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A Chat With You

ANY one who ventured for the first time on the waters of some great river would be in doubt at times as to the direction of the current. Backwaters, broad eddies where the current swung in circles, stagnant reaches where it widened into a sea—all these things would confuse and mislead the explorer. It is only when we move up the river toward its source for some distance, and get a broad and extended view of the course of the stream, that we can see how the inevitable main current really sets. The current of civilization, the trend and progress of the ideals of mankind, is a mightier, broader stream than ever La Salle or Hudson or Stanley looked out upon. It is easy to be deceived by an eddy in which the waters seem for a time, for years, perhaps, to flow backward toward that dim, cruel, barbaric source from which we all came. It is often hard to achieve a vision wide enough to see beyond the rapids and broken waters of the present into the still, calm reaches of the future. It is hard at times to remember that the fulfillment of great natural laws is measured, not by years, but by centuries, and that no splendid ideal ever attained a position of permanence before it had been tested long in the fires of vicissitude and fought for on a hundred battlefields.

NOW, this present Christmas, when such a great part of the world is in arms, when the whole force of nations is directed toward destruction, when the greatest war of history is waging, it is easy to ask what force the gospel of peace and Christianity has brought with it, and what it has done to check barbarism and rancor and strife. Against the sword the cross seems powerless, and the martyrdom of the founder of Christianity seems, on the surface, to bear little fruit at present. There are other years to come, however, and in the midst of eddies and rapids it is most needful to have some reminder of how the broad general current runs. That kindness begets kindness, that unselfishness and consideration for others are the true foundations of lasting peace, that the spirit of forgiveness of injuries shall conquer where armies shall fail—these are the lessons that Christ taught, and it was to emphasize and bring them home that He gave up his life.



THEY are something a good deal more than theories or ideals. Underlying everything in nature—physical, ideal, or spiritual—are certain fixed and unalterable laws, subject to no true exception when the application is broad

A CHAT WITH YOU—Continued.

and general enough. Newton discovered one when he announced his theory of gravitation, Darwin another when he gave his scheme of evolution to the world. It is harder to come at the laws of moral life than of physical, but the simple creed of Christianity contains the nearest approach and their highest interpretation. If we find for the moment these laws apparently disregarded, it no more disproves them than the spectacle of an ascending balloon disproves the law of gravitation. Sooner or later the war and strife of this world will be refined so that it takes the form of commercial competition rather than bloodshed. Private warfare between individuals was outlawed long ago, and some day public warfare, with all its attendant and inevitable cruelties and injustices, will follow it.



IT would be easy to fill this page and many another with instances of how the spirit of Christianity has softened the rigors and asperities of warfare. In every camp in Europe the day will be celebrated. No prisoner, no wounded man will miss entirely the warmth, the glow, the kindness that has made Christmas the universal holiday. For the moment the stream may be choked and twisted aside, but it is flowing

through unseen channels and hidden ways, and there are thousands of unknown, unsung heroes and martyrs who to-day practice the virtue that the nations have for the moment thrown aside. How great the slow, insensible change has been is measured in the fact that in the past, wars more cruel if not as widespread as this have been waged in the name of Christianity, while to-day the conception of any war at all seems repugnant to the spirit of Christ's doctrines



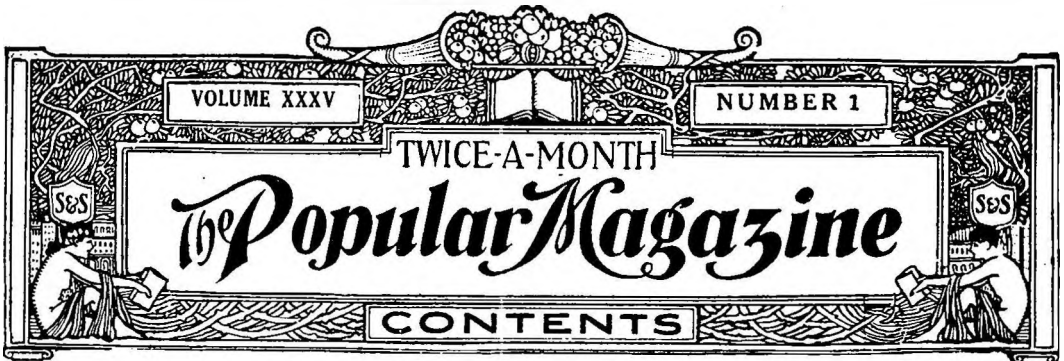
WE can see back, up the stream, a long way into the dim past, but downward, before us only a little way. But we surely know now which way the current runs; we may be certain that the sacrifices of the past have not been in vain, and that this Christmas which most of us will keep in more thoughtful fashion than usual is still the season for thanksgiving and rejoicing. There have been earthquakes and floods and forest fires, but the berries still grow white on the mistletoe, and red on the holly. There have been poverty and disaster for thousands, and barren fields and scattered harvests, but still the gift trees shall bloom with flowers of light, and bear new fruit in the snows of winter.



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THE NEXT POPULAR ON SALE JANUARY 7th

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. XXXV.

DECEMBER 23, 1914.

No. 1.

The Scapegrace and the Gentleman

By Francis Lynde

Author of "The Unscrambling of T. C. R.," "My Uncle's Money," Etc.

To duck and dodge and save yourself at whatever cost to your men—that is the unpardonable sin of an officer in the army. The hero in Lynde's novel bears the stigma of this flagrant piece of cowardice. It means good-by to the service for him. But his subsequent career in the war-swept republic of Mexico filled as it was with daily dangers, proved that he was no quitter but a man of courage. There are big issues in the story: President Wilson's "peaceful" war, the ousting of Huerta, the struggling upward of the peons, the assaults of rival revolutionists. Francis Lynde has written what might be called the "inside" story of these; but also he has given us half a dozen individuals who were only incidentally concerned with these big things, yet the story of whose career is a drama that will command your interest. We cannot recall a novel of Lynde's that has more "holding" power.

(A Complete Novel)

CHAPTER I.

TWO MEN AND A MAID.

FOR much that had happened to Rod Forbes, and most that might be scheduled to happen, you would say that any court of justice would hold the girl responsible. At least, that was the way Kinkaid, the regimental surgeon and my old-time college classmate, put it on the starlit April evening while we sat burning bedtime tobacco under the flap fly of his tent in the cavalry camp on the north bank of the Rio Grandé.

"You've been with her enough during the past few days to enable you

to surround the idea," said Kinkaid, pulling thoughtfully at his pipe. "There are two kinds of women who smash families and set brother against brother; those who do it with malice aforethought, and those in whom attractiveness and an irresistible sex appeal are so strong that they can't help it. Of course, the colonel's pretty niece belongs to the 'can't help it' class. Quite probably she hasn't any conscious notion of the way she has walked into Rod Forbes' powder magazine, carrying lighted matches."

"Tell me more about it," I encouraged.

For a week I had been Kinkaid's

guest in the cavalry camp, sharing his tent and mess while I gathered—or was supposed to be gathering—"Mexican-situation" material for an Eastern magazine. Thus far, the material quest had been as barren as the dry plains of Coahuila, stretching away, lifeless and sterile, on the opposite side of the river. Wherefore Kinkaid's story, if he had one, was to be welcomed as water to the thirsty.

"I'll have to go back to the father and mother of these two Forbes youngsters to get a fair start," he began. "Perhaps you know the father—or know of him. He has been the congressman from his Middle West district for I don't know how many terms."

I made haste to confess my ignorance, and the big-bodied surgeon re-lighted his pipe and went on:

"If you don't know the man, you know the type: respectable country lawyer gone to seed—political seed; takes himself seriously, always votes with the majority, never misses a chance to pose as the patriotic citizen who has voluntarily refrained from becoming a second Chief Justice Marshall purely for the good of the dear people. 'Smug' is the word, and his wife is as much like him as if she were a second pea in the same pod."

I nodded. "I know the breed; sets up its own little standard of respectability, and——"

"You've got it," Kinkaid broke in. "When the two boys came along, one of them proved all the pet theories of the hereditists, and the other knocked them into a cocked hat. Jermyn is his father over again, plus a good bit of snobbishness and hypocrisy—plus some other qualities less worthy; while Rod-erick—well, you've met Rod."

"He is a most likable young cub so far as I've gone with him," I granted.

"He is a complete contrast to his elder brother—and he has paid for it,"

was Kinkaid's epigrammatic dictum. "In school Jermyn got the good marks and his brother got the thrashings. Free-handed, outspoken, and as much of a barbarian as any normal boy ought to be, Rod soon earned for himself the name of the family scapegrace, and it's only fair to say that after a while he began to live up to it."

"Naturally," I commented.

"Inevitably, you'd better say," was the crisp correction. "With plenty of kicks at home, and with his brother constantly held up to him as an example and a rebuke, Rod Forbes at eighteen was on the way to become what his father frequently called him—a roughneck and a drunkard."

"What saved him?" I queried. "Was it the girl?"

"No, not that early in the game; not the girl, or any girl. I think it was the Great Disappointment." Kinkaid broke off, and for a minute or two the champing of the mounts at the horse rope and the shrilling of the cicadas in the chaparral were the only sounds to break the soothing quiet of the Texan night.

"The Great Disappointment?" I prompted.

"Yes. Rod's one ambition was to become a soldier. The hope of some day being able to go to West Point was what carried him through Culver with passing grades. He did it, and then the chance came along, slapped him in the face, and went by. Johnson Forbes had a presidential appointment to the army school tossed to him as a political reward of merit—and he gave it to his elder son."

Comment seemed to be biting-ly unnecessary, and I made none. After another little pause in which the stillness of the April night grew almost oppressive, Kinkaid continued:

"The father made an object lesson of his choice and rubbed it in. An army officer must be a gentleman."

Jermyn filled the bill, and Rod didn't. Forbes, senior, didn't propose to risk the family reputation by sending a roughneck to West Point. If Rod wanted to go to an engineering school, well and good. If not, he could hunt a job—preferably away from home—and go to work."

"He took the college chance?"

"He did; and the technical school, or perhaps it was the disappointment, seemed to steady him. He hammered his way through the course, winning more athletic honors than the other kind, and losing his head only now and then in some student jollification over a football or baseball winning. Forbes, senior, paid the bills and said nothing until after Rod's graduation. Then the climax came, good and plenty. Rod walked straight out of the engineering school to the nearest recruiting office and put the capstone on the family disgrace by enlisting in the cavalry."

"How dreadful!" I chuckled, picturing with sufficient distinctness the throes and writhings of the outraged Forbes smugnesses. "Of course, his father disowned him?"

"In effect, yes. Never wanted to hear from him any more, and didn't care what became of him. Even went so far as to reproach the boy bitterly for having enlisted under his own name—the family name. Now comes the incredible part—though such coincidences happen every day, as we all know. Roderick Forbes was assigned to the —th Cavalry, then in garrison at Fort Logan. And the first officer he met on the parade—the West Pointer who had just been billeted as the second lieutenant of his own troop—was his brother Jermyn."

"Enter Tragedy, shaking her gory locks—and all that," I suggested.

"You bet!" was Kinkaid's emphatic assent. "True to his stripe, Jermyn tried to persuade Rod to ask for a transfer to the artillery or the infantry.

Persuasion failing, he took a leaf out of the devil's own book and made Rod's life as a ranker under him a shouting misery. I was with the regiment and I saw it all. Harwood, it was simply hell. Like all men of his temperament, Rod is slow to anger, but when the explosion does come he is little better than a madman. There were times without number during that first year when I held my breath, expecting to see Jermyn Forbes brought in dead and his younger brother marched out with a firing squad to pay the penalty."

Once more the silence of the windless night supervened, and above the insect chirpings and the subdued camp noises I fancied I could hear the murmur of the near-by river eddying in its sandy channel. Finally I said: "You haven't told it all?"

"No; only half of it. It will be two years in June since Rod enlisted. At the end of the first year the regiment was transferred to Fort Oglethorpe. While we were there, Miss Underclough came down from New York to visit her uncle, the colonel. Jermyn met her, of course, and made love to her right from the jump. For that matter, there wasn't a subaltern at the post who didn't, or didn't try to."

I laughed quietly. Miss Eleanor Underclough was herself a sufficient excuse for the unanimous love-making; beautiful as a Greek goddess, and about ten thousand times more lovable, as a bewitchingly attractive girl in full and complete possession of her American birthright is wont to be.

"In that field Lieutenant Forbes had it all his own way," I predicted. "Private Forbes wouldn't be in it."

Kinkaid rolled his big head from side to side. "Wrong! They managed to meet in some way—Rod and the girl. Nell Underclough is a law to herself in most matters. She got acquainted with Rod, or rather permitted him to get acquainted with her, and the fight

was on. The colonel tried to frown the thing down, but it wouldn't go."

"You mean that Miss Underclough wouldn't let it go?"

"Exactly. I overheard one little tilt between her and her uncle. Miss Eleanor handed the old man a few plain facts about the dignity of the soldier's calling, and refused point-blank to admit that there wasn't enough of it to pass on to the man who wears the rankers' uniform, always providing that the ranker was a man and not a mucker."

"Good little girl!" I murmured. "What came of it?"

"A number of things. For a while you'd have said that the girl was deliberately playing one brother against the other, though the game was necessarily pretty one-sided, with one man in the ranks and the other in the officers' mess. Just the same, she never missed any bets, and the situation stirred up all the petty spite and meanness that Jermyn contrives usually to keep decently under cover. The way he harried Rod that summer was something fierce. We all knew what he was trying to do."

"So do I," I filled in. "He was trying to make Rod break discipline and show himself up in the clink squad."

"You've guessed it. To have seen Rod carrying a loaded blanket roll on the parade would have been nuts to him. But it didn't work. Rod took his grilling like a man, though once in a while I saw him grit his teeth and go white under the tan and sunburn. When the official bullying failed to get results, Jermyn tried a dirtier thing. He bribed a man in his troop—and the man's job was to get his brother drunk."

I laughed again. "Don't stretch it too far, Gordon," I protested. "I'm a writing man, and pretty credulous, like

all of the tribe. But there are limits, you know."

"It's God's own truth—or rather, the devil's! And Rod came mighty near falling for it, too. Jermyn had been feeding him a mess of lies—about what Nell Underclough had said of him and so on. I don't mind telling you that I was the one who got between; gave Rod a setting up that I'll warrant you he remembers to this good day. A week later the colonel's niece finished her visit and went back to New York, and then we all saw that something different had happened to Rod Forbes."

"I'm guessing again, but I'd rather hear you tell it."

"You couldn't guess fast enough to keep up with the facts," returned Kin-kaid, grinning at me over the glowing pipe dottle. "Before Nell Underclough's train was halfway to Washington, Rod had turned a new leaf and pasted it down hard. He had always been a good soldier—up in the drills and tactics, and all that—but now he bought a bunch of books and became a shark. That was when he first began to let himself out a little in his talks to me. He was going in for promotion; going after it red-headed and with blood in his eye."

"Great Scott! Out of the ranks?"

"Yes. It can be done; it has been done."

"I can imagine what the brother did to him then," I said.

"No, you can't imagine the half of it," was the grave contradiction. "But the colonel didn't share Jermyn's prejudices, and Rod went up the 'noncom' ladder like a shot. He was the ranking sergeant when we were ordered down here to the border, and shortly afterward he took his final examinations and got his present billet as second lieutenant in his own troop; Jermyn, meanwhile, having gone up a step to first."

I nodded slowly. "I guess I've got

it all now, or all but one thing. Does our young smasher of barriers win the big prize?"

Kinkaid chuckled softly.

"You writing fellows claim to be able to work your little X-ray combination on the inner nerve centers of a woman's brain—or heart. At any rate, your guess is as good as another man's. What would you say?"

I decided instantly. "I should say it was an even break between the two brothers up to date. Miss Underclough seems to be as impartial as the blind goddess herself."

"You've hit it off exactly," was Kinkaid's rejoinder. "She has kept us all guessing. But I can give you one small pointer. She is the camp darling here, as a matter of course, and is frivolous accordingly. But away down deep under the light-hearted frivolity there is a mighty sound, sensible, well-balanced little ego. It's an ego that will condone a heap of wickedness, but it won't stand for a weak streak or a yellow one in the man she will marry. If you should ask me I'd say that she is holding Rod 'under observation.' If he measures up to grade——"

"I see. But you don't mean to tell me that she hasn't sized Jermyn up for what he is long before this?"

"Now you've got me," laughed the big-bodied man in the camp chair. "Women are curious in that respect. So long as they are able to cut out sentiment, the smoothest crook that was ever born can't fool 'em. But when the emotions come in it's different. Jermyn has a way with women, and he is playing his hand for all it is worth."

I admitted this without argument, and, since the topic seemed to have temporarily exhausted itself, we talked of other things; of the strained situation which had developed out of the prolonged and savage conflict going on just across the placid river eddying and

murmuring in the near-by darkness; of Francisco Villa's spectacular bound into the limelight; of the killing of the Englishman, Benton; of the policy of "watchful waiting" which seemed to be daily growing more and more impossible.

"We're going in," was Kinkaid's prophecy. "Huerta will end by dragging us in. It's got to come. After you're through calling Villa all the bloody brutes you can lay tongue to, you'll have to admit that he is the one first-class fighting man that the many-angled struggle has developed. He'll smash Velasco at Torreon, and, after that, Huerta will have only one alternative left—the chance of uniting all Mexico in a defensive war with the United States."

"It's a curious situation," I remarked. "I've traveled a good bit, and have talked with people from Maine to California. The sentiment of the country is against war; quite strongly against it. Yet if the firing spark should happen to be applied, as it was applied in the Spanish War by the blowing up of the *Maine*——"

"The 'firing spark,' as you call it, has already been applied many times, only the people as a whole don't know it—or don't sense it," Kinkaid broke in. "There were thirty thousand Americans in Mexico when the Madero tragedy climaxed. They've been coming out ever since, but a bigger number of them than the country at large has ever heard of will never be able to get out. They're dead."

"Some of us have felt it, if we haven't actually known it," I asseverated. "With so many American-operated ranches and mines in the isolated districts, where the news could never get out. Kinkaid, if nothing turns up here worth writing about, I'm going in to find out for myself."

"If you do you'll probably stay—and, like some of the others, stay dead."

If you go and don't get killed, you can count upon at least one good listener for the story you'll have to tell when you come out. I'd——"

The break came upon a low murmur of voices and approaching footsteps. A moment later a handsome, square-shouldered young fellow in fatigue uniform ducked under the flap fly and held the canvas up for his companion, the girl whom Kinkaid had called the "camp darling." It was a fitting phrase, and not even the soft gloom of the starlight was sufficient to blot out her pulse-quickenng beauty of face and figure.

"Breakin' in on you late at night, doc, but not professionally," said the young man, placing a folding chair for the girl and dragging out a stool for himself. "The quarters were gettin' too gay for us, so we thought we'd hike out and hunt up some right quiet old people to mix and mingle with."

"You're an impudent young cub!" laughed Kinkaid. "I'd put it stronger if Miss Nell would stop her ears. Any news?"

"Nothing worth tellin'," grumbled the handsome boy. "Another ranchman stuck up forty or fifty miles down the river, and his horse corral raided—that was last night. No use talking; we've got to go over and peg out a few of those Huerta guerrillas in Presidio. I'd give a month's pay if I could head the detail."

The girl's laugh was low and soft, but there was the barest hint of mockery in it.

"Would you really?" she asked sweetly. "I've often wondered, you know."

The young man's good nature was apparently irrefragible.

"That's right; rub it in. Because your uncle happened to bring away a Spanish bullet in his shoulder from the Santiago mix-up you have all the perquisites and privileges. We're dolled-up tin soldiers, the lot of us, and we've

never smelled powder—anywhere but at the butts."

"But you say it too often—about the pegging out," insisted the girl, thrusting shrewdly under his guard. "You remind me of the Corporal Maloney story; about the camp—er—hero who was so bloodthirsty in barracks and who had such a violent attack of—what was it?—hæmophilia?—when it finally came to hearing the bullets sing."

"Jerm told you that story, and I'll bet you a box of gloves he applied it to me," grinned the boy, still imperturbably good-tempered. "It's all right; I guess I do talk too much with my mouth. It's coming to be a habit. Butt in, doc, and stop the scrap. I'm getting the worst of it."

Kinkaid did it—by cracking a poor joke at the expense of an unhappy writer of facts who had as yet found no facts worth writing about, and the talk—in which Miss Underclough bore her part like a true daughter of the regiment—shifted back to the "watchfully waiting" situation which was wearing so upon the nerves of everybody in camp. While we were speculating upon the probable result of the Torreon battle, which was at that moment raging far away to the southward, a trooper, a noncommissioned officer wearing the chevrons of a sergeant, materialized out of the darkness, saluted, and asked for a word with Lieutenant Forbes.

Forbes stepped aside with the man. There was a bit of talk, the crackle of a match, and a momentary flare which showed us the young lieutenant bending over a written order, and a minute later he came back to us, speaking as if his tongue were a little thickened by excitement.

"I've got my chance at last!" he exclaimed, running the words all together. "Garvey, of K Troop, has been kidnaped. He was sent up the river at dusk to keep an eye on a party of

Huertistas moving out of the adobes on the other side. A ranchman has just come in with the news that the Mexicans crossed the boundary, stalked Garvey, and got away with him to their own side of the Rio Grande."

"You are going after him?" queried Kinkaid.

"By the rawest bit of luck that ever came up the pike!" chuckled the junior lieutenant. "Irons, the sergeant, who was here just now, brought an order from the colonel. Lieutenant Forbes—first name not specified—is to take a sergeant and ten men and bring Garvey in. No fighting if it can be cut out, but our man must be given up. I'll bet a thousand dollars to a cent that the order was meant for Jerm, but this is one time when I'm going to beat him to it!"

"If we don't have an attack of conscience and tell on you," put in the "camp darling" quickly.

"You wouldn't have the heart; and, besides, you are all too good sports to do a thing like that," pleaded the man with a chance. And then: "It's a hurry order. I'll have to take you back to the colonel's quarters right away, Miss Nell."

She waved him off with a flippant little gesture.

"I don't want to go now; I might have that conscience attack and tell Uncle Gardner how his order has miscarried. Don't mind me. Mr. van Brunt will undertake to see that I'm not eaten alive in crossing the parade. Why don't you go if you are going?"

It sounded cold-blooded, and I think Forbes took it that way. But before he could reply she jumped up and gave him her hand.

"That was what our English friend over in the major's quarters would call 'nasty,' Rod, and I didn't mean it," she said impulsively. "Go; and be sure you come back safe and sound."

A little later the three of us who

were still sitting under the surgeon's flap fly saw a string of horsemen filing out of camp upon the westward trail. At the moment of passing, the rider at the head of the column waved his hat in our direction. Then the black mouth of the night opened and swallowed him and his companions.

When the muffled hoofbeats were no longer audible, Miss Underclough sprang up quickly.

"If you'll be so good, Mr. van Brunt?" she said, with an oddly new note in the low, sweet-toned voice. And on the walk of a hundred yards or so across to the colonel's quarters she spoke only once, and that was to say, more to herself than to me I fancied: "I wonder if he took that long-faced Malachi Irons with him as his sergeant."

CHAPTER II.

THE COLONEL'S SLIP.

There was some quiet joking in camp, with a broad grin to go the rounds, on the morning following Garvey's kidnaping, when it leaked out that Rod Forbes' guess about the colonel's intention was correct.

As it appeared, the order for the command of Garvey's rescue party was meant to be given to Jermyn. Colonel Underclough had dictated it to an orderly, and, being a red-faced old campaigner with a short temper, he had roasted the young aid to a turn when it was discovered that the junior lieutenant, and not the senior, was the one who was missing at the mess breakfast table.

Miss Nell wasn't present. The colonel broke discipline by letting her sleep as late as she wanted to. But I caught Kinkaid's eye and the twinkle in it; and later on we were able to indulge in our share of the broad grin.

"That's the colonel all over," was Kinkaid's comment, made while we

were lying in the shade of the river-fringing trees and sweeping the bare country across the boundary with my field glass in the hope of finding some signs of Rod and his detail. "Young Caxton wasn't to blame. I'll bet he took the order down exactly as the colonel dictated it. The old man will admit it himself after he has cooled down; only he won't give the admission half the publicity that he did the roast."

"I don't see what difference it makes," I ventured. "A lieutenant is a lieutenant."

"It doesn't make any real difference—except that Rod will be much more likely to pull the thing off successfully than Jermyn would. It is merely that the colonel meant to send Jermyn. It's a sort of unwritten law in the service that the senior gets the call when there's anything doing."

"Jermyn will make capital out of it with Miss Nell," I predicted confidently.

"Sure he will. And if Rod should happen to get into trouble from any lack of diplomacy or anything of that sort, you can see how beautifully it will work out for our gentleman backbiter. I'm not sure that Rod was entirely wise in snapping at the chance last night as he did."

The forenoon, or, for that matter, the whole day, passed without incident. There was no stir in the bare hills across the boundary, and the adobes diagonally opposite our camp gave no signs of life. Toward nightfall two scouting parties which had gone up and down the river straggled in. There was no news of Garvey, and none of Rod and his detail. The troubled abyss of Mexico had swallowed our thirteen men and was apparently loath to disgorge them.

But though there was no news in our immediate neighborhood, there was a stirring report to come down the river from El Paso in the early evening. The long silence which had enveloped and

buried the fiercely fought battle of Torreon for days was at last broken. Once more Pancho Villa had triumphed. The city had fallen; the Federals were in flight toward Saltillo; and the northern capital, the city across the international bridge from El Paso, had gone wild with excited rejoicings.

"Now you may look for a quick fulfillment of my little prophecy of last night," said Kinkaid, when we left the mess tent and crossed to his isolated quarters on the river side of the cantonment. "Huerta may make another bluff or two, but pretty soon he will pull his final string and then we'll go in, whether we want to or not. It's written in the book."

I said I didn't believe it; that however much Carranza, from his narrow, provincial viewpoint, was underestimating our bigness, the Huerta group was well aware of the hopelessness of such a struggle, even with all Mexico united to fight us.

"Huerta is a desperate man, and he is in the last ditch," was the surgeon's counter. "You'll see it, Harwood, if you can make shift to live a little while longer."

Beyond that, as I remember, we smoked in comradely silence for the better part of an hour. The night was a replica of all the other Texan nights I had been lately enjoying. Peace, the peace of the great solitudes, brooded over the boundary river valley. In the camp the colonel's clockwork discipline effaced all sights and sounds. For a time the major's English friend, a retired captain of the British army, sat with us, pulling at his short pipe, but he went away early, and again we were left to ourselves.

It must have been about eleven o'clock, and Kinkaid had knocked the ashes from his pipe and was saying something about turning in when we heard a noise like the splashing of a horse in the river shallows. There was

a challenge from the sentry on the bank, a low-spoken reply, and then horse and man appeared in silhouette against the sky on the edge of the low bluff.

The horseman's route to the camp headquarters lay directly past the doctor's tent, and as he came up we both saw that he was spurring a lagging mount which seemed to be spent and badly wind-broken. At the passing instant Kinkaid spoke up sharply.

"Rod!" he called, and, when the horseman drew rein, Kinkaid stepped out from the shadow of the flap fly. "What's happened, boy?" he demanded quickly.

The young lieutenant, dripping wet from his passage through the river, was weaving in his saddle like a drunken man, and he almost fell into Kinkaid's arms when he tried to dismount.

"I guess—I guess I'm about all in," he mumbled, speaking thickly. And then: "How long—how long ago did the sergeant get in with the squad?"

Kinkaid dragged his man under the fly and propped him in a camp chair. Forbes was breathing heavily, and almost immediately his chin dropped upon his breast and he seemed to be falling asleep. The big-bodied surgeon ripped out an oath and disappeared in the tent. A moment later he was back with his medicine kit and a pocket flash light.

"Hold this," he said, giving me the electric lamp, and when I snapped the switch he took a hypodermic needle from the kit and hurriedly loaded it. Three seconds later he was baring the young man's right arm and plunging the needle under the skin.

The hypodermic dose worked like magic. In a minute or so Forbes came to with a shudder and stared at us like a man awakening from a nightmare. "Heave it up and get rid of it!" rasped the surgeon, but the young man showed no symptoms of nausea.

"I'm getting all right again now," he

said weakly, "only my head feels as if somebody had sandbagged me. Queer—dev'lish queer; I never had anything like this happen to me before."

Kinkaid's manner had suffered no diminution of the harshness when he said: "If you can talk straight, brace up and give an account of yourself. Where have you been and what's happened to you?"

"I've been riding a million miles, and nothing much has happened to me, I guess; nothing but this beastly headache and a mental mix-up that I can't seem to get straightened out. We got Garvey, and we didn't have to fight for him. You thought I wouldn't be fly enough, but I was. They had taken our man inland to a little dobe village called Camista. I cached my men in the sand hills and rode in with only Irons."

"Go on!" said Kinkaid.

"There is a small Huertista force at Camista—a hundred men, maybe. The officers took me in and gave me smooth talk. Garvey had been mistaken for a Federal deserter, so they said—some fellow named Pasquez who was really a Carranzist spy. There were apologies as long as your arm. Garvey was in the *calabozo*, but he would be released as soon as the order could come from somebody higher up."

"Well?" snapped the surgeon, whose ill temper seemed to be rising rather than abating.

"Of course I wasn't goin' to stand for anything like that," the young man went on. "I took a drink or two with my new officer amigos; and when the chance came round I passed the word to Sergeant Irons. He was to go back to the sand hills, bring up the detail, and dig a hole through the back wall of Garvey's mud dungeon. I was to stay and swap compliments with the captain and his three subalterns, keepin' 'em quiet until the sergeant had had time to get a start with Garvey."

"And then?" prompted Kinkaid.

"Then, unless an alarm should be given, I was to pretend to accept the apologies and excuses for delay and make my get-away to join the rescue squad in the sand hills. From that on we were to slip out as we could."

"And you balled it—balled it like a thirsty mucker—with the lives of a dozen men hanging upon your ability to keep a sober head on your shoulders!" gritted the surgeon. "Rod Forbes, you'll lose your commission for this—and you deserve to!"

The young man in the camp chair winced as if Kinkaid had driven a fist into his face.

"Don't—don't be too hard on me, doc," he protested, and again his tongue seemed to thicken and become almost unmanageable. "I didn't drink enough to turn a hair; two or maybe three little pourings of the rotten stuff they were shoving around the table."

"What was it?" snapped Kinkaid. "Aguardiente?"

Forbes nodded.

"You're lying," said the surgeon brutally. "It's whisky that's on your breath."

"That was from the first round. I gave Irons my pocket flask, and he poured for us, American fashion."

"Yes, and then you went on and mixed good liquor with their infernal hog wash——"

"It was only two or three swallows, I tell you, doc; not enough to faze a six-year-old boy!" was the eager protest.

"You don't know how much you took after that," rasped the relentless accuser. "Much or little, it knocked you out. You were drunk, and you don't know what happened. Isn't that the fact?"

I thought Kinkaid was pretty hard on the poor young fellow, but it wasn't my put-in, and I kept silence. Forbes put his hands to his head, and seemed

to be trying desperately to pull himself together and remember.

"I wasn't drunk," he said at length; "I was sick. You know well enough, doc, that I've been enough of a boozer in times gone by to be able to tell the difference. There wasn't any alarm given, or, at least, I didn't hear any; and after a while I got away. But I couldn't find Irons or the men. I quartered those sand hills for miles in all directions, and when my head began to clear a little it struck me that the sergeant had misunderstood his orders and had made straight for the river with the squad, after he had waited a reasonable time for me to show up. Of course, if I'd been fully at myself, I would have jumped at that right at the first."

There was a little pause and it was surcharged with tragic possibilities. Then Kinkaid spoke a good deal as a judge does in pronouncing sentence.

"You've done for yourself, Rod, painstakingly and with all the little frills. You got drunk, and practically turned your men loose in a hostile country without a commander. Now you've come back alone, and the inference is, and will always be, that you ducked and ran away to save your own skin."

The young lieutenant had been slowly slipping down in his chair under the pitiless fire of accusation, and when Kinkaid paused he had to try two or three times before he could make the words come.

"It isn't true, doc; you know it isn't true!" he managed to say at length. "I—I've ridden a thousand miles since I left that doghole at Camista. Irons ought to have waited. It was an order. How long has he been in?"

"That's the sharp nib of the thing," was the curt reply. "You're here, safe and sound and with a whole skin. But Sergeant Irons and your squad and the trooper Garvey are still somewhere over in the enemy's country—most probably

in some Mexican guardhouse by this time."

Rod Forbes started to his feet, groping with his hands like a blind man. Then, without a word, he stumbled out to where his horse was standing with its nose to the ground, grasped the bridle rein, and made his way, leading the stiffened troop horse across the parade, to Colonel Underclough's quarters.

It was less than five minutes after a light had appeared in the colonel's office tent that the general alarm was sounded and the men of the regiment came tumbling out to make a rush for the horse ropes. A little later a fair half of the regiment, mounted, armed, and taking the word of command from its officers without the bugle, was slashing its way through the shallows of the Rio Grande, heading for Mexico and the rescue, by whatever means might offer, of Sergeant Malachi Irons and the men who had lost their accredited commander.

Kinkaid had disappeared at the first sound of the "assembly," but he came back after the big detail had taken its marching orders.

"Well?" I queried, when he turned up and dropped heavily into the chair which Rod Forbes had so lately occupied.

"It's all over but the playing of the dead march," he announced soberly. "Rod is under arrest, and he will be tried by court-martial for cowardice and conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman."

CHAPTER III.

THE DRUMHEAD COURT.

What little sleep Kinkaid and I contrived to get after the departure of the rescue column we got in our chairs under the shelter fly of the surgeon's tent. About an hour before daybreak we heard the welcome return splashing

in the river, and a few minutes later the dripping horses were climbing the low bluff to the camp level.

The expedition had been entirely successful. Irons and his squad had been found hidden in a swale to the south-eastward. They had a stirring tale to tell of their flight and of the pursuit which followed instantly, so Irons said, upon the jailbreak at Camista and the rescue of the imprisoned Garvey.

Luckily there had been no bloodshed. The sergeant had led his men to the appointed rendezvous in the sand hills, and had held them there until it became evident that a longer stay would precipitate a pitched battle with the pursuing Huertistas. He had then led the way out to the northward as best he could, having no map nor any specific directions; and, later in the day, upon a fresh alarm, he had hidden the squad in a deep draw to wait for darkness.

With a single exception the sergeant's straightforward story fitted well enough with the account Rod Forbes had given under Kinkaid's questioning. The exception was Forbes' apparent unknowledge of the Camista alarm and pursuit.

"It all fits in together accurately enough," said Kinkaid sorrowfully, after the excitement of the return had died away. "Rod is just like every other hail fellow well met that ever crooks an elbow. What he thinks was only a momentary lapse of complete consciousness probably covered a number of hours. He is a lost man."

My question went back to the humanities, or, rather, to the lack of them.

"What will his brother do?" I asked, and the answer came shotlike.

"Openly Jermyn will make a great show of fighting for his brother—for the sake of the family honor. Secretly he will make capital out of the thing from the word go."

Being only a rank outsider and civilian, I had neither part nor lot in the court-martial proceedings, and I was a

good bit relieved when, after breakfast, the Englishman, Captain-Churchill, came over to ask me if I wouldn't go "pheasant" shooting with him. I assured him that there were no pheasants—in the English meaning of the word—in Texas to my knowledge, but very willingly offered to go for what we might find.

Accordingly, a little later, we rode out of camp together, the captain presenting what I took to be a Bond Street tailor's idea of the way an English gentleman should look in the shooting field. Not to make too much of nothing, I may say here that we rode the better part of the day without finding anything to warrant the fouling of the gun barrels; that I found my companion a man of parts, a world-wide traveler, and most entertaining after the lapse of the three or four hours it took to thaw him out; and that though we talked of many things before we completed the circle which brought us back late in the afternoon to the camp on the river bank, there was never any reference made to the soldier tragedy from which we had both run away in the morning.

I thought it a little odd that Kinkaid had one of the cook's men serve our supper for two in his doctor's office tent that evening. But the reason came out long before we reached the biscuits and black coffee.

"I thought you wouldn't care to meet the others at dinner to-night, Harwood—in the officers' mess, I mean," was Kinkaid's explanation. Then he added: "That's six for you and half a dozen for myself. It's a little like a death in the family, you know, and I didn't feel quite up to it."

"Tell me about it," I urged.

"I will; not because it's pleasant, but because I'd like to get it out of my system if I can. You know the charge, but you can't possibly know what it means to be hauled up and tried by the men of your own outfit. The colo-

nel might have dodged that if he had wanted to. He could have postponed the trial until the court-martial could have been made up of the officers of another regiment, but that wouldn't be like Underclough."

"He didn't take part in it himself, did he?" I asked.

"Oh, no; Captain Danvers acted as judge advocate, and Rod was given his choice of counsel. To everybody's surprise he chose his brother Jermyn."

"The hideous fool!" I ejaculated.

"Oh, hardly that. The brothers had been together for an hour or so before the trial, and most probably Jermyn had offered himself. Past that, it's only fair to say that he did his best. I tried to make myself believe that he was only seeking to prevent the family disgrace, but it was more than that; he threw himself into it with an earnestness which was the most brotherly thing I have ever seen him exhibit."

"I suppose it all turned on the man Irons' testimony?"

"Not wholly, though that was the determining evidence, of course. Rod told a straight story which didn't vary a jot from the one he told us last night. He admitted the drinking, but insisted over and over again that he didn't take enough to fuddle him. Jermyn fought along the line of Rod's story, and his cross-questioning of Irons was something fierce."

"Irons has a good record?" I asked.

"Good enough to work him up from the ranks to a sergeantcy. He's a queer fish, as dour as he looks, and a mere drilling and fighting machine. The major once said of him that he had been born a couple of hundred years too late; that he belonged back in the time when he might have gone about with a Bible in one hand and a broadsword in the other."

"The sort of a man who wouldn't allow himself to be pushed about a

great deal on the witness stand, I suppose?"

"Not a hair's breadth. Jermyn certainly handled him without gloves, but Irons stuck to his story like a leech. Jermyn suggested that the *aguardiente* might have been drugged, but Irons capped that by admitting that he had taken a drink of it himself. Then Jermyn tried to tangle him on his dates—the time which had elapsed after Rod had given him his instructions and he had left the Mexican officers' quarters in the village. But the sergeant had it all straight, and he refused to be either rattled or bullied into dodging."

"You were present?" I wanted to know.

"Yes; I was called in to testify as to Rod's condition when he reached camp last night. It came near breaking my heart, Harwood, but I had to tell the truth. If he wasn't a man just recovering from a drunk I have never seen one. And you must have smelled the liquor on his breath."

"I am waiting for the outcome," I suggested.

"There could be only one outcome. The inference was perfectly plain to every man present. Rod had met a bunch of boon companions and had once more given way to his old appetites. When the liquor was in, whatever decent prompting there was in him went out. In his maudlin condition he was just plain scared, and when he heard the row raised in the pursuit of Irons and his men he made a straight break for the river and safety."

"I simply can't believe it, Kinkaid," I asserted. "It's a part of my business to be able to read the human-face book with more or less accuracy—I earn my bread and butter by it. I've been knocking about with this young fellow for a week, and I tell you it isn't possible for a man to make his face lie for him as consistently as you're trying

to make me believe Rod Forbes does his."

"That's all right; but you are leaving out the determining and debasing factor—the liquor. Add a little alcohol to the human equation and in nine cases out of ten you get a result directly opposite to the one which all the other factors may have led you to expect. You've seen it a thousand times, and so have I. Your mild man becomes a holy terror, and your terror becomes a chattering idiot and quite possibly a pusillanimous coward. The psychologists tell us that the alcohol doesn't work any fundamental change; it merely unmasks the real man—the true ego which has all the time been lying concealed under whatever exterior the ostensible ego has chosen to assume."

Kinkaid was a positivist—he had always been that. But I could not gainsay his logic; the general proposition was only too true, as I very well knew.

"Taking that view of it, I suppose the poor fellow got the limit," I said.

"You may call it that, though I think the court tried to be merciful. The drinking part of it would have been condoned readily enough, even though it resulted—as it did result—in leaving the squad of enlisted men without an officer in a time of peril. But every man in the court saw deeper into the thing—or thought he did. Rod had shown a yellow streak. At heart this fine young fellow was a paltry coward. He couldn't hold himself up to the rack when it came to the pinch. He might have been drunk, but he wasn't too drunk to duck and dodge and save himself at whatever cost to his men. That is the one unpardonable sin in the army—as it should be. There is no room at the top for the man who commits it. Rod was given his choice of going back to the ranks or of resigning from the service. Of course, he resigned. I don't know what he is going to do; I haven't seen him to talk with him since

he was turned loose. But there is really only one thing for him to do and that is to vanish, drop out, disappear."

"And the girl?"

"Let's not talk about her," was the gruff retort.

"You mean that she has disappointed you?"

"I mean that she is like a good many other women—a fair-weather friend. She wasn't visible until some time after noon, and when I last saw her she was going out for a ride with Jernyn. And if you had seen her and heard her laugh, you would have found it hard to believe that a man for whom she had seemed to have at least a warm and friendly regard had just been sentenced to something a little worse than death. I don't believe she has made the least effort to see Rod, and, under the circumstances, you may be sure he won't try to see her."

We had worn through our dinner for two by this time, and at Kinkaid's suggestion we went outside to smoke. A little while after the pipes were going, a man leading a horse came across from the farther side of the camp. I think we both knew that it was young Forbes long before we could distinguish his features, and the guess was right. He was wearing civilian clothes, and he had a soft hat pulled low over his eyes. When he came up he ignored me as if I had been invisible.

"I couldn't go without thankin' you, doc," he said, stopping just outside of the fly shelter and looking straight ahead as he spoke. "You did your best for me, and they tell us that's all the angels can do. I'm mighty sorry it came in your way to have to mix up with a mucker like me, but I guess maybe it was lined out that way from the beginning."

"You're going away?" said Kinkaid, partly, I thought, because there didn't seem to be anything else to say.

"Yes; I'm goin' straight to hell if

I can find the road. That's about the only place left where they won't rub it into me." He stopped and fumbled in his pocket, and I wondered why he didn't go. The reason appeared when he took a small gold locket from its careful wrappings of chamois skin and passed it across to Kinkaid. "I wish you'd give that back to her, doc, when you get a chance. She'll want it back, and I haven't got the nerve. I guess that's about all. Good night and good-by."

I think I could have shot Kinkaid in cold blood and without the slightest compunction if he had let the boy go that way, without a word or a hand-grasp of encouragement. But the big surgeon was all human when it came to the pinch. Before the young man could turn aside Kinkaid was up and grabbing for him.

There was no room for three, with the third man a comparative stranger, so I slid out of my chair to walk off and let them have it out together. A minute or two later I saw the young man swing up to his saddle, and, to Kinkaid's astoundment, no less than to mine, ride straight down the bluff and into the river, pointing for the Mexican shore. When I rejoined my host he was still swearing in his beard.

"Did you see him?" he rasped. "Did you see where the young idiot has gone?"

"What would you?" I queried, meaning to pour oil upon the troubled waters. "There's no room for him in the United States, as you know and he knows, and he is merely taking the shortest way out of the country. Let him go, Gordon. He's got to 'dree his weird,' as your Scottish ancestors would have put it, and I shall be the most mistaken man on this side of the Rio Grande if he doesn't do it like a soldier and a gentleman, after all. Let it go at that and take a turn with me down the river bank. I'm leaving you

to-morrow to hunt for some place where the things happening are things that can be printed for people to read about."

CHAPTER IV.

SCENE SHIFTINGS.

Upon leaving the camp on the Rio Grande I wasted a good bit of time trying to get started upon the investigation about which I had spoken to Kinkaid—namely, the effort to ascertain whether or not the revolution were truly national or only sporadic and in spots.

Since the first requisite was to reach the interior beyond the war zone, I tried all of the boundary gateways before finally choosing Vera Cruz as the most feasible port of entry. As the event proved, the delay in reaching this decision upset all my calculations. Before the Fruit Line steamer in which I took passage from New Orleans had sighted the Mexican coast, the Tampico incident had occurred, and the first thing we heard upon landing was the startling news that the Atlantic squadron was hustling on its way to Mexico to demand satisfaction.

Foreseeing obstacles unsurmountable if the arrival of the fleet should find me still in Vera Cruz, I plunged at once into the interior, taking the railroad for the capital city. At that particular moment, as all the world knows, Huerta's capital was no place for an American investigator. The exodus of Americans, which had been begun long before, was still going on, and I was strongly advised to give up my project of pushing on into the back country. Nevertheless, I persisted; and after some little delay got away for Guajuato.

In the great mining center I found the conditions for any investigative survey entirely prohibitory. Worse still, when the news of the seizure of Vera Cruz came, there was an explosion of

popular frenzy which precipitated a hurried flight of Americans. Word came of excited mobs parading the streets of the capital, breaking windows and raising the cry of "Death to the gringos." Trains were stopped and searched for refugees, and in the circumstances it appeared more hazardous to run than to stay. For this reason I let the exodus go without me, hoping that the popular rage would presently exhaust itself. It did, and when traveling had become once more reasonably safe I left the house of the good German assayer where I had been taking shelter, and got out of the city.

At Irapuato, the junction of the east-and-west railroad with the north-and-south main line, I met an American mining engineer, who gave me news—news which, if it had penetrated to Guanajuato at all, had been carefully suppressed. The conduct of affairs at Vera Cruz had been turned over to the army under General Funston. Huerta's general, Maas, had been pushed back, and additional forces of our troops were coming, or had already come, to take a hand in the great game of "peaceable" war.

"You're not trying to get out?" I inquired of my chance acquaintance at Irapuato.

The young engineer grinned at me. "I'm waiting to hear the clock strike thirteen," he said. "There's no good way to run, and the only thing to do is to camp down and hold your breath."

"How about the railroad to Colima and Manzanillo on the west coast? Have the people stopped mobbing the trains?" I asked.

"They're not interfering with the trains, but the road is blocked, or likely to be," he returned. "The Zapatistas have cut around to the north, and they are killing and burning and harrying with their usual disregard for the humanities. That's where I've come from—over in the west. They sacked our

mine at Aconquista a week ago, and the few of us who got out alive took to the hills."

With this fresh discouragement to chew upon, it occurred to me that about the best thing for an unwarlike writer of stories to do was to sidetrack his literary curiosity and get out of the country over whatever line of the least resistance he might be able to discover. There were three ways to go from the junction station. I had had experience with two of them; hence I chose the westward flight. And having missed the midday train, I took the next, leaving Irapuato at the unholy hour of two-thirty-five a. m.

Now, in the ordinary course of things, one should board the bad-hour train—which is the evening through train from the City of Mexico—at Irapuato and be called by his sleeping-car porter at eight in the morning, in good time for breakfast in the ancient and historic city of Guadalajara.

But war is no respecter of breakfasts. It was at five-thirty, instead of eight, that the porter came to my berth to say that the train was at Yurecuaro, the junction for the Zamora branch; that the *guerrilleros* had torn up the track farther down the river toward Lake Chapala, and that we were to be given the choice between waiting indefinitely at Yurecuaro and going back in the returning train to the capital.

At this I dressed hurriedly and dug out my maps and railway guides. From Yurecuaro a branch line wriggles off to the southward, ending at the little town of Los Reyes, in the State of Michoacan. From Los Reyes westward to the nearest point on the Guadalajara-Colima line the map showed a cross-country distance of less than sixty miles, the main line and the branch together making a huge inverted U, with the sixty miles spanning the gap from leg to leg of the U.

My determination was taken in-

stantly. The branch line to Los Reyes was still in commission, and the train was ready to leave. Hastily gathering my belongings, I changed cars, and, six hours later, was landed, under the hottest of midday suns, in the town at the end of the branch.

It was on the platform at Los Reyes that the first of the series of incredible coincidences occurred. Having been up more than half of the previous night, I had slept a good part of the way down from Yurecuaro. This was why I had missed seeing, until the debarking moment at the branch-line end, a young fellow with natty black mustaches, a fine-lined face, and eyes that would have been good but for a vague hint of shiftiness in them. This young man was in citizen's clothes, and my former acquaintance with him had covered barely a week and a day; but the recognition was instant and mutual. My fellow traveler was Lieutenant Jermyn Forbes.

An explanation which didn't explain followed his half-hearty handgrip. His regiment had been transferred from the Rio Grande and he had accompanied it to Vera Cruz. By some twist of the military wheel, which he didn't succeed in making very clear to me, it appeared that he had been detailed to carry official communications to the City of Mexico. As an accredited courier he should have been entirely safe to go and return, but in some way he had missed the safety part of it.

"They were going to get me; I knew it as well as I knew that I was alive," he protested. "And from a Mexican dungeon to the firing squad is the shortest step you ever saw or heard of, Van Brunt—in the present condition of things. I had to make a run for it, and I didn't dare to try to go back to Vera Cruz. They'd have got me as sure as the devil's a hog. They have a way of doing it, you know; your man

simply disappears and nobody knows what has become of him."

"But surely your uniform would have protected you," I put in. "So long as you were wearing that you had the whole United States behind you."

"That's all right when you're not the man who is wearing the uniform. I was spotted day and night, I tell you. I could feel it, see it, taste it! I had to duck or take a chance of being stood up against a wall."

"Where are you heading for now?"

"Manzanillo," he replied promptly. "From there I can take a steamer to Salina Cruz as a refugee, you know, cross Tehuantepec on the railroad, and so get back to the regiment."

Something in his manner of saying this gave me the idea that he was oddly indifferent—for a soldier—to the time which would be consumed in this round-about journey. But that was no business of mine.

"Have you heard anything of your brother?" I asked.

His eyes darkened, and then became a blank.

"No; and perhaps you'll excuse me, Van Brunt, if I say that I don't care to talk about Rod. It's a rather sore subject with all of us." Then he shifted the topic abruptly. "Are you trying to make Manzanillo, too?"

I told him that I was; that my plan was to strike across to the nearest point on the main line of the railroad, hitting it somewhere north of Colima. At that he offered to turn in and help, and his knowledge of Spanish, which was much better than my smattering, soon brought out the facts. Upon inquiry we learned that the intervening country was mountainous and rough, but the journey could be made in three days. Posing as refugees, as we really were, and giving the blockade of the railroad as our reason for taking the roundabout route across country, we succeeded in convincing and placating the *jefe*. A pack

animal and two riding burros were secured, a mestizo guide was found, and before dark we were out of sight of Los Reyes and pushing westward into a region of great mountains and deep, water-worn barrancas—a region sparsely inhabited, so far as we could see, and consequently peaceful.

Forbes was disposed to be decently companionable when we made our first night bivouac among the big hills. Juan Batista, the guide and donkey man, had no English, and we were able to ignore him. Though Jermyn had refused to talk about his brother, the prohibition did not extend to the girl in the case. Miss Underclough, so he told me, had gone to San Diego—where she had relatives—when the regiment had been called in to Galveston. She was there now, he said, and he gave me to understand, without saying it in so many words, that he was counting the weeks until the "peaceable" war should be over and he could spend his furlough with her.

"Did Kinkaid tell me that her father had money, or did I just imagine it?" I flung in the question merely to keep him going.

"He has money enough to keep him and the family out of the poorhouse," was the laughing reply. "Among other things he has pretty large mining interests in the town you've just left—Guanajuato." Then he added a thing which made me think still less of him. "I hope to goodness he won't lose them in this war mess that has been stirred up."

"No," I retorted; "it might cut Miss Nell's dowry short."

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of that," he put in hastily. "She is her own best dowry."

I poked up the handful of fire which we had made to take the raw edge off of the chill night which had followed the burning day.

"Are the cards out?" I ventured to inquire.

"No, but I hope they will be before very long. My mother knows the Undercloughs—the New York family—and she has set her heart upon it."

I had been continually fighting the temptation to stick pins into his self-satisfied vanity, and quite as continually yielding to it.

"Of course you wouldn't disappoint your mother," I said. "From what Doctor Kinkaid told me I judge that you have always been your father's hope and your mother's joy."

"Oh, come now!" he protested. "You're ragging me, and that isn't fair. Moreover, Kinkaid doesn't like me—never has liked me. I don't know why, I am sure."

I could have told him why, but it wasn't worth while, and, after we had smoked another pipe or two, we rolled into our blankets and slept; slept and rose and ate and hit the trail again, with Juan Batista piloting the course, the mountains of the western Sierra rising higher at each added mile, and the way under foot becoming rougher and more complicated in just proportion.

By nightfall of the first full day out we were fairly over the edge of the great table-land which forms the central portion of Mexico, and were following the course of a small stream which I took to be one of the tributaries of the Baisas. The country was still ruggedly mountainous, but it was well wooded, the forests being those of the *tierra templada*, or temperate zone. In the westward vista we could occasionally catch glimpses of the great volcano which dominates the plain of Colima, and when we made camp, Juan Batista told us that we were within a day's march of the railroad.

At my prompting, Forbes asked the mestizo if there were any towns on our route. There was only one, it seemed;

a mining hamlet called Monterica Hidalgo. Though the mines in that region are chiefly silver producing, Juan told us that Monterica Hidalgo was a gold mine; *mucho bueno el oro*. Further, we learned that it belonged to the Americans; that it had its own stamp mill and concentrating plant; and that its bullion was freighted out, burro-back, over the mountains to the railroad.

Questioned again, the mestizo said that we ought to reach Monterica by noon of the following day, and his prediction was fulfilled almost to the hour. Shortly before midday we topped a wooded pass in the range and found ourselves looking down into a pocket-like valley with a torrenting stream cutting it in halves. At the base of the northern mountain the stream had been dammed, and in the shadow of the dam lay the mining town, its adobe houses whitewashed until they fairly shone in the sunlight.

"We ought to be able to get a good square meal there," was Jermyn's comment, and as we drew nearer and saw the substantial stone-built stamp mill and mine structures and the handsome hacienda of the superintendent, the hope seemed well founded.

It was at the gate of the hacienda that we drew rein. There was a broad veranda on the land side of the building, with hammocks and wicker easy-chairs. I saw women, three of them; and a man, a big, stoop-shouldered German with ragged whiskers and enormous tortoise-shell spectacles that gave him a curiously owl-like expression, was examining the leaves of a potted plant through a magnifier. A second man, ruddy, erect, gray-mustached, and clad in the correctest of white flannels, strode out to meet us, and once more the fairy-tale coincidences slipped into gear. When the white-flanneled man came up and thrust out his hand I gasped to find myself looking into the calm gray eyes of Captain Churchill,

the Englishman who had been the major's guest at the cavalry camp on the Rio Grande.

CHAPTER V.

THE HOUSE PARTY.

If the captain were astonished at this most unexpected meeting, he did not show it; it was evidently not the English way.

"I say—it's an ill wind that blows nobody good, isn't it now, Mr. van Brunt?" he remarked, while we were dismounting and turning the riding animals over to the mestizo. "You're directly from Los Reyes, and we've been waiting for somebody to turn up who could give us a point or two. How's the trail?"

I told him that the trail was passable, since we had just traversed it, and by that time we were nearing the veranda. Suddenly one of the women, a bewitchingly beautiful young person in a khaki riding suit, sprang from the nearest hammock and ran to the steps.

"Of all the wonderful things in a most wonderful world!" she exclaimed, giving me one hand and Jermyn the other. "I'm awfully glad I have never done anything wicked enough to make me want to hide! It simply couldn't be done. How on earth did you two contrive to find us?"

"By the easiest possible method known to mankind," I laughed. "We were not looking for you. We were merely trying to get out of Mexico by the shortest route."

"And we are trying to get in," she said. Churchill was introducing Jermyn Forbes to the other women and the man with the spectacles, and there was a clear field for the word explanatory. "There are six of us, and we came down the coast from San Diego to Manzanillo," she went on. "Mr. Jackson has a rubber plantation somewhere over in eastern Mexico that he

is afraid he is going to lose; the Herr Professor Bauer snatched at the chance to come botanizing—and his wife had to come along to take care of him. Captain Churchill came because he is a professional globe-trotter, and I came because Cousin Amansa Tanglewood was good enough to bring me. There you have it in a nutshell."

I glanced aside at the two women on the veranda. One was the placid German hausfrau, impossible to be mistaken in any environment, however distant geographically from the Fatherland. The other was a well-knit, gentlemanly lady with outdoor eyes, a resolute chin, and a complexion the color of soft-tanned leather. Miss Underclough saw the glance aside and nodded.

"Yes," she said, confirming my guess, "that is Cousin Amansa. You shall meet her presently. She is a personage; a somebody well worthy of all the good things you may wish to say about her in print."

"If your cousin is the plucky South African traveler of the name, she doesn't need accounting for, even in this out-of-the-way corner of the world," I hastened to say. "But you will pardon me if I say that you still do?"

For a single instant there was a look in the beautiful eyes that I couldn't begin to fathom. Then she said lightly: "Suppose we call it worry, Mr. van Brunt; plain feminine worry. My father has quite large interests in the Guanajuato mines. He wrote me from New York that he was about to make a business trip to Mexico—to Guanajuato, and telling me that I might stay in California another month if I wished. Mr. Jackson was trying at that time to make up a party to go in his yacht to Manzanillo, and from thence by rail to the City of Mexico. Cousin Amansa wanted in on it, and I begged to be taken along so that I might join my father in Guanajuato."

"Yes, but how did you get in? They've been telling us up country that all the western ports were closed against Americans."

"Sh!" she said, in mock caution. "They wouldn't let us land at Manzanillo; wouldn't let the *Ariel* come into the harbor. But there is a little port not far away that is in the hands of the Constitutionalists. We went there and transferred to a German steamer. We are not Americans, if you please. We landed at Manzanillo from the German steamer as a party of Germans. The Herr Professor did the talking, and Mr. Jackson furnished the money."

"And at Manzanillo you learned that the Zapatistas were messing with the railroad. Is that why you are here?"

She nodded again. "After Mr. Jackson had made 'gifts' to everybody in authority—that's what they call it, but it's plain bribery—they gave us passports and told us we could go across to Los Reyes and take the railroad there, if we were not afraid of a little mountain climbing. You and Lieutenant Forbes are doing the same thing the other way about, aren't you? But you must forgive me; come and shake hands with Cousin Amansa and the Bauers, and then you shall go and have the bath that I know you are perishing for."

The introductions were brief, and presently I found myself in the interior of the thick-walled hacienda—in a handsome suite of rooms with a modern bath and mahogany furniture. I was not unduly surprised at the modern luxuries. Some years earlier I had been a guest at the American-owned mines of Batopilas, in Chihuahua, during Governor Shepard's régime, and had there been given a practical demonstration of the length to which a liberal expense account may go in planting luxuries in the heart of a desert.

These Monterica folk were apparently of the same stripe. The mine

people had not yet been named for me, and I was still wondering at Miss Nell's omission a half hour later, when the tinkle of a silver bell announced the serving of the midday meal. When Jermyn and I joined the others in the big room whose windows overlooked the plashing torrent of the river, I thought it a little odd that our host or hosts were still invisible. The six members of the Jackson party were all there and waiting, and I was shaking hands with the rubber millionaire when the heavens fell.

At an explosive exclamation from Jermyn Forbes, who was standing with his back to one of the windows, I wheeled quickly. A big, square-shouldered young fellow whose freshly laundered suit of brown linen had evidently been donned for the occasion, was standing in the open doorway. He was smiling, level-eyed, across at Jermyn; and the others, particularly Miss Underclough, were palpably enjoying Jermyn's speechless astoundment.

"How are you, Jerm?" said the brown-linen athlete carelessly. Then he turned to me. "This is bully, Mr. van Brunt, and you're mighty welcome to Monterica. Didn't expect to find the ne'er-do-well down here, did you? It's a queer little old round world, and you never can tell. Draw up, good people, and make you an arm, as they say up in Kentucky. It's only a mining-camp joint, but my predecessors were human enough to leave the commissary fairly well stocked."

I can't recall just how we managed to worry through that first reunion meal in the old hacienda, but perhaps that is because there were so many exciting things to follow and push it quickly into a remote background.

Just the same, a few little items stand out pretty clearly. For one, I remember that Jermyn Forbes was silent and frowningly morose, eating with his face in his plate and answering Miss Nell's

questions about the Vera Cruz situation almost in monosyllables. For another, I remember that Rod, under a rather boyish and whole-souled attempt to play the good-natured host and keep things going, seemed curiously anxious.

There was good cause for the anxiety, as I learned immediately after the table break-up when Rod Forbes, ignoring his brother, drew me aside and led the way to an office room on the opposite side of the patio.

"You'll be wanting to know all the whys and wherefores—how I got here and all that," he began abruptly, pointing to a chair, the pipe rack, and a jar of tobacco. "Let it go; there are other things that've got to come first. Nell has told me something, but not much. What's Jerm doing over here in citizen's clothes when the regiment is in Vera Cruz?"

I told him as much as Jermyn had told me, and the look in his eyes as he paced up and down before my chair was that of a man who thinks more than he cares to say.

"It's queer how things work around," he went on, after another turn or two of the pacing. "You're here, and Jerm's here; Churchill and Nell are here, and I'm here. It wouldn't happen again that way in a thousand years. I guess it just had to be; and in that case none of us could've run fast enough to get away from it. It wouldn't be so rotten bad if you people could all do what you set out to do, but you can't."

I thought he referred to the mountain climbing for the women in the yacht party, and hastened to assure him that the trail to Los Reyes was entirely practicable.

"I didn't mean that," he objected. "You and Jerm got through, probably because nobody thought it was worth while to stop you. Jackson and the others got here from the coast simply by the rawest fluke. Jackson must have bribed everybody in sight to get past

the Manzanillo and Colima officials. But that isn't the worst of it. I keep in touch; I've had Indian runners out night and day ever since I lit down in this buried burg. The woods are full of Zapatistas. To put it as man to man, Van Brunt, I don't know a day or an hour when they won't rush us and rip this camp wide open. That's why I'm here—why the fellows who were here before me threw up their jobs and slid out while the sliding was good."

"You haven't told the others?" I queried.

"No; I didn't want to frighten the women. I've kept 'em here since yesterday morning on one excuse or another, but Jackson is getting impatient. What's the situation upalong?"

"Bad for Americans; not quite so bad as it was just after our marines landed at Vera Cruz, but bad enough. This stunt of Jackson's is absurd. Mexico is no place for an American touring party at such a crisis as this, and he ought to have sense enough to know it. Miss Nell has told me what she is trying to do, but she needn't hope to succeed. Her father will turn back from Vera Cruz—if he hasn't already done so."

Forbes nodded. "It was a crazy excuse for this trip—the chance of meeting her father in the middle of Mexico. I've caught myself suspecting once or twice that it wasn't her only reason. She's been mighty good and forgiving to me since yesterday morning, Van Brunt; not a word or a hint about the—the way we split up, you know. Maybe it'll be different, now that Jerm's here."

"You think we can't make the railroad—your brother and I?"

"I think you'd take a chance, and a mighty long one, if you should try it; and you'd probably find yourselves landed in a Mexican jail when you hit Manzanillo." He made a few more

turns in silence, and then: "I don't know whether to believe Jerm's story—the one he told you—or not. Good Lord, Van Brunt, he isn't ass enough not to know that he threw away his best chance of safety when he shucked out of his uniform!"

"I don't know about that," I replied; "but I am inclined to believe the story he tells. I don't like to say it of your brother, but it struck me that he had a rather bad fit of 'nerves.'"

"I didn't know," was the half-musing reply. "If he had got wind of the landing of this yacht party with Nell in it, it would be just like him to cook up the scare excuse for a chance to come and meet her. Never mind; we've got other things to think of just now. Tell me how I'm going to work it to keep this bunch here until it's safe to send 'em back to Colima—how I'm going to do it without scaring the wits out of the women."

I was intending to tell him that he'd have to figure that out for himself, but an interruption saved me the trouble. A half-breed appeared in the doorway, and said a few words in broken English to Forbes. I didn't catch their purport, but Forbes' reply was entirely audible and intelligible. "Send him in," he snapped; and a moment later a full-blooded Indian slipped shadowlike into the room. From beneath his belt he took a folded scrap of paper and handed it to Forbes. I saw the young fellow's jaw muscles harden as he read. Then he turned to me with a troubled frown wrinkling between his boyish eyes.

"The lightning's getting ready to strike," he announced. "There's a big bunch of Zapatistas moving up the valley, with flankers out to cut off the two trails. We've got a hurry job on our hands and not much time. Stay here a minute until I get Jermyn, the Englishman, and Jackson!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE CREUSOT.

Being neither the hero nor the villain in the play, I confess that those few minutes spent alone in the hacienda office room after Rod Forbes left me were exceedingly disquieting. Memory, unbidden, began to drag in all the horrible stories I had ever heard or read about the Zapatista savageries. Visions of battle, murder, and sudden death filled the air, and in imagination I could hear the spatter of the guns, the crackling of the flames, and the shrieks of the victims.

But there was little time for the visions. Before Forbes had been gone a minute, the noonday silence of the peaceful valley was shattered by the wild clanging of an alarm bell. I went to a window, but the office was on the wrong side of the building; it looked out upon the eastern mountain slope, and whatever excitement the alarm might be stirring up would be in the village on the other bank of the torrenting little river.

While I was absently calculating the thickness of the hacienda walls as shown by the depth of the wide window seat, and wondering how long the six men of us could hold the place against a guerrilla dash outnumbering us, say ten to one, Rod Forbes came back, followed by Jackson, the Englishman, and the plain-clothes lieutenant.

"Now you know why I was so pointedly anxious to have you stop and make us a visit," Rod was saying to the owner of yachts and rubber plantations. "This razoo of Señor Emiliano's on the railroad is only a raid, and I was hoping he'd drift back to his happy hunting grounds in the south without nosing us out. But either way, you stood a better show here than you would on the trail. We've got the ground hog's chance at least; we can fight in our own hole."

He was fitting a key to the lock of a wall cupboard as he talked, and when the door was opened it revealed a gun rack stacked with American repeating rifles, each with its belt of cartridges.

"Help yourselves," he said briefly, setting us the example. "Thank the Lord, we've got the tools. The company made an appropriation for new machinery just before I fell heir to this job, and I chucked a good slice of the money over to the gun factories."

Churchill took a gun, handling it as if it fitted. Jackson took one, holding it as a cautious man might carry a stick of dynamite. Mine was stood in a corner, to be fondled and fired only when the gods should leave me no decent alternative. Jermyn picked and chose, trying the breech and trigger action of first one and then another before he finally made his selection, thus exhibiting the superior weapon wisdom of the government-educated expert.

When we were all supplied, Rod Forbes gave us the fighting word.

"We've got a minute or two while the peons are rushing their women and children to cover," he said. "I've been looking for this every day since I hit the job, and it's planned for, after a fashion. The plant buildings will stop anything short of artillery fire, and there are stout stone walls on three sides of the yard. We've filled a lot of ore sacks with sand ready to be used for gate backing and breastworks; and there are four cases of rifles and one machine gun in the stamp mill. We'll have to abandon the hacienda, using the wall which cuts off the grounds from the working yard as the fighting line. It's tough on the women to make them give up the house and rough it with us, but it can't be helped."

I was about to say that the women would doubtless be willing to do anything that would better our chances, but Jermyn got there first. He had helped himself to a cigar from an open

box on the desk, and was lighting it calmly.

"I've been looking the ground over," he remarked—though when he had had time to do it I couldn't guess—"and you're off wrong, Rod. This house is as good as a fort, with the river on one side and a blank wall at the end where the attack will come. If your half-breeds will fight, we can hold the place till the cows come home."

It was quite evident that Jermyn had recovered from the luncheon-time shock of astoundment and was ready to put his disgraced younger brother into his proper place as a tyro and a discredited ranker. But now the Englishman struck in bluntly.

"Your brother is right as a trivet about the house, lieutenant," he asserted. "If the wall is blank at the end, as you say, there are windows enough on this side, the Lord knows. They can pot us from that mountain slope yonder without half trying. Besides, if they chance to have a fieldpiece along, the worst gunner in the lot of 'em couldn't miss bringing these mud-mortared walls down about our ears, don't you know?"

"They're not very likely to have artillery with them in a country like this," retorted the elder brother, with ill-concealed contempt for Churchill's opinion, which, after all, was only that of a retired officer of a foreign service. "I vote to hold the house. We can shove the half-breeds out in front and back 'em up with the rifles and the machine gun."

I could see the color come and go under the healthy tan on the sober face of the young fellow who was sitting on the corner of the desk with the rifle across his knee. His own little fight—the fight of the man who has been tried and found wanting—was on, and he was apparently wavering. For Jermyn, Churchill, and myself he knew he figured as a man lacking the soldier's one

indispensable quality. For a moment I thought he was going to throw it all up, turning the command and the responsibility over to the brother who had been and might still consider himself to be his ranking officer. But I was mistaken.

"We're wasting time," he said quietly, after the momentary pause. "This outfit belongs to the Monterica Company, and I am the company's hired man. There's over half a million in gold bars buried under the stamp-mill floor—stuff that the fellows who were here before me didn't have a chance to ship out, and that I haven't dared to ship out. That's what the Señor Emiliano is after, and he'll get it if he can. I'm responsible for the gold and for the lives of my workpeople, and it's up to me to make good."

"Of course it is," said the rubber millionaire, taking part for the first time in the council of war. "You know what we're up against, and the rest of us don't."

"I do know," was the even-toned reply. "I can't turn over the command and the responsibility to any one else. I don't want to make it hard for the women, but I don't believe the house is defensible."

"Oh, well, if you feel that way about it, go ahead—I'm out of it," said the elder brother, with large disdain. "But if I'd ever shown up as you have, Rod, I believe I'd be ready to take a little well-meant advice."

It was like a slap in the face, and I saw Rod's fingers clamp themselves upon the balancing rifle as if they would crush the wood and steel. What he said was as unexpected as a clap of thunder out of a clear sky:

"Van Brunt, you and Churchill don't have to be told what Jerm means; you were there and saw for yourselves, and you have probably drawn your own conclusions. You don't know, Mr. Jackson, and it's your right to know. A few

weeks ago I was dropped from the United States army for showing what the court-martial decided was a yellow streak—deserting my men in a fight. You gentlemen don't need to go into this scrap with me if you don't want to; it's your privilege to stand by and look on if you choose. But if I am to be the boss, my orders must be respected and obeyed."

It was fine, the way he said it, and the response from three of us was instant and decently hearty. But Jermyn got up and sauntered out of the office without a word, going, as we supposed, to find the women, and incidentally leaving his rifle behind him. At his departure the air seemed to clear suddenly.

"Come on," said Rod, opening a French window which let us out into the grounds. "We're due to get a quick move if we don't mean to be caught with our fingers in the gluepot."

The sweating toil of the next half hour, borne, the bulk of it, by the half-clad Indians who made up the greater number of the Monterica miners, proved one thing, at least: Rod Forbes knew what he wanted to do, and how to go about it. With the broiling sun pouring its rays from a sky which was like the inner dome of a smelting furnace, the work of preparation was driven relentlessly.

Trotting processions of the dark-skinned workmen built double and triple embankments of sand bags against the inner side of the great, spike-studded gate. Cases of rifles were opened in the mill, and Churchill drilled the Indians in the use of the guns as each relay squad came in for a breathing spell. Knowing no word of Spanish, the rubber magnate still made shift to direct the placing of the sand-bag revetments, and I, the least skillful of all, found work in opening the gun cases and ammunition boxes.

The plant layout, either by design or

by happy accident, was singularly well adapted to the defensive purpose. The pocket valley, a scant half mile in width, was split through the middle, as I have said, by the river. On the eastern or left bank of the stream, and three or four hundred yards below the plant and the mine mouth, stood the hacienda. The house grounds were narrow and long, and the house itself stood with one leg in the water.

Across the river from the hacienda and its grounds, and on a lower level, lay the adobe village, with its single street running lengthwise of the valley, its upper extremity leading to a single-arch stone bridge which spanned the narrow torrent and served as the avenue of approach to the yard gate.

The buildings, a stamp mill, a small concentration plant, the commissary, and the laboratory, were all on the plateau-like left bank of the river. They were inclosed by a stout stone wall, man-head high. The yard thus formed was roughly quadrangular in shape and was extended beyond the laboratory to a connection with the grounds of the hacienda, though there was a low wall of loose stone to mark the dividing line between the two.

But it was the configuration of the surrounding and inclosing mountains that gave the plant its greatest security. Directly behind the inclosure the valley ended against an abrupt, sky-reaching cliff. It looked as if, in some convulsion of nature, the earth had cracked and split on an east-and-west line, the southern half sinking to form the valley, and the northern half standing solid and sheer. This huge cliff was inaccessible from below, and so covered with a luxuriant growth of tropical vegetation as to completely screen the yard and buildings on that side. Through the middle of the mighty wall, in a cañon that was a mere slit in the face of the rock, poured the river, with the

power dam built across the mouth of the slit.

Below the cliff and on either side of the plant and the mine tunnel—which was driven into the cliff itself—the ground fell away in level spaces from which the jungle had been cleared. But opposite the hacienda and the village the hills closed in again, those on the left bank approaching close enough to admit of a dropping rifle fire into the grounds and upon the roofs of the hacienda and the adobes across the stream.

Rod Forbes' contention that the house could not be defended was sound enough, when the peculiar lay of the land was taken into consideration. A dropping fire from the hills could not reach us in the plant yard, and an attack from the village or from either side would have to be made across the open ground; across the river and up a little hill, if it should come from the right. Of course, if there were artillery, there would be a different story to tell. But we were hoping that there wouldn't be any artillery.

Our own armament was sufficient, and it spoke volumes for Rod Forbes' foresight. There were plenty of the American rifles, and for the heavier work we had a machine gun with a good store of ammunition. By the middle of the afternoon, we had done all there was to be done. The gates and the weak places in the yard wall had been buttressed with the sand bags, the loose wall cutting off the hacienda grounds had been strengthened in the same manner, and the upper windows of the stamp mill had been barricaded.

Then came a dragging wait, hard to be borne. The heat and stillness of the torrid afternoon gripped at the throat like the fingers of a choking hand. No breath of breeze stirred the foliage of the mountainsides, and the only cooling suggestion came from the river waste water shooting down the apron

of the spillway and rioting among the bowlders of its valley-dividing bed.

In the mill yard, the peons—men, women, and children—sought the shade of the heavy walls and wide eaves, sitting on their heels with their backs to the stones. They were Zapotecas, for the most part, Churchill had told me; a race peaceful and industrious under ordinary conditions, but a people who had given birth to a patriotic Juarez, and whose blood ran in the veins of other leaders famous in the sanguinary history of the republic.

It was to Churchill, in this sweltering interval of suspense, that I spoke of the possibility that, with arms in their hands, the peons might turn against us. Would they fight for the hated gringos and against the men of their own race in Zapata's ranks?

"Young Forbes says they will—with white men to lead 'em," returned the Englishman. But he added immediately: "I wish there were more of us, Van Brunt! The lieutenant brother is doing the sulking-Achilles act, and as for Jackson, he tells me he hasn't fired a gun—fancy it!—since he was a lad on his father's farm. That puts it on the shoulders of three of us, or at most four. Bauer can't shoot with anything but a magnifying glass."

"You're not counting Jermyn's drop-out as very serious, are you, captain?" I said.

"Bad enough, you'd say, wouldn't you? He is a trained officer, and that counts for a deal in handling a garrison of these mine-burrowing natives. I sided with the younger brother in the jangle about defending the house—he was right in that. And I'm taking orders from him because he's the head of the place—the company's representative. But I can't help wishing it was the other way about, with the officer brother in the saddle, don't you know?"

"Meaning that Rod won't measure up when it comes to the pinch?"

Churchill made the English gesture which corresponds to the Frenchman's shrug.

"He's failed, bally good and well, once."

"You are convinced of that?"

"Didn't he as good as admit it—an hour or so ago in the flare-up with his brother? I've seen it before—in men coming up from the ranks, you know. Say what you like, Van Brunt, but blood will tell."

"But the two men are brothers!" I protested.

"That makes no difference. There's a black sheep, now and again, in the best of families—a hold-over from some bad marriage among the ancestors. The lieutenant showed his birth and breeding by going to your West Point school and sticking to the family traditions. The other was content to enlist in the ranks and be his brother's horse holder."

With a point of view hopelessly at variance with the retired captain's English notions of class distinctions, I dropped the subject. Since Jermyn, Bauer, and all three of the women had been invisible during the make-ready hustle and drive, I took it that they were still in the hacienda. Leaving the stamp mill, I went down the yard, climbed the dividing barrier, and so came by way of the shaded avenue to the house.

Four of the missing ones were in the fountain-cooled patio, demeaning themselves as if war and its alarms were as remote as the stars. The German naturalist, with the hausfrau to help, was mounting botanical specimens between the leaves of a great book. Over in a corner was the village priest, a little, worn, sallow-faced man in a faded cassock, who was fanning himself with his shovel hat.

Jermyn Forbes and Miss Underclough sat apart. The girl had a bit of embroidery in her lap, but Jermyn

had taken the card of silk and was unwinding and winding it idly as he talked. I swallowed an impatient exclamation and turned to the stairway leading up into the high, square tower, going in search of the African explorer lady.

I found Miss Tanglewood where I had half expected to find her—at a tovertop window commanding an extended view of the lower valley. She was polishing the lenses of a man-sized field glass, and she nodded brusquely as I came up the stair.

"Can't make out anything yet," she said, biting the words off as a sewing woman snips the thread. And then: "Are you people all ready up at the mill?"

"As ready as we can hope to be. I have come to tell you that the house will have to be abandoned."

"Of course," she assented promptly. "It couldn't be defended."

"You don't seem to be greatly terrified at the prospect," I ventured.

"What's the use? Shouldn't care a particle if it wasn't for the women. I've held my own in worse places than this is likely to be. Luckily, I brought my hunting rifle along; it's an English take-down, and I hid it in the luggage. The Manzanillo *jefe* didn't order me searched. Sorry for Nellie, but she would come along. Anxious about her father's coming in, just at this time, and was hurrying down here to persuade him to get out while he could. By the way, did you bring any news from the hinterland? Haven't had a chance to ask you before."

I told her of the shift in the Vera Cruz occupation from the navy to the army, and of the even chance that the army of occupation would presently move inland.

"Oh, Lord, that settles it!" she exclaimed, with a queer little grimace. "Tom Underclough can't get in to Guajuato now if he wants to, and what-

ever happens here we'll still have that girl to worry about! I don't see why she doesn't get married. She's the marrying kind, isn't she?"

I put the psychological query aside in deference to a faint dust cloud which was materializing at the point below the village where the western trail wound off among the hills. Before I could speak, Miss Amansa was focusing her glass upon the yellowish blur.

"Horsemen," she announced presently, without taking her eyes from the glass; and again: "A marching column; soldiers—and irregulars, by the ragged look of them. Have a try?"

I took the proffered glass and was able to confirm her guess. At the head of the column there was a train of pack animals, with an object which resembled an enormous hammock swinging between drag ropes hitched to the pack saddles.

"They are carrying something swung in a hammock," I said. "I can't make out what it is unless it's a man, sick or wounded."

She reached for the field glass, with a grim little smile, and steadied it with the window frame for a rest.

"Your eyes are not as good as they ought to be at your age, Mr. van Brunt," she observed. "That is a field gun, unlimbered and with the carriage taken to pieces. I've seen it done that way in Rhodesia. Shall we raise the hue and cry?"

