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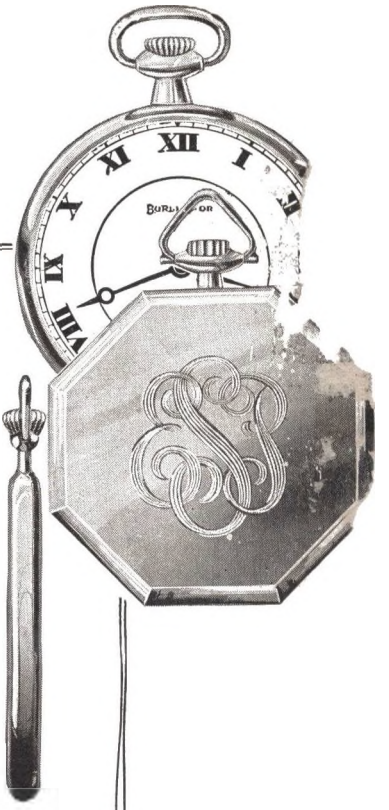

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EDISON MARSHALL will have the first installment of a new serial, "The Were-Wolf's Cave," in the next issue. There also will be stories by Knibbs, Witwer, Rowland, McMorrow, Cullen, Osborne and others.

TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

Vol. LXII. No. 1 — CONTENTS — October 20, 1921

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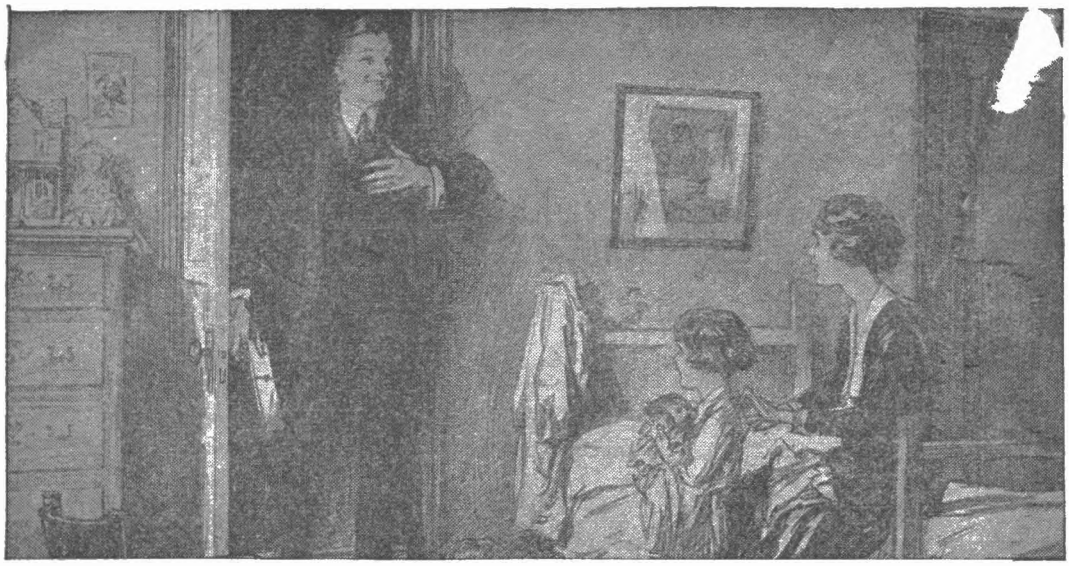
The next POPULAR will be on the news stands November 7th



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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. LXII. OCTOBER 20, 1921. No. 1

B. Typhosus Takes a Hand

By Francis Lynde

Author of "The Island of Thrills," "The Fad Maker's Fortune," Etc.

How would you like to wake up in a Pullman, one fine morning, with no memory of having started your journey and with no least idea of where you were headed for—to say nothing of not being able to remember who you were, anyway? Embarrassing, you think? So thought the man to whom this happened in this story—especially as every one in South Tredegar seemed to know him well as the Rodney Hazzard who was swinging a deal big enough to dismay the ablest. How he handled this job is something you are certainly going to enjoy finding out.

(A Complete Novel)

CHAPTER I.

I DIDN'T look to see what time it was when the Pullman porter called me, but the sun was not yet up. Raising the window shade I stared out, only half awake, upon a backward-racing panorama of wooded hills, isolated farmsteads, a willow-fringed creek paralleling the track, and on the other side of the creek, a country road.

When I sat up, blinking and rubbing my eyes and trying to place the passing panorama geographically, the porter came again, parting the berth curtains to look in. " 'Scuse me, suh," he said, seeing that I was awake and stirring; and when he would have backed away I stopped him with a question:

"Whereabouts are we, George?"

" 'Bout fifteen mile' out, suh; don' aim to hurry you-all, nossuh; but dis is de through car, and dey begins switchin' it 'bout as soon as we pulls in."

The good-natured, black face disappeared and I rubbed my eyes again. Fifteen miles out, he had said. Out from where? To what destination was I supposed to be going? How did it come that I didn't know? More perplexing still, how was it that I couldn't remember anything at all connected with the beginning of this journey—buying a ticket, boarding a train, going to bed in a sleeper?

Shocked into action, I flung off the covers and sat up with my feet in the aisle. Was I still asleep and struggling with a fantastic nightmare? No, it wasn't a dream. Was it sickness—a delirium of some sort coming on? A bit shakily I searched for my pulse. Nothing wrong there. The old heart pump was pounding away steadily; unless a sharp-set morning appetite could be called a symptom, there were no physical danger signals flying—nothing at all the matter with me save that terrifying vacancy in the place where memory should have been, and wasn't.

Mechanically I groped for my clothes and began to dress, telling myself that surely it could be only a temporarily slipped cog that made everything back of the moment when I had sleepily raised the window shade figure as a total blank. It would pass in another minute or so; it was too preposterous not to pass. I'd begin to recall things pretty soon; I'd have to recall them or be more helpless than a blind man. For now I began to realize that the blank was absolute: I couldn't even remember my own name, though now and then it seemed to be almost on the tip of my tongue.

My emotions, as I stumbled through the cluttered aisle on the way to the lavatory at the end of the car will have to be imagined. Once upon my feet, I was sufficiently convinced that there was nothing the matter with me physically. My glorious appetite might have told me something, if I had known to what it pointed. As it was, it merely conjured up visions of a well-provided breakfast table. But the total lapse of memory still persisted, though now I was perspiring like a gymnasium athlete in a frantic effort to bridge the terrific gap.

There were two other men in the Pullman washroom, and I was presently assured that neither of them noticed anything unusual in my appearance; from which I assumed that, in the eyes of others, I was normal and passably sane. I had found a suit case under my berth, and in rummaging for toilet tools I made a furtive search for letters, papers, anything that might serve to connect me up with my immediate past and start the stopped machinery; something that might at least tell me who I was. There was the usual traveler's equipment of toilet conveniences and clean linen—but nothing else. And there was neither name nor initials on the bag itself.

Furtively, again, I searched my pockets, turning up a penknife, a bill fold with something over three hundred dollars in it, a handful of silver coins, a pencil, a fountain pen; but still nothing with a name on it.

With the train rushing on to whatever destination it was at which I was supposed to debark, there was little time to spare for any collected attack upon the barrier which was so effectually cutting me off from the past. By the time the porter came along with his whisk we had thundered through a tunnel and the train was skirting the suburbs of a city, the greater part of which was hidden under a blanketing of morning fog. Off to the rear a wooded mountain lifted its summit above the fog bank, and far away to the left there was the dim outline of another mountain. So much I saw, and then the long string of Pullmans clattered over a succession of yard switch frogs and came to a stand among train sheds and concrete platforms. The porter, gathering up bags for the debarking, named the place for me: "Dis is yo' stop, cap'n—South Tredegar," and the name evoked no slightest stirring of the dormant memory.

Still more than half dazed, I joined the handful of people in the aisle. Though I knew of no reason why I should stop at South Tredegar, there seemed to be still less reason why I should go on traveling. Apart from this, if I were beginning to die from the brain downward, a swift sprint for a doctor's office was the prime need of the moment. And if a doctor couldn't help me, if the dismaying memory lapse were going to persist, one stopping place was as good as another.

A single fact ground itself in as I fell into the stream of outgoing passengers to walk up the long platform and through the concourse of a model union station. I saw nothing that tended in the slightest degree to awaken any sleeping recollections. The surroundings were as unfamiliar and strange to me as they might have been to a suddenly translated inhabitant of the planet Mars.

It was when I was crossing the little plaza upon which the station building faced that a uniformed black boy, with the single word "Marlboro" in gold letters on his cap, came up to me, grinning to show a mouthful of teeth and scraping his foot. "Glad to see yo' back, suh," he said, and reached for my bag.

Most naturally, I thought he was mistaken in his man; but since the neat uniform and gold lettering bespoke a modern hotel, I went with him, climbed into the taxi whose door he opened for me, and was promptly whirled away across a double medley of railroad tracks, up a curving street in which the early-morning traffic was just beginning to stir, and around the corner of another street to the canopied entrance of an up-to-date, many-storied hotel.

Entering the lobby at the heels of my bag-carrying black boy, I looked around. There was nothing even remotely familiar about the place, though I had a sort of vague feeling that I had been in many such lobbies before. There were a few people lounging in the chairs waiting for the breakfast room to be opened, and a few newcomers, like myself, lining up to write their names in the register.

When my turn came the clerk did not hand me the pen—wherewith I should have been obliged to sign "John Smith" or some other such harmless alibi: instead, he pushed a tagged key across the marble slab to me, saying, just as the black boy had said: "Glad to see you back, Mr. Hazzard. Feeling better than you did when you went

away? You certainly look it. You'll want to go up to your rooms before breakfast? Here, boy; take Mr. Hazzard's bag."

If I had needed any additional passes of the conjurer's wand to hypnotize me completely, they were handed out to me in this friendly greeting. Of course, my first impulse was to tell the genial young man behind the counter that he was much mistaken. Then a huge doubt came along and clapped its hand upon my mouth. Perhaps the clerk wasn't mistaken; perhaps my name *was* Hazzard, and possibly I *had* taken a quick trip. I couldn't assert, and prove it, that either assumption wasn't true.

Anyway, there was no time for argument. There were others waiting for their chance at the clerk, and the boy had picked up my suit case and was pointing for an elevator. I followed him blindly, though still with a pretty strong conviction that I was usurping some other fellow's rights and privileges.

The elevator stop was at the seventh floor, and the boy led me to a suite of two rooms and a bath at the end of the corridor. Once inside, and alone, I sized things up. The sitting room was furnished like a bachelor's apartment, and was evidently the settled abiding place of whoever had been occupying it. There were many little touches not to be mistaken for mere hotel conveniences; easy-chairs, a well-filled bookcase, a home-like reading and writing table with a drop light, an ornamental copper inkwell, and a blotting pad that had seen much use.

Crossing to the bookcase, I took out a volume at random. It was Kipling's "The Seven Seas," and on the flyleaf was written the name, "Rodney Hazzard." Was it my name? I couldn't tell. The surname seemed more or less familiar, in a way, and so did the "Rodney," for that matter, though in a lesser degree. Closing the book, I sat down at the writing table, uncapped my pen, and wrote the name on a sheet of the hotel paper. Then I opened the book and compared the two. If I had been a fairly skillful forger I couldn't have done much better. The signatures were as nearly alike as any two writings of the same name ever are.

Mystified beyond measure, I went on into the bedroom of the suite. Here there were more evidences of permanency—and of recent, or comparatively recent, occupancy. There were copies of three or four of the current magazines on a stand at the bed's head. In a wardrobe closet there were two business suits slightly worn, and a dress suit; the three neatly disposed on stretchers. On the dressing case there was a soiled collar with the tie still in it; also a crumpled handkerchief, an empty cigar case, and a bunch of keys, as if the occupant of the room, changing hastily, had neglected some of his pocket contents. I opened the dresser drawers one after another. Their contents were tumbled about, as if the drawers had been rummaged in hurriedly, but there remained a good supply of underwear and linen, all marked plainly with the monogram "R. H."

On the little side brackets flanking the dresser mirror there were two photographs in silver frames. One was the picture of a generously beautiful young woman; an enlarged snapshot, I thought it must be, for there was a tennis net in the foreground, and the young woman, who was laughing, appeared to be in the act of trying to interpose her racket between her face and the camera.

The other picture I took from the bracket and examined closely. It, too, appeared to be an enlargement of a snapshot, taken with a roofed-over but unwalled power plant of some sort for a background. The surroundings were plainly tropical; palm fronds waved into the upper right-hand corner of the picture, and there were indistinct figures of dark-skinned, half-clothed men in and about the power plant shelter. The central figure was that of a white man in shirt sleeves, belted breeches and leggings, with a pith sun helmet on his head; he had pushed the helmet up to let the camera have a fair shot at his face. I held the photograph up beside the reflection of my own face in the dresser looking-glass and compared them. Making due allowance for the surroundings and maskings, the pictured face seemed to be unquestionably my own.

More bewildered than ever, I sat upon the edge of the bed and tried once more to thrust aside the curtain before which all these stupefying mysteries were parading. Like a phantom bit out of a dream, glimpsed one instant and lost the next, the man picture, or rather its background, seemed vaguely suggestive of something I ought to know; but before I could seize upon the impression and fix and analyze it, it had vanished. As for the young woman, there was no slightest stirring of recollection when I studied her picture; and I found myself saying that no man who had ever been permitted

to frame her photograph for his dressing table could forget her. That would be admitting the impossible.

Next came some consideration of what I ought to do. In spite of all the evidences to the contrary, I could not rid myself of the belief that I was stepping into another man's shoes. But here again there were cross currents. "Hazzard" was the name the hotel clerk had given me, and, as I have said, in some way that I couldn't define the surname seemed to fit me. Yet the more I thought of it the more the "Rodney" part of it didn't fit. Nevertheless, Rodney was the name written in the volume of Kipling, and I had written it in facsimile and without hesitation on the blank sheet of hotel paper.

The puzzle was too deep for me, and by now the keen hunger I have spoken of was growing famine sized. I glanced at my watch. It was a quarter to eight, and by this time the hotel breakfast room would be open. Perhaps a square meal would help to clear my befuddled brain. Anyhow, it seemed worth trying, so I closed and locked the door of the usurped suite behind me and had myself dropped to the lobby floor.

When the elevator came to rest on the ground floor, and before the boy had slid the iron grille, I saw the man who was sitting with his back to the nearest of the marble-plated lobby columns. He was well dressed, well rounded, clean shaven, with a face that, but for the pin-point, birdlike eyes, might have been called cherubic. When I stepped out of the elevator car he jumped up, threw his cigarette away, and came to meet me.

"Well, I'll say!" he exclaimed. "So you've turned up at last, have you? The bell-hop captain told me you'd blown in on the early train, so I waited for you. It may not strike you that way, but I'm putting it up that you owe me an explanation a mile long. Haskins said he saw you taking the Limited at the station a week ago Thursday night, and I couldn't believe him—after you'd asked me to breakfast with you here the next morning." Then, with a curious look out of the birdlike eyes that was almost an appraisive stare, "What the devil have you been doing to yourself—besides getting a clean shave? You look different."

"In what way?" I asked, thinking that now, surely, there must be developments.

"Why—I don't know; healthier, I guess. Perhaps you've been sidetracking your troubles while you were away. Good idea. You looked as if you were on the ragged edge that Thursday night at the Town and Country, when you said you were making an early sneak, and asked me to come here to breakfast with you the next morning. Are you feeling as fit as you look?"

As he spoke I had the same prompting that had come to me when the clerk had called me "Mr. Hazzard" and had assumed to know me; namely, to tell this round-faced, round-bodied chipper-in that he was totally mistaken; that he hadn't seen me at the Town and Country—whatever that might be—and that I hadn't asked him, or anybody else, to breakfast with me. But something restrained me, and I answered his question by saying that I felt as well as I looked, if not better, adding that I stood ready to make the breakfast promise good if he cared to come with me.

"Surest thing you know," he answered crisply; adding: "I don't see how you got your own consent to take your hand off the steering wheel for a ten-day stretch, with things stacking up as they are. Perhaps you can tell me while we're eating." Then, as we were crossing toward the grillroom: "Don't you have to register me as your guest?"

"It isn't necessary," I told him, failing to add that, inasmuch as I didn't know his name from Adam's, it wasn't possible for me to register him.

In the grill the head waiter, who smiled a welcome and called me "Mr. Hazzard," gave us a table for two in a quiet corner. Telling my as yet unnamed guest to order what he liked for himself, I ran down the menu card and gave an order commensurate with the famine cry that was going up from every fiber of me. Cherub face paused in the giving of his own order to listen in what seemed to be awed astoundment.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he gasped, after the black boy had gone kitchenward. "You're certainly making up for lost time in the commissary department. How the devil do you get that way?"

"As to appetite?" I queried.

"You've said it. Why, hell's bells!—you've ordered more than you ever did at any three meals I've eaten with you!"

His slant toward profanity awakened a curious sense of familiarity—as if I'd been used to hearing that kind of talk in the past. I made a note of this additional bit of information about myself—or the man I was

substituting for. Besides having worn a beard, he, or I, had had a poor appetite in the past. If I were he, I had certainly gotten well over that particular phase physical, if the keen joy with which I attacked the grapefruit counted for anything. While I was eating, the gentleman with the pinpoint eyes played with his spoon and talked.

"Harking back to the dinner dance at the club a week ago Thursday: Her Beauteousness seemed a bit anxious about you that night," he said. "I happened to overhear her talking to Mrs. Tom Jeff Gordon. She said she'd been trying for weeks to get you to go away somewhere and take a rest. When Haskins told me afterward that he'd seen you boarding the Limited, I thought maybe you'd taken her advice and skipped between two days. Yet I couldn't see how in the devil you could leave for any length of time, with the big deal hanging up like Mahomet's coffin."

Here were fresh mysteries, piling layer upon layer. Was "Her Beauteousness" the young woman whose picture stood on the dresser bracket in the seventh-floor suite? And what was "the big deal" which, in my absence, or that of my double, if I had a double, had been left hanging between heaven and earth? The interest aroused by these answerless questions went some little distance toward diverting my thoughts from the crude calamity which had befallen me.

"The deal," I said, wishing to lead him on; "of course I wouldn't want to leave that hung up for any length of time."

He was eying me curiously. "I should say not, when it means a cold half million in profits, if you pull it off." Then, "I suppose the hang-up is the reason why you haven't covered your bet in Mission Avenue—or did you do that before you went away?"

"No," I denied—wholly at random. "I didn't. And you've guessed the reason—nearly enough."

For just one flitting instant I thought I saw a gleam of the most malignant and deadly animosity flash into the eyes which, at their ordinary, had no more expression than those of a blackbird. But if there was such a look, it was immediately extinguished in what was evidently meant to be a jollying laugh.

"You're a lucky dog," he said. "Another man might be willing to lose the half million for your chance in the other field. But let's get down to business; the business that I warned you had to be settled definitely the night you cut stick and ran away. You've dodged and evaded long enough, Hazzard. You're going to let me in on the deal, you know—you've got to. All I'm asking is a fair show."

"What did I tell you that Thursday night at the dinner dance?" I asked cautiously.

"You know damned well what you told me; that if I'd keep still you'd meet me here at breakfast the next morning and we'd thrash it out. Don't make me stick a knife into you and turn it around, Hazzard. You need me in your business. I might go farther and say that you can't turn a wheel without me. You can afford to let me have my rake-off."

Feeling perfectly confident that what he was saying didn't apply to me, I was able to smile across the table at him and to say: "How much do you want?"

Instead of answering the question, he bored me again with the blackbird stare.

"What the devil have you been doing to your voice?" he snapped.

"What do I seem to have been doing?" I inquired mildly.

"I don't know: it's different—*you're* different. What kind of dope have you been taking while you were away?"

"That is my secret," I returned with the proper air of mystery. "But you haven't answered my question: how much do you want?"

The birdlike eyes dwindled to piercing needle points.

"I could take it all if I felt like it; you know good and well I could. Sometimes I'm tempted to do it—just to show you that you can't play horse with me all around the block and get by with it. But I'm willing to be decent about it. We'll say fifty-fifty on the swag—and you'll take your handsome mug off for a month or so after the deal's pulled and give me a white man's show in Mission Avenue. How about it? It's fish or cut bait for yours. If I pull the string, the whole damned house'll come down on you, and you know it."

Most naturally all this was simply Greek to me. Yet it seemed to be sufficiently serious, either for me or for somebody else, to merit looking into a bit. This stockily built, needle-eyed person across the grillroom table was making a cool demand upon me, or upon the man for whom he was mistaking me, for a quarter of a million; and for some-

thing else the nature of which I couldn't guess—unless it were connected in some way with the girl with the tennis racket whose picture was on the seventh floor above.

Slowly, and as if not wholly sure of its ground, a combative urge was beginning to knock at the door of my brain. Two courses were open to me. Should I tell this nickel-plated holdup artist that I hadn't the slightest idea what he was talking about, and so end it? Or should I stand solidly in the borrowed shoes of my mysterious double—or my other self—and play for the odd trick in whatever game it was that had been left unfinished, taking the long chance of learning the rules of the game as it went along? It was the combative urge, the feeling that I'd rather enjoy a scrap with this fellow, that had the casting vote.

"I'm glad you've been open-minded enough to stand the thing squarely upon its feet at last," I said, taking the first of the chances in assuming that he hadn't done so heretofore. "But you mustn't crowd the mourners. You'll have to give me a little time to think it over."

He paused to light a cigarette, inhaling deeply two or three times before he spoke again.

"Since the deal isn't closed yet, you may have the time," he conceded. "But you've got to secure me if you want me to go on holding my tongue about the thing I know—and that you know I know. It's up to you to find a way."

"That is a fair proposition," I allowed. "When shall I see you again?"

"I've got to run down to Bridgeville on the noon train, but I'll be back this evening. Make it to-night, here at the hotel. Will that do?"

"If it suits you," I acquiesced; and at that, since he had finished his breakfast, and I was still only fairly in the midst of the feast I had ordered for myself, he excused himself abruptly and went away.

I wasn't at all sorry to be left alone to wrestle with the fresh complications which the short breakfast-table talk had flung at me. Who was this full-fed scoundrel with the boyish face and blackbird eyes? Had he really been talking to and threatening a man he knew? Or should I cling to the apparently unprovable hypothesis that I was only a miraculous substitute for another man who had mysteriously dropped out?

In either case, this bird-eyed person seemed to be sorely in need of a good, vigorous manhandling, and as I was sipping my third cup of coffee I was wondering vaguely if—Providence permitting, and the South Tredegar hallucination as to my identity continuing to persist—I shouldn't be the individual to administer it.

CHAPTER II.

When I had eaten like the Great Ug, who, it will be recalled, ate till he could eat no more because there was no more to eat, the tobacco craving asserted itself; from which I gathered that in my hidden past I must have been a smoker. At the cigar counter in the hotel lobby a youngish man, who looked as if he might have stood for the artist's model in one of the Spookenhammer style advertisements, was filling his pocket case. As I approached he turned and let the splendid effulgence of his neck haberdashery bedazzle me.

"Well, look who's here!" he exclaimed, shaking hands with me as if I were a long-lost brother suddenly rediscovered. "Where have you been hiding out for a week back? And, say—what on top of earth have you been doing to yourself? You—why, with that clean shave you look like another man!"

"I am another man," I returned; and that certainly went two ways. Then, not to be left too far behind in the friendly race: "You're looking well, yourself; better than I've ever seen you look." Which also went two ways.

"Been out of town on one of your mysterious dickerings, I suppose?" he rattled on. "I haven't had a peek at you since—let me see: you were over at the dinner dance at the Town and Country a week ago last Thursday. I believe that was the last time we forgathered. I thought you were looking rather knocked out, then—off your feed or something; and the wife noticed it, too. Here; take your hand out of your pocket—have a smoke with me."

I took the gift cigar, and then the clerk behind the counter did me an unconscious but mighty welcome favor by saying: "You took six of them, didn't you, Mr. Norman? Shall I charge them? All right—thank you."

"I guess I must have been off my feed, as you say, when you saw me last," I agreed. "Everybody tells me I looked that way." Then: "Between us two and the gatepost, I'm not quite right yet, Norman." I forced

myself to use the name the cigar clerk had given him and tried my best to make it sound as chummy as his familiar handling of me warranted. "I wonder if you could steer me up against a really capable doctor?"

He gave me a brief little stare of surprise.

"Why, you know the doctors in this man's town as well as I do. What's the matter with Jack Requin? I thought you and he were buddies from away back."

"That is just it," I argued. "Perhaps he knows me too well. I've been thinking I'd like to consult a stranger—just for once in a way."

"Well, how about Wentworth? He is a new man, and they say he is a wizard. Office in the Severance Building—sixth floor, I believe. Seen Wayne since you got in? Judie tells me he's been up at least twice a day, crazy to find out where you'd gone, and when you were coming back. I don't believe she told him a darned thing. Some bright little business girl you gathered in when you picked Judie Bledsoe, Rod."

"You've said it," I assented handsomely. Things were certainly developing rapidly. From what the bird-eyed man had said, the inference was plain that I had an office; now, it appeared, I owned an office girl who held her employer's interests warmly at heart. I was wondering if the "Wayne" of this Mr. Norman's running commentary wouldn't be the bird-eyed gentleman himself.

"Have you seen Wayne?" I asked craftily.

"Can't help seeing him," was the half-resentful reply. "He is around underfoot all the time, as you ought to know. I don't like him, Rod: reminds me too much of a magpie, or a crow; you know what I mean—inquisitive as the very devil, and none too scrupulous when it comes to swiping bright things left around where he can get his beak into 'em. I wouldn't tie up too hard with him, if I were you. I always feel like shying away from these pot-bellied, oily-tongued chaps with choir-boy faces."

The description fitted too accurately to leave any doubt in my mind as to the Wayne identity.

"I'm rather glad to hear you say that, Norman," I offered. "I am beginning to lean a trifle that way myself—about Wayne. Wentworth, you say this new medicine man's name is? I think I'll wander around and let him have a look at me. I'm feeling fine, but I believe there is a screw loose, somewhere, yet. See you later in the day, maybe? So long."

Casual inquiry made of the first policeman I came across gave me the lay of the brisk little city, and the location of the Severance, one of its half dozen tall office buildings. Norman's guess as to the number of the Wentworth floor was correct, and I was presently introducing myself—by my stolen name—to an upstanding, grave-featured gentleman who stuck rigidly to the professional tradition of the pointed beard and cropped mustache.

"Oh, yes; I've often heard of you, Mr. Hazzard, and I'm glad to know you," said this doctor person, giving me the firm-handed grip of the successful nerve repairman. "What can I do for you?"

"That remains to be seen," I told him. "Do you want the symptoms?"

"I'll look you over first," he returned; and with that he took me into his operating room, made me strip to the waist and put me through a course of thumpings, auscultings—if that is the proper term—proddings, and the like, winding up with a blood-pressure test. Then came the verdict.

"You are as sound as a dollar, Mr. Hazzard, so far as I can determine; normal in every respect."

"Exactly," I agreed. "I feel just that way. But there is one small detail lacking. I've lost my memory."

"Aha!" he said; "that is something different. Tell me about it."

I told him what little there was to tell; how I had awakened in the sleeping car some few hours earlier with my past completely blotted out—so completely that I couldn't even remember my own name; shouldn't know it yet, if it hadn't been handed to me by people who seemed to know me much better than I knew myself.

"You haven't had a recent severe illness of any kind?" he asked.

I shook my head. "How can I tell? I only know that I feel all right now."

"When did you leave town on this trip from which you returned this morning?"

"A week ago last Thursday, so they say."

At that, he gave me a cross-examination that would have made the fortune of any lawyer in the land. Then I had the summing up.

"Yours is a very interesting case—interesting and rather singular, Mr. Hazzard. If

you had had a long and severe illness your condition might be accounted for quite readily. But if you were here in South Tredegar and attending to business no longer than a week or ten days ago, you can't have had the illness."

"That seems perfectly evident," I assented.

"Loss of memory comes under a number of different heads," he went on. "The commonest forms are the aphasic, in which the subject suffers some form of what might be called memory blindness; he may have lost the ability to write, or to read, though he understands perfectly what is read or spoken to him; or he may be unable to express himself, either in speech or writing. In your case the lapse seems to be complete only in one respect; you have merely lost the recollection of your personal and individual past. As I have said, this condition sometimes follows a severe illness where there has been long-continued delirium."

"But you also say that I couldn't have had the illness," I interjected.

"Not in any ten days. That is the singular thing about it—the unaccountable thing. You say you have forgotten everything, but a little reflection will convince you that this is far from being true. You can't remember your own individual past, but your answers to my questions prove that you have brought over from that past a very complete working knowledge of life as we are living it to-day; knowledge that you could have acquired only by observation and experience. The only thing you don't recall is your personal history. You are a consulting engineer by profession, aren't you?"

"Am I?" I grinned. No one had told me that, as yet.

He smiled. "As I have intimated, I have heard of you often, and I understood that was your calling. My advice to you is this: just go on quietly about your business and see what a little time will do for you. Possibly—quite probably—this condition in which you find yourself now will correct itself of its own accord. The recovery may be gradual; it has usually been so in the few lapse-of-memory cases that have come under my observation; yet we can't tell—you may wake up some morning to find the gears properly in mesh again and the machinery running smoothly. Meanwhile, you might drop in now and then and tell me what is happening to you."

I thanked this kindly gentleman, who was honest enough not to write a drug-store prescription for me, and turned to go. But at the door I faced about to ask a question.

"Doctor, can you tell me where my office is?"

He laughed quite heartily at that, and put a question of his own.

"I had forgotten that you are measurably helpless. Have you told any of your friends of your present condition?"

"No; not yet."

"Then I shouldn't, if I were you. It would embarrass you needlessly. Just keep your own counsel, pick up the dropped threads as you go along, and you'll soon be in harness again. Your office is in the Coosa Building, I believe. You'll find your name and the number in the lobby directory, no doubt."

"One thing more," I begged. "A young man whose surname is Norman directed me to you. He evidently knows me intimately, but if I had ever seen him before he accosted me in the Marlboro lobby a little while ago, the fact had escaped me. Can you tell me anything about him?"

"Oh, yes; Mr. Frederic Norman is sales manager for the Chiawassee Iron Works, of which Mr. Tom Jeff Gordon is the president. The Chiawassee offices are in your own building—the Coosa."

It will be noticed that I hadn't told this affable doctor anything about my private suspicion that I wasn't Rodney Hazzard at all; that I was merely a witless interloper who looked enough like Rodney Hazzard to fool that gentleman's friends and intimates. The reason why I didn't talk about this phase of it was a growing doubt as to the warrant for the suspicion. The truth of the matter was that the suspicion didn't have a leg to stand on, excepting the fact that I couldn't remember.

I may confess that I left the Severance Building handsomely appalled at the magnitude of the task which lay before me—if I were really the Rodney Hazzard of everybody's recognizing; the picking up of the threads of something which I could not as yet convince myself had ever been in my hands. Still, short of running away, there didn't seem to be anything else to do; so, once more, I inquired my way, two squares west and one north, to the Coosa Building.

CHAPTER III.

There was a bank on the ground floor of the big office building, and I wondered, grinning again, if I—or the other man—had an account in it, and how many years I'd be sent up for if I should draw upon it and afterward find out that it wasn't mine.

On the lobby blackboard my name, or the one that had been wished upon me, appeared displayed among the "H's," and I learned that my office was on the ninth floor. When I entered an elevator the negro elevator boy showed a fine set of teeth and said, "Howdy, Mistuh Hazzard," and a number of the people who were crowding in either spoke to me or nodded. Sooner or later, all of these people who seemed to know me so well would have to be identified, placed, and their relations to me—or to my double—clearly defined; the penalty for failure being endless embarrassment or worse.

As it chanced, I was the only passenger for the ninth floor on that particular trip. Hence I was spared the humiliation of having some one look on while I wandered through the E-shaped corridor searching for my own office. I found it at last, at the extreme end of one of the branches of the E, and paused to read the legend on the ground glass of the door:

RODNEY HAZZARD,
Consulting Engineer,
Mines and Mining
Investments.

Beyond that door lay my Rubicon. Once fairly across the fatal threshold I should have to go on; for richer, for poorer, for better or worse. Short of becoming a fleeing absconder I couldn't turn back.

Also, beyond that door lurked a young woman; a "bright, little business girl," in Norman's description, who was devoted to the interests of "Rodney Hazzard, Consulting Engineer," and whose eyes might well be much sharper than those cruder masculine organs which had so far already appraised and accepted me. It was only a wavering of the suspicion that I was a usurper; a swift feeling that, after all, I might be only entering my own office; that enabled me to turn the doorknob.

The first step—I suppose I took it so gingerly as to make no noise—was not particularly terrifying. The office was a suite of two rooms, the one I had entered being divided in half by a railing behind which stood an unoccupied desk and a pair of trestles supporting a large drawing board. On the board lay a T-square and an open case of drawing instruments.

This room proved to be untenanted, but just as I was keying myself up for the real plunge a vision appeared in the doorway connecting this outer room with the one beyond. For some unexplained reason I had been half expecting to find the original of the tennis-girl picture holding the fort in Mr. Rodney Hazzard's office; but the bewitching young person with snapping, black eyes, a wealth of dark hair, ripe, red lips, a firm, round little chin, and a nose which halted just soon enough to give it the entrancing tilt beloved of the gods, was no more like the picture girl than chalk is like cheese.

"Good morning," she said, a bit nippily, I thought; and then, "So you've got here at last. I thought you were never coming!"

"Nothing like that," I hastened to say, letting myself through the railing gate. Then I took the plunge. "I hope you've been getting along all right in my—er—absence?"

The look she gave me couldn't be described. It was a sort of combination of shock, astonishment, and wavering uncertainty.

"Why, you——" She stopped short, went through the motion of swallowing hard, and then began again. "I—I should have got along a great deal better if you had remembered to tell me where you were going, and how I could reach you by wire or mail. I've had a perfectly frightful time trying to keep people from finding out that I didn't know."

"Too bad!" I said; then I made my first descent into the troubled sea of equivocation. "Didn't you get my note?"

"Not a single word. Was it put in the mail?"

"It ought to have been—there is no question about that. But never mind; Norman tells me you've been doing fine, and I'm sure you have. Is the morning mail in?"

Watching her out of the tail of my eye as I went to the opened desk in the private-office room of the suite, I thought I could discern a curious sort of detachment in her manner; either that or puzzled abstraction—as if she were trying to make up her mind about something and couldn't. Every instant I was expecting to hear her burst out with, "Why, *you* are not Mr. Hazzard!" or

some such exclamation as would serve to introduce the cataclysm, so I concluded I might as well give her the chance and have it over with.

"Say it," I prompted, smiling at her. "Everybody else has been saying it ever since I got off the sleeper this morning."

"What have they been saying?" she asked, busying herself with her typewriter, or pretending to.

"That I don't look like myself."

"Of course they would say that," she remarked.

"I suppose the clean shave makes some difference," I suggested.

Again she gave me that queer look that I can't describe.

"That—and some other things," she said, with the air of one dismissing an unwelcome subject.

I couldn't tell, for the life of me, just where she stood. Her attitude had grown suddenly neutral, gray, no color at all. Was she accepting me as Rodney Hazzard? Or did she know that I wasn't Rodney Hazzard? And if I were the impostor that I was still half convinced that I was, why didn't she say so and telephone for the police?

As the event proved, Rodney Hazzard's job—or mine—wasn't half as formidable as it might have been. There was an accumulation of perhaps a score of letters, the contents of which, by all odds, should have been pure Choctaw to me. But right here was where the second mysterious thing in the series broke in. While the signatures were all unfamiliar, and the subject matter of nearly all of the letters was like reading a few disconnected sentences out of a hitherto unperused book, it was none the less made clear to me that Rodney Hazzard's business, or at least something in an identical field, had been my business in the past which I couldn't recall.

While I was reading the letters the bright, little business girl was cleaning and oiling her typewriter and sharpening her pencils, and I had a feeling that she was watching me curiously out of the corner of the nearest eye. Between lines in the letter reading I was wondering what I—or the other man—had been calling her; "Judie," or "Miss Judith," or "Miss Bledsoe." Since there was no possibility of settling this question definitely, I decided to play the middle against both ends.

"Miss Judith," I began, "I find that my—er—vacation has put me out of touch with some of these matters. If you will kindly dig into the files and attach the previous correspondence to these"—handing her a bunch of the blindest of the letters—"we'll try and clear the decks."

She took the letters without saying a word and went to the filing case; and while she was busy there, I put in the time rummaging in the big desk, soaking up every note and memorandum I could find, and piecing odds and ends together until I had gained some slight working notion of the various projects in which the former owner of the desk and office had been—or should I say, was?—interested.

In this process I am bound to say that I found my mind working like a well-regulated clock. Though I recognized none of the data in the sense of remembering them, I had practically no difficulty in understanding most of them, and the total absence of recollection didn't seem to muddle the understanding to any appreciable extent. The discovery that I could readily absorb these details made one of two hypotheses certain: either I had been, in the vanished past, a fairly competent business man and engineer, or—and this was now beginning to seem far the more probable—I was really the man everybody was taking me to be; the one only and original Rodney Hazzard.

With the letter files in hand it was not difficult to answer the mail. It was routine stuff, most of it; askings for expert advice on this, that, or the other industrial project; and the facility with which I was able to work out the needed data added still more to the growing convincement that I was not, after all, the interloper I had at first taken myself to be. It was utterly incredible, I decided, that a stranger could thus seat himself at another man's desk and take up any considerable number of the dropped threads with any degree of success.

To give credit where credit is due, I must say that a good share of the success was owing to my gifted little helper. She had every detail of the office business at her fingers' ends. Where I hesitated or was about to stumble, she was always ready to come to the rescue. In addition, she was a past mistress of the pothooks and word signs, her flying pencil keeping pace with the best I could do in the way of dictating.

All this business of business dispatching

went on without a ripple, as you might say. Most of the time the lustrous black eyes were modestly veiled and their owner's attitude toward me was as impersonal as if she had been one of a score of stenographers called in out of a big office to take letters for a man she had never seen before.

This was her attitude, mind you; mine was quite different. Time and again I had to pull myself up with a jerk when I found my mind wandering, fairly in the midst of things. The faultless curve of the pretty cheek, the pure adorableness of the round little chin, the fetching manner in which she did her hair—if it wasn't one thing, it was another. The biggest doubt of the Rodney Hazzard identity now centered upon this dark-eyed little heartbreaker industriously jotting my letters down. Was it even remotely credible that I had been associated with her from day to day, and had yet been so besotted as not to save some memory of her out of the wreck which had swallowed up all other—and lesser—things?

When the last of the letters had been faced down I asked her if I had any appointments for the day, and she shook her head.

"I couldn't make any," she reminded me—which was quite obvious. "Mr. Wayne has been in any number of times, but——"

"Oh, yes—Wayne," I broke in; then, taking a shot at the conclusion drawn from Norman's description of the man: "I saw him at the hotel this morning; took breakfast with him. He has an appointment with me for this evening."

I hoped she would go on and say something about the big deal which was to net somebody half a million dollars, but she didn't. While she was at the machine typing the dictated letters, I did some more rummaging in the desk. Among other things, the office check book came to light. There was an apparent balance of something over two thousand dollars. The last check drawn was two weeks old and was in favor of Judith Bledsoe. From the amount, and the fact that the stubs showed other checks at regular intervals for like amounts, I took it to be her weekly salary.

"You haven't had any money for two weeks," I said, interrupting the rattle and clack of the typewriter. "If you will make out a check to yourself, I'll sign it."

"There isn't any hurry about that," she returned, without looking up from her notes; adding: "I haven't done anything to earn it, anyway."

The manner in which she said this still preserved that attitude of cool impersonality—aloofness. I wondered if she were still a bit resentful because I didn't loosen up and tell her where I'd been—and why? I only wished I might be able to tell her—her or anybody else.

Continuing the desk search, a number of things that meant nothing to me were turned up, among them a typewritten list of names with a note at the bottom, "In S. B." After puzzling over it a few minutes I handed it to the busy one.

"What is that?" I asked.

She did not comment upon my failure to recognize what was presumably one of my own memoranda. She merely glanced at the slip of paper and passed it back.

"It is a list of the people who signed the Guess Mountain options. It was made as a desk record of the papers that are put away in the safety box in the bank."

Having this explanation of the cabalistic "In S. B.," I began to speculate a bit. Might not these papers in the safety box have some bearing upon the half million that the bird-eyed gentleman was proposing to split with me—or to have me split with him? I think I can say with complete sincerity that, at the moment, the possibility of coming in for such a huge fee or profit, or whatever it might be called, didn't have the thunderous appeal that such things are supposed to have. Perhaps I was a little like the old negro who was offered a hundred dollars reward for finding a lost pocketbook, and who said it wouldn't do him any good because he couldn't count above ten. But the urge to jam this Wayne person solidly back into his place was strong enough to substitute for any lack of the money hunger, and the mention of "options" seemed to indicate that these safety-box papers might connect up with the deal which, as Wayne had remarked, had been left like Mahomet's coffin. Hence I determined to have a look at them.

Acting upon this decision, I told Judie Bledsoe that I was going downstairs to the bank, and asked her if she had the duplicate key to the safety box, explaining that I had left my bunch of keys at the hotel. She found the duplicate and gave it to me without question.

In the bank lobby I immediately ran afoul of a number of people who nodded or spoke

to me, and again I was obliged to carry things off as best I could. As I was passing a marble counter-rail fencing off a space with desks behind it, a baldish man with twinkling, gray eyes looked up and waved a hand to me. On top of his desk stood a brass sign with "Mr. Clegg, Cashier" on it, and I ventured to stop and say "Good morning."

The talk for a minute or so was purely commonplace. Then:

"Parker Wayne was here a few minutes ago, and he told me you got in town this morning. I was about to telephone your office and ask you to come down. About that paper you are carrying with us; we know it is all right, and the collateral is good, but we don't like to let these call loans run along indefinitely. What is the prospect? I'm asking because our—that is, some of our directors are beginning to look a little cross-eyed at it."

Here was an entirely new knot in the tangle. Up to date, there had been nothing to make me overreluctant to shoulder Mr. Rodney Hazzard's back load, whatever it might be. But a bank debt was something different. I waded cautiously.

"Let me see," I said reflectively; "how much is it now?"

"Just what it has been from the beginning—seventy-four thousand."

If I didn't turn pale and gasp for breath, I should have. As I have said, I was like the old negro—couldn't count above ten. Without being able to recall any of the financial transactions of my buried past, some inner sense was crying out that I had never in my life dealt with any such debtor figures as this.

"Aw—all right," I contrived to gurgle. "I g-guess I'll have to be getting busy." Then I made matters worse by saying that I supposed I shouldn't have gone away.

"You needed a vacation," returned the baldish gentleman, quite kindly. "You had been under a pretty stiff strain, I imagine, and I hope you managed to take a complete rest. Anyway, you are looking a lot better. And about the notes: of course, there is no frantic rush. But it is demand paper, and we have two or three right cautious old gentlemen on the board, as you know. One of them was asking me only this morning if I didn't think it was about time to tell you you'd have to lift the paper. I told him you were all right, and so tided the matter over—for the time."

"That was mighty good of you," I returned, and then, as may be imagined, I moved along very willingly to make room for another customer who was waiting to have his chance at Mr. Clegg.

Back in the safety-deposit department I found I had to deal with a trim, little lady custodian who looked up and smiled her recognition, bidding me good morning in pleasant Southern fashion, and commenting, as everybody did, upon my improved appearance. I produced the duplicate key and was given the Hazzard box without question.

Shutting myself into one of the cell-like retiring rooms, I opened the treasure-trove. There was quite a collection of papers in the box; some few securities—stocks and bonds of companies whose very names were strange to me; agreements with contractors; a couple of life-insurance policies, and finally a large document envelope marked "Guess Mountain."

When I opened the fat envelope I had my first inkling of the reason for the stupendous loan the bank was carrying. The contents of the packet were a thick sheaf of options on certain tracts of land variously described in surveyors' verbiage, each option setting forth the amount which had been paid for it, together with the purchase price of the land if the option should be taken up. I did a hasty sum in addition. The bunch of options had cost somebody upward of seventy thousand dollars of real money.

When I got a fair grasp of the situation I could actually feel a cold wind blowing up the back of my neck. Reduced to its simplest terms, my predecessor—or I—had taken options on certain tracts of land with a total aggregate acreage running into the thousands, and for these options the various owners of the tracts—and their name was legion—had been paid, again in the aggregate, over seventy thousand dollars. And if the options were allowed to expire, the seventy thousand, which was four thousand less than the sum owed to the bank, was just like so much money thrown into the fire.

As I sat there gasping and wheezing in that close little mahogany cell with the terrifying figures before me, I had a swift recurrence of the conviction that I wasn't—that I couldn't be—Rodney Hazzard. While my past was as a closed book clamped in a vise, I told myself over and over that, un-

less I had been ripe for a strait-jacket and a padded cell in that period which I couldn't recall, I should never have had the nerve to plunge, with borrowed money, into any speculation so tremendous as this.

No, I insisted, determined to believe what I must believe, if I were to retain any sort of hold upon common sense and reason, it simply couldn't be possible. By some miraculous hocus-pocus I had stepped into the shoes of some vanished man; some reckless plunger who, scenting a market from afar, had staked his money and his reputation upon a lucky throw of the dice—had staked and lost. For now I hadn't the slightest doubt that my double was an absconder. By some unlucky turn of the wheel he had lost his expected market, and, seeing nothing but black ruin ahead, he had taken the coward's remedy and fled.

CHAPTER IV.

It was with a fixed determination to drop my vicarious responsibilities squarely in their tracks that I replaced the contents of the safety box, had the smiling little custodian lady put it away, and passed out into the bank lobby. Of course it was my luck to meet somebody who apparently knew me intimately, and to be asked where I'd been, and when I'd got back, and a lot of things like that.

If I had had the entire courage of my convictions I should have told this kindly, inquiring gossip that I wasn't the man he was mistaking me for. But I hadn't quite worked myself up to that sticking place as yet, so I let him go on talking, hoping he would presently talk himself out.

Now it so happened that our joint halting spot was beside a square, marble column which marked the angle of the inclosure holding the desks of the cashier and the other bank officers, and by moving a little to the right I could see the back of Mr. Clegg's baldish head, and about half of his desk. Sitting at his elbow was a little, old gentleman with a face like a wrinkled winter apple, and the two were in close conference. It was a mention, by the old man, of the name I was parading under that made me instantly cock my ears and lose track of what my friendly gossip was saying. As distinctly as if I had been sitting in Mr. Clegg's chair I heard the thin, high-pitched voice of the older man as he said:

"Ah—er—yes; his name—Hazzard—fits him too well. I don't know just what he thinks he's trying to do; my informant couldn't tell me that. But I'll warrant you, Clegg, it's a hazard, all right. He's—ah—a plunger, in all that the word implies. He has dropped out once, without telling anybody he was going, and he may do it again—and stay dropped out. As you say, the security is good, but we don't want the talk that would be stirred up if we should have to protest his paper. I'd put a man on him, if I were you."

I didn't overhear what the cashier said in reply, but I did hear the thin rasp when it began again.

"That's the sensible thing to do, Clegg. He—ah—needn't know anything about it, and if he's all right and straight, it won't hurt him. And you do it now—to-day. There are other reasons, too—personal reasons—why I'd like to have him—er—investigated, but we needn't say anything about that phase of it."

I got rid of my unknown buttonholer as quickly and easily as I could, sank out of sight without leaving a ripple, and didn't venture to come up for air until I was out of the bank and back in the elevator hallway of the great building. The little old gentleman with the winter-apple face was undoubtedly one of the bank's directors who had been objecting to the further extension of the seventy-four-thousand-dollar loan. And in deference to his urgings I was to be dogged, watched, shadowed.

The full force of this didn't strike me until I had entered a waiting elevator to be lifted to the ninth-floor office. Then it came to me with a prickling shock that now I couldn't duck and run, no matter how badly I might want to. I was trapped. All South Tredegar seemed ready to accept me as Rodney Hazzard—had so accepted me, so far as heard from. If I should attempt to sidestep, to lay down this terrific burden I had so casually and idiotically taken up, I would be followed, brought back, haled into court.

A cold sweat started out on me when I realized fully what I had let myself in for. There was only one possible avenue of escape, so far as I could see; and that one wasn't any bigger than a mousehole. If I could go ahead and pull off this deal which I, or somebody else, had left hanging in the air, and pay the bank——

But where was I to begin?

The dictations, neatly and accurately typed, were lying on the desk waiting for my signature when I entered the two-room suite at the end of the ninth-floor corridor. While I was glancing over the letters in a mechanical fashion and signing them I was racking my brain in an effort to find some way of enlarging the mousehole of escape. What sort of land was it upon which options had been taken covering such enormous acreages? The answer to that came pat enough. South Tredegar lay in the heart of the Southern Appalachians, and coal and iron were the leading products of the region. Doubtless the land which was to be bought and sold was mineral land.

Next, who were the prospective purchasers? Unquestionably, I, or the other man, had had them on the string before the huge investment had been made in the options. Certainly nobody but a born fool would make such an investment without seeing, or thinking he saw, his way out. I glanced aside at the trim, competent little figure sitting at the typewriter. There sat the answer to all the questions—and they might as well have been buried at the bottom of the deep blue sea. For the moment I should begin trying to fish them up I should be lost. It would be equivalent to telling Miss Judith Bledsoe in so many words that I had no right to be sitting at Rodney Hazzard's desk. Still, nothing venture, nothing have; and again I took the plunge.

"Those Guess Mountain papers, Miss Judith—will you get them for me, please?" I said, trying to say it as casually as one smoker would ask another for a match.

She looked up, and I remarked again how alluringly beautiful were the quick-glancing black eyes with their impenetrable depths.

"They are in the safety box," she answered evenly.

"But I mean the correspondence."

"Letters? There have been none."

Up against a blank wall again; and, at that, I hadn't escaped unscathed. Who should know better than I that there had been no correspondence? The negotiations, whatever they were, had been carried on by word of mouth. Secrecy, of course, would be the very lifeblood of a transaction involving millions. Once more the crooked talons of the law were reaching for me. Whether I had or had not made the stifling bank loan, I was the one who would have to pay the penalty.

I dare say some of the signatures on those first-day letters were a bit shaky. Furtively I kept an eye on the "bright little business girl" as she arranged the carbon copies for filing. Was she, or was she not, accepting me fully as her aforetime employer? There was still that silent restraint in her manner: was it natural? Or was she suspicious of me?

It was she who next broke the office silence.

"Miss Treadway was telephoning while you were down in the bank," she said. "She wanted to know if Mr. Hazzard had come back."

I marked the fact that she said "Mr. Hazzard" instead of "you," and braced myself for what might be coming next.

"And you told her that 'Mr. Hazzard' was here?"

"Of course. She said she would drive down a little later and take you to luncheon with her."

Again I felt a cool breeze blowing up the back of my neck. What new complication was this which was getting in shape to dump itself upon my already overloaded shoulders? Before I could stop myself, I had said:

"I'm pretty middling busy. I wish you had told her that she needn't come."

For the first time since I had made—or renewed—my acquaintance with her, my charming little handmaiden laughed; laughed deliciously, provokingly, tantalizingly, as if I were the cap-sheaf joke of the season.

"How like a man!" she gurgled; and then, with an imp of mischief dancing in the dark eyes: "Don't you think it was rather horrid of you not to write Miss Alicia while you were away?"

"Didn't I write her?" I asked.

"I'm just supposing that you didn't. She has called up two or three times every day to ask if I'd had any word."

This was worse, and more of it. Surely, if any man had been as intimate with any woman as I seemed to have been with this telephoning lady, he ought to be able to remember her—even if he were dead and buried. Yet this part of my past was as blank as all the rest of it.

"I'm too busy to go to luncheon with anybody, to-day," I protested.

"Then you'd better call her up and tell her so," cut in my pretty prompter.

I said "damn," and thought I said it under my breath. But a slow mantling of color in the neck and cheek of the typewriter maiden told me that she had heard.

"I beg your pardon," I blurted out; but the only answer I got to the apology was a smothered laugh that lacked little of being a schoolgirl giggle, and a half-whispered remark which might have been a prayer in Tibetan for all it meant to me:

"Oh, me—oh, my! I hope I may be here to see!"

After this, I had a rather bad half hour. A dozen times I was on the point of pretending to remember something of vital importance and dashing out, to be gone indefinitely. But each time a battery of four little words brought me down, wing-broken and helpless. What was the use? But it may say itself that the business part of my mind was wrecked beyond any hope of salvage for the time being. I could only make a pretense of being busy by pawing over the papers on the desk and arranging and rearranging the contents of the pigeonholes.

It was not until half of the fatal half hour had dragged itself past, leaden-footed, that the meaning of that Tibetan prayer of Miss Judith's began to worm itself into my tortured brain. There would be a charming little scene—for the bystander. This Miss Treadway—I was beginning to shudder at the very sound of the name—would doubtless take me sharply to task for my remissness in not writing. Also, she might easily ask me a thousand questions that I couldn't answer. And, with Miss Judith looking on and——

"Isn't it about your luncheon time, Miss Judith?" I asked desperately, as I went on with the aimless paper shuffling.

"Oh, no," she returned sweetly. "I haven't changed it; I go at one o'clock, as usual."

My feeble effort to turn the coming comedy—or tragedy—into a private dress rehearsal had failed. The piece would be put on before an audience—a highly appreciative audience—of one.

In the fullness of time my straining ears caught the sounds they were listening for; the taptap of clicking heels on the tessellated floor of the corridor. Next they recorded the squeak of a dry door hinge and the heel tappings in the outer office. My hour was come.

It wasn't so excruciatingly bad, after all. When I sprang out of my chair, it was a mighty handsome young woman—the flesh-and-blood incarnation of the tennis-court picture—who rushed to meet me, both hands outheld. She was a warm blonde, as I had thought, from the photograph, she would be, rather above the middle height for women, and generously proportioned. Her face—well, you've seen it, or one like it, time and again on the pretty-girl magazine covers, and it is no exaggeration to say that the handsomest of the cover designs couldn't give her any odds and stand a French doll's chance of winning out.

Her first outburst as she put her hands in mine was an excited, "Oh, I'm so glad!" Then, in practically the same breath: "But, *Rodney!*—wha-what have you been doing to yourself?"

"What should I have been doing," I countered, trying to galvanize the smile that was expected of me. Then I let her have her hands back, but not until after I had marked the exceedingly beautiful, platinum-set diamond she was wearing upon her engagement finger.

"But you look so—so different!" she protested.

"I hope the change is for the better," I said, calling up another of the static smiles.

"It is, and it isn't," she fluttered. "You look as fit as can be, but I hardly know you without your beard and mustache."

I had totally forgotten Wayne's and Norman's remarks about my lack of hair on my face.

"A beard is a nuisance," I explained. "Haven't I always said it was?"

"Indeed, you haven't! I've always fancied you were rather vain of yours. But never mind; you can grow another one—you've *got* to grow another one. I don't like you half as well without it. Put on your glasses and we'll go. I have the car down in the street."

I turned to rummage blindly in the desk. The spectacles were a new one on me. If I had ever worn glasses, I certainly didn't recall the fact. It was Judie Bledsoe who came to my rescue, and, somehow, I felt that she did it with her tongue in her cheek.

"Here is your extra pair," she said, with the mischief imp again looking out of the dancing eyes, and she handed me a pair of goggle-sized spectacles with heavy tortoise-shell bows.

"I don't know what you'd do without Miss Judie to look after you," laughed the handsome blonde, as I adjusted the clumsy glasses —and found that, happily, they didn't blur everything hopelessly for me. "That's better," she went on. "Now you look a little bit more natural. Let's go."

"You'll be back this afternoon?" inquired my dark-eyed good angel, calling to me as we were going out.

"Surely," I promised.

When we reached the sidewalk I found that the waiting car was a pretty gorgeous, wine-colored limousine, with a good-looking young negro sitting statuesquely behind the wheel.

"To the Town and Country, William," said my companion as we got in and latched the door; whereupon the motor began to hum musically and the big car moved out to back and fill and fall into its place in the traffic stream. Lapped in the luxury of the costly upholstering, the beauteous one began on me.

"Now, Roddy, dear, tell me all about it. Where did you go? And why didn't you tell me you were going? You knew how anxious I'd been about the way you were working yourself to death. Didn't you realize that I'd be scared out of my wits?"

"Really, Alicia," I returned, twisting my tongue as best I might to the totally unfamiliar name, "I don't know; and that is the honest truth. Weren't you—didn't you suspect there was something wrong with me —that evening at the—at the dinner dance?"

"I did," she came back promptly. "You were a sick man that night, Roddy, just keeping up on sheer nerve and will power. I knew it—knew every minute. Don't you remember how I begged you to do something for yourself? And Doctor Jack Requin told you, right before me, that you'd break and go all to pieces if you didn't give yourself a complete rest. Didn't you really know when you went away?"

I shook my head soberly.

"I haven't the slightest remembrance of it."

"How very strange!" she exclaimed sympathetically. "It must have been almost like a—like a stroke! If it hadn't been for Joe Haskins I might have thought you had been murdered!" This with a little shiver. "Joe told me he saw you getting on the midnight train. Where were you when you came to yourself?"

"I was on the train," I replied; and I did hope she wouldn't press for any further particulars. But she did.

"Going somewhere?"

"No; coming back."

"How strange!" she repeated. "And you don't know where you went, or when you shaved off your beard, or what you did?"

"I—I'd hate to confess it to anybody else, but that is the exact fact."

"You poor, poor boy!" she cooed, patting my arm. "But you are feeling quite well again now, aren't you?"

"So well that if I felt any better it would hurt."

"Then we'll just let it all go and forget it; whiff! just like that: now it's gone."

She was looking at her ring—and so was I, for that matter. "It's a perfectly beautiful stone, Roddy, dear. Are you sure you could afford it, the way diamonds are now?"

"He would be a mighty poor man who would admit that anything was too good for you," I said, as gallantly as I knew how.

"That is lover talk," she bubbled, nestling a bit nearer to me. "But I know how hard you've been trying to make good ever since daddy told you you'd have to be able to write a big check if you were going to keep on coming to see me; and when I look at this stone I feel horribly conscience-stricken."

When I looked at it, I was conscience-stricken, too. If I had bought it—and now the scales had tipped again to make me believe that I must have been its buyer—I must assuredly have been crazier than a hopeless Bedlamite—with that awful bank debt looming like a tornado storm cloud in the immediate background.

"I really didn't want to take it—that night at the dinner dance," she went on, still talking about the ring. "You were not acting like yourself, and I was afraid you had just gone ahead and plunged recklessly when you bought it. Is the Big Deal so nearly a reality that you could afford to give me a thousand-dollar stone?"

"There will probably never be a time when I could afford it any better," I said.

"Then we'll forget that, too," she said, laughing happily; adding: "It's so dear to have you back, and—and entirely well."

It was no chivalrous prompting of decent loyalty to a faintly possible "other man" that kept me from putting my arms around her and kissing her—taking a chance that

the negro driver didn't have eyes in the back of his head. I simply didn't want to; that was all. And a cold little chill went chasing up and down my spine when I realized that the change which had been wrought in me went miles deeper than the mere loss of memory. Whatever I had been to this luscious beauty in the past, there were no loverlike thrillings to answer her very manifest invitation now. And I was as sorry as any red-blooded man with a proper respect for a good woman could be.

CHAPTER V.

Since it was noon of a business day there were not many people about the Town and Country Club. But the few seemed to know me well enough to stop and shake hands with me, congratulating me upon my improved appearance. There was one man, however, who didn't; a flashily dressed fellow with a hooked nose and boldly staring eyes. He came along and took a seat at a table in a far corner of the dining room, sat down, hid the staring eyes behind a pair of smoked glasses, and signaled a waiter. Besides ourselves, he was the only person in the room.

"Are you ready now to tell me all I've been wanting to know about the Big Deal, Roddy?" asked my handsome tablemate, after we had given our order.

"We shan't be so—er—so rotten rich," I deprecated.

"But you are going to win, aren't you?" she asked, a bit anxiously.

"It looks as if I'd got to win," I returned.

"You must, and you will," she asserted loyally. "You know, dear, I don't care the least little bit for myself; I'd go and live in a log cabin with you. But daddy is flint and adamant. He says I'm luxury-spoiled and he doesn't propose to see me taking in washing for a living—as if it could ever come to anything like that! But daddy's awfully good to me, and I hate to deceive him."

"You mustn't deceive him," I put in, with the best air of conscious rectitude I could assume.

"But I've *had* to. I haven't dared tell him we're engaged. He—he almost made me promise that I wouldn't listen to anything you might say until after you'd 'made good,' as he calls it."

"But see here," I blurted out; "hasn't he seen your ring?"

She blushed as prettily as a warm blonde can blush—and that, as all the world knows, is perfection itself.

"I—I don't wear it at home," she confessed. "That is why I'm so anxious to have you tell me all the things I don't know—about the Big Deal. You've always said I couldn't understand: couldn't I, dear, if you tried to make me?"

"It is just business, you know," I evaded; "buying and selling, and that sort of thing. I—I have something to sell, and if I can make the turn it will run into a good bit of money." Then I took a long shot. "Wayne thinks my deal is a sure thing, *cientemente*."

The wide-set blue eyes narrowed a trifle. "Parker Wayne?" she queried; "has Parker Wayne anything to do with the Big Deal, Roddy?"

"He knows about it."

A little issue of strained silence, and then: "Do you trust Parker Wayne when you wouldn't trust me?"

"Bless you!" I burst out; "it isn't a matter of trust, so far as you are concerned. "And as for Wayne——"

"Listen," she broke in. "I haven't told you before, because—well, because I couldn't, you know. But now that we are engaged—Parker Wayne has asked me, dozens of times, to marry him; he asked me again the night you went away. I—I wanted to let him see your ring, but I didn't dare to. I was afraid he'd chatter and it would get around to daddy. I don't care for Parker Wayne; I think I don't trust him, Roddy, dear."

She was as right as rain. The round-bodied gentleman with the magpie eyes might be a person to be feared—but not trusted.

"He had a cast-iron nerve!" I commented. "I hope you told him where to get off, pronto."

"How funny you talk!" she laughed. "That is twice you've used words that I don't understand. What is pronto?"

"It is Spanish for 'quick;' I supposed everybody knew that."

"I never heard you use it before," she offered. "And that other word: *'cien'*—*'cienta'*—what was it?"

"*'Cientemente?'* That means 'certainly,' 'surely.'"

"You must have been studying Spanish while you were gone. But about Parker Wayne: yes, I told him, as I have told him lots of times, that he didn't—er—intrigue me. Then he tried to say something about you—you and the Big Deal—but I wouldn't listen."

I heard what she said, but it didn't get fully across to me at the moment. I was thinking about that other thing she had said; that she had never heard me use Spanish words or phrases. *For I had Spanish!* A dozen times in that one forenoon of my life I had found myself thinking in Spanish. Dismissing this finally as another of the celestial—or infernal—mysteries, I came back to Parker Wayne.

"Wayne breakfasted with me this morning," I said. "He seems to think I owe him something."

"What kind of a thing?"

"Money, for one; and more absence, for another."

"How could you owe him money? You don't, do you?"

I smiled across the table at her. "That, my dear Alicia, is another of the things I can't remember."

"Didn't he tell you what you owed him for?"

"No; he merely mentioned the amount."

"Why didn't you pay him and let him go?"

"For a most excellent reason. I didn't happen to have a quarter of a million dollars in my clothes at the moment."

"Roddy!" she exclaimed. And then: "Why, he must have been crazy!"

"It struck me that way, too. He promised to tell me all about it later; why I should hand him a quarter of a million, and why, after it is handed, I should disappear again."

Again her wide-set eyes grew thoughtful.

"I wish you wouldn't have anything to do with Parker Wayne, Roddy, dear; at least, not any more than you can help. You may call it just a woman's notion, if you like, but there are times when I fancy I can see a perfect villain behind that chubby, good-natured face of his. Why did he want you to disappear again?"

I chuckled and said, "Any time you'll look in a mirror I think you'll find the reason."

"Absurd!" she scoffed; and then: "If you're through, let's go and play a few holes of golf. I'd like to see if you have forgotten your famous drive along with the other things."

At this, I kicked out free and clear. I was entirely confident that I knew nothing about golf; which, as it appeared, I had known well enough to have a "famous drive" only a short ten days in the past. Business was the excuse for my refusal. It was accepted generously and we left the table and the dining room.

As we were passing through the archway into the clubhouse lobby I saw the flashily dressed man in the corner toss his napkin aside and push back his chair; this though he didn't seem to be more than halfway through the liberal meal he had ordered. Immediately cause and effect went into a clinch like that of a pair of affectionate box fighters. The winter-apple-faced old gentleman in the bank had asked to have me shadowed—and here was the result.

With a sigh that almost vocalized itself as a groan, I went with my charmer to the waiting machine, handed her in, and got in beside her. At the starting instant I stole a backward glance through the rear window—and saw what I fully expected to see. The man with the vociferous clothes was hastily climbing into another waiting machine which would doubtless follow ours.

It did. After a quick flight of a mile or so, our car drew up at the curb in front of the Coosa Building, and I saw the hack auto creeping along the street in search of a parking place, with the man in the checked suit holding the door half opened and waiting for a chance to spring out. Small wonder, then, that I was scarcely more than half alive to what my luncheon hostess was saying as I got out upon the sidewalk. But it did finally reach me.

"You're coming up to the house this evening, aren't you, Roddy?"

"I hardly think I shall be able to," I stammered. And then I snatched at the chance to tell the straight truth, for once, in a way: "I have a business appointment. A man is coming to see me to-night at the hotel; and I've been neglecting business so long——"

"Foolish!" she said, with the intonation that made the word a caress; "you don't have to apologize so profusely to me. I'll see you to-morrow."

And with that she told her driver to take her home.

CHAPTER VI.

Freshly reminded, by the presence of the tagging shadow artist, of the chains binding me to the treadmill which I had so lightly mounted, I entered the first elevator that offered—and saw the man in the loud clothes crowd himself rudely into the same car after the starter had tried to wave him aside to the next one. I thought I called my number plainly enough, but upon leaving the car I found myself on the tenth floor instead of the ninth. Searching for the stairs by which to descend, I ran across Mr. Frederic Norman; and a glance at the door signs showed me that the entire tenth floor was taken up by the Chiawassee Iron Works offices.

"Right-o! here you are again," bubbled the cheerful displayer of flamboyant neckwear. "Been to luncheon?"

I admitted that I had.

"So have I. Come on into my shack and have a smoke."

Being nervously eager to get back on the jail-breaking job, I was about to decline. Then I remembered that Miss Bledsoe would be out at luncheon, and that I had no key to the office. So I went along with Norman and lit a pipe which he was good enough to lend me.

"I can't seem to get used to you, without the beard, Rod," said the chipper sales manager when we were at ease in his private office. "You must have had a pretty violent change of heart to sacrifice it. The fellows at the club won't know you."

Here was another small rill to swell the growing stream of revealments: I was a member of a club, in which, as a matter of course, I would have to resume my activities—whatever they might have been. But that was merely a passing detail. What was most pressing just now was the avenue of escape in business. Because I was fairly desperate, I thrust out a feeler in the sales manager's direction.

"Fred, did I ever tell you anything about my big deal?" I asked.

He grinned. "Not enough to hurt."

"But I have told you something, haven't I?"

"Why, yes; in a general way. One night when we were driving over from the Town and Country you bragged a bit about a big bunch of fishing lines you had out that might bring in half a million or so. From what little you said, I gathered that it was a coal-land deal somewhere up in the mountains. I remember you added that you had stretched your bank credit to the limit to swing the thing."

"What else did I tell you?"

"You said that you had just had a streak of luck, but that it had cost a man his life. When I tried to get you to tell me how that could be, you shut up like a jolly old clam. Surely you remember that, don't you?"

"Dimly, if at all," I dodged; and for the third time in that thrilling day I thought I could feel the hair rising at the back of my head. "I didn't tell you I'd had anything to do with the man's death, did I?"

"Hardly," he said, with a laugh. "But how about it now? Are you ready to loosen up?"

"Not quite yet," I answered.

"Is the deal going through?"

"Here's hoping; and if you know a stronger word, let me have it and I'll use it."

At that he became deprecatory in a friendly way. "You throw yourself too hard on your job, old man," he said, as chummily as possible. "I'm wise to your reason, of course; but that's largely bunk. If Alicia Treadway wants to marry you, she'll do it; and it won't make any difference whether you lack a bawbee or a million. She's a mighty fine girl, Rodney—and that isn't saying half enough for her. I suppose you've seen her since you got back?"

"I've just been to luncheon with her."

"Good boy! You keep the rigging taut on that side of the boat and old Josiah can't capsize you, no matter what he says or does. He——'

The day being springtime warm, the corridor door had been left open when we entered. At the sound of footsteps we both looked up—I to see the winter-apple-faced, sharp-eyed old gentleman of the bank conference passing the open door, Norman to break off short in the middle of his sentence. When a door opened and shut somewhere farther down the corridor, Norman grinned at me.

"Speak of the 'Old Nick' and you straightway hear the clatter of his hoofs," he chuckled.

I was far beyond making any fitting response to this light-hearted jest. There was a horrible, choking sensation in my throat, but I contrived to keep the symptoms submerged. I thought I had sounded the depths

upon finding that I was engaged to a young woman who, however charming she might be, was still a stranger to me. But here was a bottomless pit of a deeper depth; Alicia's father, and the old man who had, vicariously at least, set the shadow hound upon me, were one and the same. I recalled his final word to Cashier Clegg: "There are other reasons, too—personal reasons—why I'd like to have him—er—investigated." The personal reasons were plain enough now!

"I'll have to be getting back to the grind," I broke out, as soon as I could trust myself to speak; and then, as casually as I could say it: "Where was Mr. Treadway going?"

Norman laughed.

"To President Gordon's office, for a guess. He bought some Chiawassee stock a month or so ago, and he's been deviling Gordon ever since, trying to find out whether there's any chance of making our next quarterly dividend two and three-quarters instead of two and a half."

I took my time descending the single flight of stairs and traversing the corridor on the floor below. Every step was leading me deeper into a morass from which escape seemed blankly impossible. Fervently I cursed the fate which had led me to leave the train at South Tredegar merely because a Pullman porter had told me that South Tredegar was my destination. Why hadn't I paid another fare and kept on going?

Back in that past which was buried in such a deep grave I must have had some reason for taking a ticket from somewhere to South Tredegar. And what could that reason have been unless I were really Rodney Hazzard returning from the runaway trip begun ten days before?

That was one view of it, and the other was no less bewildering. If all these things that were happening to me were any part of the life I had been living up to a period which evidently dated from that delirious Thursday night of the Town and Country dinner dance, the short interval between that and this had assuredly wiped the slate clean. On the other hand, it was baldly incredible that so many people would accept me unquestioningly as Rodney Hazzard if I were not Rodney Hazzard. Casual acquaintances might be so misled, but it was beyond belief that the young woman who was secretly wearing Rodney Hazzard's engagement ring should be.

And here was another grief. I was engaged to a charming young woman who seemed to be well worthy of the best that any man could give her, but if I'd ever been in love with her, I couldn't recall the fact. Contrariwise, I found myself perilously near to falling in love with a very different type of young woman. It was a lovely mess.

Miss Bledsoe was back in her place when I entered the ninth-floor office, and with her, and waiting for my return, was a big, burly man whom Miss Judith introduced as Mr. Daniel Hilliard, owner of certain Alabama coal lands.

Mr. Hilliard, it transpired, had been sent to me by one of my—or Rodney Hazzard's—many friends, and he wished to consult me professionally. This gentleman, with his thick roll of blue prints and enough data to have filled a small volume, accounted for the entire afternoon. His purpose was to operate his coal properties himself, and what he wanted was a complete layout of a mining plant.

Here, again, the mysteries took the center of the stage. Without the slightest knowledge of how I had come by it, I found that I possessed the workable equipment of a technical and practical mining engineer; was able to enter easily into the details of my patron's plans, to draw sketches for him, to make cost estimates. At the close of the long conference he shook my hand warmly.

"You are precisely the man I've been looking for, Mr. Hazzard," he said gratefully. "My friend and yours—Mr. Tom Jeff Gordon, didn't overrate you at all. He said that if I could catch you when you weren't neck deep in some of your own enterprises, you could give me exactly what I wanted. Now, if you'll let me use your desk a moment——"

I got up and gave him the desk and my chair; saw him take a slip of paper from his pocket and write upon it. The next thing I knew he was handing me his check for five hundred dollars.

"That is by way of a retaining fee," he explained. "I want to make sure of you, Mr. Hazzard A little later I'm going to ask you to take a day or so and run down to my place for a look-over. This talk we have had is going to be worth a good deal of money to me, and if you'll stay with me you'll find that I'm no piker. Mr. Gordon has been kind enough to put me up at his club, the Cupola, and if you can come

around this evening, I'll be glad to have you take dinner with me."

When he bowed himself out my bright little business girl was fussing over her typewriter. With a feeling that I was letting myself in for at least another ten years in the penitentiary, I wrote "Rodney Hazzard" on the back of Mr. Hilliard's check and passed it over to her.

"We are doing business," I observed. "You may put that in your bank deposit to-morrow."

As once or twice at the beginning of things that day, she gave me that curious look which was as unreadable as a sentence in Sanskrit. And what she said had no bearing whatever upon the Hilliard check.

"I hope you had a pleasant luncheon."

"Why shouldn't it have been pleasant?" I inquired.

"I'm sure I don't know—if you don't." Then, like a bolt from the blue, and with a flash in the dark eyes: "Did you tell Miss Alicia?"

The sudden demand nearly bowled me out of my chair. What was it that I should have told Miss Treadway? I evaded craftily.

"I told her everything she wanted to know—so far as I could."

"That is better," was the cryptic reply. "I—I was afraid you might not be going to. Now if you will give me that data of Mr. Hilliard's, I'll put it in type and send it around to the Cupola Club. If you take dinner with him, he will want to talk over his plans some more."

"But you needn't work overtime," I protested.

"Mr. Hilliard has been in town for the better part of a week trying to give this office a commission," she answered with a touch of asperity. "The least you can do is to give him all the time you can spare."

I took this meekly, even humbly. So far from provoking any feeling of resentment, her air of calm proprietorship was the most grateful thing I had encountered in all that day of chaotic upsettings. For a thrilling moment I forgot the menace of the huge bank loan, the man with the loud clothes, even the exasperating loss of memory that was making me trip and stumble and blunder like a blind man in new and strange encompassments; forgot, also, that I was duly engaged to marry the daughter of the winter-apple-faced gentleman who was going to prove me a criminal, if he could.

It was the resurgence of the memory of all these things, and particularly of the sudden loveless engagement manacling me, that made me slam down the curtain of the roll-top desk and get out. As I was heading for the elevators I had another glimpse of the man in the loud-voiced garments. He was sitting in the window seat at the corridor end, and when he saw me he started up to hurry toward the elevators. But he was too late to catch the car that I went down in.

Since I had nothing in particular to conceal—as yet—I ignored Mr. Josiah Treadway's Hawkshaw person and took a turn around the block to locate the situation of the Cupola Club. Having done this, I betook myself to the Marlboro and to the seclusion of the seventh-floor suite, where I sat and smoked, and wrestled like Jacob of old with his crippling angel in despairing—and futile—efforts to rediscover myself; this until it came time to go and keep the dinner engagement with Mr. Hilliard.

At the club I had to run the gantlet of a bunch of men who knew me most intimately, as it seemed, and who were as unknown to me as if I had never seen a single one of them before. If I were the impostor I so keenly wished to be, no man of them all appeared even to suspect it. With such a cloud of witnesses I saw that any alibi for me was out of the question. If I should swear on a stack of Bibles a mile high that I wasn't Rodney Hazzard, there were scores of South Tredegarites who would cheerfully rise up to testify that I was either a liar or had lost my mind.

I suppose it is possible for the human mind to hold its own for a certain length of time against any number of batterings from without; to stand alone in its own convictions, no matter how much pressure may be brought to bear upon it by other minds. But in the nature of things there must be a limit, a moment when the batterings have their due and inevitable effect. Tell a person often enough that he is a sick man, and in time he becomes a sick man. More and more as the exciting day had worn on, the confident, early-morning assumption that I wasn't—that I couldn't be—Rodney Hazzard had been breaking down under the overwhelming assault of evidence to the contrary; and the good-natured rallyings and handshakings of the club members finally tipped the scale. If I wasn't the original and only Rodney Hazzard, one of two things

was certain: either I was dreaming or South Tredegar was a community of credulous simpletons ripe for a visit of the fool killer.

The dinner with the Alabama coal-land owner was a pretty long-drawn-out affair, bestudded with much business talk, so it was after nine o'clock when I bade my genial entertainer good night and walked around to the Marlboro. As I pushed through the swing doors of the lobby entrance the first person I saw was Wayne. He was leaning back in one of the leather-cushioned lounging chairs, smoking a cigarette, but he sprang quickly to his feet when he caught sight of me.

"You're here at last, are you?" he said brusquely. "I've been waiting an hour and more. Let's go up to your rooms."

"What for?" I asked bluntly.

"Because our business is private—or, at least, it had better be."

I offered no objections. Apart from Miss Judith Bledsoe, this man was my only known source of information regarding the big deal.

In the sitting room of the suite, and with the lights switched on, Wayne turned the key in the door and closed the transom.

"Not for my sake, but for yours," he threw out snappily as he planted himself in a chair on the opposite side of the writing table from me. "Now, if you'll kindly keep your hands where I can see them——"

This was the back-breaking straw. I had no means of knowing how gentle and easy-going I had been with him in the past; but I did know that this cool demand of his made me see red.

"My hands are my own!" I rapped out angrily. "If you don't want to feel the weight of them, you'll keep a civil tongue in your head! What are you driving at, anyway?"

He leaned back and lighted another cigarette, and over the blaze of the match I saw that he was regarding me with something like a little shock of surprise. But his answer was collected enough.

"Nothing that you need to get so explosive about. But the way you acted this morning when I told you you'd have to whack up with me on the Guess Mountain rake-off makes me a bit prudent; that's all. Judging from your new attitude, you've been kidding yourself into the notion that you can scrap it out with me; but you know you can't; you're not built right for the rough stuff. I found that out a good while ago. If you'd had any really red blood in you at all——"

"Cut out the personalities. They're not getting you anywhere."

"They are getting something, however—your goat, for example," he flung out, with a mean little sneer. Then he sat up to drill me with the unwinking eyes. "You've got to come across, Hazzard, if you want me to keep my mouth shut. You're going to listen to reason."

"Suppose you spill a little of this superfluous reason."

"I'm going to. Two hundred and fifty thousand is my price, and I want to be reasonably certain that I'm going to get it. The assurance part of it is a very simple one. You have a safety-deposit box in the Coosa Security, and so have I. In your box you doubtless have the options without which you cannot close the deal with Muhlenberg and his principals. To-morrow morning at nine o'clock sharp we'll go to the bank together and transfer that bunch of options from your box to mine. When the thing comes to a head, you give me a certified check for my share, and I give you the options. What more could you ask?"

"A mere nothing—the answers to a couple of trivial questions. Why, in the name of ten thousand devils, should I give you two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, or even that many copper pennies? Why, on the other hand, shouldn't I throw you out of this room and kick you down half a dozen flights of stairs?"

"My commission—brokerage," he tossed out, defining the first "why." "Who put you next in this Guess Mountain deal in the first place? And how far along would you have got if I had told these mountaineer hicks how much you were going to make out of them? You thought you were keeping things dark, but I know every move you've made; got 'em down in black and white. I could queer the deal to-morrow, if I wanted to. You've borrowed up to your neck in the bank and a word in Clegg's ear would bring him down on you like a thousand of brick. And as to the kicking part. Say, Hazzard; you wouldn't kick a stray yellow dog—not if I claimed to own it. You haven't that kind of sand."

Disconcerted as I was over the discovery that this bird-eyed footpad knew so much more about my affairs than I myself did, I still found time to wonder what reason I

had given him in the past to believe that I was in the habit of taking any man's bluff lying down.

"You seem to be taking a lot for granted," I told him. "But I'm still waiting to be shown. Got anything else up your sleeve?"

He gave me a queer look, as if this line of talk wasn't what he had been used to hearing from me. Then he shook his head.

"It won't go, Hazzard; it's too late for you to try to put up a front, now. You won't fight man-fashion; it isn't in you. And you'll come across; first with those options, and later with the kale. The grand jury is now in session in Talbot County. If you weaken, I might be tempted to go before that jury and tell it how you plotted to get old Jeff Layne killed off out of the way, so that his Cousin Joab, with whom he was at feud, would fall heir to that key-piece tract in Noble's Gap and sign the one option without which all the others were worthless. If you will make me stick the knife into you and turn it around a few times, I can do it!"

Before the words were fairly out of his mouth I was over the table and at him, and if he hadn't been wearing a stiff collar, I should have choked the breath out of him while he was struggling free of me, and of the wrecked chair in which he had been sitting. Naturally, I expected to see the flash of a weapon next; and I was kicking the broken chair out of the way for another jump at him when I saw it wasn't going to be needed. He was coughing and clawing at his collar, and the look in the magpie eyes was about equally divided between fright and a shocked and incredulous astoundment.

I didn't give him time to say anything. With the red haze still blurring things for me, I ran to the door, unlocked it, and flung it open. Grabbing him again I chucked him into the corridor, where he got his feet tangled and fell down. When he bounded up like a smitten rubber ball the fright and astoundment in his face had given place to a mask of the most malignant rage a round, fat face could harbor.

"So you dug around until you found a scrap or two of a fighting man's nerve, did you?" he yelped; and then, shaking like a person coming down with an ague fit: "This is going to cost you the other half of your rake-off—that, and the girl! And I'll live to see you hanged, or rotting in a convict coal mine! I'll——"

The interruption was a foot race, up one corridor and down another to the elevator alcove. He beat me to it by a neck, as you might say, and had the good luck to find a down-going car just stopping at the seventh floor.

I went back to Suite 709, puffing and blowing a bit and feeling strangely elated. It was as if the brief red-blooded struggle had suddenly opened a wide door into spaces that were half familiar; areas in which I had aforetime been able to fight for my own hand as a man among men. And with the exultant feeling came a sort of war-horse lilt —"as the steed smelleth the battle afar off," as the old Hebrew writer puts it. Providence or Fate—name it as you will—had been pleased to draw an impenetrable curtain between me and my past, but it hadn't palsied my fighting hand. With all the handicaps, or in spite of them, I would pry Rodney Hazzard's stalled wagon out of the mud, or break a leg trying.

It was with this fine resolution singing in my brain that I turned off the sitting-room lights and retreated to Rodney Hazzard's bedroom. And I didn't know what prompting it was that made me turn the photograph of Alicia Treadway with its back to the room before I began to prepare for bed.

CHAPTER VII.

As I was shaving and bathing the next morning, I noted that a night's sleep had in nowise abated the fighting mood in which I had gone to bed. Taking a bit of setting-up exercise while I was still aglow from the rough toweling, I fairly ached to get my hands one more time upon the round-bodied, fat-faced scoundrel who had so coolly assumed that he could hold me up for a quarter of a million.

The gravamen of his charge; that I had procured the death of a man to further the deal, had not yet assumed its full weight with me. But presently it began to ask for something like sober consideration. Had I really, in that past which was so effectually hidden from me, fallen so low as to connive at the killing of a man who happened to be in my way?

I set the circumstances, so far as they had developed, in orderly array; the huge transaction financed with borrowed capital; at the critical conjuncture, the road to fortune—and consequently to Alicia Treadway

and happiness—blocked by one stubborn old man at feud with his relatives and quite probably with his neighbors. Could I—had I—in a moment of half-mad desperation, prompted or paid one of these feudatories to abolish the obstacle? It seemed grossly, inhumanly incredible: and yet I, or Rodney Hazzard, was the one who would profit most largely by the crime.

Again my thoughts flicked to the bright little business girl whose manner toward me was so curiously half aloof and half mandatory. She doubtless knew all the ins and outs of the tragedy. Could I contrive to make her tell me—without betraying my own utter ignorance of all the details?

