doubtless some others, stir up the workmen in the mills; and above all to the shrewd trick of trying to kill out the psychological evidences by doing the thing you falsely reasoned the real criminal wouldn't do—scheming to bring Marian Hallowell and the child together in my presence to prove that there would be no result."

"Miss Hallowell doesn't suspect?—but I saw that she didn't."

"No; your scheme worked, so far as she was concerned. She believed—still believes—that the child she took into her arms a few hours ago was your child. I doubt if the mother, herself, would have recognized it under similar conditions. And as for the child—you must have been using narcotics pretty freely upon it to make its memory lapse so completely."

"No; only a mild shot now and then." The speaker's sudden laugh showed his teeth. "Jane thinks they are mosquito bites on his arm. It doesn't ask for much of the drug to tangle the memory of so young a child. I got that much out of my dip into the biological school in the university."

Vance nodded as one gravely interested in the academic side of the argument. "If you could only have controlled the reactions," he deprecated soberly. Then: "What are you going to do with the baby, Jamie—kill it with slow poison?"

"Nothing like that. I'm going to bring the boy up as my son, and the son of the woman I married—she's really dead, you know. Then, when the time comes, I'll tell him what Jassington did to the woman he believes is his mother. You can figure the outcome for yourself. I'll get my pay when I see Grigsby Jassington dying by the hand of his own son. But that's enough; it's getting along into the night, and what has to be, must be. Have you anything else to say

—or anything you want done after the—er —after you fall asleep?"

"I don't think of anything," said Vance calmly. Then: "You're planning to make it appear as a suicide?"

"Score one more for the psychological deductions," said Cliffert, with the teeth-baring smile. "This automatic is the one that was in the door pocket of my little car. When I'm called upon, I shall testify that I haven't seen it since you began using the car. Of course, it will be found here, just where you might have dropped it after firing the fatal shot. The motive will be chargeable to your profession. For the common run of people, psychology is only another name for a mild sort of insanity, anyway. As to the rest of it, nobody saw me come into the building to-night, and I shall take good care that nobody sees me go out. That's all. Now shut your eyes, please: there's another psychological quirk for you—I couldn't shoot even a dog that was looking at me."

"You really mean to do this thing, then?"

"I'm sorry to be obliged to; I hope you'll believe that, Bobby. I could wish, with all my heart, that you were not my friend; that you were a total stranger. But self-preservation is the first law. If we two were drowning together in mid-ocean, and I could save myself only by pushing you under, of course I'd do it—I'd have to do it. Again I'll have to ask you to shut your eyes."

But so far from shutting his eyes, Vance opened them wide and leaped from his chair, ducking as he sprang to take the murder maniac at a disadvantage. At the same instant the coat closet door gave with a rending crash and Lurby and his patrolman stumbled into the room. Cliffert saw them and slipped like an eel from Vance's pinioning grasp. Then, with another explosion of the maniacal laugh, and before they could gather themselves to rush him, he stepped back, thrust the pistol muzzle into his mouth, and pulled the trigger.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE GREEN CAR.

It was not until after the green roadster had left Middlevale's southernmost suburb well to the rear and was speeding smoothly over the Bickford pike to nowhere in particular that Vance's seatmate broke the silence which had been tacitly maintained by both of them since Vance had trundled the car out of the home garage.

"Did the story in this morning's *Dispatch* tell it all?"

"Substantially all of it, yes."

"But in that the credit is all given to Michael Lurby!" she protested.

"I know; I want him to have the credit. If I am to stay in Middlevale and continue to do business as an industrial psychologist, it won't do to let people absorb the idea that I am actually, or even potentially, nothing more than a different kind of a detective in disguise."

"Then Grigsby's huge reward will go to the police."

"Your brother-in-law may do as he pleases with his money. It couldn't have come to me in any event. In a manner of speaking, you know, Cliffert was my friend. Besides, I'm going to demand a reward that your brother-in-law can't pay."

She looked up at him with a smile which was guileless innocence in its native form. "I know; you're in love with this car: it's mine, and I'll give it to you."

He paid no attention to the gibe. "You haven't told me yet about the baby—and your sister," he reminded her.

"Looking at it one way, there isn't so very much to tell. We raced out to Ingerton Heights last night, after you telephoned —Grigsby and I. Willie didn't know me, of course; any more than he did when we were there together—you and I. But he did know his mother when we brought him home. It's simply heartbreaking to think of what that poor little kiddie has been through."

"You've had a doctor?"

"Oh, yes; he says Willie will be all right again after the effect of the drugs has worn off, but it may take some time."

"I am partly to blame for what the baby has had to suffer," Vance admitted regretfully. "In spite of all that I knew of Cliffert, I was fooled into accepting part of his story as true. I was confident, almost from the first, that he was the kidnaper, but up to yesterday I believed that the child he had at home was his own; that he had your sister's child hidden away somewhere in a safe place provided beforehand. I didn't give him credit for enough originality to imagine that he would take the bold course of keeping the stolen baby openly in Middle-

vale. That was the most geniusful move in the whole desperate game, and the one most likely to make it succeed. Of course, you saw his sister last night? How did she take it?"

"It was dreadful! She was perfectly dazed—stupefied. You are not charging her with being his accomplice, are you?"

"Oh, no; she was merely an innocent accessory. She believed Cliffert's story about his child, just as I did."

"Poor woman! She had had the news of the suicide before we got there, and she acted as if she had been turned to stone. And to make it harder we were taking the baby away: even in the short time she had had him she had learned to love him, I think."

"You didn't leave her alone?"

"No; the neighbors were coming in, and everybody was kind and sympathetic. But that's enough about our part of it. Tell me what happened last night: the things that the newspaper account didn't tell."

He told the story, tersely but vividly, and her lips were pale when he finished.

"How awful!" she shuddered. "And to think that in spite of your being prepared and ready for him he might have killed you! Was he wholly mad?"

"No, not wholly; it was chiefly on the homicidal side—what you might call a blind spot in the moral area. In other respects he was probably as sane as any one, and rather more acutely intelligent than most. That is one of the consequences of a mental unbalancing of any sort. With any of the brain areas beclouded or eclipsed, the others are likely to be developed beyond the normal. It is nature's method of compensating for the crippled faculty. Cliffert's plot and its execution proves this: it was as nearly the perfect crime as could be imagined, but, as you see, it asked for an abnormal mentality to conceive it and put it over."

"I can't yet understand how you came to suspect him in the beginning."

"It wasn't so mysterious as it may seem. When I came to Middlevale three months ago Cliffert was very decent to me—on account of the old college acquaintance; helped me find an office and gave me a good many business introductions. Like many others, he was good-naturedly skeptical about the practical value of my profession; he laughed at it and made a joke of it. One day I bluffed him into taking some of the phychological exams—those prepared for the testing of persons suspected of being unbalanced; though, of course, I didn't tell him that. The series included the blood-pressure test that you may have read about."

"What did you find out?"

"I established two facts; first, and most important, that he was seriously unbalanced mentally, and that this lack of equilibrium made him morally irresponsible. Besides this, the blood-pressure test proved that he either would not, or could not, tell the truth."

"Do you mean to say that you can measure a person's truthfulness with your instruments?" she questioned curiously.

"It has been done, by the blood-pressure test—with the sphygmomanometer. You know what that is; the instrument the doctor clamps upon your arm to measure the tension of the blood in the arteries. It has been pretty conclusively proved that the pressure rises automatically and most remarkably when the subject is telling an untruth. I told Cliffert to give me truthful answers to a certain set of questions that I should ask him. His answers were—either consciously or unconsciously—nearly all plausible lies—as I took occasion to ascertain by investigation afterward.

"Later, when it come to the detecting job, I first tried, as you know, to fix upon the type of person who would, and could successfully, commit the double crime; and I ignored everything else absolutely. Cliffert's was the one mentality within my purview which filled all the requirements—and it filled them precisely. After that, it was merely a question of demonstration—like a mathematical problem, you know. I set about provoking the proper reactions and noting them down as they occurred."

"And you were spinning the web around Cliffert all the time when you seemed to be looking for some one else?"

"Quite so. The whole structure of alternatives—Freeman, Jarvis, and Larsen, Wycombe and Ficke—was built up to give Cliffert a chance to convict himself. These alternatives were all impossibles; Freeman didn't have the mental caliber, Jarvis and Larsen were in the same category, and as for Wycombe and Ficke, I immediately suspected that whatever mystery there was attaching to Mr. Wycombe's visit to the man

Bragdon's home, to the note that Bragdon got in his dinner bucket, to Bragdon's interview with Ficke, and to Ficke's disappearance, was probably due to some angry effort on Mr. Wycombe's part to defeat some business plan of Mr. Jassington's in reprisal for the money loss he had just suffered. A little inquiry discovered the land-title situation at Lancaster, with Mrs. Dietrich, Ficke's aunt, holding the key to it. I wouldn't have gone any further in this direction if it hadn't become suddenly necessary to provide an alibi for Ficke."

"And you thought all this out a step at a time, weaving and spinning, spinning and weaving, drawing the threads tighter and tighter every day—wooh!—it's almost uncanny—inhuman!" exclaimed the pretty listener; and her shudder, if not real, was most aptly simulated.

"Oh, for pity's sake—see here!" Vance exploded. "You mustn't put me over calmly into the diabolical class that way—just when I'm most anxious to convince you that I'm perfectly human from my feet up! It's nothing at all but pure science—spelled with a little 's,' at that!"

"I know; that is what you say. But to think of sitting here right next to a person who can take all the little wheels inside of one apart, and put them under a chilly, shivery magnifying glass, and pick out all the tiny flaws——"

"Oh, good Lord! if I'd only known I was going to do anything like this!" he groaned; and the green car wabbled in sympathy.

"Oh, please be careful with that wheel!" she cautioned. "You'll have us in the ditch!"

"I don't much care; I'd run the little wagon off the steepest embankment I could find if that would convince you that I'm just as blind and foolish as other men when it comes to——"

"To being a creature of impulse," she cut in mockingly. "I'm quite willing to believe it—or a cave man, or anything like that. Where are you taking me?"

"That is the third time you've asked me that same question within three days," he returned grimly. "I'm going to take you on and on until——"

"Until my mental reactions are satisfactory, you are going to say?" she returned demurely.

"Can't you forget the bally business part of it for a minute or two?" he begged.

"The psychological part, you mean, don't you? Yes, I can forget that very easily. Because, you see, your psychology breaks down just at the very identical place where you need it most."

"I wish you'd assume, for just about three minutes, that I'm merely an ordinary human being, Marian, dear—a man, and your lover! But why has my psychology broken down, I'd like to know?"

"Because—well—because, if it hadn't, you'd have known, weeks and weeks ago, that you—that I—oh, *please*——"

And at this the green car, slowed now to a walk and left to itself, ambled peacefully into the shallow ditch at the roadside and stopped; and neither of them cared.

The next complete novel in the POPULAR is by Henry C. Rowland, author of "Utopia." It is called "The Mire," and is an adventure story.

THE FARMER EXPRESSED SURPRISE

JOSEPH P. TUMULTY, secretary to the president, was out for an automobile ride with his friend Otto Carmichael, of New York. After whizzing through Rock Creek Park, they crossed the Potomac and covered a few miles of Virginia roads.

At a rather sharp curve, Tumulty's car just missed an old farmer, thanks to the agility of the farmer. The old fellow, however, was so taken up with his efforts to avoid the automobile that he did not see a motor cycle which was just behind the car. The result was unfortunate. The farmer, the motor cycle and the motor cycle's rider bit the dust in a confused and squirming bunch.

"Jupiter!" complained the old man to Tumulty, who had gone to the rescue. "I never knew your gosh-dinged team had a colt along!"

That Big Word, "Indispensable"

By Clarence L. Cullen

Author of "The Tip on Barney Phelan," Etc.

In which Byron J. Bingley, the celebrated director of the screen world, deals with "a mortified case of megalomania moviensis." Did you ever hear of this ailment? It is quite common. The cure is difficult, but B. J. is not daunted

"THE symptomatology of this screen simp," stated Mr. Bingley, in a voice of dreadful calm considering his actual state of seething fury, "stamps his as a mortified case of megalomania moviensis, superimposed upon a chronic condition of craze-for-the-kale."

The moving-picture concern's stockholders, whom Byron J. Bingley, the celebrated director in chief of the company, was addressing at a hastily called meeting in the administration building, coughed inquiringly and shuffled their feet. They were plain, unpretentious business men, habitually preoccupied with reveries as to dividends. What had "symptomatology"—whatever that meant—and "megalomania" what-d'ye-call-'em—which was rubbing it in—to do with the case of a nearly if not quite indispensable leading screen actor who verbally and in writing had notified Mr. Bingley, on the day before, that he would sign a contract for the ensuing year only upon the condition that his present excessively large salary be doubled? So the director-in-chief's audience coughed and shuffled, and some of the more opaque stockholders drummed despairingly on the long table with their fingers.

"As an actor who can act and a stunter who can stunt," continued the director in chief, scowling at the drummers—as Byron J. Bingley could well afford to, knowing himself to be far more indispensable to the concern than any random-picked dozen of the stockholders themselves—"this money-mad movie mine of ours squats in a pretty good strategic position. The fact that it happened to have been this outfit that gave him his chance to build up his big international reputation cuts no figure at all. The point that we've got to consider is that he's got that reputation neatly stowed away on the ice and that there's no possibility of taking it away from him. They want him; they demand him; they scream for him; they flock to see his screen stunts; and when I say 'they' I mean everybody in the world all the way from Painted Post to Penang."

"Work a little faster, B. J., will you?" dare-devilishly suggested one of the stockholders. "We grant that the son of a gun, besides knowing how to act, is a Class-A stunter, and that he's got a reputation. Suppose you start from there?"

"As I say," proceeded Mr. Bingley, not even fluttering an eyelid at the interrupter, "he's got 'em all shaded as a Thespian of the sill-climbing or squirrel species. Needless to say here, a leading movie man who can do something besides simper and pull the pantalooned languishing-Lydia stuff on a screen, is, far from being a liability, an asset of practically unlimited value to an outfit like ours. This squid, coming to us as he did from the speaking stage, really savvies the rudiments of acting. But that which gives him his big nudge is his ability as a stunter that goes hand in hand with his proficiency as a player. We don't have to fake his falls from cliffs, his rides on freight brake beams, his automobile wrecks, his escapes from the hoosegow by means of the eaves, and all that stuff, because the crafty coyote, a really first-rate athlete and acrobat who knows the coin value of keeping himself in condition, can do anything the insanest scenario asks him to do, from flopping from a bridge into the funnel of a steamship passing full-speed underneath to climbing the Matterhorn without the aid even of an alpenstock."

The stockholders squirmed in their seats. Had they been summoned to this meeting to hear their extortionate leading man extolled? On this showing, wouldn't their acrobat actor have been justified in demanding a new contract with a quadrupled wage, instead of a salary merely doubled?

"If the bird's so good as all that," reck-

lessly suggested the refractory stockholder, "I move that, after voting unanimously to give him ninety-eight per cent of the company's gross receipts, this meeting do hereby adjourn."

"I have stated," continued Mr. Bingley, ignoring the humorist as if he had spoken not, "but one side of a situation so simple that a sand piper suffering from arrested development could sense all the implications of it in the fraction of a second. The other side of the situation I shall express in two easily understandable words: Nothing doing!"

The stockholders blinked expectantly. The ironical one uttered an anticipatory "Ah!"

"Nothing—whatever—doing!" raged Mr. Bingley, suddenly flinging off his mask of dreadful calm. "Any movie monkey who thinks he can get anywhere by pulling that I. W. W. stick-up stuff on me has got several other scratches a-coming! It wouldn't make the difference of a phony piece of eight with me if this coin-copping Carlo could outact Otis Skinner while engaged in climbing the outside of the Washington Monument by the use of his eyebrows, he's never, while his swelled head is hot, going to get me under the gat and gouge me for that twice-the-old-figure tilt in his wages! Not none! Not nohow! I have not, I hope, spent more than half of a crowded lifetime in telling theatrical terrapin, most of them imbued with that tilt-me-or-I-quit theory, just where they head in for dismantlement, to permit, in the fiftieth year of my age, a hoakum huckster who can act a little and roll off a roof when called upon, to prong me with the ultimatum that if I don't come-again-twice-birdie on that wage thing he'll pack up his doll rags and play puss in the corner with somebody else. It is not, I hope and believe, so easy as all that to stampede me into a cold and clinging sweat!"

The stockholders, while the dust from the director in chief's fist bangs on the table was settling and while Mr. Bingley mopped, mutteringly, his bedewed brow, looked satisfactorily subdued and suppressed; all of them, that is, except the sardonic, show-me stockholder, who, after having punctuated Mr. Bingley's outburst with an acrid "Hear!" and a rasping "Bravo!" now sailed under the spotlight with a few searching questions.

"Have you any idea," was his first inquiry, "in case this bird is turned loose at the expiration of his present contract, how you're going to replace him?"

"I'll be in a position to give you a clearer reply as to that," replied Mr. Bingley, settling into his suave manner, "when I have found the correct answer to a computation upon which I am engaged, to wit: Which is easier, to make an acrobat of an actor, or an actor of an acrobat? Much depends upon my successful solution of this problem."

"Is it likely," was the inquisitive stockholder's next question, "that this stick-up screen Silas will be able to stroll over to some other movie outfit that'll pay him twice the wages—the devilish big wages—that he's getting here?"

"Not," was Mr. Bingley's velvety reply, "if secret diplomacy, in the shape of a recently ratified gentlemen's agreement between heads of moving-picture concerns that there'll be nothing cooking by way of permitting stick-up screen Silases to play off one company against another for coin-grabbing purposes—not if this gentlemen's agreement holds, as I think it will."

"Have you notified this porch climber—and that's a name for him that goes two ways—that there'll be nothing transpiring with regard to his gimme-all-you've-got demand?" was the final inquiry of the ironic investor in the Bingley movie plant.

"I have deferred doing that," replied Mr. Bingley, "until I ascertained the sense of this meeting of stockholders on the subject. The sense of the stockholders being unanimously and emphatically against being shaken down by any screen squid whomsoever in the company's employ, no matter how big his reputation, I shall now summon this predatory young person and so inform him."

Whereupon, having obviously ascertained the unanimous and emphatic sense of the stockholders on the subject by the clairvoyant or telepathic method, since only one of them had opened his mouth from the start of the meeting, Mr. Bingley sent for that film favorite of far-flung fame, Egbert Elwell.

After a short delay the renowned young gentleman lounged, pretty sure of himself and with a slight overdoing of his habitual gracefulness of movement, into the presence of the director in chief and the stockholders. Well set up and perfectly turned out as he undeniably looked in the evening clothes

called for by the part he was then playing, it, nevertheless, could be sensed that the stockholders—unpretentious business men occupied mainly with musings upon dividends—experienced a certain difficulty in reconciling themselves to the midday make-up plastered somewhat thickly upon his agreeable enough, if not particularly strong, features; in discerning the need, to mention one item in particular, for the heavy bluish pencilings on and under the lids and at the corners of his eyes; pencilings which gave to the eyes, naturally not at all large or in any other way remarkable, a certain adventitious soulfulness which, considering the brilliant sunshine of the forenoon and the surroundings in general, seemed, to the Philistine minds of stockholders, somewhat incongruous in any male, movie actor or no movie actor. It could be sensed, too, by a skillful and sympathetic senser, that the habitual and slightly gelid or dental smile with which Egbert greeted these sordid stockholders did not get him very far, so to speak, with them. It may have been that they, in common, perhaps, with a multitude of others whose only opportunity to see that smile had been on the screen, had become slightly tired of the Elwell teeth.

"I sent for you, Mr. Elwell," began Mr. Bingley, gazing absorbedly out of a window to denote detachment, "to inform you of the decision of the company's stockholders with regard to your demand for a doubling of your salary in your next contract."

Mr. Elwell, his standing posture almost too graceful for human toleration, nodded, the fixed or frozen smile slightly intensified and the teeth more monotonous, if possible, than ever.

"The decision, Mr. Elwell," said Mr. Bingley, abandoning his detached manner with amazing suddenness, "is nix! Nix, now and forever!"

Egbert, now positively Apollolike in his posture, shrugged indifferently.

"Quite so," said he, tucking the handkerchief a little more neatly into the cuff of his evening coat. "Matter of no consequence, however—no consequence whatever," he added, meaning, as Mr. Bingley and the stockholders, of course, instantly interpreted it: "There's other shops that won't say nix!"

"No consequence whatever is right," purred Mr. Bingley, detached again. "It may be of consequence to you, however, to know, as you are now informed, that quite lately a certain binding, if not widely advertised, agreement has been entered into by the leading picture concerns, whereby their faces are unalterably set against these double-the-dough demands on the part of film performers."

Egbert, palpably with the purpose of producing the profoundest possible irritation, now made his smile a smile of supreme confidence, each and every Elwell tooth seeming to express a sanguineness beyond the power of mere words to indicate.

"We'll see how that agreement works out when my present contract expires," said he; meaning, of course, again: "That agreement stuff'll all vanish into vapor when they're given a chance to engage me."

"Your present contract expires in about a month," said Mr. Bingley, scratching with immense absorption at a slight incrustation of paint or something on a lapel of his coat. "By that time the Hawaiian picture, for the making of which we sail for Honolulu next week, will be finished. If, at that time, you desire to renew your contract with us on the present terms, well and good; we'll be pleased to have your signature. If you don't, well and good again; we'll plug up the hole somehow, and you'll be a free agent. Go to it, son! Get it while you can—if you can!"

Egbert, unable, even with his considerable training in the art of repression, to mask with his smile a certain expression of surprise over this unexpected outcome of his demand, nodded satirically to the director in chief and the stockholders and made an exit slightly less loungingly graceful than had been his entrance.

The show-me stockholder was the first to speak when the door had closed upon the noted screen stuntist.

"While, speaking as a business man, I hate to see a duck all daubed up like that in the daytime," said he querulously, focusing Mr. Bingley. "Still I think you might have taken a vote on the subject of giving the cuss the sack before actually doing it."

"It isn't his daubing, but his doubling, that burns me," replied Mr. Bingley, grinning amiably at the kicker. "And he ain't sacked yet. He's got a month to think it over. In the meantime——"

He stopped short, plunged his hands into his trousers pockets, and strolled meditatively to a window.

"Yes, yes, go on!" croaked the movie investor from Missouri. "'In the meantime we——'"

"In the meantime," snapped Mr. Bingley, as the stockholders, rising and stretching, began to file from the room, "we'll see if, by drawing cards judiciously, we can't fill this mitt as the game progresses. I've seen the needed little stranger drop from the sky into the bob flush at the critical juncture more than once in my nefarious or poker career, and there's no reason to suppose, with a whole lunar month to work in, that it can't happen again!"

But the show-me stockholder was not the only one of the dreamers of dividends who left the room wearing a dubious expression.

II.

The great mass of blossoming honeysuckle clinging closely to the wide screened-in porch of this handsome and spacious Spanish-Mission bungalow, standing well apart from all other dwellings a little back on a main road leading from a fair city in southern California—the beautiful welter of blossoming honeysuckle might just as well have not been climbing over that porch at all, on this particular evening along toward sunset, in so far as any effect of its fragrance upon the surrounding air was concerned. For, while the perfume of blossoming honeysuckle is permeative and penetrating, it is not, properly speaking, aggressive; it possesses no power, by its sheer sweetness, to overcome any stronger or more militant effluvium against which it may happen to be matched.

Honeysuckle could never hope, for example, to win in a grapple for the supremacy of the circumambient air with such a rude, rough-stuff antagonist as frying onions; and frying onions, none other, was the antagonist which this particular mass of porch-sprawling honeysuckle was up against on this occasion.

Frying onions, the delicious, dizzying redolence thereof just sufficiently intermingled with a suggestion of meatiness as not merely to inspire a suspicion, but to clinch a certainty, that the lovely culinary rite progressing somewhere in that very honeysuckle-swaddled Spanish-Mission bungalow must be, could only be, the preparation of beefsteak and onions.

A duster-swathed stout man of middle age, with a silk cap to match his duster tilted back somewhat rakishly on his gray-sprinkled reddish hair, suddenly stopped and braked the big car which he was driving, and of which he was the sole occupant, directly in front of the spacious bungalow which flaunted its honeysuckle but diffused a far more fetching aroma. He squirmed in the driving seat to gaze enrapturedly at the bungalow, and sniffed at the air like a timber wolf getting ready to follow a hunch.

"O heavenly muse!" he gasped aloud. "Gosh! Maybe they'll gimme a hand-out!"

He restarted his high-powered car and pulled it slowly under a great eucalyptus tree at the side of the road in front of the bungalow lawn, where he braked it again. Then he debarked, heavily but determinedly, from the car, walked up the graveled path bisecting the perfectly kept lawn, then up the stone steps, and touched the electric button outside the screen door.

A wrinkled, vaguely smiling Chinaman, straw-slippered and wearing garments of fleckless white that looked like a suit of pajamas but wasn't, answered the bell.

"I want," said the good-natured-looking, jowly man in the flowing duster of silk, "to see the head of this ineffably fragrant home."

The Chinaman pulled the screen door fully open, and the jowly man entered the wide porch covered with thick-piled Chinese rugs of silk and plentifully provided with luxurious-looking deep-seated wicker rockers. Not five seconds following the disappearance of the Chinaman came the sudden cessation of a rat-tat-tat-ing, from somewhere at the back of the bungalow, that could only have been made by a punching bag in swift action. Then a young man, in a home gymnasium rig consisting of armless white silk undershirt, gray gym trousers, and heelless canvas shoes, appeared, giving an agreeable flash of white teeth with his inquiring bow, in the open main doorway.

"Young sir," rumbled the bulky duster-clad visitor, slightly flourishy in his method of removing his cap of silk, "if you deem, as well you might, that the ringing of your doorbell by an utter stranger constitutes an unpardonable intrusion, I can only beg you to consider the condoning circumstances and the overpowering nature of the temptation. I refer, of course, to the unspeakably delightful fragrance which, issuing from your

tasteful home, tugs at the heartstrings—I was going to say, at the very souls!—of pilgrims on the road, and incites them to a venturesomeness not to be restrained even by considerations of good manners."

The agile-looking young man in the gymnasium rig pulled wide the door.

"Don't mention it—come in," said he, smiling broadly. "You mean, of course, that big web of honeysuckle. It's greatly admired."

The visitor, his eyes twinkling, pushed away that idea with both outspread palms.

"Nunno, nunno—I must correct that!" he ejaculated hoarsely. "I cannot, I shall not, accept, under false pretenses, even your momentary hospitality! I do *not* mean the honeysuckle, young sir. Heaven help me for a grossly carnal being, I mean the onions—the joyous, jovial, jocund frying onions. I have, I hope, a decent, normal man's fondness for the fragrance of honeysuckle; but fried onions, son, is different; fried onions isn't a mere fondness, but a passion, a madness; and you see before you a besotted, a hopeless, an incurable fried-onions addict and slave!"

"Same here, sir—we can shake on that," was the agreeable reply of the young man; and when their hands met the visitor, withdrawing his pudgy paw, gazed at it curiously as if to ascertain if any of the fingers had been crushed in that quick, viselike grip. "I'm such a slave to 'em, in fact," the young man went on, "that I'm frequently in disgrace with my wife. She's somewhere at the top of the house at this moment, vainly trying to hide from the attar of onions. But if she were here, as she will be after dinner when the redolence has somewhat died down, no doubt she would greet you as a fellow onion bondman of her husband's. The dinner, of course, will be beefsteak and onions. The steak's the size of a doormat, and Fong Lu, himself an onion maniac, is frying about a bushel of 'em. You're as welcome, sir, as the marigolds of May. Let me have your coat and cap."

Thus, in ready unison through that ancient bond called appetite, the two men quickly fell into easy terms of communion. The younger one started to lead the way from the wide hall, furnished, as were the two drawing-rooms on either side, sumptuously in a style strictly Chinese, like the reception rooms of a mandarin, to a big room at the rear of the bungalow.

"I was exercising a bit—always have a breather of an hour or so before meals," he apologized, opening the gymnasium door. "If you don't mind waiting here with me till dinner's ready——"

"Go to it, good lad," said the jowly man, and his host, without further ado, resumed his bag-punching that had been interrupted by the arrival of the visitor.

The latter, settling his bulky frame in a reclining chair at one end of the elaborately fitted gymnasium, studied the performance and the performer through shrewd, half-closed eyes. The performance, even a tyro could have discerned, was that of a supreme artist in the bag-punching line. The bag was forced to rat-tat-tat in perfect rhythm; the tempo was furiously fast, but there was never a miss. The performer, nimble as a stage acrobat, showed an incredible quickness in all his movements, as, when he quit the bag punching for the heavy dumb-bells, he displayed also an unbelievable strength. Not a big man, every inch of his five feet ten was in thoroughly trained control. He combined the gymnast's symmetry with the weight-lifter's power; heavily-corded forearms, great smooth bulges by way of biceps and triceps, sliding knobs of outstanding shoulder muscles showing through his athletic shirt as he worked. A man of perhaps twenty-seven, with clear-cut aquiline features, crisp, black, close-cut curls tousled regardlessly all over his well-shaped head: in short, an extremely good-looking and capable-looking young man.

"I thought I knew all the headliners," remarked the bulky visitor from his reclining chair, while his host was doing astonishing things on the flying rings, "but for the life of me I can't remember having seen you work anywhere. Yet it can't be that you're an amateur—impossible!"

"Amateur is right," replied the gymnast, dropping from the flying rings to the horizontal bars and doing simply out-of-the-question things on them without apparently taking a long breath. "I've a bug for this sort of thing. Like to keep in condition. Started by taking a few piffling firsts in different kinds of athletic stunts at the University of Pennsylvania. That hipped me on the subject. So I continue it, just for fun and to keep in trim. But it must be an awful bore to watch another fellow going through such antics, eh? I'm through now, though. Wait here, please, till I have a

shower, and I'll be with you for fried onions!"

Scarcely had the young man disappeared into the bathroom at the rear of the gymnasium before there was an uproar of childish squealing in the hall, and two little Chinese boys, about seven and eight years old respectively, with slanting shoe-button eyes and diked out in American-sailor white clothes, scuttled into the gymnasium, yipping at the top of their voices:

"Kitchen chimbley's afire again! Kitchen chimbley's afire again!"

The reclining visitor promptly concluded that his host's wife was hiding away at the top of the bungalow, not to seclude herself from the odor of frying onions, but because she was a Chinese lady who, probably for the reason that she knew no English, preferred not to meet English-speaking strangers. But before he had time to give this conclusion more than one turn around in his mind his host, still in his gym rig, reappeared in the bathroom doorway.

"Confound the landlord of this shack, I wish he'd have that infernal chimney cleaned!" he broke out. Then, to the older of the two little Chinese boys: "Go bring me a sack of table salt, Ling Yi—quick!" He turned to the visitor as the lad, with the awkwardness of his race, ran out of the gymnasium. "Third time since I chartered this house two months ago that that kitchen chimney's started to blaze."

"It's—er—slightly dangerous, isn't it?" suggested the visitor, as one with a vision of beefsteak and onions forever lost in the incineration of a home.

"Oh, no—put it out in a jiffy with a bit of salt," was the reply. "But it's unhandy, happening, as it always does, just at dinner time." He went to the hall door. "Speedo with that salt, Ling Yi!" he called out, just as the boy, lugging an unopened sack of table salt, raced from the kitchen.

The guest, prepared to follow his host up the stairs and, perhaps, to help him with the holding of a ladder while he opened a skylight and so on, stared when the young man wrenched the screen out of a gymnasium window and stepped on the sill. Facing inward, the gymnast, carrying his bag of salt in his teeth, reached upward outside, caught hold of something above, and disappeared from the view of those within. The two little Chinese boys scrambled out of the window to watch the proceedings. The guest, pretty limber himself for a heavy man of middle age, followed them out of the window, and took up an observing position alongside them on the lawn.

The host was climbing up the side of the Spanish-Mission bungalow by the hand-over-hand or movie-stunt method, with a bag of table salt in his teeth. There were only window frames, awning gear, the leads of eaves, and such insecure and fragile-seeming projections to furnish finger-and-toe clutches. But the young man in the gym rig was negotiating these impossible-seeming aids to climbing as if they had been neatly carpeted stairs. By the time the visitor had fairly planted himself on the lawn to watch him, the gymnast, after a perilous swing from the bending eaves leads, was pulling himself to the red-tiled roof, where, quickly getting to his feet, he loped over to the flaring kitchen chimney, and, in something less than a minute, extinguished the blaze by tossing into it the contents of the sack of salt which he had ripped open with his teeth.

He climbed down the side of the bungalow by means of the same slight and hazardous projections he had used in ascending it, and, wearing a sooty smile, stood alongside the pair of Chinese lads, now clacking outlandishly in their own tongue, and his astonished guest.

"Devilish risky kind of work, if you ask me, son," exclaimed the visitor. "In the movies, as I've been informed, there's a deal of faking at that sort of thing; hidden projections for the stuntist that the camera, and, therefore, the audience, don't catch. But practically everything you grabbed hold of, going up and coming down, was something foolish looking that was liable to have given away on you. Wild work, lad; and life is pretty sweet for youth, ain't it?"

The young man, modestly disregarding this, mumbled the hope that the chimney would behave itself long enough for him to get his shower and shift into clothing suitable for an attack upon beefsteak and onions, and vaulted back into the gymnasium by using one finger, casually rested upon the window sill, for leverage. The visitor, left alone on the lawn with the little Chinese lads, who promptly exhibited acute embarrassment over this situation, was trying to think of something appropriate to say to them whereby to establish a modus vivendi and wondering at the same time

how it had come about that his nimble, well-educated young American host had happened to take unto himself a Chinese lady, the mother of these slant-eyed children, for a wife, when he was transfixed by the sound of a musical feminine voice, directly over his head, uttering this astonished and astonishing exclamation:

"Bless my soul and body, if it isn't beloved old B. J.!"

Mr. Bingley, his eyes batting under the level rays of the setting sun, stared aloft. A pretty, not to say a positively beautiful, young woman, was gazing excitedly down at him from a second-floor window balcony.

"By the hot coppers of Tantalus," incredulously muttered the renowned movie director in chief, "if it isn't my little Mazie Murdock of blessed and abiding memory! Come down here, imp, to be bear-mauled!"

"Turn your back, then!"

Mr. Bingley turned his back.

The young woman, whose black-bobbed hair was hanging loose, swept the hair, with one swift adept movement, into a crinkly mass at the back of her head and confined it there by thrusting one great gold pin through it. Then, gathering together the lower billows of her kimono, a wonderful garment of soft black silk emblazoned with a gleaming thread-of-gold Chinese dragon sprawling menacingly from back to front, climbed nimbly over the balcony rail and, using for ladder rungs the ornamental fretwork at the sides of the single stanchion supporting the balcony, descended quickly to the lawn. Mr. Bingley, turning just in time to be compelled, out of modesty, to avert his eyes from the last flash of black silk hosiery, wondered, among other things, what use the stairs in that Spanish-Mission bungalow were to its present occupants.

"Dear old thing!" burbled the uncommonly lovely young woman, racing over to Mr. Bingley.

"Honey bug of Hymettus!" retorted Mr. Bingley, catching her under the kimono sleeves and lifting her high. "Likewise," he added, setting her down, "runaway and renegade!"

Nearly three years before, when Mr. Bingley, by patient and protracted coaching, had movie molded this engaging young woman into a screen actress for whom he had every right to expect fame and fortune, she had suddenly vanished. A rumor had flitted back to the Bingley movie lot that Mazie Murdock had made a most successful marriage with some well-to-do nobody. And here she was, winsomer and prettier than ever, laughing moist-eyed in his face, with a Chinese dragon of gold sprawling all over her.

"But such a happy runaway and renegade, old dear!" said she, dabbing at her eyes with a foolish little handkerchief which she plucked from the inner sleeve of the kimono. "And isn't it good to see you again! Listen! Scold me some, like you used to, won't you, B. J.? Call me silly and stupid and simpish and simian-minded—please! It will sound so natural! You don't know how I missed your scolding, old thing—I did enjoy it so!"

"Look here," demanded Mr. Bingley, "is that young gymnastic genius now under the shower in there your husband?"

"Gymnastic genius indeed!" she bridled. "Why, that's only one of the things he's a genius at! He's a genius at everything, B. J.! Geniusiest genius you ever met in your life—I'm crazy to have you know him!"

"Know him?" exclaimed Mr. Bingley. "Who says I don't know him? Didn't the man drag me here to partake of beefsteak and onions with him? But wait a minute!" He flickered his eyelids in the direction of the two little Chinese boys, who stood in shy silence a short distance away. "I, of course, figured for a certainty that my host's wife would be a Chinese lady. You're Celestial, Mazie, but you're not Chinese! How come?"

She laughed, then sped over the lawn to the bashful little Mongolians and drew them to her.

"Mine by adoption, B. J.—aren't they ducks?" she said. She returned to the director in chief's side and said to him in a dropped tone: "They're the motherless children of a noted Chinese bandit whom Bill—that's my husband—saw executed at Tsze-Fwu. He's a tender-hearted dear, is Bill, and he adopted them. That was before we were married. But they're both of ours now and I'm awfully fond of them."

"See here, Mrs. Bill, let's work fast," said Mr. Bingley, suddenly becoming business-like and drawing her to the front of the lawn. "This husband of yours would be Heaven-sent for me if he could act just a little bit!"

"Act!" ejaculated Mrs. Bill. "Why, Bill's the dandiest amateur actor on the

globe! He was stage director and leading man of the Mask and Wig at the University of Pennsylvania, and he's done leads in amateur theatricals all over the world since then. Act! You ought to see Bill do the leading part—Gillette's part—in "Secret Service!' And I've heard old-timers say he's a better *Captain Swift* than Maurice Barrymore was! Why, we're rehearsing 'Jim, the Penman' now, and——"

"Enough!" snapped Mr. Bingley, his eyes ablaze. "He's my man! Will the dawdler ever come out from under that confounded shower, I wonder? Call him, Mazie! Call him! If I don't have this man signed within the next three minutes——"

Mrs. Bill placed a restraining hand on Mr. Bingley's wildly flailing right arm.

"But you can't sign Bill for the movies you know, old dear," she said gently.

"Can't sign him?" barked Mr. Bingley. "Why can't I sign him—with a princely salary for bait? Who *says* Uh can't?"

"But Bill, B. J., doesn't need any salary, princely or other," Mrs. Bill went on with intensified gentleness by way of unguent for the disappointment she knew she was causing. "He has more money now than we'll ever be able to spend between us—and I'm some little spender myself, if you'll remember! Not only that, but Bill has embarked upon the career he chose for himself. He loves that career. Nothing will ever detach him from his pursuit of it. I'm sorry, old thing. But it's absurd for you even to dream of Bill in connection with the pictures."

" 'Lo, people," said Bill, at that instant appearing outside the front screen door in a mandarin's coat of lilac satin, with Chinese black satin pantaloons drawn together at the ankles and Chinese shoes of white felt. "Dinner's ready. That means upstairs for you, Mazie."

"Not this time, Bill!" his wife squealed delightedly. "I'm not only going to sit at the table with 'em, but I'm going to eat 'em for the first and last time in my life—celebration stuff! Bill, this is the best friend I ever had before I met you! He's Mr. Bingley of the——"

"*Not* the screen-famous 'Byron J. Bingley presents——' " wonderingly exclaimed the husband of Mazie.

"None other, of course!" said Mrs. Bill. "And if he wasn't a father to me in some gloomy hours, then I never——"

"This *is* a pleasure, Mr. Bingley!" exclaimed the accomplished Bill, leaping down the porch steps three at a clip and extending a sinewy hand.

"Much obliged to meet you, son, but I only try a thing like that once," said Mr. Bingley, sidestepping, and he shook hands with himself instead of accepting the other's proffered hand.

It was a remarkably agreeable and chattery beefsteak-and-onions dinner. Mrs. Bill made good her declaration and ate fried onions, proclaiming her discovery of the singular fact that they ate better than they smelt.

After the dinner the three conferred until far in the night.

III.

Egbert Elwell, screen stuntist and film favorite, was perturbed. There were those among his sea-voyaging moving-picture associates who even remarked unto each other, sotto voce and smiling, that Egbert Elwell was peeved.

The steamship *Nikko Maru,* from San Francisco for Yokohama via Honolulu, had been following the molten-golden sea wake of the setting sun for but two days when Egbert's perturbation and peevishment took such a hold upon him that his meals did him practically no good at all.

The ship's benefit for the Seamen's Fund was the occasion for Egbert's dissatisfaction with life as it lay. On the steamer's second day out Mr. Bingley, assembling in the main cabin the Bingley Number One company en route for Honolulu for the filming of a Hawaiian picture play, addressed them in easy, colloquial fashion.

"Folks," he said, "the benefit for the Seamen's Fund, than which no benefit could be worthier, takes place to-morrow night. This company will furnish the bulk of the show, of course. Now, let me offer a suggestion: Instead of giving a hit-and-miss variety show—everybody doing a song or a dance or an imitation or telling a story and that stuff, which is the patternized ship's concert thing—suppose we give a play; a regular, sure-enough, speaking play? Huh? How 'bout?"

"Whee!" approved the Bingley movie company in chorus. "That's the eye, chief!"

Moving-picture principal performers like to get chances to act speaking parts, for various reasons. The main reason is that,

feeling themselves to be interned in monotonous silence by their screen work, they enjoy declaring themselves right out loud by means of the spoken word. Again, the uttered play furnishes the movie actors who have been on the speaking stage an opportunity to prove to their confreres who have never acted "in the legit" what world beaters and knock-'em-out-of-their-seaters they were before the movies claimed them. And still again, the movie actors who have never been on the speaking stage know perfectly well that that speaking stuff is a mere inconsequent detail of real acting, the essence of which is pantomime and mugging, and they welcome a chance to show the stuck-up simps from the speaking stage that they, the straight-out movie-trained ones, can talk a part as well as, if not better than, the presumptuous parrokeets who are always bragging about the "legit."

"Good—glad you like the idea," went on Mr. Bingley. "I've got a rip-snorting good play for you, folks. It's a classic. I've got the parts because I'm thinking of filming it. Here's a chance for you to familiarize yourself with your parts for the play's actual screen production later on and at the same time show what quick studies you can be when it comes to the speaking stuff. It's a play that was a record runner in England and the States about thirty years ago, long before the time of you theatrical infants. Maurice Barrymore—it seems necessary to inform the present generation that Maurice Barrymore, the finest actor and the greatest wit of his epoch, was the father of Ethel and John and Lionel Barrymore—made the hit of his successful life in the leading part. The play is 'Jim, the Penman'—a whacking piece of work if you're asking me!"

The company gave Mr. Bingley another hearty "Whee!" A few of the older performers had seen revivals of the fine old play in stock, and even the youngest among them vaguely recalled the "Jim, the Penman" tradition.

"It's a big cast, and there's a good part for everybody," concluded Mr. Bingley. "I've already got all of you cast. I'll be obliged if you'll streel to my cabin, right after luncheon, when I'll serve out the parts. Now, folks, remember! This is going to be a feat for you—quick-study stuff! There'll be no rehearsal at all, but I'm figuring on every one of you being letter-perfect to-morrow night. We've got a seasoned and cosmopolitan crowd of globe trotters on board this man's ship for passengers, and we don't want 'em to turn up their noses and say to each other, 'Oh, they're just dummy movie people!' because we halt in our lines. Get me?"

They got him, and after luncheon they "streeled" to Mr. Bingley's cabin and received their parts. All except Egbert Elwell, the leading man of the company. Mr. Elwell, to employ a reportorialism, was conspicuous by his absence.

Mr. Bingley, after completing his task of dishing out the subordinate parts, went to Mr. Elwell's suite, carrying the leading male part in his hand. He found his leading man stretched out on the divan of his two-rooms-and-a-bath cabin, enjoying an after-luncheon siesta with a motion-picture magazine—open at the page on which his picture appeared—beside him.

"That's right, son—take it easy while the easy-taking's good!" Mr. Bingley greeted his leading man cordially. "Forgot to drop in on me for your *Jim* part, eh? Well, I've brought it to you. Great part. Stuffed with the old suet. Fattest leading-man lines you ever listened to. You'll stone 'em to death as *Jim*, my boy."

Egbert, slowly rising from his reclining to a sitting posture on the divan flapped a deprecatory hand and waved away the typewritten part which Mr. Bingley was in the act of proffering him.

"Nothing doing, chief," said the leading man, somewhat ostentatiously suppressing a yawn. "In fact, to quote an observation which you made to me not long ago: Nix, now and forever!"

"Ye-eh? Just like that, eh?" remarked Mr. Bingley, slightly disappointing Egbert by not crumpling in a heap to the cabin floor. "Meaning, I s'pose, that you're not going to act pretty and show us what you can do as *Jim*, eh?"

"Correct, chief," said Mr. Elwell, murdering another yawn. "There's no particular reason that I can see why I should put myself out for your glorification, considering the deal you handed me a while back when I asked you for a perfectly reasonable new contract."

"Sure enough, sure enough!" observed Mr. Bingley, stuffing the leading *Jim* part into his breast pocket. "I had a sort of a hunch that you wouldn't oblige on this occasion, considering the outrageous way

you've been abused since you've been in my employ, but I wanted to give you a cherished chance to turn me down anyhow. I possess, as you'll acknowledge, the heartiest sympathy for any man who's been so badly mishandled as you have been by me, so I see your point of view perfectly. Enjoy your siesta, son—sorry I disturbed you!" And Mr. Bingley stepped out of Egbert's luxuriously furnished suite with a jauntiness that was as inexplicable as it was surprising to the leading man.

Before four o'clock tiffin that afternoon it became known among the company, all of them enthusiastically studying their "Jim, the Penman," parts, that Egbert had "bucked on the boss," as they phrased it, and that he was not going to play *Jim* at the Seamen's Fund benefit performance on the following night. The company took this in a spirit distinctly condemnatory of Egbert.

"Crab stuff," commented an old-timer of the company who had a way of finding out everything that happened back of the Bingley movie-concern scenes. "The dope is this: Eggie, whose contract expires in a couple of weeks, maced B. J., before we embarked on this voyage, for a contract calling for double dough next year—as if the son of a gun ain't getting right now something like a fifty-fifty cut of the entire Bing profits by way of salary! B. J. gave Eggie the big nix-nix on that, of course. So the stiff's as sore as a butcher. I wonder if he thinks he'll get anywhere with B. J., and make him come across with that twice-the-kale thing, by sticking him up this way—bucking when asked to work at a Seamen's Fund benefit? Not if you're asking muh, Eggie won't! That stuff ain't done—not with B. J.!"

This informed old-timer, acting as emissary for the company, which wondered whether the "Jim" performance would take place at all in view of Egbert's defection, approached Mr. Bingley on that point.

"You bet the performance will take place!" Mr. Bingley told the old-timer. "You tell 'em to study their heads off. We're going to have an elegant performance of 'Jim.'"

"Then somebody, I suppose—maybe you yourself, Mr. Bingley—will read the part of *Jim?*" inquired the emissary.

"Not on your corrugated crayon, bo!" was Mr. Bingley's reply to that. "I've got a man for *Jim.* Just you folks go ahead and get ready and *Jim* will be on the job all skeegy!"

Before night the word somehow got around among the company that the fellow who was going to play *Jim* was that good-looking skate, William J. Sopwith, or Solforth, or something like that, whom Mazie Murdock had married. Mazie, whom they'd all seen come aboard at San Francisco with this nifty-looking husband of hers and a flock of Chinese servants and a couple of cuteykin-looking little Chinese boys, had become seasick, so it was understood, before the *Nikko Maru* had passed the Farallones, and had remained out of view. Mazie had greeted with enthusiasm and real affection her old friends of the company immediately upon coming aboard, but she hadn't said much about her husband; she had seemed sort of reticent on that subject, in fact. But Mazie's man, the company agreed when they saw him walking the deck constantly with B. J.—wasn't it queer how B. J. seemed to know absolutely everybody on earth worth knowing?—Mazie's man, the company'd say, didn't need to have Mazie or anybody else speak for him. Swell looker. Class. Real thing. Swingy bird, too, by the way he carried himself—something underneath those lounging duds of his besides flab; looked like he might go some in a mix, with those shoulders. Globe-trotter, obviously; had a wad the size of the Woolworth Building, it was understood: wasn't he playing poker a good deal of the time in the smoke room with the smallest chip on the table costing five bucks per copy? So it was Mazie's man, eh, whom B. J. had picked to do *Jim?* It was wondered by the company if the Sopwith, or Solforth, or whatever his name was, guy could act any? Never could tell. He looked a good deal like an actor at that. And would B. J. cast a boob who couldn't act for the leading part in a performance he was taking such a profound interest in? Did B. J. know an actor when he saw one—foolish question, buddies! And hadn't Bing said there was going to be an elegant performance?

Egbert, cognizant of the condemnation of the company, hovered on the outskirts of this deck gossip, striving to look superior to all chatter whatsoever, but failing somewhat ignobly to register this pose convincingly. Before the company turned in that night it

became known that Miss Grace Gaylord, the extremely winning and amiable leading woman of the company, had become violently seasick that afternoon and would be unable to play the leading female part in "Jim" on the following night; and that Mazie Murdock—or Sopwith, or Solforth, or whatever it was—had recovered from her seasickness and had been asked by B. J. to take Miss Gaylord's place. Well, the company unanimously agreed, Mazie could act, whether her husband could or not! She'd be coaching him a lot, of course, out of pride, and she'd drag him through his part somehow.

Egbert, still hovering and listening, began to smell a mouse. What was this fellow, Mazie Murdock's husband, doing on board the *Nikko Maru*, anyhow? Was he really an actor, and not a mere globe-trotter, after all? And was B. J. carrying him down to Hawaii on this trip just to show him, Egbert, that he wasn't indispensable—would even B. J. have the gall to do a thing like that? However, pooh-pooh!—several and sundry pooh-poohs! Even if the "Jim" performance showed that this silent, toplofticallooking coot, Mazie's husband, could act, what difference would that make? He might get by as an actor. But—ho-ho!—where would he head in as an acrobatic stuntist? That was Egbert's edge—his unmatched ability as a stuntist in combination with his competence as an actor.

Nevertheless, Egbert turned in that night with a sinister sort of a feeling that that old B. J. scoundrel somehow had him framed.

IV.

When, in the final scene of the last act, "Jim, the Penman," famous international forger, concludes, with the police banging at his door, that the game is up, and steps behind a screen—in order not to send the audience away shuddering—with his customary savoir-faire for the purpose of planting a bullet in his brain—you are permitted to hear the report of the bullet—when the Seamen's Fund performance of "Jim" in the vast main saloon of the *Nikko Maru* came to an end with this crash of a cartridge, the verdict was unanimous that the honors were overwhelmingly Bill's—or Mazie's Man, as the Bingley moving-picture company called him for lack of a clearer understanding of his real name and rating.

The audience of world-wandering voyagers enthusiastically and unqualifiedly so pronounced. The company agreed without exception or reservation and with equal enthusiasm. They had all done well—extraordinarily well, considering the short time given them for the study of their parts and the lack of any rehearsal. They had done themselves and B. J. proud, as the latter beamingly told them. Mazie Murdock, in the leading woman's rôle, had positively picked her part up and run away with it—good girl, Mazie! But—forthrightly declared the company as a unit—Mazie's Man, as *Jim*, simply had earthquaked 'em out of their chairs. Let alone the marvelous feat of study—the fattest he-lead rôle in the language, maybe barring *Hamlet*—accomplished in less than twenty-four hours, where had this loungy-looking bird picked up his stage finesse, what? Where had he copped those easy gestures?—Otis Skinner stuff! And the entire part performed perfectly in the key, subdued, restrained; when the temptation, had the actor been a misfit, to mouth and bawl the lines of the melodrama would sure have been irresistible!

So, when the play came to a triumphant end, and the supposedly deceased *Jim* had been compelled to take no less than fourteen bows, the company got around Mazie's Man and told him—enormous praise from actor folk to any actor's face—that his performance hadn't been so rotten. Whereupon Bill carried the company below to the *Nikko Maru's* inviting grill, and there was some very special supper food, indeed, and a great deal of vintage champagne all 'round—of which Bill himself partook of nearly three sips—and the Bingley Number One Company turned in that night with the conviction firmly implanted in their minds that Mazie Murdock, taking things by and large, had done pretty tol'able well for herself, if you were asking them!

Egbert, who, after having declined to participate in the play, had failed to exhibit the good taste to absent himself from the performance, paced the steamer's deck in the darkness while the grill fiesta was in progress and for a good two hours after all hands had turned in, his before-mentioned perturbation and peevishment now fused into one steady simmering seethe. What was in the wind, anyhow? It sure looked as if foxy old B. J. was starting something for the purpose of smoking him, Egbert, out! Hadn't that

quiet-looking bird whom Mazie Murdock had captured for a husband—hadn't he acted the part of *Jim* smack-dab up to the hilt, though! Egbert, himself a better-than-average actor, knew good acting when he saw it, and there was no possible denying that this fellow was an actor plus! Well, what of that? Could he do anything else? Could he by any chance do sure-enough movie stunts? Egbert shuddered slightly when he reached this speculation. For, with the fellow's really fine build and zippy way of handling himself, Egbert saw no good reason to suppose that he couldn't do movie stunts if required to do them, or, at any rate, learn how to do them. So Egbert, finally turning in, tossed restlessly upon the fine big bed in his two-rooms-and-a-bath leading-man's suite, and dreamed, when he finally did fall asleep, that somebody with a countenance very much resembling B. J.'s was trying to build a charcoal fire under his couch.

It was quite late in the forenoon when, after this restless night, his Japanese valet awakened him by bringing him his coffee and rolls. After his shave and his cold tub and his careful dressing, all accomplished with the expert aid of the Jap, Egbert strolled out to the main deck for his forenoon constitutional. Sauntering forward, he came upon virtually all of the ship's passengers, including all of his movie associates, packed at the side-to-side rail forward of the bridge, gazing down absorbedly at something that was happening on the deck below, up near the eyes of the ship. Egbert, squeezing into the crowd in order to get a finger hold on the rail, stared below, and found himself growing quite chilly, though the heat in that latitude was becoming marked.

A scientific wrestling match was in progress on a mat spread on the deck below. One of the wrestlers was a huge Japanese, a man with the bulky body of a cinnamon bear; a descendant of long generations of expert Japanese wrestlers, now returning to his own country after a year of exhibitions in the United States. His really fine muscles were heavily incased in fat, after the Japanese notion of what a wrestler should be, yet his strength obviously was as enormous as his skill was undeniable. His wrestling costume was the somewhat amplified breechclout of the Nipponese wrestler.

His opponent, dressed in a gym rig consisting of gray full-length trousers, a white silk athletic shirt, and canvas shoes, was the innocent cause of Egbert's sudden sensation of chilliness in the strong sunshine of the deck. This wrestler was Mazie's Man. Egbert, himself by no means deficient in muscle and thew of the showier sort, instantly perceived that in respect of bodily build Mazie's Man had him outclassed by several knots or sea miles. Mazie's Man had the arms and shoulders of a weight lifter, without a weight lifter's muscle-boundness, combined with the symmetry of a Class-A gymnast; he was, in fact, a magnificent specimen; anybody with half an eye could see that, and Egbert had two perfectly good eyes.

Moreover, it was perfectly plain that Mazie's Man was going to win this mat match from a Japanese wrestler whose shoulders, Egbert derived from the comments of those about him, rarely had been pinned. The match, Egbert soon learned, had been in progress for a full half an hour, without a fall, before he reached the rail; the Jap had tried his entire box of tricks, including a great deal of high-grade jujutsu stuff, on his opponent, without getting anywhere whatever with that repertoire; and now, at the very moment of Egbert's arrival at the rail, Mazie's Man had got a sure-enough American-man toe-and-scissors hold on the Jap, and was slowly but surely turning him over on the mat.

"Atta boy, Bill! You got 'im!" Egbert's movie associates and many of the male globe-trotters were bawling down in encouragement of Mazie's Man. "One shoulder down—turn 'im over, Bill! Whee! Both shoulders pinned! Goo' boy, Bill! Whee-ee-ee!"

The *Nikko Maru's* second officer, who was acting as referee, gave Mazie's Man the slap on the back that proclaimed him the winner, and Egbert, hastily withdrawing himself from the rail, walked aft, meditating deeply.

"Hey, folks, pipe Eggie!" mumbled, sotto voce, the informed old-timer of the Bingley movie company as the leading man left the rail. "Eggie hasn't smelt a single, solitary thing, I s'pose? And his shoes are not full of the sanguinary fluid as he walks, what? Double coin in the new contract, hey? It's just like B. J. to let himself be sandbagged like that, ain't it?"

Half an hour later, Egbert, still strolling ruminatively around the main deck, came

upon Mr. Bingley and Mazie's Man, the latter now changed into extremely well-fitting civilian whites. Mr. Bingley, very agreeable, stopped Egbert and introduced his companion, and they had a few moments of deck chatter. But again that night Egbert turned in with the feeling that something in his neighborhood was smoldering.

Diamond Head, shaped like an amorphous crouching sphinx, the unforgetable headland of the island of Oahu that holds Honolulu, was sighted early on the next morning, and Egbert was out on deck earlier than usual, meaning that he made his appearance about ten o'clock in the forenoon. Again, by a peculiar coincidence, he found a great many of the passengers grouped forward, directly under the steamer's signal yard, their heads thrown back. They were watching a large, sleepy-looking sea booby, stupidest of all birds of the sea, which had alighted on the end of the signal-yard mast and was drowsing there with its head under a wing.

"Silly beggars, those boobies," the English purser was saying to a party of ladies. "Tamer than barnyard chickens, too, when they're tired. Let you take hold of 'em and carry 'em about. They often light right on deck and the men of the crew maul 'em around in play for a while before turning 'em loose."

"Oh, I'd love to have a close view of that one!" one of the ladies exclaimed.

"Chance for you, Eggie, old thing," suggested a member of the Bingley company. "Lady wants a close-up of that booby. Your kind of stuff. Why not oblige her?"

Egbert, noting that, while there was a rope ladder leading up to the signal yard, the remaining twenty feet of the mast would have to be climbed by the knee-clutching method if that booby were to be plucked from his roost, shrugged indifferently.

Different, however, with Mazie's Man, who, walking with Mr. Bingley, had joined the booby-watching group just in time to overhear the lady's expressed desire to see the bird at close range.

Mazie's Man, regardless of his spotless civilian whites, disdained the rope ladder leading to the signal yard, but took it, hand over hand, for the yard by means of the signal halyard that happened to be hanging loose. It was about thirty feet of upward hand-over-hand work, but Mazie's Man negotiated it with no more apparent difficulty than the ordinary individual experiences in walking upstairs from the cellar. He shinned up the bare twenty feet of projecting mast like a lad winning the greased-pole competition at a farmers' picnic, plucked the docile and drowsy booby from his perch, shinned down the mast with only one arm encircling it, and then, to protect the bird, sped down the ladder from the signal yard to the deck and deposited the clumsy booby at the lady's feet.

The performance evoked a rousing American cheer. The cheer was ringing discordantly in Egbert's ears for two solid hours before he made his decision.

The *Nikko Maru* was steaming half speed into the harbor of Honolulu when Egbert rapped on the door of Mr. Bingley's cabin.

"Come in!" came the hearty invitation, and, when Egbert entered the cabin, Mr. Bingley, busy packing away some papers in his grip, greeted him cordially. "Nice little run we've had, eh?" said Mr. Bingley to Egbert. "Charming place, Honolulu, too. Never been in Honolulu, have you? Well, you'll like it. The place of all places."

"Mr. Bingley," said Egbert, clearing his throat to relieve himself of a certain hoarseness which he felt sure was there, "I've been thinking over that contract business. I've never had an idea, of course, of holding you up. A man, you'll grant, is entitled to go after all he can get—isn't he? But, after all, the money I've been getting this last year isn't bad money. And I don't feel, upon consideration of everything, like inconveniencing you upon such short notice. So I've decided to sign up for another year at the present salary, and to wait another year or so before demanding the increase we've been negotiating about."

Mr. Bingley, leaning far back in his deep wicker chair and thrusting his legs far forward, rubbed his chin reflectively.

"Um—ye-eh, I see, I see," said he. "Well," he added slowly, scratching his ear, "perhaps—er—uh—perhaps I can permit you to sign for another year at the present terms; subject, though—please remember this!—subject to the approval of the stockholders even after you've signed. For I am bound to inform you, Mr. Elwell, that the stockholders were extremely incensed over your manner of making your demand at that special stockholders' meeting. If you—er—uh—care to sign at the present terms,

subject, as I say, to the visé of the stockholders, why—uh——"

"Oh, I guess that part of it'll be all right," put in Egbert, using his gelid dental smile to screen his anxiety.

"Let's see—where is that contract I'd prepared for you?" mumbled Mr. Bingley; sorting over the papers he had been packing away in his grip. "Oh, here it is. Your idea is to sign now, eh? Just a minute, then, till I summon a couple of gentlemen of the company to witness the signatures."

The steward soon brought the couple of signature-witnessing gentlemen of the company, and all hands, after Egbert, put their handwriting on the paper. Egbert lingered in Mr. Bingley's cabin until the two witnesses, upon being thanked, withdrew.

"Well," said Egbert when he was once more alone with the director in chief, "there'll be no need for the two of us on the pay roll. So now, I presume," this with a short laugh that somehow did not sound rollicking, "the man you brought with you to take my place will go back to the States about his business?"

"Huh? How'zat?" inquired Mr. Bingley, looking up wonderingly from his packing.

"That fellow Sopwith, or Solforth, or something—Mazie Murdock's husband, I mean—that you've been putting in training for my shoes," said Egbert. "You'll not be carrying him any longer, of course, now that I've signed for another year?"

"My dear fellow!" broke out Mr. Bingley.

He sprawled far back in his chair and laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks.

"My dear fellow," Mr. Bingley resumed when he was again capable of coherent speech, "you can't really mean such an absurd thing as that—you simply can't! You refer, of course, to Mr. William Pennypacker Sopford. But how on earth did you ever gather the impression that Mr. Sopford, a rising man in the American consular and diplomatic service, had any intention of ornamenting my pay roll? Preposterous! I'm surprised at you. Mr. Sopford, my dear sir, is not and never will be a moving-picture actor. Mr. Sopford is United States consul at Tsze-Fwu in China, and, far, indeed, from having the most remote purpose of debarking here at Honolulu to participate in my humble moving-picture activities, Mr. Sopford, after a short vacation in the United States, is now on his way back to China, via Japan, to resume his consular duties at Tsze-Fwu."

There will be another Cullen story in the next issue of POPULAR.

FINE PIE ARCHITECTURE

PARTS of Missouri are famous for the food set forth at their summertime basket picnics. Consequently, the housewives pride themselves on the good things they provide for their friends and neighbors.