I crossed to the opposite window, which looked out upon the plant. The peons, appearing from the tower height only as animated hats, were taking their places in open order behind the breastworks. At an upper window in the stamp mill, I could make out dark figures moving behind the sand bags, and while I looked, the barrel and shield of the machine gun came in sight over the barrier. Suddenly it occurred to me that the flat top of the house tower would make an excellent point of van-

tage for the enemy. With a Maxim, or even with ordinary rifles, they could command every square foot of our intrenchments.

"The alarm has already been given, and we'd best get out of here, Miss Tanglewood," I urged, dodging the roof stairway to get back to her.

"There's no such desperate hurry, if the garrison is ready," was the cool reply. "Those fellows out there in the road have stopped, and they're setting up the gun. I'd like to know just what kind of a piece it is—too long for a howitzer, you'd say; now they are loading it. Why, bless my soul! I believe they are going to begin at that distance! They are; they're training the gun up the village street!"

A puff of dust-colored smoke sprang into the air as she spoke, and through the open window we heard the whistle of the shell as it passed between the rows of adobe huts. Instantly there was a double report: the dull thud of the gun, and the tearing crash of the shell as it buried itself a hundred feet short of the stone-arch bridge and exploded.

"It's a French Creusot that Zapata has captured in one of his brushes with the regulars," remarked the traveled lady, calmly dropping her glass into its sling case and adding, in the same teatable tone: "Perhaps we'd better go now and tell those people downstairs that it is time to move out."

CHAPTER VII.

NO QUARTER.

Descending the tower stair, Miss Tanglewood and I found we were too late to warn the noncombatants on the ground floor, the gun-fire alarm on the other side of the river having beaten us to it.

The patio was empty when we reached it, and through the open French windows on the land-side veranda we

could see a big squad of the armed peons coming up on the run, with Rod Forbes leading it. Two of the big-hatted runners were carrying familiar-looking square pine boxes which were left on the veranda in passing, and I wondered what use was to be made of dynamite.

"They've put one over on us, ringing in that fieldpiece!" Forbes jerked out, when I hastened to join him at the inclosure wall where he was posting his men so that their fire would command the road crossing the torrent at a second bridge below the village. "That long-range-artillery business will have to be choked off some way, if we want to stay on earth. If I had just one good marksman that I could bet on—but I haven't!"

My time had come, and I knew it. Though I had never in all my life killed anything bigger than a partridge, I had, in years gone by, been a member of my college rifle team, and had gained embarrassing notoriety as the man with the longest score of bull's-eyes in the intercollegiate trials. Let me hasten to say that it wasn't any special gift of gun sense, much less any overmastering passion for the sport; it was merely the ability to point a gun straight and to hold it still until the bullet could get out of it. I had shot very little since the college days, but I was afraid, mortally afraid, that the ability had not yet been lost.

"You need a sharpshooter—up in that house tower—and I—I guess I'm your man," I stammered. "Wait a minute, and I'll get one of those Winchester's and see what can be done."

He looked as I fancied he might have looked if Frau Gertruda Bauer had offered to man the battlements; but I didn't wait to hear what he had to say. Hurrying back through the fountain court of the hacienda to gain the office-cupboard armory, I met Miss Tanglewood coming from her room. She had

a medium-weight English hunting rifle in the crook of her arm, and was wearing its well-filled cartridge belt slung soldierwise.

"Not ducking to cover this early in the game, I hope?" she flung at me, with the grim smile that went so well with the resolute chin and outdoor eyes.

"No, I'm going after a weapon," I returned hastily, adding: "You mustn't go out there. They'll be training that fieldpiece on the house grounds in less than a minute after Forbes shows them where he is!"

At the arm-distributing moment earlier in the afternoon, I had taken the first weapon that came to hand, and it was now reposing peacefully in a corner of the stamp mill where I had left it when I was given a chance to take part in the make-ready hustle. Having to choose again, and this time with a definite object in view, I was more particular. Among the pieces still remaining in the closet rack there was a single-shot target gun fitted with telescope sights. I glanced at the cartridges in the ammunition belt. The odd rifle was built on the Krag model, taking a twenty-five caliber steel-jacketed bullet with a high-power charge of smokeless powder. I had never shot with anything quite so modern as this, but I thought it might serve, and, quickly testing the sights, I ran out to rejoin the lady in the fountain court.

The boom and shell crash of a second discharge of the enemy's one-gun battery was jarring the air when I reached her.

"You must let me see you safe inside of the plant buildings, and then I'll come back here and help Forbes," I said. "We must hurry; this will be no place for you after they swing that cannon around and point it this way!"

"I'm not going to run away just yet; and if I were, I'm quite able to do it alone," was the nipping retort. And

then: "Is it possible that you can shoot? I see you've picked a target gun."

I began to say that I used to shoot a little, but she cut me short.

"That upper tower window is our place," she announced abruptly; and before I could stop her she was skipping up the stair as lightly as a sixteen-year-old girl.

I managed to overtake her at the top of the second flight, and once again we had our former outlook through the open window. More of the attacking force had come up—a good many more. Forbes had already begun the fight on our side, and in the thick of a spattering exchange of rifle shots the men serving the fieldpiece were pulling and hauling at the gun to bring it to bear upon the low wall behind which Forbes and his peons were taking shelter.

"Have you ever killed a man?" queried my companion, snapping the question at me like a challenge.

"God forbid!" I hastened to say.

"Neither have I. But I suppose there has got to be a first time to everything. We mustn't let them fire that gun at Forbes and his Indians."

At the word she sank on her knees behind the window seat and began to adjust the sights of the English rifle. I think it was some old-fashioned notion of saving a woman from the killing necessity that made me fire first, with the window casing for a steady rest. At the crack of the target gun, one of the men who was tugging at the hand-spike pointing bar of the fieldpiece leaped into the air and quit. Miss Amansa's nerve failed her at the trigger-pulling instant, as I rather hoped it might, and her shot splintered the wooden pointing bar itself.

The object lesson taught by these two bits of target practice was immediately effective. In a twinkling the gun was dragged out of sight behind one of the outlying village huts, and the attackers were scattering to take cover.

Rod Forbes, squatting with his Indians behind the wall of defense, turned to face the tower and waved his hat.

"Bully good work!" he yelled. "Is that you up there, Van Brunt?"

"There are two of us," I called down, "a man scared half to death and a lady who isn't."

"You're all right—both of you! What are the beggars doing now?"

"Deploying under cover in both directions toward the two bridges."

The irregular rifle firing was beginning again, and some of the bullets from across the river found our window. I drew Miss Amansa aside out of range, and in the act remarked that the clear gray eyes were suspiciously bright, and that she was biting her lip to keep it from trembling.

"It's dreadfully hard!" she protested, quite like any other woman. "I—I can't help shooting straight, you know, and I knew if I held on my man he would have to die!"

"I'm feeling exactly the same way," I assured her, "only with better reason, because my man did die, I'm afraid. I suppose we shall get toughened to it after a while."

Notwithstanding the flying bullets which were smashing the window panes over our heads, we contrived to keep watch. A good half of the attacking force was now working its way through the jungle toward the lower bridge, and I shouted to Forbes to be ready for a rush. Turning to one of the other windows, I saw a scattering mob of possibly half a hundred men break cover at the upper end of the village and make a dash for the bridge opposite the plant gates.

Whoever was in command in the stamp mill—and I guessed it would be Churchill—had the situation well in hand. Nothing stirred and not a shot was fired from the mill or the yard until the scattering half hundred were converging to rush the bridge and storm the

little hill leading up to the gate. Then the ear-splitting, air-hammer chatter of the machine gun broke forth, turning the bridge into a shambles. It was not in human nature, however war-seasoned, to face that withering blast, and a wild panic ensued. Ten seconds later there was nothing left to mark the charge save a dozen or more stark bodies lying as they had fallen; these and two or three wounded crawling painfully to take shelter behind the low parapet of the bridge.

I was staring, transfixed with horror, at the sudden and ghastly transformation scene on the bridge and its approach, when Miss Amansa called and beckoned me to come quickly.

"See!" she whispered, pointing to the adobe hut behind which the gunners across the river had dragged their field-piece.

What she invited me to see was the muzzle of the field gun projecting through a freshly dug hole in the wall of the house. The artillerists had evidently torn down the opposite side of the house to make an entrance for the gun carriage, and had thus secured a bullet-proof shield behind which to operate the piece.

We could only guess at the pointing of the black muzzle protruding from the hole in the house wall. But the range appeared fair enough to send a shell into the hacienda grounds somewhere beneath our window, on a line which would rake Rod's shelter from end to end. In a flash my companion braved the window-smashing bullets to lean out and scream at Forbes.

"Fall back, down there, quick!" she cried; and the blast of the big gun and a chattering small-arm volley fired at the tower window came at one and the same instant.

You may take my word for it that the upper-tower room was no place for a neurasthenic for the next few seconds. The renewed rifle fire ripped

splinters from the window casings, the sashes, and the timbered ceiling, and a fragment of the exploding shell tore upward through the projecting stone sill and buried itself in the masonry overhead, showering us with débris. Before we could rub the dust out of our eyes, the fieldpiece bellowed again, and this time the shell struck the base of the tower, the explosion jarring the solid structure to its foundations.

From the farther corner to which we had retreated, we could see the complete success of the enemy's maneuver. The detachment which had been working its way downriver under cover of the jungle was now streaming across the wooden bridge below the adobes and deploying to charge the hacienda, the dark-faced *guerrilleros* yelling fiercely as they came. With the field gun exploding its shells inside of his line of defense, Forbes could do nothing. The house and grounds, our single outwork, was as good as lost.

Miss Tanglewood, being at least feminine enough to have no pockets, had lost her handkerchief, and I was offering her mine to wipe the mortar dust from her face when Rod Forbes came bounding up the stair.

"Time to get out, you two!" he bawled, when he saw us. "The house is gone, and we've got to fall back! Jump for it, or we'll be shut out!"

He flung himself down the stair, and we followed. Miss Amansa clung to her English gun, and I half carried her in the step-skipping flight to the ground floor. One glimpse we got of the devastation wrought by the shells from across the river. There was a gaping hole in the exposed flank of the tower, and the boundary wall behind which Forbes had at first sheltered his men was scattered like shards of broken crockery.

Some of the peons, almost all that were left alive of the big squad that had come out to open the battle, were lying

on their faces in the grass, pumping their Winchesters at the advancing enemy and striving as they might to delay the fatal climax. Two or three others were retreating with backloads of the spare guns and ammunition from the office-room armory. A mestizo mine boss, with a boy to help, was opening the two boxes of dynamite and placing them under the tower stairway, with Forbes hastily cutting the fuses and urging the mestizo to hurry.

I paused just long enough to get a good look at the face of the fuse cutter. Thus far, at all events, Roderick Forbes was showing himself a man of cool courage and full of soldierly resource. True, he had lost nearly half of his men—through the gap in the tower wall we could see their bodies lying among the shattered stones in the line of fire—but he had taken his own chance with them, was taking it again in lingering to fire the tower mine.

"Run for it!" he stormed, when he saw us hesitate; and then more pointedly to me: "Don't stand there killing time! Chase your feet!"

I chased them; not only my own, but Miss Amansa's also. Bullets from the charging column of Zapatistas came whizzing over our heads as we dashed through the grounds toward the loose-stone dividing wall in the rear. The peons who had been sniping the oncoming raiders from the grass were at our heels; but when I glanced over my shoulder Forbes was not yet in sight. After we had flung ourselves, breathless and gasping, over the barrier wall, I looked again. This time I saw him. He was racing toward us among the trees, and a number of his pursuers were so close behind him that I expected to see them club him down with their gun butts.

It was a good time to pray for a diversion of some sort, and if the thin, sallow-faced little padre man had been with us he might have done it. Per-

haps he was praying somewhere, for the diversion was on the way. Forbes outran the tree-dodging Zapatistas; eluded them and cut across diagonally to the right. The instant he was out of line we opened fire on his pursuers over the sand bags and drove them back. As Forbes hurled himself over the barrier, there was an earth-jarring upheaval like the eruption of a pent volcano. For a single instant the hacienda tower swayed like a reed in the wind. Then it tottered, its walls bulged outward, and the entire mass crumbled to ruins with thunderings to wake a thousand echoes.

"More sand bags here!" shouted Forbes, struggling to his feet in a dust cloud that was as thick as a fog; and for a few minutes we all worked blindly, piling the barrier higher and heavier to withstand the cannonading to which, we made sure, it would presently be subjected.

Claiming no exemption on the score of her sex, Miss Amansa tugged and lifted at the sand bags with the rest of us; but when the dust began to settle a bit I saw that she was in the last ditch of exhaustion.

"You'd better let me take you out of this," I suggested. "There won't be any more fighting until after they get their field gun across the river."

She made no protest, and together we retreated to the shelter of the buildings. There was a good bit of excitement in the big, machinery-cluttered stamp mill. A few of the peons wounded in the first shell fire had been brought in and laid out on the floor. The German professor had forgotten his botany for the moment, and was turned surgeon, with his wife and some of the Indian women to help. The priest was confessing one of the wounded men whose hurts were mortal. Churchill and Jackson were keeping watch at the upper windows. I saw nothing of Jermyn Forbes, but there

was a good deal of confusion, and the place was crowded with the women and children and the portable dunnage of the peon villagers.

Having done my duty by the explorer lady by showing her a water tap where she could get a drink and bathe her face, I was about to return to the fighting line when Miss Underclough picked her way out of the confusion and besought me for news. She was evidently terrified, as any woman has a good right to be in the circumstances, but the anxiety in the beautiful eyes was not altogether of fear.

"I simply couldn't believe it—didn't believe it until the last moment," she shuddered. "Everything was so peaceful and quiet. We had no warning—in the hacienda, you know—until the crash of the first cannon shot came. I've been in torment because I let Jermyn rush me off before I could find out what had become of you and Cousin Amansa."

"You did perfectly right in running," I told her. "I should have brought your cousin in, but she wouldn't let me. We stayed and tried to help Rod out."

She shuddered again. "I wish they wouldn't quarrel at such a time as this—Rod and his brother. The lieutenant fought against Rod's plan of trying to check the attack in the hacienda grounds. He said they'd all get killed. Did they?"

"The loss was pretty heavy," I admitted. "The artillery fire made it so."

"Was—was Rod hurt?"

"I think not; not seriously, at any rate," I said, adding: "Nobody could question his courage this time. He stayed behind to dynamite the tower, and was the last man to leave the place. They came near capturing him, too."

She did not lift the small challenge, as I thought perhaps she might.

"What are they doing now—Rod and the others?" she asked.

"Strengthening the wall between the

yard and the house grounds. That will probably be the next point of attack—after the Zapatistas get their gun across the river.”

“And that will end it,” she broke in. “If they plant the gun in the hacienda grounds, they can destroy every building here. I’m enough of a soldier to know that.”

I thought it was only too likely myself, but before I could say so she went on:

“Jermyn thinks we ought to try to make terms with Zapata, or whoever is in command of the raiders. They want the gold that is stored under the mill floor. Their killing of us to get it is merely incidental. When it comes up, will you try to persuade Rod?”

I shook my head. “I can’t promise in advance. We are not through fighting yet—in fact, the fighting has only just fairly begun. If they had given us a chance to bargain with them before they opened fire—but they didn’t; and now there has been blood shed on both sides. Let me turn it the other way about, Miss Eleanor: if you have any influence over Jerm, I hope you will try to persuade him to take his part in the defense of Monterica Hidalgo. If we are ever able to make terms with these savages, it will be only after we have shown them what we can do.”

She gave me a look that was entirely unreadable to me and pushed me toward the door.

“They will be needing you,” she said. “If I can’t help, I can at least try to keep from hindering.” And with that she went to take her place again among the Indian women.

At the greatly strengthened cross-wall barrier I found the younger Forbes directing the placing of the final tier of ore sacks.

“They don’t seem so blooming anxious as they did a few minutes ago,” he said, referring to the sudden quiet which had fallen upon the scene of the

recent conflict. “I suppose they’re getting that gun across the river. Here’s hopin’ the bridge breaks down with ’em. It isn’t any too stout.”

Something was certainly making for delay. The afternoon was waning to its close, and still there was no renewal of the attack. Jackson and Churchill, from their post on the machine-gun staging, reported the village deserted, with no sign of the enemy anywhere. From no point of view within the works could we get a sight of the lower valley and the wooden bridge, and Forbes refused to risk the lives of any of his Indians by sending them out to reconnoiter—which was the occasion of another disagreement between the brothers.

It was after the sun had gone behind the western spur of the mountains that we discovered the whereabouts of the Zapatistas and found out why we had been given the long respite. From a wooded, craggy hill above and considerably beyond the hacienda grounds came a puff of smoke to mark the new position of the one-gun battery; a position attained by what must have been incredible labor and toil and jungle clearing on the part of the raiders. Five seconds later the shell went hurtling high over the buildings to explode harmlessly in the dense foresting of the great backgrounding cliff.

At the crash the Indians covered behind their breastworks, and Jackson and Churchill came running out of the stamp mill. Rod Forbes pointed out for them the grayish smoke puff rising above the trees on the distant hill. The rubber millionaire wrinkled his nose and glanced up at the gorgeous sunset coloring in the west.

“It’s a question of minutes,” he predicted soberly. “If they get our range while there is light enough left to shoot by, we may as well take our turns confessing to the little priest. Don’t you say so, Forbes?”

Forbes was focusing a field glass upon the distant hill crag and watching for the second smoke puff. I looked around to see where we could be hit the hardest. The mill was the most conspicuous mark, and it was sheltering the greater number of the helpless ones. But there were other targets as well. Back of the mill there was a stone power house to which the steel flumes led down from the lip of the dam and which contained the electric plant and generators. Between the mill and the one-story commissary which held our siege stores of provisions, stood the cyaniding plant, a great wooden solution tank, set high, with its accompanying ore bins, filters, and sump.

One of my many dabbings had been in chemistry, and, as my eye fell upon the big solution tank, a horrid fear seized and shook me. Everybody knows the deadly nature of cyanide of potassium, how a single drop of a saturated solution of it placed upon the tongue will cause death almost instantaneously. Less generally known is the fact that even the twenty-five-per-cent solution used in a gold-saving plant will act with fatal effect if it comes in contact with an open wound—a scratched finger is enough.

Instantly the frightful menace struck itself out in vivid detail. If the tank was filled with the cyaniding solution, any one of the Zapatistas' shells might topple it over and flood the low floor of the stamp mill with the deadly stuff. The second missile from the heights was screaming overhead when I caught at Forbes' arm.

"The cyanide tank!" I gasped. "Is it empty or full?"

He did not take my meaning at first, but when he did his jaw dropped and he pointed dumbly at the float gauge on the side of the tank. The sliding index showed a ten-foot depth of the poison in the huge receptacle.

"It should have been drained—I told Miguel to drain it!" he said hoarsely.

Jackson and the Englishman had the field glasses now, and they were watching for the third shell. Jermyn came out of the stamp mill and joined us. He was smoking a cigarette. "You look as if you were in a blue funk—you two," he remarked, including his brother and me in the smiling gibe. And then: "You needn't worry. Those fellows are too far away. It'll be dark before they can get the range on us."

I pointed to the cyanide tank.

"They taught you a little chemistry at West Point, didn't they?" I asked. "That tank is nearly full of cyanide. If a shell should happen to drop in it——"

He turned slowly upon Rod.

"You are supposed to be the engineer of this outfit; why don't you drain it into the sump?" he demanded.

The younger man seemed to have lost his nerve, or at least his power to think or act quickly.

"It takes three days to drain by gravity through the filters and ore bins," he began. "There is a valve——"

The break came upon a third shell scream and a deafening crash, and for a moment the air was full of flying débris. When we could see again, a crude disaster showed itself. The gunners on the height had found the range at last, and the third shell had wrecked the commissary. The roof was ablaze, one wall had been blown out, and the food supplies with which the building had been filled were scattered in all directions.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TROPIC NIGHT.

With a very real and irremediable disaster confronting us in the threatened loss of our entire food supply, we forgot the menace of the cyanide tank, for the moment at least. Though the

roof of the commissary, like those of the other buildings, was of tile, there was wood enough in it to make it burn briskly, the fire being helped along by the shattering of a number of cans of oil which had been stored in the end of the building where the exploding shell had done its worst.

It was a moment for swift action. Apart from the destruction of our commissariat, the blaze was making an excellent range finder for the Zapatista gunners, as was proved when a fourth shell knocked a wagonload of tiles from the roof of the laboratory and passed on to explode among the tram cars at the mouth of the mine.

I think we were all paralyzed by the suddenness with which things were happening, but of the five of us who were available for immediate use, Rod Forbes was the first to come alive.

"The fire hose!" he yelled. "Fall in with me, you fellows!"

When the rest of us reached the door of the small power house, he was already inside and spinning the wheel which admitted the pressure of the water above the high dam to the plant fire plugs. A half minute later we were running a line of hose across the yard, and in another half minute the fire was under control. Unhappily, there was still daylight enough for the gunners on the crag, and the column of smoke and steam ascending from the wrecked commissary doubtless enabled them to place their fifth shot.

This shell ticked a corner of the laboratory, and, exploding a dozen yards farther on, drove us back to the mill. The fire was out, but that short tropical twilight that you so frequently read about was fearfully slow in materializing. Again and again the shells came screaming down from the height. One went over us, another fell short and sent up a geyser spouting of earth from the hacienda grounds, while a third

ripped a corner out of the stamp-mill roof, showering us with broken tiles.

"That cyanide-tank valve!" shouted Jermyn, suddenly remembering what the fire had made us all forget. "Whereabouts is it?"

The younger brother did not answer. Instead, he made a stumbling dive for a boxed-up contrivance under the deadly tank. It was a sheer mercy that he didn't keep his feet, that he tripped over some of the shell-strewn débris and fell before he had taken the second stride. For at the tripping instant the Zapatistas' good-night missile came hurtling through the gathering darkness to tear away the supporting timbers of the tank trestle on the side farthest from us and toward the wrecked commissary.

"Run!" gasped Jermyn, setting us the good example himself. But the poison flood did not fall our way, nor yet out toward the mine, where it would have done the least harm. With the devilish perversity which sometimes seems to possess inanimate things, the big tank toppled, overturned, and emptied its destroying contents upon the shattered commissary, deluging the shell-riddled and fire-damaged remains of our precious food supply.

There was plenty of panic and confusion to go with the crash of the falling cyanide tank. Many of the peons knew the deadly nature of the chemical, and those at the nearer breastworks dropped their guns and fled with shrill cries of terror. In a trice the stamp mill emptied itself of the women and children, and if the enemy could have been at hand to take advantage of the panic we might have seen our finish in short order.

Fortunately it is a characteristic of panics that they do not last long. In all the frightful property destruction nobody had been killed, and Rod Forbes' fall had given him nothing worse than a dislocated thumb. Among us, we of the cooler blood presently brought some semblance of discipline

out of the uproar, and when the excitement quieted down we began to take stock of our misfortunes.

The inventory was a long one. With the single exceptions of the stamp mill, the stables, and the office end of the laboratory building, the plant was a wreck. All of the provisions save those in tight cans were ruined, and much of the canned stuff was battered and broken. With a small multitude to feed we could easily count the number of our days, not to say hours. We stumbled about in the darkness getting these few and depressing statistics. We dared not start the power and put the electric lights on, since that would invite a renewal of the cannonade. Farther along Rod Forbes got the English-speaking men of us together in the ore shed adjoining the mill for a council of war.

"We have twelve hours, more or less, in which to invent some way of killing off that field gun," was the line the younger brother took in opening the talk. "A little daylight is all those fellows up yonder on the mountain need to wipe us off the map, and they can do it without the loss of another man."

The Englishman was the first to speak.

"A sortie?" he suggested. "Will your Indians fight in the dark?"

"They will fight, as you have seen," was the prompt reply. "But the chances are all against us on that mountainside. We don't know the guerrillas' position or how they are protected. We do know that they outnumber us two to one, and that they are good enough jungle fighters not to be caught napping. Past that, if we turn out a force big enough to do any good, we should leave the plant practically defenseless against a possible night attack."

"Croaking again, are you, Rod?" The taunt came in Jermyn's voice from the opposite corner of the shed.

"No," was the short reply. "I have a plan, such as it is, and it doesn't in-

volve the sacrifice of a lot of these poor devils who are looking to us to keep them alive if we can. One man can put that field gun out of commission as easily as a hundred. I'm going to draw straws with you, Jerm, to see which of us two is going to be the man."

I wished with all my heart that the girl, who still seemed to be halting between two opinions, could have been present to hear that little speech and the dense silence which followed it. Dense is the word; a steel-pointed bullet couldn't have penetrated it. Everybody gave the plain-clothes lieutenant time enough to come back, and, when he didn't, Jackson spoke up.

"I guess I can be spared better than anybody else," he said. "The popular notion of the man who hasn't much of anything but money is that he figures as a kind of wart on the body politic, anyhow. Tell me how to go, and what to do when I get there, and I'm your Jonah."

"You're a thousand miles out of it, Mr. Jackson," was the curt refusal. "It will ask for somebody who understands the breech action of the gun, and that puts it up to Jerm or me."

"By Jove!" said the Englishman, and we could fancy him bristling even if we couldn't see him, "are you forgetting that I'm here?"

"Not in the least; but this isn't your quarrel, Captain Churchill, and it is very pointedly my brother's and mine. We'll draw straws, as I said."

I think it had a curious effect on all of us, that jangle in the pitchy darkness where no man could see his neighbor's face to mark how the fight was going. After a little time, Jermyn's voice came again, and the sneer in it didn't need to be visualized for any one of us.

"You can't bluff me, Rod, though it's plain enough to everybody here that you're trying to. Hold the straws, Van Brunt, and give me the first draw."

It was an insult, the way it was said,

as it was doubtless meant to be; an imputation that the younger brother might take an unfair advantage if he were given the first chance. The impenetrable silence settled down again while I was taking two matches from my pocket and breaking a bit from the end of one of them. Obeying Jermyn's condition, I gave him the first draw, and Rod took the one that was left.

Churchill compared the two bits of wood by the sense of touch, each man holding his own. "I say," broke in the Englishman, "which is to go, the long one or the short one?"

Jermyn's reply came so quickly that you couldn't have driven a sheet of paper between it and Churchill's question.

"The long one, of course," he said.

"That will be you, then, Mr. Roderick," Churchill announced gravely; "and good luck go with you."

Rod got up quickly and went out. I overtook him in the wreck-strewn yard.

"You're not going alone," I asserted, with a hand on his shoulder.

"Why not?" he snapped.

"Because I'm going with you. There is safety in numbers—small numbers, at least. I shan't be in your way, and two heads are better than one."

"All right," he returned. "I'd rather have you than any of the others."

"Why?" I asked, as he led the way around the poison pools to the mine storehouse.

"Chiefly because you go ahead and do a thing whether you're scared or not. I haven't forgotten your little vaudeville stunt in the tower this afternoon, Van Brunt."

"You thought I didn't have the sand? I didn't have. But sand isn't an absolute necessity. The bravest man I have ever known confesses that he can't keep his teeth from chattering at odd times when the pressure is greatest."

I couldn't see what he got out of the storehouse, but what he gave me to

carry was a paper-wrapped package the size of a man's arm. For weapons we stopped at the laboratory office and Forbes rummaged out a pair of automatic pistols, pocketing one and giving me the other with the remark that rifles would only be in our way.

I wondered if he wouldn't go back to the stamp mill to tell Miss Eleanor good-by. He did go back, but not for any sentimental reason. It was to turn the command over to Churchill, with a brittle word or two of suggestion. The garrison was not to rely upon the darkness for security. A strict watch was to be kept and every precaution taken against a surprise. He even went so far as to show Churchill and Jackson how the dynamos could be started and the lights switched on.

"You'll need the lights if they should try to rush you," he said. "Miguel, the half-breed mine foreman, knows how to handle the switches and circuits."

We were out of the yard inclosure and feeling our way through the darkness toward the shelter of the mountain forest when I heard my companion chuckling softly to himself.

"What is it?" I asked.

"I was laughing at that hopeless brother of mine," he returned. "You held the matches for the straw drawing, and you broke one of them to make it shorter than the other; do you remember which end you broke off?"

Though it was as dark as Erebus in the forest which we were entering, I saw a great light.

"I broke off the head."

"I thought so," he remarked. "Jerm drew the short one; he knew by the feel that it was a match with the head gone."

"Yes, and he nearly choked himself trying to be the first to tell Churchill which way the draw was to go," I put in.

"Never mind," was the good-natured rejoinder. "When you know Jerm as well as I do, you will expect so little

of him that you'll never be disappointed. When he can't side-step one way, he'll find another."

After that we went on silently, not knowing how soon we might come upon the Zapatista outposts. Forbes evidently knew the ground. By a trail which would have been utterly blind to most men in broad daylight, we worked our way around to the back of the hill we were trying to approach—or at least I suppose we did. Anyway, after what seemed to me like a long hour of the fight with the jungle, we came out upon a little eminence from which we could look down upon a smoldering camp fire ringed in by sleeping figures.

The fieldpiece, as we soon made out, was a little way to the left, standing in a cleared space on the edge of a bluff. It might have been surrounded by alert guards, for all we could tell, but we were there to take a chance, and we took it. Worming our way around the group at the fire we crept up under the shadow of the gun. Forbes put his lips to my ear, and his whisper was scarcely more than a sigh.

"Keep your direction straight so that you can jump and leg it back the way we came," he directed, and then he took the paper-wrapped package from my hands and crept nearer.

I don't know to this good day just how he contrived to do his part of the job so silently and with such a complete effacement of any apparent human agency. Though I was crouching only a few feet away, I never had a glimpse of him after he disappeared. What I did see and hear would hardly make the underline in a newspaper heading. By the flickering light of the camp fire, which was no more than a dozen yards distant, I saw the breechblock of the gun open slowly as if under the manipulation of an invisible hand. Later I heard a sound of gentle tamping, and still farther along I saw the breechblock close.

I thought it most singular that there were no sentries in sight, or at least none awake and attending to business. Once during the critical interval one of the men at the fire stirred and sat up. I dragged the big automatic from my pocket and got a bead on him through the spokes of the cannon wheels. If Zapatistas are able to indulge in the luxury of good angels, I think this man's must have been on duty at the moment. Anyway, the man yawned, stretched, and threw himself down to sleep again, thus prolonging his more or less valuable life past a crisis which he was doubtless far from suspecting.

A long minute beyond this, a tiny speck of fire appeared under the gun carriage. Almost immediately the speck became a string of coruscating sparks climbing slowly up to the muzzle of the gun. Then Forbes came back, worming his way through the grass like a snake, and to the full as silently. I took his gesture in lieu of the word of command, and together we sought cover in the nearest jungle edge.

Once in the thicket, Forbes grabbed my arm. "Get up, quick, and be ready to make the sprint of your life!" he whispered; then, to my utter amazement, he sprang up with a yell that could have been heard a mile away, fired his pistol twice over the heads of the sleeping men at the camp fire, and ran like a deer for the blind trail by which we had made our approach.

I wanted mighty bad to see what the effect of all this would be on the crew we were leaving behind, but I was too busy to look back. There were yells, a few scattering gunshots, and a great breaking of bushes to indicate a hot pursuit. In the thick of it came the crash of a mighty explosion, and the noise of the pursuit stopped as if by magic. Half a mile farther on, around the hill, Forbes slowed down and gave me a chance to catch my breath.

"There's only one weak link in the

chain," he gasped, when I had put my back to a tree with the ardent wish that my lungs could be as big as a blacksmith's bellows for the breath-catching purpose.

"The weak link is right here, trying to get its breath," I panted.

I couldn't see his grin, but I could imagine it.

"I didn't mean that. I meant that we'd have to wait until to-morrow morning to find out whether we've hooked a fish or only caught the hook in a snag."

"What did you do?" I asked, when there was breath enough to spare for the four additional words.

"Tamped the bore with a wad of sacking, filled the breech with lyddite, and left the breechblock on the half lock in the hope that if the explosion didn't burst the gun it would strip the threads. I guess it worked; I don't see how it could very well help doing one thing or the other."

"Where did you get the lyddite?"

"It was in the mine storehouse. Some of the fellows who were in charge before my time had a notion they were going to use it for blasting in the mine."

Warm as I was, I could feel a chilly wind blowing up the back of my neck.

"Do you mean to tell me that I have been stumbling around in the dark in these woods with enough of that touchy stuff under my arm to sink a battleship?" I demanded.

"You had only half of it," he joked; "I had the other half, and the detonators."

"Why the crazy play with the pistol after it was all over?" I wanted to know.

"Don't you see? I was afraid some of them might hear the fizzing of the fuse and wake up in time to pinch it out. Colonel Underclough used to say: 'When in doubt, give the other fellow something different to think about.' I

did it, and I guess it worked. If you're ready, we'll hit the trail again."

Half an hour beyond this, I could have sworn that Forbes had chosen another and a much longer route for the return. At the end of the interval, we were still in the jungle and working, as it seemed to me, much too far to the right. I was about to ask him where we were when the forest broke away in front, and Forbes, who was in the lead, suddenly quickened his pace to a run.

My ears caught the signal for the sprinting spurt a moment later. Off to the left, and seemingly far below our level, there were sounds like the distant popping of champagne corks, punctuated at intervals by another noise resembling nothing so much as the ripping of a circular saw through dry timber.

"They're at it!" I gasped, closing up quickly upon my pace setter ahead; and then I knew why there were so few men around the fire on the bluff of the battery position and why they kept no watch. The main body of the Zapatistas had gone to make a night attack upon Monterica Hidalgo.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CAMISADA.

Forbes had taken the longer route returning, for a prudent reason. Assuming that the Zapatistas would immediately charge the loss of the fieldpiece to some sort of an expeditionary force from the mine, the supposition was that they would scatter and try to cut off our retreat.

The wide deviation to the eastward among the hills brought us out of the forest a half mile or more from the scene of the night attack. From the forest edge we could see across to the plant inclosure. The power was turned on, but since the yard-lighting circuits had doubtless been destroyed by the shell fire, the only illumination came from a big searchlight mounted high on

the face of the great cliff above the yard; an installation made—Rod told me—to provide against just such an emergency as the beleaguered garrison was now confronting.

By the swift flicking of the searchlight eye from point to point, we knew that the Zapatistas had divided their forces. Part of the firing appeared to come from the hacienda grounds, and part from the cover afforded by the deserted village on the opposite side of the river. As the searchlight eye swung from side to side, the machine gun in the upper window of the darkened stamp mill followed it, belching first at the village and then at the hacienda and its tree-shaded grounds.

How we were to break in, with the place surrounded and bullets flying in all directions, was more than I could guess. But Forbes was at no loss.

"Duck and follow me!" he directed; and I found that I had to obey literally, if at all, since we were presently half running and half crawling through a leafy tunnel in the forest from which we had but a moment before emerged, bearing sharply to the right—which was toward the great backgrounding cliff.

From the first dive into the thick tangle of undergrowth the rifle firing seemed to withdraw to the cork-popping distance again, and even the *b-r-r-r-tt* of the machine gun was diminished. Naturally the tunnel was pitch dark, and I found many a root to trip me, and many a low-swinging tree branch to invite me to become a second Absalom, before the scrambling race ended in a ravine which shortly became a barranca with a trickle of water in its bottom.

Here the forest opened overhead, and the starlight, by comparison with the Egyptian darkness of the undergrowth, was, as you might say, fairly dazzling. Through the rift in the trees I saw the steeply inclined reaches of the great cliff rising directly ahead. At the base of the cliff itself, where the barranca

ended abruptly in a water-worn crease or drainway from the upper table-land, Forbes stopped, fell on hands and knees, and disappeared as suddenly as if he had vanished into the air.

"Come on!" said a voice, muffled and hollowly sepulchral; whereupon, wholly by the sense of touch, I found the low-browed tunnel in the rock which had swallowed the voice and its owner. "Crawl low!" was the cautionary direction coming from somewhere on beyond, when I had made a blind mole of myself in the stifling burrow; and a little later, for my encouragement: "There isn't very much of this"—a prediction which was verified when the low-hung roof of the burrow receded and the crackling sputter of a match showed me Forbes standing erect in a hewn-out chamber of the rock and lighting a miner's candle.

"All safe?" he asked as I straightened up, blinking in the candlelight.

"Dead and buried and come to life again," I affirmed. "Where are we?"

"In the mine. I discovered that secret dodgeway last week while I was looking over those old abandoned workings. It probably dates back to the time when the Spaniards used to make life prisoners of their peons in the mines. Are you good for another sprint?"

I told him I was, if I could have the light of the candle to run by, and he set out at a smart trot, carrying the candle boxed in the hollow of his palm, miner wise, and telling me that I would run easier and last longer if I caught step and held an even distance behind.

I had not imagined that the mine could have such immense distances in it as our long windings through drifts and tunnels, old and new, proved it to have. As to this, however, I might have been better informed if I had recalled the story of Monterica Hidalgo as it is told in the earlier histories; of how its gold was first dug and smelted by the Conquistadores themselves. But

one doesn't recall ancient history very pointedly on a breath-cutting race through dripping rock burrows of apparently interminable extent, especially when a modern and thoroughly up-to-date tragedy is presumably working itself out to a gory conclusion at the end of the race.

We came suddenly, at the last, upon the tragedy, or rather upon the scene of it. A sharp turn in the final gallery and a stumbling progress over a grid-ironing of tram tracks brought us to the mine mouth. Though the searchlight eye, high above us, was still sweeping back and forth in a wide arc, playing its beam alternately upon the hacienda grounds and the adobe huts, the fighting had paused. An occasional rifle shot came from the outer ring of darkness, but the machine gun was quiet and there was no warlike stir within the wreck-littered inclosure.

At the stamp mill we found things practically as we had left them. The night assault had accomplished little more than a waste of ammunition on both sides, due chiefly to the fact that our mule-driving mestizo, Juan Batista, had gone scouting beyond the walls on his own initiative and had brought word of the approach of the *guerrilleros*, giving the garrison time to put the searchlight into commission.

There were some casualties, but nobody killed outright. The row of wounded peons on the floor of the stamp mill had grown somewhat longer, and Churchill, with a scalp wound got while he was serving the machine gun, had a bandanna knotted about his head to change him at one stroke from a Bond Street tailor's model into a bloody pirate. The rubber millionaire's rather heavy face was rapidly losing its pound of flesh, and the soft-hearted German professor was muttering to himself: "*Ack, lieber Gott!*" as he stanchd new wounds or probed for hidden bul-

lets; but these are the commonplaces of war.

Rod Forbes' first care was to make the round of the defenses, redistributing the peons so that some of them might get a little rest and sleep during the lull in actual hostilities. While he was doing this I went in search of Miss Amansa and took her out of the crowded mill for a breath of fresh air. From its sheltered position under the great cliff, the mine mouth seemed the safest place in the walled inclosure, and thither I led the traveled lady, finding a seat for her in an uptilted tramcar box just within the shadow of the tunnel arch.

We were scarcely established, and Miss Amansa had barely begun to thank me in a rather crabbed fashion for my thought for her comfort when we heard footsteps approaching, and a moment later two figures materialized out of the darkness, coming straight toward our hiding place—though we hadn't been calling it that.

"Jermyn and Nell" whispered my companion; then, with a restraining hand on my arm: "Be still. I'm Nell's cousin and natural protector; I have a right to know what's going on."

Now I was reasonably sure that the right of espionage upon these two did not extend to me, but I saw no ready way of escape. Jermyn did just what I had done; he poked around in the darkness until he had found something to answer for a seat, and when the pair sat down and began to talk they were so near that we might have reached out and touched them, if our uptilted car body had not intervened.

"You refused to talk to me this afternoon, Eleanor, about the one thing I wanted you to talk about," was the way the man began it. "More than that, you didn't give me the real reason why you had come to Mexico. We'll let that go. I believe you when you say that you expected to meet your

father in Guanajuato. And if you'll add that you didn't expect to meet Rod——"

"Horrors!" said the girl, and I could visualize the scornful curl of her pretty lip without seeing it. "Jealousy in a woman is bad enough, Jermyn, but in a man it is simply silly!"

"I know; that is what you always say. But I'm only human, and those three weeks while we were in camp on the Rio Grande—well, you went out of your way to show me that you cared more for Rod than you did for me."

"Did I?" The tone was flippant.

"Yes, you did. There is something in most women—most good women—that prompts them to push the average decent fellow aside to make room for the scapegrace. I don't know what it is; I have never known. But you did it. And whenever I tried to tell you what an irreclaimable mucker Rod was, and is, you'd fly the track and abuse me for what you were pleased to call my disloyalty to my brother."

"I don't know what else it was," the girl put in.

"It was the truth, and you know it now. You wouldn't believe it then, and you went pretty far with him; you gave him a locket with your picture in it."

"Did Doctor Kinkaid tell you that?"

"No; but I found it out. I'm not saying that you ought not to have given it to him—with our engagement already four months old—but it had a queer look, to say the least."

There was a sound as if the young woman had suddenly sprung to her feet.

"If you brought me out here to quarrel with me I shall go back to the others," she snapped.

"Oh, no; I don't think you want to make it that vital," said the plain-clothes lieutenant. "Sit down here again; I'm not half through."

There was no reply, but we heard her sit down.

"You've got to listen to me now, Eleanor," the man went on; "both because you have given me the right to speak and because the temptation, if you choose to dignify it by that name, is once more before you. I've tried to tell you in times past that Rod is simply hopeless. He is a roughneck and a bully, which wouldn't be so bad if he were not lacking in so many other ways. But he is lacking in the commonest instincts of a gentleman. He would have kicked me out of here in a minute when you sprung Van Brunt and me upon him at the luncheon table to-day if it hadn't been for what you and the others might have said."

"I don't believe it!" was the curt denial.

"It's so; and he has been grinding it into me ever since. He took pains to insult me before Van Brunt and Churchill and Jackson in the office room of the hacienda, and he has practically told me to mind my own business half a dozen times since, whenever I have ventured to suggest that some of his barbarous crudities might be improved upon."

"Is that all?"

"No, by Jove, it isn't all! A little while ago he tried to ring me in on that gun-destroying business. He had it all framed up, and he was going to placard me as a coward before all the rest of them if I should refuse to go."

"But he went himself."

"I know he did—after he had tumbled into the trap he had set for me. He couldn't very well get out of it. But you may take my word for it that he never went near the Zapatistas. Tomorrow morning will prove it, when they begin to get action again with their fieldpiece. And you will notice that he stayed out until the fighting was safely over here."

"I wish you could be entirely straight-

forward for once in a way. I don't in the least know what you are trying to do," was the half-indignant rejoinder.

"I am trying to tell you that my own brother wouldn't stop at anything to get me out of the way—out of his way. He tried to drive me into the Zapatistas' camp for the sole and simple reason that he hoped I'd be captured or killed. You forget that he was once a common soldier under my orders. He has never forgiven me for that."

"Perhaps that is because there is too much to forgive," said the girl, with the rebellious note still in her voice.

"You are arguing against the facts—facts that were proved conclusively for you in that last week on the Rio Grande. Rod showed what he was then, and he hasn't changed any in these last few weeks. If he doesn't blunder into getting us all butchered here, simply because he isn't intelligent enough or sane enough to take the one sensible course——"

"What is the sensible course?" the girl interrupted.

"To make terms with these bushwhackers. They're after the gold, and there is enough of it to buy us all off. Rod won't do it simply because he judges everybody else by himself; he knows he wouldn't keep a bargain of that kind if it seemed to be to his own interest to break it, and his argument is that the Zapatistas would take the bribe and then slaughter us all afterward."

"Wouldn't they?"

"I don't believe it; the probabilities are all against it. They might not hesitate if we were all Americans. But there are the two Germans and an Englishman. They'd hardly take the risk of killing them, and they couldn't afford to kill us and let Churchill and the Bauers go free to tell the story."

"You want me to do something—what is it?"

"It's only a suggestion. You can come nearer to pulling Rod over than anybody else can. A word from you might tip the scale."

It struck me as being a rather sordid situation. Jermyn had just been reproaching the girl for encouraging Rod, and now he was practically asking her to go a good bit farther along the same road. It made me think of those scoundrelly courtiers of ancient times who used to throw their wives and daughters at the king's head to gain some private end.

"You think I could make Rod do it if I wanted to?" asked the girl after a long pause.

"I know you can—if you go at it right."

There was another pause, and at the end of it a little stir behind the uptilted tramcar. Then the young woman said: "I don't want to talk about it any more. Take me back to the mill. The dank smell of this place stifles me." And beyond that we saw them picking their way around the wreckage to gain the shelter of our one remaining stronghold.

Miss Amansa let them get entirely out of sight before she spoke. Then she said:

"This is a queer old world, Mr. van Brunt, and the seamy side of it has an impish way of turning up in the most unexpected places. I thought Tom Underclough's girl had some sense, but it seems that she hasn't. The idea of her being engaged—and secretly engaged at that—to that narrow-minded, smooth-spoken young hypocrite—faugh!"

"You would say that she has embraced the shadow and let the substance go?" I ventured.

"I haven't seen much of the other one, of course; but he seems twice the man that this one does. I tell you, Mr. van Brunt, this one is a dangerous man! He'd sell us all out, every single one, to save himself. He hasn't

any more heart or humanity in him than a phonograph!" Then she bounced up suddenly. "I'm going in to give that girl a piece of my mind. No, you stay where you are. She doesn't need to know that there were two of us eavesdropping. I can find my way."

Thus adjured, I kept the uptilted car seat for myself, and, having gone without supper as, I suppose, every one else had, I felt in my pockets for the smokers' substitute, the all-healing pipe. At that match-lighting instant there was a surprise awaiting me that was only one degree short of a shock. A man, materializing from the Lord knows where, was crouching in the shadows of the mine mouth, and I found myself looking over the blaze of the lighted match squarely into his eyes. One glance at the face with the livid Filipino bolo scar running from temple to chin was enough. The crouching watcher at the tunnel's mouth was Sergeant Malachi Irons.

CHAPTER X.

THE TIME-EXPIRED MAN.

I hadn't any idea that Irons would remember me, or that the brief match flare would do as much for him as it had for me. But I was wrong.

"You're Doc Kinkaid's friend, the writer man, ain't you?" he said, speaking out of the black darkness which had once more engulfed him.

"Right!" I returned. "And you are Sergeant Irons."

"Nix on the sergeant," he denied gruffly. "My time's out; it was out the day you told the doc good-by and hiked f'r El Paso."

"And you didn't reënlist?"

"No."

"What brings you here?"

"I been here all the while; come down with Lieu—with Mr. Forbes, and when he got this job in Manzanillo, he fetched me along. I been gone two

days now, scoutin' 'round to see if there was any chance to make a sneak to the coast with the cash."

"Then you are working for Rod Forbes?"

"I'm his hired man, yep."

Here was a new mystery. Why should the man who had been the chief witness against Rod in the court-martial take advantage of his expiring term of enlistment to follow his disgraced young troop leader into exile in a hostile country?

"What was your idea?" I asked.

"Liked him, I guess; and I was sick o' the army. He tried to run me off at first, but I wouldn't stand f'r it, so we hit the long trail together. We was headin' f'r South America when this job turned up and caught the boss at Manzanillo."

"And you've just got back from your scouting trip?"

"Yep. There's a dodge hole through the mine, and I sneaked in that way. Them ducks outside wouldn't give me no chance to march in with the colors flyin'."

"What is the prospect for a get-away?"

"Bad—mighty bad," he said, and then: "Holy smoke!"

The man in charge of the searchlight above our heads had depressed it momentarily, and the broad beam rested for an instant upon the wreck in the mine yard.

"Holy smoke!" said Irons again. "What's it been—an earthquake?"

"No; a fieldpiece with shell ammunition. If they'd had an hour more of daylight you wouldn't have had anything to come back to. Why don't you go and report to Forbes?"

"Goin' in a minute. I got a game leg. One o' them snipers out yonder got me while I was tryin' to make th' sneak."

I struck another match, and by its light saw that he had knotted a hand-

kerchief around his right leg below the knee, that the handkerchief was twisted tightly with a stick to make it a first-aid tourniquet, and that the wound had bled profusely.

"I'll help you over to the mill," I offered, getting up to give him a hand. "We have a German botanist for a doctor, and maybe he can sew you up."

"How'd the Dutchman get here?" he asked, making no motion to rise.

"He came with the others; with his wife and a rubber millionaire and the English captain who was visiting your major up on the Rio Grande, and a lady who discovered South Africa, and your former colonel's niece, Miss Underclough."

"The sufferin' jumpin' Moses!" was the gritting comment. "All them people here, an' this little hell to pay goin' on outside?"

"All of those and two more. I'm here, and so is your former first lieutenant, Mr. Jermyn Forbes."

He was silent for so long that I was beginning to think the pain of his wound had possibly keeled him over. But the bloodcurdling oath that presently bubbled up out of the darkness at my feet told me that he was still on the conscious side of the fence.

"You don't seem to like Lieutenant Jermyn," I remarked, adding: "I don't blame you overmuch. Doctor Kinkaid told me that the lieutenant gave you the hot end of it to hold in the court-martial. Come on and let's get that leg attended to before it knocks you over. Can you walk if I give you a shoulder?"

He tried it, still muttering curses. It was a slow business getting over to the stamp mill, but we accomplished it after a time. Bauer was sitting on the floor, asleep with his back to the wall and his head propped on his wife's shoulder. But he roused up when I told him there was another wounded man needing attention. With Irons in the makeshift

surgeon's hands, I went in search of Rod and found him still going about among his peons.

"Your man Irons is back, with a bullet hole in his leg," I told him, when we met at the angle where the great gates fronted the bridge. "He came in the way we did, through the mine, and was shot while he was doing it."

"Old Malachi, eh? Queer devil, Van Brunt—the queerest I've ever struck. Is it bad?"

"I don't know how bad. The professor is trying to fix him up."

"I sent him out two days ago to see how the land lay between this and the railroad. This stored gold's been a hair-raising threat ever since I came on the job. In the nature of things, it would be common knowledge to everybody that the mine had been running right along and making no shipments."

"I see; it was a standing invitation to any bandit who might come along."

"Just that. I wanted to get rid of it, and Irons volunteered to go and see what the chances were for slipping it out."

"He has just told me. Also, he explained how it came about that he isn't the deserter I took him to be when I discovered him crouching at the mine mouth."

"He's a time-expired man, and he tells me he refused to reënlist. For some reason he didn't like Jerm as an officer."

"The disliking still holds good," I hazarded. "He pretty nearly had a fit when I told him that your brother is here."

"Something queer about the whole business, Van Brunt," was his half-musing comment. "Malachi's story was what did me up, and yet, if you'd heard him tell it, you'd have said he was telling it only because he couldn't help himself. He has always liked me, and he has always seemed to hate Jerm. He came to me after it was all over

and tried to square it. And the next day, when he got his discharge, he followed me into Mexico. Since that time a dog couldn't have been more faithful than he has been."

"Go in and see him," I suggested, and when he hesitated: "Go on, and then pile down somewhere and get your forty winks. I'll do this sentry go for you and call you if anything jumps up. There's a bad day just ahead for all of us, and you mustn't be too stale when you hit it."

Through the long midnight watch after he left me I paced the yard boundaries faithfully, keeping the sleepy peon guard mount prodded up to the efficiency mark, and later sending a man up the cliff to relieve the mestizo mine foreman at his task in keeping the searchlight going. The desultory rifle fire from the outer darkness had stopped, and the broad beam of the protecting light, pouring now upon the hacienda and now upon the adobe village, revealed no signs of life. Failing in the night surprise, the bandits were evidently taking their rest and waiting, as we were, for the day of conclusions.

It was on this pacing round that I took time to try to set in order the incredible happenings of the past few hours. It seemed utterly unbelievable that in a single sweep of the clock hands six of us who had been members or guests in Colonel Underclough's camp of observation on the Rio Grande had come together in this remote corner of another nation without prearrangement, and had, in those same twelve hours, run the gamut of all the human emotions.

What would the outcome be? Was there the remotest chance that we could hold our own in the famine-stricken fortress and finally beat the bandits off? Or would the dawn of a new day show the Zapatistas our helpless plight and encourage them to sit down and wait

for the end which could only be a short time in coming?

I saw no hope unless it lay in Jermyn Forbes' notion of a possible compromise with the brigands. There was one chance in a hundred, I supposed, that the Zapatistas would take the gold and spare our lives. But the one chance seemed pretty temerarious when I glanced over the parapet of sandbags buttressing the big gate and saw, lying as they had fallen, the bodies of the men who had tried to storm the gate in the early afternoon. Would the blood debt be permitted to go unsatisfied?

It was while I was wondering if Jermyn's notion would prevail, and how he would succeed in his effort to induce Eleanor Underclough to be his ally in breaking down Rod's opposition, that the thought of the dead bodies on the bridge kept obtruding itself with ghastly persistence. When I could endure it no longer I crept to the top of the parapet, and, telling the guarding peons in bad Spanish to keep me covered from the breastworks, dropped outside and crept down the slope to the bridge to do what needed to be done.

One by one I dragged the stiffened bodies to the brink of the river and rolled them in, expecting every moment the volley from the near-by adobes which would send me tumbling after them. But it did not come, and when the last of the machine-gun victims had been put out of sight I climbed the little hill of approach, pulled myself up over the gate, and slid, exhausted, sick, and horrified, into the arms of the watching peons.

CHAPTER XI.

DOOMSDAY.

The dawn of the next day found us facing a situation unchanged, with twelve long hours of the dreadful heat ahead of us and a prospect of famine

and battle alarms to keep us from going stale for the want of something to think about.

With the first graying of dawn over the eastern hills a rifle fire, intermittent, but spitefully persistent, broke out from the adobes. It was directed chiefly at the upper stamp-mill window, where the machine gun was mounted, and it convinced us quickly that, notwithstanding the protection afforded by the sandbags and the guns' shield, the window was no longer available as a loophole for our rapid-firer.

Accordingly, we lowered the gun by means of the block and tackle used in placing it, and in doing this the stocky little millionaire, who pluckily insisted upon going up to make the hitch, had his hat shot off and brought away a slight flesh wound in one arm.

Behind the shelter of the boundary wall and the sandbags we built a platform for the gun which raised it high enough to give the needed sweep, but even here the sharpshooters in the adobes found it, and every few minutes the sharp *spat* of a soft-nosed bullet glancing from the inclined shield told us that we should put the gun into service at a certain risk to life and limb.

The one possible defensive precaution taken in the remounting of the gun, we rummaged in the wreck of the commissary for what food we might be able to find. It proved to be but a scanty store, after it had all been carefully gathered and examined. The shell fire and the cyanide deluge had spared nothing but the canned stuff, and of this there was not more than enough to make a slender breakfast for the garrison.

Churchill suggested that we ought to portion it out, saving some of the food for a sharper necessity, and so we did—with the result of rising up almost as hungry as we had sat down. To add a sort of *sauce piquante* to the meal, we found that many of the canned

things had suffered from the heat, and it was with a discomfiting vision of ptomaine poisoning to follow that I ate my small allotment.

By nine o'clock the sun's rays were pouring down upon us like the breath of a furnace, and the sniping rifle shots were coming both from the village and the hacienda grounds. There was no volley firing, but the irregular fusillade was even worse. About the time when we would begin to hope that it had stopped a bullet would go whining overhead to keep the dodging nerve strained to the breaking point. And not all of them went harmlessly overhead. Now and again one would miss the sandbags in the upper window of the mill and come through to knock splinters from the roof timbers or to smash its way out through the tiles on the opposite side. But there was no shell fire from the height beyond the hacienda. Rod's lyddite blast had evidently settled the field gun.

Early in the day Rod Forbes told us of another weak point in our defenses, and the telling made us all forget the rifle fire, temporarily, at least.

The iron flume which supplied the plant, not only with its power, but with its drinking water as well, came down over the lip of the high dam on the slant of the spillway apron, passing underground from the foot of the spillway to the wheel pit in the small power house which stood directly behind the stamp mill.

This flume was outside of our intrenchments for the greater part of its extent, and was entirely unprotected, as was the gate mechanism at the dam level. The gate was beyond the range of the rifles, but there were a few high-power guns in our armament which could reach it, among them my own target piece. And the man who should walk out on the dam to shut the gate would be in plain sight; a fair mark while he should be crossing the dam

or standing to spin the wheel of the gate valve.

I thought it would ask for a higher quality of courage than the brigands had yet exhibited—the shutting of the water gate—but Rod Forbes quickly explained a greater menace. A full hundred yards of the underground length of the flume was screened from us by a thick growth on the river bank. If the besiegers chose to dig down to it behind the screening trees and underground we could do nothing to prevent them.

The telepathists might say that our eager discussion of the water situation served its appointed purpose by suggesting the possibility to the besiegers. At all events the forenoon of alarms was but half outworn when Churchill who had been listening in the power-house wheel pit, reported pipe-transmitted sounds of pick blows and shoveling.

“How deep have they got to go to plant their dynamite?” Jackson wanted to know, and Rod gave the answer.

“I can only fire a guess at it. I haven’t been on the job long enough to know all the ins and outs of the equipment. But, judging from the slant, the flume can’t be very deep up there at the cañon mouth.”

“And you say that the blowing up of the flume will shut off our drinking water—there’s no other supply?” Jackson demanded.

“That is the size of it.”

“But, good heavens, there’s water enough in the mine!” I broke in.

Forbes shook his head. “It isn’t drinkable. The mine drainage is all strongly impregnated with metal—practically poisoned—and the miners themselves can’t drink it.”

At this point Miss Tanglewood said her say.

“Well, are we going to stand around here and let them blow up that pipe without making any effort to store a

little water while we can?” she asked acidly.

That was enough, and for the next few minutes we dodged the sniping bullets in a frantic rush to gather up and fill from the power-house hydrant every receptacle which could by any means be made to hold the priceless fluid. It is astounding, when you come to think of it, how few containers for clean water can be found in the completest establishment. There was no lack of oil barrels, sludge tanks, ore tubs, and the like, but at the end of it all, when a jarring explosion came from beyond the river-fringing trees, and the flowing hydrant gurgled and stopped, we had done little enough for ourselves.

Beyond the failure of the water supply there is a confused sameness in the memories of that awful day. Hour after hour we made the dismal round of the intrenchments, doling out the precious water to the peons and holding them up to their work as we could. Time and again when the firing grew heavier we braced ourselves for the assault which was constantly expected and which was so long in coming; and always there was the broiling sun, the breathless air, the whining bullets, and the suspense which was worse than the sharpest conflict.

Throughout the day, as I remember it, Jermyn Forbes made no mention of the compromise plan which he had at first urged upon his brother. But after nightfall, pitch darkness in which we no longer had the protection of the overlooking searchlight, Rod called us all together in the shadow of the stamp mill and as soon as he began to talk I knew that the leaven had been set to work.

“We are mighty near out to the knot in the string, and I guess we all know that the end can’t be very far off,” was his blunt announcement. “There isn’t food enough remaining to feed a hungry dog, and what little water we’ve got

isn't fit to drink. There are two chances left for us and we'll take a vote on 'em."

"Perhaps we will and perhaps we won't," cut in the cold voice of the elder brother. "What are they?"

"One of two chances," Rod repeated slowly, as if ignoring the interruption, "and both crazy desperate. There's a small tunnel leading out from the old workings of the mine. Van Brunt knows it, and he can tell you that it is too cramped to admit more than one of us at a time. Its outer end may or may not be inside of the Zapatistas' picket line—it wasn't last night when we came in——"

"But you can bet your sweet life it is now," broke in the growling tones of the wounded ex-sergeant. "I ducked through it after you did, Cap'n Rod, and they chased me plumb up to the hole. I was halfway in when they plugged me."

"You hear what Irons says," the younger brother resumed. "The tunnel has been discovered, and we'd be potted as we came out, one at a time."

"Hold on a minute," said Jackson. "If they know about this back-door attachment why haven't they used it to steal a march on us?"

"For the same reason that we can't use it—the potting reason. I've had a few of the peons watching our end of it since daybreak this morning. Never mind; that brings us down to a single fighting chance so far as I can see. To stay here another day is to starve and perish of thirst; I'm not sure that we could hold the peons through another day like this has been. They'd make a break for the river. It's an awful temptation—hearing that good cold water tumbling over the rocks within a hundred feet of the gate."

"I'm feeling a good bit that way myself," put in the English captain. "What's the forlorn hope you're planning for?"

"It isn't a plan; it's only a notion. I thought maybe we might mass the peons here in the yard with the women and children in the middle of the crowd, pitch open the gates, and try to shoot our way out. It sounds plenty foolish, now that I've said it."

"I'm afraid we wouldn't get very far," was Jackson's comment. "Not that I'd be the only one to hold back, you know; but it just seems a little quicker than the back-door dodge in reaching the same results."

"I've given you all I've got," said Rod, speaking with that little tongue thickening I had marked on that memorable evening in the Rio Grande camp when Kinkaid had pulled him from his horse and used the hypodermic on him. Then, with an effort which emphasized itself in blurted sentences: "Some of you here—I don't know how many of you—think I haven't done the right thing in fighting; that it would have been better to put out the white flag yesterday afternoon and dicker with these devils. I didn't see it then; I don't see it now. I don't care a rotten hang for the company's gold. It does—doesn't weigh an ounce in the scale against a single life inside of these walls. But I don't believe we could have bought ourselves free with it yesterday or that we can do it now."

The leaven had worked. Some time during the day Eleanor Underclough had found her opportunity to do Jermyn's bidding, and, though she had apparently failed to convince Rod, she had still succeeded in breaking his nerve. That was made plain as he went on.

"It's been put to me as a responsibility that I shouldn't shoulder—with my record. God knows I'm willing enough to put it down if anybody else here wants to take it up."

Jermyn struck in instantly like a prize fighter who takes a cowardly advantage of the moment when the referee has stepped in.

"You're damned late getting around to it. If you had talked that way yesterday, when we had some chance, it would have been different. Now you've balled things up until an angel from heaven couldn't untangle them. More than that, you've done it with an object. You knew what your record was, and you thought you'd make a grandstand play that wouldn't cost you anything and might straighten things up for you with a certain person who needn't be named here. If you were still in the army you'd be court-martialed again. Worse still, you're drunk right now, and you know it!"

I looked for a fight; there ought to have been a fight. But, to my amazement and to that of Churchill and Jackson, I think, the younger brother threw out his hands like a man letting go all holds.

"If anybody else can straighten things out——" he began; and I was marveling at the ease with which our pretty Delilah had shorn this young Samson of a fighting man when Jermyn took the words out of his mouth.

"If you're throwing up the job you have botched do it like a man—if there's any decency left in you; step down and out and give us a chance to talk it over."

There was a little pause and a sound as if somebody were choking. Then Rod Forbes turned on his heel and walked away toward the mine without another word. And a few seconds later, when I glanced aside at the spot against the mill wall where Irons had been squatting and nursing his wounded leg, I saw that he, too, was gone.

"That clears the air," said Jermyn briskly. "You see, I know my brother better than any of the rest of you do. As you see for yourselves, he can't let the whisky alone, even at a time like this. Now we are free to do our own thinking and planning. Are you

three willing that I should take over the command of this garrison?"

It had come pretty suddenly, after all; so suddenly that I had to swallow twice before I could realize that this was what the plain-clothes lieutenant had been working for all along; what he had flung the girl into the breach for, and the certain result he had counted upon in sending her to undermine his brother's nerve and confidence. It was still jealousy. He was afraid of his brother, and he had plotted to break him down and trample him in the dust beyond any hope of reinstatement in Eleanor Underclough's esteem. A devil in human form couldn't have plotted more ingeniously. The girl had been set on to urge Rod to do a thing which she earnestly hoped he would refuse to do—even for her. And Rod had yielded—yielded first to the girl and now to his old weakness.

"Somebody's got to take it," Jackson was saying, while I was trying to surround the implacable vindictiveness of the elder brother. "What have you got to offer, lieutenant?"

"This: if you three will stand by me I'll try to open negotiations, even at this late day, with whoever is in command of this Zapatista force. If that can be done we'll make the best bargain we can, for our own lives first and for the lives of the peons afterward. We needn't have any scruples about using the means at hand. The bandits will get the gold, anyhow, and my idea will be to show them that they can get it without any more bloodshed. Where is that mestizo foreman? We'll send him over the wall with a note."

I've wondered a good many times since if Jermyn Forbes simply swept us off our feet, or whether we were all so completely beat out and discouraged that we didn't have the nerve to withstand him. Whichever it was, we three stood there in the shadow of the old mill and foolishly let him have his

way; and a few minutes later we saw a light in the office end of the laboratory to tell us that he had found his messenger and was writing his note.

It was at my suggestion that we separated shortly afterward to make a round of the darkened intrenchments, and I purposely chose for myself the section of the cross wall shutting off the hacienda grounds. At the lowest place in the wall, where the shadows of the trees fell thickest, I found that the guarding peons had been already sent away, and a white flag was stuck up in one of the sandbags.

While I was looking with dubious approval at this practical opening of the door to the besiegers, I heard footsteps—two distinct sets of them—and had only time to flatten myself in a niche in the sandbags when Jermyn came up on our side of the unguarded breastwork, and I heard him say across the wall: "*Buenos noches, señor,*" and then, still in Spanish: "I am the commandant of this garrison; will you do me the great honor to approach? Or shall I join you on your side?"

CHAPTER XII.

JERMYN ISCARIOT.

The man, officer or what not, who had come to represent the Zapatistas, may have had the courage of his convictions, but he also had discretion.

"It is not necessary that we go so far, Señor Commandant," he said in reply to Jermyn's question. "Each to his own side, and so we shall speak the more freely." His Spanish was ragged, and there were words at the meaning of which I had to guess, but this difficulty was less apparent later on.

Jermyn's character, which was a curious mixture of blunt brutality and smoothly subtle indirection, came out strong in the opening of the negotiations.

"War is a terrible thing, Señor Gen-

eral; it costs much in blood and treasure, and there is often little to gain. Most unhappily, some of your men have been killed, but on the other hand we have not come off without loss. Blood has been paid for in the coin of blood."

From my niche in the sandbags I could see dimly the figure of the man on the other side of the wall. His gesture was handsomely expressive of the Latin disregard for human life. It waved the cost question aside as a matter of little or no moment.

"It is nothing," he said. "You are yet alive, Señor Commandant, and I am alive. We speak together for ourselves and make the agreement. *Caramba!* These others have lost the desire to speak. You have the proposal to make?"

Forbes came a step nearer to the parapet, and lowered his voice.

"I have, Señor General. The command of this garrison has lately been turned over to me. I am an officer in the United States army, and we can speak as soldiers. The fighting has been a foolish mistake, and the man who has led it is no longer in authority. We are not helpless; we can still fight. But I will make terms with you."

"A thousand pardons, Señor Commandant, but it is we who shall make the terms," was the prompt reply.

"Yet you will hear me first, Señor General?"

"Without doubt, Señor Commandant."

"As I have said, we can still fight. But there is no need for further bloodshed. You have heard that there is much gold here. It is this gold that you want, and not the lives of a handful of people who are here purely by chance. Do I speak the truth, señor?"

"We may have the gold and the lives as well. Is it not so?"

"The lives, perhaps, but not the gold

unless we give it freely and of our own accord. It is well hidden. You might search for a year without finding it, Señor General."

I heard a sound from the other side of the wall. It was not a laugh; it was the mere ghost of one.

"There is some one of you who will know where the gold is hidden," were the words to go with the phantom laugh. "There are many ways in which to open the dumb lips and make them speak."

"Torture, you mean? That might do for the peons. But if I say that the peons do not know; that those of us who do know will shoot our women, and ourselves die with arms in our hands before your torturers can reach us?"

The man on the other side of the wall lighted a cigarette, first courteously passing his pocket case to Forbes.

"There is something in what you say, Señor Commandant," he admitted. Then after a reflective puff or two: "What is it that you propose?"

"It is this: there are eight of us here who are strangers, chance travelers stopping for the moment at the hacienda. Three of the eight are women; two of the number, a man and his wife, are Germans and noncombatants, and another is an Englishman, a British subject. We were all involved in this quarrel purely by force of circumstances and against our will. It is for these eight that I am speaking. If we will open the gates and tell you where the gold is hidden will you allow the garrison to lay down its arms and go free?"

The man outside smoked the remaining half of his cigarette and lighted another before he replied.

"You ask too much; far too much, Señor Commandant," he said coolly. "We will begin with the peons. They shall be taught that they must not take up the gun against the soldier of the

republic—not so? Of their women we will say nothing. But the men and the men children; it must be blood for blood, señor."

To my horror Jermyn brushed the peons aside as if they had been so many brute beasts to be sent to the slaughter.

"We do not insist upon the peons, Señor General. They are your own people, and their quarrel, if they have one, is not ours. But for the eight of us who are not concerned?"

The Zapatista envoy's reply was so involved that I could not translate it in full. But I understood that he was telling Jermyn that there were two others who had not been mentioned; namely, the former garrison commander and an ex-soldier, an American, who had served the mine manager as a scout. Was it understood that the manager and his henchman were to be surrendered with the peons?

I had been in deadly fear that Jermyn might light the cigarette which had been passed to him across the wall. The flare of his match could scarcely fail to betray me, I thought. In the pause which followed the bandit officer's question the fear was realized. Jermyn struck a match, and by the light of it seemed to be looking directly at me.

By some miracle which I shall never be able to explain, the burning match did not betray me, but it did betray him. His face was the color of parchment, and his hand trembled so violently that the match went out before he got a light. Apparently the jealousy and brother hatred, bitter as they were, could not quite rise to the fratricidal pitch.

"Of the ex-soldier we will say nothing, Señor General," he said at length, signing Irons' death warrant with as little compunction as he had shown for the peons. "But the other man—we are kinsmen, señor, much as I am ashamed to acknowledge it. If you

could give him the rights of a prisoner of war possibly?"

"We can make no condition as to this kinsman of yours, señor," was the cold reply. "He has armed his peons against us. He shall have the fair trial by what you call the martial court. You have eight besides. Of these eight we cannot spare all."

In common decency, you would say, this unspeakable Iscariot of ours might have made a little further fight for the life of his own blood brother. I could hardly believe my ears when I heard him say:

"I told my br—my kinsman yesterday that if he would fight he must take a soldier's chance. But of the other eight; surely you will not press me farther, Señor General?"

"There are two at least, and possibly more," came the reply from the other side of the wall. "You call yourselves noncombatants, señor, but two of your number of chance strangers, a man and a woman, fired on us and killed yesterday from the tower of the hacienda. These two you must give up."

I would have given a million dollars, if I had had it, for a drink of water just then. My throat seemed suddenly to shrivel up and choke me. A horrid drumming in my ears threatened to keep me from hearing what Jermyn would say, and but for the supporting sand-bags I am sure I should have collapsed in a heap at the traitor's feet. There wasn't a single ray of hope. If Jermyn had not spared his own brother, Miss Amansa and I certainly had nothing to expect from him. And, as events proved, we got nothing.

"We can trust the lady to your magnanimity, Señor General; and, as for the man, he, too, shall take a soldier's chance, since he must needs mess and meddle with things which do not concern him. But the other six of us?"

"Of the six there are two who shall

be held for ransom. We are at peace with England, and your Englishman must pay. The other is an American, and he is rich; you see, we know many things about you, Señor Commandant."

For a moment I thought that the prolonged excitement, the hunger, and the water famine had gone to my head, that I couldn't be hearing straight. Where would it end? Would this miserable wretch who had thrust his brother aside stand there and calmly bargain us all away to save his own contemptible life? But, no; he was protesting now.

"You drive too hard a bargain; you ask us to give all and you give nothing," he broke out, with a queer huskiness in his voice. Then: "If I take your word for it that the Englishman and the rubber planter shall be treated as honorable prisoners, will you permit the rest of us to go free?"

The reply came promptly:

"Against the German leaf hunter and his wife we have nothing. They know little of your language, and they will not talk. But there is one other, the señorita. She is too beautiful not to find a husband in this glorious south country of ours, Señor Commandant. Open your gates and tell us where the gold is hidden and you shall go free, señor—you, yourself, and the two Germans. It is enough."

Because I want to be believed, I shall not try to set down in so many words the haggling that followed. Even a mangy wolf of the pack will fight for its mate, and Jermyn fought desperately for that which, apart from his own wretched life, was his one vital stake in the game. At one moment he was pleading that the "señorita" was his promised wife; at another he was pointing out that the Germans were amply able to ransom themselves and offering to exchange them for Miss Eleanor. But out of every twist and turn the bandit envoy drove him relentlessly.

"You said you had terms to offer," was the cold insistence from behind the barrier. "You have no terms. One other day and you shall all die of the thirst. You cannot drink of the water of the mine, and you have no other. You will not shoot your women and kill yourself as you say. That would be the *hidalgo* way, and you have not the blood of the *hidalgo* in your veins, *Señor* Commandant. If all the others shall be dead, you yourself will still be alive to feel the hot iron, to beg for mercy, and to tell us at last where the gold is hidden. Listen, *señor*, I am smoking my last *cigarro*, and the hour is late. Is it to be yes or no?"

For the sake of our common humanity I am always going to believe that Jermyn said "Yes," intending it only as a time-gaining means to bring in the possibility of making it "No"—at least so far as Miss Eleanor was concerned. Be that as it may, the bargain was concluded. The gates were to be thrown open at dawn of the following morning, and as a preliminary our peons were to be disarmed during the night.

After the bandit went away I suddenly realized that I was cramped and aching like an overstrained studio model from crouching so long and breathlessly in one position. But Jermyn Iscariot did not show any immediate intention of relieving me. For what seemed like an interminable interval he stood with his back to the sandbag breastwork, his arms folded and his head down. When he turned at length to move slowly toward the stamp mill he was muttering to himself, but I could not catch the words.

Once on one of the many news-gathering journeys I had the misfortune to be involved in a railroad wreck. The Pullman in which I was asleep was overturned, and some part of the wreckage caught and pinned me down. Until the day of my death I shall never forget the awful, stifling pressure and

the blessed relief of being able to get a full breath when the load was lifted. Jermyn's going away brought a swift recurrence of the same emotion. It was as if I had been standing powerless to move or breathe within striking distance of a deadly reptile, and all at once the reptile had uncoiled itself and glided away.

With the two human actors removed, the scene through which I had just passed seemed as grossly incredible as a nightmare. Yet I could not doubt the evidence of my own senses. Jermyn Forbes, officer and gentleman, had actually stood beside me, almost within arm's reach, and in words capable of no misunderstanding had practically bargained away a hundred lives to save his own. It was beyond belief, but it was true.

The traitor's figure, curiously bent and halting, was still dimly discernible in the starlight when the thought struck me like a blow that the frightful responsibilities of the moment had been suddenly shifted from all other shoulders to mine. Of all those whose lives were in peril, I was the only one who knew what the dawn of another day was destined to bring forth. What could I do? What could any one do? The queries fell to the ground and died for the want of any demonstrable answer. None the less, the biting necessity remained, and the time was short. Staggering to my feet, I was about to follow Jermyn, with some confused idea of immediately denouncing him to the others, when, without a sound to warn me of his coming, the younger brother stood before me.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE UNDER DEPTHS.

At first I made sure that Rod Forbes had also been a silent witness to the bargaining between his brother and the bandits' envoy. But when he spoke I saw that I was mistaken.

"White flag, eh?" he said, still with the curious thickness on his tongue, as he pointed to the truce emblem stuck up on the parapet. "Thass Jerm's notion, is it? Does he think for a minute that these brigands will make a bargain and—and—you know what I mean—and stick to it? They won't, y'know. They'll do us same as they did those poor fellows at the Aconquista—promise fair and then order out firing squad."

I didn't know what to say to him. I couldn't tell him in his present condition any part of his brother's frightful treachery. It was only too apparent now that Jermyn's charge was true—about the whisky. The tongue thickening and the stumbling speech proved it. But I replied as to a sober man, saying that our case was a desperately hard one, and that nobody seemed to be finding any feasible way out.

"I've been thinking," he said, half as if he were talking to himself; "only I can't think—something crooked in my head. If there wash—were any way of clearing hacienda grounds—gettin' the beggars all over on other side of the creek, y'know—but I'm muddled again—forgot I'm not in it any longer." And at this he stumbled away unsteadily toward the mine with his head hanging and his hands behind him.

His going lumped the responsibilities upon me again with new crushings. Even now, as I thought, Jermyn might be telling the others a string of lies about his conference with the Zapatista chief and thus making any attempt at retrieval all the harder.

I didn't know whether it was providential or the other thing—that Miss Amansa should be the first person I met after I had picked my way around the wreck of the cyanide tank. She was groping in the dark among the water barrels, not for herself, as it turned out, but for some of the peon children who were crying with thirst.

"I don't mind it for myself," she said, after I had tipped one of the barrels for her and helped her get a quart or so of the tepid lees in the bottom of it. "But I can't stand it to hear those children cry. It's heartbreaking."

I asked her if she would do her errand and then come out again, saying that I had a thing to talk about and wanted her counsel. She promised, and, after I had waited for a few minutes at the water barrels, she re-joined me.

"I know what you're going to say," she began, without giving me a chance to say it. "Jackson has been telling me what you three idiots have been doing—turning young Forbes out and putting the other brother in. I don't blame Jackson and the Englishman so much, but you heard what I heard last night, and you knew what the elder brother was up to."

"Yes, I thought I knew, but I didn't know the half of it," I returned. "I thought he was only trying to get his brother discredited with your cousin."

"Well, wasn't he?"

Here was a clear head; much clearer than Jackson's or Churchill's, I made no doubt. Miss Amansa would have to be told the whole truth sooner or later, and I saw no reason why she should not be told now.

"Listen," I said, and then she got it bluntly and without any softening of the barbarous details.

I don't suppose there is another woman on earth who would have taken it just as the traveled lady did.

"Humph!" she said; and then: "I don't know but what you've atoned a little by playing the eavesdropper. If you hadn't done that we might all have been murdered in cold blood."

"It hasn't occurred to me yet that my listening can be made to remove the possibility," I demurred. "Jermyn will persuade Jackson and Churchill to believe that he has made favorable

terms for us, and they'll never know the difference until to-morrow morning when the little priest will be given orders to confess us."

"I must have time to think," she said soberly. "Of course, we are not going to sit still and let that unspeakable villain get us all murdered—though between that and perishing with thirst in another hot day isn't a very long step. Oh, mercy me! If those wretched children would only stop crying!"

"I'm under your orders," I offered. "I can't get a clear thought to save my soul. Ought we to tell Jackson and Churchill?"

"Not yet," she replied promptly. And then: "When were the peons to be disarmed?"

"No time was mentioned. In the nature of things you would suppose that it would be put off as long as possible. The Zapotecas are no fools. If Jermyn begins to take their guns away from them, some of them will be shrewd enough to suspect what is coming. Our Judas isn't brave enough to take the chance of a mutiny in the garrison before he is ready to open the gates."

"In that view of the case, we are not specially pressed for time," said the little lady coolly. "Nothing will be done until nearly morning; and with practically the whole night before us we shall deserve to be shot, you and I, if we can't outplot Mr. Jermyn Forbes." There was a little pause, and then she added: "I wish you hadn't told me that about his finally consenting to give Nellie up. It's the one thing that makes your otherwise credible story sound like a hideous nightmare."

"Because I still wish to retain some little fragment of my belief in human nature as a whole, I am trying to think that he said 'yes' when he meant 'no'; that he was weakly trying to gain time," I said.

