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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

Volume LVIII
Number 3

BEST FICTION MAGAZINE IN AMERICA

TWICE-A-MONTH 25 CENTS

The Popular Magazine

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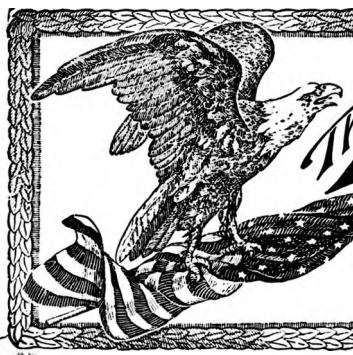
NOVEMBER TWENTIETH 1920

A FOOTBALL STORY BY LAWRENCE PERRY
A NOVEL BY WILLIAM MAC LEOD RAINE
A SERIAL BY DANE COOLIDGE & OTHER STORIES

Theodore Seixas Solomons will have a complete novel in the next issue—"The Implacable Friend," a story of mining in Alaska. There also will be an exciting mystery novelette, "Number Six and the Borgia," by **Edgar Wallace**



TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

Vol. LVIII. No. 3 — November 20, 1920

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. LVIII. NOVEMBER 20, 1920. No. 3

Tangled Trails

By William MacLeod Raine

Author of "Wyoming," "Ridgway of Montana," Etc.

It is not often that a cowboy turns detective. And it is rarely that any detective is faced with the problem Kirby Lane found when he followed Rose McLean to Denver. Eight people were known to have been, one after another, in James Cunningham's room, close to the time he was murdered. How would you like to solve this problem—especially if you were one of the eight toward whom suspicion pointed? In this story Mr. Raine most fascinatingly mingles the lure of the West and its people and the spell of the crime puzzle.

(A Complete Novel)

CHAPTER I.

NO ALTRUIST.

ESTHER McLEAN brought the afternoon mail into Cunningham. She put it on the desk before him and stood waiting, timidly, afraid to voice her demand for justice, yet too desperately anxious to leave with it unspoken.

He leaned back in his swivel chair, his cold eyes challenging her. "Well," he barked harshly.

She was a young, soft creature, very pretty in a kittenish fashion, both sensuous and helpless. It was an easy guess that, unless fortune stood her friend, she was a predestined victim to the world's selfish love of pleasure. And fortune, with a cynical smile, had stood aside and let her go her way.

"I—I——" A wave of color flooded her face. She twisted a rag of a handkerchief into a hard, wadded knot.

"Spit it out," he ordered curtly.

"I've got to do something—soon. Won't you—won't you——" There was a wail of despair in the unfinished sentence.

James Cunningham was a grim, gray pirate, as malleable as cast iron and as soft. He was a large, big-boned man, aggressive, dominant, the kind that takes the world by the throat and shakes success from it. The contour of his hook-nosed face had something rapacious written on it.

"No. Not till I get good and ready. I've told you I'd look out for you, if you'd keep still. Don't come whining at me. I won't have it."

"But——"

Already he was ripping letters open and glancing over them. Tears brimmed the brown eyes of the girl. She bit her lower lip, choked back a sob, and turned hopelessly away. Her misfortune lay at her own door. She knew that. But—— The woe in her heart was that the man she had loved was leaving her to face, alone, a night as bleak as death.

Cunningham had always led a life of intelligent selfishness. He had usually got what he wanted, because he was strong enough to take it. No scrupulous nicety of means had ever deterred him. Nor ever would. He played his own hand, with a cynical disregard of the rights of others. It was this that had made him what he was, a man who bulked large in the sight of the city and State. Long ago he had made up his mind that altruism was weakness.

He went on through his mail with a swift, trained eye. One of the letters he laid aside, and glanced at a second time. It brought a

grim, hard smile to his lips. One paragraph read:

There's no water in your ditch and our crops are burning up. Your whole irrigation system in Dry Valley is a fake. You knew it, but we didn't. You've skinned us out of all we had, you damned bloodsucker. If you ever come up here we'll dry-gulch you sure.

The letter was signed, "One You Have Robbed." Attached to it was a clipping from a small-town paper, telling of a meeting of farmers to ask the United States district attorney for an investigation of the Dry Valley irrigation project, promoted by James Cunningham.

The promoter smiled. He was not afraid of the government. He had kept strictly within the law. It was not his fault there was not enough rainfall in the watershed to irrigate the valley. But the threat to dry-gulch him was another matter. He had no fancy for being shot in the back. Some crazy fool of a settler might do just that. He decided to let an agent attend to his Dry Valley affairs, hereafter.

He dictated some letters, closed his desk, and went down the street toward the City Club. At a florist's he stopped and ordered a box of American Beauties to be sent to Miss Phyllis Harriman. With these he inclosed his card, a line of greeting scrawled on it.

A poker game was on at the club, and Cunningham sat in. He interrupted it to dine, holding his seat by leaving a pile of chips at the place. When he cashed in his winnings and went downstairs it was still early. A lawyer in the reading room rose at sight of Cunningham. "Want to see you a minute," he said. "Let's go into the red room."

He led the way to a small room, furnished with a desk, writing supplies, and a telephone. It was for the use of members who wanted to be private. The lawyer shut the door.

"Afraid I've bad news for you, Cunningham," he said.

The other man's steady eyes did not waver. He waited silently.

"I was at Golden to-day, on business connected with a divorce case. By chance I ran across a record that astonished me. It may be only a coincidence of names, but if——"

"Now you've wrapped up the blackjack so that it won't hurt, suppose you go ahead and hit me over the head with it," suggested Cunningham dryly.

The lawyer told what he knew. The promoter took it with no evidence of feeling other than that which showed in narrowed eyes, hard as diamonds, and a clenched jaw, in which the muscles stood out like ropes.

"Much obliged, Foster," he said, and the lawyer knew he was dismissed.

Cunningham paced the room for a few moments, then rang for a messenger. He wrote a note and gave it to the boy to be delivered. Then he left the club. From Seventeenth Street he walked across to the Paradox Apartments where he lived. He found a note propped up against a book, on the table of his living room. It had been written by the Japanese servant he shared with two other bachelors, who lived in the same building.

Mr. Hull he come see you. He sorry you not here. He say maybe perhaps make honorable call some other time. S. HORIKAWA.

Cunningham tossed the note aside. He had no wish to see Hull. The fellow was becoming a nuisance. If he had any complaint, he could go to the courts with it. That was what they were for.

The doorbell rang. The promoter opened to a big barrel-bodied man, who pushed past him into the room.

"What you want, Hull?" demanded Cunningham curtly.

The man thrust his bull neck forward. A heavy roll of fat swelled over the collar. "You know damn well what I want. I want what's comin' to me. My share of the Dry Valley clean-up. An' I'm gonna have it. See?"

"You've had every cent you'll get. I told you that before."

Tiny red capillaries seamed the beefy face of the fat man. "An' I told you I was gonna have a divvy. An' I am. You can't throw down 'Cass' Hull, an' get away with it. Not none!" The shallow protuberant eyes glittered theateningly.

"Thought you knew me better," Cunningham retorted contemptuously. "When I say I won't, I won't. Go to a lawyer, if you think you've got a case. Don't come bellyaching to me."

The face of the fat man was apoplectic. "Like sin I'll go to a lawyer. You'd like that fine, you double-crossin' sidewinder. I'll come with a six gun. That's how I'll come. An' soon. I'll give you two days to

come through. Two days. If you don't—hell sure enough will cough."

Whatever else could be said about Cunningham, he was no coward.

"I don't scare worth a cent, Hull. Get out! Pronto. And don't come back, unless you want me to turn you over to the police for a blackmailing crook."

Cunningham was past fifty-five, and his hair was streaked with gray. But he stood straight as an Indian, six feet in his socks. The sap of strength still ran strong in him. In the days when he had ridden the range, he had been famous for his stamina, and he was even yet a formidable two-fisted fighter.

But Hull was beyond prudence. "I'll go when I get ready, an' I'll come back when I get ready," he boasted.

There came a soft thud of a hard fist on fat flesh, the crash of a heavy bulk against the door. After that things moved fast. Hull's body reacted to the pain of smashing blows, falling swift and sure. Before he knew what had taken place, he was on the landing, outside, on his way to the stairs. He hit the treads hard and rolled on down.

A man coming upstairs helped him to his feet.

"What's up?" the man asked.

Hull glared at him, for the moment speechless. His eyes were venomous, his mouth a thin, cruel slit. He pushed the newcomer aside, opened the door of the apartment opposite, went in, and slammed it after him.

The man who had assisted him to rise was dark and immaculately dressed.

"I judge uncle James has been exercising," he murmured, before he took the next flight of stairs. On the door of Apartment 12 was a legend in old English, engraved on a calling card. It said:

JAMES CUNNINGHAM.

The visitor pushed the electric bell. Cunningham opened to him.

"Good evening, uncle," the younger man said. "Your elevator is not running, so I walked up. On the way I met a man going down. He seemed rather in a hurry."

"A cheap blackmailer trying to hold me up. I threw him out."

"Thought he looked put out," answered the younger man, smiling politely. "I see you still believe in applying direct energy to difficulties."

"I do. That's why I sent for you." The promoter's cold eyes were inscrutable. "Come in and shut the door."

The young man sauntered in. He glanced at his uncle curiously, from his sparkling black eyes. What the devil did James, senior, mean by what he had said? Was there any particular significance in it? He stroked his small, black mustache. "Glad to oblige you, any way I can, sir."

"Sit down."

CHAPTER II.

WILD ROSE TAKES THE DUST.

"Wild Rose on Wild Fire," shouted the announcer, through a megaphone trained on the grand stand. Kirby Lane, who was leaning against the fence, chatting with a friend, turned round and took notice. Most people did when Wild Rose held the center of the stage.

Through the gateway of the inclosure came a girl, hardly out of her teens. She was bareheaded, a cowboy hat in her hand. The sun, already slanting from the west, kissed her crisp, ruddy gold hair and set it sparkling. Her skin was shell-pink, amber clear. She walked as might a young Greek goddess in the dawn of the world, with the free movement of one who loves the open sky and the wind-swept plain.

A storm of handclapping swept the grand stand. Wild Rose acknowledged it with a happy little laugh. These dear people loved her. She knew it. And not only because she was a champion. They made much of her because of her slimness, her beauty, the aura of daintiness that surrounded her, the little touches of shy youth that still clung to her manner. Other riders of her sex might be rough, hoydenish, or masculine. Wild Rose had the charm of her name. Yet the muscles that rippled beneath her velvet skin were hard as nails. No broncho alive could unseat her, without the fight of its life.

Meanwhile, the outlaw horse Wild Fire was claiming its share of attention. The broncho was a noted bucker. Every year it made the circuit of the rodeos and only twice had a rider stuck to the saddle without pulling leather. Now it had been roped and cornered. Half a dozen wranglers in chaps were trying to get it ready for the saddle. From the red-hot eyes of the brute a devil of fury glared at the men trying to thrust a gunny sack over its head. The four legs were wide apart, the ears cocked,

teeth bared. The animal flung itself skyward, and came down on the boot of a puncher savagely. The man gave an involuntary howl of pain, but he clung to the rope snubbed round the wicked head.

The gunny sack was pushed and pulled over the eyes. Wild Fire subsided, trembling, while bridle was adjusted and saddle slipped on. The girl attended to the cinching herself. If the saddle turned, it might cost her life, and she preferred to take no unnecessary chances. She swung to the saddle and adjusted her feet in the stirrups. The gunny sack was whipped from the horse's head. There was a wild scuffle of escaping wranglers.

For a moment, Wild Fire stood quivering. The girl's hat swept through the air, in front of its eyes. The horse woke to galvanized action. The back humped. It shot into the air, with a writhing twist of the body. All four feet struck the ground together, straight and stiff as fence posts.

The girl's head jerked forward, as though it were on a hinge. The outlaw went sunfishing, its forefeet almost straight up. She was still in the saddle when it came to all fours again. A series of jarring bucks, each ending with the force of a pile driver, as Wild Fire's hoofs struck earth, varied the program. The rider came down limp, half in the saddle half out, righting herself as the horse settled for the next leap. But not once did her hands reach for the pommel of the saddle to steady her. Pitching and bucking, the animal humped forward to the fence.

"Look out!" a judge yelled.

It was too late. The rider could not deflect her mount. Into the fence went Wild Fire, blindly and furiously. The girl threw up her leg, to keep it from being jammed. Up went the broncho again before Wild Rose could find the stirrup. She knew she was gone, felt herself shooting forward. She struck the ground close to the horse's hoofs. Wild Fire lunged at her. A bolt of pain like a red-hot iron seared through her.

Though the air a rope whined. It settled over the head of the outlaw and instantly was jerked tight. Wild Fire, coming down hard for a second lunge at the green crumpled heap, underfoot, was dragged sharply sideways. Another lariat snaked forward and fell true.

"Here, Cole!" The first roper thrust the taut line into the hands of a puncher who had run forward. He himself dived for the still girl, beneath the hoofs of the rearing horse. Catching her by the arms, he dragged her out of danger. She was unconscious. The cowboy carried her to the waiting ambulance. The closed eyes flickered open. A puzzled little frown rested in them.

"What's up, Kirby?" asked Wild Rose.

The doctor examined her. The right arm hung limp.

"Broken, I'm afraid," he said.

"Ever see such luck?" the girl complained to Lane. "Probably they won't let me ride in the wild-horse race, now."

"No chance, young lady," the doctor said promptly. "I'm going to take you right to the hospital."

The cowboy helped her into the ambulance, and found himself a seat.

"Where do you think you're going?" she asked with a smile a bit twisted by pain.

"I reckon I'll go as far as the hospital with you."

"I reckon you won't. What do you think I am—a nice little parlor girl who has to be petted when she gets hurt? You're on to ride, inside of fifteen minutes—and you know it."

"Oh, well! I'm lookin' for an alibi, so as not to be beaten. That 'Cole' Sanborn is sure a straight-up rider."

"So's that Kirby Lane. You needn't think I'm going to let you beat yourself out of the championship. Not so any one could notice it. Hop out, sir."

He rose, smiling ruefully. "You certainly are one bossy kid."

"I'd say you need bossing, when you start to act so foolish," she retorted, flushing.

"See you later," he called to her by way of good-by.

As the ambulance drove away she waved cheerfully at him a gauntleted hand. The cow-puncher turned back to the arena. The megaphone man was announcing that the contest for the world's roughriding championship would now be resumed.

CHAPTER III.

NOT ALWAYS TWO TO MAKE A QUARREL.

The less expert riders had been weeded out in the past two days. Only the champions of their respective sections were still in the running. One after another, these lean, brown men, chap-clad and bowlegged, came forward, dragging their saddles, and clamped themselves to the backs of hur-

ricane outlaws, which pitched, bucked, crashed into fences, and toppled over backward, in their frenzied efforts to dislodge the human clothespins fastened to them.

Kirby Lane, from his seat on the fence, among a group of cow-punchers, watched each rider no less closely. It chanced that he came last on the program for the day. When Cole Sanborn was in the saddle he made an audible comment.

"I'm lookin' at the next champion of the world," he announced.

Sanborn was astride a noted outlaw known as Jazz. The horse was a sorrel, and it knew all the tricks of its kind. It went sunfishing, tried weaving and fence-rowing, at last toppled over backward, after a frantic leap upward. The rider, long-bodied and lithe, rode like a centaur. Except for the moment, when he stepped out of the saddle as the outlaw fell on its back, he stuck to his seat as though he were glued to it.

"He's a right limber young fellow, and he sure can ride. I'll say that," admitted one old cattleman.

"Hmp! Kirby here can make him look like thirty cents, top of a bronc, or with a lariat, tither one," the yellow-chapped vaquero flung out bluntly.

Lane looked at his champion, a trifle annoyed. "What's the use o' talkin' foolishness, Kent? I never saw the day I had anything on Cole."

"Beat him at Pendleton, didn't you?"

"Luck. I drew the best horses." To Sanborn, who had finished his job and was straddling wide-legged toward the group, Kirby threw up a hand of greeting. "Good work, old-timer. You're sure hell-a-mile, on a bronc."

"Kirby Lane on Wild Fire," shouted the announcer.

Lane slid from the fence and reached for his saddle. As he lounged forward, moving with indolent grace, one might have guessed him a Southerner. He was lean-loined and broad-shouldered. The long, flowing muscles rippled under his skin, when he moved, like those of a panther. From beneath the band of his pinched-in hat, crisp, reddish hair escaped.

Wild Fire was off the instant his feet found the stirrups. Again the outlaw went through its bag of tricks and its straight bucking. The man in the saddle gave to its every motion, lightly and easily. He rode with such grace that he seemed almost a part of the horse. His reactions appeared to anticipate the impulses of the screaming fiend which he was astride. When Wild Fire jolted him, with humpbacked jarring bucks, his spine took the shock limply to neutralize the effect. When it leaped heavenward he waved his hat joyously, and rode the stirrups. From first to last he was master of the situation, and the outlaw, though still fighting savagely, knew the battle was lost.

The bronc had one trump card left, a trick that had unseated many a stubborn rider. It plunged sideways at the fence of the inclosure, and crashed through it. Kirby's nerves shrieked with pain, and, for a moment, everything went black before him. His leg had been jammed hard against the upper plank. But when the haze cleared he was still in the saddle. The outlaw gave up. It trotted tamely back to the grand stand, through the shredded fragments of pine in the splintered fence, and the grand stand rose to its feet with a shout of applause for the rider.

Kirby slipped from the saddle and limped back to his fellows on the fence. Already the crowd was pouring out from every exit of the stand. A thousand cars of fifty different makes were snorting impatiently to get out of the jam, as soon as possible. For Cheyenne was full, full to overflowing. The town roared with a high tide of jocund life.

A big cattleman beckoned to Lane. "Place in my car, son. Run you back to town."

One of the judges sat in the tonneau beside the roughrider.

"How's the leg? Hurt much?"

"Not much. I'm noticin' it some," Kirby answered with a smile.

"You'll have to ride to-morrow. It's you and Sanborn for the finals. We haven't quite made up our minds."

After dinner the roughrider asked the clerk, at her hotel, if there was any mail for Miss Rose McLean. Three letters were handed him. He put them in his pocket and set out for the hospital.

He found Miss Rose reclining in a hospital chair, in a frame of mind highly indignant. "That doctor talks as though he's going to keep me here a week. Well, he's got another guess coming. I'll not stay," she exploded to her visitor.

"Now, looky here, you better do as the doc says. He knows best. What's a week in your young life?" Kirby suggested.

He drew her letters from his pocket. "Stopped to get your mail at the hotel. Thought you'd like to see it."

Wild Rose looked the envelopes over and tore one open.

"From my little sister, Esther," she exclaimed. "Mind if I read it? I'm some worried about her. She's been writin' kinda funny, lately."

As she read, the color ebbed from her face. When she had finished reading the letter Kirby spoke gently:

"Bad news, pardner?"

She nodded, choking. Her eyes, frank and direct, met those of her friend without evasion. It was a heritage of her life in the open that, in her relations with men, she showed a boylike unconcern of sex.

"Esther's in trouble. She—she——" Rose caught her breath in a stress of emotion.

"If there's anything I can do——"

The girl flung aside the rug that covered her and rose from the chair. She began to pace up and down the room. Presently her thoughts overflowed in words.

"She doesn't say what it is, but—I know her. She's crazy with fear—or heartache—or something." Wild Rose was always quick-tempered, a passionate defender of children and all weak creatures. Her little sister was in danger, the only near relative she had. She would fight for her as a cougar would for its young. "By God, if it's a man—if he's done her wrong—I'll shoot him down like a gray wolf. I'll show him how safe it is to—to——"

She broke down again, clamping tight her small, strong teeth, to bite back a sob. Lane spoke very gently: "Does she say——"

"No. The letter's just a—a wail of despair. She—talks of suicide. Kirby, I've got to get to Denver on the next train. Find out when it leaves. And I'll send a telegram to her to-night telling her I'll fix it."

"Sure! That's the way to talk. Be reasonable, an' everything'll work out fine. Write your wire, an' I'll take it right to the office. Soon as I've got the train schedule, I'll come back."

Kirby put Wild Rose on the morning train for Denver. She had escaped from the doctor by sheer force of will. Ordinarily, Rose bloomed with vitality, but this morning she looked tired and worn. In her eyes there was a hard brilliancy Kirby did not like to see.

"Good luck!" she called through the open window as the train pulled out. "Beat Cole, Kirby."

All through breakfast he was ridden by the fear of trouble on her horizon. Comrades stopped to slap him on the back and wish him good luck in the finals, and though he made the proper answers, it was with the surface of a mind almost wholly preoccupied with another matter. While he was rising from the table he made a decision in the flash of an eye. He would join Rose in Denver at once. Already dozens of cars were taking the road. There would be a vacant place in some one of them.

He found a party just setting out for Denver and easily made arrangements to take the unfilled seat in the tonneau. By the middle of the afternoon he was at a boarding house on Cherokee Street, inquiring for Miss Rose McLean. She was out, and the landlady did not know when she would be back. Probably after her sister got home from work.

Lane wandered down to Curtis Street, sat through a part of a movie, then restlessly took his way up Seventeenth. He had an uncle and two cousins living in Denver. With the uncle he was on bad terms, and with his cousins on no terms at all. It had been ten years since he had seen either James Cunningham, Jr., or his brother Jack. Why not call on them and renew acquaintance? He went into a drug store and looked the name up in a telephone book. His cousin James had an office in the Equitable Building. He hung the book up on the hook, and turned to go. As he did so, he came face to face with Rose McLean.

"You—here!" she cried. "Did you leave Cheyenne without riding to-day?"

"I didn't want to ride. I'm fed up on ridin'."

"You threw away the championship and a thousand-dollar prize to—to——"

"You're forgettin' Cole Sanborn," he laughed. "No, honest, I came on business. But since I'm here—say, Rose, where can we have a talk? Let's go up to the mezzanine gallery at the Albany. It's right next door."

"It's a man, just as I thought—the man she works for."

"Is he married?"

"No. Going to be soon, the papers say. He's a wealthy promoter. His name's Cunningham."

"What Cunningham?" In his astonishment, the words seemed to leap from him of their own volition.

"James Cunningham, a big land and mining man. You must have heard of him."

"Yes, I've heard of him. Are you sure?"

She nodded.

"What do you mean to do?"

"I mean to have a talk with him first off. I'll make him do what's right."

He shook his head. "Not the best way, Rose. Let's be sure of every move we make. Let's check up on this man, before we lay down the law to him."

"No! I'm going to see him and have it out now," she flung back.

"Then let me go with you, when you see him. You're sick."

"I don't want him to think I'm afraid of him. You're not in this, Kirby. Esther is my little sister, not yours."

"True enough." A sardonic mirthless smile touched his face. "But James Cunningham is my uncle, not yours."

"Your uncle?" She rose, staring at him with big, dilated eyes. "He's your uncle, the man who——"

"Yes, and I know him better than you do. We've got to use finesse——"

"I see." Her eyes attacked him scornfully. "You think we'd better not face him with what he's done. You think we'd better go easy on him. Uncle's rich, and he might not like plain words. Oh, I understand now." Wild Rose flung out a gesture that brushed him from her friendship. She moved past him blazing with anger. He was at the elevator cage almost as soon as she.

"Listen, Rose. You know better than that. He's no friend of mine, but I know him. You can't drive him by threats——"

The elevator slid down and stopped. The door of it opened.

"Will you stand aside?" Rose demanded. She stepped into the car. The door clanged shut. Kirby was left standing alone.

CHAPTER IV.

LIGHTS OUT.

With the aid of a tiny looking-glass, a young woman was powdering her nose. Lane interrupted her to ask if he might see Mr. Cunningham.

"Name, please?" she parroted pertly, and pressed a button in the switchboard before her. Presently she reached for the powder puff again. "Says to come right in. Door t'end o'the hall."

Kirby entered. A man sat at a desk telephoning. He was smooth shaven and rather heavy-set, a year or two beyond thirty, with thinning hair on the top of his head. His eyes were cold and hard in repose. From the conversation his visitor gathered that he was a captain in the Red Cross drive that was on. As he hung up the receiver the man rose, brisk and smiling, hand outstretched. "Glad to meet you, cousin Kirby. When did you reach town? And how long are you going to stay?"

"Got in hour and a half ago. How are you, James?"

"Busy, but not too busy to meet old friends. Let me see. I haven't seen you since you were ten years old, have I?"

"I was about twelve. It was when my father moved to Wyoming."

"Well, I'm glad to see you. Where you staying? Eat lunch with me to-morrow, can't you? I'll try to get Jack, too."

"Suits me fine," agreed Kirby.

"Anything I can do for you in the meantime?"

"Yes. I want to see uncle James."

There was a film of wariness, in the eyes of the oil broker, as he looked at the straight, clean-built young cattleman. He knew that the strong face, brown as Wyoming, expressed a pungent personality, back of which was dynamic force. What did Lane want with his uncle? They had quarreled. His cousin knew that. Did young Lane expect him to back his side of the quarrel? Or did he want to win back favor with James Cunningham, Sr., millionaire?

Kirby smiled. He guessed what the other was thinking. "I don't want to interfere in your friendship with him. All I need is his address and a little information. I've come to have another row with him, I reckon."

The interest in Cunningham's eyes quickened. He laughed. "Aren't you in bad enough already with uncle? Why another quarrel?"

"This isn't on my own account. There's a girl in his office——"

A rap on the door interrupted Kirby. A young man walked into the room. He was good looking, young, exquisite, dark-eyed, and black-haired. His clothes had been made by one of the best tailors in New York. Moreover, he knew how to wear

them. James Cunningham, Jr., introduced him to Kirby as his cousin Jack.

"Kirby was just telling me that he has come to Denver to meet uncle James," the broker explained to his brother. "Some difficulty with him, I understand."

"I'm not quite sure of my facts," Lane said. "But there's evidence to show that he has ruined a young girl, in his office. She practically admits that he's the man. I happen to be a friend of her family. He can't get away with it."

Kirby chanced to be looking at his cousin Jack. What he saw in that young man's eyes surprised him. There were astonishment, incredulity, and finally a cunning narrowing of the black pupils. It was James who spoke. His face was grave. "That's a serious charge, Kirby," he said. "What is the name of the young woman?"

"I'd rather not give it—except to uncle James himself."

"Better write it," suggested Jack, with a reminiscent laugh. "He's a bit impetuous. I saw him throw a man down the stairs, yesterday. Picked the fellow up at the foot of the flight. He certainly looked as though he'd like to murder our dear uncle."

"What I'd like to know is this," said Lane. "What sort of a reputation has uncle James, in this way? Have you ever heard of his being in anything of this sort, before?"

"No, I haven't," James said promptly.

"Where can I see him, most easily? At his office?" asked Kirby.

"He drove down to Colorado Springs, today, on business. At least, he told me he was going. Don't know whether he expects to get back to-night or not. He lives at the Paradox Apartments," Jack said.

"Probably I'd better see him there rather than at his office."

James arranged a place of meeting for luncheon, next day. The young cattleman left. He knew, from the fidgety manner of Jack, that he had some important business he was anxious to talk over with his brother.

It was five minutes to ten by his watch when Kirby entered the Paradox Apartments. The bulletin board told him that his uncle's apartment was twelve. He did not take the self-serve elevator but the stairs. The hall on the second floor was dark. Since he did not know whether the rooms he wanted were on this floor, or the next, he knocked at a door. Kirby thought he heard the whisper of voices, and he knocked again. He had to rap a third time before the door was opened.

"What is it? What do you want?"

If ever Lane had seen stark-naked fear, in a human face, it stared at him out of that of the woman in front of him. She was a tall, angular woman, of a harsh, forbidding countenance, flat-breasted and middle-aged. Behind her, farther back in the room, the roughrider caught a glimpse of a fat, gross, ashen-faced man, fleeing toward the inner door of a bedroom to escape being seen. He was thrusting into his coat pocket what looked to the man in the hall like a revolver.

"Can you tell me where James Cunningham's apartment is?" asked Kirby.

The woman gasped. The hand on the doorknob was trembling violently. Something clicked in her throat when the dry lips tried to frame an answer.

"Head o' the stairs—right hand," she managed to get out, then shut the door, swiftly, in the face of the man whose simple question had so shocked her. Kirby heard the latch released from its catch. The key in the lock below also turned.

As he took the treads that brought him to the next landing, the cattleman had an impression of a light being flashed off somewhere. He turned to the right, as the woman below had directed. The first door had on the panel a card, with his uncle's name. He knocked, and at the same instant noticed that the door was ajar. No answer came. His finger found the electric push button. He could hear it buzzing inside. Twice he pushed it.

"Nobody at home, looks like," he said to himself. "Well, I reckon I'll step in an' leave a note. Or maybe I'll wait. If the door's open, he's liable to be right back."

He stepped into the room. It was dark. His fingers groped along the wall for the button to throw on the light. Before he found it a sound startled him. It was the soft, faint panting of some one breathing. He was a man whose nerves were under the best of control, but the cold feet of mice pattered up and down his spine. Something was wrong. The sixth sense of danger that comes to some men, who live constantly in peril, was warning him.

"Who's there?" he asked sharply.

No voice replied, but there was a faint rustle of some one or something stirring. He waited, crouched in the darkness.

There came another vague rustle of movement. And presently another, this time closer. Every sense in him was alert, keyed up to closest attention. He knew that some one, for some sinister purpose, had come into this apartment and been trapped here by him. The moments flew. He thought he could hear his hammering heart. A stifled gasp, a dozen feet from him, was just audible. He leaped for the sound. His outflung hand struck an arm and slid down it, caught at a small wrist, and fastened there. In the fraction of a second left him, he realized, beyond question, that it was a woman he had assaulted.

The hand was wrenched from him. There came a zigzag flash of lightning searing his brain, a crash that filled the world for him—and he floated into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER V.

FOUL PLAY.

Lane came back painfully to a world of darkness. His head throbbed, distressingly. Querulously he wondered where he was and what had taken place. He drew the fingers of his outstretched hand along the nap of a rug, and he knew he was on the floor. Then his mind cleared and he remembered that a woman's hand had been imprisoned in his, just before his brain stopped functioning. Who was she? What was she doing here? And what, under heaven, had hit him hard enough to put the lights out so instantly?

He sat up and held his throbbing head. He had been struck on the point of the chin and gone down like an axed bullock. The woman must have lashed out at him with some weapon. In his pocket he found a match. It flared up and lit a small space, in the pit of blackness. Unsteadily, he got to his feet and moved toward the door. His mind was quite clear now and his senses abnormally sensitive. For instance, he was aware of a faint perfume of violet in the room, so faint that he had not noticed it before.

There grew on him a horror, an eagerness to be gone from the rooms. It was based on no reasoning, but on some obscure feeling that there had taken place something evil, something that chilled his blood. Yet he did not go. He had come for a purpose, and it was characteristic of him that he stayed, in spite of the dread that grew on him, till it filled his breast. Again he groped along the wall for the light switch. A second match flared in his fingers, and showed it to him. Light flooded the room.

His first sensation was of relief. This handsome apartment with its Persian rugs, its padded easy-chairs, its harmonious wall tints, had a note of response quite alien to tragedy. It was the home of a man who had given a good deal of attention to making himself comfortable. Indefinably, it was a man's room. The presiding genius of it was masculine, and not feminine. It lacked the touches of adornment that only a woman can give, to make a place homelike.

Yet, one adornment caught Kirby's eye, at once. It was a large photograph, in a handsome frame, on the table. The picture showed the head and bust of a beautiful woman in evening dress. She was a brunette, young and very attractive. The line of head, throat, and shoulder was perfect. The delicate disdainful poise and the gay provocation in the dark, slanting eyes were enough to tell that she was no novice in the game of sex.

He judged her an expensive orchid, produced in the civilization of our twentieth-century hothouse. Across the bottom of the picture was scrawled an inscription, in a fashionably angular hand. Lane moved closer to read it. The words were, "Always, Phyllis." Probably this was the young woman to whom, if rumor were true, James Cunningham, Sr., was engaged.

On the floor, near where Kirby had been lying, lay a heavy piece of agate, evidently used for a paperweight. He picked up the smooth stone and guessed instantly that this was the weapon which had established contact with his chin. Very likely the woman's hand had closed on it, when she heard him coming. She had switched off the light and waited for him. That the blow had found a vulnerable mark, and knocked him out, had been sheer luck.

Kirby passed into a luxurious bedroom, beyond which was a tiled bathroom. He glanced these over and returned to the outer apartment. There was still another door. It was closed. As the man from Wyoming moved toward it, he felt once more a strange sensation of dread. It was strong enough to stop him in his stride. What was he going to find behind that door? When he laid his hand on the knob, pin pricks played over his scalp and galloped down his spine.

He opened the door. A sweet, sickish odor, pungent but not heavy, greeted his nostrils. It was a familiar smell, one he had met only recently. Where? His memory jumped to a corridor of the Cheyenne hospital. He had been passing the operating room, on his way to see Wild Rose. The door had opened and there had been wafted to him, faintly, the penetrating whiff of chloroform. It was the same drug he sniffed now.

He stood on the threshold, groped for the switch, and flashed on the lights. Sound though Kirby Lane's nerves were, he could not repress a gasp at what he saw.

Leaning back in an armchair, looking up at him with a horrible sardonic grin, was his uncle, James Cunningham. His wrists were tied, with ropes, to the arms of the chair. A towel, passed round his throat, fastened the body to the back of the chair, and propped up the head. A bloody clot of hair hung tangled just above the temple. The man was dead beyond any possibility of doubt. There was a small hole in the center of the forehead, through which a bullet had crashed. Beneath this was a thin trickle of blood that had run into the heavy eyebrows.

The dead man was wearing a plaid smoking jacket and ox-blood slippers. On the tabouret, close to his hand, lay a half-smoked cigar. There was a grewsome suggestion in the tilt of the head and the gargoyle grin that this was a hideous and shocking jest he was playing on the world.

Kirby snatched his eyes from the grim spectacle and looked round the room. It was evidently a private den, to which the owner of the apartment retired. There were facilities for smoking and for drinking, a lounge which showed marks of wear, and a writing desk in one corner. This desk held the young man's gaze. It was open. Papers lay scattered everywhere, and its contents had been rifled and flung on the floor. Some one, in a desperate hurry, had searched every pigeonhole.

The window of the room was open. Perhaps it had been thrown up to let out the fumes of the chloroform. Kirby stepped to it and looked down. The fire escape ran past it to the stories above and below.

The young cattleman had seen more than once the tragedies of the range. He had heard the bark of guns and had looked down on quiet dead men, but a minute before full of lusty life. But these had been victims of warfare in the open, usually of sudden passions that had flared and struck. This was different. It was murder, deliberate, cold-blooded, atrocious. The man had been tied up, made helpless, and done to death without mercy. There was a note of the abnormal, of the unhuman, about the affair. Whoever had killed James Cunningham deserved the extreme penalty of the law.

Kirby decided that he must call the police at once. No time ought to be lost in starting to run down the murderer. He stepped into the living room to the telephone, lifted the receiver from the hook, and—stood staring down at a glove, lying on the table.

As he looked at it the blood washed out of his face. He had a sensation as though his heart had been plunged into cracked ice. For he recognized the glove on the table, knew who its owner was. It was a small riding gauntlet, with a device of a rose embroidered on the wrist. He would have known that glove among a thousand. He had seen it, a few hours since, on the hand of Wild Rose.

CHAPTER VI.

ESTHER.

Kirby Lane stood with fascinated eyes looking down at the glove, muscles and brain alike paralyzed. The receiver was in his hand, close to his ear. A voice from the other end of the wire drifted to him. "Number, please." Automatically, he hung the receiver on the hook. Dazed though he was, the roughrider knew that the police were the last people in the world he wanted to see just now.

All his life he had lived the adventure of the outdoors. For twelve months he had served at the front, part of the time with the forces in the Argonne. He had ridden stampedes and fought through blizzards. He had tamed the worst outlaw horses the West could produce. But he had never been so shock-shaken as he was now. A fact impossibly but dreadfully true confronted him. Wild Rose had been alone with his uncle, in these rooms, had listened with breathless horror while Kirby climbed the stairs, had been trapped by his arrival, and had fought like a wolf to make her escape. He remembered the wild cry of her outraged heart, "Nothing's too bad for a man like that." Lane was sick with fear.

In replacing the telephone he had accidentally pushed aside a book. Beneath it was a slip of paper on which had been penciled a note. He read it, without any interest.

Mr. Hull he come see you. He sorry you not here. He say maybe perhaps make honorable call some other time. S. HORIKAWA.

An electric bell buzzed through the apartment. The sound of it startled Kirby as though it had been the warning of a rattlesnake close to his head.

He had been trained to swift thought reactions. Quickly, but noiselessly, he stepped to the door and released the catch of the Yale lock so that it would not open from the outside without a key. He switched off the light and passed through the living room into the bedchamber. His whole desire, now, was to be gone from the building, as soon as possible. The bedroom also he darkened before he stepped to the window and crept through it to the platform of the fire escape.

The glove was still in his hand. He thrust it in his pocket, as he began the descent. The iron ladder ran down the building to the alley. It ended ten feet above the ground. Kirby lowered himself and dropped. He turned to the right, down the alley, toward Glenarm Street.

A man was standing at the corner of the alley trying to light a cigar. He was a reporter on the *Times,* just returning from the Press Club where he had been playing in a pool tournament. He stopped Lane. "Can you lend me a match, friend?"

The cattleman handed him three or four and started to go.

"Just a mo'," the newspaper man said, striking a light. "Do you always"—puff, puff—"leave your rooms"—puff, puff, puff —"by the fire escape?"

Kirby looked at him, in silence, thinking furiously. He had been caught after all.

"Never mind, friend," the newspaper man went on. "You don't look like a second-story worker to yours truly." He broke into a little amused chuckle. "I reckon friend husband, who never comes home till Saturday night, happened around unexpectedly and the fire escape looked good to you. Am I right?"

The Wyoming man managed a grin. It was not a mirthful one, but it served.

"You're a wizard," he said admiringly, and went his way.

From a booth in a drug store, on Sixteenth Street, Kirby telephoned the police that James Cunningham had been murdered at his home in the Paradox Apartments. He stayed to answer no questions, but hung up at once. From a side door of the store he stepped out to Welton Street and walked to his hotel.

He passed a wretched night. The distress that flooded his mind was due less to his own danger than to his anxiety for Rose. His course of action was not at all clear to him, in case he should be identified as the man who had been seen going to and coming from the apartment of the murdered man.

He slept little, and that brokenly. With the dawn he was out on the street, to buy a copy of the *News*. The story of the murder had the two columns on the right-hand side of the front page, and broke over to the third. He hurried back to his room to read it behind a locked door.

The story was of a kind in which newspapers revel. Cunningham was a well-known man, several times a millionaire. His death, even by illness, would have been worth a column. But the horrible and grewsome way of his taking off, the mystery surrounding it, the absence of any apparent motive, unless it were revenge, all whetted the appetite of the editors. It was a big "story," one that would run for many days, and the *News* played it strong.

As Kirby had expected, he was selected as the probable assassin. A reporter had interviewed Mr. and Mrs. Cass Hull, who occupied the apartment just below that of the murdered man. They had told him that a young man, a stranger to them, powerfully built and dressed like a prosperous ranchman, had knocked on their door, about nine-twenty, to ask the way to the apartment of Cunningham. Hull explained that he remembered the time particularly because he happened to be winding the clock at the moment.

A description of Lane was given in a two-column box. He read it with no amusement. It was too deadly accurate for comfort.

The supposed assassin of James Cunningham is described by Mrs. Cass Hull, as dressed in a pepper-and-salt suit and a white pinched-in cattleman's hat. He is about six feet tall, between twenty-five and thirty years old, weighing about two hundred or perhaps two hundred and ten pounds. His hair is a light brown, and his face tanned from the sun.

There was one sentence of the story he

read over two or three times. Hull and his wife agreed that it was about nine-twenty when he had knocked on their door, unless it was a printer's error or the reporter had made a mistake. Kirby knew this was wrong. He had looked at his watch, just before he had entered the Paradox Apartment. He had stopped directly under a street globe, and the time was nine-fifty-five.

Had the Hulls deliberately shifted the time back thirty-five minutes? If so, why? He remembered how stark terror had stared out of both their faces. Did they know more about the murder than they pretended? When he had mentioned his uncle's name, the woman had been close to collapse, though, of course, he could not be sure that had been the reason. To his mind there flashed the memory of the note he had seen on the table. The man had called on Cunningham and left word he might call again. Was it possible the Hulls had just come down from the apartment above, when he had knocked on their door? If so, how did the presence of Rose fit into the schedule?

Lane pounced on the fear and the evasion of the Hulls as an outlet for Wild Rose. It was only a morsel of hope, but he made the most of it.

The newspaper was inclined to bring upstage the mysterious man who had called up the police at ten-twenty-five to tell them that Cunningham had been murdered in his rooms. Who was this man? Could he be the murderer? If so, why should he telephone the police and immediately start the hunt after him? If not the killer, how did he know that a crime had been committed less than an hour before?

As soon as he had eaten breakfast Kirby walked round to the boarding house on Cherokee Street, where Wild Rose was staying with her sister. Rose was out, he learned from the landlady. He asked if he might see her sister. His anxiety was so great he could not leave, without a word of her.

Presently Esther came down to the parlor where the young man waited for her. Lane introduced himself as a friend of Rose. He was worried about her, he said. She seemed to him in a highly wrought-up, nervous state. He wondered if it would not be well to get her out of Denver.

Esther swallowed a lump in her throat. She had never seen Rose so jumpy, she agreed. Last night she had gone out for an hour, alone. The look in her eyes when she had come back had frightened Esther. She had gone at once to her bedroom and locked the door, but her sister had heard her moving about for hours. Then, suddenly, Esther's throat swelled and she began to sob. She knew well enough that she was at the bottom of Wild Rose's worries.

"Where is she now?" asked Kirby gently.

"I don't know. She didn't tell me where she was going. There's—there's something queer about her. I—I'm afraid."

It was impossible to explain, even to this big, brown friend of Rose, who looked as though his quiet strength could move mountains. He was a man. Besides, every instinct in her drove her to keep hidden the secret that some day would tell itself.

Her eyes fell. They rested on the *News* some boarder had tossed on the table, beside which she stood. Her thoughts were of herself and the plight in which she had become involved. She looked at the big headlines of the paper and for the moment did not see them. What she did see was disgrace, the shipwreck of the young life she loved so much.

Her pupils dilated. The words of the headline penetrated to the brain. A hand clutched at her heart. She read again hazily:

JAMES CUNNINGHAM MURDERED.

Then she collapsed into a chair.

CHAPTER VII.

KIRBY ASKS A DIRECT QUESTION.

As Kirby walked to the Equitable Building, to keep his appointment with his cousins, it would not have surprised him if, at any moment, an officer had touched him on the shoulder and told him he was under arrest. Entering the office of the oil broker, where the two brothers were waiting for him, Kirby had a sense of an interrupted conversation. They had been talking about him, he guessed. The atmosphere was electric.

James spoke quickly, to bridge any embarrassment. "This is a dreadful thing about uncle James. I've never been so shocked before, in my life. The crime was absolutely fiendish."

Kirby nodded. "Or else the deed of some

insane person. Men in their right senses don't do such things."

"No," agreed James. "Murder's one thing. Such cold-blooded deviltry is quite another. There may be insanity connected with it. But one thing is sure. I'll not rest till the villain's run to earth and punished." His eyes met those of his cousin. They were cold and bleak.

"Do you think I did it?" asked Kirby quietly.

The directness of the question took James aback. After the fraction of a second's hesitation, he spoke. "If I did I wouldn't be going to lunch with you."

Jack cut in. Excitement had banished his usual almost insolent indolence. His dark eyes burned with a consuming fire. "Let's put our cards on the table. We think you're the man the police are looking for—the one described in the papers."

"What makes you think that?"

"You told us you were going to see him soon as he got back from the Springs. The description fits you to a T. You can't get away with an alibi, so far as I'm concerned."

"All right," said the roughrider, his low, even voice unruffled by excitement. "If I can't, I can't. We'll say I'm the man who came down the fire escape. What then?"

James was watching his cousin steadily. The pupils of his eyes narrowed. He took the answer out of his brother's mouth. "Then we think you probably know something about this mystery that you'll want to tell us. You must have been on the spot very soon after the murderer escaped. Perhaps you saw him."

Kirby told the story of his night's adventure, omitting any reference whatever to Wild Rose or to anybody else in the apartment when he entered. After he had finished, James made his comment. "You've been very frank, Kirby. I accept your story. A guilty man would have denied being in the apartment, or he would have left town and disappeared."

"It wouldn't go far in a courtroom," Jack said.

"Not far," admitted Kirby. "By the way, you haven't expressed an opinion, Jack. Do you think I shot uncle James?"

Jack looked at him, almost sullenly, and looked away. He poked at the corner of the desk with the ferrule of his cane. "I don't know who shot him. You had quarreled with him, and you went to have another row with him. A cop told me that some one who knew how to tie ropes fastened the knots around his arms and throat. You beat it from the room, by the fire escape. A jury would hang you high as Haman on that evidence. Damn it, there's a bruise on your chin that wasn't there when we saw you yesterday. For all I know, he may have done it before you put him out."

"I struck against a corner in the darkness," Kirby said.

"That's what *you* say. You've got to explain it, somehow. I think your story's fishy, if you ask me."

"Then you'd better call up the police," suggested Lane.

"I didn't say I was going to call the cops," retorted Jack sulkily.

"I think you're wrong, Jack," the older brother said. "Kirby had no more to do with this than I had."

"Thanks," Kirby nodded.

"Let's investigate this man Hull. What Kirby says fits in with what you saw a couple of evenings ago, Jack. I'm assuming he's the same man uncle flung downstairs. Uncle told you he was a blackmailer. *There's* one lead. Let's follow it."

Reluctantly Kirby broached one angle of the subject that must be faced. "What about this girl in uncle's office—the one in trouble? Are we going to bring her into this?"

There was a moment's silence. Jack's black eyes slid from Lane to his brother. It struck Kirby that he was waiting, tensely, for the decision of James, though the reason for his anxiety was not apparent.

James gave the matter consideration, then spoke judicially. "Better leave her out of it. No need to smirch uncle's reputation, unless it's absolutely necessary. We don't want the newspapers gloating over any more scandals than they need."

The cattleman breathed freer. He had an odd feeling that Jack, too, was relieved. Had the young man, after all, a warmer feeling for his dead uncle's reputation than he had given him credit for?

As the three cousins stepped out of the Equitable Building to Stout Street, a newsboy was calling an extra.

"A-l-l 'bout Cunn'n'ham myst'ry. Huxtry! Huxtry!"

Kirby bought a paper. A streamer headline in red flashed at him:

HORIKAWA, VALET OF CUNNINGHAM, DISAPPEARS.

The lead of the story below was to the effect that Cunningham had drawn two thousand dollars, in large bills, from the bank, the day of his death. Horikawa could not be found, and the police had a theory that he had killed and robbed his master for this money.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CORONER'S INQUEST.

If Kirby had been playing his own hand only, he would have gone to the police and told them he was the man who had been seen leaving the Paradox Apartments, by the fire escape. But he could not do this without running the risk of implicating Wild Rose. Awkward questions would be fired at him that he could not answer. He decided not to run away from arrest, but not to surrender himself. If the police rounded him up he could not help it; if they did not, so much the better.

He made two more attempts to see Wild Rose during the day, but he could not find her at home. When at last he did see her, it was at the inquest, where he had gone to learn all that he could of the circumstances surrounding the murder.

There was a risk in attending. He recognized that. But he was moved by an imperative urge to find out all that was possible of the affair. The force that drove him was the need, in his heart, to exonerate his friend. Though he recognized the weight of evidence against her, he could not believe her guilty.

Yet the evidence assaulted this conviction of his soul. If the Wild Rose, in the dingy courtroom, had been his friend of the outdoor spaces, he would have rejected, as absurd, the possibility that she had killed his uncle. How could she have chloroformed him and tied him up? But his heart sank when he looked at this wan-faced woman who came late and slipped inconspicuously into a back seat, whose eyes avoided his, who was so plainly keyed up to a tremendously high pitch. She was dressed in a dark blue, tailored serge and a black, sailor hat, beneath the rim of which the shadows on her face were dark.

The coroner was a short, fat little man, with a highly developed sense of his importance. The inquest was his hour, and he made the most of it. His methods were his own. The young assistant district attorney, lounging by the table, played second fiddle.

The first witnesses developed the movements of Cunningham, during the evening of the twenty-third. He had dined at the City Club, and had left there, after dinner, to go to his apartment. To a club member, dining with him, he had mentioned an appointment at his rooms with a lady.

"Did he mention the name of the lady, Mr. Blanton?" asked the coroner, washing the backs of his hands with the palms.

"No."

"Or his business with her?"

"No. But he seemed to be annoyed." Mr. Blanton, also, seemed to be annoyed. He had considered not mentioning this appointment, but his conscience would not let him hide it. None the less, he resented the need of giving the public more scandal about a fellow club member who was dead. He added an explanation. "My feeling was that it was some business matter being forced on him. He had been at Colorado Springs, during the day, and probably had been unable to see the lady earlier."

The coroner reproved him tartly. "Please confine your testimony to facts and not to impressions, Mr. Blanton. Do you know at what time Mr. Cunningham left the City Club?"

"At eight-forty-five."

Mr. Blanton was followed by a teller at the Rocky Mountain National Bank. He testified to only two facts—that he knew Cunningham and that the promoter had drawn two thousand dollars on the day of his death. A tenant at the Paradox Apartments was next called to the stand. He brought out only one fact of importance, that he had seen Cunningham enter the building at a few minutes before nine o'clock. The medical witnesses were introduced next. The police surgeon had reached the apartment at ten-thirty. The deceased had come to his death, in his judgment, from the effect of a bullet out of a .38 caliber revolver, fired into his brain. He had also been struck a blow on the head by some heavy instrument, but this in itself would probably not have proved fatal.

"How long do you think he had been dead when you first saw him?"

"Less than an hour."

The coroner washed the backs of his hands with his palms, again.

"Did anything peculiar about the wound impress you?" he asked.

"Yes. The forehead of the deceased was powder marked."

"Showing that the weapon had been fired close to him?"

"Yes."

"Anything else?"

"One thing. The bullet slanted into the head toward the right."

"Where was the chair in which the deceased was seated? I mean in what part of the room."

"Pushed close to the left-hand wall, and parallel to it."

"Very close?"

"Touching it."

"Under the circumstances, could the revolver have been fired so that the bullet could have taken the course it did, if held in the right hand?"

"Hardly. Not unless it was held with extreme awkwardness."

"In your judgment, then, the revolver was fired by a left-handed person?"

"That is my opinion."

The coroner swelled like a turkey cock as he waved the attorney to take charge.

Kirby Lane's heart drummed fast. He did not look across the room toward the girl in the blue-tailored suit. But he saw her, just as clearly as though his eyes had been fastened on her. The detail that stood out in his imagination was the right arm, set in splints and resting in a linen sling suspended from the neck.

"Was it possible that the deceased could have shot himself?"

"Do you mean, is it possible that somebody could have tied him to the chair after he was dead?"

"Yes."

The surgeon, taken by surprise, hesitated. "That's *possible,* certainly."

James Cunningham took the witness chair after the police officers, who had arrived at the scene of the tragedy with the surgeon, had finished their testimony. One point brought out by the officers was that in the search of the rooms, no two thousand dollars was found. The oil broker gave information as to his uncle's affairs.

"You knew your uncle well?" the lawyer asked presently.

"Intimately."

"And were on good terms with him?"

"The best."

"Had he ever suggested to you that he might commit suicide?"

"Never," answered the oil broker with emphasis. "He was the last man in the world one would have associated with such a thought."

"Did he own a revolver?"

"No, not to my knowledge. He had an automatic."

"What caliber was it?"

"I'm not quite sure—about a .38, I think."

"When did you see it last?"

"I don't recollect."

The prosecuting attorney glanced at his notes.

"You are his next of kin?"

"My brother and I are his nephews. He had no nearer relatives."

"You are his only nephews—his only near relatives?"

Cunningham hesitated, for just the blinking of an eye. He did not want to bring Kirby into his testimony, if he could help it. That might ultimately lead to his arrest.

"He had one other nephew."

"Living in Denver?"

"No."

"Where?"

"Somewhere in Wyoming, I think. We do not correspond."

"Do you know if he is there now?"

The witness dodged. "He lives there."

"Do you happen to know where he is, at the present moment?"

"Yes." The monosyllable fell reluctantly.

"Where?"

"In Denver."

"Not in this courtroom?"

"Yes."

"What is the gentleman's name, Mr. Cunningham?"

"Kirby Lane."

"Will you point him out?"

James did so.

The attorney faced the crowded benches. "I'll ask Mr. Lane to step forward and take a seat near the front. I may want to ask him a few questions, later."

Kirby rose and came forward.

"To your knowledge, Mr. Cunningham, had your uncle any enemies?" asked the lawyer, continuing his examination.

"He was a man of positive opinions. Necessarily, there were people who did not like him."

"Active enemies?"

"In a business sense, yes."

"But not in a personal sense?"

"I do not know of any. He may have had them. In going through his desk, at the office, I found a letter. Here it is."

The fat little coroner bustled forward, took the letter, and read it. He handed it to one of the jury. It was read and passed around. The letter was the one the promoter had received from the Dry Valley rancher, threatening his life if he ever appeared again in that part of the country.

"I notice that the letter is postmarked Denver," Cunningham suggested. "Whoever mailed it must have been in the city at the time."

"That's very important," the prosecuting attorney said. "Have you communicated the information to the police?"

"Yes."

The coroner put the tips of his fingers and thumbs together and balanced on the balls of his feet. "Do you happen to know the name of the lady with whom your uncle had an appointment, on the night of his death, at his rooms?"

"No," answered the witness curtly.

"When was the last time you saw the deceased alive?"

"About three o'clock on the day before that of his death."

"Very good, Mr. Cunningham. You may be excused if Mr. Johns is through with you, unless some member of the jury has a question he would like to ask."

One of the jury had. He was a dried-out wisp of a man, wrinkled like a winter pippin. "Was your uncle engaged to be married, at the time of his death?" he piped.

There was a mild sensation in the room. Curious eyes swept toward the graceful, slender form of a veiled woman sitting at the extreme left of the room. Cunningham flushed. The question seemed to him a gratuitous probe into the private affairs of the family. "I do not care to discuss that," he answered quietly.

"The witness may refuse to answer questions, if he wishes," the coroner ruled.

Jack Cunningham was called to the stand. James had made an excellent witness. He was quiet, dignified, and yet forceful. Jack, on the other hand, was nervous and irritable. The first new point he developed was that, on his last visit to the rooms of his uncle, he had seen him throw downstairs a fat man with whom he had been scuffling. Shown Hull, he identified him as the man.

"Had you ever had any trouble with your uncle?" Johns asked him.

Young Cunningham hesitated. "No-o. What do you mean by trouble?"

"Had he ever threatened to cut you out of his will?"

"Yes," came the answer, a bit sulkily.

"Why—if you care to tell?"

"He thought I was extravagant and wild—wanted me to buckle down to business more."

"What is your business?"

"I'm with a bond house—McCabe, Foster & Clinton."

"During the past few months, have you had any difference of opinion with your uncle?"

"That's my business," flared the witness. Then, just as swiftly as his irritation had come, it vanished. He remembered that his uncle's passionate voice had risen high. No doubt people in the next apartments had heard him. It would be better to make a frank admission. "But I don't mind answering. I have," he added.

"When?"

"The last time I went to his rooms—two days before his death." Significant looks passed from one to another of the spectators.

"What was the subject of the quarrel?"

"I didn't say we had quarreled," was the sullen answer.

"Differed, then. My question was, what about?"

"I decline to say."

"I think that is all, Mr. Cunningham."

The wrinkled little juryman leaned forward and piped his question again. "Was your uncle engaged to be married, at the time of his death?"

The startled eyes of Jack Cunningham leaped to the little man. There was in them dismay, almost panic. Then, swiftly, he recovered and drawled insolently, "I try to mind my own business. Do you?"

The coroner asserted himself. "Here, here, none of that. Order in this court, *if* you please, gentlemen." He bustled in his manner, turning to the attorney. "Through with Mr. Cunningham, Johns? If so, we'll push on."

"Quite." The prosecuting attorney consulted a list in front of him. "Cass Hull next."

Hull came puffing to the stand. He was a porpoise of a man. His eyes dodged about the room, in dread. It was as though he were looking for a way of escape.

CHAPTER IX.

"THAT'S THE MAN."

"Your name?"

"Cass Hull."

"Business?"

"Real estate, mostly farm lands."

"Did you know James Cunningham, the deceased?" asked Johns.

"Yes. Worked with him on the Dry Valley proposition, an irrigation project."

"Ever have any trouble with him?"

"No, sir—not to say trouble." Hull was already perspiring profusely. He dragged a red bandanna from his pocket and mopped the roll of fat that swelled over his collar. "I—we had a—an argument about a settlement—nothin' serious."

"Did he throw you out of his room and down the stairs?"

"No, sir, nothin' like that a-tall. We might a-scuffled some, kinda in funlike. Prob'ly it looked like we was fightin', but we wasn't. My heel caught on a tread o' the stairs, an' I fell down." Hull made his explanation eagerly and anxiously, dabbing at his beefy face with the handkerchief.

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

"Well, sir, that was the last time, though I reckon we heard him pass our door."

In answer to questions, the witness explained that Cunningham had owed him, in his opinion, four thousand dollars more than he had paid. It was about this sum they had differed.

"Were you at home, on the evening of the twenty-third—that is, last night?"

The witness flung out more signals of distress. "Yes, sir," he said, at last, in a voice dry as a whisper.

"Will you tell what, if anything, occurred?"

"Well, sir, a man knocked at our door. The woman she opened it, an' he asked which flat was Cunningham's. She told him, an' the man he started up the stairs."

"Have you seen the man since?"

"No, sir."

"Didn't hear him come downstairs, later?"

"No, sir."

"At what time did this man knock?" asked the lawyer from the district attorney's office. Kirby Lane did not move a muscle of his body, but excitement grew in him as he waited, eyes narrowed, for the answer.

"At nine-twenty."

"How do you know the time so exactly?"

"Well, sir, I was windin' the clock for the night."

"Sure your clock was right?"

"Yes, sir. I happened to check up on it, when the courthouse clock struck nine. Mebbe it was half a minute off, as you might say."

"Describe the man."

Hull did, with more or less accuracy.

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

"Yes, sir, I sure would."

The coroner flung a question at the witness, as though it were a weapon. "Ever carry a gun, Mr. Hull?"

The big man on the stand dabbed at his veined face with the bandanna. He answered, with an ingratiating whine. "I ain't no gunman, sir. Never was."

"Ever ride the range?"

"Well, yes, as you might say," the witness answered uneasily.

"Carried a six-shooter for rattlesnakes, didn't you?"

"I reckon, but I never went hellin' around with it."

"Wore it to town with you, when you went, I expect, as the other boys did."

"Mebbeso."

"What caliber was it?"

"A .38, sawed-off."

"Own it now?"

The witness mopped his fat face. "No, sir."

"Don't carry a gun, in town?"

"No, sir."

"Ever own an automatic?"

"No, sir. Wouldn't know how to fire one."

"How long since you sold your .38?"

"Five years or so."

"Where did you carry it?"

"In my hip pocket."

"Which hip pocket?"

Hull was puzzled at the question. "Why, this one—the right one, o' course. There wouldn't be any sense in carryin' it where I couldn't reach it."

"That's so. Mr. Johns, you may take the witness again."

The young lawyer asked questions about

the Dry Valley irrigation project. He wanted to know why there was dissatisfaction among the farmers, and, from a reluctant witness, drew the information that the water supply was entirely inadequate for the needs of the land under cultivation.

Mrs. Hull, called to the stand, testified that on the evening of the twenty-third, a man had knocked at their door to ask in which apartment Mr. Cunningham lived. She had gone to the door, answered his question, and watched him pass upstairs.

"What time was this?"

"Nine-twenty."

Again Kirby felt a tide of excitement running in his arteries. Why were this woman and her husband setting back the clock forty minutes? Was it to divert suspicion from themselves? Was it to show that this stranger must have been in Cunningham's rooms for almost an hour, during which time the millionaire promoter had been murdered?

"Describe the man?"

This tall angular woman, whose sex the years had seemed to have dried out of her personality, made a much better witness than her husband. She was acid and incisive, but her very forbidding aspect hinted of the "good woman" who never made mistakes. She described the stranger who had knocked at her door, with a good deal of circumstantial detail.

"He was an outdoor man, a rancher perhaps, or more likely a cattleman," she concluded.

"You have not seen him, since that time?"

She opened her lips to say "No," but she did not say it. Her eyes had traveled past the lawyer and fixed themselves on Kirby Lane. He saw the recognition grow in them, the leap of triumph, in her, as the long, thin arm shot straight toward him.

"That's the man."

A tremendous excitement buzzed in the courtroom. The coroner rapped for order.

"Which man do you mean, Mrs. Hull?" asked the lawyer.

"The big brown man sittin' at the end of the front bench, the one right behind you."

Kirby rose. "Think probably she means me," he suggested.

An officer in uniform passed down the aisle and laid a hand on the cattleman's shoulder. "You're under arrest," he said.

In the tense silence that followed, rose a little throat sound that was not quite a sob and not quite a wail. Kirby turned his head toward the back of the room. Wild Rose was standing in her place looking at him with dilated eyes, filled with incredulity and horror.

CHAPTER X.

"ALWAYS, PHYLLIS."

"Chuck" Ellis, reporter, testified that, on his way home from the Press Club, last night, he stopped at an alley on Glenarm Street, to strike a light for his cigar. Just as he lit the match he saw a man come out from the window of a room in the Paradox Apartments and run down the fire escape. It struck him that the man might be a burglar, so he waited in the shadow of the building. The runner came down the alley, toward him. He stopped the man and had some talk with him. At the request of the district attorney's assistant he detailed the conversation and located, on a chart shown him, the room from which he had seen the fellow emerge.

"Would you know him again?"

"Yes."

"Do you see him in this room?"

Ellis, just off his run, had reached the courtroom only a second before he stepped to the stand. Now he looked around, surprised at the lawyer's question. His wandering eye halted at Lane.

"There he is."

"At what time did this take place?"

"Lemme see. About quarter past ten maybe."

"Which way did he go when he left you?"

"Toward Fifteenth Street."

"That is all." The lawyer turned briskly toward Kirby. "Mr. Lane, will you take the stand?"

Every eye focused on the range rider. As he moved forward and took the oath the scribbling reporters found, in his movements, a pantherish lightness, in his compact figure, rippling muscles perfectly under control. There was an appearance of sunburned competency about him, a crisp confidence born of the rough-and-tumble life of the outdoor West. A man had walked upon the stage, one full of vital energy.

The assistant district attorney led him through the usual preliminaries. Lane said that he was by vocation a cattleman, by avocation a roughrider. He lived at Twin Buttes, Wyoming.

"Are you related to James Cunningham, the deceased?" asked the lawyer.

"His nephew."

"How long since you had seen him, prior to your visit to Denver, this time?"

"Three years."

"What were your relations with him?"

The coroner interposed. "You need answer no questions tending to incriminate you, Mr. Lane."

A sardonic smile rested on the rough-rider's lean, brown face. "Our relations were not friendly," he said quietly. A ripple of excitement swept the benches.

"What was the cause of the bad feeling between you?"

"A few years ago my father fell into financial difficulties. He was faced with bankruptcy. Cunningham not only refused to help him, but was the hardest of his creditors. He hounded him to the time of my father's death, a few months later. His death was due to a breakdown, caused by intense worry."

"You felt that Mr. Cunningham ought to have helped him?"

"My father helped him, when he was young. What my uncle did was the grossest ingratitude."

"You resented it."

"Yes."

"And quarreled with him?"

"I wrote him a letter and told him what I thought of him. Later, when we met by chance, I told him again, face to face."

"You had a bitter quarrel?"

"Yes."

"That was how long ago?"

"Three years since."

"In that time did your feelings toward him modify at all?"

"My opinion of him did not change, but I had no longer any feeling in the matter."

"Did you write to him, or hear from him, in that time?"

"No."

"Had you any expectation of being remembered in your uncle's will?"

"None whatever," answered Kirby, smiling. "Even if he had left me anything, I should have declined to accept it. But there was no chance at all that he would."

"Yet when you came to town you called on him at the first opportunity?"

"Yes."

"On what business?"

"I reckon we'll not go into that."

Johns glanced at his notes and passed to another line of questioning. "You have heard the tesimony of Mr. and Mrs. Hull and of Mr. Ellis. Is that testimony true?"

"Except in one point. It lacked only three or four minutes to ten when I knocked at the door and Mrs. Hull opened it."

"You're sure of that?"

"Sure. I looked at my watch just before I went into the Paradox Apartments."

"Will you tell the jury what took place between you and Mrs. Hull?"

"Soon as I saw her I knew she was scared stiff about something. So was Hull. He was headin' for a bedroom, so I wouldn't see him."

The slender, well-dressed woman in the black veil, sitting far over to the left, leaned forward and seemed to listen intently. All over the room there was a stir of quickened interest.

"How did she show her fear?"

"No color in her face, eyes dilated and full of terror, hands trembling."

"And Mr. Hull?"

"He was yellow. Color all gone from his face. Looked as though he'd had a shock."

"What was said, if anything?"

"I asked Mrs. Hull where my uncle's apartment was. That gave her another fright. At least, she almost fainted."

"Did she say anything?"

"She told me where his rooms were. Then she shut the door, right in my face. I went upstairs to Apartment 12."

"Where your uncle lived?"

"Where my uncle lived. I rang the bell twice and didn't get an answer. Then I noticed the door was ajar. I opened it, called, and walked in, shutting it behind me. I guessed he must be around and would be back in a few minutes."

"Just exactly what did you do?"

"I waited by the table in the living room, for a few minutes. There was a note there signed by S. Horikawa."

"We have that note. What happened next? Did your uncle return?"

"No. I had a feeling that something was wrong. I looked into the bedroom, and then opened the door into the small smoking room. The odor of chloroform met me. I found the button and flashed on the light."

Except the sobbing breath of an unnerved woman, no slightest sound could be heard in the courtroom but Lane's quiet, steady voice. It went on evenly, clearly, dominat-

ing the crowded room by the drama of its undramatic timber.

"My uncle was sitting in a chair, tied to it. His head was canted a little to one side and he was lookin' up at me. There was a bullet hole in his forehead. He was dead."

The veiled woman in black gasped for air. Her head sank forward and her slender body swayed.

Before Kirby could reach her the fainting woman had slipped to the floor. He stooped to lift her head from the dusty planks—and the odor of violet perfume met his nostrils.

"If you'll permit me," a voice said.

The cattleman looked up. His cousin James, white to the lips, was beside him unfastening the veil.

The face of the woman in black was the original of the photograph Kirby had seen in his uncle's room, the one upon which had been written the words, "Always, Phyllis."

CHAPTER XI.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

The rest of the coroner's inquest was anticlimax. Those who had come to tickle their palates with excitement tasted only one other moment of it.

"According to your own story you must have been in your uncle's apartment at least a quarter of an hour, Mr. Lane," said the prosecuting attorney. "What were you doing there all that time?"

"Most of the time I was waiting for him to return."

"Why did you not call up the police at once, as soon as you found the crime had been committed?"

"I suppose I lost my head and went panicky. I heard some one at the door, and I did not want to be found there. So I ran into the bedroom, put out the light, and left by the fire escape."

"You don't look like a man that would lose his head, Mr. Lane."

A smile lit the brown face of the witness. "Perhaps I wouldn't, where I come from, but I'm not used to city ways. I didn't know what to do. So I followed my instinct and bolted. I was unlucky enough to be seen."

"Carry a gun, Mr. Lane?"

"No." He corrected himself. "Sometimes I do on the range."

"Own one, I suppose?"

"Two. A .45 and a .38."

"Bring either of them to Denver?"

"No, sir."

"Did you see any gun of any kind in your uncle's rooms—either a revolver or an automatic?"

"I did not."

"That's all, sir."

The jury was out something more than an hour. The news of the verdict was brought to Kirby at the city jail by his cousin James.

"Jury finds that uncle James came to his death from the effect of either a blow on the head by some heavy instrument or a bullet fired at close quarters, by some unknown person," James said.

"Good enough! Might have been worse for me," replied Kirby.

"Yes. I've talked with the district attorney and think I can arrange for bond. We're going to take it up with the court, to-morrow. My opinion is that the Hulls did this. All through his testimony the fellow sweated fear. I've put it in the hands of a private detective agency to keep tabs on him."

The cattleman smiled ruefully. "Trouble is I'm the only witness to their panic, right after the murder. Wish it had been some one else. I'm a prejudiced party, whose evidence won't count for much. You're right. They've something to do with it. In their evidence they shifted the time back thirty-five minutes so as to get me into Apartment 12 that much earlier. Why? If I could answer that question I could go a long way toward solving the mystery of who killed uncle James and why he did it."

"Probably. As I see it, we have three leads to go on. One is that the guilty man is Hull. A second possibility is the unknown man from Dry Valley. A third is Horikawa."

"How about Horikawa? Did you know him well?"

"One never knows an Oriental. Perhaps I'm prejudiced, because I used to live in California, but I never trust a Japanese fully. His sense of right and wrong is so different from mine. Horikawa is a quiet little fellow, whose thought processes I don't pretend to understand."

"Why did he run away, if he had nothing to conceal?"

"Looks bad. By the way, a Japanese housecleaner was convicted recently of kill-

ing a woman for whom he was working. He ran away, too, and was brought back later."

"Well, I don't know a thing about Japs except that they're good workers. But there's one thing about this business that puzzles me. This murder doesn't look to me like a white man's job. An American bad man kills, and is done with it. But whoever did this aimed to torture an' then kill, looks like. If not, why did they tie him up first?"

James nodded reflectively. "May be something in what you say. Orientals strike me as being kind of unhuman, if you know what I mean. Maybe they have the red Indian habit of torture, in Japan."

"Never heard of it, if they have; but I've got a kinda notion—picked it up in my reading—that Asiatics will go a long way to square a grudge. If this Horikawa had anything against uncle James, he might have planned this revenge and taken the two thousand dollars to help his get-away."

"Yes, he might."

"Anyhow, I've made up my mind to one thing. You can 'most always get the truth, when you go after it good and hard. I'm goin' to find out who did this thing and why."

James Cunningham looked into his cousin's face. A strong man himself, he recognized strength in another. Into the blue-gray eyes of the man from Twin Buttes had come a cold, steely temper that transformed the gay boyish face. The oil broker knew Lane had no love for his uncle. His resolution was probably based on a desire to clear his own name.

"I'm with you in that," he said quietly, and his own dark eyes were hard as jade. "We'll work this out together if you say so, Kirby."

The younger man nodded. "Suits me fine." His face softened. "You mentioned three leads. Most men would have said four. On the face of it, of the evidence at hand, the guilty man is sittin' right here, talkin' with you. You know that the dead man and I had a bitter feeling against each other. You know there was a new cause of trouble between us, and that I told you I was going to get justice out of him one way or another. I'm the only man known to have been in his rooms last night. According to the Hulls I must 'a' been there when he was killed. Then, as a final proof of my guilt, I slide out by the fire escape, to get away without being seen. I'll say the one big lead points straight to Kirby Lane."

"Yes, but there's such a thing as character," James answered. "It's written in your face that you couldn't have done it. That's why the jury said a person unknown."

"Yes, but the jury didn't know what you knew, that I had a fresh cause of quarrel with uncle James. Do you believe me absolutely? Don't you waver at all?"

"I don't think you had any more to do with it than I had myself," answered the older cousin instantly, with conviction.

Kirby gave him his hand impulsively. "You'll sure do to ride the river with, James."

CHAPTER XII.

A GLOVE AND THE HAND IN IT.

As Rose saw the hand of the law closing in on Kirby, she felt as though an ironic fate were laughing in impish glee at this horrible climax of her woe. She found herself entangled in a net from which there was no easy escape. Part of the evidence against Kirby, or at least the implication to be drawn from it, did not fit in with what she knew to be the truth.

But what was she to do? What ought she to do? If she went with her story to the district attorney, her sister's shame must inevitably be dragged forth to be flaunted before the whole world. She could not do that. She could not make little Esther the scapegoat of her conscience. Nor could she remain silent and let Kirby stay in prison. That was unthinkable. If her story would free him, she must tell it. But to whom?

She read in the *Post* that James Cunningham was endeavoring to persuade the authorities to accept bond for his cousin's appearance. Swiftly Rose made up her mind. She looked up in the telephone book the name she wanted and made connections on the line.

"Is this Mr. Cunningham?" she asked.

"Mr. Cunningham talking," came the answer.

"I want to see you on very important business. Can I come this morning?"

"I think I didn't catch your name, madam."

"My name doesn't matter. I have information about—your uncle's death."

There was just an instant's pause. Then, "Ten o'clock, at the office here," Rose heard.

A dark, good-looking young man rose from a desk in the inner office when Rose entered, exactly at ten. In his eyes there sparked a little flicker of surprised appreciation. Jack Cunningham was always susceptible to the beauty of women. This girl was lovely, both of feature and of form.

She looked around, hesitating. "I have an appointment with Mr. Cunningham," she explained.

"My name," answered the young man.

"Mr. James Cunningham?"

"Afraid you've made a mistake. I'm Jack Cunningham. This is my uncle's office. I'm taking charge of his affairs You called his number instead of my brother's. People are always confusing the two."

"I'm sorry."

"If I can be of any service to you," he suggested.

"I read that your brother was trying to arrange bond for Mr. Lane. I want to see him about that. I am Rose McLean. My sister worked for your uncle in his office."

"Oh!" A film of wary caution settled over his eyes. It seemed to Rose that what she had said transformed him into a potential adversary. "Glad to meet you, Miss McLean. If you'd rather talk with my brother, I'll make an appointment with him for you."

"Perhaps that would be best," she said.

"Of course he's very busy. If it's anything I could do for you——"

"I'd like you both to hear what I have to say."

For the beating of a pulse, his eyes thrust at her as though they would read her soul. Then he was all smiling urbanity.

"That seems to settle the matter. I'll call my brother up and make an appointment."

Over the wire Jack put the case to his brother. Presently he hung up the receiver. "We'll go right over, Miss McLean."

James Cunningham met Rose with a suave courtesy, but with reserve. Like his brother, he knew of only one subject about which the sister of Esther McLean could want to talk with him. Did she intend to be reasonable? Would she accept a monetary settlement, and avoid the publicity that could only hurt her sister as well as the reputation of the name of Cunningham? Or did she mean to try to impose impossible conditions? How much did she know and how much guess? Until he discovered that he meant to play his cards close. Characteristically, Rose came directly to the point after the first few words of introduction.

"You know my sister, Esther McLean, a stenographer of your uncle?" she asked.

"I—have met her," he answered.

"You know—about her trouble?"

"Yes. My cousin mentioned it. We—my brother and I—greatly regret it. Anything in reason that we can do, we shall of course hold ourselves bound for."

"I didn't come to see you about that now," the young woman went on, cheeks flushed, but chin held high. "Nor would I care to express my opinion of the—the creature who could take advantage of such a girl's love. I intend to see justice is done my sister, as far as it can now be done. But not to-day. First, I'm here to ask you if you're friends of Kirby Lane. Do you believe he killed his uncle?"

"No," replied James promptly. "I am quite sure he didn't kill him. I am trying to get him out on bond. Any sum that is asked I'll sign for."

"Then I want to tell you something you don't know. The testimony showed that Kirby went to his uncle's apartment about nine-twenty and left nearly an hour later. That isn't true."

"How do you know it isn't?"

"Because I was there myself, part of the time."

Jack stared at her in blank dismay. Astonishment looked at her, too, from the older brother's eyes.

"You were in my uncle's apartment—on the night of the murder?" James said at last.

"I was. I came to Denver to see him—to get justice for my sister. I didn't intend to let the villain escape scot-free for what he had done."

"Pardon me," interrupted Jack, and the girl noticed his voice had a queer note of anxiety in it. "Did your sister ever tell you that my uncle was responsible for——"

"No, she won't talk, yet. I don't know why. But I found a note signed with his initials. He's the man. I know that."

James looked at his brother. "I think we may take that for granted, Jack. We'll accept such responsibilities on us, as it involves. Perhaps you'd better not interrupt Miss McLean till she has finished her story."

"I made an appointment with him, after I had tried all day to get him on the phone or to see him. That was Thursday."

"He was in Colorado Springs all that day," explained James.

"Yes, he told me so when I reached him finally at the City Club. He didn't want to see me, but I wouldn't let him off till he agreed. So he told me to come to the Paradox and he would give me ten minutes. He told me not to come till nearly ten, as he would be busy. I think he hoped that by putting it so late and at his rooms he would deter me from coming. But I intended to see him. He couldn't get away from me so easily as that. I went."

Jack moistened dry lips. His debonair ease had quite vanished. "When did you go?"

"It was quite a little past a quarter to ten when I reached his rooms."

"Did you meet any one going up or coming down?" asked James.

"A man and a woman passed me on the stairs."

"A man and a woman," repeated Jack, almost in a whisper. His attitude was tense. His eyes burned with excitement.

"Was it light enough to tell who they were?" James asked. His cold eyes did not lift from hers until she answered.

"No. It was entirely dark. The woman was on the other side of the man. I wouldn't have been sure she was a woman except for the rustle of her skirts and the perfume."

"You stick to it that you met a man and a woman but couldn't possibly recognize either of them," James Cunningham said, still looking straight at her.

She hesitated an instant. Somehow she did not quite like the way he put this. "Yes," she said steadily.

"You didn't take the elevator up then?"

"No. I'm not used to automatic elevators. I rang when I got to the door. Nobody answered, but the door was wide open. I rang again, then went in and switched on the light. There didn't seem to be anybody in. I didn't feel right about it. I wanted to go. But I wouldn't because I thought maybe he—your uncle—was trying to dodge me. I looked into the bedroom. He wasn't there. So, after a little, I went to a door into another room, that was shut, and knocked on it. I don't know why I opened it when no answer came. Something seemed to move my hand to the knob. I switched the light on there."

"Yes?" James asked gently.

The girl gulped. She made a weak, small gesture with her hand, as though to push from her mind the horrible sight her eyes had looked upon. "I think I screamed. I'm not sure. But I switched off the light and shut the door. Then I heard some one comin' up the stairs, and I knew I mustn't be caught there."

"Who was it? Did he come in?" asked Jack.

"He rang and knocked two or three times. Then he came in. I was standing by the table with my hand on some kind of heavy paperweight. His hand was groping for the light switch. I could tell that. He must have heard me, for he called out, 'Who's there?' In the darkness, there, I was horribly frightened. He might be the murderer come back. If not, of course he'd think I had done it. So I tried to slip by him. He jumped at me and caught me by the hand. I pulled away from him and hit hard at his face. The paperweight was still in my hand and he went down just as though a hammer had hit him. I ran out of the room, downstairs, and out into the street."

"Without meeting anybody?"

"Yes."

"You don't know who it was you struck?"

"Unless it was Kirby."

"Jove! That explains the bruise on his chin," Jack cried out. "Why didn't he tell us that?"

The color flushed the young woman's cheeks. "We're friends, he and I. If he guessed I was the one that struck him, he wouldn't tell."

"How would he guess it?" asked James.

"He knew I meant to see your uncle—meant to make him do justice to Esther. I suppose I'd made wild threats. Besides, I left my glove there—on the table, I think. I'd taken it off, with some notion of writing a note, telling your uncle I had been there and that he had to see me next day."

"The police didn't find a woman's glove in the room, did they?" James asked his brother.

"Didn't hear of it if they did," Jack replied.

"That's it, you see," explained Rose. "Kirby would know my glove. It was a small riding gauntlet, with a rose embroidered on it. He probably took it with him when he left. He kept still about the whole thing, because I was the woman and he was afraid of gettin' me into trouble."

"Sounds reasonable," agreed James.

"That's how it was. Kirby's a good friend. He'd never tell on me, if they hanged him for it."

"They won't do that, Miss McLean," the older brother assured her. "We're going to find who did this thing. Kirby and I have shaken hands on that. But about your story. I don't quite see how we're going to use it. We must protect your sister, too, as well as my cousin. If we go to the police with your evidence and ask them to release Kirby they'll want to arrest you."

"I know," she nodded wisely, "and, of course, they'd find out about Esther then and the papers would get it and scatter the story everywhere."

"Exactly. We must protect her first. Kirby wouldn't want anything done that would hurt her. Suppose we put it up to him and see what he wants to do."

"But we can't have him kept in jail," she protested.

"I'll get him out on bond; if not to-day, to-morrow."

"Well," she agreed reluctantly. "If that's the best we can do."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LADY WITH THE VIOLET PERFUME.

"I won't have it," Kirby said flatly. "If Miss McLean tells her story to the district attorney, he'll probably arrest her. It'll come out about her sister, an' the papers will run scare heads. Won't hurt me to stay here a few days if I have to."

"They'd certainly arrest her," commented Jack Cunningham. "From a lawyer's point of view there's every reason why they should."

"Yet she couldn't possibly have done it?" the cattleman replied.

"Couldn't she? I wonder." The Beau Brummel stroked his bit of mustache, with the hint of insolence his manner often suggested.

"Not possible," said Lane forcefully. "Uncle James was a big, two-fisted fighter. No slip of a girl could have overpowered him and tied him. It's not within reason."

Jack put a neat, highly polished boot on the desk of the sergeant of police. "Ever hear of a lady called Delilah?" he asked lightly.

"What about her?" In Kirby's quiet eye there was a warning.

The man about town shrugged his well-tailored shoulders. "They have a way, the ladies. Guile, my son, is more potent than force."

Kirby repressed an anger that he knew was worse than futile. "If you knew Miss McLean you couldn't misjudge her so."

"I don't say she did it, old top. I'm merely pointing out that it's possible she did. Point of fact your friend made a hit with me. I'd say she's a game little thoroughbred."

"You and James will regard what she told you as confidential, of course."

"Of course. We're of your mind, too, though I put her proposition to you. Can't see anything to be gained by airing her story, unless it's absolutely necessary, on your account. By the way, James wants me to tell you that he thinks you won't have to spend another night at this delightful hotel the city keeps for its guests. Bond has been practically agreed on."

By the middle of the afternoon Kirby was free. After he had talked over with James a plan of campaign, he called Rose up on the telephone and told her he would be right out to Cherokee Street. She came to meet him in the stuffy parlor of the boarding house, with hand outstretched.

"Oh, Kirby, I'm so glad to see you and so sorry I was such a horrid little beast, last time we met. I'm ashamed of myself. My temper explodes so—and after you came to Denver to help me and gave up so much for me. You'll forgive me, won't you?"

"You know it, Rose," he said, smiling.

"Yes, I do know it," she cried quickly. "That makes it worse for me to impose on you. Now you're in trouble, because of me."

"We're in trouble together," he corrected. "I thought that was supposed to bring friends closer and not to drive them apart."

She flashed a quick look at him and changed the subject of conversation.

"Are you going back to Twin Buttes?"

"No. I'm goin' to find out who killed James Cunningham, and bring the man to justice."

"Let me help you," she cried eagerly. "Let's be partners in it, Kirby."

"Bully. We'll start this very minute. Tell me all you know about what happened, the evening of the murder."

She told again the story she had confessed to his cousins. He asked questions, pushed

home inquiries. When she mentioned the man and the woman who had passed her on the stairs, he showed a keen interest.

"You say you knew it was a woman with the man by the perfume. What kind of perfume was it?"

"Violet."

"Did you notice a violet perfume any other place, that night?"

"In your uncle's living room."

"Sure?"

"Yes."

"So did I."

"The woman I met on the stairs then had just come from your uncle's rooms."

"Looks like it," he nodded in agreement.

"Then we've got to find her. She must have been in his apartment when he was killed." The thought came to Rose as a revelation.

"Or right after."

"All we've got to do is to find her, and the man with her, and we've solved the mystery."

"That's not quite all," said Kirby, smiling at the way her mind leaped gaps. "We've got to induce them to talk, and it's not certain they know any more than we do."

The subconscious mind of the rough-rider was preoccupied with a sense of a vague groping. The thought of violet perfume associated itself with something else in addition to the darkness of his uncle's living room, but he did not find himself able to localize the nebulous memory. Where was it his nostrils had whiffed the scent more recently?

CHAPTER XIV.

IN DRY VALLEY.

If Kirby had been a properly authenticated detective of fiction he would have gone to his uncle's apartment, locked the door, measured the rooms with a tape line, found imprints of fingers on a door panel, and carefully gathered into an envelope the ashes from the cigar his uncle had been smoking. The data obtained would have proved conclusively that Cunningham had come to his death at the hands of a Brahmin of high caste, on account of priceless gems stolen from a temple in India. An analysis of the cigar ashes would have shown that a subtle poison, unknown to the Western world, had caused the victim's heart to stop beating exactly two minutes and twelve seconds after taking the first puff at the cigar. Thus the fictional ethics of the situation would have been correctly met.