At one of these affairs a statesman of considerable prominence was the honor guest of the community's leading citizen, and, at the rustic feast, delivered a real oration on the excellence of a gigantic, double-crusted green-apple pie—that is, he was oratorical when not handicapped by a full mouth.

He accompanied his host and hostess home for supper. Before the last meal of the day was served, Mrs. Leading Citizen called out her colored cook and told her in the statesman's presence how he had enjoyed the big pie.

"And, Emma," continued the hostess, "all of us admired the fancywork you had on the top crust—all those curlicues, dots, and arches."

"Yes," chimed in the statesman. "How did you do that, Emma?"

The cook smiled, stood first on one foot then on the other, writhed her hands as if in agony, and was dumb. Ensued much urging and repetitions of "How?" The cook became desperate.

"I don' know as you'd zackly approve, m'um; but I had to have a sharp tool to work with; so I jes' up an' used your extra false teeth!"

Beef

By H. H. Knibbs

Author of "The Ridin' Kid from Powder River," Etc.

Old Bill Strange explains some of the high jinks in the times of his violent youth, correcting the idea that all a cow hand ever did was to get drunk, ride a horse, gamble, fight, kill or get killed

THE captain, who had served in the Philippines, South Africa, Nigeria, the Cameroons, and who knew the Seven Seas as he knew his own door-yard, is about the mildest-mannered Britisher who ever bumped a pulahan into the Great Beyond or taught a Hun good behavior. He had seen so much of the real thing that when he said he would like to witness the making of a moving picture, I thought, at first, that he was joking. But he was in earnest.

"Society stuff—or a scrap?" I queried.

"Well, cowboys, if you don't mind."

"Good! There's a rip-roaring picture being made right now by the Mesa Company. I happen to know some of the boys. Hop in and we'll run over there."

The "set" on the big, open-air stage showed the interior of an old-time Western dance hall. About the stage loafed Mexicans, sheriffs and deputies, bad men, villagers, and painted ladies, waiting for the action to begin. It was warm. The leading lady sat in the door of her dressing room reading a magazine. The star, a notable Western actor, was discussing stage business with the director. The "heavy" and the camera man were having a mild argument. The assistant director smoked a cigarette and studied the scenario. Along the steps of the dressing rooms a group of cowboys lounged, laughing and joking. I introduced the captain to the boys. We sat on the steps and lighted our pipes.

"They look like men who have done things," remarked the captain.

"They are all real hands in this bunch," I assured him.

"That's a picturesque old chap, over there," said the captain, nodding toward where Bill Strange sat by himself, the old-timer of all old-timers. It needed no make-up to enhance the fact.

"Bill doesn't talk much," I told the captain.

Just then the boys were called to a scene, which did not happen to require the presence of old Bill. He leaned back against a post and fumbled in his pocket, ineffectually, it seemed, for a look of disgust touched his lined face. Evidently, in changing from his "town-clothes" to Western apparel he had forgotten to transfer his tobacco and papers.

We moved over to where we could view the action better. The captain watched the proceedings closely. I noticed that old Bill was looking at the captain pretty hard.

A little later we shifted our positions, which brought us closer still to the old-timer. I knew his name and had seen him in many pictures, but I had never shaken hands with him. Occasionally he raised his keen blue eyes and glanced curiously at the captain. I dumped the ashes from my pipe and put it in my pocket. I drew out tobacco and papers and began to roll a cigarette. Old Bill's eyes shifted to me, and then away. I proffered the makings. He nodded, and as he rolled a wisp of a cigarette he spoke.

"Buenos Aires," he said, without glancing up.

The captain, who had been intent upon the picture-making, turned quickly, as though some one had called to him. Old Bill grinned. "Met you down there, onct. July, eighty-nine."

The captain's bronzed face brightened. "July, eighty-nine? I don't recall your name, but I recall a circumstance——" and he introduced himself. The old-timer nodded. They chatted a while about Buenos Aires and some incident having to do with a cantina and the pampas. Presently the captain turned to watch the action, which embraced the abrupt entrance of the star on horseback, the sudden disperson of the dance-hall folk, gun play, and the breaking of some stage furniture.

"Did they really do so much wholesale shooting those days?" queried the captain.

"Frequent. Only they wasn't shootin' blank ca'tridges," Bill chuckled. "But these here pictures don't always show the reason for such killin's. Some folks gets the idee that all a cow hand ever done was to git drunk, ride a hoss, gamble, fight, and kill or git killed. The boys did them same things—but mostly they had a reason for doin' 'em. Sometimes it was liquor or a woman, but mostly it was beef."

"Beef?"

"Yessir! Beef. I come clost to gettin' ketched onct myself, and it was beef that was at the bottom of it." Old Bill paused and gazed across the stage. I held my breath, fearing that the old man would let his statement go at that. But the meeting with the captain who had evidently befriended him in some way, down there in Buenos Aires, had warmed old Bill's heart. I mentally folded my flippers and waited. The captain had forgotten the making of the picture, as Bill, the silent, leaned forward to overcome the noise on the stage.

"I had a contract to furnish beef for the soldiers at Fort Ainsworth. Feed in them parts was poor and my cattle was thin. One day the Q. M. tells me the beef I was furnishin' wasn't up to army requirements. I knowed it. He said if I didn't furnish better beef he'd jest buy what he needed somewhere else and charge it up to my contract. I seen where I stood to lose more'n I ever owned. So I set to thinkin' of how I was goin' to fill that contract and make a little somethin', 'stead of losin' a lot.

"I knowed where they was some good cattle, about two hundred miles south. I figured if I traveled fast I could git them cattle to the fort in time to save my contract. I would have to travel fast and light. I figured about three hundred head would be a-plenty. So I oils up my six shooter, borrows a double-barreled shotgun from the Q. M. and tells him I'm goin' south for a spell, and that I'll have some fat cattle back at the fort inside of thirty days. But I told him to say I was jest goin' on a hunt, back in the hills.

"It was a mighty poor idee to talk about your business to folks, them days, specially if you was packin' money and travelin' alone. I had the cash for them cattle in my money belt, so I kind of let it leak out among the boys that I was goin' for a hunt.

"I knowed I'd need help, pushin' the cattle up North and holdin' 'em nights, so I gits holt of a young Mexican boy that used to hang around the fort, and I ast him if he would like to go huntin' with me. He was mighty handy with a hoss and a rope, jest as handy as a man. And he had plenty nerve. He said he would go anywhere, so long as he could ride. I told him he would git plenty ridin' afore we got back. I fixed it up by givin' his ole mother a side of beef, and I tells her to tell anybody that asked, that me and the kid had gone huntin' in the hills. The boy's name was Esteban, but we jest called him 'Steve.'

"I sure picked my saddle hosses for that ride—a big iron-gray that could outwalk any hoss I ever seen, and a tough little buckskin cayuse for the boy. I took two pack animals: and I let Steve take a ole six shooter that was layin' around my shack. Steve sure thought he was a made man.

"We lit out about three o'clock one mornin' without sayin' anything, and headed south. Steve was the proudest kid you ever seen. He like to wore out his rope a puttin' it on everything in sight as we jogged along, and when he wasn't practicin' with his rope he was talkin' or singin' or foolin' with that pistol—which was empty, seein' as I had figured to ride back alive.

"The kid sure was a good hand around camp, rustlin' wood and water, and hobblin' the hosses and cookin' like it was play for him—and I reckon it was. We made good time. In ten days we was at the Ortez rancho where I had figured on gettin' some first-class beef. Then Steve caught on to what kind of a hunt I was makin', and the idee of helpin' me push them cattle back to the fort sure suited him down to the ground. He was only a kid, but he was a natural-born buckaroo, kind of heady to hold, sometimes, but always willin' to do what I told him if I told him quick enough.

"I settled with ole man Ortez for them cattle and told him they was gov'ment cattle—just in case somebody took a notion to 'em, while we was driftin' 'em up North. Folks used to take them kind of notions, them days. A man with a small outfit, drivin' cattle up the trail them days, never knowed the cattle was his till he sold 'em —which sounds kind of queer, but you git the idee? You see, captain, we wa'n't hooked up to stand off no crowd. Jest me and the boy and three hundred head of cattle that wa'n't any too willin' to hit the trail.

"We pushed 'em along as fast as was good

for 'em, and seein' they was jest two of us to handle 'em, we didn't git any too much sleep. That didn't bother the kid none. He was the livest kid I ever seen. But somehow, with ridin' all day and worryin' when I wan't night herdin' to spell the kid, and goin' ag'inst the heat, I got kind of sleepy-like in my head, not but what I couldn't see and hear and know what I was doin', but I wan't honed up to a cuttin' edge, like."

The old-timer paused and turned to watch the action. The Mexican orchestra was playing in the big saloon set, and the cowboys were dancing with the girls. He shook his head. "They didn't dance them kind of dances, them days," he said, half to himself.

The captain proffered a cigar. Old Bill chuckled, as though recalling something humorous. "Beef!" he said. "Beef was the why of it."

"Did you get your cattle to the fort?" queried the captain.

Old Bill nodded. "Four days north of the Ortez rancho, we was driftin' along easy: young Steve was ridin', off to the left, and the dust was a-rollin' and a-blowin' acrost the flats, and nothin' but a hard sky and a hot sun in sight, when my hoss put his foot in a hole and like to stood me on my head. But we was goin' easy, and he was strong and come up all right. Mebby you don't believe in signs? Well, I don't, a whole lot. But I knowed that hoss never walked plumb into a hole like that without a dog-gone good reason. So I sets to lookin' around for the reason. I didn't look long, or far. I jest watched his ears. Right soon he tells me by them ears that he seen somethin' way off to the right. We was jest pullin' up a easy grade on the flats when I seen that reason a fannin' it our way, with a couple of other reasons ridin' alongside of him. I had that ole shotgun under my leg, and she had two man-size doses of buckshot in her. But I didn't calc'late to do any arguin' that-a-way 'less I had to. The three strangers lopes up. I've seen some prairie dudes in my time, but the boss of that outfit had 'em all beat. But he was a hand, all right. I could tell by the way he set his hoss. And he was about the handsomest rooster I ever laid eyes on. His hair was black and curly, and he sported a little mustache that was sure peart and slick. His big, white Stetson had a leather band, spotted with silver. He wore a red sash, like them Mexicans and he packed two ivory-handled six shooters, and rode with a Winchester under his leg. His boots was stitched fancy, with yella and green thread, and he had pants made of that there buckskin-gray Spanish cloth and a little coat of the same. His eyes was black and snappin', but they wa'n't room enough between 'em to suit me. 'Course he was dark complected, but he wa'n't all Mexican. I got that the minute he opened up. He talked like a educated fella. The two hombres with him was jest ordinary cow hands.

" 'Mornin'!' says the prairie dude.

" 'Same to you,' says I.

" 'Looks like you had your hands full,' says he, polite, and noddin' tow'ds my cattle and the boy.

" 'Not so full but what I kain't let go and scratch my ear,' I tells him, for I didn't like his looks, or the way his men acted. They set their hosses like they was ready to make too quick a move for jest ordinary American cow hands, mindin' their own business."

"The curly headed fella laughed, and it kinda sounded like he wa'n't takin' me serious. 'If it's all the same to you,' he says, smooth and easy, 'I wish you would drift your cattle a couple of miles west of this trail. I got some stock of my own, ahead there, and I don't want to run any chance of their gettin' diseased. I see your cattle are from the South.'

" 'Suits me,' says I. 'I'm willin' to oblige. But they ain't no sick cattle in this bunch.'

" 'Thanks!' he says, and wavin' his hand he reins round and fans it back up the trail.

"Young Steve was settin' his hoss longside of me. I was watchin' that prairie dude and his friends lope off. 'What do you think of that outfit!' I asts the kid, jest to see what he would say."

" 'Malo!' says the kid, without blinkin' an eye. "Them bad hombre, I think.'

" 'We're thinkin' alike, this mornin',' I says to Steve. 'But so far I don't see no reason for us to be ornery. We'll push the bunch over west a piece. You ride out and turn 'em—and keep your eye peeled.'

" 'Si! I peel him,' says the boy. 'But my gun she have no shoot.'

" 'That's all right. I'll tend to the shootin', if they's goin' to be any,' I tells him.

"So Steve gits busy and rides acrost the end of the bunch and swings 'em.

" 'Bout two miles fa'ther north we come to a draw. I figured by the lay of the land, we had likewise come about two miles west of the old trail and that if we pushed the cattle through the draw we would cut into the old trail ag'in. Young Steve was ridin' a piece ahead of me and to the right. I hollers to him to pull up a minute. Then I makes a quick ride along the side-hill and gits ahead of the bunch. I seen they was plenty cattle tracks in that draw, like mebby outfits had been drivin' around like that prairie dude had ast me to do. The bottom was cut up a-plenty from the bunchin' of cattle goin' up that draw: jest a trail mebby as wide as a wagon road, and ankle-deep with dust. Well, them cattle was dry, and the next water was quite a piece ahead. So we pushed 'em along, Steve and me ridin' behind on the wings, where we was tryin' to see through that rollin', chokin' dust. We was coughin' a-plenty and cussin' some, when somethin' kind of stirred the dust-cloud around us. I think it is a steer, breakin' back. But it wan't no steer. First thing I knowed I was lookin' into the business end of a ivory-handled six shooter, and the dust was settlin' as the cattle moved on. 'You can leave 'em—right here,' says the prairie dude. 'It'll save you a whole lot of hard work and trouble.' Then I knowed why he had ast me to drift my cattle a couple of miles west of the old trail. They wan't no chanct of stickin' us up on the old trail, 'cause we could 'a' seen 'em comin'. But in that draw, which was chokin' with dust, we couldn't see nothin'.

" 'Course I put up my hands, and jest then I seen another of them cow thieves alongside of the kid. They was no use arguin'. They had us.

" 'These here is gov'ment cattle,' says I, hopin' the prairie dude would kind of pull back when he heard that. But he only smiles and says that in that case I wouldn't lose nothin'—and that the gov'ment could stand to lose a few head of cattle.

"I was gettin' kind of hot. That there dude was so dog-gone polite it riled me. I started in to tell him jest what he was, but he only grinned and says, 'Get goin'!' And I knowed by the way he said it that they was only one other thing to do—and that was to git bumped off, so I calls to the boy and we swung round and rode back down the draw. When we got on the flats we hit for the old trail and rode north a piece.

"The fa'ther I rode the madder I got. The kid was askin' me what we was goin' to do; but I wasn't talkin' jest then. We made mebby six or eight miles afore we pulled up in some brush and lit off my hoss and set down on the ground to think. Settin' down on the ground and thinkin' steadies a fella quicker'n anything he can do, when he's riled.

" 'This mornin',' says I to myself, 'I was ownin' three hundred head of cattle, and had a fair chanct of makin' good on that contract. This evenin' I got two saddle hosses and two pack animals, and a mighty poor chanct of doin' nothin' but curlin' my tail and fannin' it for the fort.' The more I thunk, the madder I got—but it was cold mad. I had got over bein' hot. The country ahead sure looked empty. I figured that that outfit had got word somehow, that I was comin', with jest a boy to help, which would make it easy pickin' for them. And it sure was. There I set, busted, and with a contract to fill and feelin' foolisher'n a hen hitched to a buckboard. But it wa'n't losin' out on my contract that riled me so much, jest then. It was thinkin' of that prairie dude's face, and how he got the drop on me so easy. I could 'a' stood it better if he'd acted sassy, but he was as polite as a wood pigeon, jest cooin' his orders like he was sorry to make me any trouble. No, I wan't mad at the idee of losin' out on the contract, so much; for I knowed I was takin' big chances when I started out with only a kid to help me. But settin' there on the ground steadied me a whole lot. And the steadier I got, the more I thunk of givin' that there cow thief the supprise of his life. I knowed he wouldn't be lookin' for me to do anything but light out for home, 'cause he would figure I wan't such a fool as to ride back and start a row, or else he'd 'a' took my shootin' irons, right quick. He reckoned he had me whipped.

"All this time the kid was settin' alongside of me, holdin' the reins of his hoss and blubberin' like as if them cattle had been his, and he had lost 'em. I seen he wa'n't scared—jest mad clean through. Now they is all kinds of nerve, captain, as you know. They's the r'arin', fightin' kind, the cold, snaky kind, and the quiet, settin'-still-and-waitin' kind, and I wondered if the kid had that kind of sand. So I ast him. 'Steve,' says I, 'if I was to hide you and the hosses in the brush somewhere around here, where

not even a Injun could find you, would you be willin' to stay, and not make a move, till I come back with our cattle?'

" 'You goin' kill them hombre for the steal?' says the kid, and he quit blubberin' right there.

" 'I dunno. I'm willin'. I got a idee thataway.'

" 'Then I stay,' says Steve.

" 'All right, pardner. If I don't git back in three days, you jest fork your hoss and ride for the fort. You can tell 'em what happened. Take some grub along, but you better turn the rest of the animals loose, and never mind tryin' to drive 'em back with you. You want to travel fast, and if you took the hosses, them hombres might ketch you. Sabe?'

" 'Si! I do like that.'

" 'All right. Don't make no fire, and keep clost to the hosses till I show up. Right ahead is some rough country where I reckon I can hide you out so nobody but the Almighty'll know where you are.'

"So I done it—leavin' the kid and the hosses in a little cañon quite a piece off the old trail. They was grass and water there, and plenty brush. Then I jest takes my six shooter and that ole shotgun and some hard bread and jerky, and a canteen, and I sets out afoot. I headed south."

"I sure stepped quiet and easy when I come near to that place where we had been stuck up. Then I trailed over east a couple of miles, goin' by the stars as near as I could. I was glad they was no moon right then. It was plenty light enough by the stars for what I was goin' to do. I knowed I was up ag'inst a big job. That outfit had been doin' business reg'lar, judgin' by the handy way they had done me. I knowed I couldn't stick 'em all up in a bunch, like they do in these here pictures. I figured to saw 'em off one at a time. First, I located where the cattle was. Then I located which way the wind was blowin'. I could hear the cattle, movin' around slow in the dark; and workin' so I was down wind from 'em, I bellied along in the grass, pushin' the ole shotgun ahead of me easy.

"I figured the night hawks would be ridin' clost to where I was, and I didn't want one of their hosses to get wind of me there in the grass, afore I was clost enough to make that ole shotgun a sure thing. It was too dark to use a rifle, if I'd 'a' had one."

"After a while I heard one of the night herders ridin' along slow and hummin' a song. I laid mighty quiet, hopin' he'd show up ag'inst the sky, long enough for me to draw a bead. I wan't far from the cattle, and, sure enough, he come ridin' along, but they wan't no sky line back of him. I could hear the saddle creakin' and his hoss steppin'; but I wa'n't takin' a hair out of the tail of my chanct to git him. He rode by me, and I almost let him have it. But I says to myself, this here game is where I got to win every hand, or git busted. So I laid quiet and waited for him to drift back.

"I did some thinkin' while I was waitin' there in the grass. I was wonderin' if that outfit got me, what the kid would do—if he would git back all right, for he had a long ride ahead of him. And I was wonderin' what they would say back at the fort when I didn't show up. I sure hated to have 'em think I had lit out, to git out of fillin' that contract. But I quit thinkin' about that when I heard the night hawk a-ridin' back, singin' his little ole song to hisself. I didn't know jest how I was goin' to git a bead on him, but I knowed I was. And right about then he pulls up his hoss, mebby twenty feet from me, and I kind of guessed what he was goin' to do. You see, I had to shoot from the ground, where I was layin'. I dassen't make a move, for fear his hoss would hear me and snort. He was rollin' a cigarette, there in the dark. He brung the match up, between his hands. I seen his face. I cut loose. He never knowed what hit him. His hoss left there quick. That ole shotgun sure talked out loud. The fella must 'a' jest lifted out of his saddle and dropped.

"I heard another night hawk holler, 'way over on the other side of the herd. I was thinkin' of leavin' there, right then, when I got another idee. And right a-top of that idee comes the other herder, poundin' along in the dark and callin' out, 'What the hell's the matter, Jim?'

"He never found out. I let him have the other barrel jest as he was stoopin' over his pardner in the grass. I reckon I jest about sawed him in two, for he never made a move after I shot. Then I figured I'd kind of sift away and let the rest of the outfit think it over, in the mornin'. I reckoned they would, when they found them two fellas in the grass."

"About three miles west of the herd I bushed out that night and I'd a slept pretty

good if it hadn't been for some ants that got to prospectin' around under my shirt. Anyhow, when the sun showed up I hunted around till I found a spring, back in the hills. I filled up, for I was mighty dry. Then I lit out from there and bushed down on the top of a ridge, in the brush, from where I could see the country below pretty good. I laid out all day, drinkin' from my canteen onct or twice, and chewin' some jerky and hard bread. I wondered how the kid was makin' it; and what them fellas said when they found their night herders there in the grass.

"It sure was a long day, and hot. When I wasn't sleepin' I done some figurin'. By the size of the bunch of cattle they was holdin' I knowed they had more'n my three hundred head. And I knowed they'd be mighty particular about showin' themselves ag'inst the sky line after what had come to their pals. I couldn't work that game over ag'in. But somebody would have to night-herd them cattle as long as they stayed where they was. I was wonderin' why they *was* stayin' right in one place after havin' stole my cattle and mebby the rest of their stuff. I found out later that they figured they was strong enough to set up in business right there where the grazin' was good and the water. They had killed a Mexican outfit that owned the first bunch they stole—and they might be right there yet, if they'd bumped me off.

" 'Long about eight that evenin' I set out, figurin' to come onto the cattle from the South, this trip. It took me mebby three hours to work 'round to where I was clost enough to see 'em, dim in the starlight, out on the flats where they was no chanct of gettin' clost to 'em without bein' caught at it. I was layin' in a little neck of woods, 'bout a quarter of a mile from where they was holdin' 'em. I couldn't do nothin', so I jest set my back against a tree and done some thinkin'. I knowed my bunch would naturally drift South if they wa'n't mixed up too much with the rest of the herd. And I was layin' south of 'em.

"I could hear the night-herders movin' around, but they wa'n't lightin' no cigarettes that evenin'. I wa'n't sure, but I thought I could make out only two riders on the job. Thinks I, mebby that outfit ain't so strong, after all. I never jest exactly honed to be on foot, anywhere; but at night, with the brush around me, I could keep out of the way of any man on a hoss, and most like git him, at that.

"Long about midnight I set up quick. I heard somethin' steppin' clost to me, and then somethin' steppin' off to one side. Pretty quick they was a snappin' and cracklin' of brush and I knowed that some of the cattle had drifted out of the bunch. Then I heard a rider come patterin' down to turn 'em back. He was movin' right smart along the edge of the brush, and jest the difference between the light on the flat and the dark in the brush give me my chanct. I pulled down low, bein' scared of overshootin'. It was a longer shot than the others, and it got him, but it didn't finish him right off. I was mighty glad to git away from the sounds he was makin' as he crossed over.

"I didn't stay and try for another. I knowed that would be a fool idee. I jest sifted off through the brush, and laid out all that day, gettin' what sleep I could, and drinkin' warm water from my canteen, for I wa'n't takin' a chanct of goin' near a water hole right then. I figured that outfit was short three hands. I was wonderin' how many was left. Likewise I was wonderin' where they was holin' up. I was kind of itchin' to get a look at that dude outlaw, over the end of a gun—the gun bein' mine, this trip.

"I knowed I had 'em guessin' hard. They didn't know who was pickin' 'em off so easy. Mebby they guessed, for they had seen that ole shotgun under my leg when they stuck me up. I figured they would light out of there right soon. Likewise I figured I'd try and be around to see 'em start.

"I laid out till along about midnight. Then I set out, figurin' to work east of the outfit this trip and find out where they done their cookin'. It was rough goin' at night, but I took it easy, havin' plenty of time. I had quit doin' night work. I knowed they wa'n't camped north or south or west of the cattle. I had been on them three sides of 'em. So I worked over to where I figured I was mebby a mile east of the herd, and set down in some brush on a little hill and waited for the sun. Long about sun-up I spied some smoke curlin' from a draw between me and the cattle. I watched that smoke a spell, and then backed down the hill and worked around and started for that smoke. I sure did some crawlin', and it was

slow work. The sun was warmin' up right smart when I come to the edge of that draw. Right ag'inst the west bank was a dugout, which a man never could 'a' found comin' from the west till he had stepped onto it. The smoke was curlin' up from it, and out in front was two saddles. I reckoned I knowed why them saddles wa'n't inside. They was a hoss tied in the brush clost to the dugout and another hoss grazin' down the draw. I laid and watched that door, but nobody come out. The sun was burnin' into my back and I was sufferin' for water. Likewise I was gittin' tired of eatin' jerky and hard bread. I thought I could smell coffee boilin'—but mebby I jest imagined that.

"I dunno how long I laid there, blinkin' the sweat from my eyes and squirmin' when the sun got to bitin'. It was a right long time. I didn't know how many was left of that bunch, but I was willin' to find out. They wa'n't no window in that dugout—jest the door, and that was shut. Somebody was doin' the cookin' for that outfit, and I says to myself that it sure wa'n't the dude. Well, the dude and the cook makes two. Then mebby they is two or three left and they're holdin' the cattle. Now the dude, he wouldn't be doin' that kind of work, neither. He's the boss. If I can git him——

"Takin' my six shooter in my left hand, I stepped down the side of that draw, with the ole shotgun held plumb on that door. If it opened, the fella that opened it would sure make a mistake. But you see they wa'n't expectin' that anybody would come walkin' plumb up to that dugout in the daylight, 'cause they had got the idee that whoever was pickin' 'em off, was doin' his huntin' nights. I figured they would figure that-away.

"I had the butt of that ole gun ag'inst my hip and I knowed she was lined plumb center, so keepin' her there I kind of edged round easy so as not to be right in front—and then I let off my six shooter. Out jumps a fella and his gun flashed. He like to got me, at that, but that charge of buckshot sp'iled his throw. It took him in the belt, as I found out later. It was the dude. He jest wilted, right there. I like to sawed him in two.

"Then the door she went shut, mighty sudden. I was thinkin' of lettin' go the other barrel into that door, but somehow I kind of hated to have that ole gun empty right then. So I stepped round lively and got to one side, where I could see the door if anybody tried to come out. I come pretty clost to cuttin' loose the second time, when I seen the door move a little, but I didn't know how many birds was roostin' in there, so I watched mighty sharp. Pretty quick somebody pushes a stick out through the crack where the door was jest open a little, and on that stick was a white rag. I liked to laugh, only I wa'n't feelin' jest exactly that way. So I tells 'em to hurry up, as I was gettin' nervous. Then out comes a waddie. The minute I seen him I knowed he wan't much account. 'I'm cookin' for this outfit,' he says. 'I ain't no outlaw.'

"'You won't do no more cookin' in this here vale of steers,' I tells him.

"'Don't kill me!' he says, shovin' his hands up.

"'How many more is in there?' I asts him.

"'Nobody. Lank and Bill quit this mornin'. They done rode south.'

"I held that ole shotgun on him and backed him into the dugout, after makin' him open the door wide, so I could see in pretty good. Then I turned him round and felt for his shootin' iron, which I took care of. Then I pushed him outside, with the muzzle of that ole meat getter. 'I'm givin' you one chanct,' says I. 'If you're lyin' to me, and they *is* somebody over with the herd, the minute I spot 'em I'm goin' to blow a hole in you that'll leave nothin' but your hat and your boots. Step along ahead, and step slow. Git goin'.'

"'What you aim to do to me?' he squawks, as I prodded him along to a little ole tree on the west edge of the draw.

"I didn't tell him, right then. I jest tied him to that tree and went back and throwed that there silver-studded saddle which was in the dugout on the hoss that was tied in the brush near by. It was a mighty fine saddle and a mighty fine hoss—better'n any I ever owned. I took them two ivory-handled guns from the dude, and his Winchester was on the saddle. Then I rode over to where the cattle was. I could tell by the way they was actin' that they wa'n't nobody holdin' 'em that mornin'. I figured the cook had told the truth, for onct. I rode back and untied him. I ast him a few questions. He told me that findin' them night-herders in the grass had chilled his pardners so bad that they had quit and rode

south where it was warmer. The boss had tried to make 'em stay, but they couldn't see it. What scared 'em was havin' their pals dropped so sudden, and nobody around what did it.

"I seen I would have to move quick to keep them cattle bunched, so I give the cook his chanct, and he took it. 'You help me round up and cut my stock,' I tells him, 'and if you do that, without makin' the wrong move, or tryin' to make a get-away, I'll agree to turn you loose when we git the job done. I'm ridin' a fast hoss—and you know it. Figure out what you want to do—and figure quick!'

"It didn't take him long to decide. He set to and helped me round up and cut out my stuff. We bunched 'em and drifted 'em north on the old trail.

" 'You takin' me to the fort?' he says, as we was ridin' along.

" 'What fort?' says I. 'What do you know about any fort?'

"He seen he had let his foot slip, so he went right ahead and told me how his boss had figured it all out, havin' got word from one of his pals workin' for ole man Ortez, that I was headed north with some mighty fine cattle. And I could see that the fella was jest what he claimed to be, a cook, and no real outlaw—jest a kind of weak-headed waddie who would work for anybody that would hire him.

"When young Steve seen us driftin' in with the cattle he was a mighty supprised kid. He'd been layin' up on the edge of the cañon, lookin' out acrost the flats, and wonderin' if I was comin' back, when he spied us. But he didn't make no move till he was sure it was me, and he wa'n't sure till we was right clost, account of the strange hoss I was ridin'. Then he come a-boilin' down on his buckskin pony, slid him up to me, took one look at that hoss and saddle, and them ivory-handled guns, and grinned. He knew jest about what had happened to that prairie dude. And I sure must 'a' looked blood hungry. I was packin' them two fancy guns, the Winchester, the old shotgun and my own six shooter. I had them fancy sixes hangin' one each side of the horn, and a gun under each leg. I sure didn't need all that artillery, but I had a idee.

"That evenin' I turned the cook loose and told him to fan it faster'n he ever done before. He did. I reckon he stopped by that dugout and got some grub and what was worth packin' of the dude's outfit—but that wa'n't his clothes. They was sure sp'iled."

Old Bill Strange chuckled grimly. "I wonder if some folks would figure three hundred head of cattle was worth four humans? I dunno. It's kind of hard to figure the right or wrong of a job like that. I always figured I was kind of actin' as a deputy for the Almighty, in riddin' the earth of them coyotes.

" 'Course, when I took them guns and the hoss and the saddle, I didn't need 'em, havin' a hoss and outfit of my own. But I had a idee. Young Steve had sure stuck to the job—and him nothin' more than a pore Mexican boy, with nothin' but a pair of overalls and a shirt and a hat to his name. He didn't even have a pair of boots—jest shoes, that wan't no good for ridin'. So next day I tells him he ought to have a pair of boots. He said he wished he had 'em. I tells him they is a mighty good pair back there on a fella layin' alongside a dugout. The kid grins—bein' Mexican, and used to a pretty rough life. 'I go get them boot,' he says. And he done it.

"When we got back to the fort, I called the kid over to my shack one day and give him the whole outfit and told him it wa'n't for workin' for me—but it was for doin' what I told him when I went back to git them outlaws. He was so supprised he didn't know what I was sayin'. He bust right out cryin'. The deal was too big for him to handle all to onct.

"I filled that contract. That was what I set out to do."

The captain, who had himself filled some sanguinary contracts for his government, smiled.

Then, as if by magic, we were sitting there watching the studio stage. The old trail, the cattle, the dust, the blazing sun, the night with its gruesome flares of sudden destruction, and the dugout in its sinister silence, had vanished. Folk were laughing and chatting in a most natural manner. Some one called to old Bill. He rose.

"I got to go kill off a couple of bandits in this scene," he said, chuckling. "I'm sheriff in this story."

One of the cowboys strolled up. "How did you like the action in that last scene?" he queried.

"Great!" said the captain. And, of course, I nodded.

Angel Face

By Charles Somerville

Author of "The Voice From the Mountain," Etc.

There has been more financial excitement over oil lately than over almost any other stock-market issue. Real wells have been brought in by the hundreds, fake ones by the thousands. This story is about a promotion that "promotes" in a startling way. It is something that can be read with pleasure and profit

WHEN, under his alliterative, euphonetic, and newly chosen appellation of Focian Farnsworth, Jack Grady, who had been variously known in several cities as Roger H. Rogers, Gregory St. Clair, Montgomery Wells, and Vanderbilt Stuyvesant, names picked by him as being especially suitable, ornamental, and impressive for gold lettering on office doors, engaged as his secretary stenographer, Miss Amelia Plumb, he was superlatively pleased.

The instant he sighted the young woman he mentally dubbed her "Angel Face," and as instantly decided that for his special and peculiar purposes, as well as for the perfect completion of the equipment and furnishings of the offices of the Exhaustless Oil Corporation, Ltd., New York and Texas, Miss Plumb was the very thing, the pippin, the prize!

As a matter of fact, to any other employer, Miss Plumb, young, slim, demure, pretty, quietly spoken, simply appareled, and who stood up against a stenographic test by returning transcribed notes flawless in cleanliness, spelling, and punctuation, must have appeared a most desirable office complement. Oh, much—much more than that! A direct gift from a most amiably disposed heaven, no less.

But an even higher value that Miss Plumb would have in the affairs of the Exhaustless Oil Company, Ltd., New York and Texas, was observed in the study of the girl as she stood before him by Mr. Focian Farnsworth, its president—and everything else connected with the concern.

As an instinctive adept in human psychology he was quite thrilled by the girl's appearance, especially her small, nicely featured countenance, the serene guilelessness of it, marked so unmistakably in the steady honesty and kindliness of her large, gray eyes. This astute judge of human nature and the fallibility of the business laws of States and nation had been unfamiliar with church decorations since the childhood of Johnny Grady, but there came swiftly to Farnsworth at sight of Miss Plumb a recollection of those fair if slightly rigid countenances of saintly honor and goodness that are set in stained-glass windows and are designed to give comfort and inspire trust.

Thus the mental characterization, "Angel Face," and the quick decision that he must and would engage her regardless of whether her stenography staggered and it should be discovered that she spelled with her wrist. If only she was really in character the young woman her physiognomy seemed so unconsciously but broadly to advertise, then "she for him and he for her, from the ground up, clean across the board, soup to nuts and every other little old way," he most promptly decided.

When Miss Plumb had quietly, quickly, and so very successfully passed the stenographic test which Farnsworth didn't care a rap whether she did or not, she modestly asked a remuneration of twenty-five dollars a week.

Focian stared.

"That's very reasonable—too much so, Miss Plumb, with the cost of living as it is to-day. I'll go you five better. We'll say thirty a week," said Focian, adding with a pleasant twinkle of roguery in his bright, green eyes, "er—if you don't object?"

"Why!" blurted little Miss Plumb softly, and Focian appraised with joy the girlish surprise and pleasure disclosed almost startlingly by the expansion of her beautiful, honest gray eyes. "How good of you!"

"Not at all," replied Focian handsomely. "You have demonstrated that you are an excellent stenographer. I like your businesslike appearance and manner. It is always a pleasure for me to do the right and

kind thing when it is in my power to do so. If you can start right in now, I would be pleased."

Miss Plumb looked greatly troubled.

"I am sorry, but I'm afraid I cannot. I feel it would be only honorable to give the other firm a week's notice."

"Oh, certainly, by all means," Focian reassured her. "The right thing to do, by all means. Of course, then, you left to advance yourself. What were these people paying you?"

"Only twenty," said Miss Plumb, with such prompt honesty that Focian glowed in self-appreciation of the unerring quality of his character judgment.

"You have done only the right thing," he said, "to leave the employment of such people, Miss Plumb. As for me, I simply cannot understand the mercenary spirit of those unwilling to give fair recompense to a valuable employee. If we get along well together, my dear young lady, as I've no doubt we will, thirty dollars a week will be by no means the limit of your earning capacity with Exhaustless Oil."

"Oh—oh—thank you!" said the overwhelmed girl.

"Not at all," Farnsworth replied smilingly, paternally also, although Focian had by only a few months topped the age of thirty-five and looked scarcely thirty in close-fitting brown clothes, soft silk collar with its gold pin clasp, mauve four-in-hand, dapper black-brown russet shoes and silk socks to match. "Not at all."

Miss Plumb closed the delightful interview with a demure little bow.

"I shall report a week from to-morrow," she said, and with quick, quiet grace was gone.

Focian Farnsworth then tugged at his small, sporty, closely cropped military mustache and burst into song:

"Sweet little Angel Face,
Dear little Angel Face!
She is the girl for me, for me, for me,
Oh, she is the girl for me!"

He extemporized happily.

Much, however, remains to be seen.

II.

From the standpoint of sex it is not for one second to be concluded there was anything meretricious in the gracious attention and generosity accorded Angel Face by Jack Grady, née Roger H. Rogers, Gregory St. Clair, Montgomery Wells, Vanderbilt Stuyvesant, and Focian Farnsworth.

On this possibility of suspicion he was at pains necessarily to make stout and ample defense to Mrs. Grady who wouldn't have known herself by that name, having assumed her relationship to Jack when he was Gregory St. Clair, then promoting his wonderful plan for establishing a chain of coöperative boarding houses throughout the country for road actors of moderate means. It was a plan whereby Gregory St. Clair had cleaned up sixty thousand dollars selling the stock of the "Live and Let Live Actors' Consolidation of America and the World" before he found it necessary to evade New York's Rialto and move to Boston, there, as Roger H. Rogers to begin the hatching of another financial bad egg.

He had escorted his wife—she knew him thoroughly well now and was in full sympathy with the assumption of his new name of Farnsworth, to view the recently established offices of Exhaustless Oil. He brought her to the entrance of a vast, prominent skyscraper in his own six-cylindered distance obliterator. They moved together most happily. She admired the building, its great corridor, the silver-braided uniforms of hallmen and elevator attendants, the rich, gold lettering "Exhaustless Oil Company, Ltd., New York and Texas, Focian Farnsworth, President," on the double entrance doors of the big office suite. But to the other equipment—the smart furnishings of the brass-railed reception room, the rich dignity of the mahogany desk and deeply cushioned leather chairs of his private office, Mrs. Farnsworth utterly refused to give attention. This was wholly, sharply, acrimoniously awarded Angel Face from the moment the besilked and furbelowed, tall, rounded, somewhat ample Mrs. Farnsworth had stepped inside the reception room and beheld Angel Face seated in her businesslike, plain, straight-lined blue gown, swiftly, deftly touching off her work on the typewriter keys.

Farnsworth, who had intended to present Miss Plumb to his fashionably adorned wife, beheld the flashing glint in Mrs. Farnsworth's eye, took her by the arm, urgently leading her to his private office and once inside, promptly closed the door.

She placed herself plumply down in Farnsworth's own chair of presidential authority in front of the big mahogany desk.

"Who—who," she demanded, "is that little—little minx?"

"Why—that's Angel Face," he said calmly, amusedly.

"Wha—at?" his wife cried angrily.

"For the Lord's sake, Belle, don't yell!" countered the promoter. "Has a woman always got to go off half cocked—is a woman always a hopeless nut?"

"See here—you——"

"Even the best of them are nutty at times," observed Farnsworth impersonally, but added nimbly: "Even you! My beautiful baby doll, I never expected that from you! For Heaven's sake, don't let that girl out there hear you squeaking at me in that tone of voice!"

"I don't care if she——"

"Easy—easy, Belle. If anybody, man or woman, ever accused you in my presence of owning an ivory dome, I'd brain 'em. Ain't you wise to Angel Face?"

"Angel Face?"

"Sure. Ain't you wise?"

"To why you call that drab, foolish-looking, Oh-my-such-simplicity minx out there, Angel Face? No! I don't get you, Greg"—she looked swiftly toward the door, warned by his eyes—"Focian, I mean. I don't get you."

Suddenly the tall, ample young woman with the much-befeathered hat, rigidly affixed blond coiffure, powdered, tinted complexion, sharp-nosed but pretty face, showed her full, reddened lips in the moue of a childish sob that looked only comical on her worldy countenance.

"You nev—never called me 'Angel Face,'" she whimpered.

"Neither did I ever call you a simp, but I will if you don't cut the Tearful Dotty stuff. It doesn't suit you worth a hang and riles all hell up in me. When you are my sporty, smiling wife, ready for a dance or a jamboree, all dressed up and swell as she can be, that's when you're the beautiful baby doll of my heart, good for another diamond or fur coat any day. Do you think I could ever play for anything—anything like that girlie outside? I'd make a fine picture sporting around with her in the gay and dizzy ice-cream parlors. What? I'm not there for that sweet-innocence stuff worth a damn, and I guess you could drug that kid outside with a claret lemonade.

"Nix—nothing like that, Belle, old gel. I picked Angel Face purely for reasons above suspicion and reproach, my love," he said mockingly. "She's just part of the new scheme, and you know what happens to people generally who get mixed in my schemes." Focian laughed, and his wife made something of the show of a doubtful smile. "Shimmy off those tears and dry your eyes. Your meal ticket still loves you."

"Well, I don't know," said Mrs. Farnsworth. "You say it all right, but can I trust you?"

The ingenuousness of this big, pretty, overgrown child was one of her greatest attractions to the gentleman of many names.

"Trust me!" he cried. "Why, Belle! Think of how many do and will"—Focian grinned gayly—"and have!"

"But you've four men working at desks and three page boys in blue and gold uniforms to make the place look busy and grand. What do you want with her? What's her job?"

"My personal secretary—my most intimately associated employee and representative—that's Angel Face!"

"I won't stand it!" cried Belle, jumping up from the big chair.

"Then, my dear, why don't you remain seated?"

"You can't tell me——"

"I'm trying to. That little girl out there, except for the brilliant head of the concern, Mr. Focian Farnsworth, is the most valuable asset Exhaustless Oil owns—only she doesn't know it. And you can just put that on your powder puff and dab the red off your nose, ma Belle!"

The woman stared at him with angry, questioning eyes.

"Why you wised it yourself the minute you saw her," elucidated Focian. "Didn't you call her the 'Oh-my-such-simplicity minx?' Only you were prejudiced. No 'minx' there. Only just simplicity—sweet simplicity—an angel face! She made me think of lady saints and seraphs in stained-glass church windows. That's where I got the nickname for her. That little soft mouth and straight nose, those big, honest, gray eyes! That girl could no more tell a lie than she could tango with the devil. Can't you get it?"

"No, I can't! If she's such a little simp what do you want with her around here where you are playing wise tricks? Seems to me she'll be making some break that'll get you into trouble, or if she isn't just a

poor idiot and really finds out your game she'll put on her funny little hat and go straight to the police."

"Nix," rejoined Focian, passing a hand complacently over a waxen flat brown pompadour and snapping open his gold cigarette case. "Here's the idea: I've said she was to be my personal representative. That's not giving Angel Face her fair, full title. The sweet child is to be the whole blamed reception committee for Exhaustless Oil. I'll be busy enough attending to the distribution of the literature on the greatest, grandest, highest-paying investment in the world and keeping my road johnnies under the whip selling the good old flam certificates to the hicks. But I am sending out big packages of the dope all through li'l' ole New York, and there are just as many suckers among the subway serfs as there are On the Wabash, Under the Shade of the Old Apple Tree, by The Trail of the Lonesome Pine, or Down upon the Suwanee River, as you must know, muh blond vamp, unless your mind's gone blooey and you can't remember Gregory St. Clair and the "Live and Let Live Actors' Consolidation of the World."

"Well?"

"Well, when the widows and orphans and the grandmas and nice old gentlemen and engaged couples trying to make a wedding stake come down to look us over—there'll be Angel Face, dear little Angel Face! And who could look into the deep, cool depths of those honest, good, and beautiful gray eyes and not buy all the Exhaustless stock that the saintly girl can be induced to sell? Why, my dear, I ask you and I answer myself: None, none, my dear! Exhaustless will be grabbed off like hot doughnuts in an army camp on a winter's night. Every time I look at her and think what I'm getting for thirty dollars a week, I feel"—Focian halted and bent over his lady, tilting her huge hat brim up until he could get his under it—"like going out and buying you a diamond ring."

At this she smiled and kissed him. With the angry light all gone from her eyes, solicitous of tone, she said:

"But can—Angel Face"—Focian smiled at the complete surrender—"talk right? Can she put the spiel over to 'em when they come?"

"Trust me, she can. Belasco never did a better job developing one of his lady stars, honey-bunch, that your Focian has done with Angel Face."

"Without putting her wise?"

"You said it."

"You big, smart boy!"

"That's the truth, loved one. I've known it all my life."

As he departed his elegant offices with his wife, the keen, psychic sensitiveness of the tall, lithe, dapper promoter caused him to feel positively that the eyes of Miss Amelia Plumb were staring fixedly at him. He glanced backward, bowed slightly and graciously an au revoir to her and closed the door, smiling pleasantly. There was no mistaking the character of the expression in the great, lovely gray eyes he had caught turned upon him. It was a look of simon-pure adoration—respectful, demure, but complete adoration.

"Nothing to it, my dear," he said to Belle as they awaited the elevator. "A wonderful find is Angel Face!"

III.

Mr. Focian Farnsworth was airily confident in putting Exhaustless Oil stock out by his special methods, which aimed at filching from small purses attached to large credulities, he would easily gather to himself a full one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, scattering another fifty thousand dollars perhaps to the band of glib-tongued experts he could always and quickly muster into a driving organization when he had "hit on something." He was also as airily confident that in so far as the law was concerned he had found Justice blindfolded and left her bound and gagged. When it came to knowledge of the ins and outs and intricacies of mining laws and postal laws, Focian felt himself as much entitled to a toga as Supreme Court Justice White. There was nothing headlong to the vanity of Farnsworth, however. He had laid his plan fully before two of the reputedly shrewdest underground lawyers of the big metropolis and got a wise blink of approval from over the rims of the eyeglasses of both.

In pursuance, he visited the Texas oil fields. He picked out a big patch of "field" for himself—decidedly a big patch—some twenty thousand acres or more that had long since been passed over as impossible by experts if they had passed upon it at all. A few hundred dollars covered Focian's outlay for this stretch of magnificent size but

of an aridity that even a cactus would scorn to grow on it. However, it sounds very imposing in a stock prospectus to speak of the ownership of twenty thousand acres of—well, any thing. And, moreover, in these same circulars he would be able to state without fear of contradiction that the possessions of the Exhaustless Oil Corporation, Ltd., were situated near the richly paying Pazzazza gusher, the Million-a-Minute Wells, the Billion Spout lands, and half a dozen other gushers that had become famous, lands where legitimate strikes had been followed by great and effective development and enterprise. To be sure, Focian's twenty thousand acres weren't in the heart of the oil lands, nor even on the outskirts, but they weren't more than one hundred and fifty miles out in No Man's Land from one of the big wells, and who could accuse him of false misrepresentation if he asserted his holdings were near those sections whose rushing gushers were making millionaires overnight? Texas is a mighty big place. A vast distance to a Rhode Islander, for instance, would be accounted a stone's throw by a Texan. And there you are. Or, rather, that's where Focian Farnsworth stood.

Next after securing the land, Focian visited the mushroom towns that had developed in the oil lands and the established cities of the locality. It seemed an aimless wandering, but one night in a sordid, underground saloon of San Antonio Focian sipped at a stale and flaccid beer staring across the room at another table, where sat a sturdy but stomach-fat, flushed-faced, blear-eyed man of fifty, who had yet left a certain dignity of mien because of a strongly featured face and crisply, curly, grizzled hair. Focian heard him order whisky of the negro waiter. He had beckoned the negro to him, and said:

"Boy, kindly fetch me a fresh bottle and have this glass cleansed."

The simple speech indicated quickly to Focian a man of culture. He searched out the swart, half-breed proprietor and asked about the grizzled, blear-eyed man.

"Too bad—him," said the half-breed. "Used to be damfine engineer—big man. No good no more. Nobody speak to him. All gone souse. Drunk all the time for a year."

Focian figured right then that he was at the end of his special quest and a few hours later as he handed over a roll of bills to the grizzled-haired man—Scott Blake—he knew it.

As he had expected, he had found the besotted man of broken fortunes fiercely embittered and desperately in need. And Focian was asking of him no compact in a hideous offense or a violent crime.

"All I want you to do, Blake," he said just before he handed over his money, "is to take a few men out there, just barely enough for the job you understand, and start a drill. Oh, you'll have to work at it, you know. It will have to be a regular sort of a drill, so that if any fresh fly guys come snooping around we can prove we are within the law about working for oil while gathering the dough East to further the enterprise. Sure—of course, you're on."

"About an inch down a day."

"Aw—well, say three feet," laughed Focian. "And, of course, I can't be blamed either if the work gets delayed because you went off on a week's battle with the old demon now and then. Nobody can't say you ain't no great engineer, hey!"

Maudlin tears spring into the eyes of the wreck.

"There are four university diplomas to prove that," he sobbed and hiccuped.

"Never mind, old man," Focian hastened to say, patting his shoulder. "The bit you'll get out of the sale of Exhaustless stock will set you up down here on your own account, and then you can tell 'em all to go to hell and show 'em a thing to do. Hey?"

"You're m' friend," sobbed Scott Blake, "m' dam good friend."

Mr. Grady—Rogers—St. Clair—Wells—Stuyvesant—Farnsworth straightway returned to New York, stopped a few days in New Jersey to incorporate duly the Exhaustless Oil Corporation, under that State's complacent laws, ordered the lithographing of many thousands of beautiful gold-and-blue stock certificates in its name, called in a renegade journalist he had at his command, and together they wrote the breezy, fascinating prospectuses to touch the simple human imaginations into wild dreams of opportunity for once in their small, hard lives knocking at their humble doors offering untold riches in gold! There was one especially effective appeal—illustrated. There were in this depicted the poor farmer and his toiling family sweating under the hard sun, the humble mechanic or street-car conductor or day laborer with his pick and

shovel, there were shown the interior of poor homes or very modest homes or the desolation of widows struggling on meager incomes with broods of sickly children around them or the aged leading lonely lives on the pittances of income allowed from their small money possessions. And the other pictures —when they had invested in Exhaustless Oil! Everybody was riding in automobiles, attending theaters and dances, sitting down to banquets, sons going to colleges, daughters as beautiful brides or walking in rose gardens, and kindly smiling attendants moving about to fill every want and caprice of old men and women. Why envy Aladdin his lamp when you had Exhaustless Oil certificates in the little old tin cash box at home!

Then he turned loose his harpies over territory he had mapped out as a general might map out a land for attack and siege —well-dressed, smiling, ever smiling young men, youthful as college boys some of them, older men—every inch the gentleman as you could see by their frock coats, high hats, gray-striped trousers, patent-leather shoes, and gray spats, very courteous these older gentlemen and of serious mien, easily to be mistaken for a family doctor or lawyer—very easily.

And then President Farnsworth undertook the training of Angel Face. First he handed her all the literature, the finely printed, highly colored literature on Exhaustless Oil. He asked that she put aside all other work until she had read it—that, perhaps, if she didn't mind, she would finish reading it that night at home, for until she was thoroughly acquainted with the "Great development and rich investment" she could not fully enter into her duties.

Angel Face returned next day with her great gray eyes aglow.

"It is perfectly wonderful, Mr. Farnsworth," she said. "Why, for just a few thousand dollars invested one could become rich!"

"There are wretched swindling concerns, however, you know, Miss Plumb, who prey upon the poor."

"Oh, yes, indeed. Mother once bought ten shares of stock for two hundred dollars and—she's tried to sell them and nobody will buy them. They haven't even heard of the company. But I read your—our literature to her and told her about"—Miss Plumb blushed—"oh, about our offices and you, and she made me bring this—it's only three hundred dollars," Miss Plumb produced the money in a roll of notes from the breast pocket of her neat little blue jacket. "She'd like to invest——"

"Why—why, certainly, Miss Plumb," said Focian. "Just make a memorandum, and I'll have the certificates made out to her this very afternoon."

"Thank you."

"Now, Miss Plumb, there will be many other persons—hundreds, thousands who will be as quick as your mother to see the rare investment offered by Exhaustless Oil. Some, of course, may have made investments in the past that turned out—well, poorly if not worse," said Focian indignantly. "Of course, I am a very busy man, Miss Plumb. You see this enterprise is merely a side matter with me. Most of the time during the business day my larger affairs call me to the Stock Exchange. I want you to make it your special duty to see the people—especially women and old men or very young folks. I really haven't the time, and I am ashamed to say sometimes the patience, to go over everything with such good people, having become used, of course, to dealing snappily with other men of big affairs—the people who come to the office. Go over the matter with them just as you did with your mother, tell them if you want to that your mother is a stockholder. I would like you especially to represent us in talking to the office callers, if you will undertake the duty. I have observed that you are gracious and considerate in manner, express yourself well and probably have the disposition to be kindly and patient in explaining all the advantages—the great advantages—of an investment in Exhaustless. Do you think you can do this important work for me —for us, the corporation, Miss Plumb?"

"I shall be happy—honored to try," said Angel Face, but with a modest embarrassment President Farnsworth highly approved.

"Thank you. And later, I will consider awarding you a commission—at least, an honorarium on the sales you make."

"Oh, thank you."

"Of course, Miss Plumb, there is really no reason why myself or my associates, the directors of the Exhaustless Corporation, should offer this stock for sale at all. I could out of my personal fortune readily spare the funds necessary to pay the expenses of the enterprise and reap the entire

vast profits myself. But Exhaustless is a pet project with me. I have sufficient money—all the fortune one man could possibly need to have and leave behind him. But I am still too young to be able to consider a life of idleness. I must be active in affairs—planning and executing," he smiled charmingly. "I'm not ready yet for retirement and golf. However, when the Exhaustless project was brought to me I talked it over with several fellow clubmen—men I knew to be good-hearted, generous to a fault, and we agreed that we would give the thrifty poor a chance to earn the rich rewards, sure to come from the great Texan oil wells of Exhaustless. It seemed a truly fine method for the practice of philanthropy, yet one that would not cause us to be given unpleasant publicity for doing a good action. And so"—Focian nibbled at his mustache a moment as if embarrassed by the confidence he had given, then waved a hand—"and so the stock is for sale on the market, but guarded, every certificate, against being gobbled up by the big interests of Wall Street. We will protect it so that the money from Exhaustless will flow only into the modest purses of the thrifty poor!"

Angel Face bowed and turned to walk away. She almost caught Focian in the act of grinning as she turned back.

"Mr. Farnsworth," she began, but for another instant the words would not come.

"Yes, Miss Plumb," he said encouragingly.

"Mr. Farnsworth," she spoke, and this time more steadily, "I just—just wanted to say that I am proud and happy and honored to be employed by so good a man."

"Oh, come, come, my dear Miss Plumb! Why, I believe you've nearly made me blush! But your words are very kind—too kind. Still, I deeply appreciate them."

President Farnsworth courteously and democratically arose and made her a brief, modest bow.

He stared a second at the door that closed behind Angel Face, then suddenly bowed his head on arms outstretched on the big mahogany desk and shook with laughter.

IV.

And did the public—Mr. Focian Farnsworth's special hand-picked kind of public—fall for Exhaustless Oil? *Did it fall?* As Niagara Falls!

There poured upon the offices "of the corporation" in the prominent skyscraper drafts of money from the Farnsworth harpies, money wheedled and won from the hat factories of Connecticut, the shoe factories of Massachusetts, the stockyards of Chicago, the cotton mills of the Carolinas, the orchardlands of Delaware, the little farms everywhere. Money fell for hours at a time daily from the agile hands of President Farnsworth as he knifed open stacks on stacks of letters, fluttered from his fingers into a waste-paper bag big and deep as a picnic hamper, soiled, battered, ragged, sweaty paper money most of it, thin, worn old money part of it. Scarcely a day the wastebasket wasn't at least half filled by the money filtering through the dapper swindler's hands while Angel Face with marveling eyes sat near checking down the names, addresses, sums sent, number of certificates to be forwarded.

"Be very particular getting the names and addresses accurately, Miss Plumb," Focian would say at nearly every day's session.

"Oh, yes, sir, I am being most careful."

He meant it. This list would constitute a future treasure for Grady-Rogers-Wells-St. Clair Stuyvesant-Farnsworth and whatever name he'd choose next for a good "sucker list" is all such a prince of persuaders needs as capital to set up thrivingly in business anew.

Finally Angel Face would assist President Farnsworth in packing the money into his own special, gold-mounted black seal leather hand bag which he would himself—yes, personally—carry forth for deposit in several banks.

"It is poor people's money," he told Angel Face gently one day. "I will trust it to no other hands but my own."

Whereat her beautiful gray eyes rewarded him with the Decoration of the Great Heart and Golden Deed.

And did Angel Face play well her own special part? I'll say so! Julia Marlowe, Mrs. Fiske, Ethel Barrymore, Maude Adams, Duse, Bernhardt, and Mary Pickford bunched—just like that—could have snatched no garlands from Angel Face in her particular rôle.

She wept with the widows, planned with the betrothed and the newlyweds, comforted the aged, kissed the children selling Exhaustless stock the while with the ease, quantity, and speed of an ice-cream-cone vender at Coney Island on a hot day!

In the beginning long-headed Focian had taken no chances. In the first days he had "planted" applicants on Angel Face, secret agents in all the special types known for the fairest, ripest fruit for plucking.

"That kid," said the old general who had visited the office posing as a lonely, venerable gentleman hoping to meet the new drastic cost of living by investing his small all in a proposition promising to swell it twentyfold, who had, moreover, unknown to Angel Face questioned her shrewdly, if gently, as she expatiated on the treasure dreams Exhaustless would surely make come true, "that kid," the old general told Focian, "could sell Ford an automobile or some of your damned worthless oil stock to Rockefeller himself. Trust her? Say, Shylock would have lent her a million smackers any time on the security of one look into her big, gray lamps!"

Thus not four months after the beautifully ornamental blue-and-gold Exhaustless certificates were cast forth as are fancy, highly colored painted flies for trout, there arrived the day when President Farnsworth visited all the banks carrying as usual the gold-mounted black hand satchel. But he wasn't taking money out of it to put into the banks this day. He was dragging money out—neat, small packets of brightly golden-yellow money, tightly wadded, held in white or green paper bands that were stamped variously from five hundred dollars to ten thousand dollars. When his rounds were completed the satchel had grown as plump as a puppy after a breakfast of oatmeal mush.

"Poor suckers! Poor suckers!" chortled Focian. "Bum statistician, that Barnum. One born every minute! Huh! Million a minute, say I, and you can quote me!"

There remained now but a single, straggling strand of the scheming net by which he had brought in the golden haul. There was a packet of five thousand dollars in cash that had been forwarded him by his Chicago chickadee—Focian having instructed that this last batch of sucker sugar should be sent in this wise instead of by draft. The packet had been due in the morning but had not arrived, and now when Focian returned Angel Face informed him the packet was yet on its way.

President Farnsworth betrayed no shadow of annoyance. It was a small matter, he decided, one not to be allowed to interfere with the immediate execution of his future program. Presently he touched the button at his desk summoning to him Angel Face.

When she entered he was drooping languidly on an elbow passing his long, thin hand wearily over his smooth-shaven, massaged chin and brow. His usually alert, bright-green eyes looked dull with fatigue.

"My dear Miss Plumb," he announced. "I'm thoroughly tired out—quite done, you know, I fear. Not that the affairs of Exhaustless have been such a great matter, thanks to your able assistance. The good plan of my fellow clubmen and myself toward the thrifty poor nears completion. Most of the stock has now been placed in the hands of the worthy. Every report I have had from our engineer, Mr. Scott Blake, has, as you know, been increasingly favorable. As I say, I am utterly tired out. My doctor told me several days ago it was imperative that I take a rest. Perhaps I should."

"Oh, by all means, my dear Mr. Farnsworth," urged Angel Face, "by all means obey the doctor. I have noticed you do not look your usual self to-day. If you do not take a rest I am sure I—I mean, we would all be most greatly concerned!"

"Thank you for your kindness, Miss Plumb, and I think I will take your advice. I know of a hunting lodge in the Adirondacks at my disposal any time. I think I shall go there—yes, why not?— this very day! I should not think of doing it, however, if I did not know I was leaving the office in your capable hands. I feel sure you know how highly I have valued your services, Miss Plumb."

Indeed, she did. He had raised her salary in several jumps until now it stood at sixty a week!

President Farnsworth arose abruptly from his chair, pushing a button as he did so, which brought one of the silver-braided, gray-uniformed pages of Exhaustless.

"Order me a taxi," he told the boy, waited until the lad had left the room and turned suddenly to Angel Face.

"My dear Miss Plumb, kindly note down this address: Gary Elmore, Rumney Lodge, Maripo, Herkimer County, New York."

He smiled.

"In strictest confidence, Miss Plumb, Gary Elmore is none other than myself. But if I am to get the complete rest I need, it is quite necessary that I should hide my

identity wherever I go, else the feverish money-makers of the Street would surely ferret me out demanding to be advised about this or directed concerning that. They would think nothing of defeating for their own selfish interests my plan for recuperation."

"You would think," murmured Angel Face, "they would show more consideration."

"Not they. Very well, then to you and you alone—Mrs. Farnsworth will accompany me—I am intrusting this name and address. You know the packet I am expecting but which has not come—a packet of important papers. It will be quite necessary for me to allow the matter it contains to break in upon my rest. Forward it yourself, personally; write the address yourself. See that nobody else gets sight of the address."

"I understand perfectly, Mr. Farnworth," answered Angel Face almost tenderly.

"Thank you."

Focian arose, took up his hat of soft Italian felt and the gold-mounted bag.

"Good-by, Mr. Farnsworth. Please don't do any worrying. Try to enjoy your rest and make it as long as you can."

"I will, and thank you for your good wishes. I don't think I'll be back for some time."

"Some time," as President Focian Farnsworth defined it in his own mind departing the Exhaustless Oil office, was going to be a long time—full and sufficient certainly to allow for the fading of the clamor of the widows and orphans, until the squawks of all the stung died down and out unto the final squeak and then some.

Matter of fact, his baggage was already checked at the Grand Central Station, and Belle was awaiting in a near-by fashionable hotel.

"I wonder," he grinned at Belle in the Pullman chair opposite on the train for Maripo that night, "what dear little Angel Face, sweet little Angel Face will do when the storm of widows and orphans breaks upon her some day soon?"

"You will oblige me just now," replied Belle firmly, "by forever forgetting that—that Angel Face!"

"Orders are orders," answered Focian gayly. "Consider the stained-glass window busted, my dear."

V.

In a mountain drag with plowing, lean horses ahead, Mr. and Mrs. Focian Farnsworth arrived at Rumney Lodge at noon of the following day—Thursday. A crash of cheering fell upon them from the broad veranda. For assembled there were Jack Grady's silver-tongued crew of bandits, young and old, arrived from all quarters of their wanderings for the merry purpose of "splitting the swag." The older ones, it was to be observed, had forgotten their frock-coat dignity and frisked and yelled as lustily as the young. The cellaret at Rumney Lodge was always well-stocked. Several times had it been tapped o' the morn.

The group rushed down the pathway to give hand to Belle who descended the drag thus regally. They slapped Focian on the back and cavorted around the couple. They danced and sang.