"You're more charitable than I am,"

snapped the resolute lady. "I've been studying his face since last night, whenever he would give me a chance. He is a mere sham, Mr. van Brunt. If you could open the place where his soul is supposed to be you would simply find a hole—a vacuum. But this isn't getting us anywhere. I want time to think. Take me over to the mine, where I can't hear those children crying."

I didn't tell her that I had good reason to believe that Rod and the ex-sergeant were in the mine, but the belief reconciled me to the idea of leaving her there alone as she begged me to do. The urging was only partly on her own account. She suggested that I ought to go and remove the white flag and see to it that the peons were not sleeping too soundly at their posts.

Leaving her to do her thinking, and hoping very fervently that she would be able to think to some purpose, I made the suggested round of the intrenchments, even stopping to talk a little with a few of the men who had learned a bit of English from their former employers and the mestizos. The esprit du corps of the Indian miners was admirable. They were still full of fight, notwithstanding the famine and their thirst. One of them told me that they were quite ready to go out and fight in the open if the "señor" would lead them.

The officer-of-the-guard duty performed, I drifted back to the stamp mill. In the dark interior there was still the subdued confusion of more or less patient suffering. The Indian mothers were trying to quiet the thirsty babies, and I thought it spoke volumes for the discipline of the fathers that they did not break bounds and make a mad dash for the river at the crying of their little ones.

The German naturalist and his wife were both asleep with their backs to the wall, and the little padre man told me in his curious Spanish that the

señorita was also trying to sleep on the little pallet Jackson had made for her in the least-disturbed corner of the mill. When I found Jackson he told me that Churchill was on watch at the machine-gun platform. It was by this time well on toward midnight, and there was no stir beyond the walls to betray the presence of the besiegers. I asked for Jermyn, and was told that he hadn't been seen since he had left us to go and set the negotiation plan in motion.

At first I was puzzled to account for the traitor's disappearance. Then it came to me all at once that he was trying to hide from the presence of his own unutterable baseness; was finding it impossible to face, even with a lie in his mouth, the people whom he had betrayed. The disappearance made it easier for me. I was not obliged to tell Jackson what I knew—not at the moment, at least.

When I started out to have a word with Churchill, Jackson followed me.

"Do you know, Van Brunt," he said, "I don't more than half trust the lieutenant, after all. He certainly rubbed it into his brother like a beast, even if Rod had been taking a drop too much—as I guess he had. And I don't like this sudden disappearance of Jermyn's. Do you suppose he's gone over the wall to have a talk with the bandits on his own account?"

I told him I thought it was altogether unlikely.

"What's done is done, and can't be undone, I suppose," the rubber millionaire went on half dubiously. "But I can't help wishing that one or all three of us had had nerve enough to break in when he was pitching his brother out neck and heels. It all came too pat. It looked as if it were cut and dried beforehand. Past that, the younger one, drunk or sober, is twice the man his brother is, with a good bit to spare. Don't you think so?"

"I know it," I rejoined briefly.

"Well, what's going to be the outcome?"

"Just this, I think: that the three of us, you and Churchill and I, will have to take hold of Rod Forbes, sober him up, and beg him to forgive us for throwing him down as we did. We're in a bad row of stumps, Jackson. I can't talk as plainly to you now as I'd like to, but I can tell you this; some of us—a good many of us—are living our last night on earth if something doesn't turn up before sunrise to-morrow morning."

"I don't like mysteries," said the stocky one. "I've always noticed that they queer a business deal quicker than anything else will. If you won't talk, perhaps you'll advise. Shall we go to Jermyn and tell him that we've changed our minds?"

"A little later, perhaps, we shall find that that is the only thing left for us to do. Can I count on you when the time comes?"

"You can. If you've got a scheme of your own in mind, go and get busy on it and I'll talk to Churchill. He doesn't say much, but it's rambling around in the back of my head that he is feeling exactly the same as we do about this sudden swap in commanders."

Hoping that Miss Amansa had had time to do her thinking. I picked my way across the yard toward the mouth of the mine. At a little distance beyond the wrecked commissary, I met the explorer lady.

"I was coming to hunt you up," she said. "We're in a pretty kettle of fish! Did you know that Rod Forbes was over there in the mine when you let me go there?"

"I did."

"Why didn't you tell me he had been drinking?"

"To be perfectly frank, I hadn't the heart to tell you, Miss Amansa."

"Well, that settles it. He is in no

condition to do anything. Why, he is simply raving—chattering nonsense about carrying water to the Zapatistas so that they may drink till they burst!"

"I know. I saw him and talked with him for a minute—just before I found you at the water barrels. Of course, you didn't tell him anything?"

"Certainly not. He is in no condition to hear it, and, besides, it would have been simply fiendish when you remember that, after all is said, they are brothers—children of the same parents. If we get out of here alive Rod must never know; the disgrace of it would bury him mountain deep."

"But the thing to be done?" I pressed.

"Is to hunt up this rascally elder brother and face him down in his villainy—all four of us. Go and find him; that's your part of it."

I let her go on to the mill by herself, and instantly began a search for the traitor. It was like looking for a needle in a haystack. There were a thousand places in the pitch-dark, wreck-littered mine yard where one man could hide, and Jermyn had apparently found one of the thousand. I spent a fell half hour poking into all the holes and corners, and was obliged at last to go to Miss Amansa and tell her that I had failed. She had her answer ready, and it came like a shot out of a gun.

"That's enough; you've done your part and proved that we are without a leader. Now go and get Jackson and the Englishman, and we four will take matters into our own hands. We've got to sober that idiot of a younger brother in some way and make him take hold again."

I found Jackson and Churchill at the gun mount, and Miss Amansa put it to them with brittle brevity. Jermyn had disappeared and we were without a leader. We had all been idiotically foolish to turn the command over to the lieutenant in the first place, and now the only thing to do was to go

to Rod Forbes and beat him, hammer him, drench him—do anything that was necessary to get the liquor out of him. With famine or worse staring us in the face, and only a few hours' respite there was no time to mince matters. We must get busy at once.

Since there was no dissenting voice, we were preparing to follow Miss Amansa's lead across to the mine mouth when we were forestalled. Malachi Irons came limping up through the darkness, and when he would have passed us I asked him where he was going.

"I'm goin' after that Dutch doctor. Th' boss is bad sick," he said gruffly.

I grabbed and held him. "You know better than that, Irons. You know as well as we do that—he is just plain drunk. Isn't that so?"

"You're a bunch of idiots, all of you!" the ex-sergeant exploded, impartially including the lady. "That boy ain't touched a drop o' liquor since he left the States! It's the fever, I tell you! Can't you tell the difference between tropic fever and a jag?"

CHAPTER XIV.

CATASTROPHIC.

The ex-sergeant's wrathful explosion put an immeasurably worse face upon a matter that was already bad enough. Drunkenness we might have coped with in some way, but the dreaded fever of the *tierra caliente* was a different proposition.

As soon as might be after we had the news, the five of us, with the Herr Professor to make a sixth, were gathered about the sick man. Irons had made a rough bunk for him in the entrance tunnel of the mine with planks and a tarpaulin. He was raving when we reached him; babbling foolishness, and with a temperature high enough to set him afire.

"Ach, Himmel! If ve only hat der quinine!" lamented the German.

It said itself that there must be a stock of quinine about the place, if we knew where to look for it. In such a climate it would be only a little less necessary than bread. I went to search in the laboratory office, and luck was with me. I found a small medicine chest, and hurried back with it to the mine. We broke the lock, and in the box the German found what he needed.

It was a reasonable supposition that Bauer had taken a medical degree before he had settled down to become an absent-minded plant hunter. Anyhow, he went at the business like a professional, administering a dose of the drug big enough to have killed an elephant, I thought.

Irons thought so, too, and when he had jerked me aside his growl was a fierce threat.

"If that Dutchman ain't onto his job—if he's gone and poisoned the boss—there's goin' to be hell to pay, and he'll pay it!" he grated.

"That's the new practice," I explained; "to give it all at once. We'll see in a few minutes what the effect will be."

It was then that Irons said a thing which began to open a small door in the mysteries.

"If the boy croaks without gettin' the girl, I've got just one thing to make sure of before I go down the long road. The other one won't get her!"

"This is no time to talk of killing," I said, knowing well enough that the threat was pointed at Jermyn.

"Nah!" said the time-expired man, spitting the word out viciously. "I'll never kill him; I'll let him live so't she can hate him till his hair gets gray! She'll do it, too, when I tell her why she'd ort to!"

The man's vindictive loyalty to the younger brother was like a strong solvent; the etcher's acid that brings out the lines of a clear picture where before there had been only confusion.

"What has Lieutenant Forbes done to you?" I asked quickly.

"He's made me live in hell, that's what he's done. I'll tell you—it don't make no difference now. I used to hit the bottle once, and one night—it was up in Denver—I hit it one time too often. There was a man killed, and this here devil of a lieutenant knowed who killed him."

"Ah!" said I. "And he didn't denounce you?"

"No; he kept me to use. If I'd do as he wanted me to, he'd keep his mouth shut. If I didn't, I could go up against it."

"And he used you against his brother?"

The ex-sergeant dragged an arm across his scarred face.

"You know good and well he did; you was there, and Doc Kinkaid told you. I swore to a lie—he made me swear to a lie. That boy wasn't drunk that night at Camista. He was drugged."

"I see," I said, and, indeed, I did see many things. At any time before the overhearing of Jermyn's talk with the bandit envoy, I should have refused to believe the charge the ex-sergeant was making. But now there was no room for disbelief.

"You came down here with Rod to try to make it up to him," I went on. "Is that all you have done?"

"It was mighty nigh all I could do. But I writ a letter to the colonel's niece after she went to San Diego, tellin' her that Lieutenant Rod wasn't the man the court-martial had made him out to be."

"Did you sign the letter?" I asked.

He shook his head. "'Twouldn't 'a' done no good, if I had; she wouldn't pay no 'tention to a letter from a 'non-com' that might have a grudge of his own to work out 'g'inst an officer."

"Did you tell her in the letter that the brother was to blame?"

"Couldn't without givin' myself

away. And that would've meant a hangin' for me if it'd all come out."

The sick man was beginning to struggle, and Jackson and the Englishman knelt to try and quiet him. There was only one more question to be asked of the ex-sergeant, and I put it briefly.

"So it was a frame-up all around—that night up on the Rio Grande, when you brought the colonel's order to Kinkaid's tent and gave it to Rod? It was intended for the other brother, wasn't it?"

Irons nodded. "I took it to him first. He looked at it a minute and seemed to be studyin'. Then he said: 'Take it to Rod; he's over at the doctor's tent with Miss Eleanor.' Then he grabbed at me and bored me through with that hot-wire eye o' his. 'You'll go with the detail,' says he, 'and when that bully brother of mine takes a drink, as he's sure to, sooner or later, you'll dope it good and stiff. If you come back without doing it, you'll get a rope around your neck.' I went—and I done it. And I been in hell ever since."

"Anything else?" I asked.

"One thing, yes; before I left camp I writ it all out and gave it to Doc Kinkaid in a sealed envelope, to be opened if he didn't hear from me in a year. That's all."

It was out now, the whole despicable business, and I well understood the ex-sergeant's motive in telling me. He had held it as long as he could. A great loathing for the man who could thus plot his own brother's ruin came over me, and for the moment I'm afraid that the innocent cause of the plot, the woman who had come between, came in for an unmerited share of the despisings.

But there were other things to think about. Rod was still raving, only now it was with some coherence; he was pleading with Jackson and Churchill to let him get up.

"Thunder, yes! I know I'm sick and

goin' to die; but I tell you there's a thing to be done, and I've got to do it!" he babbled. "Stand me on my feet and give me a shove. I'll keep goin' if you'll do that much for me."

At a sign from the German, the two at the bunkside lifted the big fellow and steadied him on his feet. By the flickering light of the candles we could see how far gone he was. He had torn his shirt open at the throat. His eyes were wild, and he was trembling and shaking like a victim of some hideous debauch.

"Steer me out of this!" he commanded. And when the two who were supporting him hesitated, he swore like a pirate, ignoring, or, more likely, not seeing Miss Amansa. Once outside of the mine he gathered himself with a mighty effort. "That'll do," he said to Churchill and Jackson. "I can go it alone now. Scatter out and find me Miguel, the mestizo. And I want Zapote and Jacquito, the under headmen of the peons. Get 'em to me before I go off the hooks again!"

Miss Amansa stayed with him at the mine mouth, and the rest of us jumped to obey his orders. I was the lucky man who first found Miguel, and when I brought the mestizo Forbes caught at him and pulled him aside out of our hearing—Miss Amansa's and mine. The talk between the fever madman and his major-domo was short, and we got only the end of it as the foreman was moving away.

"You can do it, Miguel—as we talked before, you know?"

"*Si, señor.*"

"Take as many of the men as you'll need, and, when it is done, don't forget the signal—burn the red flare. When you see the answering red light down here, pull the string and let her go. You've got it all straight?"

"*Si, señor.*"

"Beat it quick, then. The night's young, but I'm old—old as Methusalem!" And when the man was gone:

"Oh! If this cursed headache would only let up for one little half hour!"

I could see that he was fighting the delirium desperately. He was reeling and staggering and trying to talk to Miss Amansa, begging her to go and see to it that no harm came to Miss Eleanor, when Churchill trotted up with the two under headmen. Forbes gave the word to the Indians in low tones, and the pair vanished in the darkness.

Beyond that there was some little confusion. From the light footfalls all around us we understood that there was some movement of the peons going on. Rod Forbes surged heavily against me.

"Give me a shoulder over to the main gates," he mumbled, and by the time we had crossed the yard we found fully three-fourths of the peons silently tearing down the sandbag barrier, lifting the sacks, and repiling them on either side of the gate.

"Where's Jerm?" demanded the sick man.

I told him I didn't know; that we had been searching for him and couldn't find him.

"It's up to you to keep an eye on him," was the blunt caution shot at the three of us. "If you don't he'll queer the deal as sure as cats eat little fishes. Listen, and I'll tell you what's comin'. I'm goin' to head a charge on those adobes. We'll make it sound as much like the real thing as yellin' and gun bangin' 'll let us. Churchill, you and Jackson stay here and hold the fort and be ready to cover us with the machine gun when we fall back."

"You're not going to try to cut your way out?" the Englishman broke in.

"Couldn't do it in a month of Sundays—not enough of us," objected the sick man, whose tongue was growing thick again. "What got to do is to get 'em all over on other side the creek; get that? They'll come if we can make noise enough. Confound this crazy headache—can't talk straight save m'

life. Van Brunt, you game to go over in hashenda yard and keep cases? Lemme know when they make for lower bridge; burn something—make flare. Understan'?"

It was just here that Jackson came to the front like a man.

"You're not half fit to lead a charge, Forbes," he protested. "Pass the word to your Indians to follow me, and I'll do the forlorn-hope act."

I don't know how they wrangled it out; Forbes was alternately cursing the rubber millionaire and telling him that he was a man and a brother in spite of his money, when I dodged out of the crowd at the gate and made my way along the cross wall to find a favorable place at which to climb over and be shot. The wrangle couldn't have lasted very long. When I reached the spot where the white flag had been stuck up in the sandbags, I heard the creaking of the great gate hinges, a babel of fierce cries, gunshots, and the trampling rush of many men down the little hill leading to the stone-arch bridge.

It was hardly half a minute until the noisy pandemonium was transferred to the adobe village on the flat below and the gunfire became a back-and-forth fusillade. I hardly knew what my cue would be, but fortunately it was made plain for me. Almost immediately I heard shoutings and alarm cries, and the grounds on the other side of the wall seemed to be alive with men running toward the road at the other end of the inclosure.

With a little backward look over the sins of my life, I tumbled over the wall and ran to keep pace with the hurrying reënforcements. The fight among the adobes was growing hotter every minute, and I could hear the *tshk* of stray bullets striking the trees as I stumbled along. In the excitement I forgot all about the wrecked tower and went plunging headlong among the ruins. When I had extricated myself,

the last *guerrillero* had left the hacienda grounds, and against the starlit sky I could see a mob of men crowding the lower bridge in hot haste to get across to take part in the fight at the village.

Now properly my part in whatever drama was getting itself enacted was to run back and set something afire for a signal. But having had no military training, I committed the capital crime—in the military code—of doing a bit of private thinking. If Forbes wanted to get all of the Zapatistas over into the lower level on the right bank of the torrent, it was reasonably probable that he would want to keep them there. But how was that to be done if the bridge remained?

The firing and the shrill yells burst out with renewed vigor, and in the midst of it came the ripping crash of the machine gun. The bridge was but a few hundred feet below the hacienda, but I had no means of destroying it. While I hesitated, a smoky flare sprang up from something blazing in the plant yard, and then I understood that either by accident or design the latter half of my job had been anticipated by somebody else. Instantly the flare became a towering column of flame to light up everything within half a mile, and now the machine gun chattered again and I saw splinters fly from the parapet and planking of the wooden bridge. Churchill was covering it from his post within the yard, and any recrossing of the river on the part of the *guerrilleros* was now made impossible.

Relieved of the private-thinking necessity, I turned, fled back through the hacienda grounds, and flung myself over the cross wall. It was the wreck of the commissary that was burning. That part of the yard was deserted. The peons that remained were crowding to the gate, and the fierce fight in the village seemed to be surging back up the single street toward the stone bridge. I started to go with the crowd,

knowing that every one of us would be needed to beat back the pursuers and to close the gates if Rod and his men were being driven to cover.

It was because the fire was so hot that I couldn't pass between it and the cross wall that I made a running circuit around the half-wrecked laboratory. At the office end of the building I found out who had set the fire. As I came up, the office door flew open and a man dashed out, half dragging and half carrying a woman who was struggling frantically to free herself.

The man was Jermyn Forbes, and when he leaped to the ground from the little door-fronting platform, he held the woman with one hand while with the other he caught up a burning brand and flung it into the building he had just left. I don't know what his crazy object was—and never shall know. Before I could interfere, the wounded ex-sergeant came crawling from behind one of the cyanide vats.

"Turn her loose!" he shouted; "turn her loose, I say!" and out of the holster at his hip he dragged a huge army pistol.

The lieutenant's reply was wordless. With catlike quickness he whipped a gun from his pocket and fired once, twice, thrice at Irons. I saw the wounded man flinch and shrink, but I saw no more. That was because I had snatched the young woman from the murderer's one-handed grasp and was running with her across to the mill.

"Put me down; don't try to carry me, please!" she panted, this after I had put the blazing commissary between us and the duel to the death going on behind it.

I put her down because I had to. The running fight on the bridge and its approach had pushed itself fairly up to the gates, and our peons were pouring into the yard in a fleeing mob and massing themselves on either side in readiness to shut the great wooden

valves in the faces of their outnumbering pursuers.

Rod Forbes was in the rear, covering the retreat; the last man, as a good officer should be. I saw him and the girl saw him. He seemed to bear a charmed life. The bullets were flying thickly, and some of the big-hatted bandits were near enough to hack at him with their machetes. He had a clubbed gun and the slight advantage of the little hill up which he was retreating, and at every sweep of the clubbed rifle a man went down. In the light of the fire his face was ghastly, but his eyes were blazing.

"Shut the gates!" he roared, and then the girl at my side shrieked and tried to run out to join him; tried and fought me as she had fought Jermyn because I wouldn't let her commit suicide.

I don't know just what happened after that; how Forbes got in, or how the peons got the gates slammed in the face of that charging horde of Zapattistas. This was because I was too busy with Miss Underclough. But the thing was done in some way, and well done; with a hurried flinging of the sandbags against the wood to withstand the battering from without, and a hasty resumption of the garrison firing to drive the attackers back down the hill and over the bridge.

In the *mêlée* Rod had stumbled past us, and I saw him take some small object from one of the peons and place it upon the wall. Then he turned to shade his eyes from the glare of the burning buildings and stared up at the face of the great cliff overshadowing the valley. A moment later a red flare broke out suddenly, high up among the trees on the cliff face, and by the glare of it we could see the river cañon slit and the dam, with the water for which we were all perishing pouring in a torrent over the spillway.

Young Forbes turned toward us and waved his arms.

"Back—get back, everybody!" he shouted. Then he struck a match, and the small object he had placed upon the wall sprang into an answering burst of red fire.

It was Forbes himself, staggering and evidently in the last ditch of exhaustion, who, still shouting to the rest of us, caught Miss Eleanor away from me and ran with her to the higher ground near the mine mouth. As we ran, the flare on top of the dam went out, the solid earth shook to the dull crash of a subterranean explosion, and the peons, men and women alike, raised shrill cries of "*El temblor! El temblor!*"

But it was something more terrible than an earthquake which came leaping out from the high gash in the great cliff. In the light of the burning buildings it looked like a huge white continuous projectile shooting out in mid-air to fall with a deafening crash into the valley, a spouting flood as big around as a battleship and infinitely more destructive.

We saw it as it came, a solid wall of water sweeping down the stream channel and carrying everything before it, great trees torn out by the roots, the wreck of the wooden spillway apron, huge boulders grinding the wreckage to splinters with a noise like a thousand angry beasts tearing at their prey. A great cry rose up from the adobes as the water wall came thundering down into the flat, a wall so high and wide that the spray shot clear of our breastworks, with the flood itself surging under the gates to form pools into which our peons ran to fling themselves face downward, reckless of all save their consuming thirst.

Of our company the Englishman alone had stood his ground. With the flood sweeping down upon the adobes, he trained the machine gun once more upon the lower bridge, but its ripping sawmill snarl was lost in the roar of the water. We could see little of what hap-

pened among the adobes; a few flying figures in the street, a few others climbing to the flat tops of the houses only to melt into the seething waters as the houses melted under them; this, and Churchill thrusting belt after belt of cartridges into his gun and cranking it steadily.

The commissary roof was falling in, to send up showers of sparks when the tail of the flood from the dynamited dam crumbled the wall on the river side of the plant inclosure, and took the great gates with it in its rush to the lower levels. Where the adobe village had stood there was a vast flat ravine such as might have been made by the passage of a giant scraper. The lower bridge was gone, and out of the ground-floor windows of the hacienda the retreating waters were pouring in cascades. And of human life in the ravaged valley there was no sign.

When I came to a realization of things nearer at hand, I found that I was supporting somebody with a sort of protecting arm, and the somebody was the African explorer lady.

With the strain off, Miss Amansa released herself in something like maidenly confusion.

"Really, I beg your pardon, Mr. van Brunt. It's the first—or perhaps almost the first—time I ever felt the need of a man, I assure you. Are we all here and all alive?"

I drew her aside and kept her with me until we came to the ruins of the two burning buildings. Near the door of the laboratory there was a sight to make me take my companion by the shoulders and try to face her the other way. The bodies of two men, locked in a death grip and scorched almost beyond recognition, were lying in the little open space between the laboratory and the commissary. Miss Amansa twisted herself out of my grasp and once more showed what resolute stuff she was made of.

"Nonsense!" she said; "I've seen dead men before. It's Jermyn Forbes and that scar-faced henchman of Rod's, isn't it? I'll stay here and keep the others away while you go to the mine and get that tarpaulin. Hurry, before any one comes!"

But there was no special need for hurry, either on account of the dead or the living. As I passed the little group on the high ground, I saw that Rod was down on his back with his head resting in the German hausfrau's lap, and the girl kneeling beside him, dry-eyed and stricken. The collapse had come at last, and in answer to my question the professor shook his big head doubtfully.

"Ve haf *nicht* her hospitalal *oder* der goot food," he said. "He iss vot you say 'all inside.' Ve can'd take him sommveres, und ve can'd leaf him here. Maybe so he iss die. *Nicht wahr?*"

CHAPTER XV.

THE LAND OF THE FREE.

It was a mighty hot summer day when the good ship *Ariel* changed her course two points off to starboard, and from our chairs under the bridge awning we, Miss Amansa and I, got our first glimpse of the land of the free and the home of the brave in the shape of a low-lying cloud, dead ahead, figuring as Point Loma.

From that terrible night in the wilds of Michoacan to the bright summer day off San Diego is a pretty long jump, both in time and distance, but with the gentleman safely dead and the scapegrace like to die, there wouldn't seem to be much more of the story to tell.

What there was can be told while Miss Amansa is focusing her field glass upon the landfall dead ahead, and if it reads like an A. P. news item, it is chiefly because there are some things which even a dealer in thrills may wish to blue pencil out of his copy.

Into the brief category fall those frightful aftermath days which we spent at the wrecked plant, burying our dead, living on the scraps and leavings found in the hacienda kitchen until such time as some of our peons could go and come and bring us proper food, and striving as we might to keep the flickering breath in the body of the brave young fellow who at the last had so unselfishly put his life into the scale to save us all.

But if all is well that ends well, we had nothing to complain of worse than the heat and the anxiety and the starvation and a few hundred other privations. In defiance of the Herr Professor's sorrowful prediction, Rod Forbes finally took a half-nelson grip on the fever and threw it—thereby saving his own life, and, if appearances may be trusted, Miss Eleanor's reason. When he was fit to be carried, the loyal Zapotecas put him in a pole hammock; the gold which had cost so many lives was buried deep in the mine to be dug up in that peaceful time which is always coming, and never comes, to poor, distracted Mexico; and we set out for the coast.

At a little port south of Manzanillo—a port which is not set down on the modern maps—we found Jackson's yacht, which he had been prudent enough to keep in waiting until its skipper should have word from him that it either was or wasn't needed. At this port, which shall be nameless here because Jackson's money bought us a few official friends who may not want to court publicity—and where some of the same money was distributed in generous largesse to our faithful and loyal peons—we embarked; and at the moment when Miss Amansa was laying aside her field glass and saying that there was no possible doubt about the identity of the land ahead, we had been steaming for days over a summer sea, our invalid was able to sit up and take his nourishment, Miss Eleanor's appe-

tite was returning, Churchill's head was healing, and the wound in Jackson's arm no longer threatened blood poisoning.

"It's a nightmare, looking back at it," said Miss Amansa. "Doesn't it seem that way to you, Harwood?"

"Part of it does," I acquiesced. "Hasn't some one said somewhere that the course of true love never does run smoothly? It seems like a dream that I have heard something to that effect."

"Nellie's case, you mean? It has been rather tragic right from the first. She has told me all about it, you know. It seems that Jermyn fairly hypnotized her during that visit at Fort Oglethorpe—almost before she knew Rod. He pushed her into the engagement, and she was sorry for it almost as soon as the words were spoken.

"Why was it kept a secret?" I asked.

"That was Jermyn's idea, singular as it may seem. He knew what Nellie didn't know, that her father would most likely oppose the match. Cousin Tom hasn't much use for the elder Forbes, and he had not only carried his dislike over to the elder son, which was the only one he knew, but he had spoken of it to his brother, the colonel. Jermyn wanted time to straighten this out, having, as I shall always believe, an eye on Tom Underclough's money."

"But he didn't give the girl any such reason as that for wanting to keep the engagement secret, did he?" I protested.

"Oh, no; he told her he wanted to wait until he was promoted, taking the magnanimous stand that he couldn't support her properly on a lieutenant's pay."

"I see; and it was after that that Rod came on the scene?"

"Not very long after it, I fancy. Jermyn himself was to blame for bringing Rod into it. His wretched abuse of his 'private-soldier' brother was so conspicuous that Nellie began to take his part. From that to the tragedy on the

Rio Grande—the one the bitter old sergeant told you about—was only a step.”

“And Miss Eleanor suspected the treachery?”

“She did, almost at once, and she tried her best to make Jermyn admit it at the time. He wouldn't, and after she went to San Diego the letter came from Sergeant Irons. She concluded at once that the writer was the sergeant, but she didn't know what to do until, by the merest chance, she learned, through some New York friends, that Rod had been heard from in Manzanillo—that he was going into the interior to take charge of a mine which had been abandoned in fright by the Americans who had been operating it.”

“Did she know the name of the mine?” I asked.

“She did, but, of course, she had no idea where it was. She says now that she had some half-baked notion of meeting her father in Guanajuato and getting him to go with her to find Rod. That was why she insisted on joining the yacht party and why she talked me into going along to keep her in countenance.”

“Then she was already convinced of Rod's innocence of the court-martial charge?”

“Quite convinced, and she meant to find him and tell him so, notwithstanding her engagement to Jermyn. The meeting with Jermyn at Monterica Hacienda was totally unexpected, of course. Jermyn's insane jealousy was at the bottom of that meeting, too. The story he told you, about carrying dispatches from Vera Cruz to the City of Mexico was only partly true, as he confessed to Nellie on that last fearful night.”

“Which part was true?” I asked.

“The part about the dispatches. He made up the part about being in danger and having to run for the west coast. The truth was that somebody in San Diego had got word to him about the

yacht party. He knew Rod was somewhere in southern Mexico, and he put two and two together: Nellie was going to meet Rod, and he determined to head her off at Manzanillo—was on his way to do it.”

“Then he was really a deserter, in fact.”

“Just that—among other things. And at the last he was a raving maniac, as you have probably conjectured.”

“Even so, I cannot begin to guess what he was trying to do with the girl when I came upon him at the door of the laboratory.”

“Nobody knows—Nellie least of all, I think. She says that he came over to the mill just after Rod had led the charge on the adobes. He told her that Mrs. Bauer and I were to be taken out through the secret passageway in the mine; that we two had gone on ahead. He dragged her over to the laboratory, shut and locked her in the office, and through the window she saw him set fire to the commissary. By that time she was half scared to death, and knew he must be out of his head. She fought him when he came back after her, and that is all she remembers until she found you carrying her over toward the hill.”

I skewed half around on the camp stool and took a look aft. The *Ariel* carried a promenade deck abaft the cabin with an awning over it, and the bridge was low enough to give a clear view. Jackson was leaning against the starboard rail with a pair of binoculars at his eyes. The English captain was doing a stumping sentry-go up and down on the port side. The two Germans were invisible—they were doubtless both in the saloon cataloguing the botanical specimens which the Herr Professor had kept on gathering up to the beach-combing moment when we had bidden farewell to the land of the Aztecs.

The two young people were far

astern, and one settee was big enough for both. Forbes was a mere shadow of his former bigness, but he was trying to smoke and the girl was holding a lighted match for him, sheltering the tiny blaze behind her hand and leaning over close to him to make sure that it didn't go out.

"They seem to be getting along all right now," I said, turning back to my bride companion. "Your pretty cousin will doubtless be able to make her uncle, the colonel, believe that Rod ought to be reinstated in the army—if she can't, Doctor Kinkaid can open a certain sealed envelope he is keeping and help her—and after that the delightful details—orange blossoms, bride's veiling, church rehearsals, and all that—will arrange themselves. We've missed something in life, you and I, Miss Amansa. I wonder if you've ever realized it?"

"I have," she said simply.

"So have I," I returned. "People used to say I was a born bachelor, and they kept on saying it until I was too old even for that. But it isn't true. It never was less true than it is just at this present moment."

"I suppose you could find some young woman, if you should look around. The fools are not all dead yet," she snapped, with something of her old-time brusquerie.

"The woman I have in mind has never been very young, I think, and she will certainly never be old. At a rough guess, I should say that she is about ten years my junior. That is about the right difference, isn't it?"

"H-hm," she said, looking me over with an appraisive eye. "You are forty-five, if you're a day. That would make her thirty-five. Give it up, Harwood. It's too late for both of you."

I reached over and took one of the firm, capable hands in mine.

"That is for you to say, Amansa," I told her quietly.

For a long time she did not speak, and when she did the resolute eyes were looking straight into mine. But now there was a roguish twinkle in them which was positively girlish.

"And we haven't a single thing in common, save one," she smiled. "We can both shoot straight."

"HARD ROCK IS HARD ROCK"

THIS is the uncommon title of an uncommon novel by Julius Grinnell Furthmann which we will offer you in the first issue of *POPULAR* for 1915, on sale January 7th. Few fiction writers have conceived the possibility of romance in the day's work of the hard-rock men, but Furthmann, who has lived among them, assured us that there was plenty of romance in this neglected field. To prove it he has written a book that will thrill you and hold your interest unflinchingly.

Green Magic

By Albert Payson Terhune

Author of "The Fate Chaser," "The Claws in the Contract," Etc.

The sons of the desert are confronted with a "Miracle of Miracles" when "our Mr. Prawle of the Hooley Farming Implements Company of Omaha" produces a wad of greenbacks, and the wonders of the paper currency are explained to them. Of all the Bedouin folk one Maghrib tribesman was destined to be most concerned with this American Green Magic. His story is worth telling, and Terhune knows how to tell a good story.

IT was in the walled city, in I-erusalem, the most high—known to Feringi as "Jerusalem"—that Sidi Hafiz beheld the miracle. Not he alone, but nine other sons of the desert, It befell in the shop of Domian, the Greek money changer.

Sidi Hafiz ordinarily would have ventured into the walled city, past the pashalic guard at its Jaffa Gate, and the trousered garrison in the Tower of Daoud, with about the same readiness as a jackal would walk into a plain-seen trap or a hawk into a limed cage.

More than one of Sidi Hafiz's people, it is true, had dreamed gloatingly of entering such a shop as that of Domian, the money-changing unbeliever; but they had dreamed of entering it bent on loot; gripping saber and musket; and with the glad, fanatic shriek of "Deen! Deen! DEEN!" Not in servile peace and with unclutching hands. But in these days of a law-ridden land and of garrison towns, that sweet dream must forever be a dream.

And it had remained for Sidi Hafiz and a representative from each of nine other Moab and Syrian Desert tribes to enter Jerusalem in a paradoxical

fashion; not only in peace and openly and of their free will, but, at the same time, for profit.

They had come at the behest of Abbas Bey, the soldier merchant king, whose influence with the pasha himself—might Allah, the all terrible, forget him in his hour of need, and might the graves of his ancestors be dug up by pariah dogs!—was so great as to secure a six-day safe-conduct for the tribal representatives.

During these six days the quasi-outlaws might come and go at will, in and around the walled city. They might laugh at the very beards of their hereditary foes, the padisha's own Syrian cavalry. They might, in short, do anything save slay and pillage. And, even though they were thus cheated of a visit's two chief pleasures, the event was one to remember.

The pasha, urged thereto by Abbas Bey, had guaranteed them this wondrous "safe-conduct" that sheltered them in the house of their foes. He had guaranteed it under his official hand and seal—a warrant of safety on which the Bedouins would have relied as they would have relied on ropes made of

desert sand. But he had also guaranteed it under the triple oath that no man may break and still hope to look one day upon the Prophet's face.

The pasha had sworn to their safe-conduct. He had sworn it on the sword of the Prophet, on the beard of his father, and on the third sacred symbol. And these ten hawk-souled children of the wilderness had thereupon entered the walled city as fearlessly as they would have entered their brothers' tents.

Abbas Bey had not begged and intrigued and bribed, to secure this safe-conduct for the tribesmen merely for the sake of giving them a pleasant excursion—in a land where pleasure excursions are unknown—to a city which customarily was barred against such as they. He did this thing for his own thick purse, and for his own hopes of future gain.

Abbas Bey drew the bulk of his wealth from his caravans; caravans that plied on the thirty-five-day camel journey between Bagdad and Damascus; caravans that spanned the waste places from Arabia Petraea to the Great Sea; caravans that crawled east and west athwart the pink-brown Mountains of Moab.

And on a goodly percentage of these rich caravans the Bedouin tribes were wont to take toll. One could not always procure government cavalry to guard one's caravans, however great one's influence. Nor could one hire a private armed guard of sufficient strength for such a purpose, without cutting woe-fully into net profits.

And when a caravan fared forth without such protection, there was ever the danger of a sudden scurry of hoofs, a mêlée of shouts and shots, through the black night; an onrush of brown-faced men out of the darkness—and then a tear-compelling sequel of stampeded camels and stolen bales, and, perhaps—of lesser import, though no laughing

matter—a muleteer or so left lying asprawl in the trampled sand with a crooked knife jab in back or throat.

To avert this contingency—insurance being unknown—it had occurred to Abbas Bey to call to him, at Jerusalem, delegates of the chief tribes through whose shifting territory his caravans were wont to pass; and to seek to come to some arrangement whereby, through the payment of annual tribute to their sheiks, or their emirs, he might gain immunity from raids.

The idea was not new. Nor had it been new in Bible days. Yet more than once it had proven effective. Hence the presence now of the ten Bedouins in Jerusalem.

For three long days, in an upper chamber of Abbas Bey's countinghouse, the ten had sat in conclave with the merchant. For three days their desert stolidity had ever and anon been shattered by the yells, the moans, the arm-tossings, the beard-tearings, without which no self-esteeming and wise man may drive even the simplest of bargains.

Time and again, in those three days, had Sidi Hafiz, of the Maghrib tribe, and his nine fellow Bedouins wept aloud and sprung to their feet, and beat upon their breasts and sworn shrilly that they were not there to chaffer like Cairene antique venders. Equally often had Abbas Bey cast dust upon his beard and rent the yoke of his silken kumbaz, and had declared that they were conspiring to ruin him.

And at the last, both sides had agreed upon terms which, within a piaster or two, were practically what each side had mentally fixed on in advance as a fairly just tariff.

After which had followed a marvelous feast; wherein fowls baked in oil had been varied by goat flesh stewed in oil; and followed by a glorious mutton-and-lentil ragout, swimming in delicious oil and rendered sirupy by pounds of barley sugar. And there had,

of course, been side dishes of unleavened bread, honey, curds, candy, fish in oil, baklawa, oil-preserved fruits, mutton chunks fried on skewers, and similar appetizers, and three kids roasted whole, their flesh coated with sugar, their interiors seethed in pure oil.—And, naturally, thick, black coffee in and out of season. And even colorless mastic which, after the first few drafts, sets loose the sand devils of folly and boastfulness in the tongue.

And on the day following, led by Abbas Bey in person, they proceeded in due form to the shop of Domian, the Greek money changer, to receive the first installment of the tribute they were to bear back to their respective tribes.

It was a moment of vast solemnity; little less solemn and tense, perhaps, than when the dog pack stands awaiting the distribution of bones.

And, just then, the Feringi waddled into the shop.

Sidi Hafiz, despite the annoyance of the interruption, stared in envious yearning at the newcomer; appraising him as he would have appraised a racing stallion.

The man wore a stiff hat. And it is known to all men that a stiff hat is the mark of the foreigner. No foreigner could reach the Orient, from the barbarous transoceanic land where stiff hats are worn, without much money. Hence, all men who wear stiff hats are rich.

Also, the foreigner was fat—as none but rich merchants are fat. His hands were dough color and soft; the hands of one who handles naught rougher than smooth gold coins. He wore a jewel at his throat, and another on his left hand; and athwart his barbaric kumbaz stretched a heavy-linked golden chain.

Oh, to have met such a prize in the Mountains of Moab; to strip him of his visible wealth, and then hold him for incredible ransom! Sidi Hafiz could have wept for hopeless longing.

With the fat man was a boy of, perhaps, sixteen years; who was more plainly clad, and who smoked a cigarette. Evidently the money king's son. Such folk pay high ransom for their offspring. And again Sidi Hafiz's eyes grew moist.

The Feringi proceeded to perform a miraculous feat. He pulled from his pocket a wad of green and of yellow paper in pieces of oblong shape, and marked with pictures of eagles, and of gray-headed, hatless men, and with figures and with words in an unknown alphabet.

These oblongs of paper he counted and spread out on the counter beside which sat Domian. Then he spoke to the Greek in a right nasal and clipworded language. Sidi Hafiz had more than once heard that language; and though he understood no word of it, he knew it for *Inglese*.

But he had scant chance to note this; for he was staring incredulously at Domian, who was acting in right amazing fashion. The Greek had picked up the sheets of green and yellow pictured paper, and was running them through his fingers with a deft motion; keeping count meanwhile with moving lips.

And at last, speaking to the Feringi in palpably halting English, he dived both hands into an iron money box, drew forth a double handful of gold pieces—Sidi Hafiz's fingers itched horribly as he toyed with his knife hilt—dumped them on the counter; rapidly ran over them with his long fingers; tossed a coin or two back into the drawer, and shoved the rest across the counter to the Feringi.

As the Greek lovingly folded the green paper and prepared to stow it into his strong box, the Feringi swept the gold from the counter's edge into his own trouser pockets, nodded to his son, and, with him, left the shop.

"Oh, offspring of three thousand fools!" gasped Sidi Hafiz, confronting

Domian, crass surprise for once strangling Bedouin taciturnity. "Is it thus that you scatter your wealth? Assuredly, Allah has deprived you of wisdom, and has made you even as 'the owl in the wilderness, and as the pelican that is in the desert'! Do you at all times throw away two handfuls of gold in return for green and yellow scraps of paper? Or was it the sight of that fat Feringi ox which swept empty your brain?"

The other Bedouins, open-mouthed, were also staring at the Greek. But Domian burst into a great shout of laughter. And it was patent that he was laughing at them; notably at Sidi Hafiz, son of Imbarak.

Now, as all folk—even infidel Greeks—should know, to laugh aloud is the province of the unwhipped child or of a woman. For a bearded man to laugh is sign of weak wit or of liquor; and is excusable only on one or both of those grounds. For him to laugh in the face of another is next in unpardonableness to those twin supreme black insults of Moslemism—"In al-abuk" and "In al-deenak" ("Curses on your father!" and "Curses on your religion!")

And Sidi Hafiz once more reached furtively for his knife. Abbas Bey intervened.

"List, brother of eagles," said the bey soothingly. "There is no disgrace that you did not understand. It——"

"Then doubly is it a disgrace for this scion of Greek hyenas to laugh in my beard!" stormed Sidi Hafiz. "And I would I were where I might——"

"The transaction you witnessed," continued Abbas Bey, edging his own generous bulk tactfully between the irate Bedouin and the somewhat startled Greek, "is one that comes not into the lives of desert-bred men. Yet so common is it with money changers that this man forgot his courtesy and laughed."

"He——"

"The paper the Feringi brought in

here," hastened on Abbas, the peace-maker, "in his own land passes for money. Each sheet of it is worth so much in gold or in silver."

The wrath of Sidi Hafiz was all at once transferred from Domian to this bey who dared to mock his supposed ignorance. But Abbas at length, and by many gestures, made him and the rest understand he was speaking the truth; and they listened in awed amaze, as Abbas continued:

"Those crumpled pieces of paper are as coins in America, the home of that Feringi. Here, they are not. Wherefore, he asked Domian to exchange them for coins that will pass current in our land. Domian in turn will send them to the banking house at Iskanderia or at Cairo, where they will be passed on and in time be redeemed for the same amount of gold he gave the Feringi."

"The same amount?" chuckled Domian. "No! A modest profit. American money is always at par. I benefit by the rate of exchange—a medjidie to every five dollars—when I give him Turkish gold for American bank notes. The fathead did not know that. For the hundred dollars I gave him, my profit is twenty medjidie, over and above my rate of commission."

"And green paper, in his land, is worth of a sum of gold!" babbled Sidi Hafiz, half to himself. "Miracle of miracles! It is jinni work!"

"Not all kinds of paper," explained Abbas patronizingly. "But this kind is. The kind the Feringi gave Domian. See?"

He reached out and took from the Greek's lean hand the topmost of the sheaf of notes.

"This," he said, spreading it wide on his palm, "is what the Americans name a 'five-dollar bill.' In our money, it is worth——"

"Six medjidie and five piasters," glibly interrupted Domian, "plus one

medjidie, exchange premium. Seven medjidie, five piasters."

Hafiz viewed the outspread bill with superstitious wonder. To him the whole thing still smelled of magic. He studied the dark and light-green shading of the bill, the meaningless numbers and letters on it, the central figure.

But long before his study was anything like complete, Domian snatched away the bit of paper, put it with its fellows, and stuffed the whole collection into his strong box. He was not enamored of this look Sidi Hafiz had bestowed on the money.

Thus to ten Bedouin tribesmen was the paper-currency system revealed. Thus, ere a month should pass, would tidings of the miracle sweep through desert and wilderness; from the cave lands south of the Dead Sea to the sword line of yellow that marks the threshold of the Syrian Desert; a day's march to the north of Damascus.

And of all the Bedouin folk, one Maghrib tribesman—Sidi Hafiz by name, son of Imbarak—was destined to be most concerned with this American green magic.

Cyrus Q. Prawle, of Omaha, Nebraska, U. S. A., was not the Cræsus that his vast bulk and gold watch chain and derby hat had led the appraising Sidi Hafiz to believe. In fact, he was merely "Our Mr. Prawle" in the H. & J. Hooley Company's farming implements factory at Omaha. From Manitoba to Miami, from Pompton to Pasadena, from Denver to the Dardanelles, from St. Petersburg to San Pietro, he had sold farm tools.

He was the Hooley Company's best outside salesman. And his salary was as nearly satisfactory as the average salary can hope to be. But there was scant chance that the name of Prawle would crowd out that of Monte Cristo as a synonym for boundless

wealth. For once, Sidi Hafiz, of El Maghrib, had overestimated.

Mr. Prawle had, this year, taken his only son, Cephaz, across Europe with him on his biennial three-month tour of the Old World. It had been a pleasant experience for the lad. And blithely he had fared along beside his obese father; as the latter carried the gospel of patent reapers and nonrustable plows through the British Isles and eastward across the continent of Europe, and at last in Constantinople had sought to impress the Turkish government with the desirability of using Hooley tools to make the wilderness blossom like the fifth proposition of Euclid.

It was in Turkey that news had come to Cyrus Q. Prawle of an unbelievable occurrence. Namely, that all Europe had suddenly gone homicidally insane, and that war drums were everywhere hammering into scared silence the hoot of factory whistle and the pur of mill machinery.

A week or two earlier, Prawle, journeying profitably through France and Germany, had heard no premonitory growl of the dogs of war. The illogical mania had not yet swept like a death gale east and west from Berlin. All had been serene. Orders for Hooley goods had been gratifyingly brisk.

Prawle was an old traveler. He visualized the scenes he had just traversed. He knew that not only would a hundred order cancellations apprise his firm that the sword and the plowshare had reversed their wonted rôles, but that hordes of traveling Americans on the Continent would at that very moment be seeking to rush westward.

He knew that in thousands the temporary expatriates must be surging pell-mell out of the path of war; that every train and boat would be jammed to the danger point; and that the first moves in the Iron Game would already have put many of these modes of transportation out of commission.

Clearly, it was no fit time for trying to sell farm implements in Europe, and also no fit time for trying to recross the Continent at all. For another month or so, the traveler in eastern Europe would be wise to journey east instead of west.

Not displeased with the chance of an enforced vacation, Prawle ran over to Syria for a short tour of the Holy Land, taking Cephas along.

Like more than one other old globe-trotter, Cyrus Q. Prawle had a way of carrying with him to Europe a goodly roll of United States currency, to reinforce his letter of credit. More than once he had found, by experience in out-of-way Continent towns, that bankers are extremely willing to accept American greenbacks even when they are more than inclined to shy at letters of credit drawn on houses of which they are not the local representatives.

So, increasing the safety of his hoard by sharing it with Cephas, Mr. Prawle started eastward. And at once he was glad he had American money along. For the distant rumble of war had inclined Oriental bankers to look doubtfully on letters of credit.

It was to secure extra funds for a little three-day camping trip to the Jordan and the Dead Sea that Prawle had entered the shop of Domian, the money changer, that morning. He had paid little attention to the group of lean-faced and hook-nosed men, in dirty red burnouses and dirtier white headgear, who had eyed him so longingly. He had been in the Nearer East long enough and often enough to regard all brown men as of one type; and not long enough, nor often enough, to learn that a desert Bedouin is as different from a greasy Jerusalem merchant as a race horse from a mangy pack donkey.

Cephas had examined the group with greater interest. He had wondered disgustedly at their failing to live up to the appearance of moving-picture

Arabs, and he had coveted a chance to buy one of their short and crooked belt knives with the thimble-tipped cowhide sheaths.

Next morning, with a dragoman, three muleteers, a cook, a waiter, and three tents, four mules and three Syrian ponies, the Prawles set out along the winding Roman road that wriggles drunkenly downward from the higher ground of "the mountains round about Jerusalem" to the green valley of the Jordan.

And in the afternoon they pitched their camps a quarter mile to eastward of the ruined tower that marks the site of ancient Jericho. The lapping of the Jordan was in their ears. Close, to the south, stretched the sulky, gray waters of the Dead Sea, with stretches of white salt-deposit beach. Beyond, across the Jordan, rose the Mountains of Moab, ruddy brown and opalescent in the setting sun.

The world here was old; and it slept. It was a million miles and a million years away from warring Europe and wondering America.

The two Americans found a lazy delight, after a heavy dinner, in stretching their saddle-cramped bodies before the blaze of the camp fire; and listening in cozy security to the far-off coughing yaps of the jackals among the Moab foothills, and the more distant wolf howls; and to the occasional hysteric "laugh" of a prowling hyena in the sedges beyond the river mouth.

It was all strange and delightful; the vast star-strewn spaces, the strange sounds, the line of picketed camp animals, the tuneless droning of the muleteers' song; here, on the other side of the earth. And, with drowsy, well-fed content, father and son basked in their novel surroundings. Cephas, a veteran Boy Scout, reveled in this glimpse of real wilderness camping.

From time to time, scurrying white or blue-draped forms flitted past them,

just beyond the firelight radius. Once, such a shadowy figure halted in its passage and stood for an instant, transfixed, blinking at the flame-lit and recumbent Cyrus Q. Prawle; then melted into the outer darkness.

Presently, after his seventeenth yawn, Mr. Prawle scrambled crablike to his feet and waddled into his tent, followed by the drowsy ex-Boy Scout, Cephas. And presently the open canvas structure began to reëcho with the rhythmically peaceful detonation of a stout man's snores. The muleteers soon after replenished the fire and fell asleep beside it. The dragoman and cook, in the kitchen tent, were already raucously roaming the dim aisles of dreamland.

The camp slept; the fire sputtered lower; the voices of the nearer jackals and wolves and hyenas blended right harmoniously with the diapason of human snores. And so the night passed.

Cephas Prawle awoke from a vision of heading a squad of Boy Scouts against Constantinople. Earliest dawn was graying the canvas roof of the tent. Cyrus Q. Prawle was no longer snoring. From this latter phenomenon, Cephas' experience led him to deduce that Cyrus Q. Prawle was awake. And drowsily the boy turned over on his pillow to say good morning to his father.

But the tent's other cot was empty.

At first, it naturally occurred to Cephass that his father had risen and gone forth in search of food or a bath. Then the boy's eyes lighted on the corner of a wallet sticking out from under the pillow of Prawle's cot. Also, on a pair of stout and dusty boots on the floor at the side of the cot.

Now, as Cephass well knew, it was ever Cyrus Q. Prawle's last nightly act to put under his pillow the wallet containing his paper money and his letter of credit. And it was also invariably his first act, on waking, to put the wallet back in his inner vest pocket. A hotel

bedroom robbery, years earlier, had taught the traveler the precaution; and it had since become second nature to him.

That he would leave the money unguarded, here in a land where natives glory in preying on foreigners, while he strolled out of the tent, a heavily sleeping boy the only remaining occupant of the canvas bedroom, was absurd.

It was equally unlikely that an unwieldy man whose footsoles were morbidly tender would sally forth shoeless among the rubble and sharp pebbles outside the tent. Yet the wallet and the shoes were there. And Mr. Prawle was not. All of which was quite enough to awaken Cephass' Boy Scout instinct to a pitch of mild interest in the mystery.

The lad got up and pulled on his own boots—except for footgear, he and his father had conformed to supposititious camp customs and to irresistible sleepiness by going to bed full dressed—and then looked at his watch. The hour was four-fifteen. From the silence around Cephass, he and possibly his father seemed to be the only persons in camp who were awake.

Slipping the deserted wallet from its half-revealed pillow hiding place into the open portmanteau, and snapping the lock of the bag, Cephass Prawle issued from the tent on his father's quest.

Outside, the fire lay dead. Around it slept the muleteers. The horses and mules, heads adroop, stood or reclined at their double-staked picket rope. But Cyrus Q. Prawle was nowhere in sight. Then it was that the instinct which had made Cephass a joy to his Scout Master and a scourge to his family came to the fore.

The dew lay heavy. As heavy as light rain. And in it even a gross outsider could have read a trail. This is the trail read by that peerless ex-Scout, Cephass Prawle:

Two pairs of naked feet had approached the sleeping tent, long after

dewfall, and had entered. Their wet tracks, now that Cephas cast back, could be seen going to the very edge of Cyrus Prawle's cot. Then, deeper in the soft earth as though pressed down by a joint burden of considerable weight, they pointed outward again; past the tent door, close by the slumbering muleteers, and along the grassy, rolling ground toward the Jordan.

Cephas, his trail instincts aflame, forgot all but the zest of the pursuit. Past the camp he sped, and out toward the Jordan. Arrived at the river, he found a wide smear in the mud at the brink. A native raft of four logs thonged together on the far side of the stream explained this phenomenon.

Stripping and bundling his clothes in approved Thompson-Seton fashion on his head, he plunged into the yellow water. On the far side he readily picked up the trail again. But now there were three pairs of feet; two bare, one stockinged, in the dew and mud. The stockinged footsteps were irregular, and they made their deepest impression at the heel—as though their owner had been unwillingly hauled along by vehement external pressure.

Sidi Hafiz was a hero. He was, for the hour, the idol of his own tribesfolk, the men of El Maghrib, who were recklessly encamped behind the first row of Moab foothills, scarce three miles east of the Jordan. It was seldom that Sheik Yusef, of El Maghrib, ventured so near to civilization. But he had been anxious to learn, as early as might be, the result of Sidi Hafiz's Jerusalem mission.

And, before dawn, Sidi Hafiz had returned from his journey, in company with his brother, Najeeb, who had tarried near Jerusalem to escort him back. And between them they dragged a very fat, very angry, very scared Feringi, who was shoeless and blasphemous.

To his assembled tribesfolk, Sidi Hafiz

told the tale of the capture, and of what preceded it. He told—and swore to the truth of his tale by the triple oath that none may violate or doubt—of the green magic whereby paper was exchanged for gold; he told of the Feringi's visit to the shop of Domian, the Greek money changer; and he told of Abbas Bey's explanation of paper currency.

He went on to tell how he and Najeeb, on their way to the Jordan, had passed a tourist camp, where lay at ease that same moneybag Feringi, and how, at midnight, they had crawled into his unwatched tent, deftly bound and gagged him as he slept, and borne him away to be held for ransom.

"And the ransom will be as the ransom of a sultan's brother," ended Sidi Hafiz proudly. "For he is one of the richest of Feringi. His kinsfolk will pay and pay again, to receive him alive."

A tribesman who had once, in a period of moral weakness, for nearly a year served as servant to the American consul's kavasee at Jerusalem, was summoned, and was required to put into fractured English the demand of Sheik Yusef that the prisoner at once write to his dear ones to the effect that a ransom of seven thousand medjidie alone would save the captured millionaire from a decidedly uncomfortable death.

Cyrus Q. Prawle, in reply, spoke loudly of ambassadors and of punitive warships. To which Sheik Yusef replied that few warships had thus far penetrated the Mountains of Moab. Then they stripped and searched him. Their reward was the discovery of a dollar watch on a massive rolled-gold chain, sixty medjidie in gold and silver, and a case full of frayed cigars. Of the precious green paper they sought not one scrap was to be seen on him.

The failure to find the captive actually upholstered in the crackling verdant oblongs that any banker would gladly exchange for minted gold

greatly dashed the spirits of Sidi Hafiz. But he comforted himself by reflecting that the seven thousand medjidie would assuredly be forthcoming on receipt of Prawle's first appeal for help. If not then, most certainly on the occasion when one of his ears should accompany a second appeal. Sidi Hafiz was a simple, trustful soul.

Before sunrise, the group gathered about the expostulating prisoner was amazed by the advent of a second Feringi. Namely, the captive's son. So intent they had been on listening to Sidi Hafiz's tale of green magic, and on searching the luckless Prawle, that no one had heard or seen Cephas until he emerged from around a shoulder of rock into the very precincts of the camp.

The boy approached the group, as twenty men wheeled to face him. On instinct—from reading Indian yarns and watching movies—Cephas raised his right hand, palm outward, in the universal peace sign.

As he did so, a dozen hands fell disappointedly away from as many pistol butts. He did not know why. Nor did he know that, by appearing thus in the camp, and by making the sign of friendship, he thus automatically made himself the guest of the tribe.

In every Eastern desert the guest law obtains—has obtained sacredly inviolate since the days of Abraham. By its hallowed, unwritten provisions, a stranger voluntarily entering a Bedouin camp and claiming the guest right, at once becomes the charge of the whole tribe. He must be fed, sheltered, guarded; permitted to go and come at will; and he remains under the sheik's guardianship for a varying length of time, after his departure.

Unaware of all this, Cephas halted, irresolute. And, as he halted, the group parted; and he saw his hastily dressing and lurid-languaged father. At sight of Prawle, Cephas forgot everything else and ran forward, volleying a dozen

eager questions as he ran. Prawle answered as briefly, and still more brusquely.

"Captive?" sputtered Cephas. "Seven thousand medjidie? Why—why, it's highway robbery!"

"I didn't suppose they intended it as an exhibition ping-pong game," snorted his testy sire. "And now you've made it twice as bad by butting in! They'll probably raise it to fourteen thousand. If you'd stayed where you were and notified our consul at——"

"Forgeeve!" cooed an oleaginous voice at Cephas' elbow. "But Sheik Yusef, of El Maghrib, say will you rest in tent, O guest? Coffee is prepare. A kid shall stew, and——"

"Sure!" Cyrus Q. Prawle broke in, nodding approval to the interpreter. "A cup of coffee would do first rate just now."

He took a step toward the nearest of the low, black, goat-hair tents. At once, ten none too gentle hands thrust him back.

"Son is guest!" explained the interpreter. "Him I speak to. You a prisoner. Get back where belong, O man of much fat."

To a second fusillade of indignant queries from father and son, the torturer of English sought to explain—and succeeded fairly well in making clear—the difference in their relative positions, the reason for such a difference, and the rudiments of the eternal guest law.

"Son," said Cyrus, as the truth began to dawn on him. "I guess I'm up against it. And to think I steered east instead of west, to dodge trouble! It seems you're free. Though I still don't see why. You'll have to get back to camp, and then to Jerusalem in a rush, and let our consul know. He can cable to Constantinople to our ambassador. This idea of a ransom is crazy. And I'd better cable the firm, too. They might be able to do something at Wash-

ington. Got a pencil and any paper about you? An envelope—back will do.”

Cephas produced the pencil. Then he plunged his hand into the voluminous inner pocket of his khaki jacket in search of a notebook he usually carried there. Out came a goodly handful of odds and ends.

From the collection of old envelopes and other contents of the pockets, something fluttered to earth. Sidi Hafiz, who stood near, sprang forward as might a cat at a mouse. Then, recollecting himself, he halted, almost in mid-air, and crouched, staring avidly at the fallen object. He spoke aloud in guttural Arabic, and every eye followed the direction of his own. The thing on the ground was the target of the whole camp's gaze.

Cephas stooped, picked up what he had dropped, and restored it to his pocket. As he did so, Sidi Hafiz touched him lightly, respectfully, on the arm.

“*Howadji!*” said he.

Then he beckoned the interpreter and drew Cephas to one side. For a full five minutes, the two conferred with Sheik Yusef, while Cyrus Q. Prawle, pinioned between two husky Bedouins, and out of earshot, stood and wondered.

At the end of the conference, Cephas left the camp, attended by several Bedouins, and without so much as a single backward glance at his father.

An hour afterward, a lookout from the summit of the rock shoulder above the camp yelled something.

Instantly, the men who were holding Prawle propelled that very cross and very footsore salesman ahead of them out of the camp. Around the hill shoulder they went, preceded by no less a personage than Sheik Yusef himself, and followed by an eager throng. A hundred yards away, and coming toward them, rode Cephas and the dragoon and a muleteer, with a led

pony, while alongside at the side of the path strode Sidi Hafiz and his fellows. On the face of Sidi Hafiz was the blankly joyous look of one who gazes into paradise. Clasped between both his hands he bore something that he had carefully wrapped in a corner of his soiled burnoose.

The rest of the advancing party halted. Sidi Hafiz came forward on foot. As he did so, the Bedouins who guarded Prawle thrust that bewildered victim forward, and the interpreter croaked at him:

“Go! Skedaddle thou! Free! It is paid.”

Prawle had stumbled on to where his party waited, had scrambled aboard his groaningly overweighted pony, and had started back with Cephas and the dragoon toward his own camp, before his dumb astonishment loosened grip on his tongue.

“What's—what's it all mean?” he clamored then. “How'd you get 'em to turn me loose, son? What's the idea?”

Cephas turned on him a face well-nigh as dumfounded as his own.

“I'm blessed if I know, sir,” he faltered. “It's—it's a joke, of course. But I don't get the point.”

“What do you mean? Speak up, can't you? What happened?”

“You saw what dropped from my pocket. That fellow in the dirty red robe told me through the interpreter that the sheik would let you go if I could give him eleven hundred and twenty of those. You'd be released, without waiting to get the ransom in gold. I didn't know what to make of it, but I told him I had them back in my portmanteau. So we had a powwow, and he and the sheik swore a solemn oath that I didn't understand—the interpreter said it was something about swords and whiskers—and all that; and he came back to camp with me.”

“But——”

“When I counted out eleven hundred

and twenty of them, and gave them to him, he nearly fell dead with joy. Gee, they surely can't be redeemable over here, can they? They aren't in Europe, I know. You can't get them this side of the Atlantic, at all. It's lucky I didn't know that, or I'd never had carted them all the way from America with me."

"Lucky? I should say it——"

"Eleven hundred and twenty of them gone!" sighed the boy. "And now I'll have to wait, I don't know how long, to save up enough for my cornet."

"Nice, filial fellow *you* are!" snarled the still nerve-racked Prawle. "Mourning for the loss of those silly things, when they saved your old father's life! But," he mumbled, in dire perplexity, "I—I don't believe it, even yet. It doesn't make sense!"

To Sheik Yusef, Sidi Hafiz was just then chuckling:

"And every one of these green papers

with figures and Feringi words on it is called a 'five dollar.' Each is worth, with the exchange price added, seven medjidie and five piasters. The Feringi fool knows naught of exchange rates, as Domian, the infidel, said. So on each of these bits of papers we gain one medjidie! Eleven hundred and twenty medjidie above the demanded ransom price! It was for that reason I bade him pay in green paper, and not in gold. Have I done well, oh, my master?"

While his days shall endure, Sidi Hafiz, son of Imbarak, will not forget the tragic hour when green magic changed to black magic; the tragic hour when, in the Jerusalem shop of Domian, the Greek money changer, he sought to acquire eight thousand one hundred and twenty medjidie in gold—in return for eleven hundred and twenty cigarette coupons!



THE FASCINATION OF WAR

WHEN the French and British were doing the hesitation with the Germans in the proximity of Paris, the theatrical firm of Klaw & Erlanger put on a new play for its premier performance in Washington. Naturally, at that time, every newspaper in the United States was crammed full of cablegrams, aërograms, and diagrams concerning the war.

"These newspapers," lamented Mr. Klaw, in the lobby of the theater, "haven't any sense at all about the war news they print. They're not fair to the advertisers, and they're not fair to the reading public. They have educated people to read nothing except stuff about the battles. That being the case, what's the use of advertising a show? People won't see the ad, and it's just money thrown away.

"If you don't believe me, I'll prove it to you. A few days ago we put on an important and a costly production in New York. At eleven o'clock the next morning I was sitting in my office reading the papers when Abe Erlanger came in.

"Hello, Marc!" he yelled out, all excited about what the critics had had to say about the new show. "What did they do to us this morning?"

"I'll be dog-goned if I know!" I said, with a start. "I've been reading the war news."

"Well, let's see whether the show failed or went over," suggested Erlanger sheepishly, reaching for a paper. "I've been reading that war stuff all the morning, too."

The Steeds of Summit Pass

By Vingie E. Roe

Author of "When the Red Hills Threaten," "King of the Unsurveyed," Etc.

The taming of a wild horse—leader of the biggest band of denizens in the primeval fastnesses of Summit Pass, a prince in his own right, heir to the peaks and valleys by divine heritage. A short story of great strength.

THE country lay high and open to the sun, wild as when God dropped it from His busy hand at creation. Its beauty was so great that it reached divine simplicity, imposing peaks, sharp slants, and lifting crests, sweeping slopes and noble, spreading valleys, all green as an emerald, and as clean cut in the summer light. It was an enchanted country, shut in behind the Carmolla Ridges to the east, the Hoopskirts to the west. It may have had an inlet to the north. None knew for certain. It opened toward the south only through the high, narrow, difficult, and dangerous neck of Summit Pass. It lay so far away from the beaten track of civilization, that few had ever become aware of its existence—a cowboy or two from the distant ranges, perhaps the scant remaining members of a tribe of Indians on the Little Shoot below.

But it was no tenantless land, for all that. On the contrary, it was very populous, busy with intense life.

A small band of wild goats lived among its mountaintops. Two black bears crept about the stream that threaded it, and a pair of grizzlies, lone couple of their kind in a radius of a thousand miles, sunned themselves on

its cliffs. Deer watched from its coverts and fled from a wolf or two. In a cleverly built pond above the meadows, beaver had their huts, and many little fur animals were busy at its edges.

But, best of them all, sharpest of eyes and scent and wit, most intelligent and cunning, was Whitefoot, leader of the biggest band of denizens the country had.

Whitefoot was a prince in his own right, heir to the peaks and valleys by divine heritage, and he looked the part in every small particular.

In body he was a thing of unmatched beauty, in spirit a warrior of parts.

He stood a good seventeen hands, as plainsmen measure horseflesh with a generous spring of thumb. He was black as a moonless night, with its soft lackluster—all save the right forefoot, which was milk white, and the snowy star between his beautiful eyes. His tail was a flying banner, his mane and foretop a dusky storm cloud, forever rolling and turbulent. He was lean and rounded, indescribably graceful, and when he trotted out before his mares, he gave on his pliant pasterns like a thing on finished springs.

He was arrogant and proud. His head was always tossing, his nostrils

spreading and contracting, his dark eyes forever rolling in quest of adventure, love, or battle, though of the latter he had scant experience since he had driven the big, gray stallion from the outside plains, and taken his herd of mares. That had been a battle royal, with none to see save the high-wheeling vultures and the sleek mares watching with gentle eyes. The gray had limped away at its end, with his handsome throat torn and bleeding, and had never returned, though Whitefoot often stood at the high outer end of Summit Pass and scanned the valleys and plains below suspiciously, trumpeting shrilly with unanswered defiance.

Then he trotted back to his cloud-high country contentedly.

He had no memory of another life, another country. He may have been born in his fastness, very likely had been.

And he owned it, peak and valley, stream and shady grove, and was a king. All things have an end, however. It is the senseless, foolish way of this old world. And for every change something is responsible, some little thing usually so small as to be passed over in the reckoning of why and wherefore, making the mysteries of earth.

In Whitefoot's case it was a miserable, misshapen calf that could not follow the drive at the fall round-up, and which was very dear to the heart of its lean, wild-eyed mother, who just could not leave it at the vehement urging of a blasphemous rider. That the rider was Buck Starbuck himself, owner of the first great ranch below the high country, was the hand of fate. Never before had the Starbuck cattle strayed so far to the north.

Ordinarily the round-up would have cut across fifteen miles below as the extreme limit of grace, but this year bad luck had held carnival at the ranch, and every cow was wanted in the fall gathering.

Therefore, when the hump-backed calf, bleating piteously, dropped out of the drive, Buck put an extra crimp in his efforts to keep the mother.

Time after time she worked to the edge of the drift, and broke for the back country. Time after time she was driven back and sent far inside the line. As the grassy miles slid back, she became more and more frantic, thinking of the helpless baby left to die behind. Finally, just as Buck was mopping the sweat from his forehead, considering the matter ended, she came for him like a whirlwind.

Motherhood had triumphed over fear, and it was time for man to look to himself. Death and destruction rode that lean, lowered head, and the wise pony under the rancher leaped aside like a streak to let this thing go by. When a mother cow "goes on the peck" in defense of her calf, she commands more respect among cattlemen than a rampant bull.

But Buck's fighting blood was up, and with an oath he turned and swept after her. That was a wild race, and the cow led him seven miles in a wide circle. Its apex rounded directly under the rearing cliff of rock that buttressed the end of the Hoopskirt Range from the plain where Summit Pass led down its difficult way.

And for no known reason, Buck, as he swung by, looked up.

In three jumps he had stopped his running pony, and sat facing upward with his mouth open and his eyes bulging.

Silhouetted sharply against the autumn sky, Whitefoot stood like a statue at the outward high turn of the pass. His head was high up, muzzle tilted in a bit, and he was watching this strange creature—horse, and yet not horse—that chased the cow below. Wonderment and keen curiosity and readiness for flight spoke in every stiff, taut line of his splendid body. The wind

from the south blew his great mane backward, exposing his throat, flared his long tail like a giantess' fan.

His like had never trod that country before. Buck, who was a monomaniac on horseflesh, had never seen a horse before—so he whispered to himself with hushed breath. For five minutes he sat like a rock and watched the glorious animal. Then Whitefoot, losing interest, tossed his head, whistled twice a sharp, defiant warning, turned stiffly, and disappeared into the wall of rock behind.

When Buck came to himself, the cow was gone. That night she nuzzled her calf fondly, safe in a tuck of the hills.

Winter came down upon the ranges, and the owner of the Starbuck Ranch carried into it a memory that lived in its leaping fires, its twilights, and its bleak days. He could not rid himself of the vision of Whitefoot standing like a statue on the brow of the cliff.

That was a hard winter—a hard winter. It gripped the ranges and squeezed them without mercy. It buried the dried grass in the coulees under tons of snow, so that starvation mocked the cattle. It blew and froze and blew again, so that they drifted for miles, miserable and gaunt, and finally died against the first blind obstacle.

Great loss loomed before the Starbuck Ranch, to add to the other bad luck of the year, and Buck smoked many uneasy pipes before the big box stove. In the bunk house the punchers played pinochle and seven-up and draw poker, though the latter went out of favor for the simple reason that every winnable article had belonged so often to each player that values had slumped considerably.

In the ranch house, Flora Starbuck twinkled her white fingers over the keys of the piano that Buck had bought when she came back from her second term of school in Harchin City, and sang "The Trail of the Lonesome Pine" in a false

soprano that every man-jack on the ranch thought was destined for fame and Europe. Flora was a queen in her own domain as surely as Whitefoot was a king in his. She was Buck's only child for one thing, and she was pretty for another, with a slim, blond prettiness that passed for superior clay in the cow country.

She ran to peekaboo waists and high pompadours, with bows at the back and a curl hanging on her shoulder—a combination of two periods of style, one now, and the other what she was raised with. She was twenty-three, and believed herself irresistible. In that she had good grounds for belief, for she could have had her pick of the Starbuck's boys, lean, healthy, adoring, hard-riding punchers, who would have cleaned her number-three shoes with their neckerchiefs.

However, she tossed her yellow head when Buck anxiously sang the praises of several favorites of his, and went her own way—a way that was strewn with primroses of little, half-tender friendships for this and that one, but which led through its devious flirtations to a slim, brown-eyed, soft-voiced, curly-haired scapegrace, who worked on the Circle Bell, forty miles below, and who was Buck Starbuck's pet aversion ever since a certain horse race two years back. This smiling, cigarette-rolling nuisance was Brit Claibourn, from Tennessee—he called it *Tennessee*—and Flora's pick of the country, though she made his life a burden with her treatment of him.

And it may be remarked, in passing, that he was a past master in the art of horse wrangling, a sorcerer, a wizard, some even said a "whisperer," that mysterious designation of the less favored for one who knows horses and loves them so well that he communes with their wild spirits above the common herd.

When Buck Starbuck thought of

Whitefoot, he thought of Brit Claibourn and stirred uneasily. His hatred and his covetousness did battle together.

Before the winter was half gone, he had decided to own the wild black stallion if it took his ranch, his daughter, and his pride to compass it.

He was haunted by that picture he had seen against the autumn sky—and he knew if he was to possess Whitefoot, there was but one man in the country competent to do the job among those all but impregnable fastnesses—namely the impudent youth from Tennessee.

Therefore, with the first passable weather of spring, he happened down to the Circle Bell. He was received with uproarious joy by his friend Brand of the ranch, and he spent several days swapping yarns of the winter's work.

Brand had a nice house and an accomplished wife, but Starbuck drew to the bunk house among the men. He was rough and talkative, and accounted a hard man to work for, but he commanded attention, and carried with him a sort of dignity. Therefore, he turned the waters of conversation according to his will, and he willed "horses" first, and after that "women," so that the two subjects became inimical before the long evening was done.

They brought forth many a tale of the border and the Colorado line, and smoke and speech filled the rude interior.

"Can't tell me," said Starbuck, apropos of some disputed point. "There ain't no man but what's got his price. Mine's horses. Some's women. More's money. We can all be bought."

"Right you are, Bucko," said Brand; "there's that time I wanted Corvallo of that mine——"

"Go on! You-all are only gettin' old an' mangy, Charlie, an' seein' the ugly side."

Brit Claibourn, from Tennessee,

leaned forward and flipped his dead "smoke" at the stove.

"When you're young enough to feel th' red blood flowin' in you, there's a line above trade, an' don't you forget it."

His brown eyes were gentle and full of faith, for he was thinking of Flora Starbuck and his own loyalty, that could not be bought or sold.

Flora's father looked at him through narrowed eyes.

For the first time in two years he spoke to the boy.

"Your price's women, kid, and I can prove it."

"Yeh?" drawled Claibourn.

"You and me ain't lost no love since the time you rode Moonlight at the Corners, have we? You've hated me like poison, yet you've fell for my girl like any unbranded calf."

With the last word, the cowboy sprang to his feet like a shot, his face red as his handkerchief. His love for Flora had been a successful secret among his associates, and this tossing of it out before them in jest was sacrilege. He was fighting mad on the instant, but Starbuck raised his hand.

"You know you've got no chance with her against my say-so. I'll show your price. If you'll be friends with me and do a certain honest trick for me, say, in a couple of months, you can order the weddin' cake at Hooker's."

The boy, red as fire with rage, went suddenly white, a sickly gray-white, as he looked into the hard eyes of Flora's father. He knew well that every word the man spoke was truth. That against him he would have no show with Flora; that if he did his will, his love and his future were both assured. And he thought he also sensed on the instant the drift of Starbuck's method.

He drew a shaking hand across his lips.

"Yeh think yeh can make me mad enough to tell yeh to go to hell an' lose

Flora so, don't yeh?" he said sharply, "to prove that my price's temper an' pride?"

He leaned forward, his brown eyes holding the light of murder.

"But yeh don't come no such scurvy game on us, Buck Starbuck. If Flora ratifies your word it's done now. I'm loyal to her. What's it yeh want me to do?"

Starbuck smiled because Brit had so misread his honest statement.

"Wait," he said, "until you see Flora."

A week later, Brit stood with Flora at her own door.

"An' you'll marry me, honest, little snowdrop girl, if I pull off this capture stunt? Will yeh?"

The boy's lean face was beautiful with the love he did not try to conceal, and if Flora had had the depth of womanhood he thought she had, she wouldn't have dallied a moment to play with so precious a thing.

However, she smiled and tossed her yellow head coquettishly.

"Uh-huh," she said, "you bet I will. Just you bring dad this one horse, and we'll have the biggest wedding the range has ever seen."

"Yeh order that cake at Hooker's," said the boy, "an' th' purtiest dress in th' world, O pretty-posey girl!"

So the little hump-backed calf that had lagged in the fall set loping over the plains in the spring the man who never failed, the sorcerer, the "whisperer," bound for Whitefoot's kingdom up behind the Carmolla Ridges.

He had waited until the levels were green with the young grass, so that the snow would be gone from the high country. He had never been so far north before, and he scanned the new range with interest. Buck had given him minute directions, and when, after five days' riding, he sighted the Hoopskirts, he knew he was near his point.

He camped at the foot of the rocky wall that night, and spent the mystic twilight figuring out the pass that must lead up to the high turn, where Buck had seen the wondrous horse. With his head in his saddle, and ponies grazing near, he finally separated one high, bold jut from a score of others. Satisfield, he fell to dreaming, first of the wild king he was to meet on the morrow, and then of Flora, with her yellow hair and her unfathomable blue eyes. So he slept under the western stars, with doom for Whitefoot in his curly head and his slim, brown hands.

Dawn came early in the high country. In the ramparts of the Carmolla Ridges to the east there was a great gap, as if a giant had lost two teeth, and through this the rising sun sent always a broad band of light.

It was in this wash of gold that Whitefoot loved to graze at daybreak.

The night's dew sparkled like a million gems, the short, new grass was sweet and tender. And it was with the gratitude of the wild that shows itself in the divine attribute, contentment, that Whitefoot led his mares out to graze in the sunwash. He was a very different Whitefoot from that regal creature who had whistled defiance at Buck Starbuck eight months before.

The hard winter which had taken toll of the ranges had all but wiped out the life of the high country. The wolves had gone long since down into the plains, many of the deer had died, and five of Whitefoot's mares lay scattered among the rocks, drying skeletons upon the grass which the stubborn snow had guarded so long and well. The rest were almost as thin and dry. Whitefoot himself was a caricature. His once shining coat was shaggy, and beginning to shed in ragged patches. It hung upon his bones loosely. His mane and tail were great clouds of unkempt tangle, grown preposterously with the poverty

of his body. His beautiful eyes were hollow.

But for all that he was still the king.

He still carried himself with his mighty pride, still stepped with his pliant spring. His lean head was high on his thinned neck, his ears as sharp and high-pointed as ever. The light of power and fearlessness was still in those sunken eyes. He had come through the most terrible winter of his life, and brought the stronger of his mares through by the sheer force of his dauntless spirit, the strength of his will and his courage.

Peace had come upon the high country with the passing of the deadly snow, the advent of the new grass.

The wolves no longer harried them, and one of the grizzlies had not shown up—frozen, no doubt, in its winter hole.

So, on that particular morning, Whitefoot led his band to graze in perfect ease. They scattered along the open side of the meadow above the gap, and eagerly ate. They could never get enough these days. Their lean bodies cried unceasingly for food in every starved tissue.

But though the need of the heartening grass was so paramount, and the joy of its munching so great, the king never forgot for a moment that he was the king. He grazed on the outside next the gap in the rampart, where the green meadow went flush to the edge, and the rock wall dropped sheer a thousand feet. Often he stepped to the edge, and, with head high up, looked out across the green plains spread out below. Never a foe did his keen eyes find in all that soft expanse, nothing save a stray cow or two, and, perhaps, a coyote trotting down into a coulee. The world was opening again, and it was very good. From time to time he raised his head and looked all around the meadow. Slowly the band worked to the north, edged around a shoulder of rock, and disappeared in a grove of oaks.

It was then that the enemy entered Whitefoot's Eden. For an hour by sun, Brit Claibourn had been searching out the hidden trail to the high pass, had found it at last, and started up its tortuous way, leading both his pony and pack horse. It was a wild trail, indeed, well calculated to guard a principality. It passed between rotten needles of rock a hundred feet high, and ready to fall at a jar, crept under threatening bowlders and around jutting points, where the thin air fanned his elbow, and there was nothing beneath but a narrow shelf.