But Kirby was only a plain outdoors Westerner. It did not even occur to him, at first, that Apartment 12 might still have secrets to tell him, after the police and the reporters had pawed over it for several days. But his steps turned back several times to the Paradox as the center from which all clews must emanate. He found himself wandering around in that vicinity, trying to pick up some of the pieces of the Chinese puzzle that made up the mystery of his uncle's death.

It was on one of these occasions that he and Rose met his cousin James coming out of the apartment house. Cunningham was a man of admirable self-control, but he looked shaken this morning.

"I've been sitting alone, for an hour, in the room where uncle James met his death —been arranging his papers," he explained. "It began to get my nerve. I couldn't stand it any longer."

His left arm hung limp. Kirby's quick eyes noticed it.

"You've hurt yourself," Lane said.

"Yes," admitted James. "My heel caught on the top step as I started to walk down. I've wrenched my arm badly. Maybe I've broken it."

The janitor of the Paradox came out and joined them. He was a little Japanese, well on toward middle life, a small-featured man, with very small, neat feet. "You feelum all right, yes, now?" he asked, directing his slant, oval eyes toward Cunningham.

"Yes, I've got over the nausea, thanks, Shibo." James turned to the others. "I've been worrying a good deal about this business of uncle James, I suppose. Anyhow, I've had two or three dizzy spells, lately. Nothing serious, though."

"I don't wonder. You sit at a desk too much, James. What you need is exercise. I'll trail along with you to a doctor's."

"Not necessary. It's only a few blocks to his office. Fact is, I'm feeling quite myself again."

"Well, if you're sure. Probably you've only sprained your arm. By the way, I'd kind a like to go over uncle's apartment, again. Mind if I do?"

James hesitated. "I promised the chief of police not to let anybody else in. Tell you what I'll do. I'll see him about it and

get a permit for you. Say, Kirby, I've been thinking one of us ought to go up to Dry Valley and check things up, there. We might find out who wrote that note to uncle. Could you go? To-day?"

Kirby could and would. He left Rose to talk with the tenants of the Paradox Apartments, entrained for Dry Valley at once, and by noon was winding over the hilltops far up in the Rockies. He left the train at Summit, a small town which was the center of activities for Dry Valley.

Kirby registered at the office of the frame building, which carried on its false front the word, "Hotel." This done, he wandered down to the shack which bore the inscription, "Dry Valley Enterprise." The owner of the paper, who was also editor, reporter, pressman, business manager, and circulator, chanced to be in printing some dodgers, announcing a dance at Odd Fellows' Hall. He was a fat, talkative little man. Kirby found it no trouble at all to set him going on the subject of James Cunningham, Sr. In fact, during his stay in the valley, the Wyoming man could always use that name as an open sesame. It unlocked all tongues. Cunningham and his mysterious death were absorbing topics. The man was hated by scores who had been brought close to ruin by his chicanery. Dry Valley rejoiced openly in the retribution that had fallen upon him.

"Who killed him?" the editor asked rhetorically. "Well, sir, I'll be dawged if I know. But if I was guessin' I'd say it was this fellow Hull, the slicker that helped him put through the Dry Valley steal. Course it might 'a' been the Jap, or it might 'a' been the nephew from Wyoming, but I'll say it was Hull."

Lane put in an hour making himself persona grata, then read the latest issue of the *Enterprise*. In the local news column he found several items that interested him. These were:

Jim Harkins is down in Denver on business and won't be home till Monday. Have a good time, Jim.

T. J. Lupton is enjoying a few days' vacation in the Queen City. He expects to buy some fancy stock at the yards, for breeding purposes. Dry Valley is right in the van of progress.

Art Jelks and Brad Mosely returned from Denver, to-day, after a three days' visit in the capital. A good time was had by both. You want to watch them, girls. The boys are both live ones.

Oscar Olson spent a few days in Denver this week. Oscar owns a place three miles out of town, on the Spring Creek road.

Casually Kirby gathered information. He learned that Jim Harkins was the town constable and not interested in land, that Lupton was a very prosperous cattleman, whose ranch was nowhere near the district promoted by Cunningham, and that Jelks and Mosely were young fellows more or less connected with the garage. The editor knew Olson only slightly.

"He's a Swede—big, fair fellow—got caught in that irrigation fake of Hull and Cunningham. Don't know what he was doing in Denver," the newspaper man said.

Lane decided that he would see Olson and have a talk with him. Incidentally, he meant to see all the Dry Valley men who had been in Denver at the time Cunningham was killed. But the others he saw only to eliminate them from suspicion. One glance at each of them was enough to give them a clean bill, so far as the mystery went.

Lane rode out to Olson's place and found him burning brush. The cattleman explained that he was from Wyoming and wanted to sell some registered Herefords. Olson looked over his dry, parched crops, with sardonic bitterness. "Do I look like I could buy registered stock?" he asked sourly.

Kirby made a remark that set the ranchman off. He said that the crops looked as though they needed water. Inside of five minutes he had heard the story of the Dry Valley irrigation swindle. Olson was not a foreigner. He had been born in Minnesota and attended the public schools. He spoke English idiomatically and without an accent. The death of Cunningham had not apparently assuaged his intense hatred of the man, or the bitterness which welled out of him toward Hull.

"Cunningham got his. Suits me fine. Now all I ask is that they hang Hull for it," he cried vindictively.

"Seems to be some doubt whether Hull did it," suggested Kirby, to draw him on.

"That so? Mebbe there's evidence you don't know about." The words had come out in the heat of impulse, shot at Lane tensely and breathlessly. Olson looked at the man on the horse and Kirby could see caution grow on him. Kirby fired a shot point-blank at him.

"Nobody can be dead sure of that, unless he saw him do it," he said.

"Mebbe some one saw him do it. Folks

don't tell all they know." Olson looked across the desert, beyond the palpitating heat waves, to the mountains in the distance.

"No. That's tough, sometimes, on innocent people, too."

"Meanin' this nephew of old Cunningham? He'll get out, all right."

"Will he? There's a girl under suspicion, too. She had no more to do with it than I had, but she's likely to get into mighty serious trouble just the same."

"I ain't read anything in the papers about any girl," Olson answered sullenly.

"No, it hasn't got to the papers yet. But it will. It's up to every man, who knows anything about this, to come clean."

"Is it?" The farmer looked bleakly at his visitor. "Seems to me you take a lot of interest in this. Who are you, anyhow?"

"My name is Kirby Lane."

"Nephew of the old man?"

"Yes."

"Why did you come here?" asked the Scandinavian, his blue eyes hard and defiant.

"I wanted to have a look at the man who wrote the note to James Cunningham threatening to dry gulch him, if he ever came to Dry Valley again." It was a center shot. He read it in the man's face, before anger began to gather in it.

"I'm the man who wrote that letter, am I?" The lips of Olson were drawn back in a vicious snarl.

"Yes."

"You can prove that, o' course?"

"By your handwriting. I've seen three specimens of it to-day. One at the courthouse, one at the bank that holds your note, and the third at the office of the *Enterprise*. You wrote an article urging the Dry Valley people to fight Cunningham. That article, in your own handwriting, is in my pocket right now. What I'm getting at is that the same man wrote the article that wrote the letter to Cunningham."

"Prove it!"

"The paper used in both cases was torn from the same tablet. The writing is the same."

"You've got a nerve to come out here an' tell me I'm the man that killed Cunningham," Olson flung out, his face flushing darkly.

"I'm not saying that."

"What are you sayin', then? Shoot it at me straight."

"If I thought you had killed Cunningham, I wouldn't be here now. What I thought when I came was that you might know something about it. My idea is that Hull did it. But I've made up my mind you're hiding something. What is it?"

"I'd be likely to tell you if I was, wouldn't I?" jeered Olson.

"Why not? Better tell me than wait for the police to third-degree you. If you're not in this killing, why not tell what you know? I've told my story."

"After they spotted you in the courtroom," the farmer retorted. "And how do I know you told all you know? Mebbe you're keepin' secrets, too."

Kirby took this without batting an eye. "An innocent man hasn't anything to fear," he said.

"Hasn't he?" Olson picked up a stone and flung it at a pile of rocks he had gathered, fifty yards away. He was left-handed. "How do you know he hasn't? Say just for argument I do know something. Say I practically saw Cunningham killed an' hadn't a thing to do with it. Could I get away with a story like that? Wouldn't the lawyers want to know how come I to be so handy to the place where the killin' was, right at the very time it took place, me who is supposed to have threatened to bump him off myself?"

"Do you know who killed my uncle?" demanded Lane, point-blank.

Olson's eyes narrowed. A crafty light shone through the slitted lids. "Hold yore hawsses. I ain't said I knew a thing. I was stringin' you."

Kirby knew he had overshot the mark. He had been too eager and had alarmed the man. He was annoyed at himself. "Well, whatever it is you know, I hope you'll tell it," he said. "But that's up to you, not me. If Hull is the murderer, I want the crime fastened on him. The fellow's guilty, I believe, but we can't prove it."

"Can't we? I ain't so sure o' that." Again, through the narrowed lids, wary guile glittered. "Mebbe we can, when the right time comes."

"I doubt it." Lane spoke casually and carelessly. "Any testimony against him loses force, if it's held out too long. No, I reckon Hull will get away with it—if he really did it."

"Don't you think it," Olson snapped out. "They've pretty nearly got enough now, to convict him."

Olson flung a greasewood shrub on a pile of brush. Kirby could see that the man's caution and his vindictive desire for vengeance were at war. He knew something, evidence that would tend to incriminate Hull, and he was afraid to bring it to the light of day. Suddenly the man's anger barked at Lane. "Well, what you waitin' for?" he asked harshly.

"Nothing. I'm going now." He wrote his Denver address on a card. "If you find there is any evidence against Hull, and want to talk it over, perhaps you'd rather come to me than the police. So long."

He handed Olson his card, and turned his horse toward town. The man from Wyoming had a very strong hunch that Olson would call on him within a week or ten days. What was it the man knew? Was it possible he could have killed Cunningham, himself, and be trying to throw the blame of it on Hull? Kirby could not forget the bitter hatred of Cunningham the farmer cherished? That hatred extended to Hull. What a sweet revenge to kill one enemy and let the other one hang for the crime!

A detail jumped to his mind. Olson had picked up a stone and thrown it to the rock pile—with his left hand.

CHAPTER XV.

COLE SANBORN COMES TO TOWN.

Cole Sanborn passed through the Welcome Arch, at the station, carrying an imitation leather suit case. He did not take a car but walked up Seventeenth Avenue as far as the Markham Hotel. Here he registered, left his luggage, and made some inquiries over the telephone. Thirty minutes later he was shaking hands with Kirby Lane.

"You dog-goned old hell-a-mile, what you mean comin' down here an gettin' throwed in the calaboose?" he demanded, thumping his friend on the shoulder with a heavy, brown fist.

"I'm sure enough glad to see you, Mr. Champeen-of-the-world," Kirby answered, falling into the easy vernacular of the outdoor country. "Come to the big town to spend that thousand dollars you won the other day?"

"Y'betcha! It's burnin' a hole in my pocket. Say, you blamed ol' horntoad, howcome you not to stay for the finals? Folks was plumb disappointed we didn't ride it off."

"Tell you about that later. How long you figurin' to stay in Denver, Clay?"

"I dunno. A week mebbe. Fellow at the Empress wants me to go on that circuit an' do stunts, but I don't reckon I will. Claims he's got a trained bronc I can show on."

"Me, I'm gonna be busy as a dog with fleas," said Kirby. "I got to find out who killed my uncle. Suspicion rests on me, on a man named Hull, on the Jap servant, an' on Wild Rose."

"On Wild Rose?" exclaimed Clay in surprise. "Have they gone crazy?"

"The police haven't got to her yet, old-timer. But their suspicions will be haided that way, right soon, if I don't get busy. She thinks her evidence will clear me. It won't. It'll add a motive for me to have killed him. The detectives will figure out we did it together, Rose an' me."

Kirby looked at his watch. "I'm headed right now for the apartment where my uncle was killed. Gonna look the ground over. Wanta come along?"

"Surest thing you know. I'm in this to a fare-you-well."

As they walked across to Fourteenth Street Kirby told as much of the story as he could, without betraying Esther McLean's part in it. He trusted Sanborn, implicitly, but the girl's secret was not his to tell. Sanborn applied his shrewd common sense to the problem as he listened to Kirby.

"Looks to me like you're overlookin' a bet, son," he said. "What about this Jap fellow? Why did he light out so pronto, if he ain't in this thing?"

"He might 'a' gone because he's a foreigner an' guessed they'd throw it on him. They would, too, if they could."

"Shucks! He had a better reason than that for cuttin' his stick. Sure had. He's in this somehow."

"Well, the police are after him. They'll likely run him down, one o' these days. Far as I'm concerned, I've got to let his trail go for the present. There are possibilities right here, on the ground, that haven't been run down yet. For instance, Rose met a man an' a woman comin' down the stairs while she was going up. Who were they?"

"Might of been any o' the tenants there."

"Yes, but she smelt a violet perfume that both she and I noticed in the apartment. My hunch is that the man and the woman were coming from my uncle's rooms."

"Would she recognize them? Rose, I mean?" asked Sanborn.

"No, it was on the dark stairs."

"Hmp! Queer they didn't come forward an' tell they had met a woman going up. That is, if they hadn't anything to do with the crime."

"Yes. Of course there might be other reasons why they must keep quiet. Some love affair, for instance."

"Sure. That might be, an' that would explain why they went down the dark stairs an' didn't take the elevator."

"Just the same I'd like to find out who that man and woman are," Kirby said. He lifted his hand in a small gesture. "This is the Paradox Apartments."

A fat man rolled out of the building, just as they reached the steps. He pulled up and stared down at Kirby.

"What—what——" His question hung poised.

"What am I doing out of jail, Mr. Hull? I'm lookin' for the man that killed my uncle," Kirby answered quietly, looking straight at him.

"But——"

"Why did you lie about the time when you saw me that night?"

Hull got excited, at once. His eyes began to dodge. "I ain't got a word to say to you—not a word—not a word." He came puffing down the steps and went waddling on his way.

"What do you think of that prize package, Clay?" asked Lane, his eyes following the man.

"Guilty as hell," said the bronchobuster crisply.

"I'd say so, too," agreed Kirby. "I don't know as we need to look much farther. My vote is for Mr. Cass Hull—with reservations." The men from Wyoming stepped into the elevator, and Kirby pressed the button numbered three. At the third floor they got out and turned to the right. With the Yale key his cousin had given him Kirby opened the door of Apartment 12.

Wild Rose had reported to him the result of a canvass of the tenants, which she had made. One or two of them she had missed, but she had managed to see all the rest. The single fact that stood out from her inquiries was that those who lived in the three apartments nearest to Number 12 had all been out of the house on the evening of the twenty-third. The man who rented the rooms next those of Cunningham had left for Chicago on the twenty-second, and had not yet returned to Denver.

Cole took in the easy-chairs, the draperies, and the soft rugs, with an appreciative eye. "The old boy believed in solid comfort. You wouldn't think to look at this that he'd spent years on a bronc's back, buckin' blizzards. Some luxury, I'll say. Looks like one o' them palaces of the vamp ladies, the movies show."

Kirby wasted no time in searching the apartment for evidence. What interested him was its entrances and its exits, its relation to adjoining rooms and buildings. He had reason to believe that, between nine o'clock and half past ten, on the night of the twenty-third, not less than eight persons, in addition to Cunningham, had been in the apartment. How had they all managed to get in and out, without being seen by each other?

"O' course, I don't *know* every one of the eight was here," said Lane, "I'm guessin' from facts I do know, makin' inferences, as you might say. To begin with, I was among those present. So was Rose. We don't need to guess any about that."

Cole, still almost incredulous at the mention of Rose as a suspect, opened his lips to speak and closed them again with no word uttered.

"The lady of the violet perfume and her escort were here," Kirby went on. "At least she was—most probably he was, too. It's a cinch the Hulls were in the rooms. They were scared stiff when I saw them, a little later. They lied on the witness stand so as to clear themselves an' get me into trouble, in their place. Olson backs up the evidence. He good as told me he'd seen Hull in my uncle's rooms. If he did, he must 'a' been present himself. Then there's the Jap, Horikawa. He'd beat it before the police went to his room, to arrest him, at daybreak, the morning after the murder. How did he know my uncle had been killed? It's not likely any one told him between half past ten and half past five the next mo'ning. No, sir. He knew it because his eyes had told him so."

"I'll say he did," agreed Sanborn.

"Good enough. That makes eight of us

that came and went. We don't need to figure on Rose an' me. I came by the door and went by the fire escape. She walked upstairs, and down, too. The violet lady an' the man with her took the stairs down. We know that. But how about Hull and Ólson and the Jap? Here's another point. Say it was nine-fifty when Rose got here. My uncle didn't reach his rooms before nine o'clock. He changed his shoes, put on a smoking jacket, and lit a cigar. He had it half smoked before he was tied to the chair. That cuts down to less than three-quarters of an hour the time in which he was chloroformed, tied up to the chair, and shot, and in which at least six people paid a visit here, one of the six stayin' long enough to go through his desk an' look over a whole lot of papers. Some of these people were sure enough treadin' close on each other's heels, and I reckon some were makin' quick getaways."

"Looks reasonable," Cole admitted.

"I'll bet I wasn't the only man in a hurry, that night, an' not the only one trapped here. The window of the den was open when I came. Don't you reckon some one else beat it by the fire escape?"

They passed into the small room where James Cunningham had met his death. The chair in which the murdered man had been found was gone. The district attorney had taken it for an exhibit at the trial of the man upon whom evidence should fasten. The littered papers had been sorted and most of them removed, probably by James Cunningham, Jr. Otherwise the room remained the same.

The air was close. Kirby stepped to the window and threw it up. He looked out at the fire escape and at the wall of the rooming house across the alley. Denver is still young. It offers the incongruities of the West. The Paradox Apartments had been remodeled and were modern and up to date. Adjoining it was the Wyndham Hotel, a survival of earlier days, which could not long escape the march of progress. Lane and his friend stepped out to the platform of the fire escape. Below them was the narrow alleyway, directly in front the iron frame of the Wyndham fire escape.

A discovery flashed across Kirby's brain and startled him. "See here, Cole. If a man was standin' on that platform over there, and if my uncle had been facing him in a chair, sittin' in front of the window, he could 'a' rested his hand on that railing, to take aim, and made a dead center shot."

Cole thought it out. "Yes, he could, if yore uncle had been facing the window. But the chair wasn't turned that way, you told me."

"Not when I saw it. But some one might 'a' moved the chair, afterward."

The champion of the world grinned. "Seems to me, old man, you're travelin' a wide trail, this trip. If some one tied up the old man an' chloroformed him, an' left him here convenient, then moved him back to the wall, after he'd been shot, then some one on the fire escape could 'a' done it. What's the need of all them *ifs?* Since some one in the room had to be in on the thing, we can figure he fired the shot, too, while he was doin' the rest. Besides, yore uncle's face was powdered. He was shot from right close."

"Yes, that's so," agreed Lane, surrendering his brilliant idea reluctantly. A moment, and his face brightened. "Look, Cole. The corridor of that hotel runs back from the fire escape. If a fellow had been standing there he could 'a' seen into the room, if the blind wasn't down."

"Sure enough," agreed Sanborn. "If the murderer had give him an invite to a grandstand seat. But prob'ly he didn't."

"No, but it was hot that night. A man rooming at the Wyndham might come out to get a breath of air, say, an' if he had he might 'a' seen something."

"Some more of them *ifs,* son. What are you drivin' at, anyhow?"

"Olson. Maybe it was from there he saw what he did."

Sanborn's face lost its whimsical derision. His blue eyes narrowed in concentration of thought. "That's good guessin'. Kirby. It may be 'way off; then again it may be absolutely correct. Let's find out if Olson stayed at the Wyndham, while he was in Denver. He'd be more apt to hang out nearer the depot."

"Unless he chose the Wyndham to be near my uncle."

"Maybeso. But, if he did, it wasn't because he meant the old man any good. Prove to me that the Swede stayed there an' I'll say he's as liable as Hull to be guilty. He could 'a' throwed a rope round that stone curlycue stickin' out up there above us,

swung acrost to the fire escape here, an' walked right in on Cunningham."

"You're shoutin', Clay. He could 'a' done just that. Or he might have been waiting in the room for my uncle, when he came home. We'll have a look at the Wyndham register."

They did. The Wyndham was a rooming house rather than a hotel, but the landlady kept a register for her guests. She brought it out into the hall, from her room.

There, under date of the twenty-first, they found the name they were looking for. Oscar Olson had put up at the Wyndham. He had stayed three nights, checking out on the twenty-fourth.

The friends walked into the street and back toward the Paradox without a word.

"I've a notion Mr. Olson had a right interestin' trip to Denver," said Lane quietly.

"I'll say he had," answered Sanborn. "An' that ain't but half of it, either. He's mighty apt to have another interestin' one here, one o' these days."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BRASS BED.

The roughriders gravitated back to the fire escape.

"While we're cuttin' trail, might as well be thorough," he said to his friend. "The miscreant that did this killin' might 'a' walked out the door or he might 'a' come through the window here. If he did that last, which fork of the road did he take? He could go down the ladder, or swing across to the Wyndham, and slip into the corridor. Let's make sure we've got all the prospects figured out at that."

Before he had finished the sentence, Lane saw another way of flight. The apartment in front of Cunningham's was out of reach of the fire escape. But the nearest window of the one to the rear was closer. Beneath it ran a stone ledge. An active man could swing himself from the railing of the platform to the coping, and force an entrance into that apartment through the window.

Kirby glanced up and down the alley. A department-store delivery auto was moving out of sight. Nobody was in the line of vision except an occasional pedestrian passing on the sidewalk at the entrances to the alley.

"I'm gonna take a whirl at it," Lane said, nodding toward the window.

"Mebbe the lady's at home. I don't allow to rescue you none, if she massacres you," the world's champion announced, grinning.

"Wrong guess, Cole. The boss of this hacienda is a man, an' he's in Chicago right now."

Kirby stepped lightly to the railing, edged far out with his weight on the ledge, and swung to the window sill. The sash yielded to the pressure of his hands, and moved up. A moment later he disappeared from Sanborn's view, into the room.

It was the living room of the apartment into which Lane had stepped. The walls were papered with blue and the rug was a figured yellow and blue. The furniture was of fumed oak, the chairs leather-padded.

The self-invited guest met his first surprise on the table. It was littered with two or three newspapers. The date of the uppermost caught his eye. It was a copy of the *Post*, of the twenty-fifth. He looked at the other papers. One was the *Times*, and another the *News*, dated respectively the twenty-fourth and the twenty-sixth. There was an *Express* of the twenty-eighth. Each contained long accounts of the developments in the Cunningham murder mystery.

How did these papers come here? The apartment was closed, its tenant in Chicago. The only other persons who had a key and the right of entry were Horikawa and the Paradox janitor—and the house servant had fled to parts unknown. Who, then, had brought these papers here? And why?

The apartment held two rooms, a buffet kitchen, and a bathroom. Kirby opened the door into the bedroom. He stood paralyzed on the threshold. On the bed, fully dressed, his legs stretched in front of him and his feet crossed, was the missing man Horikawa. His torso was propped up against the brass posts of the bedstead. A handkerchief encircled each arm, and bound it to the brass upright behind.

In the forehead, just above the slant oval eyes, was a bullet hole. The man had probably been dead for a day, at least for a good many hours.

The cattleman had no doubt that it was Horikawa. Kirby stepped to the window of the living room and called to his friend.

"Want me to help you gather the loot?" chaffed Cole.

"Serious business, old man," Kirby told him, and the look on his face backed the

words. Sanborn swung across to the window and came through.

"What is it?" he asked quickly.

"I've found Horikawa."

The eyes of the men met and Cole guessed that grim tragedy was in the air. He followed Kirby to the bedroom. "God!" he exclaimed. His gaze was riveted to the bloodless yellow face of the Oriental. Presently he broke the silence to speak again. "The same crowd that killed Cunningham must 'a' done this, too."

"Probably."

"Sure they must. Same way exactly."

"Unless tying him up here was an afterthought—to make it look like the other," suggested Lane. He added after a moment, "Or for revenge, because Horikawa killed my uncle. If he did, fate couldn't have sent a retribution more exactly just."

"Sho, that's a heap unlikely. You'd have to figure there were *two* men that are Apache killers, both connected with this case, both with minds just alike, one of 'em a Jap and the other prob'ly a white man. A hundred-to-one shot, I'd call it. No, sir. Chances are the same man bossed both jobs."

"Yes," agreed Kirby. "The odds are all that way."

He stepped closer and looked at the greenish-yellow flesh. "May have been dead a couple of days," he continued.

"What was the sense in killin' him? What for? How did he come into it?" Cole's boyish face wrinkled in perplexity. "I don't make head or tale of this thing. Cunningham's enemies couldn't be his enemies, too, do you reckon?"

"More likely he knew too much and had to be got out of the road."

"Yes, but——" Sanborn stopped, frowning, while he worked out what he had to say. "He wasn't killed right after yore uncle. Where was he, while the police were huntin' for him, everywhere? If he knew something, why didn't he come to bat with it? What was he waitin' for? An' if the folks that finally bumped him off knew he didn't aim to tell what he knew, whyfor did they figure they had to get rid of him?"

"I can't answer your questions right off the reel, Cole. Maybe I could guess at one or two answers, but they likely wouldn't be right. F'r instance, I could guess that he was here in this room from the time my uncle was killed till he met his own death."

"In this room?"

"In these apartments. Never left 'em, most likely. What's more, some one knew he was here an' kept him supplied with the daily papers."

"Who?"

"If I could tell you that, I could tell you who killed him," answered Kirby with a grim smile.

Lane told him of the mute testimony of the newspapers in the living room. "Some one brought those papers to him, every day," he added.

"And then killed him. Does that look reasonable to you?"

"We don't know the circumstances. Say, to make a long shot, that the Jap had been hired to kill my uncle by this other man, and say he was beginning to get ugly an' make threats. Or say Horikawa knew about the killing of my uncle and was hired by the other man to keep away. Then he learns from the papers that he's suspected, an' he gets anxious to go to the police with what he knows. Wouldn't there be reason enough then to kill him? The other man would have to do it to save himself."

"I reckon." Cole harked back to a preceding suggestion. "The revenge theory won't hold water. If some friend of yore uncle knew the Jap had killed him, he'd sick the law on him. He wouldn't pull off any private execution like this."

Kirby accepted this. "That's true. There's another possibility. We've been forgetting the two thousand dollars my uncle drew from the bank, the day he was killed. If Horikawa and some one else are guilty of the murder and the theft, they might have quarreled, later, over the money. Perhaps the accomplice saw a chance to get away with the whole of it, by gettin' rid of Horikawa."

"Maybeso. By what you tell me, yore uncle was a big, two-fisted scrapper. It was a two-man job to handle him. This li'l' Jap never in the world did it alone. What it gets back to is that he was prob'ly in on it, an' later, for some reason, his pardner gunned him."

"Well, we'd better telephone for the police an' let them do some of the worrying."

Kirby stepped into the living room, followed by his friend. He was about to reach for the receiver, when an exclamation stopped him. Sanborn was standing before a small writing desk, of which he had just let down

the top. He had lifted idly a piece of blotting paper and was gazing down at a sheet of paper with writing on it.

"Looky here, Kirby," he called.

In three strides Lane was beside him. His eyes, too, fastened on the sheet and found there the pothooks we have learned to associate with Chinese and Japanese chirography.

Lane picked up the paper. There were two or three sheets of the writing. "Might be a letter to his folks—or it might be——" His sentence flickered out. He was thinking. "I reckon I'll take this along with me, an' have it translated, Cole." He put the sheets in his pocket after he had folded them. A moment later he was telephoning to the city hall, for the police.

There was the sound of a key in the outer door. It opened, and the janitor of the Paradox stood in the doorway. "What you do here?" asked the little Japanese quickly.

"We came in through the window," explained Kirby. "Thought maybe the man that killed my uncle slipped in here."

"I hear you talk. I come in. You no business here."

"True enough, Shibo. But we're not burglars, and we're here. Lucky we are, too. We've found something."

Kirby led the way into the bedroom. Shibo looked at his countryman, without a muscle of his impassive face twitching.

"Some one killum plenty dead," he said evenly.

CHAPTER XVII.

JAMES LOSES HIS TEMPER.

Cole grinned whimsically at his friend.

"Do we light out now, or wait for the cops?" he asked.

"We wait. They'd probably find out, anyhow, that we'd been here."

Five minutes later a patrol wagon clanged up to the Paradox. A sergeant of police and two plain-clothes men took the elevator. The sergeant, heading the party, stopped in the doorway of the apartment and let a hard, hostile eye travel up and down Lane's six feet.

"Oh, it's you," he said suspiciously.

Kirby smiled. "That's right, officer. We've met before, haven't we?"

They had. The sergeant was the man who had arrested him, at the coroner's inquest. It had annoyed him that the authorities had later released the prisoner on bond.

"Have you touched the body, or moved anything, since you came?" the sergeant demanded.

"No, sir, to both questions, except the telephone, when I used it to reach headquarters."

The officer made no answer. He and the detectives went into the bedroom, examined the dead valet's position and clothes, made a tour of the rooms, and came back to Lane.

"Who's your friend?" asked the sergeant superciliously.

"His name is Cole Sanborn."

"The champion bronchobuster?"

"Yes."

The sergeant looked at Sanborn with increased respect. His eyes went back to Kirby sullenly.

"What you doing here?"

"We were in my uncle's apartment lookin' things over. We stepped out on the fire escape and happened to notice this window here was open a little. It just came over me that maybe we might discover some evidence here. So I got in by the window, saw the body of the Jap, and called my friend."

"Some one hire you to hunt up evidence?" the officer wanted to know, with heavy sarcasm.

"I hired myself. My good name is involved. I'm going to see the murderer is brought to justice."

"Well, I'll say you could find him, if anybody could."

"You're entitled to your opinion, sergeant, just as I am to mine; but before we're through with this case, you'll have to admit you've been wrong." Lane turned to his friend. "We'll go now, Cole, if you're ready."

The Wyoming men walked across to Seventeenth Street and down it to the Equitable Building. James Cunningham was in his office. He looked up as they entered, a cold smile on his lips.

"Ah, my energetic cousin," he said, with his habitual touch of irony. "What's in the wind now?"

Kirby told him. Instantly James became grave. His irony vanished. In his face was a flicker almost of consternation at this follow-up murder. He might have been asking himself how much more trouble was coming.

"We'll get the writing translated. You have it with you?" he said.

His eyes ran over the pages Lane handed him. "I know a Jap we can get to read it

for us, a reliable man, one who won't talk, if we ask him not to."

The broker's desk buzzer rang. He talked for a moment over the telephone, then hung up again. "Sorry," Cunningham said. "I'm going to be busy for an hour or two. Going to lunch with Miss Phyllis Harriman. She was uncle James' fiancée, perhaps you know. There are some affairs of the estate to be arranged. I wonder if you could come back, later, this afternoon. Say about four o'clock. We'll take up, then, the business of the translation."

"Suits me. Shall I leave the writing here?"

"Yes, if you will. Doesn't matter, of course, but since we have it, I'll put it in the safe."

"How's the arm?" Kirby asked, glancing at the sling his cousin wore.

"Only sprained. The doctor thinks I must have twisted it badly, as I fell. I couldn't sleep a wink, all night. The damned thing pained so." James looked as though he had not slept well. His eyes were shadowed and careworn.

They walked together, as far as the outer office. A slender, dark young woman, beautifully gowned, was waiting there. James introduced her to his cousin and Sanborn as Miss Harriman. She was, Kirby knew at once, the original of the photograph he had seen in his uncle's rooms.

Miss Harriman was a vision of sheathed loveliness. The dark, long-lashed eyes looked out at Kirby with appealing wistfulness. When she moved, the soft lines of her body took on a sinuous grace. From her personality there seemed to emanate an enticing aura of sex mystery. She gave Kirby her little gloved hand. "I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Lane," she said, smiling at him. "I've heard all sorts of good things about you from James—and Jack."

Kirby said the proper things, but he said them with a mind divided. For his nostrils were inhaling again the violet perfume that associated itself with his first visit to his uncle's apartment. He did not start. His eyes did not betray him. His face could be wooden, on occasion, and it told no stories now. But his mind was filled with racing thoughts. Had Phyllis Harriman been the woman Rose had met on the stairs? What had she been doing in Cunningham's room? Lane carried this preoccupation with him, throughout the afternoon. It was still in the hinterland of his thoughts when he returned to his cousin's office.

His entrance was upon a scene of agitated storm. His cousin was in the outer office, facing a clerk. In his eyes there was a cold fury of anger that surprised Kirby. He had known James always as self-restrained to the point of chilliness. Now his anger seemed to leap out and strike savagely.

"Gross incompetence and negligence, Hudson. You are discharged, sir. I'll not have you in my employ an hour longer. A man I have trusted and found wholly unworthy."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Cunningham," the clerk said humbly. "I don't see how I lost the paper, if I did, sir. I was very careful when I took the deeds and leases out of the safe. It seems hardly possible——"

"But you lost it. Nobody else could have done it. I don't want excuses. You can go, sir." Cunningham turned abruptly to his cousin. "The sheets of paper with the Japanese writing have been lost. This man, by some piece of inexcusable carelessness, took them with a bundle of other documents to my lawyer's office. He must have taken them. They were lying with the others. Now they can't be found anywhere."

"Have you phoned to your lawyer?" asked Kirby.

"Phoned and been in person. They are nowhere to be found. They ought to turn up somewhere. This clerk probably dropped them. I've sent an advertisement to the afternoon papers."

Kirby asked Hudson a few questions and had the man show them exactly where he had picked up the papers he took to the lawyer. James listened, his anger still simmering. Kirby took his cousin by the arm and led him into the inner office.

"Frankly, James, I think you were partly to blame," he said. "You must have laid the writing very close in the safe to the other papers. Hadn't you better give Hudson another chance before you fire him?" In the end he persuaded Cunningham to withdraw his discharge of the clerk.

"He doesn't deserve it," James grumbled. "He's maybe spoiled our chance of laying hands on the man who killed uncle. I can't get over my disappointment."

"Don't worry, old man," Lane said quietly. "We're goin' to rope an' hog tie that wolf, even if Horikawa can't point him out to us with his dead hand."

Cunningham looked at him, and again the faint ironic smile of admiration was in evidence. "You're confident, Kirby."

"Why wouldn't I be? With you and Rose McLean and Cole Sanborn and I all followin' the fellow's trail, he can't double and twist enough to make a get-away. We'll ride him down sure."

"Maybe we will and maybe we won't," the oil broker replied. "I'd give odds that he goes scot-free."

"Then you'd lose," Kirby answered, smiling easily.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"ARE YOU WITH ME OR AGAINST ME?"

Miss Phyllis Harriman had breakfasted earlier than usual. Her luxuriant blue-black hair had been dressed and she was debating the important question as to what gown she would wear. The business of her life was to make an effective carnal appeal, and she had a very sure sense of how to accomplish this.

A maid entered with a card, at which Miss Harriman glanced indolently. A smile twitched at the corners of her mouth, but it was not wholly one of amusement. In the dark eyes a hint of adventure sparked. Her pulses beat with a little glow of triumph. This Wild Man from Wyoming, so strong of stride, so quietly competent, whose sardonic glance had taken her in so directly and so keenly, was a foeman worthy of her weapons.

"Good gracious!" she murmured. "Does he usually call in the middle of the night, I wonder? And does he really expect me to see him now?"

The maid waited. She had long ago discovered that Miss Phyllis did not always regulate her actions by her words.

"Take him into the red room, and tell him I'll be down in a minute," Miss Harriman decided.

After a very few minutes Miss Phyllis sauntered into the room and gave her hand to the man who rose at her entrance. She was simply but expensively gowned. Her smile was warm for Kirby. It told him, with a touch of shy reluctance, that he was the one man in the world she would rather meet just now.

"I'm so glad you came to see me," she said, just as though she were in the habit of receiving young men at eleven in the morning. "Of course, I want to know you better. James thinks so much of you."

"And Jack," added Lane smilingly.

"Oh, yes, Jack, too," she said, and laughed outright when their eyes met.

"I'm sure Jack's very fond of me. He can't help showing it occasionally."

"Jack's—impulsive," she explained. "But he's amenable to influence."

"Of the right sort. I'm sure he would be."

He found himself the object of a piquant amused scrutiny under her long lashes.

"I came to see you, Miss Harriman, about the case," he said. "My good name is involved. I must clear it. I want you to help me."

It seemed to him that her eyes grew darker, as though some shadow of dread had fallen over them. "How can *I* help you?" she asked.

"If you would answer a few questions about——"

"What questions?" Her voice had become tense and sharp.

"Personal ones. About you and my uncle. You were engaged to him, were you not?"

"Yes."

"There wasn't any quarrel between you recently, was there?"

"There was not, though I quite fail to see how this can concern you, Mr. Lane."

"I don't want to distress you," he said gently. "Just now that question must seem to you a brutal one. Believe me, I don't want to hurt you."

Her eyes softened, grew wistful and appealing. "I'm sure you don't. You couldn't. It's all so—so dreadful to think about." There was a little catch in her throat as the voice broke. "Let's talk of something more cheerful. I want to forget it all."

"I'm sure you do. We all want to do that. The surest way to get it out of our minds is to solve the mystery and find out who is guilty. That's why I want you to tell me a few things to clear up my mind."

"But I don't know anything about it—nothing at all. Why should you come to me?"

"When did you last see my uncle alive?"

"What a dreadful question! It was—let me think—in the afternoon—the day before the——"

"And you parted from him on the best of terms?"

"Of course."

He leaned toward her, ever so little, his eyes level with hers and steadily fastened

upon her. "That's the last time you saw him—until you went to his rooms at the Paradox, the night he was killed?"

She had lifted her hand to pat into place an escaping tendril of hair. The hand remained lifted. The dark eyes froze with horror. They stared at him, as though held by some dreadful fascination. From her cheeks the color ebbed. Kirby thought she was going to faint. But she did not. A low moan of despair escaped from the ashen lips. The lifted arm fell heavily to her lap. Then Kirby discovered that the two in the red room had become three. Jack Cunningham was standing in the doorway. His glance flashed to Lane accusingly. "What's up? What are you doing here?" he demanded abruptly.

The Wyoming man rose. "I've been asking Miss Harriman a question."

"A question. What business have you to ask her questions?" demanded Jack hotly.

His cousin tried a shot in the dark. "I was asking her," he said, his voice low and even, "about that visit you and she paid to uncle James' rooms, the night he was killed."

Kirby knew instantly he had scored a hit. The insolence, the jaunty confidence, were stricken from him as by a buffet in the face. For a moment body and mind alike were lax and stunned. Then courage flowed back into his veins. He came forward, blustering.

"What do you mean? What visit? It's a damned lie!"

"Is it? Then why is the question such a knock-out to you and Miss Harriman. She almost fainted, and it certainly crumpled you up, till you got second breath."

Jack flushed angrily. "Of course it shocked her for you to make such a charge against her. It would frighten any woman. By God, it's an outrage! You come here and try to browbeat Miss Harriman, when she's alone. You ask her impudent questions, as good as tell her she—she——"

Kirby's eyes were like a glittering rapier, probing for the weakness of his opponent's defense. "I say that she and you were in the rooms of uncle James at nine-fifty, the evening he was killed. I say that you concealed the fact, at the inquest. Why?" He shot his question at the other man with the velocity of a bullet.

Cunningham's lip twitched, his eye wavered. How much did his cousin know?

"Who told you we were there? How do you know it? I don't propose to answer every wild accusation, nor to let Miss Harriman be insulted by you. Who are you, anyhow? A man accused of killing my uncle, the man who found his valet dead and is suspected of that crime, too; a fellow who would be lying behind the bars now, if my brother hadn't put up the money to save the family from disgrace. If we tell all we know, the police will grab you, again, double-quick. I've a good mind to phone for the police right now."

"Do," suggested Kirby, smiling. "Then we'll both tell what we know and perhaps things will clear up a bit."

It was a bluff, pure and simple. He could not tell what he knew any more than his cousin could. The part played by Rose and Esther McLean in the story barred him from the luxury of truth telling. Moreover, he had no real evidence to back his suspicions. But Jack did not know how strong the restraining influence was.

"I didn't say I was going to phone. I said I'd a jolly good mind to," Cunningham replied sulkily.

"I'd advise you not to start anything you can't finish, Jack. I'll give you one more piece of advice, too. Come clean with what you know. I'm going to find out, anyhow. Make up your mind to that. I'm going through with this job till it's done."

"You'll pull off your Sherlock Holmes stuff in jail then, for I'm going to ask James to get off your bond," Jack retorted vindictively.

"As you please about that," Lane said quietly.

"He'll choose between you or me. I'll be damned if I'll stand for his keeping a man out of jail to try and fasten on me a murder I didn't do."

"I haven't said you did it. What I say is that you and Miss Harriman know something and are concealing it. What is it? I'm not a fool. I don't think you killed uncle any more than I did. But you an' Miss Harriman have a secret. Why don't you go to James and make a clean breast of it? He'll tell you what to do."

"The devil he will. I tell you we haven't any secret. We weren't in uncle's rooms that night."

"Can you prove an alibi, for the whole evening—both of you?" the range rider asked curtly.

"None of your business. We're not in the prisoner's dock. It's you that is likely to be there," Jack tossed out petulantly.

Phyllis Harriman had flung herself down to sob, with her head in the pillows. But Kirby noticed that one small pink ear was in the open, to take in the swift sentences passing between the men.

"I'm intendin' to make it my business," Lane said, his voice ominously quiet.

"You're laying up trouble for yourself," Jack warned blackly. "If you want me for an enemy, you're going at this the right way."

"I'm not lookin' for enemies. What I want is the truth. You're concealing it. We'll see if you can make it stick."

"We're not concealing a thing."

"Last call for you to show down your cards, Jack. Are you with me or against me?" asked Kirby.

"Against you, you meddling fool," Cunningham burst out in a gust of fury. "Don't you meddle with my affairs, unless you want trouble right off the bat. I'll protect my good name and this lady's, if I have to do it with a gun."

Kirby's steady gaze appraised him coolly. "You're excited and talkin' foolishness. I'm not attackin' anybody's good name. I'm looking for the man who killed uncle James. I'm expecting to find him. If anybody stands in the way, I'm liable to run against him."

The man from Twin Buttes bowed toward the black hair and pink ear of his hostess, turned on his heel, and walked from the room.

CHAPTER XIX.

COUSINS DISAGREE.

It was essential to Kirby's plans that he should be at liberty. If he should be locked up in prison, even for a few days, the threads that he had begun to untangle from the snarl known as the Cunningham mystery would again be ensnared. He was not sure what action James would take at his brother's demand that he withdraw from the bond. But Lane had no desire to embarrass him by forcing the issue. He set about securing a new bond.

He was, ten minutes later, in the law offices of Irwin, Foster & Warren, attorneys who represented the cattle interests in Wyoming, with which Kirby was identified. Foster, a stout, middle-aged man, with only a few locks of gray hair left, heard what the roughrider had to say.

"I'll wire to Caldwell and to Norman as you suggest, Mr. Lane," he said. "If they give me instructions to stand back of you, I'll arrange a new bond as soon as possible."

Kirby rose. He had finished his business.

"Just a moment, Mr. Lane." Foster leaned back in his swivel chair and looked out of the window. His eyes did not focus on any detail of the office building opposite. They had the far-away look which denotes a preoccupied mind. "Ever been to Golden?" he asked, at last, abruptly, swinging back in his seat and looking at his client.

"No. Why?"

"Golden is the Gretna Green of Denver, you know. When young people elope they go to Golden. When a couple gets married and doesn't want it known, they choose Golden. Very convenient spot."

"I'm not figuring on gettin' married, right now," the cattleman said, smiling.

"Still you might find a visit to the place interesting and useful. I was there on business, a couple of weeks ago." The eyes of the men fastened. Lane knew he was being given a hint that Foster did not want to put more directly.

"What are the interesting points of the town?" asked the Twin Buttes man.

"Well, sir, there are several. Of course, there's the School of Mines, and the mountains right back of the town. Gold was discovered there somewhere about 'fifty-seven, I think. Used to be the capital of the territory, before Denver found her feet."

"I'm rather busy."

"Wouldn't take you long to run over on the interurban." The lawyer began to gather toward him the papers upon which he had been working when the client was shown in. He added casually: "I found it quite amusing to look over the marriage licenses of the last month or two. Found the names there of some of our prominent citizens. Well, I'll call you up, as soon as I know about the bond."

Lane walked across to the Equitable Building and dropped in on his cousin James. Cunningham rose to meet him, a bit stiffly. The cattleman knew that Jack had already been in to see him or had got him on the wire. Kirby brushed through any em-

barrassment there might be, and told frankly why he had come.

"I've had a sort of row with Jack. Under the circumstances I don't feel that I ought to let you stay on my bond. It might create ill feeling between you and him. So I'm arranging to have some Wyoming friends put up whatever's required. You'll understand I haven't any bad feeling against you, or against him for that matter. You've been bully all through this thing, an' I'm certainly in your debt."

"What's the trouble between you about?" asked James.

"I've found out that he an' Miss Harriman were in uncle James' rooms, the night he was killed. I want them to come through an' tell what they know."

"How did you find that out?" The eyes of the oil broker were hard as jade. They looked straight into those of his cousin.

"I can't tell you that exactly. Put two and two together."

"You mean you *guess* they were there. You don't *know* it."

A warm, friendly smile lit the brown face of the roughrider. He wanted to remain on good terms with James if he could. "I don't know it in a legal sense. Morally, I'm convinced of it."

"Even though they deny it."

"Practically they admitted, rather than denied."

"Do you think it was quite straight, Kirby, to go to Miss Harriman, with such a trumped-up charge? I don't. I confess I'm surprised at you."

"It isn't a trumped-up charge. I wanted to know the truth from her."

"Why didn't you go to Jack then?"

"I didn't know at that time Jack was the man with her."

"You don't know it now. You don't know she was there. In point of fact, the idea is ridiculous. You surely don't think, for a moment, that she had anything to do with uncle James' death."

"No, not in the sense that she helped bring it about. But she knows something she's hiding."

"That's absurd. Your imagination is too active, Kirby."

"Can't agree with you." Lane met him eye to eye.

"Grant, for the sake of argument, that she was in uncle's room that night. Your friend Miss Rose McLean was there, too—by her own confession. When she came to Jack and me with her story we respected it. We did not insist on knowing why she was there, and it was of her own free will she told us. Yet you go to our friend and distress her by implications that must shock and wound her. Was that generous? Was it even fair?"

"I'm sorry you feel that way, James. Perhaps I was wrong. But you want to remember that I wasn't asking about what she knew, with any idea of making it public or telling the police. I meant to keep it under my own hat, to help run down a cold-blooded murderer."

"You can't want to run him down any more than we do—and in that 'we' I include Jack and Miss Harriman as well as myself," the older man answered gravely.

"But I'm sure you're entirely wrong. Miss Harriman knows nothing about it. If she had, she would have confided in us."

"Perhaps she has confided in Jack."

"Don't you think that obsession of yours is rather—well, unlikely, to put it mildly? Analyze it, and you'll find you haven't a single substantial fact to base it on."

This was true. Yet Kirby's opinion was not changed. He returned to the subject of the bond. It seemed to him best, he said, in view of Jack's feeling, to get other bondsmen. He hoped James would not interpret this to mean that he felt less friendly toward him.

His cousin bowed, rather formally. "Just as you please. Would you like the matter arranged this afternoon?"

Lane looked at his watch. "I haven't heard from my new bondsmen yet. Besides, I want to go to Golden. Would to-morrow morning suit you?"

"I dare say." James stifled a yawn. "Did you say you were going to Golden?"

"Yes. Some one gave me a tip. I don't know what there's in it, but I thought I'd have a look at the marriage license registry."

Cunningham flashed a startled glance at him that asked a peremptory question. "Probably waste of time. I've been in the oil business too long to pay any attention to tips."

"Expect you're right, but I'll trot out there, anyhow."

"What do you expect to find among the marriage licenses?"

"Haven't the slightest idea. I'll tell you to-morrow what I do find."

James made one dry, ironic comment. "I rather think you have too much imagination for sleuthing. If I were you I'd go back to bronchobusting."

Kirby laughed. "Dare say you're right. I'll take your advice, after we get the man we're after."

CHAPTER XX.

NICODEMUS RANKIN FORGETS AND REMEMBERS.

By appointment Kirby met Rose at Graham & Osborne's for luncheon. She was waiting in the tower room for him.

"Where's Esther?" he asked.

Rose mustered a faint smile. "She's eating lunch with a handsomer man."

"You can't throw a stone up Sixteenth Street without hittin' one," he answered gayly.

They followed the head waitress to a small table for two, by a window. Rose walked with the buoyant rhythm of perfect health. Her friend noticed, as he had often done before, that she had the grace of movement which is a corollary to muscles under perfect response. Seated across the table from her, he marveled, once more, at the miracle of her soft skin and the peach bloom of her complexion. Many times she had known the sting of sleet and the splash of sun on her face. Yet incredibly her cheeks did not tan nor lose their fineness.

"You haven't told me who this handsomer man is," Kirby suggested.

"Cole Sanborn." She flushed a little, but looked straight at him. "Have you told him—about Esther?"

"No. But, from something he said, I think he guesses."

Her eyes softened. "He's awf'ly good to Esther. I can see he likes her and she likes him. Why couldn't she have met him, first? She's so lovable." Tears brimmed to her eyes. "That's been her ruin. She was ready to believe any man who said he cared for her."

"Have you found out anything more yet about—the man?" he asked, his voice low and gentle.

"No. It's queer how stubborn she can be for all her softness. But she almost told me last night. I'll find out, in a day or two, now. Of course it was your uncle. The note I found was really an admission of guilt. Your cousins feel that some settlement ought to be made on Esther out of the estate. I've been trying to decide what would be fair. Will you think it over and let me know what seems right to you?"

"I'm going out to Golden to-day on a queer wild-goose chase," Kirby said. "A man gave me a hint. He didn't want to tell me the information out and out, whatever it is. What he said was for me to go to Golden and look over the list of marriage licenses, for the past month or two."

Her eyes flashed an eager question at him. "You don't suppose—it couldn't be that Esther was married to your uncle secretly, and that she promised not to tell."

"I hadn't thought of that. It might be." His eyes narrowed in concentration. "And if Jack and Miss Harriman had just found it out that would explain why they called on uncle James the night he was killed. Do you want to go to Golden with me?"

She nodded eagerly. "Oh, I do, Kirby. I believe we'll find out something, there."

Lunch over, they walked across along Arapahoe Street, to the loop, and took a Golden car. It carried them by the viaduct over the Platte River and through the North Side into the country. From the terminus of the line they walked up the steep hill to the courthouse. An automobile, new and of an expensive make, was standing by the curb. Just as Kirby and Rose reached the machine, a young man ran down the steps of the courthouse and stepped into the car. The man was Jack Cunningham. He took the driver's seat. Beside him was a veiled young woman, in a leather motoring coat. In spite of the veil Lane recognized her as Phyllis Harriman. Cunningham caught sight of his cousin and anger flushed his face. Without a word he reached for the starter, threw in the clutch, and gave the engine gas.

The roughrider watched the car move down the hill. "I've made a mistake," he told his companion. "I told James I was coming here, to-day. He let Jack know, and he's beat us to it."

"What harm will that do?" asked Rose. "The information will be there for us, too, won't it?"

"Maybe it will. Maybe it won't. We'll soon find out."

Rose caught her friend's arm, as they were passing through the hall. "Kirby, do you suppose your cousins really know Esther was married to your uncle? Do you think

they can be trying to keep it quiet, so she can't claim the estate?"

He stopped in his stride. James had deprecated the idea of his coming to Golden, and had ridiculed the possibility of his unearthing any information of value. Yet he must have called up Jack as soon as he had left the office. And Jack had hurried to the town within the hour. It might be that Rose had hit on the reason for the hostility he felt on the part of both cousins to his activities. There was something they did not want brought to the light of day. What more potent reason could there be for concealment than their desire to keep the fortune of the millionaire in their own hands?

"I shouldn't wonder if you haven't rung the bull's-eye, pardner," he told her. "We ought to know right soon now."

The clerk in the recorder's office smiled when Kirby said he wanted to look through the license register. He swung the book round toward them.

"Help yourself. What's the big idea? Another young fellow was in lookin' at the licenses, only a minute ago."

The clerk moved over to another desk where he was typewriting. His back was turned toward them. Kirby turned the pages of the book. He and Rose looked them over, together. They covered the record for three months without finding anything of interest. Patiently they went over the leaves again.

Kirby stepped over to the clerk. "Do you happen to remember whether you made out any license application for a man named Cunningham, any time, in the past two months?" he asked.

"For a marriage license?"

"Yes."

"Don't think I have. Can't remember the name. I was on my vacation two weeks. Maybe it was then. Can't you find it in the book?"

"No."

"Know the date?"

Kirby shook his head.

The voice of Rose, high with excitement, came from across the room. "Looky here!"

Her finger ran down the book, close to the binding. A page had been cut out with a sharp penknife, so deftly that they had passed it twice, without noticing.

"Who did that?" demanded the clerk angrily.

"Probably the young man who was just in here. His name is Jack Cunningham," Lane answered.

"What in time did he want to do that for? If he wanted it why didn't he take a copy? The boss'll give me hail Columbia. That's what a fellow gets for being accommodating."

"He did it so that we wouldn't see it. Is there any other record kept of the marriages?"

"Sure there is. The preachers and the judges who perform marriages have to turn back to us the certificate within thirty days and we make a record of 'em."

"Can I see that book?"

"I'll do the lookin'," the clerk said shortly. "Whose marriage is it? And what date?"

Lane gave such information as he could. The clerk mellowed when Rose told him it was very important to her, as officials have a way of doing, when charming young women smile at them. But he found no record of any marriage of which they knew either of the contracting parties.

"Once in a while some preacher forgets to turn in his certificate," the clerk said, as he closed the book. "Old Rankin is the worst, that way. He forgets. You might look him up."

Kirby slipped the clerk a dollar and turned away. Rankin was a forlorn hope, but he and Rose walked out to a little house in the suburbs where the preacher lived. He was a friendly, white-haired old gentleman, and he made them very much at home under the impression they had come to get married. A slight deafness was in part responsible for this mistake.

"May I see the license?" he asked, after Kirby had introduced himself and Rose.

For a moment the cattleman was puzzled. His eye went to Rose, seeking information. A wave of color was sweeping into her soft cheeks. Then Lane knew why, and the hot blood mounted into his own. His gaze hurriedly, and in embarrassment, fled from Miss McLean's face.

"You don't quite understand," he explained to the Reverend Nicodemus Rankin. "We've come only to—to inquire about some one you married—or rather, to find out if you did marry him. His name is Cunningham. We have reason to think he was married a month or two ago. But we're not sure."

The old man stroked his silken-white hair. At times his mind was a little hazy. There

were moments when a slight fog seemed to descend upon it. His memory, in recent years, had been quite treacherous. Not long since he had forgotten to attend a funeral at which he was to conduct the services.

"I dare say I did marry your friend. A good many young people come to me. The license clerk at the court is very kind. He sends them here."

"The man's name was Cunningham—James Cunningham," Kirby prompted.

"Cunningham—Cunningham! Seems to me I did marry a man by that name. Come to think of it, I'm sure I did. To a beautiful young woman," the old preacher said.

"Do you recall her name? I mean her maiden name," Rose said, excitement drumming in her veins."

"No-o. I don't seem quite to remember it. But she was a charming young woman—very attractive, I might say. My wife and daughter mentioned it, afterward."

"May I ask if Mrs. Rankin and your daughter are at present in the house?" asked Lane.

"Unfortunately, no. They have gone to spend a few days visiting in Idaho Springs. If they were here, they could reenforce any gaps in my memory, which is not all it once was." The Reverend Nicodemus smiled apologetically.

"Was her name Esther McLean?" asked Rose eagerly.

The old parson brought his mind back to the subject with a visible effort. "Oh, yes! The young lady who was married to your friend——" He paused, at a loss for the name.

"Cunningham," Kirby supplied.

"Quite so—Cunningham. Well, it might have been McLeod. I—I rather think it did sound like that."

"McLean. Miss Esther McLean," corrected the cattleman patiently.

"The fact is, I'm not sure about the young lady's name. Mother and Ellen would know. I'm sorry they're not here. They talked, afterward, about how pleasant the young lady was."

"Was she fair or dark?"

The old preacher smiled at Rose benevolently. "I really don't know. I'm afraid, my dear young woman, that I'm a very unreliable witness."

"You don't recollect any details. For instance, how did they come and did they bring witnesses with them?"

"Yes. I was working in the garden—weeding the strawberry patch, I think. They came in an automobile, alone. Wife and daughter were the witnesses."

"Do you know when Mrs. Rankin and your daughter will be home?"

"By next Tuesday, at the latest. Perhaps you can call again. I trust there was nothing irregular about the marriage."

"Not so far as we know. We were anxious about the young lady. She is a friend of ours," Kirby said. "By the way, the certificate of the marriage is not on record at the courthouse. Are you sure you returned it to the clerk?"

"Bless my soul, did I forget that again?" exclaimed the Reverend Nicodemus. "I'll have my daughter look for the paper as soon as she returns."

"You couldn't find it now, I suppose," Lane suggested.

The old gentleman searched, rather helplessly, among the papers overflowing his desk. He did not succeed in finding what he looked for. Kirby and Rose walked back to the courthouse. They had omitted to arrange with the license clerk to forward a copy of the marriage certificate when it was filed. The roughrider left the required fee with the clerk and a bank note to keep his memory jogged up.

"Sure I will. I've got to have it, anyhow, for the records. And, say. What's the name of that fresh guy who came in here and cut the page from the register? I'm going after him right, believe you me."

Kirby gave his cousin's name and address. He had no animosity whatever toward him, but he thought it just as well to keep Jack's mind occupied with troubles of his own, during the next few days. Very likely then he would not get in his way so much.

They were no sooner clear of the courthouse than Rose burst out with what was in her mind. "It's just as I thought. Your uncle married Esther and got her to keep quiet about the marriage, for some reason. Your cousins are trying to destroy the evidence so that the estate won't all go to her. I'll bet we get an offer of a compromise right away."

"Maybe." Kirby's mind was not quite satisfied. Somehow, this affair did not seem to fit in with what he knew of his uncle. Yet if he were going to marry the stenog-

rapher he had wronged he might do it secretly, to conceal the date on account of the unborn child.

The eyes of Rose gleamed with determination. Her jaw set. "I'm gonna get the whole story out of Esther soon as I get back to town," she said doggedly.

But she did not—nor for many days after.

CHAPTER XXI.

A CONFERENCE OF THREE.

Kirby heard his name being paged as he entered his hotel.

"Wanted at the telephone, sir," the bell hop told him. He stepped into a booth, and the voice of Rose came excited and tremulous. It was less than ten minutes since he had left her at the door of her boarding house.

"Something's happened, Kirby. Can you come here—right away?" she begged. Then, unable to keep back any longer the cry of her heart, she broke out with her tidings. "Esther's gone."

"Gone where?" he asked.

"I don't know. She left a letter for me. If you'll come to the house—or shall I meet you downtown?"

"I'll come. Be there in five minutes."

He more than kept his word. Catching a car on the run at the nearest corner, he dropped from it as it crossed Broadway and walked to Cherokee. Rose opened the house door when he rang the bell, and drew him into the parlor. With a catch of the breath she blurted out again the news.

"She was gone when I got home. I found —this letter." Her eyes sought his for comfort.

He read what Esther had written:

> I can't stand it any longer, dearest. I'm going away where I won't disgrace you. Don't look for me. I'll be taken care of till—afterward. And oh Rose, don't hate me, darling. Even if I am wicked, love me. And try some time to forgive your little sister. ESTHER.

"Did anybody see her go?" Lane asked.

"I don't know. I haven't talked with anybody but the landlady. She hasn't seen Esther this afternoon, she said. I didn't let on I was worried."

"I don't know."

"Have you any idea where she would be likely to go—whether there is any friend who might have offered her a temporary home?"

"No." Rose considered. "She wouldn't go to any old friend. You see she's—awf'ly sensitive. And she'd have to explain. Besides, I'd find out she was there."

"That's true."

"I ought never to have left her, last spring. I should have found work here and not gone gallumpin' all over the country." Her chin trembled. She was on the verge of tears.

"Nonsense. You can't blame yourself. We each have to live our own life. How could you tell what was comin'? Betcha we find her right away. Maybe she let out something to Cole. She doesn't look to me like a girl who could play out a stiff hand alone."

"She isn't. She's dependent—always has leaned on some one." Rose had regained control of herself quickly. She stood straight and lissome, mistress of her emotions, but her clear cheeks were colorless. "I'm worried, Kirby, dreadfully. Esther hasn't the pluck to go through alone. She—she might do——"

His strong hand went out and closed on hers. "Don't you worry, pardner. It'll be all right. We'll find her and take her somewhere into the country where folks don't know. Denver ain't such a big town that we can't find one li'l' girl *muy pronto*." His voice was steady and cheerful, almost light. "First off, we'll check up an' see if any one saw her go. What did she take with her?"

"One suit case."

"How much money? Can you make a guess?"

"She had only a dollar or two in her purse. She had money in the bank. I'll find out if she drew any."

"Lemme do that. I'll find Cole, too. You make some inquiries round the house here, kinda easylike. Meet you here at six o'clock. Or maybe we'd better meet downtown. Say at the Boston Chop House."

Cole was with Kirby when he met Rose at the restaurant.

"We'll go in and get something to eat," Lane said. "We'll talk while we're waitin'. That way we'll not lose any time."

They found a booth, and Kirby ordered the dinner. As soon as the waiter had gone, he talked business.

"Find out anything, Rose?"

"Yes. A girl at the house who works for the telephone company saw Esther get into an automobile a block and a half from the house. A man helped her in. I pre-

tended to laugh and asked her what sort of a lookin' man he was. She said he was a live one, well dressed and handsome. The car was a limousine."

"Good! Fits in with what I found out," Kirby said. "The bank was closed, but I got in the back door by pounding at it. The teller at the K-R window was still there, working at his accounts. Esther did not draw any money to-day or yesterday."

"Why do you say good?" Cole wanted to know. "Is it good for our li'l' friend to be in the power of this good-lookin' guy with the big car, an' her without a bean of her own? I don't get it. Who is the man? Howcome she to go with him? She sure had no notion of going, when we was eatin' together an hour before."

"I don't see who he could be. She never spoke of such a man to me," Rose murmured, greatly troubled.

"I don't reckon she was very well acquainted with him," Lane said, shaking out his napkin.

"Why would she go with a man she didn't know very well? Where would she be going with him?" The flame in her cheeks, the stab of her eyes, dared him to think lightly of her sister.

His smile reassured. "Maybe she didn't know where she was going. That was his business. Let's work this out from the beginning."

Kirby passed Rose the crackers. She rejected them with a little gesture of impatience.

"I don't want to eat. I'm not hungry."

Lane's kind eyes met hers steadily. "But you must eat. You'll be of no help, if you don't keep up your strength."

Rather than fight it out, she gave up.

"We know right off the reel Esther didn't plan this," he continued. "Before we knew the man was in it, you felt it wasn't like her to run away alone, Rose. Didn't you?"

"Yes."

"She hadn't drawn any money from her account. So she wasn't makin' any plans to go. The man worked it out an' then persuaded Esther. It's no surprise to me to find a Mr. Man in this thing. I'd begun to guess it before you told me. The question is, what man?"

The girl's eyes jumped to his. She began to see what he was working toward. Cole, entirely in the dark, stirred uneasily. His mind was still busy with a possible love tangle.

"What man or men would benefit most if Esther disappeared for a time? We know of two it might help," the man from Twin Buttes went on.

"Your cousins," she cried, almost in a whisper.

"Yes, if we've guessed rightly that Esther was married to uncle James. That would make her his heir. With her in their hands and away from us, they would be in a position to drive a better bargain. They know that we're hot on the trail of the marriage. If they're kind to her—and no doubt they will be—they can get anything they want from her in the way of an agreement as to the property. Looks to me like the fine Italian hand of cousin James. We know Jack wasn't the man. He was busy at Golden right then. Kinda leaves James in the spotlight, doesn't it?"

Rose drew a long, deep breath. "I'm so glad. I was afraid—thought maybe she would do something desperate. But if she's being looked after, it's a lot better. We'll soon have her back. Until then they'll be good to her, won't they?"

"They'll treat her like a queen. Don't you see? That's their game. They don't want a lawsuit. They're playin' for a compromise." Kirby leaned back and smiled expansively on his audience of two. He began to fancy himself tremendously as a detective.

CHAPTER XXII.

CUTTING TRAIL.

Kirby's efforts to find James Cunningham after dinner were not successful. He was not at his rooms, at the Country Club, or at his office. Nor was he at a dinner dance, where he was among the invited guests, a bit of information Rose had gathered from the society columns of the previous Sunday's *News*. His cousin reached him at last next morning, by means of his business telephone. An appointment was arranged in five sentences.

If James felt any surprise at the delegation of three which filed in to see him he gave no sign of it. He bowed, sent for more chairs from the outer office, and seated his visitors, all with a dry, close smile, hovering on the edge of irony.

Kirby cut short preliminaries. "You

know why we're here and what we want," he said abruptly.

"I confess I don't, unless to report on your trip to Golden," James countered suavely. "Was it successful, may I ask?"

"If it wasn't, you know why it wasn't."

The eyes of the two men met. Neither of them dodged, in the least, or gave way to the rigor of the other's gaze.

"Referring to Jack's expedition, I presume."

"You don't deny it, then."

"My dear Kirby, I never waste breath in useless denials. You saw Jack. Therefore he must have been there."

"He was. He brought away with him a page cut from the marriage license registry."

James lifted a hand of protest. "Ah! There we come to the parting of the ways. I can't concede that."

"No, but you know it's true," said Kirby bluntly.

"Not at all. He surely would not mutilate a public record."

"We needn't go into that. He did. But that didn't keep us from getting the information we wanted."

"No?" James murmured the monosyllable with polite indifference. But he watched, lynx-eyed, the strong, brown face of his cousin.

"We intend to see justice done Miss Esther McLean—Mrs. James Cunningham, I should say. You can't move us from that intention or——"

The expression on the oil broker's face was either astonishment or the best counterfeit of it Kirby had ever seen.

"I beg pardon. *What* did you say?"

"I told you what you already know, that Esther McLean was married to uncle James at Golden on the twenty-first of last month."

"Miss McLean and uncle James married —at Golden—on the twenty-first of last month? Are you sure?"

"Aren't you? What did you think we found out?"

Cunningham's eyes narrowed. "Oh, I don't know. You're so enterprising you might discover almost anything. It's really a pity, with your imagination, that you don't go into fiction."

"Or oil promotin'," suggested Cole with a grin. "Or is that the same thing?"

"Let's table our cards, James," his cousin said. "You know now why we're here."

"On the contrary, I'm more in the dark than ever."

"We want to know what you've done with Esther McLean," persisted Kirby.

"But, my dear fellow, why should I do anything with her?"

"You know why as well as I do. Somehow you've persuaded her to go somewhere and hide herself. You want her in your power, to force or cajole her into a compromise of her right to uncle James' estate. We won't have it."

A satiric smile touched the face of Cunningham, without warming it. "That active imagination of yours again. You *do* let it run away with you."

"You were seen getting into a car with Miss McLean."

"Did she step in of her own free will?"

"We don't claim an abduction."

"On your own statement of the case, then, you have no ground of complaint whatever."

"Do you refuse to tell us where she is?" Kirby asked.

"I refuse to admit that I know where the young lady is."

Kirby rose. The interview was at an end. Cole Sanborn strode forward. He leaned over the desk toward the oil broker, his blue eyes drilling into those of the broker.

"We sure will find her, an' if you've hurt our li'l' friend—if she's got any grievance against you an' the way you treat her—I'll certainly wreck you proper, Mr. Cunningham."

James flushed angrily. "Get out of here —all of you. Or I'll send for the police and have you swept out. I'm fed up on your interference."

"Is it interference for Miss McLean here to want to know where her sister is?" asked Kirby quietly.

"Why should you all assume I know?"

"Because the evidence points to you."

"Absurd. You come down here from Wyoming and do nothing but make trouble for me and Jack, even though we try to stand your friend. I've had about enough of you."

"Sorry you look at it that way." Kirby's smile was friendly. It was even wistful. "I appreciate what you did for me, but I've got to go through with what I've started. I can't quit on the job because I'm under an obligation to you. By the way, I've arranged the matter of the bond. We're to

take it up at the district attorney's office, at eleven this morning."

"Glad to hear it. I want to be quit of you," snapped Cunningham tartly.

Outside, Kirby gave directions to his lieutenants.

"It's up to you two to dig up some facts. I'm gonna be busy all morning with this bond business, so's I can keep outa jail. Rose, you go up to the secretary of state's office and find the number of the license of my cousin's car and the kind of machine it is. Then you'd better come back and take a look at all the cars parked within three or four blocks of here. He may have driven it down when he came to work this morning. Look at the speedometer and see what the mileage record is of the last trip taken. Cole, you go to this address. That's where my cousin lives. Find out at what garage he keeps his car. If they don't know, go to all the garages within several blocks of the place. See if it's a closed car. Get the make and the number and the last trip mileage. Meet me here at twelve o'clock, say. Both of you."

"Suits me," said Cole. "But wise me up. What's the idea in the mileage?"

"Just this. James was outa town last night probably. We couldn't find him anywhere. My notion is that he's taken Esther somewhere into the mountains. If we can get the mileage of the last trip, all we have to do is to divide it by two to know how far away Esther is. Then we'll draw a circle round Denver at that distance and look——"

"Cole slapped his thigh with his hat. "Bully! You're sure the white-haired lad in this deteckative game."

"Maybe he didn't set the speedometer for the trip," suggested Rose.

"Possible. Then again more likely he did. James is a methodical chap. Another thing, while you're at the private hotel where he lives, Cole, find out, if you can, where James goes when he fishes or drives into the mountains. Perhaps he's got a cottage of his own or some favorite spot."

"I'm on my way, old-timer," Cole announced.

At luncheon the committee reported progress. Cole had seen James Cunningham's car. It was a sedan. He had had it out of the garage all afternoon and evening and had brought it back just before midnight. The trip record on the speedometer registered ninety-two miles.

From his pocket Kirby drew an automobile map and a pencil. He notched on the pencil a mark to represent forty-six miles from the point, based on the scale of miles shown at the foot of the map. With the pencil as a radius he drew a semicircle, from Denver as the center. The curved line passed through Loveland, Long's Peak, and across the Snow Range to Tabernash. It included Georgetown, Gray's Peak, Mount Evans, and Cassell's. From there it swept on to Palmer Lake.

"I'm not includin' the plains country to the east," Kirby explained. "You'll have enought territory to cover as it is, Cole. By the way, did you find anything about where James goes into the hills?"

"No."

"Well, we'll make some more inquiries. Perhaps the best thing for you to do would be to go out to the small towns around Denver and find out if any of the garage people noticed a car of that description passin' through. That would help a lot. It would give us a line on whether he went up Bear Cañon, Platte Cañon, into northern Colorado, or south toward the Palmer Lake country."

"You've allowed forty-five miles by an air line," Rose pointed out. "He couldn't have gone as far as Long's Peak or Evans —nowhere nearly as far, because the roads are so winding when you get in the hills. He could hardly have reached Estes Park."

"Right. You'll have to check up the road distances from Denver, Colorado. Your job's like lookin' for a needle in a haystack. I'll put a detective agency on James. He might take a notion to run out to the cache, any fine evening. He likely will, to make sure Esther is contented."

"Or he'll send Jack," Rose added.

"We'll try to keep an eye on him, too."

"This is my job, is it?" Cole asked, rising.

"You and Rose can work together on it. My job's here in town on the murder mystery."

"If we work both of them out—finding Esther and proving who killed your uncle —I think we'll learn that it's all the same mystery, anyhow," Rose said, drawing on her gloves.

"Say *when*, not *if*, we work 'em out. We'll

be cuttin' hot trail *poco tempo,"* Kirby prophesied.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DETECTIVE GETS TWO SURPRISES.

Kirby stared down at the document in front of him. It was the document he had asked the county recorder at Golden to send him—and it certified that on July 21st *James Cunningham and Phyllis Harriman had been united in marriage* at Golden, by the Reverend Nicodemus Rankin.

This knocked the props from under the whole theory he had built up to account for the disappearance of Esther McLean. Kirby was puzzled. Why had his uncle, who was openly engaged to Phyllis Harriman, married her surreptitiously and kept that marriage a secret? It explained, of course, the visit of Miss Harriman to his uncle's apartments on the night he was murdered. She had an entire right to go there at any time, and if they were keeping their relation a secret would naturally go at night, when she could slip in unobserved.

Kirby had a hunch that there was a clew at Golden he had somehow missed, and that feeling took him back there, within three hours of the receipt of the certificate. The clerk in the recorder's office could tell him nothing new, except that he had called up Mrs. Rankin by telephone and she had brought up the delayed certificate at once. Kirby lost no time among the records. He walked to the Rankin house and introduced himself to an old lady sunning herself on the porch. She was a plump brisk little person with snapping eyes younger than her years.

"I'm sorry I wasn't at home when you called. Can I help you now?" she asked.

"I don't know. James Cunningham was my uncle. We thought he had married a girl who is a sister of the friend with me the day I called. But it seems we were mistaken. He married Phyllis Harriman, the young woman to whom he was engaged."

Mrs. Rankin smiled, the placid, motherly smile of experience. "I've noticed that men sometimes do marry the girls to whom they are engaged."

"Yes, but——" Kirby broke off and tried another tack. "How old was the lady? And was she dark or fair?"

"Miss Harriman? I should think she may be twenty-five. She is dark, slender, and beautifully dressed. Rather an—an expensive sort of young lady, perhaps."

"Did she act as though she were much —well, in love with—Mr. Cunningham?"

The bright eyes twinkled. "She's not a young woman who wears her heart on her sleeve, I judge. I can't answer that question. My opinion is that he was very much in love with her. Why do you ask?"

"You have read about his death since, of course," he said.

"Is he dead? No, I didn't know it." The birdlike eyes opened wider. "That's strange, too."

"It's on account of the mystery of his death that I'm troubling you, Mrs. Rankin. We want it cleared up, of course."

"But—two James Cunninghams haven't died mysteriously, have they?" she asked. "The nephew isn't killed, too, is he?"

"Oh, no. Just my uncle."

"Then we're mixed up somewhere. How old was your uncle?"

"He was past fifty-six—just past."

"That's not the man my husband married."

"Not the man!"

The old lady got up swiftly. "Please excuse me a minute." It was scarcely a minute before she was with him again, a newspaper in her hand. In connection with the Cunningham murder mystery several pictures were shown. Among them were photographs of his uncle and two cousins.

"This is the man whose marriage to Miss Harriman I witnessed," she said.

Her finger was pointing to the likeness of his cousin, James Cunningham. The words of the preacher's little wife were like a bolt from a sunny heaven. Kirby could scarcely believe his ears.

"You're quite sure of that?" he gasped.

"I ought to be," she answered rather dryly. "I was a witness."

A young woman came up the walk from the street. She was a younger and more modern replica of Mrs. Rankin. The older lady introduced her.

"Daughter, this is Mr. Lane, the gentleman who called on father the other day, while we were away. Mr. Lane, my daughter Ellen." Briskly she continued, showing her daughter the picture of James Cunningham, Jr. "Did you ever see this man, dear?"

Ellen took one glance at it. "He's the man father married the other day."

"When?" the mother asked.

"It was—let me see—about the last week in July. Why?"

"Married to who?" asked Mrs. Rankin colloquially.

"To that lovely Miss Harriman, of tourse."

"This gentleman is the nephew of the Mr. Cunningham who was killed. He thought it was his uncle who had married Miss Harriman," the mother explained to Ellen.

The girl turned to Kirby. "You know I've wondered about that myself. The society columns of the papers said it was the older Mr. Cunningham that was going to marry her. And I've seen since your uncle's death notices in the paper, about his engagement to Miss Harriman. But I thought it must have been a mistake."

This explanation was plausible, but Kirby happened to have inside information. He remembered the lovely photograph of the young woman in his uncle's rooms and the "Always, Phyllis" written across the lower part of it. He recalled the evasive comments of both James and his brother, whenever any reference had been made to the relation between Miss Harriman and their uncle. No, Phyllis Harriman had been engaged to marry James Cunningham, Sr. He was sure enough of that.

Did his uncle know of the marriage of his nephew? That was something Kirby meant to find out, if he could. The news he had just heard lit up avenues of thought as a searchlight throws a shaft into the darkness. It brought a new factor into the problem at which he was working. Roughly speaking, the cattleman knew his uncle, the habits of mind that guided him, the savage and relentless passions that swayed him. If the old man knew his favorite nephew and his fiancée had made a mock of him, he would move swiftly to a revenge that would hurt. The first impulse of his mind would be to strike James from his will.

And even if his uncle had not yet discovered the secret marriage, he would soon have done so. It could not have been much longer concealed. This thing was as sure as any contingency in human life can be: *If Cunningham had lived, his nephew James would never have inherited a cent of his millions. The older man had died in the nick of time for James.*

It was on the way back from Golden, while he was being rushed through the golden fields of summer, that suspicion of his cousin hit Kirby like a blow in the face. Facts began to marshal themselves in his mind, an irresistible phalanx of them. James was the only man, except his brother, who benefited greatly by the death of his uncle. Not only was this true; the land promoter had to die *soon* to help James. Phyllis and a companion had been in the victim's apartment either at the time of his death or immediately afterward. That companion *might have been James and not Jack.* James had lost the sheets with the writing, left by the Japanese valet Horikawa. The rage he had vented on his clerk might easily have been a blind. When James knew he was going to Golden to look up the marriage register he had at once tried to forestall him by destroying the information.

As soon as Kirby reached town, he called at the law offices of Irwin, Foster & Warren. The member of the firm he wanted to see was in. "I've been to Golden, Mr. Foster," he said, when he was alone with that gentleman. "Now I want to ask you a question."

The lawyer looked at him, smiling warily. Both of the James Cunninghams had been clients of his.

"I make my living giving legal advice," he said.

"I don't want legal advice, just now," Kirby answered. "I want to ask you if you know whether my uncle knew that James and Miss Harriman were married."

Foster looked out of the window and drummed with his finger tips on the desk. "Yes," he said at last.

"He knew?"

"Yes."

"Do you know when he found out?"

"I can answer that, too. He found out on the evening of the twenty-first—two days before his death. I told him—after dinner at the City Club."

"You had just found it out yourself?"

"That afternoon."

"How did you decide that the James Cunningham mentioned in the license you saw was the younger one?"

"By the age given."

"How did my uncle take the news?"

"He took it standing," the lawyer said. "Didn't make any fuss, but looked like the day of judgment for the man who had betrayed him."

"What did he do?"

"Wrote a note and called for a messenger to deliver it."

"Who to?" Kirby asked colloquially.

"I don't know. Probably the company has a record of all calls. If so, you can find the boy who delivered the message." Foster hesitated, then volunteered another piece of information. "I don't suppose you know that your uncle sent for me next day and told me to draft a new will for him and get it ready for his signature."

"Did you do it?"

"Yes. I handed it to him the afternoon of the day he was killed. It was found unsigned among his papers, after his death. The old will still stands."

"Leaving the property to James and Jack?"

"Yes."

"And the new will?"

"Except for some bequests and ten thousand for a fountain at the city park, the whole fortune was to go to Jack."

"So that if he had lived twenty-four hours longer James would have been disinherited."

Foster looked at him out of eyes that told nothing of what he was thinking. "That's the situation exactly."

Within two hours the man from Twin Buttes had talked with the messenger boy, refreshed his memory with a tip, and learned that the message Cunningham had sent from the City Club had been addressed to his nephew Jack.

CHAPTER XXIV.

KIRBY MAKES TWO INTERVIEWS.

Jack Cunningham, coheir with James of his uncle's estate, was busy, in the office he had inherited, settling up one of the hundred details that had been left at loose ends by the promoter's sudden death. He looked up at the entrance of Lane.

"What do you want?" he asked sharply.

"Want a talk with you."

"Well, I don't care to talk with you. What are you doing here, anyhow? I told the boy to tell you I was too busy to see you."

"That's what he said." Kirby opened his slow, whimsical smile on Jack. "But I'm right busy, too. So I brushed him aside an' walked in."

Kirby drew up a chair and seated himself. "When uncle James sent a messenger for you to come to his rooms at once, on the evening of the twenty-first, what did he want to tell you?" The steady eyes of the cattleman bored straight into those of Cunningham.

"Who said he sent a messenger for me?"

"It doesn't matter who just now. There are two witnesses. What did he want?"

"That's *my* business."

"So you say. I'm beginnin' to wonder if it isn't the business of the State of Colorado, too."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that uncle sent for you because he had just found out your brother and Miss Harriman were married."

Jack flashed a startled look at him. It seemed to him his cousin showed an uncanny knowledge at times. "You think so."

"He wanted to tell you that he was going to cut your brother out of his will and leave you sole heir. And he wanted you to let James know it right away."

Kirby was guessing, but he judged he had scored. Jack got up and began to pace the room. He was plainly agitated. "Look here. Why don't you go back to Wyoming and mind your own business? You're not in this. It's none of your affair. What are you staying here for, hounding the life out of James and me?"

"None of my business! That's good, Jack. An' me out on bond charged with the murder of uncle James. I'd say it was quite some of my business. I'm gonna stick to the job."

"Then leave us alone," retorted Jack irritably. "You act as though you thought we were a pair of murderers."

"If you have nothin' to conceal, why do you block my way? Why did you steal that record at Golden? Why did James lose the Jap's confession—if it was a confession? Why did he get Miss McLean to disappear?"

Jack slammed a fist down on the corner of the desk. "I'm not going to answer any questions. You're the man charged with this crime—the man that's liable to be tried for it. You've got a rope round your neck right this minute—and you go around high and mighty trying to throw suspicion on men that there's no evidence against."

"You said you had a quarrel with your uncle that night—no, I believe you called it a difference of opinion, at the inquest. What was that disagreement about?"

"Find out. I'll never tell you."

"Was it because you tried to defend James to him—tried to get him to forgive the treachery of his fiancée and his nephew?"

Again Jack shot at him a look of perplexed and baffled wonder. That brown indomitable face, back of which was so much strength of purpose and so much keenness of apprehension, began to fill him with alarm. This man let no obstacles stop him. He would go on till he had uncovered the whole tangle they were trying to keep hidden.

"For God's sake, man, stop this snooping around. You'll get off. We'll back you. There's nowhere nearly enough evidence to convict you Let it go at that," implored Jack.

"I can't do that. I've got to clear my name. Do you think I'm willing to go back to my friends with a Scotch verdict hangin' over me? 'He did it, but we haven't evidence enough to prove it?' Come clean, Jack? Are you and James in this thing?"

"No, of course we're not. But—damn it, do you think we want the name of my brother's wife dragged through the mud?"

"Why should it be dragged through the mud—if you're all innocent?"

"Because gossips cackle—and people never forget. If there was some evidence against her and against James—no matter how little—twenty years from now people would still whisper that they had killed his uncle for the fortune, though it couldn't be proved."

"Just as they're going to whisper about Rose McLean if I don't clear things up. No, Jack. What we want to do is for us all to jump in and find the man who did it. Then all gossip against us stops."

"That's easy to say. How're you going to find the guilty man?" asked Jack sulkily.

"If you'd tell what you know, we'd find him fast enough. How can I get to the bottom of the thing when you and James won't give me the facts?"

Jack looked across at him doggedly. "I've told all I'm going to tell."

The long, lithe body of the man from the Wyoming hills leaned forward ever so slightly. "Don't you think it for a minute. You'll come clean whether you want to or not—or I'll put that rope you mentioned round your brother's throat."

"Talk's cheap," Jack sneered uneasily.

"You'll find how cheap it is. James had been speculating. He was down an' out. Another week, and he'd have been a bankrupt. Uncle discovers how he's been tricked by him and Miss Harriman He serves notice that he's cuttin' James out of his will and he sends for a lawyer to draw up a new one. James and his wife go to the old man's rooms to beg off. There's a quarrel maybe. Anyhow, this point sticks up like a sore thumb: if uncle hadn't died that night, your brother would 'a' been a beggar. Now he's a millionaire. And James was in his room the very hour in which he was killed."