"*Rum*ney Lodge all right, boys," laughed Focian. "But have it your own way."

He led them within to the wide hall of the handsomely furnished house, their eyes following him with lively appreciation and following also with appreciation fully as lively, even more keen the gold-mounted black satchel that he bore.

Clever, quick mulatto servants laid and served a luncheon to an unremitting cannonade of champagne corks. Afterward they brought out musical instruments and struck forth the mad and sliding rhythms of the jazz. Belle must dance with everybody, and she was laughingly and pantingly pushing off the arms of Focian, merriest of all, when a mountaineer clattered in the path way on a badly used-up horse.

"Who's Gary Elmore?" he demanded of the yellow butler. "Telegram for him marked 'Important—rush!'"

Farnsworth dashed back his disordered pompadour, his flushed, laughing face settled seriously as he stared at the interrupting messenger.

He snatched away the envelope, ripped it, unfolded the dispatch.

"Good cripes!" he cried, and choked on the exclamation. Next he handed the messenger a bill, muttered "No change," waited until the renewed clatter of the hoofs of the messenger's horse denoted departure, until the last of the mulatto servants had been waved away.

Then he spread the telegram again before his eyes.

"Get this!" he cried to the staring group. "Just get *this!*"

Wire from San Antonio very important as follows: "Everything else off. Struck oil! There's millions in it! Scott Blake." Sorry to disturb your rest. AMELIA PLUMB.

Still the group regarded Farnsworth dumbly.

"He's drunk," said Focian fiercely, "that engineer's drunk and gone nutty! He's drunk!"

"But, say, old man, if he isn't?" demanded "Silk-Socks" Sandy.

"If he isn't—if he isn't—why, damn't it all, if he isn't, we're the suckers. Suckers! Us—the wise guys! If it's right—and damned if it doesn't read right with that lead 'Everything else off'—why, what's happened is that we've sold out for a few thousands property worth millions to a lot of hicks and pikers. Millions—millions for the chicken feed in that blamed bag! Some joke!" ranted Farnsworth. "Some joke! Some hell of a joke!"

The others fell back into chairs or against the wall as Farnsworth paced fiercely up and down the room.

Belle burst into wild tears with audible, squeaky sobs.

"Shut up!" yelled Farnsworth at her, and she fled to the veranda.

Finally he wheeled and faced his expectant lieutenants.

"Not a flea of a doubt but this bird Blake's message is on the level," he told them. "He's probably sore it happened. He'd rather stay soused. He keeps his head pretty well under booze, anyway. Nope. This telegram's the goods!"

"What's the next move, chief?" asked "Laughing Larry" Green, voicing the interrogation in the minds of all.

It found Focian quite ready for the question.

"What the devil would it be, you simp? What could it be but to take that dough in the bag there and hurry back all of you, every one of you, to where you came from and buy the stuff back! Buy it back before any of the suckers hear what's happened out there in the oil field. If they do—if they yet the news before you get to 'em—good night!"

He glared at them.

"You fellers all obeyed instructions about keeping tabs on the hicks you sold to for the making of the new, big sucker list?"

They nodded confirmation unanimously, hastily.

"Well, then it isn't such a hell of a mess after all. Pack your troubles in your old kit bags and beat it back to where you came from. Buy back that stock—every sliver of paper of it."

He fell to pacing the room again. Again he wheeled.

"Here's the dope. It's the goods—sure fire! You approach the sucker with kindly eyes. The gentlemen behind the promotion of Exhaustless Oil stock are really and truly gentlemen, you'll tell them, and that since the stock was put on the market these perfect gentlemen have discovered through tests that the oil lands in Texas were not oil lands at all, nothing but a sea of sand, worthless! that the investors would in the end have nothing to show for their money but the fancy gold-and-blue certificates. These gentlemen you'll tell 'em, being such perfect gentlemen, men of wealth, of social prominence, of good old Revolutionary families, are dismayed and horrified to find they have accepted the money of the humble, the thrifty poor to further such an honorable enterprise and are determined to do the kind and honorable thing. They've sent you back to buy up the stock, to pay for it dollar for dollar, not a penny less than was paid for it—to do the squarest thing it was ever known for financiers to do. And if they don't fall for that and you don't come back with those bunches of paper making the whole gang of us millionaires, it will be because the whole damned bunch of you has been struck dumb!"

"Bully for you, Jack!" yelled "Monocle" Murphy, and the others joined in a big cheer. A mulatto was sent horseback to assemble all the conveyances necessary, and within two hours the working, fighting force of Exhaustless Oil and their peerless leader with Belle—smiled upon once again by Focian—awaited the next train into New York.

The best connection from Maripo placed the crowd aboard a limited for New York late that night, and it was nine o'clock in the morning when the battalion alighted at the Grand Central Station. There were hurried farewells and then each and every smooth-tongued bandit set speedily about his separate way, Farnsworth's instructions still ringing in their ears.

Focian's composure was quite returned. Certainly his quick wit would save the day. Certainly a fortune so big as to make him a lord of the land for life would not slip by the craziest freak of fortune that ever crossed a clever man's life—a very clever man's life, from that very clever man's fingers. Certainly not!

He left Belle at the near-by fashionable hotel and himself somewhat later and in all confidence pushed open the gold lettered door of the offices of Exhaustless Oil.

And there was Angel Face to greet him, her great gray eyes silver orbs of adoration and joy.

"Oh, Mr. Farnsworth, isn't it wonderful?"

"Isn't it, my dear little girl!"

"I hope I did right in forwarding the telegram."

"Why most certainly, Miss Plumb. It was the fine, perfectly right thing to do. The thing I could trust you to do as I have learned to trust you so implicitly in all things."

"Oh, thank you. And, Mr. Farnsworth, you should have seen how delighted my mother was when she heard my news. She just cried for joy."

"How nice!" said Focian, but hardly gayly.

Here was a bit of Exhaustless that couldn't be bought back!

"And my brother—I made him buy one thousand dollars' worth—all the money he had saved! He hugged me a hundred times last night—till he nearly broke my ribs, really. You see it means he can marry right away!"

"Ah—yes, your brother!"

"Quite a chunk gone blooey," figured Focian.

"And me!"

"You?"

"Why, Mr. Farnsworth, you've treated me so generously in the matter of wages that I had saved quite a little money and twice when women have come—one was a widow with lots of children and another a very old woman and were crying and afraid they were going to lose their money, and were convinced by what others had told them and against all I could say that Exhaustless Oil was fake—think of it, Mr. Farnsworth, a fake!—why, I bought their lots, five hundred dollars each, for myself. And that means——"

Angel Face paused and blushed furiously.

"You going to get married, too, eh?" laughed Farnsworth. After all, this represented only a few drops out of the bucket—bucket! huh! the hogsheads of gold that would be rolled to him from the Texas oil fields. He could afford to look upon the matter good-humoredly, sportily.

"Congratulations, Miss Plumb. Of course, it was to be expected that a sweet, pretty girl like you couldn't remain single—not if there are any young fellows living with an ounce of sense in their heads or sentiment in their hearts. Congratulations and Exhaustless will not forget you at the wedding."

"Oh, thank you! It is all so wonderful!"

"Fine!"

Miss Plumb had now bethought herself she was perhaps assuming too great a familiarity with the great man, the magic man who had so prodigally poured gold into the lap of herself and her family and all.

She started to go demurely back to her desk, but as Focian was stepping into his private office, she turned and called to him.

"Oh, Mr. Farnsworth," she said, "I forgot to tell you. I hope you'll approve, as you did my sending the telegram. I did something else."

"What?"

He asked so sharply that Miss Plumb was astonished and startled. But she felt she knew her great-hearted Mr. Farnsworth thoroughly well, so with a bright smile she continued:

"Well, after I had sent you the telegram, I got to thinking of all the poor people who had invested in our stock—the stock you had promised them would make them their fortune as, of course, you knew so well it would. I thought of my own joy, of the joy my mother and brother would experience so—so——"

"For God's sake, what?"

"Mr.—Mr.—Farnsworth!"

"What—what?"

"Why, last night I telephoned all the papers about the big strike!"

Farnsworth grasped Angel Face by the wrist and dragged her into his private office. He slammed the door.

"Say that again!"

"I telephoned all the papers of the big strike. I told them, too—I—I took that liberty—of how Exhaustless was really a philanthropical scheme to aid the thrifty

poor backed by several large-hearted financiers. But I didn't give your name, Mr. Farnsworth. I knew better than to do that. Why, some of the men on the telephones of the newspapers laughed at me first. One of them said: 'Oh, bunk!' But when they acted that way I got real angry and read them Mr. Blake's telegram and told them they could make inquiries at San Antonio themselves and just see if it wasn't true."

"That was last night?" snarled Focian.

"Yes."

"Did—the papers tell—tell the good news to everybody to-day?" gulped Focian.

"Oh, yes, and the Associated Press called up this morning for confirmation and said they would spread the good news everywhere over the country so all the poor folks who had bought Exhaustless would be sure to hear about it."

"Where the hell are those papers?"

"Mr. Farnsworth!"

"I say, where the hell are those papers?"

"On—on my desk!"

He thrust her aside, rushed into the outer room, and grabbed the top newspaper off the stack on her desk. He found what he was looking for, rather, got what he was looking for from a big headline on the front page:

"BIG OIL STRIKE POURS GOLD INTO LAPS OF POOR."

He stopped to read no more, nor to heed the agonized sob of Miss Amelia Plumb as she stood with her beautiful, great, gray eyes streaming tears as she cried:

"Oh, Mr. Farnsworth, please Mr. Farnsworth, dear Mr. Farnsworth, what have I done?"

Instead, he plunged out of the office and slammed the door behind him with a ferocity that shattered its glass panel and scattered the gold lettering of the "Exhaustless Oil Corporation, Ltd., New York and Texas, Focian Farnsworth, President," upon the marble tiling of the hallway without.

Late that night J. Brady-Rogers-St. Clair-Wells-Stuyvesant-Farnsworth drooped droolingly out of a taxicab into the arms of the chauffeur in front of the fashionable hotel where he had left Belle. The chauffeur patiently bore him to the entrance and transferred his burden to a bell boy, and square-jawed, red-haired, button-nosed, wide-mouthed Mickey McCabe.

"I've seen some souses," commented the chauffeur, "but this is the bird of 'em all."

The wiry, muscular, small frame of Mickey McCabe was exerted to its utmost pulling and towing President Farnsworth of Exhaustless to the elevator, thence through the corridor to the door of his apartment. The bell boy propped him against the wall, fished a pass key out of his pocket, opened the door, and said:

"Here you are, boss."

He shook his man vigorously.

Suddenly Focian stood erect, lifted his head, and glared.

"Damn little fool!" he growled.

"Sure," said the bell boy.

"Damn li'l'—idiot!"

His eyes were shining with drunken hysteria.

"All right, boss."

"Bah!" cried Focian Farnsworth, throwing the bell boy savagely from him. "Angel Face!"

"Wha—at?"

"Damn Angel Face!"

"If you say so, it goes," said Mickey McCabe as Farnsworth staggered out of sight into his apartment. "But nobody ever put that one over on me before. And I'm going to tell my mother on you," added the button-nosed Mickey. "She's the only one'd believe you called me that."

THE BEST PRAYER

A METHODIST bishop from the Middle West was at a dinner in New York recently when the conversation turned to extemporaneous prayer.

"The best one I ever heard," said the bishop, "was offered by an old lady in Sunday school one morning when she and other Red Cross workers wanted the services as brief as possible, so that they might get off some necessary work. The prayer was this:

" 'O Lord, grant us a full heaven and an empty hell.' "

Blight

By H. de Vere Stacpoole

Author of "The Beach of Dreams," Etc.

Townley, the tree doctor, has a weird tale to tell of a rubber plantation on the Amazon. Called down there to cure sick trees, he comes upon an inexplicable relationship between a man and his forest

TOWNLEY is an insignificant-looking little man till you look at his face; then you forget his size and all the things that at a first glance make for insignificance, for his face is lit by a spirit, patient and indomitable, kindly, genial, and full of genius.

He is a doctor and his patients live in all sorts of places. He has been called to consultations in the forests of India, in the forests of the Amazon, in the plantations of English dukes and American millionaires, always in places where trees grow, for his patients are trees. He is a tree doctor. He will attend vines and bushes and flowers, but trees are his specialty, or, rather, sick trees, and if you can get Townley to talk on the subject he will tell you that trees and plants and flowers are just like men and women and children, subject to cancer, subject to tumors, parasitic diseases and all sorts of maladies, some known, some partly known, some unknown. That they can show like and dislike, that they can fret and pine. He will tell you that flowers and plants and trees require love as well as attention, that Luther Burbank is a lover as well as a magician and that the roses of Dean Hole drew their perfection from the heart of the gardener no less than from the soil of the garden. And so he will go on till you fancy yourself talking to a mystic and a poet, and you will be right, he is both, but he is also one of the most practical men on earth. He was born and educated in England; and his genius came to him perhaps through his father who was a gardener at Kew. But England could not hold him, her ideas were too small, her trees too few. In America where tree doctoring is a profession and patients to be reckoned in hundreds of millions, he found his soil. A book on transplantation published when he was twenty-five gave him fame right off, and he never looked back.

However, I am not setting out to write a biography of William Townley, but a story he told me and which has more to do with men than trees. This is his story.

"I thought I knew something about rubber at that time. I had studied it, vine and tree—under glass. I thought I knew something about men, too, I had studied them, man and boy—but under glass, as you may say. I hadn't then come on to the fact that all man's experience contained in mind and books is a small thing compared to what he doesn't know of man and nature. Men run in a herd in a big groove of their own cutting, the country around is pretty much unknown. Even Shakespeare ran in it else his works wouldn't be of universal appeal.

"I had not seen the Amazon then, either, and he who has not seen the Amazon has not really seen God.

"It was a book of mine on the parasitic diseases of trees that brought me the letter, and the letter was from Colonel Alonzo Perreira, of the Esperanza plantation on the right bank of the Amazon, one thousand seven hundred and fifty miles from the mouth. It was a strange letter, typewritten in faultless English, practical in a way, yet producing on my mind the feeling that the writer was under the dominion of an agitation and an urgency not entirely accountable for in the matter.

"The trees on the Esperanza estate had come under a blight of some sort, that was the gist of the business, he wanted me to come and see them, to come at once, without a moment's delay. Money was of no object, absolutely none, and after all this and the signature was the postscript in manuscript, 'Come, I pray you, at once.'

"He gave me the name of his agents in Philadelphia, Milligan & Forsyth. I wrote them and got the reply that Perreira was

the richest rubber man on the Amazon, that he had cabled me a credit on them of twenty thousand dollars—ending with the perfectly superfluous advice that I would be well advised from a monetary point of view to take up the proposition.

"I was not thinking so much of the money. I wanted to see the Amazon, I wanted to see those sick trees, and I wanted to see Perreira, this multimillionaire who lived seventeen hundred miles from Para, which lies seventeen hundred miles from everywhere. It seemed to me that Perreira was as sick as his trees. My mind is like that. I sometimes imagine things, and sometimes I am right.

"That letter was the call of a sick man, it seemed to me, not the hail of a planter only concerned about his pocket. The fancy came to me that Perreira loved his trees and then, somehow, my mind refused that idea for no special reason. I sometimes refuse ideas for no special reason, and sometimes I am right.

"But I was going. They have a cable up the Amazon, and I cabled that day, Saturday, it was, and on the Tuesday following I started.

"I had fixed my fee at ten thousand dollars and traveling expenses. I could have had twenty, but I wanted a holiday and I wanted to see the Amazon, and I am not a hog, anyway.

"I took passage up the Amazon in a big ocean-going steamer, the R. M. S. *Tamar,* and I was on deck most of the time I was not asleep or at meals. The Amazon is not a river, it is a moving sea, and all the trees in the world seem to have grouped themselves on the banks to watch it; palms and matamatas and sand boxes, embaubas and ferns, in leagues and millions, and the forests you drop at sunset you pick up at dawn with the blue toucans still yelping over them and the great butterflies coming out to see the ship, and the blazing parrots screeching at her, and the egrets drifting over her like puffs of snow, white as the egrets you dropped a thousand miles back, and the river just as broad and the trees just as many and as new and fresh and green as they were before the pyramids were built or Egypt thought of.

"Then one morning at breakfast the captain said to me, 'In an hour we will be at the Esperanza landing stage.'

"Then as I stood on deck with my traps beside me I saw the plantation open beyond a cape of trees and the landing stage, big as a deep-sea wharf, and in another ten minutes I was shaking hands with Perreira. He had come down to meet me and he was something of the sort of man I had expected to meet; nervy, dried up and dark as a native, a Peruvian of the best sort and with all the manners of a Spanish grandee.

"I liked him, right off, but I did not like his house, nor the dinner he put before me that day. I was unused to houses with scarcely any furniture, to farina and black beans and coffee without sugar or milk, but one gets used to most things after a little while, and after a while I got used to Perreira's way of living; I had other things to think of besides comfort and food.

"Those trees—the second day I was there he took me off into the forest past a palm belt and into the true jungle where the giants stood festooned with climbing vines and bush ropes, then close to a pachuaba palm, standing on its exposed roots as if they were stilts, he showed me a rubber tree, the first we had come on. He showed me where it had been tapped.

" 'You see,' said Perreira, 'it has given scarcely any milk, look at it, touch it, it is sick.'

"It was. I could see that at a glance. The bark had a leprous look, dry beyond ordinary, and scaling off in parts, though not much.

" 'Let's look at another,' said I.

" 'There is no use,' said Perreira, 'they are all the same, for hundreds of miles, wherever my estate reaches, they are the same. It began last year. It does not reach beyond my estate, the blight only touches me.'

" 'That is strange,' said I.

" 'Yes,' said he, 'it is strange.'

"He said no more but stood looking at me as I cut some of the bark off for microscopical examination, then we went back to the house and I set to work that day in the little laboratory he had rigged up for me. I worked for several days and with entirely negative results. I could discover no fungus or parasite to account for the condition of the bark. There was a thickening of the cellular tissue and the fistular cavities were reduced in size, empty, or blocked. That was all.

"On the night when I told Perreira of my results we were sitting in his office, which was the coolest and pleasantest room

in the house, in cane rockers and with a table laden with rum, crushed ice, lime juice, and cigars between us.

" 'You can arrive at no conclusion, then,' said he, 'except that my trees are dying from, shall we say, a general debility without appreciable cause?'

" 'That is so,' I replied.

" 'In your book,' said he, 'there is a chapter at the end which speaks of the likes and dislikes of trees, a strange chapter in a practical book, yet it was the mind revealed in that chapter that caused me to send for you; here, said I, is a man who sees beyond the surface and who is not afraid to say what he sees and to whom I can speak what I think. Now I am going to tell you what I think. I would not tell it to any other man but you. I think my trees are blighted by an act of mine; that they are dying because, out there in the forest, many days journey from here, my brother lies dead and unburied.'

" 'Did you kill him?' said I.

"The words came from me almost without volition, our minds seemed for a moment absolutely in tune, and it was as though I had read his thoughts and repeated them like a gramophone.

" 'In a way I did,' replied he, as though the question were quite an ordinary one. Then he rose up and began to mix some drinks at the little table where the tray stood. I watched him as he handled the sugar and the rum and the pounded ice, measuring everything carefully, but doing so, evidently, with his mind a thousand miles away.

"Then, when he had handed me my drink, he took his own and sat down again in the cane rocker.

" 'I will tell you exactly what happened,' said he, 'and how it happened, but I must first tell you that we are an unlucky family —or were, for I am the last of them all. My grandfather was a trader of Lima and my father inheriting all his wealth began trade in rubber with Para and eventually took up this estate. He was a hard man to the natives, and he was killed one day by a blow-gun man; walking in the garden here something flecked his cheek and stuck to it; he plucked it off thinking it was a flying insect and found that it was a blow-gun dart. He knew that he must die in twenty minutes or so, and, coming into the house, he made his will leaving the estate to my eldest brother, Ramon. Juan, the second eldest, was appointed overseer under Ramon, with succession in the event of Ramon's death, while I, the youngest, was directed to study law so that I might be of assistance to my brothers in the management of the business. My father was a very clever man, and he knew the tricks of lawyers and how they prey on business men for the sake of their fees. I was to be the lawyer of the firm, with a share in the profits of the business and succession to the estate should I survive the others. Having made his will and smoked a cigarette, he died. I said we were an unlucky family, and three was our unlucky number. We were three, nine is a multiple of three, and nine years after the death of my father my eldest brother Ramon died a violent death. He was out crocodile shooting with Juan and the breech of his rifle burst, killing him.

" 'I was at Para when the news reached me, and I came here by the first steamer and found Juan quite broken down with grief. Juan was a big, domineering, violent-tempered man, yet I found him on my arrival in tears, weak as a woman and the shadow of his old self, without volition and with only one desire—to get rid of the estate. All this surprised me, for I had loved Ramon far more than Juan had appeared to love him, yet I was myself, though, indeed, sad enough, as you may imagine.

" 'I did not wish to part with the estate, and without my consent a sale would have been impossible. I argued with Juan, pointing out the folly of such a course with rubber increasing in value as it then was, offering at the same time to leave Para and come up and help him in the practical working of the business. He agreed with this, and after a while he began to recover and find his old interest in life, and in six months he was himself again, domineering, violent-tempered, a hog—as you say in America—for work and the terror of the malingerers and bad hands. A man difficult to get on with, yet with whom I never had a difference, for I knew his temper to a hair and managed to lead him by humoring him.

" 'So it went on for three years—for three years, mark you—till, one day, Pedro, the chief of the workers on the estate, came back from the forests with a tale.

" 'Pedro had been sent with half a dozen of the hands on an exploring expedition with a view to discovering new rubber tracts.

You must know that this estate is so vast that for us, the owners, or, rather, for me the owner, it is beyond the river belt in large parts, unknown.

" 'Pedro at a point six days' journey away had found a rich rubber tract, but he had found something else which in his flowery language he described as a river of gold. He had done gold mining in his young days and he was not wrong. He had found a river with large deposits of auriferous sand and from the specimens he brought back with him we determined that the thing was worth exploring. That was human nature. We were rich, richer than many an American millionaire, for our riches rested on the firm foundation of the forests, they and Para were our real gold mines, yet, such is the power of the yellow metal that we could not rest and we, who had gold a thousand times beyond our needs, dreamed of gold and talked of gold as though we were beggars. We set about making preparations for a great expedition. We arranged to take twenty men including Pedro and to build a hut or *tambo* at the end of each day's march so that, were the river to prove workable, we might establish a regular road to it through the jungle with resting places for the gold getters and their burdens.

" 'All our men were native to the spot and used to the forests, with that instinct for direction which the forest breeds in men. We started on a Tuesday and the third of the month, and just as the sun was rising above the trees.

" 'Pedro led the way with the hands and we followed on the beaten track left by them. We had had luck from the first, one of the men injuring his foot against the thorny stem of a pachiuba palm. We had to lie up for a day at the first *tambo* we built. We built our second *tambo,* like fools, close to a great patch of embauba trees. These trees, you must know, are poisonous with malaria. Pedro said it did not matter, so far from the river, but he was wrong, for next morning Juan was in a fever. No one else was touched. I wished to delay the march or even return till he was better, but he would not listen to this. It was not in his nature to turn back or to lie up for a touch of fever, so we pushed on ever deeper into the forest and ever farther from help. He was worse that night, but the next morning he declared himself better, though his appearance had now begun to alarm me; his face was shrunk and his eyes were brilliant as the eyes of a woman at a fête, and his hands shook as they held the coffee cup, but his legs, under the dominion of his powerful will, seemed unaffected. He would go forward, and forward we went.

" 'That evening he seemed better. We had now reached the fringe of the true wilderness, the rubber trees had ceased, and we had struck a great belt of matamatas and fig which grow together finely. Mixed with them were unknown trees, and everywhere the vine and the liantasse and brush rope festooned the air; the trees seemed hung with drapery of torn lace festooned with orchids, and the air shoots of the wild pine and the tubes of the water vine rushed up through the gloom to be lost where the parrots shrieked and the monkeys chattered.

" 'The moon was near the full, and when she rose the noises of the night began; you have heard the Mother of the Moon, that little owl which fills the night here with its melancholy cry, but you have not heard it out there in the forest, nor the roar of the howling monkeys rocking themselves on the branches, nor the hundred sounds made by unknown things that only speak at night when the moon turns all that place into a great green cave like a cave of the sea where the vines and the air shoots seem climbing up through green and waving water.

" 'Next morning Juan declared himself still better, but it was the declaration of a man on the verge of bankruptcy. He did not know it, nor did I know that the fever, though suppressed, was still working in him, so we pushed on making good progress day by day, each night building a *tambo,* a work that only took the hands three hours, and each morning leaving it behind us. So it went on till we had built our sixth resting place by the bank of the little river that held the gold.

" 'Pedro had spoken truth. The river is small, but it is there, and its mud and sand are laden with gold deposited through the ages and brought down from some source of gold far up to the west, but maybe, indeed, not so far—who can tell?

" ' "We are rich," said Juan as he sat that night when we had finished washing and weighing a specimen of the sand taken at haphazard, "we are rich enough to command fleets and armies. We will be kings."

" 'I had never heard him talk in an ex-

travagant way before; it was the fever that he had been carrying for days like a demon in his bosom and which was now about to claim him.

" 'At supper he talked like a man drunk. I thought it was the gold; it was the fever. Next morning I knew.

" 'Ah, that was a bad time, six days' march from any help, with few drugs and the roughest food, without a woman for a nurse, for in sickness as in childhood what can we do without a woman's hand?

" 'The *tambo* was given over to the sick man, and for three days he lay fighting the disease with what poor help we could give him, then on the evening of the third day he sent for me. I was asleep in a shack we had built among the trees when Pedro called me saying that Juan wished for me at once. I came, and there he was, lying on the bed of leaves we had made for him, his eyes half closed and his hands folded on his breast.

" 'He opened his eyes when he heard my step and motioned me to sit down on the ground beside him. Then he closed his eyes for a moment. I thought he had fallen asleep, but he was not asleep. Suddenly in a clear, sane voice he began to speak to me.

" ' "When I sent for you from Para," said he, "I told you that Ramon had died from an accident, that his gun had burst while he was out shooting with me. Have you seen that gun?"

" 'No,' I replied, wondering what he meant. I thought for a moment that his mind was wandering, but I dismissed that idea, his manner and his tone spoke of perfect sanity.

" ' "No," he replied, "you took my word for it, you did not ask for evidence of his death, you did not imagine that I lied to you. Ramon did not die from an accident. I killed him."

" 'You killed him!"

" ' "I killed him. Would you prefer the word murder? I murdered him. I am near death, and I wish to confess."

" 'I sat with my hands folded. I knew he was speaking the truth, my tongue lay like a pebble in my mouth. Then I said:

" 'You murdered Ramon!'

" ' "Call it that," he said.

" 'But why—but why?' I asked, speaking as though to get out of a darkness that had suddenly surrounded me. 'Why—why?'

" ' "It was done in passion, about a girl," he replied. "She favored him; I loved her; he was the real master of Esperanza. I never cared for Ramon—you know my temper; I often held it in, often; he always managed to cross my wishes, yet I held my temper in. I hated him at times, for he was always right on business matters, and somehow I was always wrong, that touched my pride. Then I fell in love; she was the daughter of a *seringuero,* as low down as that, but she had eyes like the night; but Roman had been before me with her, she would not look at me, the daughter of a *seringuero.*

" ' "Then Ramon and I had our quarrel, and I killed him in the woods not far from that spit where the alligators sun themselves. We had our guns with us. I wrapped his head in leaves and threw his gun in the river beyond the spit, where it lies six fathoms deep. I carried him home and told the hands it was an accident; there is no questioning of statements at Esperanza.

" ' "I killed him, and now that I am dying I tell you and ask your forgiveness."

" 'I sat without speaking. Ramon was my favorite brother, this thing had stricken the life in me, Juan was dying, the whole world seemed suddenly to have come to an end.

" 'He asked me to forgive him. I scarcely knew what he meant. I had no anger in my heart, only grief. Had he been strong and well all would have been different, then rage would have filled me, no doubt, and I would have avenged Ramon or handed the murderer to justice, but he was dying and he had confessed. Did I forgive him? Before God, I cannot say whether I did or not. I cannot read my mind as it was just then. It seemed, indeed, just then a blank, but I know that when he asked again, "Do you forgive me?" I answered, "Yes."

" ' "Then," said he, "I die in peace." He closed his eyes and I left the *tambo.*

" 'The sun was setting and the open space by the river was filled with the light of sunset, great moths flew in the golden, gauzy light and the smell of the forest was altering; few men seem to have noticed this change in the scents that fill the air of the forest when day begins to turn into night. I believe I myself had not noticed it till just then. My senses had suddenly become more acute as though the shock I had received had sharpened them, also my perception of things, as though my mind, ever so slightly

joggled from its base, were seeing things from a fresh viewpoint.

" 'Right before me between two branches a bird-eating spider had spread its huge web in which a little colored bird had become entangled. This thing which was common seemed to me new and monstrous and strange—strange as the new world which had suddenly surrounded me.

" 'I walked a little way among the trees, and, taking my seat on a fallen log, I tried to pull my mind together, to think and to remember.

" 'Pictures of Ramon came up before me and of our boyhood. I had always been his favorite. I was the youngest brother, rather delicate, the spoiled child of the family. Ramon had always stood between me and the rough things of life, he had been generous to me with money. Had I forgiven his murderer?

" 'Had I betrayed Roman? Looking into my heart I could find no anger against Juan. Death had intervened, destroying anger and the thoughts of vengeance, but I had not forgiven him. I had said the words, it is true, but I had spoken out of a mind rendered negative by contending forces and under dominion of the great power exercised by the dying.

" 'That power was on me still.

" 'I left the trees and returned toward the *tambo*. Pedro and the others had lit a fire some distance away. It was now dark, and the flicker of it showed against the night of the trees and strangely fierce against the still silver of the moonlight.

" 'At the door of the *tambo* I paused. There was no sound. I entered and struck a match. Juan was still lying on his back with his hands folded, but he was not dead; he was sunk in a profound sleep, his face had changed, miraculously as though he had gained ten years of youth and his forehead was dewed by a gentle perspiration. Death had passed him by, the fever had left him, he would not die; he would recover and be well and strong again. He had been at the turning point when he had sent for me to make his confession, and that sudden ease coming to his mind had cast the die for life.

" 'The match went out. I lit another and stood till it burned my fingers gazing on him.

" 'Then I went out into the night and came to the fire where Pedro and the others were seated smoking, with the great white moths flitting about them and the great white moon shining above. I told them that I would look after Juan that night and then I went and lay down in my shack among the trees with all the noises of the forest around me and the great problem before me staring at me like a sphinx.

" 'My forgiveness was withdrawn with the withdrawal of death. I was now the judge and also the guardian of the honor of our house and its good name.

" 'Would you believe me that in that terrible position and freighted with that great trust, I slept? I slept as soundly as the man in the *tambo,* and with the first screaming of the parrots and yelping of the toucans I woke.

" 'The dawn was strong, and, creeping toward the hut, I looked in. Juan was still asleep, lying, now, on his right side and breathing easily and lightly. I entered and, listening, I counted his respirations. They were normal. In an hour or so he would wake a new man, weak, very weak, but on the road to recovery. Yet he must never return to Esperanza. I did not say that, Justice said it, and the ghosts of my forefathers and the ghost of Ramon.

" 'I left the place, and, going to where the men were still asleep, I woke Pedro.

" ' "Pedro," said I, "Senhor Juan is dead, rouse the hands, collect the stores, and give the order to march. There is no need to dig a grave, the *tambo* will be his tomb, so he has willed it."

" 'The men awoke yawning in the light that was now full, and without question, and like beasts of burden they shouldered their loads. Pedro gave the order to march, and they wheeled back along the road we had come, I, following, leaving the golden river and the sleeping man, who was my brother, in the *tambo* that was to be his tomb.

" 'You are the only man who knows this and now my heart seems lighter. You can understand, and also that the judge pays for his office a far larger sum than the salary he receives. That was three years ago, and now see in the third year my trees are telling me that my payment is due. I have got to die like them, but first I have got to bury what remains of Juan. It is all a fate working out intricately. I don't know how I will die, maybe the fever will take me as it took him when I make my journey into the forest to find his bones and to bury them.'

"I made that journey with him," finished Townley. "When he had told me that story it was as though a strong bond had been woven between us. I went with him. We found the old ruined *tambos,* one by one, but we did not reach the river, for in the fourth *tambo* from the start we found a skeleton. It was the skeleton of Juan. He had dragged himself back thus far, miraculously, despite the want of food and the weakness that must have been his. It was the knowledge of this fact that killed Perreira—with the help of a Mauser pistol.

"We buried the brothers beneath a great matamata tree.

"That is the Amazon, where the men are as strange as the trees, and the trees as the river, and where the great plantations turn rubber into gold that no man can spend in a climate that few men can live in—where the sure things are fever and fate and the shouting of the toucans by day and the roaring of the howling monkeys by night."

SONGS FROM OVER THERE

A. W. O. L.

A. W. O. L.—yes, Bud, that's me!
Six months up front; some long, hard spell,
Couldn't get no leave, so you can see
Why—I just went A. W. O. L.

As long as there was fightin' I didn't ask to go
I wasn't gonna be a yellow pup,
If other guys could stand it, you bet I wouldn't show
That any kind of game could do me up.
I slept in rain an' drizzle an' I et my meals from tin,
An' if I felt like blubberin' I'd set my teeth an' grin;
But when we got to billets an' it looked as if we'd stay,
An' leave was plumb denied me, why I simply went away.

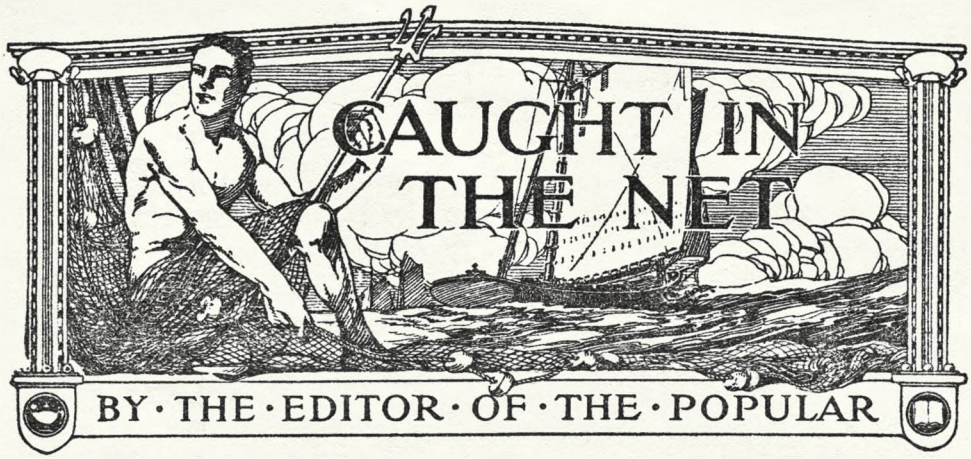
My clothes an' my features was muddy
But under the mud was a smile,
For after my laborin', Buddy,
I thought I'd just play for a while.

I beat it on the railway an' when the guard came by
I muttered "ne comprend" to all he said,
An' so I come to Paris—to Paris, Bud, an' I
Have done my best to paint the city red;
I've played around regardless, I've bought the chickens wine,
I've stood on café tables an' sang "The World is Mine."
At last the M. P.'s got me an' they put me in the coop,
But when I think of all my fun, why I don't give a whoop!

I beat it from camp in a hurry
An' now I must pay for the crime,
But though I catch hell, I should worry,
For I've had one hell of a time!

A. W. O. L., yes, Bud, that's me,
Six months up front; some long, hard spell,
Leave or no leave—I've had my spree,
I'm glad I went A. W. O. L.

BERTON BRALEY.



WHAT WILL BE THE REMEDY?

ONCE strikes were a remedy, but they are rapidly becoming a disease, which, in turn calls for cure. The recent truce proposed between capital and labor for a period of six months, until the country had adjusted itself to post-war conditions, was one of the most progressive moves made in alleviation of our perpetual industrial disturbances. Certainly the wage system in labor does not possess sufficient pliability and felicity to prevent constant clashing of interests. Furthermore, it is being forced upon everybody that strikes are not only a terrible economic waste per se, but they make innocent nonparticipators suffer in such number and to such extent that the power of the minority causing the general injury is altogether out of proportion to the whole involved. Urgently some sort of check or balance must be forthcoming or all kinds and degrees of workers will organize into striking units, which might produce civil disorganization and strife of the worst description.

During this period of reconstruction through which we are passing so painfully, and in which the crying need is for uninterrupted labor and production, it is with dread that we hear of the many strikes and upheavals. Not that we censure the workingman in his age-long struggle for better living, nor blame the employer for his measures of self-preservation; but we do attack the fact that there is no more effective means of adjustment devised, so that such losses need not be incurred by the contestants and the public. This is one of the biggest tasks of the future. Already it has been met with a number of suggestions and plans like that of having labor representatives in the councils of capital and sharing profits of the business on equitable basis, but the remedies for our industrial unrest are very limited and do not meet the whole complex issue.

An idea of the appalling waste in time and money and its concomitant social ills and evils may be had from the record kept by the bureau of labor of these repeated outbreaks. Between 1916 and 1918 there were no less than 11,092 strikes and 338 lockouts, and during this time labor was considered on its good behavior for patriotic reasons. Indeed, in the nineteen months during which we were at war, the average was 321 strikes a month. The settlements were about evenly shared. In 1916 employers and employees each won 33% of the contests, with 34% compromised, while in the two succeeding years capital won only 23% of the fights, labor getting 35%, and 42% being compromised.

It has been computed that a thousand years of work-time are annually sacrificed in the United States owing to strikes and lockouts—that is, a thousand years of a hypothetical life. Think of how quickly we might recover from the damages of war if there were no industrial stops for a couple of years. Who will bring forth the solution, the remedy? It is one of the finest of chances for immortality in the hearts of men that we know.

FINE BUILDINGS AS MEMORIALS

GENERALS on high-stepping chargers seeming to ride over the tops of trees in public parks; on many an open square, soldiers with inspired expressions standing atop piles of cannon balls; in other public places, admirals, with binoculars in hand, with stern visage watching imaginary ships of the enemy go down; on yet other pedestals, mere groups of soldiers and sailors, shaking hands or doing other inane things—all this in marble or bronze at an immense cost, and the work often botched or meaningless, the result of political influence, or even of competitive examinations in which the best sculptors declined to take part. The Civil War and the Spanish War were productive of so much of this kind of sculpturing that the movement to erect memorial buildings instead of statues to soldiers of the Great War just ended has already succeeded to a large extent.

The most striking result thus far is the decision of the city of Santa Monica, California, to build an open-air theater along Greek lines. The theater will seat three thousand, and will be erected on the lower part of a great hill overlooking the ocean. The top of the hill is already crowned with a magnificent group of buildings, one of which is the high school. Thirty thousand dollars in bonds was voted for the work, and the theater will soon be dedicated with a historical pageant.

About two hundred and eighty towns have thus far definitely decided upon community houses, auditoriums, and other variations of liberty buildings as war memorials instead of monuments, obelisks, or even arches. One thousand other cities and towns are considering similar projects. There are three ways of raising funds—by voluntary contributions, by bond issues, and by a combination of public subscriptions and public funds. Bonds have been objected to in some cases on the ground that the soldiers themselves will thus be called on to help pay for the memorial, but the amount in each individual case is not large. Drives for the sale of nondividend-paying stock have raised large sums, and subscriptions for bricks at one dollar each were successful in Philadelphia and Cincinnati. If the building is to become a headquarters for patriotic, literary, art, or dramatic societies, rents will largely maintain it. "Living endowments," or pledges of five dollars a year each, the interest on one hundred dollars, have been productive of sufficient revenue in several cities.

THE VALUE OF BRAINS

EVEN before the era of racing costs and jumping wages it used to be a sad sort of joke that college professors were more poorly paid than many mechanics and some laborers. Compared with the force of muscle and skill of hand, brain energy seemed to be at a discount. Topsy-turvy, this condition found its epigram in the slogan of the president of Harvard, who, comparing the pay of motormen and professors, the former exceeding the latter to a degree, asked: "Which is more valuable—minding the train or training the mind?"

One of the unexpected lessons taught to business by the late war was that college professors were competent to fill positions requiring executive ability, exact knowledge, and practical application of common sense. Up to that point in our history business had looked rather askance at the college professor as a dry-as-dust being whose academic mind had no relation to real life. But now that opinion has been completely reversed owing to the exhibition of capacities undreamed of in the "academic" class under the exigencies of war, with the result that business now seeks the services of the professor and tempts him with larger recompense than can be afforded by universities.

In this way the problem of obtaining the best instructors for their departments has become a serious one for our institutions of learning. At their richest, they cannot hope to compete with the rewards held out by commercial enterprise. And for their highest influence on the molding of the nation it is imperative that they shall be able to command the finest flower of scholarship and character.

To offset the competition of business for academic brains of the best type, the college is compelled to put the case before the public and seek assistance. Money, in brief, is the solution. Harvard led in the van with an appeal for eleven million dollars, a sum,

which in comparison with her services to American manhood and ideals, is but a trifle. A popular drive for educational purposes would not be a bad idea, although it is difficult to make people in general enthusiastic about intellectual needs. But we hope that some of our "new" millionaires—the war is supposed to have made several thousand of them —may distinguish themselves by making generous contributions to these funds.

WHALING FROM THE AIR

THOSE gray, grim whaling vessels that lured nineteenth-century lads from snug beds and doting mothers, forth to a wild home on the rolling wave, swing at anchor now in the dim harbor of the past. And the monster mammals that furrowed the deep have themselves threatened to become as extinct as the dodo bird. Whaling has been all but obsolete during the last decades.

But thanks to the respite of recent years the big cetaceans of the Pacific are beginning to blow again. The king of sports is coming back, and with a brand-new lure for tempting adventure—dreaming boys out of their landlubber beds—the lure of the air. For the whaling of the future bids fair to be done by airships as well as water ships.

Lieutenant James McCullough, an army flier of San Diego, has opened the season, so to speak, for aviating after whales. He was practicing aerial gunnery off the coast of southern California the other day, when a whale began spouting several miles away. Instantly the birdman started in pursuit. Now, no mere fish, even if it is a whale, can survive the combination of a one-hundred-and-fifty-mile-an-hour airplane and a Marlin machine gun, and soon the shore residents were towing in a gray-back that yielded hundreds of gallons of oil and over a ton of steaks.

Whale meat, discarded as worthless in the old days, now has a keen market waiting for it, and the catch netted some fifteen hundred dollars, which is not at all bad for an afternoon's fishing, and suggests a pleasant financial zest to the sport of whaling from the air.

And so it is. Adventure is like a good actor. After making its final bow it frequently comes back for an encore—its make-up slightly altered, perhaps, by new inventions. And these inventions, though much libeled as joy-killers, have in no wise made adventure "safe and sane." On the contrary we can depend upon every little invention adding a danger all its own to our enterprises. Harpooning whales from sailing vessels was a hazardous undertaking; but shooting them from airplanes entails a brand-new set of even greater hazards—for which let all true disciples of adventure give thanks.

EASY WORK FOR BURGLARS

MANY small burglaries have been reported of late in large cities in different States, in which sums of money amounting to hundreds of dollars and Liberty Bonds in some cases, have been taken from bureaus or small safes at homes. An unusual number of burglaries at the offices of business concerns, in which much larger sums have been taken from the office safes have been also reported.

The most remarkable feature of these robberies is the fact that so many people risk keeping money in home or office, which, as shown in court records, are among the most unsafe places for money. Why they should take this risk, with banks easy of access in all cities, appears a puzzling question. Some of the victims have admitted that it was because of an erroneous belief in their own immunity.

As policemen and detectives know, the specialists in the underworld of criminals have a systematized method of finding where there are sums of money outside of banks and their plan is simple. Burglars or their agents talk with servants or others in home districts as reputable people and when they find that a family has money at home the rest is easy and the burglary follows. Agents of burglars frequent office buildings and learn the gossip in the same way. They find that some firm keeps thousands of dollars in the office safe regularly. The burglars enter the office and force open the safe at an auspicious time, when watchmen relax their vigilance, the robbers usually escaping with the money in an automobile. On the other hand banks are specially guarded, and it is so

seldom that burglars succeed in robbing a bank that a successful bank robbery is a notable event in the underworld.

Among struggling people in city flats or tenements, who are trying to save part of their earnings, the custom of keeping money at home instead of in savings banks, which burglars steer clear of, often prevails. That one of the most unsafe places in which to keep money is the home, was convincingly shown about twenty or twenty-five years ago when the failure of a national bank, followed by the failure of a number of smaller banks, took place in New York City. Thousands of wage earners who had deposits in the savings banks, became panic-stricken and a general rush of depositors to withdraw their savings from these institutions, which were in no danger whatever, followed. As even savings banks could not meet such a rush without notice, the statutory notification prohibiting withdrawals of money until a certain time elapsed was given, after a day or so, to depositors and when the time limit expired the scare was over. On the first day of the rush, however, large numbers of depositors had withdrawn their savings and an unprecedented number of small burglaries followed. The apartments of a large number of those who had withdrawn their deposits were robbed, many of the victims losing the savings of a lifetime.

POPULAR TOPICS

IN peace the university is one of the great influences, quietly performing a tremendous work in the shaping of our life. Until the late war demonstrated its worth in a national crisis, we hardly thought of its fighting value. The university men distinguished themselves in every department of warfare. Let us cite a few examples. The best trench helmet was designed by an archæologist. How to obtain the best charcoal for gas masks was the suggestion of a tropical botanist. Our production of field glasses from 1,800 a week in 1914 to 3,500 in 1918 was the job of physicist and chemist. The death rate was greatly reduced by our physicians. A doctor of philosophy established conferences for the discussion of technical problems. Indeed, scientific training proved itself on battlefields as well as back of the lines. We owe a big debt to the universities.

WE are glad to record that the State of Wisconsin has determined to give her soldiers, sailors, marines, and nurses of the war either a bonus or an education in gratitude for their services. The voters of the commonwealth indorsed a project to distribute $15,000,000 for the purpose, $10 a month for each month of service, the minimum being $50, or $30 monthly toward an education at a State university or other public institution.

AGAIN the budget system for our government is being agitated. Recently, twenty-two governors of States figured in a canvass of public opinion on the question. All of these State executives protested against the haphazard method of estimating expenditures of the Federal government through twenty-nine congressional committees. Incidentally, it was pointed out that forty-one of our States have adopted budget schemes to curb waste and extravagance. How long will Congress hold out against this modern improvement in financing?

IT has been rumored that American tourists of the mountain-loving and climbing variety are finding in the Canadian Rockies all the joys and thrills of Switzerland. Some go so far as to say that the Canadian mountains are like fifty Switzerlands thrown into one!

FOR months we have been sympathizing with the grape growers of California, thinking what prohibition would do to the wine-making industry. We are told we need not mourn for them. A way has been discovered to make delicious wine and yet keep its content of alcohol at one-half of one per cent. Not only that. The alcohol removed from these new wines can be used as an additional by-product.

ANOTHER phase of prohibition is presented in the possible alcohol substitutes on which many chemists are laboring to satisfy the sot gentleman who craves his "kick." According to our latest information a pellet had been concocted which had all the jolt of a high-powered drink. Three of them made one merry, six of them made one mad.

AS a commentary on the U. S. Steel Corporation rumpus, the *Financial World* gave a list of wages paid to some of the workers. We think the figures worthy of quotation for a number of reasons, especially when you consider that we are able to make steel cheaper than England even with such pay rolls. Here they are: Steel sheet rollers, $28.16 a day of eight hours; sheet heaters, $21.12; roughers, $11.92; catchers, $11.92; steel pourers, $12.84; vessel man, $14.65; engineers and manipulators, $12.03. Twelve-hour workers get more: Blooming mill heaters, $17.91; skelp mill rollers, $21.73; lap welders, $16.08; blowers, $13.76; bottom makers, $12.91; regulators, $13.52.

IN some respects we seem to be getting on with South America, though we are criticized for being blind in that direction. Trade between us and the Argentine during the year ending June 30, 1919, amounted to $304,000,000, which made that country the eighth largest customer of the United States.

BELGIUM, the first to suffer the ravages of war, seems likely to be the first in reconstruction. That is if Ghent is any indication. The Belgians are working day and night to make Ghent the chief cotton distributing point for central Europe. The harbor is being expanded, rail facilities increased, and modern warehouses constructed. Ghent is geographically nearer a greater number of spinning centers than any other European port. It is purposed to surpass Bremen, Havre, and Trieste as distributing centers.

EIGHTEEN months will be required to pump the water out of the Lens colleries which were flooded by the Germans. While the water is thus being pumped at great expense, France is thinking of developing her hydroelectric resources. The Rhone River is under consideration. Twenty water-power stations are proposed in a bill, to produce an average of 715,000 horse power each. Fifteen years would be required for the task at an estimated expense of $500,000,000. It is calculated that the River Rhone would afford power equivalent to 5,000,000 tons of coal annually.

WHILE we hear on all sides the complaints of the high cost of living, the New York State superintendent of banks issues a statement showing that the number of accounts has increased from 3,446,889 to 3,579,057, a growth of nearly four per cent in a year. The total resources on June 30, 1919, of all New York banking institutions under State supervision amounted to seven and a half billions, an increase of 929 million dollars in six months.

ONLY room for six more famous persons in Westminster Abbey, and to get them in it will be necessary to cremate the bodies. Who will the immortal six be? Which of England's great men now living will be cheated of the honor? Which would prefer to die to get in? We wonder.

The Secret City

By Roy Norton

Author of "The Glyphs," "The Liberator," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

At the end of "The Glyphs," of which this story is the sequel, it will be remembered that the eccentric Doctor Morgano preferred to remain in the ancient city of the Maya people, in the jungle fastnesses of Guatemala, to study the lost civilization. Three years later, in Paris, Henri Hallewell and Wardrop, his fellow adventurers, receive a cipher message borne to them by a man named Guiteras, and they learn that Morgano wishes to escape from the religious fanatics among whom he lives. Hallewell, Wardrop, and an Arab named Beni Hassan start out to rescue the doctor. Near the secret city they are captured and are kept prisoners on parole until it is decided what to do with them. A Spanish girl named Marzida, who speaks English and French, is inclined to help them. The capital of the Maya race is now inhabited, and there are many luxuries, some of them modern, and plans are afoot to restore the power as well as the civilization of the Mayas throughout Guatemala.

(A Three-Part Story—Part Two)

CHAPTER VII.

WARNED by Marzida, we avoided her, and put in the day as best we could, although somewhat upset by the little she had told us. Yet at luncheon we were given a fresh insight into the character of Manco, who unbent a trifle and seemed to discover in Wardy an interesting companion. It was started by Manco who made a jesting quotation from one of the old Greek classics, to which Wardy promptly retorted with another quotation from the same source, and within a few minutes I was forgotten. Wardy and Manco got involved in a discussion concerning some old Greek play and Manco's eyes twinkled and looked almost human as they went at it.

"I could almost wager," said Manco, "that you are an Oxonian!"

"I am!" declared Wardy stoutly. "And that is Oxford's interpretation of those passages."

"But," persisted his excellency, "Oxford fails to take into consideration——" et cetera, et cetera. And I found myself surreptitiously staring at Marzida who, if I judged her rightly, was not even listening to what was said, but was engrossed in her own thoughts. As for me, I got enough of the classics when I was at school, and have never loved them since. I like more practical things. I am not interested in anything dead, be it languages or lost nations. Moreover, I felt that we were in a predicament that permitted no division of interest. In plain Americanese I felt that we were "up against it."

The afternoon we dawdled through as best we could, enlivened somewhat by Benny's description of what he had demanded to eat and of how he had obtained it. His astute observation, however, enlightened us somewhat further as to the conditions of his excellency's household, and they were not entirely for or against us. It seemed that in the rear of the residence were quarters for state workmen to the number of about a hundred and fifty, who could doubtless be called upon to run us down in case of attempted flight; but that otherwise there were apparently no guard whatever kept over us, or any special watch upon our actions. Benny gathered that our capture was known to every one in the Sacred City, but that the people were entirely willing to leave our fate in the hands of the authorities. Thus far it was neither reassuring nor disconcerting, and, therefore, I looked forward with increasing eagerness to the promised interview with Marzida.

The dinner passed with Manco in an unusual condition of silence as if he were absorbed in thought, and Marzida accompanied him from the roof where it was

served. Wardy and I were disappointed that we had received no signal from her, and lounged around the parapet and smoked, and wondered what it was best for us to do. We saw his excellency disappear unattended, but clad in a sort of state robe that we had not hitherto seen, consisting of a loosely flowing coat brought to the body by a belt, trousers that were loose around the thighs but that were gathered snugly from the knees downward by lattice-work windings of bands led upward from ornate shoes to jeweled garters. Over one shoulder was thrown a loose mantle, not at all unlike an ancient Roman toga, that was clasped by a jeweled ornament.

"Wish I could get a closer look at that outfit," said Wardy. "I'm interested in things like that."

"I'm a great deal more interested in how we are to know where we are to——"

A quick little gesture of warning from Wardy silenced what might have proved an indiscretion, for we could never be completely certain when it was safe to talk.

We suddenly descried a boat putting out into the lake, and it was evidently some sort of state barge; for it had eight rowers apparently in uniform, and in the stern sat the unmistakable figure of his excellency. The boat headed toward the island by an oblique course as if to pull around to the great broad steps leading up from the landing place, but which from our vantage point we could not see. And then we were surprised by Marzida's voice behind us.

"Listen," she said to Wardy. "It might be best for you to send for your man Beni Hassan and when he comes to let him sit there at the head of the stairs as if in waiting for your orders. Save by these, no one could eavesdrop."

Wardy lost no time in obeying her suggestion, and until Benny came we said nothing that even the servants bringing cool drinks for the evening, and putting the last tidying touches to the rugs and tables might not have heard. When the last one had disappeared Wardy gave instructions to Benny who nodded swiftly, flashed his white teeth as if with satisfaction that something, he cared not what, was afoot, and replied in low Arabic: "Not even the ghost of a cat from the tomb of a pharaoh shall pass that way without my hearing him, my master!" And in a moment he had slipped across and seated himself on the topmost step. He dropped down in that waiting attitude which somehow seems to forever fit an Arab at rest, quite as if for centuries they have developed waiting to a fine art.

Marzida nodded her approval and led the way to a corner of the roof where there were cushions thrown over stone couches, and beckoned us to sit beside her. She broke into her explanation without any waste of words, as if anxious lest we be unexpectedly interrupted.

"You two men know, I am certain from tiny scraps I have overheard, what the Sacred City was but a short time ago. But there are probably not a half dozen of the Maya people who have the remotest idea that you have ever been here before. Ixtual, one of the hereditary high priests, kept your secret well. That peculiar man, Morgano I think you called him, but now known to this people as Quano, was brought by Ixtual to the head men of the Mayas as a sort of messiah who was sent by their god Icopan to lead the race out of its sloth and back to its ancient glories. They had them, I am sure, whether you believe it or not."

"Who could doubt it, seeing the work of their hands?" said Wardy, with a gesture that seemed to take in the whole valley.

"But what you and all white men save, perhaps, a score have never known, is that the Maya people have clung to their religious beliefs, and a thousand customs and superstitions and ambitions and hopes through all the centuries; that not even being conquered by their own weaknesses and plagues and Spaniards has ever been able to make them lose sight of an ancient prophecy that some time they were to be led back, like the lost tribes of Israel, to their land of promise. Ixtual made them believe that Morgano was the inspired one, and I'm rather of the belief that Ixtual himself believes it. But I have gathered, by patching little things together into a whole, that this man Morgano, for some reason of his own—perhaps because he, too, believed himself inspired—also convinced them that it was the truth, and led a party of its priests and councilors here to this Sacred City which had actually been lost to Maya knowledge."

"Then as far as I can see," said Wardy thoughtfully, "prophecies do come true. And about Morgano? Is he still here?"

"Yes, he is still here and is the supreme high priest of the Mayas, inasmuch as he is

the mouthpiece and guardian of their supreme god Icopan. He is, you might say, the king of the Mayas; at least, being the spiritual ruler gives him nearly that much power. But the inside truth of it is that he is a bone of contention between two distinct factions."

"Bone of contention? What do you mean by that?" Wardy asked, leaning toward her.

"Why, just this. As far as I can learn, and you may be certain that I have at least the average woman's curiosity, Quano is a peculiar sort of man, who takes no pride whatever in his position, seems to have no personal ambitions, doesn't like to be bothered with the mere routine of ruling, and as a result does about as he is told to do by the high priest of the council, Ixtual, who is one of the Moderns. The Moderns, as they are called, consist mostly of men who have seen something of the outside world. Some of them, like my stepfather, have been educated in it. These men have but one idea, which is, first of all, to weld the Mayas into a people with a national ideal, to more or less modernize their religion, and then in time by any means at their command gain territorial independence from Guatemala. They hope to solidify the ambitions of the Mayas secretly through possession of the Sacred City and its valley, where they can educate and influence the people as a nucleus for a starting point. Then they believe that some place there is a hidden treasure that will give them all the finances they need for their next step which, if it succeeds, would mean the absolute overthrow of the Guatemalan government. As far as I can understand it, the Moderns, as well as their opponents, called Ancients, believe that Quano is the sole man who can discover where the treasure is concealed. And that is one reason why they permit him to absorb himself in studying old glyphs and all sorts of stone cuttings and inscriptions that none of them can decipher. The people themselves don't know this. They think he is a very holy man who secludes himself entirely to ponder over religious matters."

Wardy and I were both looking at her as she sat with her chin resting on her hand and staring out across the lake as if herself entranced by the mysteries of the Maya race enshrined on the isle of temples. We exchanged glances.

"Then," said Wardy, "what part would Morgano play if he found this supposed store of treasure?"

"If the Moderns found it," she said, "I think he would continue as he is, nominally a revered king, but virtually a prisoner of sorts here in the valley; but if the Ancients got possession, his life wouldn't be worth—that!" and she snapped a thumb and finger as an indication of nothing.

"But who are these you call Ancients?" I asked, and she turned toward me with a friendly little smile.

"The Ancients," she said, lowering her voice and leaning toward us, "are fanatics of the worst type, who believe in all the old rites with the possible exception of human sacrifice. Yet neither one nor a thousand lives would stand in their way for the full restoration of the ancient religion. They are those who have never been out of the Maya settlements on the other side of the Twin Peaks, who know nothing of the outer world, who are fools enough to believe that they can exist here for centuries without molestation, and would not hesitate at anything to gain power. No, not even at murder! They believe in the sacredness of their cause and, while they might pity obstacles to be removed, would as relentlessly remove them as if they were grains of dust. And now I ask you to listen very closely to what I have to say. For some reason that none of the Moderns can understand, the rumor has gone round among the Ancients, who constitute at least two-thirds of the population, that they have found something which will lead them to their goal. They do but wait for that something, and what it is none of the Moderns has been able to discover. Manco doubts if any except their own leaders know what it is. The Ancients believe in destroying any alien who tries to cross the jungle barrier. The Ancients have already demanded the deaths of you and your Arabian, and the meeting to-night is one they have forced, and, if they win, you will be executed; murdered before the next full moon!"

Suddenly she wept, shielding her face with her fingers, and bending forward until only the outline of her head could be seen against the light. It was the old, old picture of womanly compassion for those she believed unjustly condemned to death, and nothing could have more thoroughly convinced us of our peril. I saw Wardy's big, capable hand slip impulsively across and

come to rest on her shoulder and his fine deep voice was never more melodious than when he said softly: "Courage, friend! Courage! And I call you friend because you have proved to be such. We are not men unfamiliar with danger or unacquainted with death. None of us is afraid. It is better, therefore, to calm yourself and tell us if you think there is not some way by which to escape."

With evident effort, doubtless somewhat encouraged by his voice, and, perhaps, by the touch of his firm hand, she controlled herself and turned to study his face. Then she slowly and quite despondently shook her head in negation.

"Not a way that I can even think of," she said. "You see, they know that you must somehow have made your way through the outer jungle and the passages beneath the Twin Peaks, of which none but a bare half dozen men know. The men who do know are equally divided between the two powerful parties. Not even all the high priests know it. Those who live in this valley were conducted here blindfolded and have taken their most solemn oaths to abjure the world outside. The courier who discovered your trail through the jungles belongs to the Ancient party, and told his own leaders that white men had come this way and that they had been brought in by a muleteer with pack animals, who had been turned back and had disappeared in the direction of the coast. The guards who know the secret passages trailed your footsteps through the dust and learned that you were hidden inside. So, you see, not even Morgano himself, nor the high priest Ixtual would dare do more than intercede for you, because you know too much to be permitted to live."

"But," I objected, "suppose that Ixtual, the high priest, proved that he is our friend?"

"Not even friendship would induce him to spare you," she replied gloomily. "This is a case in which both parties, rivals though they are for power and differing in their ideas of how to restore the Maya nation, must agree that you are too dangerous to live. The proof that they take no risks whatever is given by the fact that there is now a guard of full fifty men, some of whom, every minute of the day and night, are on watch up at the great entrance to the passage. Moreover, Manco, a Modern, although a zealot for his people, suspects that the Ancients have introduced spies into this household, and that despite your paroles, and ready submission to the rules laid down, you are under almost constant surveillance. I am risking much and am in danger of becoming suspect merely by being here with you now."

Somehow this information greatly exasperated me. I didn't care to involve her in our own dangers; dangers in which we had involved ourselves with foolhardy eyes widely opened. It didn't seem fair.

"I wish," I said, "that you had not taken the risk! It makes it a sorry situation that we should drag you into this mess. It doesn't make me feel very big and independent to think that you, through mere human pity, have been endangered by trying to warn us."

"That," she replied, "can't be helped. It wouldn't have left me with any self-respect had I not done all I could to warn you. I haven't been able to help you in any way, but I am glad to have at least been able to tell you where you stand, which may be of vital use, because you cannot hereafter be surprised and taken off your guard."

"Could we depend upon Manco?" Wardy asked, proving that his active mind had been reviewing the situation.

She laughed bitterly.

"His is as cold and aloof and fine an intelligence as you have ever met," she replied. "Neither life nor death, love nor hate, mean anything to him. He would sacrifice me, or, if he had one, his own son, or himself, for the Maya. He has but one love and but one dream, and that is entirely centered in the rehabilitation of his people."

"Then," said Wardy seriously, "be he right or wrong, against or for us, the man is great."

"He is," she assented without hesitation. "So great as to chill one. He was kind to my mother, but she learned to fear him. He has been kind to me, but I, too, know fear. Any appeal to him based on pity or humanity would be futile. Any appeal to his intellect—a cold hard plea of reasoning—would command instant respect and consideration. He is a man without a heart—a disembodied intelligence. Nothing more and nothing less. And I tell you this—if I am not mistaken, Ixtual and he are of a kind. They understand each other. They strive together. They plot together with never a

disagreement or a question. Each is but a tool for the other. The great Quano is to them, I honestly believe, but an implement at hand. They value him as such and use him as such."