It was faint and unused, for none had ever passed it but Whitefoot and his mares, and they but few times in their lives. The prairie horses behind him shivered and snorted and crouched in fear, and he had hard work to make it. But make it he did, and so he stood at last on the high turn of the pass, where Whitefoot had stood to whistle at Buck Starbuck, and he gazed with awe at the world so far below. Then he urged his ponies and turned through the narrow gateway in the mighty buttress of the Carmolla Ridges.

For a hundred and twenty feet this was a sharp cut in the solid rock barely wide enough to permit his pack to pass. At the far end it gave abruptly on the loveliest cloud-high country Brit had ever beheld.

This was, indeed, a lost land, a primeval fastness. For a while he breathed in its beauties with glowing eyes.

Then he took from the pack a coil of heavy rope and a hand ax, and calmly proceeded to cut and drive two oak posts and lace the gateway shut securely.

Sounds carried far in that altitude and the utter stillness, and, with the first staccato stroke, Whitefoot, quietly grazing at the meadow's top, threw up his head and listened. It was an alien note, and with his native keenness he knew it forewarned of disaster. And

the spirit of the king rose up in arms. He shrilled his pealing call to his mares, who gathered in like soldiers, trotted to place in the lead, and swung out on his long stride around the shoulder and down the meadow. They came like rolling thunder, twenty-seven of them, and they made a glorious sight in their freedom and their arrogance, albeit they were ragged and thin.

Their heavy tails spread on the wind, and they ran with the unhampered grace of wild things.

Any man who had ever heard of him would have known Whitefoot. There was no mistaking that regal head, the wide reach of his stride, that body weaving on its springs. The spirit of a hundred wild sires was rampant in his every point as he came charging down his meadow with his mares a close-packed phalanx behind. At the first turn out of the oaks, he had caught sight of the strange horses in his domain, and he came for them, screaming with defiance.

For the moment the cowboy was taken off his guard. He had not expected them to be so near. He who knew horses knew instantly that grave danger threatened his ponies if not himself, though few wild horses will stand to a man—and that is the psychology of soul in the grotesque little biped. It is to blame for all the tragedy of the animal world since the first ape walked and became a man.

Claibourn stood behind his pack horse and watched Whitefoot come, and cold shivers of pure joy coursed down his back.

"Jerusalem the Golden!" he breathed. "Buck was right. What a horse! Oh, glory, what a horse!"

Then he slipped his rifle from the pack, and, stepping out abruptly, fired it into the air.

At the startling ribaldry of that vicious noise, coupled with sight of this fearsome small creature, the charging

stallion lowered his head and stiffened his legs until he slid, plowing long furrows in the soft sod. The running mares almost piled upon him, only saving themselves by amazing quickness. With a snort and a scream, Whitefoot wheeled and thundered away up the meadow, never stopping until it lay far behind.

For two hours he stood on a rocky butte and watched with brilliant eyes for this enemy to come trailing him, while the mares grazed uneasily on the scant herbage of the rocky glades.

From that moment Whitefoot's doom was upon him.

Brit Claibourn drove his ponies into a narrow cañon and roped them in.

He made camp and cooked his breakfast. Then he set out upon his business. That noon Whitefoot, who had given his vigil over to a wise, old yellow mare, and was grazing fast, lifted his black muzzle and sniffed the air.

He had caught a faint, alien scent. Ten minutes later his keen eyes corroborated it. A small creature that scrambled upright was worming among the trees. Like the very wind itself, the band was off farther up among the rocky land. Once again that day the same thing happened, and by nightfall they were far up in the fastnesses. It was a dry night, that, for the only stream in the high country trickled through the meadow.

Whitefoot was uneasy and paced all night on sentry.

Then began what Brit called his "tiring system." Hour by hour and day by day he stalked the band of horses, showing himself to them, startling them into headlong flight to creep upon them again and repeat the performance.

It was a system well calculated to destroy, by its ceaseless reiteration, the first wild fear of the animals. Countless times before it had served.

A wild thing will gradually become used to anything which happens over

and over again without harm to itself, and Claibourn counted on wearing out Whitefoot's suspicion.

But he had never met a horse with Whitefoot's brains. Something warned the black stallion that this creeping creature with the fire and the awful voice meant disaster, and he never became used to it, never relaxed his vigilance.

For five golden spring days the cowboy stalked him before he admitted to himself that he had made no headway. The band fled as swiftly and as far each time he appeared as at first. He had had several close views of them, and his admiration for the black leader had grown amazingly. No wonder Buck Starbuck was crazy about this horse. There was something holding and compelling about him far above the usual run of horses. Was it his beauty, great still in all his raggedness, his vagabond poverty? Or was it the spirit that shone in his intelligent eyes, that flaunted in his tossing head?

Brit came gradually to cease his dreams of Flora, and to dream of Whitefoot, as he lay in his camp at night—of the way he stood at guard, tense, alert, confident, of that almost human look in his beautiful eyes, of the great speed of him stretching away down the long meadow, of his martial mien, and his tossing cloud of mane. He fell to wondering how it would feel to back him, to drift down the plains above those pliant springs. From that he thought of Buck Starbuck, the man who would take that ride—Buck Starbuck, the monomaniac on horses, the hard master, who would conquer or break, who would exult and display and get the best of his possessions. After that it did not matter.

Thinking of the spirited turn of Whitefoot's head, the cowboy stirred uneasily. He wished it had not been Buck Starbuck for whom he was going to get the black leader. He knew

Whitefoot would never be conquered, that he would "break" first.

On the sixth day Claibourn changed his method. There was no making friends with this bunch, therefore he shut down. He moved his camp to the head of the meadow, where the little stream came out of the Hoopskirts, and flowed along to spill over the edge between the giant's teeth. With the wild band scared out of the meadow, he doubted much if they would find water, and therein he was right. He merely camped, and at dusk of the second day, Whitefoot came in sight far up among the oak trees. He stood long with black head lifted, sniffing the cool waters. But the little creature with the thunder voice stood between them and him, and he turned back, nursing his thirst.

At dawn they came again, stamping through the grove, and several of the mares, thirst-driven and reckless, broke and fled past his camp with its column of smoke, to the stream. But Whitefoot, seeing his enemy on watch, only stamped and tossed his head, and pealed a shrill whistle. Then he whirled and shot away. But Brit knew now that he was his. Another twelve hours, and fear must dip to suffering. But he did not know Whitefoot yet. Not so easily would the spirit that had beaten the terrible winter yield to man.

At the end of the twelve hours, every mare and yearling in the band had broken away and dared the enemy for water. The stallion alone stood aloof, watching, and Brit looked at him through a little pair of glasses.

"Poor old beggar!" he said, with a wry face, as he saw the hungry light in Whitefoot's eyes. It was an indomitable heart fighting bodily anguish.

His tongue was a little swollen, showing between his black lips.

At that sight, Brit threw down the glass and saddled his pony.

He was ready for the struggle.

He hobbled the pack horse—and it

may be said in passing that these two ponies were the best in his "string"—and left it at the camp near the stream.

Then he set out after Whitefoot. The stallion, standing quietly in the grove of oaks, heard him coming, and fled. The band, heartened with water, were strong and eager, and they clung closely to him. It was a killing chase, and Brit and his fresh horse were left far behind. He merely loped along, and followed far up a green, narrow cañon. This was a "blind," and soon the herd came tearing down upon him like a cyclone, Whitefoot running free and splendid in the lead, his mane like a cloud, and his ears laid close.

The cowboy wisely hugged the wall and let them go by on the other side. Then he followed. For three hours this went on, up one level, narrow, green neck after another, around and about and back again, for Whitefoot could not leave the vicinity of the blessed water. Brit knew that the gallant horse was suffering greatly from thirst alone. He had brought that issue up with infinite craft, for he knew that never without some such ally would he capture this horse. And he was setting out to wear him down to so thin an edge that he could take him at last, and deliver him to bondage. Hour by hour Brit loped along, keeping the stallion constantly on the move. At noon he changed horses, snatched a bite while he watched the stream, and set out again.

He found Whitefoot standing high on the little butte, watching also.

His tongue was swollen more, but otherwise he showed no sign of his trouble. His head was up, his ears alert, his eyes bright. At sight of his enemy he was off up among the rocks like the wind. Hour by hour they kept up the play through the long afternoon. With each new sight of his prey Brit felt a growing uneasiness.

"What's eatin' you-all, Brit?" he said disgustedly. "Cain't yeh ketch a bronc

no more without gettin' chicken-hearted?" And he set his thoughts resolutely on Flora, and how she would look in her wedding dress.

The black leader was growing desperate that afternoon. Twice, thrice, he eluded his enemy and broke for water, but the cowboy was upon him, shouting and riding him down. Three times, with the gracious water in sight, Whitefoot quailed and fled. He was panting now. Brit could see his great lungs heave with his heavy breaths, and once again that sick feeling began to assail him.

"Give in, then, darn yeh!" he cried aloud. "And I'll give yeh water and feed and—and care, too!"

Whitefoot was a king, indeed, built of steel and temper and a gallant heart, but the winter had been hard—so hard. He was thin and poor and weak, and now he had been without water or food for more hours than Brit liked to think.

"Why don't he give in, then?" the cowboy asked aggrievedly of the late blue sky. But Whitefoot would not give in. He circled and doubled and feinted, and always, from the remotest valleys of his high country, he returned to the neighborhood of the stream. It drew him like a magnet, and Brit, taking a drink himself as he changed mounts again, felt the sickness at his heart.

The band had thinned out, scattered back in the coves and scallops, scared, mystified, and Whitefoot galloped alone save for the old yellow mare, faithful as love, and three youngsters, all black with white stars in their foreheads.

"His fambly!" said Brit, and, to save his life, he could not help the thought of Flora in her wedding dress.

As dusk drew on, the stallion drew nearer and nearer in his sweeps and circles.

His ears lay close to his head, and the whites of his beautiful eyes were bloodshot. With a sense of warning, Brit swung to camp and got his gun,

that roaring braggart whose voice was fear incarnate.

And it was well he did. Just as the sun dipped down above the Hoopskirts, Whitefoot, swinging close, gave one deep scream, and charged down upon him and his horse. Cold chills ran down Brit's back. This was no horse. It was rage and love of life and royalty rolled into one, and it came upon him like the thunder of doom! Its eyes were flame in its black face, and its teeth were bare above and below its thick tongue. It meant to destroy or be destroyed. And as it came hard upon him, Brit fired the gun almost into that wild face.

Once again the psychology of the little creature with the brain saved him. Whitefoot swerved and was gone back into the grove.

That night the cowboy built a row of little fires between the upper valley and the stream, and tended them till dawn.

As he stood vigil in the starlit dark, velvet soft and silent, he fancied he heard movements near—breathing that whistled in a dry throat, steps that stumbled from a great weariness. He swore softly and fingered his gun, and persistently thought of Flora. With the first gray of day through the gap, he strained his eyes toward the north.

There, facing the blessed water, stood the king, his faithful yellow consort, and the three black youngsters, forming a compact guard.

Brit saw that the end was near for the gallant leader. His tongue hung far out, black and dry. His beautiful eyes were like balls of fire in their hollow caverns. He watched his enemy with all his old alertness, but the long travail had told upon him heavily.

The cowboy hastily saddled his best pony, and, taking his rope this time, circled out. He believed his task all but over. But Whitefoot swung away on his long stride with a burst of his wondrous speed. He left Brit in two min-

utes, but the cowboy saw him waver once as he neared the grove, saw him throw his head and heave his shoulders. Round and round above the stream they went, and always Whitefoot was just out-of-reach. Again and again the rope was spread and all but thrown and again and again the stallion put on just the ounce of speed to escape.

"Damn him!" he gritted. "Why's he so much a prince? Why don't he let a lost game go?"

But the sun traveled on up the sky, and still the game played itself interminably in the upper meadow. Still Whitefoot fought for his liberty and his high country. He was wavering now in earnest, and his breath could be heard from the grove to the stream. Clai-bourn was a trifle white about the mouth, and twice he trailed his rope and eased his running pony, half minded to quit, but the thought of Flora in her wedding dress urged him on.

He must have Whitefoot, or he'd never have Flora. So he closed in and pressed the king with a fresh horse.

It was near noon when Whitefoot, his breath whistling terribly, his eyes far sunken, his gallant limbs carrying him in ragged circles, tossed up his head like a drowning swimmer, and gave up the game.

But not as Brit had foreseen.

They were near the eastern rampart toward the north, and Whitefoot was at the wall, Brit pressing him from the open meadow.

With a last stretch of every weary muscle, a final heroic effort of bursting lungs and heart, the gallant horse swept down along the rock wall toward the gap where the meadow went flush to the precipice's edge. Straight to the center of the gap he went, and, whirling, faced his enemy with that regal head still up.

He looked once at the yellow mare, who, by some strange telepathy, had deserted him at last, and, like a trained horse in a show, Whitefoot the king

began backing toward the gulf of space behind.

Brit had followed fast upon him, and now he drew his pony sharp in for the swing of the flying rope.

But it did not swing. Something in Whitefoot's majestic backward march arrested Brit's hand, set the sickness throbbing in his throat.

Whistling for breath horribly, weaving from side to side, his splendid, shabby body shaking with the labor of his breaking heart, the king prepared for death, as certainly and calmly as a Roman soldier defeated on the field of battle. And Brit Claibourn, from Tennessee, the "whisperer," the sorcerer of horses, knew it. Knew in his heart that the stallion would back over the cliff rather than yield, knew that no man would ever take that ride down the sweeping plains, ever tame that wild spirit.

The white line about his lips spread over his face, and he cried aloud:

"Come out, Whitefoot! Come, boy! Come!" And, wheeling in a panic of fear lest his mercy come too late, he galloped down the meadow. Once he turned and looked back. The king stood flush upon the brink, the wind of noon fanning his long, black tail. With tight-lipped haste the cowboy gathered his gear, packed his pony, swung into his saddle, and loped toward the pass.

He tore down the rope gate, watching Whitefoot as he worked. He fancied even here he could hear that awful whistling, but the king still stood like a soldier at his post. Brit drove his pack horse down the narrow pass, halted, and crept back on foot. Something in his heart made him long to see Whitefoot go to the blessed water. Long he watched from the shelter of the wall, and it seemed hours to him while the stallion stood as he had left him, head up, wide tail flaring on the soft wind, watching the pass.

When so long a time had elapsed that

the king knew his enemy was gone, he lowered that dauntless head, and, drooping in every limb, staggering and all but done, went lurching the few steps to the south where the little stream fell over the cliff. With shrill cries and whistlings, the old yellow mare, the three young blacks, and then the scattered band came to him on the run.

The king was king again, monarch of the high country!

And Brit Claibourn went down the difficult and dangerous pass.

A week later he faced Flora Starbuck and her father at the ranch.

"And so," lied the boy evenly, "he went over the cliff. He would not be taken. I've failed. And—and you, Flora?"

His eyes were very wistful.

But Flora tossed her yellow head in anger.

"I don't have to marry any failures, Mr. Claibourn," she said sharply. "I ain't used to them. They're out of my line."

"And mine!" rasped Buck Starbuck. "And so are liars and thieves! Your price's horseflesh, too, my bucko—I made a little mistake in my estimate! I guess it's likely you know where Whitefoot is, all right, an' that you'd rather have him than my girl! Well—we'll see if you ever ride him in this country—and we'll settle then!"

For a moment Brit was ready to choke the big man before him, seeing red.

Then he shrugged his shoulders and, turning, threw his rein over his pony's head.

"I guess you're right," he said whimsically; "my price's horseflesh, all right. An' brotherhood to 'em," he finished, under his breath.

But as he loped away to the south, over the green spring plains, he was thinking sickly of Flora in her wedding dress.

The Bishop and Mr. Poe

By Robert Welles Ritchie

Author of "Guns and a Girl," "The Goblin's Treasure House," Etc.

A story of summertime, but it has an eeriness that makes it good reading for the Christmas holidays. You'll want to get hold of Edgar Allan Poe's tale of "The Gold Bug" and read it again after you have finished this. The events in Ritchie's astonishing story of to-day have a close connection with what may have been seen and known by the sad, mad dreamer of ghostly romance near a hundred years ago.

SOMETHING said "Gr-r-r-rumph!" in a nasty, metallic chatter somewhere down below; our swinging seat careened forward with a sickening motion, then found its balance and hung motionless. We were suspended, Betty and I, between sky and sand, and with all the Atlantic Ocean crinkling like stiff silk under our eyes.

Betty grabbed my arm with both her hands and began to whimper, softly and with the air of being ashamed that her fine spirit should bend even by that much before untoward circumstance. I cuddled Betty close to me—cuddling is permissible, I take it, when the lady of the receptive part is not yet turned thirteen—and I filled her ear with hasty assurances.

"Ferris wheels often cut up like this, Bettykins," I said. "In fact, it is not unusual for any Ferris wheel occasionally to lie down on the job, and this is such a rattletrap old one you can hardly blame it for getting tired. But just because it has stopped turning when we are seventy-five feet from the ground is no reason for worry. We ought to—— Hey?"

A thin voice came up from the sands down where the slender snout of the donkey engine, the decrepit wheel's motor factor, was spouting pine-wood smoke into the blue:

"You-all all right up there-re-re?"

"Fine as silk," I called down, as cheerily as I could. "What's bust?"

The gesticulating, foreshortened figure in shirt sleeves swept his hands in the direction of the engine and bawled back something that sounded like: "Umpah—belt—um-um-um torn out—'bout an hour—um-umph!"

"He says, my dear," I translated for Betty, "that the lady engine has unfortunately broken one of her—ah—stays, and will we be good enough to sit up here and enjoy the view for about an hour? Under the circumstances there will be no extra charge, I'm sure."

The sturdy little heart rallied in a smile through the tears. She gave a frightened squeak as a gust of wind gently rocked the swinging basket that was our unstable perch, and then she settled her head against my receptive bachelor waistcoat, and sighed a trig sigh of resignation—resignation almost prepared to find comfort. Bets is

all blue; she's her father's own girl, and I, Dan Miles' best friend, know the stuff Dan's girl drew on for an inheritance of character.

The situation might have been far worse, I admit. Instead of thirteen-year-old Betty Miles there in the stalled car with me, there might have been a certain haughty young person who just three days before had told me I had "picked up a powerful lot of Yankee tricks in N'York." That would have been distinctly unpleasant. Imagine being with a proud beauty who had thrice said you nay, hung in a three-by-two basket between grinning sky and unsympathetic sand!

Better Betty!

We were, you see, out at the Isle of Palms, making a day of it—just Bettykins and I. We had chosen to come to the Isle of Palms because that is the nearest approximation to a Coney Island Charleston has—and it is a poor counterfeit. Just this superannuated Ferris wheel, which for the time was holding us prisoner, a merry-go-round, a tumble-down dancing pavilion, and a peanut roaster—all flung out scatterwise on the sand between dunes and surf line, and linked with Sullivan Island and Charleston beyond by a trolley line.

Like Sullivan Island and all the other low-lying detached bits along the South Carolina coast, the Isle of Palms is nought but a slender sand spit, paralleling the coast; indeed, it is an island only in so far as it lifts itself above the tide line on the east and the wilderness of the swamp on the west—a fresh-water swamp fed by the Cooper River, and as primitive a jungle of myrtle, palmetto, and water oaks as ever it was in the days of the Spanish pirates. The sea winds pile the sand into mountainous dunes, pushing them ever back and back into the swamp forest. The highest line of dunes hangs directly over the green surf of the morass, topping the broken plain of the trees' summits, then pitches

down in a sliding precipice of smooth yellow to bury the nearest trees.

As you stand on the brink of this moving tide of sand, you look down at the grim work of assassination: a few yards away are the bare, frantic fingers of giant oaks long since buried except for their topmost branches; a little lower palmetto and myrtle struggle desperately for life, buried half their length already and doomed; beyond them the sand meets the amber water of the swamp, and there all is bewildering green, shot with the jewels of jasmine and the pink glow of the crape myrtle. For miles back to the higher lands about Charleston, the labyrinths of the swamp stretch, for the most part bog, and with blind hog tracks leading here and there across the ridges of dryer ground. A fearsome place of mystery!

From our aerie, Betty and I could look over the top of the sand mountains. The green beyond appeared a level floor, or, as Betty said, like the Tree Land where Peter Pan lived. Familiar enough was the view to me who, as a boy, had dreamed of pirate gold out there in the fastness of the forest, and had plotted often from the tops of the sand dunes just how, of a dark night, I would stealthily follow a moving light into the wilderness, and from the convenient branch of a tulip tree watch black-whiskered and earringed men at work with their spades. Now, after so many years away in the unromantic jungle of New York, I needed but the sight of these massed treetops beyond the sand to whisk me back to a yesterday of dream realities. Danny Miles and I were out there sprawled atop that highest sand pinnacle, our bare legs comfortably baking in the sun, and in whispers we conned the tale of Jupe, the negro, dropping the Gold Bug through the skull's eye, and of—

"Tell me that story again, Uncle Bob." Betty, comfortably drowsy under the lulling of the winds and the

heavy strokes of the sun, pillowed her head in my lap with a little proprietary air, ready to be amused. "You know, the story dad tells of Mister Poe and the Gold Bug, and digging up the precious treasure out here. Dad tells it right fine."

A little startled at the way Betty had sounded what was passing in my mind, I nevertheless was willing to grant her wish. How better pass the time while we were prisoners of the wheel? So I began Poe's immortal tale of the Gold Bug: his masterpiece of mystery, whose scene is laid in that very green wilderness we could see over yonder. Though the tap-tapping of a hammer sounded below us, and the thin timbre of men's voices, yet Betty and I were in a world apart, with sea, sky, and swamp our only boundaries. The moment, the scene fit the tale.

I fondly embroidered as I spun the yarn of William Legrand and his beetle marked with the death's-head, placing the lonely hut of the mystic and his slave right over the brow of that little dune, directing Betty's eyes to the thin ribbon of water separating the Isle of Palms from Sullivan's Island, as the place where Legrand and his friend Poe embarked in the skiff on the quest of the skull in the tulip tree. It pleased me mightily, this marking of the scene on the green and yellow chart stretched beneath us; somehow the web of fiction was brushed away, and I was narrating serious fact.

"So you see, Betty, the whole trick hung on Legrand's locating 'the Bishop's hostel. Cap'n Kidd's secret directions, which Legrand solved so neatly, said: 'A good glass in the Bishop's hostel—forty-one degrees and thirteen minutes northeast and by north.' That meant, of course, that if you sat in 'the devil's seat in the Bishop's hostel' and turned your telescope according to directions—forty-one degrees and all that, which nobody

but a mariner understands—you'd see the grinning white skull on the seventh branch, east side, of the tulip tree."

"Now take this 'good glass'"—I handed Betty the battered pair of racing binoculars I had brought with me—"and turn them off there beyond where that dead cypress sticks up from the palmettoes, and unless I'm mightily mistaken, you'll see the Bishop's hostel."

The child, all in accord with my game of make-believe, put the binoculars to her eyes and turned them in the direction of my pointing finger. Slowly she swept a stretch of the wilderness with the lenses.

"I see the dead cypress," she murmured through pursed lips, "and—and something—— Say, Uncle Bob, what's a 'hostel' look like?"

The glasses were still at her eyes, but not moving now. They were fixed.

"A hostel? Um—well, Mr. Poe says in this case the 'hostel' was a cluster of rocks pointed like castle towers. I think he was mistaken, though; there are no rocks around here."

"*This* is pointed!" There was an eager lift of excitement in Betty's voice. "And—and—there's a funny man's head just under the point—a man's head with a funny hat on."

She gave the glasses to me after a space, and excitedly pointed the spot. As part of the game I pretended tremendous seriousness in locating the Bishop's hostel she had discovered. Across the circular fields of the glasses a bewildering procession of green flags marched until—by George!

It was a pointed something, that thing out there—something solid and man-fashioned, and lifting at a sharp angle from the masses of undergrowth. A ship's prow and stump of bowsprit, by all impossible!

And below the bowsprit stub was, indeed, a man's head—or a head, It was crowned with a something tall and conical——

I set the focus of the glasses a shade finer.

A miter!

The prow of an ancient wreck out there—a good mile from the beach—and its figurehead a mitred bishop!

Pshaw! I was letting the game of make-believe get away from me; it couldn't be. I lowered the glasses, carefully wiped the lenses, steadied my eyes by a long look seaward, and tried again. As sure as we were prisoners in a crippled Ferris wheel a mitred bishop looked out upon a green unknown over there from the splintered bowsprit of a ship. Poe wrote in his "Gold Bug" of "the Bishop's hostel"; here was the Bishop himself surveying the scene of the "Gold Bug's" mystery.

The coincidence was all of a sudden extravagantly staggering. Here these miles and miles of almost untracked primitive, which had once lured the fancy of the great tale writer to endow its wastes with fictitious mystery, suddenly revealed real mystery. Because Betty and I had been marooned in mid-air, and because I had told her the story of the Gold Bug, and because I had pointed out at random into the swamp and said, "There's the Bishop's hostel," why, there *was* the Bishop himself and at home. There was magic in the discovery. Betty and I—I know not which was more the child—joined hands and crossed hearts in a solemn covenant to keep forever secret our mystery of the mitred bishop.

A sharp toot on the donkey's whistle below us interrupted our awesome whisperings. The wheel began to creak and groan. We started our slow progress downward. I made a quick survey, with the glasses, of the spot where the mystery ship lay over back of the bulwark of the sand dunes, marked the position of the blasted cypress and its relation to the dunes, then—we came down to a prosy world. We took the trolley back to Sullivan Island beach

and the settlement of summer cottages near Fort Moultrie, where Dan Miles had his home, and where I was a guest. As I pushed open the gate and stood aside with elaborate politeness to permit Bettykins' passing, she put a finger to her lips with a silent "Hush!" and I nodded assurance. Our secret would be inviolable.

Now I am going to confess to you, discerning reader, what you already have guessed—for all the gray that's in my hair, I am a twelve-year-old in what the prayer book calls "the vain imaginings of our hearts." And when Betty and I returned that evening, I was her peer, bound by the chains of romance, and thrilling under the lure to adventure. After my partner in the Great Mystery had been tucked under her mosquito bar, and when her father and I sat out in the cool dark of the upper gallery, I innocently turned the talk around to the Isle of Palms and Poe's "Gold Bug." The conversation was reminiscent, for many the day Dan and I had plotted the path to Cap'n Kidd's buried gold, and more than once, when we were lads in the Citadel together, we had slipped over to the great swamp to explore its outer fringes in some old dugout.

"Dan," I said, when talk had dwindled to the silent fellowship of wreathing cigar smoke, "did you ever hear—after you'd grown up, I mean, and when I'd gone North—ever hear anybody say the Isle of Palms had a real mystery—something Poe might have built upon?"

He mused for several minutes, then answered:

"Of course, there's the story of Lafitte, the pirate, putting in through the inlet occasionally back in the early eighteen hundreds; you know of them. Then that yarn about Major Payson Manigault's disappearance; that's authentic; great hurrah about it in the papers some time in the early thirties. I ran across it when I was tidying up

the papers and magazines in Grandfather Huger's house years ago. Somebody's written it up in a history of before-the-war Charleston, too."

"Tell me the story," I urged. "You know—getting back to old scenes after so many years—our kid mysteries out on the Isle of Palms—everything seems real and fresh and—well, Betty and I got goose flesh all over again when I told her the story of the Gold Bug up in the wheel this afternoon."

Dan laughed. He knew the feel of the swamp and the desolation of the dunes.

"I'm a bit rusty as to details," he began, "but the story goes something like this: A Major Manigault—one of the Meeting Street Manigaults, I suppose—had a summer home down on the Isle of Palms back somewhere around thirty-one or thirty-two, in the time when the smugglers used to run their sloops into the inlet there. Fact, nobody lived on the island then except a few outcasts suspected of being in the customs-evasion business, and Manigault and his family during the fever months. The Manigault house must have been pretty isolated, standing as it did some four or five miles from the summer colony here around Fort Moultrie. Nothing but sand and palmettoes—and the big swamp behind; pretty lonely, eh?"

"Well, one of those summers in the early thirties came a big fever scare in Charleston. Came early in the spring and before anybody had thought of quitting the town for the beach—just in a night as those yellow-jack scourges used to hit the old town in those times. Everybody in a wild scramble to get down here to the Sullivan Island colony, where the clean winds blow. Manigault sends his family ahead of him down to the lonely house on the Isle of Palms, and a few days later he starts to join them—with the family plate. Banks all shut down in the fever panic, you see; no place to store a hundred pounds,

more or less, of ancient silver. Picture the old chap in the family coach—one of those big affairs on swayback springs like Grandfather Huger used to have—silver chests and big urns and salvers in their hoods all piled up about him on the cushions. Imagine his dash through the streets to the ferry—streets with the blinds up and silent in the grip of the fever terror."

Dan took a long pull at his cigar, luxuriating in the story-teller's little conceit of suspense.

"Over the ferry and out through the Sullivan Island settlement," he continued, "then on down the lonely beach road, rattlety-bang and jiggity-jig in that plunging treasure coach, went Major Manigault. The dark fell on him as he was passing the ramparts of Moultrie; a sentry at the portcullis afterward told of the coach's passing. Then the night swallowed him. He vanished."

"But——"

"Not a trace," Dan put in hastily. "Coach, horses, negro driver, plate—and Major Manigault simply disappeared, and that's the end of the story."

"Then a ship—a stranded ship with the figurehead of a bishop—had nothing to do with Major Manigault's disappearance?"

I presume I put the question artlessly as Betty herself might have done, so keen I was to find some link between our discovery of the afternoon and the mystery Dan unfolded. Then I remembered my solemn pact with Betty, and when her father curiously asked to know what a stranded ship could have to do with the vanishing Major Manigault I had to answer lamely something about the set properties of the true mystery demanding a phantom ship. Truth of the matter was, however I might revel in the make-believe of creepy romance with Dan's girl, I was not ready to court his laughter by revealing how ridiculously excited I had become over

what the lenses of my binoculars had picked from the swamp. He might be too "grown up" to catch the spirit of the thing.

Like a boy filching a forbidden book and reading it in the light of a knot-hole in the haymow, I managed to abstract Dan's dog-eared copy of Poe's tales from the library, and to carry it to my room undetected. Dan, you see, would want to know why a man in supposed possession of his faculties should sit in his pajamas, under a hot lamp, until two o'clock in the morning, reading and rereading "The Gold Bug." What I wanted to refresh my memory upon was Poe's location of the Bishop's hostel out there in the Isle of Palms swamp; could it by any chance be identified with the high prow of a wreck, by some tremendous freak of tide and wind carried a mile into the jungle, and there dropped out of ken of all the world?

"We crossed the creek at the head of the island—Sullivan Island—by means of a skiff," I found the statement of the master story-teller on his journey of the treasure quest with Legrand and Jupe. Yes, that is the creek now crossed by the trolley bridge, I reflected. "And, ascending the high grounds on the shore of the mainland—the Isle of Palms; there is no mainland anywhere about—proceeded in a northwesterly direction through a tract of country excessively wild and desolate, where no trace of human footstep was to be seen. In this manner we journeyed for about two hours—certainly a mile an hour would be good time through the swamp—and—entered a region infinitely more dreary than any yet seen. It was a species of table-land, near the summit of an almost inaccessible hill, densely wooded from base to pinnacle, and interspersed with huge crags," et cetera.

All true to the topography of the swamp, as Betty and I saw it from the stalled Ferris wheel, except as to the

"species of table-land" and the "inaccessible hill." Mere Poe accessories, those; there were no hills or table-lands nearer than Summerville, thirty odd miles away. It was necessary, however, for the purposes of the tale that the Bishop's hostel should be on a height above the forest, so that, from it, the skull on the tulip tree guarding Captain Kidd's treasure could be seen with "a good glass."

Well and good. It was a mile, or thereabouts, from the creek dividing Sullivan Island from the Isle of Palms to the shabby Coney Island and the Ferris wheel, and in a northwesterly direction. Another mile, surely, from the wheel over the crest of the sand dunes to the uptilted prow of the mystery ship; same direction, too. There, not on a table-land, but high up under the stub of a bowsprit, the effigy of a mitered bishop looked out upon the kaleidoscopic colors of Noman's Land. Was this mere coincidence or—and how the foolish, romantic heart of me cried out that it must be—was that mitered head out there guardian of a mystery that Poe told not of?

On the morrow, after Dan had gone to town to his work, I had a whispered council with Bets under the passion vine on the veranda. Very solemnly she agreed with me that it was my duty to penetrate to the Bishop's retreat, at whatever cost of physical effort, and make a thorough examination into the mystery of his being there a mile from his proper element. Also, of course, I was to take my binoculars to determine if a grinning skull on the seventh limb, east side, of a tulip tree could be discerned from His Reverence's position. Betty promised, during my absence, to inform herself thoroughly on the lives and manners of pirates from a perusal of "The Interesting and Instructive Careers of the Spanish Buccaneers in the Western Ocean," a yel-

low-backed old volume I found in Dan's library.

From Dan's ducking outfit I chose without compunction necessary tools for adventure—a pair of hip boots, a pocket compass, and the heavy machete he used for carving through tangles of marsh land. With the Cuban blade sunk in one of the boots, these over one shoulder, and my binoculars slung over the other, I started for the trolley and the Isle of Palms, Betty's rapt eyes following me from the veranda. In less than an hour I was set down by the side of the sprawling pleasure park on the sands. The landmarks I had noted along the top of the sand dunes when Betty and I were stalled aloft the day before I easily picked up, and off I went over the sliding face of the sand hills in a long traverse to the top.

I was, perhaps, half a mile beyond the Ferris wheel when I topped the rim of the farthest dune and stood on this weird boundary between the blue and yellow wilderness of ocean and shore, and the green riot of the great swamp. A blasted palmetto, which raised one skinny arm to fend the anger of the sea, was the marker I had picked from the swinging basket of the wheel to point my path into the jungle.

From its shaggy base I could see the bare fingers of the giant cypress far, far out over the solid floor of foliage—that cypress which, from the height of the wheel's arc, had seemed to stand almost in line with the high, pointed prow of the Bishop's ship. But of His Reverence or the penthouse of the bowsprit over his mitered head not a sign from my point of entry into the swamp.

I leveled the compass on my knee and noted a course to the dead cypress; it was a little north of northwest, even as Legrand and Poe had set their track in that land "excessively wild and desolate."

One last look I turned out to sea before I made the steep plunge down the

precipice of sand to the swamp line. The ocean lay flat and dull as pewter, heaving ever so slightly in a long, sluggish lift; the sky closed down upon it in a near horizon, a lifeless, hazy sun puddle. Not a breath of air stirred. Not a bird whistled. Earth and sky seemed lifeless.

I took the plunge. The phrase is apt; no other words fit that sudden transition from the wide spaces of the white sand into the muffling gloom of the semitropical forest. One minute sunlight and the freedom of stretch; another the green haze of foliage, jumbled barriers of standing and fallen trunks, nets of close-hung vines. A Southern swamp is unworldly beyond the powers of imagination to conceive. A lively fancy can easily people it with slimy monsters of the geological myth land, flying lizards with leathery wings.

In my boots and with the machete swinging ceaselessly, I fought a way through the tangle. Now I was balancing on some half-submerged log, which gurgled and squelched under foot; now I was lifting myself by a handy vine over a pool of black water. Here a foothold on quaking hassock amid the gaping mouths of green and spotted water plants; there nothing to it but to sink in the slime over my knees and hack at ropes of creepers barring my progress. I heard the stealthy rippling of moccasins seeking cover in the advance of my splashing boots. I saw the parchment necks and cruel beaks of snapping turtles as they pitched clumsily off their perches to dive into the crevices between the cypress roots. The sudden flapping of a wet streamer across my cheeks sent chills down my spine; it might have been the lancing attack of a snake. A bird somewhere in the near distance began a moaning, heartbroken plaint—perhaps over some secret assassination in its nest.

Oh, it was a grueling, gruesome passage! I called myself a fool for at-

tempting it before I had been at the task an hour; but still I persisted.

One distinct surprise I had. I had worried my way, perhaps, three-quarters of a mile from the dunes, when I encountered slightly rising ground, which seemed to tend in the direction my compass told me I must go. My first foothold on it assured me it was sand—sand overlaid with a rime of dead vegetation. As the low hill rose from the flat level of the swamp ten, then fifteen and twenty feet, the tangle of growth upon it grew less profuse, though the giant tulips and water oaks on either flank marched pace and pace with its rising contour. Here, in truth, was a strange thing: a detached dune dropped in the heart of the swamp. How to account for it I do not know, except on the hypothesis that some time in the past a tremendous gale from the ocean had whirled the sand into the swamp, and, pushing vegetation, had closed in behind to heal the scar of its entry into the devastated territory. But a long, low dune it was, bare almost on its summit, and cloaked as to its sides with mantles of shrub. No trees had taken roothold there.

I made speed with the easier passage of the invading dune; found myself some twenty feet or so above the floor of amber water and crawling slime. I identified in the near distance the blasted cypress which had been my guidepost from the start; it was to my left hand and slightly ahead of my position. Through a dense thicket of myrtle, glowing pink with its delicately laced flowers, I chopped my way and plumped upon the uptilting poop of a ship.

It rose at a sharp angle from the sand and scrub perhaps ten feet, a yard length of broken bowsprit poking out and up a few feet higher. My first sight was of a hollow shell, whose sides were rotted and sun-dried curving beams flanked with rusted spike heads. Since I had come upon the rear of the

wreck fragment, I looked into what had been the nose of the ship; the deck boards were gone, and only the sparse ribs and the heavy stem timbers sprouted from the sand, scarce seeming to hold together. The base of the bowsprit showed where it was set into the jointure of the stem. Two iron posts, which must have supported a fife rail, were almost flush with the sand.

I confess there was an acceleration of my pulse when I picked my way around the stark timbers to the front of the wreck. Yes, there was the Bishop!

Heroic figure of mystery he was. Fully ten feet from the hem of his vestment, level with the sand, to the tip of his miter; his left hand clasped a book to his breast; the right was gone at the wrist. His great, graven face, streaked by the elements and burrowed into pockmarks by wood beetles, was still set in a gravely austere mold; stern eyes were fixed in contemplation of this his last see—the green riot of the swamp. Of all the grisly souvenir of a lost ship this lordly figurehead alone retained the full aspect of the makers' fashioning; the rest was trash. As he had breasted the tidal wave which swept him thither, who knows how many years before, so now this prince of the church survived in calm dignity the raids of the swamp decay.

I brought my eyes away from the hypnotic spell of the Bishop's, and walked about to the slanting side of the bow to see if I could find the ship's name. Not before I had chopped away a clump of brush did I come upon faint clews to the identity of the Bishop's blasted ark. Down about a foot above the sand level I found where the lettering of the craft's name had been cut into the wood; probably once painted, too, but now bare. A portion of the heavy plank bearing the name was gone. Above the sand I read only the fragment:

DEL OB

With the point of the machete I quickly dug away the sand into which the lettered beam sank. I uncovered in succession an "I," an "S," a "P," and then came a rupture; the rest of the legend was missing. So I had only:

DEL OBISP

Blessed the months I once spent in California with the Spanish nomenclature of so many of its towns. I could supply the missing letter—just one—"O."

— DEL OBISPO
(— OF THE BISHOP)

The full name, therefore, might be The Bishop's House, The Bishop's Castle—

Had not Poe written that the observation point for the treasure seekers had been corrupted from "Bessop's Castle" to "the Bishop's hostel"? Here, on the only high point of ground in all the swamp—so elevated above the rest of the flats that it could be seen from the top of the Ferris wheel—was a natural place for taking observation "with a good glass," and this was the — of the Bishop!

I stripped off the heavy boots and gingerly climbed the ribs of the wreck, using the protruding spikes for footholds, until I had come to the butt of the bowsprit directly over the tip of the Bishop's miter. Here was a narrow space between the jagged ends of the split timbers—a seat, if you would call it such; at least, the only seat free from spikes on all the wreck.

"A good glass in the Bishop's hostel in the devil's seat—"

Would a sardonic spirit place "the devil's seat" directly over a bishop's miter? Could not the grim and twisted humor of Edgar Allan Poe be capable of that conceit? Some fanciful notion born of my reckless romanticism assured me this were true; that I had in very truth come to the devil's seat, and

from it would use my glass to spy out the death's-head marking buried gold.

I unslung my binoculars and turned them first over my left shoulder back in the direction of the beach. The spidery top of the Ferris wheel showed plainly enough without the reënforcement of the lenses; with them I could see the bolts on the wheel's framework. Then, trembling a bit under the goad of excitement, I laid my compass on my knee.

"A good glass in the Bishop's hostel in the devil's seat—forty-one degrees and thirteen minutes—northeast and by north—"

Northeast by north I found; the elevation, 41-13, I had to guess at. "What folly!" the scornful wisdom of my thirty-odd years hurled at me as I slowly raised my glasses from the near bushes to sweep them through an upward arc in the direction northeast by north. "What a joy!" the elf of romance answered.

Before my eyes, pressed to the ends of the two black cylinders, paraded slowly a magnified perspective of leaf, bough, and white columnar tree trunk. Half inch by half inch I lifted the ends of the binoculars. Everywhere the solid bank of green, splashed with the sifted gold of the jasmine, like nets on the tresses of the forest. Slowly—slowly then—

A white skull swam into the field and grinned at me!

No, do not laugh. Do not cry "Liar!" and shut the book. I repeat earnestly and with jealous care for the quality of my veracity: A white skull swam into the field and grinned at me. So close it was I could see the shadows the sun made of the eye sockets, the blank spaces where teeth had dropped from the jaw. The death's-head lay on its side, firmly wedged between two branches. It had a pensive, listening attitude, as if with an ear down to hear the coursing of the sap. A horrid thing

it was there in the fair green of the trees!

I dropped the glasses to my lap, trembling, and, with my unaided eyes, sought the skull. There, in a giant tree—not a tulip, as in the Poe tale, but a water oak—not a hundred yards away from me was the white spot. I could even see the dots marking its eyeholes. With great care I marked the tree of the skull from others surrounding it, then clambered down from the devil's seat—such it surely was—and, with great care lest I err, pushed and hacked my way through the undergrowth until I stood beneath the tree of grim distinction.

"A glass in the Bishop's hostel in the devil's seat—forty-one degrees and thirteen minutes—northeast and by north—main branch seventh limb east side—"

The skull lay between the fifth limb and a stump of the sixth on the eastern side of the main stem of the tree; had not two lower limbs been torn off—scars on the trunk showed where they had gone—the skull would have been on the seventh limb.

No, I did not climb to the skull and drop a gold bug on the end of a whipcord through its left eye to determine "a bee line through the shot fifty feet out." For one reason, I had no digging tools with which to reproduce the night task of Poe's hero and the negro Jupe; again, the patches of sky visible through the leafy tent above me had suddenly darkened, and a fretful wind from the sea puffed through the swamp. The promises of storm I had noted on the sand dunes were bulking stronger, and the water-logged wilderness was no place to be caught. I did beat through the brush and vines at the foot of the tree, and beneath the white butt of the skull, visible in a half-moon of bone over the edge of the high limb. Nor was I the least whit surprised, when, in one of the strokes of the machete, the steel rang against metal.

I stooped to investigate. There, com-

pletely overgrown by thimbleberry and sassafras, lay a moldering chest some three feet in every dimension. Its top was thrown back, and it was against one of the corroded hinges my machete had struck. The chest was empty save for the moss and toadstools that filled it nearly to the brim. So rotten was the wood composing the sides and top that when I jerked the cover free from the leaf mold that weighted it, the hinges pulled from the wood, and the cover came away in a single piece. I was about to drop it when a darker stain in the middle of the outer surface held my attention. When I had brought the slab close to my eyes I saw that what I had taken for a stain was a metal plate, nearly eaten away by verdigris. As I drew the point of the machete across it a clear white line was cut through the green rust. Silver!

Need I tell you who have followed me so far into this extraordinary adventure of coincidence with what reluctance I quit the tree of the skull and began plunging back to the Bishop's ship, and thence on through the swamp on my back track to the dunes? So infallibly had revealing romance led me to the very core of a mystery, that I was positive—I am still positive—that had I but been possessed of the proper tools, and a storm not threatened, I would have uncovered there something tremendously startling. As it was, I carried the chest cover with the silver plate strapped across my back by the thongs of the binocular case when I started for home.

Before I was well out of the swamp, great gouts of water began to splash the heavy leaves in a sharp fusillade, and all the wilderness was humming and droning to the lash of big winds. I had to struggle up the bounding sand cliff on hands and knees, and when I reached the summit of the dunes, the gale pushed against me as a moving wall. The heavens above the sea were

mottled green and vivid saffron, and fluffed with the smoke of racing clouds. The plane of ocean, black tinged with silver, lay brooding, restless, gathering its latent fury for the assault. A grim, gray spectacle this, the war dance of the furies of sea and air. Hardly had I taken seat in the trolley for the run to the Sullivan Island settlement, when, with a salvo of a thousand guns, the storm leaped down upon the land. The car skuttered like a scared rabbit through whirlwinds of sand, and the torn fronds of palmetto; it rocked on its rails; the very air was electric. I well knew by the time I had dashed dripping into the Miles house that a hurricane—one of the wild West Indian devils—was upon us.

But the fury of the storm bated no jot of Betty's breathless interest in what I had to tell her, and the souvenir of my adventure I had brought back with me. No fairy story ever written put the little miss on her toes as did that mildewed square of wood with the rusted plate on its face. We tiptoed to the library with it, Betty made elaborate precautions to insure that we were not observed; then, with a reading glass, a toothbrush, and some silver polish from the kitchen, Betty and I set ourselves to uniocking the final door of the mystery. The storm raged and thundered, the frail summer cottage trembled on its stilts; but in the gloom-filled library two children, one a little older than the other, but both of the same fresh vitality of heart, scrubbed a weather-smear'd silver plate bit by bit clean of its tarnish.

It was a figure, the figure 8, that first appeared through the reading glass. We breathed hard in excitement. Then, just above the 8, the thin lines of some Gothic letter. I plied the toothbrush, while Bettykins peered through the glass.

"Oh, it's going to be a 'P,'" she

breathed. "I just know it's going to be a 'P,' because that stands for Poe!"

A "P" it revealed itself. Then came another figure, a 2; then a 4, all faint and illusive as the writing of sympathetic ink before flame. I scrubbed and scrubbed. Betty breathlessly announced each new arrival out of the limbo of the verdigris. The letters came tantalizingly inchoate. After half an hour's work we had only this:

A Y S A N G U
rleston 1824

We struck a light and continued feverishly to explore the unsealed past. So deeply had the rust bitten into the plate that I despaired of being able to decipher the whole inscription. Betty shared my fear. We hailed the first faint appearance of every new graven line with gasps of joy. When an "M," larger than the other letters uncovered, took its place before the linked "AN" in the upper line, some chord of memory twanged in my mind; but the thing to be remembered was itself illusive. Nearer to the boundary of tangible recollection advanced this shadow of a thought when an "A" appeared between the "G" and the "U." Suddenly I took the glass from Betty and bent very close to the plate, touching here and there upon it with the cleansing powder. Upon the plate appeared, then, what had been negatived on my brain:

PAYSON MANIGAULT
Charleston 1824

I had found the silver chest, or one of the silver chests, of that Major Manigault who, three-quarters of a century before, had fled fever-stricken Charleston for his retreat on the Isle of Palms, riding with his household valuables piled about him in his coach out into the darkness of obliteration.

Dan came in, half drowned, while I was reciting to Betty the story of Major Manigault's disappearance as I had heard it from her father. With an un-

conscious air of ceremony we led him to the library table, where lay the cover of the treasure box, and I then told him of the Bishop, the skull in the tree, and all the astounding verification of Poe's fiction machinery.

When he had heard me through, Dan spoke quietly:

"Bob, d'you know what this looks like to me? It looks as if Edgar Allan Poe was a party to the murder and robbery of Major Payson Manigault—at least he had guilty knowledge of it, and—a man of his peculiar temper—why, he simply had to out with his secret in the disguise of 'The Gold Bug.'"

I started to object. Dan's leaping to so grave a conclusion, and one reflecting upon the name of so wonderful a romancer, seemed to me brutal.

"But you can't get behind the facts—the circumstantial evidence," Dan insisted. "Here you have the silver chest of a man who disappeared one night after he had driven past Fort Moultrie on the way to the Isle of Palms. That was some time either in thirty-one or thirty-two. Edgar Allan Poe, if I remember the biography of him, was a private soldier stationed at Fort Moultrie during those years. A good many years afterward—ten or eleven, if I remember rightly—he wrote 'The Gold Bug,' laying the scene frankly on the Isle of Palms. You go out to the Isle of Palms, follow the directions Poe laid down in his story, and find—what? A skull, evidence of murder; a silver chest, evidence of robbery. The chest belonged to Major Manigault, the man who disappeared. Circle's complete!"

"But the wreck—the Something-or-other of the Bishop—a Spanish ship nobody knows how old!" I pressed my objections warmly. "If Poe knew of the existence of that ship—if 'the Bishop's hostel' was, in fact, the butt of the bowsprit over the figurehead, and he chose this single landmark in the swamp to weave in his story, how is it

that you, I, everybody about here, did not know that wreck lay in the swamp?"

It was Betty—wise Betty—who volunteered the answer:

"Maybe Mister Poe did see the Bishop, and the sand came and——"

"Covered the wreck up for years," I finished for her, leaping to the suggestion. "The thing lies at the end of a long tongue of sand—probably the very sand that was driven into the heart of the swamp when the Bishop's boat was carried there. The same big wind that covered the wreck once could strip it bare later."

"But the skull in the tree!" Dan smiled triumphantly. "A landmark, surely, just as Poe had it in his story. There are people—Poe himself, maybe, was capable of doing that thing."

"It lay on its side," I countered lamely, "not as if *put* there by anybody. A wave—at the time the Bishop's crazy ship was driven there—one of the poor devils of sailors might have been carried into the tree and—his head stayed."

I do not know to what lengths our discussion of the baffling facts would have carried, had we not been startled by a crash in the rear of the house, and the high screams of the negro house servants. It was the roof of the summer kitchen that had been lifted clear out to the garden patch. For many minutes, and, in fact, all through the night, Dan and I were sufficiently occupied combating the assaults of the hurricane. Morning came to a summer colony desolated; not a house on Sullivan Island that had not been racked and tortured out of plumb; the sea, even, had swept high above its tide mark and undermined many.

Three days after the storm, Dan and I, equipped with shovels and a pick, set out for the Isle of Palms and the treasure ground guarded by the skull, to probe to the bottom the mystery which lay under the dead eyes of the Bishop.

We never arrived at the shadow-haunted spot. The hurricane had obliterated every landmark, changed the whole face of the sand dunes, and leveled wide swathes in the swamp. Gone was the blasted cypress which Betty and I had marked from the Ferris wheel; gone—I am sure of it—the last vestige of the Bishop's sad, stranded derelict. In my knowledge no man has since seen the gravely austere features of that churchly sentinel over the swamp's dark secret; nor any man the whitened skull with ear to the faint murmur of the water oak's coursing sap. The Bishop,

the skull, what may or may not have been seen and known by a sad, mad dreamer of ghostly romance near a hundred years ago: these are the swamp's own, inviolable.

Two more facts, and the story is done. Both are from original sources:

Major Payson Manigault disappeared on the night of May 6, 1831.

Edgar Allan Poe, enlisted in the United States army under the name of Edgar A. Perry, was sent to Fort Moultrie in the summer of 1829, and quit in the summer of 1830 to enter West Point.



INVOCATION, CHRISTMAS, 1914

TEN thousand homes are steeped in tears,
 A million men lined up to slay;
 Our hearts grow cold with rage and fears—
 The world's at war this Christmas Day.

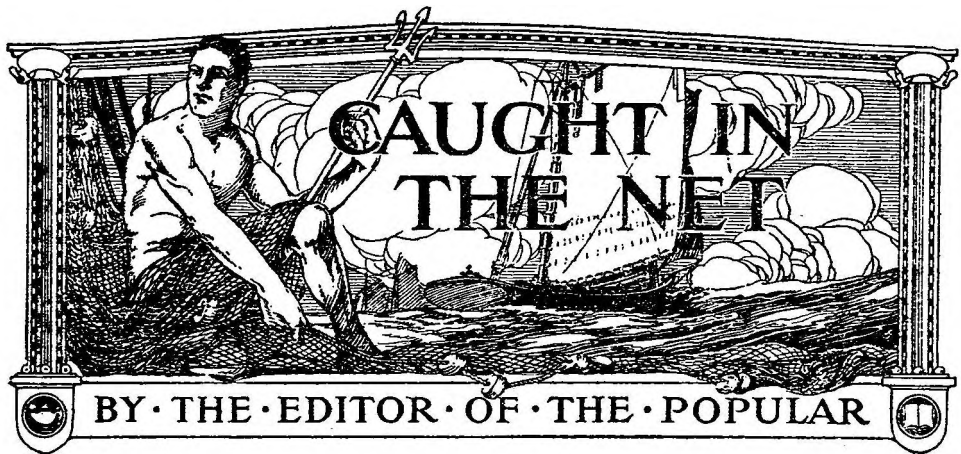
Sweet carols that we sing make mock
 Of all the words that in them lay,
 For, list! we hear the battle shock—
 The world's at war this Christmas Day.

Bright berries of the holly tree
 Seem drops of blood, to our dismay;
 Mistletoe pearls a rosary—
 The world's at war this Christmas Day.

Sweet manger child, lead us again,
 For we have wandered far astray;
 Send peace and happiness to men—
 The world's at war this Christmas Day.

Kneel we together at thy door,
 And offer hearts that plead and pray
 For love and brotherhood once more—
 The world's at war this Christmas Day.

D. E. WHEELER.



INSIGHT

WE go along through life scorning many men, not of our sort, whose manners, speech, and appearance displease us. To the vast multitude who hurry past in tides of life on the street, we are indifferent, cutting our way through the crowd, as if we were a sharp-prowed craft on an alien sea. It is not given to us in our imperfect sympathies to see truly into all men, nor even into many men. At best we care for a few, and hearten them by the caring.

It is the grace of mother love, that it penetrates the pitiful limitations of the one little life, and believes in an inner beauty. The mother believes in the unique significance of the child, and by that faith nourishes it to growth.

Sometimes the belief is sufficient to lift the obscure quality through all impediment, till it emerges clear and victorious. More often, the struggle of the life to affirm its essence is overlaid with failure till it sinks to the drearier levels of a commonplace and compromising existence. But even then, that belief is always like a dim beckoning that might have been obeyed, a call, growing ever fainter, that is never wholly lost among the stranger voices.

It is the genius of religion to extend that area of caring, of direct vision to the essential nature lying hidden behind the veil of grossness. In love, we are permitted to see in the life of the beloved the quality, the incorruptible core of being, which Christ saw in all men, so that the race of men became dear to Him. Such was His practice with His friends in Galilee, and that was the teaching He left in their consciousness to be spread among all races of men.

UNCLE SAM MAKES HISTORY

ALMOST the same day that war slammed shut the doors of Europe's commerce, America opened a gateway to the world's trade of the future. Under ordinary circumstances the completion of the Panama Canal would have been an event attracting world-wide interest. Instead it passed almost unnoticed. None of the New York newspapers gave it more than a column, and that on an inside page. Those of London and Paris dismissed it with a paragraph.

But the canal is open, and the number of ships passing through it day by day is increasing steadily. When the wars are ended, and when half the earth turns its energies from destruction to construction, the finishing of this great waterway will bulk larger and larger in the perspective of the years. Nineteen-fourteen will pass into history as a glorious date for America, if for no other reason than the completion of the work for which the world had waited for four centuries.

Judging the future by the past, there were many who thought ten years ago that the building of this canal would be marked by the most stupendous decade of graft that a nation ever had known. But it progressed and was completed without scandal. It was a triumph of engineering and of administration. In the face of many huge and unexpected difficulties, everything was done quickly and efficiently. This gigantic work of peace ended, by startling contrast and coincidence, just when the rest of the world was beginning to go frantic in the delirium of war.

Any shortening of distances of the great highways of the globe, increases correspondingly the ability and capacity of the means of transportation. It now takes a freight steamer twenty-five days to go from New York to San Francisco. It used to take the same steamer sixty days and more to make the voyage via the Straits of Magellan. That means that one boat can now do the work of two. There were more merchant vessels afloat at the beginning of 1914 than ever before in the world's history. The opening of the Panáma Canal has increased their carrying power by at least fifty per cent without the addition of a single ship.

DOGS OF WAR

THE dogs of war are the dumb heroes of the battlefields. Loyalty is their trade, and they practice it until they die.

For centuries dogs have been used in warfare, as sentries, scouts, messengers, and for actual purposes of attack. In modern military organizations they are trained to all these things, but they are regarded as a necessity in locating the wounded that are not found by the stretcher bearers or ambulance corps.

Fields of battle nowadays are widely extended, and soldiers have to take advantage of every possible bit of natural cover. The instinct of the wounded is to use their last strength in seeking protection from artillery fire, cavalry charges, the wheels of guns, and the other horrors to which they are exposed. They crawl away into the most hidden, safest places. The collection of the wounded is usually at night. This accounts for the large numbers that after each battle are reported as "missing." In some instances the missing have been more than half as many as the known total of killed and wounded.

The ambulance dog, trained to the work he has to do, depends on his powers of scent, and works as well in pitch darkness as in daylight. Collies, retrievers, and bloodhounds have been found particularly efficient in this work in recent wars. They are differently equipped in the armies of different countries. The Germans provide their ambulance dogs with a saddle with pockets in which are bandages and dressings, while around the neck is a wooden flask of stimulant. The Italians and French put the flask in a pocket of the saddle. British experts consider bandages and stimulant unnecessary, as every man has to carry his own first-aid dressing, and the extra weight hinders the dog's action. In the English

army the dogs wear a very light saddle with the Geneva cross on each side, and a loud bell hangs from a leather collar. The Russians provide their ambulance dogs with small lanterns and attach the bells elsewhere on the collar.

In some of the European armies the ambulance dog is trained to return to his master and guide him to the wounded man; in others he is taught to bark and give the news of his discovery in that way. Still another method is to have the dog on a long leash and thus lead the searcher in the right direction.

The Japanese also use scouting dogs in this way, and so do many of the European armies. They are trained to growl at any sudden surprise, their natural temptation to bark being thwarted by muzzling with a leather strap. In sentry duty the muzzle is moved. With an upwind blowing these sentry dogs are able to detect the approach of men and horses an extraordinary distance away.

In the annals of the French army *Mustache* is still a celebrity. *Mustache* was one of the war dogs in the Italian campaign when Napoleon was first consul. He saved the French army from a night surprise and annihilation. Later he tracked and captured a spy who had secured valuable information. But this dog's crowning achievement was at the battle of Austerlitz.

The standard bearer of the regiment had just fallen dead. *Mustache's* teeth and an Austrian soldier's hands grasped the tattered, bloodstained banner simultaneously. *Mustache* flew at his enemy's throat and bore him down. Then, seizing the flag, he carried it back to the regiment. Napoleon gave *Mustache* the highest decoration for valor. He met a soldier's death not long afterward, racing forward beside the flag, leading the regiment in a furious charge.

THE PLAY BOYS OF THE WESTERN WORLD

A GROUP of five thousand persons on a sloping lawn falling away from a stately country house to a dainty artificial lake. Two bands playing at opposite ends of the ample grounds. A white canopy, and under it hundreds of people listening to a lively vaudeville troupe. Another larger tent, and here tea and sandwiches for the famishing, as the afternoon wears along. Halfway down the spacious lawn, a rectangle is marked out with ropes. The pistol cracks, and a tug-of-war is on. God is on the side of the heaviest contestants this day. Then as the afternoon light shoots long rays across the contented people, and the shadow of a short man becomes titanic and menacing, the call is to the platform, and all the chattering host masses itself in front of the speaker's table.

A little man with gray hair and gray mustache, worn face, harassed lines between the eyes, and kindness in the eyes, stands up squarely, and speaks emphatically. He is listened to rapturously, applauded mightily. That is Lloyd George, of England, at a Liberal fête.

This commonplace-looking man has torn the social structure of England into shreds. He has given the law-making power to elected persons instead of to hereditary lords. He is doing away with one rich man having a half dozen votes. He is breaking up the vast landed estates, held idle for the rearing of partridges, pheasant, and deer. He has insured a nation, and given pensions to the aged.

The two storm centers of the English-speaking world are Theodore Roosevelt and David Lloyd George. They are both born, bred, and perfected fighters. They have a jutting out of the lower lip and a smashing gesture of

the arm and hand, which come from beating back opposition. They fire up into repartee and energy when the going is hard. They are at their fighting best under a rain of missiles and abuse. They came into a tame, sure world hoping to find it a scene of action and a continuing adventure. Their lives have been a series of outbreaks. Most good men are like a firecracker. They have one loud noise in them, and then they disintegrate into silence. But these men carry explosive force which can repeat its violent performances. As quickly as their vitality is quenched at one point, it breaks loose with flame and speed at another point, and the end is not yet. They each contain a grain or two of spiritual radium, a demonic force which manifests itself again and again without exhausting its energy. They are vastly popular because they are tonic. They prove to us that things can be changed, that there is a lot in life besides routine and monotony.

OUR STANDING ARMY

THE railroad is the largest employer of labor in the United States. In the 13 years 1900 to 1912 inclusive, the number of employees increased from 1,017,653 to 1,716,380, or approximately 71 per cent. In the same time the railroad pay roll was swelled from \$577,264,841 a year to \$1,252,347,697, or 117 per cent.

What a tremendous army this railroad force makes up can be appreciated from the following distribution of the employees: There are 16,204 general officers and other officers, 78,818 general office clerks, 38,428 station agents, 161,730 other station men, 64,382 engineers, 67,195 firemen, 49,685 conductors, 137,067 other trainmen, 57,507 machinists, 70,817 carpenters, 249,429 general shopmen, 44,277 section foremen, 357,326 trackmen, 38,773 switch tenders, watchmen, et cetera, 42,548 telegraphers and dispatchers, and 242,194 laborers and employees not otherwise designated.

Out of the railroad force of this country Moltke, Joffre, or Kitchener could fashion forty army corps. There probably never was an army in the world that could match this one in intelligence, efficiency, and physical worth.

In every department of the railroad except one the compensation of the employees has been raised materially since 1900. In 1900 the average pay of all employees was \$1.90 a day. In 1912 it was \$2.42. This is an increase of 27 per cent. It is apparent that organization among railroad employees has been effective in a wage sense. In 1900 the average pay of general and other officers was \$7.56 a day. Now it is \$8.33, an increase of approximately 10 per cent. Meanwhile the pay of engineers had swelled from \$3.75 to \$5.00, an increase of 33 per cent; firemen from \$2.14 to \$3.02—41 per cent; machinists from \$2.30 to \$3.21—39 per cent; conductors from \$3.17 to \$4.29—35 per cent; other trainmen from \$1.96 to \$2.96—51 per cent, and so on. Telegraphers, trackmen, and general laborers have had their compensation increased, but not so much as those mentioned above. With switch tenders, crossing tenders, and watchmen the situation is not so good. Their ranks are made up largely of pensioners or old and decrepit men. They get less pay now than in 1900. Then they averaged \$1.80 a day. Now the average is \$1.70.

As a whole it probably is true that there is no great branch of labor in the world so well paid as the American army of the railroad, or by the same token, so well worthy of it.

In the Service

By Clarence Herbert New

The spy system of England, though not nearly so elaborate as that of Germany, is an all-important branch of the Army Department. England's secret agents are in every country; their main task, to find out exactly what other countries are doing and what they are going to do. One of these agents finds himself in Budapest during the fateful days of waiting following the carefully planned assassination of the Archduke Francis Ferdinand of Austria and his wife, the Duchess of Hohenberg, which the Servian military staff was charged with having indirectly abetted. What the English spy learns is of tremendous importance to his country. But the job of getting back with his information is a desperate one. Clarence New tells the story graphically.

IF Blackwell's Island were parked with beautiful trees and lawns—if it had, at Hell Gate, finely equipped sulphur baths, restaurants with little tables at the river's edge, and a trolley line running to a handsome bridge at the lower end—it would be a very fair reproduction of the Margareten Insel—the most famous pleasure resort of Budapest.

On the afternoon of July 25th, Mrs. Cecil was sitting at one of the tables on the Danube bank, with her friends, Sir John and Lady Frances Netley—listening to a Hungarian gypsy orchestra, watching the dancers on a polished maple floor under the trees, and chatting with the gay young Austrian officers who stopped every few moments to pay their respects. The party had motored across France and Bavaria in their own car, and, even without their potent letters of introduction, would have been popular anywhere.

Sir John was said to be a retired diplomat, now living the quiet life of a country gentleman upon his beautiful

estate in Hants, while Mrs. Cecil—for two years the widow of a dashing cavalry officer detailed to the foreign office—was undeniably a lovely woman, of American birth.

There was, in the atmosphere of the gay little island, an undercurrent of suppressed excitement. Several of the officers were in service uniform—and occasional remarks indicated the Servian imbroglio as the general topic of conversation. Some were of the opinion that Serbia would back down and submit to the imposition of a heavy indemnity for indirect complicity in the assassination of the archduke and duchess. Others—better informed as to public sentiment in Belgrade and Nish—predicted hostilities within three days. To those civilians who had some knowledge of diplomatic life, there were evidences that the Austrian secret service was using its entire force throughout the dual empire—and the general conversation was more or less guarded accordingly.

Nothing had been farther from the

minds of Sir John and the two ladies than any materialization of the war cloud which had seemed to be hanging over Europe for months. It was the same old cloud which had been threatening for years—but diplomacy had kept it from spreading beyond the horizon, and would presumably do so in future. Otherwise—oh, the idea of a European war was too absurd to consider for a moment, in these days of civilization, common sense, and widespread commercial interests! As they motored along the Danube valley into Austria, however, it began to appear that war between Austria and Servia was something more than a possibility, and that Russia's backing of the little state was likely to be more serious than had been supposed. But western Europe would never permit the Bear to acquire Balkan or Mediterranean territory—so the trouble, however serious, was quite sure to be localized.

Sir John was leaving at eight, that evening, for a brief call upon a former confrère in Vienna. Taking the little trolley down the island to the Margareten Brücke, they returned to their hotel for his suit case, and then drove to the Westbahnhof—Lady Frances talking with him on the station platform until the train pulled out, while Mrs. Cecil remained waiting for her in the limousine, outside. They had allowed twenty-five minutes for securing his ticket and compartment before the train departure, and Alma had been sitting in the car but a moment when she noticed a distinguished-looking man just stepping out of the side entrance to the station. Something in his face was strangely familiar, though she couldn't remember the Vandyke beard. He stopped on the steps to light a cigar before taking a taxi, but she noted the piercing glance from under the brim of his Fedora hat which seemed to be searching the neighborhood—and with

that expression in his eyes came recognition. She leaned forward in the open window and beckoned.

As her face appeared in the glare of the station electrics, he paused—with the lighted match poised in one hand—then leisurely walked across the pavement to her car, with lifted hat.

"Alma! You here! This is a pleasant surprise! Waiting for some one? There's no train coming or going for at least twenty minutes—have you time to set me down at one of the hotels? Fancy yours will do—whichever it is."

"Why—yes. There's plenty of time, I think. Step in—and tell the chauffeur." Again she noted the keen glance, without a turn of his head. Then he spoke to the chauffeur and sat down beside her in the car—leaning well back in his corner, so that his face could not be seen through the window. "Were you expecting any one to meet you?"

"Hmph! I was jolly well hopin' they *wouldn't!* An hour ago, I was standin' behind a curtain in the chancellor's house, across the river—listening to a talk between him and one of the kaiser's men from the Wilhelmstrasse in Berlin. If both of 'em aren't ravin' crazy—if they've any backin' of authority in what they said—we may see Europe a hell inside of a fortnight. The possibilities were so overwhelmin' that I didn't dare stay there another second! I'd found a ladder in the garden, an' managed to get down it without makin' a sound. Climbed over the rear fence! It was just gettin' dark, but I fancy one of the secret police saw me! Ran down through the little narrow streets at the back of the hill—through the tunnel—crossed the suspension bridge—went to my hotel for this luggage—took a taxi up to the station, and booked to Vienna. At the other end of the platform, when no one was lookin', I climbed the iron railing an' walked down on the incomin' side. Stepped out

into the street, lookin' for *mouchards*, an' saw you."

"But—Barclay—aren't you in danger every minute you stay in Budapest?"

"Er—quite so. I'd be in even more, were I on any outgoin' train! If the secret service is convinced I was in the chancellor's house, this afternoon, they'll put a dozen men on my track! What they were talkin' there is a bomb-shell with a lighted fuse! I'm confident nobody on that side of the river saw my face. It all depends on what trace they get of me between that house an' the station. If they learn that I booked to Veinna, I'm safe until the trains are searched on telegraphed orders. I may even stay here a few days with impunity. But arrivals at all the hotels will be under pretty close surveillance—particularly if they're men travelin' alone. That's why it seemed a good move to register at your hotel—look as if I were an expected addition to your party, don't you know?"

"Barclay, how serious do you really think what you overheard may prove? You know I used to laugh at Burt when he came home from Downing Street with news of some crisis which had been averted by a hair's breadth—but his anxiety was too real to be a joke, at times. You were his dearest friend—he had implicit confidence in your judgment—and I feel as if I more than half belonged to the foreign office myself. Now, just how bad is the outlook—from what you know?"

"Well, suppose one of the greatest military nations on the Continent has not only mobilized her army on a full war basis, but is at this moment concentratin' it along one of her borders? Bear in mind that no ambassador of any country has been recalled, up to this moment—that there's not the slightest intimation of such action, outside of Servia an' Austria—an' that the concentration of three or four million men along a stretch of a few miles is

a job which takes at least a month! Now—the mere fact that a nation may be in position to strike a sudden, overwhelming blow at her neighbors—at least two or three weeks before any of 'em could possibly guard against it—is quite serious enough in itself. It implies definite, prearranged plan of attack for at least a month back! Personally, like other foreign-office attachés, I'm merely a pawn in the game. If I'm shot or otherwise done away with, it's of interest to nobody except my family an' friends. But if it so happens that I'm the only one to obtain a hint of an approachin' cataclysm—then my life an' potential ability to warn London are worth millions! Suppose a dozen of us get the hint—and but one of us wins through? Who can tell which that one will be? And what I heard is not enough—the truth must be corroborated! I must have evidence! With the Austrian secret service on my track already, it'll be a quite int'restin' game, don't you know?"

For a moment or two she was silent—thinking—considering desperately how much she could or dared do toward averting a calamity whose overwhelming magnitude she was dimly beginning to sense. She was her own mistress—too independent by nature and birth to consider the question of her reputation very seriously. From eight years' association with foreign-office people, she had come to feel a fascination in the game, with its many bloodless victories. If, by any personal risk, she could render valuable assistance toward preventing a world-wide calamity, was it not an ethical duty she owed to her friends and adopted country? She studied Carrington's face in a veiled side glance. The man was a gentleman—one whose record, so far as she knew, was clean. There had been a time when she instinctively felt that his liking for her was a warmer feeling than a man may have for his friend's

wife—but he had never consciously betrayed himself or treated her with other than the most courteous respect. With her, he'd been always a favorite—in a thoroughly chummy, brotherly relation. If what he feared were to materialize, all the conventions and civilized standards of conduct were likely to go by the board. When military rule supersedes civil government, license becomes unbridled. The women in a conquered country recognize before everything the rudimentary necessity of keeping the breath of life in their children and themselves—questions of reputation become more or less academic. Presently, she decided.

"Barclay, suppose you were to shave your face clean? You remember the strong resemblance between you and Burt? More than once, people mistook one of you for the other. Would you be any safer, to pass as my—my husband? If we—worked together—could you manage to get more definite information—with—with less probability of being suspected?"

"Oh, that's quite out of the question, Alma! Awfully decent of you to suggest it, you know—but I couldn't consider it! Even if we made a go of the arrangement, there'd be a lot of talk—afterward. Sir John and Lady Frances were foreign-office people some years ago—they'd see the necessity, an' back our play. But, any moment, we'd be likely to run across men or women who know Burton Cecil died two years ago! There'd be questions—tittle-tattle——"

"Burt died in New Orleans. None but a few relatives saw him buried on the old estate in Berkshire. Suppose it were said he had been with his regiment in one of the Afghan expeditions—shot in a little border skirmish—body not recovered? Funeral merely an empty ceremony of respect. And he turned up alive, after eighteen months' hardship and captivity among the central Asian tribes? The story is not un-

common—plausible enough. But the main question is—would it help in getting full information to Downing Street of whatever is brewing here? You said, just now, that you were merely a pawn in a game so vast that you touch but an edge of it. Well—am I any less so?"

"My dear girl! You don't realize what you're suggestin'! First place—the danger for you, every moment, would be no bally joke! They'll show no mercy if you're caught, I assure you! Then—to play the game—it means I'd have to be in your rooms—our relations must seem natural—there'd be more or less appearance of intimacy before the hotel people——"

"I know you pretty well, Barclay—and trust you. Of course, there's danger—one recognizes that fully. But the only real consideration is—will it be an advantage in getting information to London—or not?"

"Oh, of course it would, don't you know! Put me at once where I'd be vouched for. Fancy it would get us both out of Austria without a question. Be an excellent blind in Germany, too! On the other hand, if we're caught, it'll be just that much worse for *you*! I'm tempted, Alma. The thing is far bigger than my worthless life or your priceless good name! If you're quite decided, we'll try it! Drop me a couple of blocks this side of your hotel, an' then go on with my luggage—wait for me in the foyer! I'll find some barber on a side street an' have this beard off—then I'll come to the hotel an' register, with you standin' by to make everything appear all right. Send the chauffeur back for Lady Frances at once—with the message that some one arrived very unexpectedly, an' that you had to come here with him."

Carrington's luggage was marked with the initials "B. C.," which stood, also, for "Burton Cecil." Mrs. Cecil had the hotel porter take them up to

her private suite at once—mentioned to the clerk in the bureau that her husband had just arrived from London, and would be at the hotel in half an hour—then sat down in the ladies' reception room to wait for his appearance.

When Carrington left the car, he walked down a side street a few blocks, until he located a fairly clean barber shop, which seemed to be well patronized. Stopping in a tobacconist's at the corner, he lighted a cigar with a patent gas-tube appliance which he purposely allowed to flare up when he tipped the bulb handle and burn a ragged hole in his beard. Then, walking into the barber shop, he somewhat irritably explained the catastrophe—asking if the beard could not be trimmed so that the burned spot wouldn't show. The barber smilingly shook his head—but did his best. The singed area was still quite evident—and the gentleman seemed very much put out over the ridiculous accident—but there was no help for it. The beard had to come off. In twenty minutes, a handsome man—smoothly shaven, and with a subtle air of distinction in his manner—walked back to Mrs. Cecil's hotel. She came out of the reception room when he entered the foyer, and stood chatting with him as he registered. Then they went up to her suite together.

Lady Frances had arrived a few moments before—a few whispered remarks in a corner of the reception room placing her in possession of the facts. Realizing even better than Alma the potential seriousness of the situation, she promptly acquiesced in the plan—though its violation of the proprieties was something of a jolt to her British principles. As Sir John's departure had broken in upon their customary dinner hour, they postponed the meal until their return from the station—so came down to the dining room with Carrington. It was still more than half filled—

Hungarians take their principal meal and its attendant music seriously. They had scarcely seated themselves when two other late arrivals came in—taking a table farther down—and, touching Carrington's elbow, Mrs. Cecil cautioned him in a low tone:

"Don't look around just yet! One of those men is Count von Schwartzberg, chief of the German secret service in the Berlin Auswartiges Amt. You undoubtedly know him. He saw quite a good deal of Burt when we were in Berlin three years ago! They fenced and played pool together. He'll recognize me in a moment or so—and probably come over for a chat——" She went on with minute details of little incidents in connection with her husband which the secret-service chief would know, and presently he came across the room to pay his respects. She noticed that he glanced curiously and rather searchingly into Carrington's face, as they shook hands—his eyes lingering upon a white scar just under the hair above the Englishman's temple.

"This is quite an unexpected pleasure, captain! Did I not hear some rumor of your having been wounded—or—er—supposed to be lost? Something serious, I'm quite sure."

"Dare say. I was out with an expeditionary force in northern Afghanistan, a couple of years ago. Fuzzies rushed us in force one night, don't you know. I was stunned by a bullet which creased the top of my head. Dropped! Men thought I was gone—had no time to pick me up—reported me killed! Took me eighteen months gettin' away from the blasted Fuzzies. I say, count! Have you been playin' any more 'cowboy pool' since we were last in Berlin? That American game I showed you? Faith, I'd no chance when you once got the hang of it! An' the fencin' bout at the cavalry gymnasium near the Exerzierplatz? Remember

that? You're a dev'lish good blade with the foils!"

"It's most courteous of you to say that, captain."

"Oh, you're thinkin' of that disarmin' trick after the parry an' disengage in prime! But you couldn't have been expected to know that was comin'—unless you'd been shown it by Descartnet—the maitre d'arms of the French army. I had it from him. Aside from that, your wrist is better than mine."

Von Schwartzberg had one weakness as a secret-service head, which occasionally worked to his disadvantage. If, after being suspicious of a person for what seemed good reasons, he found himself entirely mistaken—or thought so—his personal pride and belief in his own infallibility were so inflated that he never questioned his final judgment. And for this reason, he put out of his mind the possibility that his former suspect could be in any way dangerous. The scar over Carrington's temple was unfamiliar to him, and looked like an old one—but a man acquires scars of all varieties in many different ways, and he did not see how an impostor could possibly know of an incident in that fencing bout which was more a matter of impression, through the touch of the blades, than anything which could be clearly explained in words.

During the conversation, he learned that the Netleys and Cecils were motoring about the Continent in their own touring car—and cautioned them that a feeling of insecurity over the Servian imbroglio was making police regulations more strict than usual. He advised them to get a special passport from the Auswärtiges Amt as soon as they reached Berlin—then considered a moment—thought he might be able to obtain the proper blank at the German embassy in Vienna, and promised to have it ready for them in forty-eight hours, if they were passing through, en route to Germany.

Carrington thanked him—but feared it would be an imposition upon his time and good nature. Von Schwartzberg insisted, however, and they finally agreed to call for the paper in Vienna on the following night. Lady Frances carefully avoided saying that she expected Sir John back in Budapest—and wired that they would join him in the Austrian capital, circumstances having arisen which changed their plans.

The next forenoon was spent in final calls upon the people who had entertained them. Alma Cecil found it difficult to realize that the leisurely summer jaunt through the Continental cities—including a round of gayeties wherever they stopped—had suddenly become a maze of intrigue and personal risk in which it was impossible to foresee what the next day might bring forth. As the car rolled up through Bohemia into Prussia, Carrington outlined the possibilities in the way of obtaining more definite information.

"Gettin' into army or governm't offices with a chance of pickin' up papers or any definite points is simply out of the question! You may be quite sure none but Germans of known loyalty are admitted to 'em—an' with this thing in the air, they'll be very closely guarded besides. But I notice by the Berlin papers there's no let-up in the social life. Receptions, theater parties, dances, card parties—every night in the week. Now—we'll have no diffic'ity in gettin' cards for any affair we care to attend—through Goschen, at the embassy. Several of 'em will be given at houses of the general staff an' governm't officials. At such houses, you may be quite sure there'll be a good deal of conferrin'—in corners, where the people aren't likely to be overheard—regardin' secret instructions which have been given the army officers—apologies for cuttin' engagements because of unexpected orders to be elsewhere. It's impossible to suddenly change the every-

day plans an' appointm'nts of four million able-bodied men without a great deal of discussion an' rearrangin', under the surface! There'll be nothin' said where a foreigner is likely to overhear it—but I'll wager all Berlin is buzzin', underneath, over a movement so vast that it must affect every industry an' every family in the country! I fancy we've not more than two or three days to spare—in Berlin. What we learn, we must dig out in that time. After that, it's a dash for Ostend an' Dover, with some chance of our not makin' it, d'ye see."