"You can't prove that!" Jack cried, his voice low and hoarse.

Kirby smiled, easily and confidently. "The evidence will be produced at the right time." He rose and turned to go.

Jack also got up, white to the lips. "Hold on! Don't—don't do anything in a hurry. I'll—talk with you to-morrow—here—in the forenoon. Or say in a day or two. I'll let you know when."

His cousin nodded grimly. The hard look passed from his eyes as he reached the corridor. "Had to throw a scare into him to make him come through," he murmured in apology to himself.

Kirby had been bluffing when he said he had evidence to prove that James was in his uncle's rooms the very hour of the murder. But he was now convinced that he had told the truth. The confession had been written in Jack's shocked face when Kirby flung out the charge.

But James might have been there and still be innocent, just as was the case with him and Rose. The cattleman wanted to find the murderer, but he wanted almost as much to find that James had nothing to do with the crime. As he wandered through the streets, Kirby's mind was busy with the problem. Automatically his legs carried him to the Paradox Apartments. He found himself there before he even knew he had been heading in that direction. Mrs. Hull came out and passed him. She was without a hat and probably was going to the corner grocery on Fifteenth.

"I've been neglecting friend Hull," he murmured to himself. "I reckon I'll just drop in and ask him how his health is."

Hull opened the door of the apartment to his knock. He stood glaring at the young man, his prominent eyes projecting, the red capillaries in his beefy face filling.

"Whadjawant?" he demanded.

"A few words with you, Mr. Hull." Kirby

pushed past him into the room, much as an impudent agent does.

"Well, I don't aim to have no truck with you, a-tall," blustered the fat man. "You've just naturally wore out yore welcome with me before ever you set down. I'll ask you to go, right now. I ain't got a word to say —not a word."

"Then I'll say it." Kirby's eyes became hard and steady as agates. "Who killed Cunningham, Hull?"

The fishy eyes of the man dodged. A startled oath escaped him. "How do I know?"

"Didn't you kill him?"

"Goddlemighty, no!" Hull dragged out the red bandanna and gave his apoplectic face first aid. He mopped perspiration from the overlapping roll of fat above his collar. "I dunno a thing about it. Honest, I don't."

"You're a tub of iniquity, Hull. Also, you're a right poor liar. You know a lot about it. You were in my uncle's rooms just before I saw you on the night of his death. You were seen there?"

"W-w-who says so?" quavered the wretched man.

"You'll know who, at the proper time. I'll tell you one thing. It won't look good for you that you held out all you know till it was a show-down."

"I ain't holdin' out, I tell you. What business you got to come here devilin' me, I'd like for to know?"

"I'm not devilin' you. I'm telling you to come through with what you know, or you'll sure get in trouble. There's a witness against you. When he tells what he saw that——"

"Shibo?" The word burst from the man's lips in spite of him.

Kirby did not bat a surprised eye. He went on quietly. "I'll not say who. Except this: Shibo is not the only one who can tell enough to put you on trial for your life. If you didn't kill my uncle, you'd better take my tip, Hull. Tell what you know. It'll be better for you."

Mrs. Hull stood in the doorway, thin and sinister. The eyes in her yellow face took in the cattleman and passed to her husband. "What's *he* doing here?" she asked, biting off her words sharply.

"I was askin' Mr. Hull if he knew who killed my uncle," explained Kirby.

Her eyes narrowed. "Maybe *you* know," she retorted.

"Not yet. I'm tryin' to find out. Can you give me any help, Mrs. Hull?"

"What do you want to know?" she demanded.

"I'd like to know what happened in my uncle's rooms when Mr. Hull was up there —say about half past nine, maybe a little before or a little after."

"He claims to have a witness," Hull managed to get out from a dry throat.

"A witness of what?" snapped the woman.

"That—that I—was in Cunningham's rooms."

For an instant the woman quailed. A spasm of fear flashed over her face and was gone.

"He'll claim anything to get outa the hole he's in," she said dryly. Then, swiftly, her anger pounced on the Wyoming man. "You get outa my house. We don't have to stand yore impudence—an', what's more, we won't. Get out, or I'll send for the police."

The amateur detective got out. He had had the worst of the bout. But he had discovered one or two things. If he could get Olson to talk, and could separate the fat, flabby man from his flinty wife, it would not be hard to frighten a confession from Hull of all he knew. Moreover, in his fear Hull had let slip one admission. Shibo, the little janitor, had some evidence against him. Hull knew it. Why was Shibo holding it back? The fat man had practically said that Shibo had seen him come out of Cunningham's rooms, or at least that he was a witness he had been in the apartment.

The cattleman found Shibo watering the lawn of the parking, in front of the Paradox. According to his custom, he plunged abruptly into what he wanted to say. He had discovered that if a man is not given time to frame a defense, he is likely to give away something he had intended to conceal.

"Shibo, why did you hide from the police that Mr. Hull was in my uncle's rooms the night he was killed?"

The janitor shot one slant. startled glance at Kirby before the mask of impassivity wiped out expression from his eyes.

"You know heap lot about everything. You busy busy all like honeybee. Me, I just janitor—mind own business."

"I wonder, now." Kirby's level gaze took the man in carefully. Was he as simple as he wanted to appear?

"No talk when not have anything to tell."

Shibo moved the sprinkler to another part of the lawn. Kirby followed him.

"Did Mr. Hull ask you not to tell about him?"

Shibo said nothing, but he said it with indignant eloquence.

"Did he give you money not to tell? I don't want to go to the police with this, if I can help it, Shibo. Better come through to me."

"You go police and say I know who make Mr. Cunningham dead?"

"If I have to."

The janitor had no more remarks to make. He lapsed into an angry, stubborn silence, which Kirby could not break.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE MASK OF THE RED BANDANNA.

It had come by special delivery, an ill-written little note scrawled on cheap ruled paper torn from a tablet:

> If you want to know who killed Cunningham, i can tell you. Meet me at the Denmark Bilding, room 419, at eleven to-night. Come alone.
>
> ONE WHO KNOWS.

Kirby studied the invitation carefully. Was it genuine? Or was it a plant? He was no handwriting expert, but he had a feeling that it was a disguised script. There is an inimitable looseness of design in the chirography of an illiterate person. He did not find here the awkwardness of the inexpert; rather the elaborate imitation of an amateur ignoramus. Yet he was not sure. He could give no definite reason for this fancy.

And in the end he tossed it overboard. He would keep the appointment and see what came of it. Moreover, he would keep it alone—except for a friend hanging under the left arm at his side. Kirby had brought no revolver with him to Denver. But he knew where he could borrow one, and he proceeded to do so.

Not that there was any danger in meeting the unknown correspondent. Kirby did not admit that for a moment. There are people so constituted that they revel in the mysterious. They wrap their most common actions in hints of reserve and weighty silence. Perhaps this man was one of them. There was no danger whatever. Nobody had any reason to wish him serious ill. Yet Kirby took a .45 with him, when he set out for the Denmark Building.

During the day he had examined the setting for the night's adventure. He had been to the Denmark Building and scanned it inside and out. He had gone up to the fourth floor and looked at the exterior of Room 419. The office door had printed on it this design:

"THE GOLD HILL MILLING & MINING COMPANY."

But when Kirby had tried the door he found it locked.

The elevators in the Denmark had ceased running hours since, when Kirby went back, that night. He took the narrow stairs which wound round the elevator shaft. He trod the iron treads very slowly, very softly. He had no wish to advertise his presence. If there was to be any explosive surprise he did not want to be at the receiving end of it. He reached the second story, crossed the landing, and began the next flight. The place was dark as a midnight pit. At the third floor its blackness was relieved slightly by a ray of light from a transom far down the corridor.

Kirby waited to listen. He heard no faintest sound to break the stillness. Again his foot found the lowest tread, and he crept upward. In the daytime, he had laughed at the caution which had led him to borrow a weapon from an acquaintance at the stockyards. But now every sense shouted danger. He would not go back, but each forward step was taken with infinite care.

And his care availed him nothing. A lifted foot struck an empty soap box, with a clatter to wake the seven sleepers. Instantly he knew it had been put there for him to stumble over. A strong searchlight flooded the stairs and focused on him. He caught a momentary glimpse of a featureless face standing out above the light—a face that was nothing but a red bandanna handkerchief with slits in it for eyes.

The searchlight winked out. There was a flash of lightning and a crash of thunder. A second time the pocket flash found Kirby. It found him crouched low and reaching for the .45 under his arm. The booming of the revolver above reverberated down the pit of the stairway. Arrow swift, with the lithe ease of a wild thing from the forest, Kirby ducked round the corner for safety. He did not wait there, but took the stairs down, three at a stride. Not till he had reached the ground floor did he stop to listen.

No sound of following footsteps came to him. By some miracle of good luck he had escaped the ambush. It was characteristic of him that he did not fly wildly into the night. The cattleman waited, crouched behind an outjutting pillar in the wall of the entrance. Every minute he expected to see a furtive figure sneak past him into the street. His hopes were disappointed. It was nearly midnight when two men, talking cheerfully of the last gusher in the Buckburnett field, emerged from the stairway and passed into the street. They were tenants who had stayed late to do some unfinished business.

There was a drug store in the building, cornering on two streets. Kirby stepped into it and asked a question of the clerk at the prescription desk.

"Is there more than one entrance to the Denmark Building?"

"No, sir." The clerk corrected himself. "Well, there's another way out. The Producers and Developers Shale and Oil Company have a suite of offices that run into the Rockford Building. They've built an alley to connect between the two buildings. It's on the fifth floor."

"Is it open? Could a man get out of the Denmark Building now, by way of the Rockford entrance?"

"Easiest thing in the world. All he'd have to do would be to cross the alley bridge, go down the Rockford stairs, and walk into the street."

Kirby wasted no more time. He knew that the man who had tried to murder him had long since made good his get-away by means of the fifth-story bridge between the buildings. As he walked back to the hotel where he was stopping his eyes and ears were busy. He took no dark-alley chances, but headed for the bright lights of the main streets where he would be safe from any possibility of a second ambush.

His brain was as busy as his eyes. Who had planned this attempt on his life and so nearly carried it to success? Of one thing he was sure. The assassin who had sent the shots at him down the narrow stairway of the Denmark was the one who had murdered his uncle. The motive for the ambuscade was fear. Kirby was too hot on the trail that might send him to the gallows. The man had decided to play safe by following the old theory that dead men tell no tales.

CHAPTER XXVI.

JACK TAKES OFF HIS COAT.

From time to time Kirby saw Cole. He was in and out of town. Most of his time was spent running down faint trails which spun themselves out and became lost in the hills. The champion roughrider was indomitably resolute in his intention of finding her. There were times when Rose began to fear that her little sister was lost to her for always. But Sanborn never shared this feeling.

"You wait. I'll find her," he promised. "And if I can lay my hands on the man that's done her a meanness, I'll certainly give them hospital sharks a job patching him up." His gentle eyes had frozen, and the cold, hard light in them was almost deadly.

Kirby could not get it out of his head that James was responsible for the disappearance of the girl. Yet he could not find a motive that would justify so much trouble on his cousin's part. He was at a moving-picture house on Curtis Street with Rose, when the explanation popped into his mind. They were watching an old-fashioned melodrama in which the villain's letter is laid at the door of the unfortunate hero.

Kirby leaned toward Rose in the darkness and whispered, "Let's go."

She rose and on the way to the aisle brushed past several irritated ladies. Not till they were standing on the sidewalk outside, did he tell her what was on his mind.

"I want to see that note from my uncle you found in your sister's desk," he said.

She looked at him and laughed a little. "You certainly want what you want when you want it. Do your hunches often take you like that—right out of a perfectly good show you've paid your money to see?"

"We've made a mistake. It was seein' that fellow in the play that put me wise. Have you got the note with you?"

"No. It's at home. If you like, we'll go and get it."

They walked up to the Pioneers' Monument and from there over to her boarding place. Kirby looked the little note over carefully. "What a chump I was not to look at this before," he said. "My uncle never wrote it."

"Never wrote it?"

"Not his writin' a-tall."

"Then whose is it?"

"I can make a darn good guess. Can't you?"

She looked at him, eyes dilated, on the verge of a discovery. "You mean——"

"I mean that J. C. might stand for at least two other men we know."

"Your cousin James?"

"More likely Jack."

His mind beat back to fugitive memories of Jack's embarrassment when Esther's name had been mentioned in connection with his uncle. Swiftly his brain began to piece the bits of evidence he had not understood the meaning of before.

"Jack's the man. You may depend on it. My uncle hadn't anything to do with it. We jumped at that conclusion too quick," he went on.

"You think that she's—with him?"

"No. She's likely out in the country or in some small town. He's having her looked after. Probably an attack of conscience. Even if he's selfish as the devil, he isn't heartless."

"If we could be sure she's all right. But we can't." Rose turned on him a wistful face, twisted by emotion. "I want to find her, Kirby. I'm her sister. She's all I've got. Can't you do something?"

"I'll try."

She noticed the hardening of the lean jaw, the tightening of the muscles as the back teeth clenched.

"Don't—don't do anything—rash," she begged.

"Don't worry. Maybe I'll call you up later, to-night, and report progress."

He walked to the nearest drug store and used the telephone freely. At the end of fifteen minutes he stepped out of the booth. His cousin Jack was doing some evening work at the offices where he was now in charge of settling up his uncle's affairs. Kirby found him there. A man stenographer was putting on his coat to leave, but Jack was still at his desk. He looked up, annoyed.

"Was that you telephoned me?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I told you I'd let you know when I wanted to see you."

"So you did. But you didn't let me know. The shoe's on the other foot now. I want to see you."

"I'm not interested in anything you have to say."

The stenographer had gone. Kirby could hear his footsteps echoing down the corridor. He threw the catch of the lock and closed the door.

"I can promise to keep you interested," he said, very quietly.

Jack rose. He wore white shoes, duck trousers, a white piqué shirt, and a blue serge coat that fitted his graceful figure perfectly. "What did you do that for?" he demanded. "Open that door."

"Not just yet, Jack. I've come for a settlement. It's up to you to say what kind of a one it'll be."

Cunningham's dark eyes glittered. He was no physical coward. Moreover, he was a trained athlete, not long out of college. He had been the middleweight champion boxer of the university. If this tough, brown cousin wanted a set-to he would not have to ask twice for it.

"Suits me fine," he said. "What's your proposition?"

"I've been a blind idiot. Didn't see what was right before my eyes. I reckon you've had some laughs at me. Well, I hope you enjoyed 'em. There aren't any more grins comin' to you."

"Meaning, in plain English?"

"That you've let a dead man's shoulders carry your sins. You heard us blame uncle James for Esther McLean's trouble. Yet you're the man, you damned scoundrel."

Jack went white to the lips, then flushed angrily. "You can't ever mind your own business, can you?"

"I want just two things from you. The first is, to know where you've taken her; the second, to tell you that you're going to make this right, and see that you do it."

"When you talk to me like that I've nothing to say. No man living can bully me."

"You won't come through. Is that it?"

"You may go to the devil for all of me."

"The girl you took advantage of hasn't any brother," the Wyoming man said. "I'm electin' myself to that job for a while. If I can, I'm going to whale the life outa you."

Jack slipped out of his coat and tossed it on the desk. Even in that moment, while Kirby was concentrating for the attack, the roughrider found time to regret that so good-looking a youth, one so gallantly poised and so gracefully graceless, should be a black-hearted scamp.

"Hop to it," invited the college man.

Kirby lashed out with his right, hard and

straight. His cousin ducked with the easy grace of a man who has spent many hours on a ballroom floor. The cattleman struck again. Jack caught the blow and deflected it, at the same time uppercutting swiftly for the chin. The counter landed flush on Kirby's cheek and flung him back to the wall. He grinned, and plunged again. A driving left caught him off balance and flung him from his feet. He was up again instantly, shaking his head to clear it of the dizziness that sang there.

Not at all loath, Jack took the offensive. He went to work coolly to put out his foe. He landed three for one, timing and placing his blows carefully to get the maximum effect. A second time Kirby hit the floor. Jack hoped he would stay down. The clubman was a little out of condition. He was beginning to breathe fast. His cousin had landed hard two or three times on the body. Back of each of these blows there had been a punishing force. Cunningham knew he had to win soon, if at all.

But Kirby had not the least intention of quitting. He was the tough product of wind and sun and hard work. He bored in and asked for more, still playing for his opponent's wind. Kirby knew he was the stronger man, in far better condition. He could afford to wait—and Jack could not.

The roughrider landed close to the solar plexus. Jack winced and gave ground. Kirby's fist got home again. He crowded Jack, feeling that his man was weakening. Jack rallied for one last desperate set-to, hoping for a chance blow to knock Kirby out. He scored a dozen times. Lane gave ground, slowly, watchfully, guarding as best he could. Then his brown fist shot out and up. It moved scarcely six inches, straight for the college boxer's chin. Jack's knees sagged. He went down, rolled over, and lay still.

Kirby found water and brought it back. Jack was sitting up, his back propped against the wall. He swallowed a gulp or two and splashed the rest on his face.

"I'll say you can hit like the kick of a mule," he said. "If you'd been a reasonable human I ought to have got you at that. Don't you ever stay down?"

Kirby could not repress a little smile. In spite of himself, he felt a sneaking admiration for this insouciant youth who could take a beating like a sportsman.

"You're some little mixer yourself," he said.

"Thought I was, before I bumped into you. Say, gimme a hand up. I'm a bit groggy, yet."

Kirby helped him to his feet. The immaculate shirt and trousers were spattered with blood, mostly Kirby's. The young dandy looked at himself, and a humorous quirk twitched at the corner of his mouth.

"Some scrap. Let's go into the lavatory and do some reconstruction work," he said.

Side by side at adjoining washbowls, perfectly amicably, they repaired as far as possible the damages of war. Not till they had put on again their coats did Kirby hark back to the purpose of the meeting.

"You haven't told me yet what I want to know."

Out of a damaged eye Jack looked at him evenly. "And that's only part of it. I'm not going to, either."

He had said the last word. Kirby could not begin all over again to thrash him. It was not reasonable. And if he did, he knew quite well he would get nothing out of the man. If he would not talk, he would not.

The bronchobuster walked back to his hotel. A special delivery letter was in his box. It was postmarked Golden. As he handed it to him the clerk looked him over curiously. It had been some time since he had seen a face so badly cut up and swollen.

"You ought to see the other fellow," Kirby told him with a lopsided grin as he ripped open the envelope.

Before his eyes had traveled halfway down the sheet the cowman gave a modulated whoop of joy.

"Good news?" asked the clerk.

Kirby did not answer. His eyes were staring in blank astonishment at one sentence in the letter. The note was from Cole Sanborn. This is what Kirby read in it:

Well, old-timer, there ain't no trail so blamed long but what it's got a turn in it somewheres. I done found Esther up Platte Cañon and everything's O. K. as you might say. I reckon you are wondering howcome this to be postmarked Golden. Well, old pardner, I'm sure enough married at last, but I had a great time getting Esther to see this my way. She's one swell little girl and there's only one thing I hate. Before she would marry me I had to swear up and down I wouldn't touch the yellow wolf who got her into trouble. But she didn't say nothing about you, so I will just slip you his name. It wasn't your uncle at all but that crooked oil broker nephew of his, James Cunningham. If

you can muss him up proper for me, you'll sure be doing a favor to yours respectably,

CLAY SANBORN.

P. S.—Esther sends bushels of love to Rose and will write to-morrow. I'll say I'm going to make her one happy kid. COLE.

Kirby laughed in sardonic mirth. He had fought the wrong man. And of course Jack had known it all the time and been embarrassed by it. He had stuck loyally to his brother and had taken the whaling of his life rather than betray him.

Kirby took off his hat to Jack. He had stood pat to a fighting finish. He was one good square sport. Even as he was thinking this Kirby was moving toward the telephone booth. He had promised to report progress. For once he had considerable to report.

CHAPTER XXVII.

OLSON TELLS A STORY.

When Rose heard from Esther next day she and Kirby took the Interurban for Golden. Esther had written that she wanted to see her sister because Cole was going to take her back to Wyoming at once.

The sisters wept in each other's arms and then passed together into Esther's bedroom for an intimate talk. The younger sister was still happy only in moments of forgetfulness, though she had been rescued from death in life. Cole had found her comfortably situated at a farmhouse, a mile or two back from the cañon. She had gone there under the urge of her need, at the instigation of James Cunningham, who could not afford to have the scandal of his relations with her become public at the same time as the announcement of his marriage to Phyllis Harriman. The girl loved Cole and trusted him. Her heart went out to him in a warm glow of gratitude. But the shadow of her fault was a barrier in her mind between them, and would be long after his kindness had melted the ice in her bosom.

"We've got it all fixed up to tell how we was married when I come down to Denver last April, only we kep' it quiet because she wanted to hold her job a while," Cole explained to his friend. "Onct I get her back there in God's hills she'll sure enough forget all about this trouble. The way I look at it, she was jus' like a li'l' kid that takes a misstep in the dark an' falls an' hurts itself. You know how a wounded deer can look at a fellow so sorrowful an' hurt. Well, tha's how her brown eyes looked at me when I come round the corner o' the house up Platte Cañon an' seen her sittin' there starin' at hell."

"You'll do to take along, old alkali, you sure enough will," smiled Kirby.

Kirby knew the patience, the steadiness, and the kindliness of his friend. Esther had fallen into the best of hands. She would find again the joy of life. He said as much to Rose on the way home. She agreed. For the first time since she left Cheyenne the girl was her old self. Esther's problem had been solved far more happily than she had dared to hope.

"I'm going to have a gay time apologizin' to Jack," said Kirby, his eyes dancing. "It's not so blamed funny at that, but I can't help laughing every time I think of how he must 'a' been grinning up his sleeve at me for my fool mistake. I'll say he brought it on himself, though. He was feelin' guilty on his brother's account, an' I didn't get his embarrassment right. James is a pretty cool customer. From first to last he never turned a hair when the subject was mentioned."

"What about him?" Rose asked.

The cattleman pretended alarm.

"Now, don't you!" he demonstrated. "Don't you expect me to manhandle James, too. I'm like Napoleon. Another victory like the battle of last night would sure put me in the hospital. I'm a peaceable citizen, a poor, lone cowboy far away from home. Where I come from it's as quiet as a peace conference. This wildest-Denver stuff gets my nerve."

She smiled into his battered face. A dimple nestled in her soft, warm cheek. "I see it does. It's a pity about you. I didn't suppose your cousin Jack had it in him to spoil your beauty like that."

"Neither did I," he said, answering her smile. "I sure picked on the wrong man. He's one handy lad with his dibs—put me down twice before we decided to call it off. I like that young fellow."

"Better not like him too much. You may have to work against him yet."

"True enough," he admitted, falling grave again. "As to James, we'll ride close herd on him, for a while, but we'll ride wide. Looks to me like he may have to face a jury an' fight for his life right soon."

"Do you think he killed your uncle?"

"I don't want to think so. He's a bad

egg, I'm afraid. But my father's sister was his mother. I'd hate to have to believe it."

"But in your heart you do believe it," she said gently.

He looked at her. "I'm afraid so. But that's a long way from knowing it." They parted at her boarding house.

A man rose to meet Kirby when he stepped into the rotunda of his hotel. He was a gaunt, broad-shouldered man with ragged eyebrows.

"Well, I came," he said, and his voice was harsh.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Olson. Come up to my room. We can talk there more freely."

The Scandinavian rancher followed him to the elevator and from there to his room. "Why don't they arrest Hull?" he demanded as soon as the door was closed.

"Not evidence enough."

"Suppose I can give evidence. Say I practically saw Hull do it. Would they arrest him—or me?"

"They'd arrest him," Kirby answered. "They don't know you're the man who wrote the threatening letter."

"Hmp!" grunted the rancher suspiciously. "That's what *you* say, but you're not the whole works."

Kirby offered a chair and a cigar. He sat down on the bed himself. "Better spill your story to me, Olson. Two heads are better than one," he said carelessly.

The Swede's sullen eyes bored into him. Before that frank and engaging smile his doubts lost force. "I got to take a chance. Might as well be with you as any one."

The Wyoming man struck a match, held it for the use of his guest, then lit his own cigar. For a few moments they smoked in silence. Kirby leaned back easily against the head of the bed. He did not intend to frighten the rancher by hurrying him.

"When Cunningham worked that crooked irrigation scheme of his on Dry Valley, I reckon I was one of them that hollered the loudest. Prob'ly I talked foolish about what all I was gonna do about it. I wasn't blowin' off hot air, either. If I'd got a good chance at him, or at Hull, either, I would surely have called for a show-down an' gunned him if I could. But that wasn't what I came to Denver for. I had to arrange about gettin' my mortgage renewed."

He stopped and took a nervous puff or two at the cigar. Kirby nodded in a friendly fashion, without speaking. He did not want by anything he might say to divert the man's mind from the track it was following.

"I took a room at the Wyndham because the place had been recommended to me by a neighbor of mine who knew the landlady. When I went there, I didn't know that either Cunningham or Hull lived next door. That's a God's truth. I didn't. Well, I saw Hull go in there, the very day I got to town, but the first I knew yore uncle lived there was ten or maybe fifteen minutes before he was killed. I wouldn't say but what it was twenty minutes, come to that. I wasn't paying no attention to time."

Olson's eyes challenged those of his host. His suspicion was still smoldering. An unhappy remark, a look of distrust, might still have dried up the stream of his story. But he found in that steady regard nothing more damnatory than a keen, boyish interest.

"Maybe you recollect how hot those days were. Well, in my cheap, stuffy room, opening on an air shaft, it was hotter'n hell with the lid on. When I couldn't stand it any longer, I went out into the corridor an' down it to the fire escape outside the window. It was a lot cooler there. I lit a stogie and sat on the railing smoking, maybe for a quarter of an hour. By an' by some one come into the apartment right acrost the alley from me. I could see the lights come on. It was a man. I saw him step into what must be the bedroom. He moved around there some. I couldn't tell what he was doing, because he didn't switch on the light, but he must 'a' been changin' to his easy coat an' his slippers. I know that because he came into the room just opposite the fire escape where I was sittin' on the rail. He threw on the lights, an' I saw him plain. It was Cunningham, the old crook who had beat me outa fifteen hundred dollars."

Kirby smoked steadily, evenly. Not a flicker of the eyelids showed the excitement racing through his blood. At last he was coming close to the heart of the mystery that surrounded the deaths of his uncle and his valet.

"I reckon I saw red for a minute," Olson continued. "If I'd been carryin' a gun I might 'a' used it, right there an' then. But I hadn't one, lucky for me. He sat down in a big easy-chair an' took a paper from his pocket. It looked like some kind of a legal document. He read it through, then

stuck it in one o' the cubby-holes of his desk. I forgot to say he was smokin', an' not a stogie like I was, but a big cigar he'd unwrapped from silver paper after taking it from a boxful."

"He lighted the cigar after coming into the small room?" Kirby asked.

"Yes. Didn't I say so? Took it from a box on a stand near the chair. Well, when he got through with the paper he leaned back an' kinda shut his eyes, like he was thinkin' something over. All of a sudden I saw him straighten up an' get rigid. Before he could rise from the chair a woman came into the room, an' after her a man. The man was Cass Hull."

"The woman—what was she like?"

"She was tall an' thin an' flat-chested. I didn't know her at the time, but it must 'a' been Hull's wife."

"You said you didn't know what time this was," Kirby said.

"No. My old watch had quit doing business, an' I hated to spend the money to get it fixed."

"Who spoke first after they came into the room?"

"Yore uncle. He laid the cigar down on the stand an' asked them what they wanted. He didn't rise from the chair, but his voice rasped when he spoke. It was the woman answered. She took the lead all through. 'We've come for a settlement,' she said. 'An' we're going to have it right now.' He stiffened up at that. He come back at her with, 'You can't get no shotgun settlement outa me.' Words just poured from that woman's mouth. She roasted him to a turn. Believe me, she laid him out proper, an' every word of it was true, far as I know.

"Well, sir, that old reprobate uncle of yours never batted an eye. He slid down in his chair a little so's he could be comfortable while he listened. He grinned up at her like she was some kind of specimen had broke loose from a circus an' he was interested in the way it acted. That didn't calm her down none. She rip-rared right along, with a steady flow of words, mostly adjectives. Finally she quit, an' she was plumb white with anger. 'Quite through?' yore uncle asked with that ice-cold voice of his. She asked him what he intended to do about a settlement. 'Not a thing,' he told her. 'I did aim to give Hull two thousand to get rid of him. But I've changed my mind, ma'am. You can go whistle for it.' "

Kirby leaned forward eagerly. "Two thousand! Did he say two thousand?"

"That's what he said. Two thousand," answered Olson.

"Then that explains why he drew so much from the bank that day."

"I had it figured out so. If the woman hadn't come at him with that acid tongue of hers he'd intended to buy Hull off cheap. But she got his gorge up. He wouldn't stand for her line of talk."

"What took place then?" the cattleman questioned.

"Still without rising from the chair, Cunningham ordered them to get out. Hull was standin' kinda close to him. He had his back to me. Cunningham reached out an' opened a drawer of the stand beside him. The fat man took a step forward. I could see his gun flash in the light. He swung it down on yore uncle's head, an' the old man crumpled up."

"So it was Hull killed him, after all," Kirby said, drawing a long breath of relief.

Then, to his surprise, when he thought about it later, a glitter of malicious cunning lit the eyes of the rancher.

"That's what I'm tellin' you. It was Hull. I stood there an' saw just what I've been giving you."

"Was my uncle senseless then?"

"You bet he was. His head sagged clear over against the back of the chair."

"What did they do then?"

"That's where I drop out. Mrs. Hull stepped straight to the window. I crouched down back of the railing. It was dark an' she didn't see me. She pulled the blind down. I waited there a while an' afterward there was the sound of a shot. That would be when they sent the bullet through the old man's brain."

"What did you do?"

"I didn't know what to do. I'd talked a lot of wild talk about how Cunningham ought to be shot or strung up to a pole. If I went to the police with my story, like enough they'd light on me as the killer. I milled the whole thing over. After a while I went into a public booth, downtown, an' phoned to the police. You recollect, maybe, the papers spoke about the man who called up headquarters with the news of Cunningham's death."

"Yes, I recollect that all right."

Kirby did not smile. He did not explain that he was the man. But he resolved to

find out whether two men had notified the police of his uncle's death. If not, Olson was lying in at least one detail. He had a suspicion that the man had not given him the whole truth. He was telling part of it, but he was holding back something. A sly and furtive look in his eyes helped to build this impression in the mind of the man who listened to the story.

"You didn't actually see Hull fire the shot that killed my uncle then?"

Olson hesitated a fraction of a second. "No."

"You don't know that it was he that fired it."

"No, it might 'a' been the woman. But it ain't likely he handed her the gun to do it with, is it? For that matter, I don't know that the crack over the head didn't kill Cunningham. Maybe it did."

"That's all you saw?"

Again the almost imperceptible hesitation. Then, "That's all," the Dry Valley rancher said sullenly.

"What kind of a gun was it?" Kirby asked.

"Too far away. Couldn't be sure."

"Big as a .45?"

"Couldn't 'a' been. The evidence was that it was done with an automatic."

"The evidence was that the wound in the head was probably made by a bullet from an automatic. We're talkin' now about the blow *on* the head."

"What are you drivin' at?" the rancher asked, scowling. "He wouldn't bring two different kinds of gun with him. That's a cinch."

"No, but we haven't proved yet he fired the shot you heard later. The chances are all that he did, but legally we have no evidence that somebody else didn't do it."

"I guess a jury would be satisfied he fired it, all right."

"Probably. It looks bad for Hull. Don't you think you ought to go to the police with your story? Then we can have Hull arrested. They'll give him the third degree. My opinion is he'll break down under it and confess."

Olson consented with obvious reluctance, but he made a condition precedent to his acceptance. "Le's see Hull first, just you'n me. I ain't strong for the police. We'll go to them when we've got an open-an'-shut case."

Kirby considered. The cattleman knew from his observation of this case that, after all, the authorities sometimes had a way of muddling things. Perhaps it would be better to wait until the difficulties had been smoothed out before going to them.

"That suits me," he said. "We'll tackle Hull when his wife isn't with him. He goes downtown every day about ten o'clock. We'll pick him up in a taxi, run him out into the country somewhere, an' put him over the jumps. The sooner the quicker. How about to-morrow morning?"

"Suits me, too. But will he go with us?"

"He'll go with us," Kirby said quietly.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LIKE A THIEF IN THE NIGHT.

From ten thousand bulbs the moving-picture houses of Curtis Street were flinging a glow upon the packed sidewalks when Kirby came out of the hotel and started uptown.

He walked to the Wyndham, entered, and slipped up the stairs of the rooming house unnoticed. From the third story he ascended by a ladder to the flat roof. He knew exactly what he had come to investigate. From one of the windows of the fourth floor at the Paradox he had noticed the clothesline which stretched across the Wyndham roof from one corner to another. He went straight to one of the posts which supported the rope. He made a careful study of this, then walked to the other upright support and examined the knots which held the line fast here.

"I'm some good little guesser," he murmured to himself as he turned back to the ladder and descended to the floor below.

He moved quietly along the corridor to the fire escape and stepped out upon it. Then, very quickly and expertly, he coiled a rope which he took from a paper parcel that had been under his arm. At one end of the coil was a loop. He swung this lightly round his head once or twice to feel the weight of it. The rope snaked forward and up. Its loop dropped upon the stone abutment he had noticed when he had been examining the exteriors of the buildings with Cole Sanborn. It tightened when he gave a jerk.

Kirby climbed over the railing and swung himself lightly out into space. A moment, and he was swaying beside the fire escape of the Paradox. He caught the iron rail and pulled himself to the platform.

By chance the blind was down. There was no light within; but after his eyes had become used to the darkness he tried to take a squint at the room from the sides of the blind. The shade hung an inch or two from the window frame, so that by holding his eye close he could get more than a glimpse of the interior. He tapped gently on the glass. The lights inside flashed on. From one viewpoint he could see almost half the room. He could go to the other side of the blind and see most of the other half.

A man sat down in a chair close to the opposite wall, letting his hands fall on the arms. A girl stood in front of him and pointed a paper knife at his head, holding it as though it were a revolver. The head of the man fell sideways.

Kirby tapped on the windowpane again. He edged up the sash and stepped into the room. The young woman turned to him eagerly, a warm glow in her shell-pink cheeks. "Well?" she inquired.

"Worked out fine, Rose," Kirby said. "I could see the whole thing."

"Still, that don't prove anything," the other man put in. He belonged to the staff of the private detective agency with which Kirby was dealing.

The Wyoming man smiled. "It proves my theory is possible. Knowing Olson, I'm willin' to gamble he didn't sit still on the fire escape and let that drawn blind shut him off from what was going on inside. He was one mighty interested observer. Now he must 'a' known there was a clothesline on the roof. From the street you can see a washing hanging out there any old time. In his place I'd 'a' hopped up to the roof and got that line. Which is exactly what he did, I'll bet. The line had been tied to the posts with a lot of knots. He hadn't time to untie it. So he cut the rope. It's been spliced out since by a piece of rope of a different kind."

"How do you know that's been done since?" the detective asked.

"A fair question," Kirby nodded. "I don't. I'll find out about that when I talk with the landlady of the Wyndham. If I'm right, you can bet that cut rope has puzzled her some. She can't figure out why any one would cut her rope down an' then leave it there."

"If you can show me her rope was cut that night, I'll say you're right," the detective admitted. "And if you are right, then the Swede must 'a' been right here when your uncle was killed."

"*May* have been," Kirby corrected. "We haven't any authentic evidence yet as to exactly when my uncle was killed. We're gettin' the time narrowed down. It was between nine-thirty and nine-fifty. We know that."

"How do you know that?" the professional sleuth asked. "Accordin' to your story you didn't get into the apartment until after ten o'clock. It might 'a' been done any time up till then."

The eyes of Kirby and Rose met. They had private information about who was in the rooms from about nine-fifty-five till ten-ten.

The cattleman corrected his statement. "All right, say between nine-thirty and ten-five. During that time Hull may have shot my uncle. Or Olson may have opened the window while my uncle lay there helpless, killed him, stepped outa the window again, and slipped down by the fire escape. All he'd have to do then would be to walk into the Wyndham, replace the rope on the roof, and next morning leave for Dry Valley."

The detective nodded. "*If* he cut the rope. Lemme find out from the landlady whether it *was* cut that night."

"Good! We'll wait for you at the corner."

Ten minutes later the detective joined them in front of the drug store where they were standing. The hard eyes in his cold gambler's face were lit up for once.

"I'll say the man from Missouri has been shown," he said. "I let on to the dame at the Wyndham that I was after a gang of young sneak thieves in the neighborhood. Pretty soon I drifted her to the night of the twenty-third, said they'd been especially active that night and had used a rope to get into a second story of a building. She woke up. Her clothesline on the roof had been cut that very night. She remembered the night on account of its being the one when Mr. Cunningham was killed."

"Bully. We're one step nearer than we were. We know Olson was lookin' in the window from the fire escape just outside."

The detective slapped his thigh. "It lies between Hull and the Swede. That's a cinch."

"I believe it does," agreed Rose.

Kirby made no comment. He seemed to be absorbed in speculations of his own. The

detective was reasoning from a very partial knowledge of the facts. He knew nothing about the relations of James Cunningham to his uncle, nor even that the younger Cunninghams—or, at least, one of them—had been in his uncle's apartment the evening of his death. He did not know that Rose had been there. Wherefore his deductions, even though they had the benefit of being trained ones, were of slight value in this case.

"Will you take the key back to the chief of police?" Kirby asked him as they separated. "Better not tell him who was with you or what we were doing."

"I'm liable to tell him a whole lot," the detective answered with heavy irony. "I'm figurin' on running down this murderer myself, if any one asks you."

"Wish you luck," Kirby said, with perfect gravity.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ON THE GRILL.

Kirby was quite right when he said that Hull would go with them. He was on his way downtown when the taxi caught him at Fourteenth and Welton. The cattleman jumped out from the machine and touched the fat man on the arm as he was waddling past.

"We want you, Hull," he said.

A shadow of fear flitted over the shallow eyes of the land agent, but he attempted at once to bluster. "Who wants me? Whajawant me for?"

"I want you—in that cab. The man who saw you in my uncle's room, the night he was killed, is with me. You can either come with us now and talk this thing over quietly or I'll hang on to you an' call for a policeman. It's up to you."

Beads of perspiration broke out on the fat man's forehead. He dragged from his left hip pocket the familiar bandanna handkerchief. With it he dabbed softly at his mottled face. There was a faint, a very faint, note of defiance in his voice as he answered.

"I dunno as I've got any call to go with you. I wasn't in Cunningham's rooms. You can't touch me—can't prove a thing on me."

"It won't cost you anything to make sure of that," Kirby suggested in his low, even tones. "I'm payin' for the ride."

"If you got anything to say to me, right here's a good place to onload it."

The man's will was wabbling. The cattleman could see that.

"Can't talk here, with a hundred people passing. What's the matter, man? What are you afraid of? *We're not going to hit you over the head with the butt of a six-shooter.*"

Hull flung at him a look of startled terror. What did he mean? Or was there anything significant in the last sentence? Was it just a shot in the dark?

Their eyes met and fought. The shallow protuberant ones wavered. "Oh, well, it ain't worth chewin' the rag over. I reckon I'll go with you."

He stepped into the cab. At sight of Olson he showed both dismay and surprise. He had heard of the threats the Dry Valley man had been making. Was he starting on a journey the end of which would be summary vengeance? A glance at Lane's face reassured him. This young fellow would be no accomplice at murder. Yet the chill at his heart told him he was in for serious trouble.

He tried to placate Olson with a smile and made a motion to offer his hand. The Scandinavian glared at him. The taxicab swung down Fourteenth, across the viaduct to Lake Place, and from it to Federal Boulevard. Hull moistened his lips with his tongue and broke the silence. "Where we goin'?" he asked at last.

"Where we can talk without being overheard," Kirby answered.

The cab ran up the steep slope to Inspiration Point and stopped there. The men got out.

"Come back for us in half an hour," the cattleman told the driver.

In front and below them lay the beautiful valley of Clear Creek. Beyond it were the foothills and, back of them, the line of the Front Range, stretching from Pikes Peak at the south up to the Wyoming line. Hull looked across the valley nervously and brought his eyes back with a jerk. "Well, what's it all about? Whajawant?"

"I know now why you lied at the inquest about the time you saw me on the night my uncle was killed," Kirby told him.

"I didn't lie. Maybe I was mistaken. Any man's liable to make a mistake."

"You didn't make a mistake. You deliberately twisted your story so as to get me into my uncle's apartment forty minutes or so earlier than I was. Your reason was

a good one. If I was in his rooms at the time he was shot, that let you out completely. So you tried to lie me into the death cell at Cañon City."

Hull's bandanna was busy. "Nothing like that. I wouldn't play no such a trick on any man. No, sir."

"You wouldn't, but you did. Don't stall, Hull. We've got you right."

The rancher from Dry Valley broke in venomously. "You bet we have, you rotten crook. I'll pay you back proper for that deal you an' Cunningham slipped over on me. I'm gonna put a rope round yore neck for it. I sure am. Why, you big fat stiff, I was standin' watching you when you knocked out Cunningham with the butt of yore gun."

From Hull's red face the color fled. He teetered for a moment on the balls of his feet, then sank limply to the cement bench in front of him. He tried to gasp out a denial, but the words would not come. In his throat there was only a dry rattle.

He heard, as from a long distance, Lane's voice addressing him.

"We've got it on you, Hull. Come through and come clean."

"I—I—I swear to God I didn't do it—didn't kill him," he gasped at last.

"Then who did—yore wife?" demanded Olson.

"Neither of us. I—I'll tell you-all the whole story."

"Do you know who did kill him?" Kirby persisted.

"I come pretty near knowin', but I didn't see it done."

"Who, then?"

"Yore cousin—James Cunningham."

In spite of the fact that his mind had at times moved toward his cousin James as the murderer, Kirby experienced a shock at this accusation. He happened to glance at Olson, perhaps to see the effect of it upon him. The effect was slight, but it startled Kirby. For just an instant the Dry Valley farmer's eyes told the truth—shouted it as plainly as words could have done. He had expected that answer from Hull. He had expected it because he, too, had reason to believe it the truth. Then the lids narrowed, and the man's lip lifted in a sneer of rejection. He was covering up.

"Suppose you tell us the whole story, Hull," the Wyoming man said.

The fat man had one last flare of resistance. "Olson here says he seen me crack Cunningham with the butt of my gun. How did he see me? Where does he claim he was when he seen it?"

"I was standing on the fire escape of the Wyndham across the alley—about ten or fifteen feet away. I heard every word that was said by Cunningham and yore wife. Oh, I've got you good."

Hull threw up the sponge. He was caught and realized it. His only chance now was to make a clean breast of what he knew.

"Where shall I begin?" he asked weakly, his voice quavering.

"At the beginning. We've got plenty of time," Kirby replied.

"Well, you know how yore uncle beat me in that Dry Valley scheme of his. First place, I didn't know he couldn't get water enough. If he give the farmers a crooked deal, I hadn't a thing to do with that. When I talked up the idea to them I was actin' in good faith."

"Lie number one," interrupted Olson bitterly.

"Hadn't we better let him tell his story in his own way?" Kirby suggested. "If we don't start any arguments, he ain't so liable to get mixed up in his facts."

"By my way of figurin' he owed me about four to six thousand dollars he wouldn't pay," Hull went on. "I tried to get him to see it right, thinkin' at first he was just bull-headed. But pretty soon I got wise to it that he plain intended to do me. O' course I wasn't going to stand for that, an' I told him so."

"What do you mean when you say you weren't going to stand for it. My uncle told a witness that you said you'd give him two days, then you'd come at him with a gun."

The fat man mopped a perspiring face with his bandanna. His eyes dodged. "Maybe I told him so. I don't recollect. When he's sore a fellow talks a heap o' foolishness. I wasn't lookin' for trouble, though."

"Not even after he threw you downstairs?"

"No, sir. He didn't exactly throw me down. I kinda slipped. If I'd been expectin' trouble would I have let Mrs. Hull go up to his rooms with me?"

Kirby had his own view on that point, but he did not express it. He rather thought that Mrs. Hull had driven her husband up-

stairs and had gone along to see that he stood to his guns. Once in the presence of Cunningham, she had taken the bit in her own teeth, driven to it by temper. This was his guess.

"But I knew how violent he was," the fat man went on. "So I slipped my six gun into my pocket before we started."

"What kind of a gun?" Kirby asked.

"A sawed-off .38."

"Do you own an automatic?"

"No, sir. Wouldn't know how to work one. Never had one in my hands."

"You'll get a chance to prove that," Olson jeered.

"He doesn't have to prove it. His statement is assumed to be true until it is proved false," Kirby answered.

Hull's eyes signaled gratitude. He was where he needed a friend badly. He would be willing to pay almost any price for Lane's help.

"Cunningham had left the door open, I reckon because it was hot. I started to push the bell, but Mrs. Hull she walked right in an', of course, then I followed. He wasn't in the sittin' room, but we seen him smoking in the small room off'n the parlor. So we just went in on him.

"He acted mean right from the start—hollered at Mrs. Hull what was we doin' there. She up an' told him, real civil, that we wanted to talk the business over an' see if we couldn't come to some agreement about it. He kep' right on insultin' her, an' one thing led to another. Mrs. Hull she didn't get mad, but she told him where he'd have to head in at. Fact is, we'd about made up our minds to sue him. Well, he went clean off the handle then an' said he wouldn't do a thing for us, an' how we was to get right out."

Hull paused to wipe the small sweat beads from his forehead. He was not enjoying himself. A cold terror constricted his heart. Was he slipping a noose over his own head?

"Well, sir, I claim self-defense," Hull went on presently. "A man's got no call to stand by an' see his wife shot down. Cunningham reached for a drawer an' started to pull out an automatic gun. Knowin' him, I was scared. I beat him to it an' lammed him one over the head with my gun. My idea was to head him off from drawin' on Mrs. Hull, but I reckon I hit him harder than I'd aimed to. It knocked him senseless."

"And then?" Kirby said, when he paused.

"I was struck all of a heap, but Mrs. Hull she didn't lose her presence of mind. She went to the window an' pulled down the curtain. Then we figured, seeing as how we'd got in bad so far, we might as well try a bluff. We tied yore uncle to the chair, intendin' for to make him sign a check before we turned him loose. Right at that time the telephone rang."

"Did you answer the call?"

"Yes, sir. It kept ringing. Finally the wife said to answer it, pretendin' I was Cunningham. We was kinda scared some one might butt in on us. Yore uncle had said he was expectin' some folks."

"What did you do?"

"I took up the receiver an' listened. Then I said 'Hello!' Fellow at the other end said, 'This you, uncle James?' Kinda grufflike, I said, 'Yes.' Then, 'James talkin',' he said. 'We're on our way over now.' I was struck all of a heap, not knowin' what to say. So I called back, 'Who?' He came back with, 'Phyllis an' I.' I hung up."

"And then?"

"We talked it over, the wife an' me. We didn't know how close James, as he called himself, was when he was talkin'. He might be at the drug store on the next corner, for all we knew. We were in one hell of a hole, an' it didn't look like there was any way out. We decided to beat it right then. That's what we did."

"You left the apartment?"

"Yes, sir."

"With my uncle still tied up?"

Hull nodded. "We got panicky an' cut our stick."

"Did anybody see you go?"

"The Jap janitor was in the hall fixin' one of the windows that was stuck."

"Did he say anything?"

"Not then."

"Afterward?"

"He come to me after the murder was discovered—next day, I reckon it was, in the afternoon, just before the inquest—and said could I lend him five hundred dollars. Well. I knew right away it was a holdup, but I couldn't do a thing. I dug up the money an' let him have it."

"Has he bothered you since?"

Hull flew the usual flag of distress, a red bandanna mopping a perspiring apoplectic face. "He kinda hinted he wanted more money."

"Did you give it to him?"

"I didn't have it right handy. I stalled."

"That's the trouble with a blackmailer. Give way to him once and he's got you in his power," Kirby said. "The thing to do is to tell him right off the reel to go to Halifax."

"If a fellow can afford to," Olson put in significantly. "When you've just got through a little private murder of yore own you ain't exactly free to tell one of the witnesses against you to go very far."

"Tell you I didn't kill Cunningham," Hull retorted sullenly. "Some one else must 'a' come in an' did that after I left."

"Sounds reasonable," Olson murmured with heavy sarcasm.

"Was the hall lit when you came out of my uncle's rooms?" Kirby asked suddenly.

"Yes. I told you Shibo was workin' at one of the windows."

"So Shibo saw you and Mrs. Hull plainly?"

"I ain't denyin' he saw us," Hull replied testily.

"No, you don't deny anthing we can prove on you," the Dry Valley man jeered.

"And Shibo didn't let up on you. He kept annoying you afterward," the cattleman persisted.

"Well, he—I reckon he aims to be reasonable now," Hull said uneasily.

"Why now? What's changed his views?"

The fat man looked again at this brown-faced youngster with the single-track mind who never quit till he got what he wanted. Why was he shaking the bones of Shibo's blackmailing. Did he know more than he had told? It was on the tip of Hull's tongue to tell something more, a damnatory fact against himself. But he stopped in time. He was in deep enough water already. He could not afford to tell the dynamic cattleman anything that would make an enemy of him.

"Well, I reckon he can't get blood from a turnip, as the old sayin' is," the land agent returned.

Kirby knew that Hull was concealing something material, but he saw he could not at the present moment wring it from him. He had not, in point of fact, the faintest idea of what it was. Therefore, he could not lay hold of any lever with which to pry it loose. He harked back to another point.

"Do you know that my cousin and Miss Harriman came to see my uncle that night? I mean do you know of your own eyesight that they ever reached his apartment?"

"Well, we know they reached the Paradox an' went up in the elevator. Me an' the wife watched at the window. Yore cousin James wasn't with Miss Harriman. The dude one was with her."

"Jack!" exclaimed Kirby, astonished.

"Yep."

"How do you know?"

"Saw 'em as they passed under the street light, about twenty feet from our window. We couldn't 'a' been mistook as to the dude fellow. O' course, we don't know Miss Harriman, but the woman walkin' beside the young fellow surely looked like the one that fainted at the inquest when you was testifying how you found yore uncle dead in the chair. I reckon when you said it she got to seein' a picture of one of the young fellows gunnin' their uncle."

"One of them. You just said James wasn't with her."

"No, he come first. Maybe three-four minutes before the others."

"What time did he reach the Paradox?"

"It might 'a' been ten or maybe only five minutes after we left yore uncle's room. The wife an' me was talkin' it over whether I hadn't ought to slip back upstairs and untie yore uncle before they got there. Then he come an' that settled it. I couldn't go."

"Can you give me the exact time he reached the apartment house?"

"Well, I'll say it was a quarter to ten."

"Do you know or are you guessing?"

"I know. Our clock struck the quarter-to, while we looked at them comin' down the street."

"At them or at him?"

"At him I mean."

"Can't stick to his own story," Olson grunted.

"And Jack and the lady were three or four minutes behind him?" Kirby reiterated.

"Yes."

"Was your clock exactly right?"

"Maybe five minutes fast. It gains."

"You know they turned in at the Paradox?"

"All three of 'em. Mrs. Hull she opened the door a mite an' saw 'em go up in the elevator. It moves kinda slow, you know. The heavy-set young fellow went up first. Then two-three minutes later the elevator went down an' the dude and the young lady went up."

Kirby put his foot on the cement bench and rested his forearm on his knee. The cattleman's steady eyes were level with those of the unhappy man making the confession.

"Did you at any time hear the sound of a shot?"

"Well, I—I heard something. At the time, I thought maybe it was a tire in the street blowin' out. But come to think of it later, we figured it was a shot."

"You don't know for sure."

"Well, come to that I—I don't reckon I do. Not to say for certain sure."

A tense litheness had passed into the roughrider's figure. It was as though every sense were alert to catch and register impressions.

"At what time was it you thought you heard this shot?"

"I dunno, to the minute."

"Was it before James Cunningham went up in the elevator? Was it between the time he went up and the other two went up? Or was it after Jack Cunningham and Miss Harriman passed on the way up?"

"Seems to me it was——"

"Hold on!" Kirby raised a hand in protest. "I don't want any guesses. You know or you don't. Which is it?"

"I reckon it was between the time yore cousin James went up and the others followed."

"You reckon? I'm asking for definite information. A man's life may hang on this." The cattleman's eyes were ice cold.

Hull swallowed a lump in his fat throat before he committed himself. "Well, it was."

"Was between the two trips of the elevator, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Your wife heard this sound, too?"

"Yep. We spoke of it afterward."

"Do you know anything else that could possibly have had any bearing on my uncle's death?"

"No, sir. Honest I don't."

Olson shot a question at the man on the grill. "Did you kill the Jap servant, too, as well as his boss?"

"I didn't kill either the one or the other, so help me!"

"Do you know anything at all about the Jap's death? Did you see anything suspicious going on at any time?" Kirby asked.

"No, sir. Nothing a-tall."

The roughrider signaled the taxicab, which was circling the lake at the foot of the hill. Presently it came up the incline and took on its passengers.

"Drive to the Paradox Apartments," Kirby directed.

He left Hull outside in the cab, while he went in to interview his wife. The lean woman with the forbidding countenance opened the door. Metaphorically speaking, Kirby landed his knock-out instantly.

"I've come to see you on serious business, Mrs. Hull. Your husband has confessed how he did for my uncle. Unless you tell the whole truth he's likely to go to the death cell."

She gasped, her fear-filled eyes fastened on him. Her hand moved blindly to the side of the door for support.

CHAPTER XXX.

A FULL MORNING.

Presently a faint color dribbled back into Mrs. Hull's yellow cheeks. Kirby could almost see courage flowing again into her veins.

"That's a lie," she said flatly.

"I don't expect you to take my word. Hull is in front of the house here under guard. Come and see, if you doubt it."

She took him promptly at his suggestion. One look at her husband's fat, huddled figure and stricken face was enough.

"You chicken-hearted louse," she spat at him scornfully.

"They had evidence. A man saw us," he pleaded.

"What man?"

"This man." His trembling hand indicated Olson. "He was standin' on the fire escape acrost the alley."

She had nothing to say. The wind had died out of the sails of her anger.

"We're not going to arrest Hull yet—not technically," Kirby explained to her. "I'm arranging to hire a private detective to be with him all the time. He'll keep him in sight from morning till night. Is that satisfactory, Hull? Or do you prefer to be arrested?"

The wretched man murmured that he would leave it to Lane.

"Good! Then that's the way it'll be." Kirby turned to the woman. "Mrs. Hull, I want to ask you a few questions. If you'll kindly walk into the house, please."

She moved beside him. The shock of the

surprise still palsied her will. In the main her story corroborated that of Hull. She was not quite sure when she had heard the shot in its relation to the trips of the elevator up and down. The door was closed at the time. They had heard it while standing at the window. Her impression was that the sound had come after James Cunningham had ascended to the floor above.

Kirby put one question to the woman innocently that sent the color washing out of her cheeks. "Which of you went back upstairs to untie my uncle, after you had run away in a fright?"

"N-neither of us," she answered, teeth chattering from sheer funk.

"I understood Mr. Hull to say——"

"He never said that. Y-you must be mistaken."

"Maybe so. You didn't go back then?"

The monosyllable "No" came quavering from her yellow throat.

"I don't want you to feel that I'm here to take an advantage of you, Mrs. Hull," Kirby said. "A good many have been suspected of these murders. Your husband is one of these suspects. I'm another. I mean to find out who killed Cunningham and Horikawa. I think I know already. In my judgment your husband didn't do it. If he did, so much the worse for him. But this is the point I'm making now. If you like, I'll leave a statement here signed by me to the effect that neither you nor your husband have confessed killing James Cunningham. It might make your mind a little easier to have it."

She hesitated. "Well, if you like."

He stepped to a desk and found paper and pen. "I'll dictate it, if you'll write it, Mrs. Hull."

Not quite easy in her mind, the woman sat down and took the pen he offered.

"This is to certify," Kirby began, and dictated a few sentences slowly. She wrote the statement, word for word as he gave it, *using her left hand.* The cattleman signed it. He left the paper with her. After the arrangement for the private detective to watch Hull had been made, Olson and Lane walked together to the hotel of the latter.

"Come up to my room a minute, and let's talk things over," Kirby suggested. As soon as the door was closed the man from Twin Buttes turned on the farmer and flung a swift demand at him.

"Now, Olson, I'll hear the rest of your story."

The eyes of the Swede grew hard and narrow. "What's bitin' you? I've told you my story."

"Some of it. Not all of it."

"Whad you mean?"

"You told me what you saw from the fire escape of the Wyndham, but *you didn't tell what you saw from the fire escape of the Paradox.*"

"Who says I saw anything from there?"

"I say so."

"You trying to hang this killin' on me?" demanded Olson angrily.

"Not if you didn't do it." Kirby looked at him quietly, speculatively, undisturbed by the heaviness of his frown. "But you come to me and tell the story of what you saw. So you say. But all the time you're holdin' back. Why? What's your reason?"

"How do you know I'm holdin' back?" the rancher asked sulkily.

Kirby knew that in his mind suspicion, dread, fear, hatred, and the desire for revenge were once more at open war.

"I'll tell you what you did that night," answered Kirby without the least trace of doubt in voice or manner. "When Mrs. Hull pulled down the blind you ran up to the roof and cut down the clothesline. You went back to the fire escape, fixed up some kind of a lariat, and flung the loop over an abutment sticking from the wall of the Paradox. You swung across to the fire escape of the Paradox. There you could see into the room where Cunningham was tied to the chair."

"How could I if the blind was down?"

"The blind doesn't fit close to the woodwork of the window. Looking in from the right you can see the left half of the room. If you look in from the other side, you see the other part of it. That's just what you did."

For the moment Olson was struck dumb. How could this man know exactly what he had done, unless some one had seen him?

"You know so much I reckon I'll let you tell the rest," the Scandinavian said with uneasy sarcasm.

"Afraid you'll have to talk, Olson. Either to me or to the chief at headquarters. You've become a live suspect. Figure it out yourself. You threaten Cunningham by mail. You make threats before people orally. You come to Denver and take a room in the next house to where he lives. On the night he's

killed, by your own admission, you stand on the platform a few feet away and raise no alarm while you see him slugged. Later, you hear the shot that kills him and still you don't call the officers. Yet you're so interested in the crime that you run upstairs, cut down the clothesline, and at some danger swing over to the Paradox. The question the police will want to know is whether the man who does this and then keeps it secret may not have the best reason in the world for not wanting it known."

"What you mean—the best reason in the world?"

"They'll ask what's to have prevented you from openin' the window and steppin' in while my uncle was tied up, from shooting him and slipping down the fire escape, and from walking back upstairs to your own room at the Wyndham."

"Are you claimin' that I killed him?" Olson wanted to know.

"I'm telling you that the police will surely raise the question."

"If they do, I'll tell 'em who did," the rancher blurted out wildly.

"I'd tell 'em first, if I were in your place. It'll have a lot more weight than if you keep still until your back's against the wall."

"When I do, you'll sit up an' take notice. The man who shot Cunningham is yore own cousin," the Dry Valley man flung out vindictively.

"Which one?"

"The smug one—James."

"You saw him do it?"

"I heard the shot while I was on the roof. When I looked round the edge of the blind, five minutes later, he was going over the papers in the desk—and an automatic pistol was there right by his hand."

"He was alone?"

"At first he was. In about a minute his brother an' Miss Harriman came into the room. She screamed when she saw yore uncle an' most fainted. The other brother, the young one, kinda caught her an' steadied her. He was struck all of a heap himself. You could see that. He looked at James, an' he said, 'My God, you didn't——' That was all. No need to finish. O' course James denied it. He'd jumped up to help support Miss Harriman outa the room. Maybe a coupla minutes later he came back alone. He went right straight back to the desk, found inside of three seconds the legal document I told you I'd seen his uncle reading, glanced it over, turned to the back page, jammed the paper back in the cubby-hole, an' then switched off the light. A minute later the light was switched off in the big room, too. Then I reckoned it was time to beat it down the fire escape. I did. I went back into the Wyndham carryin' the clothesline under my coat, walked upstairs without meetin' anybody, left the rope on the roof, an' got outa the house without being seen."

"That's the whole story?" Kirby said.

"The whole story. I'd swear it on a stack of Bibles."

"Did you fix the rope for a lariat up on the roof, or wait till you came back to the fire escape?"

"I fixed it on the roof—made the loop an' all there. Figured I might be seen, if I stood around too long on the platform."

"So that you must 'a' been away quite a little while."

"I reckon so. Prob'ly a quarter of an hour or more."

"Can you locate more definitely the exact time you heard the shot?"

"No, I don't reckon I can."

Kirby asked only one more question.

"You left next morning for Dry Valley, didn't you?"

"Yes. None o' my business, if they stuck Hull for it. He was guilty as sin, anyhow. If he didn't kill the old man it wasn't because he didn't want to. Maybe he did. The testimony at the inquest, as I read the papers, left it that maybe the blow on the head had killed Cunningham. Anyhow, I wasn't gonna mix myself in it."

Kirby said nothing. He looked out of the window of his room without seeing anything. His thoughts were focused on the problem before him.

The other man stirred uneasily. "Think I did it?" he asked.

The cattleman brought his gaze back to the Dry Valley settler. "You. Oh, no! You didn't do it."

There was such quiet certainty in his manner that Olson drew a deep breath of relief. "By Jupiter, I'm glad to hear you say so. What made you change yore mind?"

"Haven't changed it. Knew that all the time—well, not all the time. I was millin' you over in my mind quite a bit, while you were holding out on me. Couldn't be dead sure whether you were hiding what you

knew just to hurt Hull or because of your own guilt."

"Still, I don't see how you're sure yet. I might 'a' gone in by the window an' gunned Cunningham like you said."

"Yes, you might have, but you didn't. I'm not going to have you arrested, Olson, but I want you to stay in Denver for a day or two, until this is settled. We may need you as a witness. It won't be long. I'll see your expenses are paid while you're here."

"I'm free to come and go as I please?"

"Absolutely." Kirby looked at him with level eyes. He spoke quite as a matter of course. "You're no fool, Olson. You wouldn't stir up suspicion against yourself, again, by running away now, after I tell you that my eye is on the one that did it."

The Swede started. "You mean—now?"

"Not this very minute," Kirby laughed. "I mean I've got the person spotted; at least I think I have. I've made a lot of mistakes since I started rounding up this fellow with the brand of Cain. Maybe I'm making another. But I've a hunch that I'm ridin' herd on the right one this time."

He rose. Olson took the hint. He would have liked to ask some questions, for his mind was filled with a burning curiosity. But his host's manner did not invite them. The rancher left. Up and down his room Kirby paced a beat from the window to the door and back again. His brain was working on his cousin James. He went back to the first day of his arrival in Denver and sifted the evidence for and against him. A stream of details, fugitive impressions, and mental reactions flooded through.

For one of so cold a temperament James had been distinctly friendly to him. He had gone out of his way to find bond for him when he had been arrested. He had tried to smooth over difficulties between him and Jack. But Kirby, against his desire, found practical reasons of policy to explain these overtures. James had known he would soon be released through the efforts of other cattlemen. He had stepped in to win the Wyoming cousin's confidence in order that he might prove an asset rather than a liability to his cause. The oil broker had readily agreed to protect Esther McLean from publicity, but the reason for his forbearance was quite plain now. He had been protecting himself, not her.

The man's relation to Esther proved him selfish and without principle. He had been willing to let his dead uncle bear the odium of his misdeed. Yet beneath the surface of his cold manner James was probably swept by heady passions. His love for Phyllis Harriman had carried him beyond prudence, beyond honor. He had duped the uncle whose good will be had carefully fostered for many years, and at the hour of his uncle's death he had been due to reap the whirlwind.

The problem sifted down to two factors. One was the time element. The other was the temperament of James. A man may be unprincipled and yet draw the line at murder. He may be a seducer and still lack the courage and the cowardice for a cold-blooded killing. Kirby had studied his cousin, but the man was more or less of a sphinx to him. Behind those cold, calculating eyes what was he thinking?

Only once had he seen him thrown off his poise. That was when Kirby and Rose had met him coming out of the Paradox, white and shaken, his arm wrenched and strained. He had been nonplused at sight of them. For a moment he had let his eyes mirror the dismay of his soul. The explanation he had given was quite inadequate as a cause.

Twenty-four hours later Kirby had discovered the dead body of the Japanese valet Horikawa. The man had been dead perhaps a day. More hours than one had been spent by Kirby pondering on the possible connection of his cousin's momentary breakdown and the servant's death. *Had James come fresh from the murder of Horikawa?* It was possible that the Oriental might have held evidence against him and threatened to divulge it.

The time element was tremendously important in the solution of the mystery of Cunningham's death. Kirby had studied this a hundred times. On the back of an envelope he jotted down once more such memoranda as he knew or could safely guess at. Some of these he had to change slightly as to time to make them dovetail into each other:

8:45—Uncle J. leaves City Club.
8:55—Uncle J. reaches rooms.
8:55-9:10—Gets slippers, etc. Smokes.
8:55-9:20—Olson watching from W. fire escape.
9:10-9:30—Hulls in Apt.
9:30-9:40—X.
9:37-9:42—Approximately time Olson heard shot.

9:20-9:42—Olson busy on roof, with rope, etc. Then at window till 9:53.
9:40-9:53—James in Apt.
9:44-9:50—Jack and Phyllis in Apt.
9:55-10:05—Wild Rose in rooms.
10:00—I reach rooms.
10:20—Meet Ellis.
10:25—Call police.

That was the time schedule as well as he had been able to work it out. It was incomplete. For instance, he had not been able to account for Horikawa in it at all unless he represented X in that ten minutes of time unaccounted for. It was inaccurate. Olson was entirely vague as to time, but he could be checked up pretty well by the others. Hull was not quite sure of his clock, and Rose could only say that she had reached the Paradox "quite a little after a quarter to ten." Fortunately his own arrival checked up hers pretty closely, since she could not have been in the room much more than five minutes before him. Probably she had been even less than that. James could not have left the apartment more than a minute or so before Rose arrived. It was quite possible that her coming had frightened him out.

So far as the dovetailing of time went there was only the ten minutes or less between the leaving of the Hulls and the appearance of James left unexplained. If some one other than those mentioned on his penciled memoranda had killed Cunningham it must have been between half past nine and twenty minutes to ten. The X he had written in there was the only possible unknown quantity. By the use of hard work and common sense he had eliminated the rest of the time so far as outsiders were concerned.

Kirby put the envelope in his pocket and went out to get some luncheon. "I'll call it a morning," he told himself with a smile.

CHAPTER XXXI.

KIRBY INVITES HIMSELF TO A RIDE.

The Twin Buttes man had said he would call it a morning, but he carried with him to the restaurant the problem that had become the pivot of all his waking thoughts. He had an appointment to meet a man for lunch, and he found his guest waiting for him inside the door. It was Hudson, the clerk whom James had accused of losing the sheets of paper with the Japanese writing.

"I've got it at last," he said as soon as they were alone. "Thought he never would go out and leave the key to the private drawer inside the safe. But he left the key in the lock—for just five minutes—while Miss Harriman came to see him about something this morning. He walked out with her to the elevator. I ducked into his office. There was the key in the drawer, and in the drawer, right at the bottom under some papers, I found what I wanted." He handed to Kirby the sheets of paper found in the living room of the apartment where Horikawa had been found dead.

The cattleman looked them over and put them in his pocket. "Thought he wouldn't destroy them. He daren't. There might come a time when the translation of this writing would save his life. He couldn't tell what the Jap had written, but there might be a twist to it favorable to him. At the same time he daren't give it out and let any one translate it. So he'd keep it handy where nobody could get at it but himself."

"I reckon that just about evens the score between me and Mr. James Cunningham," the clerk said vindictively. "He bawled me out before a whole roomful of people, when he knew all the time I hadn't lost the papers. I stood it, because right then I had to. But I've dug up a better job and start in on it Monday. He's been claiming he was so anxious to get these sheets back to you. Well, I hope he's satisfied now."

"He had no right to keep 'em. They weren't his. I'll have 'em translated, then turn the sheets over to the police, if they have any bearing on the case. Of course they may be just a private letter or something of that sort."

Mr. Lane rather dodged the ethics of the act of Hudson. He had, of course, instigated the theft of the papers. He was entitled to them. James had appropriated them by a trick. Besides, it was a matter of public and private justice that the whole Cunningham mystery be cleared up as soon as possible. But he was not prepared to pass on Hudson's right to be the instrument in the case.

The cattleman had made inquiries. He knew of a Japanese interpreter used in the courts. Foster had recommended him as entirely reliable. To this man Kirby went. He explained what he wanted. While the Japanese clerk read the writing to him, in English, and afterward wrote out on a type-

writer the translation of it, Kirby sat opposite him at the table to make sure that there was no juggling with the original document. The affair was moving to its climax. Within a few hours, now, Kirby expected to see the murderer of his uncle put under arrest. It was time to take the chief of police into his confidence. He walked down Sixteenth toward the city hall.

At Curtis Street the traffic officer was semaphoring, with energetic gesture, the east and westbound vehicles to be on their way. Kirby jaywalked across the street diagonally and passed in front of an electric brougham headed south. He caught one glimpse of the driver and stood smiling at the door with his hat off.

"I want to see you just a minute, Miss Harriman. May I come in?"

Her dark eyes flashed at him. The first swift impulse was to refuse. But she knew he was dangerous. He knew much that it was vital to her social standing must not be published. She sparred for time. "What do you want?"

He took this as an invitation and whipped open the door. "Better get out of the traffic," he told her. "Where we can talk without being disturbed."

She turned up Fifteenth. "If you have anything to say," she suggested, and swept her long-lashed eyes round at him with the manner of delicate disdain she held at command.

"I've been wondering about something," he said. "When James telephoned my uncle, on the evening he was killed, that you and he were on the way to his rooms, he said you were together; but James reached there alone, you and Jack arriving a few minutes later. Did James propose that he go first?"

The young woman did not answer. But there was no longer disdain in her fear-filled eyes. She swung the car, as though by a sudden impulse, to the left and drove to the building where the older James Cunningham had had his offices.

"If you want to ask me questions you'd better ask them before Jack," she said as she stepped out.

"Suits me exactly," he agreed.

"Mr. Lane has a question he wants to ask you, Jack," she said when they were in the inner office.

Kirby smiled, and in his smile there were friendliness and admiration. "First off, I have to apologize for some things I said two days ago. I'll eat humble pie. I accused you of something. You're not the man, I've found out."

"Yes?" Jack, standing behind his desk in the slim grace of well-dressed youth, watched him warily.

"We've found out at last who the man is."

"Indeed!" Jack knew that Esther McLean had been found by her friends and taken away. No doubt she had told them her story. Did the cattleman mean to expose James before the woman he knew to be his wife? That wouldn't be quite what he would expect of Lane.

"Incidentally, I have some news for you. One of your uncle's stenographers, a Miss McLean, has just been married to a friend of mine, the champion roughrider. Perhaps you may have heard of him. His name is Cole Sanborn."

Jack did not show the great relief he felt. "Glad to hear it," he said simply.

"Did we come here to discuss stenographers?" asked the young woman with a little curl of the lip. "You mentioned a question, Mr. Lane. Hadn't we better get that out of the way?"

Kirby put to Jack the same query he had addressed to her.

"What's the drift of this? What do you want to prove?" Jack asked curtly.

The eyes in the brown face plunged deep into those of Jack Cunningham. "Not a thing. I've finished my case, except for a detail or two. Within two hours the murderer of uncle James will be arrested. I'm offerin' you a chance to come through with what you know before it's too late. You can kick in, if you want to. You can stay out, if you don't. But don't say afterward I didn't give you a chance."

"What kind of a chance are you giving me? Let's get clear on that. Are you proposing I turn State's evidence on James? Is that what you're driving at?"

"Did James kill uncle James?"

"Of course he didn't, but you may have it in that warped mind of yours that he did."

"What I think doesn't matter. All that will count is the truth. It's bound to come out. There are witnesses that saw you come to the Paradox, a witness that actually saw you in uncle's rooms. If you don't believe me, I'll tell you something. When you and Miss Harriman came into the room where

my uncle had been killed, James was sittin' at the desk, looking over papers. A gun was lying close by his hand. Miss Harriman nearly fainted and you steadied her."

Miss Harriman, or rather Mrs. James Cunningham, nearly fainted again. She caught at the back of a chair and stood rigid, looking at Kirby with dilated horror-filled eyes. "He knows everything—everything. I think he must be the devil," she murmured from bloodless lips.

Jack, too, was shaken badly. "For God's sake, man, what do you know?" he asked hoarsely.

"I know so much that you can't safely keep quiet any longer. The whole matter is going to the police. It's going to them, this afternoon. What are you going to do? If you refuse to talk then, it will be taken to mean guilt."

"Why should it go to the police? Be reasonable, man. James didn't do it, but he's in an awful hole. No jury on earth would refuse to convict him with the evidence you've piled up. Can't you see that?"

Kirby smiled. This time his smile was grim. "I ought to know that better than you. I'll give you two hours to decide. Meet you at James' office then. There are some things we want to talk over alone, but I think Miss Harriman had better be there ready to join us when we send for her."

"Going through with this, are you?"

"I'm going through in spite of hell and high water."

Jack strode up and down the room in a stress of emotion. "You're going to ruin three lives because you're so pigheaded, or because you want your name in the papers as a great detective. Is there anything in the world we can do to head you off?"

"Nothing. And if lives are ruined, it's not my fault. I'll promise this. The man or woman I point to as the one who killed uncle James will be the one that did it. If James is innocent, as you claim he is, he won't have it saddled on him. Shall I tell you the thing that's got you worried? Down in the bottom of your heart you're not dead-sure he didn't do it—either one of you."

The young woman took a step toward Kirby, hands outstretched in dumb pleading. She gave him her soft, appealing eyes, a light of proud humility in them. "Don't do it," she begged. "He's your own cousin —and my husband. I love him. Perhaps there's some woman that loves you. If there is, remember her and be merciful."

His eyes softened. It was the first time he had seen her taken out of her selfishness. She was one of those modern young women who take but do not give. At least that had been his impression of her. Yet she had married James instead of his uncle. She had risked the loss of a large fortune to follow her heart. Perhaps, if children came, she might still escape into the thoughts and actions that give life its true value.

A faint sphinxlike smile touched his face. "No use worryin'. That doesn't help any. I'll go as easy as I can. We'll meet in two hours at James' office."

He turned and left the room.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE MILLS OF THE GODS

Kirby Lane did not waste the two hours that lay before the appointment he had made for a meeting at the office of his cousin James. He had a talk with the Hulls and another with the chief of police. He saw Olson and Rose McLean. He even found the time to forge two initials at the foot of a typewritten note on the stationery of James Cunningham, and to send the note to its destination by a messenger.

Rose met him by appointment at the entrance to the Equitable Building, and they rode up in the elevator together to the office of his cousin. Miss Harriman, as she still called herself in public, was there with Jack and her husband. James was ice cold. He bowed very slightly to Rose. Chairs were already placed.

For a moment Kirby was embarrassed. He drew James aside. Cunningham murmured an exchange of sentences with his wife, then escorted her to the door. Rose was left with the three cousins.

"I suppose Jack has told you of the marriage of Esther McLean," Kirby said as soon as the door had been closed.

James bowed, still very stiffly. Kirby met him, eye to eye. He spoke very quietly and clearly. "I want to open the meeting by telling you on behalf of this young woman and myself that we think you an unmitigated cur. We are debarred from saying so before your wife, but it's a pleasure to tell you so in private. Is that quite clear?"

The oil broker flushed darkly. He made no answer.

"You not only took advantage of a young woman's tender heart. You were willing our dead uncle should bear the blame for it. Have you any other more fitting word to suggest than the one I have used?" the Wyoming man asked bitingly.

Jack answered for his brother. "Suppose we pass that count of the indictment, unless you have a practical measure to suggest in connection with it. We plead guilty."

James bowed agreement to this, saying, "That is quite clear. I may say that I entirely concur in your estimate of my conduct. I might make explanations, but I can make none that justify me to myself."

"In that case we may consider the subject closed, unless Miss McLean has something to say."

Kirby turned to Rose. She looked at James Cunningham, and he might have been the dirt under her feet. "I have nothing whatever to say, Kirby. You express my sentiments exactly."

"Very well. Then we might open the door and invite in Miss Harriman. There are others who should be along soon, that have a claim also to be present."

"What others?" asked Jack Cunningham.

"The other suspects in the case. I prefer to have them all here."

"Any one else?"

"The chief of police."

James looked at him hard. "This is not a private conference then?"

"That's a matter of definitions. I have invited only those who have a claim to be present," Kirby answered.

The broker shrugged. "Oh, very well."

Kirby stepped to the door connecting with an outer office and threw it open. Mr. and Mrs. Hull, Olson, and the chief of police followed Phyllis Harriman into the room. More chairs were brought in.

The chief sat nearest the door, one leg thrown lazily across the other. He had a fat, brown cigar in his hand. Sometimes he chewed on the end of it, but he was not smoking. He was an Irishman, and, as it happened, open-minded. He liked this brown-faced young fellow from Wyoming—never had believed him guilty from the first.

"Chief, is there anything you want to say?" Kirby asked.

"Not a wor-rd. I'm sittin' in a parquet seat. It's your show, son."

Kirby's disarming smile won the chief's heart. "I want to say, now, that I've talked with the chief several times. He's given me a lot of good tips, and I've worked under his direction."

The head of the police force grinned. The tips he had given Lane had been of no value, but he was quite willing to take any public credit there might be. He sat back and listened while Kirby told his story.

"Outside of the chief, every one here is connected closely with this case and is involved in it. It happens that every man and woman of us were in my uncle's apartments either at the time of his death or just before or after." Kirby raised a hand to meet Olson's protest. "Oh, I know. You weren't in the rooms, but you were on the fire escape outside. From the angle of the police you may have been in. All you had to do was to pass through an open window."

There was a moment's silence, while Kirby hesitated in what order to tell his facts.

"Suspicion fell first on me and on Hull," Kirby went on. "You've seen it all thrashed out in the papers. I had been unfriendly to my uncle for years, and I was seen going to his rooms and leaving them that evening. My own suspicion was directed to Hull, especially when he and Mrs. Hull at the coroner's inquest changed the time so as to get me into my uncle's apartment half an hour earlier than I had been there. I'd caught them in a panic of terror when I knocked on their door. They'd lied to get me into trouble. Hull had quarreled with uncle James and had threatened to go after him with a gun in *two days* after that time—and it was *just forty-eight hours later he was killed.* It looked a lot like Hull to me.

"I had one big advantage, chief, a lot of inside facts not open to you," the cattleman explained. "I knew, for instance, that Miss McLean here had been in the rooms just before me. She was the young woman my uncle had the appointment to meet there before ten o'clock. You will remember Mr. Blanton's testimony. Miss McLean and I compared notes, so we were able to shave down the time during which the murder must have taken place. We worked together. She gave me other important data. Perhaps she had better tell in her own words about the clew she found that we followed."

Rose turned to the chief. Her young face flew a charming flag of color. Her hair, in

crisp tendrils beneath the edge of the small hat she wore, was the ripe gold of wheat tips in the shock. The tender blue of violets was in her eyes.

"I told you about how I found Mr. Cunningham tied to his chair, chief. I forgot to say that in the living room there was a faint odor of perfume. On my way upstairs I passed in the dark a man and a woman. I had got a whiff of the same perfume then. It was violet. So I knew they had been in the apartment just before me. Mr. Lane discovered later that Miss Harriman used that scent."

"Which opened up a new field of speculation," Kirby went on. "We began to run down facts and learned that my cousin James had secretly married Miss Harriman at Golden, a month before. My uncle had just learned the news. He had a new will made by his lawyer, one that cut James off without a cent and left his property to Jack Cunningham."

"That will was never signed," Jack broke in quickly.

Kirby looked at Jack and smiled cynically. "No, it was never signed. Your brother discovered that when he looked the will over at uncle's desk, a few minutes after his death."

James did not wink an eye in distress. The hand of the woman sitting beside him went out instantly to his in a warm, swift pressure. She was white to the lips, but her thought was for the man she loved and not for herself. Kirby scored another mark to her credit.

"Cumulative evidence pointed to James Cunningham," continued Kirby. "He tried to destroy the proof of his marriage to Miss Harriman. He later pretended to lose an important paper that might have cleared up the case. He tried to get me to drop the matter and go back to Wyoming. The coil wound closer round him.

"About this time another factor attracted my attention. I had the good luck to unearth at Dry Valley the man who had written threatening letters to my uncle and to discover that he was staying next door to the Paradox the very night of the murder. More, my friend Sanborn and I guessed he had actually been on the fire escape of the Wyndham and seen something of importance through the window. Later, I forced a statement from Olson. He told all he had seen that night."

Kirby turned to the rancher from Dry Valley and had him tell his story. When he had finished the cattleman made comment.

"On the face of it Olson's story leaves in doubt the question of who actually killed my uncle. If he was telling the whole truth, his evidence points either to the Hulls or my cousin James. But it was quite possible he had seen my uncle tied up and helpless, and had himself stepped through the window and shot him. Am I right, chief?"

The chief nodded grimly. "Right, son."

"You told me you didn't think I did it," Olson burst out bitterly.

"And I tell you so again," Kirby answered, smiling. "I was mentioning possibilities. On your evidence, it lies between my cousin James and the Hulls. It was the Hulls that had tied him up after Cass Hull knocked him senseless. It was Hull who had given him two days more to live. And that's not all. Not an hour and a half ago I had a talk with Mrs. Hull. She admitted, under pressure, *that she returned to my uncle's apartment again to release him from the chair.* She was alone with him, and he was wholly in her power. She is a woman with a passionate sense of injury. What happened then nobody else saw."

Mrs. Hull opened her yellow, wrinkled lips to speak, but Kirby checked her. "Not yet, Mrs. Hull. I'll return to the subject. If you wish you can defend yourself then." He stopped a second time to find the logical way of proceeding with his story. The silence in the room was tense. "I've been leaving Horikawa out of the story," the cattleman went on. "I've got to bring him in now. He's the hinge on which it all swings. *The man or woman that killed my uncle killed Horikawa, too.*"

James Cunningham, sitting opposite Kirby with his cold eyes steadily fixed on him, for the first time gave visible sign of his anxiety. It came in the form of a little gulping sound in his throat.

"Cole Sanborn and I found Horikawa in the room where he had been killed. The doctors thought he must have been dead about a day. Just a day before this time Miss McLean and I met James Cunningham coming out of the Paradox. He was white and shaking. He was suffering from nausea and his arm was badly strained. He explained it by saying he had fallen downstairs. Later, I wondered about that fall. I'm still wondering. Had he just come out of the

apartment where Horikawa was hiding? Had the tendons of that arm been strained by a jujutsu twist? *And had he left Horikawa behind him dead on the bed?"*

James, white to the lips, looked steadily at his cousin. "A very ingenious theory. I've always complimented you on your imagination," he said, a little hoarsely, as though from a parched throat.

His wife was sobbing softly. The man's arm went round her and tightened in wordless comfort.

From his pocket Kirby drew the envelope upon which he had a few hours earlier penciled the time schedule relating to his uncle's death.

"One of the points that struck me earliest about this mystery was that the man who solved it would have to work out pretty closely the time element. Inside of an hour, ten people, beside uncle James, were in his rooms. They must 'a' trod on each other's heels right fast, I figured. So I checked up the time as carefully as I could. Here's the schedule I made out. Maybe you'd like to see it." He handed the envelope to James.

Jack rose and looked over his brother's shoulder. His quick eye ran down the list. "I get the rest of it," he said. "But what does X mean?"

"X is the ten minutes of uncle's time I can't account for. Some of us were with him practically every other minute. X is the whole unknown quantity. It is the time in which he was probably actually killed. It is the man who *may*, by some thousandth chance, have stepped into the room and killed him while none of us were present," explained Kirby.

"If there is such an unknown man, you can cut the time down to five minutes instead of ten, providing your schedule is correct," James cut in. "For, according to it, I was there part of the time and Mrs. Hull part of the rest of it."

"Yes," agreed his cousin.

"But you may have decided that Mrs. Hull or I are X," jeered James. "If so, of course that ends it. No need for a judge or jury."

Kirby turned to the man by the door. "Chief, one of the queer things about this mystery is that all the witnesses had something to conceal. Go right through the list, and it's true of every one of us. I'm talkin' about the important witnesses, of course. Well, Cole and I found a paper in the living room of the apartment where Horikawa was killed. It was in Japanese. I ought to have turned it over to you, but I didn't. I was kinda playin' a lone hand. At that time I didn't suspect my cousin James at all. We were workin' together on this thing. At least, I thought so. I found out better, later. I took the paper to him to get it translated, thinkin' maybe Horikawa might have written some kind of a confession. James lost that paper. Anyhow, he claimed he did. My theory is that Horikawa had some evidence against him. He was afraid of what that paper would tell."