"But what does Morgano—or, as you call him Quano—think of all this?" asked Wardy, bending toward her again as if trying to see her face through the dim light of stars.

"I don't know," she answered readily enough. "Him I have seen but few times. One looks upon a god but rarely in this land. And here he is to the people an inspired instrument; a being sacred; a thing sacrosanct. He lives alone. He works alone. His solitudes are not to be disturbed. No more than three or four times a year is he ever seen by any of the ordinary Mayas, and those are occasions of the most important character. He is the mouthpiece for their god Icopan, who speaks but seldom. I never saw the sacred image but once. It is in the great temple on top of the pyramid out there on the island. Then, enormous curtains swung open at noon and all the people knelt and bent their heads. The great Quano came and said they were to do certain things and observe certain customs and then"—she stopped and whispered—"the eyes of that image glared at us suddenly and—I was frightened! I don't suppose you will believe it, but I tell you it stared at us, and the people kneeling were afraid, and when they dared look up again the eyes were once more dark. You may not believe this, but I tell you it is true!"

Wardy and I exchanged glances of meaning, and suppressed our smiles. We knew how the eyes of the god Icopan were made to shine. We knew, what she did not, that the image had a voice. We knew that secret steps led upward for eighty feet to the polished reflectors that at high noon of an unclouded day made terribly fierce the glare of those eyes, and that the voice was thunderous through an ingenious application of concentrated megaphones. And—we, too, had once been terrified by this cunning mechanical invention. Neither of us thought it necessary then to enlighten Marzida. Time was too swiftly and insistently ticking itself onward. She seemed aware of it, and said:

"Now listen closely. If to-night they decide that you are to be taken away from here, I shall do all I can to communicate with you, and everything I can to help you. I shall do my utmost to find a way to assist you. If you can conceive of any plan to escape and I can assist you, I shall do so. You can depend upon my doing my best, and if ever you wish to send me word, there is but one person—one only, mind you!—whom you can trust. That is the little Maya girl you have seen with me, the little maid called Tanyka, who loves me. If ever you find the emergency grave and can see her, you may tell her anything in perfect confidence and security; for if these fanatics were to suspect her and do their utmost, they might tear from her throat her tongue; but to the last it would be a speechless one in my behalf! She is adroit, although with but fourteen years of wisdom to guide her. I can think of nothing more save to tell you to trust no one's pity. Be on guard. Be not surprised. The rest lies in the mercy of a God that is not Maya!"

And almost surreptitiously she crossed herself there in the dimness of the night, proving that an hereditary devotion to a reverence she had learned in childhood had never been obliterated by all her strange and semibarbaric surroundings.

As if she had given us all the information she possessed that she considered of value, she arose to her feet and we, too, stood up.

"Well, whatever happens," said Wardy, facing her, "both my friend and myself wish you to know that it is impossible for us to put into words our gratitude, not only for the knowledge you have given us but—for your friendship." For some reason he lowered his voice when he uttered the last three words, and I wasn't sure but that she was a trifle embarrassed, or, rather, strangely moved thereby.

She seemed modestly intent on evading any further expression of thanks, said almost hastily: "I could do nothing less; for, after all, you are of my own people, and I would rescue you if I knew how. I am not Maya. Sometimes I—I hate them!"

With which tiny explosion she turned and moved hastily toward the stairway, and, passing Benny, swiftly descended from sight. I looked at Wardy, but the big Englishman seemed to have forgotten that I was there, and his eyes were fixed on the well of darkness into which she had vanished, and there was a distinct air of interest in his attitude. When he did turn, as if suddenly aware that I was watching him, he lifted his hand and with his fingers rubbed his forehead which

I had long known was an unconscious gesture employed only when he was inordinately perplexed by some introspection.

CHAPTER VIII.

We retired to our own rooms to discuss the situation as it was presented in the light of what Marzida had told us, but our affairs looked as hopeless as ever. In fact, rather more difficult than we had apprehended. That there were two opposing factions in the land might have been of use to us somehow, save for the fact that as regards our suppression or extermination they were in agreement. Morgano was evidently helpless and almost powerless, and of Ixtual's attitude we were in doubt; but our only hope rested in the possibility that he might at least relent enough to assist us despite his fanatical racial ambitions.

If the high priests' council had come to any decision regarding us, there was absolutely nothing to indicate it in his excellency's demeanor when we met him the next morning, nor for ten days thereafter. It was almost as if we had been forgotten. Personally, I chafed at this detention, and was rapidly approaching a state of exasperation that would have impelled me to cancel my parole and boldly announce that if I found an opportunity for action, I should take it; but Wardy, to my annoyance, appeared to have dropped into a state of something bordering on contentment. And, worst of all, I discovered that at times he seemed rather eager to avoid me. I speculated over this until I blundered into an arbor in the gardens one evening and surprised him and Marzida in what could not be mistaken for anything but a happy conversation. He was telling her some story of what must have been an amusing experience, I judged from the heartiness with which they both laughed. They did not seem particularly gladdened by my accidental intrusion, and it was not long before I made an excuse to leave them alone and retire to my room where I sat and pondered a dozen trivialities over which I had hitherto had no concern. It dawned on me that I must have been rather dense and stupid not to have discerned the direction of the prevailing wind by the number of straws that had been blown across my field of vision, and the more I thought it over, the more I was troubled. I resolved to ask him, bluntly, at the first opportunity, if it wasn't about time for us to do something other than loll around Manco's house and grounds; but, so strange and unexpected are the ways of Fate, we were at that very moment approaching another sharp turning in our routine.

I did not see my friend until we met for the evening meal. He appeared in unusually good spirits and some of his witty sallies provoked smiles from even so austere a person as our host, who always impressed me as being too seriously engrossed in his own affairs to ever relax into really good humor. On this night, after the robed servants, swift, silent, and well trained, left us alone, Manco remained on the roof as if in Wardy's conversation he found relaxation. Speedily these two found themselves involved in one of their learned discussions in which I was too ignorant or uninterested to participate, for I have had small time in my life for such diversions. I am, after all, but a man of action and know my own limitations—sometimes to my own grief.

Marzida was sitting beside me, and suddenly in the starlit gloom I felt her hand on my arm and the pressure of her slender fingers that I had so frequently admired. She arose to her feet as if restless, and obeying her whispered, "Come," I too arose and sauntered after her until we were in the far corner of that commodious terraced roof whose profusion of rugs and plants, luxurious seats and cushions, so frequently suggested to my mind roofs I had seen in the Orient. She beckoned me to a seat by her side.

"You are a most difficult person!" she exclaimed with a little laugh. "So many times I have tried to induce you to talk, and all I get is either 'yes' or a 'no.' Now talk to me."

It was such a childlike command that I smiled.

"What is there to talk about?" I asked.

"Oh, lots of things!" she answered, with delightful vagueness. "You needn't tell me about yourself. I know all that. If you were half as interesting and amusing and wonderful as Mr. Wardrop thinks you are, you would be impossible." I gasped and was at loss for words until she leaned toward me with an air of gravity and said: "Suppose you now tell me about him."

"He is my friend," I replied. "And a better friend no man ever had. He is loyal. He is brave. He is honest. He is generous.

He is true. He is as steadfast as a mighty rock that not even the beating of an ocean in storm can swerve. Is that not enough? I can say no more."

I have sometimes wondered, since then, whither that conversation was leading, and I recall that she was silent for a moment, as if considering something, when a footman came almost hurriedly up to the roof and walked rapidly across toward his excellency and Wardy. Marzida lifted her head and stared at the man, as if divining that this was something unusually important. The footman made his respectful salutation, said something we could not hear and Manco immediately arose and followed him from the roof, while Wardy got up and sauntered in our direction. Marzida's and my chance for confidential conversation regarding Wardy was therefore at an end for the time being, and, as usual, she and Wardy appeared to forget me save for an occasional polite reference. We had not been alone more than ten minutes before his excellency reappeared, and came directly to us.

"Mr. Wardrop," he said, "I have taken the liberty of sending for your man Hassan. I am somewhat sorry to inform you that you and your companions have been sent for by one whose authority is beyond question. I have not the slightest knowledge of the reasons, but if you wish to make any changes of clothing for your visit, I pray you to make haste."

I felt rather than heard Marzida give a little gasp, and so astonished was I by this unexpected summons that I felt like doing the same. Both Wardy and I arose, gave Marzida our adieus, and went below to our rooms in a very sober state of mind.

"What do you suppose is up?" Wardy asked when we were alone.

"No use in guessing," I replied. "But, anyhow, it can't be worse than living here like caged canaries. Whatever it is, we shall soon know and I hope to the Lord it's something definite."

He did not seem to share my reckless willingness to accept a change, but left me to make his few preparations. I could think of nothing to do save change the borrowed clothing that had been put at our disposal by our host for my own familiar wear that had been cleaned and pressed by Benny, and was then prepared. Benny himself entered the room before Wardy and I were ready and was as usual imperturable. Being a confirmed fatalist not even death could have brought from him a sign of anything greater than annoyance.

We stepped out into the hallway and found a footman, who led the way below and to the main entry, where Manco stood talking with two men who were evidently officers of the guard. They stopped as we approached.

"Pardon me, your excellency, but can you say whether we are to be detained for any length of time?" asked Wardy.

"I do not know, but I presume not," replied Manco, and we had to be content with that as we bade him good night and followed the two officers out of the residence. Once I saw Wardy looking back just in time to catch a dim flash of something white, as if waving us good-by, and then we turned into the roadway and the house was lost to sight.

Wardy spoke to one of the guides in Spanish without eliciting any response, and so we fell into broken and casual conversation between ourselves in English as we walked steadily down toward the lake front. I wondered, as we approached it, if we were to be taken into the city; but this was speedily answered in the negative by our guides who walked directly to a boat landing, called, "Attention" to some one below, and we discovered one of the official barges manned by six rowers, who promptly came to salute and waited for us to come aboard. We took our places in cushioned seats and the boat pulled off and out into the lake. We could have enjoyed the excursion under any other circumstances, so still and favorable was the night. The moon slipped upward above the Twin Peaks just as we pulled clear of the shore, and we had a view of the almost unearthly beauty of our surroundings. We continued to speculate on whither we were bound, hoping that the boat would swing its bow round the side of the island and take us to the grand wharf at the front; but very soon we were aware that instead of directing its course there, it was swinging out as if to round the island from the rear.

"It looks as if we were going into a section of which we know nothing," muttered Wardy. "Maybe they are taking us to the farther mainland where we have never been."

"There were some big ruins over there. I remember seeing them from the window of the priest's room in the temple where we found the mummies," I said. "But if that's

the case, we aren't going to be taken before any high priests. Do you suppose it has something to do with the confounded politics of this island?"

Wardy put his hand on my arm and gave a significant squeeze.

"We aren't supposed to know anything about that," he whispered. "Maybe some of these chaps understand English."

I nodded my agreement, and thereafter we sat in silence, staring about us and trying to discover what this new view of the island was like. We moved closer to it and farther from the shore. The great white pyramid, towering upward, looked like snow in the moonlight, and the shapes of the great temple were more defined, domes and towers, columns and cornices seeming sharpened in detail as we approached. The barge swept closer to the base of the island which was a high, sheer cliff at this point, and the pyramid was lost to view. We skirted this great natural wall until the moon was no longer visible and the shadows were deep. I reckoned that we must have progressed at least half-way round the island, for our voyage had now lasted more than an hour. In all this time not a single audible word had been spoken by either the two officers of the guard or any of the boatmen, whose oars rose and fell with clocklike regularity, deliberate, unhurried, with the stroke that is taken when the way is long and well known. But now one of the officers gave a crisp command which might have been translated into, "Slow down there and turn inward to the water gate."

Obedient to orders, the nose of the barge swung to right angles, the oars dipped lightly and under barely more than our own way we floated into a deeper shadow that was a mere rift in the face of the cliff, and at the end of about thirty yards this shut over us and the boat stopped. One of the officers lighted a lantern and by its rays we saw that we had entered the mouth of a tunnel or grotto—which it was we could not decide, for it was spacious. Into this for perhaps another twenty or thirty yards we rowed and came to a landing alongside whose steps we drew. It was then that one of the officers made us aware that he did understand the Spanish tongue, for he requested us to disembark.

"Be careful here, señores," he said, "because for a short distance the rocks are slippery."

This solicitude informed us that for the present at least we need apprehend no bodily harm. We waited while the oarsmen moored their boat, and lighted two more lanterns which they took from a recess in the wall, after which we advanced. It was, as the officer had warned us, slippery for some distance, and then we came to the foot of broad stone steps up which we climbed. I counted them, thinking that possibly the information gained might prove of value some time, and—I was mentally weary of counting and physically tired, long before that steady climb was accomplished! Now and then on little landings we paused to rest. The cool, fresh draft of air that swept upward through this great mountain staircase was very grateful. My knees were trembling and well-nigh helpless when my reckoning told me that we had reached the thousandth step. The climb seemed interminable, but at the ten hundred and thirty-fifth we came to an incline, and my mental computation led me to estimate our height at about six hundred feet above the level of the lake. We were being taken to the Great Temple itself, I was convinced, and now, more than ever, I wondered what was in store for us. We came to a turn and one of the officers stopped.

"The señores will wait here for a few minutes," he said, and left us leaning against the wall and not at all sorry for a rest. Within a few minutes he returned, and once more we moved forward, but now, to the infinite relief of my legs, we walked along a level way for a short distance until we came to an open doorway beside which stood two men in uniform who saluted as we passed.

"Good Lord! More steps to climb!" exclaimed Wardy who was in front of me, and I sympathized with him as we again began to mount upward. But there was no cause for complaint; for of these there were but a bare score and then we passed through another doorway and stood in a room through whose narrow windows, stretching almost from floor to ceiling, the moon shone white and clear with tropical effulgence. We waited here for but a minute or two and then a door opened, and a man clad in flowing robes of some dark material entered, gravely acknowledged the officer's salute and bowed stiffly to us.

"We have obeyed our orders," said the officer in charge. "We have brought to your highness in all safety the prisoners."

Again I was thankful that Wardy and I had so effectually amused ourselves by studying the Maya tongue; but that word "prissoners" sounded harsh.

"They speak the Spanish language," said the officer, completing his report.

"You have done well," said the man in the robes. "You are now dismissed. You will not be required again to-night."

That was a chilling piece of information, and I glanced at Wardy who, imperturable as ever, was staring through his monocle at his surroundings as if he had not understood a word that had been spoken, or drawn a single inference therefrom.

"The dark-skinned one is the manservant," said the officer, as if giving full introduction.

"I surmised so," said the robed man. "There was no mistaking the bearded giant with the glass. And the other, although cold as stone, has the manner of one who has never served. Of the three the dark-skinned one is to be most watched. His eyes are like those of a hawk. I doubt if he is to be trusted."

I was rather thankful that Benny did not understand the Maya tongue, lest he take the man in the toga by the throat with Bedouin promptitude. The two officers bowed to us, the robed one made a gesture indicating that we were to follow him, and we passed through the door, and a corridor that led us to another door. We entered a room not unlike the one we had left, save that it was brilliantly lighted by a very modern brass candelabrum holding powerful parrafine lamps and furnished with very modern rugs and excellent modern chairs and couches, all of which appeared incongruous in such a place. The room was lofty and large. Three other doors led from it, all of which were closed. Its numerous narrow windows were unglazed, and the moonlight struggled through them and fought with the artificial light. A few tiny insects whirled and gyrated round the lamps, and it was difficult to believe that we were in the heart of an unknown world save for the reminder presented by that quiet figure in a costume that was suggestive of ancient times. It was somewhat as if we had been transported into a modernized palace by men who had no measurement of time. The old and the new were there in contrast.

"You are still under your parole of honor," said the man in the toga. "It is still acceptable. I ask you by the given word to wait here patiently for the time being."

And with that he made us a most ceremonious bow and turned and left us. Scarcely had he gone when Benny moved toward one of the doors and laid his hand on the sculptured metal latch.

"Stop, Benny!" said Wardy in Arabic so customarily used in their intercourse. "Our words are those of gentlemen. I vouched that you would break no rules of the game."

Beni Hassan turned and apologized, but added: "But is knowledge not better than the given word?"

"Not at all," asserted Wardy, removing his monocle and carefully polishing it. "The given word is supreme, like broken bread and shared salt in the places that you and I know."

"It is well," said Benny, turning and walking to one of the windows. And his curiosity aroused ours so that we, too, did likewise.

I shall never forget that view. Beneath us lay the lake reflecting the moon, and off in a circle, like huge, stern sentinels forever on guard, the great, jagged, pallid mountains reared themselves upward as if communing with the stars. On the distant shore land could be seen faint yellow lights from the windows of homes and the houses themselves seemed beautified by the glamour of mysticism. The stillness of our high altitude added to the illusion, until it was as if we stared at a great and perfect canvas painted by a master's brush. That we stood in a room where centuries before priestly kings had breathed and moved and that perhaps this very room had three years before been invaded by us after its long vacancy, but added to our sense of unreality. I looked around the room trying to discover in it something familiar; but its carefully hewn stone walls that had so long defied time had been modernized with fresh tinting, its half columns painted in white and its cornices gilded. Save for the faint, almost inaudible flickering of the lamps, it was as silent as it had been through the long centuries before first we came. Again I leaned upon my elbows in the stone window sill and stared outward. I was disturbed by the faint creaking of a door and, like my companions, turned.

There, standing rigidly, with bronzed arms folded across his fine chest and clad as might

have been a pharaoh of old, was Ixtual, the high priest, contemplating us. Very different he seemed from that Indian we had employed as a guide three years before. Very different from the Maya we had seen sweating and starving, toiling with us, and enduring with us as we traversed the great jungle barrier fighting to regain the outside world. There was some subtle air of power and magnificence, of terrible and relentless austerity about him that came as an insuperable barrier between our old acquaintanceship and this meeting.

"Well," he said bitterly, in his fluent Spanish, "we meet again after all this time. You gave me your solemn pledges that you would neither lead nor direct white men to this place. You have kept your word. But you yourselves returned! Was it necessary that I should demand that pledge also? I did not then think so. What is it you seek? Treasure?"

Mere words cannot express the contempt of his tone. It angered me to a state of coldness. I could have cursed him without stint had I not been under very good control, as he stood there haughtily eying us and treating us as if we were mere foreign adventurers come upon a mission of greed.

"Ixtual, we have not returned seeking treasure. You know that without our telling you," said Wardy with quiet dignity. "Nor had we any desire to intrude upon you. Indeed, we were not even aware that the Sacred City of the Maya was again inhabited. Be reasonable. You are speaking with gentlemen."

So restrained and calm was his big, deep voice, so capable and perfect his poise, that the Maya was, despite his possible dislike for us, impressed. That he was a superior man of his ancient race we knew, but likewise he was aware that he was confronted by a superior man of another great race who was at least entitled to respect. For the first time since he had entered the room those remarkable eyes of his, somber and aloof, lowered and for an instant he stood contemplating the floor as if lost for words.

"But why did you return?" he insisted, again looking up at us.

Now I suppose that I, in my blundering, undiplomatic way would have promptly answered that we came to liberate Doctor Morgano, our friend, and would continue the attempt until we either fell or accomplished our object; but not so with this adroit and keenly intellectual friend of mine, Wardrop, who in haste as if to prevent my response retorted with another question: "Does not the Maya ever return to a place that has interested him? Is there not enough of mystery and beauty in this lost city to cause one who is wearied with civilization to seek it again? We thought, perhaps, Doctor Paolo Morgano had done so. Ixtual, what has become of Doctor Morgano? Where is he?"

"That," said Ixtual harshly, "I decline to answer. If he ever returned here, he did so of his own free will. How should I know whither the probing spirit of a great and inspired man may lead him? None of us is as he. None of us thinks as does he. But know this, that by returning here you have placed yourselves in jeopardy so grave that I doubt if even I can save your lives except under certain conditions. Do you care to hear them?"

"Naturally," replied Wardy in a voice that was without the slightest tremor of fear.

"You are to be brought before our high council for judgment," said Ixtual. "You know too much to ever be permitted to return to your world. I can make but one plea to save you, that you consent to live here for the remainder of your lives, and never to communicate with the outside again; that you become as Mayas; that you adopt Maya customs and nationality, and renounce all else."

"And in the event of our declining to do this?" asked Wardy, in the same restrained voice.

"Then you will be executed as certainly as the sun rises and sets above this temple! Nothing on earth can save you. Listen! You might do worse than live here. I, who am a high priest of my race, have no desire to have you killed. We have shared much together. We were never unfriendly. But my first duty is to my people and the preservation of a secret that must be sacredly guarded until the Maya is again strong enough to enforce his rights and demands for privacy. And so I tell you that, however reluctantly I might do so, I, too, should cast a vote for your deaths, if you do not agree to the only terms that offer hope of life, those which I have made. Be not so foolish as to decline."

"As far as I am concerned," I began heatedly, "I——"

But he raised his hand and interrupted me, and said: "I beg you to consider. You

are not in a position where impulse will have any effect or where all your courage and fighting skill can avail anything at all. You are helpless. You have a chance to live peacefully, quietly, and I hope contentedly. You would have my friendship rather than my enmity. I swear this to you by my gods. I ask you to consider this side of your case before refusing offers that I am sincere in making, for I may prove to be your sole advocate before a court that is inexorable in its decisions. It is solely because I wish you well that you were brought here to-night. I wished for the sake of old associations and perils shared, to save you. Had I not intervened, you would have been left behind the bronze gates in the great cavern that we together explored, to die of hunger and thirst. The Maya will guard the secret of this spot though it cost a thousand lives! Be certain of that. There are not twenty men alive who know how to pass beneath the Twin Peaks and enter here, so zealously is that secret kept. Those who live out yonder"—and he made a sweeping gesture that took in the lands beyond the lake—"even those who were conducted here blindfolded, and they are Maya. What chance, then, think you, have you three men, the only aliens on earth who share that closely guarded knowledge? I tell you none. Not one, save through acceding to my terms; for on those alone can I plead for your lives. To-morrow you would have been brought here as prisoners. To-night you are here as my guests. Therefore, before you become prisoners in very actual reality, I ask you to consider this matter between yourselves, for on your decision rests your sole chance of life."

As if to forbid us to answer he moved swiftly across the room and threw open, one after the other, three doors, exposing improvised bedrooms with ample comfort for men such as we who were inured to camps and the vicissitudes of many wildernesses and deserts.

"Here are the rooms in which you are to sleep," said Ixtual quietly. "They are the best I could provide. To-morrow evening I shall return for your answer. Fear nothing meanwhile unless you pass beyond these rooms, in which case I cannot answer for your safety. I bid you good night."

He bowed deeply, and as if to preclude opportunity for further conversation moved quickly to the outer door, opened it, and disappeared. In the corridor we heard a man's voice in Maya utter sharply: "Salute, O priest of the inner temple!" and Ixtual's reply: "Salute thee, also, O guard!" And then we knew that at last we were prisoners indeed.

CHAPTER IX.

We listened until all outside was silence, and then selecting the room farthest from the entrance to the corridor in which the guard was stationed, went thither and closed the door. The room was like the others, save that on one side was a deep niche, paneled behind with sculptured stone, that we surmised had at one time been the shrine for an image probably of some lesser god of the Maya faith. We were no longer interested in the moonlight and the view from the narrow windows overhanging the great height.

"Well," said Wardy gravely, "it seems to me that Ixtual resents our return; that Ixtual would be our friend if he could, but that there are limitations to how far he would go. He still trusts our promises, and I rather think he is justified."

Both Benny and I looked at him questioningly. He filled his pipe and lighted it while we waited, and then said decisively: "I mean by that, just this: That if we give our promises to be good Mayas and remain here for the rest of our lives, he will try to see that we do. But as for me, I am an Englishman. I shall continue to be one. There are conditions under which I would cheerfully become American, because there's not much difference nowadays between one or the other, and, anyhow, they are the same sort of people. But when it comes to being forced into being a Maya, or for that matter, a citizen of any other country, I don't think my life is worth while. So—I think I shall continue to be a subject of George the Fifth for what time is left and —Ixtual and his whole tribe can go to hell!"

Now I am rather a cosmopolitan and have not lived in America for many years; but I respected him for his patriotism. It was what I had expected from him, and had he faltered, I should have been disappointed. I, too, smoked.

"Well, Henri," he said at last, "how does this proposition strike you?"

"Strike me? I'm fond of life and living; but you see I'm an American. If an Eng-

lishman can decline to forswear his allegiance at the cost of his life, I think I can stick it to go along the same road," I said.

We looked at each other with a full understanding and then at Beni Hassan, who was calmly inspecting the smoke that curled from his cigarette from the vantage point of the floor on which he sat, cross-legged, and there was nothing in his appearance to indicate that he had the slightest interest in our consultation.

"Beni," said Wardy in Arabic, "have you heard? What say you?"

"Why does *Saadatak* ask?" he replied without removing his eyes from the curling smoke, as if more interested in its loops and ascending coils of blue than in the question. "I am Mussulman. My father was a swordmaker and on each blade he etched his brand which read, 'This by Abdullah, the slave of Allah. No victory belongs to other than Allah.' And so, what matters whether we die to-morrow or in a thousand years? All is written. If you had asked me to remain here as long as I lived, I should have answered 'yes.' But had you asked me to forswear my faith I should have answered 'no.' If I would not grant this to the *genabak,* what chance hath a dog of a *giouar* like Ixtual of wrenching from me such pledge? I say 'No.' "

Ixtual did not appear until late in the following forenoon and there could be no doubt of his anxiety to hear our decision. Studying his face there in the daylight, I thought I detected signs of human impulses that I had never, theretofore, observed. He still held himself aloof with great dignity, and his voice was calm as he asked if we had agreed upon our reply.

"Yes, Ixtual," said Wardy quietly, "we have. We decline to either renounce our nationalities, or our religions, or to pledge our words that we will not attempt to leave the Sacred City. It can't be done."

"Not even though it costs you your lives?" demanded Ixtual with a frown.

"Not even then," said Wardy firmly.

For a long time Ixtual stood there with arms folded across his chest, and then moved slowly to one of the windows and looked outward as if considering the position. When he turned his face was a little softer than I had ever seen it.

"I grieve that you cannot agree with me," he said simply, "but I feared this would be your reply. You are not men to promise knowing that it is a lie. I would unhesitatingly take your pledge to keep forever silent regarding what you know; but, alas! my countrymen would not. They mistrust all white men. For so long have they been cheated, oppressed, robbed, and lied to that they believe there is no truth in the world from which you come. My friends, I ask you to think as kindly of me as you can; to think of me as one who to the end has done his best; to remember that to the last that whatever I do shall be done with a moral conviction of duty with which neither friendships, loves, nor hates have anything to do, or can stand in the way. If I thought it best for my country, I would sacrifice the mother who bore me but little less willingly and freely than I would lay down my own life in the same cause. May we, for possibly the last time, shake hands as friends?"

He advanced toward Wardy with his hand held out, and the big English sportsman instantly accepted and clasped it.

"I am sorry it has come to this, Ixtual, but I understand and approve of your attitude; for I doubtless would act the same under such circumstances."

When Ixtual turned to me, I as readily shook hands. His eyes seemed to plead a little, and he clung to my hand until I spoke.

"It's all right, old chap," I said. "We all have to play the game the best we can. I've no hard feelings, and—if we get the best of you in the long run, hope you'll cherish none toward us. Good-by."

He turned toward Beni Hassan as if to take his hand also, but the Arab stared at him harshly, put his hands behind him, and said: "Why linger? The cords are cut. We are enemies. A hundred camp fires that we shared are but dead ashes. *Bismallah!* It was so written in the beginning, and henceforth we share no salt."

Ixtual's eyes flashed but once, and then he gave a slight shrug of disdain when the Arab turned away and moved toward one of the windows as if no longer interested in Ixtual or his surroundings. Ixtual left us without looking back, and again we were alone.

At luncheon we were served by a man who might have been a deaf-mute in so far as conversation was involved, and the afternoon threatened to prove long and irksome when we were again invaded, this time

by the same officer of the guard who had brought us hither on the night before, and he was followed by two others whom I thought I recognized as two of our boatmen. These latter carried some very familiar kits that we recognized as our own, and that had been transported from the house of Manco. Wardy and I looked at each other, fully understanding the significance of this delivery, for it meant that we were not to return to our former resting place. The two bearers deposited their burdens and withdrew. The officer saluted us and said stiffly, "The señores are informed that, having voluntarily announced the end of their paroles, they are by order of the high authorities to be held henceforth in confinement as prisoners pending trial and further decisions. It is needless to inform the señores of the futility of attempting to escape, or the hazard to their lives that would be involved in any such attempt."

The echoes of his rather sonorous Spanish had not died in the room before he had stiffly saluted and passed through the door. He closed it and we heard a heavy fall, a grating noise, indicating that a huge bar had been dropped, and the sound carried with it an ominous meaning as if, at last, our adventure was nearing its end. And of what that end must be there seemed little room for conjecture.

"By Jove! The Mayas have got us, at last!" said Wardy scarcely above a whisper, and then polished his eyeglass with his handkerchief, saw that it was somewhat soiled and said, almost cheerfully: "But in any event we can be thankful that they have sent us our outfit. Hope they didn't forget the toothbrushes."

I could not restrain a rather bitter laugh at what seemed the folly of even brushing one's teeth when time to use them seemed so brief; but as Wardy immediately carried his kit to the room he had slept in and began unpacking it, I did likewise with mine, although Benny protested that he was still our servant.

"No, Benny," said Wardy, refusing his well-meant services, "I'll do it myself. It gives me something to do to pass away the time."

I found every possession of mine intact save firearms and knives. It had plainly been the intent to leave us weaponless, unless one could call a single razor a weapon, for that much they had spared me. When I returned to the big main room I saw through his open doorway Wardy seated on the edge of his couch and reading something. He stopped, looked up, hesitated, folded the paper, and put it in his pocket, and then again hesitating, called to me to come in.

"Where is Benny?" he asked in a subdued tone of voice.

I looked into Benny's room. He had not troubled to unpack his bundle, but had thrown it on the floor and was now stretched out on his couch and calmly taking a siesta —that is, as calmly as a man may who snores and gurgles in his sleep. I returned to Wardy, who said: "No need to tell me. I'm not deaf. Shut the door."

I did so, and he took the paper from his pocket and, holding it between his fingers, said: "The necessity of our plight is the only excuse I can give for showing a confidential letter written by a woman. This comes from Marzida, and was wadded into the very bottom of my leather toilet case. Read it."

I took it and read:

DEAR FRIEND: From the fact that your things have been sent for, I fear the worst. Also, I suspect from a few words overheard by me that passed between Manco and the officer waiting below that you are to be made prisoners and tried by the High Council, from whom you may expect small mercy. I implore you to use every possible means to gain time. Demand time to consider and reflect over anything they ask you. If you can but do this, I am certain that I shall find some way to assist you. I must! If you are executed, my last personal hope is gone. I would not write this under any other circumstances. I would not dare! But now I am completely upset. I have not slept since they took you away. All night I tried to think of some method to help you, but alas! so far have failed. Time! Time! Time! That is what we must depend upon. I dare not tell you of my anxieties and concern, but I do beg of you to do all you can to assist me. This may prove to be my last chance of ever communicating with you, and so, in desperation, knowing the risks involved if this letter is read by other than you, and daring what may follow, I tell you that my greatest desire is to escape from this land and everything in it. If you are to be murdered by the Maya because you have intruded in what he conceives to be his only path to national security, I ask you to believe that you will not die unmourned so long as I live. And, if you deem best, you may say as much to that invaluable, steadfast comrade of yours, Henri Hallewell, in whose calm courage and practical resource I find consolation; for men of his stamp, inured to vicissitude and danger, find ways to perform miracles when others less seasoned and equipped, might falter and fail. May God in His great mercy take

note of your terrible situation and show you means to escape, is all I can pray.

MARZIDA.

The thin sheets of tissue paper fell from my fingers and, when I recovered them from the stone floor, Wardy was looking away, and I felt that he, too, was strangely moved. I struck a match to light and burn this missive, but at the sound he turned almost fiercely upon me with a clutching hand, saying: "Stop! You have no right! It is mine!"

"And you have no right to imperil her," I asserted; but withheld the flame. He stopped as if petrified. The match burned itself down until I dropped it to the floor. The thin sheets of tissue trembled a trifle either through my own agitation, or a faint draft that swept from off the waters.

"You are right," he said, recovering himself. "I am sorry. It should be destroyed."

And then, so strong was his desire, he again reached out, took it from me, and turned his back upon me and stood there, seeming enormously large, immobile, powerful, and yet self-contained, while I waited. I sat looking at the floor and considering the contents of this letter written by one who was half hysterical with anxiety when it was penned, and pitying her now that I more fully understood that she, too, was a hopeless prisoner, doomed to live and die in this Maya net and yearning for what was, after all, her own people by blood and the lands in which such lived. I looked up and saw that Wardy was slowly, almost reverently lifting the thin sheets to his lips, and —it seemed indelicate and boorish for me to remain there just then; for in spite of my density I had learned something more, something entirely new, the carefully smothered sentiment that burned in the heart of my friend. I got up and walked from his room, and even as I did so, I heard the sharp snap of a match, and there was wafted to me the smell of burning paper. Somehow I felt that the act had cost him much, for there are letters one sometimes receives, quite rarely in one's life it is true, that one would cherish. How priceless are the letters written by friends and lovers when they can never write again. How priceless the first letters ever written by—— Oh, hang it all! I appreciated what he felt when the flame caught the corners of the sheets, and I didn't think the less of him, either.

After a time he came out and we began talking of our situation with that fatuous persistence that I presume is manifested by men who are to be shot at sunrise; hope is a mighty fine thing, and is, perhaps, the most comforting of all human traits. And then we were suddenly alarmed by the sight of Benny who bounded into the room like a disturbed panther, half crouching, and with head turned over shoulder.

"By the sacred sandals of the Prophet!" he whispered in Arabic. "This place is haunted! That cavity in the wall that you said must have been the abode for a *giouar* image whispers and creaks. It has rustled like the sands of the desert in storm. A dry noise! A noise as if it were about to move."

"Rubbish!" said Wardy. "Man, you have been asleep and had bad dreams!"

"Dreams, *genabak?* Dreams? I tell you no! Slip thither and hear!"

To calm his fears we moved cautiously into the room from which he had emerged, and approaching the niche in the wall, long unused for its original purpose, bent attentive ears and listened. For a moment we neither of us heard a sound, and then, as if to confirm Beni Hassan's supernatural fears, we heard what could be described as nothing more than a fumbling, rasping noise, as if in darkness the hands of a seeker sought a door latch or a keyhole. Involuntarily both Wardy and I drew back, and, standing in the center of the room with Benny behind us in an attitude of grave suspense, fixed our eyes on the niche. Its square, recessed stones seemed solid and immovable. Its strangely sculptured pillars appeared aged, gray, and forever fixed as are cliffs of granite. And then slowly, one of them began moving inward toward us, the one on the opposite side appeared to recede as if a whole section of the wall were hung on a pivot long disused, and a man, dust-coated, begrimed, long-haired, who had been pushing his whole weight against the obstacle, fell forward, lost his balance, and sprawled on the floor at our feet. He rolled over, got to a sitting posture, and blinked his eyes. He assisted in their clearance from dust with a pair of grimy knuckles vigorously applied, and then with fists in mid-air exclaimed: "Hello! *Un grand fracasso*—this! *Nom de Dieu!* It isn't you, is it? How did you get here?"

With a single and simultaneous leap Wardy and I jumped forward and caught

him in our arms, and shook him upward to his feet.

"Morgano! Doctor Morgano!" cried Wardy.

"You old idiot!" exclaimed I.

And Beni Hassan stood there all the time with an extraordinary grin.

"Fancy finding you again—like this!" said Wardy, shaking the little savant about in his great powerful arms, and Benny reached forward and began with long, slender, brown hands to knock the dust from the doctor's clothing, that looked for all the world like a suit of soiled pajamas or a workman's blouse and trousers.

"Dear me! Dear me!" said the doctor, beaming upward at us. "This *is* a surprise!" And then, recovering himself somewhat, he ran his fingers through his long hair and said: "Remarkable! Remarkable discovery. I deciphered at last a lot of tablets that for more than two years have given me infinite trouble. They proved to be a plan of all the secret passages of the temple. Extraordinary how the ancient builders indulged in such things. You would never believe it, but I have proved by my researches that they employed but a few men at a time and changed them at frequent intervals. That was their method of preserving such secrets. The advantages were that no set of workmen employed had time to even conjecture the purpose of their work. This passage here runs into a room of mine that I rarely occupy—and there are dozens of other passages. For months I couldn't find how the doors worked. This morning I got to thinking about it and—phuttt!—there you are! I solved it! I, Doctor Paolo Morgano. Yes, I. No other. I tell you that I can add another chapter to my great work on the ancient Maya architecture. You wouldn't believe it. Thirteen hundred discoveries have I made, and yet there remained one more. Sixteen volumes will be required for print. Ah, my friends, what I have added to the sum of historical knowledge since I last saw you is incredible. Positively incredible! For instance, you remember that in the head of the great image were a series of carved stone tablets that at the time I was unable to decipher. Well, I learned that they were devoted to the forms of food that were sanctioned by the supreme high priest for the use of——"

"For the love of Heaven!" I interrupted impatiently. "Get away from your discoveries long enough to have some common sense. Chuck all that ancient stuff long enough to talk with us about the present. You've got us into a mess that we're a lot more interested in getting out of than we are in listening to what you have learned. Wake up, man!"

He blinked, shook some more dust from his clothes, wiped some more from his face, and then came back to earth. He did have a side which was made up of mere ordinary intelligence, and which was absolutely distinct from that marvelous, almost uncanny gift of his that enabled him to decipher on the tombs of dead kings hieroglyphics that had baffled all archæologists of his time.

"I got you into this mess?" he queried as if puzzled. "Dear me! I forgot to ask how you happen to be here, and why you came!"

For a moment both Wardy and I thought he must have lost his wits, and then Wardy told him of the message we had received, and of what had followed thereafter. He listened gravely until Wardy had finished, interrupting now and then with a brief question, once asking for a minute description of the man Veguitas and grimly nodding his head at our replies.

"The situation is more serious than I thought," he said. "To begin with, I was kept in ignorance of your arrival and never dreamed of it until I found you here. Furthermore, the man who presented himself to you is not Veguitas. There is no such man. He is none other than Azani, governing high priest of the Mayas in that city beyond the jungle barrier, the worst reactionary of his race, the open enemy of Manco and Ixtual, and by me debarred from the Sacred City because he is suspected of plots. When, desperate, after repeated and futile appeals to Ixtual and Manco to permit me to depart, I conceived the idea of the cryptogram, and got Ixtual to send it out by one of his most trusted men on the pretext that I hoped to discover the lost treasures of the Mayas, the man who carried it was, three months later, found dead in the jungles; or, at least, all that remained of him was found, scattered whitened bones, and the clothing he wore by which he was identified. There was also found the broken skeleton of one of the deadliest of snakes, which we conjectured accounted for his death. But the message was not found, and I resigned myself to patience and oppor-

tunity to make another attempt to communicate or find other means of escape.

"It is easy to surmise, now, how that messenger's body was found, and the message he bore; or how he was slain by one of Azani's men. And Azani would trust no other with the tablets which he believed would make him king of the Mayas, and possessor of untold wealth. He feared to give you the letter lest you might expect some token of identification other than therein contained. The word he gave out on his departure was that he proposed to visit that branch of the race that lives in the interior of Yucatan. To give the devil his due, he is not a fool, nor anything other than an astute, murderous, unscrupulous, and courageous fanatic. I wish to the gods that you had killed him! That he languishes in a prison is our only good fortune and hope, for time we must have if we are to escape."

He stopped, twisted his long, dirty fingers together as if distracted, and then added: "And I wish to Our Lady of Sorrows that I had never written the letter that brought you into this desperate predicament! I wish I had known, sooner, that you were here; but how could I? I have steadfastly lived like a hermit, keeping aloof from all, that I might continue my studies undisturbed, and have left it to Ixtual to conduct all save the ceremonies of such importance that I, the mouthpiece of the inviolate god Icopan, was compelled to appear in person. I tell you I have schemed and fought for solitude until these fools believe me a being so sacred they dare not approach. Of secrets of the treasure, and of the great image, and of concealed chambers and passages of the temple which is but a warren, and a labyrinth, they fortunately know nothing."

And then for a long time, he told us of his isolated life and dwelt upon his discoveries, but he had one string only to his harp as far as our predicament was involved, and that was that he must think of some way to gain time. He pinned his hope on an annual feast day in June, which was sixty-four days distant, for on that day, he asserted, great decisions were made by Icopan!

And we were thus no forwarder in plan when Beni Hassan, who in the central room had been listening for alarm, hastily informed us that some one was coming, and the doctor, like a gray beetle, scuttled through the opening in the wall and closed the pivotal door behind him.

"The señores," said the officer who seemed to be our head jailer, "are to have a hearing to-night, until which time I am ordered to keep personal watch over them!"

And very ominous did it sound.

CHAPTER X.

I must admit that the officer on guard over us proved to have some consideration, for he withdrew into the farthest corner of the big main room and made himself as inconspicuous as possible. Our supper arrived on time, and he showed no inclination to join us until we invited him to do so when he very gravely thanked us and accepted. He made no objections to our retiring into one of the smaller rooms where we quietly conferred as to our situation. It required but little consideration now that it had devolved into nothing more than a fight for delay, if we were allowed to make any fight at all, which was somewhat problematical.

Time seemed to drag that evening, perhaps because we were in such acute suspense. I presume it drags thus to any human being who is a prisoner and about to hear judgment involving life or death. The sun disappeared, through the windows the short twilight shifted to the purple of night, and lights appeared in the residences over on the mainland. Wardy seemed trying to find one in particular, and I fancy was mentally picturing the interior of Manco's home. I know that I personally went over every slender point in our favor, and wondered if by any chance Marzida had learned how serious was our position, and, if so, whether her cleverness could possibly find means to assist us. As for the doctor, I rather thought of him as a broken reed. Given respite, I did not doubt that he could devise means to hoodwink the Mayas and gain for us at least a chance to escape; but time was decidedly against us.

It was after ten o'clock when we were disturbed by a sharp, peculiar rapping on the door which our officer opened. We did not hear the words that were uttered, but immediately he turned to us and said: "Señores, the council has met and you are now to be brought before it. May I take it for granted that you will accompany me thither without resistance?"

"Certainly," we replied, knowing full well the futility of any other course, and walked out into the corridor. A guard of four men formed in front of us and another squad of four men brought up the rear.

"Seems to be rather ceremonious, eh?" Wardy remarked, referring to the guards' uniforms. And they were ceremonious, I had to admit. They were heavily embroidered with gold thread, appearing more like Persian than Western costumes, and I observed that on each man's back was the symbol of the god Icopan—a cipher that we had seen on seals over treasure chests and stamped into great bars of gold and ingots of silver in the treasure caverns beneath the Twin Peaks. Their helmets, of some highly burnished metal, caught glints from the lights above, as did the tips of their spears which seemed toys in comparison with the serviceable magazine pistols which each man wore in a gold-embroidered holster attached to his belt. Somehow, the spears seemed to me to represent a concession to the Ancients, and the magazine guns the more practical ideas of the Moderns. And yet the whole sitting was ancient as we traversed corridors flanked by monoliths peculiarly large at the top and tapering to the bottom, past walls completely sculptured with hieroglyphics that had been cut thousands of years before—perhaps when Egypt was young—and came at last to an open spot we had no difficulty in recognizing, so unchanged was it since that day we had found it deserted and explored it curiously, light-heartedly. Very different was this march of ours now, as prisoners being led to trial.

We turned into a portion of the temple that I did not remember having paid any particular attention to when Wardy, the doctor and I were there alone, and we entered a corridor that wound in a great semicircle until it ended at enormous metal doors, in front of which stood two sentries uniformed like those who conducted us. They halted us until our officer gave them a password, after which the doors were opened, and we descended a broad flight of marble steps whose magnificence I should have admired under less trying conditions. Somehow they reminded me of the grand stairway in an old palace I had once visited in France. Yet in the lights there was again an incongruity; for in the great metal braziers that had once been filled with flares were now plain, ordinary paraffin lamps with ordinary reflectors! We came to the bottom of the great stairway, and I was certain that by now we were well underground in the heart of the great pyramid upon which the temple was built. Again great metal doors, covered with deeply embossed glyphs, confronted us, and again sentries challenged and were given a whispered password. Once more the doors swung wide and now we stood in what might have been the antechamber to some ancient throne room, devoid of ornament, with stone benches here and there for those in waiting, with stone tables in its center, and with a single mental door at its end. In front of it stood a man, garbed in a robe of almost barbaric magnificence. In his hand he held a staff surmounted by that same cipher of the god with which we were so familiar. Our guide bowed so deeply that he bent far toward the floor, spreading his hands outward and remaining in that posture until recognized by the robed priest who bade him await in the antechamber until further orders, then turned to us and said in Spanish:

"Señores, follow me!"

Prepared as we had been in advance for the sight of a dignified court of priests, councilors, or whatever term one wishes to apply, I doubt if any of our imaginations had even faintly outlined the scene into which we entered and where it was ours to play the most trying part. We were in a vast hall whose lofty ceiling was solidly carved with those ancient and peculiarly intricate designs by which all Maya stonework is distinguished.

This ceiling seemed to be upheld from the sides by gigantic images of which there were scores, and whose faces ranged the gamut of human emotions from malevolence to charity. These were of a uniform height of perhaps forty feet. Exactly at the end and center of this vast subterranean chamber was a comparatively small replica of the great god Icopan, seated as we knew was seated that enormous image in the temple, quite suggestive of Rodin's masterpiece, "The Thinker." It appeared to be of metal, or, perhaps, plated with gold, or—who knows?—perhaps it was made of solid gold as was that same image guarding the treasure caverns which we had once invaded. The eyes of the image were of jewels and the shielded lights surrounding it with a solid halo were so cunningly set that their reflection gave to those jeweled eyes an uncanny

brilliance almost as if they moved and stared at us as we advanced toward the center and thence to a heavily carved stone bench on one side.

Save for this glaring spot of light at the end, the chamber was without illumination, and until our eyes had fully adjusted themselves to the dimness, the full details could not be taken in. Opposite us, silent, immovable, sat a score of men in robes no less magnificent and semibarbarous than the one worn by our conductor. Had these twenty silent men moved upon us with poised spears, screaming with rage, their hostility could have been no more pronounced or deadly in its menace. In fact, I doubt if it would have so effectually made itself felt, for their very silence was more vehement and terrifying. Across the intervening distance their faces could not be clearly distinguished; but it could be observed that the majority of them were white-bearded men, indicating that with the Maya age might be supposed to bring wisdom, or that the road to eminence was long and difficult.

"Why don't they get on with it?" I whispered to Wardy, who replied: "They wait for something. What is that over there in the darkness beneath the god?"

I looked and saw what appeared to be a splotch of white, and then it moved, changed posture, resolved itself into a kneeling figure huddled as if in prayer, slowly arose to its feet, made a last obeisance and reaching toward the image touched some mechanism. Instantly shields seemed to slip from lights in all the surrounding images of lesser gods and the great cavern chamber became brilliant. We were astounded by its barbaric display of burnished metal plates and gilded points. And then we discerned that great spaces of the walls between the images were solidly carved with hieroglyphics and that one near us appeared to have been but recently cut, and that beneath it was but blank and smooth gray stone.

"Those are their decrees and decisions cut in stone, I think," said Wardy, but I was too much engrossed in studying the faces of the men who were to decide our fate to be very curious concerning stone inscriptions.

And, indeed, what I discerned was anything but encouraging; for as I looked from man to man I saw no sign of pity; nothing but harsh and unflinching dislike, or open and merciless hatred. The priest who, the only man in the room robed in unadorned white, had been lying prone before the image and for whom all others appeared in waiting, now turned toward us, and I caught my breath sharply when I saw that it was none other than Ixtual. A vague hope leaped into my mind, although I was aware that I had never fully comprehended him, or been able to predicate his thought processes. I could not, however, but recall that once his hand had been in mine and his eyes warm when he had said in those now distant days: "We neither think alike, nor believe alike, and between us there is a gulf; but this I do say, that you are an honest man who knows no guile." Somehow I hoped he might still cherish that estimate and exercise whatever power he had to the utmost in our behalf now, when in our desperate helplessness we needed succor. But study his face as I did, I could see nothing save stern and unbending purpose. Quite as if he were mentally prepared to forget all save that we were aliens whose very knowledge, however innocently gained, was inimical to his racial aspirations.

"Before you, O priests of the Mayas, stand those who have invaded the Sacred City," he said, not loudly, but in a voice that swept through the waiting silence of that subterranean chamber that had witnessed, I doubt not, tragic sacrifices of other and more guileless human beings than were we. Sometimes I wonder if there is anything in that Central African native superstition that the scene of a tragedy becomes forever permeated with tragedy that imparts to those who may come after a shuddering flash of horror. Did that account for the fact that for one infinitesimal fraction of a second there flashed through my imagination a picture of sobbing maidens, scarcely more than children, bound upon that altar before the image of Icopan, while above them stood fanatical priests with uplifted sacrificial knives? Maybe so, for I fancy I lost some of the words that Ixtual uttered in the Maya tongue that none of we three prisoners were supposed to understand, and I came back to my wits, hearing: "And, therefore, in the interests of our race, interests that should be above either love, pity, or any other impulse, the fate of these men must be decided by you. The High Priest Manco will state what is known of them."

Ixtual stopped and with folded arms

leaned back against a central pedestal whose purpose I could not conceive, and fixed his brooding eyes on the floor. Not once had he looked in our direction.

His excellency, Manco, our former host, arose and gravely moved toward the center of the room, made a gesture of respect toward the image of Icopan as if calling upon it to witness that he told the truth, and in his refined, well-modulated voice told that which we had already learned as to how we had been discovered. And then after this recapitulation he paused for a moment, and said, somewhat to my surprise: "I have talked with these men. As you know, I have lived much among such and am capable of coming to judgment. Therefore, I say to you that in these men I find this: That they mean no harm. The big man is learned and of high caste and thoughtful, cultivated mind. A man who, if he were of our race, we should prize and esteem. A man whom I would be happy to call my friend. The smaller man, he who moves like the black jaguar, is a man of the wild places, one who has fought beasts and men, and who knows no fear. He might have been a simple warrior, this, and I doubt not a loyal and resourceful one. His is the brain of one who acts, he thinks quickly, but not deeply, and is without love or hate. He is to be feared only for his quick and courageous cunning, and his given word would be kept though it cost him his life, because the word had been given. The big man would do likewise save that his pledge given would become a high moral faith to be kept unbroken by himself. The little dark man is a savage warrior from desert places who lives for but one purpose, to serve the giant who is his master. Dangerous as a mad wolf, this man, with no more mercy than a wolf, but obedient to the big man as if he were but his master's right hand. Now, these three men know too much. They must not be allowed to escape. They have declined to give their words to submit to our laws and remain here for the remainder of their lives as part of us, sharing in our ambitions and adopting our beliefs. That, O priests, is all I can say."

He sat down, and had scarcely done so when a man seemed to leap to his feet as if too long he had restrained himself with patience, and his gesture of obeisance was hastily made toward the image as if by habit only. His hawk nose, cadaverous face and fierce eyes were like those of some modern Dante inspired by hate.

"Then," declared he impatiently, "why waste time with them? Are we Mayas, or have we become so fat that we are spineless to act? There is but one decision that can be made. These men who have pried into our secrets must die! I demand their death—now!"

He might have gone further had not Manco, with a dignified gesture, appealed to Ixtual, who firmly interrupted the orator, and said as calmly as if he were but a judge of a court in some familiar place: "His Excellency Manco wishes to speak further."

"I who am the priestly accuser against these men, have not said that they pried into our secrets," said Manco.

"Then how came they here?" hotly demanded the zealot who thirsted for our blood.

"It is my opinion that they blundered here as men who hunt and who are curious concerning strange and unknown places do blunder over all the earth," said Manco quietly. "To pry into a secret implies an ulterior motive, and I am not aware that these men had any when first they came to this land."

"That," declared the orator, "does not alter the situation. If for no other reason than that they are here and refuse to submit to the only terms possible for them, is sufficient. They must die. I demand decision."

He appeared to throw himself back into his seat and the man next him, also by his appearance one of the fanatics, got up and added his demand for our execution. I began to count them as one by one they arose and spoke. One, two, three, four and so on they went until seven men had condemned us and the chances of life were steadily narrowing, and then a venerable-looking man arose and spoke in his turn:

"It matters not what others here may think," he said quietly, "for I am too old to care for the monitions of anything but my conscience, and it warns me that the Maya nation which we are refounding cannot prosper if any single stone in its base is stained with innocent blood. And I do deem these men innocent of wrong intent. I regret that they will not freely join us and assist us with that wisdom which they have learned in the outer world, of which most of us are ignorant. Therefore, I much re-

gret, also, that it becomes necessary for me to vote that they be detained here as State prisoners for the remainder of their lives, the conditions of their captivity being entirely dependent upon their own behavior. I am unalterably opposed to bloodshed. The days of human sacrifice in any form are done!"

There was a rustle of movement and another equally venerable man added his appeal for our lives, and then another and another until six of these solemn high priests had joined that side, and I breathed more freely and with renewed hope. I looked at Wardy, who sat as unmoved as if he had not understood a single word, then at Beni Hassan, whose black eyes flashed here and there as he appeared by some intuitive sense to gauge the fight that was being waged over our fate.

Eighteen men out of the twenty-two in the chamber had voted and were equally divided. The strain increased, and the silence between words seemed to have a peculiar waiting quality. The nineteenth robed priest stood up and tersely said, "Death! Nothing else offers final security!" and sat down. The twentieth robed figure did not immediately rise, but sat brooding with folded arms, as if loath to speak, and meditating. Others were beginning to rustle and turn and stare at him, as if urging him to make haste, and he began to slowly gather himself to arise when from the end of the chamber as if from the image itself came a voice so harsh, so filled with anger, so loud, that even we three miserable prisoners started from our seats.

"What is the meaning of this?" it cried. "Since when has the council of high priests of the Maya nation dared to decide upon life and death without consulting the mouthpiece of the great god Icopan, his Supreme High Priest?"

What looked like a section of the solid wall at one side of the effigy opened and to the consternation of the priests Doctor Morgano, magnificently robed, walked in, and halted in front of the image where he stood with fiercely burning eyes and with an upraised hand pointing an accusing finger at them. Slowly his eyes shifted until they fixed themselves upon Ixtual, who stood for a moment as if paralyzed, and then suddenly drooped his shoulders and head and lifted his right arm upward as if to protect his face from a blow.

"You, Ixtual! What madness seized you, that you permitted the supreme council to assemble here—here in this sacred chamber—without consulting me?" He waited for a moment and when Ixtual did not reply, said in a voice that was finely cold and emphatic: "Beware, my son, lest I who made thee do unmake!"

The unhappy Ixtual, as if still terrified, dropped to his knees and bent forward as if supplicating mercy in front of this robed figure that I could scarcely convince myself was none other than the Morgano I had so long known, so clothed anew was it with distinct majesty. The big dark eyes were fixed on him for a long time, and then this new and stern voice of the new Morgano commanded: "Arise! I shall consider your folly later." And then, to our utter astonishment, he took three or four swift, firm steps forward, seemed to quiver with rage, and pointing his finger at the high priest with the face like Dante who had clamored so insistently for our lives, stood for a moment as if speechless with indignation and then abruptly turned toward the priest at the end of the hall and shouted: "Order the guard to stand ready! They are to receive Juarno, who until to-night was high priest guarding the Sacred Island, but who is now plain Juarno, a prisoner until I have had time to consider his case. Out with you, clamorer for blood! Out with you I say, lest I forget and call upon the wrath of our gods to strike you dead!" And the fanatic who had been first to cry for the death sentence became a cringing, shivering, miserable wretch, so terrified by superstition that his knees and legs seemed barely able to support him, as in the rustling minute of suspense that followed he tottered toward the door, was passed through it, and we heard outside the inflexible voice of the obedient officer: "You will come this way, Juarno. Guardsmen, four to the front, four to the rear! March!" And then the door of the chamber closed, and again we were alone in a waiting silence.

It seemed interminable, and I wondered what next the savant might dare. I was buoyed to the utmost with a sense of satisfaction, of hope, of triumph. It was as if I had achieved a personal victory over enemies. And he turned his eyes upon us for the first time, and suddenly I, too, felt a sense of something strangely awful in them—as if in their regard hung our fate. It was

as if I had never known them before, never seen them; stranger eyes that were estimating us, one after the other, considering us, weighing our actions and forming conclusions. The stillness now carried with it something of a suspense so prodigious as to be actually breathless. As if self-hypnotized by some mysterious and inexplicable vision, the man we had known as Morgano, who had become the supreme high priest of a civilization that had been battered and subjugated for more than a thousand years, seemed not to recognize us as friends. Once he appeared to twitch his body and then raised his hand to his brow and swept it across as if striving to recall something forgotten, and then, dropping his hand with a gesture of despair, he spoke like an automaton scarcely above a whisper, but a whisper that sounded inordinately loud in the hollows of that vault in which we sat.

"The judgment of the high god," he said in that same peculiar voice, "is that these three men have profaned and desecrated the Place of Places; that they have intruded upon things from which they were debarred; that they have sought to learn that which they were unworthy to know; that they are without reverence for these our beliefs, and that being thus unworthy to live, a decree of death is passed upon them. In the last hour of the twenty-second Katun of the thirty-fourth cycle, here in this chamber, they shall expiate by sacrifice of their lives. Not because their knowledge is too great, because they have none. Not because they can do anything inimical to us or to ours who are protected by flat seas to east and west that sweep to the edge of a flat plate that is held in the hands of the gods; but because they have secretly derided our gods and beliefs, and with their derisions profaned all that the Maya has held sacred since the great god Icopan created the tortoise upon whose back is carried the tiny scale of mankind."

"My God!" whispered Wardy. "The man has gone mad! The date he named is but one day from now." And his steady hand fell upon mine and clutched it.

I might have answered had not my eyes at that moment fallen upon Manco, who was leaning forward as if spellbound or awe-stricken by something unknown. I saw then that the man next to him was quivering, and in a single glance I caught the remarkable attitudes of every man there, men who, totally unconscious of the strain, had stopped in various poses of immobility. From the hand of the guardian of the door fell his gilded metal staff. It rang upon the stone pavement as if it had become endowed with the strength of a hammer brought down by a giant's hand upon an enormous gong. The madman who had passed sentence of death upon us started, rubbed his eyes as if perplexed by some mental problem or disturbance, and then, recovering himself, said: "These three men I order to be confined in the rooms from which they have been taken, where they may have this brief time to reflect, and to consider the enormity of their offense, and so that their own consciences may prove to them the merits of my decree and—and—and——"

Suddenly his arms, swathed in superbly gilded sleeves of heavy gold embroidery moved forward, and his hands, with clutching fingers covered with splendid gems that sparkled in the light, swept outward toward us, he reeled like a man stricken, and pitched face forward upon the stones where he lay outstretched, a gorgeous splotch upon a flat and gray surface that lent no softness to his fall.

CHAPTER XI.

Instantly the whole scene shifted into what has never been to me more than a confused and distracting blur. I have dim memories of men rushing forward to lift that gorgeously clad figure of the supreme high priest; of shouts of alarm; of the flickering of lamps through the sudden swish of air; of cries in that foreign tongue, and of a great giant of a man who thrust his way through and swept aside all other men as if they were but pygmies and bent above Morgano and lifted him up as if he were a child and thrust his way back to the bench on which we had sat and laid him thereon.

"Henri! Henri!" he shouted to me, "kick this mob away! Give him air. I tell you he has fainted, or else has had a stroke and is dead."

I started to thrust those nearest back but was spared the effort by Ixtual who, as if in a frenzy, fell upon them and screamed commands. I saw that Manco had lost that slow deliberation that characterized all his movements and had come to Ixtual's aid. And then we stood alone, panting, distressed.

"The guard will obey the final decree," said Ixtual, "and remove these aliens to the place from which they were brought. Quick, obey!"

And then, as if it had been in waiting, the guard was brought in and there was the flurry of robes as the high priests made way, and men advanced upon us resolutely, and we submitted, and impelled by those about us were shifted toward the door that stood open, heard it clang shut behind us, and found ourselves standing bewildered and panting in the antechamber of the place that I hope never again to see. All resistance was vain. We knew it. All inquiries vapid. That, too, we knew. And so, submissive, dazed, wondering, we walked together up the great stairway and were scarcely aware that our heavy boots struck sound from the white and polished stone. Indeed, speaking for myself, I don't believe I recovered my senses until we stood alone in the room from which we had so recently been removed. And then it dawned upon me, very slowly, that the man we had hoped to rescue; the man whom we had loved with a great tolerance for his peculiarities, was the one who had actually sentenced us to death. I stood there gasping, thrusting my knuckles into my eyes and rubbing vigorously as if to dispel a nightmare, and seemed to realize all of a sudden that beside me, ruffled, with hair disarranged, and yet otherwise phlegmatic and undisturbed, stood my great friend, Wardrop. I laugh now when I recall that he was quietly polishing his monocle with a handkerchief, and that he stopped, inspected it, and said as if annoyed:

"By Jove! I must have dropped it! It is chipped on the upper edge. Extraordinary—extraordinary!"

And then he turned to Benny who was rolling a cigarette, and said: "Benny, you rascal! Get me some of that vile water to drink. I'm as thirsty as the desert where I found you when you were almost gone. Damn it, bring us something to drink!"

Benny hastened to look for the olla, and, I think somewhat limply, I fell into a seat beneath one of the high, narrow windows and was grateful for the breeze from without.

"Well, for the love of Heaven, Wardy," I burted out, "what do you make of it all? It beats me! Why—it's the doctor that has sentenced us!"

Usually he answered promptly as if his brain was forever calm; but now I saw that he turned toward the window, moved restlessly, stared out, seemed to consider something, and was perplexed.

"Honestly, Henri," he said, "I don't know what to make of it. It is all so strange, so inordinate, so contradictory. If Morgano is mad, and——"

He mumbled something more and moved slowly backward and forward for a few steps and then exclaimed, "If he had any deliberate purpose in all he did, we shall soon know; for he must certainly come here to explain, if he is still sane and friendly. He alone knows the way to get here. It is now midnight. All we can do is to wait."

And then, as if deliberately forcing himself to repose, he seated himself by the window, filled his pipe, and after lighting it stared out into the night with his elbows resting on the stone ledge. The smoke was puffed slowly outward, rising upward in little leisurely clouds and thinning strands. He looked so capable, so self-possessed, that I was influenced as I might have been by staring at Gibraltar from a storm-tossed cockle-boat out on its bordering ocean. I suddenly realized that worry and apprehension were very futile actions of the mind, and turned to see what had become of Benny. Stretched on the floor with his hands pillowed on his arms, he was already falling asleep.