Upon the following evening, they were among a large number of other guests in the Tiergartenstrasse at the house of General Count von Emmerling—one of the general-staff strategists of the German army. While taking off her wraps in the dressing room on the second floor, Alma noticed a luxuriously appointed bath adjoining—and beyond that, at the other side of the hall, a library sitting room evidently turned over to the men, that evening, for a smoking rendezvous—a passage apparently connecting it with the front room in which the men had left their coats. The hall door of this library was closed with a spring check, which prevented the smoke from becoming offensive to the ladies. Like their dressing room and the intervening bath, its long French windows opened upon a little balcony over a rear extension—and she noticed this balcony was hidden from the rear gardens by the dense foliage of three linden trees.

The arrangement with Carrington had been made upon the spur of the moment from a realization of the danger he was in, and a feeling that she must do her utmost—as her husband had done—to avert from England and other civilized powers the consequences of some hot-headed autocrat's momentary folly. At first, the excitement of making their escape from Austria had kept

her from thinking too much of the vast difference in her position and circumstances.

Up to the moment of Carrington's appearance at the Budapest station, her social position had been unassailable—she had instinctively felt a calm assurance of protection from every Englishman or American in any city or place, should occasion arise. Now she began to appreciate the fact that accident—unforeseen complications at any moment—might betray the circumstance of her apparently living in one hotel after another with a man who bore no legal relation to her.

Beyond that, she was realizing that they—two average individuals, with all the disadvantage of being under false pretenses in a foreign country—were pitting their brains and nerve against the highly specialized police machinery of a great world power. But instead of crushing her, the comprehension of their situation had the effect of bringing a coolness of judgment—a nice calculation of risks and possibilities—which rather amazed her. Standing there in the ladies' dressing room, she knew intuitively that if certain well-informed officials should by any chance happen to choose the library across the hall for a leisurely smoke, they would be likely to discuss the political situation. Even as the idea shaped itself in her mind, she heard a murmur of men's voices from behind the closed hall door. Slipping into the bathroom, which she locked against intrusion, she opened the French window and stepped out upon the little balcony—keeping in the deep shadow at the side of the windows.

There were two men in the room, one of whom she recognized by his voice as Count von Schwartzberg. In a moment, he addressed the other man by name—General von Emmerling, in whose house they were. The general was sitting at a flat-topped writing table between the two windows, with his back

to her—they had evidently been discussing the location of certain army corps, for he drew a sheet of paper from his pocket to confirm his explanation.

"I have here, count, memoranda of the entire mobilization, thus far—but it is written in such a way as to be unintelligible to any one else, in case I happen to lose it. The various branches of the service are merely designated with initials—'C' for cavalry—'A' for artillery—'E' for engineers and train—'S' for signal corps, including the Zeppelins—and so on. The names are those of towns or cities nearest the concentration camps, and you'll notice that none are within ten miles of any main-line railway across the border, from which overcurious tourists might see too much, and ask questions. There have been laid, however, spurs from the railways—ending in detraining platforms at the camps. If you'd like to have the memoranda for reference, it will take me but three or four minutes to copy it."

Outside, in the shadow, a trembling woman stifled with her knuckles the cry of horror which almost escaped. Carington, then, had been entirely right! It was no vague, intangible danger which threatened the peace of Europe, but a very imminent and deadly one! The names which the general had written in that memoranda would undoubtedly prove a key to the direction in which the blow was to fall. If it were only possible to obtain that paper—or the copy he was now making—

Just as Von Emmerling finished, there was a knock at the hall door, which he got out of his chair to open. One of the house servants murmured some message, and the general closed the door.

"Von Bethmann-Hollweg has just telephoned that he wishes to see us both in the Wilhelmstrasse for half an hour.

We can return before anybody misses us."

Handing the copy he'd been making to Von Schwartzberg, he slipped the original note under some papers in the upper right-hand drawer of the desk, and the two men went through the little passage into the men's coat room. For an instant the consequences of what she meant to do, if she happened to be caught, arose before her with appalling clearness—but she knew the risk must be taken. As she stepped into the library, listening intently for the sound of any footstep in the passage, she was amazed at the coolness with which she opened the drawer and fumbled among the papers for the mobilization memoranda. It had seemed a simple matter to lay her hand upon it instantly; but the seconds passed—hours they seemed. Presently she found it—under two other sheets marked "Belgian fortifications—French fortifications." These seemed important, also. Folding and tucking them inside her corsage, she disappeared in the balcony shadows as one of the general's sons came in from the front room.

Silently entering the bathroom window, she closed it, drew the curtains, and turned on the single incandescent. It seemed to her that she must have been at least an hour—but a little clock upon the table proved it exactly fourteen minutes. Slipping out into the dressing room, she gave her hair a couple of final pats before the mirror, and descended to the ballroom.

It happened, as fate sometimes orders such matters, that General von Emmerling's son was an attaché of the Auswartiges Amt—an ambitious youth, who took his profession seriously. Coming into the library, he was upon the point of lighting a cigarette, when his unusually keen sense of smell detected a faint perfume underlying the tobacco scent from his father's cigars. He noticed that it was strongest in the

vicinity of the desk between the windows, one of which was open; and it suddenly occurred to him that, among numerous letters and papers relating to army affairs, the count occasionally left documents in the drawers which might prove dangerous in alien hands. The faint perfume could have been left there by no one but a woman—and women had no business in that room at any time.

Stepping quickly to the hall door, he opened it slightly and saw that nobody was in the adjoining bathroom. From the hall he beckoned to one of the maids in the dressing room and asked her what ladies had been in there last. After thinking a moment, the maid described Mrs. Cecil more accurately than such employees are usually able to do—her gown being a rather striking one of black lace over opalescent silk. Von Schwartzberg, chief of the secret service, had left the house with his father a few moments before; but Colonel Grossehaupt, his immediate executive, was in the ballroom, dancing as if he were a young subaltern with no responsibilities.

Catching his eye, Captain von Emmerling nodded slightly, and Grossehaupt presently excused himself from his partner. A few whispered words in a corner explained the captain's suspicions. Inquiries of a gentleman who looked like a university professor, standing against the wall, elicited the information that Mrs. Cecil had spoken to none but Lady Netley since coming downstairs, and that she'd certainly had no opportunity to hand her anything unobserved. The colonel looked searchingly at both ladies, as they stood talking, near by—then whispered to Von Emmerling:

"If she really took any papers, they're on her now! If we publicly arrest her, and our suspicions prove to have no foundation, it puts us in a very unpleas-

ant position with the British embassy and——"

"Hmph! We shall care very little for anything of that sort in a couple of weeks! It's absolutely vital that no information gets to England now!"

"True, my young friend—*ja!* But do not forget that we are depending upon England's neutrality. Complications of this sort may easily jeopardize that! Sir John Netley is a prominent man—she is one of his party. If we can but keep England neutral for one month, we may then do as we please with impunity; she will be powerless against us! I will take the woman to the *Auswartiges Amt*—we have rooms there which have been used for such purposes before—and have her searched. If nothing is found on her, we can try what the American police call the third degree, to find out what she has overheard. If it seems we were entirely mistaken, I submit to a severe reprimand from the count and make the apology. *Ja!*"

Mrs. Cecil thought herself unsuspected, but the touch of the papers inside her corsage made her nervous, apprehensive of danger from any quarter. So, when Colonel Grossehaupt begged the pleasure of a waltz, and, while dancing, calmly informed her that she was under arrest, it was less of a shock than if she had felt no apprehension. Her amazed unbelief, however, was so perfect that it rather staggered him.

"You Berliners have a sense of humor all your own, colonel! I suppose you told me that just to see if I'd jump, and call for my husband. But I didn't do it, did I? Arresting me would be really too absurd, you know! Mercy, me! What have I done?" She looked up at him with a mocking glance of pure witchery that nearly turned his head.

"I regret exceedingly, madame, but I meant what I said! I've no wish to

make a scene, or subject you to unpleasant publicity—so you'll be taken to the foreign office in the Wilhelmstrasse and kept there until I receive further instructions concerning you. My motor is at the door—will you permit me to send up for your wraps, and accompany me quietly, or must we use force?"

"Why—it would be worse for *you*, in the end, if I did resist and make a scene! This is an inexcusable outrage, you know! But if I may tell Lady Netley where I've gone—so that Sir John and Captain Cecil may communicate with our embassy at once, I'll go with you peaceably."

Under slightly different circumstances, the arrest would have been a rougher, more inconsiderate affair. But, at the moment, it was vitally necessary that England should be hoodwinked as to the actual state of affairs in Germany, and held neutral until a certain preliminary stroke had been successfully delivered. After that, the debacle! Seating himself by her side in the car, the colonel watched her like a hungry cat until they reached the Wilhelmstrasse—and had the cushions of the limousine searched by the chauffeur after they left it. Then he took her to an upper room in the Auswärtiges Amt, generally used for conferences between high officials and the chancellor. Two secret-service men lounged in chairs at the other end of the room, while he went downstairs to procure a woman searcher.

During the ride, Alma had concentrated upon the problem of getting rid of the papers. If they were found upon her, she instinctively knew what would happen to both Carrington and herself—and the very imminence of the danger steadied her. The moment she entered the room, her eyes were taking in every little detail, with carefully veiled glances. Outwardly, she appeared quite at her ease—and calmly seated herself in a leather-upholstered chair at the side

of a broad table near the windows. Upon this table were a "Bradshaw Guide," a copy of the "Almanach de Gotha," a telephone directory, and several copies of the German illustrated papers—among them, a souvenir edition of the *Illustrirte Zeitung*, with excellent pictures and biographical sketches of all the government heads.

Nine people out of ten, waiting in a room for half an hour or more, will pick up anything in the nature of illustrated printed matter and look at the pictures to pass the time. The secret-service agents saw her reach across the table for one of the illustrated weeklies and settle back in her chair to look it through. She had thrown the cloak off her shoulders—a slight draft from the open window presently made her sneeze. They saw her draw a lace-bordered handkerchief from under the yoke of her waist—dab her nose lightly—and replace the dainty article. But what they failed to see—owing to her raising the paper so that it shielded her neck and chin from their view—was the folded something which her fingers drew from her corsage after replacing the handkerchief. Carelessly turning over the pages, she folded the memoranda in between the back ones—and presently laid down the weekly on the table, to pick up another one. She was absorbed in this when Colonel Groÿshaupt returned with a well-mannered but sharp-faced woman.

"You will submit to being searched, madame! It is known that you had certain papers in your possession an hour ago—and I need hardly say that it will influence us somewhat as to your punishment if you confess for what purpose you obtained them!" The man's tone was now brutal. They were no longer in a ballroom filled with prominent Berliners to whom anything in the nature of a scene would have been exceedingly distasteful—and he

had become convinced that she must be a spy.

"Unfortunately, you have me in a position where I can make no resistance, colonel! If you insist upon having this woman search me, I must submit, of course, but I warn you it is likely to cost your official position when our ambassador demands reparation."

He was quite well aware that, in a time of settled conditions throughout Europe, her threat would prove no idle one. But, knowing what he knew, he smiled inwardly at the idea of being degraded for overzealous performance of his duty. He nodded to the woman, who led Mrs. Cecil into a smaller adjoining room and locked the door. Half an hour later, they came out—just as hurrying footsteps on the stairs announced the arrival of the British ambassador, Sir John Netley, Count von Schwartzberg, and Carrington. The secret-service chief looked coldly at his executive and motioned him to one side, asking the colonel to explain his reasons for the arrest.

"Well—you found papers upon the lady—*ja?*"

"*Nein*, excellency."

"Hmph! Well—something else? Something of a compromising nature?"

"*Nein*, excellency—nothing whatever!"

"You threatened her, of course? Eh? You assured her that all her actions were known—that she had been shadowed since she left Austria, and had not been arrested until you had evidence enough to have her shot? *Ja?* You assured her of that?"

"*Ja*, excellency! The lady looked me over as if I were insane—then she turned her back on me contemptuously! *Donner!* If it should prove that we are right, she will answer for that!"

"*Nein*, colonel—it is *you* who will answer! Had you come to me before making this blunder, I could have told you all about the Herr Captain Cecil

and his charming wife! I've known them personally for many years. And Sir John Netley, as even you must know, is above suspicion! You will now make the complete apology to Madame Cecil and the ambassador—after which you will hand me your official resignation!"

A glance into his superior's face showed Grossehaupt that he meant what he said—for the moment. But his mind was at ease. When these English had left Berlin, his resignation would be returned to him, or Von Schwartzberg himself would give an accounting to authorities higher up. When the apologies had been made—when the colonel and the woman had left the room in disgrace—Alma picked up the *Illustrirte Zeitung* from the table and turned over the leaves until she came to a full-page portrait of Von Schwartzberg, with his biography opposite.

"Can you tell me where I may obtain a copy of this number, count? It's two or three months old—and I should very much like to take one home. You rescued me from a very unpleasant situation."

"Ach, madame! If you will accept that copy, with my compliments, I shall be much pleased—and flattered—*ja!* One moment! I will get a rubber band from the drawer here! So—permit me to roll it for you!" But she had it already rolled, and presented the end to him so that he might slip the rubber band over it.

Apparently determined to forget the unpleasant incident, they laughingly asked him to breakfast with them next morning at the Adlon, opposite the Brandenburg Gate, saying that Captain Cecil's leave expired the following week, and they intended motoring through the Harz Mountains on their way back.

When they were returning to the hotel, Carrington whispered:

"Did you really get any papers—or

was it all a fool mistake? I lost my nerve for a moment, when I heard of your arrest!"

"They're folded in the back pages of this *Illustrirte Zeitung*—full memoranda of the mobilization! I hid them in it just before the woman searched me."

"You're a wonder, Alma! That was a near thing!"

Next morning, the party of four left Berlin in their own car and motored along through Magdeburg, to the lower slopes of the Harz Mountains. But from that point they swerved off northwest—and upon the third afternoon rolled into the quaint little capital of Oldenburg, where they put up at the *Erbgrossherzog*, in a narrow street just off the *Marktplatz*.

For twenty-four hours, it had been increasingly evident that the usual summer conditions throughout north Germany were giving place to something more than a feeling of unrest. At a small town where they stopped for luncheon, there was a marked absence of courtesy in the bearing of the people toward them when it became known that they were English tourists. The hotel employees were sullen and openly neglectful. In various small towns through which they motored, they were stopped by local police, and compelled to show not only their individual passports, but the special authority given them by the chief of the secret service—and this paper was twice subjected to examination through a magnifying glass to make sure that the signature and seals were genuine. The document was respected, however, in every instance—and they were allowed to proceed when it seemed evident that other motorists were being detained, upon one pretext or another.

At the *Erbgrossherzog*, they found that well-known hostelry so crowded with returning tourists that it was im-

possible for Carrington and Mrs. Cecil to obtain the two-room suite and bath which they had invariably taken since leaving Budapest. Indeed, the proprietor assured them they were fortunate in obtaining a small chamber with two chairs, a table, a washstand, and a double bed. By this time, however, the great overshadowing horror which seemed inevitable had rendered questions of propriety trivial. When Carrington closed and locked the door of the room, he explained the situation briefly.

"Can't be helped, you know, Alma—the place is really overcrowded—all the other hotels are in the same fix. When you're ready to retire, I'll stay down in the foyer until you've had time to undress—then I'll come in an' manage to sleep on two chairs, don't you know. It'll not be the first time, by a long shot!"

She came to him and laid one hand on his shoulder, while they looked out of the window at the knots of people in the near-by corner of the *Marktplatz*.

Since leaving Berlin, she had been obsessed with a foreboding that after all their danger—after obtaining conclusive proof of Germany's secret intentions—they might not win across the border in time to warn the unprepared nations of western Europe. And Carrington's chivalrous respect for her position at every turn—his avoidance of undue familiarity in private—was beginning to influence her very strongly. Unless she had totally misread the expression in his eyes, even from the old days of her married life in London, he cared for her very strongly—and now she sensed a feeling of dependence upon his cool nerve, his ability to instantly size up a dangerous situation, and somehow win out of it.

"Barclay, what are the chances? How far are we from the Netherlands border?"

"Something under forty miles. Un-

less the roads have been torn up or obstructed, Sir John's car would make it in an hour. I've more than half decided to make a dash for it this evenin'."

"It would be risky. We might run into some barricade or torn-up macadam that will smash the car! You know, all along, we've been depending upon our six-cylinder power to make a sudden dash if we had to! Why do you suppose all these English and Americans are in the town? Oldenburg is by no means one of the popular resorts, even when the grand duke is at the Schloss—and I understand he's away with his regiment at the army maneuvers, somewhere."

"Ordin'ry maneuvers wouldn't require his presence—he stands too high—he'd merely deputize some general to represent him. His bein' away on milit'ry duty is rather ominous in itself. Let's go down for a walk about the Market Square an' hear what those groups of people are talkin' about! It may decide me upon what's best to do. Put on your hat again, an' come along!"

In the quaint old square of the Marktplatz there were noticeably an unusual number of evident tourists—strolling about with their Baedekers, or chatting in groups. As Mrs. Cecil and Carrington stopped near one of these, an excitable American was saying:

"There's something mighty fishy about all this! I bought my tickets in Hamburg, all right, all right—nothing said at the booking office about the road being out of order. Wasn't coming to this Oldenburg place at all! Get me? They switched us off from the other line, and dumped us down here! Couldn't get any satisfaction! Railway people say: 'No trains running into Holland—bad washouts—roads being repaired!' They'll book us back to Hamburg, all right—or up to Copenhagen! But who the devil wants to go to Copenhagen when his steamer sails next Wednesday from Liverpool!

Hey? Tell me that! Who wants to fool around Copenhagen? I been thinking I'd rustle an automobile somewhere, and hang the expense!"

"'Twouldn't do you any good if you did! We've been touring in our own car—but they tell us the roads west of here are impassable. Seems the summer maneuvers of the army are going on out there—they've taken possession of quite a stretch of country. War game, you know—sham battles—all that sort of thing. I told the officer chap who stopped me that we'd rather like to spend a day watching 'em—but he bristled up and said it was impossible. 'Umph! Umph! *Verboten!*' You know how these German officers stick their chest out, puff up their cheeks, and look as if they were going to explode when you suggest anything against their silly regulations!"

"Know what I think? This whole game looks to me as if there was going to be a whacking big war before long. Russia's going to help Servia to wipe Austria off the map—and the kaiser's wise to the game, and is going to put up the biggest scrap in the history of the empire."

"Aw—get—out! That makes me tired!"

In several groups, Carrington's keen glance noted certain quiet individuals who took no part in the discussion—and rarely smiled at the freely exchanged jokes of the exasperated Americans. They drifted from one group to another—apparently resigned to a more or less indefinite stay, like a majority of the other tourists. But no man in the diplomatic service would have failed to recognize the species. They were Von Schwartzberg's secret agents, even then marking certain people for arrest—not so much because they might be connected with some other government, as on account of their evident observations as they journeyed toward the frontier. They had been

talking to others in the Marktplatz of certain mysterious trains which had passed them en route—trains partly made up of passenger coaches with the blinds drawn, and partly of flat cars upon which pieces of what seemed to be heavy machinery were covered with tarpaulins. Carrington and Alma presently returned to the hotel, where they went up in the lift to Sir John's room and started a game of auction—discussing their chances of getting across the line. Sir John was of opinion that it might be done—and Lady Frances doubted their being stopped for more than temporary examination.

"Were it not for the count's special passport, I grant you it would be exceedingly risky to attempt it—but his own men can't refuse to recognize either his signature or his authority!"

"That's all very well, Lady Franc, if Von Schwartzberg has had no reason to change his opinion of us since we left Berlin. In the absence of telegraphed instructions, rescinding that passport, I fancy it might be respected. But we've no means of knowin' what circumstantial evidence may have come up to show that nobody but Alma could possibly have taken those papers from Von Emmerling's desk! It's a question as to whether we'll not run much less risk by keepin' that passport out of sight from now on. It's also a question whether we'll be allowed to leave the town with your car to-night—no matter which way we go! Looks rather suspicious, you know—startin' off at night. And yet—the thing has reached a point where I don't dare wait another hour. Either some of us get through an' give the alarm, or we don't. After we've played a bit, Alma an' I will go off to our room as if we were retirin' for the night—an' then Sir John had best go down to the garage as if he meant to overhaul the car—or put in a new spark plug. Be quite sure that she's in shape for a long spurt, at all events.

If any one questions you, say it's been dev'lish hot, motorin' in the middle of the day, so we're runnin' up to Bremen in the cool of the night, on our way to Hamburg an' Copenhagen. Might say we're not satisfied with our quarters here, an' have telephoned one of the Bremen hotels. Once outside the town, we can make a detour around on the Popenburg Road, an' try to get across the River Ems. Have the car at the side entrance of the hotel at sharp ten by the Rathaus clock."

When they reached their room and had closed the door, Alma placed her ear against the panels and listened for a moment or two, with a finger on her lips. Then she whispered—with her face so close to his that he unconsciously placed an arm about her shoulders:

"There was somebody watching us as we came along the hall. Von Schwartzberg undoubtedly has spies among the servants—his secret service is said to be the most thoroughly organized system of espionage in all Europe! Ring the bell and order up a bottle of wine—with some fruit and cakes. When the maid comes to the door, she must find us in negligee—and it will do no harm if you complain about the room in her presence."

In five minutes, Alma had removed her dress waist and skirt, let down her hair, and was brushing it before the mirror—while Carrington, without coat or waistcoat, was smoking a cigar by the window. There was a knock at the door—which the maid opened wider than necessary—and Carrington gave the order for wine and cakes, winding up with a complaint about the accommodations.

"You tell the people in the bureau that this is a pretty rotten room for the price we're payin'! No bath! Nothin' but a pitcher an' basin for two people! How the deuce is one to be clean? No dressin' room! We can't move about without gettin' into each other's way!

Dashed if I don't think we'd best run on to Bremen, even at this time of night! We'll certainly do much better there, at Hillmann's or the Hotel de l'Europe! I say—can one telephone Bremen from the bureau? Have them send up our bill—and look sharp, now, with that wine! Here's a mark for you!"

In a quarter of an hour, the maid returned with the wine and a hotel bill for the entire party. No—the herr could not telephone to Bremen after six o'clock at any time—and now the wires were out of order. Placing the bottle, glasses, and cakes upon the little table, she went out. They had just opened the wine when a heavy fist banged against the door and a gruff voice ordered them to open it. An officer and two soldiers stood outside.

"You are the Herr Captain Cecil? *Ja?* The Frau Cecil, also? You will come wit' me to the bureau of the commandant! *Ja?*"

"You mean that we are under arrest? For what, if I may ask?"

"Tat I do not disguss wit' you—*nein!* You are under arrest—*ja!* You will come—at once!"

"Look here, my man! I don't permit any one to use that tone with me! Keep a civil tongue in your head! I've a special passport here from Count von Schwartzberg—you're familiar with his signature, I presume? If you annoy us, it will cost your commission, I assure you! If you're merely obeying the orders of a superior officer, we'll go with you to the commandant. Just step outside and close the door while we dress!"

Carrington's tone of calm assurance and display of the dreaded secret-service chief's undoubted signature rather took the not overbrilliant officer's breath away. If there had been a mistake—if these English were, indeed, friends of the count, or under his special protection, this arrest might be a serious matter. To be sure, everything

would be changed in a day or two—still, after some phlegmatic reflection, with his nose against the door which had been closed in his face, he decided to treat these people with civility until the commandant had seen them.

They purposely kept him waiting fifteen or twenty minutes—then came out, locking the door after them, and accompanied the detail of soldiers to the commandant's headquarters. Here they were promptly taken to an office on the second floor, where a heavily built man sat writing behind a desk. Barely glancing up, he said curtly: "Take the woman into that room at the end of the hall, and remain there with her until further orders! One of you will stay and search this man!"

The soldier was evidently accustomed to his work, for in a few moments he had gone through Carrington's clothes—felt of the seams and lining—and placed letters, passports, money, keys, and time-table, from the pockets, upon the flat desk in front of the commandant, who glanced over them rapidly.

"Ah! The special motoring passport we've heard about by telegraph! The identification iss perfect! But—where haf you concealed the papers from General Count von Emmerling's library?"

"If you're speaking to me, you'll have to talk sense! I don't understand you!"

"So!" The German's eyes went over the Englishman with a cold, malevolent stare. "Look you, *mein freund*—outside of the town wall there iss a file of soldiers—waiting under orders by a couple of graves which they have been digging! You and the woman will be taken out there bresently—undt shot. You haf concealed those papers of the general's, so there's no use disgussing what I subbose you call this outrage! The woman has passed as your wife—whether she iss or notd is none of my goncern. But if you do not desire to

have her shot with you, you will broduce those papers—at once!”

Carrington's mind had been working like a flash of powder from the moment he entered the room. The papers were concealed inside of Alma's clothing. Once discovered, nothing could save them—and the destiny of Europe might hinge upon the possibility. But he was quite sure that she wouldn't be searched without orders—— If it were only possible to turn the tables—before—— He was now alone with the commandant, the soldier having retired after searching him. The doors were closed, and he felt sure nobody would venture in unless called. It seemed not to have occurred to the officer that he might be dealing with a desperate man, or that, armed as he was, the other would have any chance against him. His sword had been hauled around until it stood upright between his knees. Depending from his belt was a heavy-calibered Luger automatic pistol. Carrington instantly sized up his chances, and stepped quietly toward the desk.

“I don't know the first thing about the papers you mention—and you may rest assured that if we are shot or abused in any way, the Berlin government will call you strictly to account for it! Some one has blundered—stupidly! Count von Schwartzberg gave me that passport in Vienna—he's known me and my wife for several years! And if you received telegraphic instructions relating to us—purporting to have come from him—you'll find they're forgeries! If you want to shoot us, colonel—go ahead! You'll pay for it—dearly! I could have given you a hint about something which is occurring in France just now, if you'd treated me decently. But when a person talks as you have, I'm not very much disposed to extend any courtesies! We English mind our own business, you know—we've no inclination to mix in Continental politics!”

The German looked him over cal-

culatingly. His brows puckered heavily. Was it possible there had been a mistake, after all? The Berlin telegram—from Colonel Grossehaupt—had given no names. Merely personal descriptions, which seemed to fit, and mention of a forged passport. He took the document up and examined the signature closely. If he knew it, and he was quite sure he did, the writing was genuine. Still, no spy would hesitate to lie or concoct a plausible story, with his life and that of his woman at stake. No! Much safer to shoot them, and have done with it! But—it might be as well to hear what he had to say about France. Carrington read his thoughts like an open book.

“Well, when I make mistakes, I apologize. I also obey orders. What can you tell me about France? It may have some bearing on your case.”

Carrington placed his hands on the outside edge of the desk, and leaned across as if to make a confidential communication. His manner was so natural that the commandant never had a suspicion the man would dare attack him. But a clenched fist suddenly shot across the desk, catching him squarely between the eyes, and knocking him back in his swivel chair until it nearly overturned. Before his dazed senses began to collect themselves, another hand reached across to snatch the Luger automatic from its holster. Dazedly, he began to hear a quiet voice coming to him from a very great distance.

“Colonel, I owe you an apology, but you're too dangerous to fool with! Head all clear, now? Understand what I say? Very good! In the first place, I assure you that you've been quite mistaken in regard to us—the count will tell you so, when that forged telegram is cleared up. But you've threatened to shoot me and my wife! Under the circumstances you'll understand I can't trust you to deal fairly with us until the matter is settled. So you're going to

send for my wife, and accompany us back to our hotel—alone. We had decided upon motoring to Bremen with Sir John and Lady Netley, in search of better quarters. You will accompany us part way, at least—answering all questions from police or military officers who may stop us—acting as our surety until we are no longer liable of arrest upon the road.”

“Hmph! Undt if I refuse? *Ja!* If I refuse?”

“I will shoot you—if it’s the last thing I do on earth!”

“Very goot! Shoot!”

“And have the story get around that the commandant of Oldenburg—armed with sword and magazine pistol—sitting behind a wide desk—permitted himself to be disarmed and shot by a man whom his own soldiers had left entirely in his power? Rather a nasty thing to say of an officer, after he’s dead—don’t you think? On the other hand, if you go along with us decently—try to make some amends for the insults and threats to which you’ve subjected us—no one will ever hear of the affair. Just as you please, of course. I’ll fire when I count three. One——”

“Wait! Berhaps it iss better that I go with you!”

“Now you’re acting like a man of sense! You’ll forget all about us tomorrow!”

Alma’s relief and amazement at seeing Carrington apparently upon most excellent terms with the commandant, when she was brought into the room, were almost too much for her. Yet she managed, somehow, to greet him pleasantly—assure him she was quite certain he’d find it all a mistake—and walk leisurely back to the hotel, where they found Sir John in the car, at the side entrance. It took but a few moments to have the luggage fetched down—then, after being cordially introduced to the Netleys, the commandant seated himself in the tonneau by Carrington,

and the car ran smoothly out of the old town.

Instead of proceeding to Bremen, however, Sir John took the first road to the west—and, after a thirty-mile run, found himself approaching a vast military camp, with the embers of recent fires glowing in every direction. Even with the commandant accompanying them, the risk seemed too great to attempt breaking through. He turned south and ran down in the direction of Osnabruck. On the clear stretches of road he let the car out to a sixty-mile clip, regardless of risk. Twice they bore over to the west—and ran into vast encampments, from which only the presence of a uniformed German official in the car saved them from complications. In four hours—even slowing down for the towns through which they had passed—they had covered a hundred and sixty miles. At half past three in the morning, they crossed the Rhine at Dusseldorf—and, shortly after four, were approaching Roermond on the Meuse, when they found the road blocked by an outpost of uhlans—and could see lights on both sides, at a little distance, which indicated the presence of at least ten army corps.

The uhlans were barring their way when one of them flashed a pocket torch upon the four in the tonneau. The commandant had determined to give the alarm at any cost—but the steady pressure of something hard between his lower ribs and hip bone made him change his mind. He gravely returned the salute which his uniform demanded from the uhlan officer, and the car was allowed to proceed. Thinking themselves out of danger after they had crossed the Meuse, they set him down on the road half a mile from the nearest town—but, just beyond it, they saw approaching them a detail of five uhlans, riding back to cross the river. Knowing instinctively that they would be taken back across the German line, Carrington

rapidly explained that he would get out of the car and submit his papers for examination—which would probably give the car a clear road.

"The second you see an opening, Sir John, shove up your spark—give her all the gas she'll take—and run for it! It's the last risk—and we simply can't fail now! Make Brussels first, Alma—then London—as quickly as the Lord'll let you! Never mind me—fancy I'll get through somehow!"

When the car was halted, one of them was ordered to get out, as Carrington had foreseen—and after considerable expostulation he did so, cautioning Sir John—whom they mistook for a chauffeur—against letting his clutch pedal slip while the engine was running idle. As he was getting out of the car, Alma became apparently frightened at such an unheard-of stoppage by soldiers upon a public road in times of peace, and threw her arms about Carrington's neck as if begging him not to do it—whispering in his ear:

"Kiss me, Barclay! God knows when we'll meet again!"

Then he was out on the road, showing his passports, letter of credit, and other identifying documents. The uhlans reined their horses around him, bending down to look at his papers in the ray of light from an electric torch. The road was clear. There was an exclamation of dismay from Sir John, as if something had gone wrong—an "I told you to look out for that clutch!" from the apparently disgusted Carrington—and the car shot away into the darkness at a sixty-mile gait.

Before noon, sober-faced aids were galloping in several directions from the

royal palace in Brussels—and the telephone service was taken over by the government. That night, a group of stern cabinet ministers sat around a table in Downing Street, London—discussing the greatest impending catastrophe the world had ever known—while foreign-office operators flashed England's ultimatum to Sir William Goschen, in Berlin. In the Elysée Palace, across the Channel, a one-armed veteran of the Franco-Prussian War told President Poincaré how many days must elapse before the armies of France could be mobilized on the Belgian border.

Upon the following day, Lady Frances and Sir John drove a pale-faced woman as far toward the River Meuse as they dared go. As they stopped to set Alma down in a small border village, the deep booming of artillery came across the fields, shaking the ground under their wheels. It increased suddenly to a sullen roar. In the distance, panic-stricken peasants could be seen running westward along the roads. On the eastern horizon, dense clouds of black smoke rose sluggishly into the air. A faint wailing, as of men in mortal agony, was borne along on the fitful wind.

"Alma—it's sheer suicide! They told me, once, of what Port Arthur was like—this is a million times worse! Come back with us, dear—it's really insanity!"

"Are you forgetting, Franc? He stayed—bravely—without hesitating—like the gentleman he was—that I might warn Belgium and England and France! If he's alive, I shall find him. Then they may shoot us both, if it has to be!"

Something new in the way of war stories will be found in the next issue of POPULAR when we shall begin the "Revelations of an Ambassador-at-large." These "revelations" are sensational.

A Matter of Viewpoint

By Raymond T. Ashley

This was the reward one man asked for saving the life of another: three meals and a cigar! A Christmas story from Southwestern Colorado where the mountain torrents are fed from banks of eternal snow. The viewpoint in the story is a banker's; his problem a very delicate one.

THE Paonia National Bank opened as usual at nine o'clock on the morning of December 13th.

Outside, the first blizzard of the winter raged, with particles of freezing sleet driving horizontally before a twenty-mile gale. The few pedestrians who were about hurried from shelter to shelter, heads bowed into the wind. Joe Engel and Tom Owens, cashier and paying teller respectively of the Paonia National, ran "head on" into each other in front of the bank, picked themselves up with much hilarity, and entered.

The street was deserted, the bank building cold and dark, for the electric plant ceased operations at seven in the morning in the rural Colorado town. Owens stirred the fire in the big stove, then he and Engel set to work upon their morning balances, bending over in the half light until their foreheads nearly touched the books.

James Addison, the iron-gray-haired president of the institution, came in amid a swirl of snow, and stopped to remove and shake his overcoat. Then, passing along before the windows of the two busy clerks, Addison noted the date upon the calendar above the cashier's place, and essayed a little joke, as great men are apt to do when the laugh is sure because paid for.

"Good morning, boys," he observed. "I see the thermometer, barometer, and

stock market are down, and it is Friday, the thirteenth—look out for bad luck to-day!"

"The boys" laughed in a quite satisfactory manner, and the president proceeded to his sanctum, a small cubby-hole of ground glass and oak at the end of the brass grillwork partition.

Fifteen minutes later the bad luck commenced.

The darkened, wind-swept street, with the snow rendering indistinct even the far side of the courthouse square, made the bank seem as isolated as if it had been in the center of a desert. A farmer's cart, with the driver hunched over in the attitude of King Richard the Third, rolled out of the whiteness up the street, across the field of vision, and into the other whiteness beyond. The town marshal stopped in front of the window long enough to partake of a chew of tobacco, and to wave a greeting to the cashier, then he, too, passed out of view on his petty round of looking for offenders against a peace which was never offended.

Two horsemen rode down the street leisurely, letting their mounts pick their way through the slush. Arriving at the bank corner, they reined up, dismounted, and tied their cattle to the iron ring in the telephone pole. Still without any sign of haste, they entered the bank and crossed the tiled floor, one—the larger of the two—to the window of

Engel, the other to that of the paying teller.

These functionaries, busy with figures and pens in the dim light, did not look up for a moment; they raised their heads simultaneously, and each said a bright "Good morning"—to a muzzle the size of a dime, backed by a snow-covered hat, a bandanna-hidden face, and a fish-oiled slicker which concealed the body of each freebooter to his ankles.

"Cash only, please!" said the taller of the two, in a light conversational tone; then, as Engel showed no signs of lowering his hands from their vertical position above his head or his eyes from their fascinated, birdlike stare at the wavering gun, the bandit reached in, unlatched the brass door, and methodically emptied the gold, silver, and currency trays into a russet leather kit bag he produced apparently from nowhere. When his harvest was gleaned, still keeping the cashier covered, he backed slowly toward the door, with a curt word to his associate to do likewise. Engel dropped his eyes casually, but the gun in the hands of the robber was too steady for Joe to attempt to get access to his own loaded pistol under the counter.

If James Addison had had a match with which to light his postprandial cigar, he would have stayed within his office, and the cross currents of several lives would have eddied differently from that moment. Upon such flimsy threads hang destinies and nations, lives and short stories! Not finding the necessary splinter of wood and sulphur, the banker rose to go into the main room and borrow one from Engel; opened his door, and came upon the end of the tense little drama. The two bandits were making for the door; Engel and Owens were staring at the receding muzzles as though in hope of hypnotizing the Cyclopean iron eyes;

none of the four heard Addison's door open.

The president grasped the situation, reached for his gun in the drawer of his desk, the drawer squeaked, and—things happened in quick succession. Both highwaymen turned at the sound from this new and surprising quarter, and in the fraction of a second in which their attention was diverted, Engel moved with a celerity which astonished himself. Joe dived for his weapon, and fired as soon as he felt the butt within his grasp. The smaller of the two men reeled, caught himself, then plunged to the floor as another bullet tore through his lungs.

As the larger man whirled to fire at Engel, Addison shot at the bandit's arm; the aim was true, for the arm fell inert at the side of its owner, the gun falling to the tiles. Addison fired again as the man opened the door, but missed, and the lone desperado was gone—across the sidewalk, upon the big buckskin horse, and into the murk of storm. And the little kit bag, with the Paonia National Bank's sacred money inside it, went with him!

In a few moments the crowd of morbid curiosity seekers had reached a size closely approximating the population of the town; but the bank doors were locked, and no one was allowed to enter except the coroner and the marshal, who bustled about with great show of officiousness and very little efficiency.

When the disguise of the dead man had been removed, they knew exactly as much as they had known before. He had never been seen by any one in the vicinity, and neither his pockets nor his tethered horse gave any clue to his identity.

In the course of some two hours it occurred to the marshal that the sheriff should be notified, and a pursuit instituted; after another hour, that official was found playing cribbage in the rear of Smith's Emporium, and along

toward evening a truly rural posse started out, in eighteen inches of fresh snow, after a bandit who had six hours' lead and a mount better than any in the village.

And for nine days the milk soured in the pans, the one daily train came and went unheralded, and even the cracker-box statesmen in Smith's grocery let the nation run itself, while all the countryside earned and spent—in imagination—the two thousand dollars reward offered by the bank and the authorities; but only in imagination, for the lone fugitive was not forthcoming.

The Paonia National drew a careful balance of its funds "before and after taking," and, as a result, some seven thousand two hundred and four dollars was marked off their comfortable surplus and charged to profit, loss, and the public enemy; which irked them sore.

II.

If there is aught of truth in any of the various theories of evolution, or the transmigration of souls, James Addison must have been descended from an inch-worm. In Spanish-speaking countries, where a name is applied according to some personal characteristic, he would have been yclept *El medidor*, "the measurer." One pictured his brain as teeming with figures and coördinates, rather than the usual loves and pleasures and human interests; and one imagined his heart to be not an organ of warm-pulsing muscle, but as some sort of "recording wattmeter" which pumped his thin blood and measured the flow of it!

James Addison had the banker's viewpoint, acquired through many years upon that side of the ground-glass partition whence the neatly lettered sign "President" read backward.

The banker's viewpoint is a curious phenomenon; when one is thoroughly inoculated with its virus, one has a tendency to regard all things in the light

of their monetary equivalent—perhaps, just a trifle, one is liable to leave out of his "trial balance" of life all consideration of love and charity and tenderness, which cannot be cashed or deposited, and have no value as collateral.

Thus the years had crystallized Addison's nature of "the measurer" into an unreasoning desire for more and ever more of the dollars that meant as near happiness as a man might aspire. He had seen too many figures—and not enough women. Only one woman had been in his life—his wife, Mary, and she had *frozen*—there is no other apt word—and faded and died, leaving young Billy, who had his mother's eyes and mouth, and nothing of his father but an inceptive "head for figures."

When young Billy, twenty years old, had returned from college with the sun in his blood and a "gentlemen's course" diploma in his figurative pocket, the elder Addison had thought it the most natural thing in the world that his son should enter the bank, under the direction of Joe Engel.

When Billy laughed at the idea of handling other folks' "greasy money" for six days a week behind the counters of the Paonia National, his father had been grieved, but had offered no objection. However, a coldness had arisen when Billy lost a thousand dollars backing the thoroughbreds at the county fair, which James Addison paid, albeit grudgingly.

The breach between father and son widened as the months passed, more on account of the coldness, the aloofness of the father, than from any other cause. The break had come when Billy returned from a week at Grand Junction, with an aching head that called for cold towels and sympathy, and with a few hundred dollars in poker I O U's upon the wrong side of the ledger. James Addison, ten years late, had undertaken to lay down the law, in hard, incisive words, which aroused within

the lad the Celtic anger he inherited from his maternal ancestors. Billy had left home, and for over a year no word had come to the gray-faced man who hid his heartache behind his wall of dollars and reserve. Billy had gone out to tilt at the windmills of a world which was strangely out of perspective.

On the days following the robbery, the elder Addison urged forward the search for the culprit, by renewed reward and by threats of dire consequences when another election should roll around. The faithful Engel, wise in the ways of men, surmised that his employer was only finding an outlet for the wistfulness and loneliness which consumed him.

The cashier had formed the habit of late of going in the evening to the banker's house on the hill, in order to be with Addison as much as possible.

James Addison most certainly was not a congenial companion, as he would sit for hours at a time gazing moodily into the fire and answering the sallies of his subordinate with grunts or monosyllables. The excitement of the robbery and the search for the criminal who had escaped had taken the mind of the bank president off his personal grief, but when the search was abandoned, on the twenty-third of December, the feeling of loneliness returned with redoubled intensity—aggravated, no doubt, by the holiday spirit of all the other inhabitants of the little town.

All in Paonia, rich and poor alike, were preparing for the Christmastide—with the single exception of Paonia's most prominent citizen, James Addison, who should have been happy, for he was very rich. Somehow, it had been borne in upon his consciousness, these last few months, that he was not so terribly rich, after all; he felt miserably poor and lonely and old.

Joe Engel did his best. On this evening of the twenty-third, he sat for hours after the winter sun had gone down,

seeking vainly for a subject of conversation which would interest his employer. But when the cashier mentioned the Mexican war, Addison promptly informed him that he did not care whether the Mexicans were warlike or peaceful, alive or dead; when Engel referred to currency legislation pending before Congress, the bank president stated positively that it was all one to him whether that august body of citizens at Washington should legislate, pray, run around in circles, or bay at the moon!

Joe gave it up in despair and went home, leaving Addison to face his thoughts. He faced them, alone, in the empty house, which held naught but memories and echoes; echoes of a voice which had crooned young Billy to sleep for a few short years, and then had grown silent, memories of a manly lad who had helped to bear the silence—had helped greatly, although the detachment of his father, the very incoherence of a love which was inherently deep, had been mistaken by the boy for indifference, for coldness, for money madness.

James Addison gazed with somber eyes, first into the slowly dying coals, then into the two faded photographs above the mantel. He stood and leaned close to the picture on the left.

"Mary," he said, "I am sorry." Then to the other photograph—of a lad whose eyes seemed to turn after one, he said softly: "And, Bill, I wish you would come back and help the old man bear it!" But the words sounded harsh in the empty room, and the dim-lit face of her up there seemed hard and unyielding. The banker leaned his head upon his folded arms; but he did not weep—tears do not come easily when one has acquired the banker's viewpoint!

He was conscious all at once that some one had been ringing the doorbell again and again. Without any semblance of interest, he went to the door, took a telegraph message from the uni-

formed boy without, closed the door, and looked at the outside of the envelope with the usual inane speculation as to the sender. Finally it occurred to him that the best way to solve the problem was to open the missive. He did so, read for, perhaps, one-fifth of a second, and jumped for the telephone, twisting the little handle with quite unnecessary violence.

"Rio Grande Railroad office!" he shouted, and by the time the "Hello" of the station agent came to him, he was dancing up and down in his impatience.

"I want an engine, and I want it quick!" he shouted, in the voice of one who owns half the surrounding countryside. "Where for? Ouray, and I want to start in just twenty minutes. What? What's that, sixty dollars? Young man, nobody inquired how much it was going to cost, did they? I don't care if it costs six thousand dollars. You have that engine ready when I reach the depot, or I'll have your hide!" Phlegmatic James Addison jammed the receiver onto its hook and ran for his overcoat.

Whatever the message from Ouray had contained, it had been potent enough to overturn in five seconds a banker's viewpoint which had been fifty years a-building!

III.

During the summer months, God's country lies in the region known as the San Juan, in southwestern Colorado; a region of super-Alpine peaks and magnificent torrents, with a setting of more-than-Italian sky, and a climate of, well, say, heaven.

But mountain torrents must needs be fed from banks of eternal snow, and when that fine Italian sky becomes leaden, and for days on sunless days the silent flakes in billions swirl to the mono-colored earth, super-Alpine peaks are precarious haunts; for billions of

flakes make tons; and countless tons of sliding snow, moving at the velocity of a Krag bullet, are irresistible!

The summer names of gulch or creek or basin are picturesque, poetic; but their winter names are sinister. Your Columbine Hill of yester-June is the deadly Marshall Basin Slide; and the Bridal Veil Falls of happy luncheon memory, when one sat upon the roof of the snow tunnel to be kodaked, becomes Old Riverside, old ogre Riverside, who darts down his three miles of V-shaped track and yearly takes his toll of those who brave his wrath.

However, the law of existence says men must mine, and the law of man says that those who mine must keep the titles of their ground clear, "e'en though the heavens fall"—in myriads of white, silent, shiny flakes!

Ed Walton, mining engineer, was worried. For five weeks he had lain inert, slowly nursing a broken leg back to strength. And for three of those weeks, through his square window in the Ouray Hotel, he had watched hopefully for a cessation of the snowfall in the mountains; but day after day the clouds hung low, and the mantle of white became heavier.

Further wait was impossible. The patent papers for the Baltic Group must be posted upon the ground before Christmas Day, and it was now the twenty-third. Walton rang the bell for the attendant, and sent for his most efficient chainman, Will Addison.

A few moments later Billy Addison came in, fresh from the bath and hearty breakfast his young body demanded.

Here was no boy who had shattered his physical and moral well-being in riotous dissipation! The eighteen months since leaving college had transformed young Addison from an immature, pleasure-loving boy to a very efficient specimen of six-foot manhood.

On leaving home after the quarrel with his father, Billy's inchoate code

had demanded of him two things: that he give way no more to those weaknesses which had caused the breach, and that he "make good" through his unaided efforts. Then, and only then, would he return to Paonia and prove to James Addison that he was of the stuff from which real men are made!

Walton had given the young fellow a chance, when Billy had sought work with the request that he be "canned if he could not deliver the goods." But the "can" was very far from the mining engineer's thoughts. Billy had "delivered"!

"Billy," Walton began, "I am up a tree! The patent papers for the Baltic people must be posted on the ground by day after to-morrow, and——"

"All right," the young fellow interrupted, "I'll start right now——"

"But there's some pretty hard snow to buck," the engineer warned.

"And here is a pretty hard man to buck it!" Billy thumped himself confidently upon the chest. "I'll take a saddle horse to the foot of the Riverside Zigzag, then climb the hill. I will be back by dark."

The lad shook hands hurriedly, and fifteen minutes later Walton saw him gallop up the street, with a lunch in his saddlebags, and the Baltic papers in his pockets.

It became dark at half past four, and Walton became nervous. A dozen times through the day he had heard the rumbling of the mighty slides, their deep-toned reverberations echoing from the encircling hills.

At six, unable to stand it longer, Ed Walton went to Billy's room, and prowled among the papers and photographs he found on the bureau. Finding an old letterhead of the Paonia National Bank, with James Addison's name in the corner, he guessed correctly that this Addison was the father of Billy, and immediately Walton telegraphed to the banker that Billy was in the hills,

with the snow slides running badly. It was this message which had galvanized James Addison into such astonishing celerity!

Walton chafed until eight o'clock, then, as no word came from Billy, the engineer could stand the suspense no longer. He took to his crutches again, and sought the big Club Saloon, the haunt of the camp's leisure.

When Walton entered, the place was crowded, forty or fifty men playing at the card tables or grouped at the enormous stove.

"Boys," Walton sang out loudly, "I am afraid I will have to have some help; Billy Addison is up in the hills, and it begins to look like he is behind one of the big slides!"

The room was silent. The card games halted for a moment, and the players at the billiard tables paused. But no one volunteered. Ed Walton was turning toward the door, his nervous smile gradually changing to a sneer, when a man rose from one of the tables in the darkest portion of the room: a man broad of shoulder, with dark beard and dressed in German socks and corduroys.

"I'll take a chance," he said casually, then, with a flickering smile, which included the crowded barroom, he added: "Guess there won't be much competition."

Walton extended his hand. "You are the only three-ply thoroughbred in this village!" he exclaimed. "What is your name?"

The stranger hesitated for an instant. "Jack Elkins," he said.

"I wouldn't ask you to tackle it, if I could navigate myself," Ed apologized.

"Oh, that's all right, partner," replied Elkins. "Just give me a line on the trail, a horse, and a shovel, and I will see what I can find!"

When the outfit had been furnished, Ed Walton stood upon the edge of the sidewalk and cried great, manly tears,

as he watched a lone rider gallop into the night, past the flare of lights which threw weird, capering shadows across the snow.

The storm had ceased abruptly, and the sky, nearly clear, showed blue-black in contrast to the white-limbed peaks of the White House Range. Six thousand feet above him the mountains loomed, seeming ever falling forward from west to east, impressive, silent, untroubled by the trifling tragedies of the human ants who worked and lived and struggled with so much effort and lack of dignity. Walton shook an impotent fist at the towering masses, then crunched his way slowly to the hotel, and to bed—but not to sleep.

James Addison reached Ouray at four in the morning, his specially chartered engine breaking all records for a winter trip up the cañon from Paonia, one hundred and twenty miles away. Directed by a sleepy attendant at the Club, the banker sought Ed Walton's room in the hotel and knocked sharply. The mining engineer, having guessed rightly the import of the special train, arose and opened the door.

"Where is my boy?" James Addison asked, without preliminary. But Walton, dumb misery in his eyes, shook his head.

"But come, come, let us do something!" Addison insisted.

Ed pondered a moment, then commenced to dress warmly. This done, "Come with me!" he ordered.

A scant half hour had elapsed before the two, in a rented sleigh, with two sure-footed horses, had left town by the road leading up the cañon, the horses plowing breast deep through the drifts.

Three miles above Ouray, where the road is blasted from the quartzite cliffs, stood an old tollgate, attended by one "Uncle Jimmy" Sanders. Here Walton gave up in despair; the horses were exhausted, and the pain in the engineer's

injured leg had become unendurable agony.

James Addison, numbed and cramped by the bitter exposure, sat still, only his restless eyes showing the anxiety which consumed him, as he scanned the dawn-lit expanse of snow and crag.

Uncle Jimmy Sanders, roused by a shout, assisted both men to alight, built a cheerful fire, and busied himself preparing breakfast for his guests, with never a word concerning their quest except when he answered Walton's query with the information that both Billy's horse and that ridden by the stranger had gone through the gate during the night, the bridle reins tied to the saddle horn after the approved fashion.

During the meal, Ed Walton attempted to utter some word of hope, but Addison silenced him with a gesture. They finished eating in silence.

Uncle Jimmy opened several packages of oat meal and corn meal, and went to feed the horses. Pulling wide the door, he paused to peer nearsightedly up the cañon. Then—

"Put on the coffeepot again, Ed," he quavered; "here come a couple of dead men for breakfast!"

The mining engineer hobbled to the doorway, but the bank president was ahead of him, running up the snow-filled roadway.

Around the bend, a hundred yards away, staggered two figures, veering ludicrously, he on the right progressing by a series of painful hops, aided by the left arm of the other.

Even as Walton looked, the left-hand man toppled over in the snow, pulling the limping man to earth with him.

Old Sanders dived for his bunk in the corner, grasped a bottle of whisky, and sped up the trail, sixty rheumatic years forgotten in his urgency! Walton remained in the cabin, jumping about on one foot, and cursing great, harmless oaths, striving to give expression to the wonder which consumed him.

IV.

"Hello," dad," said Billy Addison weakly as his father reached him, and "Billy!" breathed James Addison, as he folded the lad in a great bear hug, while the restrained tears of many heart-weary months coursed down his cheeks and froze into tiny icicles in the wind. "But you are hurt!" he cried—for Billy's face was a mass of frozen blood.

"No, I am all right," the young fellow answered. "But see about Jack, here. He is played out, and he has a hurt arm."

Old Jimmy had arrived by this time, and was kneeling by the side of the "rescue party." Elkins had not fainted; he had simply sunk from exhaustion when the tollgate cabin was sighted. Now he raised himself and reached for the bottle in the hand of Sanders, and drank deeply, the fiery stuff sending the color back into his cheeks. His right arm lay inert, and a small rivulet of blood ran down the fingers and dripped to widen a splotch in the snow.

Mr. Addison, releasing Billy, sprang to the injured man's assistance. Tenderly lifting the hurt arm, he commenced to roll up the coat sleeve; but the arm was jerked away, though the effort wrung a moan from Elkins. "It is nothing but a scratch!" the latter muttered gruffly. "Let's get along."

The overcrowded sleigh entered town at sunup—nine-thirty; Walton and young Billy were taken to the hotel, where old Doctor Blake set to work upon Billy's ankle. Elkins refused to go to the hotel, or to have the physician until after he had finished with Billy. The sleigh waited for the doctor, then drove up Vinegar Hill with Blake and Elkins. James Addison watched them out of sight, then went to the room where Billy and Ed Walton were propped side by side on the bed, and volleying two hundred words a minute.

"Here!" the elder Addison commanded. "Let's have that all over again, from the beginning."

"All right, dad," Billy answered; "there is not much to my part of it. I left here at ten o'clock, and turned my horse loose at the foot of the Zigzag. From there up I had hard sledding, but I made it, and nailed the patent papers to a scrub juniper on the Baltic claims before three in the afternoon. Ate my lunch, and hit the trail again."

"The wind had risen, and the new drifts had filled the trail, so that I floundered on the slide-rock slopes about as much as in the road. It was dangerous, and I knew it. I picked my footing as carefully as possible, until my foot caught in a crevice; I slipped, fell—head downhill—then could not get either up or down, as the loose snow gave no resistance for my hands to push against. Every movement sent a stab of pain through the ankle I had twisted in falling."

"Was I cold? Heavens, no! I was sweating like a grass-fed horse—not perspiring, but just sweating."

"It never occurred to me that Old Riverside might slip. I guess a fellow never thinks he is to be the one to get it next. I simply lay there, waiting for the pain to quit. It was warm and comfy, and I was fagged. I think I must have dozed, for the next thing I knew, some one was walking on me. Jack Elkins, puffing waist-deep in the drift, had easily followed my elephant trail from the main zigzag, and had stumbled upon me, half buried."

"Jack picked himself off me, shook off the snow, picked up his big coal shovel, and said: 'Come on, kid, we've got to hump along.' Just like that; no heroics, no 'me chee-ild' business, but a simple summing up of the facts at hand."

"I rubbed my ankle with snow when we had straightened it out, and we started for town, Jack half carrying yours respectfully, while I looked for-

ward with much glee to eight miles of hop, step, jump through three feet of 'beautiful snow'—hippity, hop, hop, zig-zag to the right, hop, hop, hop, allemande left, then sit down to rest in the middle of a snowslide track, with forty million cubic yards of it between us and the summit of the range!

"We heard the slide break—one big *bo-o-oom—swish!* One fifty-eighth of a second later, the light went out. That's all—don't ask *me* to describe an avalanche; I know nothing whatever about it—and I have inside information at that. It seems to me that I remember Jack throwing his arms around me; and pulling me to a crouching position; nothing else is clear. I am sure I kept my eyes open.

"When I awoke, of course I did not realize what had occurred; I felt snug and warm. Some one was beating a drum slowly, and in my ears was the tinkle of falling water. My senses clearing further, I knew where I was. Both feet and my left arm were pinned tightly, but I could move my right hand. Groping in absolute blackness, I felt Elkins' body above me; it had been his heart, beating against mine, which had furnished my drum music. His left arm, down across my neck, was *tense*, and I felt his wounded hand, doubled over my face, with blood dripping into my hair. He was holding his weight off me to keep me from suffocating! Above Jack's head my fingers found the inverted bowl of his shovel—all that had saved our lives after Old Riverside had spared us!

"Elkins, sensing from my movements that I was awake, spoke first; in a husky whisper, because he was all in. 'How's she coming, kid?' he asked. Jack would never make a good hero—he needs a press agent.

"I am still here,' I answered.

"Listen!' Jack said; somewhat fearfully, I thought. 'I don't know whether

I am crazy or not. Can you hear running water?'

"Yes," I reassured him, 'I thought at first I was dreaming, but I can still hear it.'

"Thank God,' I heard him mutter, then: 'Here, now, you have your right hand, I have my left—let's dig!'

"And dig we did. Jack would scoop a handful of the closely packed snow, pass it to my hand, doubled under as far as I could reach, then I in turn would pass the stuff under him, across my own body, and pack it as hard as I could behind my left knee. It was slow work, but gradually it became easier, as we reached the loosened snow, away from our heated bodies. Suddenly Jack fell heavily upon me—we had broken through! Two minutes later, we landed in the good old Uncompahgre, already chambering its little arch under the big slide; it knows how—it has done it each year since Pleistocene! Ahead of us, a hundred yards downstream, gleamed a crescent of daylight; I say 'daylight,' because it seemed that way to us—in reality it was the darkest portion of the night!

"There is not much more to tell. We scrambled out of the cañon to the wagon road, Jack helping me, and both of us impeded by our frozen clothes. We had to keep moving, so we crawled, hopped, and rolled until we saw the toll-gate—and you!"

Billy glanced at his father, then quickly away, blinking fast; for the banker was leaning forward eagerly, unconsciously stroking the hand of his son—*mothering* him with a touch the boy had not ever known from man or woman. James Addison's throat was working spasmodically, as he endeavored to form the words that would not come—the fount had been too long dry.

Walton broke the ensuing silence in a matter-of-fact, brusque tone. "Mr. Addison," he said, "I kind of like the

Hambletonian strain in this colt of yours, and if you will buy him a transit, this firm will be Walton & Addison from now on."

"What do you say, Daddison?" Billy asked, making use of a diminutive which had been forgotten since knickerbocker days.

"Will I buy him a transit?" James Addison asked of the circumambient air. "Two, nine, a hundred of them—on one condition, that this firm sets its patent stakes while the columbines are blooming!"

"Done!" the two on the bed said, with one breath.

Doctor Blake appeared for a moment at the door. "Go to sleep!" he commanded the two recumbent figures, as he nodded his head for the banker to accompany him. Outside, the medical man commenced hesitantly. "Mr. Addison," he faltered, "it is not ethical, and it is not my usual procedure to talk with my mouth; but did I understand you to say that man in the cabin, Elkins, was hurt by a *snowslide*?"

Addison nodded affirmatively.

"Well"—the old doctor was very deliberate—"that avalanche was a mighty good shot!"

Saying which, Blake moved sedately down the street, leaving one James Addison standing on the curb, in the dusk, combing his hair with his fingers and thinking deeply.

V.

Doctor Blake had ordered that the man who had saved Billy Addison's life should be left in peace until evening, so there was nothing for James Addison to do but to curb the impatience which consumed him. In the reaction from a lifetime of money-getting and parsimony, the banker now wished to lavish upon Elkins some tangible expression of his gratitude.

It was a very delicate problem; one might not offer money in return for

such a service—the chances were that a man capable of the clean-cut, quiet heroism which had characterized the retiring Jack Elkins, would resent any attempt to reward that service in any way other than by a simple word of thanks. However, the elder Addison was resolved to overcome any such scruples, if he could find any method by which this might be accomplished. Perhaps Elkins would accept a situation in the Paonia bank—but even James Addison, the solemn, was forced to smile at the mental image of the big fellow behind the counters with Engel and Owens, fingering the money which Billy had—rightly—characterized as "dirty"! No, Jack Elkins would never make a banker! He looked much more like one who would live and die in the open, a "rolling stone" to whom the gathering of "moss" was not of the slightest consequence! The bank president walked block after block in the snow-filled paths which performed duty as sidewalks, and in the end he had reached no conclusion at all, satisfactory or other. He returned to the hotel, carried dinner up to the two men in Walton's room, ate with them, then secured a bowl of broth and a glass of milk for Elkins, and climbed the slope of Vinegar Hill to the cabin Blake had indicated as belonging to Jack Elkins. Arriving there, he turned the knob quietly and entered.

Elkins was lying in bed, but the banker received the impression that the man had been listening intently, that Elkins seemed to be on guard, as it were, though what there was to fear was certainly not evident. Be that as it might, there could be no doubt as to the welcome light in the eyes of Jack Elkins when he saw what his visitor carried.

"Good evening, Mr. Elkins," Addison began.

"Evenin'," Jack returned, "and holy cats, but I'm glad to see you and that

grub—I was just about ready to howl like a starved wolf!"

"Howl all you like," the banker said genially. "It is your night to howl. It's a shame for a man who put in the night you did last night to be left alone and hungry in an empty cabin. I think we had better move you to the hotel to-morrow!"

"No hotel in mine, thanks," the injured man stated positively. "I'm pretty comfortable here, and I will be able to get up in the morning. There's nothing the matter with me but a scratch or two."

Addison had his own opinion about that scratch or two, but he kept that opinion strictly to himself, and started talking volubly, striving to lead the conversation into a channel which would allow him to say some small word of his appreciation.

"Mr. Elkins——" He hesitated, then stammered: "Maybe you thought this morning that I was just a trifle thankless, but I want you to know—I can't say it exactly——"

"Then don't try, sir," the other man broke in. "I reckon I know how you feel; and I reckon the kid would've done the same for me. He looks like that kind of a colt to me! Let's let it go at that, and call it an even break."

Addison took the unhurt left hand of Elkins, which lay upon the covering of the bed; his voice was husky when he continued.

"No," he said, "we won't call it an even break, by any means; but we will say no more about it, as it seems to worry you to hear any praise. But I will tell you one thing: as soon as you are able to travel, you are going with me for a month or two, and you are going to have the time of your young life. We have a fine little town, down there at Paonia, and the whole town will be yours for as long as you wish to stay."

"Down where?" Jack Elkins asked, a

little frown of puzzled surprise showing between his brows.

"Paonia—this State; I am president of the Paonia National Bank."

For no very apparent reason the man on the bed began to laugh; he tittered, restrained himself, and finally burst into a guffaw which threatened to choke him. The banker watched him, a fear growing within him that the dramatic episodes of the preceding night had unsettled Elkins' reason.

"What are you laughing at?" he asked at last.

"Why—why—at the picture of me hobnobbin' with a banker." The explanation was not very lucid, but it had to suffice, as Elkins offered no further enlightenment.

"Well, what do you think of my proposal?" the banker insisted.

"Oh, no, Mr. Addison," Elkins demurred; "I couldn't think of doing anything like that; I'm afraid Paonia would get on my nerves. I'm not used to the alfalfa country. If you are dead set on doing something for me, why, just have those hotel people bring me up a bite to eat to-morrow, and a cigar to steady my pulse."

And this was the reward Jack Elkins asked in return for having saved the life of another man—a man who was a stranger to him, whose very name was unknown when he took the dangerous trail leading into the snowslide territory. Truly, as Billy had said, Jack Elkins needed a press agent. Three meals and a cigar for saving a life; what in the world is romance coming to? James Addison was learning several things which up until this time had not been included in his philosophy of dollars and cents.

The banker shook his head in deep humility, as one who admits defeat. "Well, have it your own way," he conceded. "Is there anything I can do to make you more comfortable to-night?"

The injured man had finished with

the gruel and milk, and his eyelids were drooping like those of a tired child.

"Nothing, thanks, except a cup of water. You will find a faucet over in the corner, if it isn't frozen."

Addison went to the portion of the room Elkins had indicated, and took a granite-iron cup from the little closet above the cookstove. He turned the brass handle of the faucet, but no water came. He looked under the sink in the swiftly gathering dusk, and saw another handle, of iron, leading through the floor, supposedly to the pipe beneath. He seized this and gave it a twist. It resisted, and he jerked sharply. The iron bar gave way suddenly, and with it a section of the flooring. With some thought, perhaps, of repairing the damage, the banker struck a match and knelt, shading the light so that it might illuminate the space beneath the floor. The match burned, and still he knelt as motionless as a statue, until the flame reached and scorched his fingers.

Beneath the boards was a small, russet leather satchel, which had a very familiar look. The president of the Paonia National Bank was gazing upon the loot stolen from that bank, and the lone bandit who had escaped was no other than the savior of the president's son!

James Addison knew now that he had suspected this since the occurrences of the early morning, or at least since the old doctor had vouchsafed the information that the injury to the arm of Elkins was a gunshot wound, and not the result of his experience under the avalanche. The secretiveness of Elkins, his refusal to let them examine his arm when they had found him and Billy on the trail above the tollgate; these circumstances and the subsequent refusal of the big fellow to go to the hotel, or to have any publicity attached to him or to his exploits, were now very easy of explanation. Jack Elkins was

the robber of the Paonia National, and the bank's money was hidden beneath the floor of the cabin until such time as it could be removed and circulated without raising suspicion.

Addison glanced furtively toward the bed across the room. Jack Elkins was breathing the deep inhalations of healthy sleep, and was blissfully unconscious of the tempest within the mind of his visitor.

"You are a thief," thought James Addison. "You are a bandit, an outcast, a criminal in the eyes of every law which men have made for their protection—and you are the finest, bravest gentleman it has ever been my lot to know." He gave a little twisted smile, and set himself to the solution of his problem; a problem the answer to which was not contained within any set of figures Addison had learned from school or from experience.

His duty in the matter was quite plain. Here was a man who had stolen money, who had filched from under the eyes of James Addison a part of that trust which the banker had regarded as sacred. Here was a fugitive from justice, with a price of two thousand dollars upon his head, "dead or alive"; an outlaw against whom the hand of every law-abiding citizen should be raised. It was quite simple. James Addison had only to go downtown, seek out those in authority in the little mining camp, and turn over to them the man sleeping on the bed, and the incontrovertible evidence of his guilt which reposed under the floor of the cabin. And yet—James Addison made no such move.

Bandit or thief, Jack Elkins had proven himself a big-hearted man, capable of the highest courage, and demanding no reward whatever. There had been many honest men in that saloon when Ed Walton had gone there in search of assistance; there had been many men as strong and as hardy as

Elkins—more hardy, in fact, for the bank robber was weakened by the wound in his arm. And yet, no one of those men had volunteered to trifle with the wrath of Old Riverside.

Reaching some decision at last, James Addison threw back his head and arose. Taking his loose-leaf "memo" from an inner pocket, he detached a leaf and scribbled upon it:

For value received. JAMES ADDISON.

Through all the years since Mary Addison's death, her husband had carried an exquisitely wrought watch, a gift from her in the too-short period of their happiness together. Addison removed the picture of his wife from the cover of the hunting case, then snapped the case upon one corner of the slip of paper. He laid watch and note upon the pile of money within the kit bag, replaced the section of flooring as it had been when he entered, tucked the bed-clothing around the limbs of the sleeping Elkins, and went out into the night.

VI.

Joseph Engel, cashier of the Paonia National Bank, had a grievance, and Tom Owens, paying teller in the same institution, had his choice of thræe recourses: Tom could either listen to the airing of Engel's views, he could put cotton in his ears, or he could leave the bank. Tom listened.

"Is old man Addison running this bank, or isn't he?" Joe demanded of his associate.

"Why?" Tom inquired mildly.

"Well, he has been back in Paonia a week, since he went skyrocketing across the country on that freight engine, and in that time he has visited the bank three times; twice he stayed long enough to tell me some fool joke I knew ten years ago, and on all three occasions he slapped me on the back and gave me the cheer-up signal. The

only time I can't be cheerful is when somebody slaps me on the back.

"They used to call him 'Shylock' Addison; I guess we will have to change his name to 'Sunny Jim.' I went up to see Billy Addison the other night, to see what I could learn. This is what Bill handed me: that if you and I can't run the bank without the old gentleman, we will have to close the doors! He says he and 'Daddison' are going to be kids together for a while. 'Daddison'—huh!" Engel finished in profound disgust.

Joe Engel liked to give the impression that he was a hard-headed man of business; in reality his was the heart of a boy. He was pleased to the depths of his being at the turn events had taken, but he felt obliged to cloak this from Owens, as being conducive to laxity of discipline. The worthy Joe would have been disturbed if he could have seen the grin with which Tom bent over his ledger.

What other complaints Joe had upon his mind will never be known, for his discourse was interrupted by the entrance of the president himself. James Addison stopped before the receiving teller's little window. "Cash only, please!" he remarked, with a fiendish knowledge that the bank robbery was the one sore spot upon the record of Joseph Engel.

Engel answered the grin. "Well, anyhow," he said, "there is one thing for which I am thankful."

"What is that?" the boss queried.

"I'm glad that you are on that side of the partition, so that you can't slap me on the back!"

Addison walked deliberately to the end of the counter, through the gate, and stepped up to the shrinking cashier. "Happy New Year, Mr. Vice President!" and he gave Engel a blow that sent him staggering across the floor.

"Mr. what?" Joe asked curiously, as soon as he recovered.

"Vice president," Addison repeated. "We have had a directors' meeting today, and you are the new vice president and managing director of the bank. Tom, here, is the new cashier!" He stood back, that newly acquired grin in evidence.

"What are *you* going to do?" Engel accented the pronoun.

"Me? I am going to make up for fifty years I have lost! Three of us young fellows—Bill and I and a lad named Ed Walton—are going to graze in the tall-grass country, and I hope I never see the color of dirty money again—I've gotten out of the collecting habit! It is three o'clock; let's lock the doors of the bank, and you two come along with me: we have a big feed up at the house—turkey and fatted calf and a bottle of wine!"

Engel and the pleased Tom Owens dived for their hats and overcoats, the newly elected vice president muttering "a bottle of wine, a bottle of wine," as if he had never heard of such a thing before—as, indeed, he had not, from the lips of James Addison!

The fatted calf was eaten, and toasts drunk after the approved formulæ; then Engel and Owens returned to the bank, the New Year's business making extra work on the books. Billy lay down on the big sofa in the dining room to take a nap, for his ankle had not yet fully mended; James Addison smoked his after-dinner cigar in lazy contentment before the fireplace, as he had done on that other evening, a short week before—a short week, but what a change had come over the spirit of his dream in the meantime!

And, as on that preceding evening, the doorbell rang and the banker confronted a uniformed messenger at the door. He receipted for a bulky package from the express company, billed from Ouray on a money waybill. Doubtless some token from Ed Walton,

he thought, wondering why such a token should be addressed to him instead of to Billy.

He was mistaken. The package was not from Walton; it was a russet leather kit bag, and James Addison saw it for the third time. When the clasps were sprung, a cascade of disks of silver and gold leaked out upon the hearth and gleamed in the firelight. From the top of the heap of coins, Addison took a slip of paper, opened it, and read:

OURAY, Colorado, December 28, 19—.

Mr. James Addison, precedent Paonia national bank, Paonia, Colo.

DEAR SIR: Sometimes when a fellow doesn't go strait, it is because the game was crooked. Stealing from the bank was one thing, but stealing from my friends Jim and Bill Addison is another.

The money is a few dollars short. I will make that up as soon as I am able to go to work. Ed Walton says I can go as general utility man on a big camping trip you fellows are going to take, if it is agreeable to you and Bill. Is it? Your friend,

JACK HOOVER (known as ELKINS).

p. s.—I kep the watch, as I supose you wanted me to—I want to se if it can keep any straiter time than I can.

"My friend Jack Hoover, alias Elkins!" murmured James Addison.

Hearing Billy reach for his crutches and begin to stump across the floor, the banker raked the money into the receptacle which Hoover had returned, and thrust the bag under the chair.

"What was that at the door?" Billy inquired.

"Bank business, and none of yours," his father evaded.

Billy limped into the circle of light, and stood peering at the photographs above the mantel. The elder Addison rose to his feet, put his arm about the shoulders of the boy, and he, too, gazed at the likeness of her whose pictured eyes had seemed cold and hard. The eyes were smiling now.

"It is all right, Mary," James Addison said. "I didn't quite understand!"

Custodian of the Post

By George Washington Ogden

Here is a ghost story for you—not in the setting of a moated grange, but in an army post, an almost forgotten place where the people around lived their quiet lives with only the memory of the dead fighting days to stir them. To this post—a haunted one—comes the new custodian, to take up the duties of predecessors whom the visitations of the ghosts had driven to insanity and death. His own encounters with the ghosts of the post are set forth here with sympathy and strength and a keen sense of dramatic values. A story you will follow with unflagging interest.

(In Two Parts—Part One)

CHAPTER I.

A SOLDIER COMES.

WHEN you came to the hotel at Hermosa, you stepped over the dog and put your name down in the register which Mrs. McDaniels whirled around on a turntable contrivance with advertisements adorning its border.

There was no going around the dog, no rousing him to yielding an inch, no way of avoiding him whatever. That was the only door, and it was a narrow one, and the dog lay across it just within the threshold, a bony, gray beast, dewlapped, somnolent, old. Generals had stepped over him, and their dames; broad-backed subalterns had lifted their heavy feet above his mange-worn spine; tinkling spurs of far-riding cattlemen had been raised to avoid rasping him out of his ancient dreams.

He was a dog of privilege, as one could see at a glance, and the world which came to Hermosa would have gone out of his solemn way if it could have found an open road around.

Not that much of the world came to Hermosa any more. Far from that. But now and then, at long intervals, somebody of strange cast came over on the mail wagon from the railroad forty—the exact held out for forty-two—miles away to the south. Sometimes the visitors were geologists and university professors scenting out minerals and remains, but generally it was only somebody connected with the forest reserve, on a round of inspection.

Hermosa was accustomed to them, and gave them little attention and thought, for the place was full of memories of great ones in gold braid who used to arrive with a troop of cavalry outriders in the days when there were soldiers at the post, lying deserted and rotting now, at the foot of the mountain behind the dusty village.

Mrs. Lucy McDaniels, relict of the more or less respected Pat McDaniels, army teamster in the old Indian days, had to turn back but two pages in her register to come to the name of the last colonel who had commanded at the post before its abandonment. That name

had been entered on her page seven years before, and the number of strange guests arriving since that day had been sufficient only to cover the two following leaves of the book. And this together with the day, month, and year given a line above each entry.

Stockmen, cowboys, sheep-herders, and such, who were known to her from their comings and goings of twenty years, never defiled the almost-sacred book by contact of their fists. They were part of the country; nobody required a record of their movements—and, in many cases, themselves least of all.

So there was a stir in Hermosa when the mail wagon came in that evening carrying a lean, lank man clothed in the tan service regimentals of the United States army. Mrs. McDaniels was in her place behind the hotel register when the guest stepped over the dog, bag in hand. She marked with her quick eyes, as sharp to note such incidentals as an officer at inspection, that his leather leggings were at that state of polish that the old dog could have seen himself in them if he had taken the trouble to lift his head.

"Cavalry," said she to herself, with deep approval, the light of welcome growing in her eyes, "and he's seen field service, too."

Her eyes lifted to his face as he approached, but together with the gloom of the interior—for dusk was settling—and the shadow of his hat, she could not make much out of it. Only that it was hollowed and pale, with a darker shading of small mustache across his lip.

"Good evening, captain," she greeted him, offering the pen.

He returned her salutation with a smile, and spread his name upon the historic register. After that was done, he stood the pen up in the little compartment filled with shot, as if he been used to doing that sort of thing all his

life. It was a little act which lifted him several points in the esteem of Mrs. McDaniels. It took a soldier and a gentleman to understand the purpose of that little jar of shot. There never had come along a professor yet who grasped it.

There was a smile on her face as she turned the register around to read his name, and when Mrs. McDaniels smiled it was like opening an umbrella. The expansion was amazing.

"Captain Cuthbert Powers, U. S. A."

That was what she read. It was satisfying. There was something in the name Cuthbert that made her feel comfortable. It seemed to suggest to her gooseberry pie.

"Supper will be ready by the time you wash the dust off," said she.

The driver had taken the captain's trunk out of the back of the wagon, and had driven off to stable his team, for it was beneath his plane of consequence to carry any man's trunk into the hotel. He had treated the trunks of colonels and brigadier generals in the same manner in times past.

Mrs. McDaniels summoned her son, Jerry, from the post-office store which occupied a part of the hotel, and Jerry brought the small, flat piece of luggage to the door, handling it as if he loathed it. There he left it standing, returning to his duties as postmaster, for, small as it was, the trunk was weighty, and lifting it over the dog unaided was a thing beyond the brawn of Mrs. McDaniels' son.

Mrs. McDaniels smiled as she went to the kitchen, and she smiled still while she selected a steak for the captain's supper and prepared to fry it with her own hand. The barefooted Mexican woman rolled her big eyes with unspoken resentment at this usurpation of her sacred office. But she did not know that there was a captain to cook for, clothed in the blessed uniform of the United States army, the first one that

had come in through the door in many a tedious year.

Mrs. McDaniels was a stickler for rank. She spread the captain's table as far away from that at which the driver of the mail wagon refreshed himself as the length of the room would permit, and she skirmished around until she found some whole china for it. When he came down from his ablutions, as soldierly a figure for all his sparseness as one would meet in a day's march, she was there with her hand on the back of his chair to draw it out for him, and see him seated with due ceremony and comfort.

The captain seemed a bit puzzled and embarrassed at these elaborate attentions, but he accepted them gracefully, and with thanks. He studied Mrs. McDaniels as she sped from kitchen to dining room on her errands of hospitality, bearing in his dishes with her own hand.

The first impression which the captain had of Mrs. McDaniels was of black eyebrows. The next was of freckles, and the next of fat. That was the common piecemeal appraisal that strangers made of her. After that her native graces, which were graces of word and deed, began to come forward and assert themselves. And they were so charming, so captivating, and so sincere that her waddling gait was forgotten, her masculine eyebrows were forgiven, and her freckles cleansed like the leper's spots.

After supper the captain sat outside under the cottonwood which stood before the door. It was a grand tree for its kind, departing from the scant-limbed characteristics of the family in that land, stooling out like a banyan, with cool, drooping branches, through which the wind moved with a sound like the passing of a troop of ladies robed in newly woven silk.

The driver was a man who knocked down all the barriers of caste that he

could lay his hand to, for he was no respecter of men above their trunks. So he sat under the tree, also, and smoked his pipe, and the captain welcomed him as man to man, although Mrs. McDaniels was in an uneasy sweat.

She had asked the driver about the captain, his destination, duty, and intentions, but he could give her no satisfaction. The captain seemed to talk about everything else but himself, the driver said, and to get out of him all that he knew, even more than he ever supposed he *did* know. But where he came from, where he was going, and how long he was going to stay when he got there, remained as close in the captain's possession as before the loquacious Bent Dagley met him.