"Unfortunately for your theory it was a clerk of mine who lost the paper. I had nothing to do with it," James retorted coldly. "No doubt the paper has been destroyed, but not by me. Quite by accident, I judge."

His cousin let off a bomb beneath the broker's feet. "You'll be glad to know that the paper wasn't destroyed," he said. "I have it, with a translation, in my pocket at the present moment."

James clutched the arms of his chair. His knuckles grew white with the strain. "Where —where did you find it?" he managed to say.

"In the most private drawer of your safe, where you hid it," Kirby replied quietly.

"And this paper which you allege you found in my safe—after a burglary which, no doubt, you know is very much against the law—does it convict me of the murder of my uncle?"

The tension in the room was nerve-shattering. Men and women suspended breathing while they waited for an answer.

"On the contrary, it acquits you of any guilt whatever in the matter."

Phyllis Cunningham gave a broken little sob and collapsed into her husband's arms. Jack rose, his face working, and caught his brother by the shoulder. These two had suffered greatly, not only because of their fear for him, but because of the fear of his guilt that had poisoned their peace.

"Since you've decided I didn't do it, Mr. Lane, perhaps you'll tell us then who did," suggested James presently.

There came a knock at the door.

A whimsical smile twitched at the corners of Kirby's mouth. He did not often have a chance for dramatics like this.

"Why, yes, that seem's fair enough," he answered. "He's knocking at the door now. Enter X."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ENTER X.

Shibo stood on the threshold and sent a swift glance around the room. He had expected to meet James alone. That first slant look of his long eyes forewarned him that Nemesis was at hand. But he faced, without a flicker of the lids, the destiny he had prepared for himself.

"You write me note come see you now," he said to Cunningham.

James showed surprise. "No, I think not."

"You no want me?"

The chief's hand fell on the shoulder of the janitor. "*I* want you, Shibo."

"You write me note come here now?"

"No, I reckon Mr. Lane wrote that."

"I plenty busy. What you want me for?"

"For the murders of James Cunningham and Horikawa." Before the words were out of his mouth the chief had his prisoner handcuffed.

Shibo turned to Kirby. "You tellum police I killum Mr. Cunnin'lam and Horikawa?"

"Yes."

"I plenty sorry I no kill you."

"You did your best, Shibo. Took three shots at ten feet. Rotten shooting."

"Do you mean that he actually tried to kill you?" James asked in surprise.

"In the Denmark Building, the other night, at eleven o'clock. And I'll say he made a bad mistake when he tried and didn't get away with it. For I knew that the man who was aimin' to gun me was the same one that had killed uncle James. He'd got to worryin' for fear I was following too hot a trail."

"Did you recognize him?" Jack said.

"Not right then. I was too busy ducking for cover. Safety first was my motto, right then. No, when I first had time to figure on who could be the gentleman that was so eager to make me among those absent, I rather laid it to cousin James, with Mr. Cass Hull second on my list of suspects. The fellow had a searchlight and he flashed it on me. I could see above it a bandanna handkerchief over the face. I'd seen a bandanna like it in Hull's hands. But I had to eliminate Hull. The gunman on the stairs had small, neat feet, no larger than a woman's. Hull's feet are—well, sizable."

They were. Huge was not too much to call them.

"Those small feet stuck in my mind," Kirby went on. "Couldn't seem to get rid of the idea. They put James out of consideration, unless, of course, he had hired a killer, and that didn't look reasonable to me. I'll tell the truth. I thought of Mrs. Hull dressed as a man—and then I thought of Shibo."

"Had you suspected him before?" This from Olson.

"Not of the murders. I had learned that he had seen the Hulls come from my uncle's rooms and had kept quiet. Hull admitted that he had been forced to bribe him. I tackled Shibo with it and threatened to tell the police. Evidently he became frightened and tried to murder me. I got a note making an appointment at the Denmark Building at eleven in the night. The writer promised to tell me who killed my uncle. I took a chance and went." The cattleman turned to Mrs. Hull. "Will you explain about the note, please?"

The gaunt, tight-lipped woman rose, as though she had been called on at school to recite. "I wrote the note," she said. "Shibo made me. I didn't know he meant to kill Mr. Lane. He said he'd tell everything, if I didn't."

She sat down. She had finished her little piece.

"So I began to focus on Shibo. He might be playin' a lone hand, or he might be a tool of my cousin James. A detective hired by me saw him leave James' office. That didn't absolutely settle the point. He might have seen something and be blackmailing him, too. That was the way of it, wasn't it?"

"Yes," the broker said. "He had us right—not only me, but Jack and Phyllis, too. I couldn't let him drag her into it. The day you saw me with the strained tendon I had been with him and Horikawa, in the apartment next to the one uncle James rented. We quarreled. I got furious and caught Shibo by the throat to shake the little scoundrel. He gave my arm some kind of a jujutsu twist. He was at me every day. He never let up. He meant to bleed me heavily. We couldn't come to terms. I hated to yield to him."

"And did you?"

"I promised him an answer soon."

"No doubt he came to-day thinking he was going to get it." Kirby went back to the previous question. "Next time I saw Shibo I took a look at his feet. He was wearin' a pair of shoes that looked to me mighty like those worn by the man that ambushed me. They didn't have any cap pieces across the toes. I'd noticed that even while he was shooting at me. It struck me that it would be a good idea to look over his quarters in the basement. Shibo has one human weakness. He's a devotee of the moving pictures. Nearly every night he takes in a show on Curtis Street. The chief lent me a man, an' last night we went through his room at the Paradox. We found there a flash light, a bandanna handkerchief with holes cut in it for the eyes, and in the mattress two thousand dollars in big bills. We left them where we found them, for we didn't want to alarm Shibo."

The janitor looked at him without emotion. "You plenty devil man," he said.

"We hadn't proved yet that Shibo was going it alone," Kirby went on, paying no attention to the interruption. "Some one might be using him as a tool. Horikawa's confession clears that up."

Horikawa, according to the confession, had been in Cunningham's rooms, sponging and pressing a suit of clothes, when the promoter came home on the afternoon of the day of his death. Through a half-open door he had seen his master open his pocketbook and count a big roll of bills. The figures on the outside one showed that it was a treasury note for fifty dollars. The valet had told Chibo later and they had talked it over, but with no thought of robbery.

He was helping Shibo fix a window screen at the end of the hall, that evening, when they saw the Hulls come out of Cunningham's apartment. Something furtive in their manner struck the valet's attention. It was in the line of his duties to drop in and ask whether the promoter's clothes needed any attention for the next day. He discovered after he was in the living room that Shibo was at his heels. They found Cunningham trussed up to a chair in the smaller room. He was unconscious, evidently from a blow in the head.

The first impulse of Horikawa had been to free him and carry him to the bedroom. But Shibo interfered. He pushed his hand into the pocket of the smoking jacket and drew out a pocketbook. It bulged with bills. In two sentences Shibo sketched a plan of operations. They would steal the money and lay the blame for it on the Hulls.

Cunningham's eyelids flickered. There was a bottle of chloroform on the desk. The promoter had recently suffered pleurisy pains and had been advised by his doctor to hold a little of the drug against the place where they caught him most sharply. Shibo snatched up the bottle, drenched a handkerchief with some of its contents, and dropped the handkerchief over the wounded man's face.

A drawer was open within reach of Cunningham's hand. In it lay an automatic pistol.

The two men were about to hurry away. Shibo turned at the door. To his dismay he saw that the handkerchief had slipped from Cunningham's face and the man was looking at him. He had recovered consciousness.

Cunningham's eyes condemned him to death. In their steely depths there was a gleam of triumph. He was about to call for help. Shibo knew what that meant. He and Horikawa were in a strange land. They would be sent to prison, an example made of them because they were foreigners. Automatically, without an instant of delay, he acted to protect himself. Two strides took him back to Cunningham. He reached across his body for the automatic and sent a bullet into the brain of the man bound to the chair.

Then they heard some one coming. It was too late to get away by the door. They slipped through the window to the fire escape and from it to the window of the adjoining apartment. Horikawa, still sick with fear, stumbled against the rail as he clambered over it and cut his face badly. Shibo volunteered to go downstairs and get him some sticking plaster. On the way down Shibo had met the younger James Cunningham as he came out of the elevator. Returning with first-aid supplies a few minutes later, he saw Jack and Phyllis.

It was easy to read between the lines that Shibo's will had dominated Horikawa. He had been afraid that his companion's wounded face would lead to his arrest. If so, he knew it would be followed by a confession. He forced Horikawa to hide in the vacant apartment till the wound should heal. Meanwhile, he fed him and brought him newspapers.

There were battles of will between the two. Horikawa was terribly frightened when he read that his flight had brought suspicion on him. He wanted to give himself up at once to the police. They quarreled. Shibo always gained the temporary advantage, but he saw that under a grilling third degree his countryman would break down. He killed Horikawa because he knew he could not trust him.

This last fact was not, of course, in Horikawa's confession. But the dread of it was there. The valet had come to fear Shibo. He was convinced in his shrinking heart that the man meant to get rid of him. It was under some impulse of self-protection that he had written the statement.

Shibo heard the confession read without the twitching of a facial muscle. He shrugged his shoulders, accepting the inevitable with the fatalism of his race. "He weak. He no good. He got yellow streak. I bossum," was his comment.

"Did you kill him?" asked the chief.

"I killum both—Cunnin'lam and Horikawa. You kill me now maybe yes."

Officers led him away.

Jack could not quite let matters stand as they did. He called on Kirby that evening at his hotel. "It's about James I want to see you," he said, then stuck for lack of words with which to clothe his idea. He prodded at the rug with the point of his cane.

"Yes, about James?" Kirby presently reminded him, smiling.

"He's not so bad as you think he is," Jack blurted out.

"He's as selfish as the devil, isn't he?"

"Well, he is and he isn't. He's got a generous streak in him. You may not believe it, but he went on your bond because he liked you."

"Come, Jack, you're trying to seduce my judgment by the personal appeal," Kirby answered, laughing.

"I know I am. What I want to say is this. I believe he would have married Esther McLean, if it hadn't been for one thing. He fell desperately in love with Phyllis afterward. The odd thing is that she loves him, too. They didn't dare to be aboveboard about it, on account of uncle James. They treated him shabbily, of course. I don't deny that."

"You can hardly deny that," Kirby agreed.

"But, damn it, one swallow doesn't make a summer. You've seen the worst side of him all the way through."

"I dare say I have." Kirby let his hand fall on the well-tailored shoulder of his cousin. "But I haven't seen the worst side of his brother Jack. He's a good scout. Come up to Wyoming this fall an' we'll go hunting up in the Jackson Hole country. What say?"

"Nothing I'd like better," answered Jack promptly.

"We'll arrange a date later. Just now I've got to beat it. Going drivin' with a lady."

Kirby took his ladylove driving in a rented flivver. It was a Colorado night, with a young moon looking down through the cool, rare atmosphere found only in the Rockies. He drove her through the city to Berkeley and up the hill to Inspiration Point. They talked only in intermittent snatches. Rose had the gift of comradeship. Her tongue never rattled. With Kirby she did not need to make talk. They had always understood each other without words.

At the summit he killed the engine. They looked across the valley to the hills dimmed by night's velvet dusk.

"We're through with all that back there," he said, and she knew he meant all the trouble of the past weeks into which their fate had led them. "We don't have to keep our minds full of suspicions and try to find out things in mean, secret ways. There, in front of us, is God's world, waiting for you and me, Rose."

A flash of soft eyes darted at him. He was to be her man, and the maiden heart thrilled at the thought. She loved all of him, she knew—his fine, clean thoughts, his brave and virile life, the splendid body that was the expression of his personality.

His eyes came home to her, and as he looked he knew he longed for her in every fiber of his being. He asked no formal question. She answered none. Under the steady regard of his eyes she made a small rustling movement toward him. Her young and lissome body was in his arms, a warm and palpitating thing of life and joy. He held her close. Her eyelashes swept his cheek and sent a strange, delightful tingle through his blood.

Kirby held her head back and looked into her eyes again. Under the starlight their lips slowly met. The road lay clear before them after many tangled trails.

The Yarboro Flop

By J. Frank Davis

Author of "A Purely Moral Issue," "Statutes Made and Provided," Etc.

Again Mr. Davis gives us a human close-up of politics as played. The Eddsfield machine puts in an altruistic stroke for the public

SOMETHING over a dozen of the leading Republicans of the State sat gloomily in a private parlor in the biggest hotel at Hamilton, the State capital, with the devil to pay and no pitch boiling. Something had to be done, and not one of them had been able to think of anything to do. They were licked before they started, which would have been exasperating enough, but they were worse than licked; they were frightened. Not for themselves, entirely, although there were men present who were justified in being personally apprehensive, but principally for the State. They couldn't foresee what the coming year would bring forth, but they could be certain it would be something dangerous and perhaps something disastrous.

Their candidate for governor, nominated by the Republican convention only two weeks previously, thought he had a good fighting chance to win. They had not put a damper on his optimism; he had promised to make a hard campaign and his contribution materially fattened the campaign fund. The candidate's close friends and some of the men who were organizing themselves into business men's campaign committees, in his interest, were confident he could be elected, and the politicians were encouraging the dream; after the votes were counted on election night would be time enough for them to awaken. Scores of thousands of the plain, unpractical Republican partisans throughout the State, with whom a wish is ever enthusiastic father to an assurance of victory, believed the hoodoo was about to be broken at last—that after three years in outer darkness the party was about to return to power.

All of which was nonsense, and the men who controlled the Republican machinery knew it. Bar some miracle of a sort that does not happen, their candidate would not be elected, and he was the strongest candidate they had been able to think of. No man they could have named would have stood the slightest chance of being elected. The radicals of the cities were in the saddle, and in that state they were with the Democrats rather than the Socialists. The history of the Republican party, when last it had held undisputed sway, had at times been scandalously predatory. If the Republicans could have resurrected George Washington himself and nominated him, that year, his Democratic opponent would inevitably be the next executive.

The Democratic State convention was exactly three days off. The primaries had been held, the delegates had been selected, they had been tabulated and accounted for and checked off to the last man, until the result was known to a certainty. Judge Carlton Manning, a lifelong Jeffersonian who represented the conservative wing of his party and could be depended upon to be a good enough governor, as executives average, was going to be defeated for the nomination on the first ballot by at least two and perhaps four votes.

Thomas J. Curtley was going to be nominated, which meant beyond a question of doubt that for a year Thomas J. Curtley was going to be governor. And Curtley, a brilliant, unscrupulous demagogue, was a menace. A menace not only to decent government, but to property and, what was much more vital, to public safety. Opportunity to prove this had come to him when he was mayor of the city of Eddsfield, and he had demonstrated it without an instant's hesitation.

Defeat of their candidate by Judge Manning they had anticipated and were prepared to accept—after having made the best fight they could—with a reasonable degree of philosophy, but the prospect of Curtley in the gubernatorial chair was vastly differ-

ent. Manning for governor meant merely party defeat and another year's abstinence from the political fleshpots. Curtley for governor meant danger, alarm, instability; it meant the ever-threatening knowledge that his might become, in any crucial moment, a government of men and not of laws. His victory in the coming convention was a development unforeseen, unexpected, sinister.

Webster Judson, leader of Eddsfield Republican politicians—his enemies always referred to him as "boss"—arrived at the meeting when it had been under way some time, the victim of a late train. With him was Mayor Orson Kendall of that city. When Judson had introduced Kendall to several of the company to whom he was a stranger, he made explanation of his presence:

"I took the liberty of bringing the mayor with me for two reasons: First, he is better able than anybody else to testify to exactly what Curtley's attitude is toward property and life in any emergency where he sees a chance to get votes by taking the radical side; he personally heard Curtley's orders to the chief of police, that time of the big street-railroad strike, not to stop rioting and not to arrest anybody that stoned cars or attacked their passengers. Another reason, he had a number of run-ins of one kind and another with Curtley when Curtley was mayor, and he happened to come out ahead every time. Had exceptionally good luck, or something. I thought you gentlemen wouldn't mind if I included him in our conference."

Judson added, as he observed that one or two of the more elderly men present did not seem pleased, and rightly interpreted their thoughts as bearing on Kendall's comparative youth, which was obvious: "I guarantee his discretion. You need not hesitate to speak as freely before him as you would before me."

"That isn't necessary at all, I am sure," said Eldon Frost, president of the great chain of Frost Textile Mills, a power in many other industrial and financial enterprises and an altogether honest and highly respected citizen, who was acting as a sort of informal chairman of the meeting. "We are very glad to have Mayor Kendall present. Perhaps it will be a good idea for me to review in a few words what has been said prior to your arrival. I am sorry to say we haven't seen any light yet on our problem."

"Nobody has got a single cussed idea!" grumbled Jim Phillips, a second-generation oil millionaire, famed far and wide for his gasoline, his generosities, and his grouches.

Mr. Frost smilingly passed over Phillip's outburst. Men who knew him well always did; he would have been deeply astonished if they hadn't.

"I don't need to tell you the situation as regards the status of the Democratic convention vote," he resumed, "except that I might say we have verified the figures. There are four hundred and fifty-four delegates entitled to seats in the convention, and every one of them will be there, either in person or by alternate or proxy. The vote of just one delegate is uncertain—Millburn, of Franklin—but as all the other Franklin delegates are for Curtley he will probably vote that way when the time comes. If he does, Curtley will carry the convention on the first ballot, two hundred and twenty-nine to two hundred and twenty-five. If Millburn votes for Manning, Curtley still wins, two hundred and twenty-eight to two hundred and twenty-six."

"And we get a governor," said David Leeds, an eminent lawyer quietly, "who will meet any social or economic emergency that arises during his administration by doing the most radical thing possible. He not only did not stop rioting during that traction strike, but he ordered it not stopped; isn't that right, Mayor Kendall?"

"I told him I had no sympathy with the traction company—that I believed it was acting high-handedly and unlawfully in refusing to obey the nine-hour law—but that the situation wasn't one of protecting the corporation's property, primarily, but of saving human life. I had just seen one of the street disturbances and I warned him somebody was due to get killed if the rioting went much further. He replied that the traction company was a lawbreaker, and that no lawbreaker had any rights that the public was bound to respect. He ordered the chief of police, in my hearing, not to interfere with a plan that was afoot to wreck cars and beat up not only the strike breakers, but passengers—passengers, as the chief reported, who in many cases came from out of town and boarded the cars in good faith, not even knowing there was a strike."

"An anarchist!" sputtered a little man with white hair, who had not spoken previously. "We can't allow a man like that to

be governor of this State! It's intolerable! It mustn't be allowed!"

"That seems to be the quite general sentiment of this meeting," Leeds remarked dryly. "Our small difficulty seems to be how to prevent it. Judge Manning's managers have exhausted the possibilities, and they are still at least two votes short."

"Buy 'em!" cried the little man, who got most of the things he wanted in life that way. "Buy 'em!"

"It is my impression the Manning committee hasn't overlooked that thought," replied the lawyer. "A difficulty lies in the fact that most of the Curtley votes are in the cities, where the delegates do not dare to shift, even if they were tempted to, because they would be labeled as traitors by their associates."

"Curtley has some in the country towns; a few. They ought to be amenable to reason."

"Some of them were," Mr. Frost told him. "They have all been seen."

"Is that a tabulation of the delegates you have in front of you?" Judson asked the chairman. "May I look at it?"

He studied the list.

"Even if there was any way to swing two or three votes, it wouldn't be best to do it up near the head of the roll call," he mused. "There might be one or two Manning supporters farther down the list who have agreed to swing to Curtley if it becomes absolutely necessary. But if something could be done with a town that is called very late—Williamstown or Wilton or Yarboro——"

"There's a fine situation—that one in Yarboro!" snorted Phillips. "That town hasn't elected a Democrat to office since Andrew Jackson was a child. To all practical intents and purposes it hasn't got any Democratic party. Yet it sends three delegates, the same as any other town of its population, to the Democratic convention, and the three are tied up solid to Curtley. How many Democrats are there in Yarboro? A baker's dozen?"

"Thirty-four, at the last presidential election," Mayor Kendall informed him. Several of the company looked surprised, and Mr. Frost said: "Do you make a practice of having the election statistics of all the country towns in your head, Mr. Mayor?"

"Only of Yarboro," Kendall smiled. "An old great-uncle of mine lives there. I spend a little time there summers. The old man is a strong Republican, and I have heard him discuss the Democratic organization in the town. It is made up of about three men who handle such very small Democratic spoils as ever come to an overwhelmingly Republican town like that, and thirty or so voters who are Democrats because their fathers were and confine their activities to voting the ticket when it isn't too much trouble to get to the polls. At the presidential election they get out the solid party vote, I guess. In off years they average about twenty."

Judson was listening and thinking hard. He referred to the compiled list of delegates in his hand.

"Do you know the names of any of the men who manipulate things—the three that grab off such dinky patronage as comes to the town?" he asked Kendall.

"Ed Hemenway, Abner Pease, and a blacksmith named Spink—I forget his first name."

Judson nodded, and read from a list before him: "Here they are. Edward P. Hemenway, Abner G. Pease, Damon D. Spink. They ran true to form and elected themselves to the convention."

"Those names don't sound radical," Attorney Leeds commented, "and it isn't natural that men from a little conservative country village like Yarboro should be for a man like Curtley What do they get?"

"Curtley could tell us," Judson said. "It might be jobs under his administration, but I don't believe it; he can't afford to give three jobs to a town that size. So I'm guessing it is cold, spendable dollars."

"Outbid him," counseled the little man with the white hair and irascible disposition.

Phillips retorted impatiently: "It's a cinch Judge Manning's outfit tried to and failed."

"Judge Manning's outfit didn't have an uncle who was a prominent citizen," remarked Judson.

They all caught the significance of this, and Mr. Frost nodded slowly. "It seems to be about the only chance there is, even though it may be a small one," he said. "Would you be willing to make a little flying trip down there, Mayor Kendall?"

Kendall was uncomfortable, and showed it. "I am willing to do anything I can to help," he said, "but the suggestion that these fellows be outbid—that is rather outside my experience."

The chairman gravely assented to the

principles Kendall's words implied. "You are aware that I, personally, am not an advocate of direct financial methods of that sort," he said, "but aren't there times when the only way to get a good result is by a bad means? If our State can be saved from a year of such government as Tom Curtley will give it——"

"Wouldn't it be better to try straight arguments first?" protested Kendall. "There is a train for Yarboro at about five o'clock. I can talk with my uncle to-night, and with those delegates to-morrow. If I find nothing else will move them, but that money will, I can get in touch with you gentlemen by telephone——"

"No telephone conversations," declared Judson positively. "And no messengers arriving in Yarboro from here and handing you a bag, or a package, either. Yarboro is too small a place; it would be all over the State in no time. You can arrive there without attracting a particle of attention, because they already know you and it is perfectly natural you should drop in for a little visit with your relative. Another advantage to your doing it is that you have never been active in State-wide politics; nobody there is likely to attach any political significance at all to your presence. Go down there and see if there is anything that can be done, and, if so, what it is—and then be prepared to do it, on the spot."

Mr. Frost nodded agreement with this opinion. "How much had we better send?"

"Enough," counseled Judson.

"Three men. Fifteen thousand ought to be enough," some one suggested.

"Unnecessary!" broke in Hugh MacDougall, a capitalist whose undeviating principle was to maintain that any amount except the interest he was to receive for a loan was too much. "They are countrymen, probably with small means. A thousand or two thousand dollars to men like that is a fortune. Six thousand in all should do it."

"Oh, don't pike!" cried Jim Phillips. "It's worth what it costs. Hell's bells! Don't pinch pennies at this stage of the game. To save having Curtley for governor would be worth ten thousand to you alone, MacDougall."

The old capitalist's countenance showed the thought gave him infinite pain. "Say ten thousand, then," he conceded. "Ten thousand for the three of them ought to be plenty."

"Ten ought to. But I advise thirty," said Attorney Leeds. "You have to bear in mind that if those countrymen switch, they put themselves outside the reach of party patronage for as long as the radicals control the machine, which might be for life. I take it they are shrewd enough to appreciate that. Their charge is likely to be in proportion to that sacrifice."

"But thirty thousand!" groaned MacDougall. "It's outrageous!"

"Little enough, divided up among us and the others we can get to chip in, in an hour's time, compared to what might happen in any one week if Curtley gets a chance to wallop business in the interests of 'the peepul,' argued Phillips, who despised all rich tightwads and regarded MacDougall as an especially offensive representative of the species. "I'll admit these three yaps down in Yarboro could have their feet in the party trough all the rest of their lives without getting that much money, normally, but the point isn't what they ought to get; it's what they have to get. I'll come across for my share of thirty."

There was a murmur of approval and MacDougall subsided, wagging his head dolorously.

"It will be ready for you here at four o'clock," Mr. Frost told Kendall. The meeting changed itself into a businesslike committee of the whole on apportionment and solicitation. Kendall rose to leave them.

"I know you don't like the errand," Frost said to him in a sympathetic aside, accompanying him to the door. "I wouldn't like it myself. But it is that or a year of Curtley."

"You are right; I don't relish it," Kendall replied, "but I shall do my best. This is one of the times when fire has to be fought with fire; that is plain enough. I like the political game, but I don't like all the necessary plays in it."

Under a big hanging lamp that cast its rays hotly down on the pink table cover, Kendall sat, that evening, in his great-uncle's sitting room in Yarboro and discussed the situation with all the frankness that was possible short of mentioning the fat packages of currency that nestled beneath the normal contents of his traveling bag. The old man had in earlier years been active in town and county politics, and still was something of a mentor in the local Republican councils.

"Bad eggs, the whole of 'em!" he declared.

"Ed Hemenway's the wust. He's back of this business. He went up to Hamilton and seen somebody or other, and then after he got back the delegation was for Curtley. Sweetened! That's what, sure's you're a foot high. They're bad eggs!"

"I thought you were on pretty good terms with Hemenway. And with Pease and Spink, too, for that matter. Haven't I seen them all hanging out at the store?"

"I am on good terms with 'em, outside of election time. They ain't the wust fellers in Yarboro, any of 'em—except politically. When I say bad eggs, I mean political bad eggs. Never saw a Democrat since I was born that wasn't, give him a chance."

Kendall was quite familiar with his great-uncle's ancient school of partisan thought, and hastened to bring him back to the concrete problem. "What is the best way for me to approach them, with some chance of finding out how things lay?"

"Best way to find out a thing you don't know is to ask—sometimes," the old man declared oracularly. "You know Ed Hemenway. Go see him. He'll prob'ly be at that little office of his, to-morrow mornin'. If he's skeered to talk to you, come tell me and I'll see if I can't loosen him up."

"How, uncle Truman?"

"Him and me has a good many business dealin's, one time and another. We get along toler'ble well, outside o' campaign times. He wouldn't tell me nothing about his political shennanigan', and I wouldn't ask him to, bein's we're on opposite sides o' the fence. But if it so come about that I wanted any big favor and was willin' to pay for it"—Uncle Truman glanced shrewdly up into his young relative's face—"I don't know but what him and me could talk turkey and neither of us expect t'other to blab much about the conversation."

"Yes," Mayor Kendall replied to the unspoken inquiry. "I imagine a favor like this could be paid for—if it had to be."

"I figgered so," the old man remarked dryly. "Go see Ed Hemenway and talk fairly straight. Not meanin' you tell all you know, to start with. Man that tells all he knows fust off, ain't got nothing left to dicker with afterward. But you don't need to be afraid Ed'll get put out, if you happen to mention finances. Ed ain't sensitive that way."

"And the others?"

"Mebbe you'll need to see 'em, and mebbe not, just as Ed says. If he thinks he'd like to have 'em brought into it, well and good. 'Tain't necessary. They do what Ed tells 'em. When all's said and done, it ain't far from the fact to say that Ed Hemenway's the Democratic party in the town of Yarboro. Business ain't been awful good with Ed this year, so I've heard. Ain't sold as many plows and harrers as he does some years. Might be some explanation in that as to how he come to be so strong for this Curtley."

Mayor Kendall called the following forenoon at the little fifteen-by-eighteen building which bore the weather-beaten sign: "E. Hemenway, Agency Agricultural Implements," down the single main street of Yarboro, a hundred yards or so from the six or seven stores that constituted the business center, Yarboro being principally a farming community. Hemenway, a lean, freckled, red-haired man of fifty or so, gossiped amiably with him of people and happenings since his last visit to town; if he suspected Kendall might have any special errand with him, he did not indicate it or hasten arrival at the subject.

"You're a delegate to the Democratic convention, I hear," the mayor said, after a while. "I suppose you'll be going up to Hamilton day after to-morrow, on the early train."

"To-morrow afternoon. Like to be there early. Like to get around and hear the goin's-on at the hotel where headquarters are, the night before. Powerful lot of pullin' and haulin' and dickerin' at that night-before powwow." He smiled faintly. "And then everybody goes into the convention next day and votes just like he was going to anyway. Mebbe a vote or two gets changed with all that talkin'—some years."

Kendall looked squarely into Hemenway's face.

"Why are you delegates for Tom Curtley?"

The answer was prompt and unequivocal:

"Because we're agin' Carlton Manning. This town ain't got no use for Carlton Manning. He slandered us shameful."

"When?"

"That reform speech he made four or five years ago—the one they had printed in pamphlets and sent out everywhere. Give the State a bad name, and gave a lot o' towns a bad name, and Yarboro was about the wust. There was city reporters comin' in

here to ask about it for the next three months, seems if. Ripped one party bad's he did the other. Didn't make no choice between 'em. Said what was true of the Republicans was true of the Democrats, and visa versa. Yarboro ain't had no use for him sence."

"I don't hold any brief for Judge Manning, but he has the reputation of being honest."

"Mebbe. But he talks too much with his mouth about things he don't know."

"And Tom Curtley is a bad egg." Kendall, the moment he had said it, had difficulty in repressing a smile, as he recalled when he had last heard the phrase, and to whom it had referred. "I know him. Nobody better. He was mayor of our town three years, you know."

"I wouldn't ever figger on going to the Republican mayor of a town to find out whether his Democratic predecessor was all right or not," Hemenway remarked. "Wouldn't exactly expect you to indorse him."

"I wouldn't say this about Curtley, if it wasn't true: He is a crook; he protects all sorts of vice; he believes in open gambling; there isn't anything so radical that he won't stand for it, if he thinks there are votes in it. You Democrats in Yarboro are naturally conservative men. I don't need to tell you what a radical governor might be able to do to the State, in some case of emergency."

"Vice and gambling and all that don't have anything to do with us folks way out here in the country," the politician said.

He narrowed his eyes and shot a straight question:

"How long since you been worried about what mistakes the Democratic party makes? If you was out electioneering for Carlton Manning, you wouldn't talk much different."

"I would like to see Manning nominated instead of Curtley," Kendall replied frankly, "because you Democrats might win this campaign, and I'd rather see Manning governor."

"I expect we might," said Hemenway. "We-e-l-l?"

The word was an invitation to get down to business.

"It isn't logical for you to be tied to that radical gang. You have all the reason in the world for shifting—the pressure of public opinion here in Yarboro."

"Public opinion in Yarboro is Republican," Hemenway said. "The opinion of the caucus that elected us delegates is behind us."

"Now, on the level," Kendall challenged good-naturedly. "How many voters attended that caucus? You three?"

Hemenway grinned. "Five. Damon Spink's father always gets out to caucuses; he was postmaster under Cleveland. And another feller dropped in."

"I'll concede the opinion of that causus certainly is behind you—and would be if you shifted a dozen times. Isn't there any argument I could make that would convince you your votes ought to go to Manning?"

"'Tain't likely. But there might be; can't tell till I hear. I'm listening with both ears wide open. There's nobody hiding under the table here, and you can see out of both windows. So you don't have to wonder if you've got any witnesses. You ain't."

This was a clearer invitation than before, but Kendall hesitated.

"S'pose you go over and see your uncle Truman Kendall," Hemenway suggested, "and ask him whether I'm a reliable feller to talk confidentially with, politically speakin'. I'll be waiting for you here when you get back."

"It isn't necessary. See here! I'll make a little wager with you. I will bet you a thousand dollars to five dollars that you can't cast the three votes of the Yarboro delegation for Judge Manning, day after to-morrow."

Hemenway shook his head pleasantly. "You don't excite my sportin' blood a bit," he said. "I've got a bigger bet than that the other way."

"Was it put up in cash?"

"Nope. But it's good."

"I would put my bet up where you could see it. In uncle Truman's hands, say."

"Satisfactory stakeholder, old Truman would be. But before I could see my way clear to go out and electioneer round the town"—he chuckled in frank amusement at the extravagance of the idea—"altering the opinions of delegates and them that are represented by 'em, I'd have to hear a louder noise than any you've made yet." Hemenway ceased smiling and leaned forward, eye to eye. "Whatever you've got to say to me, Mr. Kendall, say it."

"I will," Kendall told him. "It can be said in two words: How much?"

"Five thousand apiece."

"Talk sense."

"Fifteen thousand is sense. You Republicans are going to be licked. It's worth more'n fifteen thousand to have a conservative like Manning in the State House."

"Even so. Is it your idea that the only town where any attempt is being made to change delegates is Yarboro?"

Hemenway's face indicated he saw the point of this, and Kendall followed it up: "If some of the others were got first, we might not need you. We do now, however, but not at any such price."

"All right. I'll listen to your idee."

"Three thousand. A thousand apiece."

"No," said Hemenway. "Manning's man offered to come across better'n that, and there was nothing doing. Although I'll be honest and aboveboard and tell you we hate Manning so bad down here that he'd have to do twice as well as Curtley to get us. We ain't exactly in politics for our health, Mr. Kendall, but we're agin' Manning as a matter of principle. Do you know what that cussed silk-stockin' said in that there speech that they printed in a pamphlet? He said Yarboro was so rotten and corrupt, Republicans and Democrats alike, that whichever faction had the biggest bundle could always carry the town, and that he believed if the time should ever come when there didn't either side have a single dollar to spend, the election could be swung by the gang that had the biggest box of cigars. I tell you a man that slanders a decent community like that hadn't ought to get elected to anything. However——"

He left his speech hanging in the air and waited expectantly.

"Maybe I could get you two thousand apiece," Kendall conceded.

"Can't see it. I might be able to arrange it for four—twelve thousand in all."

"To save argument and get it over with, I'll split the difference with you and make it three."

"See here!" Hemenway spoke with finality. "Make it three thousand apiece, and two thousand over. That splits the difference with *you*, 's you might say. The extra two thousand goes one thousand to me, for doing the negotiatin' and standing the gaff of the explanations, and the other thousand for expenses. The eleven thousand to be in Truman Kendall's hands by to-morrow—in cash, no checks—to be paid over to me when the whole three votes are delivered for Manning."

"That extra thousand for you doesn't sound entirely unreasonable, but I don't see what expenses——"

"I do. And that's my last and best offer. Take it or leave it."

"You and the other delegates wouldn't want to go to Hamilton until day after to-morrow morning, just in time for the convention," Kendall suggested.

"Go to that night-before meeting and have to talk over what we are going to do? Not by a jugful! If you and me make a dicker, those fellers don't get a sight or a sound of any of us until we go sliding onto the convention floor, about three minutes before the clerk begins to call the roll. And I wouldn't be s'prised if we come home kind o' prompt after the convention was over, too. Our explanation of the flop will be that the conservative element of the community put too much pressure on us to be resisted, of course. But it gets darn tiresome making an explanation over and over again. And if some of those crook city politicians shouldn't believe it, that would make us mad and get us all haired up."

"Let's go over to uncle Truman's store and see what he thinks of being a confidential stakeholder," said Kendall. "How much of our business do you want him to know?"

"All of it. You put eleven thousand in his hands. When I've delivered the three votes, he pays me three thousand apiece for 'em and another thousand for the wear and tear on my powers of explanation."

"And the thousand for expenses?"

Hemenway laughed as he made ready to follow Kendall out and lock the door behind them. "Mebbe we won't have to give him any instructions about that. It ain't easy for a solid Republican like him to arrange this sort o' thing, be a go-between, and deal with a wicked Democrat, all against his lifelong principles. A thousand ain't any too much for Truman, is it?"

"To arrange it!" stammered Kendall. "Go-between!"

Hemenway chuckled softly. "He said I better tell you, after you and me got our hoss trade finished. Didn't want to have any secrets from a relation that he likes as well as he does you; 'twa'n't necessary, him

and me both figgered, you being a practical man yourself and understanding how things has to get done. Old Truman and me talked this over consid'able thorough out to my house, around daylight this morning, before you was up."

The first ballot for the gubernatorial nomination was swiftly drawing toward its breathless close, the floor, as each city and town announced its vote, a yelling, cheering tumult of Curtley jubilation. Away back in the spectators' balcony Orson Kendall sat beside Web Judson. He had come directly from the train and there had been no time to leave his hand bag in any repository sufficiently safe; it rested on the floor between his feet.

The loud-voiced clerk called the name of Williamstown. Its delegates voted unanimously for Manning.

"Wilton," he read from the roll.

"Manning, four; Curtley, two," shouted the chairman of that delegation.

The Curtley partisans, who had counted on those two for their candidate but in their hearts had feared they might be prevailed upon at the last moment to side with their conservative associates, rocked the hall with their exultation. Half the men present had pencils at work, and were reporting the tally to the other half. Curtley's total was now two hundred and twenty-five. Manning had two hundred and twenty-six. One town alone remained, and both sides knew its trio of delegates were unanimous for Curtley. But for the matter of formal record, the battle was over. Curtley shouters began to organize a demonstration of triumph.

The chairman's gavel banged above the din. "Gentlemen will be in order!" he cried hoarsely. "Clerk will complete calling the roll."

"Yarboro," bellowed the clerk.

Ed Hemenway came to his feet and stood stolidly until the uproar had somewhat lessened. "Yarboro," he then responded loudly, "casts three votes for Manning."

As the convention began to lift itself out of the chaos that ensued, Kendall and Judson found their way to an exit.

"I'm proud of you, Orson," the Eddsfield leader cried, the moment there were no ears to overhear. "It was a beautiful piece of work."

"I'm not so proud," Kendall replied soberly. "It had to be done, but I'd rather somebody else had it to do."

"Forget it and remember your Emerson," laughed Judson. "Didn't he say that 'evil can have its good?' "

"I don't think he meant that the end justifies the means, and, if he did, somebody else said it better a century or two earlier. However—I haven't been able to sleep nights for the responsibility of all that loose currency. There is nineteen thousand dollars in this bag right now. When can we see Frost and those fellows and give it back?"

Judson stopped short in the street and stared, horrified.

"Would you want that crowd of wisenheimers to think you didn't understand even the rudiments of politics?" he demanded. "They'd laugh at you all the rest of their lives. Half of that nineteen thousand goes into the State campaign fund to do our best to lick Manning, and the other half goes into the little old war chest in Eddsfield, in payment for services darned well and truly rendered. We report to Frost and Phillips and the rest of them, of course, and tell them truthfully what we had to spend and what we did with the balance. That is all they will ask and all they figure they are entitled to, and they wouldn't be shocked if we didn't make any report at all. Thunder! They think well of you now. Do you want to lose all their respect? If they ever heard of your talking such nonsense they would make up their minds you were too much of an amateur ever to be trusted again. Giving money back! My boy, it isn't done."

Another Eddsfield story, by Mr. Davis, follows in an early issue.

SUPERIOR TO THE REGULATIONS

IF "Black Jack" Pershing so desired, he could appear at any function, political, social, or military, dressed as a circus performer or wearing overalls. Having the permanent rank of general in the United States army, his wishes are above the military regulations which govern strictly the uniforms of all other officers. He can wear whatever he pleases wherever he pleases.

Mountain Horse

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

Author of "A Horse Deal in Hardpan," "Spring Tonic," Etc.

The desert has a way of pitilessly proving the mettle of a man. It even went a little further with the braggart Vincent

VINCENT was one of those unfortunates who had an income and no ambition other than to play at prospecting, punching cattle, guiding tourists, and incidentally performing unnecessary stunts of a hazardous nature, simply that he might brag about them and occasionally see his name in print. He was young, strong, and familiar with the ways of the West. Had he been thrown upon his own resources he might have amounted to something. As it was, he never stayed at one job long, because his enthusiasm was always for the new. Under the stimulus of excitement he was active, keen, energetic, and a notable figure in a picturesque way. He always rode a good horse and his equipment was always of the best.

He appeared romantic, and thought that he was; and he had had just enough real outland experience to pass as a desert man. He knew the trails, the water holes, the grazing. Even his severest critic had to admit that Vincent knew the country, and how to take care of himself. When out of employment and lacking an audience, he went unshaven, loafed at the town bars with the down-and-outs and boasted that while he had money, it did not affect his attitude toward those who had none. He bought drinks, and his immediate companions flattered him, calling him a "real guy," an "old-timer," and a "good sport."

This sort of oily adulation made Vincent think that he was something more than just a little bit of the real thing: yet it was significant that real old-timers rather shunned him. He was ever ready to wager that he could do this or that stunt and get away with it. Folk along the edge of the desert are usually cautious, quiet, and they seldom brag. Vincent was the noisy exception that proved the rule. And because wise men did not take him up when he made his wagers that he could do this or that foolhardy stunt, Vincent thought that they feared to do the things he was willing to do —on a bet.

Vincent had been riding in the forest reserve as a fire patrol and had accumulated a little money over and above his income. Upon leaving the service he had purchased a splendid mountain horse from a ranger who was also leaving the service. The price had been stiff, but Vincent had paid without a whimper, having in mind a stunt that would bring him notoriety. Things were going well in Searchlight, Tonopah, and up that way, so Vincent shipped the horse to Gold Center, on the edge of the valley, and after advertising himself about town he made the public assertion that he would cross the valley in two days, going light, and offered to take any bet, two to one, that he could not.

"I'll make it to the other side, alone, in two days, with this horse," he said. There were folks in Gold Center who wished that he would cross to the Other Side—spelled just like that. Not because Vincent had wronged any of them, but simply because he was a fool who boasted when wise men were silent, a fool who was willing to kill a good horse for the sake of making good his boast.

"He's tough enough, and willing enough. He'll make it across in two days," asserted Vincent.

A retired miner, who had listened silently stepped from the group in the saloon and, pulling a wallet from his pocket, offered Vincent a good round sum for the horse. "I don't need him," said the old miner, "but I hate to see a good horse wasted on a fool bet. You're willing to bet a hundred and fifty you can make it across in two days. I'll give you a hundred and fifty for the horse."

"He's not for sale," stated Vincent. "I said I'd cross in two days, or bust."

"I sure hope you do," said the old miner fervently.

Next morning, at daybreak, Vincent saddled up and with a canteen, four feeds of grain, and a scant supply of coffee, bacon, and crackers, started down toward the desert. No one had taken his wager—but he would show those dead ones in Gold Center that he was game. Vincent was hardly out of town when he heard some one behind him. Turning, he saw "Snape," a town loafer, riding a rangy, fast-walking mule. Vincent reined up, noticed that Snape packed a canteen and a roll of provisions, and asked Snape where he was going.

"Across," said Snape, grinning.

"Then you'll have to step, if you go with me," said Vincent.

"I'll trade you the mule for the horse," said Snape, laughing.

"Not this journey."

The contrast in their outfits was interesting. Snape packed his canteen, his gunny sack of feed and provisions, and rode an old Visalia tree—a light saddle, easy on horse and rider. Snape was apparently unarmed. Vincent rode a big, forty-pound stock saddle, heavily trimmed with silver, as were his bridle and spurs. He also packed a saddle gun and a six-shooter, adding considerably to the weight of his equipment. Then, Snape rode loosely in the saddle, sagging forward as though half asleep. Vincent rode straight as though on parade. A saddle gun does not weigh much, say seven pounds. But multiply that seven pounds by the number of steps a horse takes in fifty miles and the total in tons will be rather startling. Then, multiply forty pounds of needless weight by the same number of steps—and pity the horse.

They made the first twenty-five miles by four o'clock that afternoon, taking the old trail. They camped at Wagon Wheel Springs. Snape, who had scarcely spoken during the journey, gathered a few sticks for a fire. He made coffee, broiled slices of bacon on a stick, munched crackers and shared his meal with Vincent, who had not opened his own saddle pockets. Then they lay in the scant shade of a rock, waiting for night. They planned to ride again at three in the morning, and push through to the next water hole, some twenty miles west, figuring to arrive there about nine in the forenoon; an average speed of about four miles an hour.

Vincent could not sleep, but lay sweltering in the afternoon heat. He smoked, and talked to Snape, who answered in monosyllables. Snape lay on his back, his head on his saddle, and his arms and legs sprawled out. Vincent kept on talking. Snape did not respond. Vincent sat up. Snape's mouth was open and he was sleeping heavily. Vincent watched the rise and fall of Snape's chest, and presently he leaned forward and peered at a shiny, dark something just under the edge of Snape's open shirt. Snape was practically in rags, destitute, and as Vincent knew, a town loafer who sponged drinks and told strange yarns of his travels in the desert. But the butt of the Luger pistol in Snape's shoulder holster set Vincent thinking.

He had not realized that Snape was packing a gun. Despite his bravado, Vincent felt uncomfortable. What right had a man like Snape, a bum, a tramp, to pack a gun? Vincent knew Snape, as he knew most men roaming the desert, yet he knew nothing about him, further than he seemed to be an easy-going, inoffensive sort of person, cringing and grinning his way through the day's happenings in town. Vincent wondered why Snape had suddenly decided to cross the valley. Only the night before Vincent had bought him a drink, and the hobo had said nothing about leaving Gold Center.

Snape slept on, his mouth open, his arms and legs twitching as he dreamed. Vincent caught himself nodding, adjusted his blankets and saddle, and stretched out.

A short way from the camp stood the rangy mule, obviously making the best of this chance to rest. The mountain horse stood near the mule, as though for companionship, but the horse seemed nervous, occasionally jerking his head up as he drowsed and stared into the dusky spaces of evening. He had packed something like two hundred and ninety pounds through twenty-five miles of killing heat, across country below sea level—and he was accustomed to the thin, clear air of the high trails.

Vincent was startled from his sleep by something touching his shoulder. He rolled sideways and grabbed for his gun. Snape stooping over him, laughed. "Time to hit the trail, old-timer. What's the matter, anyhow? You scared somebody's going to roll you for your outfit?"

Vincent sat up. "No, I wasn't scared. I had a funny dream. What time is it?"

"About half past two."

Snape turned away and gathered enough brush from a distant ridge to make a fire. Vincent rose and stretched. In the dim starlight he could see his horse standing just where he had been when they turned in. The mule was nosing Snape's saddle, trying to get at the barley. Vincent strode to his horse and led him up to the camp. Snape had the fire going and was making coffee. "It'll be worse than yesterday," said Snape as Vincent stepped up.

"She promises hot. But we can ride through to Barrel Springs before noon. Then we can lay over and hit her up again after dark."

"If your horse holds out," said Snape, grinning.

"Hell, he can stand it, if I can."

Snape rose from before the fire and fumbled at Vincent's saddle pockets. "What you want?" queried Vincent sharply.

"Crackers."

"How about your own. I'll get what I want for myself."

"Oh, all right! Only, you et some of mine, last night. I guess I got enough, anyway." And Snape slouched back to the fire, fetching with him a handful of crackers from his own saddle. He drank his coffee, but did not offer Vincent any nor did he offer him any crackers or bacon. Vincent said nothing, but got his own supplies, fried a few slices of bacon, and was reaching for the coffeepot when Snape held up his hand. "How about your own?" he queried, and again he grinned through his stubby beard.

"You got that coffeepot from my outfit," said Vincent.

"But my coffee is in it, old-timer."

"Well, get a move on and drink it—and I'll make my own."

"Sure Mike!" And Snape grinned.

The dawn light showed Snape munching crackers and washing them down with coffee. Snape was not beautiful to look at. But his old, shiftless attitude was changing. He had said nothing to warrant Vincent thinking so, yet he had provoked Vincent to childish argument and had taken his measure, and Vincent knew it. Snape had always felt that Vincent was more or less of a bluff, and he had proved it. Without any apparent reason, Vincent was getting on edge. The twenty-five miles they had made had been long, hot miles, but that could hardly account for Vincent's attitude. They had made excellent time, had slept well, and had enough food and water to see them through. They were hardly into the real bad lands, and yet Vincent was on edge. Snape wondered why.

Was it a case of foreboding? Did Vincent suspect that his companion meant to do for him and take his equipment? Snape had no such intent. He had worn thin his welcome in the saloons of Gold Center and had suddenly decided to cross to the western side and try his luck over there. He knew that Vincent was going across, and without asking to accompany him, he had borrowed the mule and had set out. Of course, if Vincent's horse played out there might be a chance to make a deal, especially if Vincent lost his nerve. And there was always the chance that neither of them would get across, but that did not bother Snape. Moreover, Vincent's horse seemed to be all right.

Under the stimulus of the hot coffee Vincent's mood changed. He joked with Snape about their argument over the coffeepot and the crackers, and made the mistake of apologizing to the hobo for having refused to share with him. Vincent saddled up with a good deal of elbow motion, and he talked continuously. He seemed nervously hurried and anxious to get away. Snape noticed that the mountain horse had not eaten much of the barley, so he led his mule over and let him clean up what was left. Vincent said nothing, but it was evident that he chafed at the delay.

About half past four they started west, Snape in the lead and the mountain horse doing his best to keep up with the rangy, fast-walking mule. Ahead, clear to the sky line, lay the reddish-brown desert, flat floored, sinister, empty of all life. In the middle distance a white spot marked the bed of a dry lake. A tinge of bronze seemed to run over the sand, an almost tangible something floating close to the surface of the desert and above this impalpable sea of heat a hot, white light drove down, and spread and danced away into the cloudless spaces of the burning day. Vincent had never known it so hot in the valley. Already the mountain horse's neck and flanks were streaked with sweat. The mule showed no signs of the morning heat, but plodded on with long-reaching stride and swinging ears.

In an hour they came to the dry lake. The

white emptiness shimmered in the sun. Without speaking to Snape, Vincent touched his horse with the spurs. The mountain pony struck into a lope. Snape watched Vincent pass him, but he made no effort to urge the mule out of a walk. Snape knew that he would overtake Vincent beyond the western side of the dry lake, where the sand was heavy. Moreover, the horse carried too great a load to stand that pace for any length of time. The increasing heat bit into the riders and burned across the white lake bed, until, growing accustomed to it, they rode in a hot, stagnant pall which burdened their breathing and stung their eyelids and nostrils. Vincent worried himself into a faster gait. There was no reason to hurry, yet he was already trying to flee from the desert, to get across to the hills, to run from the possible chance of oblivion, forcing a willing horse beyond its strength and forever imagining that Snape rode close behind, grinning through his stubby beard, and waiting —for what? Vincent cursed himself, reined in and glanced back.

Halfway across the dry lake was the tiny, plodding shape of the mule, going steadily, Snape riding loose, with head nodding. At the farther edge of the lake bed Vincent's horse dropped to a walk. The animal's flanks and chest and withers were black with sweat, then almost instantly the sweat dried to a dusty scum. "He's as strong as an ox," muttered Vincent. "We'll make it, all right."

Vincent thought he could see the shimmer of the distant California hills. Once over there, and he would find water and shade, and men. And once over there, the grinning wraith of Snape would cease to follow him. If Snape would only overtake him and ride ahead again! But Snape, far behind, seemed indifferent to any idea of haste.

Then suddenly, as though an invisible hand had reached out and struck him in the face, Vincent knew himself for a coward. He had crossed the valley before, but always in the company of several men. Now, he was afraid of Snape. Yet why should he fear Snape? Snape was nothing but a bum, a hobo, a wastrel. The sudden realization that he *was* a coward, shook Vincent out of his old bravado and left him sweating cold with apprehension. Then the hot flush of reaction burned his face. His lips felt hard and shriveled and he licked his lips and glanced back. There was Snape, nearer now, but going at the same gait, nodding to the stride of the mule, and no doubt grinning vacuously.

Vincent shook himself as though coming out of a dream. He tried to understand this sudden and appalling change of feeling. He had always made good. And he would make good this time, make good his boast that he would cross the valley in two days. The newspapers would make a story of it. He would have set a record. As for Snape, back there, Vincent wished that the hobo might never make it across. Snape was worthless, a vagrant, a grinning liar. And he packed a Luger.

Vincent glanced over his shoulder as the mountain horse strode heavily in the loose sand. Snape was nearer, barely a quarter of a mile behind, riding loose in the saddle and nodding to the stride of the rangy mule. Vincent felt a sudden hatred for the man and the animal. He wished that they might give out. Then he would ride on and tell the folks on the west side what a fool Snape had been to undertake the journey. And all this while the mountain horse, answering splendidly to the unusual demands upon his strength and courage, was giving out, slowly but inevitably. Vincent's back chilled, and was hot again instantly. If Snape would only hurry, overtake him, and ride ahead! Vincent pulled up, dismounted, and pretended to examine his horse's feet. Slowly Snape drew nearer, sagging forward easily, grinning his interminable grin, nodding like a dead man tied upright in the saddle.

"Lame?" queried Snape.

Vincent shook his head. "Picked up a stone, back there."

"He'll never make it across," said Snape, still grinning.

"He's got to!" cried Vincent.

"Take it easy," advised Snape. "We ain't hit the tough going, yet."

"We'll get to the Springs long before noon," argued Vincent, mounting and reining aside, that Snape might pass him.

"No. We'll hit the Springs about noon. You didn't gain nothing by loping him across the lake."

"That's my business," snarled Vincent.

"Sure Mike! But you're packing too much weight."

"Why didn't you say so, before we started?" queried Vincent.

Snape turned in the saddle. "Wouldn't 'a' done no good. Anyhow, this here is your funeral, old-timer. You're tryin' to bust the record. I'm just going across easy."

"Well, get going! Don't stand there in the sun all day."

"Sure Mike. Say, what'll you take for that horse, right now. Trade him for this mule?"

"You're crazy!"

"Mebby. But I'll trade the mule for him."

"And you say the horse will never make it across," sneered Vincent.

"Not with you riding him. I ain't in no hurry."

"Well, I am. Get going, and shut up."

"Sure Mike!" And Snape spoke to the mule, which plodded on with a long, easy stride that kept the mountain horse nervously out of gait to keep up with him.

Vincent gazed through half-closed eyes at Snape's lean back. One shot—and no chance of a miss—and Vincent could ride the mule and lead the horse. It would be easy to bury Snape out there. He would never be found. They were not near a water hole and moreover, no one was interested enough in Snape to search for him. Vincent had never shot a man, but he knew that he could kill, if keyed up to it by fear or rage. Presently Vincent realized that he hated Snape even to the extent of shooting him down. Yet Vincent sanely argued with himself that he had no real reason to hate Snape, or to kill him. The hobo's back—his ragged shirt, his floppy black hat seemed insolent with indifference; indifference to the hazards of the journey, to Vincent as a human being, to the desert.

Vincent chafed under the peculiar bondage of Snape's presence, yet in a way, Vincent was glad he was not alone. For a while he forgot the burning heat, his seared eyelids, his cracked lips. He lost himself in imaginings, numb to everything save the steady, plodding gait of the mule and the stride of his own horse, less springy now, yet apparently strong. The desert was all about him, pressing in on him and weighing him down. He knew just where he was on the trail yet he feared to glance up and realize the emptiness before him. The shadow of Snape's mule told him that it was near noon. The Springs could not be far, now. Once there, they would unsaddle and rest. They could make it from the Springs to the other side, that night.

For an hour Vincent lived through the dull, sweltering monotony of interminable years. Then Snape's voice: "We're here, old-timer."

Vincent began to resent the "old-timer" that usually followed Snape's remarks to him. Snape himself was an old-timer. Vincent was young, just thirty-four, and somehow, Snape's tone suggested insiduous mockery. From an easy-going and cringing hobo, Snape had changed to an insolent and overbearing person, unquestionably the leader, yet never so through obvious attitude or speech. Circumstances had at last placed Vincent where he belonged, under the authority of a man who was his superior in every essential of outland travel; a man careful of himself and his animal, unhurried, hardened against petty irritations, unwilling to quarrel, yet quietly forceful and oblivious to argument. Vincent accustomed to leadership among the inexperienced, had always bluffed his way through; but the man unsaddling the gaunt mule at the water hole could not be imposed upon by superficial attainments.

In reality, Vincent hated Snape because Snape had found him out. Vincent hoped that Snape would assert himself by some word or act, when the sting of it might drive Vincent to a fighting pitch. Then, of course, Snape would give in, become the old, cringing, oily spoken, town loafer. But Vincent was wrong in his estimate of Snape. Snape might be a joke among the townsfolk, but in the desert he was his own man.

Vincent dismounted and loosed the cinchas. He heaved the heavy saddle off and spread his saddle blanket over it. The mountain horse quivered and shied as Vincent picked up the reins to lead him to the shade of the abandoned shack near the spring. Vincent jerked the reins, and the spade bit cut the horse's mouth. The mountain horse threw up his head and snorted. Snape, unsaddling the mule, peered across at Vincent. From being on edge, Vincent was becoming ugly, mistreating his horse without cause. Snape read these signs for what they were and his gray-green eyes narrowed. Yet he grinned as Vincent led the mountain horse up to the shack. And the horse, used to kindness and the companionship of a considerate rider, immediately that Vincent dropped the reins, turned its head toward Snape, seemed to appeal to him with frightened eyes, and finally stepped timidly

up and rubbed his muzzle against the hobo's shoulder. Snape patted the animal's neck and spoke to him. Vincent cursed. That any horse should turn from him to a man like Snape——

"You 'tend to your own mount," said Vincent, and his voice trembled.

"Sure Mike!"

"Can't you say anything but 'Sure Mike,' when a man speaks to you?" queried Vincent, as he unbridled the horse and tied him to a corner post of the shack with a long neck rope.

Snape grinned, but his eyes were furtive and quick. "When a *man* speaks to me, I can," he stated slowly, and as he spoke he fingered the edge of his open shirt. Just what Vincent wanted to happen had happened. Snape had declared himself, leaving it up to Vincent to go for his gun, or ignore the insult. Yet Vincent had no heart for gun-play just then. He laughed sullenly and turned away. There was a hot light in Snape's grayish-green eyes, and his mouth twitched strangely. Had he wanted to, he could have shot Vincent then and there, as the other turned his back. But Snape, despite his vagrancy, was not a coward.

After the animals had cooled they were led to water and then back to the meager shade of the shack. Snape hobbled the mule, which made no effort to stray, but stood near the shack, blinking and nodding in the heat. Then Snape stretched out on his face, his head pillowed in his arms, and his old black hat on the sand beside him. Vincent again tied the horse to the doorpost. Despite his evident fatigue the horse was restless. Vincent, who had lain down a short way from Snape, rose and struck the horse on the flanks with his hat. "Get in there, if you don't want to stand still outside," he growled. The mountain horse lunged through the doorway, snorted, whirled and broke out again snapping the long rope as it came taut. He ran down to the water hole, stopped and rubbed his nose on his foreleg repeatedly. Snape raised on his elbow and gazed at the horse. "What's the matter with him?" he asked, turning to Vincent.

"He's gone loco," said Vincent, striding after the horse.

Snape got to his feet. "I dunno. He don't act loco. Was he in the shack?"

"Yes," called Vincent over his shoulder.

"Acts like he was bit," said Snape to himself as he stepped cautiously to the doorway of the shack. Vincent caught up the horse. He could see nothing wrong with him. Suddenly Snape's Luger spat twice. Vincent stopped, and his hand went to his holster. Snape stepped back from the doorway, turned and met Vincent. "A rattler got him. Le'me look at him."

Vincent seemed disinclined to believe the hobo. Because of his own guilty conscience, Vincent thought that Snape was setting some kind of a trap to get him. The horse shook its head and constantly rubbed its nose on its foreleg. "Got any permanganate?" queried Snape.

"No. Forgot it."

"Then the horse is done for. You might as well turn him loose."

Vincent dropped the broken end of lead rope and, stepping across to the shack, peered in. In the hot gloom he could distinguish the shape of a big rattler, still moving, but evidently shattered by the two shots. Vincent stepped back. Snape watched him, and Snape fingered the neck of his shirt. Vincent glanced at the horse, then at the mule. Snape's little gray-green eyes blinked rapidly. Vincent squared his shoulders and laughed. "It's you—or me," he said in an even tone. "I'll match you to see who rides and who walks."

"I can save you the trouble. You walk," said Snape.

"I'll give you a hundred for the mule."

Snape grinned. "All right. You can have him for that, when we get across."

Vincent pulled out tobacco and papers and slowly rolled a cigarette. Snape watched him closely. Vincent's actions were altogether too deliberate. He was holding himself in, when ordinarily he would have been nervous. "I'll throw in the saddle and bridle and the carbine," he proffered.

"Too much to pack," said Snape.

Vincent sat down and leaned back against the weathered boards of the shack. "Going to quit me, cold?" he queried.

Snape, still fingering the open neck of his shirt, let his left hip sag and his left shoulder dropped forward as though he were tired and about to sit down. "Sure Mike! You would 'a' quit me, if the mule had got his."

"Well, I guess I can make it through on the grub I have. I can travel at night," stated Vincent, forcing himself to appear unconcerned. Yet it was only too evident to

Snape that the other had something else in mind. Would Vincent break, and beg Snape to stick with him, or would he shoot it out, right there? Snape reasoned that Vincent hadn't the nerve to start shooting. Vincent would try some trickery. Snape glanced sideways at the horse which stood with its head lowered and its flanks drawn in. "Mebby he'd feel better in the shade," suggested Snape, gesturing toward the horse.

"To hell with the horse!"

"Sure Mike!" And Snape deliberately turned his back on Vincent, strode over to the mountain horse, and led him back to the shade. Snape gave Vincent that chance, and Vincent had been afraid to take it.

"If we had some permanganate we might pull him through," said Snape, gazing straight at Vincent.

"You couldn't get him across, even if he doesn't cash in," said Vincent.

"Mebby not. But he's worth trying to save. There's one chance——"

"And I'll take it!" snarled Vincent as he jerked out his gun and fired point-blank at the hobo. Snape flinched, whirled half round, and whipped out the Luger. A rattling staccato of shots, and Vincent plunged forward and sprawled on his face. The horse snorted and shied away, but the rangy mule merely lifted its head and blinked at the two figures, one lying face down with arms outflung; the other leaning forward, poised, ready for the slightest hint of movement from his enemy. Slowly Snape shoved the Luger beneath his armpit and slowly he turned and walked down to the water hole.

The afternoon shadows lengthened. The mule rubbed its neck against the corner of the shack, shuffled round and hobbled to Snape's saddle and nosed the barley sack. The mountain horse had lain down, its nose in the sand. Snape came up from the water hole and kneeling, searched in Vincent's saddle pockets. A red splotch showed on the hobo's shirt, but he seemed to pay no attention to it. Finally he found what he searched for, the little hypodermic and bottle of permaganate. He screwed on a needle, mixed permanganate and water and, rising, stepped to where the mountain horse lay as though resting. Snape broke one needle, trying to puncture the animal's hide. He found another needle in Vincent's hypodermic case. This time he worked carefully. The horse flinched slightly at the prick of the needle.

Snape thought that his effort to save the horse had been wasted. Twice again Snape filled the syringe and injected permanganate into the horse's shoulder. As for his own wound, the torn muscle just above his hip joint had begun to stiffen. He soaked a handkerchief at the water hole and belted it over the wound beneath his shirt. Then he returned to the shack and sat down, staring at the myriad flies that swarmed about the still figure near the doorway. As the shadows shifted, he moved round to the south of the shack and stood gazing at the red buttes of the bad lands. He wanted to lie down and sleep, but he knew his wound would stiffen if he did so.

Ripping a loose board from the cross pieces of the door, he splintered it with a rock and made a fire. He ate nothing, but he drank several cups of hot coffee. Then he led the mule to water and fetched him back and fed him. While the mule munched barley, Snape gathered Vincent's things together, occasionally glancing up at the red buttes that lay far to the south. Then he limped to the mountain horse, and finally, by urging and coaxing got him to his feet. The horse's foreleg was swollen and he hobbled stiffly as Snape led him down to drink. The mountain horse sniffed at the water, and turning its head, rubbed Snape's shoulder. "I sabe," said Snape. "You're feeling sick and I'm crippled up, but we'll make it through, yet. Come on!"

The first hint of night touched the desert, as Snape heaved Vincent's saddle onto the horse. Then he saddled the mule, roped his forelegs and threw him and tied him down. Dragging Vincent's body across the saddle, he lashed it fast and let the mule up. Yes, he had everything, with the exception of Vincent's hat, which he almost missed in the dusk. Snape rolled the hat and tied it securely on Vincent's saddle. The hobo had taken every possible precaution to obliterate all signs of the tragedy. Eventually the desert wind would smooth out the tracks of the horse and the mule. If a search party came through they would find a dead rattler in the shack and the charred embers of a camp fire—nothing else.

Suddenly he paused and turned back. Lighting a match, he searched for the empty shells that the automatic had thrown when he shot Vincent. He found them—nine in all, but even then he was not satisfied until he had made a tally—two near the doorway

where he had shot the rattler, and seven scattered a few feet distant—the magazine capacity of the Luger. Then, realizing that he ran no greater risk in trying to make it through south, off the old trail, than he would run if he struck west for the hills and civilization, he struck straight south, leading the mule with its strange burden.

The mountain horse watched Snape disappear in the gloom. A hundred yards from the shack, Snape stopped. The mountain horse nickered, dropped his head, sniffed the mule's tracks, and then started to follow, hobbling along stiffly. Snape waited until the horse had caught up. Then he started on again. Time after time the hobo halted the mule until the horse had caught up to him. And all the while Snape cursed himself for a fool. He could have turned the horse loose and would have outdistanced him in a mile or so. Yet, after all, there was no need for haste. It would be days, even weeks before word would reach the folk in Gold Center that Vincent had not shown up on the other side.

Meanwhile, the winds would have smoothed out all traces of tracks. A rescue party might ride the old trail, but they would never know just where Snape had turned off. And they would hardly imagine that he would have turned off deliberately toward the bad lands, south. Moreover, the people of Gold Center would feel that Vincent had engineered his own funeral. As for Snape, himself, he was too inconsequential in the scheme of things to excite any interest. He had neither money nor kin.

Snape limped along, wearing down the weary hours, until the going changed from loose sand to the broken lava of the bad lands. He dared go no farther, on account of the crevices, so he tied the horse and mule, rein to stirrup, and lay down.

He awakened as the morning sun struck his face. The ragged desolation of weird butte and black, sinister crevice lay round about, a trackless land, sullenly triumphant in its silent isolation. And here, that which had been Vincent would disappear so completely, that even Snape himself, unless he marked the exact spot, would never be able to tell where the body was entombed. And Snape knew no horror as he glanced at the sagging figure across the mule's back. Rather, he felt a quiet hatred for the dead man, for every ounce of him that burdened the patient mule.

Snape untied the horse, and led the mule down a hot, red-walled corridor of rock until he came to the first wide crevice. He unlashed the rope, picked up the reins, and stepped the mule sharply to one side.

Limping back to the horse he led him to the crevice, took what grain was left, and then shoved saddle and bridle over the edge. As he straightened up something tinkled on the tufa. He stooped and picked up one of the empty shells that had fallen from his pocket. He tossed it into the crevice and emptied the rest of the shells into his hand, counted them, and tossed them after it. "The whole story," he muttered—"except you," and he turned toward the horse.

With the disappearance of all trace of the man who had tried to kill him, Snape experienced a strange feeling of peace. Even if he did not get through, even if he left his bones among the scattered rocks of the eternal desolation about him, he knew, and felt that he would forever know, that he was no murderer—that he had killed in self-defense. And the sky and the limitless desert and the stars and sun would know. Back in town, where men crawled about the streets, suspecting each other, cheating each other, lying to each other, some one might hint that he had made away with Vincent. But the little men that crawled about the streets would forget and perish. The desert was eternal, and the desert knew his story.

Bearded, gaunt, and weak, Snape rode into the lower end of the Cañon de Oro, made for a clump of alders, and there he lay by the spring, fighting his desire to drink and drink until he could drink no more. The mule, after having drunk, moved off slowly, cropping at the lush grass along the wet rocks. Two days ago Snape had given up all hope of reaching the hills, but the mule had kept on, stumbling along, instinctively heading for water, plodding across spaces that seemed to reach ahead and creep away toward the south, endlessly. Somewhere back there on the desert was the mountain horse. Snape had not missed him at first, but toward the end of the second day he had dimly realized that the horse was not following.

Drinking a little at a time, Snape slowly recovered his strength, and with his strength came clearness of mind, and he remembered. Yet it seemed like a dream—the water hole on the old trail, and Vincent and the shooting, visualized hazily at first, then clearer

and clearer. Then the bad lands and the crevice, and then a blurred recollection of an endless journey across a blinding nothingness.

"You sick?" said a voice.

Snape raised on his elbow. A short, heavy-set Mexican was standing a few yards away, and the Mexican smiled genially.

"I got out of water—over there," said Snape.

The Mexican nodded. "Me, I'm Benito. I'm look for them burro. You see him?"

"No. I just got in about an hour ago."

"It is good that you get in. Those mule she pretty weak, yes?"

"Got lost—out there," said Snape, gesturing toward the desert below.

"Other mans she get lost, eh?" queried the Mexican.

Snape's gray-green eyes narrowed. "What other man?"

"I think mebby two, three mans look for the gold and get lost."

Snape relaxed and grinned. "Nope. I'm alone, all right."

"You come from Spanish Sinks?" queried the Mexican.

"Yes—and they're dry."

The Mexican shook his head. "I know them place. It ees bad."

"You live alone?" asked Snape presently.

"Si, me and them burro, when they don' go lost."

"Well, I guess I can ride. How far is it?"

"My casa she over there, in those cañon. We go slow."

"How about your burros? Thought you were hunting them."

"Si. But I feex it, all right. You sick mans, and them burro she ees fat."

Snape got to his feet, and Benito caught up the mule. With the reaction of comparative safety came a let-down that left Snape weak and trembling. Benito helped him to mount, and slowly led the way up the Oro Cañon Trail and over the ridge. Down into the next cañon they worked their way, Snape holding to the horn of the saddle, and Benito solicitously watching, for fear that the other would give out before they reached the cabin.

Snape slept through that day and the next night. He awoke to gaze through the doorway of a mountain cabin which he could not recall having entered. Across the clearing he saw the fence of a corral, and near the fence stood a stocky Mexican, evidently talking to a horse, a bronze-colored horse with a peculiar white spot on his flank. Snape sat up and stared. Then he reached for his overalls. Staggering to the doorway he stood bracing himself with a hand on either post. Across the corral he saw his mule, grazing contentedly in an adjacent pasture. But that horse. Snape rubbed his eyes. Just then Benito turned and waved a greeting. "This caballo she come in las' night. I hear heem and I go out. I say to him he go lost and he make to tell me that I say right."

"That's funny," said Snape. "Wonder where he came from?"

"He come from those desert. He feel pretty bad, I think. But I feex heem. Some mans she lose a good caballo."

Snape stepped down and limped to the corral fence. The mountain horse, horribly gaunt, but with his fine eyes undimmed, muzzled Snape's arm. Benito turned and questioned Snape with his eyes. Snape hesitated—then nodded. He knew that the Mexican had seen the wound in his side—in fact, it was fresh bandaged when Snape had awakened. And, moreover, Snape knew intuitively that the Mexican was old in the game of desert travel—and knew that strange things, difficult to explain, often happened. Like a man staking his last coin on the turn of the wheel, Snape flung out his hand. "The other man—he's over there, in the bad lands." That was all he said.

"I go there one time—and one hombre he go, and he don' come back," said Benito slowly. "I know them place."

Snape turned and started to go toward the cabin. Benito followed him and put his hand on his shoulder. "For long time those horse he don' make the friend with me. When he see you he talk with his nose and say 'Hello! I'm glad I find my friend.' Some time them burro talk like that. The horse and the burro she know who is good mans."

"Good, hell!" said Snape. "I——"

"And those desert, she know. She don' forget. But Benito, he forget what you say. Now we eat those frijoles and those coffee, yes?"

Another Knibbs story will appear soon.

An Alibi for Altogether Al

By Clarence L. Cullen

Author of "A Tale of the Early Village," "The Vamping of An Avatar," Etc.

When is a scandal not a scandal? Alfred Z. Budlong, candidate for Congress, learns the answer, but not until considerable strain has been put on his feelings. It's a good bet that you are open to the same strain yourself

THIS being a decidedly delicate subject or an extremely indelicate one, according to the point of view, the need for the exercise of a proper restraint in publicly reviewing it is duly recognized. But, if the case is to be considered impartially, there is no possible way of avoiding, even for so worthy a purpose as the conservation of public morals, a downright presentation, at the very outset, of the essential fact in the affair. This, then, is the main fact:

Immediately following the announcement of the candidacy for Congress of Alfred Z. Budlong, a rumor was rapidly circulated, and widely accepted to the effect that some unmentioned person, living within the boundaries of the district which Alfred Z. Budlong aspired to represent in Congress, was known to possess a highly improper, not to say a shocking, photograph of the aspirant; a photograph showing that Alfred Z. Budlong, apparently in a state of entire sobriety and clothed in his right mind, shamelessly had posed for a camera when clothed in nothing else; denuded, that is to say, of every single, solitary stitch of drapery; in a condition, in short, of complete and unqualified unappareledness.

This rumor, swift as contagion and pervasive as an irruption of caterpillars, completely overspread Bloomoria, Mr. Budlong's home town of fifty thousand inhabitants, within less than twenty-four hours after the friends of the wholesale lumber merchant, somewhat against his desire, had pitched his hat into the ring as a candidate in the primaries for Congress.

But, as usual in such cases, the rumor achieved a glancing or ricocheting penetration to the consciousness of the individual whom chiefly it concerned and besmudged. Mr. Budlong, in fact, found himself moving in a medium of mystery—mystery swaddled in an encircling sibilance of snickers—three minutes after leaving his home for his office on the morning following the proclamation of his candidacy.

He drove his rattly old roadster, which he vastly preferred to the car with the hyphenated name which his wife and daughters used, into the rear of his regular or daily repair garage—for the antique roadster developed some new ailment every day—to have a loose radius-rod rebolted. He viewed the slightly sidelong, greasy grins with which the garage mechanics regarded him as the natural method of expression of a certain shyness which no doubt they now felt in the presence of a prominent Bloomorian upon whom the signal honor of candidacy for Congress had just been conferred.

But the quizzical sparkle in the eye of the garage proprietor, who presently strolled into the rear shop from his office, plainly did not proceed from any feeling of shyness; Mr. Budlong knew that it would be asking a good deal to expect a man, who as a boy had played shinny and hookey with him and punched him in the nose and got punched back, to look embarrassed or self-conscious in his presence even now that so exalted a distinction had been bestowed upon him.

" 'Lo, Al!" greeted the garage proprietor, the peculiar sparkle queerly illuminating his sardonic grin. "Aiming for Congress, I see."

"Mornin', Jim—yep, they're going to stick me up for you fellers to take a shot at," replied the candidate in the tone he employed with people he had known always. "Better hop in and help haul me through the primaries, if you want your income tax shaved. Because I'm telling you there's going to be something stirring in Washington, if you folks send A. Z. B. down there!"

"I s'pose they'll be spreading your picture —your all-dressed-up picture—from one end of the district to the other now—eh, Al?" observed the garage man, with a certain saturnine detachment, strongly stressing the "all-dressed-up" phrase.

Mr. Budlong, watching the rebolting of the loose radius-rod, said he supposed so, pictures of candidates being one of the inflictions their friends had to endure. The garage man, seeing that his barb had gone wide, tried another.

"I don't recollect ever seeing any picture of you, Al—barring them comical caricatures the papers printed of you and the rest of the reception committee last Old Home Week," he probed, gazing pointedly at the candidate through narrowed eyes in which the quizzical sparkle still shone. "Come to think of it, there's never been any photograph of you in our album at home. Ain't had many photographs taken, have you, Al? Of course I don't mean private photographs, as you might call 'em, but pictures taken in a regular photograph gallery with your Sunday duds on and all like that."

Mr. Budlong looked slightly annoyed. His annoyance proceeded from a sensitiveness which, from his adolescence onward, he had always felt on the subject of photographs. "As homely as Al Budlong," he knew, had been a comparison in common usage in his home town since his earliest manhood. The garage man, taking his registering of annoyance as a palpable admission of guilt, grinned more grimly than ever.

When Mr. Budlong, after driving away from the garage, pulled up at the drug-store curb—his breakfast beginning to remind him that he was out of the dyspepsia tablets—he waved his hand, in accordance with a custom formed in his childhood, at an old lady with a market basket whom he had known all his life and who had been his consistent and irrepressible booster. Far from waving back at him, as per her pleasant habit, the old lady, bringing her portly waddle to a sudden jarring halt and standing rigid, glared at him with a ferocity that fairly glittered through the lenses of her gold-rimmed spectacles, then waddled on at an accelerated pace as if to make it impossible for him to overtake her should he feel disposed to demand an explanation. Mr. Budlong, frozen for a full minute to complete immobility, stared after her. Then, his need for coffee-conquering dyspepsia tablets becoming too exigent for further delay, he entered the drug store.

The druggist, a pallid little bald man, with a fixed catlike smile, greeted him with at least the ghost of a certain condescension, in which, too, could be traced a kind of drab, diluted amusement.

"Give me a two-hundred-size box of those make-food-behave tablets, Jeff," he said with a new and slightly artificial breeziness, as of a candidate for Congress. "I celebrated a little rashly this morning—drank three cups of coffee instead of my usual one and a half."

"Celebrated what?" icily inquired the druggist.

"Oh, a little stroke of luck that came my way yesterday," replied Mr. Budlong. The breeziness had gone out of his tone. The contacts of the morning were beginning to have a certain corrosive effect upon this candidate.

"Luck, hey?" chillingly commented the druggist. "Well, you have been pretty lucky —so far. You've been the very image—I might say the taken-from-life photograph—of luck; the stark-stripped snapshot of luck, when it comes to that. But it's just as well to remember that luck like you've had ain't going to last always, in certain contingencies, Mister Budlong."

"Mister Budlong!" The candidate, bound anew upon the wheel of wonder by this second distinctly pointed allusion of the morning to photographs, was forced to repress a gasp at the "Mister Budlong."

"Say, look a here, Jeff," he started to storm, in the tone of an outraged friend, "supposing you thaw out a little and tell me what the dev—the dickens," he amended, seeing a woman customer entering the store, "you mean by this silly all-of-a-sudden mistering busi——"

"What can I do for you this morning, miss?" the druggist, stepping with unwonted elaborate politeness from behind the counter, inquired of the woman customer.

Mr. Budlong, thus reduced to fatuity, could only pick up his packet of dyspepsia tablets and walk out. But he walked in a simoom of uncomfortable speculation. Photographs! What in blazes did everybody mean this morning by chattering to him about photographs? And that "Mister Budlong" rap—for, of course, it had been meant for a rap: what was the sinister hidden meaning back of that? He determined hotly to

return to the drug store, later in the forenoon, to demand of Jeff Pringle just what the dev——

"'Siss for shame! Siss for shame! Everybody knows your name!'"

This harmless chant of childhood, which in other circumstances might have amused the candidate with its well-remembered implication of uninjurious infantile accusation, had an entirely different effect as boomed at him at this instant in a deep bass voice from a car standing in front of his roadster.

The chanter, a paunchy man with a practically circular countenance and thickly larded jowls, was a Bloomorian who, in a way of speaking, could afford to chant or not to chant, just as the caprice might seize him, and who could equally well afford to enact the part of the community clip, with a hippopotamuslike sense of humor, whenever he felt like it, as too frequently he did; being none other than the president of Mr. Budlong's bank—which, to make it the more binding, was the Federal Reserve Bank of the district—and Bloomoria's wealthiest inhabitant; being also the chief stockholder of Bloomoria's leading afternoon newspaper, with the policy of which he was known often to interfere with inevitably bungling results.

Mr. Budlong, taut as a stanchion under the sudden impact of the surprising street greeting, stared blankly at the banker.

"Well, A. Z.," inquired Mr. Powellton with cheery malevolence, "how's the little old focus and everything this fine morning? You look fit to fight for your life. Every move a picture. Talking about pictures now——"

Mr. Budlong, frozen solid from his feet to his neck, but practically in flames from his collar band to his top hair, remained stock-still in the center of the sidewalk, waiting. Locomotion and speech were for the moment denied him.

"Talking about photographs," rumblingly repeated the wealthy hippo humorist, resting his forearms comfortably against the wheel of his car, "just what seemed to be your little old idea, A. Z.? In the altogether, I mean. That Trilby impersonation of yours. Or maybe it was meant to be Ajax, dudless, defying the lightning. Did some prowling snapshootist catch you unawares, or did you just nachully decide to give posterity the pleasure and benefit, through photography, of acquainting itself with your anatomical contour."

"Wait a minute," Mr. Budlong said hoarsely, stepping alongside the banker's car. He took a good working two-hand grip on the car door and stuck his flaming face under the top until it was only about four inches distant from Mr. Powellton's. "Now," he demanded, "lop the trimmings off this rigmarole of yours and tell me what you're gabbling about!"

An abashed bank president in the act of being earnestly, if not fiercely, addressed by his abasher is so uncommon a spectacle that little knots of passing Bloomorians paused on the sidewalk to absorb it.

"Why, you don't mean to say, A. Z.," he broke out in a hearty tone of incredulity, with the sidewalk rubberers intently listening in, "that I am the first to tell you about this—er—undraped photograph of yourself that everybody in Bloomoria is saying you had tak——"

Mr. Budlong's arm—the arm attached to the fist that was flying straight for a bank president's nose—was caught and yanked back by somebody in the candidate's rear.

"Come along, Al—got to have a talk with you right away about a little matter," this capable yanker, a raw-boned, middle-aged man with shrewd eyes and a look of substance, said calmly in the candidate's nigh ear, hanging on to the arrested arm. The banker-humorist, exhibiting marked talent in selecting the correct moment for a get-away, shot his car down the street.

"Did you hear what that dam' chucklehead said to me, Bill?" Mr. Budlong, figuratively foaming, demanded of his friend and political sponsor, William S. Hazelbush, national committeeman, who, by his timely grab of the catapulting arm, had spared the chucklehead at least one healthy wallop.

"Ye-eh, I heard it—and I haven't heard much of anything else since I got on the street this morning," unexcitedly replied Bill.

It was in his own office, and from Bill Hazelbush, already self-designated as the Budlong political manager, that the candidate presently got the facts about the rumor that had been glancing and ricocheting all around him from the beginning of his morning.

Mr. Budlong listened agitatedly, but with locked jaws. When he had heard the tale out he took a couple of heavy-footed back-and-forth turns on his office rug.

"They can have their smudgy old Con-

gress seat, Bill," he said to Mr. Hazelbush, his intimate from tikehood. "I'm not going to stand for this kind of smearing."

Bill, smiling the inscrutable smile of a national committeeman sagely familiar with all these symptoms of a first-time candidate, twiddled his thumbs and said nothing.

"Got a wife and daughters to think about, Bill," mumbled the tender-skinned tyro. "Can't fool with a game that messes a man up this way—mustn't do it, if only for the sake of my womenfolks."

Under the rush of another torrent of hideous realization, Mr. Budlong's undeniably homely countenance again turned a fiery red for about the fourteenth time since Bill had revealed to him the nature of the rumor.

"Whew—gosh!" feverishly raved Mr. Budlong. "This is going some for an alleged respectable citizen and taxpayer! Bill," he demanded of his sponsor, "did you ever have one of these here fool dreams of being present at a ball or party or something, or walking on a crowded street, without a rag of clothes to your back?"

Bill nodded.

"Well, that's me right now—wide awake!" muttered Mr. Budlong. "Great little mess for a man to find himself in. Man of forty-two. That's supposed to be decent. His neighbors saying there's a photograph of him somewhere without any duds on. Tittering over it! Whew-gosh! Hey, Bill," pausing in front of his friend and political sponsor, "get my name scratched off the whole blasted program."

"Fine," Bill broke his prolonged silence. "You've got the right idea about the whole thing, Al. I wish I'd known long ago that you had all this political talent."

"Never mind the kidding, Bill—I mean what I'm saying," put in the candidate.

"Right idea all around," Bill went on calmly. "First off you go up in the air over the opening campaign yarn and start to soak on the nose the leading banker in town—your own banker—who in addition to that publishes a viperish evening newspaper fast-bound to the interests of the opposite party. Next, with the campaign nearly one whole day old, you demand that your name be withdrawn altogether. I'll have to hand this to you, if nothing else: you sure are some fast little political worker, Al."

Mr. Budlong, under the gun, plumped into a swivel chair and sat silent.