It was a letter in the morning mail that gave me an opportunity, of a sort. Miss Judith was tidying up the office when I let myself in, and her greeting of me had been little more than a nod, and a glance of those transcendently beautiful—and unreadable—eyes. The letter in question bore the office heading of an attorney in a town named Shotwell, and the writer, who signed himself "T. J. Blantley," had evidently been employed by me—or Rodney Hazzard—in the dickering for the coal-land options. He wrote:

This world wouldn't be complete without the trouble makers. A man whom we both know—Parker Wayne—has been up here nosing into the quarrel between old Jeff Layne and his kin, and trying to make out that the killing wasn't altogether the result of the feud. I couldn't learn what his object was, or is, but I thought you ought to be tipped off. As nearly as I can judge, he seems to have been laying strings to mix you up in it. He let drop a few hints that have set people talking. Layne wouldn't agree to sell his Noble's Gap land, and Joab Layne, his next of kin and residuary legatee, was willing to give you an option, and, after Jeff's death, he did it. The hint Wayne left lying around was to the effect that you are the only man who benefited by the homicide.

It's a thousand pities Sheriff Quade didn't capture young Tryan before Tryan skipped the country after the shooting. Bud had his own reasons for killing Layne, and if he could have been brought into court he would have cleared the air. He is a tough youngster, but I believe he would tell the truth and shame the devil if he were brought to book.

If there is anything I can do at this end of the line, let me know. It is only talk, as yet, but you never can tell where the gossips will stop. In the meantime, if I might venture to advise, I would suggest that it would be well for you to close your deal at as early a date as possible. With a great corporation in actual possession and development work under way, the Layne episode will soon be forgotten. I shall be in Cincinnati for the next few days, but after that I'm entirely at your service.

After I had read this letter carefully twice, I turned to my silent and self-contained little helper.

"Miss Judith, I think you must have known, before I—er—went away, that I was a sick man?" I began.

"Were you?" she remarked, rather enigmatically, I thought.

"Everybody says I was, so I must have been," I returned. "And that brings on more talk: while I am perfectly well and fit now, so far as I can determine, my—er—sickness has left me a bit hazy, so to speak, about matters that went on before I turned up missing. I wish you'd read this letter and tell me what you make of it." And I handed her Attorney Blantley's scrawl.

"Well?" she queried, giving the letter back after the long-lashed, slumberous eyes had swept the page. "What is it you want me to tell you?"

"I wish you would refresh my memory about this Layne affair. I don't seem to recall that I was mixed up in it in any way."

She gave me the strangest look I have ever seen on a woman's face.

"You were not," she said promptly. Then came another bolt from the blue: "Why do you go on trying to keep up this farce with me, Mr. Hazzard? Surely you ought to know that you can trust me, at least."

"Well, then, I will trust you," I broke out impulsively. "I've simply got to trust somebody. I've lost my memory, Miss Judith—lost it completely."

Again she gave me that strange look.

"You have lost your——" She got that far and then stopped abruptly with a little toss of the pretty head, leaving the sentence in the air. Then, as from a new beginning, "Very well; if you wish to put it that way, I suppose I can play my part—only I don't see any sense in it. What is it you wish me to tell you about the Layne murder?"

"Everything you know about it."

Soberly she gave me the details, enlarging a bit upon Wayne's story. Jefferson Layne, a hard-headed old mountaineer, owned a hill farm in a certain mountain gap which offered the only practicable railroad approach to the valuable coal lands owned by other members of the Layne clan beyond and behind it. The old man had no use for modern progress—or for money, as it seemed—and had steadily refused to option his land. Out

of his stubbornness an old family feud had sprung alight and there had been bitter quarreling between the octogenarian and his kinsmen who wanted him to sell. One thing had brought on another until finally the old man had taken a tempery shot at another old man —one of his cousins. Whereupon a wild and rather dissolute son of the shot-at one had gone gunning for Layne and had killed him.

"And by that means the option on the Noble's Gap land was obtained?" I queried.

She nodded.

"It does look a little bad for me, doesn't it?" I said.

"It wouldn't look so if young Tryan hadn't been here so often during the negotiations for his father's land."

So I had hobnobbed with this young murderer in the past, it appeared. Quite possibly I had paid his town board bills and the like while he was dickering with me on behalf of his father. It gave me a mighty helpless feeling not to know exactly how far I had laid myself open to suspicion. I say "I," for by this time I was pretty well over the fence on the Rodney Hazzard side of things. It was foolish to go on denying the multiplied and constantly multiplying evidences on that score when I had nothing but a silly blank to set over against them.

It was while I sat mulling over the bewildering tangle that was growing more and more binding at every turn, that I chanced to glance at the little desk clock ticking away industriously in its paper-weight case. The hands were pointing to nine, and precisely upon the stroke of the hour the door of the outer office opened and I spun my chair in time to see Wayne letting himself in.

The sight of the blackmailer, coming thus to insist upon his security terms after the lesson he had had the night before, promptly started another brain storm, and the next thing I knew we were at it again, hammer and tongs; crashing over the furniture in the outer room, knocking the trestle legs from under the big drawing board to let it careen and break a window, surging against the light counter railing to wrench it loose from one of its wall anchorings, rough-housing the game like a pair of frantic cave men.

This time I didn't have quite such an easy victory. Wayne was short, but stubby and pretty solid on his feet, and he fought like a tiger. Moreover, he was ready for me, and his first move when he saw me coming was to whip an automatic out of a hip pocket. It was my efforts to get the gun away from him that brought on the office wreckage, and when I finally twisted it out of his hand, discretion got the better part of valor and the battle ended as the other one had—in a breakaway and a race for safety, the racer slamming the corridor door to baffle pursuit as he shot through it.

I guess I wasn't a very pretty object to look at as I strode back into the private office, puffing and blowing a bit, and more or less rumpled and disheveled by the rough-and-tumble wrestling match. Judie Bledsoe was sitting as I had left her, half crouching in her typewriter chair with her hands to her ears, but she didn't look half as shocked as she had a right to when I tossed the captured piece of artillery upon the desk with a gritted out, "That's *that!*" On the contrary, her lips were twitching as if she wanted to laugh. It was the sight of the weapon that made her say, with a little gasp:

"Good gracious!—was he—did he try to shoot you?"

"He may have had something like that in mind, but it didn't work out," I bragged. "If he ever shows his fat face in this office again, there'll be something doing!"

"My—oh, my!" she breathed; and then: "I'm rather glad, you know. He—he hasn't been very nice to me."

"Huh!" said I. "If I'd known that, I'd have broken him in two and thrown him out of the window!" And I meant it.

"I believe you could do it if you wanted to. What a perfectly splendid temper you have!"

"Haven't I always had temper enough?" I demanded.

She shook her head a bit doubtfully.

"How can I tell? You're so different from the Mr. Hazzard I thought I knew so well. You—he was always too easy and good-natured, especially with this Mr. Wayne. I—I think you must have lost a good many things besides your—er—memory, don't you know?"

"I haven't lost nearly as many as I'm going to lose, if you don't stand by me and help me remember a few things," I asserted solemnly. "Do you happen to know how much of a loan account is charged up against this office in the bank?"

"Yes, I know," she nodded.

"Well, you know what the money was borrowed for and where it went. Mr. Clegg

told me yesterday that I'd have to be doing something about those notes. Do you happen to know anything about a Mr. Muhlenberg?"

"Why—yes; I know that he has been here a number of times. He is the attorney for the New York people who want to buy the Guess Mountain lands."

"Was there any word from him while I was—um—away?"

"No."

I looked her squarely in the eyes and tried to remember that this was business and not sentiment—and it wasn't so easy to do.

"I can see that you don't more than half believe me when I tell you that I can't recollect; but——"

"Let that go," she broke in. "Ask me anything you like."

"All right; thank you. Were you present when this Mr. Muhlenberg was here last?"

"I was."

"You heard what was said?"

"Not all of it."

"Can you tell me where the hitch is in the land sale?"

"I can't. There didn't seem to be any. The New York people had tried very hard to beat us to it, but we beat them."

"I see," I said. "By cutting in ahead of them and getting the options."

"That was some time ago," she went on. "After they found that they had to do business with us instead of with the owners of the land, Mr. Muhlenberg came with a proposal. The last time he was here, I understood, from what was said, that the syndicate was willing to come to our terms, but that the land titles would have to be reëxamined by another guaranty company."

"Then, if everything proved satisfactory, the deal was to go through?" I asked.

"That is what I understood."

"Have we, or ought we to have, this Mr. Muhlenberg's address hidden away somewhere?"

"It would certainly seem as if we ought—though it isn't in the files."

"Very well," I replied; "help me to find it."

She came obediently, and together we began to ransack the big, roll-top desk. Her attitude toward me was still more or less puzzling. Her disbelief in the loss-of-memory plea was perfectly evident, and yet she seemed to accept it, in a way, and to be willing to help. As we pulled out the desk drawers and examined their contents together I found that the physical nearness of her affected me in quite a different manner from the limousine-seat proximity of Miss Alicia Treadway, and I found myself wondering why under the sun, in that past which was so completely bottled up, I had been so besotted as to prefer the cool-eyed, Junoesque daughter of much money to this warm-blooded, capable little beauty with whom, apparently, I had been in daily association for goodness knows how long.

While we were still rummaging, to no effect, it was purely a mad impulse that prompted me to say: "Did you tell me, before I went away, that you were going to be married, Miss Judith?"

"What a question!" she laughed; but she did not answer it with a "yes" or "no."

"I wonder if I could have dreamed it?" I suggested.

"How should I know what you have dreamed?"

"Quite so," I admitted; adding, "all the more, since I don't know, myself. This is a great old life we're living—if one doesn't weaken."

"Judging from what you did to Mr. Wayne a few minutes ago, I should say you are not the weakening kind," she put in; and, as she pulled out another of the desk drawers, "If you only hadn't tried to make me believe that you had lost your memory."

"I didn't want to tell you that," I qualified.

"Then why did you?"

"Because it is the truth, and I had to tell you."

She sat back in the chair she had drawn up, with a bunch of papers in her lap; sat back and gave me a sort of Mona Lisa smile.

"It was awfully clumsy, you know; and altogether unnecessary; at least, with me, and—well—er—with Miss Treadway. I can understand how you might not wish to tell other people, after you found out that they didn't need to know. But with Miss Alicia and me——"

As nearly as I could make out, this dark-eyed little mixture of hard common sense and bewitching loveliness still thought I had been lying to her about the memory lapse. More than this, it was quite apparent that she was keeping something back that she knew, or thought she knew, a lot more than she was willing to put into words.

"We don't seem to be finding out very rapidly what Mr. Muhlenberg's address is," I remarked, as we turned over the contents of the last of the desk drawers, "and without it I can't make a move. Meanwhile, the situation in the bank downstairs is growing sort of *cálido*."

"'*Cálido?*' What is that?" she asked.

"'*Cálido*' is Spanish for 'warm,'" I explained. "Didn't you ever hear me use any Spanish words?"

"Never," she denied soberly. "But it is quite natural that you should use them."

Here was another little layer to add to the thickening mass of puzzles. Why should she say anything like that? Why, if she had never heard me use Spanish, should she remark that it was quite natural that I should use it? It was maddening.

I was wandering in the maze into which these and the other bewildering and befogging questions led when the door of the outer office swung wide to admit a big, two-fisted brother who looked as if he might be a foreman of laborers on a construction job. As one who knew precisely what he was about, he came on in, tapping me on the shoulder, and flipped the lapel of his coat to show me a silver star.

"You're arrested on a wire from the sheriff o' Talbot County," he grunted. "Orders to hold yuh till they can send down for yuh. Reckon yuh'll come along peaceable? Or will I——" and he jingled something that clinked ominously in his coat pocket.

"What's the charge?" I demanded, struggling to my feet.

"Dunno," he returned sourly. "Mebbe the gran' jury up at Shotwell's a-layin' of to ask yuh a few questions about the way ol' man Layne come to get hisself shot up. Yuh'll find out when you get there. Let's be goin'."

I reached for my hat, with my brain in a whirl. This was as swift as the snappy return of a hit punching bag. Whatever else might be said of him, Mr. Parker Wayne had certainly slept no great while upon his wrongs.

CHAPTER VIII.

When the burly deputy tapped me on the shoulder and told me I was under arrest, Judie Bledsoe gave a little suppressed shriek and dropped her lapful of papers. But the next minute she got her grip again.

"Won't you please let me have a word with Mr. Hazzard before you take him away?" she begged of the burly one, with honey on her tongue.

"Make it short," he grated, and went into the outer room.

"They can't prove a single thing against you!" she protested, in a feverish whisper, when the big man's back was turned. "If it comes to the worst, you must let me know. Promise me that!"

"Then you know more than you have told me?" I asked.

"I know everything. But I—I'll keep your foolish secret until you tell me that I don't need to—or until I have to tell it. And I'll go on trying to find out how Mr. Muhlenberg can be reached. You'll trust me that far, won't you?"

"I'd trust you with my head. But this begins to look rather fierce. If I only knew how much or little I'm mixed up in this Layne murder——"

"You are not mixed up in it at all! You must know, perfectly well, that you are not; but if you don't know it, *I* do!"

The deputy was coming in and my short reprieve was ended. To put as good a face as possible upon the matter, I said, so that he could hear:

"There is nothing to this, Miss Judith. Just keep the office open, as usual, and when you have time, call up Mr. Fred Norman and tell him what has happened."

As we were passing out through the anteroom my captor noticed the shattered windowpane and wrecked furniture.

"Been breakin' up housekeepin'?" he interrogated.

"Little scrap with a holdup man," I explained. "He tried to pull a gun on me—did pull one on me—and I took it away from him and threw him out."

"Huh!" he remarked, as we were pacing the corridor together. "They didn't tell me yuh was a scrapper. Maybe I'd better put the 'come-alongs' on yuh, after all."

"Don't worry," I laughed. "I'm crazy, I suppose, but not crazy enough to try to mix it with an officer of the law. Where are we headed for—the county jail?"

"You're a mighty good little guesser," he returned.

At the county institution for transgressors I got some little consideration from the sheriff, a lean, lank man with rather shifty eyes, but with the manner of a bluff and genial tavern keeper.

"Mighty sorry to have to rile the water for you this a way, Mistuh Hazzard," he said, in a slow, Southern drawl, "but a wire re-qui-sition f'om another county don't give us no leeway." Then to the deputy, "Take Mistuh Hazzard upstairs to Number Two and let him send for anybody he wants to see. I don't reckon Quade'll be down for him till some time this afte'noon."

The prison cell to which I was conducted was a plainly furnished sleeping room in the second story of the jail office, and, apart from the locked door and the barred windows, there was little suggestion of a prison about it. Left to myself, I began to try to piece the possibilities together. How far could Wayne go in his attempt to involve me in the Layne murder? If I were to take Judie Bledsoe's impassioned whisper at its face value, I might believe myself entirely innocent; but between this belief and the proving of it there was a great gulf fixed, as the Good Book says.

One point seemed reasonably clear. Wayne was out for money, and the mere fact of getting me accused of complicity in a murder wasn't going to enable him to arrive anywhere in the money field. So long as the land options remained locked up in my safety box, there would be nothing doing in Finance Street. Just the same, I did wish most heartily that I could remember a few things.

With plenty of time in which to gather my mind, I bethought me of the sheriff's permission to shout for help. The enlistment of an able lawyer seemed to be the first and most important requisite, and doubtless, in my former incarnation, I had had—must have had—a good legal adviser; the careful manner in which the options had been prepared told me that much. Why hadn't I asked Judie Bledsoe who my attorney was? I was metaphorically flagellating myself for this omission when a key rasped in the lock of the door, the bolt was shot, and Mr. Frederic Norman breezed in.

"Great land, Rodney, old man!" he ejaculated, wringing my hand sympathetically, "this is something fierce!" Then, "I came as soon as I got the word. I happened to be out when Judie telephoned first. What on top of the footstool are they trying to do to you now?"

I told him as much as I could—which was mighty little: how I had been accused by somebody of complicity in the killing of an old mountaineer up-State—a man who had been blocking a deal on some coal lands—the deal we had talked about the day before. On the strength of that accusation I was to be taken before the grand jury of Talbot County.

"Rot!" said Rodney Hazzard's good friend. "Somebody must have been having fried brains for breakfast! But Berwick will pull you out of this all right. Have you sent for him?"

Here was my hope of salvation again, handed me on a silver platter, as one might say. Berwick was doubtless the attorney whose name I couldn't recall.

"No," I confessed, "I haven't sent for him. To tell the plain truth, this thing hit me so unexpectedly that I——"

"Of course," he agreed; "it would knock anybody out of the box. I'll go dig Berwick up myself and get him here in a holy jiffy. How much time have you got before they ship you off to Talbot County?"

I told him what the sheriff had said about the other sheriff's afternoon probability.

"A rough road and an auto drive," said Norman; "there is no afternoon train. But you won't mind the drive. I suppose you've made it often enough to be used to it by this time."

I said "Yes," because I supposed I was used to the drive, if he thought I was. But if I had ever driven anywhere out of South Tredegar, the fact was still eluding me.

"I snatched a minute to tell Gordon about your arrest," Norman went on. "He says it's an outrage, and that is what all of your friends will say. If it should happen to develop into anything serious, you'll have plenty of backing. Now I'll chase out and find Berwick and get him up here. Anything else I can do for you on the outside?"

"Nothing that I think of—except to tell Miss Judith she's not to worry about me."

"There is a mighty fine little girl, Rod—one in a thousand. I don't believe you more than half appreciate what a treasure you have in her. But, of course, you wouldn't—while you're carrying an eyeful of Alicia Treadway. That reminds me: how is Alicia going to take this arrest-and-prosecution business?—or, rather, I should say, how is old Josiah going to take it?"

"Alicia will take it sensibly, I am sure," I ventured to forecast. "As for her father—well, I'm afraid I'm in rather bad in that quarter, Fred."

"I've guessed as much. But if you can emulate Little Jack Horner—put in your thumb and pull out a plum, you know—the old man will forgive you. Poverty is the one thing he doesn't forgive."

"Here's hoping," I smiled; and at that Norman left on his errand of succor.

I had waited less than half an hour when there came another rattling of the key in the lock, and my lawyer was with me; an undersized, alert little man, with cool, gray eyes, an aggressive nose, a mouth that was a mere straight line, and the jaw of a stubborn fighter.

"Well, well, Rodney, my boy!—they told me yesterday you were back in town, and I've been looking for you to drop in on me," he began. Then he made the customary comment upon my changed appearance. "If I didn't know you so well, I shouldn't recognize you, with that clean shave. But what have you been doing to get yourself behind the bars?"

Once more I briefed the facts, only this time I made them a little more circumstantial, inserting Mr. Parker Wayne in his proper place in the account.

"Ha!" said my attentive listener. "So Wayne has shown his hand at last, has he? I told you he was holding something in the background, as you will remember."

"As I don't remember," I returned, seeing at once that there was no use trying to keep my immense handicap concealed from my lawyer—not if I expected him to defend me intelligently.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Just what I say. I don't remember your telling me anything at all. As a matter of fact, I don't even remember you, Mr. Berwick," and with that I described the crude, amnesic misfortune which had befallen me.

"You've been to see a doctor?" he queried.

"It was the first thing I did, yesterday; morning, Wentworth, the nerve specialist in the Severance Building. It puzzled him as much as it puzzles me. Everybody tells me that I was a sick man when I went away some ten days ago, and this thing, whatever it is, may have been coming on at that time. However that may be, it is here and with me now. I can't recall a single happening that dates back of six o'clock yesterday morning."

The little lawyer's thin lips grew thinner as he pressed them together and shook his head.

"That certainly complicates matters rather desperately for us, Rodney, as you must see. Have you told anybody else about this —ah—memory lapse?"

"The doctor, Miss Judith Bledsoe, and Miss Alicia Treadway. The doctor accepts it in all seriousness; Miss Treadway brushes it aside as a matter of no moment—though it is only fair to her to say that I didn't go very deeply into particulars with her; and Miss Judith doesn't believe it at all."

"What reason has she for doubting it?"

"I wish I knew."

He jumped up, walked to a window, and stood for a time jingling the keys in his pocket. When he turned back to me it was to say: "That this should have come upon you just now is little short of a calamity, Rodney; but I suppose we shall have to accept it and do the best we can, hoping that your memory machinery will start up again in time to help us out. I'm assuming that you can't recall having had any dealings at all with this young hothead, Tryan, who did the shooting?"

"Naturally not."

"Tryan's father owns one of the most promising of the coal tracts on Guess Mountain, and like most of the others it was shut off from any possible transportation line by Layne's refusal to sell even a right of way for a spur track through Noble's Gap. Young Tryan did all the figuring with you on his father's property; was down here a number of times to confer with you. You were hospitable to him, as you would have been to any prospective seller. This will be used against you."

"Doubtless," I agreed. "I probably paid his railroad fare and hotel bills."

"You did this on one occasion that I know of, and there were most likely others. In ordinary circumstances I should merely advise you to tell the grand jury exactly and precisely what your relations were with young Tryan. That would probably be sufficient to clear you. But your affliction makes that course impossible; you don't know what you said to Tryan, or what he said to you. So we have the choice of two alternatives: Will you tell the jurors frankly just what has happened to you?"

"If I tell them they won't believe it—nobody would."

"I am afraid you are right as to that. We must do what we can in the time at our disposal and trust something to luck. Is Sheriff Quade coming after you himself?"

"I inferred as much from what the sheriff downstairs said."

"All right. No doubt Quade will drive down, and I'll ask for a seat in his auto going back. Meanwhile, I'll gather up all the facts that can be had here in town, and arrange for your bond—if it should turn out that you need to be bailed."

"Have I friends here who would go the length of bailing me on a murder charge?" I asked.

"You certainly have—any number of them," was the brisk rejoinder. "If I weren't your counsel, I'd be one of the signers myself."

This piece of unmitigated loyalty nearly brought the tears to my eyes.

"You'd have to stand in my shoes, Mr. Berwick, to know how good that sounds to me," I broke out. "So far as I know, or can tell from anything inside of me, I am a stranger in a strange land. Why, I don't even know my way about in this town where, as it seems, I have friends at every turn. Surely no other man has ever had such an experience as this in the history of the world!"

"Oh, I don't know," said this level-headed, little attorney. "Shakespeare puts it into the mouth of *Hamlet* to say, 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamed of in your philosophy,' and that is as true now as it was in the sixteenth century. I'll trot along and get busy."

It was not until he was about to rattle the door as a summons for the turnkey to come and let him out that I recalled one small thing I had omitted to tell him.

"Just a minute," I said. "I have told you something of Miss Judith's attitude—an attitude that I can't begin to understand or explain. This morning when I was arrested she was quite excited, as a matter of course. She begged for a minute alone with me and got it. What she wanted to do, and did do, was to assure me that I wasn't guilty, and to beg me not to let anybody make me believe that I was. In the same breath she told me I must call her in, if things came to the worst."

"That is a ray of hope," was the consoling comment. "Most likely Miss Judie knows more about your relations with young Tryan than all the rest of us put together. Anything else?"

"Nothing that I can think of."

"I'll be around again this afternoon, ready to go along with you to Talbot County."

After he was gone I had still more time in which to think over my prospects. The windows of the upper room commanded a view of the street and a stately building opposite which I took to be the courthouse. On the stone steps leading up to the higher ground of the courthouse yard I saw the bank detective killing time and watching the rat hole.

This flashily dressed shadower would tell Cashier Clegg of my predicament, and Clegg would report to Mr. Josiah Treadway. And, if I had read Mr. Treadway's sour-apple face aright, he would tell his daughter. What would Alicia do? Also, what would the bank do when it found that its debtor had been arrested on a charge of murder? Plenty, probably!

In due time the surly deputy came to the door to ask if I'd have a jail dinner, or if I wanted to send out and buy the meal at the "caffay" around the corner. I gave him money to cover the price of a luncheon commensurate with my ever-ready appetite, and a liberal margin for himself.

After a short interval a huge tray was brought in, loaded with food enough for two ordinary persons. Just as I was sitting down, the handsome, wine-colored limousine whose luxurious upholstering I had shared twenty-four hours earlier with Alicia Treadway, drew up in front of the jail, and Alicia herself, radiantly Junoesque, stepped out over the running board. I groaned, and lost some of the keener edges of that fine appetite.

I made no doubt that Alicia would honeyfugle her way past the outer and inner guard, and she did it. I had no more than struggled to my feet when the door was opened to admit her.

"Oh, you poor, poor boy!" she burst out. "What are they trying to do to you now?"

I made her sit down and listen to my sorry tale of woe; treating it as lightly as I could, and trying to make it appear as nothing worse than a poor joke. Happily, she proved to be easily convinced.

"And you were just going to have your luncheon?" she cried, indicating the napkin-covered tray. "How nice! Yesterday we ate together at the Town and Country, and to-day we eat in jail! You'll let me share with you, won't you?"

Luckily there were two chairs, and we sat down and uncovered the feast. There was

enough and to spare, and we made merry over it; or, at least, my charming tablemate did. For my own part, I am free to confess that the mirth was only from the lips outward. Try as I would to make it quit, the back part of my brain was continually staging a scene in which a stolid group of my peers was listening to my halting, stumbling testimony in my own behalf, becoming more and more incredulous as the stumbling progressed, and finally bringing in a true bill against me as an accessory before the fact to the murder of one Jefferson Layne.

And this wasn't all—or even the worst. Like a sentence of doom it was borne in upon me as we talked that whatever sentiment I had entertained toward this lovely and affectionate young woman in the past, she was now no more to me than a charmingly sympathetic acquaintance. Even now, as I sat across the tray from her, twisting my lips into a sham grin as we jested over the prison meal, the image of another young woman—a girl with slumberous, black eyes and a wealth of dark hair—was constantly coming between.

With her hunger satisfied, my handsome goddess sat back and regarded me with a thoughtful gaze.

"Don't you know, Roddy, you've changed enormously in these few days you've been away," she asserted.

"In looks, you mean?"

"Not so much that; shaving your beard and mustache would make you look different, of course. But in other ways: your voice isn't quite the same, and you talk so differently, and—oh, I don't know; I can't put it in words; but you don't seem to look at things in the same way. Why, if a thing like this arrest had happened to you two weeks ago, you would have flown all to pieces."

At this I summoned the sham grin again.

"Maybe I am flying all to pieces—inside—right now."

"You are not. In the old days you used to say that I was the strong one; and, really, you know, you did lean on me—and I liked it. But you are not leaning on me now."

"The times change, and we change with them," I said, offering no excuse for the banality.

"I wonder?" she queried. And, after a little pause: "I've changed, too, Roddy. Don't ask me how; I can't tell. But, somehow, I feel as if I should have to get acquainted with you all over again. Yesterday I gave you a chance to kiss me—in the car, you know. If you had taken it, I believe I should have screamed. You'll be patient with me, won't you?"

"If you need patience—surely."

"I'm going to need it. At this very minute I ought to be trying to buck you up to face whatever it is you have to face up at Shotwell: if you were the Roddy of two weeks ago I should be doing it."

"But you said I was a sick man two weeks ago."

"You were; sick and nervous, and—you won't mind it if I say it now?—half in terror of Parker Wayne. You wouldn't tell me why."

"Um," said I; "I've had two short interviews with Mr. Parker Wayne since we were at luncheon together yesterday, you and I. One was in my rooms at the Marlboro last night, when I threw him into the corridor and chased him to the elevators; the other was in my office this morning, when the performance was repeated."

"Roddy!" she gasped. "Why, of all things!" Then, "There it is again. Two weeks ago, or at any other time I've known you, you wouldn't have thought of doing such a thing as that! You—why, you *couldn't* have done it!"

"Which only goes to prove that you haven't known all the different facets of me," I smiled; adding: "It is a poor sort of man who won't fight for his own hand."

Again that far-away look came into her wide-set blue eyes.

"You are needing me less and less," she murmured half regretfully. And, with a mirthless little laugh, "What will they do to you in Shotwell—lock you up in jail? And if they do, what will become of the Big Deal that you haven't half told me about yet?"

I explained that what was immediately awaiting me was an appearance before the grand jury; that if that body found a true bill against me, I would be bound over to stand trial. Also, I told her that Berwick was going along with me, and that, in case I should be bound over, he would be prepared to furnish bail for me.

"Which means that, in any event, you'll be back soon?"

"That is the probability."

"I do hope you won't have to stay long,"

she said, as she prepared to go. Then with the pretty eyes downcast, "You—you've borrowed a lot of money from the bank, haven't you?"

"They tell me I have," I laughed.

"It isn't any laughing matter," she averred, shaking her head. "Daddy is almost having a fit over what is happening to you now."

"We can't blame him so awfully much," I returned; and just at this point in the talk the turnkey came; not only to let Miss Treadway out, but to tell me that Sheriff Quade had come, and that he and Mr. Berwick were waiting for me in the jail office.

CHAPTER IX.

Alicia shook hands with me in comradely fashion, wished me luck, and tripped out to her waiting car. Then I turned to my new jailer to give him the once-over, and got a bit of a jolt when he, too, shook hands quite heartily with me and called me by name.

"It's a tolerably sorry job they've loaded onto me, this time, Mr. Hazzard," he said, with a good-natured grin spreading itself over his broad-featured face. "Here's hopin' it'll blow up when they come to touch a match to it. I could promise you sure enough it would, if we hadn't drawn a bunch of old Jeff Layne's kind on the gran' jury."

"Then you didn't bring the handcuffs and leg irons along?" I bantered, trying to match his jollying mood.

"For you? Not so's you could notice it any: you-all've been too mighty white to me in days gone by. I ain't forgot the good fee money you and Mr. Berwick, here, shoved my way when you was gettin' up them land papers."

It was here that Berwick cut in to ask upon what grounds the Shotwell grand jury had caused my arrest. Quade readily told us all he knew about it. Early in the forenoon somebody had called up the county attorney's office on long-distance from South Tredegar, and on the strength of that call a warrant had been issued for me. Quade couldn't say who had done the telephoning, but I made no doubt it was Wayne.

When we reached the sidewalk the sheriff became apologetic for his car.

"Sorry I ain't got nothin' but the flivver for you-all to ride in. Maybe you'd like to take your own car, Mr. Hazzard? If you would, we'll leave the li'l' old flivver here, and I can send one o' the boys down after it."

This was my first intimation that I owned a car.

"Better take your own wagon, Rodney," advised Berwick. "It will ride easier than this thing of Quade's, and I'm getting old enough to appreciate the luxuries. Let me see; you keep your car in Blick's garage, don't you? If you'll drive us around there, Quade, we'll make the swap."

On the way to the garage which, as it appeared, was across town and in the neighborhood of the Cupola Club, I was tormented by the fear that, since we were going to take my car, I might be expected to drive it. If I hadn't lost the "know how" along with my memory, I might be able to handle the controls; but one thing was certain—I didn't know the road to Shotwell, or even which way to turn to get started upon it.

When we reached the storage place I discovered that I was the possessor of an exceedingly smart, high-powered, four-seater machine. Catching at a straw, I turned to the sheriff when I saw him looking the car over with the eye of an auto enthusiast.

"You are going to do me the favor of taking the wheel on this trip, Mr. Quade," I told him in my best manner; and the readiness with which he accepted proved that I hadn't missed my guess as to the enthusiasm.

On the sixty-odd-mile drive over mountain roads that sometimes seemed vaguely familiar and at others convinced me beyond doubt that I was seeing them for the first time, I had ample opportunity to talk things over with Berwick; and it was thus, and indirectly, as one might say, that my arrest proved a blessing in disguise. Since he had drawn all the papers in the Guess Mountain options, Berwick was able to tell me a lot of the things that I didn't know. But for the arrest it might have been a long time before I should have discovered that I had had a lawyer.

It appeared that for months a huge aggregation of Northern capital had been reaching out after these particular coal lands upon which I now held options. In the face of stupendous difficulties, I, with only the capital that I had persuaded the bank to advance me, had fought a pitched battle with the forces of Big Money, and had neatly outflanked them. Instead of dealing with a

parcel of unlettered mountaineers, the buying syndicate now had to deal with me.

"I'll give you all the credit you want, Rodney, and admit that you've earned it," Berwick said at the wind-up. "It is just as I've told you all along; you belong in a much bigger field than South Tredegar can give you. You have simply had nerve to burn, all the way through this deal. I don't wonder it made your brain slip a cog at the last."

It didn't seem to me that I'd ever had exactly the kind of nerve he was describing, but I let the assertion ride.

"About this man Wayne," I interpolated, pulling the talk down to matters present and pressing: "Is there anything more than sheer cupidity in his motive?"

"I have been considering that. As you would know, if you could remember, his business in South Tredegar has never been very obvious. He poses as a stock and bond salesman, but it was you yourself who first gave me the idea that the business front was only a mask for something else."

"For a bit of underground work in behalf of the coal trust?" I suggested.

"Perhaps," said Berwick, nodding gravely. "That may have been his object in coming South. But if he found that he could make a bigger stake out of you than out of them, I fancy he wouldn't hesitate to shift his ground. Or he may be playing both ends against the middle. So far, you say, he has failed to hold you up; continuing to fail, his next best play would be to smash your deal in the interest of the trust, which would doubtless reward him quite handsomely for such a service."

"I see," I said; and then, thinking it only fair that my lawyer should know all the facts, I told him that Wayne had another motive for wishing to efface me; namely, his designs upon Miss Alicia Treadway.

"That, I imagine, is purely a side issue," was my adviser's comment. "However, it may cut some figure. A woman in the case usually does."

For some little time our car had been descending a rough mountain road, the lower loopings of which were leading us to a cove-like valley in which nestled the county seat to which we were destined. It was sunset in the valley by the time we reached the shabby country town built in the stereotyped fashion about the four sides of a court-house square, though the upper air was still flooded with level rays of sunlight. That it was "court session" was evinced by the number of people in and around the square, and the teams and cars parked in the open spaces.

Most naturally, I expected to be taken to the jail, but when Quade switched the motor off, the car was stopped in front of a tavern which looked as if it might date back to the Andrew Jackson period at the very least.

"You're not going to lock me up, sheriff?" I asked.

"I reckon I don't have to," he returned, with his good-natured grin. "I'm a-remandin' you to the custody of your attorney."

Again I seemed to have fallen among friends; or, at any rate, into the hands of one good friend; and when Quade drove away I was free to follow Berwick into the rambling old inn, where, it presently appeared, I was known almost, if not quite, as well as I was in South Tredegar.

"Been a-missin' you right smart for a week 'r two back, Mr. Hazzard," said the gray-bearded patriarch behind the pine counter which did duty for a desk in the tavern office. And then, in answer to Berwick's query: "Room? You're mighty right, Mr. Berwick; we've always got a room for you and Mr. Hazzard. Ain't been to supper, I allow?"

Berwick said we hadn't; and a little later we filed into the long, low-ceiled dining room with the throng of office loiterers, made up, so Berwick said, of about equal parts of country litigants and their lawyers, and were given a homelike meal. It was while we were at the supper table that Berwick pointed out a slope-shouldered man with thin, red hair, a lean and hungry face, high cheek bones, and a pair of angry eyes, eating his supper at another table.

"That is Scarron—county attorney," he told me. "He is the man who will try to make trouble for you to-morrow. Have you met him before?"

"You forget," I replied. "I shouldn't know it if I'd met him a dozen times. He looks as if he might be a terror to evil-doers."

"He is," was the succinct answer; and later, when we were trying to burn a couple of our patriarchal host's terrible cigars on the tavern porch, Berwick enlarged a bit upon this phase of Attorney Scarron's character. The man was a country lawyer who had battered his way up to the elective office

by sheer hard knocks; an honest man but a bitter one. His methods with a grand jury were simple—and primitive. Though a prosecutor's relation to the indicting body is supposed to be strictly advisory, it was his practice to prepare his bills beforehand, and unless some hard-headed talesman fought him down, he would use the grand jury merely as a rubber stamp to confirm the indictments already drawn.

"That is probably what he will try to do in our case," Berwick predicted. "If he does, you'll have to put up the best fight you can, and do it off your own bat. I shall not be allowed to appear with you. You still think you won't tell them what has happened to your memory?"

I shook my head. "You don't dare to advise it."

"No," he said, "I don't. The average person—to say nothing of the average juror—wouldn't believe it; not without better proof than you will be able to offer. It looks as if you would have to go it blind, trusting something to luck. After you go to bed, I'll pry around a bit and see if I can find out, through Quade or somebody else, what evidence they think they have against you."

Taking the hint thus offered, I retired early to the big double room which had been assigned us, went to bed, and slept so soundly that I did not know when Berwick came in. The next morning, while we were taking turns at the single washstand the room afforded, Berwick told me the net result of his pryings. So far as he could learn, Scarron had no direct evidence against me. My implication in the murder rested, or seemed to rest, upon my dealings with "Bud" Tryan, and upon the fact that I had profited, or was to profit, by the death of Jefferson Layne.

After a breakfast of ham and eggs, country sausage, and hot biscuits, to which, strange as it may seem, I brought a magnificent appetite, Quade came for me and I was escorted across to the weathered old courthouse. A rather unnerving interval of waiting intervened, and then my case was called and I was ushered into the grand-jury room. One glance at the assembled talesmen told me what I was up against. Most likely it was only the average country jury, but I fancied I could see "hangman" written upon every sober face of it.

In a rasping voice that made me think of a cat sharpening her claws on the bark of a tree, Scarron read his notes to the jury. The facts upon which the indicting body was to make its finding were briefly these: I had been in close association with the Tryans from the beginning of the negotiations for the mountain coal lands; I had frequently paid Bud Tryan's railroad fare to South Tredegar, and his hotel bills while there; I had paid him other moneys from time to time, and it had been Bud Tryan's boast—as would be proved upon trial—that the coal-land deal would go through, "even if it had to ride over Jeff Layne's grave." Finally, the jury should give due weight to the fact that I was the person to be benefited most by Layne's death and the passing of his property to an heir who was willing to dispose of, and did so dispose of, the option which Layne had refused to give.

Thereupon I got a grilling which lasted for a full hour, and which was little short of the "third degree." If there was anything those hard-eyed valley farmers and mountaineers didn't ask me, it must have been something they had inadvertently forgotten. Again and again I made sure they had me cornered, nipped in a vise from which the only way of escape lay in a frank confession of the facts in the matter of the lost memory; but each time I contrived, some way, to slip aside and so to postpone the evil moment.

It ended at last, but I saw only too plainly that I had succeeded in merely deepening whatever measure of suspicion my inquisitors had entertained in the beginning. I had admitted the dealings with young Tryan, the paying of his expenses, and all that, putting these outlays upon the ground of mere business courtesies; but it was evident that few, if any, of the hard-headed ones were giving me the benefit of the doubt when I was finally dismissed and turned over to Sheriff Quade.

"Well?" queried Berwick, when the three of us forgathered in the dingy corridor.

I told him and Quade what had happened in the jury room, and the thin-lipped little attorney shook his head.

"Scarron will swing them his way, as he always does," he prophesied. "We may as well go down to the courtroom. We won't have long to wait."

Once more Berwick proved to be a true prophet. We had waited scarcely half an hour when court proceedings were inter-

rupted by a communication from the grand jury and we knew the worst. A true bill had been found against me as an accessory before the fact to the murder of Jefferson Layne.

CHAPTER X.

The fact that I was formally accused of, and indicted for, a crime the very existence of which I had known only two days, and at that, only by hearsay, came with a good bit of a shock. But Berwick eased the impact of the blow somewhat by saying that the motto of the average grand jury was, "When in doubt, indict."

"It simply means that we have our day in court," he went on, whispering to me while the judge was making his notes. "The charge is absurd, of course, and we'll be able to show it up all right. I'll ask to have your trial put over to the fall term, and perhaps by that time——"

"Let's have it over quickly—the quicker the sooner," I begged. "I'd choke to death if I had to have this thing hanging over me for the next six months. Besides, it will kill the coal-land deal dead in its tracks. Those New York people won't make another move until this business is cleared up; they'd be fools if they should!"

Berwick nodded.

"I'm game for a quick decision, if you are."

And with that he went with the other lawyers to the judge's desk where there was a bit of low-toned talk, and, as I supposed, some rearranging of the docket. Next I saw Berwick take a paper from his pocket, and I assumed that he was making my bond—which he was. When he came back it was to tell me that I was released on bail, and that my trial was set for the following Thursday.

The court business disposed of, Quade brought my car around, and with Berwick for a seatmate I took the wheel for the drive back to South Tredegar, though not without some little uncertainty, both as to my driving skill and the ability to find the way. As for the car handling, that doubt vanished with the first shifting of gears. Though I could have sworn that I had never seen the car before my introduction to it the previous day, the instinctive and purely mechanical readiness with which I was able to drive it seemed to give the lie direct to any such assumption.

On the other count—the finding of the way—there was little chance of going astray. There was but the one road leading over the mountains to the southward, and with its course fresh in mind, I was able to take it in reverse and to make better time over it than Quade had made—being less concerned, perhaps, than he was over the chance of breakage and repairs. I was anxious to get back and get my hand on the throttle of my sadly entangled affairs.

Berwick didn't have much to say as we tore along over the return road, possibly because he was kept too busily occupied holding himself in his seat in the bounding, lurching machine. One remark of his I do recall, however, and that was to the effect that my short vacation had given me a new and altogether different driving nerve.

It was on the final ten-mile fraction of the race, when we had come into the stretch of oiled pike leading to the city where the jouncing gave place to a smooth straightaway, that he talked a bit more, telling me, among other things, that Gordon, president of the Chiawassee Company, and Mr. Dan Dandridge, one of the principal stockholders in Mussel Bar Power & Light, had signed my bail bond.

"Again you titivate the grateful nerve," I said. "Do I know these gentlemen personally?"

"I can't say as to that," he answered, with a grim little smile. "But they know you very well, indeed. You've played golf with both of 'em, and you've probably been a week-end guest more than once in both of their homes."

"Um," said I; "presidents of iron companies and heavy stockholders in public utilities: so that is the sort of crowd I run with, is it? It is no wonder that I owe the Security Bank a small fortune."

Though I had my eyes on the road, I knew he was regarding me curiously.

"It is almost uncanny to hear you talk that way," he remarked; "as if you were a total stranger to all the people you know, or ought to know, so well. Can't you remember anything at all of this near-by past of yours, Rodney?"

I was easing the car down the final long hill, with the city less than a mile away.

"Not only that," I amended; "but, even more than at first, everything connected with South Tredegar and my placing in it seems utterly strange and unaccustomed. I feel

as if I didn't 'belong,' and the feeling grows upon me in spite of all the multiplied and multiplying evidences that I *must* 'belong.'"

"You didn't recognize anybody or anything over at Shotwell?"

"Not in the slightest degree. And yet I must have been there a good many times."

"You have been; I've been with you a number of the times. You have passed through a most curious transformation of some sort, Rodney. It is almost like an exchange of personalities. I've been studying you closely on this trip, and in many ways you are a totally different man. The mere loss of memory wouldn't seem to be sufficient to account for the changes in you."

"Could you schedule the changes?" I asked.

"I can sum them up better than I can catalogue them. Your point of view, your outlook upon life, seems to have been completely reorganized. For example: if what you went through yesterday and this morning had come upon you two weeks ago, you would have been a swift candidate for the ambulance and a rush drive to the nearest hospital. You were a bundle of sensitive nerves then, as you'd always been in my acquaintance with you; quick, keen, alert in business, but ready to fly into pieces if the pressure became too great. If you haven't swapped souls with somebody else, you have certainly worked a marvelous change of base in yourself."

Berwick's description of the Rodney Hazzard of the near-by past awoke a curious feeling of half recollection in me, as if somewhere in the dim and faded background I had once known a person it would fit. But if that person were my other self, all traces of the former characterization had vanished. Letting the involvements—the terrifying bank debt, the lost trail of the big deal, my engagement to a young woman for whom I had as yet no spark of the love that demands marriage, Wayne's bold machinations, and now finally this indictment on a charge of murder—letting all these misfortunes stand at their worst, I was still far from being ready "to fly into pieces," as Berwick put it. Quite the contrary, each added buffet thus far had served only to arouse a shrewder fighting spirit in me.

"I can't understand the thing any better than you can," I told Berwick, as the car swung up to the approach to one of the two South Tredegar bridges. "But I can assure you that I couldn't possibly feel readier to go to the mat with a bunch of difficulties than I do at this moment. I may wind up as a total failure, and with a life sentence to the penitentiary, but there has to be considerable 'showing' done, and some harder knocks than I've had yet, before I go down for the count."

"By George!" exclaimed the little attorney, warming up enough to put a hand on my arm, "it is worth a good half of my fee to hear you talk that way, Rodney. For weeks I've been trying to pump a little of the real fighting juice into you—the stand up and give and take, you know—and here you've gone off somewhere and soaked yourself full of it while my back was turned!"

After I had dropped Berwick at his office, I drove the car to its garage, got a hearty luncheon at the club, and then hastened around to the office. Miss Judie Bledsoe, as alluringly attractive as a ripe peach, was clattering away at her typewriter when I entered, but at sight of me she sprang up quickly with a little cry either of welcome or relief.

"Oh, I'm so glad you are back!" she burst out. "Another day like yesterday and today would have finished me! What did they do to you at Shotwell?"

"Indicted me on the murder charge," I said; and because those unfathomable eyes of hers began to grow horrifiedly large, I tried to turn it off lightly. "An indictment isn't a trial, you must remember; and even a trial isn't necessarily a conviction. What's been happening on the firing line?"

"Everything!" she panted. "There is a notice from the bank saying that they must positively cancel your loan at once, and Mr. Drew, the assistant cashier, has been up here twice since the bank opened this morning, asking what I'd heard, and when you were expected, and a thousand other things. And ever since yesterday morning, people have been dropping in to pry around, trying to find out why you were arrested, and what you'd been doing. It's been simply maddening!"

"So it must have been," I sympathized. "I should have told you to lock the office and go home. That would have been the easy way out of it. But I'm here now and ready for the fray. Where is that bank notice?"

She found it for me; a formal letter from Clegg telling me in curt business phrases that

my demand notes were now due and collectible, and asking me to call at once and take up the loan. This was a summons that couldn't safely be ignored, so I hustled down to the bank to have it out with my masters, the money lenders.

Clegg, after he had taken me into a small empty room with "President" in black lettering on its glass door, was coldly impersonal. In view of what had taken place I must understand that it was impossible for the bank to carry me any longer. I had already been given more time than I had asked for when the loan was made, and something must be done at once. The bank was always reluctant to go to extremes with its customers, but—and so forth and so on.

Instead of being scared stiff, as I suppose I should have been, I found myself growing militantly confident as Clegg handed out his formal phrases.

"And if I say I can't pay on any such short notice as this?" I asked, after he was quite through.

"In that case we shall have to realize upon your collateral."

My jaw dropped. Here was an entirely new twist to the tangle. If I had stopped to think of it, I might have known that I must have had some sort of collateral to put up to secure such a huge line of credit. But what was the nature of that collateral? It would never do to let Clegg know that I didn't know. It was merely a sparring to gain time to think that made me say:

"Isn't this a rather chilly deal to hand out to a good customer of the bank, Mr. Clegg?"

He shifted uneasily in his chair.

"We needn't mince matters, Hazzard. You are a plunger, and everybody knows it. That is all right if you plunge safely. But it looks now as if you had mistaken your depth. In President Stuart's absence from the city I can't afford to take any chances. You are in pretty bad in that Guess Mountain affair."

"Oh," said I; "so that's it, is it? Did somebody long-distance the news to you from Shotwell this morning?" I was still sparring for time.

"It was known yesterday that you were arrested for alleged complicity in a crime; it is known now that you have been indicted by a Talbot County grand jury. Your own good sense must tell you that the bank must protect itself. I don't wish to be unduly harsh with you, but——"

"But Mr. Josiah Treadway insists that you shall be," I finished for him.

"Mr. Treadway is one of our vice presidents and chairman of the board," he explained in extenuation. "In Mr Stuart's absence——"

"I see," I cut in. Then I glanced at my watch. "I haven't had time, to-day, to look at my mail and telegrams. Give me until to-morrow morning and I'll see what can be done."

He looked away, frowning reflectively—and reluctantly, I fancied.

"Make it to-morrow morning, then, at ten o'clock," he said shortly. "But I must warn you that that is the limit."

With the brief reprieve fought for and won, I made a bolt for the elevators and the ninth-floor office. And my first care upon entering the inner room was to snap the door catch against possible interruptions.

"Tell me, Miss Judith," I began abruptly, "what sort of collateral did I put up when I made the big borrow from the Security Bank?"

Once more she gave me that Mona Lisa smile.

"Of course, with your loss of memory, you wouldn't recollect," she said, with a touch of what I imagined was faint sarcasm. Then, "The collateral is perfectly good. It consists of eighty thousand dollars of Mussel Bar Power & Light first-mortgage bonds, which are quoted now—or they were yesterday—at one hundred and five."

"Eighty thousand dev——" I begged her pardon, changed it to "dollars," and demanded to know where under the sun I had acquired any such bunch of securities as that.

"The bonds are not yours," she returned evenly. "They belong to Mr. Frederic Corydel. Perhaps you have forgotten who Mr. Corydel is?"

"You've said it," I snapped. "And how did he come to lend me eighty thousand dollars in perfectly good and marketable bonds?"

"Mr. Corydel is one of the largest owners in Mussel Bar; and he is a gentleman who is always willing to take what he calls 'a sporting chance' on a friend. Of course, you don't remember the morning he dropped in here when the Guess Mountain deal had reached a point where the options had to be

paid for and there was no money in the bank?"

"I've told you that I don't remember anything."

"Naturally, you wouldn't remember that," she put in, with another of those impenetrable half smiles. "Mr. Corydel said Guess Mountain looked like a good bet. He said, 'Go to it, Rodney, old dear. I've a few pieces of engraved paper in Gordon's safe that are not working just now, and you can hock 'em with Stuart for the ready needful. I'll go get 'em for you.' And he went right away and did it."

"But why should he do that for me?"

"Because it is his way, I suppose," she answered evenly. "If any one were to tell Mr. Corydel that the end of the world was coming to-morrow, he'd be willing to bet that it was or it wasn't, whichever way anybody would take him."

"Where is he now?" I asked.

"Goodness knows. They have a country house on Long Island, a cottage at Mount Desert, a bungalow at Palm Beach, and the Manor House at Mussel Bar. You never know where to find them."

This borrowed collateral business mixed things infinitely worse than ever. I hadn't the remotest recollection of having taken this generous gentleman's gilt-edged bonds, but since I had done so, I was bound by all the canons of loyal friendship and decency to see to it that he shouldn't suffer loss. And I had only the closing fragment of one day and the opening hours of another in which to make the turn.

"Have you succeeded in tracing the elusive Mr. Muhlenberg to his lair?" I inquired.

"No; I've searched everywhere, and the address isn't in any of the office papers or files. I almost knew it wouldn't be."

"Why do you say that?"

Instead of answering my question she asked one of her own.

"Have you looked in your pockets?"

"Nothing doing," I answered shortly.

"But I mean in all of your pockets."

"What should I look for?"

"A little memorandum book, bound in dark, red leather."

"You think the address would be in that? I haven't seen any such book since I got back."

"But are you sure you have looked in all your pockets?"

I remembered then that there were a couple of business suits hanging in the wardrobe closet of my bedroom at the hotel. I hadn't looked in the pockets of these. It was a slender chance, but I determined to take it at once. Before leaving the office, I gave Miss Judith her chance to escape.

"Things seem to be lining themselves up for a grand smash here," I said. "It's an unnecessary cruelty for you to stay and be pinned down in the wreck. I shall take it in quite the proper spirit if you duck and run."

"The idea!" she retorted; and then, "You are not going to stop fighting, are you?"

"Nothing like it. But it seems to be shaping itself as a fight to a finish, and there is no need of your sticking around to be my bottle holder."

"You mean you don't want me any more?"

"That isn't it at all. But you can't afford to go on working for a man who is due to be hauled into court on a criminal charge. Your own family will tell you that, I'm sure."

"My family? I haven't any. And if you think I'd——"

She stopped short and turned to face a window, and I fancied she did it to swallow something suspiciously like a sob. In a flash I lost sight of Alicia Treadway and the big diamond which she had reproached me for buying.

"*Judith!*" I breathed.

In two strides I had the dark-eyed, little witch in my arms. For a single instant she made no resistance. Then she freed herself with a little jerk and turned upon me, more in sorrow than in anger, I thought.

"No," she said; "you don't trust me. You've shown that you don't. But if you think I'd desert anybody in such trouble as you've got into, why you—you'll just have to guess again. You need me, and you're going to need me a lot more when they take you back to Shotwell. Now, *please* go and look in those other pockets!"

I had reached the street and was halfway around to the Marlboro before I woke up sufficiently to be properly disgusted with myself. What sort of a scoundrel had I been in the past to win the confidence and loyalty—not to call it by any stronger name—of this unprotected little witch girl, and at the same time to carry on a courtship with Alicia Treadway; a courtship which had finally resulted in a hard-and-fast engagement? Why

was it that neither of the women seemed to be in the slightest degree jealous of the other?

As I was turning the corner of the last block I ran plump into the grave-faced physician in whom I had confided two days earlier.

"Hello!" he said, shaking hands with me; "here you are again. What is the good news by this time? Are you getting any glimpses into that lost past?"

"Not a shadow of a glimpse," I told him. "If anything, it grows worse as time goes on."

"Well, well," he commented sympathetically. "Did you take my advice and try to pick up the business threads where they were dropped when you went away?"

"They've picked *me* up!" I snorted; "grabbed me and wound me up in a snarl that the devil himself couldn't unravel!"

"And the snarl doesn't stir anything in that dormant memory?"

"It is just the other way around. Every fresh thing that hits me is fire-new. I'd swear I never heard or thought of them before."

He shook his head. "I've been reading up a bit—on cases similar to yours, Mr. Hazzard. There are a few of them on record, but usually the memory lapse was due to a long and severe illness. Do you have any difficulty in recalling particular words?"

"I haven't noticed anything like that. It is the events that I can't recall; those, and my surroundings, which ought to be as familiar to me as sunlight. But they're not. I can't persuade myself that I've ever lived and done business and made friends in this town. There isn't an atom of suggestive familiarity in anything I see or hear or come in contact with."

"Yet you have proof that all these things should be familiar, haven't you?"

"Suffocating floods of it! If there is any doubt at all as to my identity, I hold it alone. My closest friends would be the first to try to argue me out of it."

"Well, there is nothing to do but to go on—being thankful, meanwhile, that none of your other faculties are involved. Sooner or later something—some little chance happening, it may be—will start the wheels for you. After that, the recovery may come slowly, but it will come, once it begins. The main thing now is to keep yourself fit and in prime physical condition. Don't let your malady—or anything else—worry you. Come and see me now and then."

Yes! It was all right for this pleasant-spoken doctor to tell me not to let anything worry me. But if any man in South Tredegar had better cause for worry than I had, I thought I should like to meet him and buy him the best dinner the Marlboro's chef could devise.

CHAPTER XI.

Going on to the hotel, I went up to my rooms and made a hasty pocket search in the two suits hanging in the wardrobe closet of the bedroom. A red-leather memorandum book, Judie had said; but there wasn't so much as a scrap of paper in any of the pockets. Next I went through the dress clothes, breast, tail, waistcoat, and trousers pockets—all empty.

But with this extended search came a suggestion. According to all accounts, the last evening in my former personality had been spent at a dinner dance at the Town and Country Club; therefore I must have worn this dress suit. But since it was here on its proper stretchers, I must have changed before taking the midnight train. Just here I recalled the crumpled handkerchief, the empty cigar case, and the bunch of keys found on the dressing case: evidences, these, that there had been a change of pocket contents, though only half completed.

While I was trying to push the deductions a step farther, one of the house women, a bright, intelligent-looking mulatto girl, came in, carrying an armful of clean bed linen. When she saw that the suite was occupied she started to back out, but I stopped her.

"Just a minute," I said; "you've been missing your tip for a good while, Mary—it is Mary, isn't it?"

"No, suh," she smiled, pocketing the coin I gave her, "it's Mandy; but you never does remembeh. Thank you kin'ly, suh."

"Listen, Mandy," I went on; "did you make up my rooms the day after I left town?"

"Yes, suh," was the prompt reply. "But you didn't go 'way in de daytime."

"How do you know?" I queried.

"Corridor boy told me so. Besides, de baid hadn't been slept in, no, suh, and your clothes was layin' 'round jess where you lef' 'em."

"My dress clothes?"

"Yes, suh."

"And you put them away for me, like a good girl," I said. "Did you happen to see a little red-leather memorandum book when you were straightening up the bedroom?"

"Yes, suh," she replied, as promptly as if she had been waiting for that very identical question to be asked. "It was layin' on de floor. I picked it up and put it in de draw' of you-all's writin' table in de sittin' room."

"Show me," I suggested, and we went together to the larger room where the girl pulled open the drawer of the writing table. There was no memorandum book in it; nothing but a few sheets of the hotel stationery, some envelopes, a box of steel pens, and an extra pen staff.

"De Lawd have mussy!" said the girl with a gasp; then: "I neveh took it, Mistuh Hazzard—I's lay my han' on de Bible and swear I neveh took it! All I is done is to puck it up off de floor in de baidroom and put it in dat draw'!"

"That's all right, Mandy," I hastened to say; "I'm not accusing you of taking it. You are sure you put it here in this drawer?"

"Yes, suh, I *is!*"

"Was there anybody else in the room with you?"

"No, suh; not wid me. Mistuh Wayne, he come to de do' while I'm washin' out de bathtub and ast did I know where you was. He say he's goin' to breakfus' wid you-all."

"Wayne, eh?" I said. "You say he came to the door; do you mean the door here, or the door to the bathroom?"

"De do' to de bathroom, yes, suh. I was washin' out de tub. When I say I dunno where you is at, he tu'n 'round and go 'way."

"Never mind," said I; "it's no matter, and I'm not blaming you." But after the girl had gone I had another of those brain-storm things, with the fighting blood hammering in my veins and a thirsty desire to get my hands once more upon Mr. Parker Wayne consuming me. For now I knew why he had been so cocksure with me from the very first, and how he came to know so much more about my private affairs than I did. He had seen the mulatto girl put the memorandum book in the drawer and had slipped in and stolen it.

There was a telephone in the room, and I asked for a connection with my own office in the Coosa Building; this on the bare chance that Judie Bledsoe had not yet gone. In due time her voice, cool and businesslike, came over the wire: "This is Pine two-eight-four-five."

"Hazzard speaking," I announced. "What was in that memorandum book besides the address we were looking for?"

The answer came promptly.

"Notes of everything that couldn't be trusted to the office files."

"Well," I rasped, "it's in the hands of the enemy—I needn't name him for you."

A faint little shriek greeted this information. Then, in bewildered despair: "Whatever are you going to do?"

"I'm going on a still hunt for the thief and get that book back, if I have to take him apart to find it."

"Oh!—*do* be——"

But here either the hotel exchange or the main central plugged us out and the connection was broken.

Five minutes later I was at the counter in the lobby riffling the leaves of the telephone directory in search of Wayne's office address. The number given was on the third floor of the Iron City National Bank Building, and thither I posted, as fast as a taxi could cover the ground. But it was only to draw a blank. Wayne's office was locked, and the elevator boy thought there had been no one in, all day.

Coming out of the bank building, I saw Norman preparing to climb into one of the many parked cars on the other side of the street. I called out, and went across to him.

"Hello, there; back again and right side up with care, are you?" he said in friendly congratulation. "Mighty glad to see you foot-loose again. What's the good word?"

"I'm foot-loose, but that is about all," I qualified. Then: "Where does Wayne keep himself when he's not in his office?"

Norman shook his head.

"Anybody's guess is as good as mine. He has rooms somewhere up on the hill, but I think he uses them only to sleep in. Takes his meals wherever he happens to be. Say, there is a story going around in the Coosa that you threw him out of your office yesterday morning. Did you?"

"I didn't throw him half hard enough!" I gritted. "I've got to find him quick. Can you help me?"

"Get in," he said, holding the auto door open; and as he let the clutch take hold: "He shoots pool a good bit. We'll make a round of the joints."

This led to the drawing of more blanks. Wayne was not to be found in any of the public pool rooms, and we wound up the search at the Marlboro. Norman had been most friendly, curbing his curiosity, if he had any, and asking no questions. But as we were descending the stairs to the hotel billiard rooms in the basement he broke over.

"Is there blood on the moon, Rod?" he asked.

"There is," I growled. "Wayne has stolen something of mine and I'm going to have it back."

"Money?"

"The handle to more money than I've ever seen at any one time. If I get my hands on him again, he'll wish he'd never been born!"

He stopped right in the middle of the descending stairs to give me a curious once-over.

"I don't know you any more at all, Rod," he remarked, with a puzzled frown. "I'd like to know what kind of liquor you found to drink while you were away."

"You haven't had the proper line on me," I returned grimly. "Come on and let's see if he is down here anywhere."

He wasn't, and we started back toward the lobby. On the way it occurred to me that Norman was putting himself to a great deal of trouble on my account, and I tried to turn him loose.

"You go on home to your dinner," I told him. "Wayne will turn up somewhere, sooner or later, and I'll find him."

"Your chance is as good here as anywhere," the sales manager suggested. "He comes here to dinner oftener than he goes anywhere else. But see here, Rod—you mustn't raise a rookus in a public place like this!" Then he laughed: "The idea of my having to say anything like that to you!"

"You mean that the Rodney Hazzard I used to be wouldn't need it?"

"I should say not! Why, great man!—you would have gone blocks out of your way to dodge anything like a hand-to-hand scrap with anybody!"

"Well, I'm not built that way now," I offered.

As we entered the lobby the travelers from an early evening train were coming in, a straggling procession interlarded with bell hops carrying bags. One of the newcomers, a burly, red-faced, and bewhiskered man, saw me, batted his eyes once or twice, and then stepped out of line to shake hands with me. I had a fleeting impression that his face and figure were, or ought to be, familiar.

"Well, well! I'm glad to see you again," he broke out. "You are looking a lot better than you did when I saw you last, and that's the truth. You sure had a pretty close call." Then, perhaps in deference to the lack of recognition in my response: "Talbot's my name: Of course, you don't remember me. I was only one of the sympathetic bystanders on the boat—one of your fellow passengers."

"One of my fellow passengers?" I echoed inanely.

"Yes; from Puerto Barrios, you know. But you wouldn't remember. You were already pretty far gone with the fever when you came aboard."

Slowly, and as with the effort of a sleeper trying to arouse himself, something turned over in my brain—or at least, that was the feeling I had. Dimly, like pictures thrown upon a screen in a room insufficiently darkened, I had broken glimpses of a low-lying coast line, of a port, of a ship with hazy smoke wreaths rising from its funnel; all these in the flitting of a second of time.

"Oh—yes—the fever," I stammered; and then the big man took his leave.

"If you are stopping here in the hotel, I'll see you again. I shall be staying over for a day or so." And with that he went across to the desk to register.

"Who is he, and what was he talking about?" Norman asked.

With that curious turning and twisting in my brain, I could scarcely answer him intelligently.

"Really, I—I don't know," I muttered, half absently; adding, "He said his name is Talbot."

"Do you know him? Had you ever met him before?"

"I—I can't tell, Fred; and that is the plain truth. It seems as if I ought to know him, but——"

"But he said Puerto Barrios: you haven't been in Puerto Barrios!"

More than anything else in the world at that moment I wished to be rid of Norman; to have a chance to wrestle alone with the shadowy phantoms which seemed to be trying to visualize themselves upon my mental screen. Other flitting pictures there were now; of dense jungle growths on hot and steaming coastal plains; of scarred moun-

tains and bare gulches into which the sun poured heat as molten metal; of trees with great white boles and feather-duster crowns; of torrential rain floods beating upon metal roofs.

Norman glanced at his watch.

"We are due out to dinner with the Blaisdells this evening, Gladys and I," he said. "If I can't do anything more to help you find Wayne, I think I'll be toddling."

"That's right," I hastened to say, and I was most inhospitably glad. "I shouldn't have taken so much of your time. I'll corner Wayne somewhere, if he hasn't left town."

"Take a grip on yourself when you do," he laughed, in good-natured warning. "Cut out the rough stuff, I mean. There's nothing in it that can't be got at in easier ways."

After he left me I dropped into the nearest chair and renewed the grapple with the brain turmoil stirred up by the chance meeting with the big man who thought he knew me. A fever, he had said; and Puerto Barrios. Could I have reached the Guatemalan port, caught a fever, recovered from it, and returned to South Tredegar, all within a period of two weeks or less? It was a physical impossibility. The interval would scarcely account for the bare travel time.

What then? There was only one answer. The Talbot gentleman was mistaken. His Puerto Barrios fever patient was merely somebody who resembled me closely enough to make the mistake possible. Such things were always happening. Everybody has at least one "double" for whom he is likely to be mistaken.

This conclusion settled Talbot's part of the little mystery, but how about my own? Why should his mention of the Central American port stir, or seem to stir, half-baked memories in me? Calm reason presently handed down the answer. The lapsed memory had left a blank mental page upon which any other mind could write at will. This man Talbot had projected me—for my "double"—upon his own mental screen, and, having no memories of my own wherewith to combat the picture which he had suggested to me, I had momentarily accepted his envisionings as pictures of myself.

While I was thus giving sober reason its chance to clear the air, a party of automobilists, as I took them to be, came in at the side entrance and crossed the lobby to the dining room, the doors of which had just been opened. There were three young women and three men, and I shouldn't have given them a second glance if I hadn't happened to recognize Alicia Treadway as one of the young women. The sight of Alicia made me look again, and my gorge rose when I saw that Parker Wayne was one of the three men.

In a twinkling the psychological argument was thrust aside and the brain storm returned. Wayne had my memorandum book; the little red-leather book in which was wrapped up a possible release from the staggering obligation under which I had placed myself by the acceptance of Mr. Corydel's bonds; this, and doubtless a thousand other things besides. Most likely he had the book with him—on his person—in his pocket. I followed the group into the dining room, saw it seated, waited at my own corner table until the dinner orders had been given. Then I sprang up and walked across to where the six were sitting. Wayne had his back to me; he wasn't aware of my presence until I laid a hand on his shoulder.

"I want that memorandum book you stole out of my rooms two weeks ago," I said, and tried to say it calmly.

I suppose he felt reasonably safe in such a public place, and with his friends and the women at the table. Anyway, he bluffed me angrily.

"What do you mean—memorandum book?" he demanded. "I don't know what you're talking about. Go away. You're drunk!"

"I'm giving you a fair chance," I rapped out, loud enough for all of them to hear. "I want that book, and I'm going to have it right here and now, if I have to strip you naked to find it!"

He made no move to comply, or even to get up, and his cool assumption that I wouldn't do anything—an assumption based doubtless upon his still lingering estimate of the Rodney Hazzard of the past—fired the powder train. The next instant I had laid hold of him and whipped him out of his chair, and again the cave-man stuff held the center of the stage.

It was short and sweet, as it had to be, with a whole dining room full of people to interfere. As in the office tussle of the previous day, Wayne fought like a dog-cornered cat, clawing and clutching, and I think he would have bitten me with his teeth if he'd had a chance. But almost at once I con-

trived to trip him and fall upon him; after which it was but the work of a moment to put a knee in his round paunch and go through his pockets. I was hot after that stolen memorandum book, and I got it before the waiters and other uprushing interferers dragged me off of him.

Of course, there was an immediate attempt made to hush things up and gloze the mess over, and it succeeded fairly well. I was hustled off through the kitchen, with a couple of husky negro waiters to see to it that I reached the freight elevator in the rear and got lifted to my room floor, and escorted to the door of the seventh-floor suite by my black bodyguards.

I tipped the black boys liberally, and they had barely vanished when the manager came hastening up. Most naturally, I apologized copiously to him for what figured in the apology as an uncontrollable outburst of temper; told him I was sorry—which was a brazen falsehood—and assured him that the like wouldn't happen again. He was exceedingly decent about it; said he had a temper of his own which gave him trouble at times, and asked if, in the circumstances, I wouldn't prefer to have my dinner sent up to me. I told him I should, and he went away, rubbing his hands, and saying he hoped Mr. Wayne wouldn't deem it necessary to take any legal steps, and so bring on more publicity.

The moment the door closed behind this affable gentleman I opened the retrieved memorandum book. The little book was full of brief notes written in a fine, copperplate hand that wasn't at all like my own; all the various data concerning the Guess Mountain deal; the names and addresses of the different landowners from whom the options had been secured; briefs of conferences with the coal syndicate's lawyer and financial agent—who figured in them always under the single initial "M;" and finally the one vital bit of information—"M's" addresses for letters and telegrams—a certain number in the Bankers Trust Building, Wall and Nassau Streets, New York, and a Riverside Drive apartment house for emergency calls.

By the time one of the dining-room boys brought my dinner up I had a telegram written and ready to send down to the wire office in the lobby. The wording of the message was a bit difficult—to make it vital enough without tearing a hole in my defenses as a seller—but I hoped it would answer:

Cannot hold Guess Mountain offer open any longer. Wire before nine o'clock to-morrow what action your principals will take.

The wire sent, and the dinner dispatched, I lighted a pipe and took time to go carefully through the little red book. It was mostly Greek to me. There were records of transactions which awakened no scintilla of recollection, and on the last few pages some personal memoranda: the number of a watch; a cipher which I took to be the number of a key, doubtless that of the safety box in the Security Bank; an address in Florida with a string of dates following it, the dates being a week apart, and the latest of them dating back a little over three weeks.

I could make nothing of these notes; and when I opened my watch and compared its movement number with that in the book, they didn't agree. By and large, the little red book merely added another layer of mystery to the rapidly accumulating supply, and I had to let it go at that.

CHAPTER XII.

While I was puzzling over the notebook mysteries, and telling myself that Judie Bledsoe would probably be able to clear up some of them, a lobby boy came to the door to tell me that a lady wished to see me in the mezzinine lounge. I jumped at once to the conclusion that it was Judie come to tell me of some new cataclysm impending; but when I went down it was Alicia who came to meet me. At the same moment I caught sight of the flashily dressed shadower who had been set upon me by the bank.

Being still, as you might say, in a first-class fighting humor, I stepped aside, confronting the spy and saying:

"See here, brother; I know who you are and what you are doing. It's a cold trail, and if I catch you dogging me any more it will be the emergency hospital for yours. Do you get that?"

He bristled up and began to say that the lounge was a public place, and he had as good a right to be there as I had; but I cut him short.

"There are the stairs," I pointed out. "You may take your choice of going down on your two feet, or being thrown down. Say which, and say it quick!"

He took the reasonable alternative, and then I turned to Alicia.

"You'll pardon the little curtain raiser,

won't you?" I said. "That fellow—employed by your father—has been chasing me around until I'm tired of it. I suppose you'll tell me that you can forgive anything but the holy show I made of myself in the dining room a while ago."

"I don't know you any more at all, Roddy," she returned, handing me the phrase that so many others were beginning to work off on me, and as she spoke there was something at the back of the clear-seeing eyes that looked almost like nervous fright. "But I *had* to come. What terrible change is it that has come over you in just two little short weeks?"

I led her to one of the divan things and sat down beside her.

"I'm not conscious of any change," I told her; "but everybody else seems to be."

"You *are* changed; fearfully changed. Nobody who knew you as you used to be would know you now. You don't even look the same. But that is not what I came to talk about—and I can stay only a minute because Aunt Jane is waiting for me in the car. Daddy is all up in arms about what has been happening to you, and he'll be worse when he hears about the—the fuss in the dining room this evening. How could you *ever* do a thing like that?"

"It was as easy as twice two," I grinned. "Wayne had stolen something of mine, and I had good reasons for believing that he had it on his person. I meant to have it back, and I got it back."

"But it was so awfully public! And you've always been so strictly conventional and—and——"

"And well-behaved," I finished for her. "But go on; you were telling me about your father and his up-in-armsness."

"Yes; he saw my ring to-day and fairly blew up. He said it was disgraceful for me to be engaged to a man who was under indictment for a crime, and who couldn't pay his debts. Can't you pay your debts, Roddy?"

"No; not yet. But if those people in the dining room hadn't choked me off quite so quickly I might have paid one of them this evening. I thought you said you didn't have any use for Wayne—or something like that."

"He wasn't invited at all," she explained. "We were over at the Town and Country—the Stacy girls and I—and Ted Buford and Hal Stacy came along in Ted's big car and asked us to go to dinner with them. Parker Wayne simply invited himself, and I didn't say anything because I thought—well, you seemed to think he was trying to do something to you, and I thought maybe I could find out about it."

"That was more than kind," I praised. "He was the one who got me hauled before the grand jury at Shotwell."

"Oh!" she gasped. Then, "You haven't told me what happened to you there."

"But your father has told you; and I fancy Wayne was the one who told him. I'm to stand trial for the murder of the old mountaineer—or for instigating it."

"But you didn't do any such horrible thing!"

"Didn't I? I hope not. But let's get back to the main thing. Your father wants you to break our engagement. How do you feel about it?"

"What a savage, cold-blooded way to put it! You ought to know how I feel about it. If daddy had made any such demand two weeks ago——"

"But this is the here and the now," I interposed. "It is better that we should be perfectly frank—both of us—don't you think? You say I have changed in two weeks: haven't you changed, too?"

There was the deepest depth of honesty in the blue eyes, when she turned them upon me.

"Roddy, when I was in college, I had a chum, and in our junior year she married. It was one of those awfully swift affairs. She met a man when she was home at Easter, and three weeks later they were married. I saw her that summer at Virginia Beach, and I hardly recognized her, she was so changed. I knew she was unhappy, but when I tried to make her tell me about it, all she would say was, 'When you marry, Allie, be very sure that you're not going to wake up the next morning to find that you've married a stranger.' "

"And you feel that way about me?" I asked.

Her eyes dropped.

"I try to be honest, Roddy—with others and with myself. I do feel that way, and I can't help it."

" 'Honest confession is good for the soul,' " I quoted. "Possibly, in the course of time, I may change back into the man you've been thinking I was, but it is only fair to

say that I don't see any immediate prospect of it."

"Then you don't l-love me any more?"

At this I said the lamest thing in the entire category.

"I don't remember, Alicia."

"That is enough, Roddy, dear," she said, with a little catch in her voice; and she pulled her ring off and gave it to me.

I took her down to her car, as a matter of course, and couldn't help thinking that she was very brave, and that I was something worse than a brute for having so wretchedly disappointed her. But the thing was done and couldn't be undone; and when I shut the limousine door upon her and turned back to the hotel, I could imagine that the half-tearful smile she gave me at parting was one of those things that threatened to haunt a man to his grave.

It was with a decided feeling of relief that I encountered the big, bewhiskered gentleman who had named himself Talbot, almost as soon as I reëntered the lobby. Here was a diversion, of a sort.

"Now, if we have a little time," he said, "suppose we sit down and have a smoke and talk it out. Did you have a long run of the fever?"

I looked him squarely in the eyes.

"Mr. Talbot, are you quite sure you are not mistaken in your man?"

He took hold of me in a masterful sort of way and turned my face to the lights. After a rather prolonged scrutiny he said, "How do you mean—mistaken?"

"I mean that I think you must be mistaken. When was it you thought you saw me on the boat at Puerto Barrios?"

"It was—about eight weeks ago."

"But two weeks ago, if I am to believe the testimony of any number of eye-witnesses, I was here in South Tredegar."

"And you had been here previous to that?"

"I have been in business here for a long time."

"Um-m," he rumbled, looking narrowly at me again; "that goes to show how little the average onlooker's testimony is worth in court. I would have sworn by all that's good and great that you were the young mining engineer who came aboard the boat at Puerto Barrios eight weeks ago, half delirious with fever. Haven't you ever been in Central America?"

Again I felt myself slipping into the pool of suggestion. Had I ever been in the tropics? Was that a part of the past that couldn't be recalled? I didn't answer Talbot's question because I couldn't.

"This sick man," I said; "what became of him?"

"They got him through quarantine at New Orleans—his fever was not one of the contagious kind—and he was taken to the Charity Hospital."

"Did you learn his name?"

"I knew it at the time, but I can't recall it now."

"Would you recognize it if you should hear it? Was it Hazzard?"

He frowned reflectively and then shook his head.

"It has escaped me. But it wasn't Hazzard. It was more like Broderick, or Hodderwicke—something like that. You'd pass for twins, you two, anywhere."

It was at this conjuncture that some acquaintance of Talbot's came along and took him away, and I was left to puzzle over this new bit of mystery. Who was this fever-stricken mining engineer who looked so much like me that Talbot couldn't tell us apart? And how did it come that this curious double of mine owned my profession? I pushed the bewildering mess aside and harked back to the recent, rather heart-rending interview with Alicia Treadway, and to the new status it introduced.

Oddly enough, the aftermath of this, I found, was a feeling of immense relief. Whatever Gehenna of torment I might be preparing for myself in a future in which full recollection might reassert its sway, there was nothing now but a lilting sense of freedom in the assurance that I wasn't going to be obliged to marry blue eyes when a pair of black ones were setting me afire every time I looked into them.

Warm thoughts of those wonderful, passionate eyes—cooled a bit, to be sure, by the recollection of their possessor's peculiar and inexplicable attitude toward me—went with me as I turned my back upon the busy lobby and sought my rooms. It had been an exciting day; and since there was another which promised to be equally strenuous lying just ahead, I turned in early for the night's rest to fit me for it.

I had gone to bed and was just falling asleep when the bell of the suite telephone in the sitting room rang. When I answered,

Berwick's voice came from the other end of the wire.

"Here's a cold-blooded thing to spring on you, Rodney," was the way he began. "I've just had a long-distance call from Quade at Shotwell, and he tells me that they've advanced your case on the docket, owing to a number of continuances that have been allowed to-day—other cases not ready for trial, you know. We're summoned for nine o'clock, the day after to-morrow. It's a nuisance, of course, and it will mean that we shall have to ask for more preparation time. But we'll have to be on hand, just the same, when the case is called, and if you have any pressing business to attend to, clean it up to-morrow forenoon and we'll drive over after luncheon. Don't let this thing make you lose any sleep. It will come out all right, in the end."

Oh, yes; it was a lawyer's advice, and, like the doctor's, it was soundly sensible, no doubt. Just the same, what with grilling over this new tightening of the law's grip, and upon what the next day must bring forth, it was small wonder that I heard the tiny clock on the dressing case strike all the hours up to midnight before I closed my eyes.

CHAPTER XIII.

With the devil to pay and no pitch hot, I had an early breakfast on the morning following the night of troubled reflections; but early as it was when I got around to the office in the Coosa Building, I found Judie Bledsoe there ahead of me.

"For Heaven's sake!" I expostulated; "do you get up at daybreak to come down here, I'd like to know?"

"No-o; but—well, you remember you telephoned yesterday evening after you went to the hotel, and——"

"And you couldn't be easy in your mind until you knew how the thief chase came out. If I am the unluckiest man alive in one way, I'm also the luckiest in another."

"You mean that you have found the little book?"

"Yes; I have the book. But that isn't what I meant; I mean lucky in the matter of having friends."

She ignored the friendship mention and asked excitedly:

"Where did you find the book?"

"In Wayne's coat pocket—just where I expected to. I took it away from him."

"Tell me!" she begged, and the dark eyes were like stars.

"I'm not so poison proud of it," I said. "I had to take the beggar where I found him, and the place happened to be the public dining room of the Marlboro. It rumpled things up a bit."

"Delicious!" she murmured; and then, "Why wasn't I there to see! What did they do to you?"

"Dragged me off of him and hustled me out the kitchen way and up to my rooms. I apologized to the manager, and to the only one of Wayne's table party who needed to be apologized to."

"And that was——"

"Miss Treadway."

"Oh—for mercy's sake!"

"Also, I've wired Mr. Muhlenberg."

"His address was in the memorandum book?"

"That, and a lot of other things." I tossed the little red book across to her desk. "You'd better keep it for me. I might lose it again."

"Wasn't Miss Alicia horrified?"

"More astonished than horrified, I think. She was quite human about it."

"You saw her after the—after the——"

"Yes. She came to the hotel later, on purpose to see me. Her father wanted her to break our engagement."

She turned away, and I saw a little hitch of the shapely shoulders that was suggestive of a sob. But it was not grief that was in the starry eyes when she faced me again.

"Say it," I prompted. "It's no worse to say it than it is to think it."

"You are really the most absurd person I have ever known," she murmured; and what more she would have said I don't know, for just then a telegraph boy came in with a message.

I let Judie sign the receipt while I tore the envelope across. It was a wire from New York signed "Borden, Secretary," and the wording was brief but explicit: "Mr. Muhlenberg is on his way South. Should be with you by noon to-day." I showed it to my pretty helper, and to my utter astonishment she read it and then put her head down and hid her face in the crook of a rounded arm.

"Why, Judie!" I exclaimed.

"I just couldn't help it," she protested, looking up with the dark eyes swimming.

"It's—it's been hanging in the balance for so long!"

"Let us hope the balance has tipped, or is tipping, our way at last," I responded; "only I wish it would hurry a bit. I'm due to go back to Shotwell this afternoon."

"But you *can't* go!" she objected almost tearfully. "With Mr. Muhlenberg coming, and the bank threatening the way it is and all. It would—it would be flying in the face of Providence for you to go away!"

I glanced at the paper-weight clock on the desk. Its hands were pointing to nine, and my bank reprieve was about to expire. But I took time to explain.

"It isn't a question of can or can't; my trial has been moved up to to-morrow morning, and my bond will be forfeited if I don't present myself in court. Mr. Muhlenberg will have to wait—unless he betters his secretary's time schedule. Because, you see, the court won't wait."

"But you may be gone for days!" she wailed.

"No; Berwick will move for a continuance. The court ought to grant it, in all conscience."

With the telegram in my pocket I went down to the bank. Clegg was busy with another and still earlier customer, and as I stood aside to await my turn, a mild-mannered little gentleman stepped up to the other side of the marble counter railing and held out his hand.

"Clegg telegraphed me yesterday about your troubles, Mr. Hazzard," he said, after the commonplaces were passed. "Come in and let's talk them over," and he opened the gate in the railing and led the way to the private room in the rear marked "President."

Of course, I was immediately able to put two and two together. This was Mr. Stuart, the bank president with whom I had, in all probability, negotiated the enormous accommodation loan. There was no incertitude in his manner when he waved me to a chair at the desk end and said: "Now, then, tell me all about it. How did they contrive to mix you up in the killing of old Jeff Layne?"

I told him all I could—all I knew; and it seemed to be sufficient. Then he went straight to the heart of the business matter.

"About your loan. Is there any probability that you will be able to lift it shortly?"

At this, I showed him the telegram from Muhlenberg's secretary.

"You think he is coming to close your deal for the Guess Mountain coal lands?" he asked.

Again I drew upon my scanty stock of information.

"The deal was practically closed some time ago. As a final precaution, Muhlenberg said his principals wished to have the land titles gone over by their own abstractors. I assume that this has now been done."

"It is unfortunate that you are obliged to answer this court summons to-day. Will you be able to see Muhlenberg before you leave for Shotwell?"

"I hope to. It seems vitally necessary that I should."

"It does. Have you had any intimation that Muhlenberg or his principals have heard of this criminal charge against you?"

"I have not. But since it was published in the *Tribune* here, it probably got on the wires."

"That is bad," he said, shaking his head. "As a shrewd corporation lawyer—and he is all of that, as you have doubtless discovered—Muhlenberg will be pretty apt to try to take advantage of your involvement on the criminal charge. You mustn't let him bluff you."

"I have no intention of doing so, I assure you," I said.

He looked at me curiously. "That is the right spirit," he commended; and then, "I am glad to see you looking so well and fit. When I last saw you, three weeks ago, you seemed to be on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Your friends were quite anxious about you. Clegg tells me you went away and took a rest."

"Yes," I admitted; "I have had a rest"—which was another of those sayings that went two ways for the jack. "The only thing I've been greatly worried about is this bank loan. Mr. Clegg—and Mr. Treadway—have been—er—rather pressing."

He gave me a sort of inscrutable smile which might have meant that he knew more about the pressing business than I did; knew—what I learned later—that the winter-apple-faced old gentleman with the avid money nerve meant to take unto himself the forfeited Power & Light bonds when the bank should be forced to realize upon them.

"I think we can arrange to give you a little more time on your notes," said this cool-voiced, mild-mannered little bank presi-

dent. "And as to the legal involvement; this attempt to incriminate you is simply ridiculous. Jeff Layne was shot, in a family feud, over two months ago. Why didn't they try to implicate you at the time?"