Like Mrs. McDaniels, Bent Dagley was a survivor of the military days in that part of the Southwest. As long as there had been need for soldiers in that country, Dagley had served as scout. He knew the land as well as the Apaches, against whom he had guided many an expedition. When they were finally rounded up and deported, and the necessity for the soldiers was thereby removed, Bent got the mail contract. He had held it ever since.

Bent was a little man, as dry as saddle leather, with a sandy mustache and a sharp nose. There was a shaking of gray in his dark hair, which he wore close cut to hide, and his Adam's apple looked like an elbow in his gaunt neck. He was not remarkable in any particular way, save for his persistent hope that he might, in the end, induce Mrs. McDaniels to marry him.

Mrs. McDaniels had joined them in the twilight under the tree, and her son Jerry, big-limbed, fat, and lazy, came out after he had distributed the mail to such of the scattering neighbors as came in after it. The captain seemed unable to believe that the great lout was Mrs. McDaniels' son. No, he in-

sisted, brother more than likely, but son, never! One so blooming and young—and all that ancient, but still valid, stuff.

Mrs. McDaniels liked it, as countless mothers before blushed over the same old guff, and felt warmed in their hearts toward their flatterers, never doubting for an instant that their words were sincere. But it did not strike Bent Dagley with the same sweet, seductive sound. Bent rose up on his hind legs, as they say in Missouri, and began to feel as mean as a grizzly bear.

"Huh, anybody with eyes in his head could see she was his mother," he growled, managing to make a considerable man sound, with a rumbling depth to it quite surprising, taking into account his dryness and light weight.

"You've known her longer than I have, and that makes a difference," conciliated the captain good-humoredly.

"Oh, laws!" exclaimed Mrs. McDaniels, as if depreciating the revelation which she knew was coming.

"Twenty years," declared Bent, "and I'd been hearin' of her five or six years before that."

"Oh, you git out!" said Mrs. McDaniels.

"She's one of these here good lookers that age don't make no mark on nor difference with," said Bent, trying to repair the damage that his precipitate heat had wrought. "She'll keep on lookin' young till she's eighty-seven."

"I believe you," agreed Captain Powers, "and since we are to be neighbors"—turning to Mrs. McDaniels—"maybe I can borrow some of your cheerfulness and hope."

"Neighbors?" said she, leaning forward a bit.

"Neighbors?" repeated Bent, lifting himself on his elbow out of his reclining position on the bench.

"I'm the new custodian of Fort Simpson," said the captain.

"Then you're not in the service?" said she, a little sharply.

"Retired," the captain explained, "disabilities. I was shot through the lung in the Philippine campaign, and never got over it. Those few remaining in this world who have a little interest in me believed this climate might patch me up. Now you've got my life from beginning to end—or almost the end."

"No, no," she protested kindly, "not halfway to the end, we hope. This climate's fine for lungs; it'll do anything but grow new ones in a body's chest, I guess, and you look a long ways off from the graveyard yet to me."

The captain's importance had suffered, momentarily, with the pronunciation of that word "retired." But when she heard the manner of it, and learned that he was still warm from the smoke of conflict, she instantly re-invested him with all the consequence that his rank would bear. Bent warmed to him a little also. A retired army officer was in just about the same standing, in his opinion, as a stage driver who had descended to plain teaming. He had undergone a leveling process which placed him on the plane of equality with a somewhat less select, but a great deal more numerous, class of his kind, which was a matter for felicitation, rather than regret.

"Well, so you're the new man," said Bent. "We heard that somebody had been appointed, and about time, too, for it's fallin' to rack and ruin over there at the post, with them sheepmen carryin' off the lumber to build their houses out of."

"So you're the new custodian?" said she, as if there was a marvel in it. "Well, well!"

"Married?" asked Bent.

"Unmarried and hopeless," laughed the captain. "Have a cigar?"

Bent took it, although he seemed to feel that it was a gift of a Greek who

meant to betray him in the end. He sat turning it in his fingers before lighting it, and the moon stood with its big yellow face looking over the hills, revealing him in his doubt and perplexity.

Jerry had no further interest in the captain, it seemed. He got up, with a mumbled something about work to do, and went into the store.

"So you'll be taking possession tomorrow?" Mrs. McDaniels inquired.

"I'll go over and take a look around, but I'll stay here a week or so, if it's agreeable, until my traps come on. How far is the post from here?"

"Three miles," she told him. "This is right on the edge of the reservation. You'll live in the colonel's house over there?"

"I suppose so," said he. "I was given to understand that it's full of the department's property, but I'm bringing on my own bedding and books and things."

"It stands just the way the last man left it," said she, "and it's a big, fine house, too. I know it from cellar to garret—only there's no cellar and no garret to it—as they say. I was an army woman once in my time."

"You don't tell me?"

"Yes; my husband was post teamster back in the good old Indian times." She sighed. "But them days is gone, and he's gone, too, and all that's past and done."

"And you're better off for it—for both of 'em," said Bent unfeelingly.

"Mr. McDaniels was a good man—in his way," she defended weakly.

"But it was a mighty poor way!" said Bent.

"Ma, oh, ma!"

The noise came bellowing out of the store, where a dim light burned, and the titanic Jerry was supposed to be at his labors.

"Yes, honey!" Mrs. McDaniels answered, getting up hurriedly and waddling away.

"Listen to that big rhinostefat!" grunted Bent disgustedly. "What that feller needs is a term of about seven years with a pick and shovel in the mines. That'd make a man out of him, if anything in this here world ever would, which I've got m' doubts on!"

Captain Powers had become fully acquainted with the lay of the land before that moment. He knew Bent's simple heart, in so far as its yearnings for the widow went, as well as he knew it himself.

"Well, when you step in and take the head of the family, you can send him on his travels," he suggested.

Bent sat up, straight and alert.

"Say, how'd you git next to that, captain?" he asked.

"It's hard for an honest man to hide the honorable sentiments of his heart," said the captain, by way of explanation.

The answer pleased Bent as well as it gave him relief. He saw that the captain was not in a humor to become a rival in the widow's affections.

"I've been courtin' her for nine years!" he sighed.

"Keep it up," encouraged the captain, "you'll win."

"Do you think so?"

"Sure to."

Bent sat thinking it over a while.

"Much obliged," said he.

"Don't speak of it," discounted the captain.

"Ever anything I can do for you, captain, call on me," offered Bent.

Captain Powers thanked him, and they sat smoking on a perfect footing of comradeship, which it was the gift of that thin string of a soldier man to establish in spite of time or circumstance, whenever he felt that he had met a man worth while binding to him with a friendly bond.

"It's been some time since the last custodian left, hasn't it?" the captain inquired, at length.

"Nearly a year," said Bent.

"Removed?"

"Resigned."

"Oh, I see. Got a better job?"

"Don't know as he did," said Bent. "I tell you, captain, they ain't many better jobs goin' around lookin' for men these days than sixty dollars a month and all found."

"I guess not. But that being the case, how did it come that the job was open so long? There were no applications for it from around here, I was told."

Bent smoked half an inch of his cigar in meditative silence. Then:

"Well, pardner, I don't want to discourage you, or set you agin' your job at the start, but I'll tell you what that feller told me. He was a civilian, and he come on here from Iowa to take this place, put in by his congressman. Well, I brought him out here, same as I brought you, and he was a strappin' piece of beef, I can tell you, when he arrived. Nine or ten months later I took him out, and he was as ga'nt as a crow. Without any clothes on that man wouldn't 'a' made any shadder. That man was run out of that old post by ghosts, and nothing in this world *but* ghosts! Everybody around here knows that, and that's why nobody applied for the job."

"What kind of ghosts?" asked the captain indifferently.

"Just plain ghosts, or ghost, I should say, for there was only one. It was a woman, he said, but I couldn't make much out of his goin's-on. When that man left here he was about as empty of common sense as a human man can be, and live."

"Did anybody else ever see the ghost?"

"What ghost?" demanded Mrs. McDaniels harshly. She had come up behind them unheard in her moccasins, and stood large in the moonlight at the end of the bench where Bent sat.

"I was just relatin' to him the facts

about Bill Longan," said Bent, waving his cigar with explanatory flourish.

She laughed, and sat down beside him.

"He was a ordinary fool," said she, "and you don't want to take any stock in the tales he started goin' and left behind him."

"But he seen a ghost, not one time, but dozens of times, and I don't no more doubt that he seen it than I doubt that I see you this minute," insisted Bent.

"I'm interested, ghosts always interest me," said the captain lightly. "I've never been this close to a ghost before in all my life."

"Yes, he seen a ghost!" said Mrs. McDaniels. "He carried it around in a bottle, like many a man's done. Anybody can see a ghost if he drinks whisky long enough."

"But what have you got to say to explain the endin' of the two before him?" asked Bent.

"Oh, mush!" said she.

"There were others before Bill, then?" inquired the captain, not a little amused.

"Two," said Bent, "both of 'em stout men, and not afraid of no livin' thing that moves on legs. I knew 'em both well."

"Drunkards," said the widow shortly.

"But not till after they'd been associatin' with that dang ghost for five or six months," said Bent.

"Well, well!" commented the captain. "What become of them?"

"One was found drowned in the swimmin' pool up there, all dressed and everything, and the other one hung himself in the stable. Anyway, it was supposed he done it. They found him a week or two after it happened."

Bent seemed to relish telling of the tragic end his friends had come to in guarding the government's property at the abandoned post. But the widow made light of it.

"That's a lonesome place," she ex-

plained, "and you know, captain, when a man takes up with a bottle for company it never helps matters much. They brooded and they drank, and then they saw things, too, like Bill Longan, the last man. You'll never have any trouble that way; you're a different kind of a man."

"You've got the keys to the colonel's house, ain't you?" Bent inquired of Mrs. McDaniels.

"Yes, it's still here," she answered. Then to the captain: "I'll give it to you. There's only one—Bill left it here when he run away from the ghost."

There was scorn in the widow's voice, but it was lost on Bent.

"Bill told me that keys wasn't no stopper agin' that ghost," said he.

"He locked the house day and night, but still it come in. But maybe it won't bother you at all, captain; anyway, I hope not."

Mrs. McDaniels got up, with the key evidently in mind. The captain pressed her to resume her place beside her faithful admirer on the bench, seeing that there was no hurry about opening the colonel's house.

"In the morning will do very well for the key," he said.

"I expect you'll find things kind of tumble-down over there at the post," said she, "for it stood a good while between caretakers. Pity, too, for the government spent a lot of money there—more than a million dollars, I've heard them say. I expect that lock on the front door of the colonel's house is worn out. It ought to be changed, I guess."

From that she branched off very naturally into recounting her experiences in the early days, and the part that Pat had in the building of the post, and the hauling in of supplies long before the railroad came within the convenient distance of forty miles. When they were parting for the night,

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she ventured her first piece of advice for the captain's benefit:

"One thing you want to be careful about up there is snakes. They're everywhere—rattlers, I mean. They seem to come in and take possession when people move out, and you're likely to run into 'em at every turn."

He thanked her, and went to bed with his ordinarily unimaginative head full of speculations on what awaited him at his new post of civilian duty. Together with the rattlesnakes and the ghost, and the recollection of the melancholy fate of his predecessors there, he believed that he should find it interesting, beyond anything that he had looked for in an abandoned and ruined army post.

But it must be a melancholy hole, thought he, to rob three strong men of their reason, and two of their lives; a place not well calculated to lift the spirit of a man already drooping under the solemn shadow of a slow-lingering death.

CHAPTER II.

WHERE GHOSTS ABIDE.

Captain Powers looked back upon Hermosa from a bare gray ridge midway between the hamlet and the post for which he was bound in the long shadows of the early day. There lay a little vale, shaped like an arrowhead, with the point toward the mountain, as green as fresh-growing things could make it, the glad eye of the meandering brook flashing here and there as it turned among the brown boulders.

The little settlement was but a dash of green in the midst of tawny sands and sage-gray wastes, as if the overlying colors of a painting had scaled off, leaving only that spot of the original on the time-yellowed canvas. It was not more than a few hundred acres in extent, made glad by the mountain waters which came down in the glinting

brook, and there a few Mexican families grew their corn and fruit.

Mrs. McDaniels' hotel and store building stood like a castle or a cathedral in a medieval village, half a score of brown adobe huts clustered without order around it. The hotel was built of stone. Its two squat stories seemed lofty and magnificent beside its huddling brown neighbors, and its consequence in that community was as great as its appearance and contrast indicated.

In the cool breath of the fresh young day, it seemed a refuge to which a panting, weary man might fly, and stretch himself beside the stream, and linger there without rust in his heart until his last day came.

Captain Powers turned from it with a sigh, and faced again toward the near side of the mountain, at the foot of which the white buildings of the old fort were to be seen among the trees. The mountain was a long, regular ridge, miles in extent, shaped like a giant foot. At the toe of it old Fort Simpson lay, in a little nest of foliage. As he had driven toward Hermosa the day before, the captain had sighted the buildings while—according to the driver—still twenty miles away.

He had no reason to doubt the driver's word, for all through the afternoon the size of the little white patches had grown, and now, as he stood within little more than a mile of it, the detail of the plan of building lay plain before his eyes.

The fort occupied a level bench, elevated one lift from the plain at the mountain's base, and many trees grew along its one avenue, and bent their branches above its roofs. Back of it the side of the mountain rose scraggy and brown, like the skin of some great pachyderm, the scrawny pines upon it figuring for scant hairs.

The captain's interest grew lively as he approached, for there was evidence

of a great labor wasted there in that barren place. He passed the stables, lightly built of lumber, upon which the mark of weather and the vandal's hand was plain. A great section had blown down recently, it seemed, and there was still the tracks of wagon wheels where the busy sheepmen, according to Bent Dagley, had driven off with loads of planks.

Beyond lay the barracks, low built, of stone; and storehouses, guardhouse, and other buildings, all constructed with a solidity designed to meet the wear of years. The captain passed the post theater, and stopped a little while with a lonely twinge in his breast at the sight of the wind-rent curtain hanging in forlorn shreds.

The colors were bright upon the canvas still, and inside a little way, out of the blistering sun and sweep of winter rains, the floor still held its polish, for it had been dance hall and theater in one. He stood looking in for a little while, and in his fancy he peopled it with a gay crowd of straight-backed men and white-shouldered women, who had brought the refinements of society to that bleak mountainside, that outpost in the savage-plagued desert sands.

It cost him a pang when he turned away, for it brought back in a bitter, cold flood the recollection of all that his disability had cost him, and pressed upon him again the sad realization that all his dreams were dead.

Yes, there was dust over everything there, and ruin on every hand, as Bent Dagley and Mrs. McDaniels had said, but it seemed fitting to him that morning that he should have come to it to worry out his fast-speeding days. A broken soldier for a deserted post; dust to dust; a phantom to guard phantoms.

There was wonder, and a warming of admiration, in the officers' quarters, stretching there like a well-built street in a prosperous and stable city. The avenue of tall cottonwoods had build-

ings on one side only; the side nearer the mountain, to which the houses turned their back. In front was the great parade ground, with a vast swimming pool near by. This reservoir stood full of pellucid water, as fresh and clean as if fed by a living stream, although no source of supply was visible. The springboard was still in place, and there were cut stone steps leading down into it, by which many a Venus had descended to her bath, he knew.

On past the officers' houses he held his way, over the well-built gravel walk, cluttered now with fallen branches, with twigs, and upspringing weeds. The yards were overgrown with weeds and small shrubs which thrive slowly in that land, but the paint of the porches was as white as if it had been spread but yesterday.

The windows, too, were strangely clean and clear, but there was a silence of complete desolation over it all. Not a bird flitted among the cottonwood branches; not a sound rose out of that sleeping place. There was no footprint upon its paths, no sign that any living creature had been there in months. The spoilers had confined themselves to the lumber in the stables; not even a pane was missing from the windows of the houses, not a latch from a door, as he passed.

At the end of the avenue stood the colonel's house, the largest and most pretentious dwelling in the post, as always. While the officers' houses were constructed of stone, the colonel's was built of adobe bricks, and it was a thick-walled and solemn structure, with tall French windows opening upon its flanking verandas.

Captain Powers opened both wings of the wide front door and ran up the curtains to give himself light for his explorations. There were dun carpets on the hall and in the two front rooms which he first penetrated, one of which seemed to have been a library or study.

Several empty bookcases stood against the walls, their shelves displaced, and piles of dusty newspapers lay here and there.

As he progressed from room to room of the spacious house he found many odds and ends of unmatched furniture. It seemed as if each of the old-time occupants had left something after them, none of which accorded in color, size, or shape with the discarded pieces of the others. There were tables and chairs enough for two or three families, and dishes enough to feed half a company from, in place of one lank soldier who felt himself to be waning, and soon to be beyond the necessity of all dishes and the contents thereof, forevermore.

There were thick, yellowed cups, such as the enlisted men use in the barracks mess, and there were thin, transparent china ones, which the delicate fingers of fine ladies had adorned in the days when there were voices and laughter in those halls. There were beds with army blankets on them, and enough of everything, from which the best could be selected, to furnish almost elegantly far more of the house than the captain felt that he should ever need.

But he was better pleased that he had brought his own bedding. That would be along in a day or two, and then he would take possession. Yes, he decided, without self-argument, the colonel's house was the most desirable habitation in the post. Its walls were thicker than the walls of the other dwellings, and its rooms must be larger, therefore cooler. It faced the east, also, while all the others faced south. That would give him an afternoon veranda.

He brought to the porch a big willow rocker which stood in the hall, and sat down to try the sensation of possession in that strange and silent city. Then he saw at a glance the reason for that situation of the colonel's house. It commanded a view of the entire post

—or would have done so in the time when things were in order. Now some of the buildings were hidden behind the boughs of trees, and upspringing growth cut off the swimming pool and parade ground, but in the days when colonels dwelt there they had not to stir from their places of siesta on the veranda of afternoons to see all that came and went.

Before locking up and setting out for the hotel, he took another look at the kitchen, to see how it was provided with stove, pots, and pans. Everything seemed satisfactory and complete, and every stick of furnishing in the room belonged to Uncle Sam. Captain Powers began to feel that he had come home.

A tap in the sink was dripping, as if there might be water in the pipe, and it had been turned on but lately. Marveling, he opened the faucet, and out plunged a stream of clear, cold water, with as much force as if it had the pressure of a city's force pumps behind it. He tried a mouthful of it, and found it pure and sweet. For a moment it was a matter for marvel, and then he recalled some of the details of Mrs. McDaniels' recital the night before.

She said that the army engineers had built a reservoir away back on the mountain—miles away, she said it was—and that a wonderful and plentiful supply of water was thus provided for the post. Of course. The last occupant hadn't troubled to shut the water from the house, and the winters were not cold enough there to burst the pipes. That also accounted for the freshness of the swimming pool.

The thought of that clear blue water, with the smooth steps letting down into it, made his body yearn for a plunge. Returning he would go past it, and refresh himself with a swim.

Captain Powers went throughout the entire house, running up the drawn shades, throwing wide the windows, to let in the light and air against his com-

ing there to make his home. As he moved from room to room he thought of the ghost, and wondered what foundation the tale had, never doubting that it grew out of some natural phenomenon, which he would readily understand if he should ever meet it.

He had known men who regularly and unfailingly saw women when in delirium tremens. One young Irishman, a subaltern in his own command, always had seen the same woman, in multiplied forms. More than once he had heard them tell how this poor fellow could see his spirituous ghost entering the room through solid walls.

So the ghost of the woman who had pursued Bill Longan did not trouble him. There were other ghosts outside the colonel's house far more disquieting, those which rose up on every hand out of the scenes of past activity, to remind him of the men who had mounted and rode away from there long years ago; ghosts which came to him like bitter winds to taunt him with his own lost hopes and blasted ambitions, and fair dreams which would come no more.

The shade of the cottonwoods was drawing short, falling in the roadway, leaving the graveled walk in the sun. Captain Powers felt that he would get enough of the sun before finishing his tramp back to Hermosa, so he took to the road, and the strip of shade, as he walked toward the pool.

The road had been paved with crushed rock, but weeds and grass had sprung in it, and leaves had lodged there, so that a fieldpiece might have been driven over it now with little sound. A likely place for snakes, thought he, keeping his eyes on the ground. And so, in sudden recollection of Mrs. McDaniels' warning, he proceeded carefully, expecting momentarily to hear the hateful challenge of a rattler in the weeds.

Thus he came around the end of the

intervening barrier of bushes which had grown up on the pool side, and which shut off his view effectively from the veranda of the colonel's house. He almost bumped into a horse walking with his head bent that way, like a man in meditation, before he saw the creature, all saddled and bridled, standing there on three legs in peaceful doze.

The horse was as much startled as the captain, at least. He gave a frightened snort, and bolted a little way, for he was tethered only in the Western fashion of dropping the reins to the ground. Captain Powers was all alive in an instant, for he believed that he had come upon some rascal who was stripping Uncle Sam of his possessions at the post. He sprang forward eagerly, casting sharply about him.

The horse brought up a few rods away, his head lifted high, his nostrils dilated, and Captain Powers came to a halt as suddenly, at the same time, as if he had reached an unseen barrier across his way. Not a yard ahead of him lay a little heap of feminine clothing, with a good deal of white, and a good bit of lace, thrown down indiscriminately on top of a pair of high shoes and a blue habit.

At the same time there was such a gurgling and splashing in the pool that he was drawn to look, against the promptings of delicacy, for the sound was an alarming one, as if some one stood in need of help in deep water.

And there, at the farther side of the pool, which was a matter of two rods in width, he saw the crown of a dark head presenting, and white shoulders and arms clear and sharp near the surface, and below them the shadowy lines of a slim figure, all white as corn in the milk.

A glance told him that she was in no need of succor. She was only bent on hiding her face from him, depressing it until her cheek was buried in the water. The captain was a modest man

in the presence of virtue, and it would have taken a mighty fine discrimination to have judged which of the two was the greater embarrassed. He tried to back away, his pale face as red as an autumn leaf, and she turned her head a little to bring her mouth clear of the water.

"Go away! Oh, please, please go away!" she entreated, in agonized voice.

"Certainly," said the captain, still backing off, while she tried to further shield her features by covering her eyes with her hand. "It was a mistake—I didn't intend—I beg your pardon!"

The captain's voice was growing fainter and fainter as he spoke, not on account of the distance which he put between them, but from his overwhelming sense of guilt, culpability, and shame for his blundering intrusion. With the last word, being then two yards or more from the edge of the pool, he turned his back to her and fled, measuring the ground in rapid strides, thinking nothing of snakes, caring nothing for them, indeed. His one thought was to purge that sacred spot of his unholy presence, and to do it as swiftly as his long shanks would carry him away.

Back on the porch of the colonel's house he sat down on the topmost step, feeling quite a different man from the one who walked away from there thinking moodily of snakes, ghosts, and lost careers but a few minutes before. So all was not ghostly shadows, dust and age and shudderful things in old Fort Simpson! But it was a shocking thing, a most unforgivable thing, said he, that he had come upon her that way!

He wondered if her horse had gone off and left her, and what he might do to help her in that case. He listened, and leaned over, and caught himself trying to spy around the edge of the brushwood—to see if the horse had stopped.

He reflected, with the thankfulness of a true gentleman, that he had not seen her face. She had hidden that, all but

the outline of her cheek when she turned her head to beg him to leave, and it was set with the seal of youth and beauty, and her wet hair pressed tight upon her little ear.

Then he heard a sudden dash of hoofs, and got to his feet to see if the horse was galloping away without her. There was a flash of blue dress, a glimpse of a low-bent head as the horse dashed up a little rise, over it and out of sight. She did not look back for one swift glance, but rode on, her head bent, as if she feared that he pursued, intent on making himself master of the secret of her identity.

Captain Powers smiled. He was glad that she was out of it so well and quickly; glad, for her sake, of course, that it chanced to be him, and not one of the boors of that rough country, who had surprised her at her bath. Well, she had dressed in a hurry, and she had left in a hurry, carrying her secret with her. But he hoped that she had not been afraid.

He went back toward the pool, the snakes forgotten. For all that he ever knew of that short walk, the despised reptiles might have menaced him at every step. He was thinking about her hair, which had floated like long strands of brown seaweed around her fair white shoulders.

Black it had seemed out of the water, but then wet brown hair, massed, looks black a little way off, said he. In the water it was brown, the brown of seaweed, and that was a thing to be remembered. There is not a worldful of hair like that.

Captain Powers sat on the splashed stone steps leading down into the pool, and measured the little footprints with his hand. How small they were, and how the proud arch sprang free, as if it spurned contact with the earth. There was just a heel print, and the marks of the little toes, and but a faint outline around the rim of the foot.

There was blood in that instep, said the captain, sighing as the wind brushed the marks of her feet from the stone.

When he was dressing after his plunge, he saw a slender chain of gold dangling among the weeds near the spot where her sacred vestments—already he had invested them with holiness—had lain. There was a small locket attached. Within there was a miniature painting of a man, whose soldierly uniform showed the rank of colonel.

"She is a soldier's daughter!" said he, with a gladness in the words. For that made her doubly dear.

Captain Powers had given over the notion of dying right away, long before he reached the hotel. Already, said he, there was a buoyancy as of old times in his tread, and a lifting gladness in his heart which drew him from under the shadow which had hung at his heels like a starving hound for months.

Of course, he did not know her—for upon that pivot his new resolution to live and thrive revolved—and his memory of her could be no more than that of shadowy soft limbs deep in the translucent blue green of that blessed pool. But there was the locket, with the soldier's face in it, and that would give him a sound reason for finding her, and showing her that he was a gentleman, who could forget on occasion, when it was a gentleman's part.

"Well, you don't look much like a man that'd seen a ghost!" Mrs. McDaniels greeted him, with unfeigned gladness, upon his return.

"Such ghosts as I've seen this morning," said he, plunging into the waiting dinner, "I can meet every day, and be better for it!"

CHAPTER III.

THE WITHERED FINGER.

Mrs. McDaniels had not overstated the case of the snakes. During the five days that he had now been in pos-

session of the post, Captain Powers had killed scores of them. They were everywhere, it seemed, and, like ghosts, doors, windows, and walls were slight barriers to their elusive fashion of coming and going as they pleased.

Once the captain had met up with a great, scaly, fat veteran in the kitchen, the brigadier general he must have been, of the entire camp of snakes, and once he had found one in the bathtub. That complacent creature was stretched out at length along the cool zinc, sleeping as calmly as if there was not a human being to dispute possession with him inside of a thousand miles.

Together with the unsparing use of an old saber which he had found in the house, and ground for the battle, with which he could slice off a rattler's head at the first blow, and the vigorous application of scythe and flame to the wild growth of weeds and grass, the reptiles were becoming rather scarce. That is to say, four or five made a pretty good day's showing now, whereas fifteen to twenty had been the score at first.

The captain had not been favored by any further visits from the nymph of the locket, no matter how keen his hope that she would come in search of the trinket left behind her in that hurried minute. Again and again he told himself he hoped that she was not afraid—that no woman, old or young, ever would be afraid of him.

But that did not ease the case any. She did not come, and Captain Powers was restless on account of her absence, and almost desperate at times in the despair of ever seeing her again. The little locket he had with him always, ready to produce in the event of her coming. He knew every link—well, almost every one—in its chain, and he had invested each of them with a distinct and holy virtue, like the beads in a blessed rosary.

Bent Dagley had been commissioned to find a horse suitable in size and dig-

nity for the captain's length of limb, and Powers was only waiting the beast's arrival to scour the surrounding country in search of the girl of the pool. That was the first important business of his new life. After he had found her, he could settle down to the battle for his health in earnest.

It was strange that this unknown beauty—he took it for granted that she was all that—should lay hold of his tenderness with such force, a force which there was no giving denial to, which stern questioning of propriety could not weaken nor shake free.

In the light of his experience with women, white and brown and intermediate, it *was* strange, said the captain; even more than strange. It was bewitchingly interesting and seductively sweet.

And so he welcomed Bent Dagley that morning, not so much on his own account as on account of the big bay horse which he came leading behind his saddle. Bent had brought the horse over on approval, and if the captain liked him there was nothing to do but pay the price and keep him.

Captain Powers was a master of horses, and Bent mentally reduced the price that he had put on the animal when he saw the captain mount it and gallop up and down the avenue, watching the beast's stride for any defect that he might show.

"I might 'a' knowed one of them cavalry fellers——" muttered Bent to himself, yet inwardly pleased to find a man whom he felt that it would be impossible to cheat in a horseflesh deal.

It took them only a matter of minutes to strike a bargain, for the captain knew what the animal was worth and clipped Bent's price to his own figure with his first word.

Bent had the day to his own devices, it being his lay-over at Hermosa between trips, so he stayed to help the captain screen off a section of the porch, to

keep the snakes and mosquitoes and such things out of his open-air bed.

"Well, you been slickin' things up," commented Bent approvingly, viewing the avenue from the porch. "By crackey, you've done more in a week than them three fellers that was here ahead of you done all put together!"

"Maybe if they'd have done a little more mowing and cleaning up they wouldn't have seen so many ghosts," said Powers.

"I don't know," said Bent, lowering his voice, looking around him into the dim house furtively, as if he had only then thought of the ghost which had wrought so evilly with Bill Longan.

"One would almost welcome a ghost up here these long, quiet nights," said Powers. "It's the stillest place I ever was in—it beats a tropical jungle at noon."

"Well, I'll take mine among the livin'," declared Bent, falling to vigorously with his hammer, as if to rouse out and disperse any lingering spirits which might be hovering in the corners of the colonel's house.

The captain had it on the point of his tongue, more than once, to ask Bent what of the neighbors, whether any of them had a daughter with seaweed brown hair. But fear that his inquiry might be wrongly interpreted, and that the impression might go abroad through Bent's well-oiled tongue that the new custodian of the post was in the market for a mate, held him in silence as the day wore away. Fortunately, Bent brought the subject up himself as he was making ready to depart.

"You can ride around and make acquaintance with folks now," said he.

"Who is there about here, except the people at Hermosa?" the captain asked, masking his interest, but waiting the reply with racing heart.

"Well, there's old man Valgas, a white Mexican, over across the valley," said Bent slowly, as if recalling the

scattered inhabitants required deliberate thought. "He's a cattleman, his ranch is known as Alamitos, and he's as rich as a vein of quartz. Got two gals that's been educated out of sight of anything around here, and what he aims to do with 'em—well, you can search me!"

"Anybody else?"

"Yes, there's the Widder Flaridy"—Flaherty it was on the tax roll, but Bent's pronunciation was the one current—"over on the crick, and her two boys, and the Sumpf family about seven miles below 'em, with four daughters as red and rosy as apples, and as big around as cider barrels. None of that kind for your old Uncle Fuller! Time them gals is fifty a man'd have to take the side of his house out to let 'em pass, same as puttin' a b'iler in a mill."

"Something to that," agreed Powers, with a grin.

"Well, that's about all of 'em outside of Hermosa people, I guess, except the sawmill over on the other side of the mountain, and I don't reckon you'd be interested in it. Oh, well, there is a dang-fool sheepman or two right over here to the east of you, but we don't count them fellers in among *people* in this part of the State, much less the one that was blackballed out of the army when things was lively here a long time ago."

"Blackballed! How was that? Court-martialed, you mean?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Bent, squinting at his saddle girth, "I don't know the story. That was before my time."

It was plain that he did know it, but for reasons of his own preferred to keep it to himself. Perhaps, thought the captain, it was one of those peculiar bits of scandal which neighborhoods sometimes try to bury away from the eyes and ears of their children and strangers.

"Does he live very near the reservation?" the captain inquired.

"Right on the east edge, not more

than three-quarters of a mile from here," said Bent. "Well, I hope that blame ghost keeps on the dodge and behaves like it's been behavin'." He swung himself to his saddle.

"Thank you for your good wishes, and I hope as much," said Powers cheerfully, "but even a ghost would be pretty well strained before it could get to me through that screen."

Bent looked at him queerly, as if in doubt whether he was in jest or earnest.

"You're the beatin'est feller!" said he.

When Bent was gone, the captain set himself about getting supper, and after supper he went with his pipe along the avenue for a stroll. That was the time of day when it began to grow lonesome there, with the sun gone from the hills and the restless day breeze still in the cottonwood leaves.

Each deserted house then seemed to send up its cloud of memories, as village fires give off their smoke at eventide. A man who had seen the service that had been Captain Powers' could read each silent history like a record left in stone. Each place had its recollections of women's steps and childish laughter, of music, of soft words, of sighs. On the stones of those steps many a young bride must have stood, watching her soldier man away on a foray against the wily desert braves, and there many of them waited and yearned for gallant lads who came back to them no more.

Long ago that it was when those houses were tenanted, each was redolent of occupancy, each still warm, it seemed to him, looking now and then through a window at the darkening rooms, with the presence of those who had blessed them with their hopes. There on the floor of an open closet door lay a linen collar; in this room a man's hat; in that a woman's garment. Here a broken hobbyhorse, bare from the mange of years; there a bent and

dented horn. And the child lips which had blown it—where were they? Dust, maybe, or maybe following the seas with the navy.

Those were the ghosts which rose out of the silences of old Fort Simpson to gnaw upon the heart of the gaunt young man, who felt himself old when he ceased for a moment to remember the nymph of the swimming pool, who had come there to stand warder over them, and to fend them against the sifting ashes of oblivion.

Captain Powers moved his bed out into the inclosure which Bent had helped him make of finely meshed wire. There was no door in this screened compartment opening upon the porch, the one way of entering it being through one of the long French windows opening into what had been the library of the shadowy colonels who had come and gone.

Powers felt that he should be able to sleep there better than he had rested indoors, in the first place because he was an outdoor man and his ailment demanded plenty of fresh air; and because, despite his unsuperstitious mind, there was an overweighing gloom about the rooms which had an oppressive and wakeful effect.

Confident that snakes, at least, could not reach him through the wire screen, and quite easy in his mind on the ghost which had plagued Bill Longan and those who had gone before him, the captain went to sleep. He slept until the sunlight struck across his eyes, and then he rose refreshed, feeling that the surge of strong life was again setting toward his heart.

He went into the library, which he had begun to fit up as a living room, although it was largely in disorder yet, and dressed. The sun came into the room through the great windows, and fell upon the litter of his books, heaped on the floor before the dusty case, and lighted up the few pictures which for-

mer tenants had not thought worth while taking down from the walls when they packed up and flitted away. There was the making of a comfortable quarters there, thought he, especially for the autumn and winter days, when the dead eye of the fireplace would be glowing with a friendly cheer.

He stood in the middle of the room, adjusting his belt, roving his eyes around, mentally placing the various articles of furniture where they would best relieve the somberness of the high walls. The old walnut desk which he had found there, in perfect order in spite of all the plashed ink of all the colonels who had written their documents upon it, he had already taken over to his own use, and had placed it comfortably between two windows where the light poured upon it plentifully. It had a homely and companionable look about it, although it needed mend——

What was that?

The captain's hand stayed with the tongue of his belt buckle between two holes, his breath halting on his lips. The top drawer of the desk, in which he had placed his few papers but yesterday, stood open, as if it had been drawn out and searched. That was not so much puzzling as anger provoking, for he had a distinct recollection of taking a letter from his coat pocket just before he went to bed and placing it in the drawer, closing it thereafter.

"I'd like to catch somebody prying around here!" muttered the captain, his courage strong in the light of that cheerful morning. He strode across to the desk.

The papers in the open drawer were in disorder, as if they had been taken out and returned hurriedly, but nothing was missing. There was nothing among them, indeed, that anybody would want, a fact which seemed to make the impertinent trespass all the more inexcusable. The thought of the

ghost had gone quite out of the captain's head, for it was not natural for a man to connect a marauding spirit with a burglarious prank like that.

He rose up from the inspection of the drawer's contents to examine the windows, and as he stood so his eyes fell on a thing which caused him to draw back with unaccountable dread, a sudden cold prickling of his nerves running over him with the sensation of lifting hairs.

There, in the dust which lay thick on top of the desk, was the print of a hand. It was clear and perfect in outline, a long and slenderly delicate print, with the thumb outspread, the fingers wide apart, as if the prying visitor had rested it there while he or she stooped to open the drawer.

The captain bent over it, examining it minutely. The outline was too delicate for a man's hand, and too small. It was the mark of a woman's hand, beyond a doubt, a woman's left hand; and the third finger appeared to be maimed or distorted in such manner that only its tip rested on the wood and left its imprint in the gathered dust.

The captain remembered Bill Longan's lady ghost. He laughed.

"It's a substantial one," said he.

He turned his attention to his watch, and a considerable sum of money in the bill book in his coat pocket. Safe and untouched. Then to the windows, for evidence of the prowler's mode of entrance. They were all fastened, as he had left them, not alone in that room, but in all parts of the house. Upon the sashes there lay the years' accumulation of dust. The slightest touch would have left its mark, the most cunning hand its trace.

"Strange," said the captain, walking about the room with a gathering frown of perplexity, "very strange!"

The front door fastened with a latch spring, for which a key was needed to enter, and the key was in his pocket.

the door latched as he had left it. A burglar might have come in without noise or trace behind him, thought the captain, but that was an unprofitable field for one of such mastery of locks. Besides that, the print on the desk top was of a woman's hand.

No matter, said he, the thing was done, and it was rather mysterious and baffling, as even the simplest trick of legerdemain is until it is laid bare, as the obvious cheats of spiritualistic traffickers are until exposed. It disturbed him because the solution evaded him. Ghosts did not come around leaving hand marks after them, at least none that he ever had heard of in any of the lands where he had done his soldiering.

It might occur again, and it might not. Perhaps it was the work of certain rascals who were profiting by the absence of a custodian at the post, in stripping it of its outlying buildings, as there was plain enough evidence somebody had been doing for a long time. If they could drive him away, as they had driven Bill Longan, or set him drinking his wits away, as the other two had done, it might be a long time before another could be found to take his place.

That didn't seem like much of an explanation, either, but in place of a better and more likely one, the captain accepted it. Mainly because he was dead set against yielding an inch of ground to the ghost. One thing a man could do, said he, and that was watch. He could watch the nights out until he had solved the trickery and given somebody a lesson to be remembered, and that very task he set for himself, beginning that night.

All night he sat in the library, which was gloomy enough for all that he had dusted it, and washed its windows, and set it to rights. His lamp was not a powerful one, and the ceiling was high, the tint of the walls somber, and the corners in distressing shadows. But

the captain opened windows and doors, and put his lamp out after midnight, inviting a free entry of anybody minded to pay him a visit.

Nobody came. At dawn the captain looked at the desk to make certain that he was leaving it all closed, and went to bed, fastening all doors and windows as before.

It was past midday when he woke. His first thought was of the desk. Thrusting his feet into his slippers, he hurried to the window letting into the library. With one foot on the threshold, he paused, that cold prickling of nerves flashing through him again like an electrical shock.

The drawer of the desk stood open, as on the morning before!

There seemed to be a sardonic humor in it. The captain grinned, his long-mustached upper lip lifting until his big teeth were bare.

"All right; you got by me that time!" said he.

That night he watched until the sun rose. Nothing happened, and it was a long and irksome vigil, not likely, thought he in his weariness, to be repaid by anything that he might discover in the end.

After that he tried leaving a lamp burning in the room all night. For three weeks he placed it faithfully on the desk, a string rigged up to a sheep bell at the head of his bed, so the drawer could not be moved an inch without alarming him.

He was becoming weary of the thing, and careless whether the visitor who wanted something out of that old desk drawer ever came back again. He slept the nights through without a thought of it, and went about his day's work of cleaning up the grounds and making repairs with an untroubled mind.

He was gaining in strength, and the tenderness which had long denied him a full breath was gone out of his lung. The pallor was giving place in his face

to the underlying, ruddy hue of health, and the brown had spread over it again, as in the old campaigning days. The doctors had overcolored it, no doubt meaning well, said he. Thoughts of resuming his snapped-off career began to move his pulse with a new hope. A few months more of that life, until he was sure of himself, and had time to look around him in that country a bit and find her—

At that point he would fall into a reverie, his hat pushed back from his bronzing face, a dream in his eyes, leaning on the snath of his scythe. There was the locket, in one pocket or another, always at hand. He wanted it ready, so that he could restore it to her when they met, and he wondered always who she could be, and where he should find her, and when, if ever in this world.

As for the loneliness of Fort Simpson, that had become companionable. He had peopled the houses with slim-waisted lieutenants and their white-frocked, dove-eyed wives, and majors and captains, with their broods of clamoring children. They were there for him, almost as real as if they lived, and even the barracks were full of dusty troopers, always coming and going on their distant rides.

Fort Simpson was a dead place to him no more. It held no mysteries, save that of the three-fingered ghost, burglar, or pry-about—whatever it might be. And he was becoming quite indifferent to that.

It was this indifference, perhaps, or perhaps an unusually heavy sleep, that made it so hard for him to rouse himself when at last the tinkling sheep bell told him that some force, ethereal or physical, was being applied to the drawer of the desk. The alarm seemed a troublesome thing to him through the dim consciousness of half sleep, like the reveille used to fall on his unwilling ears back in his West Point days.

In a second or two all had cleared; he was awake, alert, tense; sitting with covers flung away, his feet upon the cool floor.

Over his head the little bell was ringing jerkily, and the light from his guardian lamp fell dimly across the long room and through the window at the foot of his bed. From the bed he could not see the interior, and he did not wait for slippers or pantaloons to make his investigation. He snatched his revolver from where it dangled in the holster on the bedpost, and sprang to the window.

He had left it standing open; he found it closed. More than that, it was secured by its fastenings within. His little bell was now ringing furiously, and from an unmistakably material force, as he plainly could see.

A woman was bending over the drawer, jerking at the resisting string, a tall, thin figure, clothed in dark garments, a cowl of black material flung loosely over her head. Her left hand rested on the top of the desk, just as the hand must have done on the night when it let its print in the dust, and her arm was white in the lamplight where her loose sleeve had slipped back and left it bare.

Captain Powers shook the sash of the folding window, and struck sharply on the pane with the barrel of his revolver. It was not in his mind to shoot, for he had set his trap for something more desperate than a woman, but he wanted to attract her and make her show her face.

The cord between bell and drawer parted while he clattered against the pane, and Powers, shut there in his wire cage, saw the woman thrust her arm into the drawer, feel about for a moment, and then stand straight, with a melancholy shake of the head. Her face was in shadow, as her back was now turned toward the lamp, and he could make nothing of her features, al-

though the gray of morning was at the windows in the east.

He waited a moment to see what her next move would be, thinking quickly that he could burst through the wire and intercept her when she started to leave the house. As he looked, the woman lifted her left hand, gazed at it intently, the fingers spread, and then placed the other hand over it with the gesture of one who strives to soothe a pain.

The lamp was directly behind her, and in the little while that she had held the hand up staring at it, Captain Powers had seen plainly that the third finger was bent and withered. It was the same long, slender hand that had left its imprint in the dust.

His silent visitor stood for a moment pressing her right hand to her left, the attitude of her body that of one in poignant agony. She did not turn her head in his direction, although he struck again upon the windowpane, but presently moved toward the hall, as if to quit the house by way of the front door.

Powers flung himself against the wire netting, expecting to jerk the staples out and make an opening for his body to pass without trouble. But the staples were long ones, and driven into hard-pine scantlings, as he recalled when they held tenaciously, defying his frantic struggle to break it down.

Giving it over after a fruitless moment, he hastened back to the window, smashed a pane with his revolver, thrust his hand in, and flung back the fastenings. He leaped into the hall and stood searching the gloom, for he believed her to be in the house still; he had not heard the door open or close.

But she was not there. He flung the door open; no sight of her. Back again to the room he turned, noting each window quickly. All closed save the one that he had opened but a breath before. The woman was gone, quicker,

it seemed, than human force could carry her; quieter than mere human feet could move.

But it was a woman; of that he was in no doubt. He was angry with himself for his stupidity in allowing her to get away, to come prowling again, no doubt, in her foolish belief that she could thus frighten him out of the field. There were a thousand hiding places outside, but he would go in search of her, beat each of them to the last blade of grass, rout her out, and strip her of her mystery.

He drew on his clothes quickly, strapped his holster about him, and thrust his pistol in it. Then down the steps he ran, peering here and there in the small light of growing day.

CHAPTER IV.

A MESSAGE FOR THE CAPTAIN.

The woman seemed to have resolved into the mists of morning which hung lightly among the leaves. There was no sound of her retreating feet, no glimpse of her along the avenue, the length of which the captain could now see clearly.

She might have dodged into the brushwood which had grown thick during the post's untenanted years behind the officers' quarters, which Captain Powers had felt to be too big an undertaking to clear away single-handed, or she might be lingering in the shadow of one of the houses, or crouching under a porch.

Eagerly he pressed the search, rushing about until he was in a sweat and panting from the work of it, and the sun was showing when he came back to the colonel's house empty of hand, after having beaten the bushes back of the quarters, and even searched each separate dwelling. Now he was taken with the thought that the barracks might be her place of concealment, and he made the round of the two long structures,

trying the locked doors, peering in at the windows, seeking and searching in every nook.

She was not there, but the heat of the hunt was on him, and the determination to find her was not to be denied. She had come there from some habitable place, from Hermosa, or over the road which ran to the sawmill beyond the mountain, or the trail running eastward, where the man who had been blackballed out of the army lived. As she had come, so she would return. It was not too late, said he, to saddle and mount and ride those roads for two or three miles, each of them. On one of them he must find her, fleeing away in her foolish sense of security.

To think in pressure such as he was under was to act. Within five minutes he was mounted and away, the neck of his blue flannel shirt open, his hair blowing back from his forehead, dashing through the long shadows of morning, starting the quail from their early foraging as he galloped along the little-ridden trails.

There was nobody abroad on either the road to Hermosa, or the crumbling trail which ran back over the mountain to the mill. He retraced his way and rode toward the ranch where the ex-army man lived.

That was not a strange trail to him. Almost every day since buying the horse he had ridden over that way, for had *she* not retreated in that direction on the morning that he startled her at her bath?

The long chocolate-brown adobe, beneficently sheltered by tall elms—as rare in that country as the undraped beauty which he had surprised—and bold-lifting cottonwoods, had become as familiar to him as the buildings of the post. The outside of it, that is. For, although he had passed it half a score of times, he had not received hail, challenge, nor invitation from those who dwelt within.

There was about the place many evidences of refinement of taste far above the level of the ordinary ranchmen of that country—grassy lawn, for one thing, and a profusion of flowers and shrubs. There was an extensive orchard of apple and peach trees, also, and white fences around the homestead, and irrigation ditches spreading abroad their blessing over the alfalfa fields.

From an eminence less than a quarter of a mile distant he often had reined in to admire its comfortable seclusion. The only human being he had yet seen about the place was an old negro, pottering about the lawn and flowers, who seemed to keep his back toward the road when the captain passed, with something like studied intention.

Bent Dagley had told him that the man blackballed out of the army was a sheep grower, but there were no evidences of flocks and herds about the homestead, no folds, no unsightly pens. The captain understood, of course, that the sheep which made the prosperity of that snug abode might be pasturing miles and miles away, and never come near it at all.

Captain Powers had resented, in some measure, the inhospitable aloofness of this bower in the desert. He had thought, at first, that it surely must be the home of the swimmer whose abolutions he had discovered, but later he had given over that hope, holding that youth and beauty could not keep so well secluded as the inmates of that house.

Now, in his quest of the withered-fingered witch who had come to trouble him, and who had slipped through his hands like oil, he held his way toward the silent house again, with his ill humor in his face. It was more than likely that the woman he sought had come from that mysterious, still place, said he; it had about it the air of hiding

something which throve unhealthily in the light.

He was still within the military reservation when he picked up the sound of approaching hoofs, coming on at a reckless pace. Mesquite had grown up rankly along the road there, and it was narrow and full of windings. He checked his own animal and sat waiting, and in a moment the rider flashed into sight.

The captain felt his heart lift with a quick bound as a partridge rising to its flight. There was something familiar in that blue riding habit, and something about the horse, unmistakably familiar. It was unlikely that there would be duplicates of either in that vicinity. And now she came nearer, now she was quite close, and there could be no doubt in the case at all. There never was hair—said the captain—that held in its coils such a mystery of sea caverns, and somber depths of great waters, in which the sunlight's piercing lances falter and fuse and melt away.

He lifted his hand to his bare forehead as she drew her horse to a stand. There was something like sudden fright in her eyes, wide open and brown, something like a hesitating question in her face.

"Oh, I'm afraid I'm over the line!" said she.

"Don't worry, you're free to ride wherever you wish to go," he told her.

"Thank you," she smiled.

"I hope that you will consider the reservation your property, and come and go through it whenever you feel like it," said he.

"When I saw you I thought you were standing guard," she told him seriously. "But it's so early I didn't think I'd meet anybody."

"I was out for a gallop myself," he explained, which she appeared to accept, although he was far from gallop-

ing when she came tearing around that bend.

There was no doubt about her identity. She was the lady of the pool, and Captain Powers made a quick mental inventory of his pockets, to remember that the locket was in his coat, and his coat in the colonel's house. Just as well, thought he. How would a man go about restoring it, anyway?

"Madam—or miss, perhaps—I beg to hand you your locket, which you must have lost in the hurry of dressing that morning when I surprised you at your bath."

An impossible formula of speech, yet about the only one that would explain. He thought, with considerable internal consternation, that he could not even produce the trinket and hand it to her without a word, without discovering to her that he was the pussy-footed maurauder who had sneaked up on her in that unconventional situation.

"You must be the new custodian," said she; "we heard that there was one at the post."

He hurried to introduce himself, seeing, or, at least, believing that he saw, that she did not recognize him.

"I used to ride up here frequently," said she, "for the sensation of passing along a road with shade of trees on it. I think this must be the only place in this part of the country where a person can do that."

"You must be my neighbor, then?" he ventured.

"I am Miss Steele," said she, "and I live down there in the first house you come to, and the only one you do come to till you strike the railroad—in that direction."

"Is it possible? Why, I've been past there dozens of times, and I've looked for you—I mean for somebody—at that place besides the old negro raking the lawn! I'd begun to believe it was untenanted."

"Mother and I have been in El Paso

for three weeks past, and uncle is away this time of the year in the mountains, looking after the sheep. They graze them in the forest reserve in summer, you know."

"No, I didn't know," he returned, his mind off focus, his eyes tangled in her hair.

"Well, they do," she nodded.

Yes, it was the same hair that he had seen spread about her white shoulders that morning in the water. It would have clothed her like *Godiva* if let down. Then he wondered if she had run away after that morning to *El Paso* with her mother, shunning the confusing possibility of meeting the man from whom she had so successfully hidden her face.

For any other reason than the very good one that she had that day, it was a face that no woman would care to conceal, thought he, and assuredly one that he never would want veiled in his presence. It was youthful and vivacious, round in health and happiness, but none of the rude wildness in it that rustic youth displays. It was a cultured face, and her speech was not merely the thin culture of a hasty generation. There was the sureness of a long line of educated forbears behind it, just as there was blood in her forehead and eyes, just as he had discovered blood in the wet print of her naked foot.

Standing there face to face was awkward, especially when he caught himself running away after all these matters which went trailing through his head. He colored in apology for his blankness.

"Will you accept a military escort for the remainder of your gallop through the reservation?" he asked.

The notion seemed to please her, for her eyes lighted gladly, and she smilingly nodded her assent.

She rode astride, attired in voluminous divided skirts, after the mod-

est fashion of those Western women, and Captain Powers never had ridden beside a cavalryman who was more a part of his horse. He accompanied her back to the starting place, after the ride under the trees, and there an air of constraint seemed to come over her. She reined in, and looked at him as if to dismiss him there.

"It may seem inhospitable, and contrary to the traditions of this country, because I don't ask you to come down and get acquainted with my mother and my aunt and uncle—we live with them, you know, and always have. They're mother's brother and sister, and their name is Bassett. But mother's health is so poor that we're cut off from the world. And uncle isn't there, either—I told you."

"You mentioned it," he nodded.

"But you'll stop in some time when you're riding past—only don't wear your uniform. Uncle seems to have some prejudice against the army, why, I don't know. I haven't, not the least."

"Thank you," said he warmly, "but I'm not really a part of it now. I'm retired, and I'm just wearing the old clothes to get rid of them."

So uncle doesn't like the uniform, heh? Well, perhaps he has a rascal's reason for it, thought the captain.

"But perhaps I shall meet you again on the trail?" he ventured hopefully.

"Why, of course," said she, entirely frank and unaffected. "I ride about a great deal—we're likely to meet almost any day."

"And if we don't, it will be through no fault of mine," he told her.

"I must go," said she. "Good-by!"

At the turn of the road which cut off the view of her home she looked back, lifting her hand in farewell salute. There was something in the gesture which seemed to tell him that they had grown to be comrades already.

"But I'll have to give her back that locket some time," thought he, "and

then she'll run away again. She must know that she lost it here."

Concerning Bassett, her uncle, he had no inclination of friendliness, even on her account. It was most fortunate that the fellow was no nearer related to her, said the captain, conscious of that barrier of prejudice which a soldier always erects between himself and another of his calling who is under the shadow of disgrace. He would be the last man to trouble the outcast by a call. How much better to meet her out in the open of the trails than in the tainted atmosphere of that man's presence, where he should not be able to draw a healthy breath.

The portrait in the locket could not be of Bassett in his soldiering days, thought he, for he scarcely would have permitted anybody to cherish such mementos of a career which ended in disgrace. The style of the coat was of a generation past, so it could not have been her brother, or one dearer, either. Well, it made little difference; she was sufficient in herself, no matter for her forbears. What a charming, rare creature for the isolation of that place to produce!

So ruminating in pleasant train, he arrived again at the colonel's house, and the mystery and vexation of his early-morning adventure with the bent-fingered woman settled over him with depressing weight, tincturing his fair dreams with an essence of mold.

One thing was clearly disposed of, at any event, and that was the doubt that his trouble maker was a spiritual agent. There was nothing marvelous in the manner of the woman's escape, considering the thousand hiding places at her hand. He must have been longer at the screen, and in effecting an entrance, than he had supposed at the time. That had given her a start of him, and while he was riding the roads in search of her, she had slipped away.

11B

Next time, he resolved, he would lay hands on her and demand an accounting. To that end he must not be bound in his movements by the lack of a door in his sleeping compartment. Straightway he set to work to provide one, and by midday he had it done.

Bent Dagley rode over from Hermosa that night with a telegram for the captain. It had been put into Bent's hands for delivery that morning by the station agent at Hancock, the railway point which served Hermosa. The message was from the war department, under which Powers held his commission as custodian of the post, and it read:

Make ready quarters colonel's house for Colonel Henry McLeod, who will arrive there July 19th.

"Well!" said Bent, when Powers read it to him. "Does that mean they're goin' to have soldiers here once more?"

"I don't think so," replied the captain, in puzzled indecision. "It don't mention any troops, you see."

"What good is a colonel without soldiers?" inquired Bent.

"Not much good—especially here," the captain admitted.

"No, and nowhere else!" declared Bent, with a feeling which spoke of past differences between himself and colonels when he rode the barrens in search of Apache tracks. "Ever hear of him?"

"Never."

"Me, neither."

"The nineteenth is day after to-morrow," said the captain.

"The day I go in," said Bent, "I'll miss the honor of haulin' him over, but I don't suppose he'd ride out on the mail stage, anyways."

"He'll more than likely have a load of baggage for you, though," said Powers.

"In the old days they wasn't so strong on trunks as they are now," said Bent. "I've seen colonels, yes, and generals,

too, by ginger, that could wrap all their baggage up in a blanket. They had men in the army in them days, not meanin' any disrespect to you."

"They certainly had," seconded the captain ungrudgingly.

Bent sat studying the captain's proportions, as if he meant to make a guess on his weight.

"Pickin' up," he commented, "wonderful! You don't look like a man that had troubles, or couldn't sleep nights."

"I haven't a worry in the world, now that I'm certain the doctors meant well but were mistaken," replied the captain, stretching the truth a bit, but doing it quite easily.

For there was worryment in the bent-fingered woman, and her silent coming, and silent elusiveness. He hadn't lost any sleep to speak of since his attempted vigils, to be sure, but he felt that he was in for some restless hours that night.

"Nothing ain't come pesterin' around here of nights?" inquired Bent, eying the captain sharply.

"Nothing but owls and snakes," the captain told him.

"It gits me!" declared Bent, but there was a plain inflection of suspicion and disbelief in his voice.

From that they turned back to Colonel McLeod, and tried to frame reasons for his coming. Both having had wide experience with colonels, they agreed that it was an unheard-of thing

for one of them to take up post without command in an abandoned fort, forty miles from a mint julep and a telegraph wire.

"But it's somebody's orders," said the captain, "and there's a reason behind it, somewhere. All we can do is wait and see."

Bent agreed that it was so, and took his leave for the night, promising to ride over next day, according to his custom when he made his lay-over, and help the captain "square things around."

The captain went with him down the broad steps to the hitching post, where his horse stood. As Bent put his foot in the stirrup the captain asked:

"Bent, do you know of a bent-fingered woman anywhere around here?"

"A—which?" asked Bent, looking around curiously.

The captain repeated his question.

"No-o," replied Bent slowly, as if pondering the thing, "I don't know of airy one. Why—what did you want one for?"

"Oh, I just wanted to get my fortune told," said the captain, with a light laugh.

Bent looked at him narrowly, and then from his seat in the saddle he took another look.

"Well, you beat me!" said he. As he rode his way back to Hermosa he shook his head sadly from time to time.

"It's struck to his brain already!" he declared.

TO BE CONCLUDED IN THE ISSUE OF JANUARY 7TH.

BERTRAND W. SINCLAIR, who has written some great stories of the Northwest, has sent us a sea story for a change. It is called "FROM THE POT TO THE PICARON." It is a short novelette, but there is plenty of action in it. It will be printed in the next **POPULAR**, on sale January 7th, the first number of the New Year.

The Amateur Professional

II.—THE TEN-THOUSAND-POUND FIGHT

By L. J. Beeston

THE old-time love of boxing, at its height in the days of the bucks of the Corinthian Club, ebbed far. Now it returns on a high wave of popular feeling. So much the better for you, Mr. Nigel Goldsack."

The man in the gold folders poured a little green chartreuse into his coffee and went on thoughtfully.

"You are a proper man of your fists. You are also a gentleman with an excellent education. You complain that high proficiency in boxing is a commodity which only the professional bruiser turns to gold. Exceptions exist—opportunities suggesting more romance than the prize ring. I am about to offer you one of such chances. What are thousands of people talking about to-night? The arrival of Cyprian Ledderer, better known as the Carpet-Beater, the heavyweight, full-blooded negro and smasher of 'white hopes.' In any evening paper you will read this question: 'Will Ledderer meet his match in Tony Swaffield?' Small need for me to remind you that Swaffield is yet another white hope who has risen with almost dramatic abruptness. A gigantic purse of ten thousand sovereigns goes to the winner of the fight, the contract being signed two months ago. Will you believe it when I say that the romantic opportunity I am going to offer you is in connection with this contest which is stirring Europe and America? There is a lady in the case. The misplaced affection of a beau-

tiful and well-known woman figures in the matter. You can help her."

"I?" said Goldsack. He laughed shortly.

"You." The speaker edged his chair closer. "It is a very private, very delicate affair." He glanced round warily at the few inmates of the smoke room in his club in Russell Square.

One hour ago I had encountered Nigel Goldsack in a cheap Soho café. I had not seen him since he left St. Basil's, in Sussex, to go to Winchester. In the chronicles of both schools his reputation as fighter is among the undying things. He told me the story, which I have already narrated, of an adventure in old Stamboul, in which he fought a three-tailed pasha in extraordinary circumstances. Now he was fallen upon seedy days. Of what use his one accomplishment? But his story, overheard by a third party, drew that listener's polite interference. He had a scheme; an adventure on hand. He invited us to his club. *Voilà tout.*

Certainly his opening remarks were electric. What! A proposal to assume some active part in the impending battle which was absorbing the attention of two continents? Who the deuce was he?

"Suppose you hurry to explain yourself?" said Goldsack, whose face had flamed.

"Be easy," assured the other. "I perceive your thought. The expression 'dirty work' flitted through your mind. That is the pity of these notable fistic

encounters. One never knows what runs beneath the surface. Ledderer's hands have not always been clean. But I will tell you the facts. Pardon my speaking in a whisper. I alluded to a distinguished lady—Kathleen, daughter of the Right Honorable Petersham Delmars, the cabinet minister. In her circle a terrible thing is whispered. It is hinted that a sentimental attachment exists between this cultured, high-born lady, and—and the man who is to meet Ledderer."

Now I had caught an echo of that amazing report myself, being a journalist, but had lent it little credence.

"Whispers — whispers — whispers," continued the other, lighting a buff-colored cigarette which appeared to require no drawing. "The lady was undoubtedly present at one of those earlier contests which commenced to win fame for Swaffield. She experienced the full measure of a woman's admiration for physical endurance allied to fine proportions and a liberal share of good looks. To my certain knowledge she attended later contests in which her hero figured; and I ask you to believe what I say when I add the family have serious reason to fear that the two have corresponded, have even met secretly. In short, they are in love with one another. A bizarre attachment, you will allow."

"One moment," interrupted Goldsack harshly. "You will not withhold your name nor the source of your information?"

Our interlocutor reached out across the green-tiled table and dropped his cigarette ash into a little copper tray. "Pardon me," he begged gently. "I must, although I cannot restrain your guessing. It is an affair calling for the utmost delicacy of treatment. Those who know Kathleen Delmars well—and I am one of them—are aware that obstruction to her will adds to the intensity of her purpose. Imagine the consternation of her family, which

prides itself on the loftiness of its connections. They fear either a runaway match, or an open engagement. Disaster!

"When I mention the name of Lord Frayne, I speak of one which has been linked with that of Kathleen Delmars in the somewhat tenuous atmosphere of matrimonial projects. Such an alliance would be very precious from her family's viewpoint; and Lord Frayne's conduct has never contradicted it. Rather the reverse is true. Will the beautiful Miss Delmars put aside a coronet for a prize-ring hero? Society discusses the horror with bated breath; soon the general public will get wind of it. Catastrophe!"

Goldsack leaned back in an indifferent attitude, lightly holding the arms of his chair, a cynical smile on his fine face. He said: "Why come to me? It is up to Lord Frayne to fight his battle?"

"I have approached you because—but your coffee is getting cold."

"Because——" echoed Goldsack remindingly.

The stranger wipea his gold folders with an air of slight perplexity. "Well, you put a direct question," said he, "and I fear I cannot answer it in a clear fashion. My object in taking you into this confidence—ah!"

The exclamation was caused by Goldsack knocking over his coffee in suddenly reaching out for it. The small episode, by making me start violently, awoke me to the fact that the conversation had enthralled me in a curious way. Muttering, "How clumsy!" Goldsack started to mop up the spilled beverage with his pocket handkerchief.

"My dear sir!" cried the other, in expostulation, and Goldsack desisted as a waiter darted to the spot. When the attendant had taken himself off, our host continued, somewhat falteringly:

"Here is the germ of my idea. The Delmars family, one of the wealthiest in England, would naturally consider

themselves under the very deepest obligation to any one who could and would save them from the disgrace of this feared marriage. Ordinary methods would fail, would do more harm than good. Let us turn to something out of the common. Miss Delmars has set up a hero; now if some one would knock him off his pedestal! You understand? I am speaking abstractedly, I know. Can you help me fashion any definite scheme? You are a boxing genius, Mr. Goldsack. If you could lower this fellow's colors, for instance? An arranged encounter is, of course, out of the question. What is needed is something in the way of chastisement for his cursed presumption in raising his eyes to a lady in Miss Delmars' position. A man of his kidney fights his own kind, you know. Suddenly confronted by a gentleman, by a gentleman almost his own match—perhaps his equal, he might well display the white feather. Would almost certainly do so, in fact. Right sure I am that a severe humiliation is all that is necessary. Must I be more concrete? Well, then—a bare suggestion. To-morrow the Right Honorable Petersham Delmars holds a garden party, a function semipolitical, open to the most important of his constituents. A thousand at least will be there in his splendid grounds. I could secure you and your friend an invitation. Now let us suppose that Tony Swaffield, lured by the chance of seeing Miss Delmars, of even exchanging a word with her, mingles with the throng? He is detected by Mr. Nigel Goldsack, who will well know how to avail himself of the opportunity of lowering abominable insolence, without making an undue scene. I put it to you. A misty project—true; but materialize it, and I venture to affirm that the consequences to you will be exceedingly valuable."

Goldsack leaped to his feet. Passion had ebbed the blood from his cheeks. Never have I seen a man so angry. Not

a word in answer, but swinging round on his heel he went straight out, I following.

In the square a paper boy went past, howling: "Ledderer arrives in London!" People were snatching at the sheets. Truly London was boxing mad.

"Come along, Noddy," snapped Goldsack, setting off with great strides.

That use of my old nickname at St. Basil's sounded good from his lips, and I obeyed orders. Away we raced through the traffic. He entered a railway-station hotel, and an elevator soared us up to the top. His room was at the back of the hotel, looking upon the platforms of the big terminus. Passengers dwarfed to midgets moved right down there; red and green lights glowed welcome or warning; hoarse screams from escape valves mounted to our window.

Goldsack started to pace up and down in a furious fashion.

"I'll go!" he stormed. "I swear I will! I'll be there, by the devil I will!"

I confess this lasting tempest was in the nature of a riddle. "Meaning the garden party?" I ventured. "Why—if you are so enraged about it?"

He stared at me hard, then threw up his head with a curious, bitter laugh. "Do you know who that fellow is—blight him! I will tell you. Lord Frayne. He must be. How I would like five minutes alone with him—the scoundrel!"

Doubt of his perfect mental balance occurred to me. He leaped to the washstand in a corner, poured a trifle of water into the basin, and, dipping his coffee-stained handkerchief, which was still damp, wrung out the square of linen.

"That goes to a chemist," said he grimly. "It has got to be analyzed. There's poison there!"

"Rot!" I snapped severely.

"Drink a spoonful of it, then."

"Thank you, I decline."

"Where were your eyes, you ass? Didn't you see his cigarette? It lighted without drawing. He never put it between his lips once. And when he leaned over to flick off the ash, he managed to drop a splash of it into my coffee. It's a drug, at the best. I could have throttled him, the infernal scoundrel."

"But why, in Heaven's name, should Lord Frayne try to drug or poison you?"

"Why? To put me off the fight."

"You? Are you insane? What fight?"

"With Ledderer. Brace yourself, Noddy. I'm Tony Swaffield!"

II.

Paralysis of astonishment stiffened me to stone.

"You—Tony Swaffield?" I gasped.

"And *he* knew it!"

"You—Nigel Goldsack?"

"In love—mad, hopeless love, with the most charming girl who ever deigned to breathe God's air."

Strange to say, I never doubted his statement. For one thing it was so natural that Goldsack, the peerless fighter, should be a great boxing champion; that my beloved idol should represent his country in the matter of fists.

He went on, still striding up and down his humble room: "It was bound to leak out; it was filtering through. That fellow knew me when he saw me in the Soho café. I'm leading a double life. Tony Swaffield in one circle; insignificant and unknown Mr. Nigel Goldsack in another. Why? Because I'm not proud of my profession, Noddy. There you have it. It isn't that of a gentleman exactly; it isn't that of a Winchester School man. Absolute want forced me into the ring, and, once in it, I changed my name and kept my secret from my few friends. Oh, I've made money there, all right; and there's quite

a pile coming to me—when I've licked Ledderer; but I'm sick of the business, and I loathe the butchers I have to pound and pound into a bloody heap.

"Who knows the truth? You, for one; and that brute Frayne, for another—as has just been proved. My manager knows; so does my trainer. They have to; but they're silent as death. Miss Delmars has no inkling of it, though I would surrender half my life to be able to tell her."

He dropped limply into a chair, wiping his forehead. I had recovered enough sense to question, consolingly:

"But surely she would not think the worse of you?"

"That is just it," groaned Goldsack. "She wouldn't. It would strengthen her affection when I must do all I can to kill it. That is my obvious duty. I don't want to be told that her marriage with me would mean her social undoing. She a wealthy society beauty; I a pugilist, a prize fighter. Misery would come of it as sure as darkness follows light. I love her, Noddy. With all my heart and soul I do; but I've got to strangle this affection somehow, and I'll do it if it kills me."

Stress of emotion was playing the deuce with him. This would not do at all if he was to knock out the formidable Carpet Beater. Then suddenly he was upon his feet again in a fresh flush of rage.

"What galls my nerve is being told my duty by that fellow," he snarled. "He tried to drug me, too, the dog! You see his idea? One person more than any other in the world wants to see me thrash Ledderer. You know who I mean—and don't you think lightly of her for that. Well, if I caved in on the big night, Frayne reckons I shall drop in her regard. I'll make him drink that stuff; by Jove, I'll make him drink it to the dregs!"

"Come, come," I endeavored to soothe. "You are assuming too much.

A man in Lord Frayne's position seek to drug you? Preposterous. I don't believe it. Then why should he invite you to the garden party?"

"Bah, you were ever a simpleton, Noddy," said he, with boiling impatience. "Your idiotic question is easily answered. He tempts me to go, to see Miss Delmars, in order that he may subject me to the grossest indignity by having me ejected by a couple of policemen."

"I doubt it, nevertheless. I am not so sure, even, that he does know you," I demurred.

"Then you are a bigger ass than I believed possible. But I mean to go, all the same. I shall accept this opportunity of seeing Miss Delmars, of seeing her for the last time. And you are going to help me, Noddy. Three minutes' private conversation with her are all I want. I shall be there; that is among the certain things of life." And he flung himself on his back upon the bed.

"You will risk the—the indignity you mentioned?"

"You will be there. You will keep your eyes open on my account. I shall trust you. Kindly hand me one of those cigarettes on the mantelpiece."

"And a ticket of invitation?"

"Oh, that is where you score again. You are a journalist attached to a paper. Secure an invitation for two."

That closed the matter. I left him soon afterward. The paper boys were exhibiting posters—"Ledderer or Swaifield? The Big Fight of the Century." Ah, what a piece of news might I write up!

Two afternoons later, Goldsack and I, on the strength of a press ticket, strolled with a big throng over the velvet lawns, the rose-arched gardens, the courts and terraces of that charming river residence at Kingston where the Right Honorable Petersham Delmars seeks ease from onerous cabinet duties.

We kept ourselves to ourselves, avoiding those clusters of humanity drawn by tables sagging under a weight of liberal refreshment, or mustered under the tulip trees where a blue-and-gold string orchestra was interpreting not-too-classical music.

We had been there twenty minutes when Goldsack shattered a spell of gloom by abruptly gripping my wrist and exclaiming in a restrained tone: "There she is, Noddy!"

A tall girl in a white dress trimmed with blue ribbon, and an immense sun hat wreathed with pink malmaisons, passed at a distance of ten yards. A group of men went with her, looking into her face, which had the prettiest dimpled smile for all.

Goldsack panted: "Is that not the loveliest girl ever created?"

"She is very charming," I modified.

"Go to her, Noddy! Tell her I am here."

"But she does not know me?"

The scruple was scarcely uttered when Kathleen Delmars turned her head in our direction. No shade of surprise showed on her face. She went on.

I said: "You were not seen."

"Pardon, I was," he exulted. "She saw me raise my hat. I mean to remain here. She's a splendid sport, Noddy, and she'll get a message through, you see."

We waited, lounging on a gypsy seat. A score of yards in front of us ran the river, with its imperceptible flow, the water but six inches below the close-cropped edge of the lawn.

An hour dragged itself off. Strain after strain floated from the string band which was working at full pressure in the summer heat. We were not interrupted. Once two men with linked arms passed before us. One was remarking: "They say the fight ought not to be allowed. Twaddle-twum. Two men pound each other, and an impetus is given to boxing in every school in the

country. I shall be there, and if this newly risen star does not put the black to sleep before——” He stopped abruptly, and Goldsack looked behind him, over the seat.

“Noddy, that fellow recognized me!” he hissed, as the two passed on. “Devilish unfortunate. Now——”

A footman with a note on a silver tray suddenly appeared. Goldsack tore it open and dismissed the lackey with a nod.

“From her—Heaven bless her,” he announced, in an agitated voice. “I’m to go to the orchard and wait.” He rose. “It must be a farewell,” he added unhappily. “She must never see me even once more.”

“I will keep a lookout on your behalf,” I assured him, and with a sympathetic grip of the hand we parted.

Obviously if Lord Frayne entertained any thought that his rival might obtrude upon the party he would watch for such an occurrence. Well, I would keep in touch with his lordship. A liveried servant passing with a tray of iced lemonade, I stopped him with the query as to where I might find my man.

“His ludship, sir? There he is, sir, talking to those ladies and gentlemen.”

The indicated party of guests almost surrounded one who was calling attention, in a thin, peevish tone, to some object in a flower bed.

I insisted, not altogether surprised: “That is Lord Frayne—that pale-haired gentleman?”

Receiving a positive affirmation, I walked up to the group. So Goldsack had erred in his conclusion. This was a mere slip of manhood, with hair almost canary color plastered upon either side of a parting in the center. Even his lashes were of the same hue. He had a very thin, aquiline nose, a mobile mouth, kept his eyes half closed, was not more than twenty-two, and his petulant drawl was a study. He was observing:

“Yaas. Delmars calls this a Shakespeare’s Garden. You see, every flower mentioned by the—ere—bard in his plays is to be found here. Now this—it is called ‘Flower-of-a-Day,’ this tiny white chap with five petals. I’ll wager five sovereigns that no one here can tell me——”

At that instant there was an interruption. That guest who had seemed to recognize Goldsack burst upon the group with the excited declaration:

“Swaffield’s here!”

Every one stared at him coldly. I think he was a bit of an outsider. But he went on, his flurry somewhat dampened: “Tony Swaffield! I’m ready to swear to it. He’s with Miss Delmars in——”

Lord Frayne threw up his hand to check the blusterer. I was not even sure that he did not strike him lightly upon the mouth.

“Come here,” said his lordship pleasantly, drawing the other away.

Two or three intimates followed, and I did not hold off, as may be imagined.

“Now,” said Lord Frayne, the little flower which he had plucked dangling between his lips, “what the devil do you mean, my dear friend?”

The informant looked a trifle scared, but was not to be driven from his position. “It’s quite true,” he blurted. “I know Swaffield when I see him. He’s in the orchard with Miss Delmars.”

Every one exchanged glances. The whispered story had certainly reached their ears. Frayne’s eyes narrowed to slits. He stroked his absurd little mustache.

“Of all the amazing insolence!” commented one.

“Where’s Mr. Delmars?” questioned a second.

“A policeman, rather,” advised a third. “Ejectment—short and sharp.”

“Pardon, those are bad ideas,” said Lord Frayne, lifting protesting, delicate palms. “This must be kept very quiet.

At the same time the fellow must not be permitted here in such circumstances, and I will see him off the grounds."

He swung on his heel. I had a few yards' start, and, without seeming to hurry, I increased it, crossing some tennis courts, and passing through a wicket into the orchard. At the same moment I saw the flash of a white dress dart away in one direction, and Goldsack turn quickly in another. I had given the alarm. A glimpse of the white frock was yet to be had by the observant, for the girl now stood still, the only exit being through the wicket gate. For a second I saw Goldsack hesitate, then he advanced in an easy fashion to leave the orchard. I heard the others' footsteps behind me, and I edged a little aside, very curious to see what would happen.

"Not Tony Swaffield?" said Frayne, obstructing, in timid surprise.

"Mr. Swaffield," corrected Goldsack, pulling himself up, running a swift gaze over the three men between him and the gate.

"A merited rebuke," said his lordship, bowing. "Well, permit me to remark, Mr. Swaffield, that I am very sorry to see you here. I really am, very sorry, indeed. To be curtly concise, I consider that your intrusion is a piece of unpardonable impertinence."

Goldsack turned very pale, but he laughed naturally enough.

"An opinion which I might possibly regard with a trifle of interest if I knew from whom it emanated," he answered.

"A fair question. I am Lord Francis Frayne."

Goldsack started. He looked round as if for some avenue of escape, and he must have seen Kathleen Delmars, who was incautiously showing herself. Watching him closely I noted that every drop of blood was leaving his face, and that he breathed with difficulty. He answered huskily:

"That allows you no right to question me."

"Oh, pardon, but I wholly disagree."

With a shrug of his shoulders, Goldsack stepped forward, and the others made way. His hand was upon the gate when Lord Frayne added, in a tone of gentle remonstrance:

"Pray leave the grounds without an instant's delay, unless you would like me to set the dogs on you."

Goldsack whipped round, his eyes ablaze.

"You dare to say that?" he panted.

"No; I take it back. It would reflect upon me. My better plan would be to eject you personally. Get out!"

The command rang clear and sharp as a pistol shot. Miss Delmars heard it. Lord Frayne was buttoning up his coat. He trembled with eagerness, with nerve tension longing for instant release. I think Goldsack would have gone, but he hesitated a fraction of a second too long. Frayne shot out a hand as if to seize him by the coat collar. Goldsack mechanically gripped that hand, and instantly received a blow between his eyes from the other clenched fist. He gave way, body bent a little, the veins like red bars across his forehead. Three paces back he took before the other went in as a flash of light, driving home under the jaw with all the weight of body and spring behind it. Goldsack half turned, slowly sank upon one hand and knee.

"Had enough?" demanded his lordship. "Say when!"

Goldsack stumbled to his feet and lurched through the gate.

I stood stupefied.

"So, so," grunted Lord Frayne, breathing upon his knuckles. "Unpleasant bounder," he added peevishly.

Suddenly a familiar voice called out: "What is going on here?"

There had appeared upon the scene our club friend in the gold pince-nez. He looked from one to the other in

amazement. Some one vouchsafed the information:

"A little breeze, Mr. Delmars, which has quite blown over."

That evening, about eight o'clock, the hotel elevator soared me up to the room overlooking the terminal lines. Goldsack was there, on his back, on the bed, in the dark. I switched on the light and spoke to him. No answer. A momentary fear that he had done something foolish made me leap to the bed. He was staring up at the ceiling as if trying to bore a hole through it by the sheer malignity of his gaze.

"Come, come, you are not going to be knocked over by this triviality," I exhorted.

No response.

"It was a fine thing to do," I continued, lighting one of his cigarettes. "I confess you deceived even me at first. But although you acted as you did, letting that slip of a boy have his whack at you, with the sole intent that—by lowering yourself in Miss Delmars' eyes—you would cure her infatuation for you out and out, yet I much doubt if she took it that way. Probably she read your unselfish object. *You* a coward? You couldn't convince her of it."

No reply. I took a chair.

"You were at fault regarding Lord Frayne, as you know," I went on. "The man at the club was not he. I know him now: the Right Honorable Petersham Delmars."

I thought that would break his apathy, but it didn't.

"So you see an attempt upon your fitness by a drug existed in your imagination," I continued easily. "To be candid, *my* idea was that the man was a big better on the Carpet Beater, and that he tried to meddle with you. However, that's past. You may be interested to know that I have just come from dining with Lord Frayne and Mr.

Delmars. Miss Delmars was of the party."

That fetched him. He sat up on the bed as if a snake had bit him in the small of the back.

"You?" he roared. "No lies! Hark you, Noddy, I'm in no mood for jokes and——"

I stood up, not being at all sure how he would accept what was coming.