"The beauty about that quitting-'em-cold idea of yours," Bill continued, "is that it would let the springers of this yarn get away with it. Because all hands—not only the agin'-you gang that want the nomination for themselves or their pals, but your friends as well—would say, and be justified in saying, that you'd quit because you couldn't or wouldn't take a chance on that supposititious, there-ain't-no-sich photograph being dangled before the electorate. The other candidates all know you've got 'em licked if you stay in. That's why the hot little sooners have started something that they hope will make you crawfish out."

The candidate, visibly impressed, was going to say something, but Bill wasn't through..

"So," Bill finished, "they've got you sewed in, coming and going. They've handed you a case of Hobson's choice. If you stick, of course they'll keep on trying to muddy you up by threatening to pull this fig-leaf photograph on you. If you draw out they'll yell gloatily that you laid down like a lascar because you feared they'd produce this birthday-suit picture. In which wedged-in contingency, of course, it's up to you and nobody else. But there've been times when you've shown yourself to be a fair-to-middling decider when there was deciding to be done."

Mr. Budlong, rising grandly from his swivel chair, with the crusader's gleam in his eye, whacked his desk.

"I'm going to stick, Bill," he hoarsely declared himself. "A. Z. Stick Budlong—that's going to be my candidation name from hell to breakfast!"

"Atta ol' son!" murmured Bill, just as the phone bell on Mr. Budlong's desk tinkled; and Bill, seated on the opposite side of the desk when the candidate answered the call, could hear a woman's voice agitating the transmitter with emphatic language. The crusader's gleam was a mere vanishing afterglow in Mr. Budlong's eye when he hung up the receiver.

"The wife's heard that infernal yarn," he said subduedly to Bill. "You know womenfolks—all worked up about it. Wants me to come home. Expect I'd better humor her."

"Sure you'd better," concurred Bill. "I'll fetch some of our bunch up to your house after lunch and then we'll ferret into this thing systematically."

By the time the candidate reached home his wife's agitation had subsided, or as-

cended, into a sort of abnegatory austerity. When a lady with at least two well-formed chins and a frame carrying a full two hundred pounds undertakes to be self-immolatingly austere she has her work cut out for her. But Mrs. Budlong, a disdainer of handicaps, was all set for the job when the candidate got home.

"My poor Alfred—this is shocking indeed!" was her cheero greeting when he found her in the library. She said it in a deep contralto voice, Mrs. Budlong possessing an impressively resonant lower register which she employed on occasions calling for nobility of tone. Mr. Budlong derived at once that his spouse was addressing him from a great altitude.

"Shocking my eye!" he broke out. "What's shocking about it? It's just a dam' ding-whanged campaign lie, and——"

"Don't be profane, Alfred—don't be common, I beg of you," she interrupted him, raising a deprecatory hand. "Not at such a time as this, of all times."

Mrs. Budlong's husband shot out of his chair, and began, in short laps, a swift marathon of the library.

"Listen here, Myrtle!" spluttered Mr. Budlong. Of late years, or since his wife's steady increase in corpulence, his regard for congruity deterred him from calling her Myrtle except on argumentative occasions, his regular appellation for her being "Maw." "Are you deliberately sitting there and telling me that you actually believe there's a photograph like that in exist——"

"Nothing is to be gained now by going into that, Alfred," she interrupted him, again raising the staying hand. "You would not, I hope, expect your wife and the mother of your children to discuss a matter like that. Calm yourself, I beg of you. These visitations are meant to be a test of fortitude. And always, as you know, the way of amendment lies open. Pray sit down, my poor husband, and contain yourself."

Mr. Budlong sat down, but not in the library. He bounded, at a lope, for his own room, where he remained, not particularly contained, until the luncheon bell sounded. The meal, which Mrs. Budlong herself served —it being the bolshevik housemaid's full day off and the two Budlong daughters being away on a visit with relatives in another city—was a gloomy gastronomic rite. Mrs. Budlong, meticulously avoiding the tragic subject, attempted, still employing the noble contralto, to make table talk, to which Mr. Budlong replied in sepulchral monosyllables.

Her attitude, plainly, was that a heavy disgrace having fallen upon the home, it was her wifely and womanly duty to make the best of it. Having taken A. Z. Budlong for better or for worse, she would abide by any awful consequences which might—and presumably would!—follow her husband's exposure. She was going to be game, and also she was going to be sad and sweet. When a lady who has unsuccessfully taken a great many obesity cures, practically in the presence of a husband of twenty years' standing, essays the sad-and-sweet role in a domestic jam she is bound to encounter a certain amount of difficulty in convincing him of her eligibility to enact the part.

Absorbed in the details of her enactment, Mrs. Budlong overlooked mentioning, until her husband was pushing his chair back, an occurrence of her forenoon that concerned him. "You have an aunt Abigail, it appears," said she, very 'cello.

"Appears? Why appears?" he choppily inquired. "I'm not stuck-up about her, but I haven't tried to hide the guilty knowledge that she exists."

"Only vaguely, seeing that you haven't mentioned her more than twice, I should say, in the twenty years we've been married," loftily countered Mrs. Budlong. "At all events, she called up this morning."

"Called up?" hollowly echoed Mr. Budlong, plainly showing that he couldn't have been more surprised had his wife informed him that the late Empress Messalina had been a morning visitor at his home. "Called up—what about?"

"Nothing in particular, but a little of everything," said Mrs. Budlong, registering praiseworthy patience. "When the operator informed me there was a long-distance call from—er—Gubbinses Corners—I think that was the name of the place——"

"That's pretty close to it—Gilmans' Crossroads—well?" he set her right

"From Gilmans' Crossroads, then. When the operator told me there was a long-distance call from Gilmans' Crossroads I had no idea, of course, what the call could be about——"

"Until the caller told you. Having the idea now, supposing you tell me."

"You might at least refrain from trying to snap my head off," said Mrs. Budlong, now sad and sweet almost to the point of

saturation, yet plainly giving her disgraced husband to understand that his present position was none too sound for him to assume the rôle of a snapper. "The caller, after sharply inquiring the name of the woman—she said 'woman'—with whom she was speaking, and being told, announced herself as your aunt Abigail; a very deaf and very disagreeable old person, I should judge."

"Announced herself as my aunt Abigail, whereupon she instantly clapped her receiver upon the hook—that it?" inquired the abused candidate for Congress.

"Oh, not precisely that," said Mrs. Budlong with a certain indulgent airiness, as if she were addressing the intelligence of a very small child. "Since you are so pressing about it, she was good enough to tell me, for one thing, that if my husband was half as mean a scoundrel—I employ her language, pray remember—as my husband's late father, meaning her late brother, I must enjoy a grand life."

"Am I to take it that that is all she said?" snorted Mr. Budlong.

"Oh, no—she certainly was suffering from no deficiency of words," replied Mrs. Budlong. "I should dislike to have to tell you all she said. Nor would you yourself, I suppose, care to hear what she said—as to your candidacy for Congress."

"Wouldn't I?" chopped the candidate. "Her remarks on that subject ought to be darned entertaining."

"Very well, since you insist upon it," resignedly replied Mrs. Budlong. "She had nothing personal against you, she admitted, except that she had heard that you closely resembled your father in appearance; and she said that Congress—which she called a snug harbor for crooks and rapscallions—would be exactly the right place for the son of your father. But she gave it as her opinion that any one of her seven fox-terrier pups had a far better chance to be elected to Congress than you have, and——"

"That's about enough, thanks, if the rest of it's like that," growled Mr. Budlong.

"The message she gave me for you," wearily concluded Mrs. Budlong, "was that, in cleaning out the attic of her home a few days ago, she had come upon an article that would be better in your keeping than in hers, especially as she didn't in the least care for it, and that she would surrender this article to anybody you might send for it; though she didn't want you yourself to come for it, considering how much you resembled, as she'd heard, your scoundrelly father."

"Lovable old party, I'd call her," muttered Mr. Budlong. "I can imagine how enormously you must have enjoyed my aunt Abigail."

"Sarcasm scarcely becomes you, my dear—as matters stand," frostily remarked Mrs. Budlong, vanishing kitchenward with the luncheon dishes.

The candidate himself answered the doorbell, which rang a moment later. National Committeeman William S. Hazelbush, with half a dozen members of "our bunch," had arrived for the close-hauled caucus of personal and political friends of the candidate which, under the seasoned guidance of Bill, was to undertake the nailing of anti-Budlong campaign lie number one. Mr. Budlong knew where Bill stood with regard to the rumor. But as he ushered them all to the library, he perceived, or fancied he perceived, that all of them, Bill alone excepted, were careful to avoid his eye. He noticed also, or imagined he noticed, when, with somewhat lumbering jocularity, he adverted to the occasion for the conference, that all of them, barring Bill, leered hangdoggily and exchanged surreptitious glances. So Mr. Budlong had no trouble in discerning how matters stood.

"Secretly tittering over it!" he raged to himself as he politely pulled seats forward for them in the library.

"Didn't take our friend Powellton long to sink one under your short ribs, Al," said Bill with a cheero grin when all hands were seated. "Take a look at this—some crafty headline, what?" and he spread out and passed to Mr. Budlong the first afternoon edition of the evening newspaper of which the tactfully chanting banker was the chief stockholder.

Mr. Budlong, who by now was becoming used to suddenly pounding pulses and swift cascades of blood to the head, had a return of these symptoms of a first-time candidacy for public office as he read, where it was spread over two columns on the paper's first page, this headline:

AN ANNOUNCEMENT BY ALTOGETHER AL.

The text beneath this headline was perfectly unobjectionable:

Mr. Alfred Z. Budlong, the well-known whole-

sale lumber merchant, in announcing yesterday his candidacy in the primaries for congress for this district— et cetera, et cetera.

Not a line, from beginning to end, that Mr. Budlong himself could take exception to, much less base an action for libel on. The "Altogether Al" headline, clapped over the innocuous text by a deftly devilish hand, was not in itself actionable, unless its victim chose to make it so by going into open court and explaining its dark and sinister meaning. The Bloomoria reader was allowed to judge for himself, from data in hand, just what "Altogether Al" meant—which of course the Bloomoria reader collectively and uproariously did.

"Hot stuff, eh?" jovially remarked Bill to the candidate. "But there's no need to turn so many different colors over it, old scout—it's just routine mud-pitching and all a part of the little old political pastime as we play it in this country. Now let's get down to business; I've got hold of a small clew that may lead somewhere. Let's see—what's the name of the dinky place?" He got a slip of paper from his sack-coat pocket and referred to it. "Oh, yes—Gilmans' Crossroads. Gilmans' Crossroads is that dairy hamlet about sixty-five miles to the west'ard of us, isn't it? D'ye happen to know anything about Gilmans' Crossroads, Al—or know anybody over there?"

"I don't know any more about it than that I was born there, as my father was before me," was Mr. Budlong's surprised and surprising reply. 'And I've got an aunt over there—my aunt Abigail, oldest sister of my father, a poison-tongued old dame that I've never seen so far as I know; that I don't want to see, either, permit me to add."

"The deuce you say!" broke out Bill, his eyes alight. "This begins to look like a clew what is! You were born in Gilmans' Crossroads. Your father likewise. And you've got an aunt Abigail over there that you've never seen. We'll have to run this down. Because I've found out—or the runners for my bureau of investigation have found out for me—that this story about that chaste photograph was brought into Bloomoria before daylight yesterday morning by the crew of the milk train that leaves Gilmans' Crossroads at midnight. The conductor of the milk train is a fellow by the name of Condon."

"Condon," put in Mr. Budlong, "is the married name of my aunt Abigail of Gilmans' Crossroads. I don't know any of her sons, my first cousins, but she's got a whole bunch of 'em, and this milk-train conductor probably is one of the lot."

"Getting warm!" delightedly exclaimed Bill. "What was all this row with aunt Abigail about—for there must have been some kind of a rough-house or you wouldn't be saying you'd never seen her that you know of, and don't want to see her. Strictly a family riot, I suppose?"

"Family riot between my father, the only son, and Abigail, the only daughter, over the division of my grandfather's farm propery, when the old man died," explained the candidate. "I don't know the details. All I know is that my dad left the farm about a year after I was born there, coming to Bloomoria, and that he never had anything more to do with aunt Abigail to the day of his death. For her part the old girl has always ignored me and my family on account of her hatred for my father. Never any sort of communication between us in all these years—here, wait a minute! I'm forgetting to mention that she called up this house this morning, after I'd gone downtown, and regaled my wife with some fragrant items of the Budlong family history."

"Warmer still, son!" broke out Bill. "Why, particularly, did she call up this house this morning?"

"Oh, by way of an excuse to work off the family history on my wife. She said she'd found something or another in her attic that I ought to be the custodian of instead of her, and she said she'd give this article—some old piece of junk, I presume—to anybody I'd send for it, enjoining, though, that I myself shouldn't come for it, seeing that she would be unable to undergo the ordeal of looking at me on account of my resemblance to my father."

"Conference is adjourned, boys," said Bill succinctly. "It's getting on a bit in the afternoon, and I've got a sixty-five-mile drive ahead of me."

"Sixty-five-mile drive?" inquired the candidate, looking puzzled.

"Going to tool the old bus over to Gilman's Crossroads, Al," explained Bill, the smile gradually reaching for his ears. "I'll get that article from aunt Abigail that she thinks you ought to be the custodian of, whatever it is, and bring it back. So long. Come on, gang," and Bill and the rest of the

caucus members filed out of the Budlong residence.

Mr. Budlong, remembering that he had a flourishing wholesale lumber business that might be the better for a few minutes' personal attention, drove to his office. But the contacts of the afternoon, as of the morning, gave him little or no chance to concentrate on lumber. He saw—or thought he saw, which amounted to the same thing—a lurking grin on the face of each and every one of his business callers. One of them, an old friend and a heavy customer, in giving directions as to the delivery of some lumber he had purchased, said: "Don't send me that stuff in little scrappy lots, will you? Send it altogether, Al."

Feeling strangely friendless, and wrought upon by the self-reproach that, under the impact of calamity, he had been unnecessarily crabbed with his little wife—no conceivable increase in corpulence could ever make Myrtle anything but his little wife to Mr. Budlong—he went home early. Myrtle, who had been watching for him from a second-floor window, met him at the door. She had discarded the sad-and-sweet rôle and was now merely her very agreeable and very human self. She had spent a part of the afternoon in washing her hair—Mrs. Budlong invariably solemnized this washing-her-hair rite by way of smoothing things out when in trouble—and she looked adiposely pretty and mighty good in general, to her husband, with the drying hair hanging over the towel spread around her shoulders. In the vestibule she caught him into her capable arms and clipped him to her comfortable breast.

"You know I don't believe a word of it, ol' thing!" she said with her cheek against his. "Let the scandalmongers rave! We've got each other and the girls, haven't we, Al?"

The candidate, plumping into a hall chair, felt more like blubbering than at any time since his boyhood. He might have given way, at that, had not the bell of the library phone saved him by sounding in the nick of time. He answered the call.

"This is Hazelbush, talking from Gilmans' Crossroads," came Bill's voice.

"'Lo Bill," said the candidate. "Find anything there?"

"I've found aplenty," said Bill. Then, in quite a solemn and accusatory voice for him: "Al, I'm surprised at you. I sure am."

More pulse racing and another Niagara in the head for Mr. Budlong.

"Surprised at what?" he gulped.

"That photograph," said Bill. "Al, it's the nakedest darned photograph I ever saw in my life. It sure does get me how you ever allowed a thing like that to be taken"

Mr. Budlong, practically certain now that this telephone conversation was nothing but fluff stuff belonging to the prolonged nightmare he was undergoing and probably soon would awake from, nevertheless forced himself to inquire:

"Where did you get the photograph?"

"Got it from 'Bull' Condon, your first cousin; your aunt Abbie's son and the conductor of the Gilmans' Crossroads milk train," replied Bill. "Bull's been carrying the photograph around with him, showing it to choice spirits of his acquaintance, for a couple of days. He surrendered it to me under protest; I had to get aunt Abbie's written order before he'd fork it over. The photograph, you know, is that article your aunt thought you ought to be the custodian of instead of her—and I'll say she was right about that!"

"All right, Bill," sepulchrally said Mr. Budlong. "I'm taking your word for all this because I, myself, am a hopeless case of lost identity. Not to put too fine a point on it, Bill, I no longer know who the hell I am!"

"How late you going to stay up to-night?" inquired Bill.

"All night, if there's anything to be gained by my doing that," replied the candidate.

"Well, I'll be dropping in on you for a minute or so 'long 'bout ten o'clock," said Bill. "I'm leaving Gilmans' Crossroads right now, and it'll take me three hours or so to drive home."

"I'll be waiting for you," said Mr. Budlong. "Better fetch a strait-jacket along with you. I may be violent by that time."

However, he did not grow violent. On the contrary, a fine fatalistic calm fell upon him. No matter what happened, he knew he never could have a more horrible day than the one now at an end. Let the howling old storm beat outside! He was at home, eating a good dinner, with a cheerful and good-looking wife on the other side of the table. Moreover, he had a pretty hefty bank roll, and they'd have their work cut out for them, if they tried to pry him loose from that! Let 'er storm!

All the same, he answered the bell with alacrity when it rang a few minutes before ten o'clock. Bill, wearing the expression of a man who had steeled himself to perform a disagreeable duty, walked without ushering to the library, where Mrs. Budlong sat at her embroidery, Mr. Budlong trudging after him.

"Well, Al," said Bill, reaching for the breast pocket of his coat, "murder will out, won't it? Can't keep things like this under cover," and he pulled the cabinet-sized photograph partly out of his breast pocket. The candidate tried to catch Bill's eye, but Bill wouldn't permit it to be caught. So Mr. Budlong, for the protection of his wife, was compelled to speak out.

"Better come into my den to show me that thing, Bill," he said. "The wife——"

"No, Al, I can't consent to that," Bill amazed Mr. Budlong by saying, looking suddenly stubborn and righteous. "A man's wife, as I see the matter, is entitled to know the worst as well as the best about him. And a woman with well-grown children is no longer a child herself and can face the facts of life without flinching. So, ol' hawss, I really feel it incumbent upon me, if you'll pardon the liberty, to show this photograph to Mrs. Budlong."

Whereupon, stooping suddenly before Mrs. Budlong, who was sitting in a deep chair alongside the bright reading lamp, he dropped the cabinet-sized photograph into her lap.

Mrs. Budlong, who had stiffened slightly when she saw what Bill was going to do, glanced downward, her eyes drawn by the sheer force of a curiosity which she found it impossible to resist, at the upfaced photograph. Like the sudden appearance of a beacon on a headland the mother's light flashed in her eyes and the smile of motherhood played over her face.

"Why, the *duck!*" she broke out. "Ain't it *sweet!*"

Whereupon she clapped the photograph to her lips and kissed it.

Back in the late seventies of the nineteenth century, soon after the old collodion wet plate of photography gave way to the dry plate, and "instantaneous picture-taking," as it then was called, came into existence, there broke out among the young mothers of the United States, and probably of other more or less civilized countries, a peculiar epidemic psychosis, the main manifestation of which was an irresistible impulse on the part of the young mother to carry her infant to the nearest approved photograph gallery and have the baby's photograph taken, in a state of stark and often howling nudity, in a china washbowl.

The baby, on being stripped squarely down to the skin, without any mitigating circumstances whatsoever, was deposited on something supposedly soft and sufficiently warm that had been placed in the washbowl; the photographer, abetted by the anxious mother, whistled and chuckled and pranced and talked about the little birdie that was going to appear to an infant that obviously cared no more for the little birdie than for the most ordinary proprieties of life; and at the least howlful instant, if such an instant ever arrived, the bulb was pressed, or the trap was sprung, and the sinister purpose was achieved. That is to say, a photograph was made that would haunt and pursue and mortally embarrass the victim for the remainder of its natural life. The fact that the victims themselves, even at their early age, must have had some premonition that they were going to suffer frightfully in after life, from these pictures, is evidenced by the expressions of withering disgust, of eloquent but hopeless dissent, or of downright yelling protest that are to be seen on the countenances of most of the babies in these washbowl photographs.

On Sunday afternoons, when folks came a-visiting, it was the custom—and may be yet, for all that is known to the contrary—for the fond mother of the baby in the washbowl to make a very particular point of showing the photograph to all hands, in all of its pagan and unblushing nakedness. The fond mother continued to do this even when the baby in the washbowl, having grown into a proud minx of a girl with her hair tucked up and her skirts let down, or into a haughty lump of an adolescent boy very ambitious to be considered a man, was compelled by considerations of politeness to company to stand by and listen to the company's idiotic and quite unedited comments on the incredible fatness of the washbowler's legs or the extreme chubbiness of the washbowler's tummy or the ferociously prophetic scowl on the washbowler's face. Wherefore, it is less a marvel that so many of these washbowl photographs, in the course of time, mysteriously disappeared from the red-plush

albums, than that any of them at all have been spared for the wonder of posterity by their outraged grown-up victims.

Mr. Budlong not only never had seen this washbowl photograph of himself, but he had been unaware of its existence. His own folks' copy of the photograph had gone up in the smoke of his mother's red-plush album when the Budlong home in Bloomoria had burned to the ground, in his childhood, and his mother had disappeared from earthly scenes even before he could fix her face in his mind. By some miracle the photograph exhibited the now gaunt and angular A. Z. Budlong not only as an astonishingly chubby baby but as a positively pretty, dimpled, smiling baby. Mr. Budlong, holding it close to the light and gazing at it unbelievingly through his reading spectacles, chuckled dryly.

"Bill," he inquired, "there can't be any mistake about this, can there? Did my aunt Abigail convince you, beyond the peradventure of a doubt, that this positively is a picture of me?"

"It's you, all right, Al, hard as it may be to believe," said Bill. "You can safely make you affidavy to that."

"Bill," said Mr. Budlong, grinning at his homely visage in the mantel mirror, "ain't it hell how a human being can so utterly live down his good looks when he can't live down anything else?"

On the following day, the rival afternoon paper to Mr. Jason Powellton's printed, smack-dab in the middle of its first page, an extremely well-reproduced three-column cut of the Budlong baby-in-the-washbowl photograph, with this caption, in heavy block type, spread all across the page:

HERE'S THAT SCANDALOUS PHOTOGRAPH OF THE HONORABLE ALFRED Z. BUDLONG!

This reproduction, and the explanatory story accompanying it, not only won the primaries election for Mr. Budlong—the victory at the primaries in that district being equivalent to election—but it had still another effect.

It so happened that quite a large number of young mothers in Bloomoria never had chanced to see a photograph of a baby in a washbowl.

"That Al Budlong baby picture is the cutest thing I ever saw!" many a young mother said to many a young father by the reading lamp that evening. "Let's have baby taken that way!"

"All ri'—sure thing—goo' idea," many a Bloomoria young father, struggling to get some sense out of the baseball news, vaguely replied. And so, in so far as Bloomoria at least was concerned, the baby-in-the-washbowl outrage was visited upon another generation of victims.

Look for "F. O. B. Miami," by Mr Cullen, in the next issue.

EMBARRASSING PRAISE

SENATOR PAT HARRISON, of Mississippi, now the manager of the Democratic national committee's speaking tours, got his first lesson in this kind of work when he was a youngster in his own State. He had undertaken to run the campaign of a candidate for the legislature, and, in promoting his man's chances, he developed that variegated, highly colored vocabulary for which he is now famous. One day he was writing the "copy" for a leaflet which was to be distributed in a certain town announcing the candidate's speaking date there and predicting the magnificent effect his speech would have.

"The Honorable Brown," he began, "is Clay County's Demosthenes. He is a speaker who binds his hearers to himself. He is hypnotic in——"

"Hold on there!" exclaimed Brown, who was looking over Pat's shoulder. "Strike out the 'hypnotic.'"

"Why?" demanded Harrison.

"Well," explained the candidate with a blush, "it's an unfortunate word; it might be misunderstood, because the last time I spoke there I was too hypnotic; some of 'em went to sleep before I got through."

Lost Wagons

By Dane Coolidge

Author of "Maverick Basin," "Fate and the Fighter," Etc.

Here is a highly breezy tale of the mining game and the strange and devious ways of those in it. When Tucker Edwards sold that mine of his to Mr. Ketcherside, things began to hum in a way which he had not expected. Not the least of the joys of this yarn is Old Buck and his old-fashioned mule train. But Mr. Coolidge's people are always all worth meeting.

(A Four-Part Story—Part I)

CHAPTER I.

DEATH VALLEY SLIM—NUMBER SEVEN.

THERE is a steel building, in San Francisco, that shoots up through the fog until its tip almost catches the sun; and beneath that gilded dome, so like the spire of a cathedral, are the offices of Ira N. Ketcherside. They are furnished in shades of red, the rich hues of teak and cherry and the deep-toned splendor of Persian rugs; and against the paneled wall, just above the directors' table, there hangs a Rembrandt painting. The table is of mahogany, polished to gleam like glass, and the directors' chairs are of old Spanish leather. All is softened and subdued, making the world seem far away with the sordid scramble after wealth; but the past clings like a bur and, even in this sanctum, it is never quite forgotten that Ketcherside made his money slaughtering hogs.

But that was long ago, before he had retired from the trust to invest his thrifty millions in the West; yet so importunate was the horde which rushed to storm his castle that he had been compelled to double the guards. At the outer door there was a hard-faced man, polite but unyielding as adamant; and for those who forced the gate there was a competent young woman whose duty was to smile, and refuse. She was there at eight a. m. when the outer door swung silently and a tall man strode resolutely in. A big, black hat was pulled down over his eyes, he wore boots and a long-tailed black overcoat; only a black mask was lacking to make him a proper bandit, but at sight of all that grandeur he paused. For a moment he glanced swiftly from the table to the hangings and then from the paintings to the rugs; until at last, in an alcove, he discovered the high light of the picture, a girl with Titian-red hair.

She was as much a part of the furnishings as if the architect had ordered her and Titian had lived to paint her. Her body had all the grace of the figure called *Sacred Love,* her face was as oval and pure; but her hair, which a vainer woman would have piled up in great masses, was parted demurely back. Yet against the subdued light it stood out like an aureole, and the startled look which leaped up into her eyes made her seem as unreal as a nymph. The tall man stood at gaze, then took off his hat, at which the classic maiden broke her pose. No longer was she a Medea or a part of the furnishings—she was a typist, and strictly business.

"Did you have an appointment with Mr. Ketcherside?" she inquired.

"Well—no," he said, "but I ought to, this time. Been coming every day for a week."

"How did you get in?" she demanded. His smile became a grin.

"Just walked in," he replied. "Nobody there, at the door. How about it—do I get to see Ketcherside?"

"What is your name?" she inquired, sitting down at her desk and reaching for a visitor's slip.

"My name is Tucker Edwards, of Gold Trails and Death Valley. They call me Death Valley Slim—Number Seven."

"Number Seven?" she repeated with the

first suggestion of a smile, and his eyes lighted up and turned grave.

"That's me," he nodded. "Been so many Slims out there lately I had to git me a number. Every stiff that crosses the valley calls himself Death Valley Slim—but I was the first, by a mile."

"What is your business with Mr. Ketcherside?"

"I'll explain that to Mr. Ketcherside."

"Mr. Ketcherside makes it a rule never to see any one he doesn't know, until they have stated their business."

"Well, I'll wait," he decided, and was looking for a chair, when there was a rush from the outer door.

"How'd that beggar get in here?" demanded the hard-eyed doorkeeper, striding over and catching at Edwards; but his hands was struck back by a blow so swift and rough that he recoiled and stood nursing his wrist.

"What are you doing here, sir?" he panted. "Do you want to be arrested? Then get out, sir, and get out quick!"

"Ow!" mocked Tucker Edwards, taking off his English accent. "Well, why don't you put me out?"

"He's some dangerous mendicant!" exclaimed the doorkeeper, helplessly, as the typist caught his eye. "Shall I go out and summon the police? He slipped through the door in my absence?"

"Oh, I'm a mendicant, am I?" inquired Edwards arrogantly. "It isn't my style to be flashing my roll; but this calls for a showdown, right now."

He reached down into his boot and, fetching out a packet of bills, began deliberately to unsnap the rubber bands.

"Just cast your eye over that," he said to the doorkeeper, flickering the bill ends to show their denominations. Pussy's native obsequiousness returned.

"Well, of course, sir," he began, "you know we 'ave our orders——"

"Leave him to me, Crosby," nodded the typist and, as the doorkeeper withdrew, she motioned Tucker Edwards to a chair.

"Where did you get all that money?" she asked with a slow smile, but Tucker was instantly on his guard.

"Where does anybody get money?" he inquired bluffly. "Where did Ketcherside get his? But I'll tell you what I'll do—I'll tell the truth if you will."

"All right," she said, "it's a bargain."

"And just to show you," he went on, "that I'm no cheap city sport I'll give you the first two questions."

"No, only one," she corrected, "I live up to my bargains. Now—where did you get that money?"

"I got it," returned Edwards, snapping the bands back into place, "from a train robber by the name of 'Butch' Brennan. He came down through Lost Valley, where I happened to be camped, and claimed my sacred hospitality; and when he left he gave me this roll as a token of respect and esteem."

He tucked the flat package down the leg of his boot and winked at her mysteriously.

"Now it's my turn," he said.

"Is it good?" she demanded.

"Good as gold," he replied, "until you try to spend it. And then, the first bill you lay down on the counter, they'll send you to Siberia for life. It seems the government has sent the numbers of these bills to every bank in the world—and, besides, there's none of them signed—so I just keep 'em for a flash roll and to use on fresh doorkeepers, when they try to give me the gate."

Her eyes, which had been veiled, suddenly became round and startled and she rose up and gazed at him fixedly.

"Don't you know," she began, "that you're taking big chances? You could be arrested and imprisoned for just having them."

"Well, we all of us take chances," he observed philosophically. "But say, let *me* ask a few now."

"Just a minute," she interjected, lowering her voice to a whisper. "Don't mention them again—you might be overheard."

"Oh—him!" he nodded, jerking his thumb toward the doorway through which Crosby had disappeared; but she shook her head and frowned. A door closed within and she settled back in her seat.

"Now what was your business with Mr. Ketcherside?" she asked, but he refused to follow her lead.

"I'll tell you that, later. Now let me ask one: Was this office built to match your hair, or was you picked to fit the office?"

"I was picked to fit the office," she answered shortly. "But, in addition, I was supposed to have brains."

"Good enough," he said. "That lifts a

great load from my mind. Now, shoot—go ahead and ask your question."

She laughed and then fixed him with her wise young eyes.

"Why don't you keep your mine and work it yourself, instead of selling it to Mr. Ketcherside?"

"Who told you I had a mine?" he demanded.

"I just knew," she said. "But you must answer the question. Because that was our agreement, you know."

"Well, all right," he grumbled. "You can't make me quit, so here's the way I'm fixed. I've been prospecting around in the upper end of Death Valley—the old-timers all call it Lost Valley—and I've located an awful rich mine. She shows up big now, but the country is kind of pockety, and I don't say she won't pinch out. I had another one, once before, and knocked the bottom plumb out of it; so this time I says, talking to myself like a regular desert rat, 'Leave her lay, Slim,' I says, 'and go and sell her to some millionaire.' So I went over to Gold Trails, where the big excitement is on, with some rock that was shot full of gold, but them jaspers were too busy trying to sell their own mines to stop to bother with mine.

"The fact is, my mine is across the line, in California, and under the California laws; and those Nevada boys are kind of shy of this Blue Sky Commission that's just been organized to check up on stocks. Finally I hooked up with a one-candle-power promoter and took him in, half and half; because I'm no promoter and this personality-plus chap has got a great line of talk.

"He's read all these books on salesmanship and such; and according to him, if you've got the personality, plus something to sell, the other feller's money is yours. Sounded pretty raw to me because I've been raised up honest, with train robbers and men of that class, but this was my first plunge into the realms of high finance, and I only made one proviso. Widows and orphans were barred, and the janitor's wife and seamstresses and washerwomen and such. I agreed to give him half, if he sells it to some millionaire—but women and poor folks were barred.

"Well, he came out to the mine, packed off all my picked ore and borrowed all my money and old Buck's; and I'm a Chinaman if I didn't find him buying the drinks with my money the next time I went in to Gold Trails. He claimed he'd been to San Francisco and seen all the millionaires and none of them would look at the mine, so he sold all the specimens to a high-grading assayer and there he was, rolling 'em high!"

"And what did you do, then?" she questioned breathlessly. "And who is this other man, Buck?"

"Oh, he's an old freighter that's stopping at my camp. Got a twenty-mule team—last one left in the world—thinks every one's trying to steal it. Why, it's them twenty mules that's keeping him poor. They'll eat their danged heads off in a week. He was hauling freight for that construction company that was building the new road into Gold Trails; and the company went broke, owing him seven hundred dollars and him owing the store about the same. Well, old Buck got the idee that the Gold Trails Store would attach his team for the debt, so he hooks up everything—three wagons and his water tank—and skips across the line to Lost Valley.

"I woke up one morning and saw a long line of something coming down the wash from the north; it was two hundred feet long and looked like a railroad train, but it turned out to be old Buck. He was lost good and plenty, and the mules were all in; but I helped him unhook 'em—used to swamp on them old teams—and we put 'em in the pasture with mine. When they'd eat up all my grass I showed him a basin where there was lots of water and grass; and then I went back to kind of scout around and see if they wasn't some salvage. That construction company was crooked and closed down owing everybody; but I ran across a watchman, guarding their commissary and supplies, that was willing to take a chance. For eight-five dollars, which was what he had coming to him, he agreed to sell me a wagonload of grub—all the grub I could haul away. He hadn't figured on that wagon.

"I went back and borrowed it, with ten of Buck's mules—that was all I could handle. She was sixteen feet long and ten feet high and would carry about ten tons—but the watchman was game, and we loaded her up. The next morning at daylight I pulled into camp with grub enough to last us for life.

"Old Buck, he's there yet, still watching for them deputies with a writ of attachment for his team. Then Butch and Curry came

through, and another gang of train robbers that had outrun a bunch of Winchesters; and everything was fine, except for the cash —we didn't have a dollar among us. This stage money was no good—we used to light the fire with it—so—well, that's why I want to sell my mine."

"No, but really," she exclaimed, "you don't mean to tell me that this is all the *truth?*"

"You come out there," he invited, nodding his head confidentially, "I'll show you the whole bunch—except Butch. He and his pardners pulled out—on their way to South America—but Buck and the wagons are *there.* And the mine is there, too; and, believe me, she's a dandy—but I'll sell out for ten thousand, cash. They's a two-foot vein —shows free gold everywhere—and, oh, yes, here's a specimen of the ore."

He threw back his overcoat, revealing the total absence of coat and vest, and unwrapped the sample from his handkerchief.

"Had more," he explained, "but a man's got to eat and—say, what's come over you now?"

He leaned back, startled by the look on her face as she sat staring at the piece of rock.

"Why—why, that's the same kind of ore —— Who was this promoter, this man you call Personality Plus?"

"W'y, Pete Hogaboom was the name, but I——"

"I'm sorry," she sighed, passing the rock abruptly back, "but Mr. Ketcherside wouldn't even consider it. That awful man got in here and talked to him for hours, trying to sell this very same mine. It was called the Lost Wagons, wasn't it?"

"So I lose, eh?" said Tucker, glumly pocketing the specimen. "Well, I'll go back and dig it out myself. And you can tell the big boss, if it's any consolation, that they're leading Mr. Hogaboom by a string. Yes, when I found him at 'Bullfrog' Smith's, buying the drinks with my ore money, I took him in hand and kind of worked him over, so that his eyes ain't quite opened yet. He'll be all right pretty soon, but—well, so long, Little Bright Eyes. I—I'm glad I met you, anyhow!"

He shot out a bronzed hand, their eyes met for an instant, and then she gave him her hand. But as he was turning to go a buzzer rang peremptorily and she started and beckoned him back.

"Wait!" she said and slipped in through the doorway which led to Ketcherside's office. A minute or two passed and she came back smiling, a certified check in her hand.

"Here's your money," she said, "Mr. Ketcherside was listening and he's decided to buy your mine. Crosby will make out the papers for you to sign."

She turned back toward the door, the smile still in her eyes, and he rocked as if struck a great blow.

"Good-by," she said, and was gone.

CHAPTER II.

ALL MIXED UP.

The boom camp of Gold Trails was strung out along a gulch, so spraddled out here and so crushed together there, that it looked like the work of a madman. And so, in a way, it was—the work of hundreds of madmen. First the tents had sprung up, anywhere along the wash, which served both as a road and a dump; then tent houses, in a jam around the first saloon and the corrugated-iron store. As the rush had reached its height and land values had gone up, the wide cañon bed below had been staked off in tiny lots and "Rag-town" had come into its own.

The boomer throng settled about the stores and saloons and restaurants like the flies that swarmed in from nowhere; and soon each lesser gulch had its double row of tents, and they in turn, more flies. Then the wagons came in with huge loads of lumber to build greater stores and saloons and the crooked, hummocky street was buried deep in debris as the excavators leveled off the lots. Plank sidewalks sprang up, horse-high above the street to facilitate the unloading of supplies, and the tramp of miners' boots made music day and night, as they came to work in the mines.

It was a fine, booming camp—one of Nevada's best—full of men and machinery and noise; but as the canvas came down and the frame buildings went up the wise ones noticed a change. The camp was short on cash. There were stores and hotels, and more saloons and chili joints, and tailor shops galore; but the first rush of men had spent all they had and no one was bringing in more.

The wind was blowing dismally down Gold Trails' one street when Tucker Ed-

wards came back to town and, though he gave a joyous whoop and waved his hand at the saloon keeper, "Bullfrog" Smith did not respond. He remembered that Tucker owed him money.

"I've sold it!" yelled Tucker as the stage came to a stop. "Sold my mine—got ten thousand dollars!"

"The hell you did!" muttered Bullfrog to himself; but, since miracles still happen, he waved his hand back and smiled.

"Who to?" demanded a voice, and Tucker paused in his descent as a head popped out of a door. The man who had addressed him was big and bulky, and white-faced from staying in the shade, and the exaggerated high boots which incased his fat legs left no doubt of his identity and trade. It was Personality Plus, the promoter.

"Ira N. Ketcherside!" announced Tucker as he leaped gayly to the ground.

"You lie!" snarled Hogaboom, turning away in a huff.

"I'll bet you money!" challenged Tucker, heading straight for the saloon and even Personality followed. As for Bullfrog Smith, he whisked around behind the bar and strewed the heavy glasses in a row, but the bottle of whisky he kept discreetly at his elbow until he had seen the color of his money.

It was a brand-new bill that fluttered down on the bar and, as he saw the gold-framed fifty, Bullfrog flipped it into the till and set out the bottles with a grin.

"Good for you, Tuck!" he beamed as he counted out the change. "Did you have any trouble making the sale?"

"Not a bit," boasted Tucker. "He just wrote me out a check and hollers down a tube: 'Hey! Raise the price of bacon!'"

"Aw, boozhwar!" mocked Personality Plus. "You never even saw him! I'll bet you you can't tell me what he looks like!"

"He's a big fat slob, like you," answered Tucker Edwards readily, "and he looks like a fresh-scraped pig. But instead of having a brow like an inbred baboon, he's got a dome for his brains, like me."

"Any mustache or whiskers?" demanded Personality shrewdly, and, as Tucker Edwards hesitated, he rushed forward.

"Lemme look at that bill!" he shouted at the barkeeper, but Bullfrog Smith thrust him back. Bullfrog was a hard-looking citizen when his fighting blood was up, having his nose laid down flat on one side; and between a man who treated the house and one who would not even drink, it did not take him long to choose.

"Lave ut be!" he ordered, reaching behind him for his wagon spoke, and Personality Plus recoiled.

"Well, look at it yourself, then," he suggested, more pacifically. "Because he never got that money from Ketcherside. Why, Ketcherside is a little man, with a white mustache and side whiskers—I tell you he's never even seen him!"

"And even then!" returned Bullfrog, who was beginning to breathe hard. "Even then, what is it to you?"

"Well, you're a good one!" jeered Hogaboom with an ugly laugh. "Can't you see I'm trying to do you a favor? Just take a look at that bill and see if it's signed—you know, by the cashier and president."

"Hey—wait!" burst out Tucker, suddenly clutching at his bootleg and fumbling about in its depths. "Say, gimme that other bill!"

He slapped down another fifty and as Hogaboom made a grab for it, he met him with a swing that laid him low.

"You keep out of this," he warned, "unless you're looking for real trouble. Now, Bullfrog, I'll just buy that bill back."

His voice was tense and his blue eyes were blazing—Bullfrog knew that he ought not to do it—but as he took out the bill he glanced at the two spaces where the bank officials' signatures should be.

"It ain't signed!" he blurted out, quite forgetting saloon decorum, and Tucker snatched it savagely away.

"Well, *that* is, ain't it?" he demanded fiercely, and thrust the new bill into his hand.

"You're a hell of a barkeep!" he went on scathingly, and Bullfrog cringed before him.

"Ah, now, Slim, by," he wheedled, "don't ye mind what I said. You're always making jokes and——"

"That wasn't a joke!" cried Personality Plus, struggling up and returning to the charge, "that was an attempt to pass stolen money. Don't you know, Mr. Smith, where he got those unsigned bills? They were stolen by Butch Brennan, the train robber. Let me look at that other one, now!"

"I'll do nothing of the kind!" returned Bullfrog Smith heatedly, "and if you're too good, Mr. Hogaboom, to drink with my customers, I don't care if you *never* come back!"

"Show him the bill," ordered Edwards, stowing his roll carefully away; and when the bank note had been produced and handed over to Hogaboom he slumped back and watched him examine it.

"Well?" he said, as Hogaboom returned it, but the promoter was noncommittal.

"I'll just take down that number!" he spoke up, as an afterthought, but Bullfrog Smith shook his head. He had made the mistake already of bawling out the fact that the first bill had really been unsigned, and from the look on Tucker's face he saw all too well that, by so doing, he had lost a good customer.

"You'll do nahthin' of the kind!" he spat back insultingly, "and what is it to you, man, annyway? Can't a gentleman come in here and buy a round of drinks without you butting in? Well, I'll say to you then what I've hardly said to anny man since I started the Happy Days Saloon—kindly git out of here, see?"

"Very well, Mr. Smith," replied Personality with deep meaning, "but if I leave, take it from me, I'll be back. Every citizen is an officer when he witnesses an attempted crime——"

"Here!" spoke up Edwards, suddenly taking him by the arm, which Hogaboom jerked violently away. "You come outside, if you want to investigate. You come on with me, and if I can't satisfy you in one way I'll guarantee to do it in another. I could've sent you to the pen for stealing my ore and selling it to that high-grading assayer, and now here you are, trying to spring some technicality and git *me* into a jack pot."

"I claim half of that ten thousand!" burst out Hogaboom abruptly, "if you got it from Ira N. Ketcherside. He was my likeliest prospect, and I talked to him for hours—all you did was to just close the deal."

"It was just the other way, all through," retorted Tucker. "When I mentioned your name to old Ketcherside's secretary, she threw up both hands and said he'd never see me, on account of what you'd done. She said you'd forced your way in there, and talked to him for hours, and made him so angry he wouldn't consider it, if it was the only mine in the world. But I put up such a talk that I sold it to him, anyway, in spite of your book-agent play—and you don't get a nickel, Mr. Personality Plus, because your personality queered the whole deal. If nerve was all we needed to get along in this world, you'd have Ketcherside backed off the map. John D. Rockerfeller would be your office boy. But it ain't, thank God. A man needs some brains."

"You don't need to become abusive," returned Hogaboom angrily. "And I demand to see that money!"

His voice rose up suddenly and Tucker swung back his hand, but Hogaboom ducked warily away.

"You're a thief!" he charged, starting purposefully toward the door, "that money you have is stolen!"

"It is not!" declared Edwards, but as Hogaboom strode out he glanced about uneasily "Here, let 'em drink that up!" he said to Bullfrog Smith, dropping a bill and making for the door; and then in a panic he grabbed the note back and looked to make sure it was signed. "Oh, hell," he groaned, "I've got 'em all mixed up!" And with a last wailing curse he was gone.

CHAPTER III.

LOST WAGONS.

The road to Lost Valley climbs up out of Gold Trails and heads straight as an arrow across the Dry Lakes toward a gap in the Grapevine Mountains. They rise up in jigsaw patterns, blocking the way to the west, and at the summit of the divide the road dives down a cañon and corkscrews around to the north. Then it straightens out again and follows a broad wash that leads down and down to the west, until at last it passes the portals and a whole new world opens out—a world where man is an atom. Distance is nothing in Lost Valley, which sweeps on endlessly, leading down from the Far North and disappearing in the haze that marks Death Valley below.

Tucker Edwards rode in on a slashing big, black mule that still tugged at its bit for more speed, and as they rounded Black Point he turned off into a trail that led straight up the valley to the north. Past hills of red and black and slides of shattered lava it followed the edge of the bench until finally a broken line, like a distant train of cars, rose up above the gray waste of brush. It loomed up in the nothingness out of all proportion to its size, changing its shape in the perpetual mirage; and then at a turn it resolved back into its elements—four wagons standing abandoned on the flat. It

was for them that Lost Wagons was named. But Lost Wagons was more than a name, it was more than the huge wagons with their ponderous seven-foot wheels; down off of the bench, which was white with crusted alkali, two waterfalls tumbled and roared. And on the flat just below, where the water spread out before it was sucked up by the desert sands, there were cottonwoods and fig trees and a pond for the horses and a fenced-in pasture of alfalfa. Yes, and just below the waterfalls, within sound of their strange music and beneath the shelter of two ancient trees, there was the shack and tent, the stone house and scattering pack-saddles, that meant home to Tucker Edwards. This was his hold-out, his home camp, where he came back from prospecting to pound out his ore and horn it; and big in the foreground was the tented pile of canned goods which he had hauled there with old Buck's team.

But though a camp fire still smoldered and there was a pot of beans on the rack, old Buck himself was missing; and, except for his boot tracks, there was no sign that he had ever been there. These were pointing toward the rock pile, where huge blocks of undermined limestone had tumbled to the foot of the bluff, and as Tucker gave a whoop a shaggy head appeared, and then the old freighter rose up. He was tall and stooped over from long years o' jolting, his beard was moth-eaten and gray; but his hair was desert red, like a mountain lion's hide, and he moved with a lion's agile stealth.

"What the heck have you been up to?" he burst out complainingly as he came down over the rocks. "I knowed, soon's I seen ye, looking back at every step, that the officers warn't very fur behind."

He leaned his rifle against a tree and stood wagging his beard as Tucker made some jesting reply; and then, still glancing at the vacant back trail, he turned and kicked up the fire.

"Well, set up, set up," he went on designedly, spreading a strip of grease-stained canvas on the ground, "might as well eat, before they jump us."

"I'm game!" volunteered Tucker, stripping the saddle from his mule and turning him out to roll. "What's the news since I've been gone?"

"Oh, nothin'," sighed Buck, "them danged Injuns come up yesterday and packed off another case of corned beef; and old Horseshootum says he's found another mine. Don't see how he finds 'em—never seen him leave camp—but an Injun is no good, nohow." He set the kettle of beans in the middle of the canvas and laid out a tin plate and a knife. "Want some coffee?" he asked. "Well, I'll have to warm it up, first. Here's some bread—help yourself to the beans."

"I'll go you," returned Tucker filling up the tin plate and feeding himself deftly with the knife, and old Buck regarded him sorrowfully.

"Tuck," he said, "how many times have I warned you to leave that danged whisky alone? Can't you see that it's ruining your life? What the heck have you been up to, now?"

"Oh, nothing," shrugged Tucker. "Done right well, it strikes me—sold my mine for ten thousand dollars. But on the way back I got my money mixed up and gave Bullfrog one of Butch Brennan's bills."

"Yes—of course," grumbled Buck, "I might've expected that. Ain't I begged you a thousand times to burn them danged bills up before some detective gets hold of them? Now old Bullfrog will turn it in and the bank will ketch the number and the officers will come out here a-r'arin'. First thing they'll see is this big pile of grub and them wagons of mine on the flat; and if I hadn't moved the mules, they'd find them, too, but I put 'em way up on Tin Mountain. There's a big basin up there, plumb down out of sight, and the trail to it is that narrer I jest necked 'em in pairs and they'll never git out in the world. I sensed something like this and moved 'em up yander, and yesterday I went down and took the nuts off my wheels so no officer can take 'em away. Did you say you sold your mine?"

"Yep, sold it to old Ketcherside, that millionaire pork packer that Pete Hogaboom was always blowing about."

"Them officers are the most heartless cusses that God ever let live, and they'll crush a man's life out like *that*, for passing phony money," complained old Buck reverting to Tucker's monetary misstep.

"Have to ketch me, first," grinned Tucker. "And beside, they've got no evidence. I bought that phony bill back and gave Smith a good one—there's no way to prove it on me, now. What say if I bury this phony roll?"

"What, have you got 'em on you *yet?*"

screeched Buck in dismay. "Here, for cripes' sake, boy, *burn 'em up!* Jest throw 'em in this fire and git rid of 'em, right now! Oh, lawzy, ain't you got *no* brains?"

"Sure," said Tucker, getting up and heading for the rocks, "but I need them bills in my business."

He disappeared among the bowlders, creeping about from cave to cave, until at last he came back, laughing.

"That's easy," he smirked, "I buried *both* rolls. They can't pinch me now, because I haven't got *any* bills—b'lieve I'll sample a can of those pears."

He thrust aside the flap of the commissary tent and backed out with a can of fruit, but old Buck was not to be diverted.

"There you go again," he railed, "you hammer-headed eejit—ain't you got the brains of a rabbit? Them detectives will come in here and search the whole ranch—why the heck don't you burn them bills up?"

"Might come in handy some time," returned Tucker Edwards lightly. "And tomorrow I'll bury 'em good. Huh, I'd never sold my mine, if it wasn't for that flash money—these millionaires have you frisked at the door. If you've got a big roll they let you come in—might be able to nick you a few; so when this doorkeeper held me up I pulled the big roll——"

"What? Butch's money?" yelled Buck. "W'y, you poo-or, damned fool—don't you know they could jail you for life?"

"Sure I knew it," agreed Tucker, "but I was down to my last dime. A man's got to take *some* chances!"

"Well, you got me beat," admitted old Buck helplessly. "Doing that—and then your drinking——"

"Aw—here!" broke in Tucker, making a grab for his overcoat and bringing out a pint flask of whisky, "you're making it harder and harder. A little more, old-timer, and I'll break this on a rock——"

"No—don't ye!" interposed Buck, getting both hands on the bottle. "Well, if you ain't the most *hectorin'* fool!"

He gave way to a weak laugh as he twisted out the cork and raised the flask to his lips and Tucker sat down and whooped.

"You're all right, Buck," he said. "Good talker, and all that. But just a minute more and I'd sure been converted."

"Quit your funnin'!" answered Buck.

"Ain't that great stuff?" demanded Tucker. "Don't it paint the lily and put a lovely rainbow in the sky? Well, I knowed you be lonely, so I thought I'd git you a bottle, if they chased me clean to the hills. Personality Plus was scouting around town trying to put that deputy sheriff on my trail but I butted into the back door of the dago's saloon——"

"Gawd bless ye!" murmured Buck laying the bottle down reverently, "and now what was this about a sale? You don't mean to say that you actually sold that mine and got your ten thousand dollars! And you sold it to Ira N. Ketcherside!"

"And never even seen him!" boasted Tuck. "Just made a talk to his secretary and the old boy overheard me. All he done was to ring a bell and the girl went in, and came out and handed me a check. You could've knocked me down with the breath of a bat's wing, and while I was standing there gawking she gimme a smile and went back to write some more checks. Say, there was sure one wise little girl!"

"Tuck!" pronounced old Buck, "by grab, you're all right—I'm proud to claim you for a friend. And if I ever git fixed I'm going to repay you for this, and for every little kindness you've done. I'll never fergit when I was driving down the wash and you rode out and guided me in. I was lost, I'll admit it, and my mules was that ga'nt they had to stand twice to make a shadder; but you come down and took me in and——"

"You're getting maudlin!" broke in Tuck. "Here, gimme that bottle, before you drink it all up. What do you think I am, a philanthropist?"

"You're a wonder!" announced Buck as he watched him drink. "And you sold it to Ira N. Ketcherside! W'y that man has got *millions!* He's a regular Crœsus! We're made, Tuck—they's no two ways to it. He'll come out here in his fine automobile with his superintendent and engineers and there'll be a regular stampede. This whole valley will be staked from here to the peaks; they'll be a boom, and lots of freighting. I'll go up and git my mules and hook 'em to the wagons, and the first load I haul will pay all my debts and put me right on velvet. I'll git a contract from old Ketcherside to haul all his freight, his heavy machinery and everything, and if I don't soak him good I'm a meechin' yaller hound—I'm going to charge him fifty dollars a ton! No, I'll charge him a hundred—he's made all that money by

raising the price of bacon—and if I can't pull forty thousand from Gold Trails to here, I'll make you a present of my team. That's twenty tons I'll haul at a hun'r'd dollars a ton and—how much does that come to, Tucker?"

"Oh, 'bout two thousand dollars," answered Tucker carelessly, "but what's the use of being a piker? You're a freighter, Buck, one of the best that ever lived——"

"Yes, I am that!" boasted Buck. "I was the champion of Arizony—won that shime of silver bells that they was passing around like a cup, when Ike Bodley got stuck with his eight. That was the rule with them bells—you was champion as long as you held 'em—but the minute you got stuck and another team could pull you out, you had to give 'em up. And didn't I drive the finest twenty that W. T. Coleman ever owned from Mohave to the borax works in Death Valley?"

"Sure," cut in Tucker, "and that's why I say—what's the use of being a piker? This man Ketcherside is a highflyer, and he's stuck on shades of red—and when he sees your hair——"

"Hair's got nothing to do with it!" declared old Buck ponderously. "I'm a freighter, understand? I know my business, savvy? When I git up on the wagon and start——"

"No, but listen, Buck!" grinned Tucker, "I'm telling you a fact—this man Ketcherside is hipped on red. Got his office furnished that way and won't hire no typist unless her hair is *right*. I guess I ought to know—I asked his private secretary, one of the prettiest little girls you ever saw—and she told me, for a fact, that old Ketcherside hired her because her hair was red. Supposed to have brains, too, she said, but her——"

"Well—*two* hun'r'd then," interposed Buck with drunken gravity, "we'll charge him two hun'r'd a ton. Never mind about my hair—I'm a teamster, I tell ye—some class, when a man hires me. Don't them borax people paint that picture on the package—that twenty-mule team hauling borax—well, what's to hender *him* from doin' it? I've got the only team that's left—all the rest broken up. If he don't hire me—go to work for somebody else!"

"Sure, that's the talk!" praised Tuck, "stand up to 'em, the robbers! Don't they raise the price of bacon on us? Well, raise the price of teaming; and I'll hold onto this water and sell it to the company for a mill-site. Can't run a mine without water—charge him ten thousand more——"

"I'll git *rich!*" proclaimed old Buck hitting the ground with his hat, "charge 'em plenty—pay off my debts at the store. But I won't never fergit Tuck Edwards, that come down and he'ped me out when I was lost and wanderin' on the desert. I'm goin' to repay you, Tuck, every dollar that I owe you?"

"Don't owe me nothing!" protested Tucker. "Say, you're getting drunk, Buck—finish this up and let's go to bed."

"I'm going to repay you," reiterated Buck, "every dollar that I owe you, and then I'm going on the road. But I'll never fergit how you saved my pore mules when they were crying like babies for food. You come down and you saved 'em, without money and without price——"

"Well, you go on away," broke in Tucker Edwards brutally, "and promise you'll never come back, and we'll call it off on all that. You're drunk, Buck, you old reprobate, or you'd never be talking this way. I tell you you don't owe me nothing!"

"Yes, I do!" insisted Buck. "And I'm going to pay you, savvy? If not in one way, w'y then in another."

"Well, all right," agreed Tuck; "if you ever find something good you let me in on it, see? And for cripes' sake, Buck, don't sit up all night singing. I'm away behind on my sleep."

He shook the dirt from the quilts on his high snake bed and climbed up onto the squeaking springs but as he was falling asleep old Buck began to croon and at last he burst into song:

"Oh, mother dear, kiss me good ni-ight,
For I my evening prayers have said.
I'm ti-ired now and sleepy too-oo,
So put me in my little bed."

"Buck!" threatened Tucker waking up in a rage, and then he lay back and groaned.

"The old walloper," he grumbled as the song went on endlessly, "I'll never bring him another bottle again."

CHAPTER IV.

GONE CRAZY.

The early morning sun topped the Grapevine Range and put shadows in a thousand distant cañons; it painted the north in mauve and rose, the south in blue and gold,

and laid daylight along the ridges to the west, but the camp at Lost Wagons was still dead. An old Indian, bent over and walking with a cane, came scuffling up the path and stood motionless against the cold dawn. He cleared his throat loudly and mumbled to himself, whining and complaining like an impatient, neglected dog; and at last the bundle of blankets on the peeled poles of the snake bed began to stir and show signs of life. The Indian coughed discreetly and shuffled noisily about and Tucker uncovered his head. But an Indian, more or less, was nothing to him and he cuddled back to make up his sleep.

"Hooo—hum," sighed the Indian, coming through the barbed-wire fence and laying some shreds of bark on the coals; and as the fire began to crackle Tucker roused up impatiently and sat scowling at the light of a new day. "Col'," explained the Indian huddling his ragged coat about him, "Injun col'—no coffee—hoo-hum!"

"Yes—I saw you smelling that bottle," observed Tucker Edwards heartlessly. "What time is it by your watch and chain?"

"Seven 'clock," answered the savage, glancing craftily up at the sun, "Injun hungly—no ketchum glub—nuthin'."

"Yes, too bad about you," growled Tucker. "Lemme look at that dad-burned watch!" He reached out a hand and, very reluctantly, old Horse-shootum passed up his ancient timepiece.

"Watch bloke," he complained, "hooo-hum."

"Huh—*Injun* watch," commented Tucker, shaking the Waterbury up vigorously, "downhill—run fast; uphill, run slow; Injun stop, no run at all. Why don't you get a real watch, like this one of mine? A stem-winder and a stem-setter—keeps time by the sun, moon, and stars!" He produced another watch of the dollar variety, but Horse-shootum chose to ignore it.

"Meee—findum mine," he declared importantly. "*Good* mine—how much you pay? Maybeso me show you mine!"

"Yes-es, you'll play hell, showing *me* the mine," returned Tucker scornfully. "Where is this mine—over there?"

He pointed an accusing finger at a big, red hill, about eight miles across the valley to the west, but Horse-shootum shook his head.

"No-o-o—*good* mine," he grinned, "maybeso, over there!" And he pointed at Tin Mountain, farther south.

"Blue rock?" queried Tucker. "Aw, I know it—*no good*. Up that cañon—over there—near top."

"No good?" inquired Horse-shootum, still eying him hopefully, and Tucker glanced at his sample of rock.

"Nope—no good," he said. "But you keepum, all same. Pretty soon come white man—big rush, savvy? Stampede! Maybeso you sellum then."

"You sellum mine?" demanded Horse-shootum, his little eyes beginning to gleam, "you sellum mine—over there?" He pointed to the big red hill across the valley, and Tucker nodded grimly.

"You bet ye I sold it," he answered boastfully. "So you think you've got a better one, hey?"

But Horse-shootum was floored by this turn of affairs, and paused to do some thinking.

"Meeee—ketchum gol'," he announced at last. "Come from wash—thlis side yo' mine." He reached down inside the rags that were bundled about his waist and brought out a worn, shiny nugget. "Him gol', huh?" he gloated as Tuck grabbed at it eagerly. "Injun savvy! Long time ago—*muchos!*" He shrilled his voice to make "muchos" seem very much and stood grinning beside the fire. "Injun findum—sellum sto'!"

"Ye-es, sure," returned Tucker, passing the nugget back impatiently, "I've heard about all that before. Feller was over there one time dry-washing and couldn't even make day's wages. And, anyhow, I've done sold my mine."

He busied himself, now, preparing a hasty breakfast and, as the coffeepot began to bubble, old Horse-shootum drew closer, watching every move he made, like a dog.

"Meee—hungly!" he suggested, rubbing his belly and sighing loudly, but Tucker paid no attention. As the bacon was cooked he ate his fill of it and drank several cups of the coffee; and then, having asserted his superiority over the savage, he poured out a cup for Horse-shootum. Then, piling up a plate with the leavings of his breakfast, he set it out on a rock.

"There you are," he said, and Horse-shootum ate wolfishly with the plate held close to his mouth. Old Buck came down

from his hiding place among the rocks and regarded Horse-shootum dourly.

"Was his mine any good?" he asked Tucker at last, and Tucker answered shortly.

"Naw—the same old mine he's been showing to everybody—that blue-looking stuff from Tin Mountain. I believe I'll go to town."

"To town!" yelped old Buck, and then he fell to grumbling as he laid a pan of bacon on the coals. "Well, go on," he said, "can't help a born fool, nohow. And say, bring me back another bottle."

"Ump-umm!" returned Tucker with instant decision. "That whisky is bad for you, Buck. Going to lay off of it a while, myself. Look what I danged near done, gitting them bills all mixed up—and even at that I was lucky. If that bill had been *good*, I'd've stayed around there drinking, and this morning I'd've woke up broke. Some of those 'pothecators would've rolled me, sure."

"Yes, and they'll roll you yet," predicted old Buck gloomily. "But go on—I don't care—go on."

"Oh, I'm a-going," grinned Tucker, "you don't need to worry. Hey, Horse-shootum, you go ketch my mule!"

It was the tremendous activity, the rush and noise and excitement, which drew Tucker Edwards back to Gold Trails—that and a desire to gloat over his sale. His stopover in town had been made all too brief by his encounter with Personality Plus; but now, with both his rolls safely buried among the rocks, he could stay as long as he liked. The crowd on the street seemed denser than ever, when he rode down the gulch to Ragtown, and after he had left his mule at the corral he strode back and joined the milling throng. The story of his unsigned bills had passed from mouth to mouth, losing nothing by the telling; until now it was popularly rumored that his sale was also a fake, though Bullfrog Smith stood up for him.

"Shu-ure, the bill was as good as anny you ever saw," he repeated time and again; but Personality Plus professed to have inside information which he claimed would send Tucker to the pen. He came rushing to confront him when Tucker walked up the street, but Tucker had turned canny and with his tongue in his cheek he answered never a word.

"Let the crazy fool holler," he replied to his familiars, and climbed up on a pile of lumber in the sun.

A long line of men formed a cue from the post office, waiting for hours to ask for their mail; and up and down the street, through the bedlam of noise, a telegraph boy shouted names. Every man was a stranger; there were no residences, no homes; and where a man lived or what he looked like was something that nobody knew. A tall blackboard by the door of the telegraph office recorded each wire as it came, and when it was delivered and the name wiped out, another unknown name took its place.

It was pleasing, even exciting, to sit up on the lumber pile and read over these live ones' names; and farther up the street, in front of a broker's office, another blackboard recorded the sales of stock. Stages and autos dashed into town with their cutouts wide open, hucksters and ballyhoo men raised their tumult, and at an angle of the street, where the road took a turn, Lew the Megaphone Man roared and bellowed:

The Wind blew
The Bull flew
For Information
See Lew,

was the motto above his tripod and a summons from him would reach any man in town and fetch him on the run.

It was a great scene—a little rugged, perhaps, but full of excitement and life—and Tucker was watching a fight by the Happy Days Saloon when an automobile de luxe drove up. At the wheel was a colored chauffeur in a red-and-gold uniform. An old gentleman in white spats got out, and Tucker was just turning back to watch the progress of the fight, when he saw *her* step into the dust. He ducked, but she had seen him—the girl who had sold his mine—old Ketcherside's wise little secretary! She smiled and crooked her finger and he came like a retriever, though his heart bade him break for the hills.

"Were you looking for us?" she asked, when he stood before them and felt a great roaring in his head.

"Hell—no!" he exclaimed, losing his wits completely, "I—w'y—I never expected to see you again!"

"Mr. Ketcherside," she said, turning to the staring old gentleman, "this is Mr. Edwards, the man you bought the mine from."

Mr. Ketcherside blinked and his goggling eyes seemed to bore Tucker Edwards through

and through. They were focused through massive eyeglasses that hung trembling on a nose which had been painted with nature's choicest vintages; and behind it all Tucker sensed a towering rage, a righteous indignation—at him. Far from being a dapper creature, as Personality Plus had described him, Ira N. Ketcherside was a terrifying figure; and after a prolonged stare, he bowed very coldly and turned to the obsequious chauffeur.

"Sam," he said, "take my bags into the hotel and order me the best suite of rooms. Get a nice room for Miss Cleghorn and put the machine in a garage—I must go down and send off these telegrams."

"What's the matter with him?" inquired Tucker when Ketcherside had left them, and Miss Cleghorn dimpled and turned grave.

"You swore," she said, "and that always makes him angry. He particularly objects to profanity."

"Swore!" he repeated and then he laughed shortly. "What's he doing out here?"

"Why, he's come to see the mine!" she exclaimed in some surprise. "Didn't you honestly expect us at all?"

"Why—no," confessed Tucker. "Or, at least, not him. What's a ten-thousand-dollar mine to a millionaire?"

"Oh, he just thinks the world of it!" she burst out eagerly. "He can't think of anything else. He's got his machinery all ordered and his experts all engaged, and he's going ahead to make it a big thing!"

"Don't talk so loud," suggested Tucker guardedly, as he saw men listening in. "Come on, let's get in off the street." He picked up her bags and led the way into the hotel lobby, which instantly began to fill up.

"What's the matter?" she asked when they had found shelter in a corner, "isn't everything all right with the mine?"

"Yes—now," he said, "but if these high-binders overhear you, it's liable to start a stampede. And some smart Aleck might have the nerve to jump your claim. But what's this machinery you spoke of?"

"Why, the machinery for the mine—the hoists and engines and things—I guess you don't know Mr. Ketcherside. When he's interested in a project he gives it his entire attention, and he's very, very particular about equipment. Every detail must be worked out by the advice of competent experts."

"Yes, but what's the holy rush? He hasn't even seen the mine."

"Oh, that's just his way," she explained, a trifle vaguely. "He believes in being thorough. He takes one thing at a time and pushes it through and then turns to something else. But aren't you glad to see me? You know, I rather thought——"

"W'y, sure, sure!" exclaimed Tucker, suddenly taking both her hands. "You're welcome as the flowers in spring. Glad to see you, Little Bright Eyes; this is an unexpected honor, but far be it from me to weaken." His boyish smile came back and, as she drew away her hands, she met his eyes and blushed.

"I believe I'll have to call you the Desert Romeo," she murmured, glancing away. "Because, really, you act the part."

"This ain't acting," returned Tucker. "I'm just out of my head, and so I'm kind of —natural."

"Well, all right," she said, "your apology is accepted. But that horrid Mr. Hogaboom was right over there, and he made a face and laughed."

"He's a bad one," observed Tucker, searching the crowd for his archenemy, "and he'll be right on our trail, like a wolf. I wouldn't put it past him to go out and jump that claim and try to hold Ketcherside up."

"He'd better not fool with Mr. Ketcherside," she said, "because that's one thing he will—not—stand. He'll spend a million dollars contesting an unjust claim, before he'll yield an inch. But if you think it's best, I'll tell him about the matter and——"

"Naw, let him have his way—he wouldn't do anything, anyway. And if he happens to lose the mine, what's the difference to him? He'll just turn around and raise the price of bacon."

"Oh—shh!" she protested, "*please* don't say things like that. Because if there's anything that angers him, it's some reference to the packing business and—well, please don't speak of bacon!"

"All—right!" bowed Tucker,. "tell me every little thing. But it's too dog-goned bad about that bacon. Because me and Buck, that's about all we live on and—did you ever hear a mule-skinner cuss?"

"No!" she cried, her eyes suddenly brightening. "Oh, is old Buck really there?"

"As big as a house," nodded Tucker reassuringly, "and say, here's an idea for Ketch-

erside. This Lost Wagons Mine was named after old Buck—or, rather, after those wagons that he left—and wouldn't it be grand, if you could hire the old boy to haul your freight to the mine?"

"Oh, do you think he'd do it—with his twenty-mule team? I'm going to tell Mr. Ketcherside! Because he has a photographer engaged, and wouldn't it be wonderful to have a big picture of the wagons!"

"Sure. And it would make great advertising stuff, if you're going to sell any stock."

"*Sell* any! Why haven't you heard the news? The company has been incorporated for two million dollars and——"

"Two—million!" gasped Tucker. "Say, some one give me air; I've been feeling kinder funny all day."

"Yes, and over four hundred thousand has been subscribed already; at par value, one dollar a share!"

"My—Gawd!" exclaimed Tucker, suddenly sitting bolt upright and then slumping back in his chair. "Say—pinch me on the arm."

She pinched him promptly and he jumped and shook his head.

"Buck was right," he murmured. "It's the booze. He said it would git me, some day."

"Well, what is there so surprising," she demanded with asperity, "in selling that small amount of stock? I guess you don't know of Mr. Ketcherside's rich connections and of the confidence his name inspires. I've bought eight thousand shares, myself."

"You have!" he cried, and started blindly for the door. "It's no use," he muttered, "I'm crazy."

CHAPTER V.

THE MASTER MAGICIAN.

The delusion of great wealth, so the psychiatrists tell us, is one of the commonest forms of insanity; and Tucker Edwards, seeing all the world gone mad, came to the conclusion that the lesion must be his. A ten-thousand-dollar mine capitalized for two million dollars, four hundred thousand shares sold at par; and a Titian-haired typist buying eight thousand dollars' worth of stock, the same as a man would buy a cigar. He was reminded in some crazy way of a negro who used to say: "Well, guess I'll go out and buy me a cigah and own a little property!" Yet, was it any worse preposterous to call a nickel cigar property than to call Lost Wagons worth two million dollars? Here was a hole in the ground that he had been afraid to go down in for fear of knocking the bottom out of it, and along comes Ira N. Ketcherside and makes it worth two million dollars by merely announcing that he has bought it. The world had gone mad, or he had, or they all had—he hurried out and motioned for a drink.

Bullfrog Smith whisked out the bottle and poured the drink himself, at the same time regarding him intently, and when Tucker had downed the liquor and drawn a long breath Bullfrog leaned over and whispered in his ear.

"Is this Lost Wagons so good?" he inquired mysteriously. "They're selling contracts to deliver the stock at one-ten. I've a little nest egg laid away. If you'd advise me to invest it——"

"Invest it!" burst out Tucker, "for cripes' sake—no! Keep your dog-goned money in your sock. W'y, I *sold* the danged hole for ten thousand dollars—how do you figure it's worth two million now? The poor bums haven't even *seen* it!"

"Yes, but that nigger that drives his car says——"

"Well, what does the *nigger* know about it?"

"He told Joe, down at the garage——"

"Ah, what do *any* of them know? They haven't *seen* it, I tell you—don't know where it is—couldn't find it if I should drop dead! So what's the use of talking about what the nigger told Joe? They're crazy, I tell ye—all of 'em!"

"Yes-es, crazy!" repeated Bullfrog, closing one eye slowly. "You show me when old Ketcherside ever lost. W'y that man is a wizard—he makes money on everything. I believe I'll buy a thousand at one-ten."

"Suit yourself," returned Tucker. "And what's a thousand to you, anyway? You can water your whisky like he raises the price of bacon. I hope he soaks you good."

He stumbled out of the saloon without paying for his drink and climbed up on the butte for air, but as he sat there in a daze a mighty voice shouted his name.

"Tucker Edwards!" it roared. "You're wanted at the hotel! Tucker Edwards! Tucker Edwards! Tucker Edwards!"

"Ah, shut up!" he cried, rising up with a snarl. "Shut up, you dad-burned fool!" But rather than have Lew bellowing his name to the hilltops he came down and

flagged him to quit. Then he cursed and went back to the hotel.

"Well, what is it?" he demanded when she met him at the door and beckoned him back to their corner. "Has the world come to an end, or what?"

"Why, no," she said, "Mr. Ketcherside wants to see you, when those mining engineers get through. I hope you aren't sick—you act so kind of strange. Are you really having trouble with your head?"

"Well, I don't know," answered Tucker, rumpling his curly hair meditatively. "Either me, or everybody else. I went out to get a drink and what do you think the saloon keeper said? He's going to buy a thousand shares of Lost Wagons at one-ten!"

"It's one-twenty-five, now," she smiled mischievously. "Why don't you buy a few shares yourself?"

"Who—me? W'y, I sold it for ten thousand! What do I want with Lost Wagon shares?"

"Sell them to somebody else," she came back promptly. "Oh, you don't know this game the way I do. I took every dollar I had and bought Lost Wagons stock, the minute the books were opened. Of course there aren't any shares yet, but I got their receipt for it; and now, already, I could sell out for ten thousand dollars!"

"Well, why don't you do it?" he suggested cautiously. "Now, I'm telling you the truth, I'd never sold that mine if I'd thought the ore would go down. The formation isn't right and—say, kid, I'd go crazy if you lost your whole roll on my tip."

"But I'm not *going* to lose," she answered triumphantly. "I'm going to double and double my money. Why I made that whole eight thousand just by following Mr. Ketcherside, and letting go in time."

"Yes, but you may not let go, some time; and then where will you get off? You'll lose your little snowball."

"No, I won't!" she declared. "Mr. Ketcherside will take care of me. He always tells me in time. But seriously, Mr. Edwards, why don't you take your ten thousand and buy in before the stock goes up? I'll tell you when to sell and——"

"Nothing doing!" he broke out, "I've been in this game too long. And I *know* that that ore won't go down. Not for sure, of course, because nothing is sure in mining, but I've sunk on another vein in the same general formation and the values pinched out like *that!*"

"All right, Mr. Wiseheimer," she said as she left him. "You just watch the price of that stock."

Either the magic of his name or the size of his bank account had already achieved a miracle for Ketcherside, for, in a hotel where certain guests were sleeping in bathtubs, he had been given a whole suite of rooms. To be sure, the flooring swayed and the walls were thin as sheathing; but it was the best suite in the St. Francis, the swell hotel of Gold Trails, and a million could buy nothing better. A group of men looked around as Tucker Edwards was shown in, and Ketcherside himself introduced him.

"Gentlemen," he said, as they rose up from their table, "this is Mr. Edwards, the discoverer of Lost Wagons. Mr. Edwards, meet Mr. Brinkmeyer, the mining engineer—Mr. Farley, my mining superintendent—Mr. Hromatka, my photographer—Mr. Squires, who does my publicity work. Don't go, gentlemen, you'll all be interested. Mr. Edwards, I want you to tell us about the discovery of your mine, and what we may expect to find there; and to-morrow we'll go out and look over the ground and get ready to put things right through."

He motioned them to be seated and turned to Tucker, who blushed to be received in such company. Brinkmeyer was the best-known mining expert in the West, Jim Farley had been superintendent of the Mohawk; and Hromatka and Squires were in a line of endeavor which made fame and even fortune, overnight. A write-up by Squires and some Hromatka pictures and a man's name was heralded to the world; and now he, Tucker Edwards, was about to be exploited as the discoverer of the Lost Wagons Mine.

"Well," he began, "there isn't much to say. I've been prospecting in Lost Valley for two or three years, and when I crossed the mouth of that sand wash I found colors along the bed rock and finally traced them back to this ledge. It lays along the side of a long, red hill, you might almost call it a mountain, and where I made my strike there's a kind of ore shoot where the hanging wall is rotten with gold. I had a lot of samples, but a promoter got away with 'em and sold 'em to a high-grading assayer. But when you get out there you'll see gold all across the face, and it's peppered in like dust shot along the hanging wall. Kind

of a red, burned-out iron right next to the wall, and she shows up big, in spots. Of course most of this ledge is awful low grade, the whole country being kind of pockety, but——"

"That will do, for the mine," interposed Ketcherside genially. "Now tell us about yourself. Mr. Squires, I'm sure——"

"Yes, indeed," nodded Squires, "go ahead, Mr. Edwards—or do they call you Death Valley Slim?"

"Number Seven," grinned Tucker. "Been so many Slims here lately I had to git me a number."

"Good!" smiled Squires, making a hasty note; and when it was over, Tucker was walking on air and his grouch had suddenly evaporated. The engineers had both joked with him, even Ketcherside had condescended, and Hromatka had taken a group of them sitting by the table, besides stealing some close-ups of him. But there was an unreality about it all which left Tucker strangely uneasy, and he made his escape to the hills.

It was as if he had fallen in with a band of necromancers and magicians—a pork packer, to speak whose name brought forth showers of gold; a beautiful enchantress who swayed men to do his will; a photographer who took his pictures, a writer who sounded his praises and an expert who could make or break any mine. Whatever this man touched, this master magician, would be transmuted by his system to gold; and yet, deep behind it, Tucker sensed more than unreality—it did not look honest to him. No matter how eager the people were to get their money down, no matter how much the stock went up, Tucker knew that sooner or later, when it came to a show-down, Lost Wagons would not make good.

But as evening came on and the gasoline flares leaped up, as the glasses began to clink and the megaphones to blare, the lure of the city gripped him. He clumped up and down the sidewalk, now the center of a crowd, now striding along with some friend; and always Lost Wagons was on every tongue and he was that oracle, the discoverer. He had located the claim, he knew the formation, he had met Ira N. Ketcherside and his staff; and his opinion, though it was different from what they hoped and believed, was received with a subtle respect. He was the big man in Gold Trails, where so long he had been a blowhard, the man who was always boosting for Lost Valley—and to hear him knocking it now raised many a hearty laugh, though they knew it was because he was sore. But who would not be sore, to sell a mine for ten thousand and see it capitalized the next week for two million?

Tucker was going up the street toward the moving-picture palace when he saw a woman's form ahead of him; and as if she sensed his presence, she turned and half looked back, and he knew it was Julia Cleghorn. The street was dark and hummocky and no place for a lady. It was distinctly up to him to escort her, but there was something about this woman that left him cold at times. He wondered about Ira N. Ketcherside. From what literature he had had access to it appeared to be the custom for such magnates to carry on a traffic in souls; or to put it more bluntly, to take advantage of their position to lead trusting stenographers astray.

Not that Julia, of course, looked to be that kind; but at the same time, you never can tell. It was that, he knew now, which had prompted his first question when they had entered on their fascinating bargain—that each should speak the truth—and he had professed a great relief when she had informed him very shortly that she had been hired to fit the room.

But had she been so hired, and, if so, what had happened to the red-headed charmer before her? And which was worse on the part of a multimillionaire—to furnish his office to match one faithful beauty, or to heartlessly hire a succession of luckless maidens, who all had Titian-red hair? It was foolish, of course, and yet something to be considered before he ventured too far; for already he had succumbed, along with all the rest of them, to the wiles of this captivating secretary. When she called him he came, with his heart in his mouth, eager to do whatever she wished; but all that would be changed if he found that her soul had been sold to the highest bidder. Or—well, anyhow, he would show her he was no monkey-on-a-stick, to be dangled for the amusement of the crowd. He stopped—and a gang of riotous young men close behind him promptly hailed him and took him in tow.

The main street of Gold Trails was not built for timid creatures who suddenly changed their minds and, seeing himself

elected, Tucker broke away from their blarney and boldly joined the lady. She was not alarmed—in fact, not alarmed enough—at the neighborhood through which she had passed; but as the gulch gets worse the farther up you go, Tucker bethought himself instantly of the picture palace. It was nothing but a barracks made of corrugated-iron roofing and floored with the natural dirt, but it was respectable anyway, and sufficiently public to satisfy the most circumspect of lovers. Only no women went there, or hardly any, and some of those who did come—but what was the difference, they had to go somewhere, and Miss Cleghorn professed to be charmed.

They climbed some broad stairs to reach the entrance of the palace, which had been backed into an excavated gulch, and as he led his fair companion past the crowded rows of benches, Tucker became the cynosure of all eyes. Nothing was said, they were too polite, but many an iron brow lifted and the rumble of male voices ceased. Women were scarce in Gold Trails, and their presence was appreciated, especially when they were as beautiful as Julia; but if she was embarrassed by these attentions, she concealed it most successfully and Tucker took heart and smiled. She was a queen, indeed, in those windswept wastes, and her modest little hat and quiet gown left no doubt as to her station in life. She was a lady, and that was enough.

If the hard-faced miners still smoked their strong pipes and spat in the native dirt, it argued no lack of respect—it was not a woman's country, that was all. A woman's place was in the home, if she had one, in Gold Trails; and if not, she must take life as it was. The cloud of tobacco smoke lifted as the picture came on, and Tucker at first was enthralled but—the plot was a common one and the sweet-faced little heroine had no chance with the gentleman mucker.

"Let's go," he growled as the hero was forgiving her, and Julia followed him meekly out.

CHAPTER VI.

THE STAMPEDE.

Tucker spent the night between two bales of hay in the corral where his mule was fed; but his rest was disturbed by uneasy dreams, and by mysterious men who tiptoed in and out. Now he imagined himself being garrotted by lurking agents of Ketcherside, and looking on helplessly while the fairest of all stenographers was carried off to a fate worse than death; and then the dream changed and he was stabbing Ketcherside with a paper knife, while Julia looked on in silent agony. It was an awful night, and when the cold woke him up he rose with an oath and, throwing the saddle on his mule, rode silently off to the west. What was it to him if old Ketcherside should be angry—let him find the Lost Wagons himself!

The morning star was glowing like a globe in the first flush that presaged the dawn and Tucker was well across the Dry Lakes when there was a thunder and roar behind him and, as his mule left the road, an automobile went rushing past. It bored on through the night and, as the darkness closed in behind it, Tucker put his mule to the gallop—the stampede for Lost Wagons was on. The memory of those mysterious footsteps, which had disturbed his dreams, came back with redoubled force, and he knew there were other horsemen before him; knowing stampedes as he did, he misdoubted very much if he was not one of the last. And Personality Plus, who knew where the mine lay, had disappeared the evening before. There was a circumstance to give any man pause, because Personality Plus would jump anything.

When Tucker rode out through the portals and gazed off across Lost Valley he hardly knew his old stamping ground. Where once the four wagons, making an etch mark against the sky, had been the only signs of life, now there were automobiles everywhere and the far western hills were dotted with moving specks. A procession of autos, like chasing bugs, was toiling up the sand wash toward the mine; and at the foot of the red hill a cluster of dark spots showed where the first of the stampeders had stopped. But the mine was Ketcherside's now. What interested Tucker was his mill site, his claim on the water at Lost Wagons. Because water was worth money now—the mine could not be worked without it.

Old Buck came down to meet him as he spurred in toward his camp.

"Tuck!" he hailed, "what the heck has bruk loose? They come in here like a passel of madmen. Wouldn't none of 'em talk, and they all said the same thing: 'Where's the Lost Wagons Mine?' and pulled their freight.

That promoting son of a goat, that was in here before, came back and tried to file on your water, but I took a shot at him first and started to talk about it afterward, and he built him a dust down the wash. I ought to have killed him, by rights."

"Much obliged, Buck," answered Tucker. "I knowed you'd hold it down for me—reckon he's gone back and jumped Ketcherside's mine. But I should worry myself sick—one's about like the other—let 'em fight it out, says I."

"Do you mean to say," asked Buck, "that old Ketcherside himself is here? Well, that explains a whole lot. You're made, Tuck, my boy, if you play your cards right—just stay here and hold down this water."

"Sure, I'm made," grumbled Tucker. "But honestly, Buck, I believe I'm touched in the head. Had the dangdest dreams last night, and every one I talk to seems crazy. All except you, Buck—you seem to be perfectly sane."

"Yes, and I *am* sane," returned old Buck viciously, "you watch me trim that man Ketcherside. I know him, the dirty scoundrel; he's been raising the price of bacon ever since I can begin to remember. But now it's *my* turn, because there's freight to be hauled, and two hundred a ton is my minimum—for him!"

"Well, he'll bite," assured Tucker, "because I spoke to his secretary and told her all about you. She's crazy to see you and she's going to speak to Ketcherside, and tell him what an 'ad' it will be. The last big team in the country—regular twenty-mule team—hauling ore from the Lost Wagons Mine! But say, Buck, tell me something—how the devil is it possible to capitalize that mine for two million? Well, that's what he's done, unless I'm plumb crazy; and I swear to God they're selling that stock in Gold Trails for a dollar twenty-five a share. Bullfrog Smith bought a thousand that I know of."

"It's the system!" snarled Buck. "That's what keeps the pore man down—these millionaires trimming him of his wages. But you watch me git mine—I've bought my last share of stock. After this I'm going to *save*. And by the way, Tuck, if it ain't asking too much——"

"Sure! What is it?" asked Tucker, as he dismounted stiffly and laid a dry limb on the fire. "Want to borrow a little money or something?"