It seemed to be a favorable opportunity to put into effect the time-tried maxim that one should have no secrets from his banker. So I told Mr. Stuart all there was to tell about one Parker Wayne, and his part in bringing on this fresh trouble.

"Wayne is a grand scoundrel," was the quiet reply. "Unluckily, you have no legal recourse. I've known of a number of shady transactions of his, but nothing so frankly criminal as this attempt to blackmail you. Of course, he didn't make the attempt before witnesses?"

"Certainly not."

"That's a pity. Such a man ought not to go unpunished. If you ever get a chance to make him commit himself, it will be your duty to do it. By the way, is Berwick to defend you in the murder case?"

I nodded.

"You couldn't have better counsel. Unless there should be a bald miscarriage of justice, you have little to fear from your indictment by this grand jury of countrymen. As to the bank loan, we'll arrange to give you at least time enough in which to turn around. If you need any character testimony over at Shotwell, you must let us know. I am sure you have friends enough here in South Tredegar to fill a special train. Good morning."

I supposed, as I left the bank, that I should have known well enough that this quiet-mannered little man was gold of the finest; but, though I couldn't remember knowing it, I certainly knew it now. So it was with a much lighter heart that I reentered the ninth-floor office.

"Any luck?" queried the bright little business girl, looking up from her machine as I breezed in.

"The best of luck. Mr. Stuart has come back, and——"

"You needn't say any more," she broke in. "I knew it would be all right if he were here." Then, "Mr. Berwick has just been telephoning. He will be over a little later. Do you want to get your mail out before he comes?"

I said I did, and we put in an hour or more over the letters much as if nothing had happened or was scheduled to happen. As I finished dictating the final letter, Berwick came in, and Judie promptly moved her typewriter to the outer room to do the transcribing, closing the door behind her.

In a few words I told my lawyer of the loss and recovery of the memorandum book, and of my telegram to Muhlenberg and its answer. While we were talking, the phone rang, and I took the receiver from its hook. To my amazement, the first words I heard were: "Wayne speaking. Is that Hazzard?"

I answered shortly that it was, and he went on.

"It's up to you to see me before you start for Shotwell. Will you come to my office in Temple Court?"

"No!" I bellowed. Then Mr. Stuart's suggestion—that I ought to show Wayne up if the chance should offer—made me add, "If you want to see me, you can come here."

"All right," was the reply. "But there'll be none of the rough stuff, this time. If you try it, you won't go to Shotwell—it'll be the bone yard for yours. Write that down somewhere so you won't forget it."

When he hung up I turned to Berwick.

"That was Wayne. He says he wants to see me before I leave for Shotwell. You heard what I said to him?"

"He is coming here?" Berwick asked.

"Yes; and I'd like to have you hear what he says."

"Fix it," was the snapped-out acquiescence.

There was a small lavatory partitioned off at the end of the office, and I motioned toward it. "Take your chair in there and leave the door ajar. I'll get Miss Bledsoe out of the way."

Judie was easily disposed of. I told her what was to the fore, and she said she'd go down to the bank and get my account balanced. In a very few minutes after the stage was set, Wayne came in, pausing in the doorway of the private office to pull a gun from his hip pocket.

"There are seven shots in this thing," he remarked, tapping the weapon with a finger tip. "You'll get all of them if you lay a hand on me. I've taken about enough from you."

"Go to it," I invited, kicking out a chair for him.

He sat down and looked around suspiciously.

"Where's the girl?" he demanded.

"Miss Bledsoe has gone out on an errand."

"That's better; then we'll get down to business. You're in bad up at Shotwell."

"I am; thanks to your lying tongue."

"And you are going to get in worse, if I don't help you out. You'll have a jury of the mountaineers, and they'll sock it to you good and proper."

"All right; go on."

"I can knock the charge into a cocked hat—if you'll make it worth my while."

"How much?" I asked.

"The same old proposition. Fifty-fifty on your profit in the land deal—and you turn over those options to me before you leave town."

"Let's get it straight," I interposed. "I stand charged with a crime. You say you can free me from this charge if I will hand you a certain sum of money; and that if I don't agree to come across with the bribe, you'll let the charge ride. Is that the size of it?"

"That is exactly the size of it."

"What guaranty do you offer that you can do what you say you can?"

"That is my business. I can do it, all right."

"Do you happen to know that an attempt to blackmail is a felony under the law?"

"Call it by any name you please. You'll divvy up with me on your big rake-off, or you'll go and dig coal for the State."

I turned to face the cracked-open lavatory door.

"How about that, Mr. Berwick?" I asked.

If I had fired a bomb under Wayne's chair, he couldn't have jumped any higher. When he came down it was with a chittering oath in his mouth.

"D-damn you!" he yelled; "you'll swing for this! I'll——"

But here Berwick opened the door and showed himself, and the place that knew the would-be blackmailer knew him no more. There were merely the violent slamming of a door and swiftly padding footsteps in the corridor to notify us that he was on his way.

"You are altogether too quick on the trigger, Rodney," said Berwick reprovingly. "You should have let him go without learning that you had a witness. It is very doubtful now if we shall ever be able to lay hands on him. If he has the sense of a potato bug he'll vanish into thin air."

After I had admitted, and regretted, the too-swift trigger finger, we settled down to talk the Shotwell prospects out to some sort of a conclusion. Berwick was confident that the judge would grant a continuance, and the worst feature of the situation seemed to be the fact that I must leave town, at the very latest, shortly after Muhlenberg would arrive. As to this, however, Berwick reassured me. We would be away less than twenty-four hours, in the ordinary course of events, and Muhlenberg would wait.

Altogether, things were looking much more hopeful and promising when Berwick left me to go home and pack his traveling bag. As before, we were to drive across the mountain, there being only one train up the Shotwell branch of the railroad, and that leaving South Tredegar early in the morning. The New York train was due at twelve forty-five, and after a noon luncheon at the club I hurried back to the office to be on hand if the trust's emissary should come in or call up. But Judie dashed my hopes of any speedy termination of the period of suspense the moment I entered.

"I've just been talking to 'Information' at the Central Station," she said. "The New York train is bulletined an hour late."

This was awkward, but there was still a margin of time. The Shotwell drive over the rough roads would ask for about four hours of daylight; more if it should have to be made in the night. I phoned Berwick, and told Judie to go and get her luncheon. With the Hilliard data before me, I employed the interval in rough-sketching a plan for the Alabama man's coal plant, and was happily able to forget, for the moment, everything else.

When Judie came back, the first thing she did was to call the railroad station again. This time the report was that the New York train was detained behind a freight wreck, and its time of arrival was uncertain. Once more I called Berwick and gave him the news.

"Bad," he commented. "I don't want to have to ride that trail over the hills in the dark. It is dangerous enough in daylight."

"What do you advise?" I asked.

"Leave a note for Muhlenberg at the Marlboro and let's go."

I dictated the note to Judie with a queer sinking sensation at the pit of my stomach. It did seem as if all the malignant fates were linked up against me. If I could have had a few minutes' personal talk with Muhlenberg to explain matters—— But that

was now impossible. He would arrive in my absence, would hear at firsthand and through the town gossips the story of my implication in the Layne murder, and if he were the shrewd bargainer he was said to be, the big deal would be off until the legal questions involved were thoroughly and unmistakably cleared up.

"Please see that this gets to the Marlboro," I told Judie, after she had typed and I had signed the note; and then I closed my desk and made ready to go around to the garage, which was the agreed-upon rendezvous with Berwick.

"Is—isn't there anything else I can do for you?" she asked as I was about to leave.

I smiled grimly. "You may pray for me, if you feel like it."

She looked away and did not speak again until my hand was on the doorknob.

"If—if the trial shouldn't be postponed, will you send for me as a—a witness?"

"No," said I, thinking that I'd make any sacrifice imaginable rather than have her dragged into court to be badgered and harried by the merciless, angry-eyed county attorney.

"But you must!" she insisted, in a flutter of vehemence. "I—I was present most of the times that Bud Tryan came to see—came here, I mean—and I heard all that was said."

"No," I said again.

"But why?"

"Let it go on general principles," I offered, trying to say it casually. "I've had a taste of Scarron's quality—he is the prosecuting attorney over at Shotwell—and if he should put you on the stand for cross-examination, I'd have to murder him. Good-by." And I hurried away before I should be obliged to tell her that in something less than four short days she had pushed Alicia—all the Alicias—aside to become the only woman on the footstool for me.

Berwick was a bit nervous, I thought, when I met him at the garage; and on the long, hard drive he had very little to say for himself. We reached Shotwell and the old tavern at late supper time, and again my marvelous appetite asserted itself. Berwick ate little, and said nothing; but later, while we were burning tobacco on the tavern porch before turning in, he said he'd been thinking the situation over, and had about reached the conclusion that we might as well go through with the thing and have done with it, once for all.

"Here is the way it stacks up," he argued. "If we take a continuance, you will be left under a cloud—from the New York point of view; you will figure as a man under indictment for a crime connected with this land deal, and Muhlenberg will be very apt to take a shrewd advantage of this. On the other hand, if you go back to South Tredegar acquitted, the advantage will be yours. I'm ready to fight it through, if you are."

I considered for a moment and then told him to go ahead, and we'd take a chance.

"That's business," he said. "I see there are a good many of the Tryan tribe here for the trial. We'll pick our witnesses from that bunch, and let Scarron do his worst."

CHAPTER XIV.

I slept soundly, rose early, ate a hearty country-tavern breakfast in the long, low-ceilinged dining room, and at the appointed hour went over to the courthouse with Berwick in a frame of mind that was at least reasonably equable and tranquil.

In the central hallway of the weathered old building there was a jam, and as we were working through it toward the door of the courtroom, Quade came elbowing his way to us, his big, plain face beaded with perspiration.

"Just a minute," he wheezed hoarsely in my ear. "Can I borray your car for a little spell, Mr. Hazzard?"

"Surest thing in the world," I told him promptly.

In the courtroom, after we had taken our places within the bar, I had a chance to look around. The spectators' two thirds of the place was filled to overflowing, and there didn't seem to be any striking display of sympathy in the sea of faces that met my eye.

A short time after we were settled, the judge, a tired-looking, old man, wearing the traditional frock coat, high, turn-down collar and stock tie of Andrew Jackson's time, came to the bench, and the jurymen stumbled to their places in the box. The preliminaries of court opening followed immediately, and then my case was called. The judge looked over his spectacles at us and asked the two attorneys if they were ready for trial. Scarron, grim and angry-eyed, snapped out, "Ready, your honor," and I thought he seemed a shade disconcerted, or

at least surprised, when Berwick promptly made the same response.

I didn't follow the indictment very closely as Scarron rattled through his reading of it, but out of the mess of whereases and legal doublings and turnings and twistings I gathered that I was charged as feloniously and with malice aforethought aiding and abetting and conniving at a high crime against the peace and dignity of the commonwealth, to wit, the doing to death of one Jefferson Layne, of the county and district aforesaid, the motive thereto, as would be shown by the evidence, being a desire to expropriate, for the profit and benefit of the prisoner at the bar, certain properties and holdings of said Jefferson Layne, in and of the cove, ravine, or gulch known as Noble's Gap.

The reading finished, Scarron called his witnesses, one after another, in rapid succession. Their testimony brought out quite clearly all the facts in the land deal; proved pretty conclusively that without Layne's holdings the deal must have fallen flat. Other witnesses told of young Tryan's frequent visits to South Tredegar, and testified to the fact that he had met me by appointment at various times, either in Shotwell or at his father's house on the mountain. Also, it was brought out that Tryan had had more money than his circumstances would account for.

In this rapid-fire examination of witnesses, Berwick did his part ably, objecting to irrelevancies, and doing his best in cross-examination to shake the testimony of these men who, so far as I could judge, were but telling the simple truth in homely fashion. These cross-examinations were not helping us. If I had been a member of the jury I should have said that Berwick was merely clogging the wheels in the hope of stopping the machine before the pace became a runaway.

While all this was going on I heard a locomotive whistle announcing the arrival of the morning train from South Tredegar. Most naturally, this meant nothing to me; but shortly afterward there was a stir among the standing onlookers near the courtroom door and to my astonishment and dismay I saw Judie Bledsoe slip in quietly and take her place among the country women in the back part of the room. It was just as Scarron had called his final witness that a slip of paper was passed to Berwick by a deputy sheriff. On it was written, in Judie's fine, copper-plate hand, "If you find you are going to need me, don't fail to call me."

Berwick whispered to ask what I made of this, and I shook my head.

"She must have come on the train. She told me yesterday that I was to send for her if it came to the worst," I whispered back.

"What does she know?"

"I can't say. But she seemed quite sure that she would be able to clear me. I don't want her called. I won't have that man Scarron——"

Berwick put up his hand to silence me. Scarron's concluding witness had taken the stand. He was a slow-speaking, sober-faced young mountaineer answering to the name of John Dillon, and Scarron was directing him to tell, in his own language, exactly what had taken place on the South Tredegar road on a certain night two weeks before the murder of Jefferson Layne.

I shan't attempt to set down circumstantially the rambling tale this boy told. Summarized, it amounted to this: on the night in question he had been returning to his home on Guess Mountain by a short cut through the woods. At a point where his path neared the "big road" he had seen an automobile, which was pulled out at the side of the road. Its motor was stopped, and the lights were turned off. Near the car two men were standing under the shadow of a pine tree, talking. One of the men was urging the other not to "go to sleep on his wrongs," and offering to help with money and assistance if the other "got into trouble."

Scarron handled his rather dumb witness very skillfully. By clever questioning he elicited the fact that this was after Layne had had the trouble with Bud Tryan's father and had taken a shot at him with his squirrel gun. Asked, finally, if he had identified the two men talking under the pine tree, Dillon said he had; one of them was Bud Tryan, and the other was—"him," pointing to me.

"Say 'the prisoner at the bar,' " snapped Scarron; and the boy repeated the phrase like an automaton. Asked how he could be certain of the identity, he replied that he "reckoned" he knew Tryan's voice—and mine. Besides, he knew my automobile, and it was the one that was standing in the road.

Back and forth over the now familiar ground Scarron led the witness, getting all

the effect of reiteration for the benefit of the jury, and, what was quite as much to the purpose, sealing up, or trying to seal, all the nooks and crannies through which Berwick's coming cross-examination might penetrate. Again and again the boy was made to repeat what he had heard of the talk. There had been no mention of a crime as a crime, and no specific offer of a bribe, but the inference was made perfectly clear; Tryan had wanted to take vengeance upon the would-be slayer of his father, and the man who had come in the auto was willing to befriend him if he "got into trouble."

Leaving that phase of it, Scarron went back to the identifying. Dillon admitted that he hadn't seen me clearly; it was too dark. But he knew my voice and my car. Asked to describe the car, he did it. It was a "furrin" car—meaning, as I supposed, that it was unusual. It had a queer scoop-shovel top and was painted green, and was the only one of its kind that had ever been in Shotwell. He knew the car well; had seen me driving it many times before. Asked what happened after the talk was ended, he said that Bud Tryan had "struck off" through the woods, and that I had got into the car and turned it to drive back toward South Tredegar.

When the direct examination of the witness was drawing to its close, Berwick whispered to ask me if I had any recollection at all of this night visit to the lonely spot in the road. Of course I hadn't, and I said so emphatically. But my denial meant nothing. For all I could adduce to the contrary, Dillon might have been telling the simple truth and nothing but the truth—as, indeed, he appeared to be.

Scarron asked one final question before dismissing the witness.

"Did you warn Jeff Layne after you heard this talk?"

"I shore did," was the sober reply.

"That will do. Stand down."

Berwick immediately called Dillon back to the stand and grilled him unmercifully. But Scarron had so thoroughly covered the ground that there was little more to be dug out of the witness. Doggedly he held to his story, repeating it almost word for word; and though Berwick, half desperate, as any one could see, employed every trick and device of the trained cross-examiner, he was unable to shake Dillon's testimony, or to make him trip or stumble. The only additional fact brought to light was that Dillon was a member of the Layne tribe and distantly related to the murdered man.

When Berwick began calling the few witnesses he had contrived to single out and summon the night before, it was unnervingly evident to me that the jury had already made up its mind. Dillon's straightforward story, substantiated, as it seemed, at all points, had settled the question of my culpability, and the half dozen witnesses who testified that my relations with all of the option sellers, including Layne who had refused to sell, had been perfectly business-like and aboveboard, and even friendly, did us little good.

In his cross-examinations Scarron riddled them one by one; held them up to ridicule and confused them until most of them were fain to take back all the favorable things they had said of me. Naturally, in the circumstances, Berwick did not dare to put me on the stand in my own defense. That would have been suicidal. As matters stood it was more than a defeat; it was a rout.

Berwick leaned over and whispered to me.

"If we rest our case here it will be a conviction, as sure as the Lord made little apples," he declared. "We must call Judie Bledsoe. She is positively our only hope."

"No," I objected stubbornly.

"But why not?"

"I've told you. I won't drag her into this and give Scarron a chance to bully her as he has bullied these other witnesses."

In a few well-chosen words, hot from the skillet, as one might say, Berwick told me what he thought of me and my obstinacy. I would get the hook, and I deserved to get it. The girl was present and ready to testify. My opposition was simply asinine. If he should do what he ought to do, he'd throw up the case and tell the court the reason why.

It was while he was pouring all this irefully into my ear that a small commotion began to stage itself at the courtroom door. The judge brought his gavel down with a smack and peered, frowning, over his spectacles. Then everybody craned to look. What we saw was Sheriff Quade entering with a prisoner; a young man, red-eyed and sullenly defiant. Berwick gave one look and leaped to his feet. "Your honor!" he barked; "we wish to call one other witness.

I summon Buford Tryan, commonly known as Bud Tryan!"

Scarron protested bitterly, as a matter of course. The defense had closed its case, he urged, and the honorable counsel's request was entirely out of order. But the judge overruled the objection and Tryan was put upon the stand. Berwick took him in hand quickly.

"Tryan, tell the court and the jury where you were on the night of May fifteenth last," he rapped out.

"I don't ricollect," was the answer, which was probably true as to the matter of the date.

Instantly Berwick took a new tack.

"Look at this gentleman sitting here beside me; did you ever see him before?"

Tryan twisted himself in the witness chair and glanced at me.

"Yep; I've seed him a heap o' times."

"Where have you seen him?"

"Here in Shotwell, and in South Tredegar."

"Anywhere else?"

"Not as I ricollect—'ceppin' up at pappy's house on the mountain."

"Did you, or did you not, meet him at a place on the South Tredegar road on or about the night of the fifteenth of May last?"

Scarron objected to this as a leading question, but the judge let it stand.

"The witness may answer," he said; and Tryan, scowling down at his own feet, made his denial.

"No, I didn't meet him; hit wa'n't Mr. Hazzard. Hit war a feller named Wayne, a-drivin' Mr. Hazzard's car. He allowed he'd borrayed hit."

There was a sensation in the crowded courtroom; a sound like the sighing of the wind in the treetops. The strained look vanished out of Berwick's face and his attitude toward the witness became placatory, almost friendly.

"All right. Now, Bud, tell the court and jury in your own language just what took place between you and Wayne on that night when you met Wayne on the mountain road."

Again Scarron protested, and again he was overruled. Tryan told his story piecemeal, as Berwick's questionings drew it out. Wayne had always been friendly with him; he hadn't known why, but now he did know; it was because he'd been fool enough to keep Wayne informed as to what was going on in the land deal. Wayne had given him money at times, and had promised to help him to get out of the State if he got into trouble with Layne; he was promising this again on the night when he drove out from South Tredegar in the "borrowed" car.

Berwick, wholly master of the situation now, was still genial, but he was as ruthless as a hound upon a scent which had been lost and was found again. Times without number the judge warned Tryan, telling him that he was not required to incriminate himself in his answers, but at length the young fellow burst out sullenly.

"I ain't a-keerin' much, judge. Ever'body knows I plugged ol' Jeff Layne for turnin' loose on pappy, an' I'd do hit ag'in, ef I had to. Nobody didn't put me up to hit 'ceppin' this yer skunk Wayne, an' I reckon all *he* wanted was to git Mr. Hazzard hooked up in hit, somehow. 'Pears that a way to me, now."

Beyond this open confession Tryan's story simplified itself. On the day of the shooting of Layne, Tryan had been picked up by Wayne in an auto on a lonely mountain road in agreement with a prearranged plan. But instead of helping him to get out of the State, Wayne had driven him to a deserted cabin in the forest and told him he would come after him later, after the hue and cry had died down.

Here Tryan had been left from day to day and week to week. Wayne had visited him a number of times, but only to bring provisions, and to tell Tryan that it was not yet safe for him to make a run for it. Berwick knew, and so did I, why Wayne had been holding Tryan thus within reach. He was willing to save my neck by betraying Tryan's hiding place if, by doing so, he could win the big stake for which he was playing. True, if he should betray Tryan, he would have to take a chance upon what Tryan would say and do in reprisal; but apparently he had been willing to take that chance. It was a bold game, with the odds in favor of its success. If I had been the nerve-broken Rodney Hazzard that everybody said I was up to the night of the dinner dance at the Town and Country Club, the big stake might have been won.

When Berwick finally released the witness, Scarron declined morosely to cross-question him, and the judge turned to the jury. His charge was brief, and was chiefly

a definition of the law of evidence under which they were to render their verdict. Like the judge, the jury was also brief. In less than ten minutes after they retired the twelve men were back in the box and the foreman was giving their decision. I was acquitted.

CHAPTER XV.

Brief as it had been, the trial had filled the entire forenoon session, and the noon recess was called immediately after the jury had rendered its verdict. While we were making our way out of the crowded court-room I found that the thronging spectators, whom I had thought were only morbidly curious, were really most friendly. It seemed as if a good half of them came elbowing and shoving to shake hands with me, calling me by name and congratulating me upon my acquittal.

These crowdings and haltings made me restively impatient. I wanted to get out and find Judie, but she was lost in the shuffle and I did not see her again until we met in the office of the tavern across the square. Even then there was no chance to talk with her, to ask her if Muhlenberg had turned up, and why she had made the long, roundabout train journey to Shotwell. Dinner was on the table, and Berwick rushed us into the dining room; and after the hurried meal he took things masterfully into his own hands.

"You'll want to be getting back to South Tredegar in a hurry," he told me, "and you'd better take your car and make a fast run of it. Blantley, our local attorney here, came in on the train, and I'm going to stay over and arrange for Tryan's defense on the murder charge. I think we owe Bud that much. Do you know how he came to turn up so opportunely to-day?"

"I suppose Quade got a tip and followed it up."

"Not at all. Tryan heard, through some of his people who were keeping in touch with him, that you were to be tried on a charge of complicity. He sent word to Quade, volunteering to come in and clear you if Quade would come after him. He was afraid the Layne tribe would mob him if he came to Shotwell alone. That was why Quade borrowed your car."

I thought that was a pretty fine thing for the young mountaineer to do, and said so, adding that I hoped Berwick would leave no stone unturned to get the boy off with a light sentence. Then I got hold of Judie.

"You'll go back to South Tredegar in the car with me?" I asked.

She shook her head. "I'll wait and take the train."

"But that won't get you in until after dark. Why won't you go with me? Are you afraid of my driving?"

"Maybe that is it," she said. "You may call it that, if you like."

I didn't believe this excuse for a moment, but I had no alternative if she chose to urge it.

"I'm sorry," I said. Then, "Did Muhlenberg come?"

"Yes; he is at the Marlboro, waiting for you."

"You sent my note to him?"

"I took it to him myself."

"Oh; then you have seen him?"

She nodded brightly.

"I have seen him and talked with him. He doesn't know anything about this foolish murder trial—unless he has heard of it in South Tredegar to-day. I told him you'd be back this evening."

"How did you know I'd be back?"

"Because I meant to see to it that you got back."

"Huh!" I said; "so you still think you could have cleared me?"

"I know I could. I told you so before you left town."

"How?"

"Never mind that now; it will keep." Then, with a glance at her wrist watch: "You are wasting time. You ought to get back as soon as you can."

It was a flat dismissal, and I had to take it.

"All right; I'm gone," I told her; but after I had turned to go it occurred to me that in the round-up with Muhlenberg I might need some help that only she could give me.

"The train will get you in town between six and seven. Would you mind going to the office for a while after you've had your dinner?" I asked.

"Not in the least," she assured me. "I meant to do that, anyway."

"Thank you," I said. "I may have to bring Muhlenberg around, and, if I do, it will be because I need your help."

At that, she handed me another of those cryptic remarks of hers.

"I've given you all the help I could—all you'd take. But I'll be at the office from seven o'clock on."

Quade had left my car standing in front of the tavern, and I was soon on my solitary way across the mountain. Nothing happened until after I had jounced and hurtled over some forty of the sixty-odd miles of impossible road, and then I was careless enough to run over a stump that stuck up high enough to catch and bend the left-hand steering knuckle of the car. Since the accident happened miles from any human habitation, the only thing to do was to repair the damage as best I could. Fortunately, the car's tool box proved to be well supplied, and after a couple of hours of hard work I got the knuckle straightened and was able to go on. But since I couldn't be sure that I hadn't cracked the steel in the hammering, there was no more speeding for me, and it was fully dark when I finally reached South Tredegar.

Driving the car to its garage and giving the order for its repair, I turned my steps toward the Marlboro. The critical hour had struck. Within the next few shifts of the clock hands I should know definitely what fate had in store for me, and on the short walk to the hotel the coward that lies dormant in every man born of woman rose up to tell me that whatever the outcome of the conference with Muhlenberg might be, I'd better run for it; that sooner or later the lost memory would make me trip and stumble and bring disaster irretrievable; that my only chance of recovery lay in getting away from South Tredegar and fighting free of the associations which, so far from helping me to remember, seemed to be plunging me deeper and deeper into the dark pit of confusion.

It was with this runaway thought in mind that I entered the great hotel by the side door and went directly to my rooms, where I packed a grip and left it where it could be found if I should send for it. Then I went down to the lobby floor to take the big jump—and did it, I am ashamed to say, with my heart in my mouth.

Asking at the desk for Mr. Muhlenberg, I learned that he had gone out to dinner with some one whose name I did not catch, and had left word with the clerk to tell me that he would return early. This gave me a chance to get my own dinner, which—in deference to the impending crisis—was eaten with some little abatement of the magnificent appetite I had lately been trying to satisfy.

After worrying through the meal I returned to the lobby to wait for Muhlenberg, and not until that moment did it occur to me that I shouldn't know him when I saw him. Judie could help me in this, and since she was probably by this time waiting in the Coosa Building office, I started for the telephone booth, meaning to ask her to describe the trust's emissary for me. Before I had taken two steps I ran plump into Mr. Stuart, the mild-mannered little president of the Coosa Security Bank; and recognizing this as a piece of the sheerest luck, I made haste to harvest it.

"It is in your power to do me the greatest possible service, Mr. Stuart," I told him, after the greetings had passed and he had warmly congratulated me upon the outcome of the Shotwell trial. "Mr. Muhlenberg has arrived. He is dining out, but I am expecting him back at any moment. I wish, if possible, to close the Guess Mountain deal with him this evening. I am confident that I shall be able to drive a better bargain if you, as my banker, will consent to be present."

To my great satisfaction he smiled a ready acquiescence.

"Berwick would serve your purpose better," he said, "but since you say he can't be had, I'll be glad to sit in at your conference. Is Muhlenberg fully empowered to close the transaction?"

I answered that I hadn't yet seen him, but that I inferred he had come prepared. Thereupon we sat down to wait, and I told the banker more about the Shotwell trial and its dramatic conclusion involving Parker Wayne in something closely resembling a conspiracy to procure the murder of Jefferson Layne.

"Perhaps it didn't go quite that far," I qualified. "But the old mountaineer was blocking the deal; and if the deal couldn't go through, Wayne would lose his chance in the hold-up game. Berwick thinks he has been carrying double; that at first he was employed by the trust to obtain the options direct, but that later he saw a chance for more money in the blackmailing scheme. At any rate, it is proved conclusively that he was holding Tryan solely for the purpose of extorting money from me."

"I imagine Wayne will turn up permanently missing, after this," was Stuart's com-

ment; and then, as the screen doors of the main entrance parted to admit a stout, clean-shaven person who looked enough like the cartoonists' caricatures of predatory wealth to be the twin brother of big money itself, "Here is your man, now," he added.

Stuart's presence at the moment of meeting gave me some small chance to appraise the trust's emissary, and at the same time to get a little better grip upon myself. Unless I were greatly mistaken, this gentleman was going to give me a run for my money.

He didn't seem particularly joyous when I told him that Mr. Stuart, as my banker, had consented to be present at our interview; and more than once I caught him prying into me with shrewd, unwinking eyes, as if he were seeking to determine what change, other than the absence of the beard and mustache, had taken place in me. This, I felt, was the crucial test; a sharper one than any I had undergone at the hands of any of the South Tredegar folk. If I were the impostor that I had at first believed I was, this hawk-eyed gentleman would unmask me. But there was only suave deprecation in his tone when he said:

"We can hardly talk business here, Mr. Hazzard. Shall we go up to my rooms—or to yours?"

"Mine, if you please," I replied, unwilling to forgo even the trifling advantage of fighting upon my own ground; and accordingly we had ourselves lifted to the seventh floor.

As we sat down at the small writing table in my sitting room, Muhlenberg produced a handful of cigars. Stuart declined to smoke, but I took one of the gold-banded perfectos and lighted it. If there were any steadying influence in tobacco, I wanted it.

At the striking of the matches, Muhlenberg opened the business matter with a canny bargainer's attempt to bear the market. The New York specialists had completed their examination of the land titles, and so far as that went, the results were satisfactory. There were reasons why the purchasing syndicate wished to acquire ownership of the Guess Mountain lands, but there were also reasons deterrent. The coal veins were difficult of access, and a tremendous amount of development capital would be required. In addition, the labor element entered into the question; labor costs in such an out-of-the-way region would doubtless be next door to prohibitory; and so on.

"All of which must have been clearly understood by your principals when the negotiations began," I pointed out, after the bargaining argument was concluded. "Are you trying to tell me that the syndicate you represent wishes to be released from our agreement? Because, if you are, I shall be only too——"

"Oh, no, no; nothing like that!" he broke in smoothly. "But the price you are asking is far too much, Mr. Hazzard. Five million dollars for a few tracts of wild mountain land——" He spread his hands and his shoulders went up.

Gasping inwardly at this, the first intimation I had had of the prodigious sum involved in the wild speculation, I none the less tried to rise to the occasion.

"The matter of the price—my price—has all been thrashed out in the past, Mr. Muhlenberg"—I truly hoped from the bottom of my heart that it had—"and an understanding was definitely arrived at. I stand ready to carry out the seller's half of the bargain. Of course, if you don't want the property—if I am obliged to look elsewhere for my market——"

The shadow of a smile wrinkled at the corners of the hawklike eyes.

"You would scarcely be able to find one offhand," he thrust in smartly. "Moreover, I have been hearing some very disturbing things about you to-day, Mr. Hazzard; things which complicate this matter most unfortunately. I hear you have been indicted for alleged complicity in a murder in connection with the securing of these land options, and while, of course, we——"

"You haven't heard it all," I interrupted. "I was indicted day before yesterday, and tried and acquitted in open court this morning. The charge was utterly absurd, as was clearly proved when the facts were brought out in court. We are wasting time; yours and Mr. Stuart's and mine. If your principals wish to withdraw, please say so plainly and I shall look elsewhere for a purchaser."

At this, for the first time in the interview, he let the real man under the suave and genial exterior show through.

"You'll look a damned long while, Mr. Hazzard; I can assure you of that," he rapped out. "Five million dollars don't grow on every tree!"

It was here that the banker spoke for the first time, breaking in quietly to say, "Very

true, Mr. Muhlenberg. But, on the other hand, the time has passed when all the capital-bearing trees grow exclusively in New York." Then turning to me: "I think possibly we might be able to finance your proposition right here in South Tredegar, Hazzard, if these New York gentlemen would like to be released. In fact, I don't know but I'd be willing to offer to organize a corporation to that end."

Apparently the New Yorker knew Stuart, or knew enough about him to be sure that the quiet proposal meant just what it purported to mean; that it wasn't a bluff. At all events, he changed his tone immediately, and after haggling a little longer to save his face he drew from an inner pocket the papers which were to bind the tremendous transaction. I signed, with Stuart for a witness, and in a few minutes, with no more to-do about it than if I had been selling, and the trust had been buying, a building site in the suburbs, the five-million-dollar bargain was closed.

By mutual agreement the actual transfer of cash and property was deferred to the following day; and to avert any chance of further complications, I asked Mr. Stuart to act for me in the fiduciary capacity, handing him, in Muhlenberg's presence, the key to the safety-deposit box, and giving him written authority as my agent, in fact.

As soon as the business was concluded, Muhlenberg bowed himself out. When the door closed behind the New York lawyer, Stuart congratulated me in his quiet way, and, in turn, I thanked him out of a full heart for helping me out.

"I doubt if I should have been able to hold him up to the mark, if you hadn't said what you did," I admitted. "He was about to get me on the run."

"Oh, I think you would have held him," returned the little banker, with his affable smile. "Your profit in this transaction will be very considerable, won't it?"

I said it would.

"Going out of town?" he asked, as he found his hat and prepared to take his leave.

I snatched at the Daniel Hilliard undertaking in Alabama as an excuse, telling him briefly what I had promised to do for Hilliard, and saying that I really ought to get about it without any more delay. At this he smiled again.

"Keen as ever, aren't you?" he commented. "With a clean-up as big as the one you've just now concluded, most men would think themselves entitled to a real vacation. But I commend your energy." And with that he left me, promising to handle the settlement with Muhlenberg, if, as I intimated, I might not be able to be present myself.

After he went out I dropped into a chair and let the fierce reaction have its will with me. In five short days I had lived a strenuous lifetime, and now that the strain was off I found myself gasping like an exhausted swimmer cast suddenly by a kindly tide rip into safe wading depth. Incidentally, over and above the triumph of my escape from the machinations of Wayne, and the involvement in the Layne murder, greater than the successful closing of the big deal and the saving of Mr. Corydel's bonds, arose a mighty desire to duck and run—the instinct which prompts the wounded animal to hide itself until it can either die or get the better of its hurt. For now, as never before during the five strenuous days, the crippling memory blank shut down upon me like a lid.

Fortunately, there was now no reason why I shouldn't obey the prompting that was urging me to run and hide. Some three weeks earlier, so they said, I had caught a midnight train and had vanished, leaving no trace. Why shouldn't I do it again? My bag was packed, and I had only to walk out and disappear. If I could only take Judie Bledsoe with me——

That thought of Judie reminded me that she was doubtless still at the office in the Coosa Building waiting for some word from me. I would go around that way and see her; tell her what had been done and what I must do. I thought she would understand; I was sure she would, if I could make her believe that I was telling the truth about my grievous handicap.

Accordingly, traveling bag in hand, I directed my steps toward the great office building three squares distant. As I turned the second corner my gaze went automatically to the ninth story, and to the suite at the farther end of the corridor. The windows were lighted. Judie was there.

CHAPTER XVI.

When I entered the ninth-floor office in the Coosa Building, I tossed the traveling bag aside and sank down in the armchair at the big desk. Judie was at the typewriter, and I took it she had been writing letters; she

was pulling a sheet out of the rolls as I came in.

"Tired?" she asked, putting a heart-warming note of womanly sympathy in the single word.

"Just about all in, down and out," I told her. "It's the pace that kills."

"I should say as much," she assented with a little laugh. Then, "Have you seen Mr. Muhlenberg?"

I nodded. "'I came, I saw, I conquered,' as the old Roman egoist remarked. The big deal has gone through. I was lucky enough to have Mr. Stuart with me, and he and Muhlenberg will make the transfer of the property and the cash to-morrow. I kicked out of that part of it."

"You would, naturally," she said. "The money doesn't mean anything to you."

I wondered for a minute why she should say that. But now that I came to think of it, it was perfectly true. The huge profit in the transaction hadn't appealed to me at all; I had scarcely thought of it in the sharp bargaining with the trust's emissary. Even now it seemed a thing apart.

"You are right," I conceded; "I don't care a bawbee for the money. I guess I was fighting chiefly for the pure joy of the scrap."

"Anybody could see that," she agreed quickly; "and it was fine." Then, with a glance aside for the dropped traveling bag, "You are going away?"

"You've said it. One more day like any one of the past five would finish me."

"I know it has been frightfully trying," she said, again with that sympathetic stop pulled all the way out. "But it is all over now, isn't it? You have done the big thing you came to do, and you are free to go on to Florida."

"To Florida?" I queried. "Why should I want to go to Florida, in particular?"

She looked across at me with a quaint little pursing of the pretty lips.

"It is for you to say, of course, but—must we keep it up straight through to the end?"

"Keep what up?"

"The absurd mystery you have been trying to wrap yourself up in—just why, I can't imagine."

"But there isn't any mystery about me—apart from my ridiculous loss of memory," I insisted.

She started and gave a little gasp.

"Did you—did you honestly mean that—about losing your memory?"

"I did and do. Five mornings ago I woke up in a Pullman car on the Great Southwestern as the train was approaching South Tredegar. You must believe me when I tell you that I haven't the faintest recollection of anything that ever happened to me before that morning awakening."

"But how—why——"

I knew what she was going to ask, and answered accordingly.

"I tumbled into the proper rut, as you might say, almost by chance. A Marlboro porter picked me up at the railroad station and I went with him to the hotel. There everybody seemed to know me, and I was shown up to my rooms—which was lucky because I couldn't have found them myself. I didn't even know my own name until after people began calling me by it."

"But—but," she cried out excitedly, "don't you know you are not Rodney Hazzard at all?"

At this, if the swivel chair hadn't had confining arms, I might have fallen out of it.

"My dear girl!" I exclaimed; "are you crazy? Or am I?"

"Neither of us," she answered, and now she was quite herself again. "Have you really been thinking all the time that you were Rodney Hazzard?"

"I've been forced to think it!" I exploded. "I'll leave it to you if I've been given a lost dog's chance to think anything else!"

"Well, you are not," she said this with such evident sincerity as to leave no loophole of uncertainty. "You merely look enough like Rodney Hazzard to mislead people."

"Good heavens!" I gasped; "do you mean to tell me—but it can't be! Surely all these people I've been meeting—or some of them, at least—would have——"

"It can be, and is," she broke in decisively. "Don't you remember now who you are?"

"I remember nothing; absolutely nothing. And if what you are saying is true, I'm nobody; I'm a wraith—a shadow—a lost man. You've knocked out the one little identity prop I had to lean upon!"

"But you've been trying to remember, haven't you?"

"Trying? I've tried until my brain is like

a mess of scrambled eggs! Sometimes the past that I can't reach seems just over the edge of things, but I can't grasp it. All I can say is that nothing here in South Tredegar, nor yet in Shotwell, has served to recall it. Everything was and is strange; nothing is familiar."

"Naturally it wouldn't be," she cut in soothingly. Then she turned to her desk and rummaged in a drawer. What she found and handed me was a cabinet photograph; the picture of a handsome young man with a pointed beard and neatly trimmed mustache. "Do you know what that is?" she asked.

She had touched the hidden spring. Something seemed to burst with a clatter and crash in the back part of my brain, and I heard myself say: "Of course I know; it's Rodney—my brother." Then, as I sprang up and began to walk the floor, the vanished past began to reveal itself like a slowly unrolling scroll; my boyhood with Rodney in the little home town in Indiana; our school-days, when we looked so much alike that our teachers couldn't tell us apart; our college, where we had taken the same course in mining engineering. Even our handwriting had been characteristic of the twin similarity; the home folks could never tell which one of us was writing until they came to the signature of the letter.

Judie gave me time to right the boat and bail it a bit, and I needed it. Finally she broke the silence.

"Is it coming back to you now?"

"Piecemeal," I said, drawing a long breath. "It is just as the doctor predicted; that some little thing would start the stopped machinery. Your showing me that picture did it."

"What doctor was that?" she queried.

"Wentworth; in the Severance Building. Norman told me about him and I went to him that first morning, before I came here. He said there'd be a comeback, sooner or later, and it is here. Only it is beginning from the far end; I can't seem to bring it down to date. I can remember that after we were graduated, Rodney came South somewhere to go into business for himself, and I—I went to Central America, didn't I?"

"You did. You were in Guatemala for three years or more, doing some engineering work for a gold-mining company. Don't you remember that?"

Instantly I recalled the series of glimpse pictures evoked by the man Talbot's bit of talk in the Marlboro lobby. Talbot had not been mistaken; he was as right as rain. I *was* the fever-stricken mining engineer who had come aboard the steamer at Puerto Barrios; I, myself, and no other. But how I came to be there, and what I was trying to do, were still among the things unrecallable.

"You'll have to help me a bit," I pleaded. "Two nights ago I met a man in the hotel who said he was a fellow passenger of mine on a boat from Puerto Barrios to New Orleans; that I had a fever and was delirious. I supposed, as a matter of course, that he was mistaking me for somebody else, and told him so; but I guess he wasn't. Do you happen to know what I was trying to do?"

"Since I wrote your brother's letters and saw your replies, I do know all about it," she returned. "Mr. Rodney wrote, begging you to come and help him in this Guess Mountain deal. That was about two months ago. He was breaking down, even then, and was afraid he couldn't keep going long enough to carry the deal through. You wrote back that you would come; and then again to say you were about to start.

"That was the last we heard, and we couldn't imagine what had become of you. Your brother held up as long as he could, but the strain broke him at last. I don't know definitely where he went, but I've been taking it for granted that when the collapse came he just went to pieces and ran away to your father and mother in Florida. They went down there a short time ago and bought an orange grove near Sanford. That was what made me say what I did a little while ago—about your being free, now, to go and hunt your brother up."

"Poor Rod!" I broke in; "it was a rather low-down trick I played on him; getting sick and dropping out just when I was needed most."

"Don't you remember anything at all about your sickness?"

"Next to nothing. I fancy it was typhoid or paratyphoid—which would account for the enormous appetite I'm carrying around with me now. Talbot said I was taken to the Charity Hospital in New Orleans upon the arrival of the steamer, and the hospital doctors must have thought I was fully recovered, since they evidently turned me loose. And I must have had some glimmerings of memory while I was convalescing,

because I apparently knew enough to take a ticket to South Tredegar. But tell me; have you known all along that I was Roderick and not Rodney?"

"Of course!" she replied scoffingly; "that is, almost from the first. You look enough like your twin to pass for him anywhere, but that is all. The moment you began to talk, I knew who you were. But if I hadn't known then, you said and did any number of things that first day to prove that you weren't Mr. Rodney. And the next day—I nearly went to pieces when I tried to imagine Mr. Rodney doing what you did to Parker Wayne! What I couldn't understand was why you were trying to make people believe you *were* Mr. Rodney."

"I didn't have to try," I pointed out. "It was the other side to; as I've said, I wasn't given a yellow dog's chance to believe anything else, myself. Still, it doesn't seem possible that all of Rod's friends could be so blind as to let another man step in and double for him."

"Think a minute," she urged. "You haven't met so very many of his really intimate friends in these five days, have you? And hasn't nearly everybody commented upon your changed looks?"

"I give you right, there," I conceded; "it has been the first word handed me whenever I met a new one. But there is Miss Treadway: don't tell me that a woman who has promised to marry a man could calmly swap him for another without——"

Out of the corner of my eye I saw her give a little toss of the shapely head.

"I'm not a mind reader. I don't know what you've been saying to Alicia Treadway, or what she has been saying to you."

"What she has said was a good bit to the doubtful, I'll have to admit," I confessed. "It was the same song that everybody else has been singing: 'You're so changed that I hardly know you'—that sort of thing, you know. Mighty little wonder she doesn't know me! But I'll never get over being thankful for one thing, at least."

"What is that?"

"That I don't have to marry Miss Alicia Treadway."

Silence for a minute or so while I dropped into the desk chair again and tried to drag myself around to the point of view which had so violently, not to say brutally, reversed itself. Out of the new tangle which the restoration of my own identity had precipitated I could draw only one clear-cut conclusion. Now, more than ever, it was binding upon me to vanish and leave no trace.

There was no slightest chance that I could go on impersonating Rodney now that I knew I was a rank impostor. And if I should take the other course—tell it abroad that I wasn't Rod, but only Rod's brother substituting for him. Heavens! the cumulative consequences were fairly appalling. The land transaction would blow up with a loud noise, Rod would be ruined, and the court at Shotwell, learning that it had been hoaxed into trying the wrong man, would undoubtedly insist upon trying the right one.

"You went to Shotwell to-day meaning to tell the judge and jury that they had the wrong Hazzard?" I said.

"If I was obliged to," she qualified. "I knew it would upset things dreadfully, if I should have to, but I didn't intend to let them punish you for something you didn't do, or even know about."

I twisted my chair to face her.

"In that case you would have had to choose between Rod and me. If you had cleared me it would only have been a shifting of the charge over to Rod. Had you thought of that?"

She pressed her lips tightly together and nodded.

"I had thought of everything. I knew that if it came out that you were only Mr. Rodney's brother, there would be an awful mix-up with everybody—the bank, and Mr. Stuart and Mr. Muhlenberg. Unless you had legal authority—as I knew you didn't have—none of them would have let you act for Mr. Rodney. But I didn't care; I wasn't going to let them send you to the penitentiary coal mines as a convict."

Here was an entirely new wrinkle in the tangle, and it made my blood tingle.

"Would you have pulled down the whole house of cards like that for the sake of a man you didn't know and never saw until five short days ago, Judie?"

She turned away and her answer was made to her type machine rather than to me.

"I know you much better than you know me. I've been here with your brother for a year and a half, and when he wasn't talking business, or about Alicia Treadway, he would fill in the time telling me what a miracle of a twin brother he had. He—he

seemed to think that the sun rises and sets in you. He used to keep your photograph here on his desk—one taken at the mine in Guatemala: I don't know what he has done with it now."

I knew what he'd done with it; it was the snapshot that was paired off with Alicia's on the dressing table in his bedroom at the Marlboro. The recollection of Alicia's picture reminded me that I had a duty yet to perform before I should vanish, and I took up the desk-set phone and called the Treadway house number. Fortunately, it was Alicia herself who answered.

"Roddy talking," I said, adding the first conscious lie to the many unconscious ones I had been telling.

"Yes, I know," she answered, and in her voice there was a little tremolo thrill that was hopeful—for Rod. "I've just had Mr. Berwick on long-distance from Shotwell," she went on, "and he has told me what happened, to-day. You don't know how glad and thankful I am! Did you drive back over the mountain?"

"Yes," I replied; "and listen, Alicia—er—dear; the Big Deal has gone through at last, and to-morrow—unless the world should come to an end in the meantime—a fellow named Rodney Hazzard will be able to buy and sell any number of those little bush-league capitalists your father would like to have you pick from when you marry. Don't you think, in the circumstances, we'd better forget what was said in the Marlboro lounge a couple of evenings ago—after my little fracas with Parker Wayne in the dining room?"

"Oh, Roddy, dear!" she came back. "Do you *want* to forget it?"

"It's the surest thing you know. And now listen once more. I'm leaving town to-night and I shan't be able to see you again before I go. But I'll promise you this: when you see him next, the fellow who asked you to marry him will be the same little old Roddy Hazzard that you've always known, conventionalities and all. If you should put him under a microscope you won't be able to detect any of those differences that have been troubling you so. I realize that I haven't been—er—quite the man you used to know, for the past few days, but it will be all right from this time on. And say: I'm going to leave a little piece of jewelry with Judie Bledsoe for you. I want you to put it on your finger again. You'll do that for your Roddy, won't you, Alicia—er—dear?"

I caught her fluttering "yes" before central cut us off, and was glad the interruption came before I should be obliged to stultify myself to any more unforgivable degree. When I hung the receiver on its hook, Judie's eyes were dancing.

"They tell only half the truth when they talk about love being blind," she derided. "It is deaf, as well; as deaf as a little old June-bug beetle! The very idea of Alicia Treadway thinking for a moment that it was Mr. Rodney talking to her at this end of the wire!"

"What do you know about love?" I demanded.

She laughed in my face.

"Sir James Barrie once wrote a play called "What Every Woman Knows." I suppose you never had a chance to see it—in Guatemala."

I had a prodding hunch that here was my opening to say a thing that was fairly aching to be said, but I postponed it in deference to the crowding and exacting demands of the moment in a different field.

"About the business of covering my tracks; that is the important thing just now," I said. "It must never be known that Rod's had an understudy playing his part for the past five days. I'm going to try to find him and get him back here. But if I shouldn't find him—if we should miss and he should turn up before I can get hold of him—you'll have to good-angel him to a fare-you-well—put him next so that he'll know everything that has been said and done and be able to take up the threads where I'm dropping them. It's asking an awful lot of you, but——"

"I'm still on Mr. Rodney's pay roll," she minded me, half jestingly. "Of course I shall tell him all I know."

"You'll know how to steer him straight," I hastened to say. "He'll have a harder job shifting from me to himself than I had in substituting for him because he will know what he is doing, and I was in a state of blessed ignorance. Nobody must know that he's been out and I've been in. It would set the clock back to just where it was five days ago, with a thousand added tangles to make matters worse."

"Indeed it would," she agreed readily; and then, with the rapturous eyes veiled:

"You are quite right in saying that you must go away, and—and never come back."

"Oh—oh, hold on," I protested. "I didn't say I was never coming back."

"But you mustn't—ever. Because, if you do, people will find out, and——"

"Leave that to your little Roderick; I'm coming, if I have to grow a red beard and dye my hair to match it."

She laughed a bit at that. "Would your beard be red? That is the fighting color, isn't it?" Then she went on half musingly: "It was the most wonderful thing that ever happened—your coming just when you did. It's trite to say that it was the psychological moment, but that is what it was really. Even if your brother hadn't broken down he would never have been able to carry things through. I knew it—felt it—all along."

"Why wouldn't he?"

"Because he hasn't—because his beard isn't red. He has everything that goes to make the successful business man; he is a genius in that way, and a perfectly gorgeous one. But he won't fight; you know what I mean—stand up and take blows and give them. Parker Wayne would have robbed him in the end; I know he would."

"Um," said I; "you've called the turn on Rod; he was never much of a rough-and-tumble scrapper, even as a boy; but he makes it up by being lovable and generous to a fault. As for me, I don't much mind the hard knocks—not if I can hand a few of them back. But the hardest one is coming right now."

It was a bunglesome little trap, but she fell into it as neatly as anything you ever saw, saying, as I hoped she would: "And what is that?"

"Leaving you," I asserted baldly. "But, as I've said, I'm coming back after you."

"I—I don't know what you mean," she stammered.

"Then I'll make it plainer. You are the only woman in the wide world. I knew it the moment I laid eyes on you."

"Ridiculous!" she scoffed. "You have known me only five little days, and no longer ago than yesterday you were trying to make yourself believe that you ought to be in love with Alicia Treadway!"

"'Trying' is right," I grinned. "But it was like building a fire under a balky mule; all it did was to burn the wagon up. I realize that you don't know me yet, and I'm perfectly willing to give you time; a month, or even two of them, if you think it will take that long."

"How am I going to get to know you any better if you go away?" she asked, all too unconcernedly, I thought.

"But, don't you see, I've *got* to go!" I lamented. "It is equally impossible for me to go on impersonating Rodney, or to declare myself—after the part I've been playing—as Rodney's brother. A few of Rod's friends might credit the story of the memory lapse, but more of them wouldn't. And those who didn't credit it would set both Rod and me down as a pair of sharp rascals who, for some reason that was not apparent on the surface of things, had conspired to pull some sort of game upon a trusting and confiding public. More than that, the big land deal would blow up into small fragments and scatter itself all over the scenery. I committed a forgery no longer than an hour ago when I signed Rod's name to Muhlenberg's papers."

She nodded, half absently, I fancied; and then I went back to the main contention.

"But these things are only side issues. I'm going away because I'm obliged to, and I'll stay away long enough to raise that red beard I spoke of—so that I won't look too criminally much like the shaved person these South Tredegarites have been welcoming to their hearts and homes during the past five days. Then I'm coming back—for you."

She looked aside, and it was only the twitching of the ripe red lips in a teasing smile that saved my life when she said: "You may not find me then; I may be married and gone."

It seemed to be time for a little *tour de force*—if I have the French of it right—and it was only a lover's leap, as you might say, from my chair to hers. When I gathered her in my arms she fought me a little, but I guess that was only the eternal feminine asserting itself automatically. For, the next minute, she was hiding a hot little face on my shoulder and trying to tell me brokenly that, after all, she was nothing but a silly, sentimental little fool, because she had long ago fallen in love with Rod's picture of me—with that and his brother-foolish praisings of me.

"Of course, at that time I didn't ever expect to see you," she protested in sweet confusion. "It was such a gushy, school-girly thing to do! But I couldn't help it; and when you wa-walked in that morning——"

It was the snap of a door latch and quick, nervous footsteps in the outer office that made us hastily break the clinch and fall apart; and, speaking for myself, I'm not at all sure that I had the mask of complete innocence well pulled on before the door opened and Rod—Rod himself in his own proper person, brown beard, neatly trimmed mustache, tortoise-shell spectacles and all—stood before us.

CHAPTER XVII.

When Rodney saw me he flung the hand bag he was carrying to the farthest corner of the room and made a rush for me quite in the old affectionate and brotherly fashion.

"Rick!—you old berserk!" he burst out, wringing my hand. "So you got here at last, did you? But it's too late. I held on as long as I could—until I went off my head and ran away without realizing what I was doing. I've come back now to go to jail—where I belong."

Together Judie and I pushed him into a chair—his own swivel chair—and made him listen to the story of the five weird days, briefed and simplified into words of one syllable. When it was told he put his face in his hands and his shoulders were shaking.

"I don't deserve it!" he cried out brokenly. "I ought to have had nerve enough to stand the gaff, but I hadn't. It's your fortune, Rick—not mine. You've earned every dollar of it!"

"Nothing like it!" I laughed. "I couldn't frame up a deal of that size in a thousand years. Judie and I merely shook the tree when the apple was ripe. Now you must take your orders and take 'em swiftly. Have you been to the hotel?"

"No; I'm just off the Florida train. As I turned the corner from the station I saw the office lights and came up to see what they meant."

"All right; here's the program. You go into that lavatory, before you show yourself anywhere else, and shave; oh, don't kick—you've got to do it. I have the tools right here in my grip. After you've done that, I'll give you your cues—and there are about a million of them. You'll have to drop into the place I'm leaving, and do it letter-perfect. You'll know what I mean when I repeat that I've been doubling for you the best I could, even with Miss Treadway. Among other things, you'll have to promise her that you'll let your beard grow again; she doesn't quite fancy the clean shave.

"While you are disguising yourself, I'll take Miss Judie home. Lock the door behind us, and stay right here until I come back. My train doesn't leave until midnight, and I'll give you all the time there is in between."

Like a man in a dream he began to unbuckle the straps of my grip. Suddenly he looked up as if he had just realized what I had been saying.

"But you're not going away!" he protested. "That's pure piffle. I want you to stay here with me—work with me—share this boodle with me. You've *got* to stay!"

"Nothing doing!" I retorted. "You haven't grasped the situation. Just at the present time there is room for only one of us in this thriving little city of yours; do you get that?"

"But see here!" he pleaded; "I can never play up to my part unless you stay and coach me!"

"Yes, you can—after I get through with you to-night; and what I can't tell you, Judie will." And with that I took Judie under my arm and ducked.

We found a taxi, and I put her in and went with her to the house on Battery Hill where she roomed and boarded. The parting had to be brief, with the taxi waiting to take me back to the office. But there was time for a word or two on the front doorstep.

"Did you really mean it when you said you'd come back?" she whispered.

"You'll see me the very day that my beard will pass muster."

"I shan't like you so well with a beard—a red beard; I know I shan't."

"Then we'll be married and skip for it, and I'll shave the beard off the minute we're out of town."

"Tommie!" she said, meaning the Sentimental variety, I suppose; but since the street wasn't very well lighted, and the house was dark as a pocket, she let me wrap her in my arms and kiss her, and this time there were no echoing footsteps to make me cut it short.

Rod had made his sorrowful sacrifice to the necessities by the time I reached the office, and I scarcely recognized him. But when we looked together in the lavatory glass, I had to make a face before I could

tell which was my own reflection in the quicksilver.

"You'll do," I decided; and then we settled ourselves for the cramming course in prompt cues.

It lacked only fifteen minutes of the midnight train time when all the arrears were brought up to date, and I told Rod that, so far as I could see, he was pretty well prepared to fall in where I was falling out.

"But there is one more hitch," I pointed out. "I've told Stuart, and also Alicia, that I'm leaving town to-night. In view of that, it won't do for you to be here to-morrow; besides, it would be more than dangerous if you should have to meet Muhlenberg—he is too sharp-eyed for you to take a chance on him, and there is no need of it, since Stuart will act for you in closing the deal."

"But what shall I do?—run away again?" he asked.

I fished out the sketches I had made for Daniel Hilliard and went rapidly over the data I had figured out for that gentleman.

"Here's your chance," I said. "I've already banked five hundred dollars of Mr. Hilliard's money for you, and you can get out and earn it. There's a train for his place in Alabama at four o'clock in the morning. Keep yourself out of sight until that time, and then make a sneak for it. How will that do?"

"Fine," he said; "and when I come back, I'll lean good and hard on Judie for more of the cues."

"All right," I grumbled; "but do all of your leaning in the next month or so. Now I must go."

"You won't fail to come back?" was his last plea.

"Not unless old B. Typhosus takes a hand again," I laughed. "With Judie here and waiting for me, I'd come if I had to count the ties."

I made for the station and the train which was to carry me three fourths of the way on my twenty-four-hour jump to Florida and the new home of my father and mother.

And now? For a weary month I've been loafing here under the Florida orange trees, jotting these foolish things down to kill time while my beard was growing. It's grown now; long enough to trim, at least. To-morrow I'm going back—to Judie.

DO SOMETHING ELSE!

THE men who are going to bring the world back to normal are the men who succeed in spite of failure. The cotton planter who lets his cotton lie in storage while he sits on his veranda, idly waiting for the price to go up; the mechanic whose muscles grow slack because his particular line of work offers him no employment; the manufacturer who locks up his plant and goes off on a yachting trip because there is no paying demand for what that plant has been turning out—such men are a poor sort after all. What the world needs is the cotton planter who will grow other crops when cotton is a drug on the market, the mechanic who will take other work when his accustomed tools are useless, the manufacturer who will convert his plant to new uses when its old output is not desired.

We have said farewell to the days when the world, rich and comfortable, offered easy opportunity to every seeker. The time has come when a sick and ailing world can recover only through the efforts of men who, by making opportunities for themselves, minister to the immediate needs of desolated peoples. The age cries out for greatness that goes on its own; and it offers inestimable prizes to those who drop the worn-out tools to furnish forth things that are new, things that are necessary.

Mademoiselle Champagne

By Wallace Irwin

Author of "Letters of a Japanese Schoolboy," "The Blooming Angel," Etc.

It seems as though Cally Devore climbed on the water wagon just in time.

"WELL, Cally's *It* again!" said the president of the Askers, accusingly, as he reached out to pull a dice box toward him over the brilliantly painted table.

"That sets him back eight quarts," was the strictly impersonal comment of "Buff" Hayes as he gazed across, heavy lids drooping over indolent eyes.

"Scotch," said "Red" Mickelson thirstily.

"Or a case and a half of rye," decreed Boyce Trubell's foggy bass.

Hawtrey Jones, president and grand panhandler of the Society of Askers, pursed his tight little mouth between sagging cheek muscles and barked in the nipping tones which had gained him a reputation as village humorist in the sunny colony of Santa Juanita:

"Does she ask, 'Scotch or rye?' when she meets you at the door, Cally? Or does this Mademoiselle Champagne——"

"Oh, cheese it!" growled the young man whom they had been baiting with such energy.

"I know," protested Hawtrey. "But if we roll the bones for who'll produce the goods, and if weeks go by and nobody pays his debts—well, what's the good of the Askers?"

"I've often wondered," mused Cally Devore, tilting his handsome body back in a chair which had been painted blue and orange to match the futuristic table.

At this remark, savoring of sedition, all eyes were turned upon him; and Cally Devore, being a babe in arms among these hardened sinners, blushed a little in his effort to look very old.

The Society of Askers were meeting, as they did occasionally, at a round table in San Balsalmo's palmy patio. There were four faces, variously debouched, centering a stare upon the youngster, Devore, as he tilted beside a circle of polished wood under an Alice-blue California sky. Buff Hayes, who had played football back in 1900 and done very little since, had grown blue jowls over a jaw which nature had built for strength; Boyce Trubell was one of your alcoholics whom whisky makes thin—his nose jutted like a beak between eyes that were rimmed with crimson; Red Mickelson remained an auburn Apollo, grown somewhat fat and splotchy; Hawtrey Jones, president and grand panhandler of the society, had the pasty look of a plucked fowl.

Cally Devore, physically at odds with this company, appraised them for the first time with coolly critical eyes. He had been immensely flattered, a year ago, to have been admitted into the group of worldly and socially skillful men who had chosen for themselves a whimsical name—which had been Hawtrey Jones' inspiration. But this afternoon the picture seemed dulled, the joke had lost its point. One insistent, condemning sentence seemed ringing in his ears: "Men who might have been and never were." What was the matter with him? Was it the influence of California spring; or had the drink, doled out from Trubell's pocket flask, been thinner and poorer than usual?

The Society of Askers had been born in Santa Juanita but a few hours after the birth of amendment eighteen in Washington. Hawtrey Jones, universally indulged as village cut-up, had called the first meeting, very publicly, during the last wet night in the Hotel Capistrano's once celebrated barroom. "The Society of Askers;"—so had read the comic account in next morning's *Globe*—"Object: free booze. Membership: limited to five. Ways and Means: any way to get it. Stealing permitted when all else fails."

For a few months the Askers had been a diversion, hence a social boon, to Santa Juanita, which is one of your outdoor colonies, dependent for mental stimulus upon gossip of divorces, going and coming. The

variously stuccoed houses, snuggled among opal hills, had laughed uproariously at the naughty boys who had given it out cold, as the saying goes, that they would gamble, flirt, and dance only in such houses as kept the full decanter full in view. The idea had worked charmingly, dizzily well for half a season.

Then Santa Juanita had shown a tendency; a tendency to serve liquor a little late or not at all, in so far as the Askers were concerned. The best joke will run its course, even in a golfing community. On one point the town agreed: it was too bad about Cally Devore. Old Junius Devore had about given the boy up. In another year he would be as bad as Hawtrey Jones.

"Cally, you're stung again!" repeated Buff Hayes, who sat toying with the fateful dice merely as a matter of habit.

Cally Devore threw back his head and laughed. He was clear-eyed, lean-faced, and finely made. There was a flush on his cheeks and something reckless in his eyes as he said:

"Eight quarts. It's up to me to go fishin' again."

"Fishin'! Not catchin' much up at Quigg's these days, eh what?"

"Bible readings up there, Cally?"

"Lay you a quart of wood alcohol she slips a little Scotch to him on the side."

"Scotch? Not on your life. She's vamping him—cheaper and easier."

"You've noticed something about Cally, haven't you? Far-away look and everything?"

These comments and more like them went rapidly round the blue-and-orange table, causing the young man who had inspired them to flush a shade deeper.

"Eight quarts," he stammered self-consciously, "is a lot of liquor these days."

"It's easier to make gin out of sweet spirits of niter," suggested Red Mickelson sadly.

"Shut up!" commanded the grand panhandler. "Trouble with us is our morale's blown up. We go forth full of boasts and come back full of excuses. Nothing more intoxicating."

They were all looking at Cally as Hawtrey resumed:

"What's the use of being young and beautiful and having the entrée to the pink palace on the hill if you can't cash in? There sits the finest wine cellar in the State of California, doing nothing. All you need's the nerve to ask for it."

"How long has it been since we sicked our Cally on Mademoiselle Champagne?" inquired Trubell.

"Five weeks next Wednesday," replied Hawtrey.

"If I came back with the goods some day you'd all be surprised, wouldn't you?" asked Cally with a hollow grin.

"Not too surprised to drink it," announced Hawtrey. "But we've given you up, Cal. We took you in, we brushed you off, we bore patiently with your childish faults. Step by step we educated you in the art of asking. And how have you turned out?"

Poor Cally's grin grew sickish.

"What have you done for the Askers? Five weeks ago, come Wednesday"—Hawtrey was inducing melodrama into his lines—"we sent you forth on a holy mission. Mademoiselle Champagne had come to town. 'Go to it, Sir Knight,' says we. 'On yonder hill there sits a pink palace in whose dungeon keep lies many a tun of golden sack, many a flagon of sparkling dew from the enchanted valley of Rheims. By this we mean that Uncle Eph Quigg has gone to hell and left behind him the divinest stock of booze from Seattle to Tia Juana. Sole heiress to that magic hoard, there dwells within those strawberry walls a princess of New England origin, Mademoiselle Champagne——'"

"When you've finished with your scenario," said Cally Devore, "I'd like to say something."

"He speaks at last!" shouted the grand panhandler.

"Well, didn't I go to the Quigg place?" asked young Devore blunderingly.

"We admit you've done your duty by Quigg's." Hawtrey took up the prosecution. "You've gone there regularly every afternoon and stayed about three high balls, Greenwich time. But what have you brought back? What's she handing you?"

"Ginger ale," said Cally in brief.

"Great sulphur matches!" Hawtrey Jones pursed his slit of a mouth to a thin whistle.

"You see, I'm kind of working a system that——"

Hawtrey braced his knuckles under his chin and half finished a sentence.

"If it was anybody else but that funny little Quigg girl——"

"Just what do you mean by that?" Cally cut in, his blue eyes hardening to steel.

"Don't get het up, old dear. All we're asking for is a field report."

"Well, I'll tell you." Cally's temper faded as quickly as it flared. "I went at the Quigg job as a sporting proposition, and all I want is a sporting chance. If any of the regular places had been open to us, you know darned well I'd never have considered the Quiggs."

"I'll concede that much," relented Hawtrey. "We asked you to solve the socially impossible."

"It wasn't hard getting acquainted," said the apologetic Asker. "She told me that people had a way of being neighborly at Majolika Falls, where they come from——"

"Majolika what?" broke in Mickelson.

"Falls," insisted Cally. "Had a watery sound. I'll say so. The civic center there is called Temperance Hall and you're socially dead if you don't belong to the Epworth League."

"And she's inherited the Quigg wine cellar!"

"Miss Quigg—her first name's Rebecca—has brought with her a certain Aunt Deb. Really, it wouldn't be so hard to work, if Rebecca had the say. She's a good sort. But this Aunt Deb is a banshee. She wants to lay aside a share of Uncle Eph's fortune to founding an Ephraim Quigg Fund for the purpose of discouraging bootlegging in southern California."

"Are you trying to kill me?" implored Hawtrey Jones.

"Fact. It seems that Becky"—Cally hesitated slightly on the familiar version of her name—"never laid eyes on Uncle Eph; maybe if she'd had a look at the old pirate she'd have refused to take his money. Aunt Deb says he died in sin. Sin is right."

Cally Devore lit a cigarette and eyed his jury before the final plea.

"There's the formation I've got to break through if I ever lay a finger on that stock."

"Does she know what she's inherited?" asked Trubell, almost reverentially.

"How can she help it?"

Cally Devore, as though energized by a sudden hope or warned by a sudden scruple, arose and put on his hat. He still wore the bantering air which had helped him through the cross-examination, but his heart was torn between a qualm and a temptation.

"None but the brave deserve the fair," jeered Hawtrey after the departing Asker.

"And everything's fair in——" Cally Devore strode away, as if at a loss to finish a poor epigram.

"Love and liquor," supplied Hawtrey, speaking too softly to reach the departing member.

Devore was swinging through San Balsalmo's leafy patio with its blue-tiled arcades, fluttering banana palms and plashing fountains. The season which Californians dare to call winter had passed into the temperate languors of spring. A Chinese boy, brilliant as a bluebird in his satin pajamas, scuttled after the young gentleman to restore a walking stick which he had forgotten.

"Love and liquor," mused Hawtrey Jones with a fishy glance toward the vanishing champion. "I wonder if he's planning to take the whole cellar?"

"Matrimonially?" asked Red Mickelson, yawning.

"Why not? Cally's no spring lamb, you know. He's not going to spend a month of his valuable time, having the life ragged out of him by this gang, without something to show for it. Look at the layout! Little rube heiress, socially outside, and in sole possession of that cellar—'long comes a dashing, wicked young clubman with a worldly lure——"

"If he marries Mademoiselle Champagne," came in Trubell's foggy bass, "he'll get what's coming to him, and it won't be booze. She'll have him singing in the First Methodist choir."

"For that cellar," declared pot-valiant Hawtrey, "I'd elope with Emma Goldman."

Buff Hayes, who had been dozing like an overfed animal, suddenly awoke from his coma.

"Haw!" he snorted. "What I'd like to know is how is Justine Tallant taking all these trips of Cally's up to the pink palace?"

"Justine?" asked Hawtrey, as if he had never before heard the name. "Well, what's she going to do about it?"

"Cally's taken up most of her time since the divorce," suggested Hayes. "I don't see her turning him loose now just because Mademoiselle Champagne's got a hammer lock on his afternoons."

"Suffering cats!" growled Mickelson.

"Exactly!" agreed Hawtrey. "And you know how they fight."

"She's a good sportswoman," declared Trubell somewhat sentimentally.

"We all are, so long as we're winning. But look at the consequences. Suppose Cally should fall in love."

"With the little Quigg?" Hawtrey emitted a rough guffaw. "Buff, for that quip you deserve to be crowned with a bale of hay."

"Well," persisted the relic of gridiron fame, "he's taking a lot of trouble."

"After all," suggested Trubell, "who really knows if Uncle Eph left any stock?"

"Know it?" Hawtrey's little eyes came wide open. "Man alive, I saw it myself."

"No!"

The interjection came from several throats at once. It was as though an alchemist of old had boasted of seeing the philosopher's stone.

"Sure as you're born. Uncle Eph wasn't hard to cultivate, you know, except Santa Juanita wouldn't touch him with a ten-foot pole. He was a bit too raw even for this town, where they'll stand things pretty rare."

"I sort of missed him when he died," admitted Trubell. "He could always make *me* laugh, and that's something."

"He was an honest-t'-goodness old scalawag—that's what I admired about him," said Hawtrey. "Pulled some pretty good practical jokes, too, when he was drunk——"

"Which was all the time," supplied Red Mickelson.

"Remember how he used to go roaring down Junipero Street, sort of cake-walking and throwing his ivory-headed cane like a drum major? And those whiskers!"

"A beautiful sight!" said Trubell.

"They say he put away two quarts of Scotch and three of wine every day of his life. And he was a practical joker to the death. Who but Uncle Eph would have chosen the front steps of the First Baptist church on a Sunday morning to drop dead on?"

"Sporting, I call it," said Mickelson.

"And here's where the wine cellar comes in," went on Hawtrey, gazing morosely at his empty glass. "One night after a dance I found the old boy bowling along the Shore Drive in that comely limousine of his. Soused to the ears. 'Come on, you dude,' he yells, 'and I'll show you the only first-class sight in this jerkwater village of snobs and sissies!' Did I go? I did. I was crazy to get a squint at that wine cellar. There had been so much talk about it and so few people had seen it that I was beginning to think it was a myth——"

"And you saw it?"

"Spent the night with it," grinned Hawtrey. "Wine cellars were no luxury in those days. But I'll never forget that night. They tell me that, before the war, there were a hundred and twenty-one million bottles of champagne in the world. I think Uncle Eph had most of it—or that's the way it looked to me when he took me downstairs, swung open an oak door, and showed me a sight that haunts my dreams. I verily believe that there was a mile of vintage wine down there. None of your California stuff. All imported. And old red stuff—yum—yum! —*Clos de la Perriere, Clos de Vaugeot, Chambertin, Romanee-Conti*—and the old rascal had imported two enormous tuns for his sherry with *Jerez de la Frontera* burned in the wood."

"How 'bout Scotch?" whispered Trubell with the open-mouthed wonder of a small boy listening to fairy tales.

"Cases of it—stacked up like the Great Wall of China. Uncle Eph's own favorite brand, specially bottled for him—Auld Tappit Kine. A spoonful of that stuff would make you willing to kiss a rhinoceros right on the tip of his cute little horn."

The Askers, their prestige failing, their thirst increased, sat around the table in silent contemplation of that Arabian wonder. Red Mickelson was the first to speak, and his voice crackled like a dry leaf.

"Here's luck to Cally," he said, and the glass he raised was quite empty, save for an insipid fragment of ice.

"I wonder if he'll deliver the goods?" asked Hawtrey Jones of the dreamy circle.

Cally Devore, at that very instant, was wondering the same thing. He had not gone up to the pink hacienda to call on Miss Quigg, as had been his custom for the past month. The bantering conversation round the blue-and-orange table at San Balsalmo had crystallized a conviction which had long wandered in his mind. She would be doing something foolish with her liquor—she and her fanatical aunt—if somebody didn't step in and save her from herself.

Arguing stubbornly with his conscience, which was small, but could buzz like a gnat, he sauntered down Junipero Street, uncertain which way to turn. Among romantic palms, on a high promontory overlooking the

sea, he could catch a glimpse of the pink hacienda where, he knew, little Becky was waiting for him.

His motives wouldn't be entirely base, should he ask her to marry him. What an adorable child she was! What a contrast to Justine Tallant, dancing half clad and arrogant at the Country Club.

"Mush!" grunted Cally.

And by one of those senseless whims which often seize that mysterious sex, the male, he changed his mind about calling on Becky Quigg. Round the corner he could see two feather-duster palms, marking the confines of a chalk-white house where Justine Tallant ruled and schemed and quarreled.

He knew that Justine was offended. Never a word said she, but he could feel it in the air. After all, there was nothing to be gained by her hostility. All Santa Juanita was probably talking about his defection from the lady's court. He was really rather fond of Justine, and there was no reason for ill feeling. Cally thrust his hands deep into his pockets and strolled toward the feather-duster palms. A sleepy Chinaman met him at the door and announced with an air which seemed to hide duplicity:

"Velly solly, she out!"

Cally turned away with a smile. Probably Justine had told Wong to lie consistently. At the gate he yawned and looked again toward the pink palace. Curious, he thought, how a fellow gets into a habit! But he was resolved not to see Becky so soon. He wanted time to think her over.

II.

Becky Quigg lounged in the shadow of a rosy arcade that sunny afternoon and surrendered herself to a Spanish witchery. The hard whalebone of Massachusetts had softened in that scented air which came to her like the breath of a hothouse, fragrant of earth and sap, suggestive of orchids. Over a low pink wall she could see the gentle glory of her domain; she had scarcely believed it real when first she stepped into it out of New England's hard realities. Then she had yielded a little day by day, learned to surrender herself to it, to breathe it into her lungs and let it possess her.

Through the paradise of palms, exotic pines, and prodigiously flowering shrubs a one-eyed Chinese gardener shuffled along, humming some air which was wandering and endless like the yellow river which had spawned him. His wordless song stood out, the *leit motif* for accorded instruments from wind and tree and water; the whir of humming birds' wings, the silver flutes of meadow larks, the distant tut-tut of motor boats coming from the stretch of harbor which lay below.

The Puritan conscience, that ill-tempered spiritual schoolma'am to which she had been taught to defer since babyhood, stalked out of the shadows to rap her knuckles and bid her stiffen and resist. But she was too far gone in California to heed the holy pang. Somewhere in her dreamy mind she did wonder a little if it were a sin to live in Eden, or if one of those golden oranges, just showing through the hedge, might dangle there to tempt the Eve in her.

Sin. Uncle Ephraim Quigg had died in sin. Aunt Deb, whose knowledge of the infernal was sometimes Dantesque, had told her much and hinted more as to the career of that piratical adventurer who had spent his youth in Carson City, frequenting all-night resorts where he could play a piano or a sucker with equal facility. A vulgar card trick, Aunt Deb maintained, had won for him the Skating Minnie Mine, on the strength of whose prosperity the gigantic wastrel, already bloated with liquor, had rolled into California in a private car, had settled in Santa Juanita and cheated a Spanish grandee out of his hacienda by means of a poker game which, in melodramatic incident, outrivaled the third act in "The Great Northwest."

As she drowsed there, drugged with California spring, Becky was quite unable to agree with Ephraim Quigg's damnation to fires everlasting. Since she was old enough to remember he had sent his brother's wife's sister-in-law, Mrs. Deborah Stanley, a little pension whereby Rebecca was to be, as Uncle Eph expressed it, "kept out of the factory." Spending his money with a sort of crabbed wisdom, Aunt Deb had never failed to make a point of his inexhaustible wealth and his illimitable vices. He had lived in liquor and had died in it.

Under the tolerance of her mood the girl lay wondering just how much Aunt Deb had exaggerated Uncle Eph's transgressions. She had certainly made a romance of his wealth; for when the will had been read, naming Rebecca Quigg as sole legatee, a kind old corporation lawyer from San Francisco had sat

down with her to explain that the Quigg estates had shriveled like the Magic Skin, leaving little more than thirty acres of paradise round the pink hacienda and a bonded income barely adequate for its upkeep.

But who, secure in Eden, dreams of annoying real estate speculation in the Land of Nod? Becky sighed and lay a little farther back in the comfortable porch chair, pulling a Navajo rug over her knees as protection against California's cool shade.

Never before had she opened her heart to let love in. There had been no Romeos in the Temperance Club which had formed her social environment back in Majolika Falls. She had been aware of marriage, among other stern duties, had even considered a proposal from the thin, cold lips of Mr. Varian Keep, who dealt in hardware and led the choir. The Lochinvars of Majolika had been "town boys," youths to be avoided for their deeds in pool rooms and local dance halls.

How, then, had romance stolen forth to meet her out of the manzanita groves and opal hills of southern California? They had scarcely taken possession of the big house with its lovely grounds and shocking art collection when her cavalier had appeared, smiling and handsome, to give them welcome to Santa Juanita. His appearance had been sufficiently accountable, for it was customary back in Majolika for neighbors to be neighborly. In her thoughts he stood like a beautiful milestone in this new journey of life.

In Majolika Falls it had been in vogue to refer to college men as "stuck up." But there was nothing high, haughty, or peculiar about Cally Devore. She liked the way his hair waved at the temples and the expression of his eyes, which would sometimes deepen until they were almost black. Becky knew nothing of the fashionable world into which strange fortune had thrown her. But surely his behavior would have been rated in her home town as nothing less than "keeping company."

Aunt Deb, always sensitive to gloomy auspices, had hinted that this Devore boy might be an adventurer questing after heiresses. But the gleam of the white Italian home of the Devores, just visible through eucalyptus trees, banished such unworthy doubts. True, the elder Devores had never called; nobody in all Santa Juanita had called on the Quiggs, with the exception of faithful Cally. There *had* been the Reverend Mr. Cunix of the Anti-Saloon League whose interest had been mainly focused on Aunt Deb's pious endeavors. Becky had almost forgotten him in the pleasant changes of her heart.

The westerly sun, shooting bright amber lights between amethystine shades, had crept round a pink pillar and pushed back the shadow until the girl lay half exposed to the clear warmth. She was small in stature and plump as a September quail; not a fashionable figure. But the face turned toward spring's glory was pretty and wistful with a well-arched little nose and violet eyes which seemed to reflect the same color faintly on the pure skin. Her hair, clinging in garlands round her head, was blue-black as any Spaniard's could have been.

She arose finally to move her chair back out of the heat, and as she did so she glanced at the dial on her wrist. A quarter past four. Would he forget to come?

"Becky!"

She was startled out of her dream to see Aunt Deb standing in the doorway like a crape-shrouded mast. She was mournfully clad for the street and under her black veil —Uncle Ephraim's will had especially forbidden mourning—her meager face wore the set and stubborn expression which chinless faces sometimes show.

"Going out, Aunt Deb?" asked Rebecca dreamily.

"Going out!" shrilled the sour old voice. "Mercy sakes, Becky. I've been telling you all day that I had an appointment with the Reverend Mr. Cunix at the parsonage. The Society for the Suppression of Illicit Liquor Traffic has put in a special request——"

"Oh, yes." In spite of herself Rebecca yawned.

"What's come over you, Becky?" asked Aunt Deb, squinting through little, gold-rimmed spectacles.

"Oh! Has something?" Rebecca cowered back involuntarily like a criminal discovered.

"You're mooning all the time. Everything I say goes into one ear and out of the other. This atmosphere is very demoralizing. Just see the way your Uncle Ephraim carried on."

An appeal and a resentment in the girl's eyes stilled the last rebuke. It was strange how Rebecca Quigg, heiress, still permitted her dependent to bully and to bait her. The habit of a lifetime will not change with the decree of a probate court.

"I suppose that Devore boy will be hanging round wasting some more of your time. In my opinion he's a young scamp. There's a great field in Santa Juanita for reform." It was characteristic of Aunt Deb to wander like this, always sharp and never to the point. "And it's plain to be seen what the worldly folks of this town think of us. It's your Uncle Ephraim's sinful reputation—and who can blame them? And now I'm going to donate these temperance books and tracts to the Suppression library. I think you ought to send that Devore boy kiting, or find out his intentions. Land sakes!"

The last interjection had to do with time's passage, no doubt, for Aunt Deb ran rapidly down the steps and threw herself into the waiting automobile so recklessly that a corner of her mourning skirt jammed in the door as she closed it. The car scuttled round a bend of the drive and Rebecca was aware too late of a little shabby pamphlet which had fluttered out of the pious bundle Aunt Deb had purposed to carry to the Reverend Mr. Cunix. Rebecca went dreamily down the steps to pick up the fallen leaflet and read its faded title:

"TEMPERANCE ALMANAC
of the
Massachusetts Temperance Union
for the year of our Lord
1842."

She ran her thumb idly across the dog-eared pages of a tract whose type she knew only too well. At the head of a calendar page, giving dates and phases of the moon, stood a *Horrible Example.* It was a steel engraving illustrating a fallen gentleman, his features not unlike those of the late Henry Ward Beecher, permitting himself to be rescued from a doorway labeled "Gin, Wine, and Rum," by several pot-hatted and side-whiskered philanthropists. The sermon opposite was entitled, "Treating and Traveling." She read:

One of the earliest, and of all others the most destructive custom in the use of intoxicating drinks was "treating"—giving liquor as a mark of friendship, respect, and hospitality. Incident to this, a course which soon followed. was the whole system of betting. It will probably occur to our readers as readily as to our own mind. how frequent and invariable, too, the practice has become to bet a "bottle of wine," "a bowl of punch," a "treat," or even a "mug of cider." It became the universal panacea of grogshop, tavern and more genteel differences, wrangling and strife——

Rebecca Quigg raised her soft eyes from the page of lofty sermonizing and paused to listen; a certain pleasant pur, which had been audible through the shrubs materialized into the form of a light-blue coupé which a pretty lady was steering round the curved drive. To Becky the moment was embarrassing, because hitherto she had been permitted but a distant view of that sportively clad type who were wont to go darting in and out of the Country Club gate. So when the blue car stopped flush with the Quiggs' pink steps the heiress became disconcertingly aware that Santa Juanita had decided to call.

"Miss Quigg?" asked the visitor, almost gayly, as she stepped down from the driver's seat.

"Yes, I'm Miss Quigg—very pleased to meet you, I'm sure," stammered Rebecca, taking one of the gloved hands and noting how monkey thin was the arm which worked with the movement of greeting.

"I'm Mrs. Tallant," explained the lovely motorist.

Rebecca, a freshman in worldy knowledge, had sufficient of the old Eve in her to realize much at a glance. Justine Tallant was not so young as she wished to appear; she was squeezing every ounce of youth out of life's tube. Her figure was girlish, but her face was sharpened to a point, which was all but foxlike. Only her grace and her style saved her from being scrawny.

What was it she hid behind that pleasant look? She might have been asking, "Why does the girl get herself up like that?" There was a hidden purpose, too, in the polite, good-humored smile which she shed upon the stranger from Majolika Falls.

"Oh, my dear," began Mrs. Tallant, chattering energetically from the moment of her arrival and putting on a confidential air which quite disarmed Becky of her first suspicions, "how I envy you the breeze up here! If you stay during the summer you'll adore it. I never drive out this way but what I wonder why I keep that stuffy corner in town. And how wonderfully well you've done everything!"