Wardy, as if to reassure himself that he had made no mistake in the date set for our execution, now carefully calculated it on a piece of paper with a stub of pencil, and after a time said: "Well, I have confirmed it. In fact, we have about twenty-four hours left unless we can escape in the meantime, and that, of course, seems impossible even with that crazy man's aid."

"It serves us right for coming here to help him out!" I declared bitterly.

"No, Henri, you are wrong," retorted Wardy patiently. "Whether we live or die doesn't matter so much as our own convictions that when called upon by one we deemed a friend in distress, we did not hesitate to make the attempt. We could never have forgiven ourselves had we acted otherwise."

And somehow the nobility of the man's mind impressed itself upon me in that moment more than it ever had before. That

was the code that he had fixed for himself, and the one that he unfalteringly adhered to throughout his life.

We waited for hours, seldom talking, and given over to meditation. Most of the time Wardy sat quietly smoking, but I got up now and then and paced to and fro not unlike a trapped animal, I presume, for my feelings were as such. And then, as it began to grow light in the east, I followed Wardy's example, undressed myself, and went to bed. I am enough of a philosopher and healthy animal so that I went to sleep quickly and easily and I neither dreamed nor was disturbed until the guard arrived with our breakfast at the customary time. It is true that we ate without much conversation, but rest and food had at least given us a fresh grip on hope. Indeed, I doubt if our apprehensions had yet reached the highest pitch of acuteness. That was yet to come.

It was almost noon when we heard outside the challenges, then the opening of the door, and Ixtual entered and stood just inside. There was not the slightest doubt but that he was distressed and perturbed.

"I have come to implore you to reconsider your decision and to submit," he said, holding both hands toward us in appeal. "Nothing else can save you—now!"

"What do you mean by 'now,' Ixtual?" Wardy asked, steadily eying this strange man who had once been our companion—almost friend.

For a moment Ixtual appeared to consider the advisability of answering, and then, as if the human side of him had conquered the zealot, he said: "Because on but two grounds could your execution be deferred: One by the clemency of the man who sentenced you to death and who by his powers might grant you time for reflection, the other by your own absolute surrender to whatever impositions the council of high priests might put before you. I am not even certain that your submission and pledges can save you; but I can, and dare try. I will intervene for you to my utmost. I will call an immediate meeting and appeal for you. Manco will do all in his power and use all his influence. With the leader of the Ancients a prisoner, as he now is by the highest command, his followers would doubtless relent in sufficient numbers so that your deaths would not take place until we could at least try to dissuade the supreme high priest, Quano—him you knew as Morgano—to relent in your behalf; to take pity on you!"

"Then," said Wardy, adhering to his point, "we are to understand that unless we crawl like beggars in terror of death, surrending all our convictions, religious beliefs, nationalities, and honor, and pledging ourselves in what you and we would know to be nothing but lies, we must die unless Doctor Paolo Morgano, who alone has power to save us, relents?"

I felt sorry for Ixtual. His distress was so manifest. He stood looking all his embarrassment but found no words.

"Come, Ixtual! You who know would ask us to do this wretched, cowardly thing?" insisted Wardy very quietly.

"But it is the only thing I *can* do!" he exclaimed, miserably and with an air of helplessness. "And that is not all! You don't understand. You don't realize that it is my hand, by virtue of my office, that must wield the knife that kills you—you who have been my friends!"

"Then Ixtual, you must not quail!" said Wardy in that same quiet, grave voice. "For we will not prove cravens and lie to save our lives. The last proof you can offer of any affection you may have for us will be in that mercy of a swift dispatch, in the courage of a true blow. That alone is all we ask."

He reached for his tobacco pouch that lay on a window ledge and, fascinated by his extraordinary calmness, I watched his hands. They did not tremble. He filled his pipe, and with a single, unfaltering sweep lighted a match and held it, unwavering, above the bowl.

"But see here, Ixtual," I exclaimed, seeing that Wardy had nothing more to ask, "if the doctor's voice could at least give us a little more time, why doesn't he speak? Surely, even if he's as mad as a hatter, he might do that much for us."

Ixtual turned his face toward me slowly as if loath to reply and then said, almost sorrowfully: "You saw fall upon the stones the hope of the Maya race; the mouthpiece of our god; the man sent to bring us from the bondage and degradation of centuries. He fell speechless, senseless! Speechless and senseless has he been since that moment. In my own arms I carried him to his room—the room filled with strange books, with piles of paper on which he has written, and tablets that he has had

brought there that he might better understand all this, his human task. And there I laid him upon the simple bed that was of his own desire—a stone couch covered only with the blankets in which he slept when we together were led here by the wish of the god Icopan. Manco, the learned, brought all the skill he had acquired from your great schools to restore him, and has bent above and watched him ever since, but all without avail. Doctor Morgano, the inspired one, is as one who sleeps, breathing so slowly that at times he seems to have passed back to the feet of Icopan who sent him here to save the last of the Maya race. And so, the voice that might save you, is dumb! Quano moves not—speaks not, and even now—there"—and he waved his distracted arms outward—"there are, prostrate upon the pavements of the inner temple before the stern semblance of the Maya god Icopan, high priests who pray continuously that the face of the god be not turned away from our despair and that we be left not leaderless!"

By heavens, there was not the slightest doubt of the man's sincerity; of his desire; of his anguish! He believed all that he had declaimed with such tragic energy. Believed that the unkempt, irresponsible, sometimes drink-sodden little savant I had known in the Quartier Latin of Paris was the savior of his race! Believed that this erratic, badly balanced but wholly lovable little wisp of a man whose life had been spent among books and tombs and mummies and tablets over all the ruins of the known globe, held in his frail shell some divine spark from the gods of a dead and almost forgotten race! I could have derided him had his sincerity been less evident. I could have laughed in his face and told him to wake up and stop being a fool, living in a fool's dream, had I not fathomed his despair. And so, vaguely understanding his prodigious distress, I felt sorry for him, forgetting for the moment that my life, and two other lives depended in a measure upon this extraordinary little man's recovery.

Something of my feeling must have been betrayed, even as once before it had been when this same Maya, fervent, fanatic, visionary had clutched my hand and clung to it, and sworn that we were friends. Something, I don't know what, seemed to break within him, for once again he forgot everything save that we were fellow men with but one common though limited point of mental understanding and he moved swiftly toward me, and, bending forward, said:

"Oh, brother of mine! You alone know what I suffer! You alone know what this means to me! You know that I would give my life for yours or his, and you know of all that I have worked and hoped for! Oh, I can't help it. I am whirled in the great wheels of the gods until I swoon. My people live or die, exist or vanish, through Quano alone. After all the sleeping centuries when Icopan turned from the Maya, the god relented, and, perhaps forgave, and sent his agent. And now through some blindness of ours, the god again threatens to turn his face, and to take from us the wisdom of his voice. If I seem against you, remember that I, too, am but a tiny tool scratching my little mark on the tablets. That I am but such in the graver's hands, and can but obey the master will. I must do the best I can lest my part be ill done and others suffer for my delinquencies. I must steel my heart to do that work that hurts and revolts, and makes me cry with pain. You will understand, will you not?"

I didn't feel up to speech just then, for some reason that I can't at all explain, and that, if explained, would probably sound foolish; so I just put my hand on his shoulder with a firm hold, looked him in the eyes, tried to speak and then turned away. I tell you that poor devil was honest and real. It was his way of looking at life, and he couldn't help it any more than I can, when I make a botch of things after I have done my very best.

And so, as I had nothing to say, and couldn't have said it anyhow, I walked over to a window slit and looked out to see if there was anything worth looking at on the lake away down below, and when I saw there wasn't and turned, Ixtual had gone.

The luncheon came, and we ate. The afternoon began, and it didn't seem to have any leisure, for it moved fast. Wardy had written something to Doctor Morgano, and then after a while, said: "Here, old man, read this, and if you think it's all right sign it."

I took the pages he had torn from a notebook and read the penciled letters.

You alone will comprehend, if this ever comes to you, why our venture hither was made. That it has failed is no fault of yours, because you doubtless adopted your own methods which, we

are frank to admit, we do not understand. All of which will not matter if the hunt horns of life cry finish for us and the hunt is done when this lies before your eyes. Why you did, and how you did, are alike incomprehensible. But this we wish you to know, that we pass without animosity, regret, or fear. Forget us. It is the best way.

I read it and then threw it down and asked: "But what for? Why?"

"Because," he said, "I am convinced the man is mad and, inasmuch as that doesn't count, I'd like to have him feel no remorse if he comes to his senses after it's all over."

I was about to sign it when I saw he still held another sheet in his hand, that evidently he didn't intend for my perusal.

"What's that?" I asked, and rather reluctantly he handed it to me, and I saw that it was a separate postscript to his letter which I read:

P. S.—In the house of his excellency, the High Priest Manco, lives a girl who was kindly to us. I ask you to say for me that we remembered and were grateful to the last, and that I, personally, died with but one regret, which was that I was helpless to enable her to accomplish the fulfillment of certain dreams. You need say no more than this, for she will understand. J. D. W.

"I don't quite get that," I said, puzzled.

"Marzida, too, wished to escape from the tyranny of her surroundings," he said simply, and then after a moment added: "Poor, poor, caged thing! Beating helpless wings against the bars."

And then I knew that there were things and emotions I had not surmised, and that the death of my friend likewise killed hope in one who must continue to live as best she could. It all seemed pretty rough—an unmerited finish—and I fell to grieving because I could not at least have a fighting end, in which I could feel the thrill of struggle, rather than submit tamely to the executioner's knife. I had no wish to kill either Manco, Ixtual, or any of those venerable old men who had displayed pity and leniency; but I did wish that I could at least take into the final night as companions a few of those robed hyenas who had so lustily clamored for our deaths. Too long had I lived where ready fang and naked claw fought to the last, to agree to supine death.

Benny disturbed my thoughts with a warning hiss, and when I looked at him, pointed toward his room. Together we hurried across to the doorway. We were in time to see the stone panel move, somewhat feebly as if the man behind lacked strength, and then, weak, pale, almost staggering, Doctor Paolo Morgano appeared and fell toward us.

I will admit that nothing save the fact that he seemed so pitifully ill and helpless induced me to rush to his aid. There was in my mind a great question mark set down by his name.

"By the love of Our Lady, give me something to drink," he croaked from a harsh throat, "I had terrible—yes—terrifying difficulty in remembering how to open the door! Something is wrong—here!" and he tapped his head with a finger and blinked his eyes as if distressed by some admitted fault of brain mechanism.

Wardy came hurriedly through the door and gently led him to one of the long stone benches where, as if too exhausted to sit erect, he sprawled. Benny brought him a huge bowl of water that he gulped as if feverish, like one who has narrowly escaped death on a desert of dry sand, and again he fell to running his lean fingers through his hair as if harassed by some inexplicable problem. And then to my utter astonishment he sat up with a jerk and said:

"The last I can remember is that I had listened for some time through an aperture in the state chamber known to me alone; that when affairs seemed critical I decided to interfere; that I rushed out and—— As I am a living man—— Upon my honor—— I seemed to be some one else! It was as if some one, savage yet trying to be just, some one with queer ideas of things, put words into my mouth! Honestly, for the time being, I was actually the kingly high priest of this people! I was a man with power over life and death. A man whose orders would be obeyed. A man who thought of nothing but the welfare of his people and—and——" He paused helplessly, and again ran distracted fingers through his hair and then exclaimed: "I can remember nothing more! Nothing! Absolutely nothing. I awoke as if from a trance or deep sleep, and saw Manco sitting there watching me. I smiled up at him, and he gave me a draft of some sort; but I was so worried about you that I fought against it, though pretending to sleep. Then when he tiptoed out of the room I heard him tell my attendants that under no circumstances was I to be disturbed for at least two or three hours, when he would return, and I came here to ask what has happened."

"Nothing, except that you have condemned us to be murdered to-night in the twelfth hour!" I exclaimed.

"I? I did that? Impossible!" he declared wildly.

"It is true," said Wardy, staring at him. And then he told him rapidly, as if time were the first object of all, what Ixtual had said to us, and of our predicament. As he listened the doctor seemed to recover his old cunning.

"I can fix that," he declared. "I must get back and issue another decree, at once. I'll—I'll tell them that in my long sleep the god has warned me that if given time you may repent, and that I, therefore, reprieve you for—let's see—the next Maya festival when Icopan is consulted is—ummh! —I can gain at least three months. I think that——"

"Suppose you go and attend to that first of all," I insisted. "That is a point in which we three have a most decided interest. Get that over with, and put it through, and we can have considerably more time left to listen to your explanations."

I have an idea that even then he might have delayed to tell us something of Maya feast days, had not Wardy also gently insisted that he go at once and issue this new decree of reprieve, and we boosted him out of the doorway and closed the entrance behind him. Our world appeared considerably less gloomy. It was not until he was gone that Wardy turned an inquiring eye on me and said:

"Well, I don't know but that you were right when you said that we were dealing with a madman. Or—is it something else we don't yet understand? Something beyond our comprehension?"

For a moment I puzzled over that, and then, finding it complex, asked what he meant.

"I mean," said Wardy slowly, "that maybe there are two beings in that shell we know as Doctor Morgano. One is the man we know. The other is——" he paused, moved across, and his voice fell to a mere whisper—"the mouthpiece, the tool, the instrument of——"

He stopped because I could not restrain a laugh of derision. I am not certain but that he was annoyed; for he turned away with a singular tightening of the lips, and after a moment said: "Well, if he issues the reprieve we shall know of it before long; but if he goes into another lapse, and forgets, I doubt if anything can save us."

Our supper was brought to us, and still there was no good news from that little temple world outside our prison. Nine o'clock came, and we began to fear that something untoward had intervened, and sat quietly discussing what accidents might have arisen. There were so many that could be conjectured. The doctor might have swooned again, or gone into a cataleptic fit, or fallen in the secret corridor, or through lapse of memory failed to find the way to get either in or out, or—oh, it was easy enough then to think of a thousand things that might prevent him from reprieving us. And then, just at ten o'clock, three officers of the guard appeared and we brightened up in anticipation of glad news. Their spokesman gravely saluted us and said:

"Señores, it is our painful duty to conduct you to that place where the decree of our Supreme High Priest Quano, sentencing you to death, shall be finally carried out!"

As he spoke ten armed guards silently entered the room behind him, and I could have cursed aloud when I discerned that it was now too late to even so much as offer a fight!

CHAPTER XII.

"We can at least denounce that insane ——" I began angrily when Wardy cried: "Stop! That would avail nothing! Let us at least finish with dignity!" And then he gravely turned to the foremost officer and asked: "Are there any preparations necessary on our part? We are helpless, as you may observe, and have no desire to make the situation any more unpleasant than it must be by necessity."

The officer and some of his men who understood Spanish actually gasped with admiration for his extraordinary nerve. They were looking upon as cool a sportsman at that moment as ever stood in shoes; a sportsman who had lost his match and had neither complaint nor appeal to offer.

"I am sorry—sorry to say that it will be necessary for you to strip to your waists," said the officer, quite as if embarrassed and humiliated to make such a statement; but before the words were out of his mouth the big Englishman was calmly divesting himself, and an instant later stood there with his enormous torso exposed, the most superb specimen of manhood I surmise that

any Maya had ever seen. More slowly I, too, stripped and they murmured at the sight of the great scars covering my body where once in Africa, a lion had marked me for life—almost for death. Beni Hassan alone stood with folded arms and fiercely burning eyes.

"*Saadatak,*" he said to Wardy in Arabic. "If these dogs of *giouras* wish me stripped, by Allah, let them come and try to do it!"

Wardy seemed to consider for a moment and then in Arabic expostulated with: "It shall be as you wish; but until their knives reach our hearts there is still a chance, thin, faint, almost nothing it is true, that something may interfere in our favor. If nothing does, is it not befitting a follower of the Prophet to pass with dignity, thus showing to these that men of his faith can laugh at death?"

For a moment more we waited, all of us with eyes fixed on the Arab who stood there like a falcon ready to strike with all the power of his naked talons, and then, with a single exclamation of resignation, "Allah is Allah!" he impetuously jerked off his tunic, and stripped his shirt with a second fierce sweep. Lithe and sinewy he appeared, like a half-unswathed statue of bronze, and now with head held firm and unbending. Wardy turned and moved toward the door, and even the soldiers fell aside for him to pass into their midst as if giving deference to one so brave and steadfast.

They conducted us over the familiar route until we came to the head of the great stairway, descended it into the heart of the great pyramid and were received into the antechamber. The outer door closed behind us and the guard formed in front of it. All was deathly still, as if the spirit of tragedy brooded over the place. The door leading to the inner chamber stood open and we saw that in the exact center of the room had been placed a great stone altar, shallowly hollowed in the center as if to embrace a human form, and channeled with curious channels that I doubt not had been used in ancient days to catch the blood of the victims who had been sacrificed.

"By heavens! It looks like a hard bed!" I muttered to Wardy despite my previously made resolution to hold my tongue between my teeth.

"Silence!" commanded the high priest at the doorway, and that instant we saw at the far end of the inner chamber a robed figure appear swinging a censer from which curled upward tiny wreaths of lavender-colored smoke whose faint odor reached us where we stood. A voice began chanting a weird sort of sacrificial prayer that broke into low monotones. The other robed figures brought to the head of the altar a tiny stone table on which lay two knives not unlike the savage kukri used by the Ghurka warriors of the East, knives so bright and clean that they seemed on fire. The prayer came to an end. The priest with the censer had disappeared from view. They seemed waiting for some one, and then there came with undisguised haste from the farther end of that dread chamber Ixtual, who stood with both hands upraised as if to command attention and in a voice that struck me as highly relieved, cried:

"A sign! A sign from the god of gods, Icopan! Heed ye, O priests, to his commands, issued through the mouth of the Supreme High Priest Quano, who has recovered from his long sleep and speaks that which he was bade to speak! Icopan, god of gods, is displeased that these three men should be sacrificed without time for meditation, and warns those who demand the shedding of blood in haste lest the wrath of the gods fall upon them! Not until the sacred day of fast and prayer, the eighty-first sunset from now, may these men be slain. Nor can the wrath of the gods be averted if there be complaint or lack of obedience to their august commands! Listen again, O priests, and heed!"

He paused for a moment impressively, turned to the image at the end, knelt, made genuflections of reverence, and appealed to the god Icopan to silence his tongue if he erred in voicing the command, and then again arose, and in identically the same words he had first used, as if they had been religiously memorized, repeated his pronunciamento. But this time those within dropped to their knees and bent their foreheads to the pavement. The guards closed round us and urged us to our knees likewise at the angry command of the priest at the door who muttered: "Bring to reverence the idolaters! It is the voice of the god Icopan to which they must listen!"

None of us had any objections. We were too highly pleased. The commands of the gods of the Maya suited our books exactly for the time being. And then, as Ixtual's voice ceased, the great door to the inner

chamber, or Maya sanctuary, suddenly closed shut, all of us got to our feet, and almost before I had recovered from my daze I found myself trudging back up the great stone steps with Wardy and Beni Hassan by my side. Strangely enough, we did not utter a word until we found ourselves alone again in our prison chamber, and then it was the Arab who spoke first.

"What did Ixtual say?" he asked, and we remembered that he spoke but few words of the Maya tongue. When Wardy explained Benny shrugged his shoulders, grinned, and exclaimed: "Well, by the beard of the prophet! Their gods spoke none too soon, and it was well they stammered not for in a minute more we should have been dead men."

We resumed our clothing and waited for the doctor to come, but at last, disappointed, retired. And furthermore he did not put in an appearance until the night following. When reproached for permitting us to come so near death, his sole reply was that he had thought it unnecessary to inform us that he must wait for the dramatic moment that he might fully impress the body of high priests.

"I can't understand, considering how well disciplined you have your priests," I said, "why you don't issue a decree liberating all of us, yourself included."

"That," he declared, "is utterly out of the question! None of us can ever leave here with their consent. Our sole hope of escape in any event is to so lull them into such a state of false security or negligence that any plan I can conceive may be carried out with the minimum of molestation. And, furthermore, I regard it as exceedingly unsafe to even attempt anything until the present unrest has had at least a few weeks to quiet down."

"Then you mean to say that we have got to be shut up here as prisoners, week in and week out, until you can——" I began, but he stopped me with a gesture.

"No, I have a way to avoid that. I have arranged that you are to be returned to Manco's house where you must again give paroles. And, needless to say, the paroles must be kept if any plan I can make is to succeed. You must—absolutely must—help me by keeping all suspicions from Manco's mind. You will be transported there tomorrow night by the same men who brought you here."

"And in the meantime we shall have to be idle, doing nothing and——" I again exclaimed until Wardy checked me with a gesture.

"The doctor, I am certain, appreciates the necessity for quick action," he remonstrated in a soothing tone.

"Yes, and the moment I discover a way to escape, I can find means of communicating with you," said the doctor. And that was about all the satisfaction we got before he left us.

His promise to transfer us from the island prison, however, was faithfully kept, for on the following night we found ourselves again in Manco's house exactly as if nothing had happened in the interim of our absence, almost, indeed, as if we had never left there.

And then began a series of weeks that at first I could but regard as pitiful comedy played under the unseen canopy of tragedy, but that as time progressed troubled me, and finally exasperated. The first manifestation was Wardy's change of attitude toward Manco; for now he seemed ready to listen to his excellency's lengthy discourses on the Maya religion, to question as if he were clearing up doubts, and to even occasionally express appreciation for some of its better qualities. My irritation reached culmination one night after we had been at Manco's for five weeks, and, as usual, Wardy had escaped the moment his excellency disappeared and devoted all the remainder of the evening to Marzida.

"See here, old man," I blurted when we were alone in our rooms, "where the deuce do you stand in this situation?"

"What do you mean? I don't understand," he replied, turning toward me with a puzzled air.

"I mean that for five weeks we have been here without forming any project to escape; that you seem quite happy and content to let the remainder of the sand run from our glass so long as you are in the company of Marzida, and, worst of all, you seem positively reconciled to this abominable idol-worshiping religion of Icopanism. You don't intend to submit at the last and, like the doctor, join the Mayas, do you?"

He laughed a little at me, and then seeing that I was very much in earnest became grave and, coming closer, talked to me in a low voice.

"The religious matter," he said, "is merely

one of curiosity and interest, and—I like to hear Manco expound. No, I shall not become Maya. As to inaction, yes, I plead guilty, and there are times when I have forgotten its necessity. And it is because"—he stopped, looked away, and then with his old-time frankness, when frankness was required, said softly—"because I have been happy. Exquisitely happy. And because I can never be happy again away from Marzida!"

"Then," said I sadly, "there are but two alternatives by which you may continue that happiness. One to escape and take her with us, or the other for you to surrender completely, join these people, and marry her—that is—if she cares for you."

I hadn't the heart to tell him, so miserable he seemed, that in my opinion it would have been far better for us to have remained prisoners in the temple out on the island where this intimacy could not have taken place, and where we could have had opportunity for keeping Morgano up to concert pitch in his efforts. Before falling to sleep that night I thought, rebelliously, that if any action was taken, I should have to inaugurate it myself; but action was coming faster than I could have anticipated. Indeed, it lifted itself into view at breakfast on the following morning when Manco appeared visibly harrassed by something, and Marzida gave us a quiet signal that she wished to talk to us alone after our host had departed.

We found the opportunity at hand immediately, and then she gave us an explanation.

"Something has taken place that seems to be pretty upsetting," she said. "A man named Zujil, that Manco has suspected as being nothing less than a spy for the Ancients, and who is what might be called a superintendent under him, is known to have received yesterday some sort of a message by the regular courier from outside. This morning Manco learned through one of his own confidential men that last night Zujil took a boat and rowed toward the island. It is believed by Manco and his man that he was conveying news to some one of the high priests. It is against the decrees for any man to step foot on the island unless specially summoned, and, what is more, he could never land there without a written order or passport from one of the high priests, all of whom have such authority. I gather from what I could learn, that Manco suspects some sort of plot hatched by what we call the Ancients, and that he fears it may concern you as well as a high priest who, I think, was thrown into a cell by order of Quano himself. A sort of revolt, I think, but, of course, don't know for certain."

"Why doesn't Manco give the chap the sack?" I asked. "How did they find out that he rowed toward the island?"

"His residence," said Marzida, ignoring my first question, "is that big white house just behind our grounds. It was in such a good state of preservation when we came here that Manco himself had the man quartered there. His only outlet on this side is through our outer grounds. He was seen by one of Manco's men who—well—who have been acting as night watchman since you were brought back."

We considered all this for a moment, and then, before we could reply, she added: "And that isn't all. Your man Beni Hassan was missed last night, and they were about to give an alarm, but before they could do so, he was discovered, most mysteriously, in his quarters again!"

I thought of the restless Arab and laughed. Quite well I knew that Beni Hassan could never be contented to sit idle. So his mysterious disappearance and reappearance was without significance to me, regardless of how much it might perturb Manco and his galaxy of jailers. If I required anything else to rob this information of any portent, the sight of Benny himself, cool, placid, squatting out on the edge of the terrace as if half asleep, was sufficient. But Marzida, troubled, had not been gone a minute before he looked about, saw that we were alone, and came hastily toward us.

"Listen," he said quickly, "I have learned something. The young white effendi told you that I had been lost last evening. Well, I was. I found from an outhouse a tunnel filled with rubbish, and, having nothing else to do, and being tired as the sleeping winds, and yet as restless as they, I crawled through to see whither it led. It took me to the house of which she spoke. And it took me to a place from whence I could look within. I saw nothing. I thought nothing more of it until I heard her words. If it be of value I could take you through that way that you might put upon that man they believe our enemy a watch—a watch unknown to himself."

And then as if he had given nothing of

more than curiously small value, he walked back to the terrace and again seated himself in the shadow of the awning. But it is in little values sometimes that fortunes are changed, and I wondered, at various times during the day when walking restlessly and idly about, if a knowledge of that secret exit might not some time be important, and resolved, as much in a spirit of adventure as anything else, to visit it with Benny that very evening. And all without my realizing it, luck was playing my way.

Benny grinned like a mischievous ape when I told him of the excursion, and gave me the signal when, in the darkness it was safe for me to venture with him from his quarters into a sort of half-ruined chamber in the rear that was, as he had said, about half filled with fallen rubbish and weeds. Parting the stuff he had thrown over the hole to conceal it, we dropped down some few feet and made our way along the tunnel until he whispered to me that we must go cautiously as we were about to come to some steps.

We did, a moment later, and the passage was so narrow that I had to go sidewise, suggesting to me that we were passing upward to the top story of the house in a secret way between two walls. We emerged in a low, open space that was evidently between the ceiling of the room below and the terrace roof, and now I saw several narrow slits that appeared to be mere openings through the ornamentation of the cornice. Through these the light from within was shining and I saw a man seated at a table with his back toward us and his hands holding open the pages of a book. For a minute I watched him, and then looked about and above me to find the door to the terrace which I had no doubt existed. It was just then that I heard a noise in the room below, and again watching, I heard the man at the table give a command to some one to enter. One whom I presumed to be the spy entered and made the salutation that was invariably given to a high priest, and said in the tongue: "The High Priest Pozocan has arrived."

"Then bring him in at once and let no one see him."

"I have already arranged that," said the spy. "There is no person in my house save ourselves."

"You have done well," said the priest, closing his book as the man disappeared, and not arising from his seat until the door again opened and a man muffled as if to avoid recognition entered and threw the scarf off from about his neck and exchanged greetings.

I instantly recognized a man I was not likely to forget, one of the high priests who, in that terrifying hour in the subterranean council chamber had been most insistent upon our immediate execution. And then came a surprise of such magnitude that I caught my breath and gasped. The priest who had been sitting at the table turned his face so that for the first time I had a full view of it there under the strong light. It was the man we had known in Paris as Veguitas! The man we believed serving a sentence of imprisonment in a French jail.

The conversation that followed proved that he and the priest, Pozocan, were confederates and fellow plotters, for he talked freely of his adventure; of how he had been given the message found upon the dead courier sent out by Ixtual, of what fools he found Wardy and I to be; of his hatred for the French authorities, and of how he had been finally imprisoned, but with a liberal bribe had effected escape.

"And," said he at last in conclusion, "I have in my possession, aye, have brought hither, the tablets, copies of which Quano, the inspired dreamer, sought! The tablets that will disclose the hiding place of the great treasure vaults!"

Both men were in a frenzy of exultation by this time and shook hands vigorously. After which Veguitas, as we had known him, brought from the cupboard a heavy modern suit case which he unlocked and took therefrom, one by one, the tablets that Wardy bought from a mere junk dealer of Paris! I could have laughed, there in my hot, shallow hiding place. The man had not even suspected that he had merely borne to us a cipher message imploring us to assist the little savant to escape; that he had unwittingly been as good a messenger as the man who had died in the jungle might have been, and that there was nothing at all to be learned from the chunks of stone he had so laboriously brought to the Sacred City.

"Now," said Veguitas, after he had replaced the tablets in the suit case and locked them, "what are your plans at this end? What have you accomplished in my absence?"

"I have accomplished this much," said his

companion, "that owing to the blundering of three explorers who mysteriously found their way into the great cavern, I have succeeded in getting the guard more than trebled, and"—he paused and chuckled at his own cunning—"the men who have been added are all of my own selection, and when the time comes will obey my commands."

"But—but," said Veguitas, "you say three men actually——"

"I will tell you of them later," interrupted Pozocan. "All in due time. I have promised these additional guards, of whom there are two score, that once the treasure is found and we are placed in power, each shall be given the equivalent of five thousand pesos in gold and shall be promoted to places of greater ease and authority in the army, which they shall begin to drill as soon as we have the funds with which to buy modern arms and equipment—the army that must ultimately seize Guatemala. It was undoubtedly the intention of Ixtual and Manco to get these treasure tablets, or for convenience and to avoid carrying them, copies of the inscriptions, then, when the voice of the inspired one had interpreted them, to preserve the secret and thus maintain themselves in power despite the fact that those timid palterers, temporizers, and shufflers who call themselves Moderns, are in the great minority. Our people whom they derisively call the Ancients, have been inactive only because they were poor and without means for their great and holy purpose. All these will instantly arise, and the others must give way, or—perish! Our cause must not falter because it costs a few more lives!"

Veguitas for a long time seemed wrapped in study, as if the problem were many-sided.

"But," said he at last, "will the great Quano not yield to the influence of Ixtual and withhold the knowledge of the treasure from the high council?"

"Not when the tablets are given by me personally into his own hands," declared Pozocan emphatically. "I shall tell him that I have come upon them by accident and that I believe them to be the keys to the treasure collected throughout ages by our ancient race. I shall tell him that I demand that this secret be given to the high council in session lest one side or the other profit to the detriment of our cause."

"But—but will he not possibly refuse?"

"No, he will not! Listen. Quano, the great one, when not inspired by the spirit of the gods, is but a fool! He is ignorant, he is simple, he has no ambitions beyond silly trivial things. He cares not for power. For days he is nothing but a dreamer, and then, suddenly he becomes the mouthpiece of the high gods and men tremble before him, and his eyes are filled with strange fires, and none can resist or question. His wrath is high and cold. His voice as chill as one beyond the pale of death and dwelling in immortality. I tell you that he *is* the chosen tongue of the god of gods, whose voice brings life or death!"

He stopped and made a swift gesture that was not unlike the sign of the cross made by a devout Roman Catholic when speaking of the Deity.

"If he does refuse, or endeavors to mislead me, it—it will prove the end; for in that event I could no longer control some of the hot-headed ones who, despite the sacrilege, would go mad with anger, slay him as an alien impostor, and if not checked by something or other of which I cannot even imagine, probably kill some others who have been his strongest supporters!"

He sighed deeply as if terrified by the very dangers of the powers he had invoked, and then, as if to renew his own courage, waved his hands and declared: "But, after all, there is no fear of that. There can't be. Those are the tablets themselves. Better even than the mere copies for which he sent, and which he thought too precious to risk the loss of, or injury to, en route. And being impractical in all things when not inspired, he will accept them as being duplicates found by me, for neither he nor Ixtual, nor Manco, believes that the message he sent ever passed beyond the outer jungle. And he will tell me what they mean, because he has no cunning of his own. It cannot turn out otherwise."

"But—these men—these invaders—how came they here? What was done with them?" asked Veguitas, reverting to what must have been to him a most important topic.

"How they came no one knows, nor does it matter, because they found the way and —knowledge is sometimes dangerous. What was done with them, I will tell you." And then he proceeded to pour forth a description of the scene in the council chamber in which he gloated over the fact that at the

last moment it was none other than Quano himself who, to the confusion of Manco and Ixtual, had sentenced us to death. The poor fool, bloodthirsty, a thing of long past ages when ignorance, superstition, and bloodshed ruled the earth, said, thumping his fist on the stone table:

"These men shall die. They shall restore the virtues of the ancient sacrifice. And Ixtual and Manco must beware lest they follow. Quano, the inspired, we must guard closer than ever, lest in a mad moment he escape us, or is stricken by the gods. For through him alone can we be directed and led to conquer and retrieve our own. We must guard him because within him is two men, one a doddering old simpleton, the other an instrument of Icopan who speaks through him alone. Verily, the gods do choose strange tools for their work, but we may not question their will!"

He stopped, calmed himself, and then became more practical, merely the plotter again.

"It is wise that none save those guards of my own selection who conducted you hither know of your presence. Were Ixtual, or Manco, or their followers to know that you are here, they might become cautious, as does the black jaguar at the smell of man's spoor. But, although it may be days or weeks before the god gives to Quano the meaning of these tablets, it is best that you remain here, hidden, until the hour comes when we must strike hard and sure. I will take the tablets with me, and at the first propitious moment—to-morrow probably—I shall deliver them into Quano's hands. Now I must go, lest my absence be noted."

I waited for his departure, and then, once it was made, slipped cautiously back to rejoin Benny. The tunnel seemed inordinately long and filled with pitfalls before Benny and I debouched from its entrance, cautiously waited to see that the way was clear and then emerged into the night. I hastily made my way to our rooms, while Benny sought Wardy to tell him that I wished to talk with him, and until he came I paced to and fro, considering all the information at hand and how we might apply it to our own use.

TO BE CONCLUDED.

EDUCATION AND RISING PRICES

EDUCATIONAL institutions, though well-endowed, have been feeling the pinch of high costs lately. They have always spent their income feeling it was better to do a good work than to spare it and lay up surplus funds. With the conclusion of war, many find their plants depleted, and their staffs deserted. Professors who left for war work are frequently staying in the new location because they are paid better than they might ever have hoped to be in college. Thus the strongest point of a university is in serious danger of threatening them all as an institution, and unless the obvious remedy is applied, they will all succumb to mediocrity.

There is no magic about an education. Many acquire it without ever going to a school, but it cannot be denied that the best place to learn is in a place established for the purpose of teaching, under competent instructors who enjoy their work, and who seek to impart to youth their own high ideals of service. The professors have been facing many difficulties of late, knowing not where to retrench again, for expenses had been pared down to the limit. And with the continued rise in prices, with no end in sight, it becomes absolutely impossible to exist without assistance. The teaching profession is in danger of desertion. It will dissolve.

With these truths in mind the heads of various universities are giving their best thought to the problem. Several have started campaigns among their alumni for sums ranging from one million dollars to eleven million dollars, for additional endowment with which they can offer their professors a sum nearer their true worth. The alumni are willing workers, are loyal helpers, and it seems likely that several such sums will be raised before the colleges will have solved their chief problem.

Amateur Stuff

By W. R. Hoefer

Author of "Old Kid Opportunity," Etc.

"Bust him one, Joe," says one guy. "Bounce one offen his jaw," pipes up another. And then the poor bum was given his chance to show what he could do against a prize pug

YOUNG Mort Tilden, a sport devotee with a comfortable income and a cosmopolitan acquaintance, had invited old Pete Terry, a veteran conditioner of boxers, to witness the amateur bouts at the exclusive Gotham Athletic Club, and the two were lounging in the club smoking room, discussing the evening's entertainment in general and one sensational boxer in particular.

"This boy Frazer," quoth Tilden, lighting a monogrammed cigarette as he settled himself comfortably in his big lounging chair, "is my idea of a real boxer. He's the best amateur I've ever seen."

"He ain't a bad kid," lazily admitted the old trainer, declining a proffered cigarette and lighting up an old, blackened pipe.

"He's so good, in fact," continued Tilden enthusiastically, "that I think he'd have a chance against Leonard if he ever turns professional."

Old Pete's leathery face wrinkled into a good-natured grin. "He might at that," said he, "if they'd leave him bring a ax in the ring with him. I admit this boy's good. He's got a nice left hand and a gold watch for coppin' this championship at his weight and everything. But if he should fight this Leonard right now there'd be two winners —Benny and some undertaker."

The other laughed skeptically. "What makes you think so?" he asked.

"Well," drawled Terry, "the main reason, outside the fact that we *know* how good Leonard is, is this: one's a crackin' good amateur an' the other's a corkin' good professional. An' when two birds like that mingle my coin's always on the 'pro.'"

Tilden grunted disdainfully. "But why?" he asked. "What's the chief difference between them, aside from the fact that one makes a living at it and the other does it for sport?"

"An' amateur might make good," replied old Pete, "an' a professional is *gotta* make good. At least, good enough to get money for it. An' the best answer I know to this question is a bird named Cal Kennedy."

"What about him?" asked the other, scenting a yarn.

"Well," drawled Terry, "if you want a earful I'll tell you." He shifted his squat, chunky form about in his chair, for greater ease, grinned reflectively, and began:

"It's five years ago in February that I first lamp this Kennedy kid. I'm with Danny Lewis who's got a stable of boxers. An', boy, it's sure one fierce night. Cold as a pawnbroker's heart, a heavy snow, an' a sixty-mile gale to whip it into your face. Coming into Fourteenth Street, we beat it into Stacey's café, fast.

"Up at the bar is a guy with a crooked nose an' a straight-whisky habit. Four pals with him 're hoistin' the drinks he's payin' for with one fin an' pattin' him on the spine with the other. This bird's so hard he prob'ly wears brass knuckles when he says his prayers. He won't scale over one-fifty, soakin' wet, but he's bull-necked, heavy-jawed, an' is got a pair of shoulders I'd hock the subtreasury to own; he's a regular pocket edition of Tom Sharkey an' Sam Langford rolled in one."

"Kennedy?" asked Tilden.

"Nope. It ain't Kennedy," chuckled old Pete. "This Kennedy blows in with the storm just then. An', lad, he's some sight. Take words like bum, derelict, outcast, an' failure, mix 'em up an' multiply 'em by Cobb's battin' average an' the result's a faint idea of what he looks like. No overcoat, pants ragged at the bottom an' out at the rear, he's wearin' what used to be a dinner jacket, no kiddin', pinned across his bare chest an' from the top of his old, dirty cap to the toes of his busted out, low-cut shoes

he's soggy, drippin' wet, oozin' melted snow at every step. An' with a week's collection of whiskers he's a copy of a movie gunman, burlesque hobo an' real tramp, added up an' proved.

"Joe, the bartender, gives him a even dirtier look'n he's already got; he's expectin' a touch for a drink. But this bird just explores his pants an' excavates a thin dime an' a jitney an' orders Scotch whisky. He's got a cough an' is shivering something fierce. He sure needs a drink worse'n the ex-kaiser needed a lickin'.

"The third rail's crowded like a rush-hour Bronx express, an' in reachin' for his glass this ragged bird accidentally shoves the lad with the busted centerboard. Crooked Nose turns around, calls this kid a name which was never gave him by his parents, an' the four pals with him, figurin' five-to-one odds is a good bet on any scrap join in, and hold a conversation with this bum that'd be censored by the Purgatory Press.

" 'Bust him one, Joe,' suggests one.

" 'Bounce one offen his jaw,' pipes another.

"By this time the whole roomful is crowdin' around an' the crowd is yellin' to toss the bum out on his ear. Then this Joe guy, who's gotta pretty good load aboard, starts in to follow the advice. He steps up to the kid an' slaps him across the mouth.

"The ragged lad don't say a word. Don't even close his hands; just stares at the crowd like he's been doped. That gets Danny Lewis sore.

" 'Why the yellow mutt,' says Dan. 'He wouldn't fight a invalid jack rabbit.'

"This Joe thinks so, too, I guess, for he takes a swing, a real one this time, an' it just kinda grazes this ragged lad's face. That's too much for even this down-an'-out kid. With a kinda sob he swings one from his heels. Whatever he's got he packs it all in that one wallop an' his right hand catches this Joe square on the point.

"Knock him down?" asked young Tilden.

"Out—cold," answered Terry. "Joe wilts up against the bar, then drops, clean out, his head restin' on the bar foot rail. Well, that starts all of Joe's pals. They sail in an' muss this ragged lad up awful before me an' Danny Lewis can get to him. At last we get him outside, an' I'm just about to slip him a piece of change an' leave him be on his way when Dan butts in.

" 'I want to talk to him,' says Dan. 'Wait'll I get a taxi and we'll bring him up to my place.' Dan seems kinda excited about this kid. A little later we're in Lewis' flat. Up to now this kid ain't opened his head. He just stares. I slip him a cigarette an' the way he inhales it is a fright. He all but eats it.

" 'What's your name?' asks Dan. An' I nearly fell offen my chair when that bundle of rags opens his blood-smeared face.

" 'Calhoun Rawlings Kennedy, to be precise,' he says, an' he's got a manicured voice an' accent like the leading guy in a society play.

"I've got a proposition to make you, son,' says Dan, 'but first you'd better get into the bathroom and clean up. You'll feel better. Put on my bathrobe when you're through, and I'll rustle up some clothes for you later.'

" 'Thanks, awfully,' says Kennedy, in a dead kinda voice, 'but I'm afraid that in fairness I ought to warn you that you'll lose out in any proposition you make me. However, I do want to use that bathroom.'

"When he comes out, cleaned up an' even shaved, we get our second surprise. We can see what he looks like now. Instead of a bum, this kid's a nice-lookin', clean-cut lad. He's got a good forehead, fine, intelligent eyes, an' a nose so well made it's a crime for them birds in Stacey's to take a poke at it. His mouth, a good deal like a kid's, is his weakest point, an' his chin is the strongest. His pointed jaw spells stubbornness three different ways.

" 'Now, lad,' says Lewis, in a kind voice, 'have you got any friends?'

" 'None,' says Kennedy with a bitter kind of a smile."

" 'Relatives?'

" 'Oodles of them,' he answers.

" 'But no close ones who could stake you,' says Dan.

" 'On the contrary,' says this kid wearily, 'I've a father, mother, and two sisters, any of whom could buy out Stacey's saloon and not notice the dent in their bank account.'

"At that we think this Kennedy's a little absent in his conning tower, an' I grin at Dan an' tap my forehead.

" 'Maybe your old man is Senator Kennedy?' I says, joshin' him an' naming the second biggest Kennedy I know of.

" 'No,' says the kid, 'he's Judge Kennedy,' an' names the biggest Kennedy they is.

"'Not Judge Vance Kennedy,' says Dan, surprised.

"'Yes,' pipes young Kennedy.

"'Well, for the love of Lulu!' explodes Danny, sore in a second at the old rooster he ain't never even seen. 'Why don't he do something for you?'

"'He can't,' says Kennedy. 'No one can —now.'

"'Why not?' asks Lewis. 'Dope?'

"'No.'

"'Did you go and bump somebody off?'

"'No,' says the kid.

"'Then why don't you make him come across with some coin?'

"Young Kennedy leans forward an' just stares in a vacant, hopeless way for a coupla minutes. At last he says: 'Because I must have a little self-respect left—somewhere. If I had the nerve of a louse I'd take a gun and kick off—I haven't, though. But I simply won't squeal—even now.'

"And then, sittin' hunched up in a big morris chair, covered in Dan's flashy bath robe, this kid tells us about himself in a low, dry kinda voice."

II.

"It seems this Judge Kennedy is the kid's old man, sure enough. The lad has never done a stroke of work till a short time ago. He don't have to. He comes home from college as chesty as a bantam rooster an' so wise no one can tell him a thing, not even the right time. The old gent sends him into a law office to commit some real work. Instead this kid just fools around an' has a good time. I guess he's real clever at 'most anything. He stars in amateur society plays, is a good amateur dancer, a amateur athlete, an' a swell amateur at almost anything he tries. Also, he's pretty talented in hittin' the high spots at night around New Orleans—that's where he lives.

"He an' the old judge have daily runins. It finely gets so they come to a showdown. It's one mornin'. The judge bawls him out for slidin' down late to breakfast, bleary-eyed and with a hang-over, and the boy gets a hot call-down for ownin' habits as loose as the wind shield on a second-hand flivver. He counters by chirpin' that even if pop won't leave him have all the kale he wants he might at least leave him have all the time he wants, at least for breakfast. An' then this old gent, who can shoot considerable language when he gets a start an' owns a nice, sharp tongue, starts after the kid's goat an' he sure gets it.

"He don't rave an' get dramatic. He lets that old stuff run for Sweeney an' the stage guys. He just sits back with a cool smile an' a hot line of chatter an' wises up this kid to what a poor boob he is. He admits the boy is right clever at a lot of stuff that don't mean anything, but he claims this kid couldn't make his living at any of 'em if he had to. The judge claims he's got more real respect for the servant who pries open the front door to leave callers in, because, while it don't take no brains to do it, it does take a little trainin' to do it proper an' some persistence to stick to the job an' collect regular wages.

"Then the kid comes to bat an' bats out a few remarks. He claims he's the original clever guy an' could make a soft livin' at most anything. But what's the use? As long as pop has the kale, why not let some of it get the air. He oughta be glad to take the rubber off the bank roll once in a while.

"Then the old judge comes right back again with a cool smile and a nasty rasp to his sarcasm. 'I'm perfectly willing to advance you money, Calhoun,' says he. 'In fact, it's evident I'll have to to keep you out of the poorhouse. You couldn't even earn enough money to buy your own cigarettes. But,' says he, gettin' more sarcastic with each wind-up, 'I want you to know this: I'd rather have you mopping up the floors in a downtown restaurant and prove that you're competent to make a living at even that sort of work than have you go on like this. *You're a rank amateur—at everything,'* pipes the judge.

"That wallop hits a nice, sore spot. This boy hits the ceilin', right off. 'I wonder if you mean that?' he says slowly.

"'Every word of it,' snaps the judge.

"'All right,' says young Kennedy. 'I'm going to take you up on it. But I'm not going to be boob enough to stick to it. I'm going over to Louisville and get a job without any influence, keep it six months, throw it in my boss' face, come back here and prove that I've been able to make a living and then let you start in again to support me. You're entire argument is that I'm incompetent and can't make a living. I'll prove that I can do it easier than most of these boobs who have to do it. And when I come back I hope it'll stop all talk around

here about my alleged incompetency and being an amateur.'

" 'And when you get ready to come back, let me know,' says his dad. 'I'll send you the fare. You'll need it.'

"Young Kennedy grins. 'Oh, no, I won't,' says he. 'But if, by any chance, I don't make good, don't flatter yourself you'll ever have the satisfaction of hearing me squeal. Ordinarily I'll take all the money I can pry away from you, but in what amounts to a bet of this kind I'll make good and won't get any allowance from you until I do.'

"Well, that starts a nice little riot at home for a while. The lad's mother an' two sisters think it's awful an' try to stop it. But the old judge just smiles an' sits tight and the kid laughs an' tells 'em not to worry. He'll be back, ready to have pop support him again in six months."

Young Mort Tilden lit another cigarette and smiled, rather sardonically.

"And then, I presume, young Kennedy went out on his own and couldn't make good at anything," said he. "Which, of course, seems ridiculous, as any chap with even fair ability can hold down a job of some kind."

Old Pete Terry chuckled. "Wrong," said he. "This kid makes good right off the bat. That's this bird's main trouble. He does things so easy that he don't appreciate when he's in soft. He gets so cocky that when he does get a kick in the shins from old man Fate he ain't prepared for it.

"First off, he beats it into Louisville an' grabs a job as a newspaper reporter. Makes a hit, right off the reel, by diggin' up a big story. Then he sends the old man a kidding wire an' has to celebrate an' tank up a coupla days. His boss eases him a fierce call-down an' the boy gets sore an' goes to another paper. Same thing happens. Makes good right off. Another celebration. Another call-down. Another job. Pretty soon, though, his reputation gets around on all the papers an' one day he finds he can't get a job at this game any more.

"But he should worry. He starts in selling advertising. Makes good right off, an' then tries to tell his boss how to run the place. Gets the gate at last, an' from then on he starts in makin' a complete collection of experience; always gettin' chesty when he makes good and endin' up by takin' a peek at the want-ad columns for a new job, discoverin' more work.

"At last he's in Pittsburgh, after doing everything from floorwalkin' in a department store to beatin' the piano keys in a cheap movie joint. He's got everything in soak that the three-ball uncles'll take, an' one day he finds himself right plumb up against it, hard. Finally a cop tells him about a job in a iron foundry, an' he grabs it an' starts to get some sense with the job. All he can think of, now, is the word 'amateur.' He's crazy to stick this job out an' come through. An' he starts to do it, too. It's tough laboring work, but this kid's game, I guess, an' is there three weeks an' going strong an' liking this job like he never likes anything before when he gets hurt at the job an' goes to a hospital. Then he learns that old man Luck can leave him just like he can ordinary boobs, without any wealthy papas. When he leaves that hospital he's flat broke, too weak to do much work, an' gettin' kinda desperate.

"An' when he finally begins patronizing the soup line an' registerin' at the city lodgin' houses for his eats an' a flop he gets desperate first, then a little scared, then he tosses in the sponge an' is a common bum. He hits the road an' even the boss ain't got any too much use for him because he won't go underneath an' ride the rods like they do an' is awful backward about bumming his chuck from back doors.

"Well, at last he just drifts into little old New York in company with a cheap dip, a crack stick-up guy an' a hobo, an' they all three ditch him the first chance they get, because he don't class with them. He does work up enough gall to panhandle a guy for fifteen cents for a drink an' some free lunch an' he butts into Stacey's, outa the storm, where Lewis an' me first see him."

III.

" 'So you see,' says young Kennedy, lookin' up at Lewis an' me, when he finishes with his tale of woe, 'my dad was right. I'm an amateur—at everything. But,' he pipes, with just a show of spunk, 'what wouldn't I give to turn the laugh on him!'

"Dan studies this kid hard for several seconds. 'Listen, Kennedy,' says Danny finally, 'maybe you can. I'm going to give you a chance to make good at something. At the toughest game I know. It's a mighty long shot. It looks impossible with you in this mental condition. But you never can tell. Real long shots *do* cop—once in a

long, long time. I got you here because you K. O.'d that chap in Stacey's saloon. You've got a punch, and I'm going to make a fighter of you—if it ain't too late. Have you ever done any boxing?'

" 'Yes,' says Kennedy. 'A good deal; in fact, I won the boxing title at my weight in the intercollegiates; but I'm only an amateur at that, too.'

" 'No matter,' says Dan. 'We'll make you a professional.'

" 'You can't,' says Kennedy, shiverin' a little. 'My—my nerve's gone.'

" 'I know it,' says Dan. 'But you'll get it back.'

" 'No,' says the kid, shakin' his head, 'I won't. It's gone. Even the tramps on the road used to laugh at me, at last. I'm down to panhandling for drinks.'

"Forget it,' says Dan. 'I'm not staking you out of charity. I've got a good reason for it. Do you know who that guy is you knocked cold in Stacey's?'

" 'No,' says the kid.

" 'He's Joe Maroni, the toughest welterweight between here and Siam. He hasn't got too much class, but they don't knock him out. He's never even been knocked off his feet in a ring. Even Kelley, the champ, couldn't do it in ten rounds. You're the first to rock that tough bird to sleep.'

" 'It was a bit of luck,' answers Kennedy, 'and he was pretty drunk. If it hadn't landed he would have killed me.'

" 'But it did land,' says Dan.

" 'It's no use,' the kid keeps sayin'. 'I must be yellow; and they've discovered it. I didn't used to think so. I'd have licked any one that said it a few months ago.' His hands're trembling something fierce as he lights another cigarette. 'I'm just a rotten amateur; at everything—ev-ery-thing," he whispers, an' with that he covers his face with his hands an' his shoulders begin to shake.

"Well, I'm kinda sorry for the poor rummy, at that, but it don't make any hit with me to see a guy go to pieces that way.

" 'I guess he's right,' I says to Dan. 'Look at him; crying. His nerve sure is gone if he ever had any. He can't forget it, either.'

" 'And I can't forget he knocked out that tough dago,' says Dan. 'No one else ever did. He's got a wallop, somewhere. He don't look it—now,' an' he looks at the shaking figure in the bath robe, 'but he's got one.'

" 'See here, son,' says Lewis, puttin' his arm around Kennedy, 'I'm one guy who's *seen* your wallop; and I'm going to back it. I'm making you this promise now. Let's shake hands on it.'

"Kennedy gets up an' shakes hands with Lewis. 'I'm warning you that it's no use,' the kid keeps saying. 'You haven't a chance for your money. But if—you—insist——' an' his voice kinda fades out, his face goes dead white an' then he pulls a flop on the floor. He'd fainted dead away. We find he's skipped a few meals an' is all in. I feel like kickin' myself around the block. There I was, tryin' my best to kid this boy an' willing to believe he' got a saffron streak along his spine, an' all the time we're makin' him talk he wants some chow an' is tryin' to keep up on his nerve an' cigarettes, instead, before he'll say a word."

Old Pete paused to fill his pipe. "And what happened then?" asked Tilden.

"Well, then," said Pete, grinning at the recollection, "Dan leaves this Kennedy lay around his place a coupla days to rest up an' eat. An' say, maybe that bird couldn't eat. The way he inhales grub on us it begins to look like we'll have to match him with the world's champion so's Tex Rickard can guarantee us a hundred thousand washers an' a ton of meal tickets or Dan'll be all et out of house an' home, so to speak.

"Well, in about a week, when his appetite is sunk an' his spirits have gone up to nearly normal, I take him down to Warner's gym where Dan has got a couple of boxers workin' out. One of 'em's Artie Sayers, a middleweight. Now, this Sayers don't know any too much outside the boxing game. He thinks Tod Sloan wrote 'Paul Revere's Ride' an' is got an idea that Shakespeare is a drink, but he knows enough arithmetic to count up to ten, 'cause he's heard more'n one referee count that far over guys he's knocked out. An' he's quite some scrapper. He's met most of the good ones an' will trim a lot more of 'em than will beat him. Also he knows a boxer from a plumber when he sees one. So I take him aside.

" 'Artie,' I says, 'we got a boy here who's done some boxing. Amateur stuff. He beat Willie Whoozis an' some other guys at college an' copped off a medal for the job.'

" 'Do tell,' says Artie, rubbin' his tin ear

an' grinnin'. 'Did he leave you see the pink ribbon he also copped off for winnin' that ping-pong tournament?'

" 'He's got a awful wallop,' I go on.

" 'He's got nice marcelled hair, too,' pipes Sayers, lookin' over at Kennedy an' chuckling. It's plain that Art don't enthuse any too much over our kid.

" 'An' not only that,' I says, gettin' a little sore at the kiddin', 'he done somethin' that no one else has ever done before.' "

" 'You don't say,' chirps Sayers. 'It must be he pried a dollar loose from Tom Sharkey.'

" 'Now cut out this cheap josh stuff an' listen. This boy knocked out Joe Maroni,' I tell him.

"That opens up his eyes.

" 'What with?' asks Art. 'A mallet?'

" 'No mallet. All he needed was his right hand. Now, what I want from you ain't any small-time comedy. I want you to take this kid a coupla rounds an' see what he's got.' An' Sayers does. He comes over to me afterward.

" 'Say, Pete, you got something there,' he says to me. 'That kid's a streak. I have to admit it. He's got a awful stylish left hand, an' he's clever and fast. Unless I get in close I can't even muss his hair. But he's pretty raw in the clinches. A real wise lad that'll rough him around'll get away with murder on him. Did this Mrs. Belmont loan him to you?'

" 'Why?' I ask.

"Art grins. 'He talks like John Drew, and he looks like a Newport entry for a male beauty contest.'

" 'Do you think he can take a wallop?' I ask.

" 'You can't tell that till you toss him in a ring and he *hasto* take it," answers Sayers. 'You can't tell about these amateurs who don't have to make a living at it. A little slap in the eye might make him fold up like an accordion, and again a busted nose might make him only a little more peeved and just itchin' to fight still more. But I'll say he's the flashiest gymnasium fighter I've seen in a long time.'

"Well, for about a month we keep this Kennedy workin' out with the gang at Warner's. He looks awful good. An' he's gettin' so he's forgot he was down an' out an' acts a little chipper once in a while. But he don't never smile. He just looks grim an' determined. I guess he wants to make good awful bad. At last he begins to pester Dan for a match.

" 'All right,' says Dan. 'We'll get some prelim kid for you.'

" 'Could you get Maroni?' asks Kennedy.

" 'Sure,' says Dan, 'but he ain't a prelim fighter. He's a long ways from a champ, but I'll say he's as tough as a thirty-cent steak, an' if he ever lands on a guy right the referee starts to count. He'll be a different baby in the ring'n he was that night in Stacey's, too. We better fight some easy guy for our first start.'

" 'Get Maroni,' insists Kennedy. 'He's been bragging about what he'll do to me if I'll get him a fight.'

" 'Well, all right,' says Dan, 'but if he pries you loose from your senses don't fix no blame on me.'

"So Kennedy an' this wop're matched. It's only down on the card as a semifinal bout, but the story goes round that Cal Kennedy once knocks the wop kicking an' that it's gonna be a grudge fight. The papers print a little about it an' quite a parcel of the fans get worked up over the scrap. It takes place at Jack Lawson's club up in the Bronx. On fight night this Kennedy boy is so nervous he can hardly keep still a minute. I'm afraid it's 'cause he's scared, but Lewis says no, it's because he's so anxious to make good, now he's got a chance.

"Lewis, Sayers, an' me 're in the dressin' room with him while the bout before his goes on. It's goin' just about a minute when we get a roar from the crowd loud enough for Dummy Taylor to hear it. Jimmy Daley, a old-time bantam sticks his nut through the doorway, a little later, an' tells us to get a wiggle on.

" 'What's all the noise out there?' asks Sayers, 'President Wilson just come in?'

" 'No,' pipes Jimmy. 'Tommy Dorgan just went out—cold. This chunky Brown kid knocked him out in the first.'

"An' that news don't help our boy any, either. He gets a little paler an' prob'ly wonders if he's gonna get his like that. But he just licks his lips in a nervous way, slips on his bath robe an' we're on our way to the ring.

"The wop is already in the ring, struttin' around, when we start down the aisle. Kennedy stares through the thick haze of tobacco smoke, lamps the fight mob which looks like about a million black an' white dots, spots the tiny-lookin' roped-off space

set up far away down the aisle under the blazing arc lights, hears the crazy howls an' tough cracks the gallery birds 're making, an' just mozeys down that aisle in a kind of a daze.

"The second he climbs through the ropes them tough fans upstairs start after him. He's a little too smooth lookin' for a pug, an' it seems to get 'em sore.

" 'Hey, Aubrey,' chirps one fan, 'did mamma wave that nice hair for ya?'

" 'If he's a fighter, I'm King Dodo,' pipes another guy.

" 'Don't be too rough with him, Joe,' yells another bird. 'Kill him kinda easy.'

" 'Who's yer undertaker, Perce?' howls another one, an' a bunch of 'em start whistling a funeral march.

"I'm puttin' on his gloves an' his hand is shaking somethin' fierce. I can hardly get the glove on.

"Don't leave them hard-boiled fans worry you none,' I tell him. 'They give every new guy the old razberry.'

" 'They don't worry me,' he pipes, with a sick-lookin' smile. 'I'll be all right after we start.'

"Then the refreree gets him an' the wop in the middle of the ring, gives 'em their instructions, an' a guy with a bigger voice than Caruso bawls out their names to the crowd. When he mentions Maroni the crowd slips the wop a nice hand an' them gallery birds go wild. An' when the ref yells out, 'Cal Kennedy,' them upstairs fans start in with their kidding again.

"An' standing under them fierce, white lights over the ring they's a awful difference between them two lads. This Maroni is one chunky, husky-built boy, just able to slide in under the welter limit. An' I never saw a harder-lookin' map on a guy; all jaw, no forehead, a black scowl an' a crooked nose on him. Young Kennedy's pretty rangy, with nice arms an' chest an' a corking back an' shoulders. He's half a head taller'n Maroni, with a lot longer reach, but that tough little guinea looks strong enough to break him in two. Even the newspaper boys grin when they lamp Cal's smooth-lookin' map, but when they get a good slant at the length of his stubborn-lookin' jaw I bet they get interested.

"Well, the old gong sounds an' they're off. After about a minute this wop gets in close an' hooks a hard left to Kennedy's mouth. An' that's all our boy needs. He spits out some blood over his shoulder an' gets sore right off. His nervousness is all gone. He just sticks out that chin of his an' starts after Joe. He's got an awful sweet left hand, an' he keeps pasting the wop with it. Joe's head keeps bobbing back until you think it's coming off. An' say, that Kennedy lives right in speed alley. This Joe can hardly lay a glove on him when he gets started right."

Old Pete sat back in his chair, knocked the ashes out of his blackened pipe and chuckled.

"Was it much of a fight?" asked Tilden.

"It ain't a fight—for six rounds," replied Pete. 'It's a good imitation of a first-class slaughter. By the third round the gallery is all with our boy. He's gettin' better every minute. In the fifth he's got one of Maroni's eyes almost closed an' bleeding from the nose an' mouth. Toward the end of this round they're over in Joe's corner an' Kennedy unwraps that heavy right cross of his. Maroni goes down for 'seven.' An' then, between rounds Dan tells Kennedy to go in an' collect the money, it's safe.

"Well, in the sixth Kennedy starts right in to finish Maroni. He jabs a coupla times, works in close an' hooks the wop three times on the jaw without a return. Then he uncorks that right cross again an' it lands kerplunk on Joe's body an' shoots him up against the ropes, our boy after him like a tiger. But this nervy little guinea won't quit. He just keeps coming an' coming in for more. Kennedy keeps workin' his fast jab until Joe's face is a mess. He's just a red smear. An' toward the end of the round Kennedy hits him with everything but the ring post an' Maroni gets groggy an' in a clinch he just falls against Kennedy. The gallery's howling for a knock-out, the boys in the press seats 're yellin' to stop it, an' some birds who can't stand gore 're turning away from the ring. It looks like only a miracle can keep our boy from winning with a knock-out. But the miracle happens—in the next round.