"Well, if it ain't asking too much," began old Buck deprecatingly, "I'd sure like to pay off that store debt before they levy an attachment on my team. I'll be able to pay you back soon."

"Wait till I get my roll," answered Tucker and hurried off the trail to the rock pile. He came back grinning, counting the bills as he strode in, and handed over eight crisp bank notes.

"There's eight hundred, Buck," he said. "Reckon you'll need any more? Well, any time you do, just ask for it. You're a friend of mine, Buck, and——"

"Yes, and you're sure a friend of mine," asserted old Buck fervently. "I'll pay you back, the first money I git. Look back yander on the road—there's a big, red machine coming in!"

"She's Ketcherside's," pronounced Tucker, "I'd know that boat anywhere—everything that man owns is red."

"Coming up here," exulted Buck. "Now you watch me nick him. D'ye mind if I flash this roll?"

"You do nothing," advised Tuck, "and tackle him later. He's got something else on his mind."

"Well, all right," agreed Buck, "but I'll make it a hundred. There's no use being a hog."

It did not take a mind reader to discern, even from a distance, that Ketcherside had something on his mind. Tuck could even go so far as to guess what it was—he was peeved because he had gone off and left them. Yes, and doubly peeved to see the valley swarming with automobiles and he one of the last on the ground.

"Where have you been, sir?" he demanded as he whisked out of his car and rolled his goggling eyes on Tucker. "We searched for you everywhere—why didn't you notify us, if you intended to go off and leave us?"

"I've been on the road," answered Edwards briefly. "When a stampede starts I don't wait on anybody—some jasper might jump my mill site."

"Jump your mill site!" repeated Ketcherside. "What! Do you mean to tell me that this water is held separate from the mine?"

"Surest thing," returned Tucker, dragging open the barbed-wire gate. "What do you expect for ten thousand dollars?"

"Why—why, I certainly expected that the mill site would go with it. Isn't that customary in selling a mine?"

"Not out here," answered Tucker, meeting Julia's startled eyes. "The water's worth more than the mine. Meet my friend, Mr. Buck—Mr. Ketcherside."

He waved his hand at grim-faced old Buck, but Ketcherside barely glanced at him.

"Where *is* the mine?" he demanded peremptorily, and Tucker pointed across the valley.

"D'ye see that far red hill?" he inquired. "Well, it's right up above all those machines. Somebody's probably jumped you, by this time."

"Jumped *me!*" exclaimed Ketcherside, his face getting red. "By what right would they do anything like that?"

"By no right," replied Tucker, "just by their dad-burned nerve. They came up to jump my water, but old Buck took a shot at them and then they started across for your mine."

"It's an outrage!" stormed Ketcherside, turning to get into his machine. "I'll go over and eject them immediately. But—by the way, who are these people?"

"Why, Pete Hogaboom was the man that tried to jump my water. You know him, old Personality Plus?"

"The—rascal!" pronounced Ketcherside, showing his teeth through his white mustache. "I must give that fellow a lesson. But—but see here, Mr. Edwards, that sale isn't completed, until you give me peaceable possession. I have paid you the purchase price and accepted your deed, but according to law the deal is not completed until——"

"Well, all right then," grinned Tucker, producing his ready roll, "I'll just buy the old glory hole back. A two-million-dollar mine for ten thousand dollars! How's that, Buck—pretty good?"

"Damned good!" nodded Buck, but Ketcherside was protesting and at the end he got the floor.

"That is, *technically!*" he explained. "But that's far from saying that I'm willing to call the deal off. On the contrary, I'm just insisting that you carry out your contract. You are obligated to turn over the property. If I'd bought your horse, wouldn't you feel the obligation to catch him and deliver him to hand? Well, it's the same with this mine, though, of course, if you're afraid——"

"I'm not," broke in Tucker, "and with a brave man like *you* along——" He laughed and climbed into the machine. "Well, come on," he said. "It'll be a pleasure to see you and Hogaboom tangle. Give her the gun, Sam, old scout, and let's be getting over there before they dig all the ore out of the hole."

The colored chauffeur rolled his eyes as he backed out the gate and started off down the wash, and Miss Cleghorn looked shocked and annoyed; but Tucker went on with his baiting. He did not know what *lese majeste* meant.

"Just wanted to find out," he observed provocatively, "how much a millionaire really expects for ten thousand."

"He expects what he has bargained for," answered Ketcherside shortly, and relapsed into an ominous silence. The road—or rather the wagon tracks—led off down one sand wash and then up another one to the west; and as they followed its slow sweep, the red hill rose before them, slashed and striated by long lines of white. These were ledges of quartz and lime, some following along the hill and others cutting across it at an angle; and where a narrow, side canon cut through the greatest of these long veins, there was gathered a cluster of men. In the bed of the wash below, their automobiles could be seen, and a sprinkling of ridden-down saddle horses; the cluster was strangely like a collection of flies that have discovered a leak in the honeypot. Ketcherside seemed to divine their purpose, for he leaped out indignantly and started up the rough hillside toward them.

"What are you doing up there?" he called out threateningly, and the crowd began to melt away. They scattered to right and left, some circling around behind him and beating a guilty retreat to their machines; but the most merely stopped and looked back at the open cut which marked the discovery hole of the Lost Wagons Mine. It was a small hole, indeed, to be worth two million dollars; there was a white dump down the hillside, a red gash through the country rock, and the rest was just stones and cinders. A dead crater rose above them and a flow of black lava painted its slopes in funereal colors; but the hill itself was red, a burned-out, rusty red, and that is a good sign for gold. Ketcherside struggled along up to it, followed by Tucker and Miss Cleghorn, and the stampeders stood at gaze and waited. Pete Hogaboom was holding the mine.

He was back in the cut, gathering specimens from the breast with all the industry of a thieving chipmunk, when Ketcherside labored up and caught him. When he was confronted he stalked out boldly with the ore sack still in his hand.

"What do you mean, sir!" gasped Ketcherside, almost apoplectic with rage and weariness. "I'll have you sent to State's prison for this. Didn't I warn you in Gold Trails not to trespass on my property? Give me back that sack of specimens, instantly."

"Oh, no," returned Hogaboom, putting the ore sack behind him and regarding the great millionaire insolently. "I've got a legal claim on this property. There's Mr. Edwards there, and he don't dare deny it—he promised me a half, if I sold it. Wasn't it through me he got your name—didn't I tell you all about it? Well, that ought to count, in the courts. And until I get my half——"

"Get off my ground, sir!" thundered Ketcherside, advancing upon him angrily, and Personality Plus began to weaken. "I have nothing to *do* with that!" went on Ketcherside vehemently; "that's between you and Mr. Edwards. But I hold title to this claim, and if you don't vacate immediately——"

"I'll make you," put in Tucker significantly.

"Aw, boozhwar!" scoffed Hogaboom, slipping adroitly out of the cut and retreating with the ore sack behind him; and when he was in the open he turned and ran off down the hill, taking this last of his treasure-trove with him.

"I'll have him arrested!" declared Ketcherside, sinking down on the dump and surveying the ravished cut. "Do you think they they have taken much ore?"

"They've stripped the face," reported Tucker, after a hasty glance within. "But you can dig down and get plenty more."

"No, don't touch it!" cried Ketcherside, as Tucker started back. "I want it left the way it is, for my experts. If they advise me to dig further——"

"Dig further!" repeated Tucker, and then he gave an ugly laugh. "All right," he said, "it's your mine."

Ketcherside rose up ruefully and went in to survey the mischief.

"I must post a strong guard," he announced, as he came out. "This ore is too rich to be left here unwatched—they've carried away thousands of dollars' worth. I'm going to fence it, immediately, to keep these vandals away. It must be guarded, day and night. Perhaps I could hire that Mr. Buck to——"

"Nope," said Tucker, "he's going to be too busy. He figures on hauling your freight."

"Well, then you," went on Ketcherside, oblivious of his mood, and Tucker glanced across at Miss Cleghorn.

"No—I'm going!" he announced, starting off down the hill. But Julia called him back.

"Please don't go!" she implored. "The photographer is coming, and we've just got to have you in our pictures."

"Nope, not me," he sulked. "I'm not up to this stuff. Been raised honest—with train robbers and such."

"What do you mean?" inquired Ketcherside with velvety politeness, but Tucker only met his gaze coolly.

"Never mind," he said. "You're in peaceable possession, ain't you? Well, that let's me out. I'm going!"

He started again, though still half reluctantly, as if his angry thoughts clamored for expression.

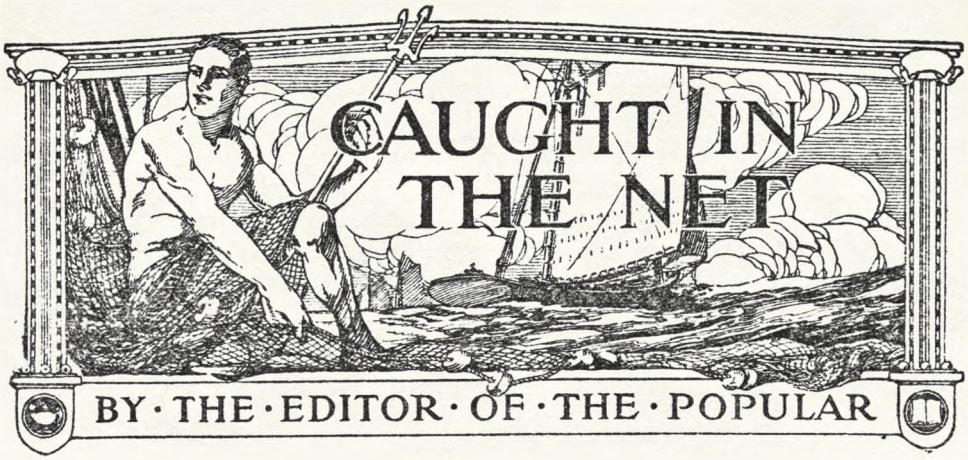
"Two million!" he croaked. "And afraid to dig out the hole. That's going too strong for me!"

TO BE CONTINUED.

A TRIBUTE TO SONG

RALPH A. GRAVES, editor and traveler, had agreed to write for a Washington newspaper a particularly high-brow criticism of a young woman's début as a soloist. In the course of his comment he declared: "When hearing her, we hang on every note."

"That," remarked George Cohan, when he read the tribute, "is unprecedented proof of what I had suspected, the lady's extraordinary power of execution."



OUR STATE FINANCES

NO matter what our individual troubles, it is pleasant to learn that, from the point of view of our State finances, as a whole, we seem to continue decidedly affluent. The department of commerce, reporting for the year 1919, informs us that, taking the forty-eight States altogether, the excess of revenues over expenditures was about $34,500,000, or 34 cents per each of us. The aggregate revenues for all the States, for the fiscal year of 1919, were $675,217,202. The aggregate expenditures, for governmental costs, including interest on indebtedness and outlays for permanent improvements, $640,403,134. The revenue amounts to $6.43 per capita, and the expenditure to $6.09.

More than three-fourths of the total revenue came from the various taxes. Aside from these, the largest source of income was from the earnings of general departments and from interest. The former include all receipts from fees, charges, minor sales, et cetera, by the various departments and offices of the State government, exclusive of the public-service enterprises, and amounted to over $83,000,000. Receipts from interest on current deposits and on the various State funds were nearly $29,000,000. Other sources of revenue were special assessments, fines, subventions, and grants from the Federal government, rents, et cetera, amounting to over $35,000,000.

The expenditures for the year—totaling $640,403,134—were, in the order of importance, as follows: for expenses of general departments, meaning payments for schools, hospitals, police and fire departments, conservation of natural resources, et cetera, $542,-661,141; for outlays on permanent improvements, $71,145,432; for interest on indebtedness, $24,079,806; for expenses of public-service enterprises—maintained by 13 States only—$2,516,755. Of the above-mentioned outlays for permanent improvements, a little more than a third, or nearly $24,000,000, was expended for the construction of new roads or the improvement of existing ones. In addition, about the same amount was apportioned by the States to their counties, municipalities, and other minor civil divisions, for road construction and improvement. By far the greatest outlay in this respect was made by California; only seven States made no outlay of this nature.

As compared with the previous year, the 1919 revenues showed an increase of $86,-911,551. There was an increase in total expenditures of $74,917,197. These figures show, for 1919, a gain in excess of revenue over expenditure of 52 per cent over the corresponding excess of 1918.

PLEASURES OF ALTRUISM

THAT the mere possession of wealth and the opportunities of gratifying nearly every whim or desire do not necessarily bring happiness has been proven over and over again. Wealthy people live unhappy or dreary lives, at times, not through any great sorrow or bereavement, but because money cannot purchase for them the happiness that often falls to the lot of others who, for the lack of it, make sacrifices.

Those with little of this world's wealth may believe that they would be happy if they had more, but, if by chance their conditions improve, they are often no more contented than before. To succor and console people in trouble, to perform unostentatious acts of kindness or to aid in movements to bring about better conditions for others many believe to be the way to happiness. This is the theory of such a host of men and women of experience who have tried it, as to make it more than a probability. Many women of wealth and leisure, who became active in the Red Cross service and other movements to aid our soldiers in the late war, have admitted that they have experienced a keener sense of pleasure in doing so than they ever experienced before. Altruism appealed to them in a way that the mere pursuit of pleasure, as the word is generally understood, never did.

Among those who spend their lives in trying to benefit others are some whose methods and objects appear grotesque, but they enjoy the work all the same. One very eccentric wealthy man, who believes that the presence of so many hobos in this country is the fault of the prevailing conditions, has made their possible reclamation the work of his life. Some years ago he organized an association of hobos from different States, which meets at regular intervals at a cheap hall in a congested section of a large Eastern city, where the hobos listen to speeches after partaking of a lunch of coffee and buns. He foots the bills gladly and pays small salaries to the "officers" of the hobo body. That his name often gets into the papers, his hobo admirers say, "ain't got nuthin' to do with it." When the association has a convention in any city, "delegates" going to it, from other cities, prefer stolen rides on freight cars, hobo fashion, to having their fares paid.

The latest development of his plan is the establishment of a "hobo college" in a small building, the supposed object of which is to teach hobos how to apply for work. So far the records of hobos becoming saturated with the desire for work are discouragingly low. He presides at the meetings, however, with beaming face, while "jungle lunches," as they are called, are served at his expense and his efforts on their behalf make him look and feel happy, his optimism as to the ultimate success of his plans being proof against the most discouraging results in the immediate present.

SHOOTING UP

THE general confidence in the financial soundness of the United States government was never demonstrated better than since this country entered into the late war. The enthusiastic way in which successive Liberty Loan issues were taken up, the promptness with which U. S. currency was recognized on its face value all over the world and the universal faith in the resources of the government and its ability to redeem all its pledges, prove that this nation, young, as the ages of nations are computed, has matured faster than some nations with longer histories.

In England, a generation ago, "As good as the Bank of England" was a favorite simile in demonstrating the soundness of commercial enterprises. England as a nation is many centuries older than the United States and the stability of its government has been the growth of nearly a thousand years, while the United States as a nation, is less than a hundred and fifty years old.

There are heavy premiums on gold over paper currency in some countries older than the United States and in many no older. There is no premium on gold here. There was a time when there was a fluctuating premium on gold here, but that time is long past. Thirty-five or forty years ago, too, people in this country would have hesitated to have accepted silver bank certificates for a larger sum than five dollars each, and few cared to accept ten-dollar silver certificates in payments. That situation, also no longer exists. For many years, silver certificates of any amount sanctioned by the government have been accepted by every one receiving them as payment, without a thought of hesitation. Now people do not care whether the payments they receive are in gold or silver certificates. They know the latter represent their face value to the last cent.

The government savings banks of the United States have been a blessing to many hundreds of thousands of struggling families. The high rate of interest paid to the depositors is assured, and they have taught many thousands the value of saving up money, even if only a little at a time, for a rainy day. They are among the most stable institu-

tions of the kind in the world, and the present universal belief in their stability helps to spread their useful influence.

The growth of the United States through its lusty youth to maturity, has been rapid. Being made up of many elements, mostly from civilized races, it naturally matured early, as a youth left to his own resources will sometimes develop into manhood more quickly than if surrounded by conservative influences of long standing.

WHEN SINCERITY IS DANGEROUS

AMONG the many pacifists, pro-Germans, anarchists, chronic malcontents, people with dangerous reactionary proclivities and others of their kind, here and in other countries, who have made trouble before and after the war with Germany, are individuals who are sincere in their beliefs and impulses. They are willing to make sacrifices for wrong ideals with which they are obsessed, and their very sincerity and singleness of purpose make them dangerous, as these qualities give them an influence with the large class of people who are always ready to allow others to think for them.

In this country one of the most typical exponents of delusive ideas, in this class, is Eugene V. Debs, who has received a prison sentence of ten years for violating the Espionage Act and who has predicted a general strike of workers in reprisal, if the sentence is carried out, pending efforts by his friends in his behalf to have the sentence set aside.

Eugene V. Debs has the intangible gift known as personal magnetism. He is not an attractive speaker or graceful on the platform, and his enunciation of certain words is often crude and uncouth, but the followers, to whom he always appeals, swarmed round him wherever he was holding forth as the worker bees swarm around the queen. His manifest sincerity appealed to all and when he appeared first, many years ago, as the leader of a Pullman-car strike, conducted principally by the socialists, the people in their enthusiasm sometimes carried him on their shoulders to the platform at strike meetings.

As a frequent socialist candidate for election as United States president, his receptions by his audiences were equally enthusiastic and his hostile attitude to the policy of the government of this country during the war, as brought out in his speech for which he was tried, made him more of a menace than if he had been a man with less influence among unthinking crowds.

Any one who commands the affection of his followers, as Debs does, has a gift of inestimable value if used wisely. In a worthy cause a man like Eugene V. Debs would be a strong power for good among the great multitudes of people who are accustomed to be led by others.

EFFECTS OF UNFAMILIAR WORDS

THE use of big or unfamiliar words, in speeches or literature, has been felt at all times as an unconscious compliment by many hearers or readers. At one time a meeting of workers belonging to many trade unions was held in a big hall in a large city, where speakers from other places addressed the audience. The first speaker started as follows:

"On looking over this august assemblage I feel that I am facing a microcosm, socially and economically, of the people of the United States."

Here he was interrupted by a roar of spontaneous applause from every part of the hall and saw that he had made a hit. It was the word "microcosm," which is not unfamiliar to most well-informed people, that did it. There was not more than one in every five in the audience who knew what the word meant, but most of them felt that they had been complimented very highly. After the meeting, many asked what a "microcosm" might be.

A PERIL MAGNIFIED BY FEAR

SINCE the scarcity of houses or apartments to rent in the cities became acute, there have been an unusual number of stray dogs wandering around the suburban districts. A good many families which were forced to leave such houses or apartments because the owners wanted them for others, because of exorbitant rents, had been allowed to keep a dog. When they went away the family dog was often left to shift for itself.

Not long since, a stray dog at a suburban part of New York City caused widespread terror by biting children it met while they were playing. It had bitten no less than eleven children, whose wounds were later cauterized by local doctors, before it was killed by a policeman, the dog's head being afterward sent to the department of health of the city for examination as to indications of rabies. Not more than twenty years ago the cry of "mad dog!" would have been raised as a matter of course. Earlier than that such a panic would have prevailed as would be impossible now.

At the time Louis Pasteur first announced his plan of inoculation for hydrophobia, the fear of this disease was at its height. Sometimes a sort of hysteria, caused by fear, was mistaken for hydrophobia. When the Pasteur Institute was established in Paris, it demonstrated that hydrophobia was less common than was thought. One of the early reports of the institute stated that in fourteen months, out of two thousand one hundred and sixty-four bitten by animals "undoubtedly mad" and treated by Pasteur's methods, twenty persons died. Of five hundred and eighteen bitten by animals supposed to be mad, it was stated, only two died. It was generally understood and admitted that no one could be sure of the remedy acting, and it was stated that sixty per cent of people bitten by mad dogs did not develop hydrophobia.

Gradually the fear of hydrophobia began to die down. Many so-called cases of hydrophobia may have been something else. There have been cases of victims of dog bites suffering from the effects of toxins on the teeth of dogs after the latter had been eating garbage; which at an earlier time would have been diagnosed as hydrophobia.

It is now known that hydrophobia, while it undoubtedly exists, is one of the rarest diseases. The danger of having hydrophobia through the bite of a dog or any animal it is believed, is about equal to if not less than that of being killed by lightning when walking on an open road in a thunderstorm. A stray dog snapping at every one it meets, may have been chased and beaten until it looks on every one it meets as an enemy.

But there is still a remote danger of such a dog being mad, and in case of a person being bitten by such a dog, the animal, if possible, should be examined by experts to find out if it is really mad, notwithstanding the comparative rarity of real cases of rabies.

POPULAR TOPICS

THE Lafayette wireless station, at Bordeaux, France, built by the A. E. F.'s engineers but now operated by the French government, recently established a world's radio velocity record by sending a message around the world in one-seventh of a second. New York can be reached in one-fifth of a second, and messages can be sent at the rate of three thousand words an hour. This station is seven times as strong as the famous Eiffel Tower wireless in Paris.

ACCORDING to a report of the commerce commission there are now in use, in the United States, 8,867,170 telephones. This is an increase of 639,586 over last year's figure.

PERHAPS you have noticed that this number of POPULAR is thirty-two pages larger than recent issues. This is a happy result of some slight improvement in the print-paper situation. Production of reporting American mills has increased six per cent over 1919. For the first eight months of this year these mills produced fifty-one thousand five hundred and thirty-four tons of paper. For the same period Canadian mills pro-

duced sixty-seven thousand eight hundred and fifty-eight tons, a thirteen per cent increase over 1919. All the mills are running at top speed.

IT is expected that Alaska will do much toward increasing the paper supply in the future. It is said that the National forests of the territory contain resources sufficient to supply one million five hundred thousand tons of paper annually, and that the success of the paper industry there is assured. This is only one of Alaska's many sources of wealth.

THRIFT isn't considered a typical American virtue, but in spite of that seventy-five per cent of the War Savings Stamps sold since 1917 are still in the hands of the men and women who bought them from the government. Redemptions to date have aggregated about three hundred million dollars.

THE department of commerce predicts that with increased production our oil fields will be exhausted in twenty-five years. Then Mexico will become the great oil reservoir of the Western Hemisphere. Despite years of civil war Mexico already is important in this field. Although only 12 per cent of the potential capacity of the Mexican wells is being produced, exports from that country for the first six months of this year were 60,000,000 barrels, an increase of 72 per cent over that period of last year. Total exports for this year are estimated at 135,000,000 barrels. Three hundred and fifty million dollars is invested in the Mexican oil industry. Seventy per cent of this capital is American, and this year we have received 71 per cent of the oil exported. Three hundred and thirteen of the country's 1123 oil wells are now producing.

THE normal depth of the ocean is two and one-half miles. Near the poles there is a marked shallowing. The deepest place—Planet Deep—is east of the island of Mindanao, where you would have to dive over six miles to reach bottom. The peek of Mount Everest, in the Himalayas, the highest mountain in the world, would be a half mile under water if it was dropped into the ocean at this spot.

BAD news for women haters! Not content with invading political gatherings for the purpose of deciding how to vote, and the barber shops to have their hair bobbed, the ladies now are trying to get into masculine secret societies. The Paris convention of Free Masons recently voted to admit women into Masonic lodges. If this meets with the approval of the world conference of Masons this winter, what will become of "lodge night," and all the "friendly games" thereby depending?

FOR the first time in history the emerald is now the rarest and most valuable of precious stones. In London recently a price of three thousand five hundred dollars a carat was paid for a five-carat stone.

NEW YORK is a great city in which to live—provided that you can find a place to hang your hat. The city is now short 102,170 apartments, and 107,122 persons have been forced to "double up." It is thought that by the end of 1921 there will be a shortage of over 130,000 apartments.

SOME of the bolsheviks deported from the United States some months ago "went in for" railroading when they reached their fatherland. Their Red brethren offered them the choice of going to work in section gangs and going to jail. They picked the section gangs.

The Coach at Old Magenta

By Lawrence Perry

Author of "The Fullback," "The Big Game," Etc.

There is more than one way of saving a dying college. Magenta calls into consultation a great football coach. A good football story by a great authority on amateur sports

ALL about the campus of little Magenta College, which stands upon a hill whose gentle slopes are covered with elm and maple and curiously gnarled catalpa trees, was that silence which the countryside knows in early August, when the very branches seem sagging under the weight of sunlight, and nature is completely given up to self-absorption. "Toot" Lansing paused on the graveled walk leading off the campus to an old colonial house, which revealed a woeful need of paint.

"Some college, Mac," he grinned. "Looks like a patch on the pants of education, eh?"

"Does look sort of run down, for a fact."

"Not much of a football look, about the place."

"Not until *you* got here, Toot."

"Football! If you brought a football to this place, they'd dissect it to see if it'd ever been alive." Lansing suddenly put his hand upon the shoulder of the man who had been the assistant trainer of the great Yaleton eleven, when he was captain and All-American tackle. "How long have you been in this place, Mac?"

"They got me here as trainer, physical director, and general coach, six years ago," sighed McNulty. "I stayed because I've never had the money to get away. I can't coach football. Still, what have I had to coach!"

"All right," laughed the other, "I'm asking."

"Nothing. When the war broke out, there were two hundred students in this college. Ninety-five couldn't get into the S. A. T. C., because of physical defects running from near-sightedness to knees that interfered. Soho, which is supposed to be our great football rival, beat us seventy-eight to nothing, down at Soho, last season."

"Soho, eh! Don't know that I ever heard of her. As a matter of fact, Mac, I never heard of Magenta, until two days ago."

"Well, I haven't got much on you. I've heard of it, but I can't see it." McNulty laughed mournfully. "You said, Toot, you'd come up here to talk about coaching football. You don't act as though you're drunk. What's the idea?"

"I'm insane, I think. When I came back from the war, I said I was through with coaching—at any price. That went, too. I was just starting out to look for a real job, one with a future big enough to interest me, when this letter came. From a girl—Shirley Whitemarsh."

"She's the daughter of the president, Doctor Whitemarsh. A beautiful lass, too."

"I thought so, from the letter. There was something quaint and fresh and girlish about it that got me quick. She said Magenta was dying on its feet, that it was killing her father, that she'd heard how I had coached Yaleton through two championships, and won the Western title for the Grasshoppers, and so wouldn't I come up here and give the college a football eleven. She said that was all the place needed as a life-saver—which shows that she's got brains, as well as beauty. Ordinarily I'd have written a nice little note and forgotten it." Toot gestured. "I suppose it's because of those sixteen months in France; any American girl that wants anything out of me can have it these days. That is, I mean I'm willing to argue with her about it."

"She's a fine, true girl," mused McNulty. "But I don't see why she's worritin' about the college, when she's going to marry young Tully, son of the president of the United States Overseas Corporation."

"Good night!" Lansing turned toward the road. "Here's where little Tootsie beats it for the metropolis. I coach a football team for no engaged girl."

"How about a girl who *was* engaged?" Following the clear, full voice, a girl of perhaps twenty, advanced toward the two men from behind a syringa bush, with a free-limbed swing that caught Toot's eye, at once. Her eyes were gray, rather widely set, and level. Her hair was that wonderful yellow of cornsilk before it ripens.

"I couldn't help hearing part of what you said, Mr. Lansing. If my *not* being engaged is an essential"—she was blushing now—"to your coming here—although why that should make a difference I cannot see—why I wish to say, merely, that I am not engaged."

"I see." Toot, to his inward irritation, felt himself blushing, too.

"I think I had as well discuss the matter, Mr. Lansing, because it enters so significantly into the mood which made me ask you to come here. I *was* engaged to 'Hal' Tully, but—but he has decided to transfer to Yaleton, instead of coming to Magenta, in the fall, a place where his father and grandfather were educated." Her eyes were lighting with indignation. "And I told him that no man who didn't love Magenta could love me."

"Tough!" commented Toot.

"Oh, it had to come—the situation, I mean. Mr. Tully and other important trustees have been horrid to father, since Jason Moss died last year; they have been planning to force him out. And the whole thing is because Soho always beats us at football. They won't admit it, but it's true."

She stepped forward impulsively, placing her hand upon Toot's extraordinarily broad shoulder.

"So can't you see, Mr. Lansing, that if you develop a worthy football team here, it'll be such a wonderful thing. Mr. Tully, and other old alumni who have money, will fire up and revive the old Magenta spirit. Mr. Tully will become enthusiastic, in spite of himself!"

"Fine!" Toot glanced at the girl. "Miss Whitemarsh, do you know what the Grasshoppers paid me for coaching them three years ago? Seventy-five hundred dollars. Do you know that, two weeks ago, I turned down a three-year contract, at eight thousand a year, to coach Oxford University?"

"Oh!" The girl glanced at him with wide, mournful eyes. "Of course I—we—I hadn't thought about that. We have a chair, in Art, that is vacant this year, and I've induced father to offer it to you. It pays fifteen hundred dollars a year. It——"

"A chair in Art! Fifteen hundred!"

"If you'll come to the house and meet father?" The girl gestured toward the old colonial mansion.

Doctor Pleasants Whitemarsh was almost precisely the sort of man that Toot had expected him to be—a kindly scholar, into whose benevolent eyes and face had grown an expression of furtive anxiety that did not belong there. For he was fitted for the cloistered places, where the strifes and turmoil of this world are but a dimly heard murmur. He came stooping out of his library, the index finger of his right hand marking the place in a book on comparative religious philosophy, which he had been reading.

"Father," Shirley Whitemarsh advanced swiftly, to the man, and threw her arms about him. "This is Mr. Lansing of whom we talked."

"Dear, dear, my girl!" Doctor Whitemarsh's humorous glance at Toot won that young man's heart at once. "Well, indeed! This is very thrilling—ahem, very! Won't you come into the library, Mr. Lansing?"

Seated at his desk, upon a corner of which the girl had seated herself, with judicial poise, Doctor Whitemarsh leaned forward toward Lansing, who was seated in a chair directly beneath the girl's swinging feet.

"My daughter, Mr. Lansing, has decreed that even as the Pythian games of ancient Greece were the symbol of a Parnassus freed from the terrors of the fabled serpent, so shall you, in the rôle of Apollo—of whom, if I may say so, you very singularly put me in mind—through the agency of the sport of football, restore Magenta to a simulacrum—mark the qualification—to a simulacrum of its former prestige. What?"

"If you only could! I think that you ——" Shirley checked her impulsive speech.

Toot gestured diffidently, and then went on.

"You have to have players, you know," suggested Toot dryly. "How many students will you have, this fall?"

"Why," Doctor Whitemarsh hesitated, "I should say at least one hundred and fifty. Our freshman class will certainly number fifty. There has been rather an unaccountable decline, in recent years."

"Not at all unaccountable," said the girl stoutly. "No football victories."

"Well——" Her father waved his hand resignedly. "I, at least, have brought myself—or to be precisely correct, have been brought—to the state where I am open to conviction."

"I see," Toot frowned. "Do you know if any of the incoming freshmen have ever played football?"

"I've looked into that," interposed Shirley. "At least, I have reports upon forty-two. Not one ever played football. You see, in recent years, we have been sending most of our graduates to the Olivet Theological Seminary."

"Magenta, in fact," declared Doctor Whitemarsh proudly, "has come to be known as the rock—or, to change metaphors, if you will—the font of Presbyterianism, in this State."

"Well, the two best men I ever played against are parsons now," murmured Toot. "There was nothing 'Pot' Graecen wouldn't do this side of complete mayhem." He hurried on, observing a pained expression on the good man's face. "Any old players coming back?"

"There are three you might want. Really powerful men. One works on his father's farm at Brixton, near here; the other is the son of the blacksmith in the village; the third keeps the college grounds in order."

"You're a wonder, Miss Whitemarsh."

"I've had to be. They didn't even elect a football manager, last year. No one wanted the opprobrium; so I took it myself."

Toot eyed the girl admiringly and nodded.

"Got any loose scholarships, Doctor Whitemarsh?"

"Loose?"

"Mr. Lansing means available scholarships, father. Why, yes. There are six in the School of Applied Design; that's your department, Mr. Lansing, the chair of Art, of which I spoke; and there are four in the college."

"Four, yes." Doctor Whitemarsh took a slip of paper from his desk. "But I have decided to give them to four sterling boys who have been recommended to me by the Reverend Doctor Shaggett, of Brixton, who vouches for them as the leaders of religious thought and scholastic activity in——"

"Nothing doing, Doctor Whitemarsh." Toot rose to his feet, glowering down upon the man. "I want those scholarships myself."

"You want them?" Doctor Whitemarsh's eyebrows lifted curiously. "But what in the world——"

"He means, father, that he wishes to have the awarding of the scholarships."

"Oh, he does. H'm!" The president of Magenta sighed. "I'm afraid I cannot go as far as that, Mr. Lansing."

"All right. I've come some three hundred miles to talk about this thing. I've heard all Miss Whitemarsh has to say. I'd like to put Magenta on the map because—because"—a warm light stole into Toot's icy-blue eyes—"I like—Magenta. You let me have the say about those scholarships, and I'll tackle the job. Otherwise, not; not for a minute."

"Of course, he can have them, father. That is, all except one. I've decided to give that to the man who brings the ice here each morning."

"That's the stuff." Toot crossed to the girl and took her hand. "I'm on, Miss Whitemarsh. Now, your father's busy, wants to read. So if we can go somewhere, where I can find out how much those scholarships mean, we'll get somewhere."

That evening, as the train bound out of Brixton, the seat of Magenta College, drew into the station, Shirley Whitemarsh held out her hand, which was immediately lost in Toot's encircling fingers.

"Good-by, Mr. Lansing." Her eyes were suffused. "You have been wonderful."

Toot found his ready tongue incapable of speech. Behind the girl, the sunset showed red through the trees on the hill, with the college towers turning pink.

"Miss Whitemarsh——"

"Better get on the train, Toot."

Toot turned sharply as Tim McNulty's voice bore in. He let drop the girl's hand and scowled.

"What are you hanging around for, Mac? I told you to see to cutting that pasture they call the athletic field, and see about plans for a new stand that'll hold more than a hundred people. If you can't do what I tell you, I'll bring a trainer back with me who will."

As McNulty gazed wonderingly, the irate young man swung himself aboard the train and disappeared into the car, with a farewell wave at Shirley Whitemarsh.

Next afternoon, Toot Lansing walked into

the outer room of the private office of Adrian Tully, president of the United States Overseas Corporation, and Magenta alumnus. The mulatto who sat on guard received the visitor with the necessary amount of suspicion and contempt.

"I don't want any talk with you, my boy. You run right into your boss' office, as I told you to, and say the football coach of Magenta College wants to see him. Hurry!"

The negro returned in a moment with a stoop-shouldered man of middle age.

"I am Mr. Tully's secretary," he said. "If there is anything——"

"Oh, blazes!" With that lightning quick movement which betokened perfect adjustment of nerve and muscles, Toot stepped between the two men through the half-opened door, into the presence of the transportation magnate he had come to see.

Adrian Tully was a heavy-set man, in his fifties, with an iron-gray, General Grant beard. As he looked up, his small eyes gleamed through a tropical growth of eyebrows.

"How'd you get in here? I told my secretary to talk to you."

"Yes, but I want to talk to *you*. I don't know whether you ever heard of me, but I'm rated as one of the good coaches of football, in this country, and I'm going up to Magenta, at a sacrifice, practically for nothing, to see if I can do something for the decrepit old place."

The gleam in Tully's eyes deepened.

"Football at Magenta! Did you ever hear of the man who tried to get gold out of sea water? What we need up there is a clean sweep—and the place is going to get it."

"Look here, Mr. Tully. There's a speech you once made that I've always kept in my pocket. Among other things you said that, when it came to employing a young man with a gold Phi Beta Kappa key or a gold football, you'd take the football every time."

"So I would—so I do."

"Well, I'm going to try to sprinkle a lot of gold footballs around dear old Magenta this fall."

"Go as far as you like. I suppose you want money from me. You won't get a cent. I'm through with Magenta until old Whitemarsh and his crew get out. They've killed any football spirit, or any other sort of spirit, that was ever there."

"I'll prove you wrong, if you give me six summer jobs, at forty dollars a week, in your corporation, in which I can put six good men for the next two years."

"I wouldn't have a Magenta man around me, if I were paid for it."

"All right; good day." Toot turned upon his heel and walked out of the office. It was characteristic of him, though, that by nightfall he had secured assurances from two classmates, and from Magenta alumni, that summer positions were open to such young men as he might recommend. Thus heeled, Toot boarded a train and, thereafter, for nearly a month, wandered, not at all irresolutely about sections of the country not too remote from Magenta.

"My dear," said Doctor Whitemarsh to his daughter, as he sat down at the dinner table, on the evening of the opening of Magenta College, "the faculty, at its meeting this afternoon, while expressing unreserved pleasure at the sudden increase to be noted in the department of applied design, is hardly impressed with the personnel thereof. You will understand that the requirements for entrance are that students there shall have had a high-school education."

"Yes, and they all have had."

"I suppose so." Doctor Whitemarsh glanced out the corners of his eyes. "But two of the credentials cite high schools in Alaska; one in Russia."

"I think, father," murmured Shirley, "that you may safely trust Mr.—Professor Lansing properly to attend to his department."

"I hope so, I hope so." Doctor Whitemarsh sighed. "But I must confess that never, in my wildest dreams, had I pictured such men as I have seen to-day, in Professor Lansing's art department. It would be complimentary to call them sons of Anak. Why, daughter, I noted one fellow with the chest and shoulders of the Farnese Hercules, whose head most veritably comes to a point. I conceive of interests he might have that are remote from art."

Shirley laughed.

"They are men, father. 'He-men' as Professor Lansing calls them. They are an agreeable change from the boys we have had pattering about this campus, in the last ten years. I am positively inspired."

"Well, well," Doctor Whitemarsh shrugged. "Let us say grace and eat our dinner, my daughter."

Next afternoon, Toot and Tim McNulty

stood, side by side, on the small area, on the back campus, which from time immemorial had served as the scene of Magenta's athletic activities, watching the twenty-two candidates for the college eleven as they filed out of the little shanty which served as a dressing room.

Toot, with the ball under his arm, assigned the candidates to various positions, as their size and build indicated, and then spent the afternoon giving to each a practical demonstration of the fundamentals of the places they were to fill. All seemed interested and willing, and the afternoon passed as pleasantly and efficiently as may be imagined. At least, it did until toward the end of the practice, when the gorillalike individual, whom Shirley Whitemarsh had matriculated from an ice wagon, suddenly rose from a crouching posture.

"I've had 'nuff for to-day," he growled.

"You stay here, Mulligan, until you can get by Croose the way I told you," said Toot crisply.

"Aw, go to the deuce." Turning his back upon the coach, Mulligan was walking from the field, when Toot caught him by the arm and swung him around.

"You stay here, do you get me."

For reply, Mulligan, who already in rough play had proved his mastery over the other men of the squad, threw himself unexpectedly upon Toot and bore him to the ground face upward. But like a flash Toot bridged, a trick in wrestling that Mulligan knew not how to handle. He solved the problem by releasing his hold, and punching the coach upon the temple.

The next instant the two men were circling around each other, while the players instinctively formed a circle. Mulligan rushed with whirling arms. Toot uppercut him on the cheek, with his right, laying the flesh open, and then side-stepped, his adversary plunging and reeling into the crowd. But he came back, murderous. A full blow from the man's flailing fists would doubtless have ended the fight forthwith, but Toot was a finished boxer and, while he did receive two or three half-stopped wallops, they served merely to give edge to the fierce pleasure he was having in cutting Mulligan to ribbons. In fact, he ended the fight, when he wearied of punishing the man, by hooking his right to the jaw.

Spurning the prostrate heap with his foot, he turned to the rest.

"Is there any one else here," he asked, smiling his bare-toothed smile, "who wants to take a hack at licking the coach?"

No one did, and from that time on the most devoted lieutenant that Toot had was Dan Mulligan. In fact, Toot eventually made him captain.

Shirley Whitemarsh had seen the fight. There were few things she didn't see. No student had cared to take from her her self-constituted position as manager of the eleven, and so, upon Toot's earnest request —in fact, upon his threat of resignation if she refused—Shirley had remained in service. Each evening, there was a conference with the girl that Toot would not have given up in exchange for all the world. Then, too, there were occasional dinners or luncheons, at the president's home, and very often there were walks along the country roads, in the regal October afternoons.

By now, Toot was quite unable to evade the fact that he was hopelessly and completely in love with Shirley Whitemarsh, and that the only earthly reason for his complaisance, in the matter of undertaking this job, was that this lithe, gray-eyed girl had held him in the hollow of her hand from the first moment she had stepped into his view from behind that syringa bush. His only hope was that he had concealed his plight from her.

Toot had stipulated that no games be played until the middle of October. Aside from that, he had little interest in the schedule, being unfamiliar with the prowess of the teams of the region. So he had left their selection to the girl and to Tim McNulty.

"Let's see. We play Millville Tech tomorrow." Toot smiled at Shirley, one night, across the dining-room table, from which Doctor Whitemarsh had departed to his study. "Well, I don't know Millville; but the score will be not less than forty to nothing for Magenta."

"Really!" Shirley eyed him glowingly.

"Forty to nothing, sure. Maybe more. Why, Miss Whitemarsh, I've developed a natural punter who sends the ball fifty to sixty yards, every punt. I've got two tackles that can open holes in a stone wall, Mulligan and Croose. Scroggs can throw a forward pass thirty yards, on a dead line. And as for running, that boy Biggins can't be tackled by any one, once he's loose. They're all together, too—a machine."

"Hurrah! And, by the way, I've completed the schedule. Soho comes here for the last game of the season on November 16th; the other games are not really very important—except I've been writing to Yaleton."

"Yaleton!"

"It seems," Shirley went on, "that Fordhampton has abandoned the idea of a team this year. So that deprives Yaleton of rather an easy game, the week before the Pinchton game. That date is ours." She left her place and came to Toot's side. "I know that it's your alma mater, Mr. Lansing; but only think; Yaleton is where Mr. Adrian Tully has sent Hal. Why, if we give them a real, hard game, I'm not so sure that Mr. Adrian Tully might not become enthusiastic and be friends again. Will you play Yaleton, Mr. Lansing?"

"Sure I'll play her." Toot's face was grim. "We'll get licked, but——"

"You'll try to do your best against Yaleton?" The girl's hand was resting upon Toot's shoulder now. He didn't move for a full minute.

"You bet I will," he said, at length.

Magenta sent a gasp through intercollegiate circles of her more or less immediate vicinity, by defeating Millville eighty to nothing. The following Saturday, the team journeyed down to a small college in the vicinity of New York City, and won forty to two. The two following games resulted in scores of twenty-eight and thirty-two to nothing, against colleges who never in their history had failed to defeat Magenta by topheavy scores.

Magenta began to appear in the newspaper reports of the large cities. Six students, in the course of a week, received appointments as correspondents for as many metropolitan newspapers. Jacob Waters, the oil magnate, Magenta, '71, came up to the college, for the last Saturday in October, and saw his college team break old traditions by defeating Lake Geneva University ninety to nothing. He left Doctor Whitemarsh a handsome check for the painting and repairing of the president's mansion, together with some indefinite remark about a new dormitory. A campaign to raise faculty salaries was launched among the alumni.

"Do you know, father, that you are positively getting stout?" laughed Shirley, one morning in November. "Never have your chapel addresses been so wonderful. Dean Prentiss told me, yesterday, you were a new man."

"Well——" Doctor Whitemarsh rubbed his hands. "I don't know, my daughter. But there seems a new atmosphere, all about; a new *prana*. From a sort of *rumunculous*, I seem to be swelling into a giant."

On the second Saturday in November—the week before the fateful Soho game—the Magenta team, nothing more nor less than a herd of human bullocks, appeared upon the field of the great Yaleton stadium, to play the second half. The entire Yaleton backfield, and four regular line men, were blissfully perched upon the bleachers of a far-away university town, watching Pinchton play her final practice game against Willard.

At Yaleton the score was, Yaleton, nothing; Magenta, fourteen. But for fumbling it had as well been twenty-eight to nothing.

"You're a hell of a Yaleton man!" Mike Higgins, the veteran Yaleton trainer, came, from across the field, to Toot Lansing's side. Tears were streaming down the honest fellow's face. "You're a——" Mike choked.

Toot grinned.

"I'm going to lick you, Mike, good. Some day when you play us again, and have all your regulars, you may have a chance. But substitutes don't go against any Magenta outfit any more. Catch it?"

And so, while Yaleton undergrads hooted at Toot and reviled his name, the puissant Yaleton eleven startled the entire intercollegiate world by going down to ignominious defeat at the hands of an eleven of which no one had ever heard a month previously.

Shirley Whitemarsh had come down for the game under escort of one of the younger members of the faculty. Toot had her place in the great, bare stadium marked, and as soon as the game was over and he had given a few hurried directions to Tim McNulty, he hurried across the field. The girl was coming down the concrete slope, one arm linked through that of Adrian Tully, the other through that of a young man, whom Toot did not recognize.

"Oh, Mr. Lansing!" Shirley's voice rang with exultation. "I have the grandest news—I beg pardon, this is Mr. Adrian Tully, one——"

"I've met him," said Toot grimly.

"Well, this is Hal Tully, of whom I have

spoken. He's decided to come back to Magenta, after the mid-year recess."

"Have I?"

Toot, surveying him with jealous scrutiny, decided that his mood was far from one of high resolve.

"Yes, he has." Adrian Tully had resolution enough for two. His face was wreathed in smiles. "He wanted to go to this place, because they played such good football. And by George, here's my little freshwater college beating them to a standstill! Ha, ha! Ho, ho! He'll go back to Magenta, my girl!"

"And what do you think, Mr. Lansing? Mr. Tully is going to give Magenta a gymnasium and swimming pool! Isn't that grand!"

"Sure is!" Toot gazed curiously at the girl, hesitated a moment, and then, raising his hat, turned abruptly away, his mind containing no thought other than that young Tully was returning to Magenta, with all that this implied, no doubt. Emerging from the towering walls of the stadium he saw the towers of his alma mater etched in an orange sunset, wonderful, serene towers, rising over the most beautiful place in the world to him.

"Yaleton!" A wave of acute emotion passed over Toot. "I beat you old burg—beat you, for what?"

The question remained unanswered in the days of preparation for the Soho game. Shirley went from Yaleton to New York, after the game, and upon her return, was so immersed in affairs relating to the forthcoming contest, that Toot saw little or nothing of her.

As a matter of fact, he had his own meed of perplexity. His team of huskies had developed a spirit of overconfidence that was fearful to behold. They hadn't the slightest doubt of their ability to defeat all the best elevens, in the country, on successive days. On the field in practice, therefore, they were lacking in resiliency and spirit. The affair with little Soho did not appear to interest them a bit. At the close of practice, on the day preceding that game, Toot called the team to him, with fire in his eyes. As the team and substitutes grouped around him, Toot crashed his hands together.

"The practice this afternoon was rotten. There wasn't a man who made even a stab at playing the game. You think Soho'll be easy, do you? Well, let me tell you they've packed their team with every butcher and ore-mill workman and busted-out star from other colleges that they could get their hands on. And 'Peach' Dunlap, of Halvard, has been up here, all week, coaching them. Put that in your pipes and smoke it. To-morrow afternoon come out on this field prepared to play the game of your lives. No matter what you've done to date, if you don't lick Soho, it won't count with Magenta at all. Now beat it; you make me sick to look at you."

There was no doubt at all that Magenta felt about Soho just as Toot had said. The little village had filled to overflowing with graduates, who for the first time in their lives, were simply oozing college spirit. There were young men and old. Jacob Waters, '71, the oil man, motored up from New York, with a barrel of prime old fluid stowed in the back of his limousine, and the college songs that trolled forth from the Magenta Inn waxed ever more jovial as the nocturnal hours wore on. The college had never seen anything like it. Adrian Tully, his wife and son, were guests at the presidential mansion, and report went like a breeze about the college that Doctor Whitemarsh and the transportation magnate had been seen crossing the campus arm in arm.

There was but one idea, and that idea was the defeat of Soho. No one had any doubt about the outcome; in fact, anticipatory celebrations were the order of the night. No one, that is to say, except Toot Lansing, the man who had made this extraordinary occasion possible, and who, in the past twelve hours, had apparently been forgotten by every one but his players.

Toot was well aware of the things that had been going on in the neighboring college; was aware, too, of the roll of money, the size of a bucket, which had been sent up from Soho, and which the loyal sons of Magenta were covering at odds of two and three to one. It all worried Toot. Aside from Shirley Whitemarsh, whose life and affairs he apparently had been able to straighten out in the happiest way—for, for the sake of the girl and her father, he had formed an attachment for this simple, little college with its musty atmosphere of other days and for the good people who lived here. And, if his gang of hirelings could do what they had done for the place, then their presence here was something more than worth while.

"I had to do it—for the girl and for Magenta," he said to Tim McNulty. As the trainer nodded assent, Toot turned away, and then came back. "Heard anything from Katy"—Katy was the Whitemarsh's cook—"about Miss Whitemarsh and young Tully?"

"Yeh; they're friendly; but not lovin', if that's what you mean." McNulty winked. "The girl is so busy with seat arrangements, tickets, lodgings for guests and the like, that she has not much time for takin' notice of the likes of him."

"No. Nor of me." Toot frowned. "If we beat Soho to-morrow, that'll be about all she'll want out of me—until next fall."

The next afternoon, in a gloomy apartment, in the little gymnasium of Magenta College, an apartment odorous with the smell of arnica and iodine and Mike Murphy's liniment, sat huddled the Magenta football eleven and substitutes, their faces turned upward to the vague figure of Toot Lansing, who stood confronting them, his right hand oracularly raised. He was not speaking; he was waiting for an outburst of loud, raucous and prolonged laughter, in the adjoining room, to cease. It was a sound made by the Soho team to register the fact that the members thereof had nothing more serious on their minds than a pleasant afternoon at the expense of Magenta.

"Forced!" said Toot, when at length the merry uproar ceased. "Forced! Are they going to laugh in there after this game is over? Eh?"

For reply there came a low growl.

"That's the stuff!" Toot leaped upon a bench. "Soho has imported players from here to Los Angeles. Remember that. Remember that a team of legitimate college gentlemen are up against a bunch of thugs; remember you've forgotten more football than they ever knew. I want you to go out on the field and keep clearly in your mind that if those mutts lick you to-day, Magenta College will go into hock, and that it'll be a long, hard, and cold winter for you fellows. Play according to the rules—but don't let them out-man you. When you touch a Soho man let him arise from the field, look dazedly about, and then with trembling lips say, 'A man touched me.' Catch it? Win this game. If you don't, don't come back here. Pick out a good hole in the fence and dive for it. Now, then, on the field with you."

As the Magenta squad swept out of the gymnasium, down a wooded lane and thence onto the football field, they stopped for a moment in sheer surprise. Never had a man of them seen such a throng. The grand stand, which stood along the east side lines, had been enlarged to accommodate five hundred spectators; it was now sagging under the weight of at least twice that number, Magenta and Soho partisans hopelessly intermingled. A canvas fence surrounded the gridiron, and every available inch of space, beginning at the fragile barrier and extending to within a few feet of the roped-off boundary lines, was occupied.

Captain Mulligan and his men had literally to force their way to the playing area; a riot of enthusiasm assailed their ears. They sprang into position for the practice line-up, but, as the quarterback barked out a set of signals and kneeled to receive the ball from the center, the Soho eleven appeared on the side lines, and the ball shot into empty space, while the Magenta team with one accord rose to view their opponents. Similar curiosity was manifested by the Soho band, who, ignoring the frantic orders of their coach, walked out on the field until quite close to Magenta and then stood staring.

And while the two teams thus regarded one another, with an admixture of burning curiosity and baleful defiance, the spectators had the opportunity of viewing both. A silence fell upon the field. Never, perhaps, since gladiators marched into the arena of the Coliseum, in ancient Rome, had athletes of appearance so portentous faced one another. Croose, of Magenta, the man of whom Doctor Whitemarsh had taken note as one whose cranium came to a point, was by comparison, with most of the players, an exemplar of the Greek ideal. Hardly a man of either team but whose hair did not begin less than two inches from his eyebrows—with the exception of the two Ajaxes, representing each of the contending elevens, who had no hair at all beyond a point extending from a line drawn vertically upward from the ears. The referee, a stout, mild-mannered alumnus of Bowdoin, who had been assigned by the central board of officials to arbitrate the dispute, took one look at them, then turned to the umpire, a wisp of a man, with a high-pitched voice, who had been an elusive quarterback at Colgate, and was now celebrated for the depths of his knowledge of the rules of the game.

"'Shrimp,'" he quavered, "suppose we

have to put a man out of the game? What'll we do?"

"I don't know, 'Fatty.'" The umpire shrugged. "We might coax him—I've seen it done in western Pennsylvania."

A smile of relief crossed the chief official's face.

"That's so. I've done it myself in a Fordham-Georgetown game. Now about ground rules?" he went on, as the rival captains and coaches approached.

"Don't want no more rules of any sort or description," said the Soho captain, a young gentleman named Troglyoff. "I've got all I can learn in my head. Eh, Mulligan?"

The Magenta captain shrugged and scowled.

"The less rules the better for us."

"Say, but, look here——" Toot Lansing essayed to interpose, when a sarcastic smile from Peach Dunlap gave him pause.

"What's the matter, Toot, getting cold feet?"

Toot held the man with his icy stare.

"When I get cold feet, Peach, you won't have any feet at all. Bring on your team. T'ell with the rules."

The crowd, in the meantime, was vociferously calling for action. As Toot passed to the side lines, he could see Shirley Whitemarsh, tugging at her father's arm, vainly trying to bring him to a sitting posture. Her face was dead white. Adrian Tully had something in his mouth that had once been a cigar. Magenta had won the toss, and Mulligan, coached by Toot, had given Soho the kick-off, choosing the goal which would favor his team with rather a stiff wind. As another deep silence settled over the field, Mount Joy, the Soho kicker, knelt to place the ball upon the mound, while Magenta disposed herself to receive the drive.

Mount Joy, as his name implied, was an Indian who had lost his job, as a football player, when Carlisle went out of business. He was now a student in the School of Commerce at Soho, and had been for several weeks. His kick hurtled above the heads of the Magenta players, over the goal line. Scroggs, who recovered it, lost his head and started to run, when Toot's voice, rendered quadruply stentorian by megaphone, brought him to his senses. He accordingly stopped short and touched it down, giving his team, thus, the privilege of lining up on their twenty-yard line.

On the first play, Scroggs, who had forgotten all lore about danger zones for forward passes and other hazardous plays, called for a forward pass and himself threw the ball to one of his ends who was dusting out wide. But as the ball whistled through the air, a Soho man, who seemed nine or ten feet tall—he was really six feet seven—rose like a specter, in the path of the fleeting ovoid, and engulfing it in his long arms started down the side lines, toward the Magenta goal, with the springing lope of a greyhound. No one was ahead of him, and the defenders, who were cutting across the gridiron to head him off, had, as it seemed, the least possible chance of carrying out their intentions.

With fifteen yards to go the runner swerved slightly outward to make more sure of evading the Magenta quarter, the last man he had to pass. The move brought him within reach of a Magenta substitute over the side lines. Quick as a flash his foot went out, deftly touching the runner on the leg, just above the right ankle. It was a trick he had caught from a man who had played Gaelic football. Like a flash the man's foot doubled under him; he went to earth in all the majesty of his extraordinary height, while the ball flew out of bounds.

"Who did that?" The tall young man, white with rage, bounded to his feet. But, by this time, Peach Dunlap was on the scene. With a livid face he turned to Toot, who also had just come up.

"I'll get you for that, old boy," he snarled. "You saw that!"

Toot smiled sweetly.

"I don't know what you're talking about, Peach, I'm sure. The last I heard from you was something about cold feet and no rules."

"And that goes, you big stiff. I'll show you."

The ball had been recovered by a Magenta man, after a struggle out of bounds which had mutilated three feminine gowns and knocked the wind out of Professor Biggs, of the department of biology, at Soho. Scroggs called for a kick, and Jabbot, the Magenta punter, sent the ball to mid-field. Here Soho began a line attack under the direction of Peach Dunlap who, cane in hand, had walked out onto the gridiron. While the Magenta element of the throng hissed and booed and called for the man's expulsion, while the officials sought to make him listen to reason, and the Soho

team and rooters urged him to hold his ground, Toot walked out into the lime-light holding up his hand with a gentle smile.

"Let him remain," he said. "It's all right." So saying, he himself took station behind the Magenta wall of defense.

On the first play the ball went direct from the center to the full back, a man named Stubbs, who was well named, inasmuch as he rose not more than five feet four inches from the ground, but had the latitudinal dimensions of a Hercules. It was a drive on tackle, somewhat deceptive, and powerfully launched. Head down, his big, stumpy legs moving up and down like pistons, Stubbs went into the hole which had been opened, and emerging, butted Larkin, of Magenta's secondary defense, in the stomach, sending him prone. Scroggs dived for the man and went clean over his head, colliding with Croose; the two comrades went to earth exchanging fisticuffs.

On went Stubbs, puffing, snorting, snarling like a traction engine on a grade. He had toiled his way twenty yards before Mulligan wound himself about the runner, bringing him to earth. The air resounded with the Soho cheers, was dark with Soho banners and Soho headgear. Doctor Knox, of Magenta, professor of Bible history, came to grips with the dean of Soho, who in his excitement had pressed the professor's derby hat far down over his eyes. The combatants were parted by their wives, whereupon they apologized, as became men of their station and dignity.

Peach Dunlap had not had a great deal of time in which to teach his men an attack, but most certainly he had taught them to mass on tackle. Again Stubbs went into the line, this time through Mulligan. Sachez, Magenta's full back, nailed him after he had gone four yards. There is something maniacal about a team when it suddenly discovers it can gain by straight rushing; to the strength they possess is added something superhuman, something indomitable, which is beyond the power of their fellow men to stop. Slowly but steadily, the Soho eleven crunched its way over the chalk marks that led to the Magenta's goal.

It was a bitter advance. Magenta was giving her utmost to stem the tide, but wholly unable to handle the swift application of power upon a given point. Toot, silent and tense now, marked each rush with straining eyes, checking off the players who got into the interference. Suddenly, as the Soho team made its first down upon Magenta's ten-yard line, it came to him with a flash. What was happening was that Soho was using her two guards in the interference, in addition to the tackle and the end. In a jiffy, Toot called his two pair of guards and tackles to his side.

"Every time they come into the line," he said rapidly, "you two guards go out wide, with your tackles. Your opposing guards are leaving their places to get into the interference."

It worked instantly. Magenta's tackles helped now, by their guards, were no longer smothered, and the first rush of Stubbs was checked for a loss. The second met with no more success, and Peach Dunlap, seeing that the offense had been diagnosed, ordered his quarter back to launch a place kick. Standing on Magenta's fifteen-yard line, the Soho kicker could hardly have missed, and he did not; the ball went cleanly through the goal posts, netting the enemy three points.

While Soho caused the echoes to resound, the Magenta rooters slumped into despondency, exchanging one with the other the opinion that it was to be, after all, the same old story. But it wasn't. The score against Magenta was a veritable lash, and since Soho had shown all she knew—which could now be handled—the local team proceeded to shoot off some of her own fireworks. Time and again, through the first half, Magenta, through end runs and forward passes, worked the ball into dangerous territory, only, at the crucial moment, to mess up the signals, or, as more often occurred, to lose the ball on a fumble or a bad pass. The half ended with the score still standing at three to nothing in favor of Soho.

Between the halves, Toot did not go near his team, this at the earnest request of McNulty.

"They've got it, got everything," he said. "You can see that. It's merely nervous they are. What you'll say'll only make them worse; leave them to me, Toot, and we'll win by fifteen points."

"All right." The coach shrugged and walked across the field to where Shirley stood. The girl had come down from her seat in the stand and was on the side lines, watching the snake dance of the Soho students, a form of diversion which Magenta had never acquired.

"Mr. Lansing!" She ran toward him. "Are we going to win? Oh, it's terrible, the opportunities we've thrown away!" She paused a moment. "Do you know, I've been thinking more about you, than anything else. The time you've spent, the things you've done for us! Have you any idea how I—we—appreciate it, win or lose?"

"You mean just 'win,' don't you?"

For a moment the girl looked at him uncomprehendingly; then suddenly she flushed. Moving closer toward him, she was about to say something, when the referee intervened. He had spoken to Dunlap, he said, and that coach had agreed to keep off the field in the second half.

"So," he concluded, "if you go on, I'll call the game and give it to Soho."

"Oh, all right," laughed Toot. "I'll stay away, if Dunlap does." He turned to speak to the girl, but she had vanished in a swirling mass that swept about the little group.

The second half, so far as Magenta's ability to advance was concerned, was a repetition of that part of the first half which had followed Soho's place kick. Toot's pupils could tear off five and ten yards at a time, but always there intervened some flagrant error, or some glaring instance of holding or successive offside play, which vitiated all the good work that had been done.

The third quarter gave place to the fourth. The afternoon sun sank behind the mountains, and cold, gloomy shadows invested the gridiron. The spectators who had cheered themselves practically voiceless sat, as it seemed, in a sort of stupor, watching the sodden grinding struggle below—the effort of a superior team trying to make headway against the unceasing manifestations of adverse fate.

Out of the welter came a sudden flash. Biggins was loose near the side lines, and was headed for Soho's goal. A Soho substitute sprang from the crowd and brought him down. None of the officials could make sure that a substitute had done the tackling, Soho, of course, wouldn't admit it; in fact, produced a spurious claimant for the honor. And so the protests of Toot Lansing, who had seen the whole affair, went for naught.

The closing minutes drew near. In the excitement, Soho did not notice, on the line-up, that a Magenta back had remained out wide, near the side lines, pretending to tie his shoe. On a quick signal, Scroggs threw the ball to him, and he was away. Over the turf he sped like an antelope. Magenta's rooters suddenly found voice and pursued him with screams. Soho pursued him with something more tangible, with a ten-second end, who overhauled the runner on Soho's five-yard line, bringing him down with a flying tackle that was beautiful to see. The next instant Magenta groaned as the ball flew wild, a Soho end recovering it on his three-yard mark.

Time was precious for Magenta. Realizing this, Soho used up three plunges into the line, delaying on each as long as possible. With a minute left to play, Jerigal, Soho's full back, dropped back of his goal for a punt. The pass came fair and true, but as he kicked, Mulligan, who had broken through, interposed his great chest. The thud that followed sounded throughout the length and breadth of the field like the boom of a church bell. Bounding backward, the ball described a sharp parabola, flew over the heads of the crowd, and over the canvas fence that bounded the gridiron.

Instantly the air was filled with flying spectators, as the players of the two teams went in pursuit of the lost ball. Mulligan in a wild leap was the first to get hands upon the top of the inclosure, but at least a dozen Soho hands clutched at him to pull him back, while Magenta hands tugged at the flying orange legs of a Soho man who sprang for the top of the fence a second after Mulligan.

No fence of canvas could stand a strain of the sort. Down it came enveloping the players of the two teams, who fought and clawed and kicked, striking friend and foe, in their wild efforts at release. It was Scroggs, of Magenta, who first saw a ray of blessed light. Toward it he wriggled with the frantic vermiculations of a trapped eel. In an instant, he had sprung into the expansive outdoors. And there, almost at his feet, lay the embattled football.

"How do you do!" smiled Scroggs. Then lovingly, gracefully, he fell upon that ball, and the referee, stepping over the violently rising and falling canvas shroud raised his hand with a smile of relief.

"Touchdown for Magenta!" he cried.

Of the scenes that immediately followed the kicking of the goal and the call of time, ending the struggle, Toot Lansing had but a dim impression, and, indeed, they were too fervid, too kaleidoscopic for any mundane mind to encompass. In the midst of it all,

Toot knew that some instinct had taken him to the side of Shirley Whitemarsh, who stood clinging to her father, who in turn was clasping the arm of Adrian Tully, whose necktie was under one ear and his hat a mere skeleton.

"Lansing"—Adrian Tully was shaking a stout finger at him, smiling and slapping Doctor Whitemarsh upon the shoulder—"I never expected to live to see this day. You've done a wonderful thing, and almost given me heart disease. But, of course, it can't go on. I mean your art department, nor many of your football players. Doctor Whitemarsh agrees with me here. Now that we're in the limelight Magenta'll have to——"

"To purge and live cleanly," smiled Doctor Whitemarsh.

"Yes," smiled Adrian Tully, "but, I think with some advice and suggestions from a man of your capability, Lansing, the trustees can arrange so that the college will be decent and law-abiding—as well as practical. I want you to get us a good coach to take your place here—any reasonable price."

"Then you——" Toot hesitated, flushing.

"No, I don't want you here, I want you with me as personnel officer of the U. S. Overseas Company at, say, twelve thousand a year to start with. You're too valuable to be wasted."

"Gee! Mr. Tully!" Toot advanced to the man and then paused. "Can I take as many members of this Magenta team into my department with me as I want?"

"You may form your own department. Come in and see me Monday. Now, I think Doctor——" Tully drew the president of Magenta to one side, while Shirley, smiling and blushing, looked up into the coach's face.

"Mr. Lansing," she said. "You know Hal Tully?"

"You bet I know him," exclaimed Toot fiercely.

"Well, he's decided not to come here after all. He decided that after a talk with me. He's going back to Yaleton. His father says he may."

"Eh!" Toot stared at her.

"He decided," repeated the girl deliberately, "to return to Yaleton, after a long—talk—with—me, Mr. Lansing."

For a moment the coach studied her. Then, a radiant smile rippled over his face.

"Call me 'Toot,' won't you, Shirley?"

"All right, Toot."

THE REWARDS OF POLITICS

THETUS W. SIMS, Democratic member of the lower house of Congress from Tennessee, has served twenty-four years in that body. Last summer he was beaten for renomination in his party's primaries by a young man, an overseas veteran. Here is an event, a tragic event from the Sims standpoint, illustrating the fact that the rewards of politics are in no way material. With nearly a quarter century of devoted and unusually capable work to his credit, Mr. Sims, far advanced in years, faces the world without a dollar saved and is obliged to look about for some way of supporting himself for the rest of his life. Speaking of this phase of political endeavor, Franklin K. Lane, former secretary of the interior under President Wilson, said:

"If you're a young man and are thinking about going into politics, do one of two things: either make sure that you have independent means, or search your heart and be certain that you have no hunger for riches. American politics is run on the theory that the honor of public office is a sufficient reward. It is impossible to save money as a public official. If you're a poor man, go into politics only when you know you'll be glad to die poor."

The Box

By Roy Norton

Author of "David and Goliath," "The Man Who Talked Too Much," Etc.

For a couple of hard-bitten miners, handy at gun-play and such, David and Goliath seem to continue strangely in need of a guardian. But then it is one of the things that makes us love them

THE Mission" in San Francisco is immortal. It has withstood fire and earthquake, "Boss" Buckley, police reforms, and more or less all hard-fought battles with the various city improvement associations. True, its old-time warrens and thieves' rests have largely disappeared, and its cloak of respectability has become one of more substantial woof and leading to the certain promise that some day it may become a complete and honest suit of clothes.

But—Market Street is still a dividing line, and many strange characters can be found on the "Mission side." The fraternity that pits its wits against law, order, and the safe possession of property can still draw maps of every alley, byway, or warren on the Mission side; and—such memories are frequently useful for the illicit.

Much of the Mission is highly respectable, inhabited by persons of humble means, honest folk who work hard for a living; but are not millionaires. It has hotels that are frequented by hard-working and respectable visitors from upcountry, downcountry, or the mining sections. And in one of these hotels were for a few days quartered a certain pair of mining partners widely known as David and Goliath—whimsically known as such, because of their difference in stature and methods in enterprise. They were merely resting, making purchases and seeing a few sights before returning to the high hills and canons of the Big Divide where they not only had mining prospects of their own, but were in charge of certain properties of Miss Martha Sloan, and her brother, both of whom were for the time being in distant Honolulu.

The partners did not know the Mission. However sophisticated they might be in their own familiar country, they tramped through this section of a city as innocently as a pair of children, as guileless and simple as a pair of babes in the wood. They would not have been lonesome out in the mountains or deserts with no one to converse with closer than a hundred miles; but here, surrounded, and milled about by hundreds of thousands who brushed against them, they were lonely. The sole friends they had made were among men of the water-front and harbor police, due to an accident on their arrival, and these men welcomed them, were interested in hearing them talk—when they could be induced—of that strange hinterland, of deserts and wide spaces. And Goliath and David, in return, were as entranced as schoolboys by tales of city adventure.

"Reckon we ought to be hittin' the trail for home, hadn't we, Dave?" said Goliath, one morning, as he stood shaving himself in front of the battered mirror in the obscure but respectable hotel down in the Mission.

"Reckon we had," David agreed; "but —— By cripes! Ain't we been havin' a good time on this trip? Mighty lucky we got acquainted with all them boys down in the police station."

"Be hanged if we've done much else but loaf around there for a whole week!" Goliath exclaimed with a broad grin. "Don't seem to go anywhere else at all. Ain't got to know anybody else at all."

"Except three or four fellers that boards here in these diggings," David said. "One or two of 'em seem all right. That night watchman feller, Carruthers, seems a pretty good chap."

"He's another feller that's got a job I wouldn't hanker after. Night watchin' a bank wouldn't suit me at all, what with all the desperate burglars and such there is in a place like this. Must be a mighty big responsibility, eh?"

"Wouldn't like it, any way," said David,

preparing to take his turn in front of the mirror. "Sleepin' all day and bein' out all night ain't natural. Night shift in a mine is bad enough but—— Humph!"

As usual they were the first to enter the dingy little dining room; for their life habit of early rising could not be overcome, and, as usual, they found Carruthers, the night watchman there, he being the only other regular attendant at the small table in the obscure corner that they had modestly selected for their own. On this morning he looked up at them with unusual interest.

"Hello," he said. "Glad you came down before I hiked it off to my nice little bed. Wanted to see you particularly about somethin'. You men go off into the mountains somewhere above Auburn, don't you?"

"That's just where we're goin' to-morrow mornin'," said David, with a sigh of half reluctance. "We've loafed too long as it is. Why?"

"Auburn's quite a good-sized little city and a nice place to live in, ain't it?" Carruthers inquired casually. "Lots of neighbors, I reckon."

"Oh, we don't live there," Goliath corrected him. "We're off on the Divide behind, most of the time. And as for neighbors—nearest one is about ten miles, and he's a chink."

Carruthers finished his breakfast, eying the partners thoughtfully, meanwhile, and walking with them out to the room that by courtesy only was called "Writing and Smoking Saloon." He advanced to a big railway map that decorated the dingy wall, and said, "Just whereabouts is it you go? Show me on the map. I'm always curious."

The partners explained, rubbing hard fingers over the glazed surface of the map, rather pleased than otherwise that the night watchman should have such interest. He seemed to regard their destination as an incredibly out-of-the-world place after he learned that they had to travel by stage for a long distance after leaving the railway, and then pursue the remainder of their journey on foot.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed. "How on earth do you get your supplies up there?"

"That's easy," David declared, grinning at Carruthers' ignorance. "Old timber road. Rough going, now, because a bit overgrown; but good enough so we can hire a teamin' outfit to bring stuff in, about once a year. In fact, that's one thing we've been stayin' here for—to buy a lot of stuff we're takin' back with us. We're goin' to put up a little stamp mill of our own—one of these new-fangled gas engines runs her."

Carruthers made a few more desultory inquiries, yawned, and said he must get to bed because he had to get up and out that afternoon, and left them. The partners made their final purchases, paid their last visit to their friends at the police station, and bade them good-by. When they returned to the hotel it was late in the afternoon, and to their surprise they found Carruthers awaiting them.

"Talk about luck," he greeted them, "I got a chance to put something your way, to-day. That is, if you'd like to make twenty-five iron men for practically nothing."

"Every twenty-five helps just now," David replied. "What is it?"

"Bank business," said Carruthers importantly, as if anything connected with his job as night watchman at a bank must be of immense gravity and mystery. "Come up to my room and I'll tell you." On the way up the stairs he changed his mind and suggested that, inasmuch as probably the chambermaid might be cleaning his premises, they could go to the partner's rooms, which they did. "I work for the Steamship National Bank, you know," he said impressively. "And she's one of the richest and biggest and oldest and soundest in the world. You know that, don't you?"

The partners admitted that they had heard of it all their lives.

"Good!" said Carruthers, and went on, still more impressively. "Then you'll understand that they never hire any one to do anything for them unless they know absolutely, that they're honest. Well, I had to draw my pay to-day, and I overheard the head of the safety deposit ordering one of the clerks to find out the best way to have a box of stuff shipped up-State, and he was growlin' about the silly things that depositors expect a banker to do for them. Then, all of a sudden, it struck me that was along where you boys were goin'; so I just butts in and asked him if I could help.

"It seems an old cuss that has had a box of stuff stored in the safety-deposit cellars for about five years, wants it shipped up to somewhere near where you two men go, and then left in some responsible, honest person's care until he calls for it, or sends for it,

and he's ready to pay the shippin' charges and give the fellers that look after it twenty-five bucks for their trouble. I kind of pulled the long bow when I told the boss I'd known you two men for years; but I told him I'd swear that you were honest, and that you'd see that box through, and watch over it. I know you two fellers won't throw me down. So there's your chance. Just like findin' twenty-five dollars in gold in the road, eh?"

The partners were very grateful. They assured him that they would take charge of the box and protect it as if it were their own.

"Well," said Carruthers as he bade them good night. "See you in the morning. Don't know what size this box is; but will find out. Maybe you'll have to come to the bank and get it yourselves. Any way—let you know, to-morrow morning."

But, very much to their gratification, when Carruthers met them in the morning he grinned and said, "I saved you fellers a lot of bother, all right. Lucky; but the boss of the safety deposit left it to me to send that box off this morning, by an early truck. I cussed a little bit, because if I'd known where you were shipping your other stuff from I could have sent it there and saved a double haul. Had a notion to rout you out, and then thought to myself, 'No, I ought to keep my eye on this till I get their receipt.' So it's out in the hall there. She's heavy. Reckon this man Gardner, who owns it, must have it full of scrap iron. Funny what stuff some people set values on, ain't it?"

The partners repaired to the hallway where stood a big packing case, and David gasped with surprise when he saw the stenciled letters on the outside: "From Acme Mining Machinery Company, San Francisco. Handle with care."

"Funny!" he exclaimed. "That's the place where we bought our stuff from."

"That so?" said Carruthers, and then brightening up with an idea, laughed, and said, "Say, it's a piece of luck, that this box came from them some time, ain't it? All you got to do now is to send it down and ship it along with your other lot, instead of by express."

"But—but do you think it's safe? Going by freight, that way?" David asked.

"Safe? For that distance? Of course it's safe!" Carruthers reassured him. "It'll be there almost as soon as you are, won't it? And you're going to wait to get the whole lot and take it up into the mountains with you, ain't you? Only you ought to tend to it right away, because your other stuff might be shipped across the bay before this gets there."

David hastened away, succeeded in finding a lazy driver of a job wagon and returned with him. Together the partners and driver loaded the case into the vehicle, after which they signed a receipt which Carruthers tendered them, and David personally accompanied the box to its point of shipment.

"Better write to the bank and tell them where you have put this box in storage," said Carruthers, on parting with them, and then, with a second thought, "No, don't do that. Write to me here at the hotel. My takin' the letter up to the bank and handin' it in will be another little feather in my hat and prove I'm lookin' after the bank's interests. Besides, it gives me an excuse to talk to the head guys. Well, so long! I'm off to hit my downy bed."

They had not expected to see any of their police acquaintances again; but, when they came to the ferry slip, saw not only Morgan, the chief plain-clothes man, but several others they recognized. They would have remained to talk a few minutes with their new friends, but found them all strangely intent and preoccupied.

"Sorry I can't have a chin with you boys," said Morgan mysteriously, and in a heavy-villain air of secrecy, "but the fact is we're keeping an eye on every one that boards a ferry to-day. We're hoping to pick up one or two chaps that are wanted mighty badly."

They trudged aboard the boat with their suit cases, and lounged over the rail. Then, debarking, boarded the train, and pulled out of the clanging confusion of the railway station.

The partners' sense of responsibility increased after they reached Auburn. They were sorry that they had taken Carruthers' advice, rather than ship the box over which they were custodians as baggage, so that it might be kept under observation. When the freight for which they waited did not arrive on time, they were apprehensive, not so much for their own belongings as for the case which had been intrusted to their care. When the freight did not come for another twenty-four hours they were mightily distressed, and practically camped in the railway station, and pestered the agent until he snapped, in exasperation, "For the love of

Mike, don't keep rapping on my window to ask if there's another freight train coming along! I've told you a dozen times that your stuff comes on a local freight, and not a through one. A local freight is one that has a car that's switched out of the train on to our sidetrack. Most likely it'll be a box car, but if it ain't a box car, it'll be flat. And as soon as it gets here, you can bet your boots I'll see that your stuff's got off. Get me? Now leave me alone!"

Before they could decide how to act in such a case as this they were diverted by the sound of a whistle, and rushed out to the platform.

"A freight train, by gosh! It's a freight!" Goliath exclaimed.

And then, to their added disappointment, the locomotive did not even stop, but tore past, dragging its string of cars that sounded a derisive, "Click-click! Click-click!" into the partners' ears.

"Bet that damn box is on its way to the wrong place, right now!" David wrathfully exclaimed; but Goliath was beyond speech and seated himself on a truck and dropped forward and rested his chin in the palms of both hands, with both elbows on knees, and gave way to despair.

But the partners' dejection was counterbalanced by their delight when not only their own belongings, but the white elephant of a box, finally arrived, placidly, safely, unobtrusively, just as millions of other shipments had arrived, and, like all their predecessors, were duly turned over to the owners' care. It seemed ridiculous that all they had to do, after all that vast worry, was to sign their names admitting that they had received the goods in good order, despite the fact that originally they had shipped it with the dread "O. R.," meaning "owner's risk." They did not feel safe, comfortable, and at rest, until that particular box was transported by long and trying stages to their cabin high up in the mountains.

They consulted as to the safest and most secure place for its keeping, and concluded that, if the lower bunk of the tier in which they slept were but four inches higher, it could be slipped beneath and well concealed. That necessitated two days carpenter work. They were very busy with their own affairs, but conscientiously tore out a part of the cabin floor, the stanchions, the bunks, and did their work well, before they could feel peace of mind.

At last they got that precious box beneath, and, for final security, decided to board it in. That required more work, for they had to crawl beneath the lower bunk and fit timbers, and drive nails, by candlelight. It was when the last spike was driven and, perspiring, cramped, and stiff, they stood upright in the cabin, that Goliath threw a hammer viciously on the floor and declared, "If ever again I go into the bankin' business I hope I drop plumb dead before I sign the papers!"

Spring advanced. Their two responsibilities, which consisted of the care of the Sloan property down on the American river, and the care of the box, were eased by the receipt of a letter from Martha Sloan in which she announced that she could not return before summer, and a scrawled note from Carruthers, that at least had the merit of brevity, and read:

> No need to write concerning the matter. Man will pay twenty-five dollars more, if you have to keep it another year.

The partners read this communication and grinned at each other.

"I don't care, now, if he doesn't show up for ten years," said David.

"Yep!" said Goliath.

And so, in time, the partner's sense of security increased, and, engrossed in opening up their property, they almost forgot the box.

One momentous day they had a letter from Morgan which announced that he and two others of "The Force" were to have a week off, some time later, and proposed to wander that way, find the partners' cabin, and see if all the fish that hadn't been caught up there could be hooked. David and Goliath wrote laborious and urgent invitations, each of which ended with, "The cabin's yours, yours truly." And so, when summer was on, three men—"plain-clothes men"—tenderfeet from San Francisco, burdened with fishing rods, boxes of cigars, a few bottles of liquids they had collected, a very few personal necessities in the way of combs, brushes, and so forth, arrived one dusky evening at the partner's cabin.

But now the positions were altered, for while the partners were entirely at home, the plain-clothes men from San Francisco were like a triplet of boys turned loose in a strange environment. But all of them did their very best, the partners to give the others a good time, and—the others to have

it. Yet the partners were secretly distressed, and when they had an opportunity to talk alone for a bare three minutes looked blankly at each other, and Goliath said, "For the Lord's sake! Dave, where can we sleep this bunch? I reckon there ain't one of 'em that ever slept on a floor, rolled in his blankets, in all his born days."

"Wish they'd have given us a few days notice, so's we could have rigged up some bunks," David answered. "Tell you what we'll do. You and me and one of the boys can sleep on the floor to-night, so two of 'em at least can get some rest, and to-morrow we'll knock somethin' together."

A good-natured, laughing wrangle took place over this arrangement, which the members of the force declined, and it was adjusted by cutting jacks from a rather worn pack of cards. Morgan, who had drawn the floor, admitted the next morning that it wasn't exactly a soft bed, and hilariously insisted that, if the partners were determined to build sapling bunks and cover them with pine boughs, he was perfectly willing to boss the job and see that the others did their work well.

"Easiest way to do the trick," he remarked, "would be to pull out that lower bunk, swing it end for end, and broaden her out so four could roll in there. Eh?"

The partners agreed, and then suddenly exchanged glances.

"Dave, do you think we ought to—about that box—you know what Carruthers——"

"Carruthers? Carruthers?" exclaimed Morgan, abruptly sitting up from where he had been lounging on the doorstep.

"Pshaw! Might as well tell 'em, Goliath," said David. "We ain't got nothin' to fear from these fellers. They're officers of the law. They know how to keep their mouths shut about banking business. They know that banks is mighty particular." And then he turned to the listening guests and explained, "Fact is, we got a box under that lower bunk that don't belong to us, but was put in our keepin' by the Steamship National Bank down in Frisco. We get twenty-five dollars for keepin' her till they send for it. And," he concluded importantly, "of course you know that bank business is always kept secret, and won't say nothin'."

"Of course not! Of course not!" Morgan agreed. "But—Carruthers? Who is Carruthers? What's Carruthers got to do with it?"

"Him? Oh, he's a feller we got acquainted with while we was stoppin' at the Observatory Hotel in Frisco. Nice feller. Fact is, he's the chap that put us in the way of makin' this twenty-five dollars for doin' nothin'. He's night watchman up at the Steamship National, Carruthers is. Got a mighty responsible position, I reckon."

"It certainly is," Morgan admitted, and then getting to his feet. "Well, let's get at it and take down the bunk and shift that box so we can do this job of carpentering."

But a strange fact, which the partners failed to observe, was that much of the infectious hilarity, and boyish freedom of the men on vacation appeared to have given way to a strictly businesslike industry as they assisted in dismantling the lower bunk and pulling it apart. Morgan asked questions, when the box was exposed, as to why it had been boarded in. Once one of the officers started to ask a question, but was silenced by a swift and secret gesture from the chief detective.

"Now! Drag it out!" said Morgan and bent forward expectantly. In fact, his eyes opened widely, his lips half parted, and his whole attitude was one of curiosity and eagerness. Not until he saw that it required the full efforts of two strong men to move the box to the center of the room did his pose change, and then it swiftly altered to one approaching excitement and exultation.

"By gee whiz!" he exclaimed. "Got it, or I'm a goat!"

The partners, mystified, stared at him with round eyes. Morgan's two companions seemed to share his excitement. They made way when Morgan hastily walked across to the box, bent forward and scrutinized it closely, read the stenciled markings, and even tested its weight with his own hands.

"Who put those marks on the box?" he demanded, eying the partners.

"That's just the way she came to us from the bank," David explained. "And—sort of funny, wasn't it? But you see we'd bought our little stamp outfit and engine from the Acme people, so them marks came in right handy. But—I sure hope we didn't do nothin' wrong when—when we shipped it by freight, did we? Carruthers told us it'd be all right."

"So Carruthers suggested shipping it by freight along with the rest of your outfit, did he?" dryly questioned Morgan. "I suppose he told you it would be just as safe as

if it went by express, and maybe that it would save expense, didn't he?"

"By gosh! That's just exactly what he said," David answered. "But—hang it all! —he was right, wasn't he? Maybe we hadn't ought to have let it out from under our noses, but—the answer is, it's here, and I'll take my oath it looks just the same as it did when we got it! Not a nail loose in even the iron binding strips. She's just as she was when we got her, as far as I can make out."

For a long time Morgan scrutinized David's perturbed face, and Goliath's somber one, appeared to be convinced of their sincerity, and then said, "Boys, the only way to find out, is to open that box and see if what was in it is undisturbed, or whether —it's filled with nothing more than bricks and paving blocks!"

Both Goliath and David started as if in agony.

"My God!" muttered David huskily. "That would be awful! And after Carruthers and the bank trustin' us to take care of it, and—— We could never make 'em believe that we weren't the thieves!"

Morgan, the shrewd old man hunter, whose life had been passed in studying characters, actions, and manifestations of men, read these two as if they were but open books.