She paused to look across paradise before accepting the porch chair which Becky offered her. Her look of slightly patronizing approval was all-embracing, just as though Becky had planted the orange trees and tinted the pinkish walls with her own hand.

"It's just the way we found it," admitted Rebecca. "Aunt Deb—Mrs. Stanley, that is —thinks those shaggy trees down there——"

Justine Tallant leveled her yellowish eyes toward the shaggy trees and prompted kindly, in her artificial accents:

"The eucalyptus, you mean?"

"Yes. She thinks they look kind of untidy. But I just love them—they seem to hang like big curtains, with the sea showing through."

"Aren't they amusing?" agreed Mrs. Tallant, with a dry laugh.

Their eyes met in a flash of unreasoning hostility; and yet their lips continued to smile over words which were pleasant as the California afternoon.

"I hope you're going to like us," said Justine Tallant.

"I simply love this place," replied Becky Quigg, ever plain of speech. "I didn't know anything could be so beautiful."

Justine's fine-drawn eyebrows went up a point.

"It is rather nice, isn't it? But one outgrows climate, don't you think? I've been here eight seasons—imagine! One can't sit forever admiring hills and trees, can one? The people here are often amusing—too amusing sometimes."

She said the last with a wicked gesture of the eyes and prattled on.

"People here are always comparing it to Nice—that's hardly fair, is it? The whole world goes by on the Riviera, but Santa Juanita can't think of much but golf. How's your game?"

"Pretty well, thank you," said poor Becky, quite lost.

"Rather a decent course here, but the adobe soil makes it dreadfully hard when dry weather comes on. Hawtrey Jones says that you can make the eighteen holes in one shot if you only know how to bounce the ball."

Upon this graceful quotation Mrs. Tallant's yellowish eyes wandered and her flow of speech was stilled. She was looking across the hills toward the white portico and tall pillars just showing through a eucalyptus fringe.

"I didn't realize," she cooed, "that you were so *near* the Devores. You could almost pop a stone on their roof. She's charming, don't you think?"

"I don't know Mrs. Devore," admitted Becky. "They haven't called on us—yet," she floundered and hated herself for the flush which she felt sure had betrayed her.

"Of course they will," said Justine amiably. "Santa Juanita's dreadfully slow about such things."

"I know their son—that is Cally—Mr. Devore—he comes quite often——"

"Ah!" Mrs. Tallant pursed her lips. It was a sly little grimace, half hiding a smile.

"Of course, if you know Cally," she agreed, "you couldn't expect the elder Devores to be very friendly."

Aside from such a puzzlement as *Alice* might have shown to her "wonderland" acquaintances, Becky felt a thrill of resentment.

"I don't know what you mean," she said.

"Santa Juanita's so full of funny little ins and outs," smiled Justine. "It takes a while to know what to expect. Cally Devore, you know, is really a dreadfully bad boy."

The singing air of spring seemed frozen suddenly into a deadly stillness. What had this woman come to say?

"Mrs. Devore and Junius take him a bit too seriously, I think. But they've had cause. And after the sort of girls he's picked out —well, you can hardly blame them from holding aloof a little from his friends."

"He seems a very nice young man to me," was Becky's faint defense.

"My dear child!" Mrs. Tallant rilled her merriment. "Call him anything but that. Call him charming—he could charm the squirrels out of the trees. Call him handsome and talented. Even call him industrious—he's that sometimes when he wants something to drink. But you mustn't make the faux pas of calling him *nice* in Santa Juanita."

"He's always seemed so to me," persisted Becky, setting her stubborn little New England will against this slander.

"My dear Miss Quigg," her caller rippled on, "if he were nice I don't think he'd stay in the Askers very long."

"The which?" queried Becky.

"The Askers. They're our bad boys, you know—dreadfully bad boys; but it's our own fault for spoiling them. But, of course, you *must* have heard of them."

"I haven't the remotest idea," confessed Becky, her voice trembling.

"My dear," said Justine, "it's really hard to believe that you're so innocent. All the town is watching the little comedy, and they

think you've guessed the plot and are playing Cally Devore——"

"Cally Devore!" repeated the girl stupidly, then a note of anger tore her voice as she asked, "Will you please tell me what you're driving at?"

She expected the foxlike woman to resent her rudeness and go away, but Justine's tone remained caressing, as she explained:

"The Askers—they began it as a foolish drunken joke when the country went dry. Cally Devore shouldn't have placed himself with such a crowd. They're much older than he, and they're leading him downhill as fast as he can go. Nobody seems to have any influence over him. His father's cut his allowance down to nothing. Of course that keeps him in the Askers permanently, because their whole idea is to work together and get liquor free."

The rest of that sordid narrative came to Becky's ears in sounds that were far away, but very distinct. The air of spring seemed shot with muddy vapors. Illusion was gone.

"They started it last July, Hawtrey Jones and Boyce Trubell and that crowd. They're perfect dears, you know, and they'll do anything but work. None of them ever had enough ahead to lay in a stock, so they came out openly and declared that their object was to exchange their amusing company for liquor. It *was* amusing! But they carried it too far, and now the poor dears are fairly desperate for a drink. It's all right, I suppose, for old beaus like Boyce and Hawtrey to love whisky more than life itself. But poor Cally Devore——"

Whatever it was she had come to say, Mrs. Tallant was going at it indirectly. But even as a bird of prey wheels round the wounded rabbit in smaller and smaller circles, so was Justine coming to the point.

"You can't blame him for becoming an Asker. Even his mother won't give him a cent now—and Heaven knows she's done her share toward spoiling him. But Cally must get his liquor some way. I hope I haven't made the Askers sound too horrid—really, they have been as good as a musical comedy. The way they met Sir Taj Mysore at the train—it was printed in all the Coast papers. He's the Oriental lecturer or something. All the Askers met him at the train and represented themselves as a new religious cult. Cally did most of the talking. Before night Sir Taj had given them three bottles of Bourbon. Actually!"

Justine's tawny eyes were shining, her narrow face abeam with humor as she sat there.

"They're awfully funny," agreed Becky, praying for strength with which to meet some vague torment this woman was reserving for her.

"Yes," cooed Mrs. Tallant. "But I do think they've gone a little too far in your case——"

"In mine?"

Becky could only give a stupid stare to the woman who hated her for some occult reason.

"It was all very well for them to play their little game on the old residents here, who knew what to expect. But it was a bit unsportsmanlike for them—just as soon as they knew you were coming to town—to begin shaking dice for you."

"How could they shake dice for me?" asked Becky, steadying her voice.

"Well, for what you represent, my dear," Justine qualified it with one of her amiable smiles. "Your wine cellar."

The floor of the pink veranda seemed to slip away under Becky's feet. Her lips, she knew, must have turned ashen, for Mrs. Tallant's look became concerned as she arose and laid a hand on the girl's arm.

"Do move a little out of the sun," she begged. "You have to get used to the glare here—it affects the eyes."

Becky arose and moved her chair. The change was good for her, and she was able to fold her hands and feet in imitation of Mrs. Tallant's calm attitude and to give smile for smile.

"So Mr. Devore has won my liquor!" she exclaimed, and surprised herself with a laugh.

"Not quite so simple as that. I only got a very secondhand account. It seems they have a rather complicated dice game all their own, and when a member gets far enough behind he becomes the Asker—that means he's got to go out and bring in liquor for the crowd. I've furnished my share to them, so I ought to know. It seems that Cally owes the Askers quite a number of quarts of Scotch——"

"That's some sort of whisky, isn't it?" inquired Becky.

Justine Tallant sat marveling for a moment.

"Yes, and a very popular sort." She hesitated, giving the impression that this

topic had been continued long enough. Then she smiled and arose to hold out her hand. Becky arose also. She felt that politeness required her to ask, "What's your hurry?" after the best tradition of Majolika Falls. Instead she surrendered her fingers to the dainty pump-handling and hoped her caller would go without more ado.

"How I envy you, my dear!" cried Justine, halfway down the steps.

"Oh, Mrs. Tallant——"

"Your liquor, I mean," Mrs. Tallant was quick to add. "With that in the cellar you'll be the most courted heiress in the State of California."

"I'm going to break every bottle," declared Becky, and bit her lip to stay the speech that would have come.

"Mercy, no!" Justine held up a slim hand. "You mustn't do anything foolish. Think how it would dash poor Cally's hopes. Won't you come for tea some afternoon? How nice!"

Thus, like some bright-plumed insect, destined by nature to plant a poison sting in a vital part, she buzzed away, her work accomplished.

Becky went back to her porch chair. She shuddered a little and drew her aunt's crocheted shawl round her shoulders; the California shade had grown cold and damp—it was as though a breath, tainted with liquor, had blown up to her from Uncle Ephraim's thrice-accursed cellar. She was glad now that Cally Devore had missed his afternoon call.

Raised as she had been in a small-town atmosphere, she was not unaccustomed to intriguing neighbors and mixed motives; the world in little is not so different from the world in big. But Cally Devore's boyishness and simplicity had quite disarmed criticism, and she had fallen in love. Now the note of that dexterous, worldly little hornet was buzzing in her ear: "With that in the cellar you'll be the most courted heiress in the State of California."

Why hadn't she guessed it at first? Every winning speech young Devore had made, every attention he had shown her had been to the one purpose. He wanted to marry her for her wine cellar.

She lay there for a long time, the red evening sun slanting across her feet, a rising wind sweeping the veranda. Something stirred, giving the sound of a reptile crawling through dry leaves. She looked nervously round to see that the breeze had caught Aunt Deb's Temperance Almanac and scuttled it halfway across the pink tiles.

The movement suggested to her a warning and a doom in the words of that dour essay, "Treating and Traveling:"

> It will probably occur to our readers as readily as to our own mind, how frequently and invariably, too, the practice has become to bet "a bottle of wine," "a bowl of punch," a "treat," or even a "mug of cider." It became the universal panacea of grogshop, tavern and more genteel differences——

When Aunt Deborah returned she found her niece still lying in the chair she had occupied early in the afternoon.

"Land sakes, Becky!" she cawed, "if you're going to lose all your git-up-and-git you'd better pack up and go back to Majoliker Falls."

III.

That evening Becky dined as usual with Aunt Deborah and awakened from her reverie now and then to mark the old woman's nagging lecture, based on the moral decay of Santa Juanita. Shortly after eight Aunt Deb retired to her room to play the ouija board.

Becky was alone in the big hall, making a poor show of reading, when the telephone under the stairs trilled twice.

"Hello, Becky!" came the voice over the wire.

"Hello, Cal!"

"Everything all right?" boomed the clumsy masculine question.

"Oh, fine," she admitted, but went no farther.

"Aren't going to bed yet?"

"No. Aunt Deb's upstairs with ouija."

There was no immediate answer. Becky, who had but now resolved never to see him again, felt a pang of fear lest her tone had offended him.

"Becky"—and much to her relief, his voice came strong and friendly—"I was coming over this afternoon."

"Why didn't you?" she asked.

"Oh, a lot of fool things."

"Where are you now?"

"At the house."

By "the house" she knew that he meant his father's home, which he visited seldom enough.

"I wonder if I couldn't drop in on you?"

he was urging. "That is, if you've got nothing else on the ticket."

"Not a thing," said Becky.

And when the receiver was back on its hook she listened for any sound from upstairs. Absolute silence. Then she went out on the veranda to meet him, because she knew that the amateur medium upstairs could hear no echo of conversation under the heavy arcades. The moon was just showing its silver disk above the ragged eucalyptus row. The breeze, just stirring from the hills, was heavy with the breath of sleeping flowers. Becky could hear his steps, growing nearer as he came up the graveled drive. From her station behind an arcade she could see his handsome figure. He was in evening dress, a compliment which was both flattering and embarrassing to the girl who had learned to associate such attire with public events.

"I'm out here, Cally," she said, after he had strode up the steps and was about to ring the bell.

"Hello, Becky!" his hat came off and his hand went out as he swung toward her. "You popped out at me like a regular ghost."

"A ghost," she repeated faintly, and shuddered.

How might this house be haunted with an evil spirit, cunning in the ruin of men's souls! What specter of wickedness might not Aunt Deborah have conjured, sitting alone over her crazy ouija board?

"Aunt Deb didn't want to be disturbed," she explained. "I thought we might sit out here."

"If there's anything I love to do it's not to disturb Aunt Deb," he replied heartily; but under it all there was an echo of her own restraint.

"You've been awfully busy to-day?" she asked inanely enough, because she must be saying something. He had taken his place on the top step beside her.

"I started to come up here. Then something happened to change my mind." Suddenly she found him leaning very close as he added, "I'm mighty glad I stayed away."

"Why?"

"Because you noticed it when I didn't come."

Becky's heart stopped for an instant. She sat perfectly still, permitting the moonlight to beat down on her; and the moon of California is no puritan, but the burnished shield of Aragon, passionate and cruel.

"You aren't exactly invisible, you know," she answered, trying to be light.

"No. I'm too earthly, that's what's the matter with me."

Her heart was filled with pity at the unhappy look in his face as he sat gazing into her paradise.

"Don't you think"—she began, struggling for expression—"don't you think we make a lot of our trouble for ourselves?"

"How?"

"Well, the kind of companions we choose, for instance."

"That's a matter of personal taste, I suppose," he replied rather gruffly. "Heaven knows I've made enough trouble for myself."

"All you need to do is to be like other people——"

"That's the trouble with me. I'm too much like other people. But I can't take a dice box in my hand and lose a little like a gentleman but what you'd think the sky was falling in. I had dinner with my family to-night—rather rare occasion nowadays."

He checked himself suddenly, and, facing square around, asked, "Becky, do you think liquor is a curse?"

"The world would be better off," she solemnly replied, "if it had never been heard of."

"They're all against me," he said, with a bitter little smile. "That's just the way my father talks about it. His stock's run out."

He continued that smile as he sat, hands folded across knees, and regarded her quaintly.

"Do you think the whiffenpoof is a very savage animal?" he inquired at last.

"How should I know? I've never seen one. And I don't know as I want to be joked about it," she added, offended.

"I'm sorry, Becky," he hastened to apologize, and his tone was far from light. "But I'm making a point. You hesitate about condemning a whiffenpoof when you've never seen one. And yet you're ready to bawl about alcohol, sight unseen. I'll bet you've never taken a drink in your life."

"I haven't," she assured him, setting her firm little mouth. "And you needn't bet anything about me."

"Becky!" Cally moved away, hurt by her tone.

Even in the wan light she could see the hurt in his face, and she wanted to take him

in her arms and soothe him and ask his forgiveness. For Becky Quigg was enough to the cavern born to wish the man she loved to have his every whim satisfied.

"I didn't mean to be cross," she said gently.

"You've got a right to be," he muttered. "I'm not the sort you read about in Rollo books. I've been running with a pretty hard gang, but I've tried to live up to their rules, that's all."

"What are their rules?" asked she, curiosity driving her now, because everything seemed drifting toward that danger mark which Justine Tallant had pointed out.

"I don't think you'd understand them," he said, "and I'm glad you don't, Becky. You'd be surprised if you knew how different you are from anything——"

He stopped on the verge of another indiscretion. How young and miserable he looked, his face pale under the moon as he gazed at her with beseeching eyes. She shook herself away from his spell, because she could feel the pain of Justine's sting. She dared not ask him more about himself. He had told enough already to verify the story which had come from Mrs. Tallant's thin and pointed lips.

And all that while the languor of a Southern night, with star dust in the mists and romance pouring down from a Spanish moon, was urging her to acknowledge life.

"Becky!" he was pleading softly, but she was afraid now to turn to him.

"Becky!" His breath was hot against her cheek as his words tumbled over each other in their eagerness to gain her ear. "Becky, I don't know what you think of me. I'm not much, maybe—but I want to be given a chance. If you want to send me away, all right. But I've got to say it. I'm in love with you, Becky. I'm wild about you, and I don't care for another damned thing in the world."

Still she was looking away, but when she felt his hand go forth to capture hers she arose hastily and stood against a pillar. She was just strong enough for this short retreat, because the moon seemed drawing her toward him as it draws tides to mysterious ocean depths.

"Can't you learn to love me, Becky?" he was persisting.

Then out of her throat there seemed to come the response of another voice:

"I've learned that already."

"My dear!"

He had taken a step toward her and his arm had gone about her waist for just an instant when she pushed him roughly away.

"We'll be married, Becky," he was going on in that low, excited voice. "Married whenever you say. If your aunt doesn't like me, we can run away to-night——"

"No." She said it very distinctly.

"Then when, Becky? When?"

"Never," she replied, looking up at him with eyes that were direct and very sad just then. "It isn't me you want, Cally. You mustn't think of that."

He took a step away and scowled down at her.

"Are you trying to make me miserable?"

"No, dear. I want to give you anything in the world that will make you happy. Cally!"

Tears were coming now to her eyes and her voice went up a pitch as she said:

"It's mine to give, Cally. And you shall have it. You didn't need to go to all that trouble. All you had to do was to ask."

Impetuously she had snatched him by the hand and was dragging him toward the big front door.

"Come here, Cally! It's yours. Just come here," she kept repeating. And he followed like a sleepwalker.

She led him through the empty hall and down a passage toward the rear of the house. She tugged roughly against his slight resistance, then paused at last by a little wall safe near the basement door. When she had brought out a bunch of keys she continued with her captive down the narrow stairs which plunged below the house's stone foundations. As she stumbled, groping for an electric switch, she felt his hand touch hers and she could hear his gruff question, "Becky, what's it all about?"

Light sprang to the interior from a dozen bulbs. The vaulted arches of a cellar which had been built by a wine-loving grandee before the Mission was thought of at Santa Juanita, loomed like a promise of sinister adventure.

Rebecca dropped her lover's hand to glide across the pillared space toward a dingy oak door which stood to guard an evil secret. Her hand trembling, she fitted the key and swung open the door to reveal a square of inner blackness.

Here by the great iron hinges the electric buttons were plainly in view; in another

instant lights were full on in every corner of Ephraim Quigg's wine cellar. Shelf upon shelf of recumbent bottles, their butts showing like emerald targets; stacks upon stacks of crates, wire bound and burned with foreign labels; a ponderous pair of tall casks.

Becky turned then and looked at Cally Devore. She had thought of him before as a boy naughty and wayward, perhaps, but a boy still with all the winsomeness of immaturity. Suddenly his features were devastated with a passion she could not understand. He had grown chalky pale; there were sooty lines at the corners of his mouth which was drawn away from his teeth in the smile of death. Upon the uncounted gallons of fine liquor his eyes were fixed, dry and glassy.

"There it is," she said, all too quietly. "I'm sorry it's all I have——"

She turned and slipped the keys into his helpless hand.

"You mean," he mumbled in a dazed sort of way, "that you want me to have——"

"All of it!" In spite of herself her voice was rising again. "Fill your pockets, fill your arms—drink it. Carry it away."

He stood staring at her, that same blank, burned-out look on his face.

"I mean it," she insisted. "Send round wagons and take every drop of the horrid stuff out of my house. If it's what you want most of everything, you shall have it—you shall have it—oh, my dear!"

She had covered her head wildly with her arms and her shoulders were heaving as she stumbled blindly up the stairs. Cally Devore advanced, keys in hand, like a sleepwalker, to disappear into the belly of Uncle Ephraim's wine cellar.

It was ten o'clock when Becky ran upstairs to resume her post under the arcades on the pink veranda. Her tears ceased as quickly as they had come, for she was not of the wailing sort. She took a certain bitter pleasure in the thought that, given the wine cellar, Cally need not marry any other woman. Her only fear now was that Aunt Deb, tiring of ouija's revelations, would come downstairs to encounter the escaping Cally, laden with bottles.

By way of precaution Becky stole upstairs and peered through a half-open door to see Aunt Deb, her hands folded across the board, her chin on her withered breast. She was fast asleep. Becky was glad of this as she descended into the hall. The old lady sometimes slept in her chair until early in the morning. And in the morning Cally would be away with his spoils and Becky could tell her aunt of her resolve to pack for Majolika Falls.

It was five minutes after ten by the hall clock when Becky passed through and went out again to the veranda. She found Cally standing there under the moon. He was still very pale, but the boyish look was again on his face as he held out the keys and said:

"You didn't really think, Becky, that I wanted to marry you just to get that dirty stuff."

Here, then, was a turn which she had never anticipated! It came upon her so unexpectedly that she sat down upon the top step and looked pitifully up to inquire:

"Isn't it good liquor?"

"I suppose so. I didn't taste it."

"Oh!"

It was a very feeble sound she made.

"Becky," he growled, "a few hours ago I would have gone through hell to get that liquor. But there's just one place I won't go through."

"What's that?" she asked, trying to collect herself.

"Heaven."

She came slowly to her feet and laid her hands on the lapels of his dinner jacket.

"Cally," she whispered, "do you talk like that to—to the other girls?"

"Has Justine Tallant been here?" he asked, suddenly drawing back.

Becky only managed to nod.

"I thought so," he admitted, thrusting his hands deep into his pockets. "And she's given you the impression that I'm some sort of a vampire."

"She says that all the girls you go with are—are talked about."

"If anybody should try to talk about you he'd have to talk to the undertaker," stormed her lover, and the threat made Becky a little glad.

"Your folks can't think much of me," she persisted. "They've never even come to see me."

"Look here, Becky!" A trumpet note of hope sounded in his voice. "If I should go to mother and tell her that I wanted to marry a girl like you, she'd get right out of bed to come and call."

"Well, then," said Becky, and she pushed

him very gently away toward the drive, "why don't you go and tell her?"

IV.

Judge Devore was reading in his library when Cally came in. He barely looked up over the edge of his crescent-shaped eyeglasses and scowled—he and Cally had "had it out" earlier in the evening. He went back to his book, cheered by the impression that Cally had turned over a new leaf, and that he looked perfectly sober.

But the son's destination was his mother's room on the first landing. The door was slightly open and he could see her against the violet wall paper, braced up among her pillows. She, too, was reading, and in the candor of her gray hair, done for the night, she showed an older and more pathetic face than that which she wore by day in the presence of Santa Juanita.

"Mind my coming in, boss?" asked her son, pausing on the threshold.

"Cally, how you startled me!" she cried, permitting her book to slide to the floor down a steep mound of satin coverlet.

"Sorry to bother you," he apologized as he threw himself, untidy as a great Dane puppy, on the edge of her bed. "But I wonder if you'd mind pullin' me out of a hole—just like a regular sport again."

"Cally!" Her face lengthened as she studied him through her reading glasses. "What have you been doing now?"

"I haven't done it, yet," he explained; "and that's the point. She says she's in love with me. And, gosh, mother, I'm simply balmy about her. But she says she won't marry me unless——"

"Calford Devore," began his mother, sitting straight up. "Who are you talking about?"

"Becky Quigg," he replied in brief.

"You mean that awful Ephraim's niece?"

"She isn't an awful niece, mother. She's the loveliest girl I ever saw. You'd go crazy 'bout her, boss. She just hates the idea of alcohol. She's never taken a drink in her life. Why, mother, she's so innocent she thinks Scotch is a sort of sherry wine."

"Um!" exclaimed Mrs. Devore. "What's she doing with that wine cellar?"

"That's the whole idea! When we're married we're going to feed it to—well, we're going to chuck it so far the sea gulls can't smell it."

"Cally!" His mother's voice was slightly husky as she beckoned to him. "Come here, my boy."

She put her arm round his neck and asked very earnestly:

"Do you really mean—you've found a girl who is going to make you behave?"

"Mother," he said, "I'd do anything for her—even that."

"Has she accepted you?"

"No—not yet."

Mrs. Devore flared up. Fires flashed through her tortoise-shell spectacles.

"Do you mean to say that Quigg girl has had——"

"Listen to reason, mother," begged Cally, one of his shoes scattering adobe dust across her coverlet as he crossed his knees. "She's got a perfect right to have a grouch——"

"She's probably flattered to death," insisted Mrs. Devore.

"Mother, she's angelic. Her aunt is an officer in the Massachusetts Temperance Society, too." He was putting her case clumsily enough, but he scored when he added, "If you only knew how she's sort of changed my way of looking at things. I know what a mess I've been; and here's the time I'm going to point straight. But you've got to help me, mother."

"Come here!" she commanded again, and after she had smoothed his wavy, vigorous hair—the sort of hair so many women love—she kissed him and said, "My boy, what is it you want me to do?"

"I found her to-night, sitting all alone in that darned pink barn up on the hill. Her aunt—she's crazy as a June bug. Goes to her room and plays the ouija board after dark. And there's been poor little Becky with all Santa Juanita fox-trotting round her and not a soul to give her the time of day."

"What's the matter with them?" was Mrs. Devore's very natural question.

"If you knew her, mother, you wouldn't ask that," replied the son with dignity. "All I can make out is she's too decent. But can you blame her for being sore? The dear little kid's sensitive, and she's too game to show it."

"Sensitive about what?" asked Mrs. Devore.

"Because nobody in town has called."

"It's a shame," agreed his mother, bridling. "I'll call on her, my dear. I certainly shall."

"But you've got to do it right away, mother, or she'll can me as sure as fate."

"What do you mean by right away?"

"Well—to-night would help a lot."

Mother and son gazed at each other across the violet bedspread. Her face was like this, merry and whimsical; her eyes had the same trick of deepening into blue-black.

"Of all the silly nonsense," she began, then checking herself, motioned across the room.

"Just hand me my wrapper, will you? And tell your father not to put away the car."

Mrs. Devore's parley with her husband was short, secret, and successful; it had the effect of drafting his services as chauffeur for the runabout which, like your true Californian, he left standing in the drive three nights out of the seven. When the three of them stepped into the car and rolled forth Judge Devore seemed to be the only doubting Thomas. "Both of you ought to be in Napa," was his first contribution; then he came out of a long reverie to inquire, "Say, my boy, what are you going to *do* with all that liquor?"

These uncalled-for comments gained, as they deserved, a right good snubbing on the part of his wife. The judge's mouth looked grim and unconvinced under its bristly gray mustache, and Cally hoped that he had not come along to make trouble.

A little figure which looked snow-white under the glimpses of the moon came out from behind a flowering shrub just as the Devores stopped before the pink arcades.

"I told you she'd get out of bed to come," declared Cally triumphantly as he helped down a fat lady, loosely clad and swaddled in furs.

"I've gotten into such a ridiculous habit of staying at home," apologized Mrs. Devore, taking Becky's hand; then a little catch was heard in her voice as she asked, "Is it true what Cally says?"

"I think so," smiled Becky, slipping her free hand through the loop in his arm. "Isn't it, Cally?"

"Well, isn't it?" he echoed, looking tall and bashful as he grinned down at her.

"What I'd like to know," growled Judge Devore, who had been holding a little aloof from the love feast, "is about this wine cellar. What do you intend doing with it?"

"Well, you see, dad," up spoke the Devore heir, "Becky and I are opposed to the stuff in any form."

"Oh, you are, are you?" quizzed Judge Devore, beetling his brows; then he harked back to the oft-repeated question, "What are you going to *do* with all that stuff?"

"We—we might give it to some charitable institution," suggested Becky.

She thought Judge Devore's laughter most impolite.

"I know of an old soldiers' home that wouldn't refuse," he gurgled.

"I wonder if you'd mind dad's seeing the cellar?" asked Cally. "It's about the last time it'll all be together."

"I should love for him to see it," agreed Becky, concealing her fears of the aroused Aunt Deb. "If you'll just step in by the side door—that's the only way of getting to the basement——"

Heaven and her lover forgave her this slight tarrydiddle. Indeed the basement *was* much more accessible from the side door, as was proved by the speed with which the stairs to Tartarus were gained, the lights switched on and the great oak door swung back, revealing again the life work of the late Ephraim Quigg.

"Heaven and earth!" murmured Judge Devore, staring much as his son had stared upon first inspection of the treasure house. "Do you mean to say there's that much liquor left in Santa Juanita?"

"His own stock's played out," explained Mrs. Devore, "and I'm glad of it."

"It was called one of the best stocks in America, even before the drought," said Cally with all the pride of a showman.

"It can do a great deal of harm—a great deal," declared Mrs. Devore solemnly, clicking her tongue.

"A great deal of harm," echoed her husband, also clicking his tongue. It was a dry sound.

"Now, what we've got to decide right away," said Cally briskly, as he walked, hands in pockets, between rows of wine racks, "is just how to dispose of this in a way that won't be doing any damage."

"We could break the bottles and pour them down the hill," suggested Becky, always a friend of direct action.

"Wanton waste!" grunted the judge. "After all, you've got to remember that this is property."

"I understand that liquor is very useful in hospitals," said Mrs. Devore. "Whisky, especially. There is whisky here, isn't there?"

"About a million cases of it," growled Judge Devore.

"There are many diseases which are actually benefited by whisky——"

"Delirium tremens, for instance," supplied her experienced son.

"Yes. And it's very good for pneumonia. A great many teamsters and truckmen, I understand, are carried into the emergency hospitals in winter, suffering with pneumonia——"

"Auld Tappit Kine!" moaned Judge Devore, reading the labels on the cases. "You can't buy it any more. Think of feeding it to truckmen with pneumonia. And what're we going to do with the champagne?"

"It's excellent for seasickness, I know," explained the resourceful Mrs. Devore. "I had a pint every morning when we went over in the *Mauretania* in 1913—remember, Junius?"

"This is a poor time to be braggin' about it," the judge warned moodily. "But if you say seasickness, let's devote the wine to that. Of course, seasickness is sort of rare in hospitals——"

"We could give it to a hospital ship," suggested Cally with the brightest of looks.

With the hand of idle curiosity Judge Devore had opened a large drawer under the mission table.

"Golly!" he cried, "look at the big, old-fashioned bar glasses! The old boy thought of everything."

In a sort of jealous fury the judge set a half dozen generous glasses out on the table top.

"How much will you be saving out for yourself, Miss Qu—Becky?" asked Mrs. Devore of her future daughter-in-law.

"Oh, not any!"

"But, my dear! In case of emergency you——"

"You're missing the whole point, mother," exclaimed the newly reformed son. "What we want to do is to put the stuff utterly out of our lives."

"There should be temperance in everything," decreed Mrs. Devore, who was not averse to taking a nip now and then, as the saying goes.

"Look here, young lady," snapped the judge, advancing with an overpowering look, "I honor you for your convictions. But I need a supply of my own—strictly medicinal purposes, you understand—coughs and colds and snake bites and fainting fits—suppose I make you an offer for a half dozen cases of that Scotch."

"No, thank you, sir," responded Becky with all the simplicity of a little milkmaid.

"That's the trouble with the whole movement," announced Mrs. Devore. "It's being carried to such extremes that——"

The limit of those extremes she never stated, for a spectral visitor brought the conference, which was becoming heated, into a chill silence. Aunt Deb, her hair twisted into a hundred little knots, her gaunt frame inclosed in a flannel bath robe, stood pop-eyed at the door.

"Land sakes of mercy!" was her breathless oath as she surveyed the social scene.

"This is Mrs. Devore—and Judge Devore," announced Becky with all the calm at her command. "They've called."

"Is it stylish in California to receive folks in the cellar?" asked the inflexible puritan.

"You see, Aunt Deb, Cally and I are going to be married," Becky ventured.

"Not with my consent," snapped Aunt Deb, folding her knotty hands.

"That's right, madam," said the judge. "Don't make it too easy for 'em. Reserve your judgment."

"Miss Quigg was kind enough to bring us down here," said Mrs. Devore smoothly—she was regarded as something of a social steam roller in Santa Juanita—"so that we could get some idea of the stock of liquor."

"Indeed!" Aunt Deb's tone was vitriolic.

"Because, you see, your niece and my son share the same prejudice against strong drink."

Aunt Deb sat down upon the mission table. The sound she gave forth was something between a sigh and a squeal.

"It must have been Reverend Mr. Cunix's prayer!" she decided.

"I'm sure you're quite agreed with us that the liquor must go," went on Mrs. Devore briskly. "But there seems to be some discussion as to the amount which should stay."

"We make no compromise with the devil!" snarled Aunt Deb.

"Quite so, Mrs. Stanley," conceded Mrs. Devore. "It's just a matter now of guarding our own interests. In case of sickness, for instance——"

"I've found that oil of peppermint does as well *and* better," snapped Aunt Deb.

"They're off," said Judge Devore, sotto voce, as he laid one hand on Cally's arm and another on Becky's. Thus he led them

to a remote corner of the cellar, among rows and rows of priceless champagne.

"I always had a curiosity," he said, "to see what old Eph—excuse me, Miss Quigg—had stacked away down here. He was always so darned secretive—kept so to himself. There are more legends about this cellar than about Sindbad's valley of diamonds. In spite of my prejudice against it"—he cleared his throat —"I always did admire a good stock o' liquor."

Thus musing, he passed along the cobwebby rows of horizontal bottles. Musingly at last he picked one up, turned it lovingly in his hand to read its label with eyes of reverence and sympathy.

"Look here, boy!" he said in a sudden, startled tone, his fat fingers groping at the cork.

Cally's head was craning over his father's shoulder as, with little more than a flick of the thumb, he peeled the loose tin foil from the neck of the bottle and released the wire, which had been broken and clumsily replaced.

"This stuff's been tampered with," muttered the judge.

The cork, which should have risen slowly to the bubbling pressure from within, stood immovable in its place. It took some twisting and straining to get it out, and when it was pulled there followed no giddy pop such as we have learned to associate with the most expensive of alcoholic entertainments.

"And look here!" commanded the judge harshly; without more ado he tilted the bottle against his hard lips. It stayed there but an instant. Then he lowered the bottle impatiently and spat a stream of thin, clear liquid to the concrete floor.

"Water!" he snarled, passing the bottle on to his son.

"Water!" agreed Cally, after a gingerly sip.

"Now, there's the queerest case I've struck yet!"

The judge made this decision, and set busily to work, opening bottle after bottle, sometimes tasting them, sometimes setting them disdainfully to the floor. The graveyard seriousness of his demeanor secretly amused Becky. After all her conscientious fears, Uncle Eph's cellar was proving as innocent as Adam's storehouse! Over in their corner she could see Mrs. Devore and Aunt Deb, growing more and more splenetic in their argument over what should become of the liquor.

It was a long search among the shelves and racks; a search which proved that Uncle Ephraim's famous collection was water pure. And, like the champagne, every bottle of Rhine wine, claret, sauterne, and Burgundy had been carefully resealed as though to deliberately hide its watery content.

"How do you explain it?" asked Judge Devore, his face empurpled with labor and chagrin.

"Somebody must have been robbing the cellar for years and trying to hide the traces," was all Cally could suggest.

"I should think old Eph would have caught 'em at it sometimes," said the judge. "Cally, suppose you shove down one of those cases of Scotch."

The younger Devore mounted a ladder to the top of the high barricade and braced himself to bring down a convenient case. It was a child's task, for the box, its wires having been carefully replaced, was empty as a gourd.

"In other words," said Judge Devore, standing away for a last gloomy inspection, "there's nothing here to tempt a drunkard, young or old."

"Is that some sort of liquor, too?" asked Becky, her innocent finger pointing toward a curious arrangement which sat in an aisle between empty cases and watery bottles.

It was as though two packages had been dropped there by Santa Claus in some Christmas past, and never opened. A large box had been wrapped neatly in white paper and wound with red ribbons; upon its bosom there stood another package, somewhat bottle-shaped in contour, also wrapped in white paper and wound with red ribbon.

Tied securely to the bottle—for bottle it proved when the paper was torn away—there dangled a sealed envelope, plainly addressed in a shaky hand, "To Miss R. Quigg." Judge Devore jerked the envelope from its string and handed it to Becky, who broke the seal and read:

DEAR NIECE: Here's what's left of my cellar. I drank the rest myself. Took eighteen years, but I got away with it. Last night the doc told me I had a week to live, so I gave my odds and ends—a little brandy and some Chartreuse—to my Jap to bootleg. I saved out three cases of Scotch to finish off on.

You'll find all the bottles, dead soldiers, laid out to look natural. I'll tell you my idea. I don't know whether you're a pretty girl or not—

but I do know that it's harder than skinning a snake for a girl to get married round these parts. But if the story goes out that I've left this stock of booze, then you'll have to knock 'em down with a club. So I've filled all the bottles with water and left the cellar in pretty shape. All you have to do is to show the decoy to the young man you want and he's yours. Any odds on it.

Now here's my present to you. This bottle of champagne and a case of Scotch. The Scotch I leave for your husband. Give him one bottle a month for the first year—after that you won't care whether he stays home or not. The champagne I want you to open on the day you're engaged and drink to me in a part of the Hereafter where I hope we'll never meet. E. QUIGG.

"Well, the swaggering old hypocrite!" whistled Cally, who had been reading over Becky's shoulder. "But at any rate——"

There was a hatchet wedged through a strap in the wall, and with this in hand he fell upon the ribbon-tied box and began severing the wires which bound the boards together. Through the first fissure in the lid he brought out a cylinder, decorously rolled in cork paper and labeled with the announcement that it had been bottled for the cellars of Ephraim Quigg, Esquire.

"There's no fake about that!" exclaimed the judge thirstily, examining the amber glow in the sample bottle. "As long as you're on the wagon, there's no reason——"

"Uh-uh!" replied the undutiful son. "Maybe you and I can split four bottles between us. But eight of 'em I already owe on a bet."

"Bet to what?" growled the judge.

"The Askers," said Cally.

"Damned nonsense," said the judge.

"Right-o!" agreed his son.

Meanwhile Becky, who had been holding Uncle Eph's one posthumous bottle of champagne, had carried it over to the table and had a curious feeling of gratification when she found that the tin foil—unlike the many others they had tested—clung neatly to the neck. Finally she peeled this tinseled collar away and stood dreamily inspecting the liquid which, like a caged genie, bubbled coaxingly behind the green glass.

"What are you doing, Becky?" asked Cal, his look somewhat concerned.

"If I only had a corkscrew," she began, to be interrupted.

"What for?" snorted Cally Devore.

"I think I'd like to open this bottle."

Mrs. Devore laughed outright, but the judge was more considerate.

"Her impulse is right," he protested. "What matter though she err as to the means? I'll show you how, my child."

"In my house?" came from Aunt Deb.

"Not necessarily," replied Becky, with unusual cruelty. "But I'm going to do what Uncle Ephraim asked."

Judge Devore had brought his penknife into play against the wires which held the cork. Mrs. Devore was dusting the bar glasses with her pocket handkerchief.

"It ought to be iced," said Cally.

"Too late now," announced the judge as the cork popped splendidly, scoring a direct hit against the rafters and frothing bubbles cascaded to the floor.

"How many drinks?" he sang out, approaching a row of freshly wiped wine-glasses.

"None for me," declared Cally, raising a self-denying hand.

Aunt Deb's face was stony as Cotton Mather's would have been had Salem gone a-picknicking on the Sabbath day. But she made no sign. Therefore the judge filled four glasses with golden liquid which boiled without heat. Mrs Devore and her husband reached shamelessly for their portions. Aunt Deb stood stiff, as though the sight of sin had turned her to a pillar of salt. Becky's fingers groped between the two glasses, still bubbling on the table. She snatched one guiltily, then raised it level with her nose. The smell was unexpectedly pleasant.

"To your happiness, young people," suggested the judge, moving his glass in an arc.

"Oh, thank you," replied Becky, reddening. "But we ought to remember Uncle Ephraim first."

"Wherever he is!" snapped Aunt Deb.

"Let's stop worrying about that," said Becky.

There was a certain glory in the sight of Judge Devore as he tilted back his head, the brim against his lip. So inspiring was the sight that Becky sought to emulate the gesture. The taste was like cider and soda water and something else, astonishingly different. Sprightly little bubbles seemed to be dancing up her nose. The dithyrambic behavior of her pulse seemed to inspire a message of good will to men. She found herself rippling merrily at Aunt Deb's sour expression, and she rejoiced in the knowledge that earth's cares are but transitory. Even the sight of Judge and Mrs. Devore, hastening to finish the bottle between them, moved

her to a wish that there were a million such bottles to give away.

Cally had come over and taken her by the hand. He seemed a super-Cally, a Cally by divine right, a Cally who could do no wrong. One glass of champagne—the one which Aunt Deb had refused with a blasting look—still stood upon the table.

"Here, darling," suggested Becky, holding the drink under her lover's nose.

"Oho!" he laughed accusingly. "This *is* a sudden twist."

"It's just to get rid of the last bottle," she told him coaxingly.

"That's what they all say," he answered jeeringly, and he had the will power to set the glass back on the table, half finished.

The act, to Becky, was amusing. Everything was amusing, glorious, generous. She finished the last drop of the share that had been put into her hands.

"Does it always make you feel like this?" she asked in an ecstatic whisper.

"Why would people like it so, if it didn't?" Cally retorted with a smile which was a little sad.

Julge Devore, who had done his share by the bottle, leaned over and commenced a death struggle with the case of Scotch whisky.

"Here, my boy!" he commanded, making an authoritative gesture toward his son, "take one end of this, will you?"

"What are you doing with my Scotch?" asked the bridegroom elect.

"Taking it home," announced the judge rather pompously. "And if you make a move to stop me I withhold my consent to the wedding. Understand?"

Slowly and almost steadily the case was hoisted through the vaulted room and toward the cellar stairs.

STORIES ABOUT RACES

HERE is a story which Doctor Cary Grayson, Mr. Wilson's physician, recently told the former president, who particularly likes an anecdote about the Scotch:

An American, a Scotsman and an Irishman were swapping stories about sporting events, each trying to outdo the others in relating thrilling incidents.

"The closest race I ever saw," said the American, "was between two young men, which was to be won by the first man touching the tape at the finish with his chin. The winner had not shaved that morning, and he won by the growth of his whiskers overnight."

"The closest race I ever saw," said the Scotsman, "was one in which a horse, which had been stung by a bee, won by the height of the swelling on his nose."

"The closest race I ever saw," said the Irishman, "was the Scotch."

MAKING HIS APOLOGY

THE last days of the Wilson administration were enlivened for those "in the know" by gossip about a tiff between two high officials and the rumor that the president had settled their differences by persuading one of them to apologize to the other.

Many doubted the apology. At least, they said, if there had been one, it must have been extremely cool and insincere.

That reminded Eugene W. Newman, the author and journalist, of the occasion when Thad Stevens promised to retract what he had said to Abraham Lincoln about Simon Cameron of Pennsylvania. The offending remark was : "Mr. President, this man Cameron would steal anything but a red-hot stone."

Stevens, having at last been brought to the point of seeing that he had done Cameron grave injury, journeyed to the White House to "retract." This is the way he did it: "Mr. President, I told you that Cameron would not steal a red-hot stone. I take that back."

Rags

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

Author of "Tumbleweed," "The Fourth Man's Share," Etc.

Manning was wise enough to know that one has to pay a price for the freedom of vagabondage—even if that loyal little Skye terrier didn't.

"NEVER stay in any one town too long when you're broke," said Manning. "Of course, I mean, in a town where you are not known. Some day I intend to frame a set of rules entitled, 'How to Become a Successful Hobo.'"

"That's easy, without rules," asserted Buck.

"Easy to begin, yes. You're a hobo as long as you keep moving; but when you vegetate in any one town, you become a bum. And a bum is the saddest spectacle on this green earth."

"Speaking from experience——" suggested Buck.

Manning nodded. "And when you are broke, a stranger in a strange land, you'll get more sympathy and help from the down and outs than from any one else. I've tried that out pretty thoroughly. I know. Did you ever happen to notice that the stray dogs in a town naturally take up with the stray humans? And that, as a rule, the dogs that are well fed and have homes are unfriendly to hobos? However, you can make a first-rate tramp out of a home-bred dog if you catch him young enough. A dog likes adventure. Of course I refer to the real dog—not the anæmic powder puff that rides about in a limousine."

"Or a knitting wagon," said Buck. "You know—one of those electrics with a tiller. When one of those things is parked alongside a curb, darned if I can tell which end is the front."

Buck had been wandering about Manning's living room, casually inspecting the odds and ends Manning had gathered together in his more or less active life. Buck paused before a little, framed silhouette of Manning. "Never noticed that before," stated Buck.

"I dug it up to-day, just before you came."

"Huh! You wore a high collar and a real tie, those days, eh?"

"Had to. One of the rules of the game. Some folks have the idea that a hobo always looks tough. Just the minute a man begins to live by his wits and plans to journey from town to town, he's a hobo, no matter how he is clothed. That is not the popular conception of the species, but it's a fact."

Buck dropped into his favorite chair, crossed his legs and half closed his eyes. Manning paced slowly up and down the room, his hands in his pockets, his moccasined feet making no sound. The long, casement windows were flung wide to the sunshine. From the north window one could view a distant range of blue hills. Presently Manning spoke, not addressing Buck, but rather as though he were thinking aloud. Buck settled himself in his chair.

"It was the Toledo *Blade*. I remember that—and a mighty keen little newspaper. The air was keen, too. Plenty of autumn sunshine in the square, and not many folk on the park benches. I was reading want ads. I didn't want anything, especially, except to do as I pleased. I had fifty cents in my pocket, a good overcoat, clean linen—and I had had a good breakfast. Yes; I had a pack of playing cards in my pocket. Sometimes, when I wanted to forget that I had missed a meal, I used to sit in my room and play solitaire. I didn't gamble. I wasn't cold-blooded enough to make a successful card man.

"I was leaning forward, my elbows on my knees, reading the want ads, when a little Skye terrier trotted up and stood observing me with bright, blinking eyes. When I glanced up over the top of my paper he moved his tail tentatively. It wasn't what you'd call wagging his tail; but rather a slight movement that showed his willingness

to proceed further with the matter of getting acquainted, if I happened to be in the mood to do so. Although a thoroughbred Skye, he was a tramp. His hair was matted in spots, and a bur or two had caught in the long hair of his foretop—I think that is what it might be called—and had tied his ear back. The burs bothered him. He sat down and scratched at them occasionally.

"Meanwhile, I pretended to be interested in my paper. The little dog became curious. He approached, sat up—some one had taught him that trick—and actually begged to be noticed. I continued to ignore him. He dropped to his feet and barked, saucily, teasingly. Finding that I still paid no attention to his overtures, he dashed in, grabbed the edge of the newspaper and jumped back with a section of the paper in his mouth. And he had a good time with that bit of torn paper. He raced round the bench, shaking the paper, growling, cavorting, pretending that he had been wholly interested in the capture of it—and ignoring me utterly.

"Finally after he had pawed and chewed the bit of newspaper to shreds, he trotted up, hesitated, drew back and jumped to the bench beside me. He curled down, heaved a big sigh, and evidently went to sleep, for I forgot him as I continued to read the paper. Had he been a mongrel, for the fun of it I should have made friends with him at once. But he was a thoroughbred; and if we were to be friends I knew it would not do for me to seem too eager at first. Perhaps I had been sitting there an hour, when he nudged my arm. That was a sign that we really had become acquainted.

" 'What is it?' I asked. 'Are you hungry —or, perhaps, thirsty?'

"Suddenly it occurred to me that if he were a stray, he could not, like the larger dogs, stand on his hind legs and drink at the watering troughs about town. There were cast-iron horse troughs in most of the cities, those days. But he was a little fellow, too small to reach up and get a drink. So I told him we'd go and experiment. I picked him up, tucked him under my arm, and marched over to the nearest horse trough. I held him so that he could drink—and he drank and drank and drank until I became alarmed. Many persons will feed a stray dog, but how many ever give him water? He expressed his gratitude when I put him down, by wagging his tail and then sitting up in that begging attitude. He seemed to think that that was the proper thing to do, both before and after taking, so to speak. It was his way of saying, 'Thank you.'

"Now a man in my circumstances had no business with a dog. I liked dogs; but 'Rags,' as I named him, was not destined to pal with me long. A man can't very well hop a moving freight with a Skye terrier under his arm; and I hopped freights, those days. Nor can a man hit the cinders for fifteen or twenty miles and expect a dog to foot it along with him over culverts and bridges and get by without an accident. Then, there are times when one can find a place to sleep where a dog would not be welcome.

"So I decided, right there, to part company with Rags, but not before I had taken those burs from his ear. I had to cut the hair away from the base of his ear, and almost dig the burs out with the point of my knife. The little fellow flinched as I held him on the park bench; but he didn't try to get away: and when I had finished he licked my hand appreciatively.

"I had made it a rule not to allow my finances to get below the munificent level of fifty cents. Sounds funny, now. But a man can get along with mighty little food, if he has to. Then, those days, a schooner of beer was almost as good as a meal—went a long way toward keeping a fellow feeling like a human. That noon I broke my rule of thrift. I spent fifteen cents for grub, that Rags might eat. That, with a nickel for a glass of beer and the accompanying free lunch lowered my financial standing about fifty per cent. And wherever I went Rags followed me; and the longer he followed me the more I disliked to part with him.

"He attracted considerable attention. A Skye terrier does not often stray. I had about made up my mind to leave him at the public-library door, with the hope that some one would pick him up while I spent the afternoon inside, reading, when a carriage pulled up to the curb and stopped. It was a private carriage—groom and footman, stylish cobs, and all that. The young woman who stepped from the carriage knew dogs. She spotted Rags, noticed that he was with me, and with not the least hint of patronizing me, asked me if I would sell him. I at once told her I would; that I was leaving town and could not take him with me. I asked twenty-five dollars for Rags. The young woman paid it without hesitation.

"I picked Rags up and carried him to the carriage. The young woman got in, took Rags in her arms—and by the way she handled him I knew that the little dog had found a real friend. She thanked me, and drove away. I saw Rags' funny head peering from the carriage window. He barked. Perhaps it was his way of saying 'good-by.' Perhaps he barked in reproach. And suddenly I felt as lonesome as a lost dog myself.

"I had twenty-five dollars in my pocket. That meant that I would not have to hustle for quite a while. You know, Buck"—and Manning paused in his pacing up and down the room—"I could have had any one of a half-dozen jobs. I had been through the mill—knew the ropes, and had, moreover, a letter of introduction to the editor of the *Blade*. But I didn't want to work. I wanted to see all the sights I could without the admission price, as some one said. To tie down to work meant to stay in one place, give up rambling and forgo the entertaining society of the down and outs about town.

"Years before, I had known hunger and thirst and hardship in that same town. I felt like a veteran, on this occasion. But I still had a lot to learn about the great game of living without doing steady work. And all the while I had the idea that some day I would settle down and get busy. But there was a lot of country I wanted to see first—and I wanted to see it in my own way.

"My room was in a third-rate hotel down near the canal. The room cost me two dollars a week. Among the guests was Professor Brady, the sleight-of-hand man, who could really do some clever stuff when he was sober; but his regular practice extended to the juggling of tall beers and the free lunch, mostly. Then there was Ardmore, the broken-down Englishman; who drank up his remittance money just a little faster than it came to him. Kelly, a tinhorn gambler, also stopped at the hotel. And there was Butch, a sort of roustabout who worked at anything he could get to do until he had made enough to pay his hotel bill; when he would loaf for a week or two, until his credit became thin. Then he would get out and hustle again. He was a husky, hard-working young fellow, but he sure would have had to shave off his eyebrows to show any forehead. There were all sorts of other strange birds stopping at the place from time to time: mechanics out of work, cheap actors, country boys in town to find jobs; crooks, bums—any one who could scare up the necessary two dollars for a room. There's a laugh coming when I tell you they called me 'The Gent,' possibly because my linen was always clean; and while I knew the vernacular of the clan, I did not use it, ordinarily.

"I dropped in at the bar about ten that evening, chatted for a while with Professor Brady, and made the mistake of getting a twenty-dollar bill changed when I bought a drink for the sleight-of-hand man. Whether or not he passed the word that I had made a strike, or whether some of the others in the room saw the money, does not matter. When I dressed, next morning, I found that some one had 'cleaned' me. I didn't have a nickel. I was the first man downstairs that morning, and the day bartender heard my complaint without manifesting surprise. 'Some of that bunch touched you, that's all,' he stated casually. I knew I could never hope to get the money back. To have reported the matter to the police would have led to an investigation of my own circumstances.

"About ten o'clock that morning, Professor Brady came in wearing a new suit of hand-me-downs and supporting a wonderful jag. He was genial, patronizing, illuminated to the *n*th degree. He asked me to drink with him. I declined, stating that I was broke. He waved his—sleight of hand. ' 'S all right with me. Give us a couple of tubs of suds.' And before I could remonstrate he had taken some change from his pocket and after paying for the beer, handed me two silver dollars. ' 'S all right with me. Any time you need little dough, jus' say the word.' Surmising that it was my 'dough' that the genial professor was offering to me, I took it.

"The professor, self-styled, had what I call a nasty face. It wasn't what one would call a bad face, or a hard face. There was not strength enough in it for that. His little eyes were red-lidded. His mouth was loose, and his upper lip lifted at the corner when he talked—and usually he talked sneeringly of all things and of all folk. He was young, but dissipation had drawn heavy lines from the corners of his nostrils to the corners of his mouth. His face had an unhealthy pallor.

" 'Some guy touched The Gent for twenty-five bucks, last night,' blurted the bartender.

" 'Whoever says that is a —— —— liar!' said Brady.

" 'You're stewed,' laughed the bartender.

" 'Stewed—and proud of it,' stated the professor.

" 'About that liar business. I told Tom, here, that I had been cleaned,' I said.

"Professor Brady, much to my surprise, for I had never imagined he had sand enough to scrap, swung a haymaker that just missed my chin. Before I realized what I was doing I let him have a good, stiff, short poke—that didn't miss his chin. He wilted. I jumped in to catch him before he fell, but his head struck the brass foot rail, and a trickle of red oozed out of the corner of his mouth.

"The bartender ran round and helped me carry Brady into a back room. We doused him with water, but the professor wouldn't come out of it. I began to think that, perhaps, I had put him out for keeps. 'Guess I better call the bus,' stated Tom. 'It'll be hell if he croaks in here.'

" 'I guess I'll dig out, right now,' I said.

" 'All right. Beat it—and good luck. I'll take a chance. I'll tell the doc that Brady got arguin' with a bum that come in and got poked in the mug. Mebby he'll come out of it O. K. Beat it while the goin' is good.'

"I didn't stop to thank Tom. I just left there, crossed the canal and made for the freight yards. It happened that Tom had been the only witness to the scrap. I knew that Tom would tell a straight story, if it came to a show-down. But I had no intention of risking my freedom. If Brady did not come to within a reasonable time, I knew that the police would hear about it; and that would have meant jail for me, to say the least. I had no idea that I had actually put Brady out for good. But I was not going to wait and see.

"When I arrived at the yards, a freight was making up for some Southern destination. I purposely hunted up the freight conductor and asked him if he would give me a lift to Fostoria. He sized me up, hesitated, and finally told me to climb in the caboose and keep out of sight; not to sit up in the cupola. That is an instance of how being decently clothed used to help. Evidently the conductor reasoned that if a man as well clothed as I was would beg a ride, such a man most assuredly needed that kind of assistance. Ordinarily I should have kept out of sight until the train began to move and then have climbed into an empty box car, or a gondola. In this instance, I did not want to risk being thrown off the train at the southern end of the yards where the fly cops usually hung out.

"I still had my newspaper with me. I drew it out and began to read. I have noticed that a man reading a paper is less liable to be questioned than one who sits on a park bench or in a hotel chair or in the caboose of a local freight, for instance, and is not reading a paper or a book. Ordinarily men hesitate to interrupt a person's reading. So it was with the 'shacks' and the conductor. I imagine they thought me some chap who was in hard luck and more or less ashamed of it.

"It was a pretty rough ride in that caboose. It was late that night when we arrived in Fostoria. I thanked the train crew, and hopped off at the block. The night operator was sending when I came in. He glanced up and nodded toward a seat. When he got through, I asked him if I might wash up and change my collar. He made me at home. I recall that we discoursed upon the subject of tobacco. He chewed and smoked. It might be said that he lived on tobacco. I told him that my uncle was a tobacco grower in Pennsylvania. Then I explained the process of fertilizing—tobacco uses up the soil fast—and setting out the young plants; the topping or picking of the buds, to throw the plant back into leaf; the picking of tobacco worms; the cutting, loading on wagons, and the hanging in the curing sheds. He seemed mightily interested. He knew tobacco only in the plug or the package. Then I took him through a cigar factory. My uncle had operated several factories in Pennsylvania. That night operator was the most interested human being you ever saw.

"About midnight we had something to eat. It only remained for me to tell him that I had once worked for a railroad company when I was a youth, to make my advent a complete success. Had I begun by telling him I was an ex-railroad man, he would possibly have inferred that I was courting his favor. I began with tobacco; and our visit terminated with an invitation from him to share his room in town. I told him frankly that I was worth about two dollars and the clothing I had on. He waved that aside as inconsequent. Then I told him that I was not anxious for my family to hear of me in my present circumstances. He assured me that he understood; that I was

welcome to stay with him as long as I pleased, and that he never got a chance to talk with any one who knew anything but railroading, as he slept days and worked nights. He invited me to have breakfast with him that morning, but I declined. I did, however, accept his invitation to share his room that day.

"I slept all day. That evening I hunted up the editor of the local paper and showed him my letter of introduction to the editor of the Toledo *Blade*. He told me he had nothing for me unless I wanted to get out and solicit subscriptions to the paper. I told him that I didn't want to—but that I would. He gave me a line on some possible subscribers, the run of politics, and the names of some of the socially prominent. I asked to see a copy of the paper. Glancing over it—we were in the office of the *Herald* —I found a most interesting account of my little argument with Professor Brady. He had been taken to the hospital in Toledo and had been interviewed. The gist of the article was that I had beaten him into insensibility, waylaying him as he came from a theater where he had been performing, and robbing him of his money, watch, and jewelry.

"It was a dandy piece of imagination, on Brady's part. But I could not imagine that a reporter with any brains at all would have swallowed that story. However, I was relieved to learn that Brady was alive. I indicated the article to the editor of the *Herald* and told him that I was the guilty party. He laughed. 'Too bad you didn't break his neck or his leg,' said the editor. 'I know that duck. He came down here last winter and asked me to advertise his performance. He was giving a sort of one-man show for school children. I ran an ad for him—for which he never paid, by the way. He got all the kids in town out selling tickets, collected the dough, and beat it. No show; and he left with about fifty bucks to the good. Same guy. He works all the small towns around Toledo.'

"I invited the editor, whose name was Porter, to step out and look at the eclipse. While we were in the saloon, talking about con games and con men, he told me of a tough joint in town—sawdust on the floor and oil lamps on the walls—that was considered the toughest in the State. Fostoria was a railroad center of the old type, those days. And most railroad men drank, without making any effort to conceal the fact. Porter warned me to keep away from this tough joint, telling me that a gang hung out there that would knife me if they knew I had as much as fifty cents in my pocket.

"After we had taken a drink or two I asked the proprietor of the saloon if he subscribed to the *Herald*. He confessed that he did not. I told him that we had come over purposely to get his subscription, introducing myself as chief of the subscription department. Of course he came through with a year's subscription which I turned over to Porter. Porter was amused. 'You're all right,' he said. 'But you won't stick. Some bright morning you'll hit the ties for somewhere else. It's in your eye. But land 'em while you're here. We need the money.'

"I landed just eighty-two subscribers in four days—and then I knew that that source of income was played out. However, I had made something like forty dollars, and I had enjoyed myself. I still shared the night operator's room, but I saw little of him. Occasionally I spent a few hours with him in the tower. When I paid my share of the room rent he objected; but he took the money with the understanding that when he got a night off, we were to blow it in in that good, old-fashioned way. Let me be honest about it. Those days I could have more fun with five dollars, a good companion, and a thirst, than a boy with new skates and ice on the mill pond. It wasn't the liquor or the companionship, though. It was simply Youth.

"It began to look as though I could carry out my original intention of proceeding West, working my way from town to town, and holding to my hard and fast rule of never paying railroad fare, and never allowing my resources to drop below the level of fifty cents, when, one evening, the Little Red God that supervises the goings and comings of hobos, poked his finger into the works and stopped the machine. In fact, he set it back a few weeks.

"My friend, the night operator, whose name was Leary, finally got his vacation. I had been in Fostoria about two weeks when this happened. Leary's vacations usually meant a series of mild drunks, severe headaches, regrets, and a new set of good intentions. He told me this. Leary was a sallow, loose-jointed, bristle-haired, bony-faced chap, but the kindest fellow in the world. Tobacco had poisoned him so that he frequently suffered from indigestion and a

torpid liver; but he never complained. He was cynically cheerful, if you understand what I mean. He didn't get exercise enough to work off the effects of his tobacco-chewing and his smoking—and he worked nights. So I could quite understand his inclination to take to liquor when he had a fair chance. He never drank when on duty.

"I have never fancied the idea of deliberately getting drunk. In fact, a man living by his wits is the last man that ought ever to take a drink. So that evening, as Leary and I meandered from one saloon to another, I drank short beers, while he took whisky. And, of course, we talked; at least Leary did. His liquor lifted him out of himself. The railroad drudge became a sprightly soul, filled with a longing for adventure and romance. He told me he had always wanted to hit the ties and see the country. He suggested that we become partners of chance. He said he was only too willing to throw up his job, any time. He abused the railroad company, like most faithful employees do—and kept right on working for the railroad. Yet he was decent enough to blame himself for not having the ability to do bigger work. By gradations we progressed toward the dark end of the town, and before I knew where we were, Leary entered the tough joint that I had been warned to stay away from. It was called 'The Headlight.' There was no mistaking it: sawdust on the floor, oil lamps in wall brackets, cast-iron cuspidors, cheap, varnished pine bar, and the commingled odors of stale tobacco, damp sawdust, stale beer, cheap whisky, kerosene, and onions—sliced onions in vinegar—part of the free lunch that went with the tall beers.

"There were two or three railroad men in the place. They spoke to Leary. There was also as choice a gang of toughs as I have ever seen. They kept to themselves, eying me with no friendliness. They seemed to take Leary for granted. I was a stranger—and a stranger might mean a plain-clothes man. I was for leaving after we had had a drink, but Leary wanted to stay. He was beginning to feel his liquor. He bought drinks for everybody in the place. Yet no one returned the treat. He bought again. The proprietor, who tended his own bar, jollied Leary along, and I saw that sooner or later, if we did not get out of there, Leary would go broke, or get touched for his money. I was about to tell him that I was going, when a slim, well-dressed, dark-haired young fellow, of rather a sporty cut, entered. Without a word he drew a pair of scissors from his pocket and a package of black silhouette paper from an envelope and began to make a silhouette of one of the gang who stood with his elbow on the bar.

"The silhouette maker was clever. With a few turns of his wrist he had made an interesting likeness of the tough gentleman. He caught the attention of the group. They stood round him watching him as he made a silhouette of the bartender. The bartender asked him what he would have. The silhouette maker said, 'absinth,' and then I knew his special failing. But absinth was not a popular drink in that dive. Some one laughed and suggested that the silhouette man ask for champagne. Meanwhile, he was busy, making another silhouette. Eventually he sold one to each of the men present, except myself. He had not offered to make a silhouette of me until Leary insisted that he do so, stating that he wanted one as a keepsake.

"The silhouette man had a diamond stickpin in his tie, and sported a diamond ring. I noticed that the gang watched him closely, feigning an interest in his art as their excuse to get close to him. He asked me to keep my position while he made a silhouette of me. I was standing near the bar, smoking a cigarette. Just behind the silhouette man one of the toughs was leaning, peering over his shoulder and watching the scissors as they twisted and turned. The tough had been drinking enough to make him breathe heavily through his nose. He was not drunk, far from it; but in the silence, as every one silently watched the silhouette maker's clever fingers, the tough's breathing was noticeable, sounding something like a mild snore. He was utterly unconscious of it. The silhouette man, whose nerves were rather high-strung, stopped cutting the black paper and, turning to the tough, said jestingly: 'I don't mind if you look on. That doesn't bother me. But please don't snore in my ear.'

"Without a word the tough swung and knocked the other clear across the room. The silhouette man struck a chair and crashed to the floor. I was pretty sure that all that the gang had been waiting for was an excuse to get at the maker of silhouettes, provoke him to argument, start a fight, and then 'roll' him of his jewels and watch. From observation I judged that the proprietor of

The Headlight was friendly to the gang: in fact, Porter of the *Herald* had told me that the owner of the place was a hard character.

"Among the men there was an ex-railroad engineer, a big, husky fellow, weighing, I should judge, about two hundred. I learned later that he had been fired from the road for drinking. There were two or three other railroad men there, not counting Leary. Leary, as I have said, was a kindly chap. When he saw the silhouette man down and out, across that chair, Leary rushed over and tried to lift him to his feet. One of the gang also stepped in to help Leary. The tough who had hit the silhouette maker, squared off and would have hit him again as Leary and the other got him to his feet; but the big railroad engineer shouldered in. 'The lad is down and out. Just stand back. I'll take care of him.' And shoving the tough who had hold of the silhouette man, to one side, the engineer and Leary half dragged the unconscious man toward the doorway. The gang bunched. And opposite the gang stood the railroad men, proportionately about one to four. I sided with Leary and his friends, of course. Meanwhile, the silhouette maker had regained consciousness. He was dazed, but he seemed to know what had happened. He struggled to get away from Leary and the engineer. 'Wan' to 'poligize,' he reiterated. 'My fault.'

"What the leader of the gang called him wouldn't do you any good to hear. The silhouette maker still wanted to apologize, though he could scarcely stand. And he didn't realize, then, just what the gang was after. It looked as though we would have to battle to get him out of the place. The toughs seemed to feel that they had been done out of their chance to make a haul. They acted that way, at least. The leader, a squat, ugly and really tough customer to handle, said something to one of his fellows, and then he stepped up to the big engineer. 'What the hell business you got, buttin' in, anyhow, you —— —— ——.' The big engineer let go of the silhouette maker and smashed the tough square in the nose. It was a beautiful punch, and it drew red. 'Get him out of here,' said the engineer. 'I'll hold 'em off till you're in the street.'

"Leary and the other railroad men backed through the doorway, taking the silhouette man with them. I held back, more out of curiosity than because I have any special nerve. I saw one of the gang duck in and hack at the engineer's knee. The big fellow groaned. The gang rushed in. I swung a chair and it did somebody a whole lot of good. I could tell the way that that somebody went down. Then I found myself out in the street.

"A few yards ahead of me Leary and his friends were hurrying the silhouette man toward the arc light at the corner—and comparative safety. The engineer was limping along behind them, half turning to watch the saloon doorway. I didn't lose any time in getting with my crowd. We hustled the silhouette man down the next street and into a saloon—in fact, the place where I had made my first play for a subscription to the *Herald*. I told the proprietor what had happened. 'You better get the guy to his hotel,' said the proprietor. 'The bunch from The Headlight will land him, if you don't.' "

Manning stopped pacing up and down the long room, and stood by the fireplace, filling his pipe. After he had smoked a while, he laid his pipe on the high stone mantel.

"I began by talking about hobos—and a dog," he said, resuming his easy stride back and forth. "Perspective is a great thing. When I think of our little crowd, escorting that absinth drinker to safety—an utter stranger to us, and, just then, inclined to be obstinate—it amuses me mightily. But at the time we were in dead earnest. If we had been Crusaders trying to save some Christian knight from the Saracens we could not have been more in earnest. The silhouette maker reiterated his desire to return to the joint and apologize to the tough. We hung on to him. When we asked him where he was stopping he declared that he had engaged no room as yet; that he had just arrived in town. I inferred that he was broke and had started out to make a little money with which to pay for a room.

"The proprietor of 'The Diamond Saloon' —the place we were in—repeated his warning as to the necessity of getting the silhouette man off the street. While we were talking one of the toughs stepped in and called for a drink. We surmised that the gang was waiting outside. While chatting with the saloon keeper I said, apropos of nothing, 'Punch the button,' and I nodded toward the electric-light switch near the end of the bar. The saloon keeper didn't bat an eye winker. But he got me. He took a cloth and began to clean up the spilled

beer on the bar, polishing along and slowly working toward the electric-light switch. I saw several figures standing out in front of the place. The gang was there, waiting for us to come out.

"I managed to get the silhouette man into a conversation having to do with pictures, and mentioned one or two artists of note. He was frankly astonished that any one in that crowd knew anything about Winslow Homer or Sargent or Abbey. Meanwhile, the saloon keeper was slowly polishing the bar, pursuing the even tenor of his way toward the electric-light switch. I had my hand upon the silhouette man's arm. The saloon keeper tossed his cloth down and, turning as though to take a cigar from an open box near the end of the shelf back of the bar, he reached up and coolly snapped off the switch. I pulled the silhouette man toward the back of the room. 'This way,' I said quietly. I got him out in the alley and then told him it was up to us to make for a room—that the gang was laying for him and would find some excuse to roll him for his pin and watch and ring. And right there his nerve left him.

"I think that the reaction from the jolt he had got was working. In any event, the courage of his liquor had evaporated. He stumbled along after me, dodging boxes and garbage and ash heaps, until I came out on the street where the night operator lived. I hustled the silhouette maker upstairs. He was white and shaky. I got him a drink of water. Then he confided to me that he had hit the town broke, after a spree in Toledo which terminated in his finding himself on a southbound train, with his ticket, but no money in his pocket.

"He said he got off at Fostoria, hoping to scare up enough cash to get a room for the night. He told me that his family was wealthy and socially prominent in Toledo: that his father had turned him out of the house because of his recent spree. Aside from the ability to make silhouettes, this sportily inclined young chap was as helpless as a blind puppy. He implored me to stay in the room, and not allow the gang to get him.

"I was about to go down to a restaurant and get him something to eat, when Leary came in. 'Hell to pay!' he said. 'After you guys beat it, "Chuck" Swazey'—this was the leader of the gang—'stuck a knife into Connors, the engineer. Cut him pretty bad, but didn't kill him. One of Connors' pals pulled a gun and shot Chuck. It happened out in front of The Diamond. When the lights went out we had made for the front door, thinking the gang had doused the lights so they could get a crack at us. The constable's got Connors' pal. Connors is in the railroad hospital. I don't know what they did with Chuck. I know I beat it. Hell of a note!'

"The silhouette man heard, and it only needed this finale to finish him, so far as helping himself was concerned. He pleaded with us to get him out of town and to keep his name out of the papers. I told him we didn't know his name, to begin with. And he was too scared to think. He didn't introduce himself.

" 'There's No. 10, the local freight. She hits here about twelve,' said Leary. 'Come on over to the tower, and I'll fix it so you can get back to Toledo—if you ain't too high-toned to ride the caboose.' The silhouette man would have climbed a streak of lightning to get out of that town, just about then. We got him over to the tower, and pretty soon the local pulled in. Leary asked the conductor to give the silhouette man a lift to Toledo. And because I knew how the silhouette maker would feel about the time he hit Toledo next day, broke and dirty and sick, I slipped him five bucks. He wept when I gave it to him and declared that I was a gentleman. I didn't argue the point with him.

"As for myself, I thought it wouldn't do me any special good to stay in Fostoria. I knew the editor of the *Herald* would print my version of the scrap, and stand by me in case of trouble; but the editor didn't owe me anything, and I didn't care to incur obligations. Had the town been policed at all, I believe neither the silhouette man nor myself would have managed to get away so easily. But there was no police force there; merely a constable and a deputy, and they were simply figureheads. After the silhouette man had hopped the caboose and disappeared, I told Leary that I was also going to step out—but not toward Toledo. Leary declared his willingness to throw up his job and hit the cinders with me. I dissuaded him from it. I am glad that I did. He was a good chap, and had grit, but he didn't have a constitution that would long stand the jolts a fellow gets while hitting the hobo trail.

"Fostoria is somewhat of a railroad junction. There are several ways of getting in and out of town. Before I left Leary that night, I rolled my collar in a clean handkerchief, buttoned my overcoat up close, and prepared to hop a freight that was *not* headed for Toledo. Leary made me promise to drop in and see him if I ever came his way again and he asked me to write to him. We shook hands. I have never seen him since.

"A week later I was down in the Indiana oil fields, wondering if there was any more red clay left in America after that section of Indiana was made. The fall rains came on. I had hard going for a while, and my clothing began to look pretty seedy. I had hard luck, hard weather, used poor judgment at times, and had a poor country to ramble through.

"However, I must head back toward Rags, or he'll be dead of old age. Don't suppose for a minute that I ever expected to see that tyke again. I never even dreamed of it. But the Little Red God again stuck his finger in the works. I was sick and tired of southern Indiana; so when I got a chance to 'ride the plush' to Toledo, I took it. Why did I head back toward Toledo? Well, I couldn't explain that. Perhaps I had a kind of romantic liking for that town. I knew the town, and thought I disliked it. Yet I found myself recalling pleasantly certain streets and alleys and saloons and hotels in Toledo. Incidentally, it was near the first of January—New Year's Day. And southern Indiana, in winter, is a mighty sad stamping ground for a hobo.

"I was in a saloon, in Marion, Indiana, one evening, when a down-and-outer shuffled in, spotted me, and without any preamble offered to sell me a ticket to Toledo—the return portion of a two-way ticket. He said he had decided to stay in Marion; that he needed some change. I didn't want the ticket; but I saw that it was dated correctly and was genuine. I offered him three dollars for it, and he took the money. That night I boarded the northbound.

"I took a half-dozen apples along. Two or three apples make a healthful and satisfying meal, when one's menu is limited. And for the second time in my life I arrived in Toledo flat broke. But this time I knew where and how to get a room, even without funds. You remember the kind of saloon that utilized the floor above for rooming purposes—cheap little boxes of rooms—fifteen to twenty-five cents a night? But you don't undress to sleep in one of those beds. You take off your shoes, crawl under the top blanket—and sleep. Sometimes you have company—lots of it.

"I have showed you the nine-ten card trick? Well, I always reserved that as my last resource. It is not a crooked trick. It's straight—and effective. That evening I marched into a saloon, stepped up to the bar, and frankly told the fellows there that I was broke, and that I would entertain them with a card trick. If they liked the trick they could pass the hat. If they didn't they could keep their hats on. As usual, the trick mystified them. It is so simple that it usually puzzles folk. I shamelessly gathered a handful of dimes and nickels, paid for a room, and had something to eat. When I stepped out next morning, it had been snowing—a fine, sleety snow that turned to slush almost instantly.

"It was New Year's Day. Ordinarily I don't set my heart on celebrating any special holiday. All days are alike to me, more or less. But this day I caught myself longing for turkey and cranberry jelly, with the incidentals, which used to include a cocktail to begin with, and some real brandy, followed by that small, black coffee which seems essential to the enjoyment of the after-dinner cigar. I visioned it all as I walked down Cherry Street and turned the corner. I had about thirty cents in my pocket. It was lonesome on the streets downtown. Presently I found myself meandering out toward the residential section, for no special purpose whatever. I simply walked out that way, having nothing else to do.

"There were carriages in front of some of the homes. It was about two o'clock, that afternoon, when I decided to turn back toward town and get something to eat. I was passing a rather pretentious home, set back from the street, when a carriage stopped and a young woman stepped out. I paused in my stride that she might cross the walk in front of me. Just then a Skye terrier bounced out of the carriage, saw me, growled suspiciously, and held up one forefoot daintily. It was evident that he disliked the slush on the sidewalk. The young woman turned and called to the little dog. He cocked his head and eyed me, hesitated, trotted up and sniffed of my shoes—and then without hesitation sat up and begged.

" 'He seems to know you,' said the young woman. 'Here, Skipper!'

"But Skipper—whom I had named Rags during our very brief sojourn together a few months previous—seemed to think he had found an old friend. He raced round me, skidded in the slush, slid on his nose, sneezed, circled me again, barked, and tried his best to express his joy at meeting me again.

" 'I sold him to you,' I stated, thinking that I ought to say something.

" 'Oh, yes! Now I recall you. Skipper, you're a sight! And you just had your bath this morning.'

"I raised my hat and began to walk on. But Skipper was not satisfied to go unrecognized. He trotted along beside me. I simply had to turn back. Just then a young fellow in a dark-gray suit ran down the steps of the house and came to the sidewalk. 'What's the trouble, sis?' he asked. Then he looked hard at me, hesitated, and finally stepped up and thrust out his hand. He was the silhouette maker. 'I beg your pardon,' he said, 'but I didn't learn your name—that time——'

"I introduced myself. Meanwhile Skipper, or Rags, watched the proceedings with great interest. That was the right idea! Now one member of his family, at least, had recognized his friend of the park bench and the watering trough! The silhouette man immediately introduced me to his sister, to whom I had sold Rags. Then he insisted upon my coming in. I declined the invitation. Still he insisted. He said he wanted to talk with me: said that he had quit drinking; that his parents were away, visiting in Detroit, and that he and his sister were having a quiet New Year's Day dinner together. I must come in and have dinner with them. Meanwhile the chap's sister had gone on into the house. But Rags elected to stay with us. I told the silhouette man, briefly, that I had known Rags as one of my own kind and that I had sold him to replenish my finances. 'All the better!' exclaimed the silhouette man. 'Just come on in. I'll explain to Dolly. She's all kinds of a good fellow when you know her. Lord, but she has done everything for me! And man, I'm glad to see you again. Come on. There's no such word as can't in the book.'

"Well, I went in with him and he left me scrubbing in the bathroom while he told his sister as much as he knew about me—and from what I gathered later, he confessed frankly just how he had acted in Fostoria and what had happened to him. In any event, his sister Dolly was gracious to me; and she joked me about selling Rags to her when I didn't actually own him. We had the conventional dinner—without, however, the cocktail and the brandy—but that didn't matter. And after dinner we sat in the library and chatted. The silhouette maker got me started yarning about the cinder trail. Finally we were talking about pictures and books and painters and writers. Dolly seemed to enjoy the chat. During a pause she asked me if I had ever written anything for the magazines.

"I pleaded guilty. Then she asked me if I had not written a certain bit of hobo verse that had attracted some attention. I again pleaded guilty. This rather identified me—at least among the Grand Disorganized Fraternity of Cinder Sifters—and I was invited to spend the evening with them, and tell them more about my meanderings. I remember I was seated on the most comfortable davenport in the world, with Rags curled up beside me; and that the cigars were mighty good. There was a coal fire in the grate, and no other light in the room.

"Finally I rose. Rags was awake and on his feet immediately. 'But you must stay at least to-night,' said the silhouette maker. 'We have all kinds of room.' I declined, firmly this time. I spoke of having to be on my way; thanked my hosts for a delightful evening, and patted Rags, the little tyke that had recognized me and had been the dog-angel in disguise who had led me to a good dinner and pleasant company.

"I can hardly imagine that Rags remembered I had dug cockleburs from his ear, or that I had held him up to the watering trough when he was thirsty; or that I had sold him to his present mistress. No, he didn't realize that. But he knew me. And that is what touched my heart; and that is why I have spent a couple of hours telling about my rather tame experiences on the road. Rags knew me. And he knew me for a friend. That's good enough for any man.

"Out in the entryway, after I had said good-by to Dolly, the silhouette maker drew a twenty-dollar bill from his wallet and handed it to me. 'You have forgotten,' I told him. 'It was a five-spot—not twenty.'

"He argued; but I couldn't see that he should lend me any money. Finally he gave

me the five he had borrowed. I took it, of course. He wanted to know when and where he would see me again. I laughed. 'In Frisco,' I said jestingly. Then I told him that for me to show up again would be to spoil the memory of what had been a most delightful evening—apparently for all of us; that it was a wise hobo who, having made a momentarily good impression, knew enough to roll his blanket and beat it.

"'But why can't you call again, at least once before you leave town?' he said.

"'Well, there are several minor reasons. The chief reason is that I think your sister Dolly the most quietly fascinating girl I have ever met.' And shaking hands with him, I stepped out. He caught hold of Rags, who would have followed me.

"Before I reached the sidewalk I turned and glanced back. In the big living-room window fronting the street was the shaggy little form of Rags. He was sitting up—begging. He barked. I could hear the sound of his bark faintly.

"I haven't mentioned the silhouette maker's name. He isn't making silhouettes now. He is doing something a lot bigger. But occasionally I get a letter from him."

"You never went back there?" queried Buck, yawning.

"No. The Little Red God ordained otherwise."

You will find "Ransome's Sheila," a short story by Mr. Knibbs, in the next issue.

OUR BIG NEW ARMY

IF war should come to us again—provided it waits until 1924—it will find us vastly better prepared than ever before, if the war department's plans for the organization of our land forces along the lines indicated in the amended national defense act are carried to a successful conclusion. And as General Pershing, as general of the armies of the United States, and chief of staff, has been intrusted with the big task, it is quite certain that they will be carried out successfully. These plans call for the rapid mobilization in a national emergency of six field armies, complete with auxiliary and replacement troops; each field army to consist of three army corps of three infantry divisions, with necessary corps and army troops, including two cavalry divisions. This will give us an organized force of about two million men, composed of the regular army, with a strength limited by Congress to 150,000 men; the national guard, which by June 30, 1924, is to be recruited to its authorized strength of 400,000 men, and organized reserves numbering 1,400,000 men. Although all details have not been announced, the plans call for one field army composed of regular troops, two field armies of national guardsmen, and three field armies of reserves. While the regulars and national guardsmen may be called on for service in any national emergency, and the reserves are exclusively for war service, coöperation between the three forces is to be so close as to make them one big army.

For the purposes of organization, training, and control, the country has been divided into nine army corps areas. The work of assigning national guard units to these areas has been completed, and regular and reserve officers are about to be assigned to the task of organizing the enlisted reserve corps. To provide officers for these reserve troops it is proposed to increase the officers' reserve corps, which now numbers about 12,000 to 150,000. Present reserve officers will call meetings to encourage officers who served in the World War to apply for reserve commissions, and a steady supply of second lieutenants is assured from the officers' training corps of our colleges, which now number 100,000 young men in 233 educational institutions. The noncommissioned and enlisted personnel will be drawn from veterans of the recent war and other men who have had military training, and from men who attend the summer "Plattsburg" camps. To give every man a chance to become an officer, it is provided that these Plattsburgers, after attending three camps and taking up special studies, may be examined for commissions as second lieutenants.

It is planned to give all members of the reserve corps fifteen days' training each year, for which service they will receive the regular army pay of their grades.

The Yap from Ypsilanti

By Clarence L. Cullen

Author of "A Strategist in Citrusia," "Southbound," Etc.

Treating a fiery ball player with fire isn't such a bad idea.

THE new left fielder, on the very first day he got into our livery, showed how seriously he was infected by umpirephobia. He made an ill-judged stab to steal home from third. Several centuries before he slid into the plate—not that he wasn't shifty on his feet, but simply that he'd miscalculated—the catcher had the ball and was thinking of writing to his wife that night to have the home in Hokumville painted pink or something during the summer. So our new left fielder was out at the plate by about ten light seconds—light, as I understand it, traveling at the rate of one hundred and eighty thousand miles per second.

The slider, rising rapidly from his needlessly groveling recumbence on the plate, flailed the clinging soil from the circumferential part of his trousers with violent hands. Then, using only the downward-slanted southwestern corner of his mouth as an oral vent or orifice, he addressed the umpire.

"Say, yuh blind cave fish," was his remark, "w'en are yuh goin' t' git them lamp wicks trimmed?"

The umpire, one of the suave, smiling kind, merely motioned the unsuccessful stealer to the bench.

"Any cross-eyed night watchman," remarked our new left fielder, still employing only the before-mentioned corner of his mouth, "could have saw that I beat that chuck a Philadelphia block."

The umpire composedly intimated that, the day being warm, a drink of water might help the out-at-the-plate one, the water pail, of course, being anchored alongside the bench. But our new man, like so many of us, loathed friendly advice.

"I seen a floorwalker in a ten-cent store in Cleveland last week that looked a lot like youse," said he, nudging closer to the umpire. "He was wearin' blinkers t' give the shoplifters a chanst."

"That's my brother Ethelbert," murmured the umpire. "You were purchasing a pair of shoes there, I suppose?"

"Aw, play ball!" groaned the sufferers in the grand stand.

"Yes, I'm wearin' them shoes now," replied our just-signed left gardener, "and I'd enjoy losin' one or both of 'em in——"

"Conversation closed," snapped the umpire, motioning to the pitcher to start pegging. "But if you must have 'em, five words more will cost you only fifty."

So our new man drew back his famous umpire-plastering right. Before he could even begin, however, to get it into proper pistoning position, his piano-mover's arms were pinned rigidly to his sides by a toothy towhead in our uniform who had strolled over to the scene of the disturbance from the coacher's box at third. The harder the umpire smearer squirmed to wriggle out of this from-the-rear embrace the tighter the boa pressure became. Our new man's sense of outrage was intensified by the fact that, being gripped that way from behind, he could not even see who his gripper was.