"They're in a clinch, with Maroni covered up an' Kennedy sneakin' in sort, nasty jolts every time he spots a opening. The referee's just broke 'em an' is steppin' back, waitin' for the finish. Coming out of the clinch this Joe catches Kennedy wide open —for just a second. But it's long enough. He sticks all he's got left in one swing that he brings up from the floor an' hangs an

awful wallop against Cal's jaw. Our boy sags a little in the knees, his eyes get glassy an' he tries hard to clinch. But the guinea catches him a coupla times coming in an' Kennedy crumples up, slides down along the ropes, kinda slow, an' drops. He's hangin' halfway out the ring, over the lower rope, an' looks to be out, cold. The crowd's on its hind legs, rockin' the house with their yells. An' then the old bell sounds just when the referee says, 'Eight.'

"Well, between rounds we give that kid everything but a dose of radium to stick enough jazz into him to last out the bout. Danny wants to toss in the sponge, but Kennedy won't leave him. He's limp as a wet rag when we send him in for the last stanza. Artie Sayers shakes his head. He can't last it, thinks Art, an' it's a crime to send him in for more. That last session is an awful one for the kid—an' for us. Right off, after the gong, Maroni gets in a hard jolt to the face an' Kennedy turns an' spits out some blood—an' a coupla teeth. But he hangs on for dear life at every chance. Then a hard swing sends him down on his hands an' knees. It's near the end of the round.

" 'Take nine,' yells Sayers.

" 'Put him away,' howls the gallery. An' around the ringside they're yelling to toss in a towel. Then, just as this guinea is all set for a good-night wallop the old bell rings. Oh, boy, what a relief.

"Back in the dressin' room this kid ain't pretty to look at. We sponge him off an' fix him up an' he shows he's game by tryin' to smile through his puffed-up face; but he's gotta cavity where two pretty front teeth used to be an' the smile ain't a artistic success.

"When he's dressed he starts beating it out the dressing room alone.

" 'Where you going?' asks Lewis.

" 'Why,' says the kid, surprised, 'I'm going away. I expect you're through with me now, aren't you?'

" 'Through,' yells Lewis, 'why I've just begun. They couldn't get you away from me now with a dose of nitroglycerin.'

" 'Why,' says young Kennedy, 'after having that chap all but out—and then to loose him like that you must think I'm yellow or something.'

" 'Boy,' says Danny, putting an arm around the kid, 'after lasting out that last round don't ever even tell me you even *saw* a yellow streak. You look like a million dollars to me. All you need is a little more experience. From now on we're going through that bunch of welters like a limited train through a tank town.'

"But they's something wrong with this kid, an' he don't show what we think he ought. We pick a soft spot for him with a boy named Mack up in Bridgeport an' Cal stops him in two rounds. He looks great. But the next match is with a real good lad named Garry, out in Milwaukee, an' he takes a fancy lacing after having this Red Garry almost out in the fifth. We can't understand it. If he gets his man before a few rounds he looks great. If he don't, an' the other bird keeps takin' all Kennedy can hand him an' still keeps coming in for more, then Kennedy begins to go bad, just like he did with Maroni an' he gets trimmed.

"Lewis gets a coupla of more matches, an' this kid wins with quick knock-outs. Then we put him on with a real tough old bird, who just eats up punishment, a lad named Pelty, an' Kennedy almost murders Pelty for four rounds, then takes a knockdown himself an' has some trouble lasting out the bout. It looks funny to us. We get talkin' about it the next day.

" 'It's the kid's condition,' says a friend of Lewis. 'That bird can't go over a few rounds.'

" 'It's his backbone,' chirps another guy. 'He don't want to go more than a few rounds.'

" 'It's his overconfidence,' pipes Artie Sayers, 'he don't think he'll have to go more'n a few rounds.'

"Dan Lewis shakes his head. 'It ain't none of them things,' says Dan. 'It's his brain.'

"Sayers laughs right in Dan's face. 'How come?' says Art. 'How do you dope that out?'

" 'Well,' says Dan, 'it ain't bad condition. We've seen him go eight rounds a coupla times without he even drew a long breath. It ain't his backbone. We've saw him take a fierce whaling from that tough wop an' never yelp. He never quits, anyway; you got to admit that. It's just the way he looks at things. That kid still thinks like a amateur. A amateur works for a living an' boxes for fun. If he can lick a guy, it's fine. If he can't it's too bad, but anyway, what's the difference, so long as he shows

he's game? He don't have to box for a living.

" 'Now you take a pro. Take Artie here, for an example. Artie's like a bunch of other guys. He'll do anything in this world *but* work for living. He'll fight for a living. That's his business. An' he'll stick in a ring an' take a good pasting if he has to. That's also part of his business——'

" 'Well, so will a amateur—if he's game,' pipes in Sayers, a little sore at bein' kidded about work. 'An' I know some professionals who won't take a licking. They always take a Brodie to the floor, first.'

" 'Sure,' laughs Dan, 'but I was talkin' about boxers with heart, both amateur and 'pro.' Them others don't never count, anyway. The amateur figures he'd like to win. An' he goes out an' tries his darnedest. But if he don't cop they ain't so awful much difference at that. He works anyway, unless he's a wealthy bird. Now, a good, game bird which boxes for money figures he not only wants to win but he's *gotta* win. If he don't he's gotta work or he don't eat. An' you know as well as I do, Artie, that you'd do anything to keep from workin'.

" 'So that's how I figure this Kennedy kid out. He's game as they make 'em. He wants to cop a fight like anything. And he never quits under any conditions. But if he's in there pasting a guy around, slamming him with everything he's got and still that bird don't go down an' stay down he prob'ly figures he's doing the best he can anyway, and maybe, after all, here's one bird he just can't put away. So he keeps on fighting with that in mind. But when you're in there, Art, busting a guy right and left and he won't drop and stay put you don't say, well, maybe this bird can't be licked. You say, gosh, I just naturally *gotta* trim that guy. If I don't I lose matches and soon I gotta toil. And heavens knows I don't want no part of real work.'

" 'Say,' says Artie, real peeved, 'how do ya get like that. You tryin' to kid me?'

" 'I ain't trying to kid nobody,' laughs Danny. 'I'm one of these here psycolleges. I dope out how a guy's mind works and I act according. It's a regular science.'

" 'Well, if you got so dog-goned much science let's see you make this Kennedy trim Maroni when he fights him again next week. Stick some of this here psycollegy stuff into the kid.'

" 'It's just what I aim to do,' says Dan."

IV.

Here old Pete Terry paused, stretched himself, and yawned prodigiously. Young Mort Tilden lit another cigarette.

"What *did* happen?" asked Tilden, aiming a smoke ring at the chandelier.

"Well," grinned old Pete, "so far as any of us could notice Danny Lewis forgot all about his psycollegy an' went plumb loco instead. At least we all think so at the time."

"How so?" asked Tilden.

" 'Why,' said Terry, 'he comes round the day of the fight an' tells Kennedy that he's got down a big bet on him an' to try an' not keep him waiting too long to cash in, but for him to cop this guinea as soon as he can. When we remember how near this Maroni lad comes to knocking our boy out, when they met before, we figure Dan's gone clean loony. An' this seems to worry Kennedy. 'Say,' he says, 'I think I can beat Maroni, of course, and they'll have to carry me out unconscious before I'll quit, but I wish you hadn't made a big bet like that, Dan.'

"Lewis just laughs. An' then, that night, when the bout starts it looks like his dope was right. Kennedy, just like the first time, looks like he's gonna win in a walk. He musses him up something awful by the sixth. Then he tries for the old knock-out an' starts wingin' his right over. But we notice a funny thing. He don't bother to use his left hand a-tall. He don't even block with it. Just walks into this Joe and keeps tryin' to whip that right over for a K. O.

"This makes him a pretty nice, wide-open mark to shoot at an', sure enough, along in the middle of the seventh Maroni lands a wild swing; it catches Kennedy right on the jaw an' he goes down. He takes a short count an' comes up tearing in at Joe. The wop swings again on Cal's nose, an' then, before this kid can clinch, he drops him with a nasty short jolt to the body. Kennedy scrambles up, clinches, they work over near our corner an' down he goes again. This time it looks like he's gonna stay down. But he shakes his head to clear his brain, I guess, an' get his senses back, rolls over an' there he is lookin' at the three of us outside the ropes.

"Then Dan Lewis jumps up. 'Hey, Cal,' he yells, 'for the love of Mike, you *can't* lose this time. *Every cent I got in this world is on you to-night.*'

"He yells this out so loud you can hear it all around the ring. This kid looks over at Dan an' nods his head. His face looks like he's in a lotta pain, but he grabs one of the ropes an' pulls himself up. They go into a clinch right off. Coming out of it we see Kennedy's face is awful white—he must be hurt pretty bad, but he sticks out his jaw, his mouth is just a straight line, an' there's a desperate, fierce, awful determined look on his face. He ducks under a swing, comes up an' uppercuts Joe. It's prob'ly a nice lucky punch, but it makes this guinea wabble a little. Then, quick as a flash he crosses over his right. Now it's the wop who's clinching. And then, without bothering to use his left hand a-tall our boy goes after Joe like something that's gone crazy an' finely whips that old right cross over, just right, an' Maroni goes down with a thud an' he stays down.

"Back in the dressin' room, where we hafta fight our way through the crazy, cheering mob, young Kennedy staggers a little, like he's gonna pull a flop.

" 'Well,' he chirps, in a tired, weak kinda voice. 'I couldn't see you go broke, Dan; I just *had* to get up and win. How much *do* you win on me?'

" 'Just one hundred washers,' says Dan.

"This kid stares. 'What,' pipes Sayers, 'then you wouldn't of been broke if Cal had of lost?'

" 'Broke?' says Dan with a grin. 'Say, I couldn't go broke without a cyclone come along and took all my property away. I own a garage in Forty-ninth Street and two apartment houses in the Bronx. You don't s'pose I'd of been sucker enough to bet them on a fight, do ya?'

" 'But,' says Kennedy, surprised, 'I never knew you were worth that much. I thought you had maybe a few hundred on me. And you yelled at me that you'd be cleaned out if I didn't lick that chap.'

" 'Well, I'm a hump-backed Chinaman if I don't think they's something in Dan's psycollegy stuff after all,' says Artie Sayers with a dazed kinda look. 'It sure worked.'

" 'But why didn't you use your left hand,' asks Lewis.

" 'I couldn't,' says Kennedy. 'It's—it's hurt—some way.'

"I went over an' looked. 'Say,' I says, 'this boy's went through all the last part of that bout with a broken wrist.' Danny Lewis comes over an' looks. 'Sure enough,' he says. 'Why, you poor kid,' an' Danny just sits down alongside of the boy without another word an' puts his arms around him like he was his mother.

"Then," continued old Pete, "after his wrist gets fixed up all O. K. again young Kennedy goes out an' beats two real classy boys, lads who're headed for a bout with Kelly, the champion. An' finely Lewis gets him matched up with Kelly for a title bout. But this bout never takes place."

"Why not?" asked Tilden.

"Kennedy runs out on Kelly an' won't fight him."

"What!" gasped young Mort Tilden.

"That's what," chuckled old Pete. "He runs plumb out of the match, so he can do some *real* fightin'. It's just before we get into the war an' young Cal can't wait. He joins up an' goes across with a Canadian outfit."

"Then old Judge Kennedy never did see him in a professional bout," said Tilden. "He probably never knew the boy had gotten over being an amateur."

"Well," drawled old Pete, getting up with a yawn, "I wouldn't just say that. His old man never saw him in a professional bout but he heard all about it. And he sure knows, now, that his kid ain't a amateur any longer, because I sent him a newspaper with the kid's picture in it in a army uniform. He must of known by lamping that picture that his kid become a *professional* fighter, because he knows how much a month a soldier gets *paid* for scrappin'.

"But when he read the article he discovered more'n that. This boy copped off a medal for distinguished action over there, an' the article told all about it. It was a whole column long. An' Cal bein' a boxer they run this article on the sport sheet. But when I sent the old geezer that newspaper, about a year ago, I marked *two* articles. He prob'ly would of seen 'em any way. It was a New Orleans paper. But I wanted to make sure. The one piece had a big headline across the sport sheet that read, 'Professional Boxer Decorated For Distinguished Action.' "

"And the other?" queried young Mort Tilden.

"The other's a two-line notice of a billiard match the old judge himself won the night before. And," concluded Terry, with a lazy grin, "it's headed, 'News of the Amateurs.' "

The Hurricane

By Carl Clausen

A sea story with a storm in it that fairly takes your breath. Besides the tempest, there is a human interest which takes your heart. It is a noteworthy piece of work

DAVE RINCON, mate of the *Albatross,* leaned his hairy forearm upon the teakwood railing to windward and followed the phosphorescent wake of the brig astern with his dark eyes.

The warm northeast monsoon fragrant with the breath of pineapples from the plantations of the low, light-dotted shore line to starboard, fanned his broad chest with a soft, caressing touch, infinitely pleasurable and satisfying. It gave him a sense of indescribable well being to feel its warm touch against his naked body. He opened his cotton shirt at the neck and drew in the balmy sweetness in long, deep drafts. Like the soft hand of a woman it was, caressing yet invigorating, pleading yet restraining, cool yet filled with the glow of life.

Tramp as Dave was, he had grown to love the black, undulating plain of this tropic night sea with its myriad stars rocked in the cool cradle below; sunrise blazing up the long valleys of the rolling seas, calm days of purple seas, wild days of foam-whipped seas with the brig pounding double-reefed and groaning into hot, blinding gales.

Dave shifted his gaze from the phosphorescent wake astern to the swelling topgallant sails and royals overhead. Under the clewed-up mainsail a long, black-ribbed vista of backstays and halyards stood traced in pitch against the faint luminant glow of the sea, ahead. The solitary figure of the lookout man on the fo'c's'le head stood silhouetted sharply against the silvery triangle of the forestays.

Looking aloft, Dave noted with satisfaction the occasional pounding of the royal weather clews. The wind was shifting to the starboard quarter, and freshening!

Crossing to the binnacle, he addressed the man at the wheel.

"South-southwest, half west?" he asked.

The man nodded.

"The old man laid her up a point before going below," he answered.

"All right, Johnson," Dave answered. "Keep her as steady as you can while I ease the braces a bit. Thank God the wind is shifting. She's a little devil before the wind with a heavy cargo like this."

Walking to the poop-deck railing, he removed his pipe from his mouth.

"Port braces!" he sang out. "Step lively, boys. She's freshening on the quarter!"

There was a pattering of bare feet along the deck. The thump, thump of coiled rope dropped from the pin rail to the scuppers, then silence.

"All ready?"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"Haul her home, boys!" Dave sang out, easing up the weather braces inch by inch as the crew hauled in the slack. "All right! Belay main and tops'ls. Royal an' t'gan' s'l braces next. All right. Belay!"

He sprang down the poop ladder.

"Fore braces! Larry go on the fo'c's'le head and help the lookout to haul the jib sheets home. All right! Boys, take in the slack."

Dave looked aloft and saw with satisfaction the wind fill the sails to bursting as the yards swung off.

"Belay! Lay aft all hands! Main sheets! Bos'n get your chains ready and hook weather sheets to the ring bolt. She's freshening! Drag her home, boys. That's the stuff! All right, belay!"

Dave paused and raised his hand to windward over the bulwarks.

"Better drop your royal and t'gan' s'l clew lines off the pins and coil 'em ready, bos'n," he sang out. "I think we're in for a blow. All right, boys, that'll do! Coil up!"

Dave knocked the dead ashes from his pipe and filled it with fresh cut plug as he ascended the poop ladder and took a look at the binnacle.

"How's she running now, Johnson?" he asked.

"Steadier now, sir," the man answered.

"Good!" Dave looked at his watch.

"Strike four bells while I go below for a cup of coffee."

The twain double notes of the bell rang out as Dave opened the door of the cabin. Captain Jordan sprawling over a map on the table with a pair of compasses in his hand looked up from his task and glanced at his mate curiously.

"Well," he asked softly, "what do you think of the old scow, Mr. Rincon?" His voice carried a wistful note as if much depended upon Dave's answer.

The mate closed the door and leaned against the lamp locker, pipe in mouth.

"I think she's an old darling," he answered enthusiastically. "I have always been aching to command a brig, Captain Jordan. Anybody can run a tops'l schooner or a barkentine. But a brig! It takes a real sailor, captain. I was a bit afraid of her at first, but I'm getting onto her now. For two hours I've been putting her through the paces and getting next, and I'll say this, it's a real pleasure to watch her antics. I'm learning to know her from martingale to pintle and getting lots of fun out of it."

He paused, black eyes agleam with enthusiasm, and smiled at his superior.

"Mr. Rincon," said Captain Jordan, rising with a flush of pleasure on his smooth face; "thank you for your good opinion of the *Albatross*." He paused embarrassedly, blushing like a schoolgirl. "I—I think so much of the old ship that—you can't know the pleasure it gives me to hear her praised by other lips than my own." He paused again and knitted his brows. "I've had trouble with former mates, poor sailors, most of them. They never could learn to understand her. It grieved me." He folded his arms and dropped his head on his chest. "I've grown to love the old ship like a—a sister," he muttered haltingly, as if conscious of his inadequate vocabulary in expressing his affection for his ship.

Dave glanced at his superior. For a moment he wanted to cross the floor and grasp Captain Jordan's hand in an outburst of sympathy, but something about the man restrained him, and his flood of feelings subsided into silence. There was a certain quality about his superior, an exact counterpart to this burst of confidence a moment ago, that invited no confidences, and yet the man seemed to reach forth, almost pathetically for human comradeship. In a man of lesser years—Captain Jordan certainly was nearing thirty—it would have suggested bashfulness. Indeed, the man had moments of flushing to the roots of his blond hair that was almost painful to the beholder.

Above middle height and finely proportioned, Captain Jordan's stature still—except for a certain fullness at the hips—gave one the impression of slightness, which impression was further accentuated by his slender hands and tapering fingers. His hair, brushed back from his smooth forehead in a thick, wavy pompadour, was extremely fine and soft, and of that peculiar lustrous blondness usually attributed to the people of Scandinavia, but oftener found in the Celtic races across the Channel. His eyes were blue and very large. A warm shade bordering on violet, at times very expressive, at other times fathomless as if he could at will draw a veil across them to confound the beholder.

His garb was very simple, yet he gave the impression of always being well dressed, and—consciously or unconsciously—chose garments to set off his blond personality to best advantage. A silk shirt of the very best quality with a cravat of excellent taste gleamed beneath his blue double-breasted coat. The conventional sailor's cap with the thin gold braid and glaced visor, at this day so rarely seen among masters of sailing craft, set off the bold sweep of his nose and his smooth chin. He was the type of sailor that women gloat over, and compose odes to, in the sanctity of their boudoirs. Strength coupled with gentleness. Aggressiveness tempered with an air of humbleness.

As for his sailorly qualities, Dave had no misgivings. Captain Jordan seemed to handle his ship with a minimum of effort that was positively uncanny. His commands were short, crisp, and clear cut. Yet they carried a note of respect rather than one of peremptory behest, as if he wished to rule his men by good will instead of fear. The result was a high state of discipline supported by respect and affection. Not a man from cabin boy to bos'n but what would willingly have laid down his life for his captain.

With a temperament neither loquacious nor reserved, he found very little cause to talk, but when he did enter into conversation he was never dull. His theories were advanced not in a spirit of bravado, but

with an air of quiet conviction that would have seemed intolerant in most speakers, but that were really founded upon close observation and strict honesty with himself and his fellows.

Dave liked a man of few words. He had not handled the *Albatross* more than four hours out of port before he decided that he was going to like Captain Jordan. He had accepted the second command of the old brig with some misgivings as this was his first real voyage with the exception of a trip as bos'n on the copra trader, *Falcon,* to the D'Entrecasteaux Islands off New Calendonia. His misgivings were soon dispelled by Captain Jordan's tolerant manner, and his evident desire to have his second in command make good. He had gone below directly after the tug's hawser had been cast off outside the Heads and had left Dave to clear land according to his own judgment. Appreciating the courtesy and the man's faith in his ability, Dave had taken hold with all the enthusiasm of his newly acquired command, and in thirty minutes he had the old brig running before the wind at an eight-knot gait with every stitch of canvas set and her battered old nose buried to the catheads in the heavy monsoon swell.

When Dave came out of his cabin buttoning his oilskin coat around his throat, Captain Jordan was standing before the barometer beside the lamp locker with knitted eyebrows.

"There's dirty weather ahead," he said with a glance at the coffeepot in Dave's hand. "Any more coffee left in the pot, Mr. Rincon? I'd like a cup before I go on deck."

Dave nodded and placed the coffeepot on the table and looked at the barometer.

"H'm," he said. "It looks like we're in for a blow, all right." He turned on Captain Jordan. "I wish you'd let me take your watch, sir! I'm feeling fresh as a baby. I want to watch her antics shortening sails. If she gets too much for me, I'll call you."

Captain Jordan looked at the enthusiastic face of his mate thoughtfully.

"Very well, Mr. Rincon," he agreed. "I don't think I need worry with you on the bridge."

"Thank you, sir!" Dave answered.

"Eleven knots, Johnson!" Dave exclaimed gleefully to the man at the wheel as he struck a match and glanced at the dial of the automatic log. "I didn't think she had it in her."

"She's getting pretty hard to manage sir," the man replied.

Dave steadied himself against windward railing and glanced aloft.

"I suppose we'd better take in the royals," he murmured regretfully, as he watched a sea come tumbling over the lee bulwarks, in phosphorescent turbulence.

"Fore royal clew lines," he sang out, making his way for'ard along the slanting deck.

"Stand by! All ready? All right, boys! Hand over hand! Buntlines at the same time! Good! Belay! Larry, go aloft and make her fast! Bos'n, take a man with you on the fo'c's'le head and take in the flying jib! Main royal next!"

Dave paused for a moment with his hand on the pinrail and glanced to windward. A black bank of clouds hung over the low shore line, almost obscuring it.

"All right, boys! Haul her in! Windward clew line first! Good! Belay! Ed, go aloft!"

When Dave returned to the cabin a few minutes later he found Captain Jordan in the act of putting on his rubber boots.

"Still going down?" Dave inquired, shading his hand against the swinging glow of the lamp.

Captain Jordan smiled.

"Take a look at her!" he said.

"By the Lord Harry!" Dave exclaimed, staring at the barometer incredulously. "Hurricane!"

"Something like that!" Captain Jordan admitted softly. "She's been cutting some queer antics the last fifteen minutes. I thought you might need help, Mr. Rincon, so I was getting ready. You'd better call the watch. However, use your own judgment. I shan't interfere!"

The words had hardly left his mouth when the old ship took a plunge to port. The lamp swung with a smoky flare against the ceiling.

"She is on us!" Dave exclaimed, springing through the door and slamming it shut after him.

"All hands on deck!" he shouted. "Bos'n take foret'ga'n' s'l with the port watch. Starboard watch, lay aft! T'ga'n' s'l clew lines. Step lively!"

In the rush of halyards, the shrill whine of blocks, the hurricane was upon them. First a solitary blast out of the black cloud

bank that drove the brig upon her beam ends with the fierceness of the onslaught. Then, a lull, ominous and sinister, as a giant pausing, hand poised in mid-air, before crushing his victim. Brief as the lull was, it was sufficient to get the t'ga'n' s'ls clewed up, with four men, two in each rigging, scrambling aloft to furl the pounding canvas.

"Main tops'l buntlines!" Dave roared above the howl of the storm. "Haul her in! Another drag to windward! All right! Belay!"

He cupped his hands.

"Johnson! Ahoy!" he shouted at the man at the wheel. "Ease her off a couple of points and hold her there!"

With every man aloft to furl, Dave made his way up the poop ladder just as the oilskin coated figure of Captain Jordan emerged from the companionway.

"We're down to lower tops'ls, sir," he shouted against the hurricane. "As soon as the men are on deck I'll take in main and foresail."

"Very well, Mr. Rincon," Captain Jordan answered calmly. "I'll relieve Johnson at the wheel. You'll need him for the big canvas. Sing out when you're ready. I'll luff a bit and give you a chance to take it in."

Dave followed Johnson down the poop ladder. As his foot struck the deck, a bolt of lightning tore out of the cloud bank, a quivering flash that seemed to smother the universe in an all-engulfing burst of flame. For one fluttering moment the prostrate brig lay illumined in a sea of molten ether, then darkness swallowed her up.

II.

Blinded for the moment in the blackness that closed him in and overwhelmed him as two crushing walls moving swiftly together —something more tangible than mere darkness—Dave felt his way along the slanting deck with his right arm hooked over the weather railing to steady himself against rolling of the brig. Amidships he collided with an oilskin-coated figure swinging out of the main shrouds.

"That you, bos'n?" he shouted hoarsely, stretching out his hands.

"Yes, sir—Mr. Rincon!" the bos'n gasped.

"Get—all—the men—together, as fast as they—come down. I'll stand by the sheet. Sing out when you're—ready."

His words were clipped off in staccato gasps in the fury of the gale.

"Aye, aye, sir!"

The bos'n's voice came back to him hollow as from a great cavernous depth.

Fumbling along the pinrail, Dave found the chain of the main clew. It was taut as a violin string from the terrific pushing force of the wind on the bellied mainsail. One by one oilskin-coated figures passed him in the darkness feeling their way along the pinrail to the main shrouds. He heard the thump of coiled rope dropped to the deck. In the roar of the gale it sounded curiously faint as the falling of a pin on a heavy carpeted floor. The storm seemed in its very fury to have created a vacuum of sound, wherein certain minor vibrations were registered clearly while greater ones were drowned and borne away upon the atmosphere that rushed past him in furious cascades of incredible power and swiftness.

"All ready!"

It was the voice of the bos'n.

"All right! Wait until she luffs! Now, altogether! Bit by bit! Hold all you get! She's flapping! Take it in! Hold her!"

Dave shouted the words mechanically. He was aware that few of his words could be heard, but it gave him a sense of security to voice his commands in defiance of the elements.

The half clewed sail began to pound in the wind with a dull, roaring blast that reverberated hollow and ominous through the girdered stillness below decks. The deck under his feet shook and tumbled, as if some terrific rending power was tearing at the brig's vitals. The chain sheet, with two turns over the steel belaying pin, seemed almost to tear his arms from their sockets in great lunging strokes as he paid it out inch by inch across the pin.

Then, suddenly, with a deafening blast, the pounding ceased. The chain sheet whipped in the iron ringbolt with a rattle of musketry. Dave stood staring aloft endeavoring to pierce the gloom, with the noisy sheet beating about his oilskin trousers.

Some one touched his elbow. It was the bos'n.

"She blew out!"

The bos'n shouted the words in Dave's ears. His face was so close to the mate's

that the man's beard whipped across Dave's face in sharp, stinging blows.

"Blew—out?" Dave ejaculated dazedly. "What'll the—old—man say to this," he added for want of something better to say.

"It's an old un, sir. Bent—her on in—Singapore—last trip," the bos'n shouted.

"All right!" Dave answered. "Send a man aloft to gather in the leech ropes and foot. Blew out! Well, I like that. Lay for'ard with the men and take in the foresail, then!"

The wind was pouring down upon the helpless brig in vicious outbursts of unchained fury that kept her on her beam ends, steadily, as if she were chained to some monstrous weight to leeward that it was impossible to free herself from.

Climbing up the ladder of the fo'c's'le head on hands and knees, Dave felt his body being lifted from behind, step by step with the terrific pushing force of the wind, a thistledown blown among weeds. Gaining the slanting deck of the fo'c's'le head he tried to rise to his feet, but the solid wall of wind forced him to his knees. Twining his arms about an ivory stanchion, he turned his face away from the blast that was being pumped relentlessly through his mouth and nostrils, preventing expiration and nearly choking him. Stretching himself flat on his stomach upon the deck, he worked his way to the cathead, foot by foot, by moving from stanchion to ringbolt cautiously, and finally succeeded in hooking his fingers into the steel clew of the foresail.

To stand erect was impossible. Bracing his feet against a ringbolt, he stretched himself on his back, crooked his left arm around a stanchion reaching for the sheet chain with his free right hand. In this position he slacked out the sheet inch by inch as the men on deck pulled the windward clew and buntlines.

An age seemed to pass as he lay there on his back with nothing to appraise him of what was going on except his sense of touch as the sheet paid out.

Suddenly the tugging ceased. The sheet hung slack over the bitts. Two blocks!

The lee sheet went easier. In five minutes the clew was under the yard. Taking a couple of turns with the chains around the bitts to prevent them being carried overboard, Dave crawled down the ladder to windward and rested breathlessly under the sheltering bulwarks for a moment, where the bos'n found him.

"Weather buntlines carried away, sir!" the bos'n shouted. "She's standing up like a balloon. I sent all hands aloft to try to furl her. I'm going up myself."

"Hell!" Dave shouted. "All right, bos'n! Going aft and tell the old man. I'll be up in a minute with extra gaskets."

Dave found Captain Jordan crouched over the wheel with both knees on the spokes.

"Mainsail blew out, sir, and the buntlines on the fore carried away," he shouted, "I'm going below for extra gaskets."

Captain Jordan nodded.

"Better come back and lend a hand here. I won't be able to hold her alone much longer."

"All right, sir! Right away, sir!"

With the gaskets over his shoulder he climbed the fore shrouds a few minutes later and mounted the ratlines step by step. The force of the wind forced him flat against the backstays. His oilskin coat became tangled in the ratlines at every laborious step. Finally he swung himself, out of breath, to foreyard under the crosstrees and passed the gaskets in the dark to the waiting bos'n.

"You'll have to go it alone, bos'n," he shouted. "I've got to bear a hand at the wheel with the old man."

"Very well, sir, I'll do my best."

When Dave returned to the wheel Captain Jordan was in the act of lashing himself with his left hand to the foot of the wheel standard behind him. Dave grasped the wheel spokes to leeward and glanced at his captain's face faintly outlined in the murky glow of the binnacle. His wet, blond pompadour lay plastered flat upon his forehead, giving him a grotesque, clownish appearance, that was further accentuated by the high-buttoned collar of his oilskin coat which hid the lower part of his face like a mask. The man's body rose and fell against the wheel spokes at the pitching of the ship with a peculiar, dancelike motion, poised crouched at moments in mid-air, to receive the blows of the seas that broke in thundering fury about them.

Dave wiped his eyes, and, groping about on his knees in the wash of the deck, found the end of a rope with which he lashed himself to the lee standard.

"I took—a look at the glass when I was—below," he shouted in Captain Jordan's ear.

"Twenty-eight, sir!" He paused to note the effect of his word on Captain Jordan. "Twenty-eight, sir, did you hear what I said? The lowest I've seen. It has only begun."

Captain Jordan merely nodded his head. Dave had expected to see him start at his words. He felt disappointed and exasperated at the man's matter-of-fact manner.

"We must try to take in the lower topsails," Captain Jordan answered calmly. "They're both new, and won't blow out like the mainsail. A bit more—wind and she'll tear the spars out of herself."

As if in answer to his words a terrific blast of wind smote the brig careening the old ship on her side and plunging her lower yards, truck deep, into the seas. A huge sea struck her with grinding crash amidships. Dave felt himself suddenly in the center of a madly boiling whirlpool with nothing visible except Captain Jordan's head, which appeared like a gargoylish mask tossed about upon the crest of the agitated waters. The light in the binnacle, with the water swirling madly about its standard, gleamed faintly as at an interminable distance. It seemed to be the one stationary thing in this furiously churning universe.

For a moment Dave thought he and his captain had been washed overboard, but a sudden jerk at his waist rope as the ship rose to meet another sea, assured him that he was safe. Fighting wildly in the undertow that swept his feet from under him time after time, he groped blindly with eyes shut for the spokes of the wheel. Over and over he turned in the churning water. His waist rope nearly strangled the breath of him. He became possessed of one idea. He must find the wheel spokes and hold the brig on her course. Nothing else mattered. The idea became an obsession. He fought blindly, madly, senselessly with the roar of the cataract in his ears.

Gasping for breath, his hand found the spokes at last. He grasped them with a grip of death and rose to his knees. He felt a hand clutching his shoulder, and looked into Captain Jordan's white, calm face.

"I thought you—went over—Mr. Rincon," Captain Jordan spluttered. "Look out, here comes another."

Again the thundering, crushing madness engulfed the two men. This time the water rose to the top of the binnacle and put out the lamp. When the flood had subsided Dave reached out his hand for his superior without finding him. For a moment he thought that the man had gone overboard and that he was alone. With a yell of rage and blasphemy he clawed at the wooden wheel spokes shouting the name of his captain.

Suddenly he heard Captain Jordan's voice behind him.

"I'm—all—right—Mr. Rincon—under—the tiller—Arm broke—I think—hold her—steady—wheel box smashed—can't see—anything—binnacle lamp—went out."

Dave reached one arm over the wrecked wheel box and groped in the darkness for Captain Jordan. A stinging whiplike wall of spray beat into his mouth and nostrils. He tasted it. Rain! A deluge of hurricane-driven downpour it forced him to his knees by the sheer weight of its impact. It felt like a thousand high-speeded trip-hammers hammering at his eyeballs to drive them from their sockets.

Captain Jordan rose out of the darkness. Dave could not see him. He only felt the ponderous oilskin-coated weight of the man's body against his shoulder.

"Left arm," Captain Jordan muttered. "Right's O. K.—Lucky—We'll need it—— Got to keep her—before the wind."

Half an hour went by. The two men stood shoulder to shoulder steering the brig through this senseless chaos of wind and water. The old ship plunged, heaved, reared, and groaned, raked from stem to stern with tons, hundreds of tons of fury-whipped seas. They poured upon her in cataracts, black walls of it crumbled to windward and collapsed over her frail bulwarks, smothering her for minutes at the time. Lifeboats were crushed as eggshells and torn from their davits. The deck house was washed overboard carrying thirty feet of the port bulwarks with it into the sea. Every movable object was smashed, torn, and disintegrated. The old ship was being plundered with a stupid bestiality that was maddening. Mercy is unknown to the elements. She was like a fawn, cast to ravenous wolves, torn at, shattered, leaped upon, clawed at. The two men clung to each other across the frail wooden wheel stunned to insensibility, shocked by the enormity of the devastation.

Suddenly out of the blackness rose a form. A pair of hairy paws clawed at Dave's face. Under ordinary circumstances he would have shrank back in fright, but his spirit

had been crushed beyond the state of fear. He was aware of something vaguely familiar about the hands. Strange as it seemed, their touch felt comforting to his shattered senses. He reached out his fingers and came in contact with a bearded face. It was the bos'n's.

"Fore—truss—carried away—all hands overboard——" the man gasped. The tips of Dave's fingers touched something warm and sticky. Blood. The man was hurt. Grievously. "I hit my—head—struck on capstan—fo'c's'le—head—all in——" The words were cut off in a terrific deluge of water. The man was torn from them in the darkness.

"My God," Captain Jordan cried, "he went over!"

"Hear—what he—said?" Dave muttered. "All hands—overboard—we're—alone——"

III.

There is something unspeakably contemptible in the elements' bestial disregard for human life. Especially so on the sea. A terrible holocaust may overtake the land dweller, a volcanic eruption may lay waste his homes and his gardens, yet he himself may escape upon the solid ground beneath his feet.

With the toiler of the sea it is different. Overtaken in midocean by a hurricane, he must stay with his ship. No sheltered chamber where he may retreat for respite. No opening gate to receive him and give him comfort. Only the limitless stretches of the ravaging sea. And he must battle even for the very breath that the landsman draws as a matter of course.

In the black reeling universe but one thought came to Dave. "Will she weather it?" He asked himself the question over and over again, and smiled to himself grimly. The thought was too preposterous. There was a spluttered "She may" from Captain Jordan at his elbow. Dave was not aware that he had voiced his question aloud. He wondered vaguely if his superior had suddenly developed mind-reading abilities. The idea seemed not at all strange. Perfectly in keeping with the happenings of the last two hours.

For want of something better to do Dave began to analyze his feelings. Was he afraid? He decided that he was not. This conclusion was followed by a pang of conscience. According to his decision he ought to be afraid. He wondered if he were losing his mind. A state of tranquillity under such conditions savored of imbecility. A vortex of nervous horror seized him at this possibility. If he had to go down he wanted to die with a clear brain. Sobs of rage, choked inarticulate before they reached his lips shook him in great, tearing gusts.

How he lived through that night of maddening horror, he never knew. He opened his eyes. Dawn glowed dully in the east. He must have slept! Not a breath of air stirred. The brig lay rolling and pitching between leaping, pyramidal seas that smote her dully on all sides, retreated swiftly after striking to meet another sea and gather renewed strength for the assault. From every side they struck her, a leaping half-spent mob of baffled furies, hissing about her, clawing at her, tearing at her wounds.

Dave stared dully for'ard over the wreckage. A double row of naked ribs, all that was left of the bulwarks, stood like a row of crazy fenceposts on each side of the clean-swept lane of the deck. The jagged stump of the foremast pointed crazily to the sky. The fo'c's'le head was a wilderness of tangled shrouds, splintered yards, running gear, and blocks. One yard, the lower tops'l, had been driven to the truss through the deck of the fo'c's'le head. From its end flapped a bit of torn canvas. From the jib boom a dragnet of tangled ropes and rigging rose and fell out of the agitated seas with the heaving of the brig.

The broken main topgallant mast swung back and forth in the port shrouds where it had become tangled in the crosstrees. Binnacle and companionway hatch were gone. Not a splinter remained of the lifeboats. Two battered blocks swung dismally from the empty davits. The *Albatross* had weathered the hurricane, but at what a sacrifice. She looked like a ship of war that had run the gantlet of a hundred cannons.

Dave turned his brine-scalded eyes. Beside him the limp figure of Captain Jordan sprawled across the wheel. The man's long hands dangled between the spokes of the wheel like two spent pendulums. His blond hair hung in a soggy matted cockscomb to the bridge of his nose. His eyes, half open and glassy, were sunken deep into their sockets.

Dave stared at his commander dumbly. At first he thought him dead, but a line of

froth bubbles moving in and out between the man's blue, swollen lips assured him that life was not extinct. Dave aroused himself to action. The fluttering torch of his life fires was touched into flame by the necessity of caring for his captain.

With stiff crackling fingers he removed his sheet knife from his belt and severed the rope with which he had lashed himself to the stanchion, and rested for a moment upon the wrecked wheel box to decide upon his next move. For some minutes he sat staring at the ghastly face of his commander, trying to collect his thoughts. The wan sun, chill and comfortless, danced wraithlike and ghostly from pinnacle to pinnacle of the choppy seas. An icy, clammy mist hemmed him in on all sides. Not a breath of air stirred except the sudden chill rushes of wind as the ship rose and fell. Not a sound, but the hissing wash of the seas. The ominous quiet disturbed his soul.

Sliding down the starboard side of the wrecked wheel box with his knife between his teeth, he cut the lashings that bound Captain Jordan to the stanchion and swung one of the man's limp arms about his neck and half carried, half dragged Captain Jordan across the bulging deck. Amidships he paused wearily and propped his sagging burden against the wrecked companionway hatch. Descending three steps down the ladder he swung the man's body across his shoulders and staggered into the cabin. When his feet touched the floor he leaned swaying with his burden against the brass hand rail and stared stupidly at the chaos about him.

Every movable object had been flung about and crushed. Trunks, boxes, and lockers lay gaping and shattered with their contents strewn in wild confusion everywhere. The barometer hung broken and useless from its hook, with its glassless frame dangling by one hinge. The lamp wallowed in a soggy heap of oil and water in one corner where it had been tossed. The side of the port bunk had been caved in by a skidding trunk which lay bottom up with gaping seams and its water-soaked contents bulging from its mouth. It was as if a mob of furies had made wild sport of the cabin.

Staggering across the littered floor he dropped his burden into the lower starboard bunk and sank gasping for breath on an overturned trunk. A feeling of utter hopelessness took hold of him. He tried hard to compose his mind and judge things coolly.

The door of the mess locker banged noisily upon its creaking hinges. Every time it opened, Dave had a glimpse of bottles suspended in the rack. Brandy! He rose to his feet and staggered across the floor. With trembling hands he pulled a half-empty bottle from the rack, removed the cork, gulped half a pint of the fiery liquid down his parched throat, and moved unsteadily to Captain Jordan's side, pressing the mouth of the bottle to the man's swollen lips. The brandy passed down Captain Jordan's throat.

Presently Dave felt better. Wedging the bottle of brandy carefully in the corner of the bunk to prevent losing a drop of the precious fluid, he divested Captain Jordan of his oilskin coat and, turning the man upon his right side, cut his left shirt sleeve off at the shoulder. The arm was blue and swollen to the elbow from the fracture. Breaking some pieces of wood from a shattered trunk, he cut them into splinter lengths and tore the shirt sleeve into bandages, swathing the arm lastly in strips torn from the blankets. His work completed, he turned the man on his back, and was about to cover him with dry blankets from the top bunk, when his eyes fell upon his commander's white, naked chest. With one hand grasping the corner of the blanket, Dave stared dazedly at Captain Jordan. Was he dreaming? For a moment he crouched breathless over the man with his right hand shading his eyes, unable to believe his senses. Slowly his hand stole to the slashed shirt. With trembling fingers he moved the soggy silken cloth to one side. In the murky half light of the bunk gleamed the white, rounded throat of a woman. In the soft declivity of her throat lay a small golden locket suspended from the neck by a slender chain. Dave opened the locket with trembling fingers. A pair of violet eyes looked out of a young, proud face framed in a double coil of lustrous hair. The features were those of his captain.

Hastily buttoning the silken shirt at the neck, he tucked the covers about Captain Jordan and stood staring stupidly at the white face above the blankets. Very carefully he unhooked the clasp of the chain, placed the locket in his coat pocket, and went on deck.

Dave's mind was so worn out with the agony of the battle of the night that this new fantastic situation did not at first impress him, beyond a sort of vague wonder. Later as he busied himself with the clearing of the rigging for'ard, the preposterousness of the thing dawned upon him. What possible set of circumstances or motives could have induced a woman of Captain Jordan's evident education and refinement to masquerade in man's clothing and to be engaged in the hazardous occupation of skipper of a small sailing vessel? He took the locket from his pocket and sat staring at the youthful eager face.

Calmly, coldly Dave weighed the possibilities of the situation, as he went about his work clearing the wreckage, feeling vaguely that he had in some way been swindled, that his confidence had been taken advantage of. Into his ears was dinned the question: What should he do about it? He clenched his hands. Nothing?

The sun, wan no longer, had dispelled the mists and was pouring in all its tropic intensity upon the back of his oilskin coat. Divesting himself of the coat, he flung himself into the work of cutting adrift the dragging rigging. For an hour he labored, and then suddenly bethought himself of food. Climbing aft over the tangled wreckage, he entered the cabin and with an ax chopped down the door to the supply locker which had become wedged by the straining of bulkhead.

In the supply locker as everywhere else he found chaos. Cans, crates, bottles, flour sacks, lay in the wildest disorder with the contents scattered all over the place. From a barrel lashed in the corner he grabbed a handfull of water-soaked biscuits and dug out a can of preserved meat from the wreckage on the floor.

Returning to the cabin, he knocked the top of the can in with a blow of the ax and ate ravenously, glancing surreptitiously the while at the pale face above the blankets. Captain Jordan lay in a deathlike stupor, motionless and ghastly white, with the lids of his sunken eyes fluttering faintly. Dave was about to return the locket to Captain Jordan's neck, but restrained from fear of awakening him. Later he would watch his chance!

At the end of his meal, he placed the can of meat and some biscuits upon the wrecked trunk within easy reach of the bunk and returned on deck. His mind was made up. He elected to assume an air of ignorance! When Captain Jordan should come out of his stupor he would greet him as if he had discovered nothing. He would replace the locket. Captain Jordan would never know. It was the only honorable way. With this determination he went about his work thoughtfully. The same careful study which he had given to handling the brig was now tenfold necessary to manage this delicate situation. Drawing the locket from his pocket, he sat looking into the clear blue eyes, with feeling of wonder and mystery. Drowsiness came over him. The strain of the night and the excessive heat asserted itself upon his worn nerves. He could hardly keep his eyes open. Before he knew it he had dropped off to sleep with his head resting upon the tangled mass of rigging. In his clenched hand he held the golden locket.

IV.

Captain Jordan came out of her stupor and opened her eyes. At first she was merely conscious of a dark space faintly illumined from without. She felt no pain, only a sense of weighted heaviness. She seemed to be sinking slowly into some misty void upon whose vapors her soul hung suspended not far distant. Queer things suggested themselves to her. She breathed an opiate in the ropy air. The darkness in which she lay was a moving confined murkiness of mist that rocked with a strange wind.

Presently she let her eyes drift away and saw the cabin flooded with sun from the wrecked skylight. Soon she became aware that the weighted heaviness came from her arm lying swathed upon her chest like some monstrous, swollen thing. She raised herself upon her right elbow to ease the weight, but succeeded only in shifting it. Her sunken eyes fell greedily upon the food beside her. Plunging her right hand to the wrist into the tin, she drew forth a fistful of meat and ate ravenously. Again and again she plunged her hand into the tin and ate until her fingers clawed its smooth bottom for the last scrap of meat, and the empty tin rolled noisily to the steaming floor.

She closed her eyes and sank into a burning, feverish sleep that lasted for hours. She was chained to a cliff by the edge of a stream whose cool waters her lips might not

touch. Thirst at last conquered the weariness of the body, and she awoke with parched, palpitating throat, crawled out of her bunk and staggered on deck.

Her eyes took in the desolation unseeingly. Wallowing over piles of wreckage that barred her way everywhere, she succeeded in reaching the mainmast only to find a skeleton of shattered staves, all that remained of the fresh-water barrel. Dropping to her knees, with the heat of the tropic sun palpitating monstrously through her swollen arm, she clawed at the empty staves.

The muffled, laborious breathing of the hawse pipes, as the water passed in and out with the rising and falling of the brig, was maddening. To her tortured senses the sea was no longer living water. The greasy slopes of the seas rolled and crumbled about her in the humid heat with a crackling noise. There was nothing in all this waste that was good for the soul to see. She shook herself savagely.

Suddenly she bethought herself of the small barrel under the fo'c's'le head. On her knees with her broken arm impeding her progress like a weighted thing chained to her, she crawled for'ard and burrowed under the wreckage of the fore-rigging into the gloom under the fo'c's'le head. She found the barrel. The top had been crushed in, but a soft clucking sound assured her that some water was still left. She plunged her hand between the shattered staves and withdrew it cupped full of water. Sea water had entered. It was brackish, nauseating but still fit to drink. She drank and drank.

Then she crawled back on deck and dragged herself to a shady place among the wreckage. Her brain was clearer now. The pain in her arm was very great. With returning consciousness great throbbing waves of pain swept over her. For the first time she began to wonder if she were alone.

Her bandaged arm and the food she had found placed beside her precluded this possibility. Some one else beside herself must have survived.

After resting she began a laborious search of the ship stalking that other person, or persons—who like herself had been spared.

Clambering upon the fo'c's'le head, she found Dave asleep upon the tangled rigging. Upon the deck beside the sleeping mate lay a small golden locket and chain. Bending down, Captain Jordan picked it up and examined it. For some moments the skipper of the *Albatross* stood looking at the sleeping man, lost in thought. She was found out at last! The secret she had guarded so zealously all these years was a secret no longer.

A fierce unreasoning anger took possession of her as she stood gazing at the sleeping form of her next in command. It would be impossible longer to carry on the deception. Soon the water front from Cape York to Melbourne would know. Her name would be the butt of ridicule wherever ships went. Her master's certificate would be revoked. Disgrace, scorn, and laughter would follow her to the ends of the earth.

She glanced about her bruised and battered ship, the ship which her foster father had built and loved. Every inch of the old brig held memories of this man who had lifted her out of the sordidness of her childhood and had given her a place as his daughter among the daughters of the earth. She remembered the night of her deliverance so very clearly. She had crept through the swinging doors of the old Empiro wine hall on George Street, with her basket of flowers, to seek shelter from the chill dampness of the water front. The patrons of the Empiro were her best customers. Rough, bearded sailors with toil-bruised hands. They always bought flowers and often refused their change for a shilling and sometimes even for half a crown.

This night a big tanned stranger was dining at the table in the far corner. When she offered him a three-penny bunch of marigolds shiveringly, he looked up from his plate with that kind, bashful sailor smile of his which she grew to love so dearly in after years, and lifted her to a chair beside him.

He laughed and joked with her about the length of her hair and the shortness of her bare legs that scarcely reached to the first rung of her chair. He had bought her more food than she had eaten in a week before, and while she ate he told her laughingly about the sea and soberly about his lonesomeness. He asked her what her name was and said that his was Captain Thomas Jordan.

After she had eaten he bought the entire contents of her flower basket and pressed into her hand a half sovereign. He asked her about herself. She told him, and his eyes grew hard and thoughtful.

When she took him down to the wharf

and showed him the miserable hovel she called home, he turned his face to the glowing city beyond the bridges and shook his fist.

The next day he came back with two other men who asked her many questions. Captain Thomas Jordan, of the brig *Albatross,* wanted to adopt her. He lifted her on his shoulder and pointed to a white, new ship gleaming among the forest of spars and rigging down the bay. Would she like to be his daughter and go with him on his new ship? These gentlemen—he pointed to his companions—could fix it up. She agreed wonderingly, breathlessly.

A week later she stood beside him on the poop deck of the *Albatross* and watched the city drop astern.

"Your name is now Mary Jordan," Captain Thomas Jordan said; "when I die this ship will belong to you."

The wonder of the new life had filled her with delight. For years they tramped the seas together. She grew into young womanhood with the tan of the southern seas upon her cheeks. Shoulder to shoulder the two weathered tropic gales and lee shores, and as the years passed she grew to love the sea and the man who had taught her to love it.

At the age of seventeen he let her take the ship unaided from Suva, Fiji Islands, to Auckland, New Zealand, while he watched her proudly from his chair under the poop awning. They ran into a squall one night, but he kept his hands off. In thirty minutes she had the *Albatross* flying before the gale, close-reefed. She had learned her lesson well. When she came below and shook the water from her hair and threw her sou'wester on the cabin table, he took her by the shoulders and laughed softly.

"Good work, Captain Mary Jordan," he said. After that he left the navigation almost entirely to her. How she had gloried in it. She had grown to love the sea as a brother.

Then one day suddenly a week out from Singapore her foster father was stricken down in the prime of life. She herself had performed the simple rites of the sea in numb, tearless agony. When she moored the *Albatross* in the hot angle of the piers at Sidney a month later she found herself the sole owner of the brig and of a string of small cottages in Fillmore. In his frugality her foster father had provided for her amply.

For a while she had settled down to the irksome rôle of landlord, fighting the call of the sea mightily.

Then one day after placing her affairs in the hands of a competent agent, and telling him that she would be gone for years, she packed her trunk and departed for Wellington, New Zealand, where the *Albatross* was lying at anchor awaiting a cargo and a new crew.

Two weeks later a blond youth walked into the office of the New Zealand board of trade and presented himself for examination for master mariner. In due time the youth received his certificate and Miss Mary Jordan disappeared from the earth. Her agents received a request for settlement by letter twice a year from out-of-the-way corners of the world.

Captain Jordan looked at the sleeping mate. She glanced at her carefully bandaged arm. Her frown relaxed. This man was a man among men. Resourceful, brave, and a good sailor. She glanced about the ship. Lone-handed he had gone about clearing the wreckage and salvaging her property as if it was his own. Her foster father would have liked Dave Rincon.

Her eyes grew soft as she remembered their struggles of the night before. Not for a moment had the mate weakened. He had fought the hurricane beside her without flinching and had continued fighting alone after her accident. Perhaps he could be as discreet as he was brave?

It was near sundown when Dave awoke. The sun hung low over the placid sea that was like an open casket lined with purple velvet where one might reach forth his hand and choose his treasure. He rose stiffly. Glancing aft, he was astonished to see the form of Captain Jordan reclining upon the wrecked skylight seat on the poop deck. The locket! He would never be able to replace it now. He glanced querulously at his open palm as if expecting to find it there. No trace of it on the deck. Of course, it must have dropped from his hand and slid overboard with the rolling of the ship. This made it easier than ever. Captain Jordan would attribute its loss to the storm. Rousing himself, he descended the ladder and made his way aft.

He was consumed with the necessity of making Captain Jordan feel that he knew nothing, and in his eagerness rather over-

did himself like a young actor at the first test. He addressed Captain Jordan with a strain of petulance that was meant to sound casual.

"How is your arm, Captain Jordan?"

His commander's chin slanted at an angle that precluded sympathy and interrogation.

"Very well, Mr. Rincon, thank you."

Dave turned his face away embarrassedly.

"She weathered it!" he said. His remark seemed idiotic and futile. He had to say something.

"She did," Captain Jordan answered enigmatically.

In a sudden burst of solicitude Dave asked:

"Does it hurt much? Your arm?"

"Some, Mr. Rincon. Thank you for inquiring."

"Don't mention it, sir! I was wondering——" Dave paused. "A schoolmate of mine, when I was a boy, had his arm broken climbing over a fence. He was back in school in a week with his arm in a sling," he added idiotically.

Captain Jordan nodded and glanced at the injured arm.

"You're a very good surgeon, Mr. Rincon."

"Thank you, sir," Dave blurted.

Captain Jordan looked up. "You're not looking very fit, Mr. Rincon. Better go below and rest."

"It's the heat," said Dave. "This weather's awful. Rest! I've slept all day. Must go and clear the wreckage about the pump. I'm dry as bone."

"There's water in the keg under the fo'c's'le head, Mr. Rincon," Captain Jordan said. "It's a bit brackish, but better than nothing."

At dusk, with the cistern pump cleared and working, Dave carried a bucket of fresh water aft and bathed Captain Jordan's swollen arm, removing the rough splinters and substituting others which he split from an empty pine box and smoothed down with his sheath knife, wrapping the arm first in strips of soft blanket soaked in olive oil.

Captain Jordan submitted without a whimper. Dave barely surprised a gasp of admiration for the stoicism with which his commander underwent the painful operation. The arm was blue and swollen to the armpit.

When they made ready for the night Dave carried his mattress on deck, explaining that his cabin was the only one not utterly destroyed, and conducted Captain Jordan to his own bunk, and placed food and water within easy reach.

Captain Jordan watched Dave curiously as the mate busied himself setting things aright in the disordered cabin. Dave filled the lamp and hooked it to a ring bolt in a deck beam overhead, lit it, and went on deck. When he had gone Captain Jordan pulled out the gold locket, opened it, and smiled softly.

V.

The calm lasted for a week. Dave and Captain Jordan labored side by side clearing the wreckage and rigging up jury sails. It was a prodigious task. Dave's admiration for Captain Jordan grew as the calm days dwindled into night after laboring beside his plucky commander in the merciless heat of the tropic sun. There had been moments during the first few days when he had shrunk from Captain Jordan, with a feeling bordering on disgust at beholding one of the sex which he had always associated with dainty things and a sort of vague poetry, laboring beside him grime-covered and perspiring; but this feeling soon gave place to a sense of comradeship and intimacy that made him quite breathless with delight.

Dave had never regarded a woman in the light of comradeship before. The intimacy that exists between men battling side by side is something deeper than the sex intimacy. It has a foundation more lasting by virtue of men's necessity to each other in transacting daily business and in the common effort to sustain life.

Captain Jordan, feeling vaguely ashamed at her deception, but yet refraining from a dénouement, for fear of widening the gulf that common necessity had bridged, watched the young mate with a smile of approbation and a warm light in the violet eyes.

At night in Dave's bunk, those violet eyes would grow soft and thoughtful as Captain Jordan lay listening to the measured tread on the deck above, before the mate stretched himself on the mattress under the stars. Dave had purposely refrained from putting Captain Jordan's cabin to order. There was too many other important things to do, he explained, and, besides, he would rather sleep on deck. It didn't occur to him that Captain Jordan's willingness to this arrange-

ment was unnecessarily hearty. In his eagerness to insure the permanency of this arrangement, Dave quite overlooked this curious circumstance.

When treating Captain Jordan's arm, Dave developed a tenderness that astonished even himself. He came to look forward to these moments, between times evolving plans in his head, to execute the next dressing with a minimum of pain to his commander. The realization of being indispensable to the physical comfort of some one—a woman—gave him a new value in his own eyes. He surprised himself with bits of soliloquy upon the subject of surgical dressings.

There began then a curious battle of wits between the man and the woman, with Dave at a great disadvantage. Captain Jordan knew that the mate had discovered her secret, and the woman in her keenly appreciated the possibilities of the situation. The desire of her sex to be an object of admiration, which had lain dormant so long because of her constant position of sex equality with men began to assert itself. She, too, grew to look forward to the time of dressing her arm. The touch of Dave's hand gave her a curious feeling of relaxation, and she began to realize that the sea had robbed her of something very precious.

Knowing men only from the position of a superior officer and therefore not intimately, much had been spared her of sordidness. But she had also missed much knowledge which is the common heritage of all the toilers of the earth. In port she had always of necessity kept much to herself. Whenever she ventured about the haunts of men it was when goaded by curiosity. Once in Suva a dark-haired girl, a singer in a wine hall, had been attracted to Captain Jordan's table by the blond beauty and youth of the sailor. To the captain's intense embarrassment the girl had seated herself in her lap and had shown her undisguised admiration for the blond youth by kissing Captain Jordan very fervently.

Captain Jordan had left the place with a sense of abysmal disgust at herself for her masquerading.

In the lonely hours pacing the deck after this episode, she wondered about herself, took herself to task, and at times grew very lonesome and wretched.

Now she wondered if she had come upon the heritage out of which she deliberately had defrauded herself. She began to watch Dave covertly as she assisted him to the best of her ability with the clearing away of the wreckage. She watched fascinated and wonderingly the play of his arm muscles moving in brown, firm undulations when Dave swung his ax and perspired among the wreckage in the heat of the tropic sun. She watched for a sign of—she hardly knew what—in his dark, quiet eyes.

As the days passed there grew within her a desire for this sturdy son of the sea. She surprised herself by contemplating seriously things she had barely thought of before. She wondered if her five years of masquerading had made her incapable of attracting a man. She found herself contemplating with delicious excitement the purchase of exquisite garments, and grew eager to put herself to the test with Dave.

The mate sensed the change in his commander toward himself. At first her attitude embarrassed him acutely. It made his position more difficult. But as their companionship grew more intimate day by day he gradually became at ease. At night while the old ship staggered through the calm seas they sat under the stars together and talked. Dave drew out his captain when their faces were screened by the night, in a way that would, under ordinary circumstances, have been presumptuous in a mate toward his captain. Gradually he found himself taking the lead in everything they did or said. And Captain Jordan surrendered. She recognized this as the protective arrogance of the mate-lover which woman since time immemorial has recognized as a law and before which she delights to surrender her opinions and prerogative.

A new era had begun in Dave's life. A new and strange era. He was falling in love, and dared not in honor show it. Captain Jordan, with a woman's intuition, saw it and watched it breathlessly. She, too, had drunk of this ancient elixir. So the days passed into weeks and the two labored together poignantly conscious of how necessary each one was becoming to the happiness of the other.

One day the calm broke. Shortly after daylight a gentle breeze filled the sails which had been set in expectation of this event. They had rigged two jury stays from the main topmast to the jib boom upon which were bent two salvaged stay sails to keep

the brig's head from running up into the wind with the heavy spreads of canvas astern. By ten o'clock, with the breeze freshening, the *Albatross* was slipping through the smooth sea at a three-knot gait. In taking their observations at noon they found themselves one hundred miles southeast of the Fijis and shaped their course southwest for New South Wales.

VI.

It was a strange sight to both sailors and landsmen when the battered and bruised *Albatross* slipped through Sidney Heads a month later and staggered to her moorings in the bay without a tug. She was boarded by representatives of the press and swarmed over by curiosity seekers. The story of her adventures spread like wild fire from Cape York to Kangaroo Island. The lieutenant governor paid her a visit in person. Her story was printed in scare-head type from Freemantle to Brisbane.

After a month's wining and dining Dave retired to his room at the hotel and found a small package awaiting him. Thinking it one of the many tributes from hero worshipers, he opened it absently. As he removed the rustling paper, a small golden locket fell into the palm of his hand. He stood staring at it wonderingly. A letter slipped to the floor. Stooping, he picked it up and unfolded it:

MR. RINCON: Please accept this gift as a token of the esteem of a fellow sailor. Formally, you will report to my agents as the new master of the *Albatross* as soon as the brig is ready for sea. Informally, I shall expect you for tea and an apology this afternoon at four. CAPTAIN MARY JORDAN.

Dave looked mistily at the locket in the palm of his hand. With trembling fingers he opened the clasp and placed the slender chain about his throat. Then he selected the best tie from the rack on the wall near the dresser and rang the bell for a pitcher of hot water.

THE MOSQUITO IN DANGER

SOME years ago a patient investigator found that keeping a few toads in a garden was a good way of getting rid of destructive caterpillars and other insects inimical to plant life. This plan has been tried by a number of people and found in some cases to be effective in at least reducing the breeding of these insects to a minimum. A single toad can get rid of more of these pests than an entire brood of chickens could and it has not the destructive tendencies that chickens have. Some people who have utilized members of the toad family for this purpose predict the ultimate extermination of the insect pests of the gardens if the use of toads for the purpose becomes general.

Now word comes from the State of Oregon that an equally potent enemy of the mosquito has been discovered in the water dog, a variety of newt found in stagnant ponds, water barrels and tanks and other places where the mosquitoes breed in different parts of this country. Water dogs are supposed to have the same insatiable appetite for the larvæ of the mosquitoes that the horse leech is credited with having for blood. It is asserted that in a series of experiments it was found that a single water dog could devour at least two hundred mosquito larvæ in twenty-four hours, and it is proposed to breed water dogs as mosquito exterminators.

In most countries wherever man goes the mosquito follows him. Even in the cold wastes of Alaska its faint song is heard toward the end of every summer. Besides causing intolerable itching, following the minute quantity of poison injected through its probe when it bites, malarial and yellow fever germs are at times injected by the mosquito.

Some optimistic people of a semiscientific turn of mind predict that the day, or, rather night, of the mosquito, which is a nocturnal insect, is nearly over and that the water dog will ultimately be generally used and in time exterminate the entire mosquito family. Why should this not be? Former insect pests have been exterminated. The water dog may have a great mission after all. May we not hope that this humble newt will go down to history as the great mosquito exterminator?

Three Strikes!

By Roy W. Hinds

Author of "Aladdin and His Wonderful Cramp," Etc.

From the title you might think this is a baseball tale, but it is far from being that. Hinds introduces us to a trio of crooks, instead, who imagine they are onto all the curves in life

THEY couldn't miss. Any one of them, single-handed, *might* have missed—but the triumvirate was impregnable.

First, there was Montague Beamish, who harbored within his sleek throat as finely attuned a set of vocal cords as ever played upon a yokel's gullibility. Rarely did folks decline to confide in him, and, confiding, finally invest their all. With a flourish of well-chosen conversation and a deft twanging upon whatever penchant for gain lurked within the breasts of his victims, it was extraordinary, indeed, if purse strings were not loosened for the grand pay off.