"No use to worry, yet," he said, much as if he were addressing a pair of terrified boys. "You can leave it to me. I'm going to open this box. The bank won't hold you responsible—for that. I'm now the head of the detective force of San Francisco, so you needn't hesitate over that part of it."

And before the partners could have objected, had they so desired, he picked up a hammer that had been lying on the floor, slipped the claws beneath the heavy iron binding straps and lifted one up.

"Um-m-mh! Top is fastened down with heavy screws. Might have expected that. Get me a big screw driver."

David ran out to the tiny engine house and returned with one. Morgan calmly removed one after another until the center boards of the top were all loose and then tried to lift them.

"Double battens beneath," he said. "Might have expected that, too. Got to remove the whole top."

There was a tense stillness in the cabin, broken only by the sounds of the screw driver as he twisted and turned, or the shuffling of feet as the men standing about him shifted and moved. They all bent forward and stared as he lifted the entire top of the packing case, and then all were again restrained when they saw exposed the top of a heavily and substantially built trunk. Moreover, it, too, had been bestowed with the utmost caution, for it was securely fastened by hardwood cleats and screws to the outer case.

"Here, Bill, you take a turn at this job. It's hard work, and I'm getting tired," said Morgan to one of his men.

Again they all stood and watched as screw after screw was laboriously removed.

"Turn her upside down so the trunk can fall out," Morgan ordered, and stepped aside while they all obeyed. "Right that trunk," he said, and, when they had done so, bent over and inspected it. The locks were doubled and new and strong; but the gray-haired man wasted no time.

"Nothing to do but bust 'em," he said, and the partners, somewhat horrified, but submissive to his authority, saw him lift the hammer and bring it heavily down on one after another of the four hasps holding padlocks, until all yielded. He threw the hammer aside and lifted the lid, exposing nothing more than layers of folded newspapers which he tore away hastily as if to discover anything beneath. And there, neatly, solidly packed, layer on layer, were flat packets of currency, and squat canvas bags. Morgan picked up a bundle of bills and read aloud the figures printed on the paper binding, "Five thousand dollars." He glanced at his audience and added, "That's the bank's own count. Now for the others."

One after another, quite as if these precious packets were valueless, he picked them from the trunk and tossed them on the floor, until all the currency was removed.

"A hundred and five thousand dollars!" gasped one of the detectives, as if staggered by the sum of wealth.

David and Goliath, the partners, who had brought this burden to its resting place and kept it beneath a bunk in the belief that it was but a collection of junk, stood speechless and bewildered.

"Five thousand dollars in gold!" said Morgan, lifting and dropping back into its place a heavy bag. Then he counted the other bags, with groping fingers that segregated them, one after the other. "Sixteen

of 'em! Sixteen bags of gold! Eighty thousand dollars. Think of it, men! A hundred and eighty-five thousand dollars."

He stooped over and lifted bag after bag to the floor until he disclosed several layers of old blankets and a flattened piece of carpet.

"Clever crooks, the men who packed this stuff! They had a lot of space to fill, so that the loot wouldn't rattle in the trunk, and there's not even so much as a suit of old clothes to give 'em away. Not a thing to incriminate 'em. But—we've got the goods!"

"But—but—what does it mean?" stammered David, the smaller of the partners, bending forward and scowling beneath his red eyebrows and red hair at the fortune that lay exposed.

Morgan glanced at his confreres, gravely smiled, and carefully restored the wealth to the trunk and banged down the lid before he answered. He turned, sat upon it, and then looked up at the partners.

"It means," he said thoughtfully, "that we've accidentally stumbled on something we've been looking for a long time. It also means that if we didn't know you two to be honest men, you'd be in a pretty bad fix—right now! You've been used as a tool by one of the cleverest crooks that ever blew a safe and——" He stopped, grinned, rubbed his chin, and ended, "I think we'll get him yet!"

He stood up, looked at the treasure chest, and then said to his confreres, "Boys, I'm afraid our vacation's over before it more than started. We can't lose any time in getting this stuff back to its owners. That is the first thing to do. If Field and 'Liath will arrange for some way to get this trunk hauled out to Auburn, we will start back with it, to-day."

"But—but——" David objected, "you might tell us what it's all about. You say this chap Carruthers has used us as if we were a pair of boobs. Tell us how?"

Morgan stared at him for a moment, and then said, "All right, I will. Suppose we go outside and sit on the bench."

They moved out through the door and sat down, and Morgan lighted a pipe before he satisfied their curiosity.

"First," he said, "you two men came up to Frisco, stopped in the Observatory Hotel, and there met a man calling himself Carruthers, who told every one he met that he was a night watchman in the Steamship National Bank. That was clever, because it was to explain why he never went out in daylight, and was apt to be out at night. You see, Carruthers had to cover his tracks. I call him Carruthers, but that isn't his real name."

He stopped for a time, seemed to recall all that he had learned regarding the man, and then went on:

"His real name is O'Leary. Up to the time when he was about twenty years old he was a machinist, and he worked for the Pall Safe & Lock Company, and got to be an expert. Then he was taken into their confidential department. They used to send him out to open safes and vaults and strong boxes, whose mechanism had gone wrong, or when combinations were lost. The men who do those jobs are always skilled and specially trained; and entirely trustworthy men. Maybe it was the temptation, or—Heaven knows what!—but, anyhow, the company made a mighty big mistake in educating and then trusting O'Leary. He went wrong. One night, he cracked a safe in a country bank, and if his pals hadn't squealed, would never have been suspected. He did about three years for that job, and then, when he came out, turned loose.

"There's no doubt he was in on a dozen other jobs; but he got nipped for but one, and did five years more. Somehow, his wits got sharpened by experience, and, although he has been in court a half dozen times since, and it's practically certain that he mixed up in another score of big hauls, nobody could ever get the goods on him. The man is a fox.

"Two or three of the jobs involved murder, and it's dollars to pennies that O'Leary wouldn't hesitate at murder, if it came to a pinch. But, as I said, he always got away through lack of evidence. Smart? Although he was watched always by the best men in the country, he got clean away and was in San Francisco two months before we got warning that he was known to have come there, and then we couldn't find him, and thought he had merely come through and passed on. We'd forgotten him when the big thing blew up. Then we remembered him too late."

"We did that, all right!" growled one of the other detectives.

"Had us for fair!" the other interjected, and Morgan nodded acquiescence.

He leaned forward with his elbows on his knees and turned toward the partners.

"You see, one morning, about ten o'clock, we got a telephone scream from the Pine Oridental Bank to send men up there—quickly—and to say nothing. So the man that was then chief—the chief before me that was—called for me and a couple of others, and up we went. The P.-O. had been cracked as if it was an egg. All its fancy vaults and safes and everything, had been gone through as if they were of paper. What showed the marks of experts was that, although the bank had been robbed of a hundred and eighty-five thousand dollars, nothing whatever was taken but worn currency and gold.

The gold was the mistake! Gold is heavy as we all know. The burglars hadn't been able to resist it, clever as they were, and had gotten away with nearly three hundred weight of gold. That proved to us that several men were on the job, because no one man could have carried it very far. Moreover, two watchmen, who had been sandbagged, then bound and gagged, agreed that there were more than two men on the job. One of them recovered consciousness enough to be certain that, although nothing but the outer vault was blown, there was one man in the gang who was so expert that he turned all the locks of the inner safes in about as much time as it would take a hungry man to eat a meal."

The chief stopped, shook his head, and grinned, as if rather pleased by the adroitness of the thieves.

"Never saw anything like it!" he exclaimed admiringly. "Not a thing had been overlooked. Not a mark in the dust, not a finger print. Nothing! Nothing whatever to give a clew, or a lead. Might have been done by ghosts wearing kid gloves and felt slippers. Front doors opened with skeleton keys. Watchmen nabbed silently. Main vault blown without attracting attention from the roundsman. All we could get was that the bank had been robbed of a fortune, and—the weak point—greed again!—the burglars had gotten away with three hundred weight of gold.

"Old Hearnes, who was then chief, called up every man he had and—believe me!—nobody with a heavy bag went out on any of the ferries, or on any train down the line toward San José, for thirty days, without some of our men being sure of what he carried. Well, all we could do was to find out where any sudden flourish of gold had been changed. And there wasn't any. Most always thieves are out to spend what they've stolen; but in this case it wasn't so. Nobody showed up around the tenderloin, or in any of the gambling joints, or at the races, who attracted any attention. Nobody had any more money to blow than usual.

"In fact, for about three months, everybody we suspected seemed to be busted. Hearnes went wild. He threatened to fire every man in plain clothes and to dampen the others in uniforms. Things were hot. The whole blamed force was out trying to grab an idea of who had robbed the bank, and the worst of it was that the bank wouldn't let it become public that it had been cracked. Financial things were shaky."

Morgan laughed as if highly amused by the bank's predicament.

"Naturally, spotting was all we could do," Morgan went on. "And more than any man in San Francisco, Carruthers, as you call him, was watched. But here is the astonishing thing about that crook; nothing—absolutely nothing!—can be got on him. Two days after that bank robbery he got a job in the United Iron Works, at his trade, and has been there ever since.

"But he didn't change hotels, so we got a man in there one day and went through all his stuff, without finding a thing. We had his mail watched; but he received one letter only in three months, and that was merely a reply to one he'd written to a Seattle firm asking for a job. He joined a trades union, took out a card in the public library, spends most of his evenings indoors reading, and on Sundays goes to church. He's always been a teetotaler as far as we can find out, doesn't smoke, never mixes up with women of any sort, good, bad, or indifferent.

"He opened up a little savings-bank account, and deposits part of his week's wages there like clockwork. In fact, he acted as if he had cut out the crooked stuff entirely, and become an A-1, decent, hard-working citizen. The only friends he seems to have, or to have made, are men who are undoubtedly respectable in all ways.

"One of our shadows was within hearing one day when an old yeggman, who'd been in Sing Sing with him, held him up on the street, and O'Leary cusses his old pal out, tells him he's reformed, says he's learned it pays best to be honest, and that he's going

to keep on as he is until he's saved money enough to open a machine shop of his own. He ends up by telling the yegg that if he ever speaks to him again, on the street or anywhere else, the yegg will get his block knocked off."

Morgan suddenly brought his fist down with a bang of annoyance on the bench.

"Think of his cleverness! See how smart he is! If somehow I hadn't been suspicious of all such reformations in such men, I'd have called the watch off months ago, and made up my mind that he had turned on the level. In fact, I had thought so at times, and kept track of him only because I thought maybe that some of his old pals might meet him, and that out of some of 'em we could pick up a new lead on the big bank robbery.

"There must have been four men, or possibly five, in on the job. One of them was probably the expressman who was so conveniently waiting to haul the chest from where it was turned over to you to the freight depot; and perhaps another is, or was, a porter in the hotel where you two men stopped. Carruthers furnishes the brains for the combination. He and his gang had spotted the bank, and by studying it and the methods of the watchmen, had decided how to crack it. The only thing that bothered them was how to get away with such a lot of loot. Just while he was worrying over this problem, you two miners came along, and Carruthers' attention is attracted by you because—well—because you're a pair that nobody could avoid noticing.

"I did the first time I saw you—and—I've watched men, and studied 'em all my life. Again, you two fellows don't talk much, but, because you're honest and haven't done anything to be ashamed of, you aren't exactly—ummh!—secretive. A man like Carruthers could know you inside out and learn all about you the minute he got your confidence. I'll bet ten dollars to one you told him where you mined, what kind of a place it was, how to get here, and that you were shipping up some mining machinery that you had bought from the Acme people! Now, didn't you?"

"By heck! We did!" exclaimed David wrathfully.

"I thought so," Morgan remarked, with a quiet grin. "Well, Carruthers saw his chance and nailed it. He knew that the hardest job of all, far harder than getting his hands on the loot, would be to dispose of it in some way until things blew over; to land it in some place where it could be recovered when it was safe for him to get away. It was to be a tremendous haul, because—make no mistake!—a single job paying a hundred and eighty-five thousand isn't common by any means. The common, or garden crook, blunders by stealing new bank notes that he tries to change. He can't resist the sight and feel of new money. In all that lot in there, you'll not find a single batch of new bills. Banks don't usually keep track of the numbers on old ones. They can be changed anywhere and can't be traced.

"But just the same, the quantity that Carruthers planned to take would have been almost impossible to hide or get away with. It would be easy in New York, but San Francisco is on a peninsula, and is hard to escape from, if the police decide to watch every man who leaves the town by ferry, steamer, or trains that run from one point. You two miners offered Carruthers a way out. You were shipping mining machinery, by freight, from the Acme Company. If he could get one of their packing cases, or another, and imitate the stencil, then get the stuff to his rooms, pack it, and land it in with your lot, not a soul on earth could suspect that a fortune was actually being smuggled out of town.

"He saw another opportunity to make the haul a big one because he could ship gold, which is so heavy that under ordinary circumstances he would never have dreamed of touching it. Moreover, just because mining machinery is heavy stuff, the heavier his box, the less danger of attracting attention from those who handled it. And, what is more, he picked as innocent tools the very men that he knew were on good terms with the police force and whose stuff would never be very closely examined if, at the last moment, they chose to carry the heavy box across the apron of a ferryboat."

The partners looked as if their souls were troubled; but Morgan gave them no chance to talk.

"I think the first thing we'll do will be to get this money back. I'll take Bill with me on that job, and think it's best to leave Pete here with you two until we come back; because—boys, you're up against at least three or four, and possibly, five men who, if it came to a show-down, wouldn't have any

more hesitancy in wiping you out than they would in killing a couple of lambs. If it happened that they showed up here and you weren't on guard, I can't tell what might follow. Carruthers' way would be to send you some sort of order, probably signed by him for the bank, to turn the box over to bearer, and so forth.

"But we can't tell what sort of a thug he'd send for it, or what would happen, if it was turned over to that man, and he took it away and then examined it to make sure and found out that the dough was gone. So I'm going to leave Pete here to camp on the box filled with stones, and nailed and screwed up just as it was when we found it, until we get back. By that time, if I'm fit to hold my job, I'll have something else doped out by which, with any luck, we ought to nab the whole bunch."

David took a few steps until he could look into the interior of the cabin, where a nickel-plated alarm clock hung on the wall and said, "Well, I can't quite get the whole thing through my head yet! But this I do know, that either Goliath or me, by hiking fast, can borrow a mountain buckboard and a pair of mules from a feller over across the forks and be back here with 'em this afternoon."

Morgan was visibly pleased.

"If you can borrow them, and do the driving yourself, it will help to keep any outsider from knowing about it. Remember that I'm depending on that very point—that no one shall know anything. One of you had better go at once."

Goliath accepted this mission, and within fifteen minutes had disappeared. Morgan began discussing the best way to carry the treasure, and this time it was David who offered a suggestion.

"I can put new hasps on the trunk and stow it back. Why not put all the currency into your suit cases, which you can carry, and let me make a box for the gold that I'll ship by express, claiming that its some machinery that has got to go back for repairs?" he asked, and Morgan agreed that this was a most excellent plan. They fell to work, and by the time Goliath returned with the buckboard were ready to load the treasure thereon.

"Don't forget for a moment," Morgan adjured, "that you are dealing with cool, desperate, and murderous men. Pete knows the danger. And as for Bill and me, we shall probably be back here in about three days —just as soon as I can get my plans laid. Well, so-long!"

Goliath and Pete put in the day restoring the box and trunk within to their original appearance, and rebuilding the bunk above them. When David returned late at night, and on foot, after having delivered the borrowed buckboard, the cabin wore its habitual look.

"Got 'em away slick as a whistle," he informed Goliath and the remaining detective, Pete. "But that Morgan is certainly one cautious man! He and Bill got out at the edge of the town and hoofed it in from there after warnin' me that if they saw me again we weren't to let on that we knew each other at all. Said he didn't think it likely that any of the gang might be on watch at the station, but that he wasn't takin' any chances."

If there had been any watch kept over the shipment, there was nothing to indicate it for the next three days, during which time the partners resumed their regular work, following Pete's advice, and the detective himself seemed to keep watch over the cabin in his own way. On the third night, long after the trio had concluded that Morgan was not coming, they were disturbed by the appearance of a livery-stable proprietor from Auburn who had found much difficulty in finding his way through the obscure road, and who yelled outside, "Hey, you fellers in there!" When David opened the door he was puzzled by the man's next words:

"Brought your three miners up from the railway. The fellers you hired, you know."

Before David could reply and explain that there must have been some mistake, a roughly dressed man dropped to the ground and came forward. His voice sounded familiar, and David recognized it as that belonging to Morgan.

"Oh, glad you got here," said David, readily enough.

"Come on, fellers. This is the place," Morgan called to the others, and two other men jumped out of the spring wagon and pulled therefrom rolls of blankets and bundles that would have done credit to any perigrinating miner coming to a new job. David had recovered from his surprise, and was sufficiently astute to play his part.

"You boys will have to sleep on the cabin floor to-night, so you can dump your stuff inside," he said.

It was not until the teamster had turned his tired horses and disappeared on his homeward journey that any explanation was given.

"Well," said Morgan, with a grin of satisfaction, "the Pine-Oridental Bank has got its money back, and maybe they weren't glad! And now for the rest of it. I called off everybody keeping track of Carruthers. Never can be sure that he hasn't been wise to the fact that he was being spotted all the time. What I want to do is to give him a free hand. I'm handing him the rope to hang himself."

He chuckled as if amused by the blank looks of the partners, and the questioning stare in Pete's eyes. Bill and the other detective grinned cheerfully.

"I sort of took pains to spread the news around, through that fool livery-stable driver, that you were opening work a little heavier up here. In a mining country such news travels fast. Within a week every one around this section will be talking about this mine, and you two men, and hinting that you've struck something big. So to-morrow, all my bunch, including myself, are going to learn how to mine, and—we're actually going to work. No bluff about it! We're going to do our best so that if anybody floats in to look us over, he can see us hard at it. Get me? We're going to put up a big bluff, because, to-morrow, you're going to write a letter to Carruthers. Here's the idea you are to put in your own language and get mailed."

He took from his pocket a typewritten paper that he handed to the partners who thoughtfully read it:

DEAR MR. CARRUTHERS: Your bank has never sent for the box you gave us to take care of. We don't like to keep it any longer, because we've opened up our ledge and are going to put on a gang of men to work. Somebody might get on the job that would get curious about the box and break it open to see what's in it. You'd better get some one else to keep it for you. We didn't know whether to write you or the bank about it, but thought maybe you would write and tell us. Of course, if this doesn't reach you so we can get an answer in a few days, we shall know you have moved from the Observatory Hotel, and that all we can do is to write the bank and tell them we think we have earned that twenty-five dollars they promised to pay us for keeping it, and ask them to tell us what to do with it or send somebody to get it. Of course, there's nothing in it that's worth anything to any one but the owner, it's up to him. Maybe the bank will tell you about that part of it. If there's nothing in it that anybody could steal, we can stick it anywhere until it's sent for.

"Carruthers," said Morgan, "will call for that box or send for it, within a few days. If he calls for it himself, he will first make certain that he's not being led into a trap. If he doesn't, all we've got to do is never, under any circumstances, to lose sight of that box full of stone, because, sooner or later, it will lead to some of his gang."

The letter, phrased less perfectly and entirely clothed in David's language was mailed on the following day, while four San Francisco detectives, superintended by Goliath, learned the art of building a cabin that would appear as a mess and bunk house. On the third night it was occupied by four tired men who spread their blankets on fir boughs and expectantly waited. And on the fourth day there came a letter, delivered into a rural delivery box three miles away, that read:

Yours received. Sorry that you can't care for the matter a while longer. Shall call or send word within ten days. Do not write regarding it to any one but me. Important, as will explain later. Inclosed find money order for twenty-five dollars. You will get that much more when I call or send. Wishing you the best of luck, I am, yours truly,

JOHN CARRUTHERS.

"It's ten chances to one that he will study this place well before he calls or sends any one for the box," David remarked; "so, if you want to really nab him, it's best for all of you to really mine. Besides—we don't kick none on having a good, husky gang of men for nothing in wages."

For a whole week they waited and worked. Morgan declared that it was doing him much good physically. By common agreement, the subject of their real work was never openly discussed, and their conversation could have given no eavesdropper any intimation that any of them were other than they appeared, hard-working miners. The sagacity of this rule was proven when, while they were at supper in the dusk of the eighth evening, a man, who had approached noiselessly, stepped into the doorway and said, "Good evening, men."

"Good evening," they responded in ragged chorus.

"I'd like to speak to 'Liath or Field," the visitor said, without moving inward, and David got to his feet and moved toward the door to suddenly exclaim, "Hello! Why,

it's Carruthers! Goliath, here's our old Frisco friend. Come in, Carruthers!"

Carruthers acted as if reassured by his reception; but was still too cautious to take any chances. He gave a significant gesture to David, and stepped outside, whither David followed.

"All those fellows in there your men?" he muttered.

"All of 'em workin' here," David assured him, at which Carruthers seemed somewhat relieved.

"I've got a team and a driver up the road there a piece. He wasn't quite sure about the road, so I told him to wait there till I came down to see if I could find out if this one went anywhere, and was the right one," Carruthers lied glibly. "No, we can't stop to eat. We brought along a lunch with us that we finished when it didn't look as if we were getting anywhere. I want to get that box to Auburn to-night so we can turn it over to its owner. He's down there in a hotel. But with that gang of yours hangin' around, maybe—well, banks like to have things done quietly. I told you that, lots of times, and——"

David stood before him, the picture of unblinking innocence and trust, the epitome of guilelessness. He turned and glanced toward the cabin from which the sounds of conversation wafted, all relative to ledges and leads, and just then Goliath came sauntering forth as if to greet an old acquaintance and joined them with, "Hello! How are you? Come in and eat."

David did not heed his partner's interruption, but said, "Best thing for you to do, Carruthers, since you won't stop and take a snack, is to go back and bring your team down here. The men most always go over to the bunk house as soon as they've grubbed, and sit around on a bench outside. Your box is in our cabin under my bunk. I can make some sort of excuse to them fellers so they won't think nothin' about it, if they was to see you load it in the wagon. They won't even remember it, most likely, by to-morrow mornin'. Sure you can't stop overnight with us?"

"Sure!" said Carruthers. "Got to get a move on. It's pretty dark now, and will be darker yet before we get out to the main road. I'll go get my team."

He turned to go, appeared to remember that he had paid but scant attention to Goliath, stopped long enough to say a few words to him, said, "See you in about an hour," and walked away into the little opening in the forest where the road ran. The greenery swallowed him, as the partners watched. The conversation of the supposed miners in the cabin had come to an abrupt stop. David and Goliath went in and detailed the conversation with absurd exactitude. Morgan asked a question or two, but his men preserved a deferential silence.

"Good! Well done, Field," he said, when David had concluded. "Here's what we must do. Bill, you are to slip around and hide yourself half a mile up the road. When that wagon passes you, you're not to lose sight of it and the box, but to follow. Pete, you and Tim are to come with me and play cards in the bunk house. Dave, you and Goliath are to stay here and help them load that box full of stones.

"Then you are to urge these crooks to stay overnight, and when they go, are to bid 'em good-by as if nothing had happened to make you suspicious. After they go you are to walk inside, sit down and do any fool thing you can think of for a half hour. Light the lamp and leave the door open so that if any one is left behind to watch you, they can see you doing it. After that pretend to go to bed, turn out the light, and follow up that road as fast as your legs will carry you, because we may need you before morning. Come heeled! Now, out we go!"

Not more than a half hour later, in the dusk that had now deepened into a starlit gloom, with the promise of moonlight behind the eastern peaks, a mountain buckboard rattled into the clearing and came to a stop in front of the cabin door. From it leaped Carruthers and a man the partners had never before seen. These latter glanced in the direction of the bunk house and saw therein nothing more threatening than three men, roughly clad, and in shirt sleeves, playing cards.

The partners greeted Carruthers and his companion, reiterated their invitations to stop overnight, and then, when the proffered hospitality was declined, dismantled the bunk and exposed the heavy packing case. Carruthers quietly and carefully examined it, in the meantime keeping up a stream of inconsequential remarks. David saw him turn toward his accomplice and grin and give a quick nod, as if in assurance that all was well, and that the box had not been tampered with. They carried it out and

hoisted it to the conveyance, and then, again, the partners urged the pair to remain overnight, assuring them that haste was useless and the road through the forest difficult.

"We can find the way, all right," Carruthers asserted. "And, besides, it'll soon be bright as day, with moonlight."

"Ever been up this way before?" David politely asked the driver.

"Far as the main road," the man said easily.

"Well, you can't miss that," David remarked. "It's three miles from here, but there's no crossings and you'll have it all to yourself. Same as if you owned it, and all the stumps in the middle."

The man laughed as if appreciating the joke. Carruthers glanced across to the mess house where the card players were still visible, promised to call on the partners and spend a day or two with them after he had finished his work, inquired about the fishing and shooting in that locality, referred to the additional twenty-five dollars he had paid them, and turned to wave them good night as the buckboard moved away. The partners scrupulously obeyed Morgan's instructions, by undressing with the lamp lighted, extinguishing it, and then reclothing themselves in the darkness. The detectives did likewise.

The partners slipped out of their cabin first, and exercising full knowledge of woodlore kept under cover until they reached the road. To their surprise they heard the sounds of a man rapidly walking ahead of them, and paused to hold a consultation. They did not deem it possible that it could be Morgan or any of his men, and their suspicion was confirmed when, a short time later, the man hunter and his subordinates came slipping quietly through the gloom.

"Um-m-mh! It's good news," said Morgan. "Also it's well that we covered up the way we did; for unquestionably Carruthers left one of his men behind to watch for anything doubtful. We must hurry now and try to overtake that chap without his knowing that we are on his trail. Dave, you are the smallest and quickest and stillest of the lot of us. Suppose you go ahead and we will keep far enough in the rear so that we can't be in danger of giving an alarm."

David slipped down the shadows of the road almost at a run and then, convinced that he must have gained to a dangerous point, took off his boots and, defying stumps or ruts, ran noiselessly. He came upon his quarry and in a moment more might have blundered into him, had not the man stopped and whistled a few bars of a popular song, after which he stood and listened. The proof that it was a signal came when, from a few hundred yards in front, the same tune was repeated. The man moved forward with David almost on his heels, and near enough to overhear him greet the others. David, slipping still nearer him, made out the outlines of the wagon into which the man climbed, saying as he did so, "Everything's all right. The whole outfit down there has hit the hay. I watched 'em turn in."

"It's a mighty good thing for them that they didn't show too blamed much curiosity," Carruthers growled. "I didn't want to wipe 'em all out, if it could possibly be helped. They're such a simple lot of boobs."

The wagon moved forward, slowly, with the horses sometimes stumbling over the stumps, and the driver wishing that the moon would rise; but David crouched beside the road and waited until his friends arrived. Unlike the criminals, these had no more fervent wish than that darkness might continue to hide their movements, as well as to render the progress of the wagon slow. They picked up the missing member of their party and began a silent and dogged pursuit, barely keeping within hearing of the bumping wagon wheels.

They were hot, and feeling the strain of their work, when the wagon turned into the main road, and they knew that their heavy work had but begun; for immediately, the horses ahead of them were urged to a trot and they were compelled to run to keep within hearing. They began to divest themselves of their clothing and throw it behind bushes at the sides of the road. They were at last running like athletes clad in nothing more than trousers and shirts, and with bellowing chests and arms held to their sides. They strung out, according to their endurance, with David and Morgan in the lead, Goliath third, and Tim, the latest arrival from San Francisco, dropping slowly behind, but doggedly striving to carry on in this trying night marathon.

"Lord! Hope they're not going to do this all night," Morgan was panting, when David suddenly reached a hand over to his arm and restrained him.

"Stop!" he whispered. "Stop! They're

slowing down, and that may mean they are going to turn off the main road."

His surmise proved correct. It seemed as if the driver was not quite certain of his position, for they heard two men get down and search for something by the roadside.

"Here it is. I've got it," they heard a voice call, and the wagon again moved forward for a hundred paces, and then a man led the horses carefully into what proved to be an old road almost completely overgrown with brush, and with nothing but the absence of trees to show that it had ever been cut through the forest. The wagon bumped and scratched and tore its way along, the brush rasping along the bottom of its bed and crashing under the wheels. The three criminals were all on foot, and one of the pursuers heard Carruthers vent a succession of oaths as a brush flew back and struck his face.

For nearly a mile this continued, and then the pursuers saw ahead of them a lantern, and heard a shout. Carruthers and his men responded, the wagon struggled forward for another lap, and then suddenly moved into an old clearing and stopped. The followers, slipping cautiously forward, saw that it had reached an old, half-ruined cabin, probably abandoned by some placer miner, for a decade or more. Light shone from the open door and through the broken windows.

"Got it, did you?" inquired one of the men there, and Carruthers replied, "Surest thing you know. Easy! You see it was just as I told you fellows, down there in Frisco; that it pays never to be in too big a hurry. And half of you growled and cussed like a lot of idiots because you hadn't any patience. We had to wear the bulls out until they quit spotting me and keeping an eye on any of you boys."

One of the other men laughed and said, "That's right! They kept a mighty interested watch on me all the time I was workin' up there in Portland, but never got anything on me. How about you, Cal? You was the biggest kicker of the lot."

"If you think it's any fun tendin' bar in a lousy Nevada minin' camp for forty bucks a month, when you know you've got a wad all waitin' for you, you're off your nut. That's why I wanted to get it over with," growled a surly voice.

Carruthers was apparently the leader of the gang, for he climbed into the wagon and said, "Here, Cal, you and the others help me get this stuff inside. And Mike, you may as well take the horses out and give 'em some feed and water. The rest will do 'em good, because they've got a long, hard day of it, to-morrow, and we ought to start not later than four in the morning. How far off is that car you've got cached, Cal?"

"About thirty-five miles from here, I reckon," came the reply. "Glad I don't have to stick with Mike and the nags."

"They're plenty good enough for me," declared the man who was unhitching the horses. "I can take my time, and I reckon most likely I'll not sell out until I'm well over into eastern Oregon. But what I do is none of your damned business, once you get your share into that automobile, is it?"

"Ah, shut up!" Carruthers added an oath, and they continued their work. He appeared to command their obedience, although sullen growlings indicated that it was not through affection, but sheer fear.

The watchers saw the heavy box carried inside the cabin, and Goliath, whose position commanded a view of the interior, saw it deposited on the floor. A littered table, some cooking utensils and supplies indicated that one or perhaps more of the men had occupied the cabin for several days, and Goliath shrewdly surmised that one man at least, probably the teamster, had been there long enough to familiarize himself with the way of the partners' camp, and had probably watched it more or less for some time to assure himself that the new men were actually mining.

The wisdom of Morgan's forethought became plainly certain; his injunctions against reference to the box of loot, his explicit demand that none of them ever speak aloud of their plans or refer to the robbery, to San Francisco, or anything other than mining. Doubtless, time and again, every word they uttered had been overheard and weighed by listening ears of some one of these men, until he became convinced that they were harmless, and unsuspecting.

The surly teamster trudged into the cabin where there were now six men, all watchful and waiting eagerly as if at last their long period of restraint had reached its climax. Carruthers alone seemed cool and unhurried.

"Clear off that table," he ordered curtly, and then, as one of the men moved as if to recklessly brush its littered tin plates to the

floor, "No, not that way, you fool! Do you want to leave all this truck behind in such a mess that if any one blundered into this shack he'd become suspicious that it had been left after a murder? I tell you to put that stuff away just as if whoever had lived here was coming back!"

He even compelled the men, with a sort of malignant obstinacy, to clean the cabin up and sweep the floor before he made any move from the box on which he had been calmly seated with folded arms, and observing eyes.

"Now," he said at last, "we'll open and cut this stuff up as agreed. One-third for me and the other two-thirds to be split equally between you five. That's right, ain't it? For if anybody's got any kick, now's the time to make it. We're all here."

He looked challengingly around, and then when none raised an objection, reached over and took a hammer from the table and began ripping the metal binding off the box. Obedient to Morgan's whispered orders the detectives and the mining partners had taken positions around the cabin and were peering through the chinks where time had melted away the mud in places, thus giving view to all within.

Both David and Goliath would have thought this a favorable time to rush the job to a finish; but Morgan's instructions had been positive that no move must be made until he gave the signal, because he wished to gain as much incriminating evidence as possible from the conversation that must inevitably ensue. The veteran's thoroughness permitted nothing less than a gain of all possible knowledge before coming to the final clinch. The men within crowded closely around Carruthers, bent forward, peering, rapacious. The men without listened and watched, restraining their very breathing as if fearful that even the sound of exhalation might reach the obtuse and engrossed ears of some of the criminals whom they had run to earth.

Under Carruthers' hands the bindings were ripped away. Some of his men grumbled when he took a screw driver from his pocket and assailed the first screw with quiet, deliberate movements.

"Bust her open! What's the use in wastin' time?" one voice exploded.

Carruthers looked up and stared at the man, in the meantime holding his hand, and asked, with sneering emphasis, "Who's doing this? You or me?" And then with exaggerated deliberation and care continued his task. As if through sheer determination to impose his will upon his followers, he removed every screw across one end of the case, then down each side, and across the opposite end, when he might as well have lifted the boards and thrown them aside. He took meticulous care with each screw, working slowly and in silence, and the watchers outside saw interchanged glances that approached rebellion. Plainly Carruthers' bullying domination was reaching its end, and none but those waiting outside appreciated the possible dénouement when the contents of the treasure case were exposed.

The tensity of the men within increased when, the trunk removed, their leader calmly unlocked the padlocks and lifted the loosened lid, exposed the wrappings beneath. For the first time he hesitated, bent forward, and scowled at the tops of the blankets, apparently recalling that he had packed the stolen treasure with nothing but layers of currency covered by a newspaper. He caught his breath, held it, and the watchers could discern in that well-lighted room the hardening of his face, the setting of his jaws, and his increasing hesitancy, as he glanced sideways at those who surrounded him, desperate men all, none of whom would hesitate to kill him in the passion of swift disappointment.

And then they saw an extraordinary manifestation of coolness and nerve; for he abruptly looked upward, scowled, thrust his elbows back against the nearest men, and said, "What the hell is the rush? Can't you give me room to work? I'm smothered here in this hot room. It's as if the whole cursed bunch of you was afraid I'd grab the stuff and make a bolt for the door. Get back. Give me room! Here, if you're afraid I'm goin' to grab the stuff, one of you can fish it out."

He stood up, pretending childish anger and obstinacy, and backed away, but the watchers saw that he chose the doorway for his direction. Their nerves tensed, and they gathered themselves for conflict; but the voice of the driver, Mike, brought Carruthers to a halt. To those without it sounded menacing in its coolness, as if its owner had become distrustful.

"No," he said, "go ahead and finish the job. No use in gettin' peeved over nothin', is there?"

Carruthers stood, plainly exposed, and all his followers stared at him, as if they, too, had become suddenly imbued with suspicion and anger. He did not move, even when Mike gestured him to proceed, and then slipped backward and quietly closed the door. Suddenly Carruthers turned at bay and, seeing that he was in a position where nothing but his brain could save his life, raised one fist and smote it into a palm.

"Somebody has opened this box since I packed it," he cried. "It wasn't me! I swear it. There were—there were—nothing but newspapers on top of the bills!"

One of the men, unable to longer restrain himself, reached forward and jerked the blankets aside. He lifted one of the packages up, tore from it a wrapping of old denim, and exposed a heavy stone. As if doubting touch and vision he lifted and unwrapped a second, threw it to the cabin floor, along which it plunged and rolled heavily, and then there was a moment when no one spoke and all glared at Carruthers. He recognized the danger of his position and rallied himself to meet it. He knew that he was in the hands of any but lenient, forgiving, or trusting men, and faced them.

"Boys," he said, "I'll swear I packed it in that box. All of it. Nearly two hundred thousand! Don't fly off the handle. It's not my fault. I never kept even a single green one for myself. Would I have taken a chance on coming here, if I'd got away with it?"

Even in the passion of disappointment, his men appeared to ponder this, and the pause gave him hope. It was broken by the voice of Mike.

"Cut that stuff out!" he said icily. "You didn't come because you wanted to. You came because you knew that I was on you like a tiger! Because you knew that if you didn't come, I'd slit your throat if I had to swing for it What you hoped for was a chance to make a sneak and leave us to hold the bag, damn you! You tried to get me fired from my job as night porter at the Observatory Hotel, so's you could git away, didn't you?"

"I never did!"

"You lie! What we want to know is just this—where's the stuff? Where'd you hide it? Me and the other boys know you never packed it in this box at all. You've tried to double cross us. The only chance you got is to lead us to it. Ain't that so, fellers?"

A chorus of curses and growls assured him that he was fully supported. For a time, they stood glaring at their deposed leader, and under the menace of their eyes he floundered, hesitated, stammered, and tried to speak. He was like a terrified lamb surrounded by a pack of hungry wolves. He wet his lips, and put his hands to his throat as if encouraging voice, and then, helpless and dumb, fastened his eyes on the worthless treasure case.

"Goin' to spit it out, or ain't you?" demanded his persecutor. "No? You ain't?"

There was another wait in which Carruthers tried to formulate some excuse, some sentence that might stay proceedings. Almost imperceptibly they closed in on him, a relentless and insistent band, waiting for his explanation, and ready to exterminate him, if he failed to convince them of his thieves' rectitude. And while those within and without waited for his explanation, there was an angry shout, coupled with a curse, and a shot that exploded with all the immense noise of a bomb in the tiny space, and Carruthers lurched forward against the table and stared at the man Mike who, in blind fury, had fired from his hip with the expert quickness of the trained gunman.

Carruthers' eyes flashed into an expiring glow, and a determined anger. Before those around could grasp his intent, his own hand flicked downward toward his pocket, his coat bulged outward, and there was a second explosion. Mike, who had been facing him with fixed eyes, swayed for an instant, in a tense silence, as if power of muscular control were lost, dropped back toward the floor, came into contact with the bereft treasure chest, sagged thereon and gently laid his head upon his arms over the bare table as if overcome by sleep.

Carruthers, with either curiosity or triumph in his dying eyes, watched him until he came to rest and then suddenly released his own hold on the edge of the rough table, threw both hands upward, and pitched backward to the cabin floor. No one observed that the door had suddenly opened. The two shots had come so closely together that roar and echoes intermingled. The stillness subsequent was pervading. It was broken by a calm voice from the doorway, "Put up your hands, men!"

Startled, surprised, and somewhat dazed by their own unexpected tragedy, the desperadoes whirled and saw the white-headed Morgan quietly confronting them with a heavy automatic pistol held unwaveringly toward them The man called Tim, who was somewhat behind and sheltered by another, ripped out a curse and a gun. Instantly from the window by him came a shot that shattered his hand and the gun fell to the floor. David, who looked through a broken pane and in whose hand was a heavy frontier pistol from whose muzzle curled upward a tiny wreath of smoke, merely smiled.

"Anybody else want to try it?" he inquired in his pleasant drawl.

The town of Auburn still remembers the strange passengers who boarded the morning train, four of whom were handcuffed together, and is still discussing the coroner's inquest over the bodies of two notorious bandits and burglars who had slain each other almost simultaneously. But what the town probably does not know is that, when some weeks later in San Francisco, four criminals were sentenced to San Quentin, the two principal witnesses of the inquest, David and Goliath, were themselves given a surprise

"Dave, you and Goliath will have to come with me to wind this thing up. We'll take a taxicab and get it over with," said Morgan, and, thinking that there must be some other legal matter unfulfilled, the partners dutifully submitted.

The taxi stopped in front of an imposing stone building, and David, peering upward at the door which they were entering, saw for the first time the Pine-Oridental Bank. Both he and Goliath were rather overawed by the grandeur of its interior, by its long rows of bright and ornate brass cages, its little army of clerks who looked up cutiously and began interchanging whispers, and also by the fact that Morgan conducted them through a door marked "President," where they were immediately ushered through another marked "Private." A white-haired man arose from behind a table, smiled and spoke to the chief detective and was introduced.

"So," he said "You are the partners known as David and Goliath The appellation seems to fit. Please take seats." And to Morgan, "Yes, we got news of the conviction in five minutes after the sentence was passed Our lawyer phoned. Your official declaration is that Field and 'Liath here are entitled to the rewards offered, so I've drawn a joint check for the entire amount, which includes not only the reward offered by our bank, but by the International Bankers' Protective Association, which they've wired me to pay. It's a tidy sum!"

Neither David nor Goliath had ever dreamed of receiving reward of any kind for anything on earth but hard work; so they sat dumbly and blinked at the slip of paper the banker handed them which called for twenty-five thousand dollars. Morgan and the banker smiled at their manifest astonishment. David was the first to recover.

"This all for us? Where does Morgan get off?" he queried.

"As officers of the law, they cannot accept——" began the president, and was interrupted by David with—— "Oh, I see! That bein' so, I reckon me and my pardner'd rather have it all in cash—say in hundred-dollar bills with a few fives, ones, and a little silver. Ain't that so, Goliath?"

For a moment the giant stared at him, as if striving to fathom his intent, and then his face suddenly warmed into a fine grin as he rumbled, "Sure! Sure! So's we can cut it six ways and make the right change. I reckon there ain't no law agin' a square deal, and if there is—well, Davy, me and you'll have to bust it. That's all!"

The next story in this series will be "Old Harmless," appearing in the December 7th issue.

IN THE CATALOGUE OF CRUELTY

IN the States of the Union which allow divorces on the ground of cruelty and inhuman treatment, the lawyers have hung up brilliant records in the matter of proving what cruelty really is. In one court a man was given an absolute divorce because his wife refused to sew his buttons on. In another, a wife got the decree because never since their wedding day had the husband asked her to "go buggy riding, thereby causing the plaintiff great mental anguish." Again, a wife was released from the matrimonial bond because her husband would not cut his toenails often enough.

The Devil's Chaplain

By George Bronson-Howard

Author of "Yorke Norroy, Diplomatic Agent," "From Dusk to Daylight," Etc.

(A Four-Part Story—Part IV.)

CHAPTER XXIV.

SEPTIMUS SIX "GOES WEST."

MATTERS had progressed precisely as Alan had expected, when the Chaplain made his appearance that afternoon. As Cantilever had heard, the Chaplain had had news of the formula from Tom Lee, before he reached headquarters. Alan was accordingly sent for. Kewpick came for him to the laboratory, inviting him to proceed directly to the Chaplain's apartments.

"Where's the old fellow?" the big man in the "Prince Albert" and the Western "statesman" felt hat and string tie had demanded jovially. "The chief wants to congratulate him."

"Upstairs, or asleep," Alan had replied.

Only the first part of the statement was true. In discussing with the old man—a very old man, indeed, since his daughter's revelations of the night before—just how he, Alan, might manage to release Ulm, on his way to the Chaplain's, they had figured out, accurately enough, that Six would be summoned, too, and that if he were elsewhere, Alan would be allowed to go his way alone to the Chaplain's. It had turned out just as they had expected. But Alan did not dare do more than give Ulric Ulm the promised signal with his knuckles. Once the door was released and unlocked, he went his way to the Chaplain's room, his heart heavy with certainty that tragedy awaited him there. He entered with a feeling that it was the end.

"So you have something for me, my young friend?" asked the Chaplain, with jocund benignity. "Well, well!"

Matters had progressed rapidly after that. Alan's seeming surprise and denial, Tom Lee's interruptions, his voice not so silkenly suave as usual, repeating Professor Six's statement and Alan's former acknowledgment of it. Alan had need of all his courage to explain that the opium always befuddled him! he hadn't quite understood what Lee had said.

It was then old Six came in, accompanied by Kewpick. When he steadily denied having made any such statement, the Oxford-bred Chinese passed a hand before his eyes. For the moment even Kewpick was deceived. Not so the Chaplain. His eyes still on Alan, he dispatched Tom Lee for Chard and the Bingleys.

Chard, breathless with hurrying, entered and immediately confirmed Lee. Yes, Allenby had brought him certain tablets and asked him to try them out on some one actually suffering for the want of the stuff. The Bingleys had arrived with a terrific "yen."

"You see, chief," Fannie Bingley, a sloe-eyed French-looking girl, on stiltlike heels, interposed eagerly, at this point, "Bill and I pretty near got a tumble in Lacy's that day. Had to ditch the touch and beat it out by the basement, with two squalling house dicks at our backs. We picked up Reade's trailer, but it was all he could do to lose the white taxi they chased us in. By the time we got *here*, we were nearly dying. So if *that* wasn't the real stuff—and *better*—why we ain't got any habits, that's all." The Chaplain dismissed her curtly; Chard, too.

Ensued an awful silence.

Alan had not passed a sleepless night and a dreadful day without gaining a comprehensive catalogue of all that the Chaplain would do to gain an end so dear to him.

"So you think you've fooled me, do you?"

That was what the Chaplain had said after his long and steady stare had failed to produce the effect he expected.

"No," said Septimus Six, rather wearily. The old head was leonine enough, still. But

it was no longer raised in the old leonine way. For years now, he had lived for the "revolution." He may have been a little mad. But it was an unselfish madness. And he honestly believed that revolutionists, in general, were like himself. More! He had credited many of them, the Chaplain particularly, with stern virtues all plutocratic panderers lacked. Septimus Six lived for the revolution, and now it appeared that, were it successful, it would but place the world in the grip of another set of Marats, Dantons, and Robespierres.

"No, I do not think I have fooled you, Trego," he said. "I have not tried very hard. What you wanted I have decided will not do. That is all."

Perhaps, the Chaplain realized that he would waste his efforts here. He knew Septimus Six of old, the man who accepted penal servitude for life, sooner than betray his friends.

"Kewpick," the Chaplain said, "get me my Luger pistol."

The big silent Prince-Alberted figure waddled across the room and brought back a case of polished ebony. Taking the Luger from it, he caressed its haft of damascened gold, its long, inlaid barrel, lovingly, wiping them with a cloth of spotless chamois. With this wrapped about it, he examined the clip containing nine thin, sharp-nosed, steel-jacketed cartridges. Then he spoke.

"There used to be twelve of these cartridges in this clip," he said slowly. "Each one of the vacant places stands for a man who thought he was smarter than the organization. I'd advise you to come through, young Allenby."

"I am completely satisfied," the Chaplain said in an emotionless sort of voice, "that the synthetic is an accomplished fact. I am sure Six gave this boy the formula. Had I been here last night, he would have brought it to me. What has happened I do not know. Nor care."

He took the Luger pistol from Kewpick.

"I don't want to have to kill one of you to make the other come through. But I *have* killed *three* men with this weapon. Must one of you make the fourth? Come!"

No answer. They heard a click and knew it for the cocking of the pistol. The two men, the old one and the young, stood stiffly silent. The Chaplain, resting his elbow on the arm of his chair, let the Luger dangle loosely between his fingers.

"Now, this is your last chance," he said, lifting his glittering moon-agate eyes again. "Don't think I am like Master Billiken. That I kill because I *want* to kill. If *I* kill, it is not even because I *want* that formula: It is because I *must have* that formula. The matter has gone out of my hands. I am responsible to the entire organization. Well? Answer, yes or no. Remember, though, if you say 'No' I fire."

Propping up his elbows, he raised the gun until it pointed steadily at the space between Alan and Septimus Six.

"Is it 'Yes?' Or 'No?'"

It was immediately evident neither man dared wait lest he reconsider. They answered simultaneously, "No!"

Even as they spoke, Trego fired. It was at Alan he aimed, but Six meant it should not be Alan who died. He must have been watching Trego's forefinger, for he sprang before the boy, just as it crooked tightly about the trigger. Before the Chaplain could divert his aim, the explosion had come, a deafening affair of acrid smoke, in so small and confined a room.

Within the room, the smoke was swept across the lighted candles and up the fireplace. As it cleared away, Alan was seen to have caught the old man's body in his arms, the leonine head, with the long, white locks, hanging loosely backward over his arm. Quickly he carried him to a couch near by and knelt beside him, his head to the old man's heart. A gush of hot tears ran down Alan's face, as he got to his feet. But when he saw the Chaplain's eyes, cold and relentless, the tears seemed to shrivel up in the heat of his rage! He advanced toward him, hands stark to his sides.

"You devil!" he screamed, lifting both hands and convulsively clawing the air. "You fool and devil! Do you think I'll tell you now!"

In a frenzy of hate, he shook his fist in the Chaplain's face.

"Kill me, too, why don't you?"

With an inarticulate snarl, Trego sprang to his feet, whirling the pistol high. But Kewpick sprang, too, and caught at the Chaplain's wrist, whirling it higher.

"First time *you* ever played the fool," Kewpick snarled as with his free hand, he plucked the weapon from the upheld fingers. "Have you forgotten that young Allenby is the only other person who knows the formula?"

Alan had returned to the couch. Standing beside the old man's limp body, his hot tears ran their course, unchecked.

"We'll have the time of our lives getting it out of him," Kewpick muttered, after a glance in Alan's direction, and in tones intended for Trego's ear alone. "He's not afraid of being killed. God knows how you'll get it."

"I'll get it, never fear," Trego returned. In his tumultuous rage, he made no effort to keep his own voice low. "I'll get it the same way I got him, in the first place. Only this time, the thing will be *real*. Send for Billiken."

"For what purpose?" asked Kewpick.

For the moment, it looked as though the Chaplain would turn on his faithful henchman and rend him. But a look at Kewpick's doggedly set face settled any idea of violence.

"I suppose you have the right to know," the Chaplain conceded sullenly. "Well, then, here's for what purpose. Billiken wants that girl. Well, I'm going to give her to him, that's all. He can take her where there'll be nobody to interfere! For his honeymoon."

He bit off his words, making a sentence of each phrase. Kewpick walked slowly to the door, and laid his hand on the knob, watching Alan the while.

In silence, Alan slowly walked across the room, until he stood facing the Chaplain whom he topped by half a head.

"What did you say?" Alan demanded of him, his tones flat, expressionless. Kewpick left his place near the door, moving closer by sliding steps almost imperceptible.

"What are you lingering around for?" demanded the Chaplain of Kewpick, his eyes blazing. "Do you think I need protection against this howling young jackass. Do what I told you. Get Billiken. Bring him here, and I'll give him the girl myself."

What happened, then, happened too swiftly for Kewpick to interfere. Without moving his body, Alan's fingers flew at the Chaplain's throat and stuck there. It was like the movement of some mechanism operated by strong steel springs. Neither Kewpick nor Tom Lee could believe what they saw, that one like the Chaplain might be writhing so impotently in the grasp of one hitherto considered so negligible.

In such sudden respect did the huge Kewpick hold this amazing new Alan, that he made no effort to break his hold. He was fat and heavy, with little agility. For the first time he realized that Alan was a strapping youth more than six feet in height, weighing close upon two hundred. So Kendrick Kewpick reached for the Luger where it lay. "Drop it?" he commanded hoarsely, thickly, the while his fingers found the pistol.

Only Tom Lee noticed that the door, which had been ajar ever since Kewpick released the knob, now swung noiselessly open. And Tom Lee was too terrified to make a sound even when a hooded pistol barrel, like the head of a cobra, thrust between door jamb and door. It was as Kewpick's fingers fastened on the butt of the gun that Tom Lee heard a sharp click and saw a spurt of fire. With a quick inarticulate cry of pain, Kewpick dropped the Luger. It rattled on the polished floor. Instinctively he raised his wrist to his mouth as Alan, with a sudden cry at the sight of the Chaplain's purpling face and bulging eyes, flung the fellow from him. His rage was spent.

Both Kewpick and Tom Lee let the Chaplain lie where he had fallen. He was not dead, for he raised himself with a convulsive twist before falling forward, forehead down. He lay quite still. But neither his henchman nor his secretary knew nor cared, just then, *how* he lay. The eyes of both were turned to the door. There it hung idly, open, outward swung into an empty hall.

No one was to be seen. But the Oxford-bred Chinaman, after gasping twice, trying to wet his lips with his tongue, raised a shaking forefinger and pointed to the insterstice between door and jamb. Then Kewpick saw the hooded black barrel, too. He and Tom Lee both raised their hands high in air.

Then, out of the black hall beyond they heard an unfamiliar voice.

"Allenby," it commanded sternly, "pick up that pistol on the floor, but don't fire it! Mine will do the trick without making any noise. Get any weapon those men may have, too."

"Who are you?" demanded Alan, his voice trembling.

"Never mind that now. Don't forget that poisonous person on the floor."

As the emotionless voice proceeded, Alan searched the two who stood with hands held high. When he knelt to feel in the pockets

of the Chaplain, his face was disfigured by a look of almost murderous hatred and he kept the Luger pistol barrel jammed in his enemy's ribs, the while. From each he took no hardware deadlier than their keys and pocket knives.

"All through? Good! Take the key and join me outside here in the hall."

The door swung to as Alan moved out into the hall, to join that person whose appearance was a careful replica of what Captain Christopher Cotton's, A. E. F., had been in the days of his dire distress. But it opened again, instantly, and the still invisible stranger added, as one who elucidates a long unsolved problem:

"I thought I'd tell you, since you seemed to want to know so badly, that this is what I am going to do about it, gentlemen—answering the question you so kindly left for me, you know. That is——" the voice went on thoughtfully, "the *beginning* of what I am going to do.

Within, a hand was seen to reach for the key and remove it from the lock. Then the door closed.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE HOT HALF HOUR.

Mr. Yorke Norroy replaced the key on the outside, but did not turn it. Alan saw that, not until he had pressed the black button in the prescribed fashion and heard the familiar click follow, did the stranger attempt to lock the door

"We'll have to leg it now, young Allenby," said his companion, hurrying him ahead. "Get ahead with you!" They had come to the end of the corridor and stood in the pale, corpse-candlelike light of the great glass dome. Alan halted his companion here.

"Guilda," he said breathlessly, "we must get Guilda!"

"I tell you, you must go on," said Norroy, quickening his bored, languid manner. "From what I overheard, you are the precious one. You alone possess the secret of the synthetic. I have people on the outside. I must get you out of here whatever happens. Hel—lo!"

Norroy broke off suddenly. The spool of wire he had been reeling out and which he was about to snap, with a small pair of bloom shears, in order to attach his pocket transmitter, suddenly ceased to be taut, fell loosely between his fingers.

"Caught!" he said, yawning. "Somebody below has found the microphone wire that was to serve for communicating purposes with my men when they broke in."

He glanced at the luminous dial of his wrist watch.

"No wonder," he commented, his languid manner disappearing instantly, "I told my people not to break in for half an hour or so after they saw me go in." Norroy pulled in a coil of silk-insulated piano wire.

"Evidently somebody saw, and cut it, before my men had a chance," he said ruefully. "In"—he consulted his watch—"something under half an hour, five of them will break in here; the sixth will follow shortly, with the extra assistance he has phoned for. But meanwhile——"

If the echo of the shot in the Chaplain's room sounded like a salvo of artillery along the corridors, the shots now fired from somewhere below would seem to have been fired from a pair of Jack Johnsons or Big Berthas. Norroy sprang from the view of those below, dragging his companion with him.

"Are you a fair pistol shot?" he asked Alan. Alan stammered out something in the way of a confirmatory murmur as to his prowess with firearms.

"Well, keep under cover, then," said Norroy, "and hold your fire. Mine is noiseless, remember. Don't fire unless I order you to. We must manage to kill this half hour. Ah! There you are, my young friend, are you?"

Norroy had not raised his voice; indeed, ever since leaving the Chaplain's room, he had not spoken above a whisper. But so swiftly had his weapon hand shot out, and as swiftly returned, that Alan did not realize what had happened until he heard the sound of some distant person, below, shrieking out his unexpected pain. Followed a thudding descent of a flight of steps, far below, and straining his eyes in the dim light, Alan viewed the body of a man as it fell sprawling out backward on a little landing, two flights lower down. The man lay like a great crushed spider.

"Got him," said Mr. Yorke Norroy. "Heigh-ho!" and yawned again.

Again Norroy fired; but, so swiftly, Alan could not tell if it was once, twice, or three times. And again there came a sound of pain from below, and the sound of a third shot. Added to its horrific tumult, it seemed as though all hell had broken loose in the

building. Bells began to ring a general alarm. Doors were flung open, all along the windy reaches of the topmost floor: the only one in use in the last house. The sound of scurrying feet followed. The feet were coming in the direction of the two fugitives.

"Nothing but make a dash for the next floor," Norroy commented. "There seems to be only one man down there now, and I've winged him. When I reach the next landing, follow!"

Norroy departed, shod in silence. Alan hardly knew where Norroy was, so soft and swift were his movements, until his voice came cheerily up from below. A light shot down from where Norroy lay on the landing below. His pocket torch was of the shape and size of a pocket pencil, but was tipped with a Tungsten glare, of a high-powered brilliancy that tore open a lane of bright, white light before it.

Alan stumbled on the stairs, as he saw, running out of the dim twilight behind him, guns in hand, the two be-sweatered janizaries, Michael and Isadore. Instantly they fired upon him as they ran, and Alan felt a numbing pain in his left shoulder as though he had been hit by a heavy hammer. He slipped and slid on an unexpected turn of the stairs, and fell headlong, just beyond Norroy.

Now, indeed, was the early gloom of evening lit up, as if it were that of a tropic night against the blue of which burned many fireflies and glowworms. Norroy had not been wrong about the number of enemies below. Not then. But the survivor of the first pair had been reënforced by another one or so. Norroy could see that some one was firing from some place of vantage on the first floor; another had gained the first gallery; while the original enemy was at his work again from the landing below. At first this reënforcement was ill for the oncoming enemy. One of the newcomers had fired at the flash of Michael's gun and had sent him shrieking back to the upper floor.

"You down there?" he concluded fiercely. "The fellows we want are just below me. Mike talking. Mike O'Malley."

"Gusdorf, too: Irving Gusdorf!" Isadore shrilled beside him, not forgetting the American version of his baptismal name.

"And Plant, Jimmy Plant just below. They've croaked Limpy Phil. There he lies, down there!"

"And Milliken above him," Alan called out, in a fair imitation of the big man's ridiculously light tones. Which had the result of one of the men below injudiciously exposing himself to Norroy's fire. This time there was no cry of pain. Only another thud.

"He's lying," came in the shrill tones of the green sweatered person who called himself "Irving" Gusdorf. Evidently, however, he knew nothing of the noiseless weapon Norroy used, or he would have been warned of his fate.

His own, however, opened the other's eyes. For he had no sooner spoken then he fell headlong over from the highest point to the lowest balustrade, winging his way downward at a velocity that crushed him into nothingness with a swiftness that was appalling.

There was the sound of scattering footsteps on the landing above them. Evidently it had been planned to carry the fugitive's position by assault. This was momentarily abandoned. Alan heard the footsteps retreating down the corridor overhead.

Norroy held up his hand for silence. His abnormal auricular gifts, sharpened by the intermittent use and training of the past twenty years, told him that there was but a single watcher above. Norroy motioned Alan to follow him.

It was quite dark, now. Outside, snow had begun to fall. The few passers-by, along Broadway, were muffled up to their ears, and hearing the dulled reports from within the deserted building on the corner, doubtless took them for some of the many mysterious noises of tunneling or manufacture to which New Yorkers accustom themselves without surprise, from their earliest years.

Had the Broadway block been Norroy's original objective, it would have taken no more than the first shot to bring in his watchful waiters, at headlong speed. But he had said "half an hour or more to investigate," on giving his orders. And, as they patrolled that block of Fifth Avenue where Cantilever's shack squatted between two office buildings, their constant glances at their frequently consulted wrists, told them the half hour was not yet sped.

There was a light burning behind Cantilever's tattered old Venetian blind, drawn ever since Norroy's entrance. The scrawny old scarecrow had lighted a lamp, a dingy, oily, green-shaded affair, of the sort found

in the cheapest lodgings and the oldest farmhouses. The circle of lamplight encompassed his bald head and his open account book, and left the rest of the room in shadow.

Outside Cantilever's shack the uniformed chauffeur in the impeccable uniform began to show some anxiety about the time, himself. From his repeated reference to his watch and the uneasy glances he cast toward the door, it became the opinion of one Baedeker Bok that, although the half hour was not quite over, it was his bounden duty to see to that chauffeur.

"That chauffeur," he said briefly, to his companion, "may as well take me when I go to fetch the others. As it will take some time, suppose you have your fellows ready to break into the office, in case the noise of the car sends the old fellow, inside, to cover."

The other, known wherever Yorke Norroy was, as Carson Huntley, nodded acquiescence. He strolled back to the corner, while Bok crossed to the other side of the street, and reapproached Fifth Avenue from a different direction.

Whatever it was that called the other four, as a dog is whistled to his master's heel, is still a secret of that bureau of the state department over which Norroy had sway. It remained a matter of record, however, that when Bok, to quote his own style of easy colloquialism, "eased himself" into the seat alongside the chauffeur, and Carson Huntley stood outside the door of Cantilever's, a pair of well-dressed young men were within reaching distance of either side of him.

"Drive on," said Bok, in a certain persuasive fashion, in his hand a hard, black weapon, the barrel of which just reached the chauffeur's fifth rib. The chauffeur drove on.

In the same moment, even as the scrawny scarecrow within the corrugated iron shack raised himself to listen, the shack door was opened by an exceedingly rosy-gilled, greatcoated gentleman who moved very suddenly.

No more so than the scarecrow, however, for all his scrawniness. Down from his high stool plunged old Mr. Cantilever, reaching for something. Decidedly, this would not do. So the first of the four younger gentlemen who followed Carson Huntley raised his hand swiftly. Followed a spurt of fire and the lamp toppled over.

That this might occasion no general remark, on the part of the passers-by, the thoughtful young gentleman, who was last, had closed the door behind him. And, as the spurt of fire was as noiseless as was Norroy's elsewhere, at that particular moment, the thoughtful young gentleman was not annoyed by any distasteful publicity.

He reached into his own pockets, and took out two articles, both black, from one of which, in his right hand, a white Tungsten glowed, revealing old Mr. Cantilever serving as a seat for two of the thoughtful young gentleman's companions. He again proved his right to the description of thoughtful young gentleman, by stamping on the skinny hand that was reaching up to touch a black button that dangled at the end of a wire attached to the tall, sloping desk. His eyes followed the general direction of that wire.

"Underground, eh?" he asked astutely.

"Of course, you ass," returned the prompt young gentleman who had fired at the light. "Where else *would* it be. Anybody but you would have known *that*, from the outside."

"Less of it, please," commanded Carson Huntley, locking the door and divesting himself of his greatcoat. "Lift that carpet, there. It seems to be—— Yes, it is! Now —everybody!"

Leaving Mr. Cantilever more of a scrawny scarecrow than ever—for the restraint under which they placed him gave him the last touch necessary—one after another of the devoted five followed Carson Huntley down the ladder revealed by the raised trapdoor. Cantilever's eyes, all that he had left able to move, tried to make up for the rest.

Some ten minutes before Baedeker Bok indulged his taste for the dramatic, and drove off in a car to which he had no shadow of a right, Yorke Norroy and Alan Allenby reached the second gallery, which was a wider one than the one below or any above. Which was why Messrs. Norroy and Allenby were enabled to make their way to it unobserved by whoever happened to be beneath it. For, to observe the fugitives' progress, those persons, below, must incline their heads beyond the pent-house roof of the second gallery; a most unwise action, when there was a man with a Maxim silencer about. As for those above, they had temporarily withdrawn from the combat, leaving only that single watcher, who, it

would appear, at the moment, watched very badly.

Under these circumstances, they had come, softly and shadowlike, to the wall of the second gallery, and there they halted. Alan shivered, although whether from fear or cold he himself did not know. Certainly it was cold enough and Norroy wished he had not abandoned C. Cotton's service overcoat in the cellar.

It was while he shivered, flattening himself against the wall, while he made a cautious reconnoissance, eying the luminous dial on his wrist and cursing softly at the passing seconds, that the Chaplain sprang his little surprise.

Sudden and shrill as the shriek of a hawk, a whistle sounded from the top gallery, and Norroy spun around on his heel, automatic instantly in action. It had need to be. For two doors that faced the gallery, burst open simultaneously, and through each, half a dozen men or more hurled themselves at Alan and his companion.

High above them, Alan heard the bull-like bellow of the "ex-ballyhoo," Kendrick Kewpick, the loud attention-compelling roar of the "medicine showman."

"Get Allenby, and kill the other one. Cartwright has phoned, from outside, that he cut a dictagraph wire on the stairs and has located half a dozen men outside. Kill this fellow, and we will get the others as they come in!"

Kewpick bellowed these sentences from the depths of his leatherlike lungs. But the foe, for all this encouragement and their superiority in numbers besides, were not coming along as fast as might have been expected. But now that they faced the two, they balked at sight of the threatening silencer, and came to a dead stop at the sound of Norroy's warning voice. Norroy was not the sort you took by surprise. At all stages of their shadowlike journey downstairs, he had been acutely aware of the menace of those doors. For there they stood, stark and silent, but threatening, as the fugitives passed each gallery. Once he had pointed them out, cautioning Alan.

"In case of an attack," he had whispered curtly, "remember *your* position must be always behind *me*."

Now that the time had come, Alan acted as he had been ordered to. Even as Norroy pivoted on his heel, Alan had whirled, too, gun up, his back flattening against Norroy's.

Thus they crouched, in an angle where the stairway turned: an eerie-looking sight, in that place of shadows. Even though Kewpick still bellowed from above, the snarling pack was at bay, eying, askance, the dangerous, hooded weapon that shifted its position every second, aimed now here, now there.

"Why don't you other fellows rush 'em from behind?" came Kewpick's voice.

"I'll kill any one that does," Alan piped up, waving the Luger that had been the Chaplain's. "Keep back!"

But there was no such dread certainty in his voice as in Yorke Norroy's. One of the two, whom Alan warned, came rushing headlong on to his destruction. Alan had no time to pick and choose a place that would incapacitate without killing. He just fired. The man stopped suddenly. Then, slowly, he toppled over backward and slid down the stairs.

Alan's shot was like some preconcerted signal. There was a general movement among those to whom Kewpick continued to promise the direst and most ignominious punishment.

"Better not try it," warned Norroy, as he saw what threatened. For those whom Kewpick had called so many kinds of cowards, now acted almost involuntarily, coming at Norroy headlong, urging one another ahead with shouts and yells.

"All right: if you will have it," Norroy grated at them, backing fast and spurting fire. A man fell, another, a third tripped over the two of them. Two guns raised to carry out Kewpick's command fell from burned and bleeding fingers. Another achieved nothing more serious than a minor wound in Norroy's thigh.

Alan, too, was wounded, before they were halfway toward the next landing, but not seriously enough to cripple him, as yet. Now, another shot came from the survivors below, who fired as they came into his orbit. Alan had that same sensation of being struck with a heavy hammer. He stumbled and fell. Norroy caught at the newel-post at halfway, and continued to face his enemies.

But it was plain he would face them little longer. In the short time since the horde burst from the rooms, three had fallen before Norroy's fire, two nursed wounded

hands. In other words, he had done his best. It was inevitable that this defense could not last much longer. Behind him, Alan was attempting to gain his feet again.

"You damned rats," roared Kewpick, in a frothing frenzy of panic and rage. "You've shot the wrong one. Hands off Allenby! He's got the formula! It's the other one you're to kill. Have I got to come myself?" They heard his heavy bulk creaking the stairs. Alan dragged himself to his knees, even after the second shot had felled him, and was to be counted on for another round or so.

"You dirty cowards!" called Kewpick. "Must I kill him, for you, from here?"

Norroy dared not take his eyes from those he faced. Yet he knew the speech of the big fellow on the landing above, meant neither more or less than that he was aiming at him, Yorke Norroy. In his present position, he was in sight of any one on the overhead gallery. But if he took his eyes from those he faced, one would fire, another would rush, and that assuredly would be the end. So he must stand, a fair mark, and take his chances on being shot down from above.

But when the shot Norroy expected, came, it had a result far different from the one expected. A sort of choked yell followed it; and, from where Kewpick leaned across the rail to aim, his huge bulk collapsed, his body soared downward, to fall among the six still facing Norroy, scattering them. Kendrick Kewpick had waited too long to aim.

From above, Norroy heard a once-familiar voice.

"Is it you, chief?" it called loudly, joyously. *"Is* it really *you?"*

The next instant, Ulric Ulm was springing down the stairs. But he did not get far. The diversion he had created in Norroy's favor brought about his own downfall. For, to reach the last landing, he must pass one of the more cautious of the horde, who had leaped into an alcove, where he awaited the chance of a careful shot that would end Norroy without danger to Allenby. Now, as Ulric sped by, within reaching distance of the alcove, he was knocked on the head with a pistol butt. As he staggered, his assailant swiftly reversed his gun and fired.

Ulm dropped to his knees, then he sprawled. Norroy only was left standing; Alan, too, had collapsed quietly behind him. There was but one recourse left, one road to safety, with enemies both before and behind him. It was a daring thing to do, a foolhardy thing; especially as his wound incapacitated him from anything beyond the most usual movements.

Nevertheless, Norroy did it. With a spring, sudden and unexpected, he leaped over the balustrade, launching himself into space. Followed the usual sickening sensation of such a fall: then the furious, fiery impact of an unyielding surface at the end of a twenty-foot drop.

His soles were stung as if by many scores of fiery serpents. The pain of a turned ankle was excruciating. The other thigh and leg along with it, was numb, doubtless from his wound. Disdaining his injuries, he would have dragged himself toward the comparative safety of the cellar; knowing that from there, at any moment, his own men might emerge. But at this distance, the pack above no longer feared him. The galleries fairly spurted fire.

Twice Norroy knew he was hit: once he tried to return the fire; flattening himself out on the floor and resting on elbow there. Even as he raised his weapon, his hand fell helpless, hot with his own blood. He tried to shift his gun to his left hand, but it only clattered down to the hard cedar wood and slid along its surface. When he tried to reach it, he fell forward, his chin striking the floor.

"Get that gun; that silencer!" shouted some one. "And be *sure* he's croaked, damn him. There's a shot for luck."

It was then that Norroy heard other footsteps; the sound of men racing toward him from the opposite direction. He wondered dully whether his fast-failing senses were deceiving him; summoned what little strength he had left to find out.

"Carson! Carson! Huntley!"

"Yorke? Where——"

The voice was drowned in the reechoing roll and rumble of many shots. Feet scurried in only one direction, now. Those that had been approaching from above turned instantly upward again. And swiftly scurrying, they receded farther and farther until Norroy's failing hearing no longer heard them. Nor the rush of the others that pursued them, their hot-paced energy undiminished by the ascent.

Somebody had Norroy's head on his knee. By an effort, the pain of which almost tore

him apart, he staved off the oncoming unconsciousness long enough to speak; although even then he could neither hear or see.

"They'll—be—carrying—off — a — boy. Get *him! Get* him! The—one—they—are carrying. *Get—him!*"

As Norroy relaxed and lay a dead weight in the arms that held him, Ivison James, the first of the rescuers to overtake the enemy, had heeded Carson Huntley's hail and ordered two of the fleeing enemy to drop their burden and throw up their hands.

So once again Alan sprawled on the stairway. But this time he felt no pain: no more than did Yorke Norroy. For as he lay there, alongside Ulric Ulm, neither knew whether they sprawled or what they did. They, too, were in that same gray misty border land, as was Yorke Norroy.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE STATEMENT OF ULRIC ULM. I.

Since I was the last one to see Guilda Six, before the raid on the Broadway block, and as I was Alan Allenby's companion during those subsequent events on St. Kilda's Cay, Mr. Norroy asked me to help him complete his report on the various matters concerning Kendrick Kewpick, deceased, Thomas Trego, called, by some, the Devil's Chaplain, and those connected with the formula for synthetic morphine.

How did it happen that I escaped, leaving Guilda Six in enemy hands?

Naturally, I did not desert Miss Six. It was she who deserted me. As you have doubtless read, it was arranged that I should enter her room about the time that her father and her fiancé gave the Chaplain their ultimatum. You know the sad fate of the former. Possibly, Guilda Six had some premonition of it. All that I know is that I had no sooner explained my unannounced intrusion upon her than both of us heard the shot.

"If you are a friend of Alan's," she said, "go to him. My father is an old man. I am afraid for him. Alan, alone, is not enough to protect him."

Perhaps I should say that the woman called Selina was absent from the room during my presence there. It was just as well, for it would have meant an immediate assault upon her, if I intended to remain in the room. As it is, I have never seen her.

Now, no normal man likes to think that there is a fight going on, in which his side is getting the worst of it, without making an attempt to share in it. I was not proof against these two assaults upon my normality. And I knew that Guilda could not see that I was remaining in her room, much against my will, anyhow, and only because I had promised Allenby to protect her. I told her all this, but she only jeered and gibed at me. What did my presence there profit *her?* And so on, up to a scathing excoriation of my manhood, ending in a statement that if I did not mean to go, she *did.* That fetched me. I made her promise not to stir from the room, if I went, gave her the key I had taken from the outside lock, and signaled my way out.

Things had happened with a rush. While I argued with the girl, Norroy and Allenby had made the lower landing. There was only one watcher at the stairhead, and, hearing me approach from the corridor, he naturally imagined me one of the Chaplain's men, and counseled me not to show myself. Which was how it happened that I was allowed to crawl up to him unmolested.

I jumped him immediately. He got the butt of the pistol I wrenched from him, just as I got the butt of another, later. I had just about enough time to get his body pushed out of sight before Kendrick Kewpick came waddling along, watch in one hand, a police whistle in the other. Kewpick didn't even look at me, taking me for the man he had left behind, in the darkness. He whipped up the whistle and blew a regular Robin Hood o' Sherwood blast upon it.

You have heard what happened then. Incidentally, I heard my chief's voice, Yorke Norroy's. It was all I could do to keep from whooping. As it was, I waited until Kewpick was well on his way downstairs, before I followed him. Reaching the gallery two flights below and seeing him leaning across the balustrade of the balcony, aiming, as I knew from what I heard, at Norroy himself, I halted, dropped flat on my face, and thrust my long-barreled Colt between two of the uprights of the landing rail. My aim was good, as you know. Kendrick Kewpick pitched over, face forward, and that was the last I ever saw of him.

Now, I had not intended to kill him. I was so appalled at the thought of having killed him that, like a young wild ass, I had

to show myself by rushing recklessly to my friends' assistance. But before I got the chance to fire again, that clout on the crown, which you have been told about, reached me as I rushed past, and as I tottered, my enemy, enraged at what I had done to Kewpick, no doubt, emptied his weapon into my falling body.

I awakened in a hospital. But it was only to sink into a deeper slumber. They had aroused me, only to put me to sleep more securely for the operation that was to ensue. I was afterward told, with a mass of technicalities, that, had the operation been postponed, my chance of recovery would have been nugatory.

After having passed through what seemed years of adventure elsewhere, I awoke to find myself in a room whose ceiling sloped steeply downward on either side of a central point; evidently a sort of attic. Some one had drawn the blinds and my face was bathed in sunlight. While it warmed me, or so it seemed, from head to foot, an old gentleman, with fine full beard, heavy gold watch chain, and broad-banded black-satin tie, came to my side, brought there doubtless by my cry of pain that came from my sudden movement. He instructed me to "Drink that." Which, accordingly, I did, and, incontinently I was back in the world of sleep again.

My next memory is the smell of old lavender, which I found came from the sheets. Opening my eyes, I saw that the sunlight was gone. My eyes assured me of the existence of certain objects, in the near vicinity, although my mind rejected them as incredible. But the old manor-house window, which was partly open, gave me the sight of a crooked, cobbled street that wound its way below—for evidently the house was on a hill—its most prominent feature being an old structure which I could take for nothing but an ancient English inn, no matter how hard I tried to make it something more commonplace. This, I later learned, was the Blue Anchor Inn.

It was a short way down the windy street to the water front. Here certain small, seagoing craft tossed about under bare poles, schooner-rigged, or lugger-rigged, for the most part. It was evidently some sort of a harbor that I saw, under the drawing-in of a darkling winter day. The sky had a clean-swept, wind-blown look. The rays of the sinking sun lay crimson upon the waters, like a path strewn with the petals of a blood-red rose.

Suddenly, the blaze and wonder of it all was blotted out by clouds of a steely blackness, like gun metal. Darkness came apace. The moon rode out of its obscurity like a curving coracle of royal yellow, in a sea of stars. But, before it, came a nearer light, and all on which it fell became as bright as a newly minted coin. The Inn's chimney and gables were bathed in it for a second or so. Then it passed on, my eyes following it to its source; a tall, white obelisk of a lighthouse, some way out to sea.

As the ray fell across the high white crest of the incoming combers, some one pulled the blind before me. I lay quite content within the dancing firelight, which lay like a bright pool on the polished floor, the wind without making it roar up the chimney. When somebody reached for my wrist, I looked up into a fire-lit face, the same I had seen in the sunlight, some time before.

A benevolent, full-bearded old gentleman, whose early Victorian appearance accorded well with what I had seen of my surroundings, was looking down at me.

"Am I still dreaming?" I demanded drowsily. "Is all this due to some drug, or something?"

"You," said he carefully, "are in my house on St. Kilda's Cay. I am Doctor Botany, of Prybyl Prison, although a *locum tenems* has my place there, for the present, while I attend to you and my other young friend, Alan Allenby. To-morrow, I will show you his house. It has been closed for several weeks, which is why you are here. His stepmother, after pretending to be sick for some time, while she was as well as you or I, caught the prevailing influenza of this period and died almost overnight. So I thought it best for you to be here."

"But how do I come here at all? And why?" I asked.

"I gathered from Mr. Yorke Norroy," he added, "who, fortunately suffered nothing more serious from his wounds than loss of blood, that he wished you to be with Alan. Under ordinary circumstances, you would have remained in a New York hospital.

"But Mr. Norroy had private and peculiar reasons for distrusting any one, in New York, within reach of a bribe. As there are many hospital Pullmans to be had nowadays, fitted up for the war and intended to convey badly wounded men from place to place

without endangering their condition, you and Alan were taken to Norfolk in one of them. There you were removed to a Red Cross hospital ship, just returned from overseas. This conveyed you to St. Kilda's Cay, a short journey up the Atlantic coast. It required some one with enormous influence to put these governmental conveniences to your use, but Mr. Norroy managed it, somehow. He was in need of constant medical attention himself; but, nevertheless, he returned to Norfolk. I imagine he wanted Alan where the man Trego and his horde could not reach him. Certainly, he could not have found a better place than this, remote from railroads and far out of the track of passenger steamers.

"The Chaplain—escaped?" I stuttered. "How——"

"It appears, from what Mr. Norroy tells me," said Doctor Botany, shaking his head over the depravity of a very wicked man, "that the Chaplain, as you call him, managed not only to escape, himself, with the more important among his people, but managed to cart off most of his valuables, as well."

Doctor Botany began telling off our names, on his plump, white fingers.

"You were unconscious, so was Alan. So was Mr. Norroy, for several days. At least he was allowed no visitors. Somehow, your Chaplain knew this; knew, also, that you three alone were aware that the entire block was a sort of Ali Baba's honeycomb. Mr. Norroy's men raided the first house. Your Chaplain made no attempt to take anything from the first house. He even left a few unimportant folk behind, who pretended to attempt their escape by the fire escape, and so forth. As there seems to have been no apparent trace of any connection between the first house and the others, this Chaplain of yours, and his people, working silently, conveyed the more portable stuff through house after house, until they reached the far one. As Mr. Norroy's men had never seen the block before, how could they know that the 'antique shop,' on the far corner, opened its doors only the next morning. By pretending to sell their goods, they had the majority of them carted off before nightfall of the following day. You see, the Chaplain is still very much to be reckoned with! And the arm of his organization reaches far—reaches even into New York hospitals, and——"

"So Norroy had us sent here, then," I interrupted as soon as I got my breath.

Doctor Botany nodded.

"But," and here the doctor rose, "you have heard enough, to-day. Drink this. As soon as your nurse is through with her supper, she will have something light for you to eat. You have had a narrow squeak of it, my boy, and you should thank God, very sincerely, for your recovery."

"And Allenby?" I asked anxiously.

He pointed to another bed, like mine, in the alcove of one of the projecting dormer windows: that one exactly opposite mine.

"You see him now," said the doctor, his smile benign, even tender, as he watched the sleeping Allenby. "Unfortunately, however, his continued sleep is due to the drug they made him take in that terrible place. Which is why you both remained unconscious so long. I did not have the heart in me to awaken a brace of boys to such pangs as yours would have been, had I deprived you of the drug when you were awake and still in pain."

"You mean Allenby," I faltered with a sort of sickening fear. "And me, too?"

"You don't mean to tell me you didn't *know?*" asked the doctor. "I found it out, when the ordinary anodyne dose did neither of you any good. Of course those New York surgeons filled you up with anæsthetics and anodynes both. The prisoners, over there at Prybyl, have an expression: 'Passing the buck!' Which is what surgeons always do to physicians after an operation. Turn their patients over quiet as sleeping kittens. As they well ought to be when they're crammed full of most of the anodyne alkaloids in the pharmacopeia. But let it pass. I've had to substitute small doses of *jaborandi* by mouth, and pilocarpin by needle—combined with minute doses of *hyocin*——"

I stopped him right there, with an exclamation of horror. For I hadn't forgotten what Allenby had told me about my temporary aberration due to that stuff. Doctor Botany seemed to sense something of this: that is, that I had suffered from what he instantly apostrophized as "one of the most useful but worst misused of all alkaloids." He followed this statement with a long treatise on the same subject, which need not be reproduced here; although it *would* be, were all my readers *medicos.*

"If you imagine you have an idiosyncrasy against it," he concluded, "undeceive your-

self. You have been getting it in one-thousandth grain doses, combined with pilocarpine and eserin; and minute doses of apho-morphia, which is an emetic in large doses, a soporific in small ones. It sufficed for you. I had to keep you unconscious longer than I wanted to, but you awoke well of your wounds—and of your habit besides. A little weakness, that is all."

I found myself saying, "Thank God" over and over again. Tears came to my eyes. The old fellow patted my hand.

"Emotional disturbances always follow the withdrawal," he said. "But you are right as a trivet. I wish I could say as much for poor Alan. He has been semiconscious for the better part of a week. And half the time close to raving madness, thinking about that girl. Because you came to their rescue, and she was not to be found afterward."

"Not to be *found,*" I said, sitting up straight.

"There! I shouldn't have excited you. Now, that's enough. Entirely too much, in fact. I am a poor Æsculapian, I fear. Even in *his* day—Æsculapius' day, I mean—they knew enough not to excite a patient who has just recovered consciousness. I will see what is detaining your nurse."

"You know," I said, laughing in a weak, foolish sort of way, "all the while I was thinking *she* was our nurse. Whenever you said 'nurse,' I had a picture of her."

"Her?"

"That golden-haired darling of a girl; Allenby's girl; old Six's daughter. And *you* say—'not to be found——' "

My emotions overcame me. It is to be feared I choked this out, more like some hysterical schoolgirl, than a man who has been employed on secret missions requiring the utmost in intelligence.

"Oh, damn this sort of thing," I broke out, dabbing at my eyes.

"Emotional reaction, my dear boy, due to the withdrawal of the——"

"And damn what it's due to, too," I added. "I beg your pardon, sir. But you *can't* mean that girl wasn't found where I left her, can you? Surely——"

"We won't discuss the reasons why she *should* have been found. Nor will I listen to another word about her. I take your regrets for granted. I am quite willing to believe you acted for the best. But, the fact remains that Guilda Six is still your Chaplain's prisoner. I'm rejoiced to hear, however, that she is not dead. I gather, from your attitude, that you left her alive."

"Why, I——"

But it was not until the following day that he allowed me to explain what I have already written down, as to how I happened to trump Kewpick's card in that game of guns on the stairway. Allenby was awake and heard it all. And I am sorry to say, saw it with different eyes from the doctor. I will not set down his reproaches, as I am sure he regrets them now. Besides, he was in a worse way than I, for wounds do not heal in a hurry, when one's muscles, mental and bodily, are on edge and a-fret. It ended in his friend, the doctor, being compelled to use a modicum of the one medicine that would moderate this. I knew well enough what the deprivation meant, having suffered, in a similar manner, on a certain day, back in the Broadway block. Had the doctor done otherwise, Allenby, for all his unhealed wounds, would have managed to scramble from bed somehow, yes, and would have kept on going, too, until he dropped, even though he had been reduced to as little as one-tenth of a grain per diem. He had been tossing about all night, while I slept, the doctor told me and, now that relief came, he dropped off into a doze.

"This adds to the danger, you see," Doctor Botany whispered. "Between this fact and another, your Chaplain and his crew still hold a great power over him. From now on I will endeavor to arrange your soporific doses so that you are awake when Alan is asleep. So that——"

He pulled at the corrugated, glass knobs of the little spindle-legged night table. Lying in a little nest of sealed cigarette boxes and small packets of sweets, was the very latest thing in firearms, one of the sinister, hooded sort, lately adopted for the service through the persuasiveness of Mr. Yorke Norroy.