"Who t'ell's this hangin' on to me?" he spluttered, striving helplessly, with all the great power of him, to free himself from that rearward python clasp.

"Nobody but a yap from Ypsilanti that's going to save you from being benched this time, if you'll limber up a little," the squirmer heard the voice of the unseen one holding him from behind say. "Let's go sit down—huh?"

The umpire had resumed his position back of the plate, the game had restarted, the incident, without catastrophe, was closed. Our new left fielder, thus carried through the crisis, lumbered muttering, but no longer clasped, to the bench.

Does a cut back in a moving-picture story make you mad? Because it does peeve some people that must have the action unwound like a rope off a windlass drum. I'm inquiring, because there's a little cut back called for here to explain about our new left fielder.

I remember Cluck's remarks about Hanrahan when he first mentioned him to me.

"He's a handy enough outfielder for anybody," was Cluck's opening, "and he's hit around three hundred every year since he made this league."

"Three hundred what—people?" I asked him. "I know, of course, that Hanrahan has hit a lot of folks of one kind and another—umpires, teammates, and such like—but I didn't suppose he'd socked as many as three hundred of them a year."

"Only a habit, that thing of swinging on somebody every now and then," argued Cluck, disregarding my brightness. "He might be cured of it."

"It's so easy to cure these settled habits," I flickered again. "Maybe some day they'll cure the Babe of his childish habit of running heartbroken all the way home every time the wicked man on the mound pegs a certain kind of a ball at him."

"But I hate to waive on a good all-round ball player that there's nothing the matter with, barring his being a little too profuse with his punches," mumbled Cluck.

"You're not going to waive on Hanrahan," I told him by way of letting him know that I hadn't been business manager of "Cluck" Hotchkiss' ball club all those years without solving some of Cluck's shoots. "You're going to sign him. And the only reason you're going through the motions of asking advice about it is that you want to have the fun of coppering the counsel of people who tell you, as I do, that if you sign Hanrahan, you're crazy."

"Rough gab, that, about a boy that's all right excusing his vivacious trick of resting a vitrified mitt or so occasionally on people that need persuasion," was Cluck's rap back.

"If," I tried then for a clinch, "you'll get any nutriment out of the vivacity of a ball player that most of the time, by reason of suspensions, has to be vivacious on the dugout bench——"

"They'll lift his present suspension, if I take him," Cluck broke that hold, "and taking him is worth thinking about. There ain't many chances on this circuit of getting for nothing a good, aggressive ball player that everybody's turning loose because they don't know how to handle two-handed live ones."

"That's right, there ain't," I weaved in once again, knowing all the time how useless it was. "There ain't many two-handed live ones, either, that've been given the unconditional air by four clubs in one league within the space of six years. These four foolish managers must have given Hanrahan the gate because, being inexperienced in the game, they did not know what a prize they had."

"Quite so," grinned Cluck. "You'll be telling me next that Hanrahan can't play ball."

"I'll never tell you," said I, "that Hanrahan can't play hell with a ball club."

"I haven't seen any ball club yet that a little properly regulated hell could hurt," Cluck concluded that session.

Then he crossed the hotel lobby to the telegraph counter and wrote a couple of wires, one of them to Great Headquarters, refusing to waive on Hanrahan—I'm disguising him as Hanrahan because I want to live to realize on my tontine policy, but you've guessed his right name—and the other one to Hanrahan himself, asking him how he'd like to do a little left gardening for the Hotchkiss outfit.

That evening, when the team returned from the ball yard, Cluck broke the news to the players that Hanrahan, having been sent for, had wired his acceptance. Four of them, all teammates of other seasons with Hanrahan, immediately rose from their lobby chairs, stretched, and otherwise looked busy.

"I wonder," inquired Jed Jarvis, the shortstop, "if any of the stores are still open? I want to do a little shopping."

"Shopping for what?" Cluck asked him.

"Knucks," said Jed.

"Off of that, corkhead," Cluck admonished him. "You won't need any knucks for Hanrahan. All you've got to do is to let him alone."

"That's what I was told once about a bulldog back home," said Jed. "But my letting that dog alone didn't stop him from gnawing me clean to the bone right through a pair of leather hunting pants."

"Knucks wouldn't do for Hanrahan, anyhow, unless you wore 'em all the time you

were awake, because you never know when Hanrahan's going to paste you," said "Skid" Durnin, the pitcher, a reminiscent glitter in his eye. "But if he ever lays a mitt on me again, like he did at the Copley in Boston that night three years ago when I showed three jacks to his three tens, I know where I can buy me a cylinder of poison gas."

"Lay away from all this propping for trouble with Hanrahan," Cluck addressed the team. "This last unconditional airing he's been handed will steady him. He knows I'm giving him his final chance in this league, and if he's not crossed by bother hunters he'll make his mitts behave."

"That's what Connie thought, and told us, when he took Hanrahan after Comiskey had turned him loose for socking half the umps in the league for a collection of epitaphs," said "Blink" Fosdick, the first baseman. "It was in July, I think, that Connie signed him, and by the end of August the raw-beefsteak bill for blue eyes on that ball club was mounting into money. Along toward the middle of September Hanrahan took a swing at Connie himself, but missed because Connie was even thinner than usual that season and not much of a mark for a loose or flying mitt. So Connie let Clark Griffith have Hanrahan for the rest of the season, the Washington club being so deep in the ditch by then that Clark, not caring whether he was alive or dead, would have signed William Jennings Bryan as a shortstop."

"Bury this bunch of bygones, you historians," Cluck pounced in again. "Hanrahan's a ball player and he's going to sign with me. Whenever he pulls an arm back to start a clout—if he does that while he's with this outfit—I'll know about it and, sooner or later, I'll light on the correct prescription."

"Just what Connie said, word for word, barring the prescription part, boss," grinned First Sacker Fosdick. "Connie didn't have any prescription for Hanrahan's murder malady, but maybe prussic acid would help."

"Connie didn't have any prescription, either, for the malady that makes you juggle easy chucks from third, like that one to-day," Cluck used the macerating machine on Blink, ending the lobby séance on the subject of Hanrahan.

Late that night Cluck, coming in from a show, dug me up in my hotel room.

"Dropped in to tell you," said he with a mile-away look in his eyes, "that day after to-morrow there'll be a—uh—a player without portfolio joining us here," the "here" meaning Detroit.

"Yessir, yessir—player without portfolio—and did you meet the new undersecretary for foreign affairs at the embassy ball to-night?" I tried to make it easy for him.

"Player without portfolio," Cluck repeated, squinching me. "Meaning that probably I won't be able to use him at all this season, because his broken leg is just beginning to mend. He's a willing lad from—what's the name of that 'Y' place that sounds like a jazz chord?—oh, yes, Ypsilanti—Ypsilanti's here in Michigan—and his name is 'Flaxy' Tribble. Been playing the infield for a couple of years in one of these one-burner leagues up in the Michigan copper country. He's good, I'm told, but, of course, he needs a lot. I want him to hep up on the big-time work, which is why we're going to carry him for a couple of circuit trips. He won't be able to practice, on account of his bum pin, but he'll be in uniform in the dugout, using his eyes, and maybe I'll let him coach a little. Kind of a gummy night for May in Detroit, ain't it?" and Cluck eased out and down the hall to his own room.

So now—end of the cut back—you know how Cluck insisted upon signing Hanrahan, who reported on the same day that Flaxy Tribble did, and you know, too, as much as I then did, about Flaxy Tribble, the yap from Ypsilanti, as he had called himself—thereby creating a precedent which stuck—when he held Hanrahan in that anaconda clutch from behind and saved him from smearing another umpire and drawing another suspension in the first game the new left fielder played in our livery.

The attachment thus formed—thrilling writer, Jane Austen, wasn't she?—was destined, on one side at least, to remain unbroken for a considerable period, even ripening into a sort of inseparability which—— Well, you know how the thing generally works out as between a couple of people who have passed through a great peril together; you'll have noticed that the one who has played the rescuer's part kind of adopts or establishes a sort of guardianship over the saved one, often against the desire of the plucked-from-the-brink party, who may even secretly resent this prolongation of the inci-

dent into a protectorship by his—yes, or her—rescuer.

That's how it developed from the start as between "Showers" Hanrahan—Showers because he'd pasted so many of his club mateys in the shower room after the game—and Flaxy Tribble. Flaxy, from that moment when he had succored Hanrahan from the suspension hazard of giving still another umpire an eye to match the color of the umpire's uniform, seemed to feel that the recklessly pugnacious young life of Showers Hanrahan was, and by virtue of that one specimen of succoring ought to be, under his, Flaxy's, watchful care.

Flaxy's method of expressing this feeling—for, being one of these here Silent Smiths, he never once even vaguely mentioned the matter—was to hover near and around and about Hanrahan practically all the time, but most particularly at such times as there seemed the remotest possibility that his ham-handed protégé might fall into the fine-or-suspension jeopardy of plastering people for a panorama of tombstones. Flaxy, as I say, was a quiet and a self-effacing hoverer; but he knew how to hover; as a practitioner of the esoteric or inside art of hovering I can fairly affirm that I never saw Flaxy's equal.

His prescriptive privilege of hovering around Hanrahan had been validated when Cluck, both being new men on the team, made them hotel roommates from the beginning. Showers, I am forced to acknowledge, did not take heartily to this arrangement.

"What for are yuh bunkin' me off with this here jungle leaguer with the bleached fleece?" he inquired of Cluck, meaning, by "bleached fleece," Flaxy's queer albino mop of cottony hair. "There's nothin' I can talk about with one of these brush hicks. Why can't yuh hay me down with some blob that knows the difference between Broadway and Buggins' Ferry?"

"Because I want you to teach the Zeb that difference—to wean him from the small-time stuff and wise him up on city ways," Cluck, the distinguished diplomatist, stopped him. "We all had to break in, and I've picked you to help sieve the alfalfa seed out of this pupil's hair because I know that you're jerry to the rube-busting job. Besides, all hands on the team are already bunked off in matched pairs, and you and Flaxy would look fine on the expense account as occupants of separate rooms, I think not."

The need for Flaxy to impose again his gentle, guardianly restraint upon his non-reciprocating, not to say hostile, buddy came on the night the team was making its get-away from Detroit. Hanrahan, staying up later in the club's sleeper than any of the others except Flaxy, found when he was ready to turn in that all of the lower berths were occupied. As a major leaguer of six seasons' standing—subtracting only about half of the elapsed time for suspensions—Showers considered that he had attained the rank of a lower-berth ball player. This consideration was not without merit, if it's merit you rely upon to haul you comfortably from here to there. But the more pervasive and binding idea with a ball club is that a ball player is entitled to whatever he can get—if, and when, and after, he gets it. Not only that, but lower berths generally are dished out—after the really working pitchers are served with the underneath bunks—in accordance with club seniority, the late-coming proselytes on the pay roll being supposed to look pleasant when they creep into the uppers.

Not so Showers. Not so at all Showers. Coatless and shirtless and with his heavy, bare arms knobbing dangerously, Showers bull-moosed back and forth in the car aisle, pulling open the drawn curtains and peering into the lowers, the drowsy occupants of which, with the overhead lights thus caused to blaze in their eyes, got nowhere at all with Showers by damning him to the death eternal.

Plowing the aisle like an armored tank roaring through a quiet, war-bound village street, Hanrahan reached at length the berth of a player whom he considered he had every right to dislodge from his lower. This soft-spoken southpaw, a pitcher from Idaho, had been with the team only two weeks, but by copping all of his games to date, three in number and two of them shut-outs, he already had earned the right to be treated as a pet, even had he not been traditionally entitled, as a pitcher that pitched, to a lower. But tradition and suchlike trivialities didn't figure as tonnage with Showers.

"I ast youse," Showers heatedly addressed everybody in the world, but nobody in particular, "t' lookit this here skinned lotter from the sagebrush, that's been on the speed time about twenty minutes or nearly, strawed down in a lower like he belonged, and me that——"

"Aw, go dig into a pesthouse and die!" a trying-to-sleep player bawled from his bunk.

"Move along, yuh Goose Island checker neck," came a soft drawl from the Idaho heaver's lower, "or I'll sink one in your ankle."

Meaning, by "sink one," the ejection of a leaden souvenir from the Cœur d'Alene forty-five seven-chambered toy, weighing about nine pounds, which this Idaho pitcher, despite Cluck's argument that it wasn't necessary this side of the Mississippi and might make him permanently lopsided, never went without, day or night, except when in uniform.

It is to be said for Hanrahan, however, that when his natural plastering urge was bulwarked by a convinced if mistaken sense of injustice, neither machine-gun nests nor coiled, hooded cobras could turn him. So he bent down to reach in and remove the Idaho southpaw from his lower.

It was at this point that Flaxy Tribble, the player without portfolio, confirmed and clinched his guardianship over Showers Hanrahan. Showers once again felt himself gripped from behind in an embrace like that of a hawser around a capstan.

"Let's you and me go to bed now and let 'em sleep their heads off—what say?" Showers again heard the rearward voice of his hovering roommate. Striving to squirm loose as upon the previous occasion, he seemed only to tighten the nooselike clutch of his chaperon or shadow. I have neglected to say, I think, that Hanrahan, a rangy, light heavy who would scale at about one and three quarters, was easily, for every appearance of bull strength, the team's top man, while Flaxy, a loose-coupled welter, who wouldn't have tipped it at better than one fifty-five, looked, in his clothes, nowhere near this kind of work. But there you are. I relate the facts.

"There's more breeze in the uppers than in the lowers, anyhow," the yap from Ypsilanti was heard to say, soothfully but firmly, to Showers. "It's eleven o'clock now and we make New York at seven in the morning. We could sleep that long on top of a fence post. Into that upper, buddy. Let these pets snore."

Hearing Hanrahan's low growl—"Aw-r-r leggo me!"—we could visualize the downward slant of the southwestern portion of his face. But his plastering passion had passed, the crisis was over, again was calamity averted. And, while Showers mutteringly undressed at the other end of the car, Cluck, whose berth was across the aisle from mine, stuck his head between his curtains and staked me to a cryptic wink.

Hanrahan, playing the three-star brand of ball in New York and Boston—fielding and base running not so unlike Ty and, in the two series, basting four of the Babe kind into the brush for home tickets—was delivering for Cluck and thereby arousing the wonderment and worse of the four club chiefs of this league who, one after another, had slag-heaped Showers as an incurable plasterer. They had no means of knowing—nor would they have believed had they known—of the subtle but effectual taming influence that was at work upon the tempestuous spirit of Showers; meaning that our capable but choleric left fielder, after he had been vise-gripped by Flaxy on three more critical occasions when he'd been on the point of soaking umpires or players for a set of sarcophagi, was beginning to feel that he was under the pinning power of Fate. And Fate, for Showers, meant Flaxy. The player without portfolio, dawdling on the dugout bench with never a practice ball in his hands because of his bandaged leg and pronounced limp, performed as a ball player solely in the capacity of third-base coach, and it was from this strategic spot that he was enabled to make his rearward descents upon Showers when the assassin's glint suddenly showed in the left fielder's eyes.

Hanrahan, it is fair to say, probably realized that Fate Flaxy, by his ever-prompt arm-hawsering work, was saving him quite a little salary coin in the shape of fines, to say nothing of the averted suspensions that formerly had meant long, muscle-stiffening sessions on the bench. But these considerations could not conquer the dislike, kneaded up with dread, which Showers soon began to show toward Flaxy. After that night in the sleeper he rarely or never spoke to his hovering roommate except to attempt bawlingly but unavailingly to shoo him elsewhere.

"Say, yuh spook, g'way from me, will yuh?" we heard him chop at Flaxy one night in the lobby of the New York hotel. "Quit hangin' aroun' me! I'm beginnin' t' look like yuh. I'll wake up some mornin' and find I've got hair like that fluff on your bean. G'way from me, I tell yuh!"

But Flaxy, shucking these outbursts, per-

sistently but silently declined to g'way. He had a pleasant, quiet smile, had Flaxy, back of more heavy horse teeth than you'll often see in a human countenance, so that somehow you liked—we all liked—this taciturn, odd-looking yap that really had nothing yap-like about him, with his billowy coiffure of cottony hair, white as the big bell-shaped blossom atop of a Spanish bayonet, contrasting crazily with his dark-tanned face.

But, when you've got a Showers with settled habits on a ball club, all this cathedral calm that I've been talking about can't last. The virus in Showers, even under the Fate of Flaxy treatment, was only dormant; it was destined to break out uncontrollably, when it would require improved or advanced methods of handling. This was expected; and anybody who tells you, speaking by and large, that it's the unexpected that happens is a somebody who lets George do his thinking for him.

In the first game we played in Chicago with Hanrahan covering the left patch there flashed one of those fielding situations where, if any of the outer gardeners fails to measure correctly and think swiftly, there's bound to be a two-man boot of the ball with a two-man collision, and maybe a couple of broken heads to follow.

A Chicago swattist, leanin' with all his health against a down-and-inshoot, popped one of those sky-dusting flies that make fielders guess a little even if the ball isn't lost in the sun. It was our ball game, three to none, in this fifth inning, but the Comiskey clan had three ambitious persons on the sacks so that it behooved the appropriate party out there in the meadow to be under that fly when it descended. Hanrahan, taking an erroneous, upward slant, mistakenly deemed himself to be this appropriate party. But he wasn't. The fly was a tangerine right off the tree for Mason, the center fielder, or would have been had he been let alone.

"It's Mason's!" everybody on our bench yelled at Hanrahan when they saw him charging for center. "I got it!" Mason had called out almost with the crack of the bat, and he was milling about in little circles before propping himself for the catch, with plenty of time to spare for a shave and a shampoo, when Showers, a furlong off his beat, charged into him like a runaway ore car racing down grade. Though neither man was hurt, because Showers had been the only one running, the impact knocked Mason nearly seven and three eighths feet and Hanrahan's galloping momentum carried him about the same distance. So you see! The ball hit the turf with a plop like that doubtful tire committing suicide in your garage at night, and the three Chicagoese on the sacks started their joy raid on the home plate.

Something might still have been salvaged from this agonizing situation had one or other of the responsible parties out there in the middle clearing picked up the ball and pegged it to the justifiably profane and hysterical catcher. But neither of the responsible parties did this, being otherwise employed as shall be described, so that the three loathsome lubbers of the Comiskey layout had only to dog-jog to the pan to make this ball match of ours a three-three tie, and the game standing still.

The game was standing still because Left Fielder Hanrahan, being himself at this moment of speaking little less than one knot or sea mile from his own rightful patch, was contending that Center Fielder Mason, who really was standing in the mathematical middle of his own garden, had treacherously invaded his, Mister Hanrahan's, ball-playing domain. Nothing, it appeared, could wipe out the sin of this or atone for the mortal offense short of Mister Mason's standing for a plastering for the good of his soul.

From the third-base coaching box to the middle of center field is quite a jog, but Flaxy, who up to then—whenever he could remember, that is, that he had a broken leg—had shown a pronounced limp, covered the distance practically in nothing flat, with never even a suggestion of the cripple in his speeding. Showers' right, when Flaxy reached the scene of internecine strife, already was aimed for the Mason dimple. So the best Flaxy could do was to thrust himself between the two, with the result that he took Hanrahan's hearty soak square on his own left eye.

I was told later, by some of the other players who had gamboled out there to help get the two boys out of the trenches before Christmas, that there appeared on Flaxy's dark-tanned countenance, almost instantly after he had assimilated this wallop, a sort of a somber look, denoting sorrow or something, that none of them had seen there before. But he did not strike back, thereby intensely disappointing all hands. He simply felt of the swiftly puffing optic and continued to stand between Showers and the

center fielder. Showers, it seems, even objected to Flaxy's feeling of his own smitten eye.

"Serves yuh right f'r slammin' in, yuh sunbleached simp!" was Showers' way of expressing this, causing the other players to feel disappointeder than ever in Flaxy for not doing something criminal about it.

"Cluck was going to give you the message, at the end of the inning, that you're wanted at home, Mason," one of the players said to our center fielder, who lived in Chicago and whose wife was about to add to the population of that already large city. So Mason, everything else instantly forgotten, made off the field with the swift but eccentric movements of the male who hopes this first one's going to be a boy but who don't know so much about that, thereby clarifying a smeared ball-yard situation. Damages, three gift runs for Chicago and one puffed eye, rapidly becoming a dull, purplish-blue in color, for Flaxy Tribble, player without portfolio. The game being resumed, we dropped it, fourteen to three, our morale having been mildewed by the dispiriting incident in center field. It was perfectly seemly, therefore, that, just before the game closed, I should lean over from the grand stand into the dugout and seek to sweeten up Cluck's spirits a little.

"Exercises the higher and nobler influence on a ball club, Hanrahan," helpfully remarked me. "It pleases me now that I was so favorably disposed toward your suggestion that he might be cured of his habit."

"The cure," replied Cluck, grinning grimly back at me over his shoulder, "isn't completed yet. But it will be in about five minutes. Sift back into the shower room right after the game and witness the final phase of the treatment."

So, pinned a little as to the meaning of this Delphian crack of Cluck's, I nudged back into the clubhouse shower room directly we'd finished blowing the ball game, getting there a few seconds ahead of the sore and irritable ball players.

The least sore of all of them, it seemed to me when I caught sight of him, was Flaxy. The really meant pleasant smile, which was so greatly aided and abetted by his two heavy rows of ivory-white horse teeth, was back on his weather-browned face; nor was the warming effect of that smile even slightly neutralized by the large and overripe purple fig which he was wearing underneath and also at the side of his left eye. It presently appeared, however, that Flaxy was one of those nicely balanced people who can smile even at such times as they are most intent upon business. Certainly there was something businesslike in his direct manner of walking over to Showers Hanrahan and lightly touching him on the forearm—the latter having just pulled his uniform shirt over his head preparatory to making the full strip for the shower.

"That'll be enough to take off for the present, buddy," we heard Flaxy remark in his never-raised voice to Showers. "Of course, if you'd rather strip just to pants and shoes it will——"

"Whatcha chawin' about?" Showers, yanking off his undershirt, then paused to inquire, studying Flaxy's face, and the Tyrian optic ornamenting it, with marked disdain.

"I'm talking about this, matey: you hit me out there, and I didn't hit you back because I didn't want to start anything that might get you a suspension," replied Flaxy, talking as quietly as if asking the waiter to bring him another piece of toast. "But I'm going to hit you back now, and you're going to wait for your shower till that's over."

Cluck, standing with his back to them over by his locker, moved his head just enough to focus me, where I stood by the door, tipping me then a perfect mate for the cryptic wink he'd handed me from between the curtains that night on the sleeper. The players, stopped dead in their undressing, and, as motionless for the moment as lava-preserved Pompeians, peered curiously at the player without portfolio. The cotton-topped boy might prove not to be such a disappointment after all!—that's what their peering eyes said.

"Hit *me!—you* are! Say, turn over, yuh lard-topped hayer—yuh're on your back and dreamin'!" rumbled Showers, laughing—really laughing!

"I don't want to hurt you any more than I can help, and I don't want to damage my hands, either," went on Flaxy Tribble, like you'd ask your wife at night if she'd put the cat out and locked the kitchen door. "So we're going to use gloves." He turned to his locker, which was right behind him, and produced from it two pairs of a standard make of perfectly new four-ounce gloves—not the eight-ounce pillows, mind, that New

Jersey made Dempsey and Carpentier wear, but four-ouncers that the knuckles can be felt through. "Somebody'll help you put these on," and Flaxy thrust a pair of the gloves into Showers' hands. Then, pulling his own uniform shirt and undershirt over his head, "Fasten these for me, one of you fellows, eh?" Flaxy addressed any ball player that might care to help him that way. Every man of them shot forward, like dogs straining at their leashes, to help Flaxy fasten his gloves, but the honor fell to Skid Durnin, the pitcher who'd been plastered by Showers in the Boston hotel three years before for showing three jacks to Showers' trio of tens.

You know how some of the finest athletes don't look athletic at all when they're wearing any kind of clothes. That's how it was with Flaxy. But now! It was the first time I'd seen him in any way stripped, even to the waist, as he now was. I caught myself flitting back over the plowed-under years to get the picture of a certain somebody that Flaxy, with his fast-and-pliant muscled arms and his hand-carved-looking chest and shoulders reminded me of—and I got that picture. You'll remember him. Nobody that ever saw that splendid bobcat of the gone time will ever forget Stanley Ketchel. It was Stanley Ketchel that Flaxy looked like and carried himself like and fought like.

Cluck himself helped Showers on with his gloves.

"You're going to get a dam' good licking, Hanrahan," we all heard Cluck say to Showers, not meanly or gloatingly, but just matter-of-factly. "But nobody needs a licking more, and I am confident that it will do you good."

"*Me* get a licking from *that!*" Showers really laughed again.

"There'll be no rounds," Cluck, stepping back and, still perfectly matter-of-fact, announced. "They'll fight till one or the other of them says he's through or is knocked out. Nobody lays a hand on either of them as long as the fight is fair. Press back, boys, and give them room. All right, Flaxy," nodding to the player without portfolio.

So they squared off.

You've seen Hanrahan play a hundred or so games of ball, but maybe you haven't seen him stripped. You can guess, though, that so limber and rangy a man as Showers, and such a consistent clouter of the ball, too, would peel pretty finely himself. He looked so fit and hard to me, not forgetting the three inches in height and the twenty or more good pounds he had on Flaxy, that I didn't know so much about Cluck's cocksure pronouncement that he was going to get a sure-fire trimming.

But I knew it—knew it for one of those rare hundred-to-one things that really cashes—within less than ten seconds after they'd started. For I really think that within the space of those ten seconds Flaxy, no longer with a symptom of a limp, must have shot about one hundred gloves into every part of Showers' anatomy showing about the Plimsoll line, which would, of course, cipher out at the rate of ten shots per second. Ten deep-sunk gloves per second might naturally seem like an excessive and therefore exaggerated rate of boxing speed, and maybe it is; I am merely trying to give the impression that Flaxy's velocity made upon me. He was so fast like a leopard, that he made Showers seem snail or tortoise slow, and Showers isn't and never was a slow man, doing anything with his hands. As for boxing, Showers knew the moves and had often boxed for the work, and to learn, with pretty good men; but when I say that as a boxer he did not live in the same century nor reside upon the same planet with Flaxy, I am still surprised, as a famous Alibi Al once said, at my own moderation.

Flaxy, intent upon making a workmanlike job of it, weaved in and out, both hands ceaselessly ripping over and under—Showers might just as well have had no guard at all—until he had tested his man out from every angle. When he found that he could not even write the preface to putting a glove on him anywhere, Flaxy permitted Showers to think he could rest up a mite by falling into a clinch. The clinch lasted thirty seconds, and Showers never asked for another one. During the lock, which was Flaxy's favorite and beloved dish, the six-inch piston strokes—uppercuts, kidney basters, rib roasters and such like—which the player without portfolio shot in under the hood were all marked "K" for Ketchel—I never saw such a resemblance for style and damaging power both.

At the end of five minutes of this, Showers, blowing—yes, and something else beginning with a "b"—was given a chance to declare bets off.

"Enough?" Flaxy asked him—very decently, I thought—stepping back.

Showers, through swollen lips, woof-woofed a remark that simply is not current at all in good sets like ours any more. Seeing, I suppose, that the only way to stop him was to shut off the spigot of Showers' ideas, Flaxy, feinting with the left for the galley, sent over the right for the left eye. The marksmanship was perfect. Showers, on his haunches, began to uncoil language that is only permissible, if at all, when you're lying face up and full length under your car twenty-seven miles from a garage. But his teammates would not have this language.

"Shut up," they growled in chorus, "or get up and fight!"

Showers, after taking about twelve for himself, got up. This time Flaxy feinted with the right, and his left caught Showers on the right eye, making two of those soon-to-be-blue eyes for Flaxy's one, which is good enough interest for anybody. This time Showers went down hard on his back. But he was still able to speak, and he spoke. You know about how Showers spoke.

Flaxy, turning his head, wirelessed with his eyes an inquiry of Cluck. Cluck nodded.

So Showers, when he got up this time after taking about fifteen, was maneuvered and manipulated into just the correct position, and when Flaxy's right went over on the final occasion it carried with it the poison ivy that goes with one that's started almost level with the soil, and it landed so smack-dab in the center of the button that you'd have thought in the flash that the glove had grown in the middle of Showers' jaw.

The quality of mercy is not strained. Hanrahan slept sweetly. We'll let it go at that.

Everybody took a hand at helping Flaxy off with his gloves, nor was anybody mean or vindictive enough not to assist, with face-mopping and pails of water and all that, in restoring Showers to the pleasant state of sentience. By way of showing that Showers, along with a number of other really good traits, was not without a sense of humor, I record the remark he made to those bending over him just when he began to re-emerge into consciousness.

"Nobody ever told me that guy's last name," said Showers. "What is it?"

"Tribble," somebody replied.

"Tribble hell!" groaned Showers through thickened lips. "That murderer's name is Trouble!"

Flaxy Tribble-Trouble bade us all good-by that night and went his way.

So Cluck got, and still has, a completely cured left fielder, one of the very best in any league. Any knowing fan, I think, no matter what his allegiance or bias, will admit that Showers Hanrahan, now that he's a proven ex-plasterer who never once has done anything to earn either a fine or a suspension since that session in the shower room, would be hard to beat as a good, steady, all-round, outfielding asset for a ball club.

One brisk, coolish night in late September, with the playing season practically finished, Cluck took the whole team to see a much-heralded go between a couple of top-notch welters in Cleveland. If you can think—and for a fight fan it oughtn't to be hard thinking—of a zippy coming welter with a lot of oversized teeth and a heavy thatch of almost albino hair, you've got the real or ring name of Flaxy Tribble, that last being the name which Cluck invented for his player without portfolio on the spur of the moment that night in my hotel room.

Showers Hanrahan, who was sitting alongside Cluck, silently watched Flaxy win his fight, under wraps, all the way.

"Ball player, hey?" we heard Showers say to Cluck. "Boss, that bird never played ball in his life. But he was born with a pair of boxing gloves on his hands. And Ypsilanti, too! You know that pirate never seen Ypsilanti! You sicked him on me, Cluck!"

"Nothing to take to heart if I did, Showers," pleasantly replied Cluck. "It was the correct prescription, and you needed it."

"Yes, I'll say I needed it, all right," said the cured Showers. Then a certain unrepentant light flickered in his eyes. "But I'm glad all the same, now it's all over and done with," he added, "that I once gave such a classy son of a gun as that a blue eye!"

Another story by Mr. Cullen will appear in an early issue.

The Hidden Places

By Bertrand W. Sinclair

Author of "One Good Turn," "Poor Man's Rock," Etc.

Hollister knew that he was alive, but the British war office said that he had been killed in France, and when he returned from a German prison camp, he found that Myra, his wife, who had written to him confessing that she loved another man, had married again and left England. His comfortable fortune had gone to her upon the official report of his death, and now, his face so grotesquely scarred by wounds that passers-by averted their eyes, and with only a few hundred dollars capital, he went to British Columbia, where he had a timber tract that had not been sold in the hurried settlement of his affairs when he enlisted. Investigation proved that the tract, in the valley of the Toba River, did not contain nearly so much timber as had been represented when he bought it. He lived for a time in a cabin that had been built on his land, and found books with the name, "Doris Cleveland" written in them. He also learned that Myra was living with her new husband in a near-by cabin, and carrying on a flirtation with another man. On the steamer returning to Vancouver, he met Doris Cleveland, who had been injured in an accident while living with her brothers on Hollister's land, and was blind. He had found one person who did not turn away from his battered face.

(A Four-Part Story—Part II.)

CHAPTER VIII.

QUARTERED once more in the city he had abandoned two months earlier, Hollister found himself in the grip of new desires, stirred by new plans, his mind yielding slowly to the conviction that life was less barren than it seemed. Not so many weeks since, all the future years through which he must live because of the virility of his body had seemed nothing but a dismal fog in which he must wander without knowing where he went or what lay before him. Now it seemed that he had mysteriously acquired a starting point and a goal. He was aware of a new impetus. And he did not have to strain himself intellectually to understand that Doris Cleveland was the outstanding factor in this change.

Each time he met her, he breathed a prayer of thanks for her blindness, which permitted her to accept him as a man instead of shrinking from him as a monster. Just as a man, secure in the knowledge that he possesses the comfort and security of a home, can endure with fortitude the perils and hardships of a bitter trail, so Hollister could now walk the streets of Vancouver indifferent to the averted eyes, the quick glances of reluctant pity. Loneliness no longer made him shudder with its clammy touch. He saw Doris Cleveland nearly every day. She was the straw to which he, drowning, clung with all his might. The most depressing hours that overtook him were those in which he visualized her floating away beyond his reach.

Her loss of sight had been more than compensated by an extraordinary acuteness of mental vision. The world about her might now be one of darkness, but she had a precise comprehension of its nature, its manifestations, its complexities. Hollister had always taken blindness as a synonym for helplessness, but he could not associate the most remote degree of helplessness with Doris Cleveland when they walked, for instance, through Stanley Park from English Bay to Second Beach. That broad path, with the Gulf swell muttering along the bowldery shore on one side and the wind whispering in the lofty branches of tall trees on the other, was a favorite haunt of theirs on crisp March days. The buds of the pussy willow were beginning to burst. Birds twittered in dusky thickets. Even the gulls, wheeling and darting along the shore, had a new note in their raucous crying. None of these first undertones of the spring symphony went unmarked by Doris Cleveland. She could hear and feel. She could respond to subtle, external stimuli. She could interpret her thoughts and feelings with apt phrases, with a whimsical humor—some-

times with an appealing touch of wistfulness.

At the Beach Avenue entrance to the park she would release herself from the hand by which Hollister guided her through the throngs on the sidewalks or the traffic of the crossings, and along the open way she would keep step with him easily and surely, her cheeks glowing with the brisk movement—and she could tell him with uncanny exactness when they came abreast of the old elk paddock and the bowling greens, or the rock groins and bathhouse at Second Beach. She knew always when they turned the wide curve farther out, where through a fringe of maple and black alder there opened a clear view of all the Gulf, with steamers trailing their banners of smoke and the white pillar of Point Atkinson lighthouse standing guard at the troubled entrance to Howe Sound.

No, he could not easily fall into the masculine attitude of a protector, of guiding and bending a watchful care upon a helpless bit of desirable femininity that clung to him with confiding trust. Doris Cleveland was too buoyantly healthy to be a clinging vine. She had too hardy an intellectual outlook. Her mind was like her body, vigorous, resilient, unafraid. It was hard sometimes for Hollister to realize fully that to those gray eyes so often turned on him it was always night—or at best a blurred, unrelieved dusk.

In the old, comfortable days before the war Hollister, like many other young men, accepted things pretty much as they came without troubling to scrutinize their import too closely. It was easy for him, then, to overlook the faint shadows that ran before coming events. But he had not survived four years of bodily and spiritual disaster without an irreparable destruction of the sanguine, if more or less nebulous, assurance that God was in his heaven and all was well with the world. He had been stricken with a wariness concerning life, a reluctant distrust of much that in his old, easy-going philosophy seemed solid as the hills. He was disposed to a critical and sometimes pessimistic examination of his own feelings and of other people's actions.

So love for Doris Cleveland did not steal upon him like a thief in the night. From the hour when he put her in the taxi at the dock and went away with her address in his pocket he was keenly alive to the definite quality of attraction peculiar to her. When he was not thinking of her, he was thinking of himself in relation to her. Six months earlier he would honestly have denied that any woman could linger so tenaciously in his mind.

When Doris went about with him, frankly finding a pleasure in his company, he said to himself that it was a wholly unwise proceeding to set too great store by her. Chance, he would reflect sadly, had swung them together and that same blind chance would presently swing them far apart. Sitting beside her on a shelving rock in the sun, Hollister would think of that and feel a pang. He would say to himself also, a trifle cynically, that if she could see him as he was, perhaps she would be like the rest. He wondered sometimes what she really thought of him, how she pictured him in her mind.

For a month he did very little but go about with Doris, or sit quietly reading a book in his room. March drew to a close. The southern border of Stanley Park which faced the Gulf over English Bay continued to be their haunt on every sunny afternoon, save once or twice when they walked along Marine Drive to where the sands of the Spanish Bank lay bared for a mile offshore at ebb tide.

If it rained, or a damp fog blew in from the sea, Hollister would pick out a motion-picture house that afforded a good orchestra, or get tickets to some available concert, or they would go and have tea at the Granada where there was always music at the tea hour in the afternoon. Doris knew music, which is a thing apart from merely loving melodious sounds. Once, at the place where she was living, the home of a married cousin, Hollister heard her play the piano for the first time. He listened in astonishment, forgetting that a pianist does not need to see the keyboard and that the most intricate movements may be memorized. But he did not visit that house often. The people there were courteous, but painfully self-conscious in his presence.

By the time that April Fool's Day was a week old on the calendar Hollister began to be haunted by a gloomy void which would engulf him soon, for Doris told him one evening that in another week she was going back to the Euclataws. She had stretched her visit to greater length than she had intended. They were sitting on a beach under a great fir that overlooked a deserted playground, emerald green with new grass.

They faced a sinking sun, a ball of molten fire on the far crest of Vancouver Island. Behind them the roar of traffic on downtown streets was like the faint murmur of distant surf.

"In a week," Hollister said. "It has been the best month I have spent for a long, long, time."

"It *has* been a pleasant month," Doris agreed.

They fell silent. From the east dusk walked silently down to the sea.

"I shall be sorry when you are gone," he said at last.

"And I shall be sorry to go," she murmured. "But——"

She threw out her hands in a gesture of resignation.

"One can't always be on a holiday."

"I wish we could," said Hollister. "You and I."

The girl made no answer. And Hollister himself grew dumb in spite of a pressure of words within him. He realized with an overwhelming certainty how badly he needed her in the murky vista of years that stretched before him. Yes, and before her also. They had not spent all those hours together without talking of themselves. No matter that she was cheerful, that youth gave her courage and a ready smile, there was still a finality about blindness that sometimes frightened her. She, too, was aware, and sometimes afraid, of drab years running out into nothingness.

He took her hand and held it, looking down at the soft white fingers. She made no effort to withdraw it. He looked at her, peering into her face, and there was nothing to guide him. He saw only a curious expectancy, and a faint deepening of the color in her cheeks.

"Don't go back to the Euclataws, Doris," he said at last. "I love you. I want you. I *need* you. Do you feel as if you liked me —enough to take a chance? For it is a chance," he finished abruptly. "Life together is always a chance for the man and woman who undertake it. Perhaps I surprise you by breaking out like this. But when I think of us each going separate ways——"

He held her hand tightly imprisoned between his, bending forward to peer closely at her face. He could see nothing of astonishment or surprise. Her lips were parted a little. Her expression, as he looked, grew different, inscrutable, a little absent even, as if she were lost in thought. But there was arising a quiver in the fingers he held which belied the emotionless fixity of her face.

"I wonder if it is such a desperate chance?" she said slowly. "If it is, why do you want to take it?"

"Because the alternative is worse than the most desperate chance I could imagine," he answered. "And because I have a longing to face life with you, and a dread of it alone. You can't see my ugly face which frightens off other people, so it doesn't mean anything to you. But you can hear my voice. You can feel me near you. Does it mean anything to you? Do you wish I could always be near you?"

He drew her up close to him. She permitted it, unresisting, that strange, thoughtful look still on her face.

"Tell me, do you want me to love you—or don't you care?" he demanded.

For a moment Doris made no answer.

"I'm a woman," she said then softly. "I'm blind—but I'm a woman. I've been wondering how long it would take you to find that out."

CHAPTER IX.

Not until Hollister had left Doris at her cousin's home and was walking back downtown did a complete realization of what he had done and pledged himself to do burst upon him. When it did he pulled up short in his stride, as if he had come physically against some forthright obstruction. For an instant he felt dazed. Then a consuming anger flared in him—anger against the past by which he was still shackled.

But he refused to be bound by those old chains whose ghostly clanking arose to harass him in this hour when life seemed to be holding out a new promise. He leaned over the rail on the Granville Street drawbridge watching a tug pass through, scarcely conscious of the bridge or the ship or the gray dimness of the sea, so profound was the concentration of his mind on this problem. It maddened him. He whispered a defiant protest to himself and walked on. He was able to think more calmly when he reached his room. There were the facts, the simple, undeniable facts, to be faced without shrinking—and a decision to be made.

For months, Hollister, when he thought of the past had thought of it as a slate which had been wiped clean. His few dis-

tant relatives had accepted the official report of his death in action without question. Myra had accepted it, acted upon it. Outside the British war office no one knew, no one dreamed, that he was alive. He had served in the Imperials. He recalled the difficulties and delays of getting his identity reëstablished in the coldly impersonal, maddeningly deliberate, official departments which dealt with his case. He had succeeded. His back pay had been granted. A gratuity was still forthcoming. But Hollister knew that the record of his case was entangled with miles of red tape. It would never occur to the British war office to seek publicity for the fact that he was *not* dead. There was no machinery for that purpose. Even if there was such machinery, there was no one to pull the levers.

The war office did not know men. It only knew identification numbers, regiments, ranks, things properly documented, officially assigned. It was disdainful of any casual inquiry, it would shunt any inquirer about him from official to official, from department to department, until the inquirer was worn out, his patience and his fund of postage and his time alike exhausted.

Surely the slate was sponged clean. Should he condemn himself and Doris Cleveland to heartache and loneliness because of a technicality? To Hollister it seemed no more than that. Myra had married again. Would she—reckoning the chance that she learned he was alive—rise up to denounce him? Hardly. His own people? They were few and far away. His friends? The war had ripped everything loose, broken the old combinations, scattered the groups. There was, for Hollister, nothing left of the old days.

After all it narrowed to himself and Doris Cleveland and an ethical question.

He did not shut his eyes to the fact that for him this marriage would be bigamy; that their children would be illegitimate in the eyes of the law if legal scrutiny ever laid bare their father's history; nor that by all the accepted dictums of current morality he would be leading an innocent woman into sin. But his old morality had ceased to have its old significance for Hollister. Convention had lost any power to dismay him. His world had used him in its hour of need, had flung him into the Pit, and when he crawled out maimed, discouraged, stripped of everything that had made life precious this world of his fellows shunned him because of what he had suffered in their behalf. So he held himself under no obligation to be guided by their moral dictums.

For Hollister the question was not, "Is this thing right or wrong in the eyes of the world?" but, "Is it right for her and for me?" And always he got the one answer, the answer with which lovers have so often justified themselves. Nevertheless, he forced himself to consider just what it would mean to take steps to legalize his marriage to Doris Cleveland. Briefly, it would be necessary for him to go to London, to secure documentary evidence. Then he must return to Canada, enter suit against Myra, secure service upon her here in British Columbia. There would be a trial and a temporary decree; after the lapse of twelve months a divorce absolute.

He was up against a stone wall. Even if he nerved himself to public rattling of the skeleton in his private life, he did not have the means even if he beggared himself. Legal freedom could only be purchased at a price —and he did not have the price.

Perhaps that decided Hollister. Perhaps he would have made that decision in any case. He was, he said, with a bitter wistfulness, a stray dog. And Doris Cleveland was in very much the same position. Two unfortunates cleaving to each other. He reasoned that if they could be happy together they had a right to be together.

He disposed finally of the last uncertainty —whether he should tell Doris. And a negative to that rose instantly to his lips: Let the past remain dead—buried. Its ghost would never rise to trouble them—of that he felt sure.

Morning brought him no qualms or indecisions. But it did bring him to a consideration of very practical matters. That is to say, Hollister began to take stock of the means whereby they two should live. It was not an immediately pressing matter, since he had a few hundred dollars in hand, but he was not shortsighted and he knew it would ultimately become pressing. Hence, naturally, his mind turned once more to that asset which had been one factor in bringing him back to British Columbia, the timber limit he owned in the Toba Valley.

He began to consider that seriously. Its value had shrunk appreciably under his examination. He had certainly been tricked in its purchase and he did not know if he

had any recourse. He rather thought there should be some way of getting money back from people who obtained it under false pretenses. The limit, he was quite sure, contained less than half the timber Lewis & Co. had solemnly represented it to carry. He grew uneasy thinking of that. All his eggs were in that wooden basket.

He found himself anxious to know what he could expect, what he could do. There was a considerable amount of good cedar there. It should bring five or six thousand dollars, even if he had to accept the fraud and make the best of it. When he reflected upon what a difference the possession or lack of money might mean to himself and Doris before long, all his acquired and cultivated knowledge of business affairs began to spur him to some action. As soon as he finished his breakfast he set off for the office of the timber specialist. He already had a plan mapped out.

He knew how easy it was to make money with money—and how difficult, how very nearly impossible it was for the penniless man to secure more than a living by his utmost exertion. If this timber holding *should* turn out to be worthless, if it should prove unsalable at any price, it would be a question of a job for him, before so very long. With the handicap of his face! He would not fare very well in the search for a decent job. Poverty had never seemed to hold quite such a sinister implication as it did to Hollister when he reached this point in his self-communings.

Mr. Lewis received him with a total lack of the bland dignity Hollister remembered. The man seemed uneasy, distracted. His eyes had a furtive look in them.

"I went up to Toba Inlet a while ago and had a look over that timber limit of mine," Hollister began abruptly. "I'd like to see the documents bearing on that, if you don't mind."

Mr. Lewis looked at him uncertainly, but he called a clerk and issued an order. While the clerk was on his mission to the files, Lewis put a few questions which Hollister answered without disclosing what he had in mind. It struck him, though, that the tone of Mr. Lewis' inquiry bordered upon the anxious. Presently the clerk returned with the papers. Hollister selected the agreement of sale, a letter or two, the original cruiser's estimate, a series of tax receipts, held them in his hand and looked at Lewis.

"You haven't succeeded in finding a buyer, suppose?"

"In the winter," Lewis replied, "there is very little stir in timber."

"There is going to be some sort of stir in this timber before long," Hollister said.

The worried expression deepened on Mr. Lewis' face.

"The fact is," Hollister continued evenly, "I made a rough survey of that timber, and found it away off color. You represented it to contain so many million feet. It doesn't. Nowhere near. I appear to have been rather badly stung, and I really don't wonder it hasn't been resold. What do you propose to do about this?"

Mr. Lewis made a gesture of deprecation. "There must be some mistake, Mr. Hollister."

"No doubt of that," Hollister agreed dryly. "The point is, who shall pay for the mistake?"

Mr. Lewis looked out the window. He seemed suddenly to be stricken with an attitude of remoteness. It occurred to Hollister that the man was not thinking about the matter at all.

"Well?" he questioned sharply.

The eyes of the specialist in timber turned back to him uneasily. "Well?" he echoed.

Hollister put the documents in his pocket. He gathered up those on the desk and put them also in his pocket. He was angry, because he was baffled. This was a matter of vital importance to him, and this man seemed able to insulate himself against either threat or suggestion.

"My dear sir!" Lewis expostulated. Even his protest was half-hearted, lacked honest indignation.

Hollister rose. "I'm going to keep these," he said irritably. "You don't seem to take much interest in the fact that you have laid yourself open to a charge of fraud, and that I am going to do something about it, if you don't."

"Oh, go ahead," Lewis broke out pettishly. "I don't care what you do!"

Hollister stared at him in amazement. The man's eyes met his for a moment, then shifted to the opposite wall, became fixed there. He sat half turned in his chair. He seemed to grow intent on something, to become wrapped in some fog of cogitation, through which Hollister and his affairs appeared only as inconsequential phantoms.

In the doorway Hollister looked back over

his shoulder. The man sat mute, immobile, staring fixedly at the wall.

Down in the street Hollister turned once more to look up at the gilt-lettered windows. Something had happened to Mr. Lewis. Something had jolted the specialist in B. C. timber and paralyzed his business nerve centers. Some catastrophe had overtaken him, or impended, beside which the ugly matter Hollister laid before him was of no consequence.

But it was of consequence to Hollister, as vital as the breaker of water and handful of ship's biscuits is to castaways in an open boat in mid-ocean. It angered him to feel a matter of such deep concern brushed aside. He walked on down the street thinking what he should do. Midway of the next block, a firm name, another concern which dealt in timber, rose before his eyes. He entered the office.

"Mr. MacFarlan or Mr. Lee," he said to the desk man.

A short, stout individual came forward, glanced at Hollister's scarred face with that involuntary disapproval which Hollister was accustomed to catch in people's expression before they suppressed it out of pity or courtesy, or a mixture of both.

"I am Mr. MacFarlan."

"I want legal advice on a matter of considerable importance," Hollister came straight to the point. "Can you recommend an able lawyer—one with considerable experience in timber litigation preferred?"

"I can. Malcolm MacFarlan, second floor, Sibley Block. If it's legal bsuiness relating to timber he's your man. Not because he happens to be my brother"—MacFarlan smiled broadly—"but because he knows his business. Ask any timber company. They'll tell you."

Hollister thanked him, and retraced his steps to the office building he had just quitted. In an office directly under the Lewis quarters he introduced himself to Malcolm MacFarlan, a bulkier, less elderly duplicate of his brother, the timber broker. Hollister stated his case briefly and clearly. He put it in the form of a hypothetical case, naming no names. MacFarlan listened, asked questions, nodded understanding.

"You could recover on the grounds of misrepresentation," he said at last. "The case, as you state it, is clear. It could even be interpreted as fraud and hence criminal, if collusion between the maker of the false estimate and the vender could be proven. In any case, the vender can be held accountable for his misrepresentation of value. Your remedy lies in a civil suit—provided an authentic cruise establishes your estimate of such a small quantity of merchantable timber. I should say you could recover the principal with interest and costs. Always provided the vender is financially responsible."

"I presume they are. Lewis & Co. sold me this timber. Here are the papers. Will you undertake this matter for me?"

MacFarlan jerked his thumb toward the ceiling.

"This Lewis above me?"

"Yes."

Hollister laid the documents before MacFarlan. The latter ran through them, laid them down, and looked reflectively at Hollister.

"I'm afraid," he said slowly, "you are making your move too late."

"Why?" Hollister demanded uneasily.

"Evidently you aren't aware what has happened to Lewis? I take it you haven't been reading the papers?"

"I haven't," Hollister admitted. "What has happened?"

"His concern has gone smash," MacFarlan stated. "I happen to be sure of that because I'm acting for two creditors. A receiver has been appointed. Lewis himself is in deep. He is at present at large on bail, charged with unlawful conversion of moneys intrusted to his care. You have a case, clear enough, but"—he threw out his hands with a suggestive motion—"they're bankrupt."

"I see," Hollister muttered. "I appear to be out of luck, then."

"Unfortunately, yes," MacFarlan continued. "You could get a judgment against them. But it would be worthless. Of course I could proceed on your behalf and let you in for a lot of costs, but I would rather not earn my fees in that manner. I'm satisfied there won't be more than a few cents on the dollar for anybody."

"That seems final enough," Hollister said.

He went out again into a street filled with people hurrying about their affairs in the spring sunshine. So much for that, he reflected, not without a touch of contemptuous anger against Lewis. He understood now the man's troubled absorption. With the penitentiary staring him in the face——

At any rate the property was not involved. Whatever its worth it was his, and the only asset at his command. He would have to dispose of it for what he could get. Meantime, Doris Cleveland began to loom bigger in his mind than this timber limit. He suffered a vast impatience until he should see her again. He had touches, this morning, of incredulous astonishment before the fact that he could love and be loved. He felt once or twice that this promise of happiness would prove an illusion, something he had dreamed, if he did not soon verify it by sight and speech.

He was to call for her at two o'clock. They had planned to take a Fourth Avenue car to the end of the line, and walk thence past the Jericho Club grounds and out a driveway that left the houses of the town far behind.

Doris was a good walker. On the level road she kept step without faltering or effort, holding Hollister's hand, not because she needed it for guidance, but because it was her pleasure.

They came under a high, wooded slope.

"Listen to the birds," she said, with a gentle pressure on his fingers. "I can smell the woods, and feel the air soft as a caress. I can't see the buds bursting, nor the new, pale-green leaves, but I know what it is all like. Sometimes I think that beauty is a feeling, instead of a fact. Perhaps if I could see it as well as feel it—still, the birds wouldn't sing more sweetly, if I could see them swaying on the little branches, would they, Bob?"

There was a wistfulness, but only a shadow of regret in her tone. And there were no shadows on the fresh, young face she turned to Hollister. He bent to kiss that sweet mouth, and he was again thankful that she had no sight to be offended by his devastated features.

They found a dry log to sit upon, a great tree trunk cast by a storm above highwater mark. Now and then a motor whirred by, but for the most part the drive lay silent, a winding ribbon of asphalt between the sea and the wooded heights of Point Grey. English Bay sparkled between them and the city. Beyond the purple smoke haze driven inland by the west wind rose the white crests of the Capilanos, an Alpine background to this seaboard town. Hollister could hear the whine of sawmills, the rumble of trolley cars, the clang of steel in a great shipyard—and the tide whispering on wet sands at his feet, the birds twittering among the budding alders. And far as his eyes could reach along the coast there lifted enormous, saw-toothed mountains. They stood out against a sapphire sky with extraordinary vividness.

Hollister put his arm around the girl. She nestled close to him. A little sigh escaped her lips.

"What is it, Doris?"

"I was just remembering how I lay awake last night," she said, "thinking, thinking until my brain seemed like some sort of machine that would run on and on grinding out thoughts till I was worn out."

"What about?" he asked.

"About you, and myself," she said simply. "About what is ahead of us. I think I was a little bit afraid."

"Of me?"

"Oh, no." She tightened her grip on his hand. "I can't imagine myself being afraid of *you*. I like you too much. But—but—well, I was thinking of myself, really. I couldn't help seeing myself as a handicap to you. I could see you beginning to chafe finally under the burden of a blind wife, growing impatient at my helplessness—which you do not yet realize—and in the end—oh, well, one can think all sorts of things in spite of a resolution not to think."

It stung Hollister.

"Good God," he cried, "you don't realize it's only the fact you *can't* see me that makes it possible. Why, I've clutched at you the way a drowning man clutches at anything. I'm thankful you're blind. I shall always be glad you can't see. If you could—what sort of picture of me have you *in your* mind?"

"Perhaps not a very clear one," the girl answered slowly. "But I hear your voice, and it is a pleasant voice. I know that you are a big man, and strong. Of course, I don't know whether your eyes are blue or brown, whether your hair is fair or dark—and I don't care. As for your face, I can't possibly imagine it as terrible, unless you were angry. What are scars? Nothing, nothing. I can't see them. It wouldn't make any difference if I could."

"It would," he muttered. "I'm afraid it would."

Doris shook her head. She looked up at him, with that peculiar direct, intent gaze which always gave him the impression that she *did* see. Her eyes, the soft gray of a

summer rain cloud—one could not have guessed them sightless. They seemed to see, to be expressive, to glow and soften.

She lifted a hand to Hollister's face. He did not shrink while those soft fingers went exploring the devastation wrought by the exploding shell. She finished with a gentle pat on his cheek, and a momentary, kittenish rumpling of his hair.

"I cannot find so very much amiss," she said. "Your nose is a bit awry, and there is a hollow in one cheek. What does it matter? A man is what he thinks and feels and does. I am the maimed one, really. There is so much I can't do, Bob. You don't realize it yet. And we won't always be living this way, sitting idle on the beach, going to a show, having tea in the Granada. I used to run and swim and climb hills. I could have gone anywhere with you—done anything. But my wings are clipped. I can only get about in familiar surroundings. And sometimes it grows intolerable. I rebel. I rave—and wish I were dead. And if I thought I was hampering you, and you were beginning to regret you had married me—why, I couldn't bear it. That's what my brain was buzzing with last night."

"Do any of those things strike you as serious obstacles now—when I have my arms around you?" Hollister demanded.

She shook her head.

"No. Really and truly, right now I'm perfectly willing to take any sort of chance on the future—if you're in it," she said thoughtfully.

"Then we feel precisely the same," Hollister declared. "And you are not to have any more doubts about me. I tell you, Doris, that besides wanting you, I *need* you. I can be your eyes. And for me you will be like a compass to a sailor in a fog—something to steer a course by. Now let's talk about how we're going to live, and where."

A whimsical expression rippled across the girl's face, a mixture of tenderness and mischief.

"I've warned you," she said with mock solemnity. "Your blood be upon your own head."

CHAPTER X.

"Why not go in there and take that cedar out yourself?" Doris suggested. They had been talking about that timber limit in the Toba, the possibility of getting a few thousand dollars out of it, and how they could make the money serve them best. "We could live there. I'd like to live there. I loved that valley. It would be like getting back home."

"It is a beautiful place," Hollister agreed. He had a momentary vision of the Toba as he saw it last, a white-floored lane between two great mountain ranges, green-timbered slopes that ran up to immense declivities, glaciers, cold, majestic peaks scarred by winter avalanches. He had come a little under the spell of those rugged solitudes then. He could imagine it transformed by the magic of summer. He could imagine himself living there with this beloved woman, exacting a livelihood from those hushed forests and finding it good.

"I've been wondering about that myself," he said. "There is a lot of good cedar there. That bolt chute your brothers built could be repaired. If they expected to get that stuff out profitably, why shouldn't I? I'll have to look into that."

They were living in a furnished flat. If they had married in what people accustomed to a certain formality of living might call haste they had no thought of repenting at leisure or otherwise. Marriage had shattered no illusions. If, indeed, they cherished any illusory conceptions of each other, their mating had merely served to confirm those illusions, to shape them into realities.

If Doris was happy, full of high spirits, Hollister, too, was happier than he had considered it possible for him ever to be again. And his love for this girl who had given herself to him with the strangely combined love of a mature woman and the trusting confidence of a child, was touched with gratitude. She had put out her hand and lifted him from the pit. She would always be near him, a prop and a stay. Sometimes it seemed to Hollister a miracle. He would look at his face in a mirror and thank God that she was blind. Doris said that made no difference, but he knew better. It did make a difference to eyes that could see, however tolerantly.

In Hollister, also, there revived the natural ambition to get on, to grasp a measure of material security, to make money. There were so many ways in which money was essential, so many desirable things they could secure and enjoy together with money. Making a living came first, but beyond a mere living he began to desire comfort, even luxuries, for himself and his wife. He

had made tentative plans. They had discussed ways and means; and the most practical suggestion of all came now from his wife's lips.

Hollister went about town, the next few days, diligently seeking information about prices, wages, costs, and methods. He had a practical knowledge of finance, and a fair acquaintance with timber operations generally, so that he did not waste his own or other men's time. He met a rebuff or two, but he learned a great deal which he needed to know, and he said to Doris finally:

"I'm going to play your hunch, and get that timber out myself. It will pay. In fact, it is the only way I'll ever get back the money I put into that, so I really haven't much choice in the matter."

"Good!" Doris said. "Then we go to the Toba to live. When?"

"Very soon—if we go at all. There doesn't seem to be much chance to sell it, but there is some sort of returned soldiers' coöperative concern working in the Big Bend, and MacFarlan & Lee have had some correspondence with their head man about this limit of mine. He is going to be in town in a day or two. They *may* buy."

"And if they do?"

"Well, then, we'll see about a place on Valdez Island at the Euclataws, where I can clear up some land and grow things, and fish salmon when they run, as we talked about."

"I dare say we would get on there very well," Doris said. "But I'd rather go to the Toba."

Hollister did not want to go to the Toba. He would go if it were necessary, but when he remembered that fair-haired woman living in the cabin on the river bank he felt that *there* was something to be shunned. Myra was like a bad dream too vividly remembered. There was stealing over Hollister a curious sense of something unreal in his first marriage, in the war, even in the strange madness which had briefly afflicted him when he discovered that Myra was there. He was not afraid to go to Toba. There was no reason. He was officially dead to Myra—even if his name should suggest a curious coincidence to her. It was simply a distaste for living near a woman he had once loved. He wanted to shut the doors on the past forever. He only succeeded in clearly defining that feeling when it seemed that he must go—unless this prospective sale went through. As the laborer goes to his work, distasteful though it may be, that he may live, that his family may be fed and clothed, so Hollister knew that he would go to Toba Valley and wrest a compensation from that timber with his own hands unless that sale was made.

But it failed to go through. Hollister met his man in MacFarlan's office, a lean, weather-beaten man of sixty, named Carr. He was frank and friendly, wholly unlike the timber brokers and millmen Hollister had lately encountered.

"The fact is," Carr said, after some discussion, "we aren't in the market for timber in the ordinary, speculative sense. I happen to know that particular stand of cedar, or I wouldn't be interested. We're a body of returned men engaged in making homes and laying the foundation for a competence by our joint efforts. You would really lose by selling out to us. We would only buy on stumpage. If you were a broker I would offer you so much and you could take it or leave it. It would be all one to us. We have a lot of standing timber ourselves. But we're putting in a shingle mill now, and what we need is labor and shingle bolts, not standing timber. I would suggest you go in there with two or three men and get the stuff out yourself. We'll take all the cedar on your limit, in bolts on the river bank at market prices, less cost of towage to Vancouver. You can make money on that, especially if shingles go up."

There seemed a force at work compelling Hollister to this move. He reflected upon it as he walked home. Doris wanted to go; this man Carr encouraged him to go. He would be a fool not to go when opportunity beckoned, yet he hesitated. He was not afraid, and yet he was. Some vague peril seemed to lurk like a misty shadow at his elbow. Nothing that he had done, nothing that he foresaw himself doing, accounted for that, and he ended by calling himself a fool. Of course, he would go. If Myra lived there—well, no matter. It was nothing to him, nothing to Doris. The past was past—the future theirs for the making.

So he went once more up to Toba Inlet, when late April brought spring showers and blossoming shrubs and soft, sunny days to all the coast region. He carried with him certain tools for a purpose, axes, crosscut saws, iron wedges, a frow to flake off uniform slabs of cedar. He sat on the steamer's deck and thought to himself that he was in

vastly different case from the last time he had watched those same shores slide by in the same direction. Now life held for him a variety of desirable things, which to have and to hold he need only make effort; and that effort he was now, indeed, putting forth, even though doing no more than sit on the steamer's deck watching green shore and landlocked bays fall astern.

He felt a mild regret that he went alone, and the edge of that was dulled by the sure knowledge that he would not long be alone—only until such time as he could build a cabin and transport supplies up to the flat above the Big Bend, to that level spot where his tent and canoe were still hidden, where he had made his first camp, and near where the bolt chute was designed to spit its freight into the river.

It was curious to Hollister, the manner in which Doris could see so clearly this valley and river and the slope where his timber stood. She could not only envisage the scene of their home and his future operations, but she could discuss these things with practical wisdom. They had talked of living in the old cabin where he found her shelf of books, but there was a difficulty in that, of getting up the steep hill, of carrying laboriously up that slope each item of their supplies, their personal belongings, such articles of furniture as they needed. So Doris had suggested that they build their house in the flat, and let his men, the bolt-cutters, occupy the cabin on the hill.

He had two hired woodsmen with him, tools, food, bedding. When the steamer set them on the float at the head of Toba Inlet, Hollister left them to bring the goods ashore in a borrowed dugout, and himself struck off along a line blazed through the woods, which, one of Carr's men informed him, led out near the upper curve of the Big Bend.

A man sometimes learns a great deal in the brief span of a few minutes. When Hollister disembarked he knew the name of one man only in Toba Valley, the directing spirit of the settlement, Sam Carr, whom he had met in MacFarlan's office. But there were half a dozen loggers meeting the weekly steamer. They were loquacious men, without formality in the way of making acquaintance. Hollister had more than trail knowledge imparted to him. The name of the man who lived with his wife at the top of the Big Bend was Mr. J. Harrington Bland—the logger said that with a twinkle in his eye, a chuckle as of inner amusement. Hollister understood. The man was a round peg in this region of square holes; otherwise he would have been Jack Bland—or whatever the misplaced initial stood for. They spoke of him further as "the Englishman."

There was a lot of other local knowledge bestowed upon Hollister, but "the Englishman" and his wife, who was a "pippin" for looks, were still in the forefront of his mind when the trail led him out on the river bank a few hundred yards from their house. He passed within forty feet of the door. Bland was chopping wood. Myra sat on a log, her tawny hair gleaming in the sun. Bland bestowed upon Hollister only a casual glance as he strode past, and went on swinging his ax, and Hollister, looking impersonally at the woman, observed that she stared with frank curiosity. He remembered that trait of hers. He had often teased her about it in those days when it had been an impossible conception that she could ever regard seriously any man but himself. Men had always been sure of a very complete survey when they came within Myra's range, and men had always fluttered about her like moths drawn to a candle flame. She had that mysterious quality of attracting men, pleasing them—and of making other girls hate her in the same degree. She used to laugh about that.

"I can't help it if I'm popular," she used to say with a mischievous smile, and Hollister had fondly agreed with that. He remembered that it flattered his vanity to have other men admire his wife. He had been so sure of her affection, her loyalty; but that had passed like melting snow, like dew under the morning sun. A little loneliness, a few months of separation, had done the trick.

Hollister shrugged his shoulders. He had no feeling in the matter. She could not possibly know him; she would not wish to know him if she could. His problems were nowise related to her. But he knew too much to be completely indifferent. His mind kept turning upon what her life had been, and what it must be now. He was curious. What had become of the money? Why did she and her English husband bury themselves in a rude shack by a river that whispered down a lonely valley?

Hollister's mind thrust these people aside when he reached the flat and found his canoe where he left it, his tiny silk tent intact from

the suspending limb. He ranged about the flat for an hour or so. He had an impression of it in his mind from his winter camp there; also, he had a description of it from Doris, and her picture was clearer, more exact in detail, than his. He found the little falls that trickled down to a small creek that split the flat. He chose tentatively a site for their house, close by a huge maple which had three sets of initials cut deeply in the bark where Doris told him to look.

Then he dragged the canoe down to the river, and slid it afloat and let the current bear him down. The air was full of pleasant odors from the infolding forest. He let his eyes rest thankfully upon those calm, majestic peaks that walled in the valley. It was even more beautiful now than he had imagined it could be when the snow-blanketed hill and valley, and the teeth of the frost gnawed everywhere. It was less aloof; it was as if the wilderness wore a smile, and beckoned with friendly hands.

The current and his paddle swept him down past the settlement, past a busy, grunting sawmill, past the booming ground where brown logs floated like droves of sheep in a yard, and brought him at last to where his woodsmen waited with the piled goods on a bank above tidewater.

All the rest of that day, and for many days thereafter, Hollister was a busy man. There was a pile of goods to be transported upstream, a house to be fashioned out of raw material from the forest, the shingle-bolt chute to be inspected and repaired, the work of cutting cedar to be got under way. As literally as his hired woodsmen, he earned his bread in the sweat of his brow, spurred on by a vision of what he sought to create —a home and so much comfort as he could grasp for himself and a woman.

The house arose as if by magic—the simple magic of stout arms and skilled hands working with ax and saw and iron wedges. One of Hollister's men was a lean, saturnine logger, past fifty, whose life had been spent in the woods of the Pacific coast. There was no trick of the ax Hayes had not mastered, and he could perform miracles of shaping raw wood with neat joints and smooth surfaces.

Two weeks from the day Hayes struck his ax blade into the brown trunk of a five-foot cedar and said laconically "She'll do," that ancient tree had been transformed into timbers, into boards that flaked off smooth and straight under iron wedges, into neat shakes for a rain-tight roof, and was assembled into a two-roomed cabin. This was furnished with chairs and tables and shelves, hewn out of the raw stuff of the forest. It stood in the middle of a patch of earth cleared of fallen logs and thicket. Its front windows gave on the Toba River slipping down to the sea. A maple spread friendly arms at one corner, a lordly tree that would blaze crimson and russet-brown when October came again. All up and down the river the still woods spread, a deep-green carpet on a floor between the sheer declivity of the north wall and the gentler, more heavily timbered slope of the south. Hollister looked at his house when it was done, and gave thanks for it. He looked at the rich brown of the new-cleared soil about it, and saw in his mind flowers growing there, and a garden.

And when he had quartered his men in the cabin up the hill, and put them to work on the cedar, he went back to Vancouver for his wife.

CHAPTER XI.

A week of hot sunshine had filled the Toba River bank full of roily water when Hollister in his canoe breasted its current again. Doris sat in the bow. Her eyes roved from the sun-glittering stream to the hills that rose above the tree-fringed valley floor, as if sight had been restored to her so that her eyes could dwell upon the green-leaved alder and maple, the drooping spruce boughs, the vastness of those forests of somber fir where the deer lurked in the shadows and where the birds sang vespers and matins when dusk fell and dawn came again. There were meadow larks warbling now on stumps that dotted the floor of the Big Bend, and above the voices of those yellow-breasted singers and the watery murmuring of the river there arose now and then the shrill, imperative blast of a donkey engine.

"Where are we now, Bob?"

"About half a mile below the upper curve of the Big Bend."

Doris sat silent for a while. Hollister, looking at her, was stricken anew with wonder at her loveliness, with wonder at the contrast between them. Beauty and the beast, he said to himself. It made him quake to think that she might suddenly see out of those dear, blind eyes. Would she look and shudder and turn away? He shook off that ghastly thought. She would never see

him. She could only touch him, hear the tenderness of his voice, know his guarding care. And to those things which were realities she would always respond with an intensity that thrilled him and gladdened him and made him feel that life was good.

"Are you glad you're here?" he asked suddenly.

"I would pinch you for such a silly question if it weren't that I would probably upset the canoe," Doris laughed.

"There must be quite a streak of pure barbarian in me," she said after a little. "I love the smell of the earth and the sea and the woods. Even when I could see I never cared a lot for town. It would be all right for a while, then I would revolt against the noise, the dirt and smoke and the miles and miles of houses rubbing shoulders against each other, and all the thousands of people scuttling back and forth like—well, it seems sometimes almost as aimless as the scurrying of ants when you step on their hill. Of course it isn't. But I used to feel that way.

"When I was in my second year at Berkeley I had a brain storm like that. I took the train north and turned up at home—we had a camp running on Thurlow Island then. Daddy read the riot act and sent me back on the next steamer. It was funny—just an irresistible impulse to get back to my own country, among my own people. I often wonder if it isn't some such instinct that keeps sailors at sea, no matter what the sea does to them. I have sat on that ridge" —she pointed unerringly to the first summit above Hollister's timber, straight back and high above the rim of the great cliff south of the Big Bend—"and felt as if I had drunk a lot of wine; just to be away up in that clear, still air, with not a living soul near and the mountains standing all around like the pyramids."

"Do you know that you have a wonderful sense of direction, Doris?" Hollister said. "You pointed to the highest part of that ridge as straight as if you could see it."

"I do see it," she smiled. "I mean I know where I am, and I have in my mind a very clear picture of my surroundings always, so long as I am on familiar ground."

Hollister had dreaded a little lest she should find herself feeling lost and helpless in this immensity of forest and hills which sometimes made even him feel a peculiar sense of insignificance. It was a relief to know that she turned to this wilderness, which must be their home, with the eagerness of a child throwing itself into its mother's arms. He perceived that she had indeed a clear image of the Toba in her mind.

They turned the top of the Big Bend. Here the river doubled on itself for nearly a mile and crossed from the north wall of the valley to the south. Where the channel straightened away from this loop Hollister had built his house on a little flat running back from the right-hand bank. A little less than half a mile below, Bland's cabin faced the river just where the last curve of the S began. They came abreast of that now. What air currents moved along the valley floor shifted in from the sea. It wafted the smoke from Bland's stovepipe gently down on the river's shining face.

Doris sniffed.

"I smell wood smoke," she said. "Is there a fire on the flat?"

"Yes, in a cook's stove," Hollister replied. "There is a shack here."

She questioned him and he told her of the Blands—all that he had been told, which was little enough. Doris displayed a deep interest in the fact that a woman, a young woman, was a near neighbor, as nearness goes on the B. C. coast.

From somewhere about the house Myra Bland appeared now. To avoid the heavy current Hollister hugged the right-hand shore so that he passed within a few feet of the bank, within speaking distance of this woman with honey-colored hair standing bareheaded in the sunshine. She took a step or two forward. For an instant Hollister thought she was about to exercise the immemorial privilege of the wild places and hail a passing stranger. But she did not call or make any sign. She stood gazing at them, and presently her husband joined her and together they watched. They were still looking when Hollister gave his last backward glance, then turned his attention to the reddish-yellow gleam of new-riven timber which marked his own dwelling. Twenty minutes later he slid the gray canoe's forefoot up on a patch of sand before his house.

"We're here," he said. "Such as it is—it's home."

He helped her out, guided her steps up to the level of the bottom land. He was eager to show her the nest he had devised for them. But Doris checked him with her hand.

"I hear the falls," she said. "Listen!"

Streaming down through a gorge from melting snow fields the creek a little way beyond plunged with a roar over granite ledges. The few warm days had swollen it from a whispering sheet of spray to a deep-voiced cataract. A mist from it rose among the deep green of the fir.

"Isn't it beautiful—beautiful," Doris said. "There"—she pointed—"is the cañon of the Little Toba coming in from the south. There is the deep notch where the big river comes down from the Chilcotin, and a ridge like the roof of the world rising between. Over north there are mountains and mountains, one behind the other, till the last peaks are white cones against the blue sky. There is a bluff straight across from us that goes up and up in five-hundred-foot ledges like masonry, with hundred-foot firs on each bench that look like toy trees from here. I used to call that gorge there"—her pointing finger found the mark again—"The Black Hole. It is always full of shadows in summer and in winter the slides rumble and crash into it with a noise like the end of the world. Did you ever listen to the slides muttering and grumbling last winter when you were here, Bob?"

"Yes, I used to hear them day and night."

They stood silent a second or two. The little falls roared above them. The river whispered at their feet. A blue jay perched on the roof of their house and began his harsh complaint to an unheeding world, into which a squirrel presently broke with vociferous reply. An upriver breeze rustled the maple leaves, laid cooling fingers from salt water on Hollister's face—all sweaty from his labor with the paddle.

He could see beauty where Doris saw it. It surrounded him, leaped to his eye wherever his eye turned, a beauty of woods and waters, of rugged hills and sapphire skies. And he was suddenly filled with a great gladness that he could respond to this. He was quickened to a strange emotion by the thought that life could still hold for him so much that seemed good. He put one arm caressingly, protectingly, across his wife's shoulder.

She turned swiftly, buried her face against his breast, and burst into tears, into a strange fit of sobbing. She clung to him like a frightened child. Her body quivered as if some unseen force grasped and shook her with uncontrollable power. Hollister held her fast, at a loss to comfort her.

"But I can't see it," she cried. "I'll never see it again. Oh, Bob, Bob! Sometimes I can't stand this blackness. Never to see you—never to see the sun or the stars—never to see the hills, the trees, the grass. Always night—night—night, without beginning or end."

And Hollister still had no words to comfort her. He could only hold her close, kiss her glossy brown hair, feeling all the while a surging sympathy—and yet conscious of a guilty gladness that she could not see him—that she could not look at him and be revolted and draw away. He knew that she clung to him now as the one clear light in the darkness.

Her sobs died in her throat. She leaned against him passively for a minute. Then she lifted her face and smiled.

"It's silly to let go like that," she said. "Once in a while it comes over me like a panic. I wonder if you will always be patient with me when I get like that. Sometimes I fairly rave. But I won't do it often. I am afraid your wife is rather a temperamental creature, Bob."

She ended with a laugh and a pout. Hollister led her into the house and smiled—or would have smiled had his face been capable of that expression—at the pleasure with which her hands—which she had trained to be her instruments of vision—sought and found doors and cupboards, chairs, the varied equipment of the kitchen. He watched her find her way about with the uncanny certainty of the sightless, at which he never ceased to marvel. When she came back at last to where he sat on a table, swinging one foot while he smoked a cigarette, she put her arms around him and said:

"It's a cute little house, Bob. The air here is like old wine. The smell of the woods is like heaven, after soot and smoke and coal gas. I'm the happiest woman in the whole country."

Hollister looked at her. He knew by the glow on her face that she spoke as she felt, that she *was* happy, that he had made her so. And he was proud of himself for a minute, as a man becomes when he is conscious of having achieved greatness, however briefly.

Only he was aware of a shadow. Doris leaned against him talking of things they would do, of days to come. He looked over her shoulder through the west window and his eye rested on Bland's cabin, where an-

other woman lived who had once talked to him of happiness. Yes, he was conscious of the shadow, of regrets, of something else that was nameless and indefinable—a shadow. Something that was not and yet still might be, troubled him vaguely.

He could not tell why.

CHAPTER XII.

Hollister likened himself and Doris more than once in the next few days to two children in a nursery full of new toys. He watched the pride and delight which Doris bestowed upon her house and all that it contained, the satisfaction with which she would dwell upon the comforts and luxuries that should be added to it when the cedars on the hill began to produce revenue for them.

For his own part he found himself eager for work, taking a pleasure far beyond his expectation in what he had set himself to do, here in the valley of the Toba. He could shut his eyes and see the whole plan work out in ordered sequence—the bolt chute repaired, the ancient cedars felled, sawed into four-foot lengths, split to a size, piled by the chute. Then, when a certain quantity was ready, they would cast one after another into that trough of smooth poles which pitched sharply down from the heart of his timber to the river. One after another they would gather way, slipping down, down, faster and faster, to dive at last with a great splash into the stream, to accumulate behind the confining boom sticks until they were rafted to the mill, where they would be sawn into thin sheets to make tight roofs on houses in distant towns.

And for the sweat that labor with ax and saw wrung from his body, and for the directing power of his brain he would be rewarded with money which would enable him to satisfy his needs. For the first time in his life Hollister perceived both the complexity and the simplicity of that vast machine into which modern industry has grown. In distant towns other men made machinery, textiles, boots, furniture. On inland plains, where no trees grew, men sowed and reaped the wheat which passed through the hands of the miller and the baker and became a nation's daily bread. The ax in his hand was fashioned from metallic ore dug by other men out of the bowels of the earth. He was fed and clothed by unseen hands. And in return he, as they did, levied upon nature's store of raw material and paid for what he got with timber, rough shaped to its ultimate uses by the labor of his hands.

All his life Hollister had been able to command money without effort. Until he came back from the war he did not know what it meant to be poor. He had known business as a process in which a man used money to make more money. He had been accustomed to buy and sell, to deal with tokens rather than with things themselves. Now he found himself at the primitive source of things and he learned, a little to his astonishment, the pride of definitely planned creative work. He began to understand that lesson which many men never learn, the pleasure of pure achievement even in simple things.

For two or three days he occupied himself at various tasks on the flat. He did this to keep watch over Doris, to see that she did not come to grief in this unfamiliar territory. But he soon put aside those first misgivings, as he was learning to put aside any fear of the present or of the future, which arose from her blindness. His love for her had not been born of pity. He never thought of her as helpless. She was too vivid, too alive to inspire him with that curiously mixed feeling which the strong bestow upon the maimed and the weak. But there were certain risks of which he was conscious, no matter that Doris laughingly disclaimed them. With a stick and her ears and fingers she could go anywhere, she said—and she was not far wrong, as Hollister knew.

Within forty-eight hours she had the run of the house and the cleared portion of land surrounding. She could put her hand on every item of her kitchen equipment. She could get kindling out of the wood box and light a fire as well as he. All the stock of food staples lay in an orderly arrangement of her own choice on the kitchen shelves. She knew every object in the two rooms, each chair and box and stool, the step at the front door, the short path to the river bank, the trunk of the branchy maple, the rugged bark of a great spruce behind the house, as if within her brain there existed an exact diagram of the whole and with which as a guide she could move within those limits as swiftly and surely as Hollister himself.

He never ceased to wonder at the mysterious delicacies of touch and hearing which served her so well in place of sight. But he accepted the fact, and once she had

mastered her surroundings Hollister was free to take up his own work no matter where it led him. Doris insisted that he should. She had a sturdy soul that seldom leaned and never thought of clinging. She could laugh, a deep-throated, chuckling laugh, and sometimes, quite unexpectedly, she would go about the house singing. And if now and then she rebelled with a sudden furious resentment against the long night that shut her in, that, as she said herself, was just like a small, black cloud passing swiftly across the face of the sun.

Hollister began at the bottom of the chute, as he was beginning at the bottom of his fortune, to build up again. Where it was broken he repaired. Where it had collapsed under the weight of snow or of fallen trees he put in a new section. His hands grew calloused and the muscles of his back and shoulders grew tough with swinging an ax, with lugging and lifting heavy poles. The sun burned the scar-tissue of his face to a brown like that on the faces of his two men, who were piling the cut cedar in long ricks among the green timber while he got the chute ready to slide the red, pungent-smelling blocks downhill.

Sometimes, on a clear, still day when he was at the house, he would hear old Bill Hayes far off in the woods, very faint in the distance, shrilling the fallers' warning, *"Timb-er-r-r."* Close on that he would hear a thud that sent tremors running through the earth, and there would follow the echo of crashing boughs all along the slope. Once he said lightly to Doris:

"Every time one of those big trees goes down like that it means a hundred dollars' worth of timber on the ground."

And she laughed back:

"We make money when cedar goes up, and we make money when cedar comes down. Very nice."

May passed and June came to an end; with it Hollister also came to the end of his ready money. It had all gone into tools, food, wages, all his available capital sunk in the venture. But the chute was ready to run bolts. They poured down in a stream till the river surface within the boom sticks was a brick-colored jam that gave off a pleasant, aromatic smell.

Then Hollister and his two men cast off the boom, let the current sweep it down to Carr's new shingle mill below the Big Bend. When the bolts were tallied in Hollister got a check. He sat with pad and pencil figuring for half an hour after he came home, after his men had each shouldered a fifty-pound pack of supplies and gone back up the hill. He gave over figuring at last. The thing was profitable. More so than he had reckoned. He got up and went into the kitchen where Doris was rolling pie crust on a board.

"We're off," he said, putting an arm around her. "If we can keep this up all summer I'll build a new wing on the house and bring you in a piano to play with this winter."

Hollister himself now took a hand at cutting cedar. Each morning he climbed that steep slope to the works, and each night he came trudging down; and morning and night he would pause at a point where the trail led along the rim of a sheer cliff, to look down on the valley below, to look down on the roof of his own house and upon Bland's house farther on. Sometimes smoke streamed blue from Bland's stovepipe. Sometimes it stood dead, a black cylinder above the shake roof. Sometimes one figure and sometimes two moved about the place; more often no one stirred. But that was as near as the Blands had come in eight weeks.

Hollister had an unspoken hope, that they would remain distant, no matter that Doris occasionally wondered about this woman who lived around the river's curve, what she was like and when she would meet her. Hollister knew nothing of Bland, nothing of Myra. He did not wish to know. It did not matter in the least, he assured himself. He was dead and Myra was married. All that old past was as a book long out of print. It could not possibly matter if by chance they came in contact. Yet he had a vague feeling that it did matter—a feeling for which he could not account. He was not afraid; he had no reason to be afraid. Nevertheless, he gazed sometimes from the cliff-top down on the cabin where Bland and Myra lived, and something stirred him so that he wished them gone.

He came off the hill one evening in the middle of June to find a canoe drawn up on the beach, two Siwashes puttering over a camp fire, and a tall, wirily slender, fair-haired man who might have been anywhere between twenty-seven and thirty-five sitting in the front doorway talking to Doris.

Hollister noted the expression on the man's face when their eyes met. But he did not mind. He was used to that. He

was becoming indifferent to what people thought of his face, because what they thought no longer had power to hurt him. Moreover he knew that some people grew used to the wreckage of his features. That had been his experience with his two woodsmen. At first they looked at him askance. Now they seemed as indifferent to his disfigurement as they were to the ragged knots and old fire scars on the trees they felled.

Anyway, it did not matter to Hollister.

But this fair-haired man went on talking, looking all the while at Hollister, and his look seemed to say: "I know your face is a hell of a sight, but I am not disturbed by it, and I don't want you to think I am disturbed." Behind the ragged mask of his scars Hollister smiled at this fancy. Nevertheless, he accepted his interpretation of that look as a reality and found himself moved by a curious feeling of friendliness for this stranger whom he had never seen before, whom he might never see again—for that was the way of casual travelers up and down the Toba. They came out of nowhere, going upriver or down, stopped perhaps to smoke a pipe, to exchange a few words, before they moved on into the hushed places that swallowed them up.

The man's name was Lawanne. He was bound upstream, after grizzly bear.

"I was told of an Englishman named Bland, who is quite a hunter. I stopped in here thinking this was his place and that I might get him to go on with me," he said to Hollister.

"That's Bland's place down there," Hollister explained.