Montague Beamish was soft spoken and his importunings and suggestions were hard to deny. He made one see with his own eyes—not quite all he saw, but enough for his purposes. Plausibility tripped, alluringly modulated, from his none too active tongue. Montague did not make the mistake of talking too much—he discoursed not unwisely, and, as many had learned, only too well. Candor and good humor shone steadily from his gentle blue eyes; simple sincerity fringed his every word and movement. He could clothe an illusion in such a gilded frame that the rather obscure and hazy center was made to stand out boldly as an entrancing lure. He had even been known to turn his tricks successfully upon other confidence men, when he thought one needed toning down—and, among men such as he, that is regarded as the supreme achievement of mankind.

Too, he was good to look upon. He was so good to look upon that he started his games with a decided advantage. There was no predisposition toward distrust to overcome. His appearance inspired confidence. Having that, he had naught to do but maintain it—and could he maintain it? Why, he could take a grain of confidence and start it rolling down the mountain of your gullibility, guide it dexterously by every pitfall and crevasse, and shift its course into paths where it would enlarge like a snowball, until it came up plumply in the nest of your credence as a glittering nugget of promise.

Mr. Beamish was rather tall. He had the suppleness and easy grace of healthful youth. He was not much past thirty. He had a pleasant face, the face of a man before whom you would not hesitate to take the flap off your heart. Good looks of a mannish sort he had. Scrupulous to an extreme in dress and manner, yet with no suggestion of the dilettante, he possessed a delightful mixture of wholesome ruggedness and well-born gentility which charmed.

It is doubtful if many of his victims felt anger. Surely they gained in experience which might profit them immensely in future, and surely they spent a few hours or a few days, whichever the case might be, in zestful companionship. Anger is not the word for their feelings after Montague, and their rolls, had departed—sorrowful regret is better.

Secondly, there was Christopher McRaven, known burglariously and policeously as "Spook" McRaven—the "Spook" because he operated in such an uncanny fashion. There was a certain gentleness in the manner and appearance of Christopher McRaven, nowhere approximating the gentleness of Montague Beamish, but a gentleness nevertheless. His was a rough and ungentle calling—plain and fancy burglary—but there was none of the bulldog swagger, nor the furtive shiftiness, nor the skulking agility commonly associated with the conduct of a burglar. He walked straight, looked straight, talked straight, but, ah, he lived very, very crookedly.

There was a rough touch about the physique and garb of Spook McRaven, but there was nothing uncouth about him, noth-

ing which offended. It was a frank, open roughness; like his speech, delightfully full of quaint though ungrammatical turns. His dress was that of an ordinary individual, plain and carelessly neat, if there is such a thing. His face was blunt and far from handsome, but there was nothing displeasing about it. Instead, it was attractively homely, with clear, strong eyes and a determined hew to the jaw. You would like Spook McRaven, unless you knew——

But there was no way for one to learn that Spook was a burglar, unless he were caught in the act, and Spook had never been caught in the act. The police knew he was a burglar. The police knew he lived that way. They had traced various crimes *almost* to his door—almost but not quite. And that is why he had been dubbed "Spook"—a certain disappointed detective had given him the name. Spook had been arrested many, many times, but they never had pinned anything on him. Either he or his friends had been able to produce a lawyer who kept the police from proving what they knew, a lawyer who knew all the twists and twirls of Alibi Avenue and Habeas Corpus Alley. Spook never had been detained except for short and restful periods.

Aside from his addiction to burglary, Spook also had another vice, which was less harmful to the general public, but more harmful to himself. He drank—this story transpired before J. Barleycorn expired. Spook drank. He drank hard liquor, principally gin. He knew that if he kept it up some day he would become less "spooky" in burglary and more "spooky" in nerves, and he was always telling himself that he was going to quit. But he hadn't quit yet.

But, with all that, he was an expert burglar—the second in a redoubtable trio of crooks, and——

"Trout" Standish was third—the "Trout" because he was as slippery as a trout, and because he fished in other people's pockets. Francis Standish was his name, but his companions never called him that except in fun.

Trout Standish was a pickpocket, but that hardly describes his qualifications. There are many pickpockets, but there was as much difference between Trout Standish and the ordinary run of dips as there is between a pocketbook stolen before it has made a trip to the meat market and one stolen afterward. No one but Trout knew how he did it, but he was the most adept short-and-long-distance pickpocket of his time. He could pick a pocket by telegraph and transatlantic cable, and in all languages including the Scandinavian.

His hands were not particularly small nor were his fingers particularly long, but they could dart in and out without a tremor, and glide about in the recesses of a pocket as safely as a lone bass in an unknown hole. He could pick the balance wheel out of your watch and it wouldn't lose a second.

They say he once lifted a watch from the vest pocket of a man who was on his way to a masquerade ball. The vest was underneath the masquerade costume, and the victim was masquerading as a knight in armor!

Mr. Standish was a very pleasant young man, too—pleasant of manner and speech. He was of medium height and slender, and dressed neatly and a trifle flashily; discoursed learnedly upon astronomy, which was his hobby—possibly because the stars were the only things he couldn't pick—and never would have been taken for a crook, even if you had missed your purse in a sealed room with Trout as your only companion.

Thus we have three aces, or would you say three knaves? Knaves they were, that is sure, but aces in crime, too, each to his own specialty and not one of them very adept at anything else, but forming, between them, a trio which it were well to avoid.

And this trio of pillage was arrayed against no formidable combination; indeed, any one of them, under other circumstances, would have gone it alone. They would have scorned a triple alliance against such feeble opposition, but the case had its own peculiar and special aspects now. Pitted they were against one Bernard Proudfoot, whose home was in a small town completely surrounded by the State of Kansas.

To the general public and for conversational purposes, Mr. Proudfoot was known as "Bernie." He was that sort of a young man—nobody ever thought of calling him Bernard. That name appeared, of course, on legal documents and undoubtedly would be so graven on his tombstone, but he was never called Bernard. Strangers usually called him Mr. Proudfoot about twice, but they quickly leaped to the friendly "Bernie" in the atmosphere of his genial and confiding nature.

Bernie had come to New York with suddenly acquired wealth and with his neck

shaved as round as the rim of the moon. Charity and good humor, an abiding faith in mankind, with plenty of common sense but scant on the so-called "wiseness" of the city, were qualities that shone always upon his friendly face. He wanted to learn to dress. He wasn't badly or grotesquely dressed as it was, but he wanted to pick up a bit more on the intricate niceties of vogue and fashion—and it isn't surprising that he fell for the easy graces of the immaculate Montague Beamish.

The time is mid-afternoon and the place is the room of Mr. Beamish in a quiet section of Brooklyn. Present is a committee on appropriations, Messrs. Beamish, McRaven, and Standish, and the question is the appropriation of part of Bernie Proudfoot's wealth.

"What kind of a chump is he," inquired Spook McRaven, "that it takes a combination like this to flatten him?"

"I asked you boys in," said Montague Beamish, "because I'm afraid I'm going to fizzle on him."

"Then he must be as wise as the president emeritus of the college which Solomon attended," commented Trout Standish.

"Thank you for the compliment," smiled the con man, bowing to the pickpocket, "but, strange to say, he isn't at all wise. He's in a disturbed state of mind. It's hard to play a man who isn't in a normal state of mind. His thoughts run helter-skelter and all the ordinary systems are out of joint. If he were normal, I'd be sure of him. But he's far from normal. You see, he's going to be married day after to-morrow."

"Oh!" exclaimed Spook McRaven.

"Going to be married, eh?" asked Trout Standish. "Well, that *is* liable to throw a man's mind out of gear. You can never tell what a man will do when he's on the brink of matrimony."

"A man that's going to be married," observed the burglar sagely, "is as uncertain as he is after he gets married."

"Quite right," smiled Beamish. "And yet this man is worth half a million dollars. Of course, we can't get that. But, as I've been telling you, he has, either on his person or in his apartment, close to fifty thousand dollars. That's what he brought here with him. He said he wanted to make a big splash on Broadway before he settled down. I happened to be out in his town when he left for the East, and naturally I attached myself to him. We came together, and are very close friends now.

"He had an idea that Broadway was a street of wonders where it cost a thousand dollars to breathe deeply. Broadway is a lively place, but not for Bernie. You see, he doesn't drink to excess, and Broadway to a nondrinker is about as lively as an ice-cream festival is to a drinker. He couldn't get interested in the old lane, except the shows and the street crowds, so he soon backed away. I've had him up to Grant's Tomb; and he created a sensation among the pigeons around Madison Square Garden by feeding them real peanuts instead of the shucks all one afternoon. The closest he's come to a rip-roarious time was one afternoon when we walked across a place in Central Park called the 'Carousel.' The result is that he's spent less than five thousand dollars of that enormous roll of fifty—and most of the five thousand has been spent for rent of an apartment in the city and a small cottage near the beach at Long Branch, New Jersey.

"Having half a million dollars—which he made by a quick turnover of his farm when they found oil on it—I can't interest him in any business proposition. He doesn't want to be bothered by any deals except this dicker he's got on with Hymen. This girl is from Kansas, too, and came to-day to visit an aunt over in New Jersey, a few miles from Long Branch. After they're married they're going to take a long trip; they're going to travel around a year or so. Naturally, we can't get near him after the wedding. It's almost impossible to get him to talk about anything else—and you know my only hope is in getting a man's interest, and this girl with the corn-silk hair has got old Montague Beamish backed way away from the thoughts of Bernie Proudfoot. And, having seen her picture, I don't blame Bernie.

"Now we've got to get this money before bedtime to-morrow night, or we don't get it at all. And I imagine he'll go to bed early, because the wedding is going to be pulled off in the forenoon at Long Branch.

"There are many ways in which I could gouge him for a thousand or two. I could trade him a set of bum dice, or I could talk with him over four aces—but we want the roll; that's understood. He carries this roll around some of the time——"

"And where does he carry this roll?" interjected the pickpocket.

"In his inside coat pocket—a terrible roll, mostly in one-thousand-dollar bills. He likes to carry it around with him, when he hasn't got it planted in the wall safe in his apartment. He likes to count it—his wealth is sudden, you know, and he'll keep that roll on him until after he's married and loses control of it—unless we beat the bride to it. But, at that, he's rich—over four hundred thousand in a Kansas City bank—and there really isn't any reason why we shouldn't enjoy his prosperity."

"You don't mean to tell me," pressed Trout Standish, his eyes sparkling, "that he carries that money in this coat pocket"—and he patted his own breast—"and doesn't plant it inside his shirt or in the lining of his clothes, or something like that?"

"That's what I mean," smiled the confidence man.

"Then why haven't *you* got it before this?" demanded Trout. "Anybody could lift it out of there."

"I presume I could have done that," agreed Beamish, "but, you know, Trout, it isn't in my line, and a mismovement of the slightest kind would spoil everything. I never lifted anything from a man's pocket, and, while I *might* get by with it in this case, it's too big a stake to bungle. Now, that's your specialty—you can get it easily—but would you care to try even the easiest burglary on it, even to going through a window?"

"I guess you're right about that," admitted Trout. "Every man for his own business. But I certainly hope he lugs that roll around and will let me get into the same county with him for thirty seconds!"

"Didn't you say something about a wall safe?" asked Spook McRaven professionally.

"Yes," Beamish informed him, "I'm coming to that. The safe is a contrivance built into the wall of his apartment. It's steel lined and has a steel door, about two feet square, locked by a combination apparatus, like a safety-deposit vault. They build them in some apartments, you know, for jewels and silverware. The door isn't very heavy, but a man can't open it unless he knows his business. I couldn't touch it."

"I don't like these apartment-house jobs," said Spook. "It's like trying to kidnap a bee out of a beehive."

"I already have a key to the apartment," Beamish hastened to assure him. "There will be no breaking in about it—I took care of that early in the game. You can get into the apartment without any noise. I'll fix that with the hallboy there, who knows I'm a close friend of Mr. Proudfoot and have the run of the place. But what I'm curious about is, how much noise is the blow-off going to make?"

"If that little door ain't any heavier than you say," said Spook, "it will be less noise than a pistol shot—and not sharp like that. It will be more like a loud puff. Why, it won't take but a spoonful of sirup shot off at the combination wheel. I wouldn't try to rip the door out—that'd make too much noise. All I'd do is puff the combination knob off and then work the bolts back with a pair of pliers."

"And how many tools would you need?"

"I can scatter everything through my pockets, and wouldn't have to lug a bundle of any kind."

"Great!" exclaimed the confidence man. "And it wouldn't take you more than an hour to turn the trick, would it?"

"About forty minutes."

"And there's all kinds of rugs there to muffle the thing with—why, sure there is; it's an apartment. Any amount of rugs," said Beamish.

"Then the pop-off wouldn't be heard outside the room, hardly."

"That's a great relief," Montague sighed happily. "That end of it is easy, and so is Trout's end of it."

"And just where do we all figure in this, Montague?" asked Trout.

"Now, boys, here's the detailed plan," and Montague Beamish leaned closer to them. Rapt attention was on the faces of the other men—and things began to cloud up for Bernie Proudfoot. "Here's the detailed plan: To-night I'm to meet Proudfoot. I'm going to introduce him to Trout—but he isn't to see you, Spook. The three of us—Proudfoot, Trout, and myself—will have dinner. Then Proudfoot is going to hop over to New Jersey for a visit with his intended bride. That's the last we'll see of him until to-morrow. It may be the last any of us will see of him—that all depends.

"He'll leave that money in the wall safe to-day and to-night, so there's no chance of Trout lifting it out of his pocket at dinner. He never lugs the money around unless he's

out for a ramble up and down Broadway. And he's through with Broadway now.

"Now, during the dinner to-night I'm going to try him for the last time on my own lay. I've felt him out on all sorts of things, and he hasn't fallen for them. He hasn't even leaned toward them. But now I've got him in half a notion to let me take his money for a wire-tapping swipe to-morrow. It seems he was trimmed out of a lot of money in a pool room once in Kansas City, and I've played this thing as a chance to mop up on all the pool rooms in New York. He's got a gambling streak in him, he's sore on pool rooms, and, besides, I've got him thinking he'll clean up a lot of money. If I can clinch him on that deal and get the roll myself, there won't be a thing for you boys to do. It will be all over except getting under cover.

"But I'm not sure by any means that I can bring him to it. As I've explained, he's all out of gear over the wedding. So much for my end of it.

"Now, then, Spook steps in. I'll get Spook into the apartment after Bernie has gone to New Jersey to see the girl. Spook will rap the wall safe. And, in that event, there will be nothing to do but drag out the roll and get under cover. Then there will be nothing for Trout to do.

"But supposing something happens that we can't get into the apartment. Supposing there's a new hallboy on, or something like that. Supposing they become inquisitive around there. Supposing they bar us out of the apartment house without a message from Bernie—and we don't want to get in touch with him. Or, and it is possible, supposing Bernie should decide *not* to go to New Jersey to-night. Well, there you are.

"The apartment is on the eighth floor. There's no possible way for us to get into it unless we are admitted. Then the thing finally depends on Trout. And there we have a cinch.

"I know all their plans. I've seen the letters between them. Bernie is to see the girl to-night, and that's the last time he'll see her until the morning of the wedding. Bernie will come back late to-night. To-morrow he leaves the apartment for good. Early in the morning he moves all his stuff —and he's only got a trunk and a suit case and a traveling bag—down to Long Branch. Naturally he'll take the roll with him. He's going to sleep in his cottage to-morrow night. Next morning the wedding will be pulled off—the girl and her relatives will get on the job early. But Bernie is going to spend to-morrow night alone in the cottage.

"Now, there's no chance for burglary there. I've looked that over carefully. The cottage sets in the wrong place. Besides, this man Bernie is a bad man to monkey with that way. He's a powerful young fellow, and he's got things to shoot with. The only way we can get his money by burglary is to do it when he isn't there. And he'll be in that cottage. We've got to get to that roll before he goes to bed to-morrow night.

"Unless I get the money for the wire-tapping clean-up or Spook gets it out of the wall safe, there's nothing to do except for Trout to pick his pocket some time during the day at Long Branch. And that will be easy. You see, Trout will meet him there. He will call on him after Bernie gets to the cottage. He will have met him at dinner to-night, and Bernie, to-morrow, will welcome Trout as a companion for the day. But listen, Trout, you'll have to get it before Bernie decides to be alone for the night. I know him. There will be no chance of getting him to drink anything. You'll have to frisk his pocket. You'll simply have to lift that money some time during the day, but you'll have all day to do it in. And you've frisked many a pocket in one day." Montague Beamish leaned back in his chair. "Well, boys," queried he, "what do you think of it?"

"Just let me get to him at Long Branch!" said Trout Standish eagerly.

"Just let me in his joint here when that roll is in that reënforced bird cage!" declared Spook McRaven fervently.

"Good!" cried Montague Beamish. "We've got three strikes at him—and there isn't any chump in the world who can fan this trio out! And no matter which one of us gets the money," he added, as they all shook hands, "it's split three ways."

The dinner that evening went off successfully for one Bernard Proudfoot. It wasn't so successful for his companions, Montague Beamish and Trout Standish. They had all they could eat, and the food was excellent, but that wasn't all there was to the dinner for them. By adroit conversation they learned that the roll was planted in the wall safe of Bernie's apartment, where it would remain until next morning, when Bernie

would take it with him to Long Branch. So there was no chance for Trout Standish to get his nimble fingers on the packet of currency which still hovered sweetly near the captivating figure of fifty thousand dollars.

It didn't take long for the come-on boys to learn that they had absolutely no chance of enticing Bernie into the wire-tapping deal.

"Mr. Beamish," Bernie said, after the subject had been casually broached, "I talked on the telephone this afternoon with Ellabelle"—that was *the* girl—"after she got to her aunt's house, and do you know what she made me promise? Women are funny about them things, but Ellabelle is one girl that's going to have her way. Well, she made me promise that I'd quit gambling. You know, I used to tear around a good bit that way out home, and she knows it. I had to promise her—there wasn't no other way out of it. Why, man, I'd promise Ellabelle anything! So I can't gamble no more."

"But this isn't really gambling," Mr. Beamish suggested mildly. "This is a sure thing to get back some of the money they took away from you in that pool room out in Kansas City."

"Well," Bernie countered resolutely, "Ellabelle wouldn't like it nohow. Women don't know the ins and outs of them things—and she'd call it gambling. I wouldn't feel right—and I'm going to keep my word."

So much for the efforts of Montague Beamish. *Strike one!*

But Montague and Trout were not greatly disturbed. They had two more wallops in their bag of tricks. So they parted from Bernie in right good fellowship, and he raced to his New Jersey train in unsuspecting happiness. His companions made all haste to get back to Montague's room in Brooklyn, where Spook McRaven was awaiting the outcome of the dinner.

"Batter up!" called Beamish cheerfully, when they came in upon Spook stretched out on the bed. "It's your turn, Spook—I've fanned."

Spook aroused himself and gazed sleepily upon his companions. They saw at once that he had sought cheer during the interval.

"Spook," chided Montague, "you've been drinking."

"Oh, I had a couple," he admitted.

"That was the last you took, probably; but you had several others just before that."

"But I'm—I'm all right."

"Well, maybe you are," admitted Beamish, surveying him critically. "We've got plenty of time to *get* you all right, if you're not. Come on, we're going to take a long walk."

Spook wasn't very far gone. He had just a pleasant "bun," and his companions were not dismayed. While Spook was making ready for the street, Montague Beamish picked up a bottle from the dresser, uncorked it, sniffed the contents, and promptly was seized with the suspicion that it was gin. He sipped it. It was gin. He poured it out while Spook looked on painfully.

"I never work with a man who drinks on the job," said Montague curtly, "unless drinking is part of the game."

"I don't blame you, Monte," Spook apologized, "and I've had all I want—until we get the gate receipts of this ball game. And then we'll have some drinks, won't we, old kid?"

Thus amicable relations were restored. From a little satchel he had brought to the room Spook took several articles and knick-knacks which would be called incriminating by the police. He scattered these throughout his pockets. The trio thereupon left the room.

They had ample time. Instinctively, they bent their steps toward the New York side of the river—in that direction lay their fortunes. On the way Montague watched Spook critically. At the Brooklyn end of the bridge he decided that a brisk walk across would certainly sober Spook thoroughly. So they set out. When they were on the high span between the two towering arches the confidence man found himself slightly behind Spook McRaven and Trout Standish. It was then that he noticed a suspicious protuberance of Spook's coat in the vicinity of his pistol pocket.

Somewhat nettled, Montague Beamish, so quickly that there was no restraining him, flipped up Spook's coat tails and whisked out a bottle he saw protruding from the pocket. In another instant the bottle had plumped into the depths of the East River.

"There'll be no booze——"

But there was such a look of despair upon the face of the burglar that Montague checked his words in alarm. Spook tottered feebly to the rail and peered over the transit tracks and the vehicular span. Then his head sunk dismally upon the rail.

"What's the matter, Spook?" chorused his companions.

"It's a good thing," said the burglar huskily, "that that bottle didn't hit the bridge. It sure is lucky that you heaved it clear over into the river."

"Why?" came two agonized queries.

"Because that was the 'soup' I was going to use in puffing Mr. Proudfoot's safe!"

"*Strike two!*" cried Trout Standish.

Followed furious efforts to accumulate another supply of the violent "soup." As Spook explained, it was a great deal harder to buy than gin. They couldn't buy it. The "plants" which Spook knew were dark. And neither could they find a friend who had even so much as a spoonful of the precious fluid. There was no other way for them to get into the wall safe. Spook was an expert "pop-off man," but he knew nothing whatever about the scientific manipulation of combinations. And the safe door, they decided, was too strong for what force they had left.

Thus, next day, the last batter in the line-up—Trout Standish—stepped nonchalantly up to the plate, dug his spikes into the turf, and set himself for a wallop that would send the Proudfoot roll over the fence.

In the Brooklyn room, late that night, the eve of Bernie's wedding, sat Montague Beamish, confidence man, and Spook McRaven, burglar, waiting for the score from Long Branch. Montague had let down the bars on drinking—let them very far down. Both men showed that. Regardless of Trout's success, they felt sure in this room, because no one who might get after them knew of its location. Montague had another room in New York.

"There isn't any doubt of it," asserted the confidence man, "Trout's the keenest 'flicker' in the world—and he'll bring home that roll. He can't fail. He's had all day to work in—and I know how that chump carries his money. He'll wear his Palm Beach suit down there—it's the first Palm Beach he ever had in his life—and he thinks he's a hummer in it. Why, I've seen the coat of that suit bulging a thousand times with that roll! I know just the shape of that inside pocket, and it's plenty big enough for Trout to work in."

"There's nothing to it," agreed Spook, "but waiting for Trout and the roll." And he reached for the bottle.

Trout Standish came in. It was quite late. It was plain to see the result of the ninth inning. It was writ large upon his woe-begone countenance. He made straightway for the bottle, and straightway took two straight drinks.

"What was the matter?" Montague asked finally.

"Matter?" said Trout quietly. "Matter? Why, I'm a pickpocket, am I not?"

"Certainly, you're a pickpocket. Who said you weren't?"

"I'm not a burglar, am I?"

"Certainly you're not a burglar. Who said you were?"

"And you can't expect me to break into a man's bedroom, can you?"

"Certainly not. But weren't you with him in the daytime?"

"And you can't expect me to knock him over and take his money, can you—especially when the man weighs around two hundred pounds?" Trout pressed on, ignoring Montague's question. "I'm not a sap guy, am I?"

"Certainly not—but I thought you'd walk around with him, in the crowds down there."

"I did walk around with him," Trout informed them.

There were a few moments of tense silence. The three men gazed one upon another, without ill feeling but with a great deal of bewilderment on the part of Beamish and McRaven.

"You don't mean to tell me, Trout," Montague asked, smiling, "that you were in the crowds with that chump and couldn't flick his roll?"

"I got there around lunch time," said Trout. Another drink made him more voluble. "He was very cordial. He was tickled to death that he had some one to talk with about his girl and the wedding, and he wouldn't listen to me going away until evening. We had lunch on the porch of his cottage. We had dinner on the porch of his cottage. He ordered everything from a restaurant on the pier. He's a liberal entertainer, and I have an idea that he'd be a bad guy to have fall on you. We had a wonderful time talking about the girl and the wedding. We were outside all day, meandering up and down, and all around—mixing with the crowds on the pier and on the beach. After dinner he let me know, easily but surely, that he'd like to be alone.

He's got an eye on him that made me think he would have his own way. So I came back."

"And you were in the crowds with him?" asked Montague sadly.

"I was in the crowds with him."

"And you didn't get that roll?"

"I'm a pickpocket, am I not?"

"Certainly you're a pickpocket. Who says you're not?"

"Well, do you know what that chump did?"

"What did he do?" chorused the others.

"What did he do?" repeated the pickpocket, tragically serene. "Well, I'll tell you what he did. That chump loafed around that beach all day, ate lunch and ate dinner—and never wore anything but a bathing suit!"

Str-r-r-ike three!

THE VALUE OF PUNCTUATION

THE importance of punctuation, in either manuscript or printed matter, is now recognized more and more as the world grows older, by all who study the subject, as something not to be slighted. Our lawyers can remember serious entanglements in interpreting statutes through the omission or misplacement of a comma, over which litigants differed, until the tangle was finally straightened out by legal experts in a law court. People inclined to be exact in such matters now say that in the Peace Treaty of Versailles, the punctuation should be rigidly correct. They point out that faulty punctuation of certain clauses might make their meaning so obscure that Germany would seize gladly on the circumstance as a pretext for delay and for assuming a different meaning from the one known to be intended.

Telegrams when delivered are not punctuated, but, being emergency messages, receive more careful attention by the receiver than ordinary written or printed communications would. There is an instance, however, still familiar to many people when telegraphing was new, of a dealer in an Eastern State, whose buyer in California sent him a telegram quoting the high prices of certain commodities there and asking if he should buy. He received the following telegram in reply:

No price too high.

The dealer meant the dispatch to be a negative, but the buyer interpreted it in the opposite way and the result was a serious financial loss to his employer.

Meantime, in our schools, the importance of punctuation is more carefully taught than ever before. In earlier days, when punctuation was little thought of, odd results sometimes followed the lack of ~~it~~. Confusing signs are occasionally seen over the doors of shops and public places at present, but in those earlier days such signs were frequently seen, some being unconsciously humorous, while others were purposely deceptive. We were told of two such cases in our young days, the tales of which were handed down from generation to generation, until they might have been regarded as classics. The first was at a private school in a small town, which displayed the following unpunctuated sign:

Freeman and Huggs school teachers Freeman teaches the boys and Huggs the girls.

The second was that of a barber in the same town who displayed the following sign, also unpunctuated, over the door of his shop:

What do you think
I will shave you for nothing and give you a drink

Naturally the barber had a crowd of patrons the first day the sign appeared, who were disgusted after being shaved, no drink being forthcoming, at being required to pay. With one voice they called attention to the sign.

"Oh!" said the barber. "You don't get it right. It reads this way:

"What! Do you think I will shave you for nothing and give you a drink?"

The immediate results of this explanation were never recorded as far as we could ascertain.

Sweeney's Joke

By Raymond J. Brown

Author of "Makin' Book for Clementine," Etc.

Wise as he was in the ways of horses and men, Sweeney fell for this four-legged hoodoo of the race track. He was so utterly ugly in looks and disposition that one doubted his thoroughbred blood

"HUNDRED, fifty-five; hundred, fifty-five!" sang the auctioneer. "Gentlemen, are you all through at one hundred and fifty-five? One hundred and fifty-five dollars *only* bid for this beautiful specimen of horseflesh! It's a shame, gentlemen—a shame! Why, a *truck* horse is worth more than a hundred and fifty-five dollars; and here we offer you a thoroughbred yearlin' colt—finest blood in the land—by Joker out of Leapin' Star——"

"Sixty!" I yelled.

"Ah!" grinned the auctioneer. "Mister Sweeney bids one hundred and sixty! There's a man that knows a horse!"

The crowd howled, and I didn't blame them. You might say as a general principle that any animal that's capable of movin' and breathin' at all is worth a hundred and sixty dollars—but this ganglin', bull-headed, warped bundle of bones! I've seen better lookin' steeds furnishin' the motor power to junk wagons a hundred times!

"Thank *you,* Mister Sweeney!" said the auctioneer with another grin, and the gang laughed again.

"What's the idea, Jerry?" Slim Gerrity asked me.

"Why—why——" I said.

Why I'd let myself get mixed up in the biddin' on that ugly-lookin' colt was beyond me. An attack of temporary insanity, I guess. Old Josiah King, whose string I was trainin', had asked me to drop around to the sale, which was takin' place in the Sheepshead Bay paddock, to see if anything went on the block that was worth addin' to our stable. Nothin' that I thought warranted me spendin' old Josiah's money had shown, although a few of the yearlin's had brought pretty fancy prices.

Then they led in that crook-necked, lop-eared, hollow-backed, loose-hung, mud-colored equine cartoon. Have you ever seen a man so homely that you couldn't take your eyes from him? That's the way that yearlin' affected me. He was so utterly unhandsome that he hypnotized me, and when a lull came in the biddin' somethin' inside me that I had no control over made me yelp out "sixty" and put myself in a position that was highly laughable to all the wise birds in the shed.

"What d'you see in him, Jerry?" persisted Slim.

"Why—oh, blazes!" I barked at him, "ain't you got no eye for a horse?"

If it was anybody else but Slim Gerrity, I think I'd have told him the truth—that I'd made the bid entirely against my will and that I'd regretted so doin' the second the word was out of my mouth. But to admit to that feather-headed, loose-tongued boob that I had done somethin' without reason—I'd as soon have cut off the cigar fingers of my right hand!

"You think that's—a horse!" he gasped.

"A world beater!" I lied, prayin' that somebody would raise my bid and give me a chance to duck out graceful.

"Hundred, sixty; hundred, sixty!" warbled the auctioneer. "All through at a hundred and sixty? Gentlemen!" I thought the auctioneer was goin' to burst into tears as he spoke the word. "This colt should not be sold for a cent less than two thousand dollars!"

"Haw, haw, haw!" laughed the crowd.

"Two thousand at least!" went on the auctioneer with never the trace of a smile. "When a man of Mister Sweeney's judgment thinks enough of this handsome animal to bid one hundred and sixty dollars for——"

"He must have more money than brains!" somebody in the back of the ring finished for him, and the crowd howled again.

"Are you all through, gentlemen? All through? One hundred and sixty bid. At

one hundred and sixty—goin' once; at one hundred and sixty—goin' twice! Last call, gentlemen. One hundred and sixty. Are you all through? *Sold* at one hundred and sixty to Mister Sweeney!" he shouted, bringin' his hammer down suddenly on the table. "Mister Sweeney, I congratulate you!" he said, and I was the only person in the ring, includin' the auctioneer, who didn't laugh.

Makin' the joke even funnier—it was my own money that I'd bid. Old Josiah is as good-natured and kind-hearted a man as ever dug down to help the widows and orphans, but if I spent even as little as one hundred and sixty dollars of his hard-won coin on any such libel on the glorious name of horse as that Joker-Leapin' Star yearlin', two things would have happened—I'd have found myself out of a job and the body of a man, later identified as that of Jerry Sweeney, a trainer of horses, would have been discovered lyin' in a pool of blood in some place adjacent to the King barn.

I paid my money, slipped a halter over the head of my purchase, and personally led the colt to our barn. Like everybody else that's ever been mixed up in the racin' game, I had always been ambitious to have a horse of my own. And now my wish had come true—partly. I owned somethin' that walked on four legs and et oats—but was it a horse? You couldn't prove it by me!

I thought old Josiah was goin' to fire me on suspicion that I was losin' my grip when he caught his first glimpse of the colt.

"For the love of Peter, Jerry!" he exclaimed. "Do you mean to tell me that you *bought* it? Paid *money* for it?"

"Yep. A great bargain," I said.

"You think it's—a horse?"

"Well," I said, pretendin' to examine the colt closely, "it does look somethin' like a horse."

"You think you can make a racer out of that?" he persisted.

"I'm a good trainer," I said.

"I know, but——"

"Listen, boss," I said, "the colt's ugly, but a lot of good ones ain't pretty horses. He's got good blood in him; Joker was the——"

"Joker was livin' up to his name when he sired that!"

"Well, we'll see who the joke's on in the end!" I said shortlike. I was more mad at myself than anything else, but after hintin' to Slim Gerrity that I thought I was pickin' up a likely colt, I wasn't goin' to admit to anybody in the world that I knew I'd drawn a lemon.

"But, Jerry!" The boss pulled at his long chin whisker the way he always does when he's excited. "You're not really intendin' *racin'* this animal? Why, look at his feet; they're——"

"I've made some pretty fair performers out of a lot of yours that didn't promise to be much."

"But to pick a thing like that as a race horse! You must be crazy, Jerry!"

"If I am, you want to remember that you pay me money."

"Listen here, Jerry Sweeney," said the boss, very serious and very severe. "Buyin' this colt is your own doin's. You'll not race him in my colors——"

"I've picked my own colors already," I told him. "Green and blue."

"Mighty appropriate. Green for your judgment, blue for the way you'll feel after you've met his feed bills for a few months. And that's another thing—you'll pay me board for that colt! I ain't goin' to have any hay fiend like that eatin' the feed that belongs to——"

"You're on, boss!" I interrupted. "The colt's mine; I pay the freight."

"I'll have nothin' to do with it whatever."

"Nothin'—absolutely," I agreed. "Except——"

"Except—what?"

"Well, I was just thinkin'," I said, "since the colt's by Joker and since he's goin' to live in your barn, and since your name's King—I was thinkin' 'King's Jester' would be a good name for him."

"No!" screamed the boss. "I'll have nothin' to do with him. If you want to name him after anybody, name him after yourself."

"A grand idea!" I laughed. "Your name, old hoss, is Sweeney's Joke!" I said, pattin' the colt on the neck; then I drew away my hand quickly as my hundred-and-sixty-dollar lemon stretched around his ugly head and snapped at me.

"A fine, sweet-tempered dog!" growled old Josiah. "I wish you luck with him!"

"Thanks," I grinned. "I won't have to have much to get a hundred and sixty dollars' worth out of him!"

I could have bet that Slim Gerrity would

be around to quiz me about the colt, and he was—within two hours.

"Jerry," he said, "I've been talkin' this colt of yours over with the boys——"

"Oh, I knew that!" I broke in.

"How?" he asked.

"How do I know that Sunday's church day?" I asked back.

"There ain't none of us can see why you bought him," Slim continued.

"Do you think I'd have got him for a hundred and sixty bucks if you could?"

"Aw, Jerry! You don't honestly mean to tell me you think——"

"Think I've got a horse?" I interrupted. "You can tell the world I do!"

"Bunk!" he exclaimed. "Nobody can tell me that a colt——"

"Nobody ever was able to tell *you* anything!" I said, sarcastic. "That's why you know so little now!"

"I know that what you bought to-day is just plain dog!" barked Slim, losin' his temper. "He's got 'hound' wrote all over him! He ain't got a point that a racehorse ought to have. He——"

"Some guys are gettin' by as trainers," I said, lookin' at him sharp, "who ain't got a single thing a trainer ought to have! Except nerve!" I added.

"Huh! We'll see how much of a trainer *you* are when you try to make somethin' out of that colt!"

"I knew enough to buy him when I had a chance!"

"Ahr!" growled Slim, sore to his finger tips. "You been pullin' that wise stuff on me long enough! Now's my chance! I'll tell you—put it in writin' if you want to—that that colt of yours will never win a race! You get that—never win a race? He'll die a maiden. What've you got to say to that, Mister Know-it-all?"

"Oh, don't talk foolish!"

"Talk foolish, eh? I'll tell you how foolish I'm talkin'—I'll bet you right now that dog never wins—I'll bet you he never even finishes in the money! That's what I think of your judgment! I been waitin' for a chance to get somethin' like this on you, and—— Tell you what I'll do," he said suddenly, "I won't bet you, but if that colt of yours ever runs in the money—from now to the time he dies—I'll buy you a suit of clothes!"

"Better buy yourself one!" I growled, glarin' at the shabby outfit he was wearin'.

I was mad enough to have walked into that colt's stall and cut his head off! A fine mess I'd got myself into! Between Slim Gerrity and old Josiah—a grand pair of old women when it came to swappin' gossip around!—everybody in the game would know before the day was over that Jerry Sweeney had put himself on record as sayin' that a yearlin' colt which had gone for a hundred and sixty dollars at a public sale was goin' to develop into a real racehorse!

"We'll see who the wise guy is!" grinned Slim, movin' away.

Well, for the rest of that season and durin' the winter and early spring I stole quite a little time that really belonged to old Josiah in teachin'—or tryin' to teach—Sweeney's Joke some of the tricks of the trade. I'm a hard-headed, persistent kind of a feller in some respects with a special aversion to admittin' ever that I'm wrong—especially when I know I am. I made up my mind that, if there was any horse at all in my Joke, I was goin' to bring it out—even if I had to give up my job with old Josiah and starve to death to do it!

I've handled some bad actors in my time, and I've heard of others; but of all the sour-tempered, cantankerous, treacherous, contrary animals that ever stood on a track, the nucleus of my racin' stable win first prize!

Johnny Muldoon, one of our exercise boys, walked on crutches for a month after the colt, with malice and deliberation, dropped one of his big hoofs on the kid's foot one day in his stall. Sam, my nigger helper, to this day can show you scars on his right hand that are souveniers of a little experience he had with the Joke's teeth. A familiar sight at Sheepshead Bay, durin' the early months of the Joke's education, was the colt, wildly pursued by every idle man in the inclosure, rushin' around after dumpin' off some lad that I'd sent out to teach him the elements of behavior at the startin' post.

And there was such wily but contemptible meanness underlyin' all his actions! He'd behave like an angel while Sam and Johnny Muldoon and three or four others and myself would be saddlin' him. He'd let Johnny or some other kid get on his back, and he'd trot out to the track in a frisky but gentlemanly way that would lead us all to wag our heads and think: "Well, to-day's the day; the old boy's made up his mind to behave

himself. He'll be all right after this!" And then, just when the boy who was ridin' him would be ready to send him off for a little exercise canter, the Joke would start buckin' like a Wild West horse, reachin' around with his head and bitin' at the boy's legs or else lyin' down and tryin' to roll over on his rider and crush in a few square inches of the kid's chest.

Oh, it was grand! I didn't know what day the degraded animal was goin' to lay me open to arrest for manslaughter! And to make it more pleasant for all of us, none of his actions tended to show that there was much to be gained by usin' the valuable time of a more or less expert horse trainer and subjectin' little boys to the danger of havin' their promisin' careers brought to an untimely end by reason of their sudden deaths.

If the Joke was just an ordinary colt I'd have cut him adrift before I had him for six months. But each time I considered presentin' him to some prominent drayman to be used for such purposes as his new owner might think him suited to, the thoughts of Slim Gerrity, old Josiah and the other wise birds of the turf rose before me and gave me courage to renew my efforts to make of the Joke somethin' more than a mere destroyer of hay and oats.

Just by way of givin' you a notion of the affection in which even those around my barn regarded the only piece of racin' stock owned by Jeremiah Sweeney, esquire, I'll tell you of a little conversation I had with Sam, my nigger, one day.

"Mist' Sweeneh," said Sam, "dat 'ere ho'se yo'-all owns pus'nal—yo' wouldn' 'zac'ly call um a *kin'ly* an'mal!"

"Guess you're right, Sam," I admitted.

"Ah's he'rd of how ho'ses laik dat c'n be treated."

"That so, Sam?" I asked, hopeful. "How?"

"Yo' takes de ho'se out'n de road—yo' points his haid whichev' direcshum yo' wishes. Den—bang! Yo' claouts de ho'se good'n ha'd wid a whip—an' yo' *kills* de man dat brings um back to yo'!"

But despite the lack of coöperation among my assistants, despite the sarcastic comments of Slim Gerrity, old Josiah, and other wise ginks, I hung onto Sweeney's Joke and worked over him like I never did over a stake horse. And in the openin' event of the openin' day of the spring meetin' at Jamaica, which opened the racin' season at the Metropolitan tracks, the colors of Jerry Sweeney were borne before the public for the first time. The Joke had progressed so far that he was now able to tear off a wild romp of four furlongs in about one-eighteen. You may say that the record wasn't one which should cause me to believe that my colt could earn brackets in the poorest company, to which I shall reply that I was well aware of the fact and was only startin' the Joke out of curiosity.

It was an event for two-year-old maidens. Originally there were thirteen entries, and the Joke—quite appropriately, Slim Gerrity and others thought—was number thirteen on the program. Scratches, however, had cut the field down to eight, and when the eight, with the Joke in the rear, paraded past the grand stand there was a gale of laughter. My colt caused it, of course. I'd say, as a guess, he stood five hands higher than any other one of those eight fillies and colts. His big, fat head drooped over as though his neck wasn't strong enough to support it—which it wasn't. His back curved in like the rind of a slice of watermelon, and little Johnny Muldoon, who was makin' his first appearance as a rider, was squatted down in the hollow lookin' about as prominent as a single passenger on a rubber-neck wagon. The Joke's mud-colored coat and the loose-jointed, flat-footed sprawl of his props added to the general comic effect. I hadn't improved his appearance any by braidin' his mane and tail and tyin' the braids with green ribbon.

There was no question about it—the Joke had what in a man would be called personality. He attracted and held the gaze of every man at the track just as he had drawn my attention that day in the sale ring.

Much rustlin' of programs was heard as the Joke appeared.

"Who's that Number Thirteen?" everybody was askin' everybody else.

"Sweeney's Joke," came the replies.

"Joke is right! Did you ever see such a lookin' plug?"

"He must be some horse!" I heard a guy standin' near me at the rail tell a friend. "It's his first start and his price is a hundred and fifty to one."

"Let's risk a two-spot or so on him," suggested the other.

"Think I'm crazy? I wouldn't bet on a

skate that *looked* like that if the owner himself told me he was goin' to win!"

"The owner ain't sayin' anything," I thought as they cantered to the five-furlong startin' post on the other side of the track.

The Joke had drawn Number 2 for post position, but the starter discovered very quickly that, if he wanted to get the field off before dark, he'd have to make some other arrangements. At the post the Joke did everything but eat the barrier. He kicked and reared and bucked and tried to disable the other horses with his hoofs; he rushed through the barrier, carryin' the webbin' with him; he tried to introduce one of the assistant starters to the weight of his shoes; he leaped about until Johnny Muldoon was hangin' on by an eyelash; he drove the favorite, who was on the inside, next to him, almost through the rail—in short, he behaved in what I knew was a highly characteristic manner until the starter ordered Johnny Muldoon to take him over to the outside.

When the position was changed the Joke got sulky. He turned his tail to the barrier, and everything that Johnny Muldoon and two assistant starters could do failed to turn him around.

"Yah! Take him off!" yelled the crowd. "Go on—start 'em without him!"

The starter bawled himself blue in the face. Johnny Muldoon sawed away at the reins until he was almost exhausted. The other colts and fillies began to prance about impatiently.

I heard a voice behind me.

"The colt only cost a hundred and sixty dollars," it was sayin'. "I'd say Sweeney got quite a bargain!"

It was Slim Gerrity.

"Oh, there you are, Jerry!" he grinned as though he hadn't seen me before. "You have a horse in this race, haven't you?"

"Programs cost ten cents!" I growled.

"I'll bet you another suit of clothes—on the side—that your colt doesn't finish better than—eighth!" he said, after countin' the entries.

"If you want to bet, there's a lot of fellers over there who'll take your money!"

"Sweeney's Joke!" he chuckled. "It's the only thing that's right about the colt—its name!"

"The time to laugh at a joke is when it's over!" I roared at him, just restrainin' myself from rappin' him on the head with my field glasses.

What he said in reply I don't know, for just then the Joke swung around and faced the barrier.

It happened that the rest of the field was pretty well lined up at the time.

"Come on!" yelled the starter, springin' the webbin'.

And they were off—seven of them; all but the Joke, who, with his bony, ingrowin' legs spread far apart, stood there like an equestrian statue.

Johnny Muldoon walloped him with the whip, and dug him with the spurs. If the Joke felt any of the blows and pricks he gave no sign of it. He just anchored himself and gazed down the track after the rest of the field. You'd have said that he'd decided to spend the rest of his life in just that spot.

"A fast breaker, that colt of yours, Jerry!" murmured Slim Gerrity in my ear.

The two assistant starters, havin' got the barrier out of the way, began to assist Johnny with their dog whips. No animal but an army mule—or my Joke—could have stood the wallopin' that colt took without goin' wild! Even those who had made heavy bets were neglectin' the race to watch the more interestin' contest that was bein' staged at the startin' post. And then suddenly, when it began to look like the Joke intended clutterin' up the track for the rest of the afternoon, he suddenly turned around and quietly trotted back toward the paddock.

"Well, well, well!" laughed Slim. "He knows the shortest way home, all right! That's a good sign in a racehorse."

This got a big laugh from the railbirds. I didn't stop to bandy any more persiflage with Slim. As I hustled over to the paddock gate I was debatin' with myself whether I ought to follow nigger Sam's advice regardin' the Joke, or just be satisfied with sinkin' an ax in the colt's skull.

Except for the champions in the various divisions, I think the Joke was the best-known performer on the turf that season. Between Jamaica and the closin' meet in Maryland, I started him fourteen times in all. On eight of those occasions he practically repeated his performance of that first day in Jamaica—refusin' absolutely to break from the barrier and trottin' carelessly back to the paddock after the other horses were

on their way. The other six times Johnny Muldoon got him off, but he might just as well have been left at the post for all the good he did! Once I and the other people who had been observin' the Joke's weird career with interest almost got heart failure when the colt broke in front and for two furlongs of a five-furlong dash threatened to tow-rope the field. But we might have spared ourselves our excitement, for the third furlong saw him neatly fold up his legs and finish the race in a canter, at least a sixteenth of a mile behind the leaders.

And a sixteenth of a mile was close for him! Usually he was beaten from one to three furlongs in a race of that distance.

Besides turnin' me from a stout but pleasant guy of nearly middle age into a sharp-tongued, raw-nerved grouch, the exploits of my long-legged colt were threatenin' to lose me some of my best friends. Jack Maher, the starter, a real chum for fifteen years, refused to speak to me after his first few experiences with the Joke at the barrier. Owners and trainers that I could always borrow money from began to pass me by without a nod after the Joke's antics at the post had interfered seriously with the chances of horses from their stables.

Old Josiah, who had picked me up when there was no excuse for me seekin' a berth as a trainer except that I'd grown too fat to ride and had always been like a father to me, began to treat me coldly and suspiciously.

Slim Gerrity and his gang of comedians did everything they could to make my life miserable, but before I'd go to Slim and acknowledge that even the hasty words I'd spoken at that horse sale were a mistake, I was willin' to be beggared, friendless, and barred from the turf. So I kept on, startin' my Joke in every spot where it looked like even a miracle would give him a chance, insistin' always that the colt had it in him and that it was only a matter of time and trainin' when he'd show somethin' that would make them all go down on their knees to Jerry Sweeney and beg his pardon for the doubts they'd cast on his judgment.

As a three-year-old the colt showed a startlin' improvement. Don't get excited; I'm not goin' to tell you he won any races for me, but in two starts out of sixteen he managed to finish better than last. In fact, on one of these occasions he beat two horses and on the other three.

These two performances, while not exactly makin' turf history, at least give me a come-back for Slim Gerrity the next time he come around to kid me.

"Well, Jerry," he greeted me, "I suppose you're all ready to get measured for that suit?"

"You'll be buyin' that suit sooner than you expect!"

"Bunk! The fact that this beetle of yours beat a couple of——"

"Shows that he can beat some more!" I broke in.

"Ha, ha! Why, anybody but a pig-headed fool like you would have thrown that skate overboard a year ago."

"You mean anybody that didn't know enough to recognize a horse when he saw one, don't you?"

"Aw, you can't kid me! You're hangin' onto that dog because you won't admit you're wrong. Ain't that so?"

"I'm hangin' onto him because I think he'll make good!"

"If he does, I'll add an overcoat to that suit!"

"Wait," I told him, "and see who gets the last laugh!"

The Joke's career as a four-year-old was merely a matter of history repeatin' itself. The only people who got any joy out of his appearances on the track was the general public. His antics at the barrier, the lazy way he'd lope after a field that was a couple of furlongs in advance of him comin' into the stretch, his awkward, ugly shape—these were always good for hearty laughter from everybody who wasn't afraid of him upsettin' the chances of some horse they'd bet on. The complete story of his third season on the track need not be told, but in somewhat the form of statistics it would run about like this:

Starts, sixteen; left at post, ten; last, four; next to last, two.

In other words, in sixteen starts he beat two horses, both of whom were left at the post and never did get off!

And I don't mind tellin' you that supportin' a racin' stable of even one horse runs into money! Especially does it when the horse doesn't so much as give you a whack at third money occasionally. Old Josiah was payin' me a good salary, and I was doin' pretty good bettin', or I'd never been able to stand the strain of keepin' the Joke on the turf. Feed bills, jockey fees,

entrance money, shippin' expenses—they eat up money, I'll say!

At the beginnin' of his five-year-old season the Joke, after his modest initial cost of one hundred and sixty bucks, stood me several thousand dollars—well, maybe four. I had reached the point where I was wonderin' if maybe I couldn't get some of this money back. The fact that I did entertain any such fool thought probably indicates the wanderin' state of mind into which my relations with the Joke had brought me. It takes a pretty fair horse to win four thousand dollars in cheap races of the kind that I could enter the Joke.

To add to my troubles old Josiah insisted on havin' an understandin' with me one day.

"Jerry," he said, "you're makin' a laughin'stock out of yourself—and me."

"How?" I asked him.

"With that fool horse of yours."

"I don't see how he affects you."

"You're my trainer," he said. "People can't have much respect for a stable that employs a trainer who acts the way you do."

"Boss," I asked him, "are you winnin' as many races as you used to?"

"I guess I am," he admitted.

"Have the earnin's of your stable dropped any?"

"I don't know as they have, but——"

"Well," I said, "that's the answer! I'm doin' pretty good by you; what I do with my colt is neither here nor there. As long as I deliver the goods to you, I don't see how it's any of your business——"

"The colt's bein' stabled in my barn," he interrupted.

"And you're bein' paid for it," I reminded him. "Any time you——"

"I know what you're goin' to say!" he broke in. "Any time I think I can get a better trainer than you, I'm to do it. Well, that's the point exactly. I'm gettin' tired of your fool actions with that horse of yours. Your contract with me runs out this year. I won't renew it—unless——"

"Oh, boss, have a heart!"

"No; I'm an old man. I've got my pile; I needn't worry any more. I'm sick and tired of havin' that fool horse of yours reflect on me. Jerry, why don't you get rid of it? You certainly can't expect that you're goin' to make anything out of him *now!* Why, he's five years old, and still a maiden. A shrewd trainer like you certainly ought to——"

"Boss," I said, breakin' in, "I'll tell you the truth. I've known all along that the Joke's a dog. He's probably the worst piece of racin' machinery that ever worried a starter. I'm hangin' onto him for two reasons. One is that I can't get rid of him—even by givin' him away. The other is that a lot of smart Alecks around here—you included—have been laughin' at me for three years. I'd like to turn the laugh the other way before I quit!"

"You're insane on the one subject of that horse!"

"Can't help it," I said. "I got an idea that a good trainer can make the worst horse in the world win. Some day I——"

"Jerry," the boss interrupted, "I'll give you this season. Do whatever you like with your horse until your contract runs out. Then it's either a case of me or the horse. And I'll tell you what—to give you an idea of what *I* think of your Joke, if you win with him before the end of the season, I'll tag two thousand extra a year on your new contract!"

Generous? Not a bit of it! The old guy felt as safe in makin' that offer as he would in bettin' me I couldn't swim the Atlantic.

But, anyhow, no matter what was in old Josiah's mind when he spoke about the new contract, that two thou extra a year was worth goin' after—and I went after it! If there was anything ever done to make a horse win—outside of fillin' it with hop—it was done to my Joke before that next season was fairly cracked. I hired the best jockeys to ride him. I was with him early and late. I nursed him, petted him, beat him, swore at him, had fast horses tow him around the track by ropes; did everything that I or anybody around my stable thought of or suggested. And he remained the same old Joke!

Johnny Griggs, the best jockey in the country, finally did manage to break all records by bringin' my splay-footed demon in seventh out of a field of twelve in a six-furlong event at Aqueduct. When I saw the blue and green pass under the wire with only six other colors in front of it, I felt like buyin' wine for the whole track!

"I ought to get about five hundred bucks for that ride!" Johnny told me after the race. "Oh, what a *hound* that horse of yours is! I'm all wore out! He's the only

horse I ever rode that wouldn't help himself a *little!*"

And I guess Johnny was tellin' the truth at that, for he got sick and dizzy almost immediately after and had to cancel his engagements for the rest of the afternoon.

But that performance was only a flash in the pan! In his next start, and his next, and his next and so on Sweeney's Joke went back to his old familiar position of last.

Slim Gerrity's loose tongue was waggin' in my ears morn, noon, and night.

"Almost time that horse of yours showed somethin', ain't it?" he asked me one day. "Let's see; he's two, three, four—five years old! Five years old, and he hasn't won his owner a suit of clothes yet! Tough, that is, Jerry! I remember you tellin' me you thought you had a world-beater the day you bought him. You must feel awful disappointed, old-timer!"

"I ain't the one he's goin' to disappoint," I said to him. "It's the croakers that have been knockin' him for——"

"Dear, dear!" grinned Slim. "You're not so cocky as you used to be about him. But after waitin' three full seasons and a part of another, I don't know as I blame you."

"He'll surprise you all yet;" was the best answer I could give him.

"Too bad you don't think enough of your horse to bet on him!" laughed Slim. "You'd pick up a tidy little——"

"Say, you!" I blurted out, losin' my temper at last. "Right now I'll bet you any part of a thousand dollars that my horse wins a race in the next two weeks!"

"Aw, Jerry, I'm not after your money. Remember we're old friends, and——"

"Any part of a thousand!" I repeated, shovin' my face over within an inch of his. "Put up, or shut up!"

"Oh, if that's the way it is!"

Slim dug down in his pocket and took out a roll.

"A thousand—even," he said, "but remember, Jerry, old boy, it's your own doin's. I didn't want to make the bet; you forced it on me."

"The bet's on!" I roared at him. I was mad enough at myself to have cut my throat. As if I wasn't in bad enough already, here I had to hurl a thousand dollars of my good money at Slim Gerrity! I walked away. cursin' Slim, cursin' myself but mostly cursin' that droop-necked, lead-footed animal, Sweeney's Joke.

For the next week I stormed around the barn like a wild man. We were up at Saratoga at the time. Old Josiah's pickin's durin' the season there had always been very juicy, but that week everything went wrong. A horse named Crystal, that we'd been savin' up for a killin', went lame on us the mornin' of the race we had primed him for. Our best two-year-old started coughin', and we had to throw him out of trainin'. In five successive races horses belongin' to old Josiah took part in blanket finishes only to be nosed out of the money, and Josiah and I and the rest of our stable connections were down on each one of them for a gob. Celebrity, the best horse we had, run away while paradin' to the post for a stake race, made three circuits of the track before Johnny Muldoon, who was now ridin' Josiah's horses regular, could pull him up, and, when the race came, followed the pace for seven furlongs and then blew up. Things like that happened one after the other, and I was so busy with more important things that I had forgotten all about that fool bet I'd made with Slim Gerrity until one night he met me on Broadway and reminded me of it.

"Only four days more, Jerry," he said with a wink.

"Have your thousand ready," I told him. "I'll be around to collect it."

"Oh, I've got mine, all right!" he laughed. "I don't think there's many thousands lyin' around *your* barn, though!"

"There'll be plenty to pay all *you'll* ever win!" I told him.

"I hope so," he said. "I like to be paid."

Well, two days later, I dropped the Joke into a sellin' race. He never left the post.

"Do I get my thousand now—or are you goin' to try again?" Slim asked me after the race."

"You can be sure you won't get yours until the last minute!" I told him.

And two days from then, the last day of the two weeks that I'd set in the insane bet with Slim, I saddled Sweeney's Joke for the fifth race of the day's card and hoisted Johnny Muldoon onto his back.

"Johnny," I said, "maybe you can't imagine that any start this cursed bag of bones makes could be important, but this one is. All I can tell you, son, is—do the best you can!"

"You know me!" said the kid, grinnin'.

Once or twice in the four years that I'd been racin' the Joke—or, rather, lettin' him go on the track where other horses were racin'—I'd felt somethin' like a hope that he might land in the money. Not this day, though! The dog was in one of his sulkiest moods. Only that mornin' he had tried to bite me, and had rolled over on the nigger boy who'd taken him out for a gallop.

"Can't a man make a fool of himself, though!" I was reflectin' as I seen Johnny take the Joke into his place in line. "Here I hang on to this useless skate for four years, just because I was too obstinate to let Slim Gerrity know I was wrong, and now Slim knows it, anyhow—and knows I knew it all the time!"

I strolled over to the rail to look at the race. Somehow I felt calm. After the race I'd owe Slim Gerrity a thousand bucks, but shucks! I had the thousand, and, when I'd paid it over, everything would be cleared up. Sweeney's Joke need never bother me again. Old Josiah would be satisfied; everything would be rosy!

A roar came from the stands. A cloud of dust rose about the six-furlong pole as the horses rushed away. They were off! Through force of habit I turned my glasses on the place where the barrier had been sprung. No; there was no horse there! Sweeney's Joke had got away with the rest of them!

Quickly I swung my glasses about to cover the horses, now dashin' through the backstretch. They seemed well bunched. I studied the tail-enders one after the other without pickin' up anything that looked like my colors. And then, as I swung my glasses to the van, I nearly fainted! Out in front—a good two lengths in front—and only gallopin' was Sweeney's Joke.

Sweeney's Joke runnin' like a race horse! I couldn't believe it! I fixed my glasses on the leadin' horse again. It was him; no other! Stridin' along in his clumsy, flat-footed, poundin' way—but outfootin' the rest of that field as though they were tied!

"Joke! Joke!" I yelled. "Come on, you Joke! Come on, Joke! Johnny! Johnny!" I screeched. "Let him out Let 'em see we've really got a race horse! Oh, you five-year-old lemon baby!" I roared. "You ugly, bad-tempered hound! Run! Show 'em; all these wise birds!"

Roundin' the turn into the stretch, the Joke picked up at least two more lengths on the others. As Johnny Muldoon straightened him, the five-year-old maiden that carried my colors was five lengths in front, runnin' as easy as an eight-day clock, just eatin' up the track; goin' farther away in every stride! A miracle? No, I guess not—just the dog's natural meanness croppin' out, makin' him do the thing he'd been coaxed to do for four years now at the most unexpected time!

The riders of the other horses, who hadn't paid much attention to the Joke's first burst of speed, started to whip. Up the trailers crept on the Joke. Johnny Muldoon looked around, and let out a wrap. The Joke bounded forward as though a locomotive had bumped him from behind. Nothin' to it! Nothin' to it at all! A furlong from home Johnny Muldoon might have jumped from the saddle and led his horse under the wire in a walk—for all the chance the rest had of catchin' him! The Joke win—laughin'!

As he shimmied under the wire I turned around and saw a fat feller in a wrinkled blue suit, perspiration streamin' down his face, which was as white as though he'd just seen the Grim Reaper reachin' out to slash him with his sickle—Slim Gerrity! I was over to his side in a second.

"Well, you pot-bellied, fat-headed wise guy!" I cried, fetchin' him a crack on the shoulder. "What've you got to say *now?*"

He opened his mouth, but words refused to come.

"Who gets the last laugh?" I demanded. "On who was Sweeney's joke? I was bluffin', eh? I was just hangin' on to my horse because I was too pig-headed to admit I was wrong? You'd buy me suits of clothes if he ever finished in the money, eh? You'd tease me into makin' thousand-dollar bets with you, eh? What's the wise guy got to say *now?*"

His answer was—nothin'! He just reached his hand into his pocket, and pulled out a roll of bills that was as big as his fat fist. With tremblin' fingers—oh, Slim just hates money, and loves to pay it out!—he started to count off some big bills from the top, and, as he did, I was seized from behind by a pair of strong arms, whirled nearly off my feet, and I heard a voice roarin' in my ears. There was another maniac at the track that day besides myself! It was a young feller in a gray suit, his face red from excitement, his collar wilted, his necktie

some place at the back of his neck, his panama hat shapeless and hangin' over an ear, his hair droopin' over his eyes.

"Mister Sweeney!" he was yellin'. "Mister Sweeney! He won! *My* horse won! And I had five hundred dollars on him—at a hundred to one!"

Slim stopped countin' money.

"Hah!" he exclaimed. "What's that you're sayin'? What's that about your horse?"

I suddenly felt somethin' sinkin' down near my belt buckle.

"By gum!" I breathed. "By gum!"

"What's the matter with you?" asked Slim. "A second ago you was yellin' like a wild man; now you're——"

"Slim!" I gasped. "Our bet—what was it?"

"Ahr, you know!" he growled. "That your horse would——"

"*My* horse!" I groaned. "You're sure it was *my* horse? It wasn't just Sweeney's Joke, was it, Slim?"

"The name was never mentioned," said Slim.

"Holy smoke!" I moaned. "Slim," I said then, "put your money back in your pocket."

"Hah! What!"

"You don't owe me a cent," I said. "*My* horse didn't win." I pointed to the young feller who was standin' beside us. "*His* did!" I said. "Sweeney's Joke—I sold it to him at two o'clock to-day! For a hundred dollars, and I thought I was gettin' the best of the bargain! I don't get your thousand," I said. "I don't get the purse for the last race. I don't even know whether I get a suit of clothes from you. But," I grinned, "if somebody will tell me on who Sweeney's joke is—I'll buy him a dinner!"

Brown is a steady producer. We have more of his stories on hand ready for POPULAR use.

NEW USES FOR THE X RAY

A NEW field it is believed is opened for the use of the X ray, starting in a very busy and populous American city, where arrangements were recently made by its chief inspector of police and the bomb squad of its police department with the United States bureau of mines, by which all objects suspected of being bombs or of containing bombs, will in future be X-rayed. In accordance with this plan a person who receives anything looking like a bomb or a package which he or she suspects contains a bomb must notify the police. The package or supposed bomb will then be taken to a special room at police headquarters for an X-ray observation. The officials whose function is to run down bomb outrages say they believe the new plan will be invaluable in obtaining clews to senders of bombs and if the results, as a rule, show their suspicions to have been justified the police departments of other cities are expected to follow it.

Plans for the utilizing of the X ray in other fields are also under consideration in some cities. From far-off British India the news recently came of the use of an X-ray picture there of the bony structure of a young man in a law court as part of the evidence to show whether or not he had reached the age it had been testified he had reached.

Hop Carter's Luck

By J. E. Grinstead

Author of "Hutch Takes Up a Collection," Etc.

If you have luck like his, you hardly need anything else to get on with in the world

JES' bring him in here and put him on the lounge bed," said Mrs. Erskine, as two larger boys supported her ten-year-old nephew through the door of her humble home, while three little girls with pale, scared faces, stood on the porch and watched them in awe.