"What!" I interrupted, trying to work up a fine indignation. "Do you imagine I could have quitted the garden party and left your reputation in the mire where you tried to fling it? I couldn't, Goldie. I had to blurt out the facts. Yes—I did. Told 'em everything about you. Now—don't you hit me. Don't! They were enormously interested. Lord Frayne couldn't think of enough names to revile himself with. Said you were a king, by Jove. Will you believe it—he was at Winchester, had heard of you there——"

"And has come to ask pardon of a noble fighter and fine gentleman," interrupted a voice.

Lord Frayne was in the open doorway. I had known of his intended coming, but I confess I was amazed to see, with him, Mr. Delmars and his daughter Kathleen.

Poor old Goldsack went red as fire. For an instant I really feared he would break down. Mechanically he took Frayne's extended hand, and mechanically he kept muttering: "Not at all; not at all."

Delmars shook hands with him, and then Kathleen. The girl seated herself, quite at home, her dimples deriding our gravity; and Frayne stood by her chair.

Delmars cleared his throat. He said, weighing each word as if in some cabinet debate of unusual importance:

"We know one another now, Mr. Goldsack. A few days back we met for the first time at a Soho café, and, learn-

ing that you are a fighter of no small skill, I invited you to my club, where I made you an offer. Was our meeting pure coincidence? Not exactly. For some time I had been endeavoring to meet, quite privately, Tony Swaffield, the white hope. Making the discovery that he sometimes visited that Soho café, I went there. I met you; and your real name, and your appearance—so unlike that of the conventional prize fighter—quite deceived me. I made my offer in good faith, with no inkling that you were the man himself.

"It must have caused you deep pain. I am profoundly sorry, for I know now I was speaking to a gentleman. Having expressed this regret, however, I must hark back to the main point, and your conduct this afternoon has proved that you will help me carry that point. My daughter must not receive your addresses. She knows that; you feel its wisdom in your heart of hearts. I have come openly for your simple word that you will no longer give the world cause to link your names together."

Goldsack bowed his head. For a full minute nothing broke the silence save a locomotive far below, which screamed impending departure. Goldsack went to a desk in a corner, and came back

with a sealed envelope. He said, regarding Delmars steadily:

"You will have nothing to do with Tony Swaffield, of the prize ring. Right and just. But will you extend a little hope to Nigel Goldsack, gentleman?"

"Impossible, for the two are inseparably connected."

"Are they?" answered Goldsack simply. "If they were to break apart; if the first was to cease to exist—what would you say? A professional pugilist must not look as high as your daughter; but if—if——" He opened the sealed envelope. "My contract for the fight with Cyprian Ledderer."

Lord Frayne cut in excitedly: "And a thousand pounds deposited by each man, to be forfeited on failing to appear."

"Precisely," said Goldsack, and he tore the contract across and across.

In Lord Frayne the sportsman burst out with a frantic oath.

I saw Delmars shrug his shoulders, lift his hands. I saw Kathleen run to Goldsack and fling her arms round his neck. And then I looked away, down the deep drop to the station platforms, where a newsboy was shouting: "The Big Fight! Latest!"

Latest? Not quite!

Other stories of The Amateur Professional will appear in later issues of the POPULAR.



THE WORST DEGRADATION

HE lived in a West Virginia town which, before the State had gone "dry," had been supplied amply, not to say lavishly, with saloons. He was discussing the merits of prohibition, and, as he talked, his eyes, not yet recovered from the hard blows they had received from his alcoholic potations, assumed the appearance of fire.

"Prohibition," he declared in a stentorian tone, "is a great institution. Look at me. I'm both an argument and a horrible example. I'm reasonably sober now. But, when the saloons were in full blast in this man's town, I was so low down from drink that my hunting dog wouldn't follow me unless I had a rabbit under my arm!"

Skinny's Sanctuary Suds

By William Hamilton Osborne

Author of "Red Mouse," "The Catspaw," Etc.

The creditable "stunt" of a street Arab who planned a merry Christmas. He gained his object by a job that was as strenuous as it was original

SKINNY occupied a position as strategic as it was comfortable. With the thermometer at one degree above, with the wind howling like sin, with his thin and threadbare garments buttoned close about him, still Skinny gave no sign. With an arm clasped protectingly about a wind-tortured batch of evening papers, with a hand jingling a pocketful of pennies, Skinny lolled unconcernedly against the wall of a big building, and smoked a cigarette.

"Gee," said a shivering, bundle-laden, homebound traveler, as he purchased a paper, "aren't y' frozen, kid?"

Skinny looked his customer over with a patronizing eye—almost a pitying eye.

"It ain't cold, mister," he vouchsafed, with the air of one taking absent treatment; "yer on'y think it is. Frozen—huh! Not me."

Skinny was quite right. He was not frozen. He was not even cold. There was a reason for it. He was standing on an iron grating that bounded the big building on the south, and from that particular portion of the grating on which he stood there poured forth, from some subterranean furnace, a blast of wonderfully warm, dry air. Skinny was so proud of his astuteness in selecting this comfortable spot, that he lost sight of the fact that his comfort was not a commercial asset. His independent spirit did not appeal to the

pity of otherwise sympathetic holiday shoppers. Had he subjected himself to the biting blast, had he shivered, had he permitted his thin nose to become pinched and peaked and reddened with the cold—had he done these things, his pockets had been heavier. There were not enough customers who invited him—"never mind the change—gimme a *World*."

He was bewailing this fact when the elephant arrived. The elephant was a portly old party with a very red face and very white side whiskers. He was a customer of Skinny's. Notwithstanding that all his vitals were thickly padded with many outer layers of fat, he was howling, dancing, with the cold.

"Here, boy," he wheezed, as he dropped a penny in Skinny's outstretched hand, "gimme a *Sun*—quick, I tell you, quick."

Skinny gave the elephant a *Sun*, and the elephant pranced on, puffing, blowing, rubbing his ears. Skinny waited until the elephant was out of sight. Then, for the first time, he looked at the penny. He looked at it, because he had felt it first. The instant that the elephant had handed it to him, he had known it for the thing it was.

It wasn't a penny. It was a five-dollar gold piece, bright, new, heavy as lead. In the cold, the elephant hadn't felt its weight, hadn't realized—Skinny swore softly, pleasantly, under his breath. The elephant's loss had been

Skinny's gain. Skinny had made four dollars ninety-nine cents in the twinkling of an eye. He could hardly wait to get home. He sold out his papers—it was long after dark by then; the streets held only stragglers. Then he made a lightning dash for Broadway, and rode home on a surface car. It was not often that he rode. He thanked the elephant for that.

His mother was asleep—tired out. He didn't disturb her. He ate the supper that she had laid out for him, placed a nickel-plated object—bright and shining—on a shelf in plain sight of her, and then he crawled to bed beside her with all his clothes on. He was dog tired, too.

They woke together—Skinny and his mother. Perhaps some street noise, some step on the outer stairs—or, perhaps, just habit—wakened them. Skinny crawled over and imprinted a kiss upon his mother's white face.

"Murry Chris'mus, ma," he said. His mother wrapped her arms about him.

"Eddie," she murmured sleepily, "yer present's on the table in the corner. I couldn't get yer much. I'd like to buy yer lots an' lots, Eddie, if we on'y had the money."

She closed her eyes and sighed. The weariness of years was in her bones. Skinny cursed softly.

"What's matter with my bean?" he asked. "Ma, I know what woke us up. I was played out last night. I didn't have me bean about me. I didn't shut it off. And that's what woke us. I didn't shut it off."

"What didn't you shut off, Eddie?" asked his mother.

"Just cast yer eyes up on ther shelf," said Skinny, "and ye'll sec."

His glance clung to his mother's glance as ivy clings to an old wall. Finally he saw that she saw. She smiled.

"A bran'-new alarm clock, ma," he crowed, "one that'll work fer years an'

years. A reg'lar sixty-nine-center, ma—an' I give it wit' my love."

His mother struggled to a sitting posture. She, too, had gone to bed quite fully clothed. A wise provision—the air was misty with her breath and with Skinny's. Skinny leaped out of bed, caught up the alarm clock, and passed it to her as he crawled back.

"Eddie," she cried, giving him a kiss. Then she frowned. "Sixty-nine cents," she echoed; "you hadn't ought to done it, Eddie. It breaks your capital."

Eddie only chuckled. His mother kissed him again.

"It was bitter cold yesterday," she went on. "I was afraid you'd get pneumony."

She dropped back on her pillow, clasping the alarm clock in her arms. "I'm s'tired," she said. "I wish Santy Claus'd give me one present that I've waited for for years."

"What's that, ma?" asked Skinny.

She sighed a heartbreaking sigh. "I'd jus' like, for once," she said, "to spend a week in bed."

Skinny's eyes brightened. He fumbled in his clothes. "You was afraid I'd get pneumony, ma," he said, "out in all the cold. Well, what d'ye think? I got 'new-money,' but not the kind you meant."

He thrust into her hands the five-dollar gold piece of the afternoon before.

"It was give me by a elephant," he explained.

"Eddie," she cried, the color coming into her face.

"An' so," he added, "yer wish come true. Yer kin stay in bed a week."

His mother glanced longingly at the five-dollar gold piece. "It's a godsend, Eddie," she exclaimed. Then she shook her head. "But I can't do it—I dursn't do it. I dursn't stay in bed a week."

"Fer why?" asked Skinny.

"It's jus' like spendin' all yer stock in trade on this bran'-new alarm clock," she returned. "I'd lose all my cus-

tomers—I'd have no place to wash an' iron—they'd all give me up, if I stayed in bed a week. You don't know, Eddie, how long it took fer me to get those three places where I wash an' iron. It took me years, almost."

Skinny seized the five-dollar gold piece and leaped out of bed. "Yer going to stay in bed a week," he said sternly, "and yer goin' to start right now."

She struggled once more to a sitting posture. Eddie pushed her back. "What-all yer goin' to do?" he asked.

"I got to get up," she answered.

"What's eatin' you?" said Skinny. "This is Chris'mus. You don't never work on Chris'mus. You can stay in bed to-day."

"I forgot," returned his mother. "Yes. Maybe I can stay in bed to-day. On'y to get up and get the meals."

"You don't get up and get no meals," yelled Skinny conclusively—and, we regret to state, with a horrible oath that lent finality to his decision—"yer stay in bed. Yer understand?"

She stayed in bed. Skinny got the meals. He did something else. Beside laying in a goodly stock of food and fuel, he spent his time in thought. His mother was quite right—a week in bed might result in mischief—might wreak havoc—might lose her all her trade. And yet—she had said it her own self—for years, for years she had wanted one thing more than anything—to spend a week in bed. This was her chance—and Skinny was bound that she should have her wish.

Next morning early, after he had genially cursed his mother into quiescence—every curse, be it said, sounded to his mother like a benediction—he ventured forth.

"I'm goin' to lock the door on the outside," he said, "an' if the roost burns down yer a goner. Yer got to take yer chanst o' that, ma, till I gets back. Now, dern you," he screamed, "you get back in bed—get back in bed. I tell yer!"

He locked the door on the outside, descended three pairs of stairs like an avalanche, reached the street, and swung upon a passing surface car. He rode for half an hour. He swung off and took another car. He walked four blocks. He entered an apartment house and dashed up three flights of stairs. He pushed a button.

The door opened, and a somewhat frowsy-looking lady in a dressing gown appeared. She yawned excessively.

"You can come right in, Mamie," she said, as though repeating a set weekly speech; "it's good you're early. We've got an awful wash this week." Then she stopped. "It isn't Mamie," she exclaimed, in astonishment.

Skinny shook his head. He started in. He had formulated his own speech on the way up, and he began at the beginning.

"This is Mis' Morrison's?" he asked.

"Yes," said the lady; "what do you want?"

"I'm from Mis' Mamie Snell," he proceeded, "an' I got a message fer yer. I'm Eddie Snell, her son. I got this message fer yer. Mis' Mamie Snell will not wash fer yer this week. This is a off week. She's goin' to spend the time fergittin' her business troubles, an' so she won't be here."

"It's just as well," said the lady; "next week'll do. But tell her she'll have three times the wash next week, and to arrange accordingly."

"I'll tell her," said Skinny, "an' I'm much obliged.

"Easy," he added to himself, as he reached the street again. "Ma ain't got exacting abullity, er she'd understand. Now the next place. Where in glory is Crandall's?"

Crandall's, it seems, was only some eight blocks away—all footwork. Crandall's was an old maid, and Skinny wasn't up to old maids. His "exacting abullity" wasn't executive enough, nor able enough, to cope with anything

save married women. He came off second best.

"That's the way with all these shiftless, irresponsible people," Crandall's shouted at him; "they fail you at just the time you want them. No wonder they never get along——"

"Yes'm," murmured Skinny abjectly, "fergettin' her business troubles fer a week——"

"Forgetting me—her best customer, you mean, you jackanapes—that's who she's forgetting. I'll forget her. I can get a hundred people to do my work—at the price I pay. Hussy!"

"Yes'm," said Skinny. He blinked his eyes. He stood not on the order of his going, but went at once.

"Gee," he exclaimed to himself, as he went; "no wonder ma gits tired."

The third place was Pickens—more footwork—more stairs to climb. Now Pickens was quite different from Crandall's. Pickens wasn't an old maid. It was a mother and two daughters. Crandall's may have been peppery. Pickens was adamanf. Crandall's had been thunder and lightning. Pickens was stony-eyed.

"My daughters have four parties on this week," said Pickens, "and that means—— Oh, it's ridiculous, it's absurd. We must have the wash——"

"Impossible," stoutly objected Skinny. "Mis' Snell takes this week off to fergit her business troubles——"

"She promised to be here," returned Pickens; "she's got to keep her promise. I told her particularly about this week. She has to come for three days. She has no right. Oh, she's got to come—that's all. I can't get anybody else—she knows that. Everybody needs washing after Christmas."

The younger Pickens wrung their hands in holiday despair. "What are we to do, mother?" they wailed. They had been watching Skinny closely, and had noted on his face a look of keen determination.

"Can't she send somebody?" asked the elder Pickens.

"Nobody to send," said Skinny; "the on'y woman we know is a woman who can iron, but who won't wash—it's her back an' legs—you ought to see her legs——"

Mrs. Pickens was a woman of exacting abullity, all right. She left the room and came back with her hat and coat.

"Where are you going, mother?" queried the daughters.

"I'm going after Mamie Snell," said Mrs. Pickens; "she's got to come here this week, or I'll know the reason why. I can't get anybody else."

Skinny looked at the floor. He looked at the ceiling. Suddenly he was smitten with an idea—a tremendous inspiration.

"Wait, dern you, wait!" he cried. "Don't you come. Ma's got business troubles she's tryin' to fergit——"

"She's not drunk?" queried Mrs. Pickens.

"No," answered Skinny, "but I'm blest if it wouldn't be a good thing if she was for onct in her life—I nearly had to dope her as it was. You wait," he added; "I'll fix it for you. Ma can't come here this week. Gimme the wash an' I'll take it down to her—she'll get it done. I'll get it back on time."

Mrs. Pickens drew off her coat and took off her hat.

"If you don't get it here on time——" she threatened, starting for the kitchen.

"When is it due, mum?" asked Skinny meekly.

"She always finishes at half past six at night on Saturday," returned Mrs. Pickens.

"You'll get it back at half past six on Saturday," said Skinny; "I promise yer. I always keeps my promise."

Mrs. Pickens directed him to follow her. She pointed to the basket of clothes under the kitchen sink. Then she looked Skinny keenly in the eye.

"How do I know you're Mamie

Snell's boy?" she asked. "How do I know you're not a thief?"

"Look at me," said Skinny, with a grin, "an' see if I ain't my mother's little pet."

"He's the living image of her," said one of the Pickens daughters, her spirits rising as the prospect of clean lingerie brightened.

"Remember," warned Mrs. Pickens, "their first party is Saturday night. At half past six you be here, and not a moment later. Do you understand?"

"Yes'm," said Skinny.

When he reached home his mother was asleep. He deposited his basket on the floor. He tiptoed out and tiptoed up another flight of stairs. He knocked at a door.

"Mis' Cooney," he announced, "I got a job fer yer—I got a basket full of wash to be done up. Ma's fergitting her business troubles. You got to help me with it."

"If it's washin'," said Cooney, "not a step do I stir. Not a drop of water will I put my hands to. If it's ironin', I'm wit' you. Which is it now, washin' or ironin'? Be careful what you say."

Skinny blinked. He gulped. "It's— it's——" he began.

"Be careful now," warned Cooney.

"It's ironin'," he concluded.

He stole softly down the stairs once more to the street. He bought more coal—he bought bars of soap. Then he went back to his rooms. His mother slept. And while she slept, Skinny rebuilt his fire, putting on the coal, piece by piece, with his hands. He was as noiseless as a cat. He filled a boiler with water. In it he slipped a cake of soap. He had two washtubs. He piled all the clothes he could get into one of them, and poured cold water on them. Then he sat down to wait.

His mother slept. When she woke, it was three o'clock in the morning by the alarm clock. The room was stifling with

heat—an extraordinary treat. She started up, alarmed.

"Fire," she cried weakly, "an' Eddie's locked me in."

"An' locked himself in, too," said Skinny, from the other room. "What's eatin' you, ma? I been out with the boys. I just come in."

His mother sprang—actually sprang—out of bed and darted into the kitchen. There, like a drowned rat his clothes dripping, dark rings under his eyes, was Skinny. He was doubled up over a washboard, his arms buried in a mountain of soapsuds.

"What-all are you doin', Eddie?" cried his mother, aghast.

"Go 'way back," said Skinny. "Don't mind me. I'm runnin' a scientific, sanctuary laundry for the Pickens—an' they're peaches, too, at that——" He withdrew his arms and flirited the white foam upon the floor. "Look at them arms an' hands," he said. "Ain't them lily white? Pickens clothes took off all the dirt."

"How long you been at this, Eddie?" asked his mother.

Skinny slumped into a kitchen chair. His wet garments plopped and swished against the seat and legs of the wooden chair as he did so. "Fer about fifteen hours," he said, "an' I must say I ain't stuck on women's work. But I done it—an' I done it right. Scientific an' sanctuary. And I ain't never had such hands as them—just pipe them hands."

His mother didn't pipe his hands—she piped his dripping clothes. Deftly she unbuttoned them, and relieved him of them. He squirmed out of her grasp.

"Do you think I ain't able to help meself?" he asked.

He picked up a dry bath towel from the floor. "One o' Pickens towels," he said; "I saved it just fer this. But don't worry. Everything is clean an' sanctuary. I'll wash it afterward."

Naked as he was born, he darted to the fire and dried himself. "Ah-h," he

exclaimed, "pipe the lily whites—jus' pipe the lily whites."

His mother laughed—it was good to hear her laugh. "Pipe your back, Eddie," she exclaimed. Skinny tried to pipe his back, but couldn't quite make it. "What's the idea about me back?" he asked.

"Nothin', now," she answered; "but there will be to-morrow mornin', when you get up. Talk about a week in bed. If you're not a week in bed, I'll——"

"Gee!" interrupted Skinny. "I never thought o' that."

"It's good I did," went on his mother. She reached up on the shelf and took down a porous plaster. She peeled off its covering, and clapped it upon Skinny's back, pressing it carefully into the hollows.

"That'll help some," she said.

It did help some. It helped a good deal. There were only a few twinges when Skinny jumped out of bed at half past seven next morning—the alarm clock was on the job. He threw a few well-chosen expletives in the direction of his mother—she was trying to get up—drew on his dry clothes—the room was warm as toast—and clattered up the stairs to see Mis' Cooney. Mis' Cooney was ready for him, especially when he flashed ready money in her face. She came down and ironed, while Skinny went out upon the street. The first individual that Skinny met was young "Google-eye" McGaffney. Skinny exhibited his hands and some eight inches of his pipestem arms.

"Pipe the lily whites," he said.

"Them's lady fingers," returned Google-eye. "How'd it come about?"

"Matter of business," explained Skinny. "I'm runnin' a laundry—a sanctuary laundry. Them lady fingers comes from sanctuary suds." He glanced contemptuously at Google-eye's disreputable digits.

"Y'ought to get a pair o' scientific hands," he said.

Then, like a bolt from the blue, another idea struck him. It was an idea worth while. He caught Google-eye by the coat sleeve. "Want a trolley ride?" he said.

"Quit yer kiddin'," said Google-eye. "Who's goin' to stake me to a trolley ride?"

For answer Skinny seized his companion by the collar and hustled him on board a passing surface car, in such manner that Google-eye escaped sudden death by the breadth of the finest silken hair.

"Come wit' me on me rout," said Skinny.

His route was a circuitous route, and its completion took some time. His first stopping place was at Mis' Morrison's—the joint where his exacting abullity had shone forth upon the day before. This same exacting abullity was still on the job. He emerged thence with a basket full of clothes.

"Come on," he said to Google-eye, dragging that not unwilling gentleman into a bakery. "I'll stake yer to a cream puff, if yer'll eat it."

"What d'yer think I'd do with it?" grunted Google-eye happily; "use it fer to paint a house?"

Skinny bought a bagful of cream puffs. Then he pressed on to Crandall's. Crandall's, it is to be remembered, was an old maid. Skinny offered her a cream puff. She declined. But, old maid as she was, she softened. This softening was not due to cream puffs. It was due to the fact that she had scoured the universe for a washerwoman, and without success. Skinny had turned up just in the nick of time. She capitulated.

"You take a old maid," Skinny confided to Google-eye, "an' they fall for a man every time. There bein' two of us, what could she do? It was yer nice manners that fetched her, Google-eye. Yer quite a gentleman."

Google-eye shouldered the Crandall's

clothes basket. "Gimme a nuther cream puff," he commanded, "to take the taste o' lemon out o' my mouth. I ain't got no use for Crandall's. Not for mine."

In less than an hour, Skinny and his crony were back home. Skinny dragged him in. Google-eye shivered with pleasure.

"Gee!" he said. "It's hot as — in here. It's fine, Skinny. It's hotter'n it is at school."

"Yer can stay as long as y' like," said Skinny; "my ma don't care—she's fergittin' her business troubles—an' Mis' Cooney's only too glad to have us around. Ain't you, Mis' Cooney? Say, Google-eye," he went on, "put yer hand in here—an' feel."

Google-eye felt. "What is it, anyhow?" he asked.

"It's a porous plaster," said Skinny. "Did you ever wear a porous plaster, Google-eye?"

"Naw," said Google-eye, a bit enviously.

"Would yer like to wear one?"

"I don't mind," said Google-eye.

"Stay here till I get back," said Skinny. He darted out, returning with a plaster and more soap, and an additional quantity of coal.

"I c'd stay in here forever," sighed Google-eye; "it's so nice an' warm."

"Yer goin' to stay, Google-eye," returned Skinny hospitably. "I'll show you how I run my laundry. You just wait an' see. I'll just put this here bag o' cream puffs up here on this here shelf, an' every half hour, Google-eye, we'll have one apiece, and Mis' Cooney, she'll have one apiece. Google-eye, did you ever earn a nickel an hour?"

"I'd like to get the chanst," said Google-eye.

"Roll up your sleeves," said Skinny; "here's one o' Crandall's petticoats. You can wash your hands on that. We'll clean it later in these here sanctuary suds."

"There's a half hour up just about

now," warned Google-eye, looking at the clock.

"So there is," said Skinny, diving for the bag.

At half past three that afternoon Google-eye ruefully contemplated his soaking clothes. "How'm I ever goin' to get back home?" he asked.

"Gosh," said Skinny. "I'm a pinhead, so it seems. Go into that closet, Google-eye, and throw me out your clothes. Here's a nighty of Mis' Morrison's that you can use. Hang yer clothes up there to dry. You won't be cold. It's hot enough in here to roast a elephant—"

As he uttered the word "elephant," something inside of him gave a disagreeable little twist. He cured it with a cream puff.

At half past six that evening he danced in glee about Google-eye.

"Look at his lily whites," he cried.

"Me lady fingers," corrected Google-eye.

"An' here's yer dry clothes an' yer porous plaster," said Skinny, "an' here's yer coin—an' there's one more cream puff for the two of us"—he held it tauntingly in front of Google-eye—"and it goes to Mis' Cooney," he concluded, laying it at that lady's shrine. He tiptoed into the other room.

"Ma's asleep again," he said; "she's forgot her business troubles."

His mother had her wish. She slept for a week. She did more. She ate—she reveled in warmth. From a bloodless scarecrow, she developed into a woman. But she was worried.

"Was the clothes clean?" she asked Mis' Cooney.

"It took 'em three times over—it takes men an everlastin' time, but, thank the Lord, they got 'em clean. I wouldn't 've ironed 'em if they wasn't. The clothes is as clean as their hands—an' Eddie pays me up right on the dot, an' thank the Lord for that."

Skippy's mother slept for a week. And at the end of the week Skinny had

two more customers and three more assistants. The local bakery was daily denuded of cream puffs, and the stock of porous plasters at the corner drug store was scandalously low.

And then, at the end of the week, the dream was shattered. After a scientific, sanctuary laundry, school comes like killing frost.

"I'd ruther be in business any day," grumbled Google-eye, as he slumped down at his desk. The feminine genius who presided over the room stared at Google-eye's hands. She stared at five other pairs of hands.

"What's the idea?" she faltered. "I don't quite see the point." This was supposed to be sarcasm, for hitherto hands subject to her scrutiny had ever, like Mr. Quilp's linen, been of an uncertain, delightfully uncertain color.

"They're lily white's," said Skinny boastfully.

"They're lady fingers," added Google-eye.

The remaining members of the masculine sex eyed them disdainfully. "We'll lay for 'em," they said.

They laid for 'em, and were not disappointed. The lady-finger gang closed up, and closed in on 'em.

"We done it scientific," said Skinny, wiping his hands on a victim's hair, "and we done it sanctuary. You can't beat five porous plasters in a row."

There was a big let-down after the battle. The lady-finger squad felt the drag of ennui. "What'll we do?" they asked of Skinny.

Skinny walked moodily up the street. "Blamed if I know," he said. "Hang a school, anyway."

They stopped in front of a baker's window.

"Ain't got any more scientific laundry up to your house, have you, Skinny?" queried Google-eye.

Skinny waved his hands in air. "Never thought of it," he yelled; "sure I have. Everybody report for work at

seven a. m., an' at half past three p. m. My ma can get up at nine an' iron, an' she can go to bed whenever she gets ready." He stepped into the bakery. "Do you think these here cream puffs'll keep overnight?" he asked.

It was December 24th. Skinny rose early and made his way downtown. For four hours he haunted the ground-floor corridors of the Trinity Building like a ghost. Three times he was chased out by the starter. It was after eleven when he saw the elephant come in. He followed him, rode with him in the elevator, and confronted him at the door of his office.

"I got a business trouble to talk over," he remarked.

The elephant started back and rubbed his eyes. "My great," said the elephant, "why, you're the skinny little newsboy. I've missed you—thought you were dead. Come in."

Skinny entered, hot and uncomfortable. "I ain't dead," said Skinny. "I've gone into the scientific-laundry business for a while."

He fumbled in his pockets. He produced a multitude of coins. "There's your change, with interest to date," said Skinny. "My teacher figured it all out."

"Change," echoed the old gentleman; "change—from what?"

Skinny drew forth a diminutive book. He pointed to an entry and handed it to the old gentleman. This is what the latter read:

Dec. 24, 19— I O Lefunt 4.99

"When did you make this entry?" queried the old man.

"Jus' a year ago," said Skinny.

"And what's this word 'Lefunt'?"

Skinny drew his hand across his mouth. "L-e-funt—elephant," he said; "that only means—it only means a big, very fine, nice man. You ain't on, I see. A year ago you give me a five-dollar

gold piece by mistake. My ma, she wanted to fergit her business troubles, an' I had to use it. I hadn't oughter—but the intrust makes up for it, so I thought."

The elephant opened wide his eyes—a somewhat difficult process. "But—but——" he stammered, "I didn't mean to get any change. I intended to give the five to you. If it hadn't been so cold, I'd have told you so. I was afraid afterward you might pass it on somebody for a cent. And I haven't seen you since. I thought you must be dead. Bless you, I always give five-dollar gold pieces to newsboys for Christmas—always. It's a bad habit of mine. The missus raises thunder with me for it."

"You—you won't take this?" asked Skinny, since it was apparent that the elephant wouldn't. Skinny swept it into his pocket.

"I kind o' hate to see it miss fire," said Skinny. "I had time enough to get it all together. You see," he added, "it ain't what you meant. It's what I meant. And I on'y did it because ma jus' had to fergit business troubles—and I kind o' thought the intrust would make it all correct."

"Don't worry," said the elephant. "I always do it Christmas time—always—glad to see you—thought you were dead. Go right along. Don't worry. It's all right."

Skinny shambled away. But he wasn't through. There was something that clung to his memory.

"He always does it December 24th," he told himself.

At four o'clock that afternoon, Skinny stepped jauntily up to a news stand and bought a single evening paper—a *Sun*. He slipped around to the rear of one of the twin buildings, and took his stand in the very center of a rush of hot air. He stood there with the lone paper under his arm. Commuters by the dozen rushed up to him to buy. Skinny only shook his head.

"Not for sale," he said.

Finally the elephant came along. He stopped and stared at Skinny, rubbing his eyes.

"What!" he exclaimed. "You here—back in the business—eh!"

"Not exactly, sir," said Skinny. "I run a laundry—all except one day. I sell papers on December 24th."

"You young rascal," said the old gentleman, with a roar of laughter. "Gimme a *Sun*, and be about it, please."

Skinny handed him the *Sun* and closed his fingers upon a heavy golden coin. The old gentleman started off. But Skinny detained him for a moment.

"Sir," said Skinny, "can you tell me somethin'? You're educated, and I ain't. I want to get out a little circular. I don't know how to spell a sanctuary laundry, if you please."

He had his little book open, and held a stub of pencil in his hand.

"A sanctuary laundry!" gasped the elephant. "What in Hades is a sanctuary laundry, you young dog?"

"Why," said Skinny, blinking, "it's a laundry where everything is spick an' spanty clean—it's a laundry where there ain't no germs, y'understand."

Bill Harris—you've read some stories about his "line" in former issues, told by Howard Fielding—will reappear in the first POPULAR for 1915, on sale January 7. The new story is called "A Bit of Inside Work."

The Other Film

By W. B. M. Ferguson

Author of "A Man's Code," "The Son," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PART ONE

For a long time Arnold Cummings, a young artist, had admired the old, secluded house, usually peering over the high stone wall to see it. One morning he takes a snapshot of the house and grounds, and while refilling his camera drops the fresh film into the bushes that line the wall inside. He jumps down to recover his property and discovers a man's dead body—the victim of murder. At the house there is hubbub, policemen appear, a crowd collects, and Arnold is accused of the deed by Pendleton, a butler who rushes from the house. But Arnold is released, mainly because the Deerings, mother and daughter, who are the "family" of the place, assert that he is innocent of Jonas Wylder's death. The murdered man is found to be Mrs. Deering's cousin, a successful architect, and owner of the walled-in house. Mystery surrounds his killing; the law concludes that some passing footpad is guilty; but both Cummings and his chum, Latimer, a newspaper reporter, feel that the guilt lies nearer home. Half hints and tenuous clues come to them. While calling on the Deerings, Cummings overhears a few phrases laden with suspicion. Then, when he is told by Alice Deering that his film was never found in the bushes, he sees the empty box on a table. Latimer, too, finds disturbing evidence of something concealed in a torn fragment of letter he picks up. Both men begin to suspect Peter Gorman or his son Randall of complicity. The Gormans are the nearest neighbors, Peter Gorman was the partner of Jonas Wylder, and there had been a serious break in the firm over graft charges against Gorman. Randall and Alice Deering seem in singular confidence. Tormented by his relentless questioning, Mrs. Deering finally admits to Latimer that Wylder, her cousin, and Peter Gorman were bitter enemies. This, Alice as decidedly denies. Latimer and Cummings have both fallen in love with Alice and are in a maze of doubt, fear and loyalty. Suddenly the Deerings announce they are leaving home for a rest in the country. Alice dismisses both Cummings and Latimer rather summarily.

(In Two Parts—Part II.)

CHAPTER IX.

IT occasioned me considerable surprise when Randall Gorman, the evening of that same day, called at my home.

I had not seen Latimer since the previous night, when, on our return from the Hermitage, he had left me, going on downtown. As I have stated, he returned late after I was in bed, and he had not been up when I left for my studio early that morning. Thus there had been no opportunity for me to learn how his investigations were progressing.

I received Randall Gorman in the drawing-room, off which opened the improvised studio in which I was at work when he called.

"I hope you'll pardon my disturbing

you, Mr. Cummings," said he, seeing, I suppose, the brush behind my ear—I can never overcome that habit—"but I was in the neighborhood, and, in fact, had an errand to perform. Here it is—the film you lost that morning. It seems one of the policemen or detectives—I really don't know who—found it long ago, and left it at the house where a maid satisfied her curiosity as to its contents. Miss Deering asked if I'd stop in and give it to you."

The box was the one I had seen the previous day at the Hermitage; the box with my initials scratched on it, which I had dropped that memorable morning. But now the inquisitive maid had replaced the little tin cylinder with its unexposed film.

"Thank you for your trouble," I said, "but Miss Deering shouldn't have bothered. I told her it was too trivial to think about."

"Well, so long as it was found, you might as well have it," he replied pleasantly, "and it was no trouble to me. Miss Deering felt you had been inconvenienced enough by an unfortunate intimacy with Mr. Wylder's death."

There was something so wholesome, sturdy, and independent about my visitor, that insensibly I found myself liking him. He would not have taken a prize in any beauty show, but his square-jawed, fiery-red face and level, blue eyes gave an impression of honesty, courage, and fairness, while the wide mouth hinted at generosity, sympathy, and humor. He was not the scowling, pugnacious young man of my first acquaintance. As he seemed in no particular hurry, I offered him a cigar, and we fell into conversation.

"I'm afraid, Mr. Cummings," said he, "I wasn't very civil to you the other day. I'm no good at hiding my feelings, and Mr. Latimer had made me sore the way he insisted upon haunting the place. I've known the Deerings a good long while—ever since they came to live with Mr. Wylder. And because there was no man in the house, the reporters thought they could do as they liked. You've no idea what the Deerings had to put up with in the way of impertinent questions. Some people think because a murder was pulled off there, it gives them the right to treat the place as a free show. It's a wonder they didn't run a line of rubberneck coaches to the Hermitage. Just fancy if the Deerings were your own folks; put yourself in their place.

"I know Mr. Latimer's your friend," he added, "and I don't mean to knock him behind his back, but, honestly, he's been rubbing it in pretty hard. You would think we were a bunch of crooks the way he's been pulling this gumshoe

stuff on us, and I'd like him to know we've had enough. Call him off, will you?"

As he grew more earnest, young Gorman spoke in a slangy manner rather in keeping with his appearance; yet I found nothing offensive about it. Somehow it was the kind of speech one would expect from him; idiomatic, colorful, and terse. The kind of speech a man insensibly employs who commands men of a lower caste. I knew he was employed by his father in an outdoor capacity.

"Why, I've nothing to do with Mr. Latimer's actions," I replied. "He'll go his own gait, no matter what I should say."

"Well, what's he got on us, anyway?" asked Gorman, rumpling his lurid hair. "I know you're all right, for Miss Deering thinks so, and I thought if you slipped your friend a word, he'd get wise and realize he was making a nuisance of himself. The Deerings are pretty soft; they don't like to kick a man out, especially when that man happens to have saved Miss Deering's life. They haven't any one to put up a holler for them. But if your friend keeps on, some one's going to hand him the sacred order of the boot, and I guess it'll be up to me. Great John! He doesn't suppose Miss Deering or her mother turned old Wylder off, does he? Or, perhaps, he thinks the governor or I had a hand in it, eh?"

"I'm sure, Mr. Gorman, I don't know what he thinks."

"Well, I know what some of the papers have been hinting at," said he, glowering at his cigar. "They make me tired. Those charges were a frame-up by a bunch of soreheads, and Wylder's resignation had nothing to do with it. He got out of the firm because he'd had enough of business, and his health wasn't good. They'll be saying next that the governor turned Wylder off to stop

him squealing. They can say anything these days, and get away with it."

I wondered if he was dissembling; if he knew his father for a self-confessed thief—though that may seem too harsh a term. Yet Peter Gorman—according to Mrs. Deering—had been guilty of certain practices which, though sanctioned by usage in some circles, were none the less unlawful. Padding pay rolls and securing contracts by bribery and political pull is certainly thievery, whether conducted on a large or small scale; whether conducted by a corporation, firm, or individual. It was a question in my mind if Randall Gorman knew the firm's guilt; he had not been long in the business, I understood, and his position did not bring him in immediate contact with the office. His was entirely outside work, and, like Mr. Wylder, he could be blind for years to the hidden wirepulling unless his father confided in him.

"I guess I'll wait and have a talk with Mr. Latimer if you don't mind," said my visitor. "There's no sense in bothering you. When will he be in?"

"I can't say, for he's very uncertain; he may be in any moment, and then again not until morning. But wait a while and see, if you wish."

"Thanks, but I don't want to keep you off your work, Mr. Cummings. Don't mind me——"

"Oh, it wasn't very important," I replied, "and I was about through anyway."

"Mr. Latimer's a star reporter, isn't he?" asked my visitor, after a moment's silence. "I guess a man like that can make a lot of trouble if he's down on a fellow——"

"I think this is he now," I interrupted, hearing steps on the landing. And a moment later the hall door slammed, and Latimer entered the room.

If he was surprised at finding me entertaining Randall Gorman, he did not show it, giving the other a curt nod, and

making straight for the whisky decanter. "Have a drink, Cummings?"

And when I refused, he did not extend the invitation to our visitor. Gorman's face became rather more red, if possible, and, as Latimer turned, glass in hand, and leisurely surveyed him, he arose, and they confronted each other. I could not help thinking of a hound dog and a bull terrier sizing each other up preparatory to a little bloodletting.

Then young Gorman, hands on hips and head thrown back, stated his business in a rather aggressive manner, saying practically what he had said to me.

"You've succeeded, Mr. Latimer," finished he, "in making the Deerings' home so uncomfortable that they're going away——"

"Oh, nonsense!" said Latimer, with a short laugh. Always he was an amiable, easy-going fellow, who could take a lot of ill usage before hitting back, but now either the whisky had gone to his head, or Gorman's manner or personality had made him eager for trouble, or at least inclined to meet it halfway. He smiled in a very aggravating manner, and appeared to goad rather than placate our visitor.

"It's not nonsense!" caught up Gorman. "You've made an infernal nuisance of yourself——"

"Have you come here to tell me that, Mr. Gorman?" asked Latimer, swallowing his Scotch at a gulp.

"Yes, I have. It's time somebody told you, for your hide's so thick the idea wouldn't suggest itself to you——"

"What right have you to come here and tell me my rights or wrongs?" demanded Latimer, setting down his glass. "Have you been commissioned by the Deerings? No? Then why do you take the job yourself?"

"I've the right of an old friend," said Gorman doggedly, "and the Deerings haven't any one else to act for them. I'm not going to stand by and have you

pester them to death when a little plain speaking's all that's wanted——"

"It's not wanted," said Latimer politely, "and especially from you, Mr. Gorman."

"Wanted or not," said the other, "you'll have it. And if speaking won't do, we'll try something stronger——"

"Gentlemen," said I, "you are forgetting yourselves!"

"A little plain speaking of a certain kind is what I would like, Mr. Gorman," said Latimer, paying no attention to me, and leaning over the table until he was looking straight into the other's metallic-blue eyes. "But a little plain speaking on a certain subject is what appears to be at a premium. Suppose, for a change, you do a little plain speaking about Mr. Wylder's death? How does *that* strike you, eh?"

The ruddy hue slowly vanished from young Gorman's face, but he kept his eyes in a wary manner upon Latimer. "Oh, so we're getting to it at last?" he said slowly. "So you think I know something about Wylder's death, eh?"

"I don't think, Mr. Gorman," replied Latimer. "I know."

"Oh, take that bull out and shoot it!" said Gorman flippantly. He laughed and snapped his fingers. "You're a fine gumshoe man, Mr. Latimer. If that's the best you can do, it's precious little. But go ahead; anything you can hang on me you're welcome to——"

"Is that your writing or isn't it?" demanded Latimer, taking out the scrap of paper he had shown me, and waving it under the other's nose. "I'll save you the trouble of denial, Mr. Gorman, for I can prove that it's your writing."

Gorman looked disconcerted. Plainly he was astonished at finding such a tell-tale piece of evidence in Latimer's possession. He hesitated, and then, as if realizing the futility of denial, admitted the writing was his. "And what of it?" he asked defiantly.

"This was written from the Park

Overlook Hotel," said Latimer. "Not the New York one, but the Philadelphia house. They are owned by the same company, and use the same coat of arms on their stationery. You were in Philadelphia on business for your father a few days after Wylder was killed. You wrote that letter to Mrs. Deering——"

"Purely elementary, Watson," quoted Gorman, folding his arms and smiling. "I could have saved you the trouble of dōping all this out if you'd come and asked me. Yes, I wrote that letter, but I'm not saying it was to Mrs. Deering. Sorry I can't tell you."

"You don't have to," said Latimer, "for I found this scrap of paper in Mrs. Deering's sitting room at the Hermitage. What are her fears, and why did they prove groundless? And the last doubt is removed as to the possible identity of whom?"

"Suppose you find out?" suggested the other.

"I don't have to. I know!" said Latimer, crashing a fist on the table. "And you know as well as I! You were writing about the person who killed Jonas Wylder!" shaking an accusatory finger in the other's face.

Gorman swallowed hard and took out his cigarette case with an admirable assumption of nonchalance. "You're kidding yourself, Mr. Latimer, but you can't kid me. You're in the wrong pew. That letter had nothing to do with Wylder's death, and those two sentences are entirely harmless. It was about a little personal matter that happens to be none of your business, and, if you'd like to know, it *wasn't* written to Mrs. Deering. That evidence wouldn't hang a man, would it? I guess you've got to get something better than that. I'm much obliged for your opinion of me, but will you tell me how Wylder's death would have benefited me?"

"It would have benefited your father," said Latimer, "and you know that

very well. Wylder had only to say the word——”

“That’s a lie!” cried Gorman, clenching his fist and stepping forward. “I won’t stand for it! My old man’s white clear through! You lie if you say those charges were true! They weren’t; not a word of them——”

“They were—every word of them!” said Latimer. “I know they were, and so does every newspaper man in town! And I can prove it. I’ve a witness who’ll take her oath on it. She heard your father admit the whole dirty business to Wylder. And that witness is a person you or no one can question, for she’s Mrs. Deering. What have you to say to that?” He planted his hands on the table and leaned forward as he delivered this crushing blow; for crushing it was, young Gorman starting back and half raising an arm as to ward off a physical impact.

If I had had any doubts as to his ignorance of his father’s guilt, they were now swept aside. There had been something so profoundly genuine and appealing in his sweeping assertion:

“My old man’s white clear through!” A sublime faith born of love; a righteous indignation that any one should dare to question his father’s honor. And suddenly it was brought home to me that we were facing, perhaps a greater, more epic tragedy than that of Wylder’s death; the tragedy of a son who loves, honors, and esteems his father, learning for the first time that that father has forfeited the respect of honest men. There could be no question of the love and esteem which existed between Randall Gorman and his father; of the boy’s—for he was a boy—own sterling integrity; of the grief, dismay, and bitter humiliation he experienced at hearing such a brutal truth; a truth which, though hinted at, he had up to the present steadfastly refused to believe.

I was profoundly stirred, and so, I

knew, was Latimer, who now realized he had misjudged the boy. One had but to look at young Gorman’s face, as he stood with bowed head, to see what this meant to him. All the fight had been taken out of him, and when finally he spoke it was in a colorless monotone.

“You are telling me the truth, Mr. Latimer?” he asked.

“I am,” said Latimer. And his voice was no longer harsh. “I’m sorry, Gorman, but it *is* the truth. I didn’t mean to rub it in, and I apologize for thinking you were in on it. I thought you knew.”

“Oh, it’s—it’s all right,” gulped Gorman, blinking hard and reaching for his hat. “G-good night.” He went out slowly and with bowed head.

He had entered the room a boy; he left it a man.

CHAPTER X.

For a long time Latimer and I were silent, both of us smoking hard and staring at nothing in particular. I had wanted to stay young Gorman, to make his going less harsh; to soften in some way the cruel news. Yet what could I have said? Nothing could give him back that faith in his father which had been shattered at a blow.

Latimer was the first to speak. “It’s tough,” he exclaimed, shaking his head and knocking out his pipe. “That boy thought his father was just about right—but I saw it too late. I feel as if I had done a wanton, cruel thing. But, honestly, it never crossed my mind that he didn’t know all about it. I wanted to hurt him; to corner him; to force him to tell what he knew about Wylder.”

“It’s evident,” said I, “the Deerings kept it from him. Of course they wouldn’t say anything about his father. And, believe me, Latimer, Peter Gorman will find his punishment through his son. That boy’s as honest as the day; he couldn’t do a mean, underhand trick; it isn’t in him.”

"Yes, I believe you're right," said Latimer slowly. "The fact remains that what I said about Peter Gorman *is true*; I'm not going by what Mrs. Deering told, but what I know personally. But I wouldn't have said anything to Randall Gorman if I hadn't believed he was in cahoots with his father. Time enough to find out truths for himself; the Lord knows I'm not one to tell any boy that his father's virtually a crook. I'm sorry I said anything about it."

"But," said I, "do you really think Peter Gorman was mixed up in Wylder's death? It's a long step from corrupt business methods to conspiracy and murder. Of course, I don't know Peter Gorman—never met him, and never expect to—but it seems to me he isn't that kind. It doesn't seem plausible, and it never did."

"You haven't bumped up against the things I have," replied Latimer. "I've sounded depths of human depravity in the day's work you wouldn't think could be true. But this case has stumped me completely; I haven't anything on Peter Gorman; I can't connect him with Wylder's death; if there was a conspiracy, I can't find root, leaf, or branch of it. I've tried and failed—hopelessly failed. I've fallen down hard. I tried to-night to bluff young Gorman into a confession, and failed again." He paused to light his pipe.

"I'm not a Sherlock Holmes," he continued. "In fact, I find I'm not so clever as I supposed. This case baffled the police and the other fellows, but I thought all I had to do was go out and put my hand on the right man. But what have I done? Virtually nothing. I've harried and distressed the Deerings, and about broken young Gorman's heart, and that's all. I'm sick of the whole business, and I've a good mind to throw it up. To cap it all, I received a very nice letter from Miss Deering, apologizing for what she said yesterday——"

"Yes, I met her this morning. And

it's quite true what Gorman said about their going away——"

"Is that so? When and where?"

"I don't know, Latimer, and I'm sure Miss Deering didn't want me to know. She refused to say when or where they were going, or when they intended returning."

He got up and poured himself another drink of Scotch. A revulsion of feeling seemed to have taken place in him. His despondency had vanished; he had sunk his personal and private feelings in those of his profession; he had ceased to be the friend and admirer, and was once again the machinelike newspaper man.

"So they're going away?" he echoed. "I see. They aren't going to give me a chance of probing any deeper. That's about the size of it."

I said nothing, and he added:

"I believe in young Gorman's honesty—else he's the prince of actors—but the fact remains he wrote that letter. And I'm positive it was to Mrs. Deering, and that it dealt in some way with Wylder's death. I'm sure of it. Gorman didn't tell me the truth. I don't believe he was concerned in the crime, but it's plain he's helping to shield the culprit. Why did he come here to-night?" he finished abruptly. "Was it simply to see me?"

"No, he came to return that film."

"What film?"

"The one I lost that morning—the morning of Wylder's death."

I told him of the inquiries I had made concerning it, and of its final appearance. Latimer listened intently, and, when I had finished, fell into a profound study.

"And you say that up to yesterday Miss Deering thought the film you had lost was the exposed one? The one containing the picture you had taken that morning?" he finally asked.

I nodded. "Yes, I hadn't explained about it before."

"Did you develop the snapshot of the Hermitage you took that morning?"

"No," said I. "I haven't done any developing for some time. I kept putting it off."

"Look here," said Latimer slowly, leaning over the table with clenched hands, "isn't it just possible there may be something on that film— By the piper! Cummings, I think I've hit it," he cried, his eyes snapping with excitement.

"Hit what?" I exclaimed, rising. Yet I was conscious of a sickening suspicion of what Latimer was driving at. Certain incidents which at the time had seemed trivial and natural enough now occurred to me with sinister significance and force. It was as if I had been watching the weaving of some piece of tapestry, fully cognizant of all that had gone to its making, and yet having no idea of the pattern until now the reverse side was being presented slowly to my eyes.

"Look here," said my friend, speaking slowly and with difficulty, for he was overwhelmed with the possibilities of his idea. "We've been fools not to think of this before. You took a snapshot of the Hermitage a few minutes after Wylder was killed. We know the murderer hadn't time to go far; we know he must have been hidden somewhere near at hand——"

"But I saw no one!" I exclaimed.

"No, you didn't, but the camera may have!" said he, crashing a fist on the table. "You were engrossed with focusing the camera; your attention was on the house, not on the grounds. The finder is small, and supposing the murderer was hiding in the shrubbery and, unknown to him, his features were brought into the picture, you couldn't have seen it, for it would be too small. That may have actually happened, Cummings, and the Deerings may have seen from the first what we've been blind to. I believe they know the murderer's

identity, and they may have reason to think that you, in all ignorance, snapped him; that his features are indelibly impressed on that film, and, once it is developed, the secret they have guarded so carefully will be one no longer!"

"It—it is probable," said I, "but I think it nonsense."

"It may be," said he gravely, "but I tell you, Cummings, I never felt so sure of anything in my life! I'm as sure of it as I am of death!"

Yes, and I was equally certain, though I did not say so. I don't know why this knowledge should have been mine; it was not that Latimer had convinced me by logic or eloquence; yet I knew he had hit upon the truth.

In silence we went into my studio, and I brought out the little pasteboard box, unwound the adhesive tape from the cylinder—it had not been disturbed since that morning—and emptied the film into my hand. What a trivial object, and yet fraught with such tremendous possibilities! Here literally in the hollow of my hand I, perhaps, held a man's life and the fortunes of his family. Perhaps it was mine to give or take; to save or damn. If face there was, whose would it be?

All this occurred to me as I looked at the film, and, suddenly, I was overcome with the tremendous responsibility which had been foisted upon me; I, who in all ignorance had become an arbiter of destiny. How little had I suspected that morning, when, approaching the wall with the crimson Rambler, what lay on the other side; how little had I suspected the simple snapping of my camera's shutter would lead to such consequences!

"Latimer," said I soberly, balancing the film in my hand, "I've a good mind to set a match to this and let it go up in smoke. What do you say?"

His face was as grave as my own. "Then you feel that I'm right?"

"Yes," said I, "I do. I don't know

why, but I do. I feel there is something on this film—something the Deerings thought might possibly be there; something they didn't wish me or any one to see. Have we a right to see it? Think of what this may mean to them!"

"We must go through with it," said he. He looked at me steadily. "You don't believe the Deerings implicated in Wylder's death? Nothing can make you?"

"Nothing, Latimer."

"The same here," he replied. "Let us get busy."

In silence I took down the developer and hypo, brought out the trays, and switched on the incandescent ruby light. The crimson glow suffused the room, and we moved about as if bathed in hell fire, our distorted, gigantic shadows stalking on the wall. I thought of witches and a boiling caldron; witches preparing some devilish death brew. Latimer wiped the sweat from his brow, as if performing the labors of Hercules.

"Anyway," said I, more to comfort myself, "if there is a face—if there was some one hiding in the shrubbery—it will prove nothing. It won't prove that person killed Wylder."

"No, but it will go a long way toward it," said Latimer slowly. "Why should any one be hiding there? He must have been present when the crime was committed, for he couldn't have arrived after you got there. And if it happens to be some one who has sworn under oath he was in another locality at the time— Yes, of course, it must be circumstantial evidence, but damning nevertheless."

"Well, here goes," said I, stripping the black paper from the cartridge, and cutting off Number Six film; for there was no necessity, nor could I have given the time, to develop in strip.

I placed the film face down in the tray of water to break the air bubbles, then transferred it to the developer, and set the rocker in motion. Slowly the yel-

low, glazed surface began to darken. Latimer was leaning over my shoulder and breathing hard. Perhaps no film since Daguerre's time, since he first perfected his discovery, had been developed under such conditions.

"Be careful with it, Cummings!" warned Latimer, as if I held an ineffably fragile and priceless treasure. "What's the matter? Don't you need some warm water——"

"The developer's strong enough," I replied shortly. "The trouble is with you; you're in too much of a hurry."

"It's taking an awful time," he breathed.

A few more seconds, and I held the film to the light, gave it another immersion, and transferred it to the fixing bath.

"Well?" demanded my friend.

"It's a perfect picture," I replied. "Remarkably sharp——"

"But did you *see* anything?"

"No, and we can't until the hypo clears. There's nothing to do but wait, so you may as well be patient."

"The devil!" he exclaimed. "How long do we wait?"

"From fifteen minutes to half an hour."

We lighted our pipes, and I turned off the ruby light, replacing it with the regular incandescent. The film was clearing slowly, greenish blotches showing on the back. I yielded to Latimer's importunities, and from time to time held it to the light. But though the Hermitage itself stood out sharp and true, the shrubbery was the last to clear.

At length the milky appearance finally vanished, and after a hurried immersion in running water—in lieu of the regulation time—I held the film to the light, and we scanned it with bated breath.

"I don't see anything," said Latimer abysmally. "Not a thing——"

"Look!" said I. "There! Look there in the shrubbery——"

"Where? Where——"

"Don't touch it! Keep your fingers off it! There—opposite the curve in the walk, where I told you I saw young Gorman go through. Don't you see——"

"Good heavens! It's a face," cried Latimer.

"It's a face!" said I.

"I—I can't make it out!" whispered he. "It's so small! It's a face—but whose?"

"I don't know. We'll have to print it."

"Print it? But we can't wait till morning, Cummings! I must know to-night; now——"

"We'll print it now," said I. "I can make a print by artificial light——"

"That's so!" he exclaimed. "How long will it take the negative to dry?"

"A couple of hours if we waited. But we'll print from a wet negative."

"How?" he demanded impatiently.

So I proceeded to show him, for he was more ignorant of photography than I had imagined.

Thoroughly washing the negative, and freeing it from all trace of hypo, I immersed a piece of printing-out paper in clean water, placed it on the film side of the wet negative, and squeegeed it carefully, so as not to break the film. I exposed it without using the printing frame, then soaked it a moment in water before separating the paper from the film. Once in the Nepera solution, the picture came with a rush, and, after immersion in the fixing bath, was ready for inspection. Once again we examined it with bated breath.

"Good Lord!" said Latimer, with a start.

For now the face, though small, could be seen distinctly; it looked out from the shrubbery from the extreme left of the picture, or near the far end of the wall upon which I had been perched; thus it had been beyond my angle of vision, my eyes being fastened on the house and the finder. But it had not

escaped the eye of the camera, whose focus had taken in that part of the shrubbery. The face peered forth from this shrubbery, its oval framed by the leaves. Nothing else could be seen but this oval; nothing below the chin or above the forehead. Taken from an altitude of six feet or thereabouts, this oval was necessarily foreshortened, yet one could see every feature. For the face was looking up, and the eyes were turned toward the camera; they had been watching me as I snapped the shutter. And such an expression was in those eyes, such a look upon that face—the face of Alice Deering.

CHAPTER XI.

For perhaps ten seconds Latimer and I looked at each other in a sort of palsied silence; then he turned short on his heel and went into the dining room. I followed, the print still in my numb fingers, and in the same silence we mixed ourselves a stiff glass of Scotch.

"Well"—Latimer set down his glass as if he were afraid of breaking it—"was I right?"

"You were right," said I heavily. "The camera can't lie. That face is Alice Deering's; there's no getting away from it. But look here, Latimer; I don't for a moment believe it was she——"

"Who killed Wylder?" he finished, wiping the sweat from his face. "Of course, that's impossible, Cummings."

"Utterly impossible!"

We looked away. There was silence.

"Aside from all else," said I, "think of her physique. Miss Deering isn't physically capable of striking such a tremendous blow."

"No, of course not," he said, without looking up. He was very pale. As if moved by a common impulse, we examined the print anew.

"Yes, it is she," said he slowly. "Barring that awful expression, it is she. Am I wrong, Cummings?"

"I'm afraid not. It's not a flattering likeness, but it is she. I felt something like this was going to happen, Latimer. I wish I'd put a match to it as I thought of doing."

"I wish to Heaven you had, Cummings. This proves beyond doubt that Miss Deering was present when Wylder was killed. There is no use trying to dodge the facts. She could not have hidden herself there after you came—and you snapped that picture four minutes after the crime. That spot in the shrubbery commands the walk—overlooks the very place where Wylder met his death. And Miss Deering swore under oath she did not leave the house that morning. It's bad, Cummings, very bad. It could not be worse."

"She's looking straight at the camera," said I, fingering the print. "She must have seen me taking the picture. Why didn't she hide? That's what I can't understand. Any sane person would have dodged back."

"She may not have thought she was in the focus. She may have been afraid to move for fear of attracting your attention. You see how the foliage entirely surrounds the face; that it's difficult, in fact, to see it at first glance. Or she may have looked out for a moment—at the precise moment you snapped the shutter—and been caught before she could dodge back. That's the most logical solution. If this was the face of any one but Miss Deering, I would unhesitatingly say we were looking on Jonas Wylder's murderer, for every circumstance points to that conclusion; justifies that opinion. But knowing Miss Deering as we do, that conclusion is out of the question."

"Absolutely," I agreed, reaching for the Scotch.

"There then remains," said Latimer, "the fact that Miss Deering must know who struck that fatal blow; she must have seen it struck. Her fear concerning this film was not fear for herself,

but for another. And it remains for us—or me—to learn who that other is. What time is it?"

"A quarter to nine. What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to the Hermitage with this," picking up the picture. "There can be no more evasion; the truth must now come out. There's no dodging this circumstantial evidence in black and white. I'll have the whole story before morning, Cummings, and I'll score the beat of my life!" The old bloodhound look was in his eyes.

"And what about the Deerings?" I demanded. "Don't forget it was I who put you in the way of getting this evidence. I admit it was your inspiration, but in due time I would have developed that film, and the knowledge would have been mine alone; mine to give or withhold. Don't make me sorry——"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, aren't you thinking solely of yourself? Aren't you carried away by the idea of scoring a beat? You aren't thinking how this may affect the Deerings——"

"Is justice to be done, or is it not?" said he, eyeing me. "Is Wylder's murderer to be unmasked or not? Am I to do my simple duty, or am I to be deterred by a lot of false sentiment——"

"If Miss Deering proved to be a murderer, Latimer, would you hand her over to the law?"

He paled and looked away. "You've no right to ask that. I will never have to make such a decision. Never! There is no need for this hysteria. The Deerings will not be mixed up in this; their name need not be brought into the papers. We know they are innocent. But I'm going to have the person they're shielding! That's my duty; it's your duty; it's the duty of every law-abiding citizen, and you can't get away from it. But I don't ask you to come, for it will be an awfully unpleasant duty. The Deerings may be gone by the morning,

and there's no use making this harder than it need be. I feel they intend to keep out of my way."

I saw he was determined, and that nothing I might say would dissuade him. And, after all, for my own peace of mind I wanted to reach the bottom of this infernal mystery before another night passed.

"Come along," urged Latimer, as if reading my thoughts. "Come, if for no other reason than to assure the Deerings I'm not doing this to be nasty, or for the sake of my ambition. For I'm not, Cummings, as Heaven is my witness! Miss Deering must be cleared of any semblance of suspicion. This thing has got on my nerves; it's making a wreck of me, and I'm fit for nothing."

"All right," said I, "let us go. I know how you feel. It has got on my nerves, too."

Latimer placed the print in his pocket carefully, and we left the apartment, I devoutly hoping that when next we re-entered it, the insoluble mystery of Wylder's death would be dissipated; the blight upon Alice Deering's young life removed.

It was a fitting night for such an enterprise as ours, the elements being attuned for tragedy. A thunderstorm was moving slowly down the Hudson Valley, the lightning playing fantastically above the Palisades. The air was heavy, oppressive, and difficult to breathe. Not a leaf stirred. The river moved sluggishly like oil.

We reached the wall with the crimson ramblers—I shuddered involuntarily—and passed on to the gates. They were locked.

"Hello," said Latimer, peering through the bars, "there isn't a light anywhere." It was true; the black bulk of the Hermitage was in total darkness.

"Perhaps they're in bed," I suggested.

"They never went to bed at this hour," he returned. "I wish we'd

thought of phoning. Maybe there's a light in the front of the place——What was that!"

I jumped as he placed an imperative hand on my arm. "What?" I breathed.

He drew me into the shadow of the wall. We stood in silence, my heart pounding quite shamefully. "I thought I saw something," said Latimer, lowering his voice. "Something that moved off there." He pointed along the sidewalk in the direction of the Gormans' house, which, we had seen, was lighted.

"I didn't see anything," said I. "What was it?"

"I don't know. I think I heard rather than saw it, for it's too dark to see anything. It seemed to me some one was moving along the wall."

"It's a beastly lonely place at night," I commented. I'm no hero, nor overfond of the dark at the best of times, and this place did not possess very lively associations for me. I wondered why Wylder had chosen such a spot, the Gormans being the only neighbors.

We stood a moment listening intently, and expecting I don't know what. But nothing happened.

"It shows what an overheated imagination can do," grumbled Latimer, at length, as if angry at himself. "I know the Deerings can't have retired at this hour. There must be a light in the front of the house."

"But the gates are locked. We can't get in——"

"We can. We can go over the wall," he interrupted.

"Can we? Excuse me," said I. "I went over that wall once too often, and I'm not going again—not if I know it."

"Don't be silly!" he exclaimed. "Do you prefer to stay here?"

"I don't prefer either," I retorted. "But, aside from all else, I don't like the idea of entering as if I were a burglar. It's not a very nice way of paying a call, and the gates wouldn't be

locked if the Deerings wished or expected visitors——”

“You talk almost childishly at times,” he interrupted. “Of course, they don’t expect visitors at this hour, me least of all. But I intend seeing them all the same, and there’s no other way than the one I propose. Now then, are you coming, Mother Cummings?”

“Oh, I suppose so,” I grumbled. “Lead on.”

Latimer grasped the top of the wall—he was taller than I—and, with an agile leap, straddled it. Then he reached down his hand for me.

I have no comprehensive recollection of what next happened. I merely know that I was halfway up the wall, both feet braced against the brick, when assailed violently from the rear. The next moment Latimer and I had tumbled to the sidewalk, rolling over and over, and fighting like mad.

Nor did I know who or what I was fighting; I only knew it was something, and that I was striking out blindly, and that something, apparently all arms and legs, was also striking out—and with more success—at me. I was fighting for my life. Finally I succeeded in fastening my teeth in some portion of my adversary’s anatomy, and the pressure of them brought forth a fervent oath in a voice I recognized as Latimer’s. Another moment, and I was jerked to my feet. My eyes, now accustomed to the darkness—I was satisfied one of them was wholly black—I saw we were in the grip of a burly policeman.

“Now, thin, come along to th’ house,” said this gentleman, collaring us anew with a hamlike hand. “Yez can tell yer story to th’ desk.”

“Hello, McGloin!” exclaimed Latimer. “What in thunder are you trying to do—murder us?”

“Well, be th’ powers!” exclaimed our captor, peering at us. “Is ut yerself, Mr. Latimer?”

• “What’s left of me,” said my friend.

McGloin began to chuckle. “No thanks to me, sorr. It was your fri’nd. You and him wor havin’ it out bechune yez. I grabbed him an’ both of yez done th’ rest. I took yez for a couple av burglars, beggin’ yer pardon, sorr.”

He then explained that he had seen us approach, and, our movements striking him as suspicious—as well they might—he had sought the shadow of the wall, the better to watch what we intended doing. Our scaling maneuvers convinced him we had no good intention in mind, and he had acted accordingly.

Latimer in his turn explained about our visit; of our finding the gates locked and the house in darkness, and of his taking the only route that lay open. “It’s necessary that I see the Deerings to-night,” he finished.

“I think th’ house is shut up, sorr,” said McGloin.

“What?” exclaimed Latimer. “You don’t mean to say they’ve gone already?”

“I couldn’t rightly say, sorr; I’ve only th’ night patrol as yez know. I come on here after six an’ I seen a storage van leavin’ th’ gates. There ain’t been a light showin’ in th’ back of th’ house. Thin, sorr, th’ cook——” He coughed and added ingenuously: “Th’ cook’s been in th’ habit of comin’ out for a little airin’, but I ain’t seen her th’ night. An’ I know th’ Deerin’s was goin’ away this week, for they left word at th’ desk, askin’ us to watch th’ house.”

“You don’t know where they were going, or when they intended returning?”

McGloin shook his head. “For th’ summer mostlike. I ain’t sayin’ they’ve gone, sorr. Why don’t yez ask at th’ Gormans? They’d be after knowin’ for sure.”

“You’re right,” said Latimer. “I was thinking of that.”

The three of us moved toward the Gormans, McGloin appearing glad at

the opportunity for a chat; for his was a lonely enough beat, I imagined.

"Have yez heard anything more about this Wylder case?" he asked curiously. "Th' precinct detectives ain't makin' head or tail of it—no, nor headquarters either, I'm thinkin'."

"No, nor any one else," said Latimer. "I'm up against it the same as the rest."

"Are yez now?" McGloin looked interested. "I raymimber in th' ould thirty-second—before I was transferred to this outlandish hole—there weren't much got past you, Mr. Latimer. Divil a thing."

"Well, this has got past me, all right," said my friend. "What do you honestly think of this footpad theory?"

"Well, as bechune fri'nds, mind; I think ut nonsense. We're only kiddin' ourselves, Mr. Latimer, an' you know ut. I can't make anythin' out av Wylder's death—divil a thing. There was no sense in ut. Do yez see that?" pointing a long arm. And far to the south we saw a bunch of lights twinkling high on the bluff flanking the road.

"Well?" said Latimer.

"Well, that there's a private bug-house, an' if yez should ask me I'd say th' man that killed Jonas Wylder come out of there. Or if he didn't come out of there, he should be in there, for, be gorry! that's about as much sense as there was in th' crime. Yis, sorr."

Latimer echoed the burly patrolman's laugh, but his was a trifle grim. "It won't be a bughouse, McGloin," he replied, "but Sing Sing for him, if we ever land him."

We turned in at the Gormans' gates, McGloin bidding us good night and continuing on his beat, which, I understood, extended half a mile, and from the river to Broadway.

CHAPTER XII.

We were admitted by an old manservant, and shown into a library on the ground floor, whose windows faced

the Hermitage. Presently Peter Gorman—I recognized him from his likeness to Randall—entered, Latimer's card in hand.

He was large, solidly built, and muscular, and at first glance reminded me of a "professional Irishman"; one of those loose-mouthed, cunning characters who affect a brogue to which they have no right, and by a great outward display of the Milesian's best qualities hoodwink the public; born mixers and always ready with the glad hand and a lot of blether, they never for a moment lose sight of the main chance, and, metaphorically, carry a knife up their sleeve. Yet, scrutinizing him carefully, there was something about Peter Gorman's face I liked; for one thing, it was neither treacherous nor cruel. It was evident Latimer and he had met before.

"Is this another newspaper man, Mr. Latimer?" asked Gorman, compressing his lips and looking at me.

"No, merely a friend of mine," replied Latimer, introducing me.

Gorman nodded, asked us to sit down, and placed his back to the mantelpiece. He looked dogged and aggressive, yet there seemed to be a settled melancholy blended with these emotions. "I suppose, Mr. Latimer," said he, without waiting for the latter to speak, "you've come here to quiz me about that old trouble my firm was in. I don't thank you," he added grimly, "for telling my boy what you did. So I'm a grafter, eh? You've got the goods on me, and you can prove it? I suppose you know just how much Mrs. Deering's affidavit is worth?"

"I'm not a lawyer," replied Latimer, "but you might find it hard to discredit such a witness. Anyway, I know it's true, Mr. Gorman, and so do you."

They eyed each other for a moment.

"What you may know or suspect, and what you can prove, are two mighty different things," said Gorman, at length.

"I know that," said Latimer. "I'm not here in search of proof; I'm not after your scalp. Those charges were thrown out of court, and that settles it. There's no particular reason for you to be the goat, when I could name, perhaps, a thousand others who used the same methods. I'm after bigger game than that; I'm after Wylder's murderer, and I wouldn't have said a word to your son if I hadn't believed he knew all about the firm's methods. You know what you did or did not do, Mr. Gorman, and it's a matter for your own conscience—not newspaper talk so far as I'm concerned."

I could see from Gorman's expression that Latimer was taking the right course with him; that Gorman knew Latimer was aware of the truth of those charges, and that, man to man, there was no use bluffing.

"Can I talk with you as a friend, Mr. Latimer?" said Gorman, at length. "I've been greatly upset. I want you to understand my boy had absolutely no hand in any irregularities—though I'm not saying there were any. My boy's as straight a young fellow as ever stepped!"

"I believe that," said Latimer. "Anything you care to say I'll respect, Mr. Gorman."

Gorman sat down at the desk, placed his elbows on it, and clasped his strong, hairy hands. "Between you and me, Mr. Latimer," he said, "I haven't been all I might. But I'm no worse than nine out of ten in New York. I had a hard time getting anywhere, for I had no education but what I learned by hard knocks. I started life selling papers—but I guess you fellows know my past as well as I do. The firm may have done things it shouldn't; if it did, I was the only one responsible. Wylder didn't know anything about it. He didn't know anything more about certain business methods than a child, and he was as unsuspecting as a baby. But

everybody was doing it who could, and thought nothing about it; it was part of the game. You know what things are done in the name of big business, and with the help of crooked politics. I tell you it didn't come home to me until Wylder broke the partnership; until my boy came into this room to-night and asked me point-blank if it was true.

"Personally," he continued, "I never defrauded a man of a cent, or did a dirty, underhand action. But I was brought up in a different school from Wylder and my boy, and because the firm did certain things I didn't feel personally responsible. I didn't feel about it that way. But since Wylder got out, the business has been run as straight as a string, and I'd rather it went to eternal smash than go through what I went through with him or with Randall to-night. That boy's everything in the world to me—so was Wylder's friendship, which I forfeited—and there isn't a thing I wouldn't suffer before losing his respect. I've kept him straight from the start; I don't want him to be a grafter in any form, for you can't take the smallest favor and keep straight. I don't want him to touch the muck I had to touch, or stoop to questionable business methods. I guess our greatest lessons are learned from our children, Mr. Latimer. I managed to gloze things over to-night with him, but I've had my lesson, and it will be a long day before I give him cause to be ashamed of his old man.

"Is it possible," he concluded, looking searchingly at Latimer, "that you actually imagined I knew something about Wylder's death? You will give me a frank answer, Mr. Latimer."

"I will, Mr. Gorman. It was quite possible. I thought you might be implicated in it."

Gorman pushed back his chair. "Why?" he demanded.

"Possibly because there was no other motive," said Latimer frankly. "I

knew Wylder and you had quarreled; that he possessed information that could not only cause you, but others, trouble——”

“Will you tell me exactly what Mrs. Deering said?” asked Gorman. “What she overheard between Wylder and me.”

Latimer hesitated.

“Come!” said Gorman. “We have agreed to be frank. I have been frank with you. It won’t go any further, for I think very highly of Mrs. Deering, and always have.”

Latimer yielded, and, when he had finished, Gorman arose, a perplexed, distressed look on his face. He slowly paced the room. “I don’t understand this,” he said, at length. “It’s true I had that talk with Wylder at the Hermitage; I had been keeping things from him, for I knew his old-fashioned ideas—I thought them old-fashioned then—and believed it just as well he didn’t know. And it’s true he was very angry—but more heartbroken than angry. We didn’t quarrel; you can’t call it that, and we didn’t almost come to blows. I had absolutely no enmity toward him; I wouldn’t have told him in the first place if I’d known he was going to take it like that, and I couldn’t see why he should be so infernally upset when they had nothing on us. I was brought up in a different school, you see.” He paused to offer us cigars.

“Why,” he continued, “I looked on Jonas Wylder as a brother; I couldn’t have thought more of him. I’m not kidding you, Mr. Latimer. It may seem strange to you we had anything in common outside business, but we had. And he had the talent, and I marketed it. I say there was absolutely no enmity on my side. He was embittered, and he wouldn’t speak to me, and he got sore at Randall, though the boy was in no way to blame. But it never entered my head that Wylder would make use of that information, and I don’t think it entered his. What was done was done,

and squealing couldn’t have helped matters. Nor was he that kind. Anyway, for that matter, he couldn’t have proved anything. Our friendship was too sincere and of too long standing for his animosity to last, and I know he would have come around in time; he would have forgiven if he couldn’t forget. His death was a hard blow to me, and it’s a harder one to think I should be suspected of having had a hand in it. It’s a mystery that’s given me a lot of thought, but I can’t make head nor tail of it. If a footpad didn’t bludgeon him, then I don’t know who did.

“Nor can I understand why Mrs. Deering should have added so much to what passed between Wylder and me that night at the Hermitage. She has always been very friendly, even after the trouble. I’ve the utmost respect for her, but she knows very well I didn’t hate Wylder, and had absolutely no enmity toward him. That’s absolute nonsense. Why, there isn’t a thing I wouldn’t do for the Deerings, and she knows it.”

“How long have you known the Deerings?” asked Latimer.

Gorman considered, chewing on his cigar. “About a year, I guess. They used to live in Frisco, I understand. Wylder formerly had bachelor quarters downtown, but about five years ago he told me he was going to build a place up here. He told me he had a cousin in Frisco, whose husband had died, and that she and her daughter were coming on to make their home with him. He said they were accustomed to living in the country, and that was why he was coming up here. At that time I, too, was living downtown——”

“I understood you hadn’t lived here very long,” said Latimer.

“No, it won’t be a year till August,” replied Gorman. “I know the papers said Wylder and I had been neighbors for years, but that was downtown, not here. Last year I decided to come up

here, because I happened to get the property cheap. Then my wife had died, and Randall had finished his schooling—or all he wanted of it. He wanted to start in the business. Of course, it was an inducement having Wylder for a neighbor. So, though the Deerings have been living here five years, I haven't known them quite a year; nor Randall either, of course."

"I see," said Latimer. He became thoughtful. "Did Mr. Wylder like the idea of you coming to live here?" he finally asked.

Gorman looked surprised. "What put that into your head? Why shouldn't he?"

"I don't know," said Latimer. "But did he? Did he seem pleased? Did he think it a good idea?"

"Well—— No, I can't exactly say he did," replied Gorman slowly. "Now that you speak of it, I remember he rather discouraged me than otherwise until he learned I had already bought the property. He said it was lonely and inaccessible up here, and that if he had it to do over again, he wouldn't select such a spot. I remember that very well, though giving it little attention at the time. But what are you driving at?"

"I'm not driving; I'm groping," said Latimer. "There's some mystery in the Wylder-Deering family, Mr. Gorman; one they even kept from you. Do you know anything about the Deerings?"

"Nothing except that the girl is not Mrs. Deering's daughter——"

"What?" we exclaimed in unison.

"I don't mean that," said Gorman, waving his hand. "I mean Alice is Mrs. Deering's daughter by a second marriage. I knew it was something like that. Mrs. Deering—I don't know what her name then was—was a widow when she married Mr. Deering. She let this fact drop in conversation one day, though I don't mean to say she tried to conceal it. I don't see any reason why she should. But they never talked much

about themselves. They may have to Randall, who is more intimate with them than I. I know of no mystery in their life, and as for Wylder, I knew him for at least fifteen years. I think he would have told me if he had made any unusual enemies before I knew him; certainly he made none afterward. He was as kind and honorable a man as ever lived."

"Do you know if the Deerings are at home?" asked Latimer. "That was the real reason for this visit." He told of our meeting with McGloin, and of the latter's suggestion.

"They must be in," said Gorman, "for they weren't going until to-morrow. They are going to the Berkshires for a while, though I don't know just where they——"

"McGloin said he saw a storage van leaving the house," said Latimer.

"Yes, I guess the place is practically closed up. They sent away the silver and some furniture that was to be recovered, I believe. And the servants have gone. But I know the Deerings are there, for Randall went over a while ago."

"Well, I want to see them before they go," said Latimer, rising. "The gates are locked, so we must go through your grounds, if you don't mind."

"Not at all, Mr. Latimer. I guess you know the way."

Latimer held out his hand. "I'm glad to have had this talk with you, Mr. Gorman, and I'll respect all you've said."

"Let me know if there's any way I can help you to clear up this muddle," said Gorman. "I'll be only too glad."

They shook hands, and presently Latimer and I were walking through the grounds in the direction of the Hermitage.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Well?" I queried, as we passed through the shrubbery and came out on the winding path.

"Well, I've been barking up the wrong tree," said Latimer, "though that hasn't surprised me, for, as I told you to-night, I couldn't connect Gorman with the crime. I believe he told nothing but the truth. This eliminates the Gormans, and there remains none but the Deerings. We'll get to the bottom of this infernal mystery before we're much older."

We had reached the front of the house, and now saw that the ground floor was lighted. It was some little time before the door was opened to our ring, and meanwhile, on the shades, we saw several shadows pass and repass, as if the presence of visitors had produced a profound commotion.

It was Alice Deering who finally opened the door, and, over her shoulder, far back in the hall, I saw Randall Gorman fussing with several trunks. That our visit was both totally unexpected and unwelcome was quite apparent from Alice Deering's expression; she was entirely disconcerted, and stood looking at us in blank silence, as if at a loss for words.

"Good evening," greeted Latimer formally, raising his hat. "May we come in? I apologize for the lateness of the hour, but we heard you were leaving early in the morning, and we wished to say good-by."

She flashed me a reproachful, accusing, hopeless glance.

"We heard it from Mr. Gorman," I hastened to explain.

"Oh, yes. Come in," said she, smiling in a forced manner, and stepping aside. "It—it was very good of you to come. I'm afraid you'll find everything terribly upset. Mr. Gorman has been helping us. We made quite a sudden decision, you know."

Randall Gorman came forward, nodding to us. He was in shirt sleeves. "You say you've been over at the house?" he asked, eyeing us curiously.

"Yes, we saw your father." Latimer

explained how we had gone there to find out if the Deerings were at home.

Gorman eyed us hard, but offered no comment.

By this time we had been shown into the drawing-room, where we found Mrs. Deering. The room was partly dismantled, the pictures and chandelier covered with mosquito netting. Mrs. Deering attempted to appear properly pleased at our visit, but made a failure of it. The old harried expression had returned to her eyes. She was very nervous, and began to talk rapidly and aimlessly, asking us irrelevant questions, and paying no attention to our replies. I saw that neither she, her daughter, nor Gorman believed the ingenuousness of our visit; they acted as if waiting for something to happen. The atmosphere was tense, electric; it was as if we were expecting a thunderbolt. It was evident the Deerings were under an intense nervous strain, and had been for some time. Dark circles surrounded the girl's eyes, and her face was pale and drawn. Her mother looked on the verge of a complete collapse.

"It's rather early to go to the Berkshires, isn't it?" asked Latimer vaguely. It was a desperate attempt to uphold the small talk. I could see he felt acutely for this family; that he abhorred his task, his self-imposed duty, and was postponing it as long as possible; seeking some opening that would make mention of his true mission more easy. As for myself, I could say nothing.