"So Mrs. Hollister was just telling me. There didn't seem to be anybody about when I passed. It doesn't matter much, anyway," he laughed. "The farther I get into this country the less keen I am to hunt. It's good enough just to loaf around and look at."

Lawanne had supper with them. Hollister asked him not only as a matter of courtesy but with a genuine feeling that he wanted this man to break bread with them. He could not quite understand that sudden warmth of feeling for a stranger. He had never in his life been given to impulsive friendliness. But he liked this man. They sat outside after supper and Doris joined them there. Lawanne was not talkative. He was given to long silences in which he sat with eyes fixed on river or valley or the hills above, in mute appreciation.

"Do you people realize what a panoramic beauty is here before your eyes all the time?" he asked once. "It's like a fairyland to me. I must see a lot of this country before I go away. And I came here quite by chance."

"Which is, after all, the way nearly everything happens," Doris said.

"Oh," Lawanne turned to her. "You think so? You don't perceive the great design, the perfect plan, in all that we do?"

"Do you?" she asked.

He laughed.

"No. If I did I should sit down with folded hands, knowing myself helpless in the grip of destiny. I should always be perfectly passive."

"If you tried to do that you could not remain passive long. The unreckonable element of chance would still operate to make you do this or that. You couldn't escape it; nobody can."

"Then you don't believe there is 'a destiny that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will?' " Lawanne said lightly.

Doris shook her head.

"Destiny is only a word. It means one thing to one person, something else to another. It's too abstract to account for anything. Life's a puzzle no one ever solves, because the factors are never constant. When we try to account for this and that we find no fixed law, nothing but what is subject to the element of chance—which can't be reckoned. Most of us at different times hold our own fate, temporarily at least, in our own hands without knowing it, and some insignificant happening does this or that to us. If we had done something else it would all be different."

"Your wife," Lawanne observed to Hollister, "is quite a philosopher."

Hollister nodded. He was thinking of this factor of chance. He himself had been a victim to it. He had profited by it. And he wondered what vagaries of chance were still to bestow happiness or inflict suffering upon him in spite of his most earnest effort to achieve mastery over circumstances. He felt latterly that he had a firm grip on the immediate future. Yet who could tell?

Dusk began to close on the valley while the far, high crests of the mountains still gleamed under a crimson sky. Deep shadows filled every gorge and cañon, crept up and up until only the snowy crests glim-

mered in the night, ghostly silver against a sky speckled with stars. The valley itself was shrouded close under the dark blanket of the night, through which the river murmured unseen and distant waterfalls roared over rocky precipices. The two Indians attending Lawanne squatted within the red glow of their fire on the bank. Downstream a yellow spot broke out like a candle flame against black velvet.

"There is some one at Bland's now," Hollister said.

"That's their window light, eh?" Lawanne commented. "I may go down and see him in the morning. I am not very keen on two or three weeks alone in these tremendous silences. This valley at night now—it's awesome. And those Siwashes are like dumb men. *You* wouldn't go bear hunting, I suppose?"

There was a peculiar gratification to Hollister in being asked. But he had too much work on hand. Neither did he wish to leave Doris. Not because it might be difficult for her to manage alone. It was simply an inner reluctance to be separated from her. She was becoming a vital part of him. To go away from her, for days or weeks, except under the spur of some compelling necessity was a prospect that did not please him. That which had first drawn them together grew stronger. The perfect accord of the well-mated grew stronger. The world outside of them held less and less significance. Sometimes they talked of that, wondered about it, wondered if it were natural for a man and a woman to become so completely absorbed in each other, to attain that singular oneness. They wondered if it would last. But whether it should prove lasting or not they had it now and it was sufficient.

Lawanne went down to Bland's in the morning. He was still there when Hollister climbed the hill to his work.

Before evening he had something else to think about besides Lawanne. A trifle—but one of those trifles that recur with irritating persistence no matter how often the mind gives it dismissal.

About ten o'clock that morning a logger came up to the works on the hill. "Can you use another man?" he asked bluntly. "I want to work."

Hollister engaged him. By his dress, by his manner, Hollister knew that he was at home in the woods. He was young, sturdily built, handsome in a swarthy way. There was about him a slightly familiar air. Hollister thought he might have seen him at the steamer landing, or at Carr's. He mentioned that.

"I have been working there," the man replied. "Working on the boom."

He was frank enough about it. He wanted money—a stake. He believed he could make more cutting shingle bolts by the cord. This was true. Hollister's men were making top wages. The cedar stood on good ground. It was big, clean timber, easy to work.

"I'll be on the job to-morrow," he said after they had talked it over. "Take me this afternoon to get my outfit packed up here."

Hollister was haunted by the man's face at odd times during the day. Not until he was halfway home—until he came out on that ledge from whence he could look, and always did look with a slight sense of irritation, down on Bland's cabin as well as his own—did he recall clearly where and when he had seen Charlie Mills.

Mills was the man who sat looking at Myra across the table that winter morning when Hollister was suffering from the brief madness which brought him to Bland's cabin with a desperate project.

Well, what of it, Hollister asked himself? It was nothing to him. He was a disinterested bystander now. But looking down on Bland's cabin he reflected that his irritation was rooted in the fact that he did not want to be a bystander. He desired to eliminate Myra Bland and all that pertained to her from even casual contact with him. It seemed absurd that he should feel himself to be in danger. But he had a dim sense of it. And instead of the aloofness which he desired he seemed to see vague threads drawing himself and Doris and Myra Bland and this man Mills closer and closer together, to what end or purpose he could not tell.

For a minute Hollister was tempted to turn the man away when he came back in the morning. But that, he concluded with a shrug of his shoulders, was carrying a mere fancy too far.

It did not, therefore, turn his thoughts into a more placid channel, when he reached the house, to find Myra sitting in the kitchen talking to Doris. Yet it was no great surprise. He had expected this, looked forward to it with an uneasy sense of its inevitability.

Nothing could have been more commonplace, more uneventful than that meeting.

Doris introduced her husband. They were all at their ease. Myra glanced once at his face and thereafter looked away. But her flow of small talk, the conversational stopgap of the woman accustomed to social amenities, went on placidly. They were strangers, meeting for the first time in a strange land.

Bland had gone upriver with Lawanne.

"Jim lives to hunt," Myra said with a short laugh. It was the first and nearly the last mention of her husband she made that evening.

Hollister went out to wash himself in a basin that stood on a bench by the back door. He felt a relief. He had come through the first test casually enough. A slightly sardonic grimace wrinkled his tight-lipped mouth. There was a grim sort of humor in the situation. Those three, whose lives had got involved in such a tangle, forgathered under the same roof in that lonely valley, each more or less a victim of uncomprehended forces both within and exterior to themselves. Yet it was simple enough. Each, in common with all humanity, pursued the elusive shadow of "happiness." The diverging paths along which they pursued it had brought them to this common point.

Hollister soaped and scrubbed to clean his hands and face of the sweat and dirt of his day's labor. Above the wash bench Myra's face, delicately pink and white and framed by her hair that was the color of strained honey, looked down at him through an open window. Her blue eyes rested on him, searchingly he thought, with a curious appraisal, as if he were something to be noted and weighed and measured by the yardstick of her estimation of men. If she only knew, Hollister reflected sardonically, with his face buried in the towel, what a complete knowledge she had of him?

Looking up suddenly, his eyes met hers fixed unwaveringly upon him, and for an instant his heart stood still with the reasonless conviction that she did know, she must know, that she could not escape knowing. There was a quality of awareness in her steady gaze that terrified him for a moment by its implication, which made him feel as if he stood over a powder magazine and that she held the detonator in her hand. But immediately he perceived the absurdity of his momentary panic. Myra turned her head to speak to Doris. She smiled, the old dimpling smile which gave him a strange feeling to see again. Certainly his imagination was playing him tricks. How could she know? And what would she care if she did know—so long as he made no claims, so long as he let the dead past lie in its grave. For Myra was as deeply concerned to have done with their old life as he. He rested upon that assumption and went in to his supper.

Later, toward sundown, Myra went home. Hollister watched her vanish among the thickets, thinking that she, too, had changed—as greatly as himself. She had been timid once, reluctant to stay alone overnight in a house with telephones and servants, on a street brilliantly lighted. Now she could apparently face the loneliness of those solitudes without uneasiness. But war and the aftermath of war had taught Hollister that man adapts himself to necessity when he must—and he suspected that women were not greatly different. He understood that, after all, he had never really known Myra any more than she had known him. Externally they had achieved knowledge of each other. But their real selves, the essence of their being, the shadowy inner self where motives and desires took form and gathered force until they were translated for good or evil into forthright action—these they had not known at all.

At any rate he perceived that Myra could calmly enough face the prospect of being alone. Hollister cast his eye up to where the cedars towered, a green mass on the slope above the cliff. He thought of Charlie Mills, and wondered if, after all, she would be alone.

He felt ashamed of that thought as soon as it formed in his mind. And being ashamed, he saw and understood that he still harbored a little bitterness against Myra. He did not wish to bestow bitterness nor any other emotion upon her. He wanted her to remain completely outside the scope of his feelings. He would have to try, he perceived, to cultivate a complete indifference to her, to what she did, to where she went—to insulate himself completely against her. Because he was committed to other enterprises—and chiefly because, as he said to himself, he would not exchange a single brown strand of Doris Cleveland's hair for Myra, even if he had that choice.

The moon stole up from behind the Coast Range after they had gone to bed. Its pale beams laid a silver square upon the dusky floor of their room.

"Are you happy?" demanded Doris of Hollister with a fierce intensity. "Don't you ever wish you had a wife who could see? Aren't you *ever* sorry?"

"Doris, Doris," he chided gently. "What in the world put such a notion as that into your head?"

She was thoughtful for a minute.

"Sometimes I wonder," she said at last. "Sometimes I feel that I must reassure myself that you are contented with me. When we come in contact with a woman like Mrs. Bland, for instance—— Tell me, Bob, is she pretty?"

"Yes," he said. "Very."

"Fair or dark?"

"Fair-skinned. She has blond hair and dark-blue eyes, almost purple. She is about your height. Why so curious?"

"I just wondered. I like her very much," Doris said with some slight emphasis on the last two words. "She is a very interesting talker."

"I noticed that," Hollister observed dryly. "She spoke charmingly of the weather and the local scenery and the mosquitoes."

Doris laughed.

"A woman always falls back on those conversational staples with a strange man. That's just the preliminary skirmishing. But she was here all afternoon, and we didn't spend five hours talking about the weather."

"What did you talk about then?" Hollister asked curiously.

"Men and women and money mostly," Doris replied. "If one may judge a woman by the impressionistic method I should say that Mrs. Bland would be very attractive to men."

It was on the tip of Hollister's tongue to say, "She is." Instead he murmured: "Is *that* why you were doubting me? Think I'm apt to fall in love with this charming lady?"

"No," Doris said thoughtfully. "It wasn't anything concrete like that. It's a feeling, a mood, I suppose. And it's silly for me to say things like that. If you grow sorry you married me, if you fall in love with another woman, I'll know it without being told."

Hollister watched the slow shift of the moonbeam across the floor of the room—thinking—his mind darting sketchily from incident to incident of the past, peering curiously into the misty future, until at last he grew aware by her regular breathing that Doris was asleep.

He grew drowsy himself. His eyelids grew heavy. Presently he was asleep also, and dreaming of a fantastic struggle in which Myra Bland—transformed into a vulture-like creature with a fierce, beaked face and enormous strength—tore him relentlessly from the arms of his wife.

CHAPTER XIII.

From day to day and from week to week, apprehending mistily that he was caught in and carried along by a current, a slow but irresistible movement of events, Hollister pursued the round of his daily life as if life spread before him like a sea of which he had a chart whereon every reef was marked, every shoal buoyed, and had in his hands and brain the instruments and knowledge wherewith to run a true course. He made himself believe that he was reasonably safe from the perils of those uneasy waters. Sometimes he was a little in doubt, not so sure of untroubled passage. But mostly he did not think of these potential dangers.

He was vitally concerned, as most men are, with making a living. The idea of poverty chafed him. He had once been a considerable toad in a sizable puddle. He had inherited a competence and lost it, and power to reclaim it was beyond him. He wasted no regrets upon the loss of that material security—although he sometimes wondered how Myra had contrived to let such a sum slip through her fingers in a little over two years. He assumed that she had done so. Otherwise she would not be sitting on the bank of the Toba waiting more or less passively for her husband to step into a dead man's shoes.

That was, in effect, Bland's situation. He was an Englishman of good family, accustomed to a definite social standing, accustomed to money derived from a source into which he never troubled to inquire. He had never worked. He never would work—not in the sense of performing any labor as a means of livelihood. He had a small income, fifty or sixty dollars a month. When he was thirty he would come into certain property and an income of so many thousand pounds a year. He and his wife could not subsist in any town on the quarterly dole he received. That was why they had come to live in that cabin on the Toba River. Bland hunted. He fished. To him the Toba Valley served well enough as a place to rusticate. Any place where game animals and

sporting fish abounded satisfied him temperamentally.

He had done his "bit" in the war. When he came into his money they would go "home." He was placidly sure of himself, of his place in the general scheme of things. He was suffering from temporary embarrassment, that was all. It was a bit rough on Myra, but it would be all right by and by.

So much filtered into Hollister's ears and understanding before long. Archie Lawanne came back downstream with two grizzly pelts, and Hollister met Bland for the first time. He appraised Bland with some care —this tall, ruddy Englishman who had supplanted him in a woman's affections, and who, unless Hollister's observation had tricked him, was in a fair way to be himself supplanted.

For Hollister was the unwilling spectator of a drama to which he could not shut his eyes. Nor could he sit back in the rôle of cynical audience, awaiting in cushioned ease the climax of the play and the final exit of the actors.

Mills was the man. Whether Myra, in her ennui, had given her heart into Charlie Mills' keeping, Hollister, of course, neither knew nor cared. But he did know that they met now and then, that Mills seemed to have some curious knowledge of when Bland was far afield. Mills could be trusted to appear on the flat in the evening or on a Sunday, if Myra came to see Doris.

He had speculated idly upon this sometimes. Myra he knew well enough, or thought he did. He began to regard Mills with a livelier interest, to talk to the man, to draw him out, to discover the essential man under the outward seeming. He had not been slow to discover that Mills was something more than so much bone and sinew which could be applied vigorously to an ax or a saw.

Hollister's speculations took a new turn when Archie Lawanne and Bland came back from the bear hunt. For Lawanne did not go out. He pitched a tent on the flat below Hollister's and kept one Siwash to cook for him. He made that halt to rest up, to stretch and dry his bear skins. But long after these trophies were cured he still remained. He was given to roaming up and down the valley. He extended his acquaintance to the settlement farther down, taking observation of an earnest attempt at co-operative industry. He made himself at home equally with the Blands and the Hollisters.

And when July was on them with hot, hazy sunshine in which berries ripened and bird and insect life filled the Toba with a twitter and a drone, when the smoke of distant forest fires drifted like pungent fog across the hills, Hollister began to wonder if the net Myra seemed unconsciously to spread for men's feet had snared another victim.

This troubled him a little. He liked Lawanne. He knew nothing about him, who he was, where he came from, what he did. Nevertheless, there had arisen between them a curious fellowship. There seemed to reside in the man a natural quality of uprightness, a moral stoutness of soul that lifted him above petty judgments. One did not like or dislike Lawanne for what he did or said so much as for what he suggested as having inherent within himself.

There was a little of that quality, also, about Charlie Mills. He worked in the timber with a fierce energy, from morning till night. His black hair stood in wisps and curls, its picturesque disorder heightened by a trick he had of running his fingers through it when he paused for a minute to take breath, to look steadfastly across at the slide-scarred, granite face of the north valley wall, with a wistful look in his eyes.

"Those hills," he said once abruptly to Hollister, "they were here long before we came. They'll be here long after we're gone. What a helpless, crawling, puny insect man is, anyway. A squirrel on his wheel in a cage."

It was a protesting acceptance of a stark philosophy, Hollister thought, a cry against some weight that bore him down, the momentary revealing of some conflict in which Mills foresaw defeat, or had already suffered defeat. It was a statement wrung out of him, requiring no comment, for he at once resumed the steady pull on the six-foot crosscut saw.

"Why don't you take it easier?" Hollister said to him. "You work as if the devil was driving you."

Mills smiled.

"The only devil that drives me," he said, "is the devil inside me. Besides," he continued between strokes of the saw, "I want to make a stake and get to hell out of here."

Hollister did not press him for reasons. Mills did work as if the devil drove him and in his quiescent moments an air of melan-

choly clouded his dark face as if physical passivity left him a prey to some inescapable inner gloom.

All about him, then, Hollister perceived strong undercurrents of life flowing, sometimes in the open, sometimes underground. Charlie Mills and Myra Bland and their story were part of it. Lawanne apparently was succumbing to the same malady that touched Mills. Bland moved in the foreground, impassive, apparently stolidly trustful of this woman. And all of them bowed before and struggled under economic forces which they did not understand, working and planning according to their lights, seeking through the means at hand to secure the means of livelihood in obedience to the universal will to live, the human desire to lay firm hold of life, liberty, such happiness as could be grasped.

Hollister would sit in the evening on the low stoop before his cabin, and Doris would sit beside him with her hand on his. A spirit of drowsy content would rest upon them. Hollister's eyes would see the river, gray now with the glacial discharge, slipping quietly along between the fringes of alder and maple, backed by the deeper green of the fir and cedar and groves of enormous spruce. His wife's ears drank in the whispering of the stream, the rumbling of distant waterfalls. At such times Hollister felt the goodness of being alive, the mild intoxication of the fragrant air which filled the valley, the majestic beauty of those insentient hills upon which the fierce midsummer sun was baring glacial patches that gleamed now like blue diamonds, or again with a pale emerald sheen, in a setting of worn granite and white snowdrifts five thousand feet above.

In this wilderness, this vast region of forest and stream and wild mountain ranges, men were infinitesimal specks hurrying here and there about their self-appointed tasks. Those like himself and Doris who did not mind the privations inseparable from that remoteness, fared well enough. The land held out to them manifold promises. Hollister looked at the red-brown shingle bolts accumulating behind the boom sticks and felt that inner satisfaction which comes of success achieved by plan and labor. Out of the apparent wreckage of his life he was laying the foundations of something permanent, something abiding, an enduring source of good.

Then perhaps his eyes would shift downstream to where Bland's stark, weather-beaten cabin lifted its outline against the green thickets, and he would think uneasily upon what insecure tenure, upon what deliberate violation of law he held his dearest treasure. What would she think, if she knew? What would she say? What would she do? He did not know. It troubled him to think of this. If he could have swept Myra out of North America with a wave of his hand he would have made one sweeping gesture. He was jealous of his happiness, his security, and Myra's presence was not only a reminder, it had the effect upon him of a threat he could not ignore.

Yet he was compelled to ignore it. She and Doris had become fast friends. It all puzzled Hollister very much sometimes. If it were not for the change that had been wrought in him, he would have been revolted at his own actions. He had committed technical bigamy. His children would be illegitimate before the law. Hollister's morality was the morality of his early environment—or had been.

If he judged himself by his own earlier standards he was damned, and he had dragged Doris Cleveland down with him. So was Myra smeared with the pitch of moral obloquy. They were sinners all. The world at large, he was aware, would be decisively intolerant of them all—if the world should by chance be called to pass judgment. But, personally, he no longer accepted that judgment.

Sometimes he would grow impatient with thinking and put it all by. He had his moods. But also he had his work, the imperative necessity of constant labor to satisfy the needs both of the present and the future. No man goes into the wilderness with only his hands and a few tools and wins security by any short and easy road. There were a great many things Hollister was determined to have for himself and Doris and their children. He did not spare himself. Like Mills, he worked with a prodigious energy. Sometimes he wondered if dreams akin to his own drove Charlie Mills to sweat and strain, to pile up each day double the amount of split cedar, and double for himself the wages earned by the other two men —who were themselves no laggards with ax and saw.

Sometimes Hollister sat by covertly watching Mills and Myra. He could make noth-

ing of Myra. She was courteous, companionable to Mills, nothing more. But to Hollister Mills' trouble was plain enough. The man was on his guard, as if he knew betrayal lurked in the glance of his eye, in the quality of his tone. There would be upon his face a look of hopelessness, as if he dwelt on something that baffled him. Sometimes, latterly, Hollister saw a hint of that same dubious expression about Archie Lawanne. But there was a different temper in Lawanne, a flash of the sardonic at times. In July, however, Lawanne went away.

"I'm coming back, though," he told Hollister before he left. "I think I shall put up a cabin and winter here."

"I'll be glad to see you," Hollister replied; "but it's a lonely valley in the winter."

Lawanne smiled.

"I can stand isolation for a change," he said. "I want to write a book. And while I am outside, I'll send you in a couple that I have already written. You will see me in October. Try to get the shingle-bolt rush over so we can go out after deer together, now and then."

So for a time the Toba saw no more of Lawanne. Hollister missed him. So did Doris. But she had Myra Bland to keep her company while Hollister was away at work in the timber. Sometimes Bland himself dropped in. But Hollister could never find himself on any common ground of mutual interest with this sporting Englishman. He was a bluff, hearty, healthy man, apparently without either intellect or affectations.

"What do you think of Bland?" he asked Doris once.

"I can't think of him, because I can't see him," she answered. "He is either very clever at concealing any sort of personality, or he is simply a big, strong, stupid man."

Which was precisely what Hollister himself thought.

"Isn't it queer," Doris went on, "how vivid a thing personality is? Now, Myra and Mr. Lawanne are definite, colorable entities to me. So is Charlie Mills, quiet as *he* is. And yet I can't make Bland seem anything more than simply a voice with a slightly English accent."

"Well, there must be something to him or she wouldn't have married him," Hollister remarked.

"Perhaps. But I shouldn't wonder if she married him for something that existed mostly in her own mind." Doris reflected. "Women often do that—men, too, I suppose. I very nearly did myself, once. Then I discovered that this ideal man was something I had created in my own imagination."

"How did you find that out before you were committed to the enterprise?"

"Because my reason and my emotions were in continual conflict over that man," Doris said thoughtfully. "As soon as I brought myself to really see this admirable young man of mine clearly, why, the glamour all faded."

"Maybe mine will fade, too," Hollister suggested.

"You're fishing for compliments now," she laughed. "You know very well you are. But we're pretty lucky, Robert mine, just the same. We've gained a lot. We haven't lost anything yet. I wouldn't back-track, not an inch. Would you—honest, now?"

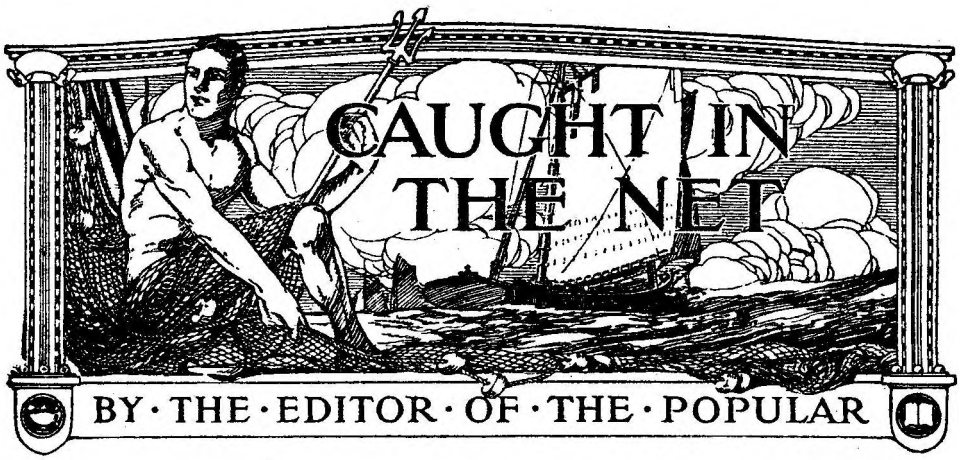
Hollister totally agreed with her that he would not. And then, while he stood with his arm around her, Doris startled him.

"Myra told me a curious thing the other day," she said. "She has been married twice. She told me that her first husband's name was the same as yours—Bob Hollister—that he was killed in France in 1917. She says that you somehow remind her of him."

"There were a good many men killed in France in '17," he observed. "And Hollister is not such an uncommon name. Does the lady suspect I'm the reincarnation of her dear departed? She seems to have consoled herself for the loss, anyway."

The matter rested there. Doris went away to do something about the house. Hollister stood glowering at the distant outline of Bland's cabin. A slow uneasiness grew on him. What did Myra mean by that confidence? Did she mean anything? He shook himself impatiently. He had a profound distaste for that revelation. In itself it was nothing, unless some obscure motive lurked behind. That troubled him. Myra meant nothing—or she meant mischief. Why, he could not say. She was quit of him at her own desire. She had made a mouthful of his modest fortune. If she had guessed the real man behind that mask of scars, and from some obscure, perverted motive meant to bring shipwreck to both of them once more, Hollister felt that he would strangle her without a trace of remorse.

TO BE CONTINUED.



FADS AND FALLACIES OF LAWMAKING

MERRILY, we go on making new laws, no matter what else happens. Our forty-eight States and the Federal Congress make more laws than any one can keep track of. It has been estimated by a conservative critic that We, the People of the United States, are responsible for 25,000 laws annually. Each State adds about 500 statutes a year to those already in hand. To show how they accumulate, the Empire State alone boasts of a grand total of approximately 40,000 laws.

Which of us can obey all of them? Even if we would, there are many of them so carelessly drawn that there would be considerable doubt and difference of opinion as to their exact intent and meaning. Lawyers are confounded often enough themselves in their interpretation of statutes. What chance, then, has the average man to know what's what in law? But it is proper to point out here that, true to our Anglo-Saxon instincts, we intuitively know the law—the common law—and so steer a pretty clear course away from important infractions. It is worth a word of wondering praise how multitudinous and intricate the statutes are which protect us from one another under the complexities of modern civilization, and still more to be wondered at how the average citizen manages to keep out of legal entanglements, or, by guile and ingenuity, manages to keep "within the law."

The great Blackstone said that democracy is peculiarly fitted to the making of laws, and lays stress on the vital importance of legislation, at the same time calling attention to the fact that there is no other state of life, arts, or sciences, in which no preliminary instruction is looked upon as requisite. He also states that in legislation by the people they will show great caution in the creation of new laws that may interfere with their rights and liberties.

With all due respect to that eminent authority, precisely the contrary is the case. Nobody is so willing to interfere with the rights or liberties of the people as the people themselves, or their alleged representatives in the legislature; and a body, or a fraction of the people, is far more ready and reckless to impose its will upon the others than have been the most masterful monarchs.

There is grave danger in the ease and nonchalance with which laws are made and unmade. It bodes ill for their "majesty." The people lose respect for them, and when that happens society is in jeopardy.

WATCH AND WARD OF OUR NATIONAL HEALTH

MODERN hygiene has rendered the world no more valuable service than in the creation of health boards. These vigilant watchdogs of public welfare save life, augment human happiness, and are a powerful factor in commerce and industry.

All of us are familiar with the work of our local boards of health, but how many of us appreciate or even know about the unremitting labor done in our behalf by the

United States Public Health Service? This is the great national agency which protects us against the introduction of diseases from abroad, which operates the quarantines throughout the country, and unites with State boards of health in the eradication of diseases that may prevail in certain communities, such as typhoid fever, tuberculosis, and malaria.

Since 1910 the public health service has been conducting a triumphant campaign against typhoid fever, but it will not regard its work successful until that disease becomes a clinical rarity. The mortality from typhoid fever has been dropping steadily. In 1910 there were 23.5 deaths per 100,000 in the registration area of the United States, while in 1919 there were only 9.2 deaths per 100,000, a remarkable reduction.

A campaign is now on for the eradication of malaria. Investigations have shown that in one county there was a loss per acre under cultivation of $11.50, in 1918, which within one year was reduced to $1.50 per acre through the methods established by the health authorities.

The public health service has proved its control of yellow fever and cholera. The last outbreak of yellow fever here, in 1905, was promptly snuffed out by the officials, without any interruption to commerce, and the great cholera epidemic, which afflicted Europe in 1910, was likewise prevented from affecting either our health or our trade. One need but compare the ravage and damage of the yellow fever outbreak of 1878, in the Mississippi River Valley, and the loss in millions of dollars to commerce through the cholera epidemic in Europe, in 1893, to appreciate the work and worth of the public health service in its manifold activities. It also has put down smallpox in the Philippines and gotten the upper hand of the bubonic plague on the Pacific coast and in Porto Rico.

Other achievements of the public health service are the discovery of the cause of pellagra, and its cure by means of diet; and the most effective methods for the cure of trachoma, a chronic disease of the eyes which has blinded many thousands of persons in this country. One of its greatest services, recently rendered, is that in connection with the control of venereal diseases. Under its leadership forty-seven States have organized special divisions in their health departments for the purpose of combating and eliminating such social evils.

The public health service has been credited with remarkable work in the treatment and cure of that dreaded scourge, leprosy. An investigation station is maintained at Kalihi, in the Hawaiian Islands, for the study of leprosy. There is also a leprosarium at Carville, Louisiana, under management of the P. H. S. At both places cures have been reported, chaulmoogra oil intramuscular injections being used. Chaulmoogra oil is expressed from an Oriental nut.

THE LONG BROWN PATH

NOW come the crisp days of autumn, to many of us the finest of all the year. There is a tang in the morning air that calls to the gypsy that lives in the most city-bound of us. In suburban streets there lingers a scent of burning leaves that sets staid business men to thinking of the shotgun that lies idle on the closet shelf. The trees are beginning to take on gaudy colors; the fields and woods are calling—and too many of us do not answer. Quail don't come so close to the cities as they did when father was a boy; comparatively few of us have the time and money to spare for a trip to the big woods, and there still are some otherwise normal citizens who haven't succumbed to the lure of harrying a little white ball over numerous acres of golf links. Then, for the city dweller, what to do these fine fall days? Walt Whitman has a suggestion:

> The long brown path before me, leading wherever I choose.

Walk! There's no excuse for any man—or woman, either, for that matter—blessed with serviceable legs and a pair of seeing eyes moping indoors through an autumn holiday. A trolley car or jitney bus will take you to where the country begins, and all you need in the way of equipment is a pair of shoes that aren't too small. And, if we may offer a suggestion—don't go too far or too fast on your first trip. Easy does it, and after a few afternoons on the road you'll be surprised at the distance you can cover without fatigue.

If you are going over five miles or so, you will be happier if your shoes are of the broad-toed, low-heeled variety, and big enough to accommodate comfortably heavy woolen socks. And another word of advice. If you have been taking your exercise behind the steering wheel of an automobile, remember that a good road for the motorist is a bad road for the walker. Strike off from the main highways and take to the dirt roads that you would scorn while whizzing along at thirty miles an hour. There, at your pedestrian three miles, you will enjoy many a roadside sight lost to the flying motorist on the main-traveled route.

POPULAR TOPICS

IN 1867 we bought Alaska from Russia for $7,000,000. Since then the territory has returned to us over seventy times the purchase price. The mining industry alone has yielded mineral products valued at $438,160,000. Since 1880 gold production has totaled $311,665,000, and a conservative estimate places the value of unmined placer gold at $360,000,000. Prospects for the development of gold-bearing-quartz-vein mining are bright, and large oil production is expected in the near future.

OUR last year's combined beet and cane sugar crop of 1,266,148 tons was the greatest on record, according to the final report of the bureau of crop estimates. It exceeded the small crop of 1919—a year in which weather conditions were unusually unfavorable—by 49 per cent, and the crop of the previous high record year, 1916, by 12 per cent. Last year the beet sugar crop was 1,090,021 tons, 86 per cent of the combined crop.

THE great American dollar is increasing steadily in value. Just now it will buy 25 per cent more than it would a year ago! Wonder if the old silver cart wheel will ever again look as big as it did back in 1913?

EXPORTS from the Philippine Islands for 1920 totaled $151,123,856, an increase of $38,006,030 over the previous year. Imports last year were valued at $149,438,283, a gain of $30,799,231 over 1919. Exports to the United States amounted to $105,216,263, as compared with $56,652,692 in 1919, and imports from the United States were valued at $92,289,778, an increase of $16,793,363 over the previous year. Sugar exported totaled 177,500 long tons, valued at $49,619,000. Exports of Manila hemp were valued at $35,862,000, an increase of over $9,000,000 over 1919. Cotton and manufactured cotton goods made up a quarter of the total imports.

IT is estimated that our exports to Germany for the fiscal year ended with June, 1921, will amount to $400,000,000, as compared with $352,000,000 in 1913. For the nine months ended with March last, they totaled $312,000,000. Imports from Germany for the fiscal year of 1921 are estimated at $100,000,000, as compared with $185,000,000 in 1913.

THE Chinese Republic recently bestowed an unusual honor on Albert G. Bowers, of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, when it presented him with the "Decoration of the Felicitous Grain, or Beautiful Crop," its highest reward for valor. Mr. Bowers, while engaged in engineering work at Chefoo, China, rescued, at risk of his life, the passengers and crew of a Japanese steamship wrecked in a storm.

LAST year, it is estimated, more than two hundred and fifty million people traveled to and from New York City by railroad. This is an increase of almost seventeen million, or about 7 per cent over 1919.

BUTTER production in the United States last year totaled 1,400,000,000 pounds; lard production, 1,936,000,000 pounds; and margarine production, 370,700,000 pounds.

IF enemy tanks ever crawl up to American trenches they will get a hot reception. The army has developed a .50-caliber machine gun, built along the lines of the Browning gun, that fires a bullet that will penetrate tank armor at 200 yards. The new gun has a range of 7,000 yards.

LAST year the United States, the greatest meat-producing country in the world, imported 160,000,000 pounds of meat, about two thirds of it New Zealand lamb. While this was an increase over 1919, it did not approach the mark of 323,000,000 pounds established in 1914.

PARAGUAY'S exports for 1919 were valued at $14,371,633, as compared with $11,057,721 in 1918. Imports for 1919 totaled $15,360,891, as compared with $10,720,073 in 1918. The United States is third on the list of countries selling to Paraguay, and sixth on the list of her customers.

ALASKAN fisheries products for 1920 were valued at $41,492,124, a decrease of $8,789,940 from 1919. Investments in the industry totaled $70,986,221, a decrease of about $3,000,000 from 1919, and 27,482 persons were employed. The total pack of canned salmon was 4,429,463 cases, three and one half per cent less than in 1919. Canneries in operation numbered 146, eleven more than in the previous year.

A LONDON designer of men's clothes predicts that man of the future will cast off somber colors and appear in hues that rival the rainbow; also that the present-day trousers will be replaced by knee breeches and silk stockings, and the stiff collar by gorgeous cravats of many folds, such as were worn by Beau Brummel and his fellow dandies.

IN the nineteen months that we were at war, according to a speaker at a conference on traffic regulation held at Yale University, 91,000 people were killed on our highways —almost twice the number that were killed in battle or died of wounds. Of the roadway-accident victims 25,000 were school children. Standardized traffic regulations, strictly but intelligently enforced, was the remedy suggested.

HAS THE GREAT MAIL-ORDER BUSINESS REACHED ITS ZENITH?

WHEN, during the deflation period, the sales of the mail-order houses dropped rapidly, even before sales generally in the business field dropped off, there was speculation as to whether the mail-order idea had not reached its zenith and was due to decline.

The mail-order idea is a typically American growth, out of typically American condi-

tions. There was, undoubtedly, something psychological back of the gigantic size that the retail mail-order business attained. Isolation always tends to increase self-consciousness and sensitiveness in people's buying contacts. The "bashful" country boy is well-known to all of us—if we have not actually been one ourselves! The sophisticated clerks in the town and city stores—whose sophistication is not always so overpowering as it appears—do not always work to make the plainer country woman comfortable no matter how full her purse may be. In years past she was not so sophisticated in merchandise or style knowledge as she is to-day. In the evening at home, with the big mail-order catalogue on the table, however, there was no embarrassment when quality and price were discussed. The needs and the details of the merchandise offered could be passed on by the whole family and comments could be made without a supercilious audience. Price may have its influence, variety of selection may enter into the case, but the freedom of thought and action that accompanies the use of the catalogue has undoubtedly played its part in building a business that to-day involves some $665,000,000 each year.

The mail-order business, it is well to remember, has been built to this point in the face of bitter opposition. If you want to touch a sore spot in all small-town business you have only to say "mail order." There is scarcely a small-town newspaper in the United States that does not devote a part of its space to keeping the dollar at home. It is bread and butter to the town to malign the mail-order house. Viewed as a whole, it seems absurd. There is about $40,000,000,000 spent in retail trade in this country in a year, and there is but little more than 1.7 per cent of this spent with the mail-order houses. This would surely seem to be insignificant enough to take the sting out of the mail-order business.

This is not a fair and proper basis upon which to figure, however, for approximately 81 per cent of the retail mail-order business is done in what are known as rural districts. On this basis, the mail-order business done in rural communities constitutes about three per cent of all the business done in such communities. Even so, it is not as startling as it might be, is it? A certain part of that three per cent consists of business that would not go to the local merchant anyway. A great many things are purchased from a catalogue that either would not or could not be bought locally. The catalogue of such a concern as Sears-Roebuck, contains a lot of things that merchants in towns of 2,500 and less have never dreamed of, much less stocked.

The great bulk of the mail-order business is done by a few companies, and these loom large by comparison and by reason of their methods of doing business. Based on the figures for total business done, which is at best an approximation, three houses do over 60 per cent of the whole. In order to accomplish so huge a task, the names of these three must have become household words.

The average sale is comparatively small, but the number of accounts is what makes the business as a whole seem a menace. It is not at all likely that even one local store could do business on the basis of the mail purchases of any one given community. But, because the number of mail-order buyers is large, it appears as if the whole commercial structure is about to fall about the ears of the community. Last year Sears, Roebuck & Co. did $254,595,059 worth of business—over a quarter of a billion dollars, which is quite some sum. It is not remarkable that the local merchant feels himself in danger when he views the total, but there are mitigating circumstances. This business represented an average sale of only about $42. The average farm family spends considerably more than that for just two items of food—coffee and sugar.

As to the methods of reaching so large a number of customers, and after reaching them, selling them, and holding them, there is much that can be said. The local merchant can well take a leaf out of the mail-order merchant's book, speaking figuratively, or several hundreds of them, speaking literally, in regard to some matters. In others, he is handicapped, as general business is always handicapped, by great power that is centralized in one concern or one group of concerns.

A catalogue, such as Sears-Roebuck sends out, involves not only great labor, but also great investment. If every merchant was willing to invest even $1.00, which is less than the present cost of this catalogue, for every customer who has purchased from him during the last year and would spend that dollar in presenting his merchandise to that customer

personally—for that is what the catalogue does—it is highly probable that his returns would average more than $42 in sales.

There is no question that houses like the one mentioned have a tremendous buying and selling advantage so far as price is concerned. Any merchant who is in a position to take the whole output of factories is bound to get it at a better price than the one who takes one-hundredth part or less of such output. With selling and advertising and a portion of the distribution cost eliminated, there is no reason why the consumer should not get a much better price, and this is why the mail-order house prospers.

The mailing list is the heart of the mail-order business, and the mailing list is also the most delicate and easily disturbed part of it. Among, say, 6,000,000 customers there is considerable natural mortality, due to death, disaster, or desuetude, and new customers must be added constantly or business will decline.

Because of the heavy cost of the catalogue, it represents a great percentage of the total advertising expenditure. The proportionate percentage for each kind varies with the age of the company. In the early stages of the business, the expenditure runs about 10 per cent catalogue and 90 per cent newspaper and magazine advertising, but, as the company becomes established, the proportion changes to approximately 75 per cent catalogue and 25 per cent newspaper and magazine—in some cases even heavier for the catalogue.

There are certain conditions that have worked hardships on the mail-order houses during the last year, and the question has been raised as to whether they were threatened with extinction. Because of the necessity of guaranteeing prices during the life of the catalogue, which ranges from three to six months, the inventory of a large mail-order house is always a heavy one. When the bottom fell out of the market last year, such concerns as Montgomery Ward, Sears-Roebuck, National Cloak & Suit, and many others, found themselves with large stocks of goods which they could not possibly sell at the catalogue price. Similar goods were being thrown on the market by retailers at any price that would provide cash. Fortunately, most of the companies had accumulated large surpluses, which served to cover the losses that had to be taken.

The stock was moved, through both regular channels and through temporary local distributing stores at reductions of 10 per cent to 30 per cent or more. Sears-Roebuck showed a net profit for 1920 of $11,746,670 against $18,890,125 for 1919. The operating and other expenses for Montgomery Ward were 107.72 per cent of sales last year, and this company had its largest sales for any year—$101,745,271. Inventory losses of as much as 35 per cent were taken.

In some instances it is possible that the chain stores have diverted some trade that would otherwise have gone to the mail-order houses, but not in many so far. The chain stores as a rule keep to the larger towns and cities, so that they are competitors in comparatively few instances in the real mail-order field. Nor do chain stores carry the variety of merchandise that the large mail-order houses do.

There is another factor that undoubtedly has cost the mail-order business something and that is the increasing accessibility of the farmer to shopping centers. With the advent of the automobile the good-road mileage has greatly increased. Out of the 8,221,297 passenger cars registered in the United States, the farmers own almost 38 per cent. Among the agricultural States, Iowa and Nebraska, for instance, there are 95 cars for every 100 farms, although, as yet, Iowa also stands first in per-capita expenditure for mail-order purchases. Still, with the farmer equipped to run into town and get whatever he wants whenever he wants it, the question arises whether he wouldn't rather do that than order from a catalogue "sight unseen" andwait until the railroads get around to delivering it.

On the whole, however, the volume of mail-order business, in all probability, will increase rather than decrease, due to a balance of factors at work in its favor. Forty-two dollars average volume per customer is a trifle compared with the average annual volume of family purchases, and any general increase in purchasing volume will favorably affect the mail-order business with a logical percentage of this increase. The mail-order habit, once acquired, is known to have a certain staying power.

The Extra Warm Cabin

By Theodore Seixas Solomons

Author of "'Water, Water, Everywhere, Nor Any——'" "The Raisin' Heat," Etc.

At the bottom of Braith's heart still glowed one last, saving spark of honor

THE mail was in at Fortymile. For the second time in that winter of famine a straggling queue of bearded, shivering figures in Mackinaws waited, eager yet patient, outside the small log-cabin post office of the pioneer Yukon mining village. Each time the door opened, to admit one man and expel another, a little cloud of steam issued. The spirit thermometer affixed to the rough-hewn casing read, under its veneer of frost, seventy degrees below zero.

Forrest Benton, the camp-appointed constable, hurried from the post office with his meager sheaf of letters and dived into the shelter of the Aurora Saloon. There, in a far corner, he glanced hesitantly at the top letter, in a woman's hand—and put it in his pocket. The others he read quickly.

Withdrawing, now, the pocketed letter, he stood as if uncertain how to open it, how to read it. He made as if to tear the end, but, instead, drew his pocketknife and carefully slit the envelope, carefully drew out the letter, and, holding it, glanced about him—at men and dogs and squaws, his ears filled with the discord of their strident voices. Not here! He could not read *her* letter here. Better the freezing, cleanly air. He withdrew to the river bank.

He read:

DEAR FORREST: Since Gordon's last letter came—such a bitter letter it was—I have hesitated whether to write to you again at all. But I know you are waiting all those cold, wintry months, and my silence would be even more cruel than what I must now say to you.

I know that Gordon must have tried your patience woefully. But you promised to be patient for my sake, if not for his. He was weaker than you and lacked your advantage of always having made your own way. You have been evasive, almost silent about what has occurred; but Gordon, at my request, has spoken out. He has taken much of the blame; but, from what he tells me—and the Braiths are not liars—I cannot help feeling that you have been disloyal to him.

No matter how he may have failed in little things, think of the courage he has shown—he, a young man reared as he has been—to attempt to wrest from those frozen wastes the wherewithal to maintain the place of his family. To leave him to continue the struggle alone, Forrest, was not the act of a friend or a Virginian. I dislike to ask it, but was it honorable? And in deserting him, did you not desert his sister, too?

I reckon this must be my last letter, Forrest. It hurts me as much as I know it hurts you. I pray for your safety and success as well as his. MARGY.

Benton's sensitive face had slowly flushed—all but a spot on either cheek, which was freezing. The warning *ping* of the nerves had gone unheeded. He stood, the letter in his hand, brows drawn, lips moving. A little later, feeling the crusting of his cheeks, mechanically he raised his free hand and rubbed them. Then he hurried to his cabin.

Before a replenished fire, Benton's thoughts grew reminiscent—not of his two years of adventuring in the Far North, but of the years before, in the peaceful, stately little Virginia town of his birth and rearing, the abode of little-changing folk, where Margery Braith, her sisters and her aging mother lived with their one negro servant and his wife, sole remnants of an affluent ease that had dwindled with the dwindling of their acres.

His own family? But was it a "family?" In that old-fashioned nook of old Virginia, the Bentons were just people—village people. Very likely they had always been of a good sort. Margy had told him once very gently that she was sure of it; that a family place was nothing, and he must not care a bit, for they were all good Americans. Yet he had felt that deep down in her patrician heart she had regretted that the friend and schoolmate who was so close to her, closer than any other, was just a village lad. Mrs. Braith had always been "nice" to him—almost too nice!

If Gordon Braith had answered the call of the far-distant gold fields to lift the debt that burdened the remaining acres, had not he, too, Forrest Benton, answered it for the same reason? And buried in his breast, obscured to the eye of his conscience, had lain the hope that it would be he, and not Gordon, who would achieve that success. Who, knowing Gordon, would expect success of him? Gordon! He flushed again—with hot anger now. Before, in their difficulties and final parting, he had felt only deep regret, even sorrow, albeit tinctured with contempt. But with this letter still in his hand sullen rage possessed him. What smooth distortions of the truth had the suave ingrate dared to write to Margy?

A knock sounded at the door. To Benton's startled "Come!" a ruddy-faced man entered and said heartily:

"You're wanted, Forrest. There's a meetin'."

"Oh, all right."

Benton closed the draft and damper of his sheet-iron stove and followed his summoner into the bitter night.

The "Annex" of the Aurora Saloon and Dance Hall, a large card room in the center of which stood the only pool table in Alaska, was the place of meeting. A dozen citizens were congregated there listening to a tall, pale man, almost a skeleton—"Kanuck" Morrison.

"Begin again, will you?" requested Bill Griffith, chairman of the Fortymile Vigilantes, when Benton entered. "Looks like a job for you, Forrest. You know Kanuck, don't you?"

"I think I saw you last summer, didn't I?" asked Benton.

"Like as not," was the reply. "I was here all spring till July."

"Where you been since?"

"Prospectin' on the Porcupine for seven months. I just got in the other day. And bein' that I'd been livin' on jerky for a week and my dogs mainly on snowballs, I naturally put straight for my cache out on the creek. Well, I seen right off that my grub had been tampered with. I'd left it covered with an eight-by-ten tent tied tight around it. One end was loose and flappin'. I climbed up and found my two sacks of flour gone and some odds and ends. It's the flour that hurts. It would have done me till spring—used careful."

"That's the way we're all usin' flour this winter, pardner," observed Sam Patch, famous recorder of that early Yukon camp.

"So I learned when I tried to buy a sack or two from the store," replied Morrison bitterly.

"Any suspicions?" asked Benton.

"Well, of course I looked for tracks. But the new snow and winds has covered them up—except in one place, over the hill and down on the next gulch, where the steep bank of the channel is nearly bare. A sled has been dropped down there right off the hill and pulled up the other bank through a deep snowdrift, where the tracks stopped, of course. A little ways off was a small shack. There was no smoke comin' out of it, and the door was closed. So I didn't go in."

"Where's your cache?" asked Benton.

"On Three-Mile Gulch where I put down three shaller holes when I first come last spring."

"Anybody know who that shack belongs to on Windy Gulch?" asked Griffith briskly.

There was silence, the men looking at each other for signs of knowledge. At length Benton spoke up reluctantly.

"It belongs to Gordon Braith."

There was an angry murmur.

"Where is he? Anybody know?" demanded Griffith.

It was understood in the camp that the partners had "split up," the previous fall, but the surmise was general that they were probably aware of each other's movements. All eyes turned to Benton, who answered with constraint yet with a certain relief in the intonation: "*I* don't."

Morrison, fagged, gaunt, hopeless, leaned against the wall. "Fine camp!" he murmured disconsolately.

Griffith glowered at him. "Is it the camp's fault if there's now and again a two-legged wolf prowling around the creeks? You can't keep that kind out. *Run* 'em out—yes, when you catch 'em. That's all you can do. This winter—run 'em *up*." He jerked his thumb toward a notice on the wall. Benton glanced at it. He seemed compelled to, though he knew it well, for he himself had tacked it up after Sam Patch, the recorder, had carefully printed it by hand, together with six copies of it. Morrison crossed the room and read it:

"Borrowing!" grub from cabin or cache in absence of owner not permitted in this camp this winter. Leaving name no excuse. Penalty,

five-eights inch rope over nearest tree. By order——

FORTYMILE VIGILANCE COMMITTEE.
WM. GRIFFITH, *Chairman.*
SAM PATCH, *Secretary.*

"When were them put up?" asked the Canadian.

"A month after news came that the *North Star* that carried the winter's grub had bust her crank shaft 'way down on the lower Yukon. This winter it's a case of keep your grub or else rot with scurvy or die. Four out of five of us are on rations, more or less, and there's hardly a man in the camp is as hefty and husky as he was."

"Wonder if the hell hound that broke into my cache saw that notice?" queried Morrison.

"He certainly did, if he could read," replied old Sam. "They were posted in the town, up and down the Yukon, up Fortymile River, and on Dome Creek. Conspicuous places, every one, weren't they, Forrest?"

"They were." Benton was very pale.

"What you goin' to do about it?" suddenly shouted Morrison. "I'm what you might call hungry—for bread—right now, and I can't beg nor borrow a sack for love nor money!"

"We know you can't," answered Griffith quietly. "As to what we'll do——" His voice, too, rose suddenly to anger. "If we can get the proof, we're going to track him down and hang him!"

The group drew together in ominous conference, questioning Morrison closely, thumbing a rude map of the creeks produced by Patch, who pointed out that there was no other camp than Braith's within several miles of the locality of Morrison's cache.

"Well, what do you say? Shall we search that shack on Windy Gulch?" asked Griffith, to which a growling assent was immediately given, Benton alone remaining silent. They moved in a body to the door, which had been cautiously opened to curious, peering faces. Benton hung back.

"Come on, Forrest!" called Griffith. "You're liable to be needed when we get there."

With heavy steps the young Southerner followed.

II.

Two miles up a far gulch of Dome Creek, tributary of Fortymile River, in front of a small log hut whose walls were banked high with turf and mud, two dog teams and nine men came to a grinding halt. The air was perfectly still, but so intensely cold that the congealing breath that issued from nostrils and open, panting throats gave the curious illusion that the dogs as well as their drivers were smoking.

The men entered the cabin and made a fire. Each one, as he filed in, had noticed a sack of flour, half full, that stood under the table crudely made of poles. But none spoke of it until, hands warmed, Griffith turned to Morrison and said, without indicating anything: "Look at it."

The Canadian miner drew out the sack and examined it.

"It's not mine," he declared promptly.

Dave Holbrook, the storekeeper, bent over the sack and rubbed its convex surface.

"Store brand," he announced, "Starr Mills, Port Costa. What was yours, Kanuck?"

"It's easy known, if you find it," replied Morrison with a wan smile. "We lugged them—me and Barnes, that left me to go over to the Chandelar—all the way from Edmonton down the Mackenzie, over the Rat Portage and down the Porcupine. Two years we was. And them two sacks was the last. It's good Canadian hard-wheat flour, milled in Winnipeg and double-sacked, the label says. And my initials was stenciled on besides. The printing was more dim from the handling—five hundred times, I guess we hefted them sacks, in and out of canoes and skiffs and sleds and rafts and on and off our backs in portages—dim, I say, but readable."

"Well, here's another full sack under the bunk," announced a stooping man. He drew it out.

"Same brand," said the storekeeper after patting the loose flour from the surface of the sack. "Hullo!"

He was examining the sewing. "This ain't mill twine. It's common white cotton like I use for tying packages. And the ears ain't made right. This sack has been refilled!"

Exclamations of surprise and suspicion followed this very positive assertion, upon which Benton's voice broke in petulantly:

"That's no evidence. What's the use? Let's get out of here!"

Morrison, it was observed, was blinking thoughtfully at the refilled sack, his furrowed face serious, determined.

"Wait a minute. Lemme look round a bit."

On all fours he nosed about the cabin, searching its littered corners, moving trash from under the bunk and table. Back of the stove, pressed like oakum into a long crack in the heat-shrunk logs, his fingers lingered for a moment on some wadded fabrics and then wrenched them free. Still on his knees, he shook them out, whereupon a dirty cloud enveloped him. He took them to the door; others followed. Against the outside logs he beat the bags—as they proved to be—until the faded, worn letters of the Winnipeg mills and the initials "J. M" were discernible. The sacks were double, the bottoms caked and grimy.

Griffith broke the silence with the grim question: "Is that enough, gentlemen?" His finger, pointed interrogatively at one after another of the Vigilantes, elicited, after a pause from each, a nod—reluctant, but convinced. When the finger came to Benton, Benton was staring at the floor.

"All right, then," snapped Griffith. "Let's get him! Benton!"

Benton glanced up.

"Get him!"

"I'd rather not."

Taking a quick step toward him, Griffith fixed upon the lean young Virginian a piercing eye.

"Each man on this committee swore an oath to the camp. You swore yours."

"I cain't track down my partner—my own home neighbor!"

Griffith laid his hand on the other's shoulder. "Look here, Forrest"—Benton raised his head—"you *can*. No man can if you can't. *Will you?*"

Benton stood, as did the older man, like a statue. And while unwaveringly he stared into Griffith's stern eyes the words of the oath he had made solemnly intoned themselves upon his inner ears. Finally:

"Yes, I will!" he said.

"All right." Griffith turned away to hide his emotion.

In the stir that followed plans were made. This spell of cold was deadly to the ill-equipped, and Gordon Braith, they knew, would never "mush" away. He was somewhere in or near the diggings. Nevertheless, as a precaution, it was agreed that both sleds should make the highest camp at the head of Dome Creek before dark. There, the farthest outpost of the Fortymile placers, the two sleds should separate in the morning, one circling east, the other west, searching the divides for tracks of any outbound sled. They would meet in Fortymile the next night and organize a permanent patrol should Benton, in the meantime, fail to "get him" on the creek.

"Don't you think you'd better stick pretty close around his camp, here, Forrest?" suggested Griffith, as the Vigilantes hurriedly prepared to depart.

"Yes, I reckon so!" Benton replied dully.

In a few moments he was alone in the little cabin, his bitter thoughts encompassing him, and the dark. He forgot to mend the fire. The cabin grew cold. His shivering brought him back from a far and sunny clime. Unconscious of his hunger, he threw himself miserably upon the bunk, drew about him his fur robe and relapsed into a half somnolent wretchedness from which, presently, he was brought to himself by the harsh, creaking sound of sled runners on the sandlike surface of the snow. It was Braith, undoubtedly. Under his breath he gritted a curse.

The door of the shack flew open to an impetuous fist blow. Silhouetted against the brilliant, starlit sky stood a slight man, of a figure not unlike Benton's. His parka hood was drawn tightly over his face. Only his nose and frost-fringed eyes were revealed. Entering the dark cabin, he came to the table and put out a confident hand for matches. He struck one, lit the candle, and started a fire. Then he turned and saw that the bunk was occupied.

"Who are you?" he asked frightenedly, as he reached quickly under his parka.

"It's I—Benton."

"You! Forrest?" There was sudden relief. Then—coldly: "When did you come?"

"This afternoon."

Braith added wood to the kindlings in the stove. He said nothing further. In a few moments, at the howling of his dogs, he left the cabin, and for some minutes Benton heard only the crunchings of the man's feet and the lighter, resonant patter of the unharnessed dogs as they capered about in the snow. Then Braith reëntered the shack with his sleeping bag and flung it in a corner. Still silent, he set about getting supper. Occasionally he glanced furtively at Benton, who lay staring at the poles of the roof. But the strain was too great, for finally he said in carefully contrived tones of contempt:

"May I inquire to what I owe the honor

of this visit? I reckon it's anyhow three months since I've been similarly favored."

Still cursing the mischance—Braith's need of food, evidently—that had delivered the man into his unwilling hands, Benton took no notice of the sarcasm. "Let us have some supper, first, Gordon," he evaded.

At the end of a silent meal, Braith, raising his eyes from his parka pouch from which he was withdrawing his pipe and tobacco, confronted a Colt's revolver, its muzzle pointed at his right shoulder. The sight transfixed him!

"Put your hands up, Gordon, and turn around!" In the flickering light of the candle Benton's face was as pale as the other's. For a moment Braith seemed uncertain. His eyes showed more of their whites. Then he obeyed.

Benton jerked the revolver from his prisoner's hip pocket and dropped it into his own. Then he flung him a pair of handcuffs with a curt "Put them on!"

Again Braith obeyed—and suddenly sat down, beads of sweat gathering upon his face. Benton now put away his weapon and made ready to smoke. The thought that a purely personal matter pressed for utterance at so ill a time made his hand shake; he could hardly fill his pipe. Yet it had to be said! He turned savagely to the handcuffed man on the stool:

"Tell me what you wrote to Margy, you dirty——" He restrained himself. He could not call a bound man the cur he was. "How *dared* you write her such a letter?"

"Oh, *that's* why you've come here, Forrest Benton! You're holding me up with a gun to punish me for keeping you out of my family!"

"Cur!" gritted Benton, sorry for his former clemency of speech. "*You* keep *me* out of your family! *You!*"

"What do you mean—'You?'" In that scornful emphasis which Braith's question echoed there was portent to him of something transcending the grievance of the letter to Margy, of something symbolized by the gun, the handcuffs. But Benton made no answer. He glowered at the man whom he had known since boyhood.

Braith cleared his throat. "I wrote her about it at her request. If you think I lied about——" His weak face flushed.

"I don't know whether you lied or not," said Benton hotly. "You were maybe too clever for that. But you must have complained before, and hinted at contemptible things, or she never would have urged you to tell her the story of our troubles. That was your chance, and you poured it out to her—your own perverted version of it. You, always doing your best, you drone! You coward!—always hiding behind your gentle breeding, your soft hands, your 'unfamiliarity with physical labor,' as you liked to term it.

"You didn't *dare* to call me your servant, but that's the way you regarded me, and you know it. You *wouldn't* work. *I* could do it—I who put up my full share of the expense—earned it, saved it, myself. While your half your mother gave to you out of the pitiful last she had. Disloyal to *you,* a friend and Virginian? A Virginian—*you!*"

"And *you?*" echoed Braith sneeringly. "You take me a prisoner at the point of a gun and handcuff me, and then sit there and tongue-lash me. You call me a coward. What are you?"

Benton flushed. "I'd say what I'm saying to you just as sure and as quick if you were free, and you know it well, Gordon Braith. I swore I would, when I read her letter. You did it for spite, for revenge—for leaving you to make a man of yourself here, alone, where I tried to do it for you and couldn't."

"Man of myself! Say, free me—if you've done with your vilification. Free me and come out there in the snow. You're my weight. You can pay off that score if you think I wronged you in telling my folks you broke your word and deserted me. And *I'll* work off some old scores, too!"

He had actually persuaded himself it was for this, this tongue-lashing, that Benton had taken him off guard and fettered him. He dared not name to himself another reason. But Benton undeceived him.

"Gordon, if you mean that I've handcuffed you to tell you what I think of you you're a fool. You don't. You know better."

The manacled hands trembled. Benton, whose eyes were on them, noted it, and the last hope that his boyhood friend was innocent of a dastardly theft died within him.

"What are you-all here for, then?" asked Braith in a strangely unnatural voice.

"My duty," returned Benton. "Don't you know I was appointed constable or sheriff or whatever you've a mind to call it?"

The hands trembled again. "Appointed? How?"

"Evidently you haven't been to Forty-mile since fall."

"No, I haven't," admitted Braith. "Since we split up and I got this claim and the shack here I've been—well, living here and—prospecting."

"What were you doing away from here the last two or three days?"

"I've been cutting wood on the mountain, yonder—too far to return every day. How did you know?"

"Because a man came here day before yesterday and found the shack empty."

"Who?"

"The man whose flour you stole!"

The manacled man turned white. He seemed about to faint. But he gripped himself and rose and lifted his head.

"How dare you say that to me, Forrest Benton!"

"Isn't it true?" Benton held his eyes—till they fell.

"No—I swear I——"

"I cain't blame you for swearing to a lie. Maybe *I* would—to save my life."

"My life!"

"You know the notice! You've seen it posted on Dome Creek below the mouth of this gulch. You may not have been in town. You may not have known I accepted the post of peace officer when the miners organized. But you know the law they made. You've seen the notice!"

"I saw the notice—afterward." He said it in an awed, husky whisper.

"After—what?" asked Benton sternly.

"After—after——" He looked to the right—at the stove; to the left—at the bunk. "After it was posted, of course!"

"Of course," murmured Benton.

By an effort Braith flared out, "I say, who dares to accuse me of stealing a man's flour?"

"I do—for one," answered Benton.

"You—you wouldn't inform on me, Forrest, even—if you did know it—even if I *did* steal it—which is ridiculous."

Benton frowned. "I believe I would have, from public duty," he murmured thoughtfully. "Before, that is—before I got her letter. But not after that. It would have seemed too much like revenge!" Suddenly he raised his head and cried in passion, "Gordon! Gordon! I tried to avoid it, to avoid coming out here. I reminded them we were partners, old friends from the same town back in God's country. But they were grim. There was no escape."

"Surely, *you* didn't tell them!"

"No. It was he who told them—Kanuck Morrison, whose cache——"

"He returned? He came back? He—he is here?" There was horror, consternation in the cry.

"Yes. And he will go without bread. You know—you must know it—that a man cain't get grub, especially flour, in this half-starving camp. Couldn't you have done without it—lived on corn cake, maybe? Or even borrowed from me? God, man! I'd have gone back with you and starved with you, if need be! We could have eaten our moccasins and our sled lashings rather than disgraced——"

"How do you *know?* You say *you* know!"

"I'm just one who knows."

Braith raised high his handcuffed arms. His face dripped.

"Tell me! For God's sake, don't keep me in suspense."

"The sacks!"

"The sacks?"

"Gordon, you were careless. You changed the sacks, but you should have burned the old ones. You calked that crack with them—yonder, in the logs. Morrison—he ferreted about this cabin, like a houn' dog on the scent—and found them! Just careless, you were. I told you in Alaska it might mean death—I little dreamed *this* kind of death!"

Braith sat down, his face drawn, his eyes staring straight into Benton's. His lower lip seemed palsied; it wagged helplessly. By an effort he withdrew his gaze. It fled to the window; to the door; to the roof, as though seeking an escape for his spirit, if not for his body. Then, abruptly, he flung himself on his knees in front of his captor.

"You wouldn't give me up, Forrest. I—I didn't see the notice until after—after I'd taken them."

"It makes no difference!" Benton flung at him in disdain. "Notice or no notice, law or no law, death's good enough for a thief—or one like you, at least, that steals not only flour but his own good name and his family's honor. Don't tell *me* that you didn't see it till after!"

"But I didn't suppose he'd be back till spring, when there would be plenty again,

On my soul, Forrest, I looked on it as so much grub wasted. I saw that cache. I go by it to the timber. It worked on my mind. I saw it at night. It got mixed with dreams I had of starving—here, alone."

Benton wrung his hands; almost wept. "Oh, you coward! Always afraid of something—of rapids or swamps or heat or cold. Take the cabin we built, that fell to my share. I was looking at it as we came up the river this afternoon. The heaviest dry logs, hewn to fit, were not warm enough for you. You insisted on our taking weeks more of our precious summer days to build a wall of sod all round it—to make it an Extra Warm Cabin. Always afraid! I should think you would have been afraid to save yourself from starving by making a Braith a thief! You, an F. F. V.—one of the first families of Virginia."

"Forrest, Forrest," cried the man who was always afraid. "You're wrong. I can die. I'm willing to die. But not with a rope around my neck. You know I can't. Forrest"—his roving eye, thought-brightened, sought Benton's—"I'll retract what I said to Margy. I'll tell her the truth—you stayed by me patiently; as long as you could; longer than any other man would have. For her sake it was, I know. But still you did. I'll tell it to her. I'll write it now. Then let me go. Nobody will know I came back to the cabin. I'll mush over the divide with no grub, and I reckon I'll freeze or starve in a few days. And you can follow me and get me, and they'll never know. And mother and the girls will never know!"

Benton sat as still as death. For many minutes he struggled with himself. Why should he not do this? Since death was the final penalty the thief must pay, his duty would be done in the spirit if not in the letter. And he, Forrest Benton, the worshiper, would regain that adored being upon whom his every hope had centered since Heaven first painted upon his soul the glowing vision of Margy as his wife!

Ah, but if he should escape? That was it. He might meet some traveler, come upon some Indian camp. He could not trust this poltroon to die! Yet his vindication—he had a right to it. Margy, who loved him, had a right to it. He would take the letter, anyhow. He leaned forward to the suppliant.

"Get up! Sit down!"

Benton arose. He found his bag and drew from it a pad of paper and a fountain pen, and laid them on the table.

"Write it!"

"Will you let me go?"

Benton drew his revolver and pointed it at him.

"You bargaining devil! Do you have to have a man threaten to blow your head off before you are willing to say the truth on *paper*—and undo the wrong you've done? Most men who are about to meet their Maker are glad of a chance to purge their souls!"

"You coward!" wailed the manacled man. "You coward—to take advantage of my plight."

"Your sister will need a man's protection when word comes to them that her brother, a Braith of Virginia, has died a felon's death. I am that man. You write it!" He took a step forward and aimed the revolver.

"Don't!" shrieked the terrified man. "I'll write it. Give me time; give me——" His body swayed.

Benton snatched a flask from his bag, unscrewed the cap, and handed it to the fainting man, who swallowed the liquor avidly. Then, with one hand released, he slowly composed his letter and pushed it over to his captor.

Benton read it carefully. "I reckon that will do. It's surely humble enough." As he resnapped the cuff to the man's right hand, Braith's eyes implored him.

"I've done it—with no promise that you'd let me go."

"You bet you have—under my threat to kill you, here and now!"

"You'll let me go, Forrest? If I swear to you, by the memory of my dead father that I'll take no food, and wander off over the snow crust, and——"

"Go to bed!" commanded Benton.

"You'll think it over?"

The other turned on him fiercely, his control breaking: "Damn you, crawl into your bag, I tell you!"

He flung the caribou sleeping bag on to the bunk, and watched Braith, fully dressed, get into it. He would be very hot and miserable—realizing which, Benton flung open the cabin door so that the bitter air that came clouding in would chill the room, and permit the imprisioned man to be comfortable and perhaps to sleep.

He himself would not sleep. He drew on

his fur parka, wrapped his wolf robe about him, and sat down on the stool, his back resting against the table.

III.

Even had he dared to sleep, he *could* not. All night long, in a dire distress, in a very torture and travail of the soul, he confronted himself within himself. He, Forrest Benton, charged with a solemn duty, trusted implicitly by that little band of northern frontiersmen battling for life in a famine winter—he faced that other Forrest Benton, the human man, the man of one love, one purpose.

Safe in the breast of his coat, near to his heart, was the letter of exoneration, the message that would make him dearer than ever to proud, beautiful Margy Braith. Whether he were to let Gordon Braith hang or go free, this letter would insure his own life's happiness.

He visioned them—him and her, after his return. He would urge her to come to him, to let him make a home for her. They would talk of Alaska, of Gordon, of his magnanimous letter. She would wish to know all—every detail he could tell her of the life and death of her only brother. Could he take her to the altar with lies on his lips? Yes, some lies—humane lies. He could conceal the theft, conceal the pursuit and the proof, conceal the lynching, conceal all that Gordon and the others had done. But could he conceal what *he* had done—forced the letter of exoneration, taken it, and then—delivered her brother over to a lynching gang? Not unless there *was* no lynching. He could conceal his taking of the letter only if he were to let him go!

He remembered Griffith's question—"*Will* you?" Griffith and the rest knew the repugnance, the horror he felt at the duty thrust upon him. They knew and yet they had trusted him when he said, "I will!" Could he betray them, he a Virginian—these serious, kindly, stricken men?

He was hot, suffocating. Rigidly he had sat for hours, thinking, thinking—flogging that master passion of his life with the scourge of his honor and his manhood. He flung the robe from him and walked the cabin, expecting to become cool in a moment. But he did not become cool. He was hot still! He wanted to draw off his heavy fur parka. Did he have a fever? What was it?

He walked out of doors, and the moment he stepped from the beaten path his foot sank deep in the snow. He stepped farther, lifting his feet out of the holes they made. Around the corner of the cabin he felt a breeze in his face—a gentle, summer breeze.

"The *chinook!*" he exclaimed aloud.

It was the sudden wind from far southlands that once in nearly every midwinter in the North dissipates the cold for a few hours or a few days.

He returned to the front of the cabin. The thermometer that he himself, months before, had fastened to the jamb was still there. He did not have to wipe it clear of frost. It was clean and shining in the starlit night. He struck a match and read it—ten degrees above zero. Imagine it! In a few hours, certainly in less than six, the temperature of the Yukon basin had risen at least seventy degrees. And it was still rising. It would be slushy going for them in the morning, whether they were to go together or separately.

He reëntered the cabin, but still stood, facing the doorway, fascinated by something in the contemplation of this rapid thaw. For one thing—if he had been in the Extra Warm Cabin last evening, with the door shut and no fire, he would never have known of this miraclelike change in the weather. For that cabin, built at the urge of cowardice, was a place almost independent of thermal change—a thing literally "out of the weather!" He wondered why the Extra Warm Cabin should obtrude itself so persistently upon his problem-racked mind, till presently he ceased to wonder. *He knew!*

He relit the candle, bending over it grimly, his mouth set, his eyes dilated. He looked at his heavy silver watch. It was three o'clock. It would not be full dawn, not light enough for their recognition by any chance travelers of the river trail for five hours.

He made coffee and fried bacon. Then he roused Braith who, exhausted by his journey of yesterday, had slept in spite of the night's terrors. He was bathed in perspiration.

"Get up, Gordon; you've got to go."

"Go where?" With this man there was no twilight of awakening. His mind had leaped back to its horror and was alert.

"I'll tell you when we're on our way!"

He helped his prisoner wriggle from the sleeping bag and removed the handcuffs to permit him to bathe his face.

Suddenly Braith asked: "Is it horribly hot in here, or do I imagine it? Why, the door is open, too!"

"A *chinook!*" was Benton's brief reply.

He seated Braith at the table and forced him to eat and drink. Then, securing the man again, he left him for a few moments to hitch Braith's three sorry curs to a battered wood sled.

The prisoner followed him out and, once more a prey to terror, would again have thrown himself upon his knees; but, with a smothered disgust, Benton restrained him.

"Don't! Don't, for God's sake, Forrest! *Don't* let them hang me. Anything but that. If you can't turn me loose to end it out in the hills, let me end it here, now!"

"*No!* That would be as bad. Suicide is confession!"

"The disgrace! It will bow their heads —kill my mother. Forrest! I gave you the letter, without any promise!"

"I know you did."

Benton drew forth the letter and slowly tore it into bits.

Braith's face went white.

"Then you're going to give me up!"

"No, I'll *not* give you up. I'll save you from disgrace, for your people's sake, Gordon Braith. But I could not use that letter. It would be saving you more for my sake than theirs—exacting from you your sister's favor as the price of your liberty!"

Into the face of the felon the glad blood came flooding back. His gratitude was eager.

"I'll write her that letter again when I get away," he promised.

But Benton gazed upon him with mournful, brooding eyes. Victor in his all-night struggle with himself, he had crushed from his heart all hope of Margy Braith.

Gesturing to his prisoner to seat himself in the sled, he started the dogs—who once had known him as their master. It was not easy to keep the sled on the trail, the compactness of which had saved it from thawing. On either side, the snow was loose, frothy. When he was sure Braith had observed this difficulty of travel, Benton addressed to him this carefully framed speech:

"These three dogs will never haul you over the hills now. The minute you're beyond sled trails at the head of Dome Creek, you'll sink to the bed and drag. And that will be the end of you!"

Though it should not—could not change his course, yet he wondered if Braith, remembering his promise to starve or freeze, would answer: "Well, what of that?" He hoped he would—hoped it against all likelihood. The hope was vain!

"Cain't you get me more dogs?" was the eager reply.

"I'll have to. I'll hide you to-day, and come for you at dark to-night with three more of my own team, and——"

"And I can start out directly, so that by morning I'll be over the divide. With a light load, six dogs will lug through the soft snow somehow. And as soon as the weather tightens up again we will have a new crust, and I can make good time south." In a few minutes he haltingly asked: "Can you—bring me some grub, too?"

Benton did not answer for a moment. Then, in a strained voice he said: "I'll bring you all you'll need!"

"Forrest, I want to say how I——"

"Stop!" cried Benton in anguish. "Say nothing—nothing!"

When they reached the main Fortymile, its broad valley bathed in the dim, silvering light of many stars, Braith became nervous and spoke again.

"Some early birds may pass us. Where are you going to hide me, Forrest?"

"In our old place, the Extra Warm Cabin. Everybody knows it's mine, now, though I haven't occupied it since I moved down to Fortymile to take this constable's job. No chance passer-by will bother you there, especially with the door padlocked and no smoke from the stovepipe."

To this came the expected reply: "I'd suffocate in that cabin with a fire in the stove in weather like this." After a pause: "You'll be back to-night?"

"At dark."

Then silence. The dogs, familiar with the long river trail to town, quickened their gait, the sled sluing and sliding about on the slippery track. Dawn light had grayed the sky and dimmed its stars when a sharp bend in the valley abruptly disclosed the squat, heavy, sod-reënforced walls and roof of the Extra Warm Cabin.

"Whoa!" called Benton. He went to the solidly cased, tightly fitting door—made by himself, a master mechanic. He drew a key from his pocket and inserted it in the padlock.

"Quick—before some sled comes along!"

Braith was by his side in a moment. He paused.

"Give me your pad and pen, will you, Forrest? I want to write some letters to give you to-night to send out on the up-river mail. You can address them yourself so that my handwriting won't——"

Benton was already fetching paper and pen from his bag. Freeing his prisoner's hands, he swung open the door. Braith entered and turned:

"Be sure to snap the padlock."

"I will," said Benton. And he did!

Gordon Braith, still exhilarated from the long ride in the springlike air of the chinook-filled valley, was conscious at first only of an agreeable coolness. He threw himself on the bare bunk, the more comfortable bunk that used to be his. In a few minutes he felt cold. He shivered slightly. He arose and walked to the window, made very small on purpose to conserve the cabin's warmth. The inner of its triple panes was still frosted. He felt it with his numb fingers.

It occurred to Braith that it would be very convenient to have his parka. He had left it on the sled. In his eagerness for concealment, it had not occurred to him to bring it in. Why should it have? It was so warm —twenty above, Benton had said. Indeed, it had felt sixty above, after the cruel cold of the preceding fortnight. His mittens, too, were in the sled, the cord uniting them slung around the neck of his parka hood.

He searched about the cabin. It was bare of fabrics. He thrust his hands into his trousers pockets and drew his stocking cap down over his ears.

The Extra Warm Cabin! What was the matter with it? He remembered having said to Benton that he would suffocate in that cabin in weather like this.

He had been sitting on the lower bunk. But he arose again and walked the floor. His face was very cold. He had to rub his cheeks, nose, and chin occasionally. But his mind was active—preternaturally so; and he resolved to think it out—this singular phenomenon of a freezing cabin on a day like this, almost a summer day.

Walls of thick, dry logs, hewn to fit close and chinked with oakum; banked up all round by a thicker wall of summer-dried moss sods; sods upon the roof—well, he knew the purpose of this construction. It was to keep the stove-generated warmth of the cabin from passing through those heat-resisting walls. Not even the hard-biting cold of seventy-three below had been able during a whole night to penetrate them sufficiently to so much as glaze the water in the bucket. That was the cabin's record of efficiency the previous winter when he and Benton had occupied it.

But now? Why, the conditions were reversed. It was the outside air that was warm—suddenly warm—while the air in the cabin—— What was the air in the cabin —this air that was penetrating him, painting white spots upon his face? Unoccupied for weeks, the cabin's temperature was that of the outside air of yesterday—between sixty and seventy below zero; and the warm, outside air of to-day could not penetrate those heat-resisting walls!

Not quickly, that is. Only slowly—of course. It was just a question of time: the warmth *must* come.

Just a question of time! But his hands were cold in his pockets—the colder because he had to expose them frequently in order to rub his face. And his feet? By stamping about the cabin, as he was now doing, they were keeping fairly warm—yet. But how much longer could flesh endure this steady, implacably encroaching cold?

He rubbed his face again. His hands began freezing. He thrust them under the waist band of his trousers; then under that of his undersuit, and held them against the bare flesh of his thighs. In a moment he withdrew them, rushed to the door, shook, kicked it. It was built like the rest of the cabin. It did not budge. The window? A child of seven could not have crawled through it. There was no escape!

His mind was on fire. His memory thrummed. Every detail of last night, of this morning—words, looks, acts—danced before him like motes in the dim light of the cabin. He saw again the haunted eyes of Benton as he promised: *"I'll save you from disgrace!"* He heard again the strained voice in which he said: "I'll bring you all the food you will *need!*"

Benton had taken him at his word—to die alone. Benton had known—better, far better, than he himself had known—of the honor that still lay in the Braith blood. And Benton had resolved to help that blood to be resolute. *Very well!*

He flung himself upon his knees and prayed—not for life to-day, to lose it to-morrow in a hangman's noose—but for a

little more warm blood—for his fingers—to hold the pen.

A few moments only his blue lips moved. Then, energetically, he rose and found the pen. It was cold. He thawed it in his bosom and under his armpit, drew a stool to the bare table, and opened the writing pad.

The ink flowed; then stopped. He replaced the cap and again thrust the black tube under his arm, while he beat and slapped his hands. His face—his face had ceased to sting. He felt it hardening—becoming a mask.

On another sheet he wrote again—warmed the pen, and beat his hands—and wrote again——

The last words were very stiff and large and scrawly, the pen held like a dagger in his stiffening fist.

He was very sleepy; so sleepy he clumped—like a man on stilts—across the floor to the bunk and fell over upon it, dreams already upon him—beautiful dreams of Virginia—of the stately old colonial house of the Braiths—the proud——

IV.

Benton kept his word. He returned at dark. And he brought all the food Gordon Braith would ever need!

As he flung open the door and entered, chill and silence smote him, and he knew. Through the doorway and the tiny window a glow of starlight made visible the bed and table—all he needed to see. Two square, white objects on the table he thrust into his pocket. The form on the bunk he carried to the sled and covered with his robe. Then he relocked the cabin, turned the dogs around and reached the straggling little settlement on the bank of the Yukon before the last card games were played in the Aurora Saloon and Dance Hall—meeting place of the Vigilantes of Fortymile.

He got together a quorum and reported: "I found him in my cabin on the river. He was lying on the bunk, frozen. I've brought him down."

Griffith broke the silence.

"He may have been there for weeks. In that case, some one else, who might have been using his shack on Windy Gulch, could have stolen the flour."

"Would it not be proper, then, to give him the benefit of the doubt?" asked Benton quietly.

"It would be entirely proper."

"And should we not direct Recorder Patch to write a short letter to his folks merely setting forth the fact that he was found frozen in his old cabin?"

"Do it, Patch. There's a team starting for salt water in the morning."

"I'll give you their address, Sam. And, of course, I'll write them myse'f, informally."

Weary, sick at heart, hopeless, Benton went to his shack and drew the two sheets from his pocket. They had been folded very clumsily. On the folded side of one, he read his own name—"Forrest." The letter said:

You locked me in on purpose. You figured it out. Doubtless you knew there were others circling the hills and I could not escape. So you thought of this way—the only way by which I might avoid disgrace. It was like you. You tore up my letter to Margy. That was like you, too. Well, here is another. Read it. Good-by.

Benton threw this note into the fire. Then, tremblingly, he unfolded the other letter:

DEAR SISTER: It is very cold. My hands are numb. Lest anything should happen, I want first to right a wrong done Forrest months ago in that letter. I was angry and I had not understood. He always did what was really best for me, especially his last acts! They were those of a real friend to me and my family—an honorable man—a true Virginian—tell mother——

Benton refolded the letter very gently, his eyes humid.

"Thank God!" he whispered.

A PLEASING RECIPE

BACK in the days of his early struggles as a newspaper man, Josephus Daniels, former secretary of the navy, sometimes found it necessary to supply copy for all the departments of his paper. On one occasion, when he was getting out the "health and beauty" column, he had to answer this inquiry from a subscriber: "What shall I do to obtain white hands?"

After ten minutes spent in frantic search of reference books, the future head of the navy department was inspired. He wrote: "Nothing."

"First Down, Kentucky!"

By Ralph D. Paine

Author of "Eyes in the Boat, Number Six," "The Orphan and the Battle Wagon," Etc.

(*A Five-Part Story—Part V.*)

CHAPTER XVIII.

COLONEL SHELBY UNDERTAKES A MISSION.

AFTER the collision at sea Quartermaster Bowman McMurray, U. S. N., was downhearted. His crumpled destroyer, the *Pemberton,* had proceeded to Norfolk under her own steam and was placed in dry dock at the navy yard. During the tedious repair job there was all the shore liberty that the most sociable bluejacket could desire, but his wages soon vanished from his pockets. Bowman joined one or two festive dinner parties and then dropped out, nor did he find enjoyment in the dances at the Navy Y. M. C. A. hut. He was conscious of his slight lameness, and he found that dancing tired him. He began to fear that his foot had suffered an extra strain at the time of the collision when he had braced himself so firmly to hold the wheel and steady the ship.

He sorely missed the companionship of old Mike Brennan who was in a naval hospital overlooking Hampton Roads. The veteran chief quartermaster, who had toughly survived so many other vicissitudes, was recovering from the shock of losing his good right arm, nor did he mourn the finish of his active career. Not condemned as a worn-out hulk but struck down in action, he had quit the service in proper style as became a man of the old navy. With his havings and his retired pay, he was comfortably provided for, and he intended to have a cottage and a garden where he could watch the warships steam past the red channel buoys or swing in tsately column in the storied waters of Hampton Roads.

Bowman McMurray went to the hospital to visit him as often as the regulations permitted. But when he returned to the idle destroyer at the navy yard, he was rudderless and adrift. He realized that the affectionate guardianship of the chief quartermaster had been a constant inspiration. His buoyant self-reliance had ebbed. He watched the crowded transports sail from Newport News and more destroyers slipping seaward to join the Queenstown Flotilla or the Breton Patrol, and came to feel that he was out of the war.

He was loafing on the *Pemberton's* deck when his attention was caught by what seemed like an apparition. Approaching the dry dock was a stately, venerable gentleman who wore a frock coat and a soft, black hat. He paused to gaze about him with an air of lively interest and raised his hand to salute two or three young officers who hurried by him. It was his tribute to the uniform. Bowman McMurray rubbed his eyes and continued to stare. Then as Colonel Shelby drew near the destroyer's gangway, he ran to escort him aboard.

The first citizen of Somersworth, Kentucky, was thrilled with emotion. The navy was unfamiliar to him and it was a memorable experience to tread the deck of a destroyer. The sight of Bowman McMurray as a blue-clad sailor with a gold wound stripe on the sleeve was a reminder that this was a war which must be won by sea as well as by land.

"Howdy, boy!" exclaimed the colonel. "Glad to find you in a regular fightin' ship. She looks devilish wicked to me. What's the matter with her front end?"

"Nothing much, colonel. We bumped another one. Did you really want to see me enough to come ramblin' down to this old navy yard? It's the finest surprise I ever had in my life."

"I was prepared to chase you till my wind gave out," chuckled Colonel Shelby. "This was easier than I reckoned. And that genial gentleman from No'th Carolina, the secretary of the navy, who has been most infernally maligned, placed himself at my service. When I had concluded my remarks, you

would have thought Bo McMurray was a brass-bound admiral. I had 'em scurryin' around, boy."