That gentleman's name came into the conversation, as I gazed at the gun, the old fellow telling me that it had been left, by the chief to be used by me, should the occasion warrant it. My eyes must have glistened, just as, often, my mental mouth had watered to possess one. But silencers were not issued to the younger members of the service; none with a service record of less than five years got one.

"You will be awake hereafter from dusk

till dawn, if I can manage it," said Doctor Botany, closing the drawer, after informing me that the sweets and cigarettes had also been left by the chief. "During the night, *I* will potter about. Asleep or awake, Alan must never be left alone, without some one on guard, until we cure him of that habit, and get that girl. Until then, the Chaplain can drive him with a double rein."

But I will make no further mention of Allenby's ills or my own: or the progress of our convalescence and so on. Suffice to say, during the nights I spent in Doctor Botany's attic at St. Kilda's, the door locked and the windows shuttered and both doors and windows barred, our enemies made no move from the outside. Perhaps they knew it would be useless.

On the other hand, the daily report I received from the *Recording Officer of the Service*—a sort of daily newspaper, in mimeograph, furnished to us of the silent service—showed that, since the raid on the corner where Byrd's store had been, the crime-trust investigation had profited nobody. All trace of the Chaplain and his cohorts seemed lost. I could imagine our chief, for all his lackadaisical, languid airs, boiling inside. Yorke Norroy did not know much about defeat, until he encountered the Devil's Chaplain.

Now we come to that day, in March, when the young flying officer came to the Blue Anchor Inn.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE STATEMENT OF ULRIC ULM. II.

In the days when St. Kilda's was by way of being a buccaneer boom town, so to speak, the only spot north of the Bermudas, or Bahamas—I forget which—where those sailing under letters of marque, so-called, could disport themselves without fear of a brush with officers of the crown, the old Blue Anchor Inn, which I had seen from my window, had been a most important hostel.

Then came the lean years, when it had hardly been worth while keeping the inn open; except that it was owned by one of those tradition-upholding families; one that had followed inn-keeping, there, ever since the first Roger Allenby left St. Mary's town and the Chesapeake shore for the Atlantic seaboard. During our own days, there had been a temporary revival of its good fortunes. The war brought back wooden ships that could be built quickly and cheaply. The shipyards were still in operation when I came there. So that my first visit to the inn found it crowded. In a way, this was not well for our affairs, for strangers came and went at the shipyards.

One afternoon, when the westering sun was making great red diamonds of the lozenge-shaped panes of the inn's dormer windows, Allenby and I ended our stroll by entering the old place. Allenby had visited it the day before, and had paid his respects to a certain set of old mariners who forgathered there in their twilit years: those who sat at the "captains' table."

Everything inside was as it should be. Old black-oaken wainscoting, smoky rafters, a staircase wide enough to accommodate any gentleman who wanted to drive upstairs to bed; old colored prints of jovial huntsmen, wearing their "pinks," in just such interiors as this—the sort of thing one sees in old English inns. While I strolled from print to print, hands behind my back, Allenby joined the old gentlemen by the fireplace, where a fire of great logs glowed.

"Sit ye down, Alan, boy," I heard from a half dozen wheezy old throats. I glanced across to see the famous ancients of the neighborhood; master mariners and octogenarians, almost every one; few were younger, some even older. All were attired in what looked like a uniform; square-cut, double-breasted, blue-serge coat, with trousers as loose at knee as at thigh, and equally loose at ankle. That is, all save one; and he wore the uniform of a naval flyer. He was quite evidently a stranger to Alan, to whom he was being introduced as I wandered over to the table.

"He's a cap'en, too," I heard one wheezy one chuckle. "All cap'ens at the cap'ens' table. Sit ye down, Alan, boy. First skipper I sailed under was his grandad, Cap'n Brandon," he said, addressing the flying corps man. With an ancient's usual garrulity he went on to reminisce *ad lib.* He continued to talk while another of the ancients engaged Alan in more intimate conversation.

"Old Giles is sick," said he, his hand to Allenby's ear. "Told me not to tell ye till ye was seaworthy again. He's mortal afraid the gov'ment will dry-dock him, if it's heard about."

"I'll go to see Giles, to-morrow," I heard

Allenby say. He turned to me. "We'll overhaul my boat in the morning and go over in the afternoon. Will you see him before then, uncle Eli?"

"Why, I'm living there now, Alan boy. Don't do to leave an old shipmate alone in the sick bay. Will I tell him you'll be there for sarten, Alan?"

"Certain sure, to-morrow afternoon, won't we, Ulm?"

I said that I would accompany him gladly, if that was all that worried him.

"And if your yawl ain't shipshape," said old Elihu, "you've only got to signal and I'll come across for ye myself."

At this the naval flying chap struck in:

"You mean you go back and forth from the lighthouse alone? With no one even to help you handle your main sheet?"

Captain Elihu Vansant's reply plumbed abysmal depths of contempt for those weaklings who needed assistance to handle a tiller and a few ropes.

"But the lighthouse?" said the stranger. "You mean to tell me that lighthouse is dependent upon the services of a sick old man and your voluntary assistance?"

"Why, yes," said Captain Elihu, opening his eyes wide.

"Well; I dare say it isn't of much importance, as a light, that is, or the treasury people would have an assistant lighthouse keeper there, anyhow, or——"

"The Loadstone light! Not *important!* You a naval man! See here."

Allenby had taken upon himself the lot of spokesman.

"Not dangerous?" was his peroration. "Not dangerous! No; the Loadstone is only the *most* dangerous off the Atlantic coast, that's all. And, there's your own department's word for it."

"We really oughtn't to be in the navy at all, of course, we bus drivers," acknowledged the naval flyer, literally abasing himself. "Sorry to have offended, since I'll have to be over here so often. Expect to use St. Kilda's as a sort of acceptance park, you know."

Cordiality being gradually restored by more humilifics, on his part, he shook hands all around and arose. "I'll be here to-morrow with one of our new seaplanes," he added. "I came over to-day in an old land bus. Care to see it?"

It is only just, to myself, to say that I would have had a profound distrust for the plausible stranger, had it not been for the uniform and the *pukka* insignia on his plane. It had not occurred to me to distrust any one wearing such a uniform, and driving such a plane. I knew the navy department's markings, and there they were on chassis and fuselage. Moreover, as we approached Michael Mooney's lush-grass pasture, just behind the town hall, where it lay, he turned to me, asking:

"Ever been up?" And when I shook my head: "Like to go?"

"Why, yes," I surprised myself by saying. By asking me, instead of Alan, the fellow had stilled even the slightest whisper of suspicion.

"Put these on, Mr. Ulm, and climb into the rear seat," said the stranger, proffering me goggles, leather coat, et cetera. "Don't put your foot on a wing when you climb in. And keep your feet off the controls. McChesney will show you after he straps you in."

The mechanician had impressed into service several of the village loungers, to whom he now called sharply to remove the "chalks," leaving the wheels free for action, the while he himself swung the propeller.

"Petrol on! Suck in!"

A great clatter ensued as of a dozen motor cycles. The plane rocked violently, then shot forward, careening across the salt pasture. Then up went her nose in air, and the ground beneath us moved away with astounding rapidity. He started to climb immediately. As I gazed down upon the town, I felt a slight, then an acute, nausea.

It was not until Brandon turned her nose down and shut off her engine, that I saw things clearly, again. And with the earth rushing up at me with the speed of a subway express, I did not care whether I saw clearly or obscurely. After one look at the swiftly approaching earth, I instantly shut my eyes. Nor did I open them again until our downward course had changed to a sort of hovering and circling. Soon we were taxiing along on terra firma again, stopping in an open field, near an old house with lichen-stained slate roof and surrounded by a small market garden, weed-grown and otherwise neglected.

"Get out," the stranger ordered. Evidently recalling that I was his guest, he laughed apologetically: "Pardon me, won't

you? I keep forgetting everybody isn't my mechanician."

But I had been too glad to be back again, safe and sound, to cavil at curtness in conversation. With an agile alacrity, unusual in one recently recovered from severe wounds, I climbed out by the footholds and was stamping around to awaken some sense of feeling in my feet, both of which were asleep. By the time they were well awake, his mechanician had taken my seat—he and Allenby having been instructed as to where we would land. Allenby and I were left to watch a speck in the sky. I had, of course, thanked Brandon, and he had said he would see us to-morrow.

"I doubt we'll be here, in the afternoon," Allenby had informed him, showing no intense enthusiasm over the idea of seeing him again. "We'll be over at the lighthouse."

"Even so," the other had laughed. "I'll have a hydro to-morrow; *Goody-Two-Shoes*, you know; a seaplane. Tell your ancient friend, the lighthouse keeper, to watch for me. I'll do some stunts to amuse the poor old chap."

With that he was off. Allenby seemed to have dismissed Brandon from his mind utterly, in favor of certain reminiscences concerning the beginnings of his Odyssey.

"That," he said, pointing to the deserted, lichen-stained, slate-roofed house, which overlooked the long line of oozy marshes that separated St. Kilda's from the mainland, "is where old Ike Hamp was murdered. And there's the barn where Billiken tied me up. I wonder what's become of that little beast, Billiken, anyhow."

Well, he was soon to know. I cannot blame myself, in the matter of what was to happen on the morrow, that eventful fifth of March, nineteen nineteen. For, later that evening, remembering I was there to suspect everybody, I took the trouble to "long-distance" the meteorological officer at the Chesapeake N. A. S. Station. Of him I inquired as to Brandon.

"Captain Charles Brandon? The flyer? Oh, you want to know if he was up to-day? Yes, he is our trial-flight officer, you know. He goes up every day. Whenever it is flying weather, that is. Yes, that is Captain Brandon; short, heavy-set, somewhat swarthy. Yes. Oh, you just wanted to settle a bet!"

So you must admit, in all fairness, that I have nothing with which to reproach myself.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE STATEMENT OF ULRIC ULM. III.

We had spent the morning of that fifth of March, as we had expected to, overhauling Allenby's little yawl; also a good part of the afternoon, before we were ready to start for the Loadstone light.

Though you are not to imagine that it was much of a trip. As a matter of fact, the entire width of the Giant's Jaws, from the Prybyl to the Loadstone, is something under four miles.

The lighthouse is built well out to sea, on that part of the Loadstone Rock "peninsular" which is half the time submerged. To raise her foundations above high-water mark was, I am told, a worthy, solid, and expensive piece of lighthouse engineering. A smaller edition built in the days of crown and colony, had crashed down and been swept away by one of those hurricanes, for which the Storm Capes are infamous, some time in the middle of last century. But this had been foreseen, because of previous weakenings of her foundations, and the new structure had been well under way for some time before that. So it was that the Loadstone Light had never been extinguished for nearly two centuries. And well it was for the coastwise shipping that this was so.

All this Allenby told me on my way out there. It was an uneventful passage except that it took some tacking to make the landing stage, on the lee shore of the light, because of the many saw-toothed "teeth" in the Giant's Jaws rocks that, at low tide, stood up like monoliths. By the time the yawl was moored to one of the iron rings of the landing-stage float, it was about the time one of our English cousins would want his tea.

Old Giles, it seems, had made great preparations for us. We might have been the most distinguished of guests. Old Captain Elihu was there, and it was he who showed me over the lighthouse. It being a more than twice-told tale to Allenby, he remained with Giles, on the third landing, which held the old man's living room and bedchamber.

For some quarter mile beyond where the lighthouse raised its height, the Loadstone Rock, at high tide, was like a series of little rocky islets. At low, its ugly black length was entirely visible all the way to where it rose high and higher, and became an integral part of the mainland. At its farthest

point from shore, it lay directly in the sea lane followed by the coastwise shipping, when there was a storm a-brewing.

Captain Vansant having shown me thoroughly through the lighthouse, we at last found ourselves in the lamp itself. The captain evidently knew as much of its machinery as any one needs to know. He explained the dioptric lens, the occulting machinery, and the two keys that were the *crux* of the whole affair. One sent the electric spark speeding across the oil-soaked wicks, the other set the occulting hood in motion. In other words, one lit the great lamp, the other set the rays whirling about here, there, everywhere—two keys, two tongues of hard, black rubber. One had only to reach out one's forefinger and jam them down. It was as easy as that: yes. Well for me that it was! And well for the coastwise shipping, during the early hours of the night that was to come!

We were out on the trimming stage balcony that encircled the light tower, when I first saw the flying man. And immediately I had one of those uneasy premonitions. Before it could have any effect, however, the old captain saw him, too, and pointed him out in some excitement, for he seemed to be headed straight for the lighthouse. At this hour of late afternoon, the day had merged into foggy dusk. More than that, a sullen roar, to the northwest, kept increasing.

"Must be out of his senses," Captain Elihu grunted, watching the aviator, whom I had told him to be Captain Brandon, trying out a new plane, "flying in weather like this!"

I said nothing.

"Fog, too," added the captain, sniffing, as a puff of heavy-laden air whirled us to the rightabout and compelled us to catch at the iron railing for support. Down below the water was churning itself into a white-capped fury.

Captain Elihu paid his respects to the reckless flying man with a second sniff of a different variety from the first. Brandon was near enough, now, for us to observe that his flying boat was carrying three instead of two, as yesterday. His mechanician and some fellow flyer—an observer, doubtless—I commented to Captain Elihu, as we stepped inside the tower of heavy glass superimposed upon a skeleton of steel.

"Lucky you lads are here," he growled, as he lifted the speaking tube that communicated with all parts of the lighthouse. "Have Alan get up the heat," he told Giles briefly. "I'll attend to the storm signals."

"Can't I help?" I asked.

He said I could, indicating the flag locker and advising me as to what was wanted.

Meanwhile he had ascended into "the lantern," as he called the upper part of the tower, and began what seemed a most complicated operation. It consisted, as far as I could make out, of turning a tiny wheel, which lowered the "lantern," until it came out of its bronze hood and fell gently into a lower frame.

Meanwhile, he had found time to tell me how to hoist the storm signals, little flags with red and black squares for centers, which I attached to halyards outside, on the trimming stage, and pulled up to the peak of a flagstaff that was braced against the iron railing. The wind almost carried me off, while I was thus occupied. When the shutter slammed behind me, I drew a deep breath of relief.

"Well, the red sector's all ready," I heard the old mariner remark, more to himself than me. "So, come on, now, storm, if you-all wants to come. Fog signal getting ready, storm signals flying, red sector shipshape and——"

"What's the red sector," I asked curiously.

He pointed to where, at two different angles, tall and narrow panes of crimson had replaced those of white glass.

"That's the red sector," he said. "Considerin' how it's darkenin', I'll be a-lighting up long before the reg'lar time." He shook his head, while, with a piece of spotless chamois, he flicked at the wonderful mass of crystal with its many ridges of glittering horizontal prisms set in bronze frames, the Fresnel refracting lens its focal point.

He descended to a sort of cabinet he called "the watch room," to wind up the "clock," he said. *Click—click—click.* The bronze framework, with its perpendicular prisms, outside which were red and white panes of glass, began to revolve slowly about the lens proper. The light, when lit, could thus throw a white beam only at intervals, When one of the colored panes passed it, a red ray must ensue.

"That's to show the safe channel, if the skipper wants to make port during dirty weather," explained Captain Elihu proudly.

"You notice the shape of them there panes —the red ones? That's the shape of St. Kilda's channel."

He pointed it out on an enlarged map of the harbor, with a diagram of wind directions in one corner. Two dark-colored triangles, each having the lighthouse for its apex, one extending in a northeasterly direction, the other due south, and each marked "Red Ray," entirely covered St. Kilda's channel.

"That peculiar shape of the red glasses isn't due to chance, my boy, as you probably perceive. Suppose it's downright dirty weather, as it looks like it may be, tonight? And suppose you are a captain, none too sure of your coast, your ship, or maybe it's her sticks or canvas can't stand the strain. In that case, there's your red ray showing you a broad, safe channel, no matter whether you're heading in with the wind abeam or abaft. The moment she gets into that red ray, her captain knows he's only got to follow it to be safe. For his chart tells him that between prison and town, the waters are deep and vessels are safe and sheltered, even quite close inshore. So your captain sails along, the red ray shining out bright and plain, heaves over his anchor, and lies safe, for the night, or duration of the fog."

Small wonder, is it, that, with all this to occupy us, we forgot the flying man. Not until Captain Elihu decided to descend and confer with Giles, before lighting the lamp, did I remember to look, and saw no sign of him.

"Wise man," I remember thinking. For there could be no doubt that, now, what Captain Elihu called a "briskish blow" was undoubtedly on its way.

We descended the spiral stairway to where old Giles sat, feverishly plugging and unplugging the speaking tube. We could hear its whistling, afar down, before we entered the living room. He looked up anxiously upon our entrance.

"What can be keeping Alan? He doesn't answer, either. I can't understand it."

"The whistle's loud enough," I said dubiously. "We heard it coming downstairs."

What I did was instinctive. You will remember I had been entrapped, once before, because of headlong recklessness. I made no such mistake this time. I opened the door with a minimum of noise and did not shut it at all. And I crawled down the spiral stairs, as a fly crawls a damp and sticky ceiling. As I reached the landing, that led from the workroom to the storeroom on the first floor, the sight of what was happening, below, struck me into stony immobility.

Just below me, on the storeroom floor, the door to the big fog-signal room open, revealing a mass of machinery, I saw Allenby struggling with three men; or, rather, with two. For the third was busying himself, behind him, dancing hither and thither, keeping out of the way of Allenby's vicious back kicks, endeavoring to make fast the gag that even now prevented my companion from notifying us of his peril. What little noise the four of them made was drowned by the drowsy thumping of the Ericsson engine, aroused to its work, and the intermittent scream of old Giles' whistling tube, the plug of which hung loose. Every now and again one could hear Giles' voice come floating through the tube:

"Alan! Alan! Why don't you answer?"

At each query, Allenby would make an even more strenuous effort to regain his freedom.

Much can happen in a moment of that sort. The man with the gag finally got his knee into Allenby's back, at the same moment that the two in front grappled with him, one on either side, each throwing both their legs around one of his. So that he stood, like the central athlete of an acrobatic act, supporting all the others.

The third man, holding the broad tapes of the gag taut, his knee bending Alan's spine, threw the latter's head back, suddenly crossed the tapes and tied them in one knot, two knots, three. Then he released his hold, and the others fell to the floor, clawing like wild cats. The third man slipped around and began maneuvering for a position where he could encircle Allenby's wrists with a pair of steel-chain handcuffs.

This was what I had waited for; one of them to separate himself from Allenby that I might shoot. By the dim light of a central-hung lantern, I saw that this third man was the fellow who had called himself Captain Brandon, of the naval air service.

By its smoky light I also aimed. And then an unexpected thing happened. As my bullet struck the impostor's wrist, his hand flew up in a convulsive movement and launched the handcuffs toward me. I had crept down a step or two before firing, so

that I stood on the last curve of the spiral stairway; and the flung handcuffs struck me smartly on the strained knuckles of the hand that held the noiseless weapon, Mr. Norroy's gift to me, for the protection of Allenby.

So sudden and so paralyzing was their impact that gun and handcuffs struck the stairs together. As Brandon leaped to catch them, I leaped for Brandon, landing squarely on his shoulders.

"Foul play," I called to those upstairs. "Foul play. Help, help!"

Immediately following my hail, help arrived in the person of Captain Elihu. As I heard the old fellow come stumping down the stairs, I yelled my warning to him:

"Get my gun. It's at the foot of the stairs. Quick, captain——"

It was then, in a kind of fury, that Brandon drove me against the door. And as it opened outward and was ajar, anyhow, the pair of us went down, head over heels, to the landing stage, four or five feet below.

Striking one's head against boards as hard as those of that sea-salted icy stage is no ordinary injury, as far as stunning the man beneath is concerned. But to me there must have been given some extraordinary power, some supernal strength of will that day. For, although I felt myself slipping into unconsciousness, even as I did so, I managed to roll over, until I was top man again.

Followed a bitter struggle, if a short one. Brandon got his thumbs into my gullet and hung on like a bulldog. I managed, somehow, in one desperate movement, to scramble to my feet, bearing him with me. By suddenly ducking my head and twisting my body about, I flung him from me, before I, myself, fell.

What brought me to my feet, again, was a cry of wild distress from some one near by. In that semidarkness that comes with a storm at sea, especially when a short winter's day is waning, I saw, at first, nothing save the endangered seaplane, which rode the water, close by, in infinite danger of being wrecked by contact with the float. As I raised myself on the landing, and looked seaward, it was as if I stood among thick cobwebs. The wind had me rocking, too, teetering about unsteadily. Even the sturdy timbers of the float quivered, its iron rings and steel rivets rasping harshly, its stout cables creaking. When the wail came again, I got down on hands and knees, and crawled to the edge of the float.

"Where—are—you?" I bawled at the self-styled Brandon, my cupped hands a makeshift megaphone. When through the wind's roar, the answer came, it was weak and quavering.

"Can't — hold — out — much — longer. Help! For God's—sake—help!"

I shuddered and peered over. The yawl was pitching back and forth, one second on a high green hill, the next in a deep, white valley. I thanked Heaven that I had worn a pair of Allenby's sea boots, for not only did they keep me dry below the thighs, but gave me a secure footing when I came to climb down the slimy green ladder toward the slippery decked-over surface of that yawl.

Calculating the distance with a sideways glance, I watched for the yawl to dance nearer. Then gritting my teeth I threw myself backward toward the mast, clutching it, and with its aid pivoted on my heel until I faced the sea again. Squirming down to the yawl's waist, I had reason to bless the sea boots again, when I must kneel, knee-deep in the water she had shipped, at every wave that broke over her.

The anchor rope gave a sudden tug as I knelt, nearly sending me overboard. The yawl keeled over, then shot up to a great height. Some cross current intervening, she met only emptiness there. Ensued a sickening drop into a boiling wrath of sea spume and spindrift, whipped up by the wind.

In the sullen darkness, above and below, only the faint phosphorescence about his face saved him who howled so dismally for help, out there, amid the great hills and caverns of dark water—such dim illuminance, as drips from plashing oars on tropic nights.

His coat had caught upon a projecting point of rock, and he clawed at a second one with broken bleeding fingers, squealing the while like some terrified shoat, with the butcher's knife at his throat. His face was ghastly. I had caught at one of the spare coils of rope, cleated to the overdecking. I had noted the fluke of an anchor, rolling about the waist of the yawl. These I fastened together, and shouting: "Hel-lo—there! Catch!"—hurled the bit of broken iron straight for his rock. He caught the rope, wildly beseeching me to pull him in. This I did, but with the utmost difficulty. When he reached the side of the yawl, and would have clawed at it, as he had at the rock, I warned him off with lifted fist.

"I promise—I swear—anything!" he shrieked. "Pull me in."

"I wasn't thinking of that," I gave him back, in a disgusted yell. "But you'll capsize her, if I let you try. So I'm going to climb to the landing and pull you in there."

When finally I got him pulled to the foot of the ladder, and had hitched the rope to a landing cleat, I fell flat, and, reaching down, caught his hair with both hands, as an Indian lifts a scalp lock.

"Climb now, damn you!" I panted.

He nearly collapsed, when he reached the landing, but planting a foot in the small of his back, I sent him hurtling toward the lighthouse ladder. He would have fallen, as he slammed against it, only I was too quick for him. Catching him by the collar, I climbed the second ladder, dragging him after me. The lighthouse door was still open. Once inside it, I let him fall. Never have I seen any one pass out so peacefully and so completely.

"Pfugh," I managed to choke out disgustedly.

I do not think I halfway realized I had been willfully and sinfully wasting precious time, rescuing such an enemy, until my eyes wandered from the self-styled Brandon to where old Captain Elihu lay close by, his fingers intertwined in the collar of one of Brandon's companions. Neither Allenby nor Brandon's third, was anywhere to be seen.

The dreaful suspicion, collated from these facts, began to deepen. It became a certainty, when I swung out into the storm again, holding to the door by one hand, and shading my eyes with the other, as I peered through the gloom, searching for the light of the lantern.

It was as I feared. *The Loadstone light had not been lit.*

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE STATEMENT OF ULRIC ULM. IV.

Out to sea was the utter darkness of a moonless, starless stormy night. The lamps of St. Kilda's had vanished in the great gloom. Prybyl Prison for all its many lighted corridors and cell spaces was as black as the bluff of basalt beneath it. And the Loadstone not lit, for the first time in close to two centuries!

As swiftly as the door slammed when I released its outer catch, it did not equal my own rapid rush for the staircase. Its corkscrew spirals made more than a step at a time impossible, but, for all that, I reached the landing above quicker than I can tell about. There I found Allenby stretched on his back, one still hand holding a torn collar and necktie: the other clutching my own weapon, the one the handcuffs had struck from my hands. His antagonist was nowhere to be seen.

Immediately I became as wary as the hunter, whom the tiger has turned into the hunted. I knew, of course, why the weapon had been allowed to remain by him whom my friend had fought so fiercely. Releasing the spring, I substituted for the empty cartridge clip I knew I would find within its butt, a fresh one I carried for emergencies. For such ammunition as fitted this precious, silent weapon was not readily purchasable, outside certain government stores. Which, of course, was why Allenby's antagonist had let it remain in his grasp.

Gripping it as Gallahad might have gripped the Grail, I climbed on intent upon one thing, and only one. For the sake of the many mariners, at the mercy of the fog and storm, I must light that light. Foward I went, and noiselessly reached the next landing. So it was that I came to old Giles' landing, and for the first time in my life saw the little moon-faced monster, Billiken.

Noiseless weapon or no, he had done one more murder, after all; for, there on the floor, lay the old man, Giles, an ugly patch in the silvery white of his matted hair. The blow had been recently struck, and from behind.

I might have risen from the dead, from the startled look of this murderous little monster! He had been ransacking drawers —he was always alert for minor pilfering, on his own part, if Milliken, Allenby's friend, is to be believed. He saw me when his hands were full of bills and silver, for he had broken into an old ship's locker fastened to the wall; one in which Giles kept the lighthouse money for small expenditures.

At sight of me, this moon-faced creature opened his ugly little mouth and his little piglike eyes seemed about to pop forth. But he made one wild reach for the weapon he had laid on the table, a weapon as ugly as himself, a rancher's Colt with a sawed-off barrel.

Then I killed him. I make no apologies

for it. Knowing that the light must be lit, realizing I could take no chances, seeing what he had done to a poor lame old man, remembering how cheerfully he had murdered many in the past, I just killed him, that's all.

"I've killed him, damn him!" I told myself exultantly. "That's the end of *him!*"

And so saying, I tore on my way upstairs.

Once I had stumbled up the last corkscrew flight and stood within the lantern, there was little enough to do. I put a forefinger on each of the two black keys—and pressed. Not so very hard, either. And the spark leaped along across the oil-soaked wicks. The occulting hood began to move.

I dropped to the lightkeeper's lookout, below.

"There she goes," I remember shouting as gleefully as any kid. For the great white beam seemed to shake itself like some great luminous moth before perching on the troubled waters. Then came the red ray, and up and down the channel the raging waters were stained as if by cochineal.

The following moment held emotions that could be couched in no phrase of childhood. As the white ray fell perpendicularly across the reef itself, I saw a tall white ship bearing directly down upon it. As the shifting ray lit up her decks, I could see oil-skinned figures, like black apes, running hither and thither. Her siren began to shriek frantically. In the same second, she struck the reef!

The words we know are coined for the uses of life, in the light of day. And so fall far short when we must tell of the times when Death comes stalking in the dark. Never before had I known how inadequate was "slow" to express the tortuous passages of torturing time.

I had seen the nose of the great white ship buried deep in swirling spray and boiling-white scum; I had watched her bows breast the heights of a great green mountain. Descending its far slope, at express-like speed, she had struck—head on. My last sight of her had been like the stricken stag who rears himself, in his last agony, to shake his massive antlered head. She had trembled from stem to stern, her every timber a-tremor. And, having seen, I must watch the light upon sea, town, sand dunes, and channel, before reaching the stricken ship again. That this might not be, I was ready to jam down the key of the occulting hood. This done, the hood remaining stationary, the great white beam bathed only that place where the ship was giving up its life, before the remorseless rage of storm and sea. All that was left of her was hull down, and sinking fast. Even as I looked her spirit was submerged. It was then I read her name, *Elsinore,* just before the block letters sank out of sight.

The rocks were covered with crawling, clawing, black figures. A ship's boat floated, upside down; the backwash was crowded with deck chairs, and general debris. Two other boats came free of their davits, as the sea swept the last deck clean. More little black figures, frantic little black figures, leaped in, one, another—a dozen or more.

Then suddenly, all were engulfed. For it was then the ship went down. A sort of maelstrom ensued, sucking in everything. I could stand no more. My own hands leaped up to my eyes, to hide the sight.

I did not remain thus long. I knew now I must at least *try* to help. Some of the many must have courage and endurance enough to stick on the reef. I recalled some talk of Captain Elihu's about life-saving apparatus. Instantly I was on my way downstairs. I stopped to lift old Giles to a sofa; Allenby must not be deterred from helping the living, because of the old man's death. And I remembered, when I had examined Allenby, on the way up, that his heart had been beating too steadily for him to have come to much harm. I hurried down to him.

To my incredulous astonishment, Allenby was sitting up, rubbing his eyes, and damning the universe. Then he saw me.

"You aren't hurt, then?" I asked joyfully.

"Don't seem to be. Bruised and all that. No"—he finished his examination of himself—"I don't seem to be wounded."

"Then for God's sake—there are people who need the best in both of us," I said soberly. And in the fewest possible words I told him everything.

I sped down the stairs and Allenby followed me, somewhat more slowly, for he was still dazed. I do not think he quite realized what had happened outside until he heard me telling the tale, all over again, to Captain Elihu, once I managed to revive him. No small task, this; the brandy I rubbed on his temples, and forced down

his throat, should have served an average man for a night's tout. When finally the old man was in condition to hear what had happened, his head fell back on my knee.

"The Loadstone that hasn't failed in two hundred years! How'll he stand the disgrace of it, poor old Giles!"

"Never mind about him," I raged. "There are men and women dying on that reef. Aren't you going to tell us where to find the lifeline?"

The old fellow tottered to his feet. The master mariner was alive in him, again. From that moment he took charge, hobbling here, there, and every other place, ordering Brandon about as if he were one of us—after I had kicked that coward back to consciousness again—and finally taking him to the landing stage, along with him.

It had been decided that I should go out with the line. I was attached to one line and carried another. This latter I was to fasten securely somewhere out there; then to pull up, after me, a sort of double trolley of strong, tough, silken fiber and piano wire. Sliding on pulleys. They would then work out to me, from their end, a sort of cradle or basket of rope and wire. Into this I could put whoever was helpless or unconscious. If there was more than one, I was to signal and the cradle would come back empty.

How I ever made my way along that slippery reef, buffeted by the waves on both sides, only God and myself know. Two things were in my favor. Until the last point was reached—the scene of the shipwreck—the reef was as wide as any average pavement. So when the waves knocked me down, I had something to cling to. Moreover, I was almost always some few feet above those same waves. The reef was never entirely submerged, even at high tide, and, for all of the storm, I was only once over my ankles in the water. It was fighting the storm, that counted; forging ahead in the teeth of a gale; with raging waves breaking over me off both sides. I fell more times than I cared to count.

They saw me coming—the pitiful pair whom the storm had spared. I went knee-deep into the boiling-white spume, as I stumbled down a slight declivity and toward the spur of rock to which they clung. Two of them, mind you, only two, out of all that great ship's company. A woman and a man. And if it had not been for him and his giant's strength, I might have gone the woman's way, without him, instead of helping both of them ashore. But he caught me by the collar of my oilskin jacket and lifted me bodily, with one of his huge hands. So I gained the spur of rock that rose some five feet or more above the boiling, raging sea.

"Fasten it, somewhere," I sputtered, the spume and spindrift stinging my mouth as I spoke. "Fasten it somewhere, for God's sake."

"Buck up, sonny," I heard him say, almost jovially. "Can't you see I've only got the use of one arm? I got this far, though. There must be some place to fasten it. If you'll hold *her*, I think I can manage it. I've got a mechanic's fingers, I have. Here—now—can—you—manager—*her?*"

So the girl, wrapped and bundled, lay in my arms, while this astonishing fellow went alertly to work. He soon had the line in some sort of a sailor's hitch, about some smaller rocky spur. When it held taut, I told him to shake it, in a certain fashion, to signal its safety. Not that this was necessary, for, outlined as we were by that great light beam, Allenby, watching under the shaded palm of his gloved hand, could see all we were doing, for all the flying spray and spume.

And so, haltingly, by fits and starts, the cradle jerked its way out to us, and I placed the girl within it.

"Go back with her," ordered the big man in the wet jersey jacket, that clung to him like the green to a Barye bronze. "That basket stuck when there was nothing in it. It'll stick worse, going back. Some one's got to push it, when it balks, young fella. When she's safe, I'll just tie this one to myself and haul myself in, hand over hand."

"You mean?" I gasped, the full purport of his words then striking me, for the first time, "that there isn't any one else out here?"

"Nary a one," he answered slowly. "It was all *I* could do to get *her*. Get along with you now!"

The shoreward trip was but a repetition of the one seaward. I was so weak, I could not scramble up to the landing stage, but must be dragged up by the united strength of Allenby and Captain Elihu.

"Look after the girl in there," said Allenby. Brandon carried her in. "We'll see to the other fellow. We're sending the cradle out now."

But I stopped them with what the big

chap had said: that he would fasten the other line to himself, and come in hand over hand, so long as they pulled when they got his signal.

"Go to it," I said. "Get him in. I can manage all right."

It was all I could do to drag myself up the ladder, to tell the truth. When I had done so, however, I came upon a situation that made me forget all about being ready to drop down gasping. For the self-styled Brandon, wild and staring of eye, was shaking the still unconscious girl so violently that the oilskins, in which the other had wrapped her, had fallen off; the hood of her own greatcoat had fallen back, and, just as I entered, her own hair fell, in a loose mass of crispy, bright locks. "It isn't you!" he was demanding in a sort of frenzy. "Not you! Oh, for God's sake say it's not you! If it's you, where's the Chaplain? Tom Trego, you know; old Tom Trego. Chard, too; where's Chard? Answer me, damn you, answer me. Was Jimmie Hopper's old girl with you? She and the one they called Selina? My God, it wasn't our ship went on the rocks, was it? That's not possible, you know—why don't you answer me, hell cat! My God I'll show you——"

It was then I sprang at him. But, before I struck, I saw his staring, rolling eyes: saw, too, that he did not see me, although there I was, right in front of him. And then I had a better look at the girl; saw that golden-bronze mass that framed the face—the one girl in all the world for me, although I had only seen Guilda Six twice. Once, to my own undoing, too; the second time, to be called coward and worse by her.

I tore her from the crazed man's hands.

"Darling, my darling," I babbled like some great, overgrown oaf. "You're safe! You're safe!"

For it was the girl I loved as much as Allenby ever did, or ever will. Although she *did* not, and never will love me.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE STATEMENT OF ULRIC ULM. V.

I sensed Guilda's returning to consciousness, and put her gently, but guiltily, on a couch I hurriedly improvised for her. Then I looked up at the rolling stary eyes of the man who called himself Brandon. I had begun to realize the truth.

His wailing broke out again.

"The Chaplain—and all the gang gone. Gone clean to hell!"

"Yes," I said quietly, "and you sent them there: you and your murderers."

His eyes held mine, for at least a moment. For the life of me, I could say no more to him. His expression was one of utter misery. What was in my mind must have percolated through some obscure telepathic channel into his, for, standing there, not saying a word, either one of us, he came to see, somehow, how his ill-timed raid upon the lighthouse had kept the light unlit at the very hour when it could do the most harm to his own people. As we stood there, eye to eye, the door banged back, and the big fellow was propelled upward and inward, followed by Allenby and Captain Elihu.

The man who called himself Brandon stumbled backward, until he was flat against the storehouse door.

"Milliken," he cried gladly. "Milliken! You're saved, you're saved! The others, too. They are saved, too, aren't they? Milliken, say they are!"

But before the big fellow could answer, Allenby leaped across and threw both arms about him.

"Milliken! Good old Mill!" He cried jubilantly. But there was a sort of choking sob in his voice. For the big fellow, now that the necessity for keeping upper lip and backbone both stiff, was over, had crumpled up, his face as drawn and tortured as any I ever saw. No one but himself would ever know what he went through, on that reef. If it is not blasphemous to say so, that was both his Gethsemane and his Calvary. And his resurrection, when it came later, was more than a rebirth. It was a birth of another man. All the base metal had been consumed in the fire of sacrifice. What was left was the true steel.

As Milliken's knees gave under him, he managed to whisper hoarsely to Allenby. "I kept her safe for you, boy. Before and after. Did the best I could."

With that, he would have gone down, had I not sprung to Allenby's side. For Allenby had suddenly realized just who the girl was. So, as we let Milliken gently down on a near-by locker, I covered him with the coat I had discarded before taking my perilous trip, and pushed my companion toward *her*.

"I'll see to Milliken," I said. And then I turned my back as, with a strangled cry of

"Guilda," Allenby sprang across the room and knelt beside her.

"Alan; oh, *dear* Alan!" came her weak little cry.

Well, they will know now, when they read this, that she had been in my arms, too. And that my lips have met hers—for the first time and the last. And they will forgive. For they have one another. And I have only that memory.

From Milliken, I turned to Brandon, who, with an eerie eldritch sort of shriek, had flung himself at the door.

"There are more of them out there—dying. And you won't help! Let me go to them. *I'll* help them! *I'll* help them!"

Before we could stop him, he had flung himself out, forgetful of the ladder. I was after him like a shot. But I was too late. He must have fallen in just the same way he fell once before that day. And the fierce blast must have caught him, and hurled him forward—to join those many others whose lives had been lost because of him. We never saw him again.

I could use up page after page, smoothing out the many-tangled threads that came out of the Chaplain's death. Perhaps it was as well for him he died at the top notch of his iniquity. For, knowing that, sooner or later, he would show in that vicinity, in search of Allenby, Yorke Norroy, retaining the revenue cutter he had commandeered, had prowled the coast looking for him.

It was well for the chief that I had lit the light when I did. For he had located the Chaplain that very day, and was on his heels when the *Elsinore* went down. Fortunately, also, for him, I remembered about the red sector, immediately after Allenby's recognition of Guilda—when we had carried her upstairs, between us, and put her to bed in one of the inspector's rooms.

It was then I told Allenby the truth about poor old Giles. After which, I fled to the lantern, and released the occulting hood. Immediately the light began to revolve again, and, as I stood there, for a while, composing myself, I saw what I now know was the cutter *Arethusa*, making her way along the red lane of light.

None of us slept, that night, save the survivors of the yacht *Elsinore*. Before morning the storm abated, and Allenby and I, seeing a small power boat forging across to us, made our way down to the landing stage, to demand of those within it—through a megaphone—that they turn back, and bring with them the parish priest. For Giles had asked, long since, that he be buried at sea.

It was then I knew that Norroy was near by. For he stood up in the boat, demanding information as to our safety, Allenby s and mine. He had not recognized us, muffled up as we were. And so thick had been the fog, that night, that the folk ashore knew nothing of the wreck of the *Elsinore*.

We carried old Giles a mile or more out, to bury him. When the last sad office had been said for him, and when, having lowered him, we had gone farther afloat to bury his murderer, my chief accompanied us back to the lighthouse. There he told us of his pursuit of the Chaplain.

McChesney, Brandon's mechanician, had revived during the night, having been but slightly wounded, and Norroy questioned him concerning the seaplane raid. With Milliken's corroborative testimony, it appeared that there was a man named Brandon, who was the flight officer at the Naval Air Service station, which the false Brandon had visited, before. His real name neither knew, but he was best known as "High-Pocket Harry," because of a high sort of dinner coat he was in the habit of wearing, a double-breasted affair with a breast pocket for a handkerchief. He had been the Chaplain's chief smuggler on the Mexican border, bringing the stuff across by airplane.

The fog and storm had disarranged their plans. He was to have taken Allenby prisoner and carry him to a certain near-by point, where the yacht was to be at a certain hour. Five-thirty or thereabouts, I think it was. It was toward that position the *Elsinore* was making her way when she struck. At last, the Chaplain had paid properly for his infamy of so many years. And, the irony of it! His own hand had encompassed his own undoing.

We let McChesney go, partly because we could not punish him, unless we punish Milliken, too. From what Guilda told us, the big fellow had definitely declared himself, long before the wreck; had outfaced the Chaplain, taking the stand that no harm should come to either Allenby or herself, whether or no he gave up the formula. He had been practically a prisoner, himself, for many days.

As for Allenby and Guilda Six, if you should go to St. Kilda's, and should wish to see them, you have only to follow the crooked, cobbled street past the old Anchor Inn. It will lead you up a hill. First you will pass Doctor Botany's, from whose attic I first saw the Cay. An old stone wall begins there, one dating back to colonial days. This extends farther than his place, though. Follow it, and you will come to the top of the hill.

Perhaps you will see her then; down by the little lake, where swarms of ducks swim, and a swan or two. Or perhaps she will be in the rose garden, a pair of garden gloves on, clipping the rose trees. You are bound to know her, for the sunlight always finds her hair. And there is no hair like it anywhere.

Perhaps there will be a big fellow helping her; a chap who weighs more than he should for his height. And he is over six feet. You will know him because he wears the most conspicuous riding breeches in St. Kilda's. Or anywhere else. Oh, yes, you are bound to see him, if it is earlier than mid-afternoon. And anybody will tell you that he is "old man Milliken," the lighthouse keeper. Although he is not in the least an "old man." But they got so accustomed to calling the lighthouse keeper "old man Giles," that Milliken inherited the title.

He must have inherited Captain Elihu, too, for the old man, the really truly old man, is generally to be seen pottering about in his wake. If there is anybody on St. Kilda's Cay who does not know why, he has just arrived there. For the tale of Milliken's heroic fight, out there on the reef, is what you might call the dénouement of Captain Elihu's dramatization.

The way he portrays Milliken was as a prisoner on the yacht, too. Which in a way he was. But, when it occurred to him to plead with Yorke Norroy to get him the place, there had been no explanation of *why* he was there—that is not in Captain Elihu's presence.

"If I can only stay near *them*," Milliken told the chief, in a sort of quiet desperation, "I can go straight enough. I've got a little money. I only need something to do. Near Alan and Guilda," he repeated.

No one in St. Kilda's ever knows they are entertaining the king of what they could call "cracksmen." But there he is. And there *they* are—Guilda and Alan Allenby. And there they will stay if Allenby has anything to say about it.

THE END.

GETTING AT THE TRUTH

IN trying one of the first cases that came to him in his Buffalo practice, Grover Cleveland had to cross-examine a particularly troublesome witness. Not only was his testimony damaging to Cleveland's client, but it was given in a bumptious, cock-sure manner that riled the young lawyer.

"Now, sir," Cleveland said, on the edge of losing his temper, "you've told a very good story here, haven't you?"

"I guess so," replied the witness.

"Then, you'll perhaps be willing to tell us who first tried to induce you to tell it so that it contradicts the actual facts?"

"Contradict the actual facts!" echoed the witness, with a fine show of righteous indignation.

"Yes!" thundered Cleveland. "Who tried it first?"

"Who tried it first?" again echoed the man in the box.

"Exactly! Who?"

"Well," said the witness, "you, for one."

Little Deeds of Blindness

By Roy W. Hinds

Author of "Say That Again, Please," "A Phantom of Flesh," Etc.

A strange tale of the weak taking revenge on the strong. There is more than one way of "serving time"

JUSTICE PICKSLEY frowned. Those who knew the justice, such as policemen, court attendants and habitual hangers-on, had no idea, however, that his scowling visage reflected any particular displeasure. Justice Picksley deemed it undignified to smile, or even to look pleasant. Thus the Picksley instincts prompted the conclusion that if it were undignified to be pleasant the height of dignity should be unpleasantness.

He had just ascended the bench for the morning session. The spectators' benches were jammed. This pleased the justice. He liked an audience. Justice Picksley had always on tap a choice assortment of lectures, and he liked these to be heard not only by the cringing and bedraggled prisoners who confronted him, but by a large body of the citizenry as well. Justice Picksley had an ambition to coin epigrams; to go down in the memory of the city as a philosophical dispenser of justice, as a spectacular dealer in jurisprudence, as a unique character in his rôle of guardian of the peace.

He knew the value of saying old things in a new and explosive way. The woeful procession that passed in front of him each day excited only a desire to be painfully humorous and to handle these affairs in a way to achieve the utmost ink drop of publicity. He liked to coddle a despairing prisoner. In soft tones, his questioning led the wretch through a recital of his life's history. The justice laid traps—ingenious traps—and the prisoner's eagerness to answer all questions sometimes led him to wander into these traps.

With consummate skill, Justice Picksley guided the man into these traps, through a series of interrogations that had no bearing whatever on the case in hand. When the prisoner had committed himself to a statement, his honor permitted him to drift far afield and apparently away from that point. Then he warily eased him back and with soft words led him to contradict some of the details of his previous assertion.

On such an occasion a few moments of tense, ominous silence would hover over the courtroom. Too late, the prisoner would become aware that he had stumbled into an untruth, or a mistake, whichever it might be, and stand trembling before the impending denouncement.

Justice Picksley thereupon would clear his throat in a deliberate, rumbling "Um-m-m-m!" The prisoner would mutter a hurried, stammering explanation, and turn his affrighted face upward. He saw instead of the gentle, soft-spoken justice, an inexorable face upon which the storm of his own doom had already gathered in a threatening cloud. The justice would shuffle a few papers on his desk, finger the handle of his gavel lightly, steal a sly glance over the throng of spectators, through his squinting eyelids, bend forward with slow and deliberate menace, and address the prisoner thus:

"You have lied to me. You have insulted the intelligence and the dignity of this court. I am very sorry. I thought that, perhaps, you were an unfortunate man who had been arrested as a vagabond because you happened to be without home and money, and I was inclined to give you a chance. You stated that you were in Montreal on the Fourth of July eleven years ago, and that you did not work that day because it was a holiday. Montreal happens to be in Canada, which is part of the British Empire, and of all the days in the year that the British Empire *doesn't* celebrate, it is the Fourth of July!"

Whereupon the justice would pause, and glance swiftly at the newspaper reporters to see whether they were taking notes of his sage remarks, and then resume slowly, to make it easier for the reporters:

"A man who lies will steal. You haven't

been arrested for stealing, and I can't do with you as I would like. I can do only what I am empowered to do, and what I feel it my duty to do for the protection of the city and as an example to willful vagabonds."

Then followed a volley of trite phrases, designed to be epigrammatic and to provide material for bright newspaper headlines. At times the prisoner tried to explain, in a sort of way, that he had made no precise statements, that he merely had answered "yes" or "no" to questions framed by the justice, and that he was a trifle rattled, but his stammering, and sometimes incoherent, pleas were brushed aside by a redoubled broadside from the bench. Sometimes Justice Picksley quoted the Scriptures, but never any part of them that contained the word "mercy."

He would wind up with a ringing denunciation of vagabondage, and a stinging sentence, and call the next case with a brightening hope that his lofty pronouncement soon would be trickling through the mechanical intricacies of a linotype machine.

It was Monday morning, an attractive day for visitors. The police grist of two days —Saturday and Sunday—awaited the ordeal of grinding in Justice Picksley's mill. An air of expectancy pervaded the courtroom as Justice Picksley ascended the bench. Most of the spectators had been there before—habitués of that chamber they were; loungers and loiterers who perhaps were as close to vagabondage as any prisoner awaiting arraignment; loafers to whom this police court was a theater. There they got their tragedy and drama and comedy, all the more stirring because it was spontaneous; because each moment was delightfully fresh with surprise.

Policemen, mostly night men off duty who were to appear against the men they had arrested, sat on benches near at hand. The prisoners, a score perhaps, were caged in a "bull pen"—a large cell at one side of the room, into which they had been herded from the lockup downstairs. A policeman stood guard at the door of the cage.

Police Chief Comber conferred in undertones with Justice Picksley. The justice, leaning toward the chief, surveyed the throng in the courtroom. His eyes were cold and disdainful, but his heart was warm and cheerful, as an actor's heart is warm and cheerful when through the peephole of the curtain he sees a crowded house out front.

Presently Police Chief Comber stepped aside. The courtroom grew anticipatorily quiet, and precisely at the moment of keenest dramatic interest Justice Picksley lifted his gavel and let it fall with a resounding thump. Court was open.

A half dozen cases had been disposed of when William Wickes, otherwise known as "The Whaler," was led out of the "bull pen" and straight before the bar of justice. Police Chief Comber mounted the bench at this juncture and stood at Justice Picksley's elbow in an advisory capacity.

Mr. William Wickes put on a cheerful face, as though he had nothing to fear, but inwardly he cursed himself for carelessness in falling into the hands of the law on a charge so debasing. Mr. Wickes was on the blotter as "drunk and disorderly."

His appearance created a ripple of unusual interest. Mr. Wickes was rather a distinguished-appearing young man, despite a harassing night in the lockup. He was garbed in style and quality. Somehow he had brushed and dusted himself and made free use of water. There was nothing about him suggestive of a previous acquaintance with police courts. But Mr. Wickes knew that Police Chief Comber had his number. Justice Picksley no doubt had been apprised of his record.

Justice Picksley took in the details of the prisoner's garb and demeanor in a cursory surveyal. He observed that Mr. Wickes' hands twitched nervously and that perspiration beaded his brow, though the room was not uncomfortably warm. The justice didn't know whether this nervous condition was occasioned by awe or was due to the rampage which Mr. Wickes enjoyed until the police department took a hand. At any rate, Justice Picksley knew that he had in front of him an extraordinary prisoner.

"Your name is William Wickes—is that right?" Justice Picksley began, at length.

"Yes, sir," the prisoner replied.

Justice Picksley seemed to weigh the answer, as though he could not be too careful, though in reality he was proceeding under habit; slowly, in order to work up to the acme of suspense. The prisoner's manner, while respectful, betokened that he held the justice in no awe.

Presently Justice Picksley resumed: "You are charged with being drunk and disorderly in the streets. Are you guilty or not guilty?"

"Well, your honor, I——"

"Are you guilty or not guilty?" the justice demanded sharply.

"I'd like to explain, if you please, that is——"

"Are you guilty or not guilty? Were you drunk?"

Mr. William Wickes hesitated but another moment, and then realized the futility of pleading not guilty. It had taken two policemen to get him to jail, and no doubt scores of witnesses could be produced to testify that he certainly was drunk and disorderly.

He admitted: "I am guilty, your honor. I was intoxicated."

Justice Picksley studied his face searchingly.

"Wickes," said he, "have you ever been arrested before?"

The prisoner's gaze met the cold stare of Police Chief Comber, and he knew that evasions would get him nothing—for there was the chief to submit the truth, and behind the chief were the records of the police department. William Wickes, so long as his identity were known, could hardly escape the records of the police department. The truth, so far as he must tell it, perhaps would get him more—if, indeed, anything could win even trifling consideration.

"Yes, sir," the culprit answered, "I have been arrested before."

"How many times?"

"A dozen perhaps—as I recall."

"And what were you arrested for—mostly?"

"Various charges," said Mr. Wickes in a low voice. "But," he added hurriedly, "I have reformed since then—I am a better man now."

"And what evidence can you submit to bear out your reformation?"

Now William Wickes was in a pretty pickle, and he knew it. Known as "The Whaler," a sobriquet given him by crooks because of his adeptness in pulling the very biggest of jobs, he had a record that was impossible to escape. True, the police didn't have anything particularly "on him" just now—at least he didn't think so—but they hardly would lose this opportunity to put him away for the limit of the law on a charge of drunk and disorderly. He didn't think it wise to fight the case. He was guilty of the misdemeanor—he had admitted that; and so long as they were determined, he could hardly get away from it. If he fought, it might spur the police to a closer scrutiny of his doings for the last few months, in which they were likely to dig up evidence of a more compromising nature than "drunk and disorderly."

He was in bad, and he knew it. The wisest course was to take his short-time medicine like a man rather than goad the police to dig up long-time stuff. So he replied:

"Your honor, I have reformed, but I am living under a different name than William Wickes. I cannot reveal the details of my reformation without compromising friends who know nothing of my past. I presume I must now suffer for that past. I would rather take my sentence than to advertise my predicament under the name my new friends know. I shall merely plead guilty, your honor, and ask mercy."

Justice Picksley smiled ironically. Police Chief Comber grinned triumphantly, and stepped away from the bench.

"As a matter of fact, William Wickes," said Justice Picksley, "you haven't reformed at all. You are the same William Wickes who has been agitating the police for several years, now. You are a crook, a very clever crook. You can't submit evidence of reformation because you can't say where you are working. Any statement you make about reformation will be run down and found to be a lie. You know that, and you take refuge in statements about new friends, and similar subterfuges known to wily crooks like yourself.

"You are a dangerous man, and it behooves every court before whom you appear to make you safe to the limit of the law. You are, according to available records, one of the cleverest crooks in the country. It is too bad that I can't hold you for the grand jury on some specific charge. I can't do it, but I can put you in a safe place for six months. I, therefore, sentence you to six months in the workhouse. Next case!"

William Wickes was led away, and on the whole he regarded himself as lucky. Six months was a mere fleeting moment of time compared with the years upon years they could have given him had they connected him up definitely with one or two of his latest depredations. Nevertheless, he hated Justice Picksley profoundly, and from that very moment his mind began to stir with vague thoughts of revenge.

The next case was that of a young man ar-

rested for vagrancy—a youth named Ernest Welton. Escorted by a policeman, he came to the bar of justice, a sorry spectacle of dumb amazement.

Ernest Welton plainly was down and out. His hair had grown long and, where the hatband girdled his head, a ring could be discerned, as on the heads of all men who wear their hats almost constantly. Hunger and privation had pounded him into meek submissiveness, but at times his eye flashed—mere bubblings of youthful protest against hardship. Justice Picksley caught these gleams, and construed them as defiant inward murmurings rather than awkward and unconscious uprisings against the trend of his sad fortunes.

"Your name is Ernest Welton," the justice said gruffly.

"Yes, sir," the youth confirmed.

"You are charged with vagrancy—guilty or not guilty?"

"I ain't got no money, sir; but——"

"Are you guilty or not guilty?"

"Well, sir, I s'pose I'm guilty—if bein' without money makes me guilty."

"Then you plead guilty. Evasiveness, young man, will get you nothing in this court. How do you happen to be without money?"

"I just ain't been able to find work, sir; but I'm thinkin' of goin' back to farmin'. I——"

"Don't you live in the city?"

"No, sir; I come here six weeks ago. I got tired of farmin' and heard about all the good jobs in the city, so I come here. But things ain't like you read about. Seems like there——"

"Where do you live?"

"I ain't got no folks, sir. I been workin' on farms ever since I was a kid—up Pennvale way. And I think I'll go back there. Folks know me up there, and they'll talk to me—and that's more than anybody will do here in the city."

A shrewd glitter crept into the eye of Justice Picksley. "How far is Pennvale from here?" he asked softly.

"About two hundred miles," replied Ernest Welton.

The justice meditated. "Welton," he said, "you have been a vagrant in the city for several weeks now." His voice was not without a certain rough sympathy. "Your appearance indicates that. You probably have been begging food and sleeping in the parks. Am I right?"

"Yes, sir," Welton assured him, "I've done a good bit of that."

"You've had a pretty hard time, eh? Well, no doubt you have. But tell me, Welton, in all your troubles—all the time you've been hungry and homeless, have you ever thought of stealing?"

"No, sir!" the youth declared emphatically. "I ain't never stole anything."

"Have you ever thought of it?"

"No, sir; I ain't. I wouldn't know how to go about it, sir; and I ain't never thought of it.'

"Have you ever thought of committing any crime at all?"

"No, sir."

The justice seemed pleased. "I'm glad to hear that, Welton. Yes, indeed! And you say it's two hundred miles to Pennvale?"

"Yes, sir—about that."

"And you haven't any money—not a cent, eh?"

"No, sir."

"Are you going to walk to Pennvale, Welton?"

"It's quite a stretch to think about walkin'. I could hardly walk it, sir."

"Then how did you plan to get to Pennvale?"

"Well, I—I thought maybe I could catch a ride on a train—a freight train, sir; and in——"

"Just a moment!" Justice Picksley interrupted harshly. "You told me you never had thought of committing a crime. Didn't you tell me that?"

"Yes, sir; but I've got——"

"And stealing rides on freight trains is a crime. You are a potential criminal, Welton. Do you know what I could do with you, if I were so disposed? I could send you to the workhouse for six months—on the charge of vagrancy under which you have been arraigned and to which you have pleaded guilty."

The face of the youth went pale. His haggardness excited no sympathy in the breast of Justice Picksley, who yet glowed inwardly over his cleverness in leading the country boy into a trap. Welton stared in fluttered amazement, and his disturbed mental state perhaps was responsible for the ill-chosen rejoinder.

"You could hardly do that, sir—six

months in the workhouse!" he said. "I ain't done nothing—six months in the workhouse!" He uttered the words like a man appalled. "Six months in the workhouse! You can't do that, sir—I ain't done nothing—I just ain't got no money. Six months —why——"

"I can't do it?" the justice interrupted softly. His voice purred with silken threat, and he hitched menacingly forward in his chair. "I can't do it?" he repeated. "Well, I'll show you that I can do it. That is the sentence I pronounce on you, Ernest Welton—six months in the workhouse!"

They led the youth away—a silly grin of dazed unbelief on his worn face. Justice Picksley, smarting over what he regarded as an indignity to his court, watched him disappear without a tremor of sympathy.

All things come to an end—even workhouse sentences. Ernest Welton, who had found the world very hard, again beat the pavements, this time in heavy workhouse shoes. He was more haggard even than in the wearing days of park benches. The fluttering gleam of surprise that came to his eye when the illusions of the city faded had settled into a squinting, lusterless stare of understanding, and, with understanding, bitterness.

In his journey through the streets of the city, however, he wasn't conscious of bitterness. His soul was yet the soul of a youth, and the warm sunshine of early spring rekindled the fires smothered by a winter in the workhouse. Jobs ought to be plentiful on the farms now. He felt like walking out of and away from the city. The open country pulled strongly upon him.

And yet something detained him.

He didn't have to walk into the country. He had money enough to pay his fare to the land of farms, the pittance he received for a stupendous winter's work—something like ten cents a day. In the workhouse he had assured himself that he would go at once to the railroad station. But the first thing he did was to eat an enormous breakfast of meat and eggs. He drank three glasses of milk. All winter the country boy had craved the food of the country. The workhouse gruel sickened him.

Then he walked aimlessly about the streets, wishing more than anything in the world to be away from those streets. His thoughts were filled with fields and woods and streams—yet he clung to hard pavements and rushing, bumping crowds. All forenoon he walked the streets, a prey to indecision. At noon resolution came to him, and he decided to take his troubles, whatever they were, to a strange place. He walked swiftly to the city hall, wherein was the courtroom of Justice Picksley.

He found the justice in his office off the courtroom. The morning session had been adjourned and Justice Picksley was thinking of lunch. The youth stood, hat in hand, just inside the office door.

"Well?" the justice demanded.

"You don't remember me, do you?" the visitor inquired.

"I don't know as I do. What do you want?"

"You sent me to the workhouse six months ago," Ernest Welton went on. His tone was respectful.

"Supposing I did," rejoined Justice Picksley. He didn't take his eyes off the youth. He had read of convicts who sometimes came back for revenge. "Supposing I did," he repeated. "You deserved it, didn't you?"

"I s'pose I did," the youth admitted.

"You fellows usually deserve it," Justice Picksley commented. He decided his visitor had not come for revenge. "What do you want now? I suppose you want me to help you. Maybe you are here with a hard-luck story, and want money. Well, there is a law against begging."

"I'm not begging, sir," Welton hastened to assure him. "I got money now."

"What is your name—and what did I send you up for?"

"My name's Ernest Welton, and they charged me with vagrancy. I didn't have no money."

"But you have money now, eh? Well, you ought to be thankful for that. You are not a vagrant now."

The youth meditated, as though this reasoning contained some truth. Presently he said:

"Well, I don't know whether I'm thankful or not. I got a little money—the money they give me for six months work. But I come here to talk about something else."

"What do you want? I'm in a hurry."

"I got a secret to tell." Instinctively Welton turned and closed the door. He continued: "I found out something in that place. It's something I ought to tell to an officer—and you're the only one I know."

An affrighted wave passed over his face, and he added: "But I don't want to be arrested again!"

"You won't be arrested—that is, maybe you won't," Justice Picksley rejoined impatiently. "I suppose you came here to complain of your treatment in the workhouse. You needn't say any more. The workhouse isn't a pleasant place—and maybe you will try to keep out of it."

The justice pulled down the cover of his desk with a bang.

"It ain't anything like that!" the visitor cried. "I ain't got no complaints. It's something—something about criminals."

The justice surveyed him thoughtfully. A gleam of understanding came to him and his whole manner changed with a snap.

"Sit down, young man," he invited in a soft voice. "Draw that chair up close here, and sit down. Now your name again is Ernest——"

"Ernest Welton, sir."

"Ernest Welton. Yes, yes, Welton—I remember you now." He pushed up the cover of his desk and soon turned the pages of a ponderous book. "Six months ago, you say? That would be about the first of October. Yes, here it is: 'Ernest Welton, vagrancy. Arrested by Officer Dugal.' You pleaded guilty, didn't you, Welton? Yes, yes—I recall you now." He closed the volume with a resounding thump, and inquired softly: "Now, what were you saying about criminals, Welton?"

The youth recovered a measure of confidence, and his tone was steady and true.

"I went to the workhouse," he said, "the same day that you sent a man by the name of Wickes—William Wickes. Do you remember him?"

"I do," Justice Picksley replied. "He is a very dangerous criminal—this William Wickes."

"I know he is," Ernest agreed, "or, leastways, he let me think he was, just a few days after we got in there. Him and me slept in the same cell the whole six months. In the daytime we was thrown with a lot of other prisoners—and this man Wickes met several of his old pardners. They was always whispering together mysteriouslike, when they got a chance. Several times he tried to get one of 'em in the cell in my place, but the guards and officers there was afraid of him and the men he knew, I guess. Leastways, I stuck right in that cell the whole six months, though it didn't make no difference to me. I'd just as soon be in one cell as another.

"But I ain't got no kick coming on William Wickes. At first he hardly spoke to me, though he never tried to abuse me—and when he did speak, he was civil enough. After we'd been in there about three weeks, I saw a change in him—a big change. I didn't understand it—at first.

"He'd come into the cell at night and mope around, never saying a word. After a while he'd get to talking, and then there was no stopping him. The stories that fellow told me, judge, would fill a book. I found out after a while that he was a drug fiend—that he was a morphine eater. He'd take some of that stuff when he come into the cell, and when it begun to work, he'd talk a blue streak. Oh, they get that stuff in there, judge—yes, siree! He tried to get me to take it, but I was afraid.

"Well, what I wanted to tell you about was some of the stories he told me. They may be true or they may be just dreams that he had after eating that stuff. But if a quarter of 'em is true, it's enough. Why, judge, he told me how these criminals work, and a few times tried to get me to go stealing—but I don't want to do nothing like that. It's too risky, and, besides, I wouldn't want to steal, even if there was no risk to it.

"Seems like this man Wickes is a member of some big crook gang. One night he says to me, 'Kid, if this was a regular prison, I'd get out of it. The gang would get me out.'

"He explained that this gang has a lot of money stored away. Oh, it's a terrible lot of money, judge—a hundred thousand dollars! Just think of that—a hundred thousand dollars! They keep that to hire lawyers and to buy a man's liberty when he gets into prison. If they can't buy him out some way, they get tools to him and help him that way.

"But they won't bother with a man in the workhouse. His time is too short, they say, and it ain't worth the trouble—when he's going to get out anyway in a few weeks or months. But when one of 'em is sent up for years and years, they turn over everything to get him out. First, they hire lawyers to take the case through all the courts, and then they help him break out, if there ain't no other way. That all costs money, and that's what they keep the hundred thou-

sand for. It's stolen money, judge; money that they have saved up for years and years, and they keep adding to it as fast as any of it's used."

Justice Picksley shifted in his chair. A crafty gleam crept into his eye, but he restrained his impatience and asked quietly:

"Where do they keep all this money, my boy?"

The youth answered animatedly: "Well, judge, it beats anything I ever heard tell of! I've read stories about robbers and such things, but I never thought real live people was up to such fancy tricks. That money, judge, is in a cave up in Drum County. Do you know where that is?"

"Drum County—yes. It's about fifty miles from here, up in the mountains."

"That's it—that's it; up in the mountains! And that man Wickes told me exactly where that cave is at!"

Justice Picksley's heart fluttered greedily. "Could you go to that cave, Ernest?" he asked.

The youth shifted uneasily.

"Yes," he replied, "unless he was stringing me with all that talk. I recollect the directions well enough, and if he was telling the truth, I could find it.

"There's a little town called Gedders. Three miles north on the Reedy road is an old shack, and there an old road, that ain't used no more, runs off at right angles. He said that road led to a gulch, and a hundred yards up the gulch there was a tree growing out of the side of the hill. The tree slants way over. It's the only tree thereabouts that don't grow straight, and ought to be easy enough to find. Well, the entrance to the cave is right below that slanting tree."

"Um-m-m," mused Justice Picksley. "Likely they will move the money right away, now that William Wickes is at liberty and you are at liberty. They wil' be afraid to leave it there—when Wickes realizes that he's made a fool of himself in telling you so much."

"Judge," the youth queried, "don't that morphine kill a man's memory?"

"I suppose it does, if he takes enough."

"Well, it's a funny thing, but Wickes never acted like he remembered anything, next morning. He'd ask me if he talked very much, and I always told him no. I was afraid to let him know he told me so much. I didn't know what them criminals would do to me."

"Did he talk every night?"

"No, sir; just them nights when he was filled up with the drugs. Sometimes he'd take only a little, and then he wouldn't talk. In a night or two he'd load up for bear, and then talk himself to sleep—laying there like a man in a trance."

The justice meditated. "Perhaps," he ventured presently, "he doesn't realize that he told you such deep secrets. It's very strange—very strange indeed."

"I don't think he knows all he said," Welton suggested. "We both got out of the workhouse this morning, and he said goodby to me as if I didn't know so much about him. He never even asked me to keep my mouth shut, but went off as if he didn't care what I done."

The justice finally said: "Welton, your story will bear investigation. Would you be willing to lead a party of officers to the cave?"

"I don't like to do that, judge," Welton protested. "There's that gang I'm afraid of. I ain't an officer, and it ain't my duty to go hunting for things like that. I just thought I'd tell you about it, and you and the police could do the rest. They'd kill me on sight, judge, if they ever caught me around that cave."

The justice's face drew into a thoughtful frown.

"Perhaps you're right," he admitted. "Perhaps you're right; but you'd better give me a detailed description of the place, and try to recall every word that Wickes said to you."

They went over the whole matter in minute detail. Justice Picksley made several notations. For several minutes he sat in a profound reverie. One hand tapped reflectively on the desk at times. Now and then a cold, calculating gleam flashed in his eye. He reached some sort of decision, and spoke.

"Welton," said he, "I don't want you to mention this to another living soul. If you do, you will lay yourself liable to prosecution for aiding a band of criminals. I shall take the case up with the proper authorities—and we will decide what to do. In the meantime, I want to know where I can find you. I presume you are going to look for work on a farm. Write me a letter at once, when you get located. This is a very delicate matter, a very important matter, and you must observe strict secrecy. Do you understand?"

"I ain't going to say another word about it, judge," Welton promised earnestly. "I'm afraid of the law, and I'm afraid of that gang of criminals. I'll keep my mouth shut, you bet!"

The youth thereupon took his departure, and soon left the city far behind.

After his informant had left, Justice Picksley smiled happily.

The truth of William Wickes' revelations was impressed on Justice Picksley during a trip he made into Drum County, the next afternoon. He disposed of court business during the forenoon, and after lunch, all alone, he set out in his automobile.

He had no difficulty in following directions. He left his car in a secluded spot off the abandoned road and went into the gulch on foot. The nature of the hills around him attested the fact that this region was rarely visited. A wild tangle of woods and rock surrounded him. So far as evidences of civilization were concerned, he might have been hundreds of miles from the habitations of man.

He came to a tree that grew slanting out of a hillside. He hunted in the undergrowth —and found the entrance of a cave, screened by a thicket. Justice Picksley thereupon hastened back to the city. The whole vision of his life was changed. Ahead of him there lay nothing now but his enterprise in the Drum County hills.

Justice Picksley was a bachelor, so he had no domestic affairs to adjust. He pleaded illness, and indeed he looked ill. His eyes were feverishly bright and he hadn't slept much since Ernest Welton, fresh from the workhouse, told him his story. The judge asked a vacation—and got it. Another justice was appointed for the interim. All thought of admitting any one else to the secret had left his mind. He saw nothing but the fortune, and his deeply greedy soul responded with a quiver of delight to the task ahead.

In the gulch he made a camp. The weather was warm. He stocked the camp with provisions and tools. In a few days he began the actual work of uncovering the robbers' hoard. As the days wore on, Justice Picksley forgot his real station in life. Ahead lay riches and a life of untoiling luxury. Day after day he dug and rooted about the cave. His clothing became tattered and brier torn. His face grew bearded and scraggly. In a few weeks he no longer was Justice Picksley. He was a wild man of the mountains.

He slept fitfully, and talked to himself a great deal. All through the day he muttered and mumbled as he worked. Sometimes, in the dead of night, he rushed to the cave and toiled furiously—and then crept, exhausted, back to his camp.

He lost all fear of apprehension by the men who had buried the money. They hadn't bothered him so far, and that gave him a sense of security. But he didn't realize that he was ruining his health. He didn't think about that. He thought only of the one hundred thousand dollars.

And still he didn't come to it. He dug the cave out of all its natural aspect. He scarred the face of the hill with trenches and holes. Finally he got so he worked without method. He dug first one place and then another. Not for a moment did he doubt that the money was there somewhere. The very fact that he had found the cave according to directions was sufficient. William Wickes wouldn't know about the cave unless his story of the buried money was true.

Once a week Justice Picksley drove into Gedders for supplies and whatever mail was forwarded to him there. One morning, driving into Gedders, he realized that he couldn't last much longer. At the post office he found a letter addressed to himself. The letter was undated and unsigned. He read:

Your sentence is up. You have served about six months in the Drum County hills, and you had better go back to your job and forget about the money. There isn't any money there. For several years you have been handing out sentences of six months without any regard to circumstances or justice. Some of the men you sentenced framed this up on you. We have been studying a long time on some scheme to make you work as hard as we worked in the workhouse. How do you like it?

That yap kid, Ernest Welton, didn't know it was a frame-up. We filled him full, and, though he didn't know it, we put it into his head to tell his story to you. We knew you couldn't resist that much money. A few years ago we used that cave, and knew all about it. We thought you would do just what you have done.

How do you like six months at hard labor? Guess you will be a little more considerate from now on.

Justice Picksley, muttering and mumbling incoherently, got back to the city at length, but he never was the same man again.

Passing the Buck

By Lieutenant Preston Gibson

JOHN FOX, JR., used to tell a story of a Catholic friend of his who took a Protestant friend to the Catholic high mass one Sunday morning at the Cathedral in New York, a magnificent edifice. It was crowded to the doors and they were way in the back. There were three priests on the altar, the bishop was there, and the church was magnificent with garlands of flowers. The Protestant was more or less awe-stricken, and finally turned and whispered to his Catholic friend: "Mike, do you know this beats hell?" "That is the intention," said Mike.

WILLIAM C. WHITNEY was much interested in horses and used to visit Lexington, Kentucky. It is a well-known fact that when the colored race reach a certain age they do not keep an account of their actual, correct age. Mr. Whitney saw one of these old fellows and asked him how old he was. " 'Deed I don't know," replied the colored man. "Well," said Mr. Whitney, "can you remember Henry Clay?" "Yes, sir; yes, sir; I sho' do remember Henry Clay." "Well, can you remember George Washington?" said Mr. Whitney. "Yes, sir; yes, sir; I remember George Washington," said the colored man. "Well, did you know him when he crossed the Delaware?" asked Mr. Whitney. "Yes, sir; yes, sir," eagerly replied the man, " 'cause I was in dat boat." "Then you must remember him when he took the hack at the cherry tree," said Mr. Whitney. The colored man hesitated for a moment, scratched his head, then finally a light came into his eyes: "Yes, sir; yes, sir; because I drove dat hack."

THIS was not a marine but a youth who had been very attentive to a girl all summer, but had never squeezed her hand while dancing, had never whispered sweet nothings into her ear, had never told her anything in the least bit complimentary. In fact, had never made any advances to her at all. The last day that the hotel was open, they were sitting on the beach, and he was telling her of the trip which he was going to take to the White Mountains, when she turned to him suddenly and said: "Aren't you going to kiss me?" "I've got some sand in my mouth," he replied. "Don't you think you'd better swallow it and get some into your system?" said the maid.

JOHN FOX, JR., showing the love of Kentuckians for their native soil, said that a man died and went to heaven from the Blue Grass State. He knocked on the gate. St. Peter opened it and admitted him. He was shown around the place and finally came to a group of men who were chained. He looked at them inquiringly and said to St. Peter: "Who are those men and why are they in chains?" St. Peter replied: "Those are Kentuckians. We have to chain them to prevent their going home."

A CERTAIN woman was looking for an apartment in New York, and she came to one where there was a sign that children were not permitted in flats. She saw a little girl playing in front of it, and she said to her: "Where do you live?" The little girl replied, pointing to the apartment house: "In there." "How can you live in there? I understand that they do not take children. How did you get in?" "Oh," said the little girl, "I was born in."

MRS. DRAPER, the wife of the ambassador to Rome, who recently died, was one of the most amusing women in court circles. A number of years ago she and her two sisters, so the story goes, were traveling with their father, General Preston, in a Pullman car from Lexington, Kentucky, to Washington, D. C. Mrs. Draper, then unmar-

ried, had a lower berth, and during the night she was heard to scream: "Papa! Papa! There is a man in my berth!" Whereupon General Preston, who was down at the end of the car, rose hastily from his berth, rushed to her, reached in his hand, and brought out a very small, thin man, whom he proceeded to kick from one end of the car to the other, exclaiming, "You damned scoundrel," et cetera. Suddenly from the berth above Mrs. Draper came a shrill voice in indignation to General Preston: "You brute! You brute! You will kill my poor old grandfather. He is eighty years old. You will kill him." Just then, Mrs. Draper called out from her lower berth, "Papa! Papa! I have made a mistake. I got into the wrong berth."

I WAS sitting in the White House waiting for the secretary to the president, when John McCormack came in. We had a few pleasant words, and then I asked him something concerning Mr. Caruso. He said: "Caruso is one of the nicest men in the world. I will give you an idea of what kind of a man he is. I was singing in concert and he was playing at the opera, and I met him in the lobby of the hotel, and said to him in Italian: 'Good morning, most illustrious tenor.' Whereupon Caruso smiled, bowed, and said, 'And when did you become a bass?' "

A CERTAIN actor with Mrs. Leslie Carter's company was in the habit of getting drunk a great deal. So David Belasco, Mrs. Carter's manager, called him to account one day. "You got to stop drinking," he said. "Well, I'll try, but you know it's a disease with me," said the actor. He went to see a doctor. "Doctor, you've got to give me something to stop my drinking." "I can't give you anything," said the doctor. "You've got to use your mind. When any one asks you to take a drink, take something else instead." "What can I take?" asked the actor. "Oh, I don't know" said the doctor. "Anything; ham and eggs." "Well, I'll try it," said the actor. So for six months he stopped drinking, and every time any one asked him to have a drink, he would order ham and eggs. Finally, he went out to San Francisco and was sitting in his room one night, when he heard a muffled cry in the adjoining room, then a body fall. He rushed out in the hall and opened the next door; there he saw a man on the floor, his throat cut with a razor which was beside him and blood everywhere. Rushing downstairs to the clerk of the hotel, he exclaimed: "There's a man in the next room to mine who has committed suicide. For God's sake give me some ham and eggs!"

Statement of the Ownership, Management, etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, published semimonthly, at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1920:

State of New York, County of New York, (*ss.*)

Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared George C. Smith, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is Treasurer of Street & Smith Corporation, publishers of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: *Publishers,* Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *editor,* Charles A. MacLean, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *managing editors,* Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; *business managers,* Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

2. That the owners are: Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y., a corporation composed of Ormond G. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; George C. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Grace H. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Annie K. Smith, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; George C. Smith, Jr., 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Cora A. Gould, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.; Ormond V. Gould, 89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

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GEORGE C. SMITH, Treasurer,
of Street & Smith Corporation, publishers.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 22d day of September, 1920. Francis S. Duff, Notary Public, No. 239, New York County. (My commission expires March 30, 1921.)

A Chat With You

YESTERDAY, one of the most interesting men in the world paid us a visit. He is Samuel S. McClure, at present of Brookfield, Connecticut. Years ago, when we were all a little younger than we are now, McClure founded the magazine that still bears his name. Under his guidance and as long as he stayed with it, the magazine was one of the most remarkable publications this country has ever seen. *McClure's,* when Sam McClure was its editor, was like the New York *Sun* when Charles A. Dana had it, inimitable and in a class by itself. McClure has genius. Rudyard Kipling, Ida Tarbell, Conan Doyle, James Barr—nearly all the great writers of twenty years ago were discoveries of his. McClure isn't editing a magazine at present. He is writing a book.

HE came in here to get a back number of THE POPULAR. Then he stayed and talked for a while. If we were rich and founding a university, we would endow one chair for the teaching of everything in general, and we would make Sam McClure the head of the department. He gave us a little of everything yesterday, finally getting around to the subject of magazines and magazine fiction. McClure knows something about everything, but this particular subject is his hobby. He knows all about it there is to know.

"If you show me the sort of fiction a man reads," said McClure, "I'll get a pretty good idea of the man. The real fiction of America to-day is printed in unillustrated magazines on news-print paper. The highbrow magazines mean nothing. So far as THE POPULAR is concerned, I have been reading it for a long time. I had my attention called to it years ago by Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson. She told me it was the best magazine published, and I have been reading it ever since."

IT would not be fair to McClure to go on trying to quote him word for word. He said many things and there was no stenographer handy. Suppose we try to put a few of his remarks into our own inferior and less winged words, it being understood that the ideas are McClure's and that we indorse them. So, here goes:

People are roughly divided into two kinds, the people who whine and the people who don't. Americans, the real Americans, are of the non-whining breed. They aspire, they build, and they work. When they fail, they take the defeat in grim silence and start all over again. All our material wealth and happiness, all our achievement, all our victories over nature are built on this fighting, working virtue. The builders don't talk. The whiners do. A man understanding this and going through some great city like Chicago or New York, sees romance behind the façade of each great building and woven into the fabric of every great industrial enterprise. Each success represents a struggle. The man who made it has had his back to the wall, has been in danger of bankruptcy more than once. His stubborn optimism, his energy, his vision had finally won the victory.

IMAGINE a stray dog wandering through the same city and reporting his impressions. The great buildings, the factories, the stores, the richness and variety and energy of the life about him would mean nothing at all. All he

could see would be some spot where the street had not been cleaned, some corner where waste and offal had been allowed to accumulate. What would his report of our civilization and achievement sound like, if he were given the power of speech and denied the gift of spiritual vision? And yet this lower animal, so endowed and so restricted by a strange fate, would be in much the same case as the whiners. They can talk. They do talk. They are gifted in the matter of speech and half blind, or more than half blind, in the matter of sight. They can see only the dirt. A small imperfection, a small disease spot looms so large to them as to blot out the great miracles of American energy and achievement. The doctrine of the whiner is bad medicine. It is well to see our faults and try to rectify them, but it is fatal to hope, on which we all live, to magnify them out of proportion. The men who crossed the mountains and the deserts, who turned a wilderness into a garden, who harnessed the torrent and the lightning, who founded and built and fought for and preserved the greatest enterprise for human happiness and well-being and progress the world has ever seen did not carry muck rakes as their insignia. In their darkest hours they could see the stars above the cypress trees.

WHAT THE POPULAR does is to try to put some of this spirit into dramatic form. You cannot give the essence of it in any formula. But you can get it in a story. The tale of individual enterprise, of a man's own personal struggle with the evil around him and within himself is the blood and bone of a magazine like this. The taming of the West is the last great epic of our race, and we are giving you its drama, bit by bit, as time goes on. We are publishing some of the most honest and representative literature of our time. The man who buys the magazine because he really likes the stories in it, and not because of paper or illustration or pretension of any kind, is the best judge, after all.

This is a rough idea of a few of the things McClure said of magazines of to-day in general and our magazine in particular. We are passing it on to you in the hope that you will agree. We ourselves hold these ideas in regard to American life. How far we succeed in embodying them in a magazine you can tell yourself. Sometimes we know we are hitting the right thing. "The Implacable Friend," by Theodore Seixas Solomons, is one of the bright spots that make us sure we are on the right road. We may be ignorant, of course we are, about many things, but we do know a supremely good story when we see it. And this is it. A tale of human, real Americans, with faults and failings and with nobilities of character as well. A tale of Alaska, the drama of the Argonauts, written by one of the most gifted writers discovered in recent years. Solomons at his splendid best in a book-length novel complete in one issue.

THERE are a lot of other stimulating and vital things in the next issue. Bower starts a new series of tales in a most original vein. Stacpoole contributes a great short story. Edgar Wallace gives us a mystery novel, also complete, in the issue. Cullen, Roy Norton, Dane Coolidge, and Giles Corey are all represented. It is such a good issue that we feel like starting all over again. After all, however, perhaps it was more interesting to listen to what Mr. McClure had to say.

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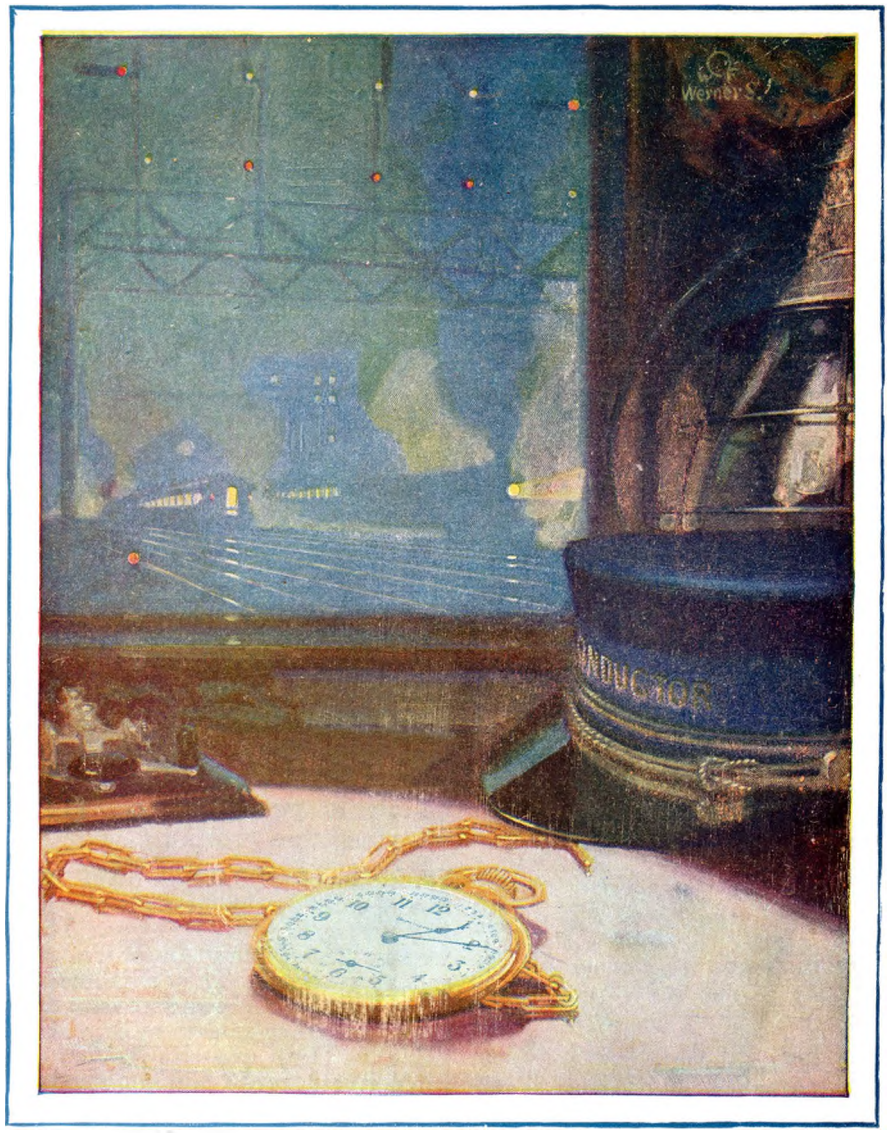

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