"Not so early," said Alice Deering, with a forced laugh. "Remember it is almost the end of June."

"That's so," said Latimer. He seemed to pull himself together. "In a way it doesn't seem so long since that morning—the morning of Mr. Wylder's death. Do you remember the picture Mr. Cummings took that morning?"

His audience stiffened. Mrs. Deering put a hand to her throat. Her

daughter exchanged a lightning glance with Gorman.

"It's strange," pursued Latimer slowly. "That picture, as you know, was taken a few minutes after the actual commission of the crime. Mr. Cummings developed it to-night."

Not a sound. The Deerings sat as if hewn from marble. Young Gorman looked doggedly at the floor.

"You didn't leave the house that morning, Miss Deering?" asked Latimer, fixing her with his eyes.

"No."

"You are quite sure?"

"Quite."

"The last you saw of Mr. Wylder was when you stood in the breakfast-room window? When you saw him disappear behind the hedge?"

"Yes. Why?" She tried to moisten her lips.

"Here is the picture taken that morning," said Latimer heavily. "I want you to look at it. Look at it, Miss Deering."

She took it mechanically. And as mechanically, as if moved by an impulse they could not deny, Mrs. Deering and young Gorman bent over her shoulder. The three of them stared in fascination at the print.

"Look at the shrubbery to the left," commanded Latimer. "Do you see that face? Do you know whose it is? Do you realize that person overlooked the spot where Mr. Wylder met his death? Do you still deny, Miss Deering, you did not leave the house?"

"I—I do," whispered the girl.

"What!" he cried. "Enough! Why do you persist in this falsehood? That evidence *cannot* be denied! You saw the crime committed! You know the criminal——"

"Oh, what's the use!" cried young Gorman thickly. "The jig's up. You can't be sacrificed, Alie. I won't stand for it. Do you see what this means? It means they'll think you did it——"

"O-o-h! My boy! My boy!" cried Mrs. Deering, in a voice of supreme anguish. She fell back; she had fainted. Alice Deering broke down, crying passionately.

We supported Mrs. Deering to her bedroom; she was hysterical, incoherent. Alice, mastering her emotion with difficulty, followed, and we left them together, returning to the drawing-room. Young Gorman paced the floor.

"Well," he said, looking at Latimer. "Are you satisfied? You would keep at it until you knew the truth. I wonder do you feel any better——"

"But I don't know the truth," said Latimer, bewildered. "What did Mrs. Deering mean by reference to her boy? Are *you* her son?"

"I?" cried Gorman. "Good heavens, no! Are you crazy?"

Alice Deering entered, wiping her swollen eyes. "Have you told Mr. Latimer?" she asked colorlessly, addressing Gorman.

He shook his head and turned away.

She turned to Latimer with a hopeless gesture. "The face in that picture," she said, "is not mine. It is that of my half brother, a son by my mother's first marriage. He is not responsible for—for his actions, and we think it was he who—who killed Mr. Wylder. There, you have the truth!"

"Thank God it's out!" said Gorman fervently.

Latimer bowed his head. There was silence.

"I am glad it is over," said the girl dully. "This was inevitable, I suppose. I will tell you the whole affair from the beginning." She paused a moment, then continued:

"Edwin Hartridge, my half brother, was always weak-minded, but for a long time entirely harmless. My mother worships him, all the more so because of his affliction. She has a horror of asylums, nor could she bear parting from him, so, while in Frisco, he always lived with

us, doctors saying that home influence and the kind of treatment he could receive only from loved ones might cure him. Of course, he is older than I, and it was a long time—not until my teens—before I began to suspect the truth. He was a most lovable, gentle character, and we were greatly attached, and, as you may imagine, when I began to find out he was not like other boys, that, through no fault of his own, he had been cursed from the cradle, my love became all the stronger.

"It may be difficult for you to understand our attitude," she continued, wrinkling her brows and speaking in the same quiet, passive monotone, "and for me to give you some idea of how we felt. I hope it will never be your misfortune to see a loved one become insane; to see him grow worse gradually, and to realize there is absolutely no help. It is one of the saddest, most heart-breaking things imaginable——"

"Was this weak-mindedness congenital?" asked Latimer very gently.

"Yes," said the girl, "but solely on his father's side. There was insanity in Mr. Hartridge's family, and, in fact, he himself was an epileptic. I must try and explain my mother's secretiveness in all this. In the first place, she married Mr. Hartridge against her parents' wishes—she told me this herself—they knowing there was insanity in his family. When Mr. Hartridge developed epilepsy, my mother kept it secret from her people; we had moved to another part of the State, and so this was easy. And for the same reason, I believe, she kept Edwin's condition secret, though, as I say, it was a long time before even she realized he was weak-minded. She was morbidly sensitive about his condition, and so was he in the days when able to realize it. Added to this was her great love for him; I don't think any mother could love a child more than she loves him——"

"You're right," said young Gorman

gloomily. "I believe she would even sacrifice you, Alie——"

"You mustn't say that," interrupted the girl. "When my father died suddenly," she continued, turning again to us, "we were left in straitened circumstances. My mother's little private fortune—the money left her by Mr. Hartridge—had gone for the most part in paying specialists' fees for Edwin. My father, like us all, had a profound sympathy for the boy, and couldn't have thought more of him, or done more for him, if he had been his own son.

"As I say, Edwin lived with us, and up to that time had been perfectly harmless; he was quite rational on many subjects, and, on first acquaintance, no one would have suspected him of being afflicted mentally. I am sure there wasn't a neighbor who imagined the truth. We had no intimate friends, and, of course, could make none. This was my mother's wish, and father and I agreed to it——"

"That was a bad mistake," said Gorman, in the same gloomy voice. "Things that can't be helped must be accepted."

"Yes, I know," sighed the girl. "It's very easy to talk, Randall. If I had known how things were going to turn out, I would have put my foot down and acted far differently.

"Well," she continued, "after my father's death Edwin became less tractable. He had been greatly attached to his stepfather, and the latter's sudden and violent death—he was killed in a street-railway accident before Edwin's eyes—gave the poor boy's brain another twist. I don't mean to say he was ever violent; far from it. But he began to have long brooding spells; times when he would refuse all food, and just sit and stare at nothing. Never before had he acted like this; he had always been cheerful and uniformly good-tempered. During these spells, which were infrequent, I was the only one who could do anything with him; he would obey me

where he wouldn't obey even his mother. I could do anything with him. And it was this—my great influence over him—that helped to place me in such a position.

"Understand, I am not complaining," she added earnestly. "I was glad to live such a secluded life; to do without intimate friends. I would have done anything to make Edwin better. I didn't want to see him shut up in an asylum. I didn't think it necessary.

"Well," she went on, pushing back her heavy hair, "Mr. Wylder had always thought a great deal of my mother, and, knowing our straitened circumstances, he asked us to come here and make our home with him. Of course, he was ignorant of Edwin's affliction. My mother finally consented, as you know, but first she wrote to her cousin, telling him about Edwin, and making certain conditions; these were that we should live somewhere on the outskirts, in a secluded locality, and that no mention should be made of Edwin to any one. For she was afraid that the truth about him might get back to her relatives in Frisco. I don't pretend to explain this hypersensitiveness; this morbid desire to shield Edwin. I only know it existed. It became a fixed idea with her, a ruling passion.

"It shows the kind of man Mr. Wylder was when he unhesitatingly agreed to my mother's strange conditions. He wrote, saying he was an old bachelor, that he had few intimate friends, and that such a life as she outlined would have no hardships for him. Again, there was nothing under the sun he wouldn't do for my mother. I have always believed—though she never said so—that he loved her at one time; I mean that he would have married her if she had consented. Certainly he worshiped mother, and her word here was law.

"So about five years ago we came here," continued the girl. "At that time there were no neighbors, for it wasn't

until last year that Mr. Gorman built next door. Mr. Wylder kept his word regarding Edwin, not even mentioning his existence to Mr. Gorman, who was his most intimate friend——"

"Wasn't that rather difficult, living next each other as they did?" asked Latimer.

"No," she replied. "I will explain that later, and you will see why Mr. Gorman had no opportunity for seeing Edwin. You must remember we lived here four years before Mr. Gorman came to the neighborhood.

"Well," she pursued, "Edwin began to grow worse instead of better; not suddenly, you understand, but so gradually one would hardly notice it. One year we took a cottage in Portsmouth, hoping change of scene would be beneficial. That was the year I met you, Mr. Latimer, and once or twice when you called you saw Edwin at the house before we could get him out of the way. He was the person who was with me in the boat—the time you saved my life."

CHAPTER XIV.

"What!" exclaimed Latimer, supremely astonished. "Is it possible? But he did not resemble you, Miss Deering. Never would I have taken him for a close relative."

"It is true, all the same," she replied. "In the first place, to my knowledge, you never had a good look at him; you never were close to him; you never spoke to him."

"That's true," said Latimer reflectively. "I saw him but three times; twice at your house, and then only for a moment. The third occasion was the day of the accident, and I was entirely concerned with you. I was not even present when he came ashore. I told Mr. Cummings about this, saying I never knew this young man's name. I thought, of course, he was a friend."

"We both favor mother in our looks,"

said Miss Deering, "but there is no such resemblance between Edwin and me, as that picture would lead one to believe. Far from it. Our features are similar, but that's all; our coloring is entirely different, Edwin being as dark as I am fair. Coloring makes all the difference in the world, and the camera is unable to show it."

"That's very true," I put in. "Blondes often look like brunettes, and vice versa. In that picture the hair doesn't show at all; the face stands out alone framed by the foliage."

"Otherwise," said Randall, "if you had seen above the forehead or below the chin, you'd have known it was a man and not a girl."

"I wouldn't have believed there was any such resemblance," added Miss Deering, "if I hadn't seen that picture. I don't think, Mr. Latimer, if you had met my half brother, you would have taken him for a relative. No one in Portsmouth knew the relationship. Our cottage, as you know, was very secluded, and Edwin seldom went out. That affair in the boat caused unforeseen complications; we wished to know you, Mr. Latimer, and yet felt unable to—to do so." Miss Deering, at this point, became rather confused, adding hastily:

"But let me continue. I need not go into details concerning Edwin's affliction except to say that that affair in the boat was *not* an accident; Edwin deliberately upset it, and this action marked another and more sinister phase in the history of his case. It was the first time he had shown a tendency toward homicidal mania, and Mr. Wylder and I decided that something must be done; that we couldn't afford to take any more chances.

"Mother protested, but finally agreed that Edwin should be placed under restraint. He was placed finally in a private sanitarium in New Hampshire, and his case watched by competent alienists.

That's where he was when Mr. Gorman moved up here. Edwin remained in the sanitarium until about a month ago, mother being able to bear the separation no longer. I don't mean to criticize her; but, in all fairness to Mr. Wylder, I must say it was through mother's pleadings that Edwin was brought back. The doctor at the sanitarium told Mr. Wylder that this move meant a certain risk; that though Edwin's condition was about the same, and that he had shown no violent tendencies since being admitted, he might do so suddenly. He strongly advised keeping him under supervision another six months at least; until he could state positively whether or not it would be entirely safe to release him. And if Mr. Wylder had been alone in the matter, he would have agreed to this."

"I should think," said Latimer, "the sanitarium authorities, on Mr. Wylder's death, would have suspected the person responsible. They knew—if no outsiders did—that an irresponsible relative lived with him."

"That seems entirely reasonable," replied Miss Deering. "But you must remember the sanitarium is in New Hampshire. They never knew this address, for Edwin was taken there from Portsmouth, and that was the only address given, for we own the cottage there. Naturally, Mr. Wylder's death wasn't given the publicity there it was here, and I don't think the sanitarium authorities, if they paid any attention, connected this Mr. Wylder with the one they knew. The name Hartridge did not appear in this case, you know, so they had no clew, and they never knew the name of Deering. In fact, I know they believe Mr. Wylder still living, for the other day there came addressed to him, and forwarded from Portsmouth, a folder of the sanitarium."

"I see," said Latimer. "I don't mean my questions to be impertinent, Miss Deering. It isn't that I doubt in the

least what you say; I'm very much interested, and I want to be sure of understanding you."

"I wish to make myself perfectly clear," replied the girl, "and I want you to question me about anything you don't understand. I think I have explained things down to the time Edwin returned here, and that was, you understand, about a week before Mr. Wylder's death, and *after* the latter's quarrel with Mr. Gorman. Not being on speaking terms with his former partner, Mr. Wylder did not tell him about Edwin——"

"My father doesn't know he exists," put in Randall. "Nor did I for a time. We were downtown all day, and Hart-ridge never left these grounds, nor had he the run of them. The hedge keeps us from seeing people on this side, and the servants have never talked."

"No, they never talked," assented the girl. "They have been loyalty itself. Of course, they knew long ago about Edwin; Pendleton was Mr. Wylder's servant for years, while the cook and maid have been with my mother for an equally long time. But let me tell you about that—that dreadful morning, and have it over!" she added, clenching her hands.

"Edwin, as Mr. Gorman says, was not allowed the run of the grounds. Whenever he went out, I always was with him. Since his return he had shown no disposition toward violence, but the old brooding spells were still with him, and, in fact, if he was no worse, certainly he was no better. I was beginning to be afraid of him—I suppose that incident in the boat had shaken my nerve—and I didn't at all like the idea of his being brought home. I had had a talk with Mr. Wylder about it, in which he referred to it as an experiment, and said if it became necessary to send Edwin away again, mother would then be convinced no injustice was being offered him. You see, Mr. Wylder's only thought was to make mother happy, and,

in this instance he did so against his own better judgment. We couldn't convince mother that Edwin might prove dangerous; she couldn't see it that way at all, she persisted in believing he was getting better; to her he was an only son, who needed her love and protection. And he had always been harmless.

"Well, the events of that morning—so far as they concerned mother and me—were the ones with which you are familiar. We did not leave the breakfast room, and the last we saw of Mr. Wylder was when he waved to us and disappeared behind the hedge. We believed Edwin was upstairs in his room, waiting for me to go out with him.

"What actually happened after Mr. Wylder vanished from our sight, I don't know, nor does any one. We know what *must* have happened, but no one saw Mr. Wylder killed. Nor when you discovered the body, Mr. Cummings," she added, turning to me, "had we any idea of the awful truth. It was not until you had gone with the policeman that Pendleton came to us with a very white face, and said he had seen Master Edwin sneaking in the back way just after the crowd had gathered on the lawn—you remember what an awful crowd there was; that there had been almost a riot for a time.

"We had forgotten all about Edwin, and a horrible suspicion occurred to me; I went up to his room, mother insisting upon accompanying me. We found him crouched in a corner, looking terribly frightened; there was blood on his hands, and when I questioned him about it, he began to whimper. He said that devils had been chasing him all morning, and he begged us to save him from them. Finally he fell on the floor in a fit that was like an epileptic attack, though it passed quickly, leaving him as he had always been. Neither then nor afterward could a word concerning Mr. Wylder's death be got out of him. He

speaks of Mr. Wylder as if the latter were alive; he even asks to see him."

Miss Deering arose, wiping the moisture from her brow.

"Edwin now is hopelessly insane," she added presently. "There was a possibility that he was innocent—and there is still that possibility, though, God forgive me! common sense will not let me credit it——"

"No, it's no use, Alie," said Randall gently. "That picture clinches it, and we may as well face the music. It's plain to be seen what happened," he added, turning to us, "though no one will ever know the exact truth. Don't ask me why Hartridge should do what he did, for he doesn't know himself. But you know insane people get queer ideas, and, perhaps, he thought he was being persecuted, and that Mr. Wylder, being the one who was active in placing him in the sanitarium, was the cause of all his fancied troubles. At all events, he must have acted with a madman's cunning; he knew the hour Mr. Wylder left, and he sneaked out beforehand, armed himself with that club, and lay in wait for him. Accident or design favored him, too. Your arrival, Mr. Cummings, scared him off after he'd hidden the body, and he dodged into the shrubbery. Curiosity prompted him to put out his head at precisely the wrong moment—or else he thought he was securely hidden—and you snapped him. Then, during the excitement, he sneaked through the shrubbery and in the back entrance. That's the only way it can be doped out. The Lord knows I would like to believe this footpad theory, but it's all wrong; it's dead against common sense. And, of course, the police never would have suggested it, if they'd known of the existence of Hartridge. No footpad could have got in here and out again without the servants or you, Mr. Cummings, seeing him.

"No, it's the only solution," finished Miss Deering colorlessly, "and I know

in my heart it is true. Think of the tragic irony of it!" she cried, throwing out her hands. "Think what my feelings must be! To realize that Mr. Wylder should be killed through his own mistaken kindness, and by one for whom he had done so much——"

"There, there," said Latimer. "Remember we cannot apply the ordinary rules to such extraordinary cases. Insanity knows no law——"

"But I feel criminally responsible!" she cried, breaking down. "Edwin never should have come here! I should have put my foot down——"

"So should Mr. Wylder for that matter," said Latimer gently. "It is very hard to place the responsibility, but if any one is to blame, it's your mother. And yet can we say anything? We know a mother's love, and even though weak and misguided, it commands our sympathy. And then Hartridge, you say, had shown no violence. Of course, if you had suspected such a tragedy would happen, it would have been easy for Mr. Wylder and you not to have yielded to your mother's wishes——"

"I'm sure we—we only wanted to make mother and Edwin happy!" said the girl hopelessly. "We acted against our better judgment; we were as weak as she! Our intentions were the best, and they turned out the worst!"

"And what became of your half brother?" asked Latimer, at length.

Miss Deering roused herself with an effort. "You can imagine my mother's state of mind when we found Edwin crouched in the corner that day; when we knew he must have guilty knowledge of the crime. Mother's one thought was to save him, for the mere idea of his being sent to Matteawan drove her frantic. She believed—and I'm sure even that picture won't shake her belief—that Edwin was innocent. I don't pretend to explain how she reconciles this with the facts; but, of course, in her sight

Edwin can do no wrong. Love is not logical.

"She feared, however, the law would convict him on circumstantial evidence; that he wouldn't have the wit to protect himself, and that he would be committed for the rest of his life to an asylum for the criminal insane.

"So we planned to get Edwin out of the way, and the following night Pendleton and I started for New Hampshire, where I placed Edwin in the sanitarium again. He was extremely docile, and gave us no trouble. I falsified matters to the sanitarium authorities; said my name was Hartridge, that I was Edwin's full sister, and that Mr. Wylder, my uncle, was unable to come in person, owing to business. I let them understand Portsmouth was still our home. Edwin was to remain in the sanitarium indefinitely, and I told them about the dangerous turn in his condition. I warned them to watch him closely. Of course, I did not say what we suspected he had done.

"I'm not trying to offer excuses for what I did," she added wearily. "It is very easy to talk of justice when it is abstract. One lie led to another, of course, and I had been hiding Edwin's existence from the public so long that it had become a sort of second nature to—to——"

"And when did *you* learn of it?" asked Latimer, turning to Gorman.

"The night Hartridge left for the sanitarium," replied the other. "I happened to be coming home as the closed carriage, that was to take them to the station, drove up. I saw Miss Deering, Pendleton, and a young man get in. Of course, I was curious, and afterward, when Miss Deering returned, I asked her about it. I had seen, too, something was worrying her dreadfully——"

"I want you to understand," broke in the girl, "that Randall Gorman did not know of Edwin's guilt until to-night. I told him all about my half brother—I

simply had to tell some one for sanity's sake. But I gave him to understand we feared Edwin would be unjustly accused——"

"It didn't matter," said Gorman doggedly. "I'd have kept my mouth shut just the same. I don't care what you asked me to do, I'd do it. You know me and I know you. I'm for you first, last, and always, and the law and all that sort of thing can come in where it likes!"

"You're a brick, Randy," said the girl, smiling through her tears. "I could ask no better friend than you." She turned anew to Latimer and me.

"From the first, Mr. Cummings, I saw the sinister possibilities of that picture you took. I was even afraid that during your walks up here you might have seen Edwin in the grounds, for I hadn't thought of people peeping over the wall from the street. You may remember the first day Mr. Latimer and you came here that I asked what had first attracted your attention to this house. That was what mother, Mr. Gorman, and I were talking about when you returned for the camera. I was assuring mother you had not seen Edwin; that you didn't suspect his existence.

"I did not tell you the truth about that film you dropped, and which, until to-day, I believed to be the one containing the snapshot you had taken. I thought it possible Edwin might have lacked the wit to entirely conceal himself, and I knew he must have been somewhere in the grounds when that picture was taken. Of course, it was only a remote possibility, but I could not afford to take chances. And so, when you had gone, the first thing I did was to go out and search in the place where you said you had dropped it. I found it——"

"Let me now explain matters," put in young Gorman. "Miss Deering told me about the film," he added, turning to us, "and I promised to have it de-

veloped, for we knew nothing about photography, and had no facilities. The next day I had to go to Philadelphia on business for my father, and I had the film developed there. The photographer whom I gave it to told me something had happened to it, that it was light-struck or something. At all events, there wasn't a single image on the whole cartridge, and he asked me if I was sure it had been exposed. This sounded funny to me at the time, but all I cared about was that the picture of the Hermitage had turned out a complete fake.

"Knowing Miss Deering was anxious, I wrote about the result to her, and that scrap of paper you found belonged to the letter I sent her. So you see," he added, with a grim smile, "I told the truth when I said that I hadn't written to Mrs. Deering—I said nothing about her daughter."

"But you returned the film to-night," said Latimer. "How could you return it if it had been developed?"

"It was another film," replied the girl, coloring deeply. "Just a part of the deception and falsehood I practiced upon you, Mr. Cummings," turning to me with burning cheeks. "To disarm any suspicion you might have, I bought a new twelve-exposure film and put it in the old box—the box you identified as your own."

"Very clever, Miss Deering," I said. "That never occurred to me."

"P-please don't!" she whispered. "Y-you don't know how degraded I feel!"

"And I visited you with a double purpose to-night," added young Gorman, addressing me. "We might as well clean up everything when we're about it. We knew from what you said this morning that the other film—the *real one*—had not been developed, and that all our duplicity and trouble had been for nothing. So I thought I might be able to get hold of it to-night when returning the other one. Miss Deering

know nothing of my intention. However, Mr. Latimer came in, and what happened afterward so upset me I gave up all idea of becoming a burglar."

"There," said Miss Deering wearily, in the manner of one laying aside a great burden, "I think you know everything. Everything! I am rid of all this deceit and falsehood. But I want you to understand that what Mr. Gorman did was done solely through his friendship for me, and that I alone am to blame. Now you know the entire truth, Mr. Latimer, and all that remains is your duty to the public and your paper! I am sorry if I have placed extra difficulties and trials in your way, but perhaps you can—can overlook that now—now that you have triumphed so completely."

CHAPTER XV.

Latimer was leaning against the mantelpiece, his eyes on the floor in deep thought. At Miss Deering's words he raised them and looked at her in a wistful, preoccupied manner. "Yes, it is a great triumph," he said slowly. "A great triumph. I suppose you would call it that."

He reached for the print lying on an adjacent table, and, after scrutinizing it for a moment in the same preoccupied way, took out his match box. He struck a match and applied it to the print, holding it between finger and thumb until the whole had become curling black cinder. He ground this to impalpable ash and permitted it to sift through his fingers into the fireplace. The girl was watching him intently; she had begun to breathe more quickly.

"And there's the end of that," said Latimer slowly, as he rubbed his hands. "We'll do the same by the film, eh, Cummings?"

"We will," said I. "With all the heart in the world!"

"Good!" said he, a smile transfiguring his unlovely countenance. "Then

but we four and your mother, Miss Deering, know what has happened here to-night. As for the public, what it doesn't know won't hurt it."

Miss Deering started up. "No! No!" she cried. "Don't tempt me——"

Latimer stayed her with upraised hand. "Surely, Miss Deering, you will consider me a friend like Mr. Cummings and Mr. Gorman. Am I less generous than they? Am I less worthy to be a friend——"

"It is not the same!" she cried. "You have your duty, Mr. Latimer—and please do not think I say so with bitterness or irony. You have your duty to your paper and the public. You are in possession of facts which it is their right to know, and which, no matter what the cost to mother and to me, they must know——"

"Listen," said Latimer gently. "The cause of justice and the public welfare will be just as well served if this whole matter ends there." And he pointed to the charred print. "What profit would there be in subjecting your mother and you and that poor demented boy to newspaper notoriety; the notoriety of a sensational murder case? Haven't you had more than enough——"

"Yes, more than enough!" she assented, white-lipped. "But that is not the point——"

"Now hear me out," said Latimer patiently. "This is pure reason, if you like, and not sentiment. After all is said and done, is it not true that we don't positively *know*—and never shall—that Edwin Hartridge struck the blow that killed Mr. Wylder? Isn't that so? Isn't it just possible he may be innocent? Isn't he entitled to the benefit of the doubt? And this being so, can't we give him the benefit of that doubt without outraging our sense of justice? Most emphatically we can! Then let us agree to believe him innocent and let your mother continue to believe so, too. Why should she think differently?"

"Let us look at it from another standpoint," he added. "Suppose all this was made public, and suppose Edwin Hartridge was convicted. Isn't he hopelessly insane, and wouldn't he be confined in Matteawan? Then where is the difference if, instead of Matteawan, he remains in this private asylum for the rest of his life? Is there any difference? Is justice outraged? Does the public suffer? Isn't it protected against him, and isn't that the fundamental object of the law?"

"Lastly, it is a question if, on this evidence, Hartridge would be convicted; then why needless suffering for you? Why needless expense to the State?"

"Very well argued, Mr. Latimer," said young Gorman warmly. "That's plain, common-sense dope! Hartridge is where he can't do any harm to himself or to anybody else, and the law couldn't do any more. That's what I've thought all along, but I didn't dare hope you'd see it that way, Mr. Latimer."

"Why?" asked my friend.

"Because—because, don't you see what it means to you?" said Miss Deering. "Aside from all duty, this story means——"

"A story means absolutely nothing to me, Miss Deering," said Latimer, raising his head and looking at her steadily, "if it also means the needless humiliation and suffering of the innocent. I have never yet paid that price for a story, and I never shall."

Alice Deering flushed and lowered her eyes. There were tears in them.

"If I had only known the truth," pursued Latimer, "you would have been saved all this. I did not wish to persecute you, Miss Deering. If you could have looked upon me as a friend——"

"Oh, I know!" she whispered. "Forgive me. I should have told you long, long ago. But somehow I couldn't! It—it was not my secret. It was not that I didn't trust you, but I thought it better to say nothing. I was afraid you

would not understand; that I was silly and quixotic. I had dedicated my life to Edwin; he needed me most, and there was none to take my place. And—and then you would not visit us; we asked you to come, and—and——”

“I couldn’t,” said Latimer. “I was afraid you might think—I thought you only asked me because you thought you should. I was too sensitive——”

“Come on,” said Gorman in my ear. “I want to show you the moon.”

We left the room unobtrusively, and I’m sure we weren’t missed, for Latimer and Alice Deering were now absorbed in an earnest conversation. Both were leaning against the mantelpiece, and the last thing I remember noticing was that the distance separating them was decreasing gradually.

Young Gorman and I took a turn about the grounds. The threatening thunderstorm had passed, and the moon had come out.

“I say,” he began abruptly, “don’t think me fresh, will you? But—er—I had you down for being gone on Miss Deering. Funny, wasn’t it?”

“Awfully,” said I. “And, not to be impertinent either, the funniest thing about it is that I thought the same of you.”

We eyed each other for a moment, while the moonlight poured down.

“Well, you were right!” blurted out Gorman.

“Yes? Well, so were you,” said I.

“Gee!” said he. “That is funny.”

“Awfully,” said I. “Have you asked her yet?”

“Asked her? Why, man, I’ve lost my voice asking her! Have you?”

“No,” said I, “and—and I’m not going to. Look there.”

I pointed to the drawing-room. Its occupants must have been near the center window, for on the shade was the silhouette of both. And as we looked,

these silhouettes became one. Gorman drew in his breath and slowly expelled it. Our eyes met.

“Well,” said he, throwing away his cigarette, “and so they lived happily ever after, God bless ’em! Yes, I guess it’s just as well, Mr. Cummings, that you indefinitely postponed that question. Anyway, you’ll save your voice. I knew it was either you or Mr. Latimer—never me.”

“It was always Latimer,” said I. “I found that out this morning. It was a misunderstanding, hypersensitiveness on both sides, and a mistaken idea of duty.”

“Well, I’m glad—seeing it can’t be me,” sighed Gorman. “He’s all right, after all. I guess we’ve looked our fill at the moon, eh?”

Some time before Alice Deering became Mrs. Latimer—it was about six months later—Edwin Hartridge died in the New Hampshire sanitarium.

I have often pondered over the awful heritage that was his; the meaningless existence he had been compelled to drag out from the cradle, and through no fault of his own; the poor, blighted, shattered life which had been given to him, and which his half sister had tried so hard and in vain to make a little brighter. Surely the pitiful, tragic story of Edwin Hartridge as I came to know it is reason enough for State laws that will prohibit or regulate in some measure the marriage of the mentally and physically degenerate, or, at all events, prevent the perpetuation of their kind!

The mystery of Jonas Wylder’s death has remained one to the public, and, granting the innocence of Edwin Hartridge, to us. I have often thought, however, of the words McGloin, the patrolman, uttered that night when he pointed us out the sanitarium. Was it prescience? How astonished would he be if he knew how nearly he had spoken the truth. Or did he know the truth?

To Cancel Half a Line

By Wilbur Hall

The moving finger writes, and having writ
Moves on: nor all your piety or wit
Can call it back to cancel half a line
Nor all your tears wash out a word of it.

DEACON" FINCH'S pool hall was suffocatingly hot and so crowded that the rough men at the tables had to clear a space about them before each shot. Save for the fog of tobacco smoke and the strong odor of the gasoline lamps, the place was no more uncomfortable than any other they might have chosen, indoors or out, for it was the middle of August, and Delta baked and panted in the heat of the desert summer.

The men—valley ranchers, laborers, or clerks in town—were all coatless. Most of them wore linen trousers or overalls and thin shirts that clung, sweat-soaked, to their skins. There was a babble of noise, coarse laughter, frequent quarrels—not all joking—and the incessant shuffle of heavy boots on the worn floor.

From the dead, still heat outside to the close, foul heat inside came a stooping man in corduroys, his faded blue shirt hanging loosely from his thin shoulders, his broad, black slouch hat framing a face worn by sickness, his eyes tired and dull. He made his slow way through the room, greeted frequently and familiarly, but impersonally. Much as one would say "Hello, pup!" to a strange dog on the street they hailed him with "Howdy, Staples," or "Well, ain't you dead yet?" or "How's the cough, Staples?"

The man answered them all with nods. At the rear of the pool room

he passed through a swinging door, which let into a narrow, dark corridor. In the partitions walling this hallway were wicket windows, and Staples approached one of these, where the crowd was thinnest, pushed a coin across the narrow shelf in the window, and received in exchange a glass of liquor, which he swallowed at a gulp.

As he turned to go two young ranchers jostled and delayed him.

"Hello, there, Staples," one said, not unkindly. "Want a little hooch?"

"Just been. No, thanks!"

The young fellow leaned down and peered in the wicket. "Come on now, Johnny; little service here—little service!"

A man reached through the window and shoved the new customers back against the opposite wall. "Wot d'ye think this is, Phil—a hotel? I'll be out there among you in a minute if you don't watch out!"

The boys laughed. "Keep your shirt on, Johnny," one said, "or we'll get Taggart in here to pinch the house."

"Wot d'ye want—whisky?"

"Make it a quart of beer, Johnny."

The man who was serving the drinks had not shown his face, but when the young rancher called Phil passed in, in payment, a slip of paper he looked out and shook his head. "No good," he said. "The deacon says we're not to cash any more of Henry Benson's checks."

"What's up? They're all right, ain't they?"

"That's all I know—the deacon says not to cash 'em."

"I haven't got any money."

"That's no difference. I'll put it on the wall. Give it to me some other time. But I can't take them checks."

The boys drank their beer and went back, past others drinking at similar windows. Staples followed them into the pool hall, found a barrel in a corner, and perched on it, his chin on his breast, his hands hanging inertly over his knees. During the evening he made several visits to the "blind pig" at the rear, but he did not join in the games or the roistering, and no one stopped to talk with him. He was as much a part of the place as the tables, or the faded, fly-specked lithographs on the walls—and little more.

About eleven o'clock a heavy, sleepy man with a lighted lantern slouched into the hall, followed by an ill-favored bulldog. The cashier, standing behind the cigar counter at the front, did not appear to see the newcomer, being engaged in trying to attract the attention of some employee in the rear at the moment. Giving up his efforts to signal to his man, he bawled finally: "Hey, Johnny, come up!"

Then he turned. "Hello there, Taggart," he said to the man with the lantern. "What's new? Have a cigar."

The man called Johnny failed to appear, but a small crowd came hastily out of the rear room and mixed quietly with those about the tables, and the swinging doors were bolted.

Taggart took the proffered cigar, slipped it into an inside vest pocket—revealing, as he did so, a big nickeled star—casually greeted a few men near the first pool tables, and then went out into the street, his dog trailing dispiritedly behind.

"All right, Johnny," the cashier bel-
lowed, winking at the grinning crowd

about him. Immediately the doors at the rear began to swing in and out again as men passed through.

Toward midnight the crowd thinned rapidly. Those who worked in the town went off to their comfortless beds—some on the flat-roofed houses, some in open tent houses, some amid piles of packing boxes and rubbish at the rears of the stores. The ranchers and farm laborers clambered into their wagons, most of them loaded with boxes of provisions or empty milk cans, bags of cotton seed, grape crates, or lumber, all going back on some one of the radial roads to distant cabins or tents, and rattling noisily through the still streets.

When Deacon Finch and his helpers began stretching the long black cloths over the tables and putting out the hissing lamps, only Staples remained to watch them languidly. He slid down from the barrel, went into the rear corridor for a minute, came out wiping his lips with the back of his hand, and spoke to "the deacon."

"What time is it?" he asked, and coughed.

The proprietor glanced hastily at a thick, nickeled watch. "Almost one. Going?"

"Might as well. 'Night!"

"So long!"

The stillness of the town was made heavier by the sounds the distant wagons made, or by the barking of some ranch dog miles away. The air lay still and dead, and the heat given off by the buildings and the ground was like that when a furnace door is opened. Staples moved slowly to the corner, where he stood a few minutes leaning against the bank wall that was hot to the touch. On a post hung a thermometer, and the man lighted a match to read it. It stood just under the ninety mark.

Staples put back his hat, and gasped for breath. "Whew!" he ejaculated.

"It's a whale of a summer. I'd like to sleep in a canal to-night."

He walked slowly across the street, toward Benson's big mercantile house—its front strange and unfamiliar because of the absence of the usual daytime array of wares placed on the sidewalk to attract trade. Even the windows looked unnatural, for the garish displays within were not visible in the starlight, and the big panes were forbidding and blank instead of inviting and alive. With his foot on the curb Staples stopped suddenly and peered through into the depths of the store. For a moment a light had flickered, then gone out.

He stood and watched and listened, but heard no sound and saw no further sign. So, thinking he had been mistaken, he walked slowly down the side street, along the blank wall of the store. When he reached the side door, without any motive he tried it. To his surprise it gave quietly, and, following it, he stepped inside. Then he saw the light again.

It was in the office at the rear of the store. Staples was only curious, not valorous. He breathed lightly and moved cautiously, but only because the place was so still and hot, and the incident so unusual and strange. Without noise he approached the office door and peered through its single pane of glass.

Inside, by the light of a candle, a man was kneeling by the small old-fashioned safe, going through the drawers.

The watcher caught his breath. The man in the office pocketed a sheaf of bills, dropped a packet inside the safe, closed the iron door, and rose. Then he reached for the candle, placed it on the floor near the strong box, and plunged toward the door.

Staples saw a sputtering flame rise above the candle, but he had no time to think what it meant. He was caught

in a trap—in the narrow aisle—without a weapon; and instinctively he braced himself as the door was flung back. The other man ran full into him, and they grappled. The thief tried to strike, but Staples had his arms pinioned. They rocked to and fro, then fell to the floor. The thief wrenched free, Staples caught him again, and struck him, and again they wrestled. The sick man's breath came fast and hard, and cold perspiration drenched him. Then his cough seized him, he loosed his hold, the other sprang up with an oath and fled down the aisle and away.

Staples started to rise, but at the moment there came a heavy explosion, and some missile was catapulted through the office door against him, sending him sprawling again. He thought he had been shot, and, for a space, he lay half stunned. Then, hatless and excited, he pulled himself up and hurried to the door.

From down the street came the sound of running feet, and instinctively Staples took up a feeble pursuit. He ran heavily, trying to call for help, but his cries were merely panting bleats. When he had gone a short way he was forced to stop again, and he leaned against a fence, coughing and exhausted.

Meantime the town was rousing. A lantern bobbed along Main Street toward Benson's, a dog barking furiously about it, then the watchman's cries were heard, punctuated by a hysterical fusillade from his revolver. Lights appeared all about in the windows, men came running into the streets, and soon the fire bell broke out in a wild, terrified alarm. The town was presently alive with excited men.

Staples started back toward the store. Men passed him at a run, panting—"What is it? What's up?"—but waiting for no answer. He stepped into a cross street, and a reckless rider, on an unsaddled horse, drove full into him,

knocking him down, and riding madly on, his nightshirt bellying out behind grotesquely above his hastily donned overalls. Staples dragged himself up again, but his cough was racking him pitifully, and he turned about and made his way slowly toward the small tent house that he called home. Although the place was oven-hot Staples felt a chill coming on. He threw himself, dressed as he was, on his bed, gasping for breath. For an hour he fought alternate attacks of cold and high fever.

Then he heard voices and footsteps, a lantern approached, and a deputy sheriff, followed by a curious crowd of men and boys, entered and placed him under arrest. They carried him on his cot to the city hall, and summoned a doctor.

Chris Benson, the fat, bald-headed storekeeper, came down about eight o'clock next morning, pushing his way through the knots of men—townspeople and countryfolk—who had congregated early, filled with excitement and interest. A gaping crowd hung about the frame storeroom which was serving as a city hall, straining their eyes to see Staples, on his cot, straining their ears for some news—even if it was nothing but gossip—about his condition. A larger number flocked at the store, gazing at everything there as though seeing it all for the first time, and treating the clerks, whom they all knew, as though these had become impressed, overnight, with new dignities and importance. There was another group at Staples' tent house, at the edge of town, where the man had lived for two years, but which no one had ever thought of visiting before. They searched every nook and corner of the place, tore his uninviting bed to pieces, sniffed at his cooking vessels, thumbed the pages of the few books and magazines he had. They were looking for nothing in particular, but expected to find anything.

Benson caught snatches of the talk as he hurried toward the store. Staples' slouch hat had been found there. He had taken more liquor than usual in Deacon Finch's "blind pig." He was a suspicious sort, anyway. Every one had known he would turn out a desperate character. They had all said so. What had he done with the money? Twenty-five hundred dollars was gone. Where did he get the powder he had used to open the safe? Supposing he got well enough and was sent to the penitentiary, how many years could he get? Some thought twenty, some forty. There was talk of "stringing him up," as an example, since the Valley had never had a robbery before. But many were sorry for the man. "He's got the 'con.' He can't live very long," some one said. And another added: "Probably he'll get paroled."

The portly storekeeper curtly ordered the clerks to clear the store of every one except those who came to buy, and went back to his office. The thin-faced bookkeeper was already there. "Morning, Jeff," said Benson shortly. "Go over to the bank and get the box from Thomas, will you?"

"What box?"

"Thomas took everything that was in the safe after the robbery and locked it up for me."

"I got you." The bookkeeper went out.

When he came back, Benson was at the telephone. "San Diego, eh?" he was saying. "I need him here, that's all—thanks. Good-by."

He spread out the papers and money and began to check up the contents of the box. The papers were powder-blackened, but not badly damaged. The bald-headed storekeeper frowned at his work, leaning far over and studying nearsightedly the figures he made.

There was a stir outside and the bookkeeper rose and looked over the glass partition into the store. "Here comes

Sheriff Clover, Mr. Benson," he said. And the sheriff walked in.

He was a very tall man, broad of shoulder, narrow of hip, long arms and legs, and a quiet manner that had fooled many desperate men. He had keen gray eyes that overlooked no detail. He seldom smiled. When he happened to put three sentences together, people in the county called it a speech and laughingly said that Sheriff Clover was "talking a good deal lately."

Benson rose hastily, with a sigh of satisfaction. "Morning, sheriff; I was just wishing you'd drop over. Henry's gone to San Diego and I had no one to leave the store with. I wanted to talk to you."

He dismissed the bookkeeper and shut the office door, the lower half of which was badly torn. The sheriff took a quick appraisal of the room, and when Benson turned from the door, was kneeling by the safe. It was an old affair, out of date, but strongly built. The charge of powder had wrecked the interior and dismantled the door. Part of the inner lining had been torn loose and hurled into the room. The lock had gone through the office door and been found near Staples' old black hat in the aisle outside. The candle, stuck in a tumbler, had rolled under the safe.

The sheriff took a chair and began to ask short, quiet, rambling questions. Benson answered them volubly. About two thousand dollars in currency was gone. The silver and gold were untouched. Staples had gained admittance by using a pass-key at the side entrance. "I don't see how he got that much powder inside the safe to blow the door off," Benson said.

The sheriff asked: "Staples been in the store much?"

"Occasionally."

"Ever here in the office?"

"Not that I know of."

"Do you carry powder?"

"Yes, a good deal of it."

"Where?"

"In a vault in the cellar. It's perfectly safe there."

"Looked at it this morning?"

No, Benson hadn't thought of that. He lighted a lantern and took the officer into the basement, a mere dugout. The door into the powder cache had been pried from its hinges; a pick was leaning against the wall.

"Well, I'll be dog-goned!" said Benson.

Seated again in the office, Benson, with a trace of embarrassment, began to speak of Staples. "You know your own business, sheriff," he said. "Seems to me like this was a pretty serious business—not because it was my store, of course, but this is the first robbery we've had in the Valley. There'll be a lot of sympathy for Staples, because he's sick. I say that he'd better be sent up for the longest term we can get him. It's the only way to stop this business. If we let him off easy, every crook in the Southwest will be down here, and it'll be hell."

"Maybe so," the sheriff said. "I'll be moving."

"You won't get to sympathizin' with Staples yourself, will you, sheriff?" Benson asked, trying to make his question joking.

"I don't guess so," said the big man.

He went to the city hall and had Staples moved, in the county automobile, to the jail at Empire, four miles away. "Take care of him, Bud," he said to his deputy, Mellen. "Give him a drink if he wants one—you'll find some in my desk."

The sheriff remained in Delta. For more than an hour he was closeted with Deacon Finch. In his own quiet way he found out everything that was known of Staples' habits. An incautious countryman approached him on the street and stopped him. The sheriff took off his sombrero, wiping the sweatband slowly and regarding the citizen gravely.

"How much time'll Staples get?" the farmer asked familiarly.

The sheriff put his hat on again. "He won't get any time to ask fool questions," he answered, moving on.

No one got any information from him. He went back to the county seat at noon, and, after he had lunched, went to the remodeled adobe that was being used as a county jail. The prisoner was better and his cough almost gone. When the sheriff came in and sat down on a box, Staples hitched himself up on his cot. The big officer laid aside his holster belt and gun, leaned back, rolled a cigarette, and looked into Staples' eyes.

"Tell me about it, Staples," he said.

"How do you mean, sheriff?"

"Who robbed Benson's?"

"They say I did. If I said I didn't, it wouldn't help any. I'm just a common bum—that's what they think in the valley. I'll bet they're saying they always knew I was a crook, ain't they?"

"Maybe."

"All right—I did it."

The sheriff shook his head. "Just for one thing, you couldn't," he said. "You left Deacon Finch's a few minutes before one. The explosion came at ten minutes past. You couldn't have gotten the powder up from downstairs in that time."

Staples' eyes opened. "That's how it was, eh?"

"Yep. And the powder wasn't used to open the safe—it was just a blind."

The prisoner lay back and was silent. He had considered that circumstantial evidence would convict him. Now the way was opening for him, but he had another problem. Finally he began speaking slowly—holding up his hand when the sheriff would have interrupted, and carrying his tale through to the end.

When he had finished, the officer sat smoking for a long time. Once or twice he swallowed hard. Once he went to

the window, in which bars had been placed by the town blacksmith, to transform the old adobe restaurant into a jail. When he sat down, it was on a box near the cot.

"'Bout six months ago," he began quietly, "some of the boys caught a horse thief riding a good little gentled pony. The owner hasn't showed up, an' the county is payin' for that pony's keep. I've got to go up to Bernice tonight, and I don't reckon I'll put a guard on here. You ain't well enough to have the leg irons on. So that's all right. The pony's back of the courthouse in the corral, an' the saddle an' bridle's hangin' there. Seems to me there's a couple of good canteens, too, and maybe a gunny bag with some grub in it."

The officer rose, strapped on his holster again, and put out his hand. "Staples," he said, "you're a whole lot of a man. I'd like to do something for you some time. Good night."

Staples allowed his hand to be shaken, but his mind was jumping from one idea to another, slowly comprehending. "Good night, sheriff," he said weakly, and a little hoarsely.

"This darn shack," said Sheriff Clover, moving to go, "might catch fire in here. If it does, you'll find the door open. It's a poor place for a jail, all right." He went out, pretending to laugh.

Through the withering heat of the desert noon, Staples, the self-exiled, rode westward, slouching awkwardly in the saddle. Hours before he had lost his acute consciousness of the furnace fires through which he traveled; now he was much more distressed by trivial discomforts that amounted to agonies. The bridle reins seared his hands. The hat he wore was not his own, and was much too large for him, and it continually moved up and down on his head, irritating him until he wanted to scream.

The perspiration that ran from every pore in his body had soaked the saddle seat, and the insides of his legs were chafed. Worse than all, the reflected glare of the sun from the white sands shot through his eyes into his brain like two probes that cut a thousand raw nerves.

The whole world seemed dead—shriveling in the crematory of the universe. There was not a stirring atom of life anywhere about. The stiff, forbidding foliage of the scattered salt-bushes, greasewood, and mesquite cast shadows so thin they were mere ghosts of shadows, splotted about the bases of the gray growths. The sand clung to the horse's hoofs, dragging at every step and falling back heavily without dust.

Before the rider loomed the mountains, their desert sides beating back palpitating waves of heat. Behind him, when he shifted miserably in his saddle, he could see miles and miles of mirage water, and beyond, low on the flat sand, two clusters of buildings, like children's blocks scattered in the center of a great, empty room. A thin line of smoke, which had risen from a locomotive, lay motionless in the air—a black wisp of veiling against the brilliant, hard blue of the cloudless sky. And over all brooded the pitiless heat.

The man swung off stiffly, poured water into his sombrero, and put it on the ground for the horse, which sucked it up greedily. The few drops that remained the man poured over his hands, wiping his face with the grateful moisture, then he took a gulp of water from the big canteen, mounted, and rode forward again.

Although he knew that the temperature was dropping slowly, Staples felt no evidences of the change. He returned to his useless habit of fretting at the trifles that distressed him, and thought of running streams of mountain water in cool glades. Occasionally

he coughed, and once he took from his pocket a flask of whisky. But he did not drink. Instead he put it back resolutely.

For perhaps two hours he rode slowly, and almost imperceptibly nearing the sand hills below the mountain range, when he saw, to the right of the road, a moving figure. He watched it closely. Half a mile was passed, and he made it out to be that of a man. He pressed the tired pony forward, and presently spoke aloud:

"My God, the heat's got him!"

Something was wrong. The man moved at a half trot, now coming nearer the road, striking it, turning out again, making from it and swinging around until he was finally approaching it again.

"He's circling," said the rider to his horse.

The pony struck into a jog, but did not gain ground on the footman until he was coming back once more in his big, hopeless, maddening circle. Their courses brought the two together, and Staples hailed:

"Hello there! What's the matter?"

The man on the sand did not vary his pace nor look up. Staples rode quite close to him and stopped, but the other trailed by. Then the rider reached out and seized the shoulder below him. At that the man struck deliriously at the detaining hand and looked up.

The rider drew back and gasped. "What, you?" he cried.

The unfortunate was little more than a boy—a boy crazed with heat and thirst. The dark face, the bloodshot eyes, the swollen lips, through which could be seen the tip of a discolored tongue, told the whole story. He was past understanding anything, and Staples drove his horse close, raised the boy by one shoulder, and then flung him off so that he fell. Then the rider slid to the ground and crushed him down. They struggled for a moment, but Staples was the stronger and the boy gave

up and began moaning. A few drops from the whisky flask quieted him and he lay heavily. Staples wet a handkerchief and bathed the swollen face and lips. Then he put a corner of the dripping cloth into the boy's mouth, and the latter sucked at it greedily.

The exertion of ministering to the delirious boy had taxed the sick man, and now Staples felt his cough coming on him. He sat down on the sand and gasped for breath. The boy, partly revived, seized the canteen and put it to his lips. Staples managed to knock it away and it fell, mouth down, and the precious stream it contained gurgled out into the sand.

It was a serious loss, but Staples had neither time nor strength to waste bemoaning it. The boy was alternately quiet, with a heavy, portentous calm, or uncontrollable with delirium. Staples was very weak and tired, but as long as he could do anything for the boy he kept at the task. He had taken a resolution, and his settled purpose spurred him on to restore the young castaway to strength. The afternoon dragged on laden feet, and finally the sun went down in a blaze of brilliant colors against which the western mountains stood out like heaps of black velvet. The still, oppressive heat remained, but it would moderate before midnight, and when it did Staples knew that the boy would be restored so that the next step could be approached.

Strengthened by some of the food and by frequent swallows of water from the remaining canteen, the boy became more rational and quieter, and about nine o'clock, as nearly as Staples could guess the time, he slept.

The man watched—huddled on the ground, himself too exhausted and suffering too much pain to rest. The great peace and stillness of the desert seemed to him, at first, only the cruel, implacable waiting of some beast of prey; the stars, brilliant and thickly set against

the black of distance, stared at him pityingly, as though comparing their infinity with his own insignificance and helplessness. He shuddered, then he looked down to where the boy lay, and a slow smile spread over his face.

There was persisting in his mind the far-away recollection of lines he had heard years ago, and that had come back to him during the last few hours—straggling, word by word, as the faces of friends come back to one in a distant country:

The moving finger writes, and, having writ,
Moves on; nor all your piety nor wit
Can call it back to cancel half a line,
Nor all your tears wash out a word of it.

He did not remember the verses perfectly, but the frame of it was there, and Staples looked up again at the stars and smiled.

"It's my chance," he said.

Two hours passed, and he wakened the sleeper. The night air was much changed, and while there was still no breath of breeze, the desert had ceased to palpitate under the fierce heat.

The boy sat up and asked for water. Staples gave him several swallows, then took the canteen. "Easy there, boy," he counseled. "You're not out of the woods yet."

The lad gazed at the other, trying to make out his face in the starlight. The man noticed the effort. "I'm Staples," he said. "Remember me?"

"Staples! What are you doing out here with me?"

"I was riding for the hills, and I found you. You were plumb crazy—loco. How do you feel now?"

"All right. Yes, I remember something about it now. I knocked the canteen over, didn't I?"

"One of 'em."

"What are you going to do next, Staples?"

The man took out his whisky flask and swallowed a long draft of the burning liquor. He did not offer any to the

boy, but put it back. "I got it figured out for us," he said slowly, "for you an' me."

"How?"

"The pony's about all in. He's only had about a quart of water since before noon. He'll stand about two hours of going—that's ten or twelve miles, if you push him."

"If I——" the boy began.

"Wait a minute. I've got quite a piece to tell you. Just wait till I get through, will you?"

"Go ahead. I owe you——"

"Forget that, and listen. I broke jail last night, and I'm riding for the mountains. They took me up for robbing Benson's store night before last."

He watched the boy. The latter started, swallowed, then said awkwardly: "They—arrested you—for that?"

"Yep. And I—I got away, and came out here, and ran into you."

The boy sat straight suddenly. "The stupid fools!" he cried.

Staples checked him with a gesture. "They found my hat in the store. I lost it there when I had a tussle with the fellow who opened the old man's safe and took two thousand in bills."

"That was me!" the boy cried. "I robbed the safe. I'm going back to tell them——"

Staples interrupted. "Yes—I saw you. Now let me finish, will you?"

"Go ahead." The boy spoke bitterly. "I'm done for. I'll play it any way you say. You saved my life—I wisht you hadn't."

Staples took another pull at his flask. Then he said: "How old are you?"

"Twenty-three."

"When I was twenty-three I was pretty wild," Staples began, settling back against the saddle that lay on the sand. "I was pretty wild—that's the truth. I got into trouble, and my folks quit me. That wasn't so long ago—I'm only thirty-five now.

"For twelve years I've been doing every kind of devilment there is, beginning with drinking and gambling and ending with robbing. I went to jail twice. Then I got sick, and for the last three or four years I've been a bum. I tried lots of times at first, but I always got a kick instead of help. I quit trying a long time ago and just let things slide. My life is over. I'm too sick to get well. And in all my time I've been no 'count—never did any good for myself, never did any good for anybody else, never got anywhere. I've heard people talk about living their lives over again. Never heard of one yet that had the chance—but once. And that once is now. I've got the chance."

The boy looked up from poking in the sand. "How do you make that?"

Staples parried. "What did you want that money for?"

The other shifted uncomfortably, then he blurted out: "To pay poker debts with. I owe pretty nearly every fellow at the club. I knew the folks would hear about it some time—it was all over town. The old man has always been down on cards and mixing with the other fellows and having a good time. He wanted me to work. I thought he was too hard on me. I knew he wouldn't give me the money—there was no other way I could get it. So I figured out how I could steal it. And I did." He put his hand into his shirt and drew out a roll of bills, which he flung on the sand. "There it is, damn it!"

Staples picked up the roll and held it. "I thought it was about like that. Do you reckon you've learned anything? You gambled and drank and caroused around. You got into debt and turned thief. You're started downhill and going at a good gait. Could you climb uphill again?"

The boy burst out bitterly: "I'll never have the chance! You've saved my life; now I've got to go back and confess. I suppose I might get a short sentence,

and I'd try to straighten up. But you know how folks in the valley would take it. I'd have to go somewhere else—the old man wouldn't do anything for me." He began to sob. "What's the use of my going back?"

"To live my life for me."

Staples spoke sharply. The boy stared through the night at him, stumbling in his effort to understand. For a few minutes they sat silent—tense and waiting.

Staples was the first to speak again. "To live my life for me—that's the good you can do by going back. I told you I wasted my chance. You are just the age I was when I started wrong. I'm looking back on a life I've made a mess of—you're looking forward to one you think you'd make the same sort of mess of. What's the use of making two failures of life? Do you savvy?"

They were both suddenly conscious of a sharp change in the air. A dry bush rattled; a sharp gust of wind swept by them, filling the air with fine sand. They looked up instinctively toward the west, and there, above the mountains, they saw that a heavy black shadow was obscuring the lower stars. "Staples!" the boy cried, in terror. "It's a sandstorm!"

The man shivered involuntarily and took another draft from the flask. Then he rose stiffly. "Yes, it's a sandstorm. There ain't any time to waste. Now listen to me, and don't risk both of us with foolishness." He held out the roll of bills. "I've talked some to Sheriff Clover about this business night before last."

"And he knows I——"

"Yes, I told him. I told him several things. But wait! I'm going to write him a little note. You take it in, with the bills. He'll tell Mr. Benson I sent 'em back. Saddle the pony and ride straight toward Signal Mountain." He pointed, and the boy nodded. "It isn't more than twelve miles to a canal, and

if you drive hard you'll make it. If the pony gives out, walk. Get there as soon as you can, then follow the canal in to Campbell's Ranch. Tell him anything you want to, and he'll take you into town in his machine. See the sheriff first—do you understand that? Now hustle!"

The boy stood doggedly shaking his head. "I won't leave you."

Staples almost screamed at him. "Don't be a fool!" he cried. "You can't do anything for me here. Leave me the canteen and the grub. In the morning they can send out for me. I'll be all right. But I can't make it to Campbell's to-night, and you can. Do you see that?"

The boy caught his breath. "Then you'll be in to-morrow and you can tell the sheriff. I'll take my medicine."

"I'm playing this game," Staples said sharply. "I know what I'm doing. Take the money and this note to the sheriff before you see anybody else in town. Will you do it?"

The boy looked again toward the west, a fitful breeze striking his face and stinging it with particles of sand. "Yes, I'll do it."

"Good enough! Now saddle up quick as you can. I'll write a note to Clover."

The boy's fingers shook as he cinched up the saddle. He was still very weak, and he had to fight himself to keep away from the canteen. But he did fight, laying the precious quart on the ground, throwing out the packages of food that remained in the saddlebags, and then climbing up. The pony's legs trembled and he nosed at the canteen. "Poor old scout," the boy exclaimed. "If you can keep going we'll hit water soon."

Staples rose. On an envelope he had scrawled a few lines, although it was so dark he could not see the letters. He handed the missive to the boy. The latter seized his hand and wrung it desperately, and when he tried to speak the

tears got the better of him again. "I'll bring help early in the morning," he said. "Take care of yourself—I'd oughtn't to leave you." He choked and began to cry without shame. "You're white, Staples. And I'm going to show you that I'll live your life and live it the way you'd like. I—I——"

Staples jerked his hand away. "You ride, boy. Good-by." He struck the horse on the haunch sharply. The pony broke into a trot. Staples called, and the growing wind took up his words and carried them to the boy—bent forward, blinded by his tears. "I'll leave the life to you, now, all right!" cried Staples.

The intermittent breezes, forerunners of the storm, gave way to gusts that whirled up pillars of sand and sent them dancing off into the night, and these circling blasts gave way to a strong wind that whipped the finer sand into movement. Then the great storm itself bore down, the more terrible because it moved so silently. Save for a sibilant, grating murmur, like that of a receding wave makes across the beach, the wind made no sound. But its force sucked up cloud on cloud of sand that blackened the stars and swept forward—clutching with greedy fingers at the scant bushes that bent before the storm like frightened things. The desert answered the call of the hurricane and gave itself to the mad dance, as though glorying in a new attack on the life that encroached upon it. This was the pitiless rain that whipped across the face of the night.

Crouched in the lea of a hummock, his coat about his head, the man Staples was fighting the dust-impregnated air for breath. Exhausted and worn by two days and nights of unaccustomed activity, weak from lack of nourishing food, suffering now from thirst, he was illy fortified against his disease. He had abandoned all thought of moving when the storm broke—now his canteen

was empty and his packages of food covered with drifts of sand.

But he was content. He had worked out his problem as he had seen it, and now he chuckled that he had played a game on the laws of life—successfully. The lines that had come back to him in the afternoon, one by one, had given him his cue, and he was satisfied with the way he had met his crisis. "My chance—my last chance, to 'cancel half a line,'" he thought, and smiled again.

The storm beat about him in silent fury, and heaped sand over him. The heap rose to a mound, but he did not stir. When the morning broke, the desert had claimed him—but on his still face there was a look of peace.

The sheriff sat in his office in the opera-house building scowling his way through a letter he was preparing to send out to the officers of neighboring counties concerning the finding and the return to Empire of a young man who had disappeared. He checked the description over carefully, changed a word or two in the lines explaining the necessity for keeping the matter out of the newspapers, then signed it and reached for the telephone.

As he did so, Chris Benson, the storekeeper, entered—his face red and his hands clenched. The sheriff dropped the letter into a drawer, closed the drawer, and locked it. "Morning, Benson," he said.

"Well?" the merchant snapped.

"Nothing yet. I reckon Staples was a better man than we thought for. It looks like he's got over the line."

Benson struck his fist against the desk angrily. "You take it pretty cool, Clover!" he cried. "You sit here playing with your thumbs and writing letters, and let a sick crook make a laughing-stock of you and this county. I thought you had something to you! You claim to be a good officer, but I'll bet my bookkeeper would have had better sense

than to let a safe blower walk out the front door of the jail and get away."

Clover looked out of the window at the scurrying clouds of dust that swept by, howling. "Sometimes I guess wrong about folks, Benson," he said, very quietly.

"Well, about next election the folks in this county will be doing some guessing about you that won't be so wrong," the other snapped. "I hope I've got something to say about the sort of loose fingers we have in this office now. I hope so."

The sheriff rose and walked across the room. His face showed no expression, but his mouth, when Benson could not see, lifted a little in a quiet smile. "Looks like you got a right to howl, Benson," he said, his back to the merchant. "Looks like I made a mistake, don't it?"

"Looks?" snorted the merchant. "You wait and see what the folks around the valley think about it!"

"Yes, I reckon they'll kick—for a while."

"They'll kick longer'n that, Sheriff Clover. They'll kick for a good long time, and nobody can blame 'em. If you think they're going to forget this—losing the first safe blower you've had to handle since the county was organized—you better get somebody to help do your figuring for you. I'm through for now, but you'll hear from me again."

He strode out into the wind and banged the door. The sheriff resumed his seat, took up the telephone, and called the stenographer who did the county work. "I got some letters to get out, Mrs. Shirmer," he said. "Yes, sort o' like to rush 'em if I can. Thanks."

He turned to his morning mail and opened one letter after another. But frequently his eyes wandered to the windows, and he frowned as he watched the swirling fog of sand sweep by and heard the wind screaming through the streets. Once he said aloud: "Wisht

I'd taken him out in the machine myself. That would 'a' bothered Chris Benson." He grinned at the thought.

In the middle of the morning a wheezing, rattling automobile that had lost its finer qualities in two years' battling with the desert, stopped at the courthouse door, delivering itself of a defiant roar as it did so. Dave Campbell, the west-side rancher, jumped down, followed by a boy—one who had ridden in to Campbell's place from the desert in the height of the storm just before daybreak. They went up to the sheriff's office.

Sheriff Whit Clover was never surprised. He had lost the emotion in years of frontiership. When the pair entered, he looked up quietly, glanced at the boy, who was very pale and worn, and then rose. "Morning, Dave," he said to the rancher. "Will you folks wait in the back office a minute?"

The boy's eyes searched the officer's face, found nothing there, took in the room, stared for a moment at a great ring of keys hanging behind the desk, and returned to the calm face of the sheriff. Then the boy went on into the other room. Sheriff Clover closed the door after them, and took down the telephone again. "You needn't bother about those letters, Mrs. Shirmer," he said.

Campbell and the boy stood waiting for him. "I guess I'm not wanted, sheriff, am I?" the farmer asked. "This here thing seems kind of peculiar to me, but the boy wanted to talk to you. If you need me, I'll be down to the implement company for an hour."

"All right, Dave," the sheriff answered, stepping aside.

"Much—much obliged to you, Mr. Campbell," the boy said. His voice was strained and his throat dry.

"Don't mention it, son."

Sheriff Clover closed the door again. "Sit down, bud," he said impersonally. "What's up?"

"I—I'm the one that stole that—that money—from the store." The phrases came jerkily.

"I thought so."

"I started to hike to the hills. I—I didn't have any water. I forgot it. And Staples found me. He saved my life."

The sheriff rolled a cigarette thoughtfully, his feet wide apart, his elbows on his knees, his eyes on his task. "Yes?"

"He said he'd told you—he'd talked to you. Here's the money and a note

he sent you. Mr. Campbell started a team out this morning to try and find him. I'd—I wish I could go out, too. I'm afraid——" the boy's throat closed, and a sob wrenched him. "I'd oughtn't to have left him—out there, last night."

The sheriff took the roll of bills and dropped them into his pocket, then he looked at the envelope on which a crude message was scrawled:

I'm sending Benson's boy back to you. Do the best you can for him—he's my chance to live life over again. JOHN F. STAPLES.



THE KIND-HEARTED PROFESSOR

ALEXANDER P. McALLISTER, of Lumberton, North Carolina, is now engaged in the highly profitable business of making gobs of money out of the cotton business. When he was at Davidson College, however, he paid particular attention to literature and the languages, and displayed a marked fondness and aptness for poetry. In the classroom he learned about meter, feet, trochaics, iambics, and pentameters from Professor William S. Currell, who one day told him to produce for the next lecture an original poem.

McAllister produced it, and unblushingly delivered it to Doctor Currell at the appointed time.

The professor read it with an absorbed, almost a pained, expression, and then, turning to the embryo Goethe, remarked impressively:

"Mr. McAllister, you are a poet at heart, but in expressing it you are—oh, my dear Mr. McAllister, don't make me mention that long-eared animal."



AFRAID OF THE FIRE

RALPH SMITH, the Georgia newspaper man, claims that the people of his State are the best, the most remarkable, and the most entertaining in the country. In proof of this sweeping assertion, he cites the case of the hardy old woman who, becoming ill for the first time in her life at the ripe old age of seventy-nine, finally was persuaded to call in a doctor.

The physician, after diagnosing the case and using all his persuasion and most of his physical force, finally induced the patient to swallow several big quinine capsules. He noticed, but could not understand, her terror at having to take the medicine. The capsules, however, had the desired effect, and before long the old lady was able to sit up and talk glibly.

Her granddaughter, seeing the improvement, decided to give the convalescent a real treat. Accordingly, she filled the old lady's corn-cob pipe, and, getting a live coal from the fire, advanced to the bed.

"Ma," she said merrily, "look whut I done brought yuh!"

The grandmother saw the pipe and the live coal, shrieked with terror, and buried herself under the bedclothes—from which retreat she managed to cry out:

"Take dat fire away fum hyuh! Take it away! Don't yuh know I'se done filled clean up wid dat doctor's cartridges!"

Christmas Eve at Sixty to One

By Ben Strever Kearns

A Christmas story from a part of the world where you'd have to get into a cold-storage plant to even make you think it was Christmas

JOSTLED about the crowded betting ring at the Juarez race track, Jack Connors and Jeff Egan found themselves a week before Christmas with but four dollars between them. They had followed the "ponies" from the spring meetings about New York, drifting along with them up into Canada, down to Pimlico, Jamestown, and Latonia. Luck was fairly good to them until they landed in old Mexico for the winter races, and then it deserted the pair, and do what they might, nothing could induce fickle fortune to return. In their travels they had spent their winnings freely, as most gamblers do, and to be broke was not a new experience to either of them.

"Jeff," said Jack, edging away from the surging mass of men who were working hard to hand their money to the bookmakers. "I don't mind being broke so much as I do missing a Christmas at home. My dear old mother will expect me up in New England next week, and here I am down in this part of the world, where you'd have to get into a cold-storage plant to even make you think it was Christmas."

Jeff listened, fingering a program of the races nervously.

"See here, Jack!" Jeff excitedly exclaimed, pointing to the fourth race—the Grand Handicap. "Christmas Eve at sixty to one. Say, that's some coincidence, eh! Let's put the four bucks on that nag. If she wins, we'll be back in God's country in time for the Yuletide."

Jack surveyed Jeff with contempt.

"There you go again," snapped Jack, "growing sentimental! Let me tell you, boy, horse-racing is no place for such stuff. Christmas Eve is sentimental mush, that's all! You'll be playing ring around Rosie with the kids next! Golden Rule's got that race sewed up tight, and will win in a walk." And before Jeff could reply, Jack was on his way to the bookmakers' stand, where he put up their last four dollars on Golden Rule at odds of one hundred to one.

Jack returned in a happy mood. Jeff was not. He insisted that Christmas Eve was better than Golden Rule, even though it was sentimental to think so.

"What's in a name, anyhow?" growled Jack. "In my kindergarten days I once bet on a nag named Erin Go Bragh on St. Patrick's Day, owned by Mike Hennessy, and ridden by Jockey O'Shaughnessy, and he didn't finish one, two, three. If sentiment ever meant anything, that combination should have brought the coin. Bah!"

Jack drew from his pocket a silver cigarette case, a remnant of former prosperity, lighted a ten-for-five "Turkish," inhaled deeply, and, grabbing Jeff by the arm, they both walked along the railing of the track far away from the throng at the grand stand and betting ring. They sat down on the ground to await the start of the Handicap. Jack traced on the ground with his walking stick circles of goodly proportion, which he claimed were the size of the

mince pies his mother baked at Christmas time.

"Jeff," said Jack, after an embarrassing silence, "there is nothing in this gambling business. One day in about fifteen you're paying a taxi driver a big fee happily, and the other fourteen you're giving a trolley conductor a nickel grudgingly for the same ride. If we win this stake, it's home for me, and I'm done with this life forever——"

"If we win," came sarcastically from Jeff.

"And we will win," jerked Jack. "That handicapper didn't know his business when he put but ninety-eight pounds up on Golden Rule. Golden Rule will run Viper at one hundred and fifteen pounds, and Jolly Girl, at one hundred and eighteen up, and the rest of the nags, off their feet——"

Jack was interrupted by a nerve-racking cough at his back. He turned and looked up into the thin, pale face of "Rube" Davis. Davis was also a race-track follower, though not of the same class as Jack and Jeff. He also had followed the horses from the spring meetings in the North, risking two and three dollars a bet, where Jack and Jeff put up that many hundreds. Davis was a consumptive, and was in the last stages of that dread disease.

"Sit down, Rube," invited Jack. "You look tired. What's new?"

With difficulty Davis sat down and drew from his pocket a newspaper, unwrapped it with trembling fingers, and, pointing to a personal, Jack read:

WANTED.—Information as to whereabouts of Reuben Davis by his sister. Mother is dying; wishes to see her boy on Christmas. Address 793 First Avenue, New York City.

"Jack," finally said Davis, breaking a sympathetic silence, "I've got just one chance of getting home to that old lady. I borrowed five dollars from a fellow and put it on Christmas Eve——"

Noticing a look of disgust spread over

Jack's face as he mentioned Christmas Eve, Davis hesitated.

"Kind of sentimental, I'll admit," he continued, "but the mother wanting to see her son on Christmas and the horse's name being Christmas Eve, too, I thought luck would surely be with me then——"

His weak voice was drowned by the loud cheering coming from the crowd in the grand stand as the horses left the paddock, with their jockeys sitting straight, and passed on to the starting point. Davis intended to say more, but a fit of coughing attacked him, and his thin frame was all aquiver from the strain. A silence fell upon the three men. And, perhaps, for the first time in the lives of either Jack Connors and Jeff Egan there was moisture in their eyes.

"They're at the post, Jack," suddenly called Jeff, jumping to his feet.

Jack arose quickly, leveled his field glasses at the pack of horses dancing about the barrier, each jockey trying for an advantage without being admonished by the starter.

"That old boy, Golden Rule, is there as cool as a cucumber," said Jack, never removing the glasses from his eyes.

"How's Christmas Eve?" quavered Davis faintly.

Christmas Eve was running wild among the other horses, his jockey seemed to have lost control of him, and he would not be worth much in a grueling race, but Jack didn't have the heart to tell Davis so.

"Oh, she's all right; a trifle uneasy, but she's got a good position now."

Davis was relieved, though still excited.

"There they go! They're off!" yelled Jack. "A good start! Golden Rule leads! He's next to the rail! Viper's next! Then Jolly Girl, a length behind——"

"Where's Christmas Eve?" screeched

Davis, his hands clenched and every muscle tense.

Jack paid no attention to him, or, at least, seemed not to hear his question, and continued announcing the progress of the race in a cool, deliberate manner.

"They're at the quarter! Golden Rule leads by a head! Maybe that old fellow ain't traveling some! Viper still sticks, but he'll fade away soon! Jolly Girl is having trouble clinging to third place!"

Davis stood as though paralyzed. He wanted to ask again where Christmas Eve was, but his lips would not move. He stared at the closely bunched horses on the far side of the track tearing along under the whips of the diminutive horsemen. At the half mile they were in the same position as at the quarter, racing wildly.

Jack held the glasses to his eyes greedily, though asked by Jeff to be allowed a second's glimpse at the fast-flying thoroughbreds.

Almost as quickly as words could tell, the horses were passing the gamblers, who were standing close to the railing in various stages of excitement. The unsentimental Jack stood calm and collected, his experienced eyes following the efforts of each jockey in his endeavor to gain an advantage over his opponents. Jeff, wildly waving his arms and yelling like a madman, urged Golden Rule on. The excitement was too much for Davis. He had witnessed many close finishes since the racing season began, but no stake he ever gambled for was so dear to him as this one. He tried to look at the racers as they thundered by, but the strain grew intolerable, and he turned his back upon them and buried his face in his scrawny hands.

A few moments, and Jack announced: "They're now in the stretch! Golden Rule leads by almost a length now——"

Jack tried to bring back the words, but it was too late. He bit his lip.

Davis reeled and would have fallen but for Jack, who, with glasses still held to his eyes, reached out and grabbed him with one hand.

"My, but this is some race!" continued Jack. "Jolly Girl is now second, close on the flanks of Golden Rule! He tries to shake her off! Kelly is whipping Viper viciously, but he can't gain an inch! Christmas Eve is pushing Viper hard for third place!"

Davis quivered with excitement at the mention of Christmas Eve.

"Look at that Jockey Nevins on Golden Rule! He's riding a great race! He's gaining on every jump! Jolly Girl hasn't got the stamina! She's falling back! Look, there, at Christmas Eve! She's passed Viper, and is now going like mad! Gee! Christmas Eve has passed Jolly Girl! She's now second by a head! Golden Rule and Christmas Eve are fighting hard! Christmas creeps up on him! They're now neck and neck! Christmas Eve forges ahead! A few more jumps and it'll be over!"

The horses were close to the wire. Jack stood silent a moment. Turning, he looked at the sad figure of Davis, hesitated, then—— "Christmas Eve wins," he said slowly.

"You're crazy, man! Golden Rule won by a length! I could see that with my naked eyes," frenziedly yelled Jeff.

Jack kicked Jeff stealthily, and shot a knifelike glance at him.

Davis was still steadied by Jack, his frame as limp as a rag, in a paroxysm of coughing. Jack waited until he subsided.

"Boy, you're all right at picking winners, at that," said Jack to Davis. "Christmas Eve beat them to it——"

Jeff was about to make another protest, but a belligerent glance and a jab on the foot with one of Jack's heels was warning enough, and Jeff stood off, amazed.

"Let me see your ticket. I don't believe you picked Christmas Eve, at that," bandied Jack.

Davis reached into his pocket, and, drawing forth the ticket, handed it to Jack. In doing so, he disclosed blood marks and cuts where his nails had dug deep into the flesh as he clenched his hands in the excitement of the race.

Before his dulled eyes Jack switched the tickets, which wasn't a very hard trick for him to do, as he was an adept at three-card monte and the shell game.

"Here, Rube!" said he, placing into Davis' hand his own winning pasteboard on Golden Rule, calling for four hundred dollars. "Hurry down to the betting ring and cash it, and beat it for the next train for home and mother."

Davis, as though in a trance, took the ticket and walked wavily away to the bookmaker, coughing as he went. He

received four hundred dollars in exchange for the ticket, never noticing the difference in the amount of money his original ticket called for.

"Say, what kind of a game is this?" remonstrated Jeff, after Davis had walked away. "Golden Rule won that race, and you know he did!"

"He sure did," said Jack, grabbing Jeff by the lapels of his coat and looking good-humoredly into his eyes. "But, honest and truly, Jeff, you wouldn't see a dying mother wishing to see her boy on Christmas, and he disappointed? Now, honest, Jeff, would you?"

Jeff aimlessly tossed a loose stone about with his foot, like a shamed child being lectured by its mother, in a moment's embarrassment.

"I ought to be kicked for just getting wise to your game," said Jeff. "But I'm on now. You're a good guy."

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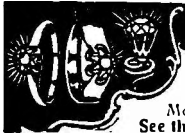
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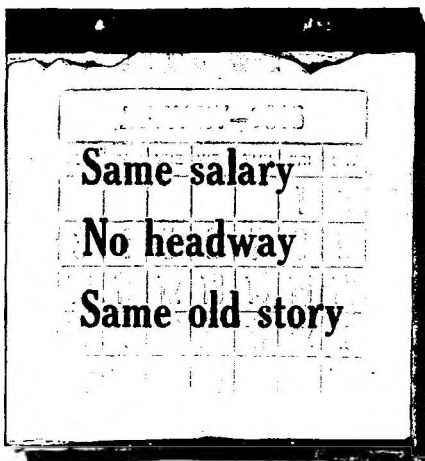
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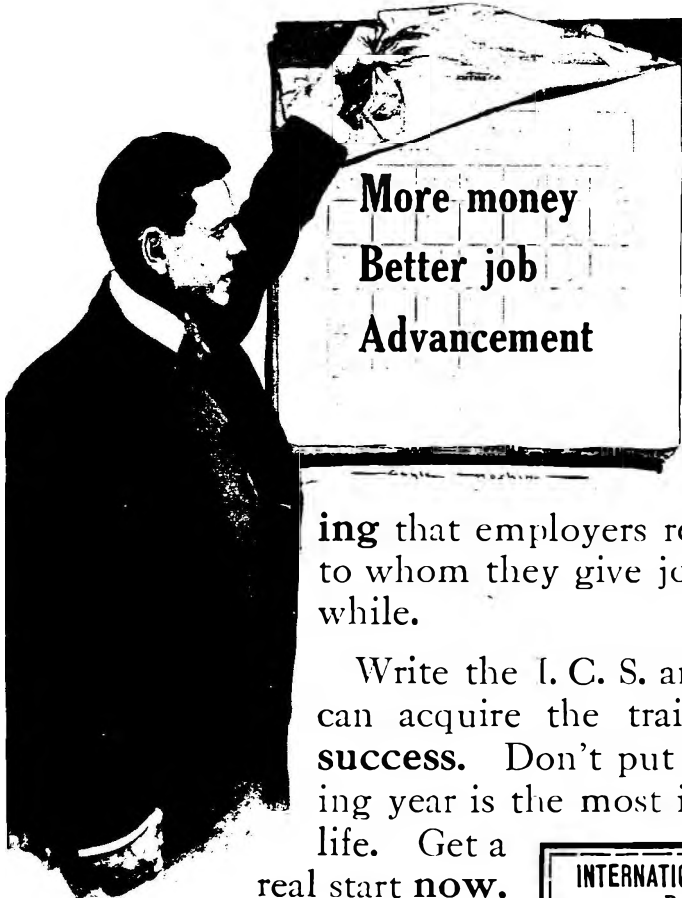


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17

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Building Contractor	Advertising
Architectural Draftsman	Commercial Illustrating
Structural Engineer	Industrial Designing
Concrete Construction	Commercial Law
Mechan. Engineer	Automobile Running
Mechanical Draftsman	Teacher
Refrigeration Engineer	English Branches
Civil Engineer	Good English for Every One
Surveyor	Agriculture
Mine Superintendent	Poultry Farming
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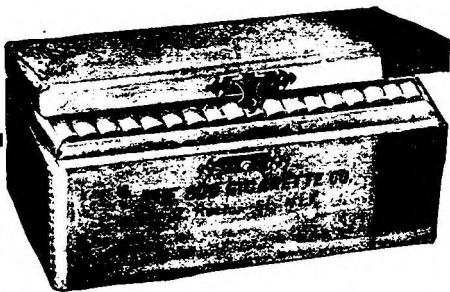
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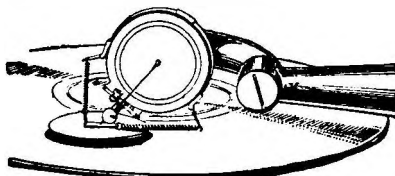
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