"For Heaven's sake, colonel, what's the answer?" implored the dazed McMurray. "Do you mind sitting on deck? I can't ask you below, for there's a hundred men living down yonder and you can't swing a kitten by the tail anywhere in a destroyer."

"I'd like to poke around after a while, Bo, if you don't think I'm too brittle. And will you dine with me in Norfolk. Now, tell me, what's this about a damaged foot? As an old friend, I feel a natural interest."

"Where did you hear about it?" demanded Bowman.

"From your Texas folks. They know me as a pestering old granddaddy. It's what you used to call a coinc'dence. And as I'm looking forward to seein' you tear loose again for Centre College, I want to know."

"That is a closed chapter of my life, gone but not forgotten," declared the McMurray. "I shall always treasure my memories of good old Centre, and in years to come——"

"I heard you spout one after-dinner speech," rudely spoke the colonel. "Don't practice another one on me. You still run true to form. What I have to say is that the papers are made out releasin' you from Uncle Sam's navy, subject to a final medical examination. The question is—are you liable to buck over the traces? This is no kidnapin' expedition."

"Release me for what? Why should I duck the service?"

"To give you the best surgical treatment that money can buy, if there's a ghost of a show to get you trottin' square again. I consulted an eminent surgeon in Washington and he advised this procedure, Bo. If there is any point of honor involved, please permit me to discuss it with you. In such matters, my notions are known to be scrupulous."

Bowman was bewildered. Gratitude swelled uppermost. Was there ever a boy with friends so true and who deserved them less? he said to himself. Yes, a point of honor was involved, a binding obligation, personal and sacred. After painful reflection, he said:

"I don't have to tell you, Colonel Shelby, how it stood me on my beam ends to give up football and college and everything. Maybe I'll have more sense after a while and want to go back to college anyhow, with football cut out. But I can't see it yet. I am that kind of a fool, among others. As for leaving the navy flat on its back, that doesn't worry me so much. I've put in a year and a half of sea service, most of it in foreign waters, and before long they will be shifting me to a desk job ashore. I've lost my punch."

"Then what troubles you, boy?" gently asked the colonel, who perceived that some issue more vital was at stake.

"If you'll go to the naval hospital with me to see old Mike Brennan, I reckon you can understand. The ferry doesn't run right to make it this afternoon, If we had a launch——"

"Let me ask the commandant of the navy yard for a boat," said the colonel. "My credentials are good enough to grab anything short of a battleship."

It was soon arranged and as the launch moved down the harbor, Bowman told his friend the story of Chief Quartermaster Michael Brennan and his self-abnegation. When they reached the wharf and climbed to the long hospital building, they found old Mike sitting in the sunshine on a piazza, with an empty sleeve pinned to his double-breasted blue coat with the red hash bars or enlistment stripes running clear to the elbow. It was the first day he had been permitted to put on his uniform and, crippled though he was, the aspect of enduring solidity was impressive.

No introduction was needed to convey to him that Colonel Harris Shelby was a man of his own kind and kin. The sympathy was instant and unspoken. The colonel uncovered his white head as he grasped the corded hand of the old sailor, with the ensign tattooed on the hairy back of it. Carefully the Kentucky gentleman made clear the motive of his mission while Bowman McMurray listened and looked on. It was manifest that the decision lay with these two elderly men whose long lives had taught them that, above all else, honor was to be greatly preferred. There came a silence during which Mike Brennan gazed at the wide expanse of Hampton Roads and a lone destroyer moving swiftly out to sea while her flag hoist fluttered a fare ye well. From the deck of an anchored battleship floated the music of a band that played "The Long, Long Trail."

"You see exactly how it is, Colonel Shelby," said Bowman, recalled from a

reverie. "Mike Brennan paid the price so I could pass it along. He kept the torch lighted. And as long as he wants me to stay in the service, I'm there! There isn't anything else. I realized that, as soon as I saw what had happened to him, when they picked him off the deck of the *Pemberton* with his arm mashed to a bloody pulp."

"No, me son, 'twas not th' intintion to put shackles on ye," replied the chief quartermaster. "I had ambitions, that's true enough, and the good of the service is th' breath of life to me. But I would ha' tried to shield you from harm that day aboard th' *Pemberton* if your enlistment had been due to run out tin minutes later."

"I never looked at it that you wanted to tie me to the service against my will, Mike," cried Bowman. "It's a debt that I'm glad and proud to pay. All I told Colonel Shelby was that if my lameness should bar me from sea duty, I might be better off and more useful doing something else. It is for you to say."

"Bowman is entirely correct, Mr. Brennan," said Colonel Shelby. "It is for you to say. I am requesting nothing in his behalf. And permit me to assure you of my profound respect and admiration. I have learned more about the American navy from you than from all the dashed volumes of history ever written."

"While they had me hauled out in this hospital," deliberately exclaimed Mike Brennan, "I lay a-thinkin'. Far back I wint in me mind to th' days whin I was a two-fisted lad like this young bucko. He has been patient with me, has Bowman, more patient than I were with old men's fancies. He has told me much about his college, Colonel Shelby, an' how he wint there, as a true man follows the flag of his service. An' the more I laid a-thinkin', the more I mistrusted was I right. Was it steerin' th' boy off his course to try to keep him in the navy? Will he not be passin' it along on his college campus, same as he would on deck? He has a strong influence among th' football lads an' thim that is so unfortunate as to be studyin' books. Could he not be payin' the debt just the same, if ye will call it such?"

Bowman could not bring himself to believe that his shipmate had really surrendered the fond aspirations which had glowed like a beacon light. The boy interpreted it as another sacrifice and was reluctant to accept it. But Colonel Shelby comprehended with a truer insight. Like as a father pitieth his children was the motive in Mike Brennan's heart of hearts.

"It would be wrong for me to try to persuade you in any way," said the colonel to the chief quartermaster. "It may make you feel happier if I tell you about Centre College and this boy, from my own point of view."

Bowman left them together and wandered down to the wharf in front of the hospital. Already his eventful career in the navy seemed like the fragments of a dream, the wild, offshore cruises out of Queenstown to meet the troop convoys, the tragedy of the shattered destroyer which had drowned his comrades by the score, and the maneuvers of the Home Fleet when he had stood the test in the choking smoke screen and learned how to carry on. Among these episodes moved one figure, steadfast, abiding, whose image would never be dimmed. He would not lose sight of Mike Brennan.

When Bowman rejoined his two friends on the hospital piazza, Colonel Shelby was saying:

"Just as soon as they will let you travel, Mike Brennan, I'll be expectin' you for a month in Somersworth. I want to show the Blue Grass folks *a man*. I'll say nothing about my old nigger that will toddle around after you with a mint julep that——"

"He won't be toddlin' far," grinned the man-of-war's man. "Thank you kindly, colonel. There's lots of things you an' me would find it agreeable to yarn about betwixt the two of us."

"And you'll come to see Centre College play football some day, when the team gets going again," eagerly cried Bowman.

"Aye, son, an' I pray God ye will be in the thick of it. 'Tis better so."

"I'll see you again to-morrow, Mike. I don't feel like talking things over just now. It sort of chokes me up. We had some grand old cruises together. And when you break out one of those Kentucky mint juleps, Mike, drink one to the old flotilla. She was good."

Mike nodded, then bravely returned the farewell salute of Colonel Harris Shelby. Bowman went down to the launch with dragging step. He did not turn to look back until the boat was out in the stream. The

chief quartermaster was standing at the edge of the piazza, shading his eyes with his hand as he gazed after them. Bowman waved his cap. The colonel said to him:

"Life is streaked with sadness, boy, and darkened with regrets, no matter how manfully you play it. You're learnin' your lesson young."

"But think of the friends I've had to help me to learn how to play it well," fervently replied Bowman. "Nobody ever had so much to live up to, or so many debts to square."

"That reminds me, Bo. I have a message for you. I wrote it down. Here, I'll tear the leaf out of my notebook."

The colonel said nothing about Nancy Overton's pilgrimage from Texas. This was for her to reveal. Bowman read the few lines in the colonel's shaky scrawl and repeated aloud:

"Tell him I want him to play football again—he will be a worthy fellow some day, if he keeps on——"

"Did she actually give you this message, Colonel Shelby, with her own fair hands?"

"No, you young lunatic. She dictated it, as you might say. I refuse to incriminate myself by answerin' any more fool questions."

"*She* sent me a message like that, and it wasn't another phantom telegram," murmured Bowman, in accents of awe. "And here's a man who has *seen* her. Listen, colonel! I was never more sensible in my whole life. Do you realize what it means? Another responsibility to live up to. Why, it's simply tremendous! That I will be a worthy young fellow some day if I keep on is highly significant."

"It is, if you make good," was the colonel's dry comment. "I should call it a highly conditional statement."

"But how can I fail, with this encouragement, on top of everything else? It may take years and years. Prob'ly it will. But you can just bet I'll bear watching."

"Ah, youth, youth!" sighed the colonel, half aloud. "The way of a man with a maid. And Mike Brennan in the background so soon."

"What's that, sir?" asked the absent-minded McMurray.

"Nothing worth while, boy. Merely an old man's maunderin' reflections."

CHAPTER XIX.

"BEYOND THE ALPS LIES ITALY—AND HARVARD!"

In the locker room of the gymnasium at Centre College, the football men were putting on the faded jerseys and the dingy, padded breeches. The Great War had been an interruption. It was astonishing to see how readily the campus resumed the old routine of work and play which concerned itself so little with the world outside. The young men who had been in the service told their stories to each other and soon tired of it. As heroes their game was fleeting. Most people were anxious to forget there had been a war. For a time they had been moved to think of something else than their own little selfish interests. They had been a nation truly united in a noble purpose, but the strain was too great, so they hastily betook themselves to grabbing dollars and abusing each other.

Amid such unhappy conditions as these, the spirit and traditions of this small college in Kentucky seemed more than ever worth while. Even football took on an aspect which justified the simple faith of old Mike Brennan, that the boys would be passing it along. This was the enduring lesson which Bowman McMurray had learned in a stern school where deeds were precepts.

Surgery had made him whole again. There had been suffering and long idleness, but his feet were nimble to dash through a swaying rush line or dodge past the floundering backs. And he honestly believed that his strength had been restored in order that he might redeem his pledge to Mike Brennan.

They sat upon the benches in the locker room, lacing their cleated shoes. There were new faces in the group, but half a dozen others had played together before. Len Garretson seemed a little taller, leaner, and lazier. When he pulled off his shirt, one saw the red scar of a bayonet wound. In a drawer of his bureau, lost in a jumble of collars and ties, was the medal of the Croix de Guerre. When he referred to the war it was to call it a hell of a mess. John Calvin Mercer, Jr., had acquired a snappy manner and was inclined to be dictatorial. His morbid taste for mathematics had won him a second lieutenant's commission in the ordnance department, and he had waged a fierce campaign of formulas and diagrams from a desk in Washington.

Duncan Fordney and Alfred Cottrell, also brothers in the bonds, had remained in the students' training corps of the college while Gentry, the half back, had gone home to help his father raise more wheat and fat cattle. Perley Kemp, that sturdy captain of the Centre eleven, slept where the poppies blow in France. Prophetic had been the McMurray's eulogy:

> These are the men to tie to, and they have made Kentucky famous. On many a dark an' bloody ground you have seen Perley Kemp plug ahead with the ball, and even if he was slow in starting and didn't gain much distance, a stout heart beat beneath that ragged jersey.

Andy Swope had come back to coach for another season and, although he never boasted, nothing would have surprised him more than to see this team defeated. His veteran players were no longer freshmen in any sense of the word. And his management had ceased to be an experiment. He had the loyal support of the campus which had almost doubled its student population. Success on the football field had already attracted attention to little Centre. It promised to be not only scholarly but famous. The increased attendance meant better football material for the masterful tutelage of Andy Swope, with two hundred students from which to recruit the squad. He had arranged a more arduous schedule of contests, against antagonists of tougher metal than ever before, and found that "the praying Kentuckians" received respectful consideration.

To see them at practice was to perceive that the eleven had become more smoothly coördinated, more consistently powerful. It possessed its own peculiar fire and eagerness, but this was welded into the ideal of *the team*. It had been a doctrine, faithfully preached by Fayette Caldwell, hammered at by Andy Swope, breathed in the very air of the campus, but now it was a living essence. Bowman McMurray had been made captain of the eleven and to his influence was partly due this realization that no man could live unto himself, even in football.

Andy Swope had been filled with forebodings. McMurray could never be made to obey. He was brilliant and unreliable. Bowman knew all this and that the coach had sworn "to make him or break him." And it was amusing to watch the wonderment of Andy Swope when he discovered that he had been borrowing a vast amount of trouble. What he first noticed was that McMurray stood at attention whenever he addressed him on the field. It was not a pose but the reflection of a state of mind. And whether it was an order, a suggestion, or a biting criticism, Bowman rapped out, "Yes, Mr. Swope," or "Aye, aye, sir!" And he smiled when he said it, the smile of cheerful subordination. When in action there was no erratic disregard of policies or instructions. This was true leadership.

Len Garretson was gratified but not astonished. He knew what had happened to the impetuous McMurray because a like experience had been granted him. These two were idling out of doors one evening while a crowd of their classmates sang old plantation melodies on the steps of a college building. It was unusual for Garretson to mention the war, but something moved him to say:

"It sank deep with you, Bo. Some men never got it at all. I was top sergeant of a company that never did lose sight of it. Maybe that's why there wasn't enough of 'em left to make a football team."

"Honest, Len? Were they shot up as bad as that?"

"Nine of the old outfit landed in Hoboken after the war quit on us."

"And you are passing it along," said Bowman. "Did the idea of coming back here seem kind of triflin' to you, like small-boy stuff?"

"No, it never did. I heard buddies talk that way, no more college for them, but it looked like we had left a job unfinished here at Centre. And another thing was that I felt curious to watch whether you'd blow up, Bo. There used to be times when I was shaky about you."

"I understand. I must have been an exasperatin' object for all hands. But there's many a brand snatched from the burning. Also knock on wood. Here's a funny thing. Have you noticed it? A little brief authority went to Red Mercer's head. He has strutty symptoms now and then; not on the football field, for I don't allow that; but in the bosom of our happy home."

"He was a second lieutenant, was our freckled old Cube Root," replied Garretson, as though that explained it all. "It's a disagreeable little disease, being a second lieutenant, like chicken pox, but it generally wears off. If it doesn't I'll knock it off. We

all love Red, but he must remember we have to live with him."

"And we all have our failings, 'specially me," loyally exclaimed Bowman, "but they don't show when the team gets under way. Things are all different, somehow."

"*We're* different, Bo."

Day after day the Centre eleven was gaining speed, confidence, solidarity. It had found itself. The season swiftly swung into the program of games which were to show whether the sensational prestige was a lucky accident or a habit. Fayette Caldwell, beloved by the college, came on from Texas to assist in the coaching.

The eleven met its adversaries and mowed them down. It had been said that under modern rules and conditions it was no longer possible to roll up large scores against a well-drilled defensive. The science of football had become stabilized. Captain Bo McMurray's men tossed this dictum into the discard. They were playing out of their class, against colleges and universities presumed to overshadow little Centre in every respect and yet they swept from one victory to another like a hurricane. It was an achievement unique in the annals of American sport. Nine games they played in all, and their score of points reached the astounding total of four hundred and seventy-six to a beggarly nine points for their routed opponents. In seven of the nine games they held their goal line inviolate.

Kentucky University, feared aforetime, went down to ruin by a score of fifty-six to nothing. The conquerors marched out of their traditional territory to invade Virginia and its historic university at Charlottesville. In mud and rain the men from Centre drove down the field for one touchdown after another and set the score at forty-six to six. It would be tedious to enumerate the other encounters which carried the name and fame of Centre College as far as the Atlantic seaboard. Football enthusiasts who had never heard of the place were making journeys to Danville to seek the answer.

One contest, above all others, was memorable because of its sequel. In the mountains of West Virginia, at the State University, was a mighty squad of gladiators whom so puissant an authority as Walter Camp had dubbed "the team of the season." This he proclaimed after these stalwarts had thrashed none other than the Princeton Tigers by the score of twenty-five to nothing. In the opinion of Mr. Camp, this was a deed of greater merit than all that Centre College had performed.

"We've *got* to show them," said Bowman McMurray to Andy Swope. "This is the first chance we ever had to get a line on what we could do against one of the big Eastern colleges. Beyond the Alps lies Italy—and Harvard."

"Your aims are lofty, and you're afflicted with imagination as usual," replied the coach, who had umpired many a league game in Boston. "You whip these West Virginia moonshiners and Harvard may condescend to notice your existence. If you asked 'em right now for a game next year, they might take it as an insult."

"I reckon Harvard is an unfortunate mental attitude," observed Bowman. "Does it wear off in after life, like second lieutenants?"

"If they get out into the United States it does, Bo, but not if they stay in Boston. Of course they know who Princeton is. The wilderness begins west of New Jersey, but as for queer little colleges like us, 'way out in No Man's Land, they'd be liable to ask if we graduated barbers, stenographers, or banjo players."

"But if we *can* whip a team that ripped up Princeton for twenty-five points," persisted Bowman, "don't you really think Harvard would give us a game?"

"It won't do you a bit of harm to dream about it. But I should say you were looking about two jumps ahead. Any team that can treat Princeton the way these mountain wild cats did, is pretty liable to chew you up and spit you out."

"No football team on God's earth can do that," declared the McMurray, not as a braggart, but with serene faith in his destiny.

Andy Swope nodded gravely, with an air of consideration. The coach had often wondered to himself whether this faith invincible might not be a factor as pregnant as all his teaching. And more than once he had reflected:

"The boy has learned to carry on, as he calls it, and nothing could be finer than his attitude toward me. No matter how rough I slam it into him, he takes it without batting an eyelash, *but*—how will he be when he gets licked? As far as I can dope it out, he never has had to take the count, not in football or anything else that mattered. Will he come back, or will it

break his heart? No matter how good he is, a man never knows until he faces the wallop."

When the Centre eleven went to West Virginia for this crucial game, the feeling was that they were on the first stage of a journey into the East. Another year might see them farther along the way. This had become their fixed ambition, to measure their prowess against the strongest of the ancient seats of learning and football. It was akin to the spirit of the Kentucky pioneers who had crossed the mountains to explore and subdue regions unfamiliar.

The West Virginian wild cats had no intention of helping to make the Centre College dream come true. In fact, they were firmly determined to knock it into a cocked hat. And they came very near it. The game was played or fought at Morganstown, on the native heath of these intractable young men who had treated Princeton with such rude vehemence a week earlier. At the end of the first half the score was West Virginia, six; Centre College, nothing.

Perhaps McMurray's clan from the Blue Grass said a few more prayers during the interval. At any rate, they returned to the fray as audaciously confident as ever. After a long period of bruising, indecisive struggle, they took the ball when they were eighty yards from the West Virginia goal and began one of those superb rallies against odds. Not by fluke or accident, but by concerted skill, eleven men as one, did they force their dangerous opponents to retreat. It was one first down after another and the onset was unchecked.

The goal was no longer distant, there were perhaps thirty yards to go, when McMurray called for time to replace a broken shoe lace. In the thick of a savage scrimmage, his shoe had been almost dragged from his foot. Two or three minutes' delay and he was ready to shout the next signal. Taking the ball himself, he dived and crawled and slid for a gain of half a dozen yards. When he pulled himself clear and trotted into position for the next formation, he was conscious of a stinging pain in his right foot. Every step he took made him suffer, but he tried to disregard it and threw a beautiful forward pass to Fordney.

He limped as he ran to surge into the interference of the next play, which was a dash around the end. The pain was more acute in the ball of the foot. It was like the searing touch of a red-hot iron. But he endured it without complaint and was resolved to drive his team across the goal line. They continued the unbroken advance, smashing through or feinting, sweeping back the eleven which had scored such an easy triumph over Princeton. Eighty yards they carried the ball for a touchdown, and, with the goal kicked from it, it was Centre College, seven; West Virginia, six.

Captain Bowman McMurray hobbled back for the next kick-off, but presently he was given a little respite between the periods. He threw himself upon a blanket, and in the lull he thought bitterly of the disaster which had overtaken him. Andy Swope was leaning over him to say:

"Sprained your ankle, Bo? Why didn't you quit? I'll take you out of the game, of course."

"You will not," cried McMurray; and then he flushed and faltered: "Excuse me, sir. Is that an order? If you say so, it goes, but—but may I explain?"

"Shoot! You can't explain away a bum prop," exclaimed the puzzled coach. "Let me look at that ankle."

"It's not my ankle at all," piteously replied Bowman. "And it won't do a bit of good to look at it. The shoe is laced tight and I'd rather leave it alone if—if you don't mind."

"Talk sense, boy. You are all crippled up. God knows I don't want to pull you out, for this game isn't sewed up by a long shot."

"If you'll let me finish, Andy, I can handle the team all right, and they need me. I don't have to try any long runs. For Heaven's sake, we've *got* to make one more touchdown against this outfit."

"All right. I'm listening, Bo. But if it isn't a sprain, what does ail you?"

"That tendon is gone," said McMurray. "It can't be anything else. It pulled out where it was spliced. My foot got an awful twist when I broke a shoe lace. I felt it right after that."

"Then I'll have you lugged to a hospital, right on the jump," exclaimed Andy Swope.

"Please don't do that," begged Bowman. "It can never be mended again. Don't you understand? This is the last game of football I'll ever play for old Centre. The damage will be no worse if you let me finish it out."

"Holy blazes, Bo, is it as bad as that?

You ought to know, I suppose. Of all the infernal luck——"

"She might be a heap sight worse," smiled Bowman. "I came back to college and did what I set out to do—passed along the things I had learned in the war. The *team* goes on just the same, and she's good. Don't say I can't play this game out, please, sir."

"Go to it, son," answered the coach. "There's no denying you a last little favor like that. But don't tell the rest of the boys. It would knock the heart out of 'em."

"That's mighty nice of you, Andy. I'll never forget it."

"Nor I, Bo. I was wondering just the other day—well, now I've seen you take as wicked a wallop as could be handed a man. I was wrong, boy."

Garretson lounged up to them and Bowman slowly regained his feet, wincing as he walked along the edge of the field with his comrade.

"How come?" asked Len. "A casualty? Do they send you back to the dressin' station?"

"Andy thought it was a sprain," evaded Bowman. "I can play if you don't mind extra work in the last period."

"Don't you lie to me, you old snoozer. I can guess better than that. This here is *some* calamity."

"Forget it, Len. Listen! We showed these mountaineers we could penetrate their defensive. Now, if we can do it once more and hold 'em hard, Harvard will read the score with a whole lot of interest to-morrow."

This was precisely what happened in the last period of play. Centre College repeated its notable achievement of an onrush across the enemy's goal line, and then stood firm, smothering the grim endeavors of West Virginia to wrest a victory from defeat. McMurray limped into the thick of it, tackling like a demon or hurling the ball to a waiting comrade but, also, the crowd saw not one of those famous runs of his through a broken field. When the last mêlée had been fought and the final signal huskily barked, McMurray went slowly to the dressing room with his arms across the supporting shoulders of Len Garretson and Red Mercer.

Silent, in a corner of the room, Bowman unlaced his shoe and peeled off the heavy stocking. There was blood on the sole of it and he carefully examined the injured foot. He was curious and perplexed. Then he uttered a tremendous war whoop of jubilation. Andy Swope leaped across the floor and caught hold of the foot which the McMurray was wildly waving in air.

"Look at it, Andy. I am crippled, all right, but it wasn't the tendon at all. I can get over this."

The coach touched his finger to an ugly hole in the ball of the foot in which some small, jagged object had fairly embedded itself. It was raw and bleeding. The wound was fairly worn into the flesh.

"I'll have a doctor here in a jiffy," yelled Andy. "It's discolored, like a little piece of hard coal did it. Why didn't you let me take your shoe off during the game, you poor fool?"

"Because I could think of only one thing," answered Bowman, on the brink of weeping. "It hurt like fury. It hurts now."

"Of course it does. No wonder you thought a tendon had busted. This chunk of whatever it is slipped into your shoe when you popped the lace in that scrimmage."

"It was just exactly as if that darn tendon had——" began McMurray.

"But it didn't. I'm not scolding, Bo. I never want to see that look on a boy's face again—it sort of haunts me yet. But this is different. Two or three weeks and you'll be frisky again."

The McMurray seemed lost in sudden thought.

"What's biting you now?" asked Andy, eying him.

"About that game with Harvard next year," said Captain Bowman McMurray. "You ought to begin writing about it right away."

CHAPTER XX.

A FAMOUS PILGRIMAGE OF BLUE GRASS FOLKS.

Bowman McMurray's hope was realized after another college year had rolled round and another football season was nearing the end of its tempestuous course. Kentucky in arms was about to engage mighty Harvard. The South would tourney with New England in a test of skill and courage for no other reward than the glory of the game and the honor of the campus. It was the climax of the career of an extraordinary eleven which had never known defeat, which felt no trepidation in undertaking this supreme trial.

It was an adventure somehow colored with romance, or such was its appeal to the Kentucky of the Blue Grass hills and vales. Border State though it was, the spirit of Dixie land was stirred by this bold raid into distant Massachusetts.

And would these young knights from Danville be permitted to ride alone and friendless into this strange country? No, suh, not even if Kentucky had to go on foot. Duty called and chivalry echoed it. Neighbors and loyal partisans by hundreds would be there to cheer for victory or to console in defeat. A journey of twelve hundred miles was no obstacle at all. They would be ashamed to stay at home. A special train of as many Pullmans as could be hitched together would carry the main body of invaders while the numerous stragglers could arrange their own transportation to the fighting front.

As for Centre College, it was threatened with an informal suspension of academic activities. For a brief time the historic standards of scholarship were likely to totter. Symptoms of the migration were visible several days before the football team departed. Uneasiness marked the demeanor of such luckless young men as lacked the cash for railroad tickets to Boston. They flocked together for discussion like birds of passage in autumn weather. And you might hear such laments as these:

"It's going to set you back a hundred dollars just to get there and home again. I went to Lexington and hocked my watch and all my clothes except these I've got on, but I'm still shy."

"Be a sport! I should worry. All I ask is the price one way. My legs are good. I can come hoofing it into Danville by Christmas."

"I'm waiting on table in Red Mercer's restaurant. You know what he did? I take my pay in three meals per day. Red staked me to twenty-five bucks, and I'll have to work it out. He called it commutation of rations."

"But you can't eat for a month after you get back, you poor heel. Didn't you think of that?"

"Sure I did. But what's a little thing like that? On to Boston, boy!"

"You said it. What's the matter with beating your way? McMurray told me how. He was a kid hobo one time, in Texas. Let's go!"

"Here's your pardner! They'll have to work fast throwin' me off freight trains between here and Mr. Boston's town."

In this manner did several of them flit from the campus, by way of the railroad sidings, the box cars, and the blind baggage. And sundry conductors and brakemen were not so implacable as usual when they discovered these grimy but cheerful young pilgrims and learned who they were. It is a matter of record that none of them was stranded by the wayside. The president of the college also had a lenient feeling for these truants. For one thing, he intended to go to the game himself. And to inflict severe penalties for such heroic devotion to the cause seemed unjust. There were extenuating circumstances. This adventure was part of a liberal education. To breathe the air of Cambridge and Boston was cultural. Boston said so herself.

The three members of the Lone Star Corporation held a conference in their rooms during one of the few leisure hours of this final week. Older by several years than when they had begun the good fight together in the Somersworth high school, the college had stamped them with its hall mark. As leaders of campus opinion they had acquired dignity without self-importance. But to each other they were the same old Texas kids, McMurray the warrior with the hair-trigger temper and the readier fists, old man Garretson's youngest son, who always played a poor hand well, and the brick-topped John Calvin, with the brains of the outfit, who never had to worry about the future because it was predestined a million years ago.

"There is a tremendous lot of interest in this game up North," said Bowman. "I shouldn't be surprised if several thousand people came to see us play."

"To see McMurray play," scoffed the minister's son in a moment of irritation, because he could not live down the unhappy fact that he had been a second lieutenant. They were eternally rubbing it in.

"Old stuff, Red. You know better," calmly retorted McMurray. "Let's call it quits. You couldn't help being an officer. It was wished on you. That war of ours was full of human tragedies just like that."

Garretson looked up from a letter he was writing and asked, with a certain anxiety:

"You feel dead sure of winning, don't you, Bo? No sinkin' sensation in the pit of your

stomach? Harvard has no more show than a Republican in Texas?"

"That sounds foolish, old man. Put it another way. I don't see how we can lose. After I came back the other day from that scouting trip, to see Harvard play Williams, I wasn't scared, if that's what you mean. They've got the weight and the power and a wonderful organization—the coaching staff is 'most as big as our faculty, and the varsity squad had as many men as our whole college, earlier in the season. But we have met all kinds of teams, and not one of 'em could stop us."

"Yale is a right-smart football college," pursued the canny Garretson, "and what Harvard has been doing to her for years is simply cruel. Not that I aim to croak, Bo, but my motto generally is to hope for the best when you go up against a thing like this."

"I'm astonished, Len," shouted the aggrieved McMurray. "Where's your faith? What is it that has carried us along from one touchdown to another? Faith that could remove mountains, you poor fish!"

"We tunneled some of 'em," grinned Garretson, "with snappy interference. Don't get me wrong, Bo. I won't play any worse for viewin' these Harvard red legs with sincere respect. They have fifty years of football behind 'em. They are hoary with it."

John Calvin Mercer, Jr., had been listening with a serious expression. He picked up the argument to say:

"Len is perfectly right. All he has in mind is to ease it a little for you, Bo, in case the game breaks wrong."

"But it won't! It can't!" was the fervid protest. "You boys never did gloom this way before. What's happened to your religion? The Lord is your shield and buckler, and you can gain ground through the Philistines if you don't get rattled."

"They'll know they have been in a football game," said Mercer.

"Don't cuss us, Bo," begged Garretson. "We're with you. You know that. I started this fuss. Any man with good intentions is sure to be misunderstood. That's what makes most of us nature's noblemen wear sad, serious faces under our hat brims. Let's talk cheerful. Who is liable to come on from Texas to witness this sectional quarrel at Boston?"

"Fayette Caldwell is already here, coaching," said Bowman. "Sallie and little Scooch start to-morrow. That accounts for one family. My dad expects to be with them. Mother couldn't be persuaded. She's afraid I may be killed or something and it might worry her. Women are sensitive that way, 'specially mothers of football sons."

"My mother is that way," said Red Mercer. "But father has been invited to join the party, and he writes that Tom McMurray insists on paying the freight. Great, ish't it? The experience will shake Reverend John Calvin Mercer out of the ministerial rut."

"Bully for my dad," exclaimed Bowman. "He is a worthy parent. Has anybody heard —well, I had an intuition that Nancy Overton might be shipmates with Sallie Caldwell, but Fayette is mighty indefinite."

"Why shouldn't he be? Fayette is a football coach, and he looks at it just as Andy Swope does," came from the sagacious Garretson. "They don't pine to have you playing football with one eye on a girl in the grand stand. You have plenty to think about."

"Nan Overton is sensible," said Mercer. "Very few pretty girls are. She is her father's right-hand man in business affairs. Do you suppose she'd get poor old McMurray all excited by coming on to this Harvard game? Not on your life. She knows him. I learned something about her superior intellect that summer I was delivering groceries. We seemed like kindred spirits, and when I've seen her wasting her time on McMurray, since then, I felt sorry——"

"Hit him in the eye, Len. You're closest," commanded the insulted McMurray. "It's one of those second-lieutenant relapses."

Danville trooped to the station en masse when the special train was ready to depart. The band played and the streets were bright with the colors of old Centre, gold and white. Desperate freshmen smuggled themselves aboard and hoped the conductor might overlook them. One of the students who was left behind ran along the platform to scrawl on the cars with a lump of chalk, "Oh, you Kentucky Colonels! Give 'em hell!"

In a stateroom compartment sat a gaunt old gentleman with an air still martial. He was, in truth, a Kentucky colonel of a rare old vintage. He had declared to his wife, Mis' Ella, that he proposed to see it through with the boys if they had to fetch him back to Somersworth in a wooden box. His companion was a grizzled chief quartermaster,

retired, of the United States navy. On his blue coat was the ribbon of the navy cross and one sleeve hung empty.

Centre College carried no army of trainers, lackeys, rubbers. Its players were not treated like young princes too precious to lift their own suit cases. In the baggage car you might have seen that versatile coach, Andy Swope, seated upon a trunk while he plied needle and thread and mended torn jerseys and damaged breeches. Assisting him were Red Mercer and Bo McMurray who had learned the rudiments of the tailor's craft while pressing the wrinkles out of Somersworth. There was no swollen athletic treasury and economy was a habit.

The special train reached Boston on the day before the game. Andy Swope hustled his squad out to the Harvard Stadium for practice and then they began to realize that little Centre College had, indeed, been put on the map. The immense, towering amphitheater almost dismayed the Kentuckians. Their courteous hosts informed them that every seat had been sold in advance, that forty thousand people would crowd these vast stone tiers, with ten thousand more clamoring for the chance of admittance. Only the classic contest with Yale had ever drawn such a multitude. To the visitors this was incomprehensible. It was McMurray who rose to the occasion. From the carpet of turf between the goal posts he gazed up at the huge structure and remarked to Andy Swope:

"You'll never see so much surprise and disappointment packed together in one place as long as you live. Barring a few hundred friends of ours, it looks like forty thousand mourners to-morrow. Isn't that a sad thought?"

"You mean they'll mostly root for their Harvard? Wrong, boy, dead wrong. I know crowds. This outfit of ours has caught the popular taste for something different. We're a queer college that is said to be full of religion and pep. A little bit to the freakish, that's how these folks size us up. All they ever heard come out of the Blue Grass before was whisky and race horses."

"It will be the greatest moment in my life, Andy——"

"No oratory, boy! Don't break loose with the ghosts of the senators, vice presidents, judges, and so on looking down at you from yonder Stadium. I'm a busy man and I can stand just about so much."

The McMurray subsided. He ran the team through a brisk signal drill, and they kicked and passed the ball until the kinks of the long journey had been sweated out of their limber muscles. From the Stadium they went to a hotel and thence to Cambridge as guests of the Harvard team for the early hours of the evening. They were fine fellows well met, these antagonists of the East and the South, and the "praying Kentucky Colonels" were discovered to be very much like other undergraduates. They did not chew tobacco nor stuff their trousers in their boots nor wear flasks on their hips.

In the corridors of the Boston hotel where many of the visitors had engaged rooms, the curious onlookers sought in vain to find picturesque types. The only exceptions, and these were delightful, happened to be Colonel Harris Shelby and his friend the circuit judge from Somersworth, who ambled arm in arm and displayed that impressive courtesy of deportment which, alas, survives mostly in fiction. Boston welcomed them with the utmost cordiality, but they held a little aloof. It was difficult to feel that this was not alien soil.

Andy Swope sent his men to bed before they could wander in search of their own friends and kinfolk. The family reunions could be held after the game. Anxious parents or sweethearts were disturbing elements. Nobody had ever made these Centre College players nervous, and this was a poor time to begin.

They were nervous next day, however, and Andy Swope had to admit it to himself. There was too much of McMurray's feeling that this was a climax instead of an episode. It was perceptible while they were changing into their football clothes at the Stadium. Into the amphitheater poured the multitude, filling the aisles like a swirling tide, flowing over the terraced rows of seats, crowding at the gates. The consciousness of this great cloud of witnesses was disquieting. To the young men who awaited the ordeal, it was like a Roman mob in the Colosseum.

As was the custom, honest words of prayer were said, that more than ever they should quit themselves like men because of the greater responsibility. Then Fayette Caldwell, a gentleman unafraid, spoke in his quiet, affectionate manner and he comforted and steadied them more than any one else could have done:

"You will forget these forty thousand peo-

ple the minute the ball is kicked off. Why not forget them now? And Harvard is merely another game in the schedule. Don't take it so hard. Some coaches would be telling you to fight. I want you to ease the tension. The Harvard team is afraid of *you*, remember, and every man of them is as fidgety as you boys are. Four years undefeated is in their minds this minute, and they don't feel happy about it.

"Do you know what I like better than all the hundreds of points you have rolled up? Centre College stands for clean football, and the honor of the game. *That* is what these forty thousand people will carry away with them this afternoon. And that's what it really means to play for your college. *Now go in and eat 'em up!*"

They trotted into the arena and dispersed for swift rehearsal. A glance at the crowded slopes of the Stadium all flecked with crimson flags, and the nervous strain tautened again. But now there came roaring down to them a tremendous outburst of applause. It was not the courageous cheer of a few hundred partisans from Kentucky, but the voice of many thousands. Bowman McMurray flashed a smile at Len Garretson and slapped him on the back as he shouted above the tumult:

"Would you believe it? Where did all these friends of ours come from? And they call it cold roast Boston!"

"Looks like we have put it across, boy."

They turned to gaze at the Harvard team and a horde of substitutes who scampered along the edge of the field with blankets streaming behind them. As the chosen eleven in the crimson jerseys detached themselves and ran across the turf, they appeared more formidable than any players that Centre had ever encountered. Prestige accounted somewhat for this impression, but there also was an advantage in weight averaging ten pounds a man. It meant just that much more brawn, momentum, concerted power. But Captain McMurray cheerily passed the old slogan along:

"The bigger they are, the harder they fall!"

CHAPTER XXI.

"WIN OR LOSE, YOU LOOK GOOD TO KENTUCKY!"

The game had no more than begun when the Kentucky eleven discovered that it had never battered itself against a rush line like this Harvard phalanx. It was massive and yet mobile. Against it the initial assaults were futile, and instead of a first down, McMurray was compelled to punt the ball. Harvard assumed the offensive, with more than half the length of the field to go. There were no spectacular forward passes, no adroitly masked attempts to outflank the eager Centre line, while on the other hand it was not the bludgeon of mere brute strength. These men in the crimson jerseys clove through resistance like the blow of a battle-ax. They struck as one, and the Kentuckians reeled back a dozen yards.

Swiftly Harvard struck again and again, always with the same result. Driven back but unshaken in spirit, McMurray's comrades endeavored to solve the problem of an attack which revealed a power of organization beyond their experience. They could not prevent Harvard from scoring. This was inevitable. But would they be played off their feet before they could counter with their own rapid and crafty tactics?

Red Mercer, in the thick of it, gazetted as the "All-American" center rush of the preceding season, and Bowman McMurray, a quarter back who had won a like distinction, were using their nimble wits even while Harvard trampled them in retreat. The strongest team has its flaws, men who are slower than others or who betray their intentions by a posture, by the glance of the eye.

Seven times did Harvard strike unchecked, unfaltering, and the ball traversed more than half the length of the field in this series of impressive advances. It halted only when the Kentucky goal had been invaded, when a touchdown had been so easily won that the forty thousand people who gazed down at them felt something like chagrin. Was this the thrilling show which had been promised? These overadvertised Southerners should have stayed in the Blue Grass where they belonged. The result was foreshadowed in these first few minutes of play.

The belief of the young Kentuckians was quite otherwise. They were wiser, steadier, for this baptism of fire. It had banished all semblance of nervous uncertainty. Harvard was formidable, but no longer an unknown equation. No sooner had Red Mercer laid hands on the ball, with the team alertly on its toes and McMurray yelping the signal than the Harvard touchdown was forgotten. They were about to swing into

their stride. Every man felt it with a sense of tingling confidence.

And presently the vast crowd was shouting madly. Never was applause more generous and unpartisan. It died and swelled again in greater volume with each fresh inspiration of

"First down, Kentucky!"

It was the kind of football which had been expected of these gallant visitors, versatile, resourceful. They were living up to all that had been said of them. The Harvard team, schooled to meet every style of play, seemed bewildered. Instead of their own precisely ordered formations, the Kentuckians appeared to improvise. They shifted their objective in full flight if an opening suddenly disclosed itself elsewhere, and the interference swooped to turn with the runner as though it were intuitive and not prearranged. The ball passed from hand to hand, behind the line, or was flung far forward of it, in the most hazardous fashion, but always there was a man ready to snatch it out of the air and dart on a course of his own.

The Harvard ends were presumed to be invulnerable, but the Centre College backs shot past them and wheeled to gain more ground. It was elusive football, and peculiarly intelligent. In a manner all their own, the Kentuckians were overcoming the handicap of superior strength and a coaching system far more elaborate. Without a slip or fumble they advanced in a sequence of these brilliant dashes until the ball had been carried two thirds of the distance between the goal posts. The rapier was a match for the battle-ax. Another sensational sprint and Centre College had a touchdown of its own. The score was tied.

No more than five minutes after this, forty thousand men and women were again lifted to their feet by a common impulse. They waved hats, flags, umbrellas. Perfect strangers pommeled each other. The noise they made was appalling. McMurray had hurled a forward pass far over the heads of the Harvard men. Its trajectory was a joy to behold. More than a hundred feet it sped, this leather oval so unhandily shaped, and dropped into the arms of Gentry, the half back. How he arrived there in time was a miracle.

With winged heels he spurned the turf and skimmed for the Harvard goal, thirty-five yards away. Two pairs of stout crimson legs pounded in his wake, but Gentry had urgent business and could not be detained. He later swore he was going so fast that his knees flew up and hit his chin. Garretson was of the opinion that a bullet from the old Colt's .45 would just about have made a dead heat of it. This jewel of a touchdown gave the lead to the Kentuckians by fourteen to seven.

In twelve years neither Yale nor Princeton had been able to score two touchdowns in a championship contest with Harvard. The little Blue Grass college was making football history and bowling over precedents. It had brought something more with it than a reputation. The New England temperament may be calm and repressed, but one could never have guessed it in this frenzied Stadium. The prevailing sentiment was not of mourning for Harvard, but of rejoicing with the plucky lads from Kentucky. The spirit of sportsmanship was not confined to the football field.

A substitute ran out to take the place of a Harvard tackle who showed signs of weariness. The newcomer halted to shake hands with McMurray and they grinned at each other as long-lost buddies.

"Hello, Bo, you useless gob! Queenstown was never like this. You'll get torpedoed this cruise."

"Not a chance, Bill. You're scuppered. Too much speed. We're the real thing in destroyers."

It was a small incident which displayed the spirit between antagonists who fought desperately but without malice. And when Harvard again took possession of the ball and was repeating her first crashing series of advances, the multitude cheered to encourage the Kentucky Colonels to hold fast. So great was the noise that the Harvard men could not hear the signals shouted by their quarter back and there was delay and confusion. Captain McMurray threw up his arm with a gesture which was quickly comprehended. It told the crowd to be quiet. Fair play demanded it. Obediently the tumult hushed, but you may be sure that they liked the visitors no less because of this rebuke.

There is a sound adage that an eleven is no stronger than its rush line. This is merely to paraphrase the doctrine that the infantry is the backbone of an army. Harvard had a vital advantage in this respect. It was exhibited when the crimson again seized the

initiative and, using precisely the same tactics as before, drove Centre College back over the same distance, more than sixty yards, and scored a second touchdown splendidly earned. It tied the score at fourteen-fourteen, and carried the game to the end of the first half.

The Stadium had staged many a great contest but never one so heart-stirring as this. The crowd sank back to catch its breath and a brief interval of sanity. Instead of seeking seclusion, to be rubbed and fussed over, the unconventional Kentuckians sat in a group on their blankets, at the side of the field, like Indians in bivouac and chatted with the president of Centre College. To Harvard spectators, the incident seemed a trifle odd, almost bizarre. It was a family affair.

From a tier of the amphitheater, Colonel Harris Shelby of Somersworth gazed down and was lost in thought. His shoulders had sagged forward, and his hands were clasped upon the crook of his cane, as though for support. One missed the soldierly poise of the snowy head. It was not all fatigue. He was aroused by the hearty voice of Michael Brennan.

"I'm all wore out meself, colonel. 'Tis worse thin chasin' German submarines. Shut your eyes an' snooze a bit. I'll pipe ye to quarters when th' action recomminces. They have hauled off to repair damages an' take the wounded below."

"The boys have shot their bolt, God bless 'em," replied the colonel, and at last his accents were aged and broken. "They don't think so. If this game could only quit right now——"

"Are ye forgettin' Paul Jones, me dear man? *They have not begun to fight.* Look how they run rings around these big Harvard battle wagons. 'Twas like Beatty's cruisers at Jutland."

"And when Beatty stood up to heavier metal, what then, Mike? He was pounded to pieces. I'm not a naval man but an old soldier who followed a Lost Cause."

"Now, what has that to do with a football team that has stood th' aristocracy of Harvard on its head for a brace of touchdowns an' will romp home with siveral more unless they drop dead?"

"Men and resources whipped the Confederacy," answered Colonel Shelby. "We had the courage, the leadership, the devotion."

"And that fits th' case in hand?" incredulously exclaimed the chief quartermaster.

"I'm afraid so, Mike. I don't want to, but I'm playin' a hunch. I refused to admit it till Harvard banged out that last hellish touchdown, like Grant plowin' his way through the Wilderness. They can throw in fresh men in the next half, a new eleven if they like, and we're mighty shy."

"We won't need 'em at all, colonel. These lads of ours will hop into it as gay as they started. There's been other games as tough to chew on as this wan. 'Tis not even a stern chase. They are fair abeam of one another, with an even score."

Colonel Shelby shook his head and said no more. He had waved his hat and yelled with the rest of them, carried away on the tide of enthusiasm, with a personal pride and an intense loyalty which those around him could not feel. But emotion was unable to obscure his vision or dull his wisdom.

With a whimsical smile he bethought himself of the telegram which the governor of Kentucky had sent to Captain Bowman McMurray, just before this game:

> The men in Kentucky are pulling for you, the women are praying for you. For God's sake make good and hit the line hard and low.

To these shrewd, practical No'therners this was sentimental drivel. Harvard football had the wealth, the material, the efficiency of a large business corporation. Football at Danville had been largely builded upon sentiment. And in his own brave youth, Colonel Shelby had seen sentiment go down to glorious defeat.

Bowman McMurray would have considered such misgivings treasonable. He was sublimely confident that his team could score again and stand braced in the last ditch against the Harvard offensive. Already they had done what Yale and Princeton had failed to do in many years.

Quite early in the fateful second half, however, Harvard struck again irresistibly. The attack shifted from one flank to the other. It fairly hurled the lighter Kentuckians out of its path. They had never encountered a human machine so smoothly assembled as this. It had been put together for the special purpose of demolishing a Yale rush line of tremendous resisting power. Spare parts were ready, as one might say, for replacement at the slightest sign of wear. Tired men were taken out and substitutes

rushed in whenever the pace seemed to slacken. In all, twenty-two players were used before the end of the game.

Centre had no more than half a dozen substitutes of reliable merit. In this respect it was gravely outclassed. Its eggs were in one basket and it could afford to have few of them broken. When Harvard hammered the Kentuckians back and so scored a third touchdown, thereby taking the lead, it was the beginning of the end. Centre was as courageous as before, but the fine edge of its speed was dulled by weariness. It displayed flashes of brilliancy, now a long run by McMurray, again a series of forward passes which carried it to the very shadow of the Harvard goal, but in the crucial moments the stalwart heroes of the crimson were as impenetrable as a stone wall. And they had learned how to range wide and forestall those dazzling passes and shifty end runs. Their coaches had not been idle during the intermission.

Until the very last, while the western sun slanted across the Stadium, the Kentuckians strove valiantly to turn the tide which rolled against them. They died hard, unconvinced that defeat had overtaken them, hoping to break clear of that relentless Harvard defense and retrieve the day as they had done on many another field. But it had ceased to be a matter of one touchdown to overcome. Their astonishing forward passes had slowed down a trifle. Harvard snatched one of them in its flight and scored again. And a goal kicked from the field increased the tally of the game to Harvard, thirty-one; Centre, fourteen. The better eleven won. It had been highly trained to meet opponents as thoroughly schooled. It was probably the strongest football team in the United States.

The dashing invaders had expected too much, they had dared too greatly, but they would never forget the tribute of cheers which had rolled down to them like the boom of surf against the cliffs. It was a precious verdict. They were not victors but they were sportsmen and gentlemen. First to grasp the hand of the Harvard captain was Bowman McMurray, who said a word of congratulation in a voice hoarse with fatigue. Then he trudged with his silent comrades into the dressing room. They desired to be left alone with their sorrow.

Andy Swope soon joined them and stood looking at these broken-hearted young athletes nor did he find their tears unmanly. He could remember suffering in the same way. All he said was:

"That's right, boys. Cry and get over it. You will get no consolation stuff from me. I don't want to be booted out of here. You did good work, better than I expected. And I think more of you than I did yesterday."

"D-don't jolly us, p-please," blubbered Gentry. "We are disgraced for l-life."

"Sure you are," amiably agreed the coach. "They are getting set to welcome you with an old Kentucky lynching bee in Danville, right in the middle of the campus."

"I don't doubt it a bit," quavered McMurray. "If I hadn't stumbled that time I was almost clear—and if I had sent Garretson at tackle instead of for the end when we had only six yards to go——"

"And if the dog hadn't stopped to scratch fleas, there would have been a dead rabbit, Bo! Hustle into your clothes and let's go eat Boston out of house and home. Somebody has to lose every football game. That's what makes 'em interesting."

"We went out of our class and got properly trimmed," said the Garretson kid. "Maybe we can give old Harvard a whirl next year. Wow, if this was football, give me another war!"

Red Mercer was nursing a large bruise on the shin. He turned to say to the doleful McMurray:

"Our folks from Texas will be expecting us for dinner at the hotel. They arrived late last night, I suppose you know. Why didn't you look them up this morning? I did."

"Because I didn't feel like it. And now I don't want to see anybody."

"I figured on a grand entrance after the game, plaudits and things, didn't you?" unkindly suggested the minister's son.

"Shut up," snapped McMurray, "or I'll dislocate a few freckles."

"Here, you boys quit that," drawled Garretson. "You've been run ragged an' your tempers are frazzled. I know what ails the second lieutenant. Nancy Overton did come trailin' along with the Texas outfit."

"I know she's in Boston," sighed Bowman, "but I shan't see her. After this awful calamity—why it's utterly out of the question. Give her my fondest regards, Red, old man. She'll understand. The pitcher went once too often to the well, just as Fayette Caldwell told me when I was a boy."

"You talk like it's empty above the ears,"

said Garretson. "Hustle, boy, and let's kiss this Stadium good-by. I never did like to linger close to one of your awful calamities."

They rode into Boston together, a dejected company, dreading to encounter their friends. They were perfectly sincere about it. Not as heroes but as outcasts would they return to Kentucky. That the Centre College eleven should be whipped was not a misfortune but a crime. McMurray was for stealing into the hotel by a side entrance, but the Garretson kid threatened to punch his head. More than all the others, old man Garretson's youngest son had learned for himself the truth of the cow-puncher's epitaph, *"He done his damnedest. Angels could do no more."*

When they trooped into the hotel lobby, it seemed as though the delegation of Kentucky pilgrims had mobilized to wait their coming. Centre College students, Danville people, landed gentry of the rich Blue Grass farms, high-salaried tobacco buyers and auctioneers in expensive raiment, sunburned breeders and trainers from Lexington who had bet even money on "the praying Colonels" and took their losses without turning a hair, dignified lawyers who were proud to be Centre College alumni, unclassified adherents who had somehow trailed along to Boston without return tickets—they were all waiting to greet the football team. One startled glimpse and the melancholy McMurray interpreted it as a mob scene. They had gathered to give this eleven what it deserved. The lynching bee was to be rehearsed this side of Danville. The young man was not in a composed state of mind, for life was a complete ruin.

He halted to glower at this assemblage, as truculent as when he had begun his football career by licking more policemen than usual in those far-off Fort Hawley days. Somebody emitted a shrill, "Yip, yip," the war cry of Dixie land, and the sedate hotel reëchoed to a cheer of unanimous approval, of hearty homage and fealty. And then the vanquished champions ran the gantlet of friends who pressed forward to shake hands with them. Bewildered, they wanted to sit down and cry again. They heard Frank Prentiss, the Danville banker, shouting at them:

"This is a mere ripple, boys. Watch the old town when Johnny comes marching home. Listen to this wire—they just now shot it through:

"'Plans for parade already under way. Bands and fireworks. Say when. Governor phones from Frankfort he'll be here with bells on. Win or lose, you look good to Kentucky.'"

CHAPTER XXII.

LIFE IS NOT A COMPLETE RUIN.

Mr. Thomas McMurray, the father of Bowman, had planned the little dinner party as a celebration before turning southward from Boston. He had been led confidently to expect football results quite different. Reviewing the afternoon's events in the Stadium, he wondered whether to call the dinner a wake or a requiem. For one guest the cloud had a silver lining. The Reverend John Calvin Mercer, of the Northern Presbyterian Church, had not only been shaken, but jolted out of the ministerial rut at beholding his scholarly son suffer as many violent perils as the Apostle Paul. This was a time for devout gratitude that he still possessed the normal number of arms and legs.

Colonel Shelby, of Kentucky, and Chief Quartermaster Michael Brennan, of the United States navy, and the world at large were invited as intimate friends of Bowman. Otherwise it was a Texas party. Fayette Caldwell and his Sallie were, of course, included. Miss Nancy Overton had made the long journey from Fort Hawley, yielding to persuasion at the last moment. Bowman had written one of his eloquent letters, urging her to share the crowning triumph of old Centre. It was to be inferred that this would be the long-awaited opportunity for him to prove that he was, beyond a shadow of doubt, a worthy young fellow. Jacob served seven years for Rachel, he reminded her, "and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her." For once Bowman quoted Scripture with accuracy. He had taken pains to look it up. There was something "highly significant" in the fact that he had known Nan Overton just about seven years. It was one of those extraordinary "coinc'dences" which had strewn his pathway.

To Mr. Thomas McMurray's dinner came the three young Texans of the football team, rather as mourners than as guests ready to enliven a sociable reunion. They brightened at the sight of Nancy. If a vision so charming could not help them to forget their tribulation, the outlook was hopeless. Bowman paid her one of his compliments by exclaiming as they met:

"'Lead kindly light, amid the encircling gloom!' You happened to be among those present on a sad day in history, Nan. How do you feel?"

"Glad I came, Bo, but sorry for you boys," she told him with that dear smile which could be so pitiful and tender. "You lost a game, but gained new friends. And the old ones are still true. Friends are worth ever so much more than football. I came from Texas to tell you this."

"May I sit next to you at dinner, Nan? Long-distance friendship like yours, that disregards mileage and things, is mighty comforting in such times as these."

"Red Mercer seems to feel the same way," laughed Nancy. "I reckon I'd better sit between you, if it's agreeable to our host."

It was fine to see old Colonel Shelby rally, for a little while, from his great weariness. He would retire early, said he, with Mr. Thomas McMurray's permission, but it was his pleasure to pay a tribute to the beauty and chivalry of the South. To his right bower, Michael Brennan, he confided with a trace of petulance that prohibition had cast a cursed blight over the fairest land on God's green footstool and enslaved a free people. At a seasonable hour they would toddle to their suite of rooms and solace themselves with a nightcap of good Kentucky liquor, and call it a day.

"An admiral of the fleet could show no wiser judgment," murmured Mike. "I'm a solid man meself an' well preserved, but wan more day like this would bilge me."

As a dinner party it lacked sparkle and spontaneity. Colonel Shelby devoted himself to Sallie Caldwell and paid court to her as he did to every pretty young woman. It was both a duty and a habit. At the head of the table Mr. Thomas McMurray was jovial and attentive, the pattern of a host, but even he lapsed now and then in moods grave and absent-minded. It troubled him to see his son unhappy. He knew how youth could suffer. Outwardly the least disturbed was old man Garretson's youngest son. Before the reformation, in his sinfully precocious youth at the stud-poker table, he had displayed this same suave indifference to fate.

Old Mike Brennan found him a congenial spirit. Far apart in years, they were alike in a philosophy of life which stood up and took it as it came. They yarned of ships and men, of the decks and the trenches, and it all came back to the basic doctrine that the only man worth while was the guy that stood the gaff. The Reverend John Calvin Mercer listened and had glimpses of sermons which he hoped might carry a new appeal to the congregation of the Northern Presbyterian Church.

What changed the course of the dinner was an impromptu speech by Colonel Shelby. It occurred to him to read them a brief newspaper clipping which he fished out of his wallet as he stiffly rose to his feet. This was both a courtesy to the ladies and the instinct of the lifelong orator.

"As a citizen of Kentucky and an alumnus of Centre College," said he, in his stateliest manner, "it behooves me to express my warm appreciation of the cordial feelin' of Harvard University and the populace toward our defeated but no less admirable football team. It has agreeably surprised yo' humble servant to find New Englanders so much like other folks. One discordant note obtrudes itself, a triflin' matter, but enough to show that the meddlesome spirit of the Abolitionists has not wholly perished in an age so much more tolerant and enlightened. A Boston newspaper of this mornin', while most kindly disposed toward our gallant athletes, went out of its way to tell us how to run our little college down in Kentucky. I quote as follows, ladies and gentlemen:

"Certainly it seems to be that academic studies are not having an overemphasis in an institution which can put its president, faculty, and student body in a special train for a football jaunt from Kentucky to Boston. The college authorities of New England are occasionally perturbed over the extent to which athletics encroach upon the classroom. Centre College seems to have a workable solution of the problem, which is to suspend academic operations altogether when the gridiron warriors hit the trail."

Colonel Shelby laid down the offensive clipping with an air of disdain and resumed his seat. Comment was superfluous. Bowman McMurray had been startled out of his painful introspections. He was bending forward, as though poised to run with the ball. Nancy Overton flashed a smile at Len Garretson who solemnly winked the signal of acknowledgment. The message read that the surest way to restore the McMurray to normal form was to give him the cue for a speech. He shoved back his chair and stood at attention, solid, deep-chested, serious, but with a play of sensitive emotions in those eyes of Irish gray. Earnestly he declaimed:

"You know what President Wilson said: *'There is a small college in Kentucky that in its years of existence has turned out more men that have attained prominence than has Princeton in more than twice that length of time!'* Remember when I told you that, Len, old man, when we rode home from the Rio Grande, and it nearly knocked you off your pony? It was the turning point in your career, wasn't it? Why be disturbed by the dyspeptic ignorance of an editor who is a twin brother to the other codfish that hangs in the Boston Statehouse?"

The McMurray was himself again, or, rather, he was forgetting himself. Garretson warned Mike Brennan to watch out for eulogies. If ever a boy could kid himself out of his troubles, said Len, it was this same black-haired wonder from Texas. All he needed was a running start and plenty of room to swing his rope. True to this anticipation, Bowman's face shone and his gestures were impressive as he went on:

"Old Centre is still turning 'em out, as the centuries roll by. Yonder sits John Calvin Mercer, Jr., for instance. Has *he* ever 'suspended academic operations' to hit the gridiron trail? Not even in his sleep. The pet and pride of the father who bred him, the ornament of an illustrious campus, he will live to make mathematics more difficult, and future generations of boneheaded students will curse the day he was born. Passing lightly by this red-headed phenomenon, let us look at young Leonard Garretson who began life as a bench-legged cow-puncher with nothing to recommend him but ability to land a knock-out with either hand. He is now destined for a brilliant career, whatever it is.

"Harvard can show us how to play football, in some respects, but our faith in Andy Swope and Fayette Caldwell—now there's a *man* that little old Centre turned out. He blushes at the mere mention of his name and is liable to slide under the table, so I mercifully desist. Do you know what happened this afternoon may be a blessing in disguise and a warning to build up a stronger rush line against the arrow that flieth by day an' the terror that walketh in darkness? In other words, we'll show 'em that Centre can come back. Nobody can express the spirit that never knows when it's whipped better than Chief Quartermaster Mike Brennan, of the old Queenstown Flotilla. He has the deck."

Cheerful and glowing, the McMurray sat down and old Mike bowed, a noble personification of disciplined duty and self-effacement. His stern, weather-beaten features softened wonderfully as he said:

"I have a strong interest in this boy an' his team an' his college. After what I saw to-day, I'm well satisfied that they are passin' it along. As an old shipmate of Bowman's I will say no more. 'Tis me great reward for a favor or two I may have done th' lad while I was in th' service."

Soon after this, Colonel Shelby said his adieus, and he leaned heavily on Mike Brennan's arm as they passed out of the room. The others lingered a little longer and then found it pleasanter to finish the evening in a private sitting room. Thomas McMurray said to his son as they walked along the hall together:

"I telegraphed to mother, Bowman. She was anxious to know. She wept a bit, no doubt, but there was comfort in what I told her."

"How did you break it to mother, dad? I couldn't figure out what to send her."

"*'It was terrible hard on his clothes, but he kept his temper,'* replied Thomas McMurray with his hearty chuckle. "You've been a good boy, Bowman, and we never loved you so much as now."

"Everybody has always been *so* darn good to me," said the young McMurray, and it expressed even more than he was aware.

The guests were not inclined to tarry late. By ones and twos they drifted out and the host strolled downstairs with the Presbyterian clergyman. They left behind them Bowman McMurray and one other. He suddenly looked around the room and exclaimed:

"Why, Nan, there's nobody here but us. How did *that* happen? I was tremendously interested, of course, but——"

"And you ought to follow them, Bo. You are so tired and sleepy that I dread watching you smother one more yawn. It looks so painful."

"Nancy Overton, that's an insult. I could no more yawn in your presence——"

"What do I care, you poor, tired boy? I'm surprised that you can sit up and take notice at all. Is there anything more on your mind that has to be said to-night?"

"Well, I don't want to seem impatient or anything, Nan, but after waiting seven long years——"

"You can wait a little longer? You are always logical, Bo," said Nancy, with a gleam of mischief in her eyes. "Remember the message I sent by Colonel Shelby when he went to find you and take you out of the navy. *'Some day!'* "

"And here I am 'most through college," he protested, "but our relations are still unsatisfactory, Nan, dear. I have seen you at home now and then, when I wasn't working away somewhere in vacations, and we seem to have got out of the habit of misunderstanding each other, which used to be so tragic and forlorn. You have no idea how I wandered out into the night from your house, when I was a boy, and decided never to marry."

"Don't, Bowman. I never did know whether to laugh or cry over you. Be sensible and tell me what your plans are, after football and college."

"Dad wants me to start in with him. Thomas McMurray & Son, hardware manufacturers. It means overalls and small wages for a while. Dad is that kind of a boss. You wouldn't believe it, Nan, but I've been actually offered *ten thousand dollars* a year to play professional football. Nothing to it! That wasn't what I went to college for, though I used to think so."

"You might marry some nice girl ever so much sooner," suggested Nancy.

"*You* don't want me to be a professional athlete," exclaimed Bowman. "What would become of all my ideals and things?"

"Of course not," said she, just as earnestly. "Then you *could* accuse me of *'dislikin' football.'* "

"So much for that! Not but what money and matrimony have to go hand in hand, to a certain extent. It's perfectly wonderful to be talking to you this way, Nan, even if we are both tired and sleepy. This has been a hard day for all concerned. But I always have a curious feeling that I may never see you again. You have been more or less of a beautiful phantom, or words to that effect, ever since you faded out of Cincinnati, the time you were visiting your aunt, Miss Ellen Hotchkiss, on Meridian Street. I forgave you long ago, just as I'd forgive you 'most anything for the sake of harmony, but it left me uneasy."

"That mysterious telegram?" smiled Nancy, quite unconcerned. "You had better ask Len Garretson. He won't tell you much, but he hinted to me that he was mixed up in it. He said you needed a change of air, or something of the sort. That is all I know, honestly. Len is not loquacious."

"The old Texas fox!" cried Bowman, not in the least resentful. "No use mentioning it to him now. I surely did need a change of air just then! And so you never sent it at all, Nan! My mind is certainly relieved about you. Women may be complex, but they ought not to add unnecessary kinks. A man can stand just about so much."

"Women love courage and devotion and unselfishness," replied Nancy, with frank tenderness.

"I know you do, and it's a fine mental attitude," sighed Bowman McMurray, "but if you could only love *me* in spite of my numerous failings——"

"Some day——" began Nancy

The door opened and Len Garretson entered with his lazy tread. He coughed and would have withdrawn, but his sense of humor detained him. With a grin on that lean, steadfast countenance he drawled:

"Beg pardon, folks, but there's a boy named Red Mercer waiting outside with a little chess box under one arm and a load of groceries under the other. What shall I tell him?"

"Tell him to go jump off the roof," savagely retorted McMurray.

"Sit down, Len," sweetly invited Nancy. "Bowman was in the midst of a romance, but he can finish it—some day."

"Motion-picture stuff!" said the cynical Garretson kid. "I wasn't jokin' just now. Red will ramble along directly to say good night."

He held up three fingers, close together, and gazed at Bowman with a wicked twinkle in those somber eyes as he murmured:

"Just like this!"

THE END.

More of Mr. Paine's work will appear in early issues.

Shades of Shakespeare!

By W. R. Hoefer

Author of "The Goat," "A Dangerous Dame," Etc.

As an actor, the only trouble with the "Kerry Patch Kid" was that he couldn't stand it to be successful

MR. THEODORE SPRACKLING,
Jefferson Hotel,
St. Louis, Missouri.

DEAR "SILK": How would you like to take another little flyer in the theatrical game for a while? Can book the "Kerry Patch Kid" twenty weeks at five hundred per with the Dainty Maidens Company.

Two shows a day, but easy money, as act would be only fifteen minutes each show. If you decide to accept, meet me in New York Thursday. Wire reply. Cordially yours,

SOL I. JACOBS.

United Theaters Attractions Company,
Princess Theater Building,
New York City.

THE urbane Mr. Sprackling digested the contents of the letter with his breakfast eggs in the hotel dining room, sighed luxuriously as he finished his coffee and smiled with satisfaction.

It was a timely offer. Securing bouts for his hard-hitting and destructive middleweight, Terry Meagan, alias the Kerry Patch Kid, was becoming increasingly difficult of late. And, moreover, the Kid's two-round knock-out of one "Bearcat" Toomey the night before at the Colosseum would hardly aid any in the process of enticing opponents into a fistic debate with the Kid. The Kid was too careless with his murderous right cross and his opponents. "He ought to save his adversaries up like Sam Langford used to do," was the thought in Mr. Sprackling's mind. But this the Kid refused to do. He was too fond of action, and without the nice discrimination of other pugilists in the matter of set-ups and push-overs in the ring.

If the Kid wasn't careful he would fight himself clear out of future bouts. And this meant no more money. Which, of course, meant real toil for himself and the Kid. Yes, the theatrical offer had come just in time.

"Good old Solly," murmured Silk, as he handed the missive across the table to his charming little wife. "He wants us back in the theater."

At the word theater Mrs. Sprackling shuddered slightly and arched her dainty eyebrows in pained surprise.

"Teddy, dear," she replied, a note of concern in her voice. "Do you really think you ought to take another theatrical offer? You remember what happened when you managed those æsthetic dancing girls—before you secured Terry to manage. I don't like to mention it, but we—well, you know we didn't eat—er—regularly in those days."

Sprackling fondly patted his wife's hand, and his good-looking countenance beamed upon her reassuringly.

"That was different, honey," he replied gently. "We played one-night stands in tank towns out in the weeds then—and on a chance. Here we'd play week engagements, in regular cities in civilization—and on a guarantee. You see the Kid's a far different attraction than the young ladies were. They always had plenty of kicks but no real punch. The Kid has the punch—the old nine-ten wallop; the sock soporific."

"But—Terry isn't an actor. And the Dainty Maidens—I've never heard of them, but wouldn't he have to act with them?"

"The Kid *is* a pretty bad actor," conceded Sprackling, "with five-ounce gloves on his hands. But," he explained patiently, "he won't have to act, darling. You see the Dainty Maidens aren't quite as dainty as they sound. They're a burlesque troupe. The Kid's act would be merely a sparring exhibition, punching the bag, a few other training stunts and the like. Then I'd make a little speech explaining how the middleweight champion has taken a run-out powder from us and how we can lick any one in the world at anywhere near our poundage."

"Well," sighed the little lady resignedly, "of course you know best, dear. Still," she added wistfully, "I do wish you'd go back to the law, Ted. It's ever so much nicer a profession."

"If you know enough wealthy crooks to defend," he conceded gently. "But the crooks I happen to know aren't either in trouble or wealthy. Anyway, what could be sweeter than managing a tin-eared pug these days? The less they know and the harder they sock the more the dear old public will disgorge to see 'em in action. Look at Dempsey. The public paid him three hundred thousand smacks for a few minutes' visit with Monsieur Carpentier—not for what he had in his brain lobes, but for what they expected to see in his left hook. And that reminds me, honey; maybe we'll get a movie engagement through this."

"But neither you nor Terry can act," she reminded her husband.

"I know it," he responded. "That's what makes me think we might be starred in the movies." A half hour later Sprackling was explaining the offer of Jacobs to the Kerry Patch Kid in the lobby of the hotel. The latter was not especially lured by the prospect of showing himself in the theater.

"Aw, I ain't no actor, Silk," he protested. "I'll fight anybody. Ya just get 'em in the ring for me an' I'll knock 'em out. But what do I wanna be an actor for, hey Silk?" The debonair manager carefully explained matters then, after which the carroty-haired Meagan, who was naturally stubborn but usually tractable where Sprackling and his wife were concerned, agreed to undertake the project.

"Aw right, Silk. Aw right," he finally agreed. "But I ain't no actor, remember that."

"If you are," replied the manager, "then I'm a ballet dancer; but that's all right, Terry."

Accordingly three days later the Sprackling entourage, composed of Mrs. Sprackling, her husband, the flame-haired Kid and the latter's bull pup, Highball, were in New York, and the Kid and Sprackling conferred with Solly Jacobs. Not long after the act was ready, and in November the Kerry Patch Kid and his manager joined the Dainty Maidens Company and made their first appearance in their act in Boston at the old Howard Theater.

The act went well with the burlesque public from the start. Sprackling appeared first, making a neat little speech in which he explained the fistic fame of the Kid for the benefit of the few who might not have heard of the latter's ring prowess. Then he challenged the world at anywhere near the middleweight limit on the Kid's behalf, paying especial attention to the champion's name in the challenge, after which he introduced the Kid, who appeared at the right moment attired in a rainbow-colored bath robe and jerkily bobbed his bullet head at the audience in recognition of the generous applause.

The Kid then went through his program of bag punching, rope skipping, shadow boxing, and mauling the big sandbag, after which he sparred three abbreviated rounds with a sparring partner secured by the energetic Sprackling, one "Rough-house" Regan by name.

It became patent to Sprackling from the first showing of his boxer that the audience liked the act. The Kid was industry personified. He skipped the rope with agility if not grace, put zip and fervor into his shadow boxing, venom into his mauling of the big bag, and pain and annoyance into his sparring partner, Rough-house Regan.

The Kid was plainly diffident and touched with a slight attack of stage fright at the initial performance. He scowled at the audience as he bobbed his brick-colored head at them in response to the applause and he glared at the florid lady with the suspiciously blond hair in the lower box who quite openly winked at him and lost his temper and for a moment had a natural inclination to break up the festivities when the fat man in the front row chuckled loudly and referred to him as a "red-headed ham."

But his shyness evaporated with each passing performance, and he was soon enjoying his appearances before the footlights quite as much as was his urbane, good-looking, sleek manager. Also, his self-esteem gradually expanded with his chest girth as he realized that the entire company, from the statuesque leading lady, Maybelle la Vernier —who in private life was Minnie Braatz, having actually been born in Hoboken—to the merest prancing chorus lady, considered him a good deal of a celebrity.

The Kid's ring fame had preceded him. Pat Cleary, the Hebrew comedian, who really carried the show, cultivated him; the two Staley girls, who starred in a sister act but were as unrelated, as a matter of fact, as the two Beaches, Rex and Rye, were thrilled at his record and cauliflower ear. And even the dazzling Miss la Vernier, who played the rôle of the wealthy society leader, Mrs. van Astergilt, and who, in the first act

sang Tosti's "Good-by" in tights and a soulful and tremulous, if a trifle cracked voice, in the ballroom scene, asked him all about his massacre of the previously famous "Knock-out" Dolan in Denver.

"Well, Terry, how do you like it?" inquired Sprackling the second week of their showing.

"Swell," replied the Kid with a pleased grin. "I guess it's kinda poor bein' a actor, hey, Silk? Ya bust right through the stage door without even a skull to get ya by an' ya crack jokes with the stage manager an' the actresses an' all. Why, we could even go right past the reg'lar ticket snatcher out in front, an' if the rummy said anything we could paste him one, if we wanted to get rough, an' what could they do about it, hey, Silk? Why," he continued, "just last night I was out playin' pinochle with the piccolo player in the orchestra. An' ya know how stuck up them guys can get, hey, Silk? if ya ain't well enough known to belong with 'em."

"Yes, indeed," conceded the manager gravely. "Piccolo players sometimes consider themselves above even drummers. But then, you're an artist, Terry, yourself, don't forget that. What could be sweeter and more soulful and artistic and uplifting than separating a chap in the ring from his teeth and senses and knocking him right out of the purse and through the ropes in full view of the admiring populace of our modern advanced civilization?"

The smooth Mr. Sprackling lazily lighted another cigarette and dreamily glanced through the wings at the rear row of the chorus, known rather unkindly as "The Old Ladies' Home," as they were finishing the song hit of the show—"You're My Jazztime, Razztime, Beautiful, Ragtime Doll"—in a prancing crescendo and a blare of orchestration.

"Why, we'll have you doing real dramatic acting, if we're not careful, Terry," said he.

This last remark was tendered the tin-eared Terry with jocular intent, but it was, if the suave manager had only known it at the time, a decidedly prophetic assertion.

II.

"Vaulting ambition oft o'erleaps itself," wrote the Bard of Avon many, many years ago. But it was not until the fourth week of the Kid's appearance with the Dainty Maidens, when the company was booked for a week's public cavorting in Providence that the wily Sprackling realized the full truth and dire import of the line. When he did, however, he breathed the heartfelt utterance that "The Immortal Bard certainly exhaled a mouthful."

It was the week previous that Sprackling had first noticed strange signs of unrest in Meagan. Then he had come unawares upon Meagan and Miss Vera Paine, the clever and attractive little comedienne of the company, before a matinée performance; and he had overheard the flame-haired one reciting a portion of the late Mr. Coleridge's "The Sigh" to the girl, back in the wings.

The Kid's reciting any one's poems ought to have warned Sprackling. His reciting one of Coleridge's—and "The Sigh," at that—should have been a danger sign. And the Kid's soulful manner ought to have prompted Silk to take heed immediately. But the manager had merely stopped and listened gleefully.

Meagan was putting feeling and soulful glances as well as bad grammar and atrocious pronunciation into his rendition, whereat Sprackling had great difficulty in repressing a mirthful howl. And at the Kid's reading:

> "But soon reflection's power impress
> A stiller sadness on my breast;
> An' sickly hope wit' wanin' eye
> Wuz swell content to droop an' die."

his manager nearly choked. The girl was rolling her handsome eyes in a manner that unmistakably registered ecstasy and appreciation. This, also, should have warned Silk. For she had an outrageous sense of humor. But after a chuckle he had then passed on and for the moment forgotten the surprising incident.

He recalled it now in Providence, however. For on Monday evening the Kerry Patch Kid came to him after the evening show and abruptly announced that he was through with his present act. Sprackling stared in astonishment at the verbal bombshell.

"What's the idea?" he asked, amazed. "Isn't this a soft enough way of collecting a living?"

"Sure," was the reply.

"Then what's the idea?" demanded the manager. "This is even more like stealing money than boxing for a living is. Not getting all swelled up, are you?" he asked suspiciously.

"Naw," was the response, albeit the Kid's

chest expanded a bit, and there was the suspicion of a swagger in his air. The boxer drew the manager to one side as they left the stage door. Then, "I'll tell ya why, Silk," he announced.

"Why?"

"Because I got ambition now," announced the other.

"Ambition? For what?" Sprackling grunted. "Work, maybe?"

"Naw, naw, not work," the other hastened to assure his manager. "I got ambition to be a regular actor." Sprackling nearly swallowed his cigarette at that.

"Terry, you aren't ill, are you?" he asked kindly. "Or slightly—er—perhaps a bit off?"

The other grinned.

"Nothin' like that. I ain't crazy an' I ain't sick. But I was made for better things 'n this cheap stuff I been pullin' here. I got a higher urge. I got real ability for regular acting. Sad stuff an' all that. An' so now I made up my mind I'm gonna pull it." The amazed Sprackling could only stare at the other for a moment. Then he employed ridicule and finally argument; but all to no purpose. He saw the stubborn Meagan's mind was firm.

He did some rapid thinking; he recalled the scene between the Paine girl and Meagan. A suspicion entered his mind.

"Terry," he said sternly. "You aren't in love, are you?" The other grunted in derision.

"Naw," he replied scornfully. "I should leave a dame get me in love, hey, Silk? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Has this Paine girl been kidding you? Putting insane ideas into that fool head of yours?"

"Nothin' like that, Kid," replied Meagan airily. "She didn't hafta. I begun to see things myself. All the little dame done was to tell me the other night, 'My, what a swell-speaking voice I got an' what swell stage presents, and ain't it a shame I'm pulling stuff like my act when this Arnold Daly an' this here Georgie Arliss keep gettin' by. An' my gracious, if I don't remind her of Jack Barrymore.' "

"You and Barrymore have the same number of arms, I'll concede that," said Sprackling.

"An', anyway, I got thinkin'——"

"With what?" was the sarcastic rejoinder.

"I got thinkin' about how Jack Dempsey was in the movies an' a hero an' all that. Why, Silk, they even marcelled Jack's hair an' went an' plucked his eyebrows, an' before you knew it you didn't know was Jack a pug or was he a matinée idle or something. An' believe me, Kid, if Jack can get away with that stuff, I'm just tossin' away my time slamming this Rough-house Regan on the map twice a day. There ain't any art in that."

"No, but there's money," was the tart retort. A talk with the Paine girl secured no better results. She denied having put any ideas into the Kid's head at all. Even denied the possibility of such a thing.

"Why, Mr. Sprackling, I couldn't put anything into his head," she told the manager seriously. He glanced at her closely, but her innocent look seemed to belie any hidden meaning in the remark.

"You've been talking to him about acting," asserted Silk.

"Why, of course," was the grave reply. "He did seem so interested. I do so admire ambition. So I tried to help him a little. I told him about poetry and art, and I gave him a book of Coleridge's poems. And do you know he went right off and memorized one and recited it at me. And I must say that the way he read those lines was really —well—er—remarkable."

"I'll say so," was Sprackling's mental comment. That same evening he wired Sol Jacobs about the affair, and the latter arrived in Providence the following day. Sol had an interest in the show as well as the act and the news disconcerted as well as stirred him.

"He's going to take a run-out powder on us unless we let him act," said Sprackling that afternoon at the hotel.

"My Gawd, he's crazy," exclaimed the excitable Jacobs. "He should be an actor, that tin-eared tough! Get busy. Do something. The act is going so fine and now he gets crazy notions."

Sprackling sighed.

"For the very first time since I've known him I can't do a thing with Terry," said he. "He won't budge. I strongly suspect this little Paine girl has put something into his mind."

The pudgy Jacobs groaned and waved his hands excitedly about.

"Then I s'pose all we gotta do is cancel the act," said he. "And it was piling 'em in. And we still had sixteen weeks left."

Sprackling lit a cigarette, blew a few smoke rings reflectively at the ceiling, and finally turned to the blustering Jacobs.

"Listen, Solly," said he. "Why not let the Kid act?"

The other gasped.

"You ain't getting crazy, too, are you, Silk?" he asked. "If we put the Kid on in a regular act the audience would be so mad they'd bust up the house as well as the show. How could the act run if this Kid tries to pull a Dave Warfield or stuff like that when he's just a cauliflower-eared guy which couldn't act a hunk of ice in 'Uncle Tom's Cabin?'"

"That's just my scheme," answered Sprackling. "Let's let Terry try it. Of course he'll be so rotten that the audience'll get sore. Then they'll hoot him so fiercely and howl him right off the stage so fast that the Kid'll come to his senses and be glad to go back to the old sparring act. It'll waste a couple of weeks, perhaps, but it's the only way."

After some discussion Jacobs grudgingly agreed to the scheme as the only way out. He didn't want to lose Meagan, who was popular and aiding greatly in carrying the show. The boxer was sent for.

"Terry," said Sprackling, when the pugilist appeared, gayly swinging a cane, his huge hands attired in pearl-gray gloves. "We've decided to let you act. Now, just what did you have in mind doing?"

The Kerry Patch Kid rubbed a thick ear as he laboriously gathered his thoughts.

"This little Paine dame an' me we're gonna pull a act together," he finally announced firmly. "We got that all made up. An' she said something about this guy Shakesbeer. It seems he writes swell stage stuff. So now suppose we go an' get him to write a real swell act for us. With sad stuff in it an' ev'rything."

"Shades of Shakespeare!" murmured Sprackling. "Terry," said he, coming to, "you don't really mean you want me to go and *see* Mr. Shakespeare—and have him write a *new* act—just for you?"

"Sure," was the brusque response. "What if this pen pusher is a high-priced guy? I'll go the limit if he's as good as they say. Get him here. That's me, Kid," and the boxer's chest expanded a trifle.

Jacobs' eyes were popping out and his mouth was open as he continued to stare at the Kid.

"My Gawd!" he finally ejaculated. "He don't even know Shakespeare is dead."

"How should I know," replied the Kid testily. "I didn't even know when he got sick."

"Shakespeare," announced Jacobs weakly, "is dead now over three hundred years."

"Well, then get some one else. We don't want any dead ones, anyway," said the Kid.

He had another talk with Vera Paine, and then returned and announced his plans.

"What we're gonna do is a scene from one of this Shakesbeer's plays," Meagan informed the others, later.

"Which one?" asked Sprackling.

"'Romeo an' Julia' or something."

"You mean 'Romeo and Juliet?'"

The Kid nodded. "Yeah. I guess so. It's in act number two in a garden," he added.

Sprackling nodded weakly. "Yes, I know," said he. "It's the famous balcony scene; in *Capulet's* garden." Then, as he thought of the Paine girl, "The little devil—to put him up to that."

However, they let him have his way. A cheap set for the scene was made. The Kerry Patch Kid and the Paine girl rehearsed the scene in spare time, the Kid having gladly agreed to go through with his sparring act until the other was ready. He was letter-perfect in his part shortly before the Dainty Maidens were to open in Fourteenth Street, in New York, and Jacobs and Sprackling had another conference before the Kerry Patch Kid was to make his first appearance on any stage in "Romeo and Juliet."

"You saw him in the scene?" asked Jacobs, who had seen none of the rehearsals, having gone back to New York. Sprackling nodded.

"How was he?" asked Jacobs hopefully. "Pretty bad, I s'pose."

"Worse," was the dry response. "He's simply terrible. The girl isn't so bad. But then she's a clever little actress. But Terry's awful."

Jacobs groaned. "I hope the audience don't get so mad they'll start shooting," said he. "Think of it."

"I am," responded Sprackling. "And I'd suggest that we put the thing on last, just before the final curtain. There won't be so many people left in the audience that late in the show, if they do start a riot and throw things."

"All right. I hope they throw heavy things—and their aim at this Kid is good," was Jacobs' parting shot.

III.

The Dainty Maidens opened in New York to a rather sparsely filled house. It was a matinée show, for one thing, and, for another, it was close to Christmas week. And for this much, at least, both Sprackling and the excitable Jacobs were grateful.

"For once in my life I wouldn't want to see 'em packing in," observed Jacobs, as the Dainty Maidens kicked their way through the opening ensemble.

"I hope," prayed Sprackling, "they don't remove their shoes and throw 'em. Or dollar watches. I wouldn't want Terry injured."

"The quicker they hurt him the better," countered the other. "Then we could get him back to his reg'lar act."

"It's a wonder," mused Silk, "that he wouldn't pick out the battle scene in 'Macbeth' to play. Then he'd have a shield, at least, for protection from the audience."

The Kid, however, very evidently had no fears of bodily injury or vocal displeasure. While waiting to go on he strutted about back in the wings, a trace of pardonable pride in his manner as he alternately viewed himself in his ancient lover's costume of doublet and hose, cloak and feathered cap, and went over his lines.