"Wha's matter with him?" the lady demanded, when the lad was laid out, as he supposed, to die. His face was pale and distorted with pain.

"Why he—why he—we was playin' on Doc Marche's new fallin' gate, an' he—an' he—the gate was about to fall on Weedy, an' he stuck his foot in it to stop it, an' then——"

"Wiggle yo' toes!" commanded Mrs. Erskine to the wounded lad.

The boy, accustomed to obeying the sharp commands of his aunt with reasonable alacrity, put the last atom of strength and resolution he possessed into the effort, and wiggled his dirty, sunburned toes.

"Ain't no bones broken," commented that lady. "I jes' declare to goodness you are the luckiest brat that ever did live, I know. You whole fambly, but you, died with yaller janders, an' you never had a touch of it. Now, you might have had yo' hoof smashed bodaciously off, and they ain't ary bone broke. Just squashed."

The other children had crept into the room, and were listening to the tirade in silence. Mrs. Erskine suddenly raised her voice to a menacing pitch, and continued:

"If I ketch you about that new-fangled gate again I'll skin you alive. Some folks is so uppity that they got to have such things, but you don't have to be fool enough to get ketched in ther man traps—er boy traps. Draw bars is good enough for pore folks. Somebody'll be kilt with that dratted gate yit."

"Weedy," a tearful miss of seven, who had been the innocent cause of the maiming, and who had thought it fun to run under the "drappin' gate" as it came down, would doubtless have sustained a broken neck but for the boy's foot being recklessly thrust into the aperture at the back of the descending gate.

The girl bravely essayed to defend the gallant lad, but sobs were choking her voice. Just as she was able to produce the first sound from her tightened throat, Mrs. Erskine turned suddenly and said: "Git out of here, now, and keep away from that fool gate!"

The children fled incontinently. As the austere lady stalked to the kitchen for a pan of warm water and the liniment bottle, she muttered: "A passle of brats is more trouble than they are worth."

Just where the good woman secured this valuable information was a mystery. She had never had any children of her own, she had been burdened with this nephew but a few weeks, and her neighbors' children held her in such dread that they passed her cottage on the other side of the village street.

The little Missouri village where this tragedy occurred was twelve miles from the nearest railroad. Mr. Erskine carried the daily mail in a cart, with a lean, lank, deliberate horse, of his own build and disposition, attached thereto. Mrs. Erskine's violent temper did not disturb her husband's equanimity, and nothing short of an earthquake could have changed the gait of Old Seelum.

When Mr. Erskine came in and saw the boy on the "lounge bed," he calmly inquired the cause.

"Stuck his huff in the gate, like a fool, to keep that uppity Marche brat from gettin' her neck broke," and then Mrs. Erskine went on to give her own version of the catastrophe, anathematizing folks that had "drappin' gates and sich."

"W-e-l-l," drawled Mr. Erskine, " 'cordin' to yo' state*ment* his luck's still holdin'. I don't see much use in Doc Marche havin'

that gate. His domain consists of fo' acres of flint rocks an' dawgfennel. Nothin' but a buckeyed cow would be fool enough to want to get into it. Anyway, the fence is all down on the back side."

"Guess that stuck up wife of hisn made him put up a gate on the front side for a showin' as a fancy enterin' to Marchemont."

"Don't get spiteful, Em. If Mis' Marche wants to think that little old flint hill is a mounting, an' that fo'-room frame shack is a castell, let her do it. She don't hinder us none."

Two days later Mrs. Erskine, on the back porch where the boy couldn't hear her, unburdened her mind to her husband.

"Doc Marche heard about that brat mashin' his huff, and he stopped in here to-day to see him. Of all the borned fools that ever did live, I reck'n he's the limit. 'Course the foot was swole, an' plumb shiny —an' hurtin' some, I reck'n. He looked at it, shuck his head, and what—do—you—reck'n—he—said?"

" 'Lowed it'd have to be ampytated, I reck'n," said Mr. Erskine placidly.

"No!" snorted Mrs. Erskine. "Said it was swole so he couldn't tell, but when the swellin' went out some more he would examine it again. 'Lowed they might be a fraction in it! The idy of a fraction in a boy's foot. Hit ain't ary'rithmetic! Ef Doc Marche comes about here again I'll set the dawgs on him. I wouldn't have him to doctor my—my—busted coffee mill!"

Whether the kindly, absent-minded Doctor Marche was right or wrong, the boy's foot stayed "swole." The accident occurred in mid-August, and he was still lame when time came for school to begin. A home-made crutch was prepared for him, and he was sent to the schoolhouse, half a mile away. By the second day his arm was sore, and he left the crutch and hopped home on his left foot. The next morning the children welcomed him at the schoolhouse with the cry, "Here comes the hopper."

A few more days, and some one said, "Here comes old "Hop" Carter." Whatever he may have been christened, this name stuck, and he became Hop Carter to all and sundry.

Hop's luck continued to hold good. The foot recovered to a degree, but remained tender, and when in a hurry he always hopped. The years passed, and Hop continued to limp. He got a job in vacation harrowing for a farmer, because he was not much good at walking, and could ride one of the mules. The team became playful and ran away, managing to drag the harrow over Hop. The teeth of the implement made several ghastly incisions in Hop's scalp, but failed in some mysterious manner to break through the cranial crust.

When Doctor Marche had finished sewing him up, and had made an entry in his note book to order more surgical thread, Mrs. Erskine, who stood near, exclaimed:

"Well, of all the luck I ever seen in my borned days, this caps it! Anybody else would have been tore to rags, and they brains gouged out—if they had any. Thet brat'll be hung or drownded. He couldn't be kilt no other way."

Time passes more slowly in an obscure Missouri village than anywhere else on earth, unless it be the spot where General Joshua had that singular experience with the sun, but still it manages to pass. Hop grew to be eighteen years old, and had so many narrow escapes, commented on by Mrs. Erskine, that "Hop Carter's luck" became a synonym for dodging the Grim Reaper.

Weedy Marche was now fifteen, and the two walked home from school together every evening. The "fraction" had never disappeared entirely, and when Hop was in a hurry he still reverted to type, and emulated his ancestors of the time when man in his evolution was a frog.

Upon a day Weedy, in a playful vein, and having reached the age when old-maid school-teachers were an abomination in her sight, played a rather reprehensible trick on the lady who presided over the mental destinies of the village. No one knew of it but Hop and Weedy—and the teacher. She learned of it in a startling manner. In fact, she found it in her chair, and knew at once that it was a tack.

The teacher put the school on their honor, and called for the culprit, dead or alive. Weedy hung her head with scarlet face, and the teacher was astounded to see Hop rise and assume responsibility for the crime. Hop was the best boy in the village. He was a close student, and always knew his lessons, though he could never recite them because he was horribly tongue-tied. The teacher was convinced that Hop was probably, at that instant, beginning a career of

crime by deliberately lying. But what could she do? She kept him a few minutes after school, but what the punishment was, none ever knew.

Late for his chores, Hop was hurrying home in his usual mode of rapid transit. Half a mile was a considerable hop, and he always stopped halfway and leaned against the old "ellum" tree for a breathing spell. On this occasion, when he reached the tree and leaned panting against it, Weedy came around from the other side.

"Did she hurt you much, Hop?"

"Noh munch," replied Hop.

"Oh, I just love you for that, Hop!" And without more ado she threw her arms around his neck and kissed him smack on the mouth.

While it was a surprise, Hop took it as a matter of course. Weedy was his girl, had been all the time. Now, she had kissed him, and told him she loved him, so the matter was settled.

Hop knew the traditions of the village. He knew the goal for men and maidens was marriage, and a home. He also knew that girls became old maids at twenty, and it behooved him to get busy. A man who had whiskers starting on his face, and who had been kissed by his sweetheart, clearly had no further business in school. So he quit, got a job, and began preparing for the inevitable.

Now, but for the mutations of time and the instability of all laws governing human affairs, this narrative should stop here, but —O Tempora! O Mores!

II.

That there was a strong dash of thoroughbred, and a little sleeping devil, under the coat of the docile and obedient Hop Carter, no one ever suspected. Least of any, Hop himself.

He was approaching nineteen when he quit school. Just about then, time began to mutate in an unusual manner. Doctor Marche grew weary of his burdens. For years he had labored to sustain the weight of making a many-turreted castle of the little frame house, and a lordly domain of the four acres of dogfennel and flint rocks. In early spring he lay down to rest, and a few days later they buried him.

The widow Marche discovered that the good doctor had induced many life-insurance companies to take a chance, and found herself possessed of a considerable fortune. It is useless to describe Mrs. Marche further than to say that she had always looked carefully over her husband's signature, to make sure that the final "e" was conspicuous. That, combined with the fact that she had named her daughter and only child "Ouida Valliere," and insisted upon calling her humble home "Marchemont," should be enough.

There were immediate changes at Marchemont. A stone wall was built on the front side of the property, and an iron gate supplanted the old "drappin' gate." The house was enlarged and painted, and one turret was built. True, it looked like an overgrown martin box, but it was a turret. When autumn came Weedy was sent away to school. When she returned for her first vacation she was not greatly changed, and there was no perceptible break in her relations with Hop.

When another year rolled around—funny how years roll that way, and some of them roll so much farther than others—when another year passed, she was a changed woman. Her attitude toward Hop was coolly formal, and gave that young man pause—a dash, in fact.

He mulled the matter over in his own mind. He took stock of himself, but could see nothing wrong. His clothes were as good as those worn by other young men of the village, and aside from the fact that he was tongue-tied, had a wen the size of a walnut over his left eye, which gave him a look of constant surprise and alarm on that side, and wore boots two sizes large on account of the "fraction," he was unable to see that he failed to make as good a showing as any. He was now twenty-one years old, and had come into a patrimony of three hundred dollars. He owed no man, was physically fit, and was good to look at, excepting always certain minor afflictions, and a disposition to hop, when he was in a hurry. Then Hop remembered how he came to have the "fraction," and the little devil aforementioned stirred slightly.

Hop had seen Weedy go to the post office, so he decided to meet her at the big ellum, and find out a few things. When he stepped out from behind the tree the young lady said:

"Oh, I beg your pardon!"

"You ain't done nothin' partic'lar, I

reck'n," said Hop. "I jes' wanted to ask you somp'n, an' 'lowed 'iss would be a good plathe."

"Indeed! And pray what is the important matter?"

"Well, you recollect one time you put yo' arms around my neck and kithed me, and told me you loved me, right here agin' thith old ellum tree. Since you come back thith time you kinder seem like you forgot about it, and——"

"How absurd! Of course I haven't forgotten that childish nonsense! You can't have been thinking of that all these years!"

In view of the fact that it had been only two years, Hop's memory was not really a marvel, and he said: "Yeth, I been 'hinkin' about it ri' smarth, but now——"

"How ridiculous! I liked you then, and I still like you, but not in that way. Besides that——" if Miss Marche had stopped there, she would have done well enough, but she didn't. "Mamma is preparing me for a different station in life, and—and——" She was talking to the elm tree. Hop Carter was gone, and the little devil in him was fully awake.

The young lady walked on up the flint hill to Marchemont. She was puzzled. Hop had always been as docile to do her bidding as a well-trained collie. He was changed.

III.

There was agitation in the village the next few days. Hop Carter was seen smoking "seegars" openly and unafraid, and more than one reputable citizen testified to having heard him say "thammit."

When the young man reached this depth of depravity he disappeared from the village, and his old haunts of vice knew him no more. None knew where he had gone, but the most reckless character in the community declared Hop had told him he was going West, which was in itself prima-facie evidence of criminal intent.

Tempus fugits, and time mutates, in a very leisurely manner during the early years of human life, but after the first vote she begins to hum. Circumstances took off the brake and soaped the runway for Hop Carter, right there at the old ellum tree, and he started out to make Gallio look like a has-been, using such unorthodox expressions as "damn the difference," "hell's the use," and the like.

On an evening two passenger trains were romping blithely along through the Missouri River valley, on the same track. It was a peaceful scene. The stars came out and winked at one another. The crescent moon, just sinking over the timber on the bluff, seemed saying, "good-by, fellows, I'll be back to-morrow night." The train that was going west came careering out of a gorge, and into the valley. The two locomotives reared up as if some one had pulled too hard against the curb, and two passenger trains buckled up and rolled down the embankment.

A doctor and a man with a lantern were searching the ruins some hours later, when they came upon a man whose right foot was pinioned to the earth with wreckage, while across his body lay part of a vestibule that had caught in such a manner that it held, but did not crush him. A little later the injured man was removed, and made more comfortable on the grass of the right-of-way. The light from the lantern fell on his pale face. He was unconscious, but the doctor stated that he appeared to have sustained no serious injury except a crushed foot.

"Danged, if that ain't what I call luck," said the brakeman. "If that vestibule hadn't caught on a brake beam it would cut him half in two."

At the word "luck" the wounded man stirred, and murmured: "Gimme a drink, Aunth Em."

"B'longs to a choir somewhere, I reck'n. He's talkin' about anthems," said the brakeman.

Hop Carter's luck was still holding. He fainted again from the pain, and the railroad surgeon mercifully gave him a shot in the arm that eased his suffering for the time.

When Hop came back to a knowledge of earthly matters he was lying on a clean, white bed, and his foot, the one with the "fraction" in it, was burning and hurting like the very devil, and there was a dry and unwholesome taste in his mouth. A woman in white cap and apron stood by his bed. She was the most remarkable woman that Hop had seen up to that time. Not so much in appearance as in performance. She would back away from the bed until she was a speck in the distance, then suddenly jump forward until she towered over him like a mountain.

Hop had never seen persons and objects

disporting themselves on ether waves before, and he watched the performance with growing interest. Finally the woman, almost out of sight, made a jump for his bed. He dodged, but she landed safely by his side, and stayed. She was holding him to keep him from climbing the head of the bed, and saying: "There now. You are all right. You are the luckiest boy in the world."

"Gimme a drink, Aunt Em," he murmured, and when the nurse had given him some water he sank into a sound slumber.

When Hop woke again he was hungry, and he made it known in no uncertain terms. When he had eaten all the nurse would let him have, he felt much better, and made some inquiries. He wanted to know where he was, and what he was doing there. He also wanted to know why his head was bandaged.

The nurse told him he was in a railroad hospital. Further than that she could tell him little. He had been brought there from somewhere, with a badly mashed foot. How bad it was she didn't know, because it was in a plaster cast, and supposed to be "healing by first intention." His head was bandaged because there was a slight wound over his left eye. And, he had better not talk any more, as it might cause temperature.

"Well, maybe you can tell me what makes my mouth so sore. I used to be tongue-tied——" Hop stopped and stared at the nurse. "That's funny. I used to say thung-thied."

The poor nurse had no means of knowing that the young lady whose duty it was to sterilize the array of nut-crackers, ice picks, shears, and pincers in the surgery had a mania for snipping things. She didn't know that when this operating nurse went to put the clamp on Hop's tongue, to keep him from swallowing it while he was under ether, that she found it tied down to the tip. Nor did she know that the operating nurse thought the clamp an essential part of the operation, and when the surgeon's back was turned grabbed a pair of snippers and cut the membrane.

Since knowing nothing seemed to be the chief attraction of his nurse, Hop gave up in disgust, with the mental comment that for a woman as physically active as she was when he first noticed her, she knew remarkably little.

The next day, Hop had a very pleasant, affable caller. He was a dapper little man, wearing a stubby gray mustache and tailor-made clothes. He took a seat by the side of the bed, and said:

"How are you this morning?"

"Feeling pretty good, only hungry," said Hop.

"Fine! That's a good sign. You are doing splendidly, Mr.—— I didn't get your name."

"Carter, Hop Carter."

"Just so, Mr. Carter. Where is your home?"

"Ain't got any."

"Where do your relatives live?"

"Ain't got any."

"Your friends?"

"Ain't got any."

"Indeed! That is truly remarkable. You know, of course, that you were hurt in a wreck on our road."

Hop remembered standing in the vestibule of the moving train. There was a considerable hiatus between that and the acrobatic performance of the nurse, that needed some bridge work.

The visitor explained as much as he thought necessary, and then continued: "Our surgeons say there was only a minor injury to the foot, but they put it in a cast as a mere matter of precaution. That, and a slight contusion on the head is all the injury you sustained. In fact, you came out of it quite luckily."

"Reck'n you never heard of Hop Carter's luck."

"No, I never did."

"That's some of it," replied Hop.

"Now, Mr. Carter, our surgeons—and we have the best in America—say there is no doubt but that you will be perfectly sound in a few weeks, and will suffer no inconvenience whatever as a result of this little trouble. But our company wants its patrons satisfied. Of course, you will lose your time, and will be inconvenienced, and we are willing to pay all your expenses until you are fully recovered, and give you five thousand dollars damages."

Hop's mind was busy. He had never been paid for being lucky before. If the foot was gone, which he believed to be true, he could still hop. His head had about quit hurting, and five thousand was a considerable lump of finance. He waited so long that the claim agent was on the point of raising his bid.

"All right. Just sign here, please, and the money will be paid to you when you are discharged from the hospital," said the visitor, when Hop finally signified his willingness to accept the windfall.

The dapper gentleman did not return. His business lay otherwheres. Hop Carter's signature barred him from suing the company for making him a cripple for life, and the claim agent had no further concern with his affairs.

It was known in Mr. Carter's native village that he had started West on that particular train. The papers stated that it was believed that several persons had been "incinerated" in the wreck. Hop's name was not in the published list of passengers, including the dead and wounded, so it was supposed that he was one of the unfortunates.

"Hop was always such a good boy. It's a pity he tuck to drinkin' that-away," said one worthy villager.

But the justice of the peace looked the word up in the big dictionary, and discovered that incinerated meant, "burned plumb teetotally up."

"Hop's luck didn't hold," said Mr. Erskine calmly.

"Hit wer a jedgment sent on him for his carryin's-on befo' he left here. Smokin' seegars, an' sayin' dammit, and sech," replied Mrs. Erskine.

When Miss Ouida Valliere Marche heard the sad news she said, "Poor Hop!" very much as if her pet Pomeranian had stuck a brier in his foot.

Now, it is not to be thought that Weedy was evil at heart. She had, in fact, inherited the kindly disposition of her father, and was merely suffering the effects of having too much fool mother.

Consider, too, the young lady's feelings in the matter. True, she had turned Hop down, but think. What hope of conjugal bliss was there in prospect for a woman married to a man who had a wen over his eye that gave him the appearance of always being surprised on one side, and who was tongue-tied? Add to these things the fact that he wore boots two sizes too big for him, and clumped about the house with his toes turned up like a foundered cow. Take this home to yourself, and be lenient with the maiden. Perhaps there is truth in the statement that "distance lends enchantment to the view." Possibly "absence made the heart grow fonder," and if she could not love Hop, with his afflictions and peculiarities, time might soften her bereavement into a sweet memory.

IV.

Hop's wound was supposed to be healing by first intention, and its intentions were, apparently, above reproach. Still, the process was slow, and in spite of the fact that the company lost interest in Mr. Carter after he signed the document waiving his right to sue for damages, Hop was in the hospital a matter of three months.

The acrobatic nurse, who had given no more demonstrations of the long-distance standing broad jump, seemed to take a strange interest in her patient. She may have thought she was young enough to be in love, but there was nothing in the expression of her countenance to indicate it. Her face looked like the death mask of a human martyr, who had died violently and with some doubt about the future. Her eyes constantly wore that sad, noncommittal expression so often seen in the eyes of the very young—and on agate door knobs.

Whether from mere professional pride, or a more tender sentiment, the nurse gave Hop's foot such attention as would indicate that she was one of the faithful, and the foot was the one Buddha used to make his famous footprint. She so impressed Hop with the necessity of not putting any weight on the injured member, that he lay awake nights in fear that he would push it against the sheets and produce instant death. When the cast was removed the nurse began a system of massage, and Hop became so accustomed to it that he couldn't go to sleep nights unless his foot was being massaged.

Mr. Carter became very weary of two things—the bed, and the hospital menu. The infatuated nurse managed to supplement the menu in such a manner as to prevent death by slow starvation. One day, when her back was turned, Hop slipped out of the bed and crossed the ward "half hammond." The nurse cried out in violent alarm. Soon afterward she brought him an old, shiny, hickory wooden leg. It was properly adjusted, and after that he stumped about the hospital making a noise like a parade of Gettysburg veterans.

Hop's three months of incarceration was a season of education in which he gleaned much knowledge. No man becomes so well

acquainted with himself as when some inquisitive surgeon breaks through his reserve, cuts through his cuticle, and proceeds to investigate his internal mechanism. There were many convalescents who had weird tales to tell of their own internal affairs, as reported by surgeons and nurses—after the fact. All these things made a profound impression on Hop's mind, which had practically lain fallow from his infancy. The one thing that took firmest hold on his awakening intelligence was a discourse by an anæmic gentleman, who could have made a fortune playing the ghost in "Hamlet."

This cadaver's chief enjoyment was a lecture on the human blood. His knowledge of the life fluid was obviously based on observation and inquiry, as he could not possibly have had a more intimate acquaintance with the rich, red, wine of life. Hop learned that the white corpuscles were the scrappers. That when the system was out of kelter these white ones formed in companies and platoons, attacked germs, and drove them out of the system with great slaughter. He learned also that there was but one white corpuscle to ninety-nine red ones, and that the whites were a rather exclusive society withal. This wise, but pale, philosopher finished his lecture by likening the circulation of the blood to human life in general. He bluntly stated that in the ordinary human commerce the people who had some money were the red ones, and those who had to take it away from them were the white ones.

During the early stages of this regular experience meeting Hop scraped his wooden leg, and listened in silence. He decided that he wanted to be a white one, but he had five thousand dollars, and that was a handicap. By degrees he overcame his reticence, and began to talk. He found that he could say Saturday, Sunday, and soap. That he could enunciate the words "say something," instead of saying "hay humpin'."

Between sessions of the meeting a poker game ran unrestrained. Hop learned the game, and discovered the means of getting rid of his handicap, and becoming a pale, emaciated white corpuscle, with a gnawing desire to take something away from some one who had it.

Throughout his convalescence Hop's hair and beard were innocent of shears and razor. His fine, soft brown hair was now long and wavy, and his face was hidden by a mask of curly whiskers. On the same day that he put his weight on the injured foot for the first time, and found to his amazement that even the old "fraction" was gone, it became apparent that he must decide at once whether to wear his hair in a Psyche twist, or have it cut.

Deciding to seek the kindly ministrations of a barber, he sallied forth into the city. From the barber shop he went to a haberdashery. The tonsorial and sartorial changes completely removed any traces of the former Hop Carter. Even the wen was gone. One must have loved him dearly to have recognized him, and as he knew of no one who had his photograph in her heart, he felt safe.

At the hospital he received his formal discharge, and the five thousand dollars. He bade farewell to the whitewashed walls, and to the wooden leg, and presumably to the nurse.

V.

Few men learn a foreign language from an interpreter. Being caught by the scruff of the neck and thrown bodily into the middle of a condition, is the surest means of making one adopt himself thereto.

When Hop left the village of his forbears, he started West. This was his first real idea, and it was very firmly fixed. So, when he was discharged from the hospital still having the unused ticket in his pocket, he boarded the first train west, and went on his way.

How that ticket happened to read "Spelton, Texas," instead of "Pelton, New Mexico," as Hop had intended, was a mystery. It was probably due to his former affliction of speech.

After an apparently interminable ride Hop was informed that the next stop was his destination. At the station he climbed off the train and looked about him. For several hours he apparenly had been crossing the sea. Not a house for miles, and only an occasional windmill standing mastlike against the horizon.

The city of Spelton had a courthouse, two general stores, one hotel, and four saloons. Hop walked from the station to the "First Chance," and entered. His native village had voted local option when Maine went dry, and he had never seen a saloon. In this place were a number of men, but they were speaking a language unfamiliar to him. As he stood looking on the strange scene

his eyes brightened. Four men were playing poker at a table. He heard one of the men say something about taking his medicine as he rose and left the table, and decided the place was a hospital. If so, any one could sit into the game that wanted to, and he dropped into the vacant chair.

"Hello, podner! Want in?" asked the three men in concert.

Hop returned the greeting and called for cards. From the instant he sat down he was a split entity, so far as his mind was concerned. His thoughts were on the game, but the dress, language, and behavior of the men about him spread a look of profound astonishment over his face that wouldn't come off.

The game went on. There was no hope of the most astute mind penetrating that look of astonishment, and Hop won from the jump. As he dragged in a big pot one of the fellows got up to go take his medicine. Hop was accustomed to this, and thought nothing of it. A man must take it regularly in a hospital. Pretty soon another slipped out for the same purpose. Hop went on playing with the remaining player, oblivious of the passing time. His opponent was a dark, swarthy gentleman, somewhat better clad than his fellows.

The pot started for the ceiling, and Hop kept staying. His opponent's bluff didn't work. Hop raised him back with a fistful of bills, and the fellow said:

"I can't come no more, podner. It's about time for my medicine, I reck'n," and he laid his three deuces face up.

Hop showed down three kings and a pair of aces. As he was stuffing the harvest into his pockets the defeated gambler looked across at him, and said:

"No offense, podner, but was you playin' 'em straight all the time?"

"Straight? 'Course I was playin' 'em straight. Didn't know they could be played crooked."

"Well, I'll be damned," murmured the defeated player, as he walked off toward the bar. He accosted the other three of the original quartet, and said: "Fellers, that danged greenhorn was playin' 'em straight all the time. We'll get a stake and buck him again. Luck like that can't hold."

Hop was putting the last of his winnings into his pocket, when an old fellow who had been watching the game touched him on the arm, and said:

" 'Scuse *me*, podner, but the gents is waiting for you."

"Waiting for me? What for?"

"You seem to be a stranger in these parts. Jes' come in, I reck'n. The fellow what wins buys drinks in this here country."

They walked to the bar, and Hop laid down a twenty-dollar bill. His guide and mentor, seeing that Hop didn't understand the language, called out in tones that could be heard throughout the house: "Gents, the stranger is goin' to open the ditch. Le's irrigate."

Hop had arrived in Spelton early in the day, and it was now some time after noon. Feeling the need of food, he mentioned the matter to his self-appointed companion.

"Shore!" said the old fellow. "I gets to watchin' that run of luck of yo'n, and I ain't et till yet, myself."

He led the way to the hotel dining room, and they sat down to a small table in the corner. There were rings of coffee on the checked tablecloth, and a general after-meal air about the place. A door slammed, and a slatternly girl in loose apron and sneakers slouched up to them, and said:

"What'll it be, gents?"

"Ham, aigs, and coffee," announced Hop's companion.

As he was not familiar with the system à la carte of the place, Hop took the same. While they were waiting for the food, Mr. Carter had leisure to take some note of the man opposite him. There was nothing of the broad-shouldered, narrow-waisted, leather-cheeked knight of the reata, so frequently mentioned in Western novels—and so rarely met with elsewhere—about this specimen.

He was almost a midget, perhaps five feet three, if standing straight, but bent with age. His cheeks may have been leather, fabrikoid, or just plain muslin and boards for all any one could tell by looking at him. Thick whiskers grew to his eyes, and looked as if they had to be clipped about the sockets to keep him from going blind and running into things, like a high-grade merino sheep. It was a mystery how so much hair could grow on so small a face. His teeth were gone, and when he talked his jaws, traveling the greater distance, caused his chin whiskers to bob up and down like the flag of a departing billy goat.

This parboiled, sun-baked old Texan had been taking a shrewd measurement of Hop

during the meal. When he had wiped the egg from his whiskers, and called for another cup of coffee, he leaned forward, as if about to impart a profound secret, and said:

"My name's Bitter, podner, Hank Bitter. What's yo'n?"

"Carter," replied Hop.

"Well, it ain't none of my business. They ain't no call to advertise it none. I'll jes' call you 'Poker.' It's easier, and you shore win the title. That was the dangdest poker playin' I ever seen, and I seen some. Them four fellers cleaned me up for that seven thousand last night. It took 'em all night to do it, and you take it away from 'em in about three hours. How long you been playin' poker?"

"About two months. Learned it in the hospital," said Hop.

Mr. Bitter's face fell, and he said: "Best thing you can do is to get out of this town while you are alive. You can't play poker. That were just the luck of a fool greenhorn. Next game you set into they'll not only skin you, they'll take yo' haslets."

Hop knew nothing about the superstitions of the great American game, but the earnestness of Hank Bitter touched a sensitive spot. He had started out to be a white corpuscle, and he didn't want to be touched this early in the game.

"I know all about that fool first luck," continued Hank. "I had it onct. I win everything in the Golden Argosy, at El Paso, except the chairs and tables. I went out and got a couple of drinks and some supper. After supper I went back to get the furniture, and—I borried fo' bits from a porter to get some breakfast."

Hank filled an old, black pipe, and poked it through the jungle into his face. When he had taken a few puffs he went on: "I kinder taken a likin' to you, young feller. If you ain't tied no way, why not put that roll in the bank, and go out home with me. We kin play poker thar, and if you got to be skun, I reck'n I kin skin you."

Hop couldn't see anything wrong with the proposal. Hank's suggestion that he put the money in the bank was sufficient evidence that he meant no violence. At the bank Mr. Bitter seemed to be quite at home.

"My young friend, Mr. Poker Carter, wants to deposit a little chicken feed with you, Billy," he said to the cashier.

Hop pocketed his deposit slip for twelve thousand dollars, got into the buckboard, and they started for the Bitter home about five o'clock in the afternoon. They had been traveling for two hours, and as yet had seen no sign of human habitation. Then Hop bethought him to ask the distance.

"Just fifty mile from the co'thouse do' to my gate, and eight mile from thar to the house. We'll make it by midnight," replied Hank Bitter.

Sure enough, just at midnight they came upon a water hole, and just beyond it a house, with a cluster of shacks around it. Hop had no idea what the place was. He was half dead with the long ride, and a desire for sleep. Hank showed him a bed, and he fell into it.

The next morning, as Hop was washing his face at a trough in the yard, he turned to Mr. Bitter, and said: "What place is this?"

"Place? This ain't no place a-tall, podner. She's the H-Bar-B Ranch, where the old woman and me lives and moves and has our bein', such as it is. Been livin' here thirty year. Ain't never had no children, and they's just us two, and a passle of ranch hands and Mexicans."

At breakfast Hop met Mrs. Bitter, commonly called Aunt Lou. She would crowd six feet and two hundred pounds, and was as big-hearted and fine as she looked.

VI.

Hop Carter's little visit to the H-Bar-B had extended into two years. He first learned from Hank Bitter that he couldn't play poker, and then learned something about the game, and a great many other things.

By degrees old Hank got his story, and by degrees Hop became more and more at home at the H-Bar-B. If Hank was any older than Hop he didn't realize it, and they were constant companions. Hop became famous in that part of the Trans-Pecos country for his exploit of trimming three gamblers on the day of his arrival. After that, old Hank saw to it that the young man's sporting efforts were confined to gentlemanly games, with reasonable stakes.

Hop became a vaquero as if by nature. He was the best rider on the ranch, a splendid shot, and a good cow hand. He had not only learned the language of the country, but could patter Spanish like a don. He had developed a thirty-three waist and

a thirty-eight chest, wore the neatest boot, and was the handsomest man in the whole countryside.

While picking up these things Hop, who had no other name in that country than "Poker," had learned that in spite of his outlandish appearance, old Hank Bitter was a man of prominence. His friends loved him for his real worth, and his enemies respected him because he was five feet three inches and a hundred and fifteen pounds of wild cat when "riled."

Adjoining the H-Bar-B was the Diamond Ranch, owned by a man named Hutchins. This ranchman lived somewhere in the eastern part of the State, but often brought his family to the ranch for a few weeks in summer.

One fine morning in late June a big herd of beef started from the Diamond. Miss Hutchins and one of her classmates from an Eastern school were out on a couple of superannuated cow ponies watching the herd get under way. In fact, they followed it several miles, and were returning to the ranch house when the visitor suddenly exclaimed:

"Oh, I just love this wonderful country!"

"All right, just love it all you want to. It won't hurt it none," replied Miss Hutchins, who, in spite of the fact that she had recently graduated with honors, reverted to type, and talked Texas as soon as she had eaten one meal of beef and beans.

"Oh, but you people who have lived here always don't realize how grand it is. You don't appreciate it!" and the visitor went into rhapsodies of poetry.

"I'm goin' to get maw to give you a pill when we get to the house," said the Texas girl. "If you was to see Poker while you are in this fix the results might be fatal."

"Who's Poker?"

"Now, looky here! You know maw and me, we're kinder responsible to yo' mother for what happens to you while you are out here, and don't you go to pesterin' about Poker none," teased Miss Hutchins.

"Oh, I'm perfectly safe. I am going to be an old maid, anyway. I was crossed in love when I was young," said the visitor. "Who is Poker?"

"Well, you ain't apt to see him, nohow. I don't know who Poker is. All I know is he's a braunk-ridin', gun-shootin', poker-playin' fool, is the handsomest man in Texas, and I reck'n that means in the world. Old Hank Bitter took him when he was young, and raised him to suit himself, and uncle Hank has got some ways——"

They reached the ranch house just then, and the Texas girl broke off her description of Poker, and said: "Better ask maw to give you that pill. You might see him some time."

On that very morning, at the breakfast table, Aunt Lou Bitter said: "Hank, do you suppose they's any danger of them raiders from Mexico starting anything serious."

"Never can tell," said Hank, as he passed his coffee cup. "It's a hundred and fifty mile to the border, but the main nest of raiders that I know anything about is the other way, over on the Pecos draws. They are cattle thieves and hawss thieves that's always been in them roughs, and now that they can lay it onto the Mexicans they're doin' a mighty prosperous business."

Nothing more was said about marauders. Mr. Bitter had a ranch cabin and branding pen ten miles from his ranch house, and it happened that on this particular morning he and Poker, with some hands, were going there to round-up a pasture and brand some calves.

The cabin and pens were on the east line of the H-Bar-B, and within three miles of the Diamond Ranch house. As the men sat about their noonday meal old Pablo, a wrinkled Mexican, who had been a horse wrangler on the Diamond since it was founded, came by riding the division fence. Hank hailed him and invited him to eat. As Pablo helped himself to beef and beans, Hank said:

"Drove the Diamond beef this mawnin', I reck'n?"

"Si, señor!"

Further conversation developed the fact that all the men from the Diamond, except Pablo and old Pancho, the house cook, had gone with the herd. When Pablo was gone Hank shook his head, and said to no one in particular: "Some men are borned blame fools, and some jes' picks it up like learnin' Mex."

When night came Hank told the men they would stay there for the night. There was no apparent necessity, but few people questioned Mr. Bitter about his personal affairs. He was, in fact, not thinking about his personal affairs just then. He knew the Diamond horse pasture was just over the divid-

ing fence, and that there were many fine horses in it protected only by old Pablo.

The men were soon asleep, except Hop, who lay on his blankets at a little distance from the camp, and watched old Hank, as he squatted against the side of the cabin. This old man had been Hop's constant study for two years, and yet he was unable to fathom what was behind that mask of whiskers. He had known Hank to play poker all night long, and the next day seem to feel no need of sleep. It was a question whether he ever slept.

There was a full moon, and little shadows were accentuated. As Hop lay watching the old man, and pondering on his strange character, Hank got up and walked softly to the wagon. He took something from a box on the side of the wagon, and crept stealthily toward the division fence. If any one interested in the Diamond Ranch had seen him he would have been promptly shot. He cut the bottom wire at a post, and, carrying the end back, tied it. The performance was repeated until all the wires were out of the way, and a yawning gap was left between the posts.

His labors finished, Hank replaced the pliers and returned to his seat beside the cabin. A light breeze had sprung up from the direction of the Diamond, and Hank seemed listening. Hop watched in wonder. What could it mean? Was it possible that Hank Bitter, rich in lands and cattle, and principal stockholder in the Spelton bank, was in league with some one to steal his neighbor's horses?

There was no sleep for Hop. He lay watching the moonlight on Hank's white whiskers, as the full moon climbed up its path of silver. Hank nodded, and seemed to doze. Suddenly he sprang erect, as the sound of a shot came faintly on the breeze from toward the Diamond. Another minute, and his men were saddling their horses in haste.

At the Diamond pandemonium had broken loose. A gang from the Pecos draws had attacked the place. The family and guests had taken refuge in the bunk house, which was built in old times, to withstand siege. Old Pablo's body lay on the doorstep, where, faithful to the last, he had given his life for his trust. The swarthy leader of the gang, who was none other than the gentleman that had stayed longest in the poker game with Hop, on the day of his arrival in the Trans-Pecos, was hammering on the door with his pistol, and calling to those inside to open the door or he would fire the house.

A cavalcade thundered onto the scene, led by old Hank Bitter and Poker, riding stirrup to stirrup, their guns spouting fire as they came on. The leader whirled his horse to meet them. There were two flashes, and he and Poker fell from their horses at the same instant.

The encounter was short, sharp, and decisive. So decisive, in fact, that the county would be put to no expense in the foolish matter of trials. Old Pancho, the cook, stepped from the shadow of an outbuilding, with a smoking gun in his hand, and crossed himself as he saw Pablo's body lying on the step, and Hank Bitter bending over the body of Poker, and cursing in a strange, low tone.

Pancho called to Mrs. Hutchins, and she opened the door:

"Eet ees the Señor Hank and the Poker. The Señor Poker ees shot dead! *Ah, Sea como Dios quiera!*" and the old man crossed himself devoutly.

Hop was carried in and laid on a bed. Hank examined his wound and found that he had been struck by a glancing bullet, sustaining a slight scalp wound, and being knocked senseless by the concussion. Being a pretty good rough surgeon, Hank soon had the blood stopped and the wound bandaged. The three women stood helplessly watching the performance. Hank raised up and the light fell on Hop's face. The visiting young lady made a funny little noise and sank to her knees by the side of the bed, throwing her arms around the wounded man. Hop opened his eyes, and said:

"Is it you, Weedy?"

"Yes, Hop, and I'll never leave you again!"

Came morning. Hop was asleep and resting. Miss Hutchins looked at her guest, and said: "I told you yesterday to get maw to give you a pill. Now look what's happened."

"A fellow don't need nothin' else when he's got Hop Carter's luck," commented Hank Bitter.

The Black Butterflies

By John Curtis Underwood

FOR forty years in Alsace and four years more they wore
Black bows like great black butterflies behind black heads and gold and brown.
And girls who grew to motherhood in many a little tortured town,
For forty years in Alsace and more their burden bore.

But the girls grew glad in Alsace, since gladness comes to all,
On mountain air at Eastertide, small girls and slim and tall.
And they laced their gay red bodices round linen white as snow
On mountaintops at Christmas time, with the warm red skirts below,
Red as the heart of Alsace in passion pure and pain,
Beating, still strongly beating till her hope comes home again.

Black butterflies went hovering through many a winter dance,
For dancing lives forever; and they shaded many a glance
That made men glad to live or die. They flitted far and wide,
By many a wayside garden, round many a mountainside,
Of a land alone in exile that fought with care and fear.
And there were brides that dreamed of them, and woke to know them near.

They showed like living symbols and shadowings of care
Behind all thoughts of tenderness, all dreams that maidens dare.
God made them for a memory of sorrows long ago,
Like lips that shadow mysteries of pain that women know,
Red as great fragrant roses in gardens by the way
Where Alsace watched in widowhood and waited for to-day.

For forty years in Alsace and more her women wore
Black bows like great black butterflies in many a little mountain town,
Like flakes of ashes from a fire in her no tears could tame or drown.
For forty years in Alsace and more their hearts were sore.

But joy came back to Alsace and light and love to-day.
Her soldier lads went marching home through streets that strove to say,
"Stride on, stride on, young conquerors. Each step is a caress.
The girls are gay to greet you. The soil itself shall bless
Your youth that comes to crown at last the love that lived through tears,
And the long yearning of the old through worn and wasted years."

Her arms are wide to welcome them and the others tall and brown
That march from far America through many a laughing town.
The girls are gay to greet them in gardens by the way.
The flags are floating notes of joy, the old are young to-day.
Her heart swells high to greet them, and she loves the whole world, too,
This land of strange black butterflies God made for France and you.

The Map

By J. B. Harris-Burland

Author of "The Eighth Man," Etc.

There is something spooky about this little story. Can you explain how such things happen?

NO one but Bannington had ever seen it, and when he first came to us with his ridiculous story, he swore that it was a map of the world.

"A round thing, you know," he explained, "with outlines—not very distinct—with shifting outlines—land and sea, you know."

Cross-questioned by the three of us, he was forced to admit that he was quite unable to pick out the continents, or, indeed, to assert definitely which was sea and which was land. It might be either the Eastern or Western hemisphere. But it was round. He could swear to that. And it looked like a map, and only a map of the world would be round.

I think it was Arnott, our host, who said that it was so like Bannington to think imperially. I know that I myself suggested that it was possibly a very large and very much knocked about golf ball—the father of all golf balls. And little Tommie Carnigan said it was a silver half crown, and that it had appeared on the wall of Bannington's bedroom to remind him that a certain half crown, lost over a game of golf ten weeks previously, had never been paid. Bannington handed over the money, and smiled.

"You're a pack of fools," he said. "This kind of thing has to be taken seriously."

I remember quite well that we were all very quiet after that, and that we stared at the great fire of logs in the smoking room, and that Bannington, who, after all, was a man one had to take seriously, stood in front of us, his back to the fire, and his thin, tall body black as ink against the flames.

"It was about four o'clock in the morning," he repeated. "One's mind is very clear at that hour. I had been awake for some little time and I heard the clock on the landing strike four. And then the thing began to try to focus itself—a blur of light at first and all wabbly—and then a circle—or very nearly a circle and then—well lines—shifting irregular lines. It was as though the thing itself had not quite decided what it was going to be. It never quite came to the point, so to speak. But it was more like a map of the world than anything else I can think of."

"Are you sure it was not a map of the moon?" laughed fat little Carnigan.

"And the time?" queried Arnott, speaking very slowly and judicially. "Are you sure it was four o'clock?"

"The clock on the landing had just struck," Bannington said sharply.

"It is five minutes slow," I interrupted. "My watch is always right. It is one of those things they test at Kew."

"Well, anyhow——" Bannington began, and then something dropped on the stone in front of the open hearth with a tinkle of splintered glass and a splashing of liquid—golden red in the firelight. I saw that Arnott's left hand was empty—and that the fingers of it did not move. It was just as though he were still holding the glass that lay in fragments on the floor. He only remained in that position for a second, but I can see him now quite clearly—the light of the fire on his deeply lined face—a face that was so much too big for his short, sturdy body—and his hand curiously outlining the circle of the glass—and an entire lack of expression in his eyes, as if he were unconscious. And then everything dissolved in his loud laugh, and the closing of his fingers.

"There goes a good drink," he exclaimed. "That's your fault, Bannington—you have a way of telling things that gets on one's nerves. You're so confoundedly indefinite."

He rose from his chair and mixed himself another whisky and soda.

"I don't like this sort of thing," he explained when he had returned to his chair. "After all, it is my house, and I don't care to have maps of the world floating about it.

And I don't want the place turned into a lunatic asylum. There's something wrong with you, Bannington—wrong. You're ill. You'd better let Lemming (I am Lemming and a doctor) attend to you. You'll be seeing snakes next, or possibly scorpions."

"Sorry," said Bannington curtly. "But you can come and have a look yourself tonight. Perhaps it was a golf ball after all—an avenging golf ball that I've hacked to pieces."

"At the fifth hole this afternoon," said Carnigan, and the conversation turned to golf—winter golf on a ground hard as iron and under gray skies that threatened snow. But all the time we were talking I watched Bannington with a professional eye. He was not at all the sort of man to suffer from delusions—to see visions, or to dream dreams. For two years I had known him as a hard-headed barrister, almost irritatingly temperate, and a bachelor, absorbed in his work.

"Like a steel blade," I said to myself, "but, perhaps, too finely tempered."

And suddenly I saw the possibility of Bannington as a "case." There was something wonderfully interesting about a man who saw a map of the world on his bedroom wall.

"I'm damned sleepy," said Bannington, when I followed him into his bedroom. "And I hope to put in more than three hours before four o'clock."

"I won't waste a minute of them," I replied, closing the door. "Undress, and when you're ready for bed, I'll leave you."

"As you like," he answered carelessly. "But, after all, we came down here for a jolly week-end, and two rounds of golf a day, not——"

"Then you shouldn't go seeing things," I interrupted, "or if you do see them you should keep them to yourself. Ever had any experience of this kind before?"

He ignored my question, and insisted that, after all, he had kept the blessed thing to himself all day.

"Put me off my drive a bit," he said, "or we should have won that foursome."

"Ever had——" I began again, but he cut me short.

"Look here," he said—perhaps it was his effort to unbutton a tight collar that made him red in the face. "Look here, Lemming, you keep your medical advice until it's asked for. If you want a patient, go and have a look at Arnott's tongue. He drinks too much, I should say."

I seated myself on the bed and asked him to show me the exact spot where he had seen the circle of light. He walked over to the wall that faced the window, and laid his two hands on the plain white paper about a yard apart.

"The diameter," he explained. "Yes, just about there—you needn't glance at the window; the blinds and curtains were drawn. A circle—very faint—much larger than this at first and covering nearly the whole wall—then contracting, as if some one were focussing the light, until it was about a yard across."

I asked him questions, and gathered that as the circle contracted, so had the pattern on it grown more distinct. But it was an uncertain pattern, even at the last, just before it vanished. It was as though some artist had not been quite sure of what he was trying to draw.

"I said a map of the world," he concluded, "but you, for instance, might have said a Stilton cheese—when one cuts off the top, you know—little blue veins running all over the place."

Imaginative fellow, Bannington. And when I had left him, and gone to my bedroom, I suddenly laughed. I saw Bannington in a new light—a humorous Bannington inventing a new style of ghost.

And yet—he had certainly lost his temper for a few moments. That suggested the idea that he had really seen something, and that he was just a little afraid that he had been the victim of an hallucination.

II.

Clustered together in Bannington's bedroom, we heard the clock on the landing strike four and watched Bannington, who was sitting on the edge of his bed smoking a pipe. He moved out one hand, and switched off the electric light. We were in darkness, and I could only see the tiny red star of Carnigan's cigarette. It gleamed out more brightly, and some one—I think it must have been Arnott—laughed. Then something dropped on the floor, and I saw a dance of red sparks, and heard the stamping of a foot.

"My pipe," said Arnott; "the mouthpiece is loose."

And then little Carnigan said that the show was late.

"No," Bannington replied, and there was something curious in the sound of his voice, as if he were half asleep, and were speaking mechanically. "The clock on the landing is right now."

Carnigan began to jest, but there was a tremor in his voice and I jeered at him. Neither Arnott nor Bannington spoke, but I heard Arnott groping on the floor for the bowl of his pipe.

"Do you fellows like Stilton cheese?" I said, when several minutes had elapsed.

"Don't be a fool," said Arnott, "I'm cold —my teeth are chattering. Hurry up with the performance, Bannington."

"It has begun," Bannington replied. "Don't you fellows see anything?"

I stared in the direction of the wall and saw nothing.

"A change?" Bannington suggested. "Grayness instead of black?"

"No," said Arnott decisively.

"Nothing yet," I chimed in, with a note of encouragement in my voice.

"Not a blink," said Carnigan, with a giggle.

I was close to Bannington, and I heard him draw in his breath sharply. I was sorry for him. A jest? Ye gods, this was no jesting matter for Bannington.

"The circle has formed," he continued after a minute of silence. "It is contracting —slowly—quite slowly—don't you see anything now, you blind bats?"

We told him that we saw nothing, and either Arnott or Carnigan walked a few paces across the floor. I think it was Arnott from the heaviness of the tread. I felt for my match box. I had an irresistible longing to strike a light and see Bannington's face. But I dropped the box, and by the time I had found it I had decided that it would be unwise to interrupt the workings of Bannington's brain.

"The circle is now the same size as it was last night," he continued after a long silence. "I think it is a little clearer," and then, after another pause, "it is growing smaller and much clearer."

Some one moved across the floor, and this time I am certain that it was Bannington, who doubtless wished to be nearer to the wall. When he spoke again, his voice seemed to be further away from me.

"It is growing smaller still," he continued. "It has steadied itself. It is a map—but not a map of the world—I don't know what to make of it—roads—circles—rectangles—queer, irregular patches—a definite boundary on the top side——"

He paused, and a hand gripped my wrist.

"He's going mad," whispered little Carnigan. "I want to get out of this."

"Plan of a building estate, perhaps," Bannington continued in that even mechanical voice. "No—a garden—a plan of a garden."

The door suddenly opened and I saw Arnott standing against the dim light on the landing. One could not, of course, see his face, but that sturdy short body and big head were unmistakable.

"My nerves won't stand this," he said, "I never could stand this kind of thing. I'll see you all at breakfast."

He held the door open for a few seconds, as if waiting for some reply from Bannington. But Bannington did not speak. In the light that came through the doorway I could see Bannington close to the wall, and his right arm was stretched out, and his hand was moving quickly.

Just like an artist sketching—a lightning artist at the "halls."

Then the door closed and we were in darkness again. No one spoke, but little Carnigan clutched my arm. And I could hear, in the silence, the faint scratching of something on the wall—swift slashes of movement. And then the sound ceased, and a sharp click flooded the room with light. Bannington was standing close to the wall with a pencil in his hand, and on the wall itself there was the plan—or map, or whatever one might choose to call it, sketched out in clear black lines. Bannington turned and laughed.

"I was just in time," he said, "I've fixed it all right. But I don't think Arnott will thank me for disfiguring his wall paper."

We went forward to look at it—this vision of Bannington's disordered brain.

"A garden, of course," said little Carnigan, lighting a cigarette and obviously pleased that the performance was over.

"Paths," I continued. "Flower beds—grass plots—the boundary wall. What's that little cross?" and I laid my finger on it.

"I don't know," Bannington replied. "It was the last thing to show itself."

"Buried treasure," giggled Carnigan. "We must find this garden."

Bannington, to my surprise, took him quite seriously. "Yes," he said, "it would be interesting to find this garden. You fellows—and Arnott—must help me."

He was quite pleasant about it, and even when Carnigan suggested that it might be in the moon, he only smiled. He took a sheet of writing paper from a drawer and drew a copy of the plan.

Carnigan yawned and went off to bed.

"Look here, Bannington," I said, "what's the meaning of this game?"

"The brain is a very delicate instrument," he replied, "mine is, perhaps, more delicate than the ordinary brain. I am very susceptible to impressions."

"You've been playing the fool with us," I said angrily.

He shook his head, and I looked steadily at his face. It was very white and the eyes were very brilliant. I told him that he had been working too hard, and he laughed.

"Good night," he said, "I'm afraid one of us will be off his game to-morrow."

One does not sleep well in the later half of a broken night, and I was down a quarter of an hour before the time fixed for breakfast. I took my putter, and went out into the garden, where Arnott had made a very tolerable green for practice. The sun was shining, and the frost sparkled on the grass. It was just the sort of morning to clear away all the cobwebs of dark rooms and imaginary pictures on the wall. I holed a five-yard putt, and felt that life was worth living. And then a window was flung up and little Carnigan poked out his head.

"The early bird finds the worm cast," he shouted.

Then he withdrew and I saw him looping his tie very carefully before his looking-glass. My eyes strayed to Arnott's window, and I noticed that the blinds were still drawn. Bannington's window was on the other side of the house.

I holed half a dozen more putts, and then I saw Bannington at the far end of the long path that ran straight from the house down the middle of the garden. I waved my putter at him, and—I remember this quite well—as I walked toward him, he moved a little to one side behind a shrubbery and vanished from my sight. Only for about fifteen seconds, mind you, and then he appeared again and came walking toward me. We met where the path intersected a big central lawn. He looked tired, and his hands were very dirty and there was soil on his clothes.

"Arnott up?" he queried.

I told him that Arnott's blinds were still down. He turned and we walked toward the boundary fence. Beyond it lay the smooth turf of a putting green and a little red flag, and one had quite a good view of the links that stretched southward to the sea. There was something very peaceful about the picture on that cold, still morning. But Bannington was out of place in it. There was a fierce unrest in Bannington's eyes as he leaned his back against the fence and began to talk to me about the circle on the wall. It seemed that he was trying to explain something that he did not understand. And then he said—quite abruptly —"Of course, this is the garden," and he pulled out the plan.

It was the garden. As we walked back toward the house, I noticed the position of the paths and the flower beds. The cross lay in the shrubbery on our left.

"What about that?" I queried, laying my finger on the paper.

He took me by the arm, and we pushed our way through the evergreen shrubs.

"It would be about here," he said, pointing to an open space covered with dead leaves. I noticed that many of the leaves had been moved and replaced. There was no frost on the upper sides of them. I suddenly glanced at his hand, and noticed the grime of earth in his nails.

"Yes," he said quietly. "This would be about the spot. We'd better go and fetch old Arnott."

We returned to the house and banged upon Arnott's door. I can still hear the noise of our fists drumming through the silence of the house. And I have a very clear remembrance of the look on Bannington's face as he broke open the lock with a crowbar, and of the green light that came through the blind and showed Arnott still in bed, and of the coldness of Arnott's hand that lay on the coverlet.

"Chloral," I said, picking up the bottle by the dead man's side. I can still hear myself saying that, and asking whether Arnott was in the habit of taking chloral, and the frightened squeak of the housekeeper's voice as she said she had thrown away "many and many a bottle like that."

But more clearly than anything can I re-

member the sudden and wonderful calmness of Bannington as he looked down on Arnott's face.

Well, the verdict at the inquest was quite simple. We had agreed that it was entirely unnecessary to drag any account of Bannington's vision into the evidence. We swore to having last seen Arnott in Bannington's room at a quarter past four in the morning, when we were chatting together before going to bed. It was quite reasonable for Bannington to shrink from any disclosures that would throw some doubt on his sanity. And, mind you, Arnott had been in the habit of taking chloral, and there was no suggestion that he had committed suicide.

But one cannot get away from the following facts. Three years before Bannington's vision of the garden, Bannington's twin brother had spent a winter week-end alone with Arnott, and had left the house one evening after dark to bicycle to the house of another friend at Folkestone. His bicycle had been found at the bottom of the cliffs between Folkestone and Dover, and it had always been supposed that his body had been washed out to sea.

Then there was Arnott's rather curious behavior on the night of his death, and the disturbed leaves in the shrubbery, and the grime on Bannington's hands, and—which I think is even more important—the complete disappearance of Bannington's drawing on the wall.

One could so easily imagine a quarrel between Arnott and Bannington's brother. They were both hot-tempered men, and Arnott was a drunkard. A game of cards, possibly, or, perhaps, a difference of opinion ending in insults and blows. The good name of a woman, I daresay—jealousy—one need not find any difficulty in imagining the sudden rising of a red storm in which a man like Arnott would lose control of himself.

And we can picture Arnott riding that bicycle mile after mile through the darkness, and flinging it over the edge of a cliff and returning to his home on foot.

And then the vision that had put Bannington's mind on to a track that perhaps he had already traversed for a little way—in some wild flight of imagination? And I can see Bannington digging all night in that shrubbery and perhaps the glow of a lantern, and Arnott watching from the window. And then—Arnott's visit to Bannington's bedroom, and the swift erasion of the map upon the wall. More easy to get rid of that than it was to get rid of Bannington—digging—like Fate making ready a grave for a living man.

And then Bannington's purchase of Arnott's house, and his refusal to talk about the events of that night. Well, Bannington himself is dead now, and one can speak what is in one's mind. Some of the truth will be known very soon, but not all of it.

I have so often wondered if Bannington really did see that narrowing circle on the wall. I have sometimes fancied that Bannington, with his trained mind and his power of sifting evidence, had slowly and carefully woven the net about Arnott, and that the map was only a device to warn Arnott and give him a chance of taking his own life. But then I am a doctor, and Materialism is the keynote of my profession.

HIS OPINION OF THRIFT

COLONEL FRANKLIN P. MORGAN—title won several decades before the war with Germany—is the Atlantic seaboard's champion good fellow, generous spender and sure-fire wit. Among other fine possessions, he has a young nephew who regards him as an oracular, oratorical, omniscient, double-A, triple-X, Rhadamanthine source of information—an impression, by the way, which the colonel has never attempted to remove from the youngster's mind.

"Uncle Frank," the nephew asked him, "what's the real meaning of thrift?"

"Thrift, my boy," replied the colonel, "is an ardent and insane desire, satisfied only by years of crazy self-denial and foolish industry, to put a lot of money where a fat, cold-hearted, rich banker can draw bigger interest on it than you can."

A Chat With You

THE trouble with the modern world is that machinery—the inhuman organisms we have invented to do our work and be our slaves—have turned upon us and enslaved us. The machine moves in a deadly routine, so we must follow it. The machine pretends to give us something, but at the same time it is sure to take something away. Freedom, initiative, the strength of our limbs, the power of our thought and aspiration, are taken away from us in factories, in trains and motor cars, in offices and counting houses. Whether in war or in peace we find ourselves no longer free individuals, but cogs in a vast machine, too big for the comprehension of any one man and too powerful for any man to fight against. In subduing nature and winning freedom from its tyranny of heat and cold and famine and tempest and space, we have fallen into the power of another tyrant.

A GLOOMY view if we were not sure that it could not last. We are going through a transition period, and some day we will swing back into the nomadic state again and refind the freedom that the caveman knew while the lightning, the sun, the winds, and the swinging tides, safely harnessed and broken to the bit, do our work for us. Who would attend to the machinery? There are various ways it might be handled. William James, for instance, had the idea of a sort of industrial army in which every young man would be drafted for a year or so, to work in a factory or a mill or outdoors at some physical pursuit. A year or so of such service, he thought, would have all the good moral effect of conscription for an army with none of the bad, and would surely be a small price to pay for a settlement of a lot of the questions that vex us now.

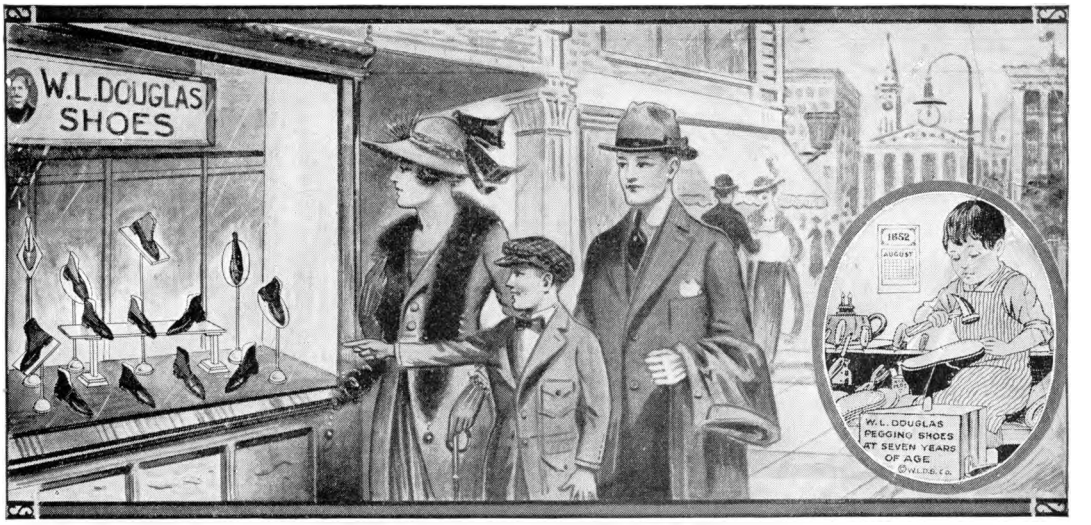
THIS happy future is still a considerable distance off, and in the meantime we have other and more pressing considerations. One of these is how we are to keep from turning into machines ourselves. Regularity of work is a good thing for the body, but regularity and routine of thought is not a good thing for the mind. There are a few people for whom the life work is a great and continuous adventure. For most of us, however, opportunity just knocks once or twice and the great thing is to be ready for it. To keep mentally alert, to remain young in spirit, to guard against the dry rot that kills the elasticity in a man is just as necessary for success as a human being as money in the bank. When any one asks you why you read fiction, ask him why he takes exercise or stretches himself when his limbs are cramped. A man isn't as young as he looks or as he feels or as his arteries are. He's as young and elastic as his mind is.

THIS is why we don't want "problem" stories. When a man comes in here with a yarn which he says dis-

cusses the labor problem or the social problem or any other problem, we go to it with misgivings. The only problem we recognize is the problem of showing in fiction what a wonderful, adventurous, funny, stirring place the world is, after all. If you can write a story solving any part of that problem you will have a welcome like the prodigal son's. One of the great advantages of having a prodigal son is the yarns he can tell. After the fatted calf has been eaten up and we sit around the fire, we want to hear about his adventures. How he discovered a gold mine and blew it away at a faro table, how he was shipwrecked and saved, the strange lands he has seen, and the stranger adventures. He's sure of an audience. It's more fun to hear about the narrow escapes than it is to have them, to listen to the tale of how he had to eat husks while we share the veal with him, than to eat the husks ourselves. It wasn't just unselfish parental affection that made the father welcome him. It was because the old man liked to hear a good story as he enjoyed the feast—and there was no POPULAR arriving in the mails every two weeks in those days.

NOWADAYS the prodigal has found a proper medium for his talents. He has turned author. Henry C. Rowland has wandered as far and seen as many strange adventures as any of his heroes. When we give you one of his novels, we are giving you something that is a true reflection of the real adventure of to-day. His latest novel appears complete in the next issue of the magazine. It is called "The Mire." The only problem it solves is how to interest and delight the reader—but it solves that perfectly. It is a pure adventure tale, the search for a man supposed to be dead, the finding of the strangest of all treasures guarded by one of the strangest and most appalling of natural phenomena. Vivid, stirring, absorbing, written so well that you never notice how it is written—a Stevensonian sort of tale, and complete in the issue out two weeks from to-day.

EVERY so often we read about a bank messenger who elopes with thirty or forty thousand dollars' worth of Liberty Bonds, and we wonder what the true story is. The papers tell us who was arrested and whether the bank got them back or not, but they generally miss the romance of the incident—and too often the romance is a sordid, uninteresting one. Here we have a financier who starts out with a bag containing a hundred thousand dollars in negotiable securities which he intends to deliver with his own hands. When he reaches his destination the bag is empty. That is the brisk, direct way in which the story starts. It moves fast. There are no tedious questionings, no cut-and-dried detective work, just a succession of dramatic situations and surprises. Moreover, the characters are all distinguished, human, and likable. A super-detective story, also complete in the one issue out in two weeks—"Tainted Collateral," by Howard Fielding. Besides this, there is the first installment of a new serial by Charles Neville Buck and a string of the best short stories of the year by such writers as Clarence Cullen, Frank Condon, H. de Vere Stacpoole, Bertrand W. Sinclair, Roy Hinds, and E. A. Apple. We know that you want to get the next issue. If you want to be sure to get it—and we would rather have you get the last copy on the stand than any stranger, however amiable—be sure to order your copy from the news dealer now.



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