After what seemed an interminable wait to Jacobs and Sprackling the regular show ended; the Dainty Maidens had registered their last prancing kick. The curtain rose again to disclose the scene in *Capulet's* garden—and the prize-ring *Romeo* entered. Sprackling held his breath in trepidation as the burly Meagan came upon the stage, a strut in his heavily muscled legs and a swagger to his thick, powerful body. In a bawling voice that filled every corner of the theater he spouted:

"He kids at scars who never got a wound——"

The audience glanced at his battle-scarred face and a woman in a box snickered as the Paine girl, lovely in her ancient costume, appeared at the balcony window above. The rest of the audience merely stared in surprise at the raucous, bawling voice. They could not quite understand the thing at the moment. Here was a new *Romeo,* indeed—who proceeded to declaim:

"But soft, what light t'rough yonder window busts?
'It is the East, an' Julia is the moon——'"

"'Sun,' Kid, 'sun,'" prompted the girl above, sotto voce.

"The sun, then," agreed the Kid, as he continued, line after line:

"——; t'row it off,
It is my lady; Oh, it is my love.
It—it—it——"

"'Oh!'" prompted the girl again. "'Oh,' Kid, 'Oh!'"

The Kid obediently recited:

"Oh, kiddo! Oh, that she knew she were.
She speaks, but she don't say nothin'; what about it?
Her eye dis—dis—dis——"

"'Discourses,'" supplied the Paine girl again in a hiss.

"Oh, gee, yeah," he said, nodding vigorously up at her, and proceeded:

"Her eye dis course is, I will answer it.
I'm too darn bold; 'tis not to me she talks:
A couple of the swellest stars in heaven
Wit' some business do treat her eyes
To twinkle in their spears till they get back."

Sprackling and Jacobs exchanged glances off-stage as the burly pugilist proceeded stumbling, halting, mispronouncing, improvising, and accepting the hissed promptings of the *Juliet* above.

"Awful," observed Silk, a look of pain in his face.

"Terrible," breathed Jacobs.

They waited for the outburst from an enraged audience, the flying missiles. But they waited in vain. For the audience, at first amazed at the unusual *Romeo,* began to titter as the scene proceeded. Then chuckles floated up from all over the house and, as the Kid, completely forgetting some of his lines made up new ones, with the girl on the balcony prompting him from above, a gale of laughter swept the place. Then applause began that became so loud and continuous that the scene was stopped for several moments.

Sprackling glanced at Jacobs in astonishment. "Why," he gasped, "they like it."

The other nodded, a grin stealing over his swarthy face. "Uh-huh. He's so rotten he's good."

"They think it's *intended* for a burlesque," said Silk.

Again the scene proceeded with the girl's clear voice floating down to the burly Meagan and again his raucous tones bellowed up

at her. The applause had heartened the Kid. He attempted to really act. And in trying to gracefully throw his cloak back over one shoulder he knocked his cap from his head, awkwardly recovered it, and hastily set it back over one cauliflower ear. Again the audience howled and applauded.

"The tough Kid's stopped the show," cried Jacobs excitedly. "The act's a knock-out."

"Sure is," grinned Sprackling. He chuckled. Jacobs chuckled.

"It's a good one on the audience," said Jacobs.

"Good joke on the Kid, too," returned Silk. "He thinks he's such a great actor they've gone crazy over him."

When the curtain was finally rung down the applause became almost deafening. Again and again the Kid was called before the curtain. And again and again he gladly came forth, chest proudly extended, and awkwardly bowed and bobbed his corroty head at the audience.

"Who is this comedian?" asked a keen-looking man, up front, of his neighbor.

"Terence Meagan, the program states. Never heard of him. Great stuff, this burlesque on Shakespeare. He's a very clever actor." And the keen-looking individual, who happened to be a dramatic critic who had dropped in at the burlesque house that afternoon for a change of theatrical diet went back to his paper and did a eulogistic screed on what he termed "the funniest thing in town."

There was more swagger than ever in the Kid's manner as he came to his manager after the show.

"I guess maybe I ain't some actor, hey, Silk?" said he pompously. "Me, I was just made for this Shakesbeer stuff."

"You were," replied Silk gravely. The following morning he came to Solly Jacobs with a clipping from a morning newspaper in his hand.

"Terry's even fooled Allan Dyer, the best critic in New York. He thinks the Kid was deliberately burlesquing Shakespeare. Calls him a remarkable comedian and the act the best thing here."

Jacobs' eyes gleamed as he read the famous dramatic critic's notice.

"We should worry now, Silk," said he rapturously. "If this puff wouldn't pack 'em in to the roof then I shouldn't know Mary Pickford from Sarah Bernhardt."

The act did pack them in, matinée and evening, for five days; and the theater manager was begging Jacobs to rearrange his other Greater New York bookings and give his house another week of the Kid's remarkable *Romeo,* while Jacobs himself was deciding to book the act indefinitely after the twenty weeks' original booking was over. This was found, to his disgust, to be impossible, however, when Sprackling saw him at the evening performance.

"Sol," said Silk, "I've some news that may knock you over. You haven't heart disease, have you? I can't let you have the Kid after the twenty weeks is up."

"What is it?" asked Jacobs in alarm. "This Terry, the tin-eared *Romeo*—don't tell me he's gone and died yet!"

"Nope—he's been hit by another offer. Ernie Edwards of the U. B. O. offers us a thousand a week for the Kid's *Romeo*—forty weeks solid over the Big Time when we're through with your bookings. They're talking about his stuff all over town. Every one thinks he's a real comedian putting on a deliberate burlesque of Avon Bill."

The other gasped. Then he sighed.

"Luck don't care what it hits," he exclaimed. "Could you beat it?" The urbane manager then sought out the Paine girl in her dressing room, to tell her of the vaudeville offer.

"But we'll have to be very careful to keep the Kid thinking that he's a great actor," he explained. "The minute he tried to be a real comedian he'd be terrible instead of funny."

The Paine girl daintily manipulated a powder puff and giggled. "That's right. If he ever learns that they think he's funny, it'll be all off. But what about the papers? Isn't he apt to read them?"

Sprackling grinned. "No chance. His only literature is his bank book and the sport page. He doesn't know a dramatic page exists. So unless some one deliberately tries to convince him we're putting something over on him he'll keep on thinking he's a great actor."

At that moment the Kid thrust his head through the half-opened doorway.

"Sh-h-h," warned the girl, placing a finger to her lips. Meagan entered the dressing room with a self-satisfied air and sat down upon a trunk.

"Who's the rummy?" he inquired, indicating a signed photograph on her dressing table.

"Another Shakespearean actor," she explained. "Sothern—my aunt played in one of his companies."

The Kid casually inspected the picture and openly yawned. "The guy any good?" he asked condescendingly.

"Oh, yes; pretty good," she conceded gravely. "But, of course, his *Romeo* was nothing like yours."

"Oh, well, we can't all be knock-outs. This Shakesbeer is hard stuff to act. Even with me, now; I kinda forget my lines sometimes. At that," he offered generously, "this guy must of been pretty fair to get by a-tall with Shakesbeer."

"Yes, he was," she replied, inspecting her make-up in a hand mirror. "But even Sothern never gave a performance like yours."

"An' I guess he never got a offer of a thousand seeds a week to pull this *Romeo* on Big Time vaudeville, hey, Silk?" And after glancing carelessly about the room the Kerry Patch Kid strutted out.

"Is he gone?" she inquired, giggling softly, after the Kid's departure.

Sprackling glanced toward the door. "Yes," he replied. Then he glanced quizzically at the girl. "And now I want to know something," said he. "You put this idea of acting Shakespeare into Terry's thick knob. You might as well admit it now. But just why did you do it?" Miss Paine giggled aloud. "Well, I'll tell you, Silk. I got the idea from that book of Daisy Ashford's, 'The Young Visiters.' It was the funniest thing I ever read. And, of course, what made it so funny was the fact that a kid was seriously attempting something she was ignorant of. And the more serious she got the funnier the book was. Well, I used to look at Terry, swaggering around, all swelled up at the attention he was getting as a boxer, and I got an insane idea to see him seriously act Shakespeare. I simply couldn't resist it."

Sprackling went off into a roar of laughter. Miss Paine giggled again, her eyes sparkling.

"And," she continued, "I talked art to him and told him about acting and gave him a book of poems. I told him he'd be a wonderful actor, and he got so he believed me. Then he insisted on reciting poetry at me and, before I knew it, he was so determined to act Romeo that I couldn't have called him off if I'd wanted to." At thought of the prize-ring Romeo, she laughed until the tears came rolling down. "Oh, I think he's the *funniest* thing," she cried, between convulsions of mirth. "I've had all I could do to keep from laughing right out in the act."

Sprackling glanced out upon the stage. The chorus was going through its last capers in the closing number. It was nearly time for the Romeo and Juliet scene. She giggled again and again.

"Oh," giggled the girl again, as she prepared to go on, "I *do* think he's the *funniest* thing."

"I'll say so," laughed Sprackling, forgetting everything in his mirth. Then they heard a sound behind them.

They turned—and looked right into the face of the Kerry Patch Kid. There was a peculiar look in the prize-ring *Romeo's* eyes. A look that Sprackling had never seen before.

"So you two went an' put up a job on me, huh?" he roared in a rage. "I been listening to ya outside. So I'm a dog-gone funny guy, hey? Well, lemme tell ya there ain't no fresh skirt is gonna make a funny boob outa me an' get away with it." His cap was over one ear, and he was violently waving the end of his cloak.

"Not so loud, Terry," pleaded Sprackling. "They can hear you 'way out front." The Kid snorted.

"I should worry about out front," he bellowed. Then the stage manager came in. "Say, cut out this racket, you," he snapped at the Kid. "They can hear you all over the place."

"Aw, go an' take a jump in the river," howled the irate Kid. Then Solly Jacobs, attracted by the noise, appeared.

"My Gawd, Terry, go easy on them lungs of yours. You got 'em all excited in the audience." At that moment the chorus came prancing in from the stage and added to the excited group about the Kid. The curtain had been rung down and had gone up again, with the Romeo and Juliet scene due at that very moment.

"Time to go on," snapped the testy stage manager at the Kid. "C'm'on, cut out this damn nonsense. You're holding up the scene." He foolishly grasped the Kid by his doublet and gave him a slight shove toward the stage and that precipitated the fireworks. The remarkable *Romeo* forsook his lover's rôle, swung his hefty right hand on the stage manager's jaw, and the latter went sprawling through some near-by scenery.

"Terry, Terry," wailed Jacobs. "The show—the show! It's time yet to go on. Quick! They're waiting!"

"T'hell wit' the show!" howled the Kid. "There ain't gonna be no performance. There ain't nobody gonna make a boob outa me. I'm gonna bust up this show right here," and he started for the excited assemblage of chorus girls, principals, stage hands, and others.

"Terry," again pleaded Jacobs. "Oh, what a tough low life——"

"Aw, shut up!" roared Terry as he swung at the pleading Jacobs, sending him flying backward upon the stage.

The audience was in a turmoil of excitement now. The chorus girls shrieked and fled in all directions. Pat Cleary, the Hebrew comedian, attempted to pacify the angry one, and he in turn was knocked flying over a wardrobe trunk. Vera Paine had some time since fled for her very life, and after every male about the place had been aimed at by the Kid's flying fists, the latter spied Sprackling, advancing in the rôle of peacemaker.

"An' you, too," roared Meagan, making for the manager.

"Terry," cried Silk, "have a heart! Use some discretion. It's me——"

"Yeah, I know it's you," howled the Kid, above the uproar of the audience. "I'm a funny boob, huh. Just wait'll I getcha, Silk!" And he tore after the astonished manager. The latter, who had seen this *Romeo's* fistic as well as his love-making ability too frequently to take any chances, immediately took to his speedy heels, the enraged Terry in hot pursuit.

Around and around they went, leaping over piled-up scenery, hurdling trunks and guy ropes and dodging hither and yon back of the scenes. Then Sprackling, seeing the Kid almost within reach, lost heed of the audience and ran out upon the stage, across, through the other wing and out the stage entrance upon the street. Nor did he escape entirely unscathed, for the blow which the Kid aimed at him struck him upon his left eye as he turned his head; but before the now battling *Romeo* could follow up his advantage he was grasped by many hands from the rear and forcibly hauled back into the theater and subdued as some one rang down the curtain.

Late that night, after the usually dapper Sprackling had attained the tranquillity of his hotel room, his wife carefully placed a piece of beefsteak on the rapidly swelling, discolored optic.

"Poor Teddy," said the little lady pityingly, patting his hand. "But the swelling will go down now, dear. So don't you worry about the eye."

He grinned wryly as he viewed his beefsteaked eye in the mirror and lit a cigarette.

"I won't, honey," he assured her. "It's the nonswelling of our bank account I've got to begin worrying about. Terry refuses to perpetrate *Romeo* any more, and the thousand a week offer has vanished like a politician's good intentions."

"Well, just wait until I give Terry a talking to—the wretch," said she, her eyes flashing and her firm little chin in the air as she thought of the damaged optic. "He ought to be sued for assault."

"He ought," agreed Silk, as he thought of the Kid's attacks on Shakespeare. "But poor Bill isn't here to press the action."

COMMON JUSTICE

HENRY MILLER, the actor-producer, is fond of good music and proportionately irritated by poor singing. He was at a midnight supper on one occasion when a middle-aged woman, who had in earlier years been a singer of some note, began to discuss favorite songs with him.

"I hate popular songs!" Miller said at last, being bored by her hyperbole.

She ran off a list of a dozen or so which she said she had often sung and still "loved," and added: "They give a new meaning to the word haunting. They do haunt me!"

"Murdered things," said Miller, without mercy, "have their ghosts."

Disarmament in Blue Basin

By J. E. Grinstead

Author of "An Imported Vamp," "Half Wild and Half House Cat," Etc.

The great trouble with disarmament is that it *may* not be mutual

AT the end of a grilling hot day's ride in the plains country, I reached the horse ranch of the 7-O-L outfit. It was apart from the cow ranch, and was managed by my old-time cowboy friend, Jimmy Hutchins, "Hutch," as he was familiarly known in the cow country.

After supper, Hutch and I dragged our chairs out on the long gallery and sat down for a smoke. The cool, evening breeze of the plains was gently stirring the graying locks of my old friend, and the soft light of a half moon fell on the classic features of the greatest plainsman I ever knew. Years ago he was a topnotcher at the round-ups and on the trail. He was strictly of the West, Western. I knew him to be the bravest, truest friend, the nerviest gun fighter, and the tenderest-hearted man, where a woman or a child was concerned, that ever drew gun in a just cause, or overlooked the frailties of other people. He was the man that instituted the custom of calling a six-shooter a "cutter." A bad, crooked trail boss once refused to let Hutch, who was the boss of another outfit, "cut his herd." Hutch knew some of his cattle were in the crooked herd, and told the crook calmly that he was going to cut them out.

"Like to know who's goin' to cut 'em, when I say not," blustered the big trail boss.

"Here's the little cutter that'll do it," said Hutch, as he tapped the butt of his gun, and coolly rode into the herd. He cut them, too, and got his cattle.

The yarns Hutch tells of the West are from firsthand knowledge. He was in them —but according to his statement he was always afraid, and the other fellow had the nerve.

"So, the 7-O-L have at last recognized your merits, and made you foreman of the horse ranch, have they, Hutch?" I asked.

"Well, that's the polite way of putting it, I reck'n," he drawled. "Fact is, they've recognized that I'm gettin' too old, and kneesprung, for a cuttin' hawss. Just for the work I have done, they made me a sort of glorified wrangler, with a title."

I knew why Hutch was foreman of the horse ranch. He was the best judge of a horse, and had the widest knowledge of breeding, of any man in the plains country. But I let the matter go, and we sat in silence, smoking.

"Been reading right smart in the papers here lately about this disarmy*ment* business. I don't know much about it, but if the world is anything like the cow country, she won't work. In the old times, when a fellow packed a gun, and was known to have the sand to use it, he rarely had to do it. I reck'n I had to do in about the first one of them disarmy*ment* movements that ever happened in this country."

No living man can copy, or polish, one of Hutch's yarns, without ruining it, so I'll just turn a rule and let him, instead of myself, tell it.

Reck'n you never knowed I was a depity sheriff once? It was back a ways, when the cow country was right rough and onculturedlike. Come along a drought like that one they had when old Bill Pharaoh was runnin' the Big Sphinx Ranch, on the Nile, and lasted dang nigh as long. The cattle all went to Montana, but I got a stubborn fit, and refused to foller 'em. Bill Staples, the sheriff of Tomache County, offered me a job as depity. I taken it, but I don't hold her long. The life's too streenyus for a timid man.

A sane, sober, civilized citizen of these here United States had about as much business in Blue Basin, in them times, as a red hair's got in the butter. Still, if it hadn't been for Blue Basin, just then, Tomache

County would have had about as much use for a depity sheriff as there is for a lock on a hearse door.

About the time I gets this job, they comes a wagon through Sotol, the county seat of Tomache. The driver is a big-framed, lean-lookin' devil, sandy, bushy, and sun-baked. His mouth's so big that his sandy mustache looks like a flock of dead grass over the entrance to a bat cave. In the wagon is a tired-lookin' woman, some younger than the man, and a mighty pretty little girl, about three year old past, comin' four. The wagon stops in front of the general store. I happen to be standing clost by, and hear the little girl say:

"Mamma, where's daddy?"

"Hush, darling," says the woman, kinder wearylike.

It was a fool question for the kid to ask, when her daddy was right there on the spring seat, in the wagon.

This outfit goes on out to Blue Basin and settles. I see the feller a few times. He comes in after supplies, and gives his name as Porter. He goes into the hawg business, in Blue Basin, and prospers some. He ain't there but a little while ontel he's got more hawgs than anybody in the settlement—and they's some hawg people there, too. His neighbors just nicknames him "Hawgy" Porter, and lets it go at that—and watches they own pens.

I reck'n it's a year after that, when me and Sheriff Bill Staples is sitting in the shade of the courthouse one afternoon about three o'clock. Sotol is taking her siesty, and she's takin' a plumb good one. The only living thing in sight is one horned toad, and he looks like he's about to faint. They ain't a sound, except the squeakin' of the windmill over at the waterworks, when a little puff of wind turns the wheel half round, and dies out.

Bill and me is watchin' the frog, smokin' some, and saying nothing. After a while, Bill rolls a fresh one and, while he's waitin' for the sulphur to burn off'n the match, he says:

"Wisht somebody'd steal a hawss or su'thin'. Business is right dull."

"Yes," I says, "if they ain't some excitement here pretty soon somebody's apt to take this village for a corpse, and bury it."

Bill had just got a light, and we was both lookin' at the frog again, when a fellow rides in on the trail comin' from the east. He stops in front old Pablo's chili joint, next door to the general store, and onloads hisself from his braunk.

I reck'n if Bill and me had been lookin' the other way, we wouldn't have turned our heads. It was too danged hot and listless for much exertion. But the feller bein' in line with the frog, we both gets a eye, both eyes, full of him.

That hombre looks right bad, but he don't do a thing you can arrest him for. He just walks into the chili joint, wakes old Pablo, eats up all he can get, and walks out again. As he stands there by his tired, sweaty old braunk, rolling a smoke, I gets his measure.

This gent is anywhere from six to seven foot high, 'cordin' to how straight he stands. He has rid so far since he had his clothes off that the inside of his pants laigs, and his boot tops kinder stick to him, and make him look bow-laigged, that a way. He's a raw-boned speciment, and looks like he was built rough, his hide put on wet, and just left to set anyway it pleases. I 'lows to myself he's around forty, and must have been some considerable boy a while back. As it was, he was right rugged, and vig'rous lookin'.

This wouldn't have been agin' him, but he was just so plumb careless and negligent lookin' that he attracted attention. The way his old Stetson set on his head, the white dust roosting in his eyebrows, the hang of his one blue-barreled gun, and the sorty springy way he climbs his old, rusty-looking braunk, all seem to say: "I don't give ary single sea-green, accordion-pleated damn for nothin' nor nobody." He couldn't have made his feelin's plainer if he'd yelled 'em through one of them meggyfoams, like they have at the side shows at the Dallas Fair.

Bill Staples and me ain't spoke a word since this wayfarer rides in. Bill has got the dangdest fool idea of the duties of a sheriff, that anybody ever heard of. He's got a notion it's his duty to arrest a man as accessory before the fact, and do the arresting before the accessing begins. As this hard-lookin' transient person rides out and hits the trail on the west side of where the plaza'd be, if there was a town around it, Bill says:

"Blue Basin, I reck'n."

"If that cold speciment goes into Blue Basin, on a hot, perilous day like this, they's apt to be some bubbles," I replies.

"Mebby so," says Staples, and rolls another smoke. Bill's face is about as expres-

sive as an old shoe, right then, and I'm afraid he's tryin' to think, hot as it is. Then he goes on:

"Them pore, innocent settlers ain't got no protection a-tall, since they shot the depity I appointed over there. Better saddle and foller that gent, Hutch."

"Who, me?" I says.

"Yes, you," he drawls out, slow and lazy. "I'd go myself, but I promised to help the assessor with his tax rolls, when it gets a little cooler. I don't want the peace and dignity of that settlement disturbed none, and that gent looks like a disturber. He may be headin' for Mexico, but Blue Basin is right on the road. If he takes the left hand at the Hayrick, and crosses into Shale County, just let him go. He'll starve to death for water in a few minutes after he crosses the line. If he goes into Blue Basin, foller him, and do yo' best to protect the innocent freeholders of that bailiwick."

Me being just a depity, that way, of course I takes orders from Bill Staples, but here's one I'd shore like to shake a right smart while afore takin', if I can. I reads Bill's face, which has the same expression as the north side of the courthouse in a blizzard, and the directions says "take it."

"I wouldn't crowd him none," says Bill, as I mounts my braunk, and starts to ride away.

I thought Staples was acting kinder queer, and when he says that, I'm afraid the heat is about to get him. This gent he's sending me to trail out'n Tomache County is the worst-lookin' thing I seen since "Red" Robinson run amuck in the honkatonk at Dodge City that time. You recollect him? When I get out on the trail, I'm lonesome, but I don't seek no solace in the company of that wayfarer that's stickin' up there on the plains between me and Mexico.

While I'm riding along I meditates some. All there is in Sotol is the courthouse, one store, Pablo's chili joint, a windmill and tank, and a few shacks. All there is in Tomache County is Sotol and Blue Basin, and some wire fence. It ain't rained a drop in two year. All the live stock in the county, outside of Blue Basin, is mine and Bill's braunks, and two burros that belongs to old Pablo. Everything else has gone on a grass hunt.

When I strikes the first little rise after I leave Sotol, I can see the Hayrick, about twenty mile due southwest. I can also see the stranger, on the next rise, a coupla miles ahead. I always was careful of my hawss on a hot day, so I don't hurry none.

It's almost sundown when I reach the Hayrick. She's just a mountain sticking up there in the plains country, and they ain't another hill as big as a old woman's bunyun in a hundred miles of it. This hummock is shaped like a hayrick, and is about half a mile long. From the top of it you can see the Washington Monument. At least, they ain't a thing in the way.

The Hayrick runs east and west, and Blue Basin is at the west end of it. The trail forks at the east end of the mountain. The left hand goes on south, into Mexico, if you don't starve to death for water. The right hand turns due west, follows along the north side of the hill, and on down into Blue Basin. I see that hombre take the right hand, as plain as print. I don't like it none, but orders is orders. Bill Staples has got his own ideas. He learned 'em in the swimmin' hole, when he was a boy. You couldn't tell him you been to the bottom, you had to bring up mud. So, I fixes to go to the bottom of Blue Basin, and knowin' what was apt to be there, I wasn't happy none.

I gets down and tightens the cinches. It was a long ways back to Sotol, and if I taken a notion to hurry back that way, I didn't want my saddle to turn. Then I mounts and rides on. I read once about that hombre that chases the Holy Grail, and I wished he was there with me. He was always rearin' to go on, and I needed some help like that.

The plains country is as full of surprises as a girl at a picnic, and the Blue Basin was the biggest one of the lot. It was just a round sink in the country, there at the west end of that mountain. It looked just like a big bowl, with hawg plumbs, shinnery, and scrub timber growing all over the inside of it. Some Professor Somebody said once that there were no signs of a upheaval, and he thought some folks that lived back in the Dark Ages dug the hole to get dirt to make the hayrick. Maybe they weren't no upheavals and eruptions in the Basin, back a ways, but they shore come right reg'lar while I was depity sheriff.

This Blue Basin place is about five mile across. I feel kinder sad, and longing for home as I rides down the winding trail, into the scrub oak, solitude and sinfulness of that settlement. I rounds a little bend in the trail, and see two things:

The first is the weary wanderer that I'm following, and the next is that cold, blue hole in the forrard hatch of his old cannon.

"Just a minute, podner!" he says.

He wasn't impolite none, but there was six inches of glare ice on his tones, and I decides plumb prompt, to give him thirty days, if he wants it. I don't try to draw, because it don't seem polite, him being a stranger that a way. He don't send no note, envoy, commission, nor special agent to ask my atty-tood to'ds disarmy*ment*. He just rides up to me, pulls my gun out'n the scabbard, and slips it in his own belt.

"Now, we can talk some," he says. "Sheriff, I reck'n?"

"Just a depity, obeyin' orders," I says. If I could have got a two-jump start right then, I'd 'a' beat the pony-express record to Sotol, and made old Tam Shadrack's sorrel mare look like a hopeless cripple.

"All right, Mr. Depity, you're goin' to take some more orders right now. I'd just send you back to Sotol, but it may take me some time to get through with my business in Blue Basin, and I don't want no sheriff's posse interferin'."

He stops, but I don't feel conversational just then, and he goes on: "Know this Blue Basin country right well, I reck'n?"

"Tarble," I says.

"On yo' way to protect the innocent citizens from a maraudin' outlaw, I take it?"

"Just obeying orders," I says, my voice kinder husky, like I just woke up.

"All right. That's fair enough, if you're good at it. Ever been married?"

"Not guilty," I pleads.

"Ever had ary hawss stole?"

"Some," I says. "Gets 'em back mostly." I'm tryin' to bluff him out'n takin' my braunk. It's too far to walk to Sotol.

"You know how it feels then, to be bereaved."

"Some. You been bereaved of a hawss right recent?"

"Nope. She's some worse than that."

He was talkin' right friendly now, and I get personal.

"What county you from?" I asks him.

"Dade."

"Never heared of it. Ain't no such county in Texas."

"Dade's in Missoury," he says.

It shore made me feel humiliated and cast down. Texas has the reppytation of packin' a flock of sheriffs and depities that nothin' on earth can draw a gun with, and here's a berry picker from Dade County, Missoury, got me stuck up and standin' on one foot like a tired hawss.

"Know ary feller in this Blue Basin country, named Sam Hawley?" he asks.

"Not by that name. Brands and earmarks?"

"Five foot eight, weighs a hundred and eighty, and ain't fat. Just wide and deep. Sandy hair and mustache, and mouth so big that they ain't enough of his face to shut it with. Fust joint on left thumb gone. Cusses fluent and chaws thick plug tobacco."

"Them last two items don't differentiate," I says. "Them's fashionable in the Basin. Other marks indicates Hawgy Porter. Goin' to make me arrest him?"

"N-nope. I reck'n not. Ain't got no papers for him. Know his fambly?"

"Why, he ain't got much family left. He has a wife and one child when he comes here, but the storekeeper at Blue Basin told me the woman taken something and died right sudden, about a month ago."

He kinder looks down at the ground a minute, then when he looks up his eyes is flat and glassy, just like the eyes of a mad cow.

" 'Bout where do this Hawgy Porter live?" he asks.

"Two-room shack, half a mile this side the store. About two mile from here," I says. I don't see no harm in directing a stranger to the home of his acquaintances, when he asks the way that fellow did.

"What kind of people lives in this Blue Basin mostly?"

"Changeable, variable to stormy, as the almanick says," I reply. "We ain't had no chance to make a record the last two year. Ain't been no court. We summonsed a grand jury last fall, from Blue Basin. All the balance of the folks has moved to grass. The district attorney had information agin' nine of the grand jurors for stealing hawgs. The judge 'lowed he couldn't expect even good citizens like them to indict themselves, so he dismissed 'em."

"Well, now, podner," he says, "I shore hate to trouble a nice feller like you, but I reck'n I'll have to ask you to dismount, and back up to that sapling."

He was so polite about it that I hated to refuse—when he had both guns that a way.

He ties my hands together behind by back, and around that little tree, then rides off down the trail to'ds the Blue Basin store. I must have had two hours of deep meditation, and profound thought, and then I hears a horse come stumbling, kinder slow, up the trail from the Basin. When he gets to me, I sees in the moonlight that it's this tough gent, and he's got that girl of Hawgy Porter, born Sam Hawley, in his arms.

He gets off, and slumps down on the ground clost to me, with the moonlight fallin' full on him. The little girl is standing by him, and he so tall her head don't come up to his shoulder, even when he's sitting down.

"Been kidnapin' some? That's a right grave offense, in Texas," I says, kinder serious, like a lawyer.

Just then the little girl puts one of her chubby, dirty little hands up, and pats his leathery, bristly cheek, and says:

"Daddy, daddy. I love you."

This big outlaw just grabs her in his arms, and kisses her dirty face like a woman. His hat falls off, and I see right smart silver threads in his hair. I looks off the other way, to see if my braunk is still grazin' in the shinnery, and he is, but I don't look back for a minute. Somethin' got in my eyes.

"Podner," he says. "I'm done. You kin arrest me now. I did 'low to take my little girl, and get out'n the country, but my hawss is give out, and I ain't got no chance."

He reaches over, and shoves my gun back in the scabbard. Then he draws his own, and throws it out in the shinnery. After that, he ontied my hands. I'm a party to a double disarmy*ment* in one night. He was also about to disarm me again, and I didn't know it.

"Now, podner," he says, "I ain't guilty of kidnapin'. Sam Hawley, or Hawgy Porter as you call him, didn't say a word when I taken Lily away. I'll just tell you how it was, and leave it all up to you.

"I was borned in Dade County. My grandfather went out to that country, on a huntin' trip with Dan'l Boone. He liked the country, and jest settled, and my folks has been there ever since. I growed up and was an old bachelor all my life. I manages to get me a little farm, and then I see Lily's mother, and falls in love with her. I reck'n I orter knowed she was too young for me, but I didn't. We married, and got along happy, I thought. Then, about a year ago, along comes this Sam Hawley. I don't know what my wife thought he was, but God's done judged her. They disappeared, and I reck'n I wouldn't have done nothin', but they taken Lily with 'em.

"I tries officers and lawyers and pays expenses and gets no results. Then one day I gets a hint that maybeso they went to Texas. I sells my farm and follers 'em. I locates 'em in Blue Basin, and—you know the rest." And he just drops his head over that little girl that's asleep in his arms by this time, and big tears falls on her yellow hair.

"This is right perplexin,' " I says, after a while. "I ain't got no papers for you. The only propity you've took, so far as I can make out, is this little gal, and she calls you daddy, right natural. Would you trade that wore-out hawss of yo'n a-tall?"

He just looks up at me, kinder funny, and says, like he's talkin' to himself, "God makes one every once in a while!"

I gets up and we changes saddles and bridles. He grips my hand so hard I can feel it yet, and I says:

"About two mile from here you strike a trail runnin' due north. Take it, and hang to it like a lost Injun. That old blue braunk will carry you and the little girl clean out of Texas, without a drop of water or a blade of grass, if he has to."

He turns into the trail, and climbs to'ds the Hayrick. I ketch a glimpse of him and old Blue, agin' the sky light. They disappear, and I don't never see him again.

I can't make it back to Sotol that night, on the wore-out braunk, so I just meditates and smokes some. Come morning I rides down to the Blue Basin store. The storekeeper says good morning, and then asks:

"Lookin' for somebody, Hutch?"

"No. Just passin' through," I says. "Any news?"

"No. She's been right quiet in the Basin. Hawgy Porter died right sudden last night. The boys find his body a while ago, and is fixin' to bury it before the sun gets too hot. 'Pears like his little girl has disappeared some."

When I gets back to Sotol about three o'clock that afternoon, Bill Staples is sitting right where I left him. I suppose he has et, and slept some, but he's in the same place, doing the same thing—just watchin' that horned frog. He looks up and says:

"Right late gettin' back."

"Yes. Had to serve some extrydishun papers," I replies.

"Traded hawses some over to the Basin, I reck'n?"

"Some."

"Got skint right smart, seems like."

"He'll come out a heap when he gets some grass," I says. "I've resigned. I'll send you my address, and you can send me my pay when the drought's over, and the people pay some taxes."

I mounts the old, tired braunk, and hits the trail for a water hole, and some grass. A feller that gets disarmed that a way ain't fit for no depity sheriff.

Hunh? Bill Staples? Still watchin' that frog, I reck'n. Was when I seen him last.

SOMETHING NEW IN RAILROADS

THERE have been many changes and improvements in railroad construction and operation in the past half century, but railroad speeds have increased but slightly. As far back as 1846 the Great Western Railway, of England, was running trains over part of its line at a scheduled speed of seventy-eight miles an hour, and a few years later some of its trains attained a scheduled speed of eighty-one miles an hour. Mighty few present-day roads ask for faster running than that. Yet each year the world becomes more pressed for time, and each year more speed is demanded.

Naturally, there must be some good reason for this failure to get trains over the road faster. Back in 1902 E. W. Chalmers Kearney, an Australian resident in England, decided that the reason was that accepted methods of track construction were unsuitable and unsafe for speeds exceeding eighty miles an hour. Speed tests in Germany, in 1903, convinced him that he was right. So he put on his thinking cap, and the result was the invention of the Kearney High-speed System, which some engineers think is destined to revolutionize railroad construction.

Mr. Kearney was convinced that the system of laying two tracks on the ground was all wrong. In his system a single rail is placed on the roadway, and a second lighter rail, supported by steel trusses, hung at a suitable distance above it. Then the car is placed *between* the rails, and provided with wheels equipped with safety clips that will keep it there under all circumstances. He claims that this overhead construction will cost but little more than the overhead construction of present-type electric roads, and that his system will make possible important savings because of the decreased widths of cuts, embankments, tunnels, and bridges. "Stream-lined" cars that will reduce wind pressure by eighty per cent, and decreased tractive friction will make practicable speeds well over a hundred miles an hour, and the cars being securely clamped between the rails will make such high speeds safe, even on curves, where the entire supporting structure can be canted.

Mr. Kearney also has designed a subway system for which he claims great advantages over the construction methods of to-day. The stations would be placed either at street-level, or at the distance underground of the present New York subway stations, but between stations the trains would dip sharply downward. Speed would be increased and operating expenses decreased by the trains running by gravity part of the time, and the proposed system would combine the advantages of the "shallow" type of construction used in the New York subways, and of the "deep level" type used in the Hudson River tubes and the London tubes.

In 1914 Mr. Kearney was about to start construction of a demonstration line in England, but the outbreak of the war forced a postponement of the project. Now improved conditions have encouraged him again to take up the matter, and he is hopeful that before long his system will receive a test in actual operation. After it has received that test we will perhaps see remarkable changes in railroad construction methods.

The Mystery of the Gray Hat

By Charles Somerville

Author of "The Dupe," "The Good Thing," Etc.

A mere gust of wind—and two lives blown out!

AS he started to cross Broadway at Twenty-third Street on a gusty afternoon in early April, the last thing Jack Duff sought in this world was adventure. His vocation supplied enough to keep such desire fed to repletion even in an ebullient, dynamic, nervy, twenty-five-year-old American. For Jack's job was that of a staff photographer for a New York daily. Snapshotting of stirring and sensational events, of floods and other disasters, scenes of war, murders, and other crimes and their perpetrators, posing celebrities, picturing marvels of all kinds and from all angles including frequently enough a perch on an aëroplane or the peak of a skyscraper, had been his ordinary pursuit for more than five years.

When Jack's time was his own his thoughts and inclinations leaned wholly otherwise. They turned gently and fondly toward a modest, pretty girl in Bronxville. Or to considering his growing bank account. Or to a certain neat suburban house on a certain pretty street. Or, connecting all three—girl, bank account, and house—he was busied with calculations as to when he would be able to make the first big payment on the suburban villa and simultaneously set up the signal for the tintinnabulations of the wedding bells.

Staff Photographer Duff had pushed and fought his way out of a human tangle caused by a strikers' mass meeting in Madison Square and was hustling toward a subway kiosk to snatch a place on an express train for Park Row. But as he stepped into the area of the Flatiron Building's vortex, a slam of April wind with all the kick of a March gale in it, swept his gray Alpine hat off his thick thatch of black hair. He looked up just in time to see the hat sail over the roof of a street car toward the opposite sidewalk. Clutching camera and plate bag to his chest, he dashed in pursuit. He successfully dodged in and out of a clutter of vehicles, but just as he rounded a big motor car, Jack came to a very sudden halt, and was left gasping for breath.

A man larger and heavier than himself had crashed into him. The shock was a stiff one. Both staggered. Jack was the first to recover his poise.

"Excuse me," he called laughingly.

But he cut off the smile with a frown as he dashed toward the gray felt hat he saw blown hard against the curb. The other man had not met his good nature in kind. Jack got a vivid flash of a long, thin, sharp-featured face with eyes glaring in anger and anxiety. The other man's hat had blown off also and long strands of iron-gray hair were whipping in the high wind.

"You clumsy——" he started to snarl at Duff.

"You go plumb to the devil," retorted the camera man, scurrying after the hat while the other stooped to snatch a similar gray felt hat from under the fat tire of the big, stalled motor car.

It was not until Duff, with plates and camera secure, had sunk into a subway seat that doubt assailed him as to the hat he had retrieved—doubt that it was his own. He took it off. Then he knew it was not his. It was very nearly the same color and same design—nearly, not quite. This hat was slightly broader of brim, decidedly higher in the crown and weightier.

Recalling the irascible, intolerant attitude of the other man toward the accident and himself, Duff grinned. For also the hat he had picked up was decidedly the more expensive article. The gray felt was very soft, fine, and smooth. The rich, blue satin lining was stamped with the name of a Parisian hatter. It bore no label to indicate that it had been retailed by an American

dealer. It had probably been purchased abroad. Neither lining nor inside, leather band showed the mark of private initials.

Yet Duff wasn't satisfied with the exchange. He more than liked the gray felt hat he had lost. With his brier pipe, a gift from his father on Jack's twenty-first birthday, his gray hat shared highest valuation among his possessions of personal comfort. It was such a sturdy knockabout of a hat. It had been with him to so many strange places. He was used to referring to it as his "old campaigner." It had an admirable pliability, a friendly adjustment to his rather prominent, bumpy forehead.

It had not been at all an expensive hat. Yet after exposure to all kinds of weather, it had never failed to respond to a little cleaning and brushing by looking good as new. And it had acquired an individual tilt of brim that Jack figured looked carelessly nifty. The more he thought of it the less he liked the notion of parting with that hat. The "cranky old bird" who had lost this foreign hat would be very welcome to its return if——

Jack Duff halted in passing through the business office of his newspaper. He went to a counter, and scribbled an advertisement.

"Slip that into the 'Lost and Found,'" he said to the clerk and paid the seventy-five-cent toll without a murmur.

Excepting in emergencies, Duff did not report to his newspaper until eleven o'clock in the morning. At nine he was finishing breakfast prepared by himself in his little bachelor flat in the Fifties just off Sixth Avenue. With his final cup of coffee he picked up his newspaper and turned to the advertising pages to see if his notice was duly inserted. It was. And coupled with it—right beneath, he read:

LOST—At Broadway and Twenty-third Street, a soft, gray hat with blue satin lining and French label. Will gentleman who picked it up by mistake pardon rudeness of owner at the time and kindly communicate with E. G., 212 Star, Broadway office.

"Well," reflected the camera expert on his last swallow of coffee, "he's bound to see my ad—smack on top of his own. And it tells him right where to come. It's his move."

Even as he rested his cup in its saucer, the bell in the little flat rattled sharply. Jack went to the button in the hallway and pressed it, releasing the spring lock on the door below.

"Mister Hothead has arrived," he said mentally and swung open the door of his apartment.

Instead, however, a man as young as himself, bowed before him. He was smartly dressed, good looking, smooth shaven. There was a long scar on his left cheek to indicate favorably the probability of his having done war duty somewhere near the guns.

"Excuse the early hour of the call," said the visitor pleasantly. "But I came about your advertisement—the hat, you know."

The hall door of Jack's flat entered directly upon the little library living room and the young man's eyes passed quickly around until they beheld the French hat on the center reading table. Then their roving definitely stopped.

"I don't quite get you," said Jack Duff. "You're not the man who lost it. He was taller, gray-haired——"

"Right. My uncle."

"Oh—but why didn't he come himself?"

"Knocked flat with a heavy cold. Caught it, I guess, when his hat blew off. *Roulet et Girard*, is the name of the makers inside. No private initials."

Duff, fully observant of the fashionable, impeccable attire of the other young man, his heavy gold ring and gold wrist watch, his entire aspect of affluence, said, laughing:

"Oh, I don't figure from your looks you'd be out trying to graft a secondhand hat. But, say, how about my hat? I don't see that you've brought that with you. And I guess I'm as fond of that hat as your uncle is of his."

"An old hat does sort of waken an attachment in a chap, doesn't it?" agreed the other young man. He took out a slim, leather wallet. "I'm sorry, Mr. Duff, but the truth is that before my uncle got out of the jam there at the Flatiron, the hat blew off again. That time it slipped under the wheels of a street car and got badly ground up. So my commission is—first to apologize for my uncle's rudeness to you and then to offer you this"—he put out a twenty-dollar note, clean and crisp—"to cover the cost of a new hat."

"Too much," said Duff. "The hat only cost me five."

"You should worry, old man," replied the other. "Uncle's wealthy. Fifteen as balm

for grief over your loss. By all means, take it."

He extended the slip of money smilingly, engagingly, and Duff as smilingly accepted it.

"My uncle will be delighted to get his gray bonnet," said the young man airily. "He's cranky about his hats—er—in common with a number of other things. He thinks these French makers are the only ones who can turn out a hat to fit his—er—rather crotchety head. The occasion is so rare when I can do anything to put him into good humor that I guess I'll just trot along back with the hat. Good day and good——"

The young man got suddenly white. He swiftly turned toward the door. The little bell had sounded clearly and sharply as before. For a second it appeared as if he intended to rush through the hallway and downstairs, either at or past the newcomer, for Jack Duff had automatically put up his hand and pressed the little button on the wall, opening the door below. A rapid but heavy tread was heard ascending.

Jack saw the young dandy swallow several times and tighten his lips in efforts to regain composure. The young man as quickly smiled again and moved well into the room. He passed to the other side of the writing table, took up the gray, French hat and stared into it.

"Excuse my jumpiness," he laughed. "The old shell-shock stuff. Not quite over it yet."

The entrance door to the flat which Jack had opened to receive his first visitor stood wide at the arrival of the second. It was usual for some fellow newspaper photographer or reporter to drop in and pick Duff up on the trip to the office, and it was the countenance of one of these he expected to see.

But the visage he confronted was that of the thin-faced, gray-haired man with whom he had collided in front of the Flatiron Building. There could be no mistake. For the man in front of him was wearing Jack's own "old campaigner." Smiling pleasantly, he extended the hat toward Duff.

"I see," said the gray-haired man, "you and I have a similar peculiarity—if it may be called so—of forming a particular fondness for a hat. Permit me to return yours. I want to apologize also for my bad manners. I was flustered out of all decency by the collision and the wind and——"

The man's eyes became suddenly arrested. They stared over Jack's shoulder. Duff turned also, and indignantly. For the man speaking was unquestionably he who had lost the hat. Also unquestionably the first visitor was guilty of misrepresentation, though for what motive, seeing that in doing so he had passed Jack in cash fully as much, if not more than the value of the hat he schemed to possess, Duff could only draw a mental blank in attempting to imagine.

A sturdy demand on the other for an explanation of his chicanery arose to Duff's lips. He saw him standing on the other side of the writing table with the gray hat lifted well up to his eyes so that his face was concealed. But before Jack could speak the first caller slowly, deliberately lowered the gray hat in his left hand. As slowly and deliberately he lifted his right hand. Jack started and braced himself to bear the tension of the shock he got then. He saw that the fashionably dressed young man was coolly covering both himself and his second visitor—the rightful owner of the hat according to Jack's knowledge—with the gentle swinging to and fro of a small but viciously fat-barreled, blue-metal pistol.

"Get away from that door," ordered the dandy. His attention was fixed upon the thin-faced older claimant for the hat.

"You fool!" the other man retorted, with a hard effort to suppress the rage which Duff, however, saw flare up fiercely in his eyes.

The young man advanced.

"Get away from that door," he repeated. "By God, you'll be the fool if you don't!"

An impulse came upon Jack to make a flying leap at the high-handed young fop and bear him to the floor. But he saw the gray-haired man smother his rage and abjectly obey the command. After all, it wasn't any of Duff's concern—that gray felt hat. He had his own back—was holding it in his hand. He was twenty dollars richer besides. If the other man did not care to defend his own property——

He stood aside from the doorway.

The fashionably dressed young man bowed mockingly toward them, but especially toward the gray-haired victim of the holdup, as he backed out of the doorway and a second later was heard rapidly descending the two flights to the street.

Still, Duff could not quite turn aside a sense of outrage at being thus, in his own home, threatened with a deadly weapon and

ordered about. He rushed to the window. He saw the young man walking in leisurely fashion toward the near-by corner of Sixth Avenue where he also saw that a taxicab was standing. He further observed what he had missed noticing at the other's departure, which was that the young man had abandoned the green felt hat he had worn on entering Jack's rooms and was departing with the French gray hat poised at a jaunty angle on his well-shaped head. Its very jauntiness affected Duff like a taunt, and he decided to let go a yell of alarm into the street. "Stop thief!" he meant to cry. But "Stop——" was as far as he got. For the tall man rushed up behind him, reached over his shoulder and clapped a hand over Jack's mouth.

"Don't—please don't!" his second visitor pleaded.

Jack turned back from the window, freeing himself from the man's grasp.

"What's that?" he asked. "Do you mean to let him get away with it?"

"No, I don't," said the other man sharply. "I'll get the hat back."

"Is he your nephew?"

"What?"

"He said he was your nephew."

"Oh, yes—yes. To be sure, my nephew. That's why—why I'm letting him go now. You—er—saw that scar on his face?"

"Yes."

"War wound. Badly shell-shocked, too. The boy's been acting strangely ever since he got home. Must have seen your advertisement. His idea of a joke I guess to get here first and snatch away from me a hat he knew I particularly wanted."

"A funny joke, I'll say. He threatened your life."

"Oh, no!" the gray-haired man laughed. "His idea of carrying out the joke. His form of erraticism is that he has become like a bad, mischievous small boy. But there's nothing dangerous about him."

"What—aiming a gun at people?"

"He has a mania for collecting firearms. But you may be sure he was careful to see that his pistol wasn't loaded. He's probably waiting around the corner in the cab for me to come out and laughing himself into hysterics."

"I'd say you are taking chances. A sanitarium—you never can tell what turn his queerness might take."

"Perhaps, after all, you're right," replied the other man gravely. "But I simply can't make myself think of there being any harm in the lad. I don't think his war experiences are going to have permanent effect. A rest in the country—at one of his parents' summer homes, is probably all he needs."

"Oh, he certainly looked and talked all right. That is, until he brought out the gun—but the old war certainly jolted some of the boys clean out of their wits. I saw some funny cases myself."

"Then you can understand."

"Sure."

Duff accepted the hand offered in friendliness and permitted the stranger to take up the olive-green felt hat the dandy had left on the table. He pressed it down on his gray locks and it fitted fairly well. Nevertheless, he grimaced.

"Nothing like my own," he nodded to Jack as he departed.

Duff walked to the window and watched the tall man in his progress toward Sixth Avenue. He walked rapidly and Jack saw him energetically hail a passing taxi, enter it, and whisk out of sight. Evidently he had not seen his nephew around the corner laughing over the "holdup"—or even looked for him there.

Duff smiled at it all. He felt he could afford to. He felt that his own interest and connection with the gray hat was ended.

But a second later Jack banged a clenched fist into the palm of his other hand.

"Gosh!—as a newspaper man I'm just one poor fish of a bonehead photographer!" he exploded mentally.

For it had flashed on him that a live reporter would have instantly seen in these incidents concerning the gray hat a "good story"—a curious, snappy feature. The accident of the exchange of hats, the "ads" inserted, the arrival of the eccentric nephew and that of his uncle right behind him, the young fellow's outrageous conduct, the gunplay, the dandy's disappearance defiantly with the hat, and the attire and talk of both indicating them to be persons of affluence if not also, probably, of social import—all this was good stuff.

But here he stood like a dumbhead, without even having found out their names, helpless to turn in anything to his city editor save a recital of the happenings without identification of the participants! Yet, after all—Jack grew calmer—the young chap was a former comrade-in-arms, and if his ac-

tions were the outcome of mental unbalance suffered in the service of his country it would be just as well that he and his family be spared notoriety. If he was questioned at the office regarding his advertisement he'd merely say it had achieved the return of his hat. He'd just let it go at that.

Yet on an afternoon, exactly a week later, Jack Duff returned to the *Star* office wondering and scowling—scowling because the gray hat had once more forced itself upon his attention and again in a most irritating and humiliating fashion.

A new British ambassador had arrived and gone to the Ritz Hotel to stay for a few days before going on to Washington. His secretary had promised the news photographers an outdoor pose of the famous diplomat on horseback in Central Park. In a brace of motor cars the camera men were waiting outside the hotel for word from the secretary to proceed to a rendezvous selected along the park's bridle path. Jack was standing at the curb, puffing a cigarette to while away the time, when his eye came casually upon a tall man and a slim girl as they stepped out of the entrance of the Ritz.

He immediately gave them keener notice. The beauty of the girl was striking. But more than this to draw his attention was the fact that the girl's face was pallid to the whiteness of chalk and that her eyes held what strongly appeared to be an expression of fear, even horror toward the man at her side.

Then Jack Duff straightened as he scrutinized the man himself. He was tall, thin-faced, gray-haired, and—there could not be a mistake—he was wearing the gray felt hat which had come accidentally into Jack's possession and been taken out of it by the young man with the drawn pistol. At least, it was either the hat itself or that hat's twin. But the hat that had been blown to him by the wind, as it were, was easily distinguishable. It possessed a foreign individuality, a peculiarity of the shape of the brim, a certain extra height to the crown marking it for positive recognition.

At first glance, however, the countenance beneath the hat did not appear to be that of the man with whom he had collided in Madison Square. For that man had worn a closely trimmed gray mustache. The young woman's tall, gray-haired escort also wore a mustache that was gray, but it was longer and waxed to pointed ends. He had, besides, a chin whisker—a goatee also waxed to a pointed end. The other man's eyebrows had been gray, but this man's brows were strikingly jet black.

Yet Duff was certain it was the man of the advertisement. Like the hat his countenance was too strongly individual to be forgotten. Line of cheek and jawbone, the aggressive, outstanding character of his hawklike nose, a slight, vaguely Mongolian upward turn of the outer corners of his eyes, convinced Duff that both men were one and the same.

"Uncle must have caught up with nephew," he smiled to himself. "What's the hunch of the black eyebrows and the goatee? What's the matter with that pippin of a girl with him?"

An impulse came upon the camera man to justify his own observations. He quickly stepped up to the couple.

"How do you do?" he said cheerfully to the man. "See you got your hat back, all right."

Man and girl stopped at the door of a coupé runabout, the door of which an attendant held open. The girl flashed a glance at Duff that seemed almost an appeal for aid. But she said nothing. Whereas her escort turned and stared blankly at Jack.

"I see you got your hat back," he repeated.

"Parle Française?" demanded the tall man curtly.

"What's the idea—do I speak French?" demanded Duff in turn. "You could speak English well enough the last time I saw you, when——"

The manner in which the tall man shrugged his shoulders was very French indeed. He caught the girl's arm brusquely and forwarded her into the coupé, quickly following and snapping the door shut with his own hand, as the brightly polished, smart vehicle shot away. The young man was left standing at the curb, flustered and angry, like a flouted beggar, and muttering to himself:

"Well, what the devil do you know about that?"

He turned to face the grins of fellow camera men in the motor cars. And the bantering of young Kane:

"One of your warm society friends, Jack?"

Duff merely nodded. His mind remained strenuously engaged on the subject of the tall man of the gray hat. For it came to

him that while he could not be mistaken as to his being the same man who had come to his rooms in response to the advertisement, yet in the guise in which Duff had just seen him—dyed eyebrows and mustache pointed to waxened ends and trim goatee—the man's face as it was now was also familiar. He had seen him appearing thus before, several times. But where? This question Duff could not answer. He racked his memory throughout the day and into the night, but no further could he get—save in one particular. The man of the black eyebrows and chin whisker in the past had also worn that same style of high-crowned, gray felt hat. No doubt of it. The face came up readily enough. It was the same man. But in what surroundings? There Duff was left in a haze.

And there, as regards the subject, his mind remained until in the passing of weeks the whole affair of the gray hat departed from his daily thoughts and was disappearing from his contemplation entirely. But this was because no gift of clairvoyance was vouchsafed Jack Duff. Else he would have known that other, stranger chapters were to interpose themselves upon him, grim chapters to make the gray hat forever vivid in his memory.

II.

Spring had passed into summer and August was near its end when on his arrival at the *Star* office, one morning, Duff found orders to report immediately to the city editor.

"Howdy, Duff," said Gavin, the pleasant-mannered, boyish, but highly effective city editor of the big New York daily. "A little trip to Jersey—Edgewater, for yours. Morgue case. Man found all smashed up at the bottom of a steep cliff of the Palisades. Far as we have the facts it looks like an accident to some foreign tourist while exploring the rocks. Suicide possible, of course. Murder even. But all his valuables were found in his clothing. Curious feature, though, is that no letters or other private papers were in the pockets. But his clothing was badly torn and ripped in the long fall. Letters and papers may have tumbled out and stuck along the face of the cliff. Leather wallet in inside vest pocket with more than one hundred dollars, American currency in it. Gold watch and two rings, both set with fine, very valuable stones. Clothing made by a fashionable London tailor. Shoes English also. Hat expensive, French make—bought in Paris.

"The man's head was frightfully battered by the rocks in his fall and the body has been at the bottom of the cliff for weeks. But the man evidently amounted to something and clearing the mystery of his identification is a good story in itself, even if there are no crime developments. Photograph all his belongings—jewelry, hat, shoes, clothes—makers' labels wherever you find them. Look for inscriptions and monograms inside rings and watch—anything like that. If the face is recognizable, photograph it and perhaps an artist can work up a portrait from it that may prove useful. Got Sturtevant started over more than an hour ago. Tell him not to neglect to get the man's exact body measurements. And teeth diagram, especially as to dentistry work. There you are, Duff. Can't say I haven't dug up a nice, cheerful little job for you on this sunny day. Go to it."

An undertaking establishment served as the morgue in the suburban place and in the front office Duff found Sturtevant and half a score of other reporters.

"Got any line on the case?" he asked of Sturtevant.

"Suicide, I guess."

"What's the dope?"

"No private letters or papers."

"But the chief says his clothes were all torn up in the fall and those things might have dropped out along the face of the cliff."

"That's true. But the tailor's label on the inside coat pocket—that was neatly removed—not ripped out. Pocket wasn't torn by the rocks in the least."

"That might mean murder as well as suicide."

"That's true, too. But we've been all over the woods and turf at the top of the cliff. No sign of a struggle of any kind up there."

"But it happened weeks ago, didn't it?"

"Yes. But there are no signs that anybody ever goes near that particular spot at the top of the cliffs. Marks of a struggle would not have been disturbed. They'd be there yet. There remains—plain enough, I guess, to show in a photograph—the marks of a single person leaving the road and approaching the edge of the cliff. Of course, the trodden grass has sprung up again over

the man's steps in most places, but there are sufficient depressions left to show the point from which he strayed from the road and onward to the edge of the cliff."

"Or a murderer might have carried the body there."

"Hardly. But the depressions of the footprints were made so long ago you can't judge whether the man who made them moved along under a burden. In fact, there are no actual footprints. Just the indications of a path made in a single passing."

"The chief said you were to get the man's exact body measurements and a diagram of his teeth."

"I'm going to call Jack Gavin up and resign," laughed Sturtevant. "What kind of a dub does he think I am? Of course, I've got that. And I've fixed everything up with the coroner for your job, kid. The stuff is all set out on a table in the back room. The body's in there, too, but"—Sturtevant winced—"nothing doing for you. It's already sealed in a metal coffin."

Duff followed Sturtevant into the bare back room and to the plain pine table set beside a window. He'd worked on scores of such cases—excitedly in his cub days, but more and more calmly as the experiences became commonplace.

"You needn't use your flash," said Sturtevant, as they approached the table. "Coroner says it will be all right to carry the table outside and make your pictures in the open."

"Bully," said Duff.

Then he drew suddenly back—as suddenly as if he had beheld the dead man's hand hovering above the grim collection of his worldly possessions and felt the touch of its icy fingers upon his face.

"What's the matter, Duff?" demanded the observant Sturtevant.

"Nothing. I mean—I mean for just a second I thought I recognized these things as belonging to somebody I knew."

"Are you sure they don't? Better take a close look."

"No," said Duff. "They don't."

But he lied—in his own defense and instinctively. For Sturtevant was famous on Park Row for his gift of biting raillery. And to tell Sturtevant—how Sturtevant would enjoy recounting Jack's "bonehead" when he let the story of the gray hat slip through his fingers! In its very beginning! A story that was going to develop into a tragedy—a murder. Or, anyway, a sensational suicide of a young man of wealth.

Only too surely for his own future peace of mind had Duff recognized the articles on the table. The heap of torn clothing—positively he knew the expensive brown suit, now in a ragged heap before his eyes, to have been that worn by the well-dressed young man who had first appeared in answer to his advertisement in the case of the gray felt hat. He saw in the buttonhole of the coat lapel the husk of a withered flower and clearly remembered the fresh, white carnation he had seen in the lapel of the young dandy who had come to his rooms. And there was the gold wrist watch. The rings were the same. The shoes also. And the hat—no doubt of it. Not the high-crowned, gray felt hat the young man had so jauntily, tauntingly worn as he departed from Jack's flat, after forcing his exit at a pistol's point, but the olive-green felt hat he had left behind him and which the tall, thin-faced, gray-haired man had worn when he departed to follow his "eccentric, harmless" nephew—the tall, thin-faced, gray-haired man whom Jack had last seen disguised, pretending an ignorance of English, and who had rebuffed Jack's attempted identification and had seemed to be forcibly escorting a beautiful, golden-haired girl with terror-stricken eyes.

What did it all mean? Was the story of the gray-haired man right about the younger man, his nephew? Had eccentricity passed into insanity and melancholia? Or was it all a lie—a blind about the young fellow's being affected mentally by his war wounds and shell shock? Certainly, he had talked clearly, intelligently, sanely enough. That explanation of the young man's high-handed departure with the hat as being merely the practical joke of a mentally flighty youth had always seemed "fishy" anyway. But what other could there be? What motive could underlie for the possession of a mere hat?

There had been the young man's eagerness promptly to smooth over all difficulties in getting prompt possession of it by passing over to Duff a twenty-dollar bill representing surely more than the value of the hat itself. Then there was his plainly indicated instinct for flight when the bell had rung and another caller was admitted. Jack remembered a detail he had not before considered. He recalled how the young man had retreated well behind the center table

and sought to conceal his countenance by holding up the gray hat and staring inside of it. And then the cold, deadly determination in the young fellow's voice when he ordered the gray-haired man to step aside from the doorway. Jack told himself that he had been idiotic ever to consider that speech: "Get away from that door. By God, you'll be the fool if you don't!" and its tone of delivery as having any possible relativity to a practical joke—even a half insane one.

Jack Duff realized that he was in an uneasy position, but his mind was a straight, honest mind. The story of the gray hat—as much as he knew of it—must come out. And there was no doubt of the right man to tell it to—Jack Gavin, his city editor.

Methodically he performed his picture making of the dead man's belongings, but with the visualization of the good-looking young dandy as he had last seen him constantly in his mind.

At five o'clock that afternoon he arose from a chair beside the city editor's desk with a definite sense of relief. He had told all he knew.

"Keep everything to yourself—not a word to anybody, Duff," Gavin ordered. "The mystery of the man's identity is good enough—it will carry the story all right. I want to think this other aspect of it over. Remember, old man, not a word to anybody."

"Yes, sir," said Duff, grateful that there had been no criticism or reprimand for having overlooked the story of the gray hat in the first place.

Jack Gavin nodded, as he lighted a big, black cigar. It was considered that the slim and boyish-looking Gavin smoked those extra big, important-looking fat cigars to indicate his true position of authority to all onlookers. He smoked long at this one, and covered a yellow pad in front of him with whorls of fancy writing and arabesques. Eventually, however, he reached out for his telephone and gave a number. Presently a voice on the other end of the wire said:

"Department of justice."

"Gavin of the *Star*. Put Chief Glynn on, please. Glynn? Howdy, chief. Yes—Gavin. Could you take dinner with me to-night at the City Club at seven? Got something interesting to chew over with you besides food. Seven sharp. Fine!"

Gavin turned to his secretary.

"Alex, call the Ritz. Get the manager on the wire—in a booth."

It was Chief Glynn of the department of justice who telephoned City Editor Gavin two days later. And Gavin, at the message Glynn gave, exclaimed back over the phone:

"Good heavens, but that's luck! Sure I'll have Duff on the job. Who you going to send? Tucker—Little Joe? That's great! What? No, chief, not a thing."

This last statement concerned utter lack of result in identifying the victim of the Palisades tragedy. Widespread publicity of the facts and of pictures of the man's possessions and a reconstructed portrait which Duff assured Gavin was really an excellent likeness of the young man had brought forth none who claimed relationship, friendship, or acquaintance with the unfortunate.

Glynn was, of course, aware of the only salient feature thus far established by the police and reporters. This was the locating, not a hundred yards away from the brink of the precipice over which the young man had fallen, leaped, or been thrown, of a comfortable, prosperous, small tavern or hotel. It was mainly the living quarters for a group of young chemists employed in a huge commercial laboratory in the town.

At this hotel it had been found a young man had arrived shortly before noon on April 8th. He carried a dress-suit case and a smaller hand bag. He had registered as "Thomas G. Haight, Boston." Suit case and bag were marked with initials corresponding. The luggage, however, was found to be stocked only with linen and toilet accessories. It contained no letters or other papers, nor any suit of the man's clothing in which the tailor's label might reveal the victim's name. Diligent inquiry thereafter had failed to trace in Boston any man of the name of Thomas G. Haight.

The hotel proprietor had personally received the guest. The proprietor was an old man of rather dim vision and used to the coming and going daily of men, from out of town, on special trips to the big laboratory. His observation of this particular arrival had not been more than superficial. But he was able to say that he was a young man of fresh, youthful complexion, smooth shaven and pleasant mannered and very well dressed. Particularly had he noticed the two rings the stranger wore and which were afterward found upon the body—a ring on either

hand, one set with a magnificent emerald, the other with a pure white diamond.

But of greater significance—particularly to Duff, Gavin, and Glynn—and, indeed, a striking fact for all the investigators of the mystery—was this further statement from the old proprietor:

"The green hat found at the bottom of the cliff with the body was not the hat the young man wore when he came here. Nor when I last saw him alive. He wore a gray felt hat. I can swear to that. After he had been shown to his room, he stayed in the hotel only a little while—about ten minutes—when I saw him leave by the front entrance. I am sure he was wearing the gray hat."

The files of the *Star* confirmed Duff in his opinion that the day his advertisement appeared and the young man had come to his flat claiming the gray felt hat was the same day on which at a later hour he had registered at the Edgewater hotel—April 8th.

III.

In the haze that hung late over the harbor in the August morning the United States revenue cutter off Quarantine Island jockeyed about in the waters near the looming, majestic liner, *Adriatic*. Clamped to the big ship's side was a tug carrying the yellow pennant of the health officer. But in a few minutes that official returned from the deep-sea traveler to his boat and, as it sidled away, the revenue cutter took its place and customs inspectors, reporters, and photographers quickly passed across a gangplank into the bowels of the huge ship.

With them went Jack Duff, and a very small, very slender, dapper man, trimly attired in dark-gray clothing, his womanishly small feet in dandified patent leathers. The figure was that of a boy, but the face was strongly featured, thin, lined, and weather-beaten, a sharp, ugly face were it not relieved by bright, twinkling, humorous gray eyes. Sherlock Holmes' best powers and methods of deduction must have met defeat in an effort to classify the little man, especially to detect on him any marks of a professional brother. For this was Tucker, the keenest of Uncle Sam's sleuths—"Little Joe" Tucker.

Duff and Tucker, on the trip down in the cutter, had kept apart as strangers—Duff herding with his fellow camera men, apparently concerned with their mutual business, of which there was considerable ahead, for Paderewski, Farrar, a noted English novelist, and a French statesman were aboard, to say nothing of a flock of society folk.

Introduced to Tucker the previous evening at City Editor Gavin's desk, Duff had received his cue from Tucker.

"Keep your eye peeled for that gray hat. The black eyebrows and spike-tailed mustache and goatee may not be under it. The same face may not be under it. But my hunch is, somewhere you'll see the gray hat. Then you look around for me. You needn't mind looking around to see if I'm near while you are hunting the gray hat. Leave that to me. When you spot it—if you do—just put up your hand and take your hat off and I'll be on the job with you."

The hour was only nine, but the decks on this morning of arrival were, of course, already crowded and in the big dining saloon the customs men had already converted tables into desks and were taking the declarations.

But Duff did not see the particular gray felt hat he sought, in there. Nor among those sauntering the deck or crowding at the rails. But among the more or less isolated passengers who in deck chairs were taking the arrival calmly as became habitual globe trotters, the camera man beheld indubitably his quarry. Not only the gray felt hat—the hat of mystery—but blackened eyebrows, waxed mustache, and pointed goatee, the same inherent, marked facial peculiarities were all there.

Moreover, beside him in a steamer chair was the beautiful girl with whom Duff had seen the man leaving the Ritz. The strained look of horror and aversion was not now startlingly apparent in her big, lovely blue eyes. But the expression was equally strange as seen in so fair and youthful a face—a look of settled sullenness and defiance.

Duff lifted his hand to take off his hat and continued toward the man in the gray hat. But even as he did so the boyish form of Little Joe Tucker intervened. He had appeared apparently from nowhere. And Tucker with Duff on his heels went straight to the tall man with the heavy eyebrows.

"Hello, doc!" he said, smiling and affable.

But the tall man looked at him in the same blank manner he had turned upon Duff in front of the Ritz.

"Parle Française?" he demanded, with the same insolent curtness.

"Oh, hell, Doc Turner, what's the use?" said the unruffled Little Joe. "You can't have forgotten me—nor that Chinese stunt along the Rio Grande—nor that little stay in Atlanta. Doc, let me have a little look at that hat."

Tucker reached for it. But instantly the big man's hand went to his head. He whisked the hat off and swiftly, but deliberately, his face still blankly emotionless, tossed the hat as far from him as he could over the side of the *Adriatic*. It skimmed high in the air, clearing the decks of the revenue cutter.

With an amazing agility the small body of Joe Tucker flashed away. He dove through the nearest deck entrance, a few seconds later to reappear crossing the gangplank to the wheelhouse deck of the cutter. He took the gangway to the cutter's deck in a single leap. From a deck hand, he whisked a long boat hook with which the man had been stationed to sheer the cutter's side from rubbing against the liner. Tucker scurried to the other side of the deck, and kneeling, stuck out the pole over the water.

The gray felt hat was still upon the surface. But it had filled—the water was lapping over the brim—and in another instant it must have sunk. Tucker rammed the boat hook down into the crown, raised it out of the water, and stood with the dripping headgear in his hand.

The tall, gray-haired man watched the pursuit motionlessly. If he contemplated an attempt at escape, it went no farther. It would have been hopeless, for he had either to try to hide himself away in some cranny of the liner or plunge into the water and try to swim ashore. He accepted the situation and stolidly awaited Tucker's return with the gray hat.

Meanwhile, Duff saw the pallid, beautiful young woman arise from her steamer chair and go to the big man's elbow.

"I'm glad," she said. "Glad!"

"You are forgetting yourself," he said to her brusquely. "You are forgetting that others—that——"

"What has become of Tommy?"

"I've told you—a thousand times."

"You've told me a thousand lies. What have you done to him?"

"If you think anything of Tommy, keep quiet!"

Tucker had returned, smiling, affable, unruffled as ever.

"Come on, doc—you and the young lady, too—to the captain's room."

Without a sign of protest, Tucker's request was obeyed. The only indication of emotion the gray-haired man had shown to Duff's eyes was in the single glance he had shot at the camera man himself. In it for a second's flash, involuntarily his own eyes had bared a great fear.

Tucker summoned a steward who promptly escorted them to the captain's spacious office. Tucker promptly got up and locked the deck door. He motioned his party to seats. He climbed himself into the captain's revolving chair, looking absurdly small in the thronelike seat, and his thin, nimble fingers went working assiduously over the wet hat. Particularly did he crush and manipulate its high crown.

"I'll say it's a wonder, doc—this hat. No feel of 'em at all from the outside. You must have got by lots of times with this trick headpiece. Excuse me, but I'll have to rip her up."

He pulled out the thin, sharp blade of his penknife and ripped the lining.

"Say, this is clever! Come here, Duff—look! See—back of the blue satin lining, a false felt lining. Let's get that out. Ah—between the mounds made by the cleft in the hat—each a compartment!" Tucker turned the crown inside out. "Clever—clever!" he said. "The stuff is sewn up in a weave of silk and horsehair so that its hard substance cannot be felt by an inquiring hand crushing the crown together. Doc, this is the best I've seen yet. Beats hollowed shoe heels and the insides of fountain pens. Beats anything I've run into for some time."

His penknife was ripping vigorously into the springy horsehair and silk-woven mesh, his delicate fingers extracting, one after the other, exquisite pearls that he ranged on the blotter.

"Well, I should say!" exclaimed Little Joe. "A perfectly matched necklace. Worth about two hundred thousand this side of the water, doc. Skinning Uncle Sam out of a cold sixty thousand dollars. Bad for you, doc. And say"—Tucker continued in the same quiet, half-bantering tone—"what do you know about a young fellow being found all smashed up and dead at the bottom of a cliff along the Palisades?"

"Dead?"

"Yes—dead," Tucker nodded.

A single scream came from the girl. She

fiercely bit her lips to keep back a repetition of it. She huddled back in her chair and covered her face with her hands. But a second later she looked up and, though her white lips were trembling, she spoke deliberately and incisively.

"You've caught," she said, "more than a smuggler. You've caught a murderer. I knew—I knew he'd done it! He told me that——"

"For God's sake, Tucker, tell her to be quiet. Be quiet, won't you? You're going to get revenge because"—Duff saw that the emotionless mask had been wiped from the prisoner's face, it was more livid than ever and its features were writhing with emotion approaching close to hysteria; his long, thin countenance was wet with sweat—"because, I'm going to tell Tucker here the whole thing—because I can't keep the damned secret choked down any longer. I can't get rid of the boy's face. I can't close my eyes without seeing it. I've been dosing myself with morphine for weeks, months, Tucker. I didn't mean to kill him. I'll swear to that when I sit in the chair. But the rest——

"This kid—Tommy Hoyt—is her husband. He'd come up from an office boy with a Maiden Lane jewelry firm. He was an expert in gems at twenty. It was the firm's fault, in the first place, sending a kid like that across, right after the war, as a buyer. An almighty clever kid in his line, but, you know, Tucker, soft—a champagne fool with a big expense account at his command. Of course, our gang spotted him. We landed him in our graft. An accredited buyer for a big firm in high standing—it was a cinch for him to slip our stuff across. But he made us nervous. Champagne and loose talk in several places. We cut him out. He beefed. But we dared him to do any more than beef.

"That might have ended it. But you see, he'd invented this—that gray felt hat. It was clever. I've gotten by with it five times. The kid knew of four times. He was always following me up, scolding for his share. And I was telling him to go whistle.

"Well, that brings us up to the afternoon in Madison Square when the hat blew off and I ran into this man whose hat had blown off, too—I figure you know all about that." A sickly smile crossed the tall man's lips. "There was three hundred thousand dollars' worth of pearls in the hat you picked up that day, young fellow," he said to Duff. "I'd stopped in at a Fifth Avenue jeweler's to talk over some business and was making for a taxi when the wind caught the hat.

"Then Tommy Hoyt spotted our 'ads' in the paper the next morning. I figured he might. Because our crowd had used the 'Lost and Found'—no, not the personals—to slip each other information now and then, and he knew it. And he was doing his best to keep tabs on us. He was wise I'd just landed the day before. So he tried to beat me to the possession of the hat. And he nearly got away with it.

"Well, I see you know what happened in this young fellow's flat. And, of course, we'd kept an eye on Tommy. I knew where he was living with the girl there—his bride. I found her. Tommy'd been there ahead, packed a couple of grips and gone—to keep out of my way. But he'd told her where he'd hide. And I tricked her into telling me the place by making her think I meant to come to an understanding with Tommy—that I'd decided to deal fairly with him hereafter. I don't think the girl was wise just then what it was all about. I think she thought it was legitimate business, and we'd been cheating Tommy. I guess it was some shock when I told her the real state of affairs. Anyway, it scared her into giving me the address of that little Edgewater hotel. So I went there. Not straight to the hotel. Because if he hadn't got to the hotel already, he would be likely to ask about any other person arriving there before him; for, of course, he'd know I was after him. So I hung about in the woods where I could see the hotel—see Tommy if he arrived or if he came out.

"I saw him come out. He looked well around him, saw nobody, and then for want of anything else to do, I suppose—to calm his nerves perhaps—he strolled down toward the woods along that lane that leads toward the edge of the Palisades.

"I remembered that pistol he'd pulled on me in the young man's flat. And I didn't like the look of his face when he did. He looked a bit fired up with drinks. And I didn't have any gat of my own. So as he came nearer I took up a stone. I picked a pretty heavy one, but a round one. I didn't want to kill him. I only wanted to stun him long enough for me to grab the hat and get away. I knew he wouldn't dare raise a yell or alarm of any kind. If they got me, they'd get him.

"I was behind a tree not five feet from him as he passed down the lane. I hit him with the stone. I got the gray hat. I flung his—the one I was wearing—down beside him. But I looked down at the same time. I saw his eyes—I've never been able to get rid of the sight of them—staring. I knew I'd killed him. So I picked him up and carried him through the woods. But before I threw his body over the rocks—I figured his head would be so battered that the wound I had made could never come up as evidence against me—I searched him for his letters and papers and tore the tailor's label out of his clothes. Of course, I couldn't tell what might be in his grip to identify him. But I had to let that go. I didn't dare be seen in the hotel. Or in the neighborhood.

"After I threw the body over I was careful to cover marks of my retreat by stalking back in the tracks I had made when carrying the body, careful not to change the direction in which the grass was already bent. I—I went back to the lane, scooped away the bloodstained dust and buried it in the turf in the woods. Then I scattered fresh dust over the place.

"I waited all day and until well into the night, alone in the woods, with that kid's dead eyes in front of me all the time. And they've never left me. I made his girl come with me. Promised she'd meet the boy on the other side of the pond. She didn't believe me and she'd not be here now only I showed her a pistol and threatened to kill her if she didn't obey me. And she's had no chance to escape from me since. I didn't dare let her get away from me—not with what she knew. And—that's all. My last trick, eh, Tucker?"

Then the tall, white-faced, mentally agonized man suddenly looked up at Duff and said to him with a curious intimacy, as if he, of all others, could best understand:

"A gust of wind—a mere gust of wind! Blowing a man's hat off and—ending his life! Ending his life in the chair!"

Look for more stories by Mr. Somerville in future issues.

PUBLIC-SPIRITED MEN

THE senator had delivered the oration at the laying of the high-school cornerstone. He was being shown the town's phenomenal development since his last visit. The mayor, acting as guide, was full of praises for the municipal government, of which he was the greater part. He intimated that, but for him, the progress of the community would have done credit to a tortoise.

"But I thought," said the senator, "this place was full of public-spirited men."

"Yes, they are public spirited," replied the mayor. "You never saw anything like their public spirit. They take it out in forever hollering their heads off because somebody else doesn't do something about something."

DISPERSING THE BORES

CHAMP CLARK, former speaker of the House of Representatives, being himself an author and journalist, has many friends in the writing fraternity. One day during the last session of Congress he had a visit from a well-known novelist who makes his home in Washington.

"You're a genius, Mr. Speaker," said the caller, "in keeping people out of your office. You have time to attend to your legislative work and also to write extensively, and I believe it's because you've discovered the secret of not letting bores sit around here all the time. They bother me to death. I can't get rid of them. How do you do it?"

"It's simple," said the statesman. "I long ago found the thing to do was to lend them a little money. If you've any rich ones annoying you, borrow from them. Neither class will ever come back."

A Chat With You

EIGHTEEN years ago, just about this time, a slender, youthful, but still bright and intelligent little stranger rolled off a printing press and caught a hitch on a passing news company wagon. The October air was chill and the dead leaves were blowing about City Hall Park in their usual dismal way, but this did not seem to discourage the newcomer. Our hero dropped off the wagon and landed lightly on a news stand, already crowded with pompous, middle-aged publications. Their presence did not daunt him. Friendless waif as he was, there was something engaging and athletic about his personality. He was slim, but wiry—very wiry. In fact, there was a wire binding right up his back. Through and through he was well built and red blooded.

With half an eye—if half an eye could be induced to work at all—you could see that he was going to grow into something big. Always in good humor, utterly fearless, yet anxious to please, genuine through and through, he needed no mentor. He was out on his own. He was like the hero in a book by Horatio Alger, Jr., bound to win. Although the day was cold and drear, he had no fear of the autumnal rains that might sweep down on his unprotected position at any moment, or of the nipping wind that tugged at his thin cover as if it would drag it off. He was there to do his stuff and he did it.

A PASSER-BY stopped and scanned the ranks of the assembled periodicals. Some of them flaunted gaudy covers, others remained haughtily motionless, but it was the honest face of the newcomer that caught the eye of the passer-by. There was something appealing about this bright-faced, self-reliant young magazine, something that spoke directly to the heart. With a kindly hand the passer-by tucked him in his pocket, paid the dealer, and hurried on his way.

The first upward step in life had been taken. THE POPULAR, young as he was—and it must be remembered that he was not yet a day old—had scored the first great success. He had sold himself. The next thing to do was to make good on the bright promise of his face and figure. He did it. In a week he had ten thousand friends. After that it was just like a big snowball rolling downhill in the middle of a blizzard.

IN days of old when a boy was born, it was the custom in the best families to call in an astrologer to foretell his future. Now they call the doctor. Our hero never needed a doctor. No adenoids, no croup, nothing. How he could eat! Ton after ton of print paper, ream upon ream of the best stories written. He had to have the best—full of vitamines and calories and things. You couldn't fool him with anything stale or second class. It cost money, but it was worth while just to see him grow. He radiated health. No one could associate with him without feeling the better for it.

SPEAKING of astrologers, let us imagine that we consulted one as to the future of the bright little baby magazine, just starting out in a stormy world. Here's what we think it would be like.

We find the astrologer in a lonely cloister, peering at the starry heavens with an antique telescope directed through an opening in the roof. His

gray beard hangs upon his bosom and his black robe is liberally sprinkled with the weird symbols of his mystic craft. On one side, a brazier burns with a blue flame, on the other crouches a black cat with baleful, yellow eyes.

We pronounce the day and the hour when our hero first saw the light, making sure to cross the hand of the sage with a piece of the good red gold. With bated breath, we watch him making queer figures on pieces of parchment, consulting ponderous tomes, drawing circles and pentacles and other curious things, too numerous to mention. At length, he throws aside his long quill pen and bends upon us his eyes, lambent as the cat's, beneath shaggy brows.

* *

"HERE is the celestial map of the native," he says in hollow tones. "Native," by the way, is the correct word in the best astrological circles.

"Being born with the sun in Libra, in the third decanate," continues the wizard, "makes him strong and well balanced. Mars and Venus are in conjunction, showing, to use the mundane language of the vulgar, that he is there with the punch and sure to make a big hit with most girls and all men. Leo in the ascendant, in the house of friends, gives him a strong circulation—a wonderful circulation! Taurus, completely below the horizon and retrograde, in a weak sign, means——"

"That there is no bull about him," we interrupt, anxious to appear intelligent.

"Mercury in mid-heaven," continues the venerable man with a nod, "shows that he will be there with the goods. He has speed, control, a good batting eye, and is fast on the news stands. Saturn and Jupiter in trine in the second house bring him fame as a teller of tales and give him humor. A wonderful horoscope!"

"Have you ever cast one just like it?" we ask. You see, we want to get our money's worth.

"One," says the graybeard "one, and only one in all my long life."

"And that one was?"

"The horoscope of Alexander the Great."

The black cat mews thrice, the astrologer throws a handful of incense on the brazier. A dense cloud fills the room. The consultation is over.

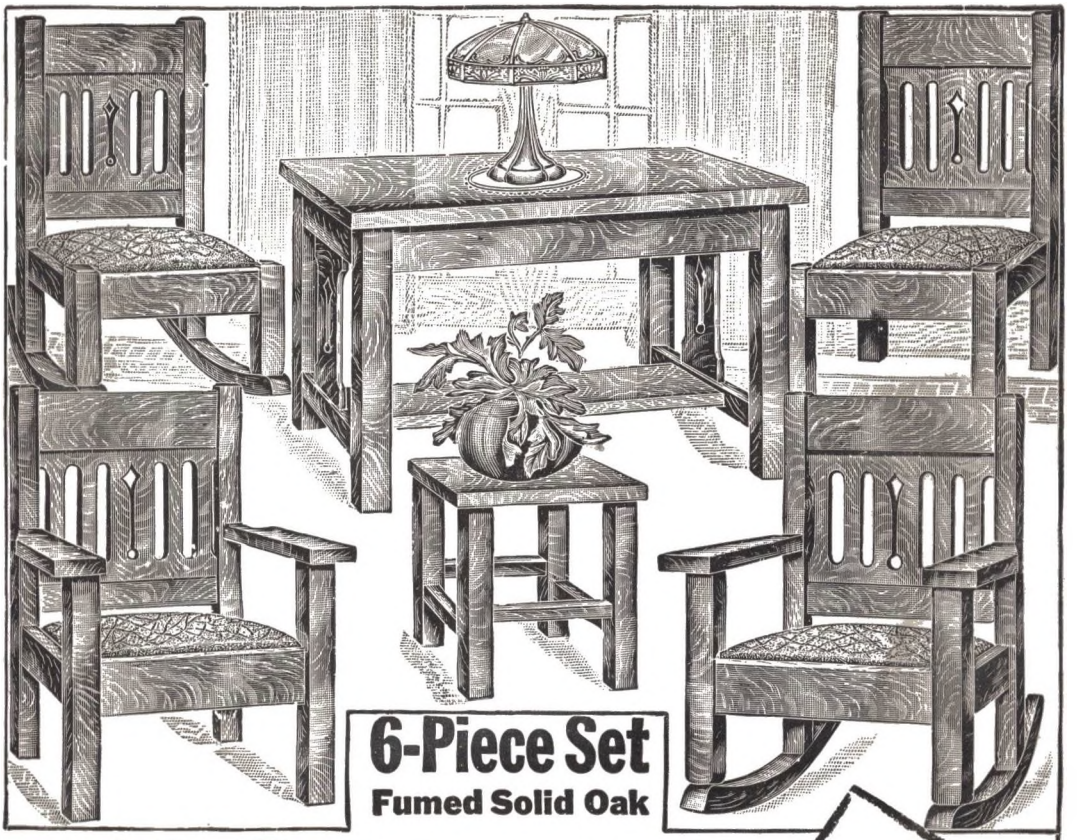
* *

EIGHTEEN years ago to-day, since our hero made his start. How time flies and how he has grown! And who was it was born under the same star?

Alexander the Great. If our memory does not fail us he was the sort of lad who makes his mother's heart swell with pride. His motto was, "Do it now, if not sooner." He traveled fast and far. At annexing new territory, he was undefeated champion of his day. Under the direction of the same good planets, the little magazine which made a start eighteen years ago is going right ahead in the same way.

At twenty-eight, Alexander is reported to have sighed because there were no new worlds to conquer. We have ten wonderful years before we reach that happy predicament.

Our hero carries no banner with a strange device, but he knows where he is going, and he is on his way. A better number next time, and a still better one after that